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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

10 March 2025

Our Ref Cabinet Tuesday, 18 March 2025
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To: Members of the Cabinet:

Executive Members Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair) Val Bryant (Vice Chair) Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas and 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, HERTS, SG6 3JF

on

TUESDAY, 18TH MARCH, 2025 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 - 11 FEBRUARY 2025 (Pages 7 - 14)

To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 11 February 2025.

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.

Ecological Emergency

The Council has declared an ecological emergency and is committed to addressing the ecological emergency and nature recovery by identifying appropriate areas for habitat restoration and biodiversity net gain whilst ensuring that development limits impact on existing habitats in its process.

The Council has set out to do that by a) setting measurable targets and standards for biodiversity increase, in both species and quantities, seeking to increase community engagement, b) to work with our partners to establish a Local Nature Partnership for Hertfordshire and to develop Nature Recovery Networks and Nature Recovery Strategy for Hertfordshire and c) to investigate new approaches to nature recovery such as habitat banking that deliver biodiversity objectives and provide new investment opportunities.

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. GROWING BALDOCK STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN (Pages 15 - 150)

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING MANAGER

This report asks Cabinet to recommend the Strategic Masterplan for land around Baldock to Full Council.

8. BARKWAY AND NUTHAMPSTEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - EXAMINERS REPORT (Pages 151 - 238)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

To consider the examiner's report and the proposed modifications to the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan and to agree that officers make arrangements to conduct a referendum within the designated neighbourhood planning area for Barkway and Nuthampstead.

9. DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER - INTERIM PLAN SUBMISSION (Pages 239 - 252)

REPORT OF THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

On 16 December 2024 the Government published its Devolution White Paper, providing details of their plans for local government reorganisation to support devolving power to communities. On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote a letter to the Leaders of all District and Borough Councils in Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire County Council, formally inviting them to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation for the area, setting out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for the process. The first stage is submission of an Interim Plan by 21 March 2025, which has been worked on jointly by the District, Borough and County Councils.

10. UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND PROCESS AND PROPOSED ALLOCATION FOR 2025/26 SPEND (Pages 253 - 280)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – ENTERPRISE

To set out the delegated approval (for Executive Members and Directors) process for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This report also sets out the proposed plans for the 2025/26 UK Shared Prosperity Fund spend allocation.

11. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN (Pages 281 - 294)

REPORT OF THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

The Council recently undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) between 4 and 7 November 2024, where we were visited by a peer team supported by the Local Government Association. The peer team met with a large number of staff and councillors, as well as external stakeholders such as contractual partners, neighbouring authorities and members of our community. The peer team produced a feedback report, which was reported to Cabinet on 14 January 2025. An Action Plan has now been developed, attached at Appendix A.

12. COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2024-25 (QUARTER 3 UPDATE) (Pages 295 - 326)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

This report presents progress on delivering the Council Delivery Plan for 2024-25. This is a Quarter 3 update, but generally reflects progress up to the point that this report was prepared (mid-February).

13. THIRD QUARTER INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) REVIEW 2024/25 (Pages 327 - 354)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

To update Cabinet on progress with delivering the capital and treasury strategy for 2024/25, as at the end of December 2024.

14. THIRD QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25 (Pages 355 - 368)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

To inform Cabinet of the summary position on revenue income and expenditure forecasts for the financial year 2024/25, as at the end of the third quarter.

15. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

To consider passing the following resolution: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following report will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

16. MUSEUM STORAGE OPTIONS - PART 2 369 - 420

REPORT OF THE CULTURE AND FACILITIES SERVICE MANAGER AND PRINCIPAL ESTATES SURVEYOR

To consider the proposed acquisition of Unit 1, City Park, Letchworth Garden City on a long leasehold basis at a peppercorn rent (i.e. zero) for the Museum Storage Facility on the terms set out in the Part 1 and Part 2 reports.

17. MUSEUM STORAGE OPTIONS - PART 1 (Pages 421 - 440)

REPORT OF THE CULTURE AND FACILITIES SERVICE MANAGER AND PRINCIPAL ESTATES SURVEYOR

To consider the proposed acquisition of Unit 1, City Park, Letchworth Garden City on a long leasehold basis at a peppercorn rent (i.e. zero) for the Museum Storage Facility on the terms set out in the Part 1 and Part 2 reports.

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, HERTS, SG6 3JF ON TUESDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY, 2025 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Daniel Allen (Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham and Dave Winstanley.*

In Attendance: *Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Jo Doggett (Service Director - Housing & Environmental Health), Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Louise Symes (Strategic Planning and Projects Manager) and Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately no members of the public, including registered speakers.*

101 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 40 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Val Bryant and Tamsin Thomas.

102 MINUTES - 14 JANUARY 2025

Audio Recording – 1 minute 48 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 January 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

103 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 35 seconds

There was no other business notified.

104 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 46 seconds

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

(2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean 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 drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

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

105 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes

There was no public participation at the meeting.

106 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 4 minutes 6 seconds

The Chair advised that the item referred from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee would be taken with the respective item on the agenda.

107 HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT ALLOCATIONS AND UPDATE

Audio recording – 4 minutes 23 seconds

Councillor Dave Winstanley, as the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, presented the report entitled 'Homelessness Prevention Grant Allocations and Update' and advised:

- The Council had received ringfenced grant funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), to meet legal housing duties and this report detailed the proposals for the allocation of this funding.
- The Council had a legal duty to assist households who were homeless, as the Council did not own any housing stock and worked with housing providers to meet local needs.
- The Council received over one thousand approaches for homelessness and housing advice each year, which were resolved without any legal duties being owed, so were not detailed in this report.
- There was £74,825 remaining from the Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2024/25 as highlighted in paragraph 7.7 of the report and the allocation of this amount was detailed in Table 3.
- In addition, the Council received notification in December 2024 of funding for 2025/26 from homelessness and rough sleeping grant funding programmes totalling £986k and this paper outlined how this funding would be allocated.
- Proposals for homelessness grant allocation amounts to housing providers would be staggered over the next 3 fiscal years, as detailed in Table 4. The providers were, Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA), North Herts Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB), Herts Young Homeless (HYH) and One YMCA.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, Councillor Dave Winstanley advised that:

- Multiyear funding was a way of spreading the funds over the 3 fiscal years, which was due to MHCLG introducing a new needs-based funding formula.
- This was not a new grant and funds had been received from MHCLG for the last twenty years.

In response to questions, the Strategic Housing Manager advised that:

- The Section 151 Officer would confirm at the end of each financial year that all criteria had been met.
- Social Services for Children looked after young people up to the age of 18. However, children who were 16 or 17 years old could be covered by the housing services as well.
- Provision of housing units for 16 and 17 years old had been reduced as a result of the costs involved in providing 24/7 care.
- There were not currently any housing units in North Herts District for homeless 16 and 17 years old, but children would be placed somewhere across Hertfordshire as the county council took on referrals across the ten district/boroughs.
- Moving forward to work with partner district councils to provide 24/7 care could only be considered once there were clearer details of future funding from MHCLG.

Councillor Dave Winstanley proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Approved the funding proposals for the in-year award of Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2024/25 as set out in Table 3 in paragraph 8.3.

(2) Approved the funding proposals for the allocation of part of the 2025/26 award of homelessness grants as outlined in Table 4 in paragraph 8.4 3.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: There is a need to secure additional services for homeless households in the district. Adopting the recommendations at 2.1A and 2.1B secures the provision of high-quality local services to help those in need, which is also consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029).

108 PROPOSED PARKING TARIFFS FOR 2025/26

Audio recording – 20 minutes 8 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as the Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, presented the report entitled 'Proposed Parking Tariffs for 2025/26' and advised that:

- Each year the Council had to adjust parking charges to keep in line with inflation.
- As no increase had been applied in 2024/25, a 4% increase would be applied to cover 2024/2025 and 2025/2026.
- Three options were proposed and these were outlined in the report.
- Consultations had taken place in December 2024 with all the Area Forums, Letchworth, Hitchin and Royston BIDs, Royston Town Council and Knebworth Parish Council.
- A summary of the comments received from these organisations was set out in paragraph 8.2 of the report, with more detailed comments at Appendix C.
- Details for the option 2 proposal were set out at Appendix A.
- Option 3 retained all the same proposals in option 2, with a proposed change to a 50p flat rate car parking tariff increase in Royston after 3pm as outlined at Appendix B.

- This report proposed a 2% inflationary increase to be applied on resident, visitor and business parking permits and visitor parking tickets in resident permit parking zones.
- At present visitors who parked in designated Electric Vehicle (EV) charging bays could do so without paying a parking fee. This report proposed the implementation of a charge for parking whilst charging an electric vehicle later in the financial year.
- Existing parking machines across all the town centre car parks and in Knebworth would be replaced with new payment options including a pay on exit scheme/post payment scheme and would be moving towards a ticketless system, as detailed in paragraph 8.3.1 of the report.
- Visitors would be required to register their vehicle at the start of the parking sessions and pay on exiting the car park. This would allow visitors to park for longer to enjoy the town centre facilities.
- Installation of the new parking machines would commence on 17 February 2025 and would run over a six-week period across all the towns.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Mick Debenham

In response to questions, the Strategic Planning and Projects Manager advised that:

- The introduction of the after 3pm off peak flat rate parking in Letchworth should help to spread footfall throughout the day.
- An offer of funding had been received from both Royston Town Council and Royston BID to subsidise parking costs with follow up meetings due to take place once tariffs had been approved at Cabinet.
- Traffic regulation orders had been amended to increase the length of stay allowed whilst using an EV charging parking bay to the maximum possible in the car park during the day to accord with the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS) government grant scheme awarded to the Council and to ensure that the vehicle must be charging whilst parked in the designated bay.
- There were currently very few EV charging bays across the car parks in the district and these provide a low income for the Council.
- The Council had entered a concession contract with Blink Charging UK which would provide additional EV charging parking bays across the district.
- Some designated EV charging bays would be allocated which would not be charged for parking in initially and there would also be dual parking bays, where visitors could pay to park and charge, or just pay to park. It would take time to monitor usage of these bays.
- The flat rate after 3pm parking subsidy scheme agreed with Royston BID had been in place for over ten years.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- Members supported the principles of the report and recognised that further meetings would be needed in Royston regarding subsidies.
- How the recommendations had changed following consultations and the importance of the input from the Royston BID.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the summary of comments and responses received to the Proposed Parking Tariff consultation at section 8.2 and the more detailed comments at Appendix C.

(2) Agreed to adopt the proposed off-street and on-street car park tariffs for 2025/26 as set out in Tables 1 to 6 at Appendix B as outlined in paragraphs 8.2.11 and 8.2.12 of this report, referred to as Option 3.

(3) Agreed not to increase the charges for Season Tickets for each of its long stay car parks or business permits for its car park at St. Martins Road in Knebworth for 2025/26.

(4) Agreed to increase the charges for resident permits, visitor permits, business permits and visitor tickets for resident parking zones for 2025/26 as set out in Section 8.4 of this report.

(5) Agreed that the proposed tariff changes, as recommended and approved in paragraphs 2.2 above, are implemented as soon as practicable, and that officers in consultation with the interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport proceed with the implementation as required.

(6) Agreed that the proposed increases for resident, visitor and business permits and visitor tickets in resident parking zones, as recommended and approved in paragraphs 2.4 above, are implemented as soon as practicable, and that officers in consultation with the interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport proceed with the implementation as required.

(7) Agreed to the implementation of customers paying for parking sessions whilst parked and charging within ‘designated electric vehicle charging bays only’ later in the financial year 2025/26 as set out in section 8.5 of this report and that the Service Director - Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport proceed with the implementation as required.

(8) Agreed that Officers proceed with the issuing of the necessary Notice of Variation to the 2024 Off1Street Parking Traffic Regulation Orders and the 2023 On-Street Consolidation Order as required to implement the increases recommended at 2.2 and 2.4 and approved above.

(9) Noted as part of the pay on exit scheme set out in paragraph 8.3.1 of this report that visitors will be charged the maximum period of stay for that car park if they do not ‘Check Out’ after completing their parking session.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To implement an increase in car parking tariffs and permits within resident parking zones in order to effectively manage their use and in accordance with the Council’s fees and charges policy as set out in its Medium- Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). To set car parking tariffs that support the achievement of modal shift away from private car use and to help support the vitality of town centres.

109 BUDGET 2025/26 (REVENUE BUDGET AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY)

Audio recording – 42 minutes 22 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Sean Nolan, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Nolan advised that there had been discussions around:

- The primary facts set out in the budget as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and looking into the savings that would be required over the next four to five years to fill the deficit and balance the in-year budget without using reserves.
- How the 'TBC' potential income items in the report would have a positive effect of the overall figures rather than a negative one.
- The Investment Strategy and around the type of investments made and any potential future risks involved.
- Where the various grant funding included within the report had been allocated and used.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Budget 2025/26 (Revenue Budget and Investment Strategy)' and advised that:

- This year the reports had been combined into one report to reflect where capital spend had significant revenue implications.
- The aim was to set a balanced budget including some of the General Fund reserves over the MTFS.
- In 2025/26 funding gains from previous Business Rates would be utilised rather than using General Fund reserves.
- The Council would need to find over £2.5 million savings by the end of the MFTS period.
- The General Fund reserves were well above the minimum recommended by the Section 151 Officer.
- The £1.435 million funding for Extended Producer Responsibility provided growth in the budget beyond inflationary cost pressures. But uncertainty over that funding stream in future.
- Consultations would take place later in the year with residents concerning any savings to be made that would have an impact on services.
- The Council would be increasing Council Tax by 2.99% which was the maximum amount allowed without holding a referendum.
- The banded Council Tax Reduction Scheme would continue to support those residents in most need.
- Some of the key features from the Budget Workshops held in November 2024 could be found in paragraphs 8.2-8.4.
- Funding was required to fully staff the Environmental Health service to ensure delivery of this important service.
- FAR had asked for additional information on the revenue investments, including whether they related to statutory services. This was included at Appendix G.
- It was an important part of the capital programme to improve facilities and services to residents across the district.
- Although the Learner Pool at Royston Leisure Centre was not included in the capital programme, discussions would continue to look to deliver a business case at a later stage.
- The comments made by the Chief Finance Officer on budget risk and General Fund reserves could be found in the section 25 report included at Appendix D.
- The Investment Strategy at Appendix F highlighted where the Council could invest its surplus funds.
- The Council wanted to be able to deliver services to residents and had a key priority of 'sustainability'. It would therefore make investments in the budget for decarbonisation of services and to provide resources for the Environmental Health service.

Councillor Mick Debenham advised that the funding included for NCP4, to replace the play equipment in Howard Park, could be removed from the Capital Programme, as this would be completed within funds already allocated to the project under ECP4. Therefore, an amendment could be made to the recommendations to remove this amount.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Service Director – Resources advised that work would be carried out to find the most effective way of providing cooling for Hitchin Town Hall and it would not conflict with any decarbonisation work.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Dave Winstanley
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- Members were pleased that the Royston Learner Pool project would still be considered in the future.
- Members were happy to support investment into Environmental Health staffing to ensure delivery of this important statutory service.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed as amended and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

(1) Notes the position on the Collection Fund and how it will be funded.

(2) Notes the position relating to the General Fund balance and that due to the risks identified a minimum balance of £2.6 million is recommended.

(3) Notes the net revenue savings that are likely to be required in future years, combined with the Chief Finance Officer's section 25 report (Appendix D) which provides a commentary on the risks and reliability of estimates contained in the budget.

(4) Approves the revenue savings and investments as detailed in Appendix B.

(5) Approves the capital programme as detailed in Appendix C, adjusted by the removal of NCP4 which will now be funded within the allocation for ECP4.

(6) Approves a net expenditure budget of £22.792m, as detailed in Appendix E.

(7) Approves a Council Tax increase of 2.99%, which is in line with the provisions in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

(8) Approves the Investment Strategy as detailed in Appendix F.

(9) Approves the adoption of the four clauses in relation to the Code of Practice on Treasury Management (as detailed in paragraphs 8.32 to 8.35).

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

(1) To ensure that all relevant factors are considered in arriving at a budget (revenue and capital) and Council Tax level for 2025/26. To ensure that the budget is aligned to Council priorities for 2024-28 as set out in the Council Plan.

(2) The Council's Investment Strategy is set to comply with relevant statutory guidance, including the CIPFA Prudential Code. The Strategy also sets out the Council's approach to risks in relation to the investment of surplus cash.

The meeting closed at 8.34 pm

Chair

CABINET
18 March 2025

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: GROWING BALDOCK STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN

REPORT OF: NIGEL SMITH, STRATEGIC PLANNING MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR DANIEL ALLEN, LEADER & INTERIM EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING & TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITIES: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report asks Cabinet to recommend the Strategic Masterplan for land around Baldock to Full Council. This masterplan covers a number of sites allocated for development in the Council's adopted Local Plan (Sites BA1, BA2, BA3 and BA10), along with other ancillary land, for housing, employment and supporting infrastructure. Taken together, these represent the single, largest development project in the Local Plan.

The policies of the Local Plan require the preparation of a masterplan for these sites. A masterplan has been produced by the landowner and applicant team working with Council officers and advisors. This has followed approved guidance and procedures. The draft masterplan was subject to public consultation and informed by independent design review. The masterplan provides an appropriate framework for the future planning and development of this strategic site.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet recommends to Full Council that:

2.1. The Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan attached at Appendix A, is approved and adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning decisions relating to the site.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To set an agreed design framework for the delivery of a strategic site within the Council's adopted Local Plan. To provide a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of multiple planned sites around Baldock. To accord with policy requirements of the Local Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. The Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan (hereafter 'masterplan') has, in officers' view, been appropriately prepared in accordance with national and local policies, guidance and advice. It has been prepared under the Council's preferred approach; the Local Plan and associated guidance encourage the preparation of masterplans for strategic sites in advance of and separate to any planning applications or decisions. The Council is currently behind schedule in delivering the homes required by the Local Plan. It is important that the strategic sites progress expediently through the planning system.

4.2. The alternative is to not refer the masterplan for consideration by Full Council. This is not recommended for same reasons as above. There would be planning, financial and reputational risks if Cabinet decided not to proceed. These are explored in Section 11 of this report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Council's internal, informal Strategic Planning Project Board has overseen preparation of this masterplan. This includes cross-party representation from all political groups recognising that the implementation of strategic sites are long-term projects which may span administrations of the Council. The Executive Member for Planning & Transport chairs the Project Board. Local ward members have been invited to participate in relevant meetings of the Board.

5.2. During its preparation, the Growing Baldock project was presented to and / or considered by the Project Board at its meetings of March 2022, February 2023, March 2023, September 2023, October 2023 and December 2024

5.3. Urban & Civic (U&C) presented to the Project Board in February 2023 in advance of a first round of public engagement. The Preferred Option masterplan was presented to the Project Board at its meeting of 30 October 2023 in advance of a second round of public consultation held in November 2023.

5.4. These more formal stages of consultation have been accompanied by a rolling programme of engagement with local communities and stakeholders. This has included frequently appearing at the Baldock Area Forum / Area Committee, establishing a U&C-led community forum, meeting with surrounding Parish Councils and focussed events for those who might be directly impacted by the proposals including direct neighbours of the sites, residents of the Icknield Way / Football Close area and the existing GP practice.

5.5. All Councillors were invited to a briefing and 'Q&A' session on the Local Plan and the general principles of masterplanning and design on 8 July 2024.

5.6. In August 2024, Project Board advised upon amendments to the Project Board Terms of Reference. These included recommendations for the future reporting of masterplans to Councillors. The updated Terms of Reference were endorsed by Cabinet in September 2024 and have been followed in preparing and presenting this item. This includes additional Councillor representation on the Board and seeking Board feedback on any views from their wider groups. Subject to Cabinet approval, a summary document will be prepared in advance of presentation to Full Council.

5.7. The final masterplan was presented to and considered by the Project Board at its meeting of 24 February 2025. The Board requested further, detailed amendments on secondary education options. These have been updated and the Board supported the masterplan progressing to Cabinet at a reconvened meeting on 4 March 2025.

5.8. Subject to Cabinet approval, all Councillors will be invited to an officer briefing and 'Q&A' session on this masterplan ahead of consideration of this item by Full Council.

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 5 January 2024.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The Council's Local Plan (the Plan) was adopted by Full Council in November 2022. It forms part of both the Council's adopted Policy Framework and the statutory Development Plan for the District.

7.2. The Plan sets out the Council's strategy for meeting the development needs of North Hertfordshire over the period to 2031. The Plan makes provision for at least 13,000 new homes. A significant proportion of the District's overall housing target are to be delivered on six Strategic Housing Sites – defined as sites of more than 500 homes – around the main towns in and adjoining the District. These are supplemented by a range of Local Housing Allocations which range in size up to approximately 300 homes within and around the District's towns and villages.

7.3. The Inspector examining the Local Plan was clear that deciding where and how housing needs should be met was an extremely complex issue. The arguments for, and the potential benefits of, new development were extensively scrutinised and carefully balanced against the inevitable harm that will arise from the release of this land.

7.4. All the Strategic Housing Sites are greenfield locations. They contain agricultural land, leisure routes and Public Rights of Way enjoyed by residents as well as habitats of importance for flora and fauna. However, the examination concluded that the imperative to boost housing supply – in terms of both local evidence of acute housing need and national policy directions – meant these developments should proceed. Key paragraphs from the Inspector's conclusions are shown below for context:

> 487. Without impinging on the Green Belt, the consequences for sustainable development would be significant. This would involve either building new homes in considerably less sustainable locations – in all probability away from the areas where they are most needed – or not delivering them at all. The former would most likely lead to a significantly greater increase in use of the private car and could lead to the creation of communities that would be relatively isolated, particularly in terms of access to shops and services. The latter would deny many the opportunity to live in their own home close to their family, friends and work, and could stifle the local economy. To my mind, neither proposition would best, or even adequately, serve the achievement of sustainable development, particularly in respect of its economic and social dimensions.
>
> …

492. On the one hand, it is clear to me that the development of most of the housing allocations proposed in this Plan would cause significant or moderate harm to the Green Belt, even with mitigation. That is a highly regrettable outcome and a very important factor. Indeed, I give substantial weight to it.

493. On the other hand, however, the need for housing both in North Hertfordshire and in Luton is acute. The proposed allocations would ensure that those needs are met where they arise in the most sustainable locations that are deliverable/developable. Rejecting these sites would delay meeting the pressing need for housing further, and not impinging on the Green Belt would mean accepting that those needs would not be met where they arise. Both would choke the local housing market. The home-making aspirations of many people, particularly those requiring affordable homes, would be shattered and the local economy would most likely suffer negative consequences. These too are matters of substantial weight.

494. In my judgement, on balance, the latter considerations outweigh the harm that would be caused to the Green Belt. Consequently, I consider that the exceptional circumstances necessary to alter the Green Belt boundaries to facilitate the allocation of the housing sites concerned do exist both in principle and in each individual case. This aspect, therefore, should not stand in the way of their allocation.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan Inspector's Report, September 2022

7.5. The Strategic Housing Sites are of a greater size and complexity than any developments that have taken place in the District over the last twenty years. They are critical to the overall strategy of the Plan. Their delivery is essential to increase the number of homes being built above historic averages and address the acute need for housing.

7.6. Policy SP9 of the Local Plan sets out the Council's approach to Design and Sustainability. This states the Council will require the production of Strategic Masterplans for Strategic Housing Sites and other significant development. Significant development generally comprises development of 100 homes or more. The policy states that masterplans may 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.

7.7. Policy SP9 also sets out a series of design principles to be followed in masterplans and applications for development meeting these thresholds. It contains documentation requirements and sets out the approaches to approval. The Local Plan encourages the submission of masterplans for agreement before the submission of a planning application. Where applications have already been submitted, the Policy also allows for masterplans to be agreed with the Council prior to their determination.

7.8. Masterplans are a recognised 'good practice' tool as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Government Planning Practice Guidance explains a masterplan as follows:

> **What are masterplans?**
>
> Masterplans set the vision and implementation strategy for a development. They are distinct from local design guides by focusing on site specific proposals such as the scale and layout of development, mix of uses, transport and green infrastructure. Depending on the level of detail, the masterplan may indicate the intended arrangement of buildings, streets and the public realm. More specific parameters for the site's development may be set out in a design code, which can accompany the overall masterplan.
>
> A range of other plans and technical reports may be needed alongside a masterplan, to provide supporting evidence and set out related proposals, such as a local character study, landscape assessment, transport assessment and proposals for securing biodiversity net gain. An implementation strategy could also be included, especially where development is expected to be brought forward in a number of phases.

7.9. To support the Council's masterplanning approach, Cabinet agreed in March 2021 to establish an informal, internal Project Board to provide corporate oversight and strategic direction. This is not a formal committee or decision-making body. Through Project Board a range of associated procedural guidance has been produced and subsequently endorsed by Cabinet (see links in Section 18).

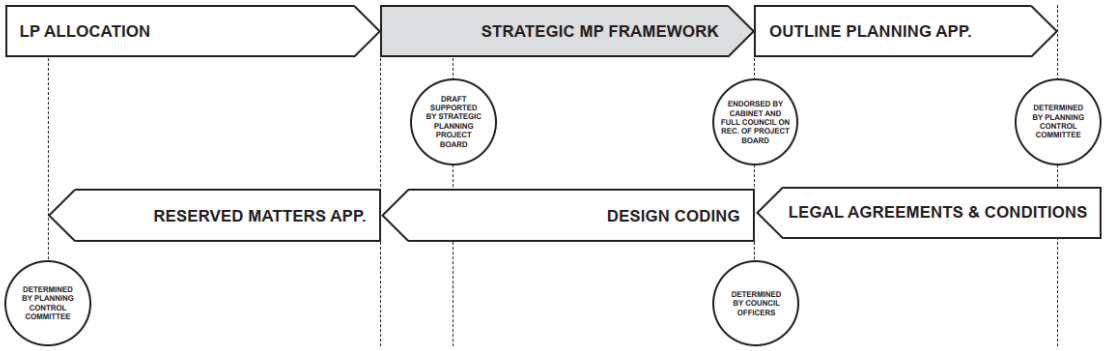
7.10. These say masterplans produced and approved before the submission of a planning application or prior to the determination of a planning application will follow the final approval process below (subject to a positive outcome at each step):

- Project Board recommendation to Service Director
- Service Director recommendation to Cabinet
- Cabinet recommendation to Full Council
- Adoption by Full Council as a material consideration in the determination of any relevant planning applications

7.11. Consideration of the masterplan does not necessitate any further debate upon the general principles of whether the development should take place in the first instance. Neither should it lead to debate on the fact that, at a strategic level, the development will result in some harm to the local area or may lead to more congestion or delay on local roads. These matters have been considered through examination and adoption of the Local Plan. Some adverse impacts are 'priced in' as the cost of ensuring the needs of existing and future residents are appropriately met. Relevant policies in the Local Plan identify site-specific and general measures that should be included to mitigate the impacts of development. These matters will be subject to further technical consideration through detailed assessments at the formal planning stages.

7.12. In this context, officers are not asking Councillors to confer any greater or lesser weight to the idea of development on this site than already exists; the masterplan provides a high-level design framework against which any future planning applications for the site can be considered. The level of design detail will increase as proposals move through the planning process.

7.13. The masterplan is the second stage in a (broadly) six-step approach to securing the planning, regulation and delivery of a site through a combination of statutory and discretionary measures. This process should be viewed holistically as a means of collectively securing design quality, setting out the vision, community engagement, on-site infrastructure and off-site contributions for the successful planning and delivery of the project.



7.14. Formal regulatory approval(s) for the development will be secured through any subsequent planning permission(s). However, the masterplan has been guided by, and considered against, the key requirements of relevant policies in the Local Plan. Similarly, although it is not a formal planning decision, any concerns or objections to any masterplan should generally be framed against relevant policies and considerations or made on valid planning grounds.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. The Local Plan allocates several sites around the north, east and south-east of Baldock for development. These are identified in the Local Plan as:

- Site **BA1**, which consists of approximately 142 hectares of predominantly agricultural land to the north of Baldock within Bygrave parish. The south-west of the site adjoins existing residential properties on Salisbury Road and Bygrave Road. Bygrave Road continues through the site becoming Ashwell Road, linking Baldock with the villages of the same name. There are a small number of existing properties along Bygrave Road which do not form part of the development agreement between Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and U&C but which are included within the Local Plan allocation. Site BA1 is allocated by Policy SP14 of the Local Plan for a strategic-scale development of approximately 2,800 homes with supporting infrastructure including a new, mixed-use local centre, a community hall and GP surgery, up to 6 forms of

entry (FE)[1] of additional primary-aged education provision and up to 8FE of additional secondary-age education provision.

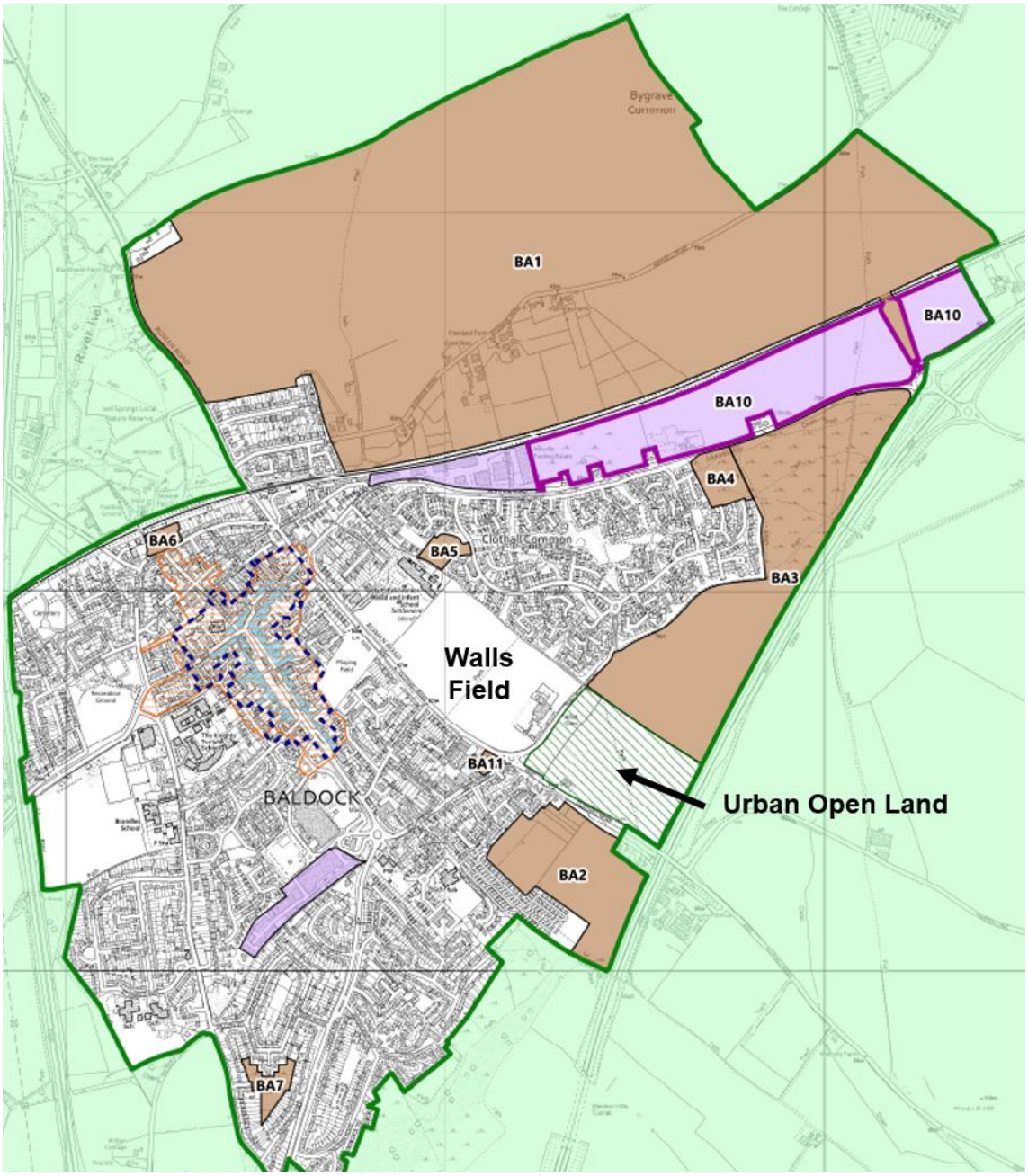
- Site **BA2**, which consists of approximately nine hectares of agricultural land to the south-east of Baldock, and south-west of the A507 within Clothall parish. The north-west of the site adjoins existing residential properties on Walnut Avenue and Laxton Gardens. Baldock Park Homes, an extensive mobile home site, lies to the south-west. The south-east of the site is bounded by the A505 Baldock bypass with a small number of residential properties and the A507 to the north east. Site BA2 is identified as a Local Housing Allocation under Policy HS1 of the Local Plan. Policy BA2 identifies detailed, site-specific criteria and a dwelling estimate of approximately 200 homes..
- Site **BA3**, which consists of approximately twenty-five hectares of land to the south-east of Baldock lying between the Clothall Common development and the A505 Baldock bypass. The north-eastern area of the site contains an informal area of habitat and walking routes on a man-made bund resulting from excavation and earthworks associated with the construction of the bypass. The south-west of the site is in agricultural use. Site BA3 is a Local Housing Allocation under Policy HS1 of the Local plan. Policy BA3 identifies detailed, site-specific criteria which include making clear that no housing is to be permitted on the bund and a dwelling estimate of approximately 245 homes; and
- Site **BA10**, which consists of approximately twenty hectares of land to the east of Baldock lying between the B656 Royston Road and the railway in predominantly agricultural use. The west of the site adjoins the existing employment area at the Ashville Trading Estate. There are a number of existing properties along Royston Road which do not form part of the development agreement between HCC and U&C and which are excluded from any Local Plan designation (though the site occupied by Watts Roofing Supplies is included). Site BA10 is an employment land allocation under Policy SP3 of the Local Plan. Policy ETC1 states that employment allocations should provide office, research & development, industrial processes, industrial and / or storages & distribution uses. Policy BA10 identifies detailed, site-specific criteria which include a requirement for a masterplan prior to the approval of any detailed matters.

8.2. The annotated extract from the Local Plan Policies Map on the following page shows the allocations. The Baldock, Bygrave & Clothall Neighbourhood Plan (BBCNP, 2021) also applies to this area. The Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the statutory Development Plan for its area alongside the Local Plan. The BBCNP contains relevant policies, including specific requirements in relation to sites BA1, BA2, BA3 and BA10. Some requirements broadly mirror Local Plan policies. Neighbourhood plan policies are referred to where relevant through this report.

[1] A form of entry is a class of 30 pupils across each year group. A 6FE secondary school would, once fully implemented, have 900 pupils aged 11-16 across school Years 7 to 11 (6 classes x 30 x 5 years).

8.3. These sites, as well as further, surrounding land are all owned by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). In March 2022, HCC selected Urban & Civic as its development partner for these proposed new neighbourhoods. Urban & Civic are a ‘master developer’ specialising in the delivery of large-scale sites.

8.4. A master developer typically brings a large site through several stages of the planning process including the masterplanning, outline application, legal agreement, design coding and certain detailed matters. The master developer will often deliver site-wide infrastructure such as key roads, green spaces, schools and utilities. They will then sell smaller, discrete parcels of land within the development to a range of housebuilders who then bring forward detailed reserved matters applications and build the homes along with (where applicable) neighbourhood streets, small-scale play facilities and open spaces. The overall coherence of the site is secured through (as applicable) masterplans, design codes, contractual obligations between the housebuilders and master developer and appropriate, long-term management and stewardship arrangements.



8.5. The sites were subject of previous planning applications, submitted in 2017 by HCC to help secure the allocations in the Local Plan. These were subsequently withdrawn.

8.6. As set out above (see Paragraph 7.6), the Local Plan says that masterplans may need to consider the cumulative impact of multiple sites. Following the appointment of U&C, officers worked to identify the most appropriate boundaries for the masterplan. The Growing Baldock masterplan covers the four local plan allocations above. It also includes:

- Land to the south of BA3 between the site and the A507 / Clothall Road. This is approximately ten hectares in size. There are allotments along the western boundary with Wallington Road with the remainder in agricultural use,

bisected by a Public Right of Way. This land is Urban Open Land under Policy CBG5 of the Local Plan. This places restrictions on its use that aim to broadly maintain its openness and visual connection with the surrounding countryside. Policy G2 of the BBCNP identifies this area, along with adjoining Walls Field, as a Strategic Green Space and similarly aims to maintain its predominantly open character;

- Walls Field – approximately eleven hectares of undeveloped land lying between the A507 / Clothall Road and the Clothall Common development. Hartsfield School lies to the north-west and Tapps Garden Centre to the south-east. This area is not subject to any designation or allocation in the Local Plan but is nationally protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is the site of a Roman small town and Late Iron Age settlement. As above, Policy G2 of the BBCNP applies to both the Urban Open Land and Walls Field; and
- Approximately 1.5 hectares of undeveloped land to the east of the A507 North Road and opposite Salisbury Road. This is adjacent to, but outside of, the Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve within the Green Belt.

8.7. Urban & Civic have produced the masterplan. In developing the masterplan, U&C have collectively referred to the masterplan area and this project as 'Growing Baldock'. Where appropriate, the Growing Baldock masterplan also identifies or refers to (potential) interventions beyond this boundary.

8.8. Production of the masterplan has followed the key stages set out in the Council's approved masterplanning guidance. This included:

- Establishing an officer group with representatives from the District Council and HCC supported by external capacity and expertise on key issues;
- Agreement of a masterplan brief for the site setting out key issues;
- Preparation of a multi-disciplinary evidence base on matters such as ecology, landscape, heritage and transport & access to inform proposals;
- Consideration and / or testing of key spatial options for the masterplan, informed by a bespoke workshop facilitated by Hyas Associates. This included (but was not limited to) options for the location, nature and / or alignment of:
    i. The main road access to BA1 and the connection to the B656 / A505 at the east of the site
    ii. The second, active travel crossing of the railway
    iii. Secondary school provision;
- Design review;
- Presentation to the Council's Project Board at preferred option masterplan stage;
- Public consultation; and
- Refinement of proposals in response to the steps above to produce the final masterplan.

8.9. The landowner team have worked with officers from the District and County Council (and their representatives) under a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) since September 2022 to develop the masterplan.

8.10. Emerging material from the masterplan framework was previously subject to formal Design Review in July 2023 using the Council's preferred partner Design South-East using their bespoke North Hertfordshire panel of experts.

8.11. The preferred option masterplan was presented to the Council Project Board in October 2023. The Project Board endorsed the work undertaken to that date as an appropriate basis for public consultation recognising that further refinement of the proposals would be required. In particular, and at that stage, the Project Board made clear that the final masterplan would need to resolve the options around secondary education to present a single solution.

8.12. Public consultations took place in March and November 2023 and invites were sent to local councillors, stakeholders and residents. U&C held in-person public events at Baldock Arts & Heritage Centre. The consultation was accompanied by a website (www.growingbaldock.co.uk) which has been maintained and updated throughout the process and remains 'live'.

8.13. Following the November 2023 consultation, extensive additional work was undertaken to explore the feasibility of the potential solutions for secondary education (discussed in detail below), reported to the Project Board in December 2024. The Council's officer project team provided detailed feedback on a full draft of the Masterplan document in February 2025.

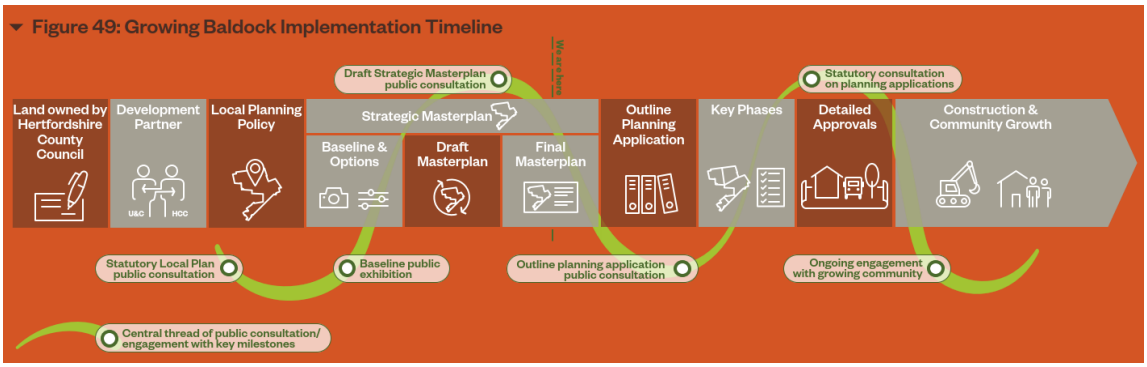
8.14. Following Design Review and the public consultations, and through the process more generally, the developers/landowners and the Council have worked together to refine the masterplan and address issues raised. Key changes and refinements to the masterplan, include:

- Realignment of the primary route through BA1 as a low-speed route through the site (rather than a 'bypass') and, following archaeological investigation, connecting to the existing roundabout junction at eastern end of the Baldock bypass;
- Rationalising the spatial options for secondary school provision so that it is made either at the existing Knights Templar site or on BA3;
- Making Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) school provision on BA3;
- Introducing greater flexibility over the nature of the second, active travel crossing of the railway between Clothall Common and BA1 to allow further investigation of providing an underpass rather than an overbridge; and
- Redistributing potential primary school provision within BA1 to provide one school to the west of the proposed local centre and one to the east, both located in close proximity to the primary route and the Bygrave Road corridor.

8.15. The size of the project, the nature of Urban & Civic's delivery model and the need to ensure flexibility on matters which cannot be resolved now have shaped the masterplan. The overall aim has been to establish key principles and objectives which can form a framework for the assessment of future, more detailed proposals.

8.16. The masterplan includes framework plans but these are strategic in scale. This masterplan does not set out, for example, a detailed street network for the site. This should be borne in mind when considering the masterplan and the level of detail it contains; it is not an 'absolute fix' of the proposals. This is recognised within the

masterplan document which shows how the design process will continue and evolve through to implementation in the diagram below (see pp.91-93 of the masterplan document).



8.17. The masterplan has focussed upon and provides:

- A written vision, key objectives and thematic design principles for the site. These provide a clear basis for testing future proposals as they continue to evolve and work their way through the planning process;
- High level spatial frameworks for key layers such as land use and transport; and
- More detailed illustrative material and written concepts for those parts of the site where there is a greater level of certainty. This includes key areas of green infrastructure and the 'BA2' site south of Clothall Road which is expected to be the first phase of development with detailed plans to be brought forward in advance of other areas of the site.

8.18. The key plans in the masterplan are:

- Land Use (Fig.17, p.37) – identifying the areas of the site to be used for residential, open space and sports provision, primary schools, reserve land for secondary education, SEND provision, employment uses and a local centre.
- Green infrastructure (Fig.21, p.45) – identifying a series of key spaces in and around the sites and town with associated open space typologies, precedent images, concept plans and strategic water and drainage strategy which aims, as a key principle, to recharge the existing aquifer feeding the River Ivel.
- Biodiversity (Fig.29, p.57) – identifying key habitat assets that will be provided, retained and enhanced. These include significant new areas of grassland habitat at the north of BA1 and at Walls Field and providing connectivity with the Local Nature Reserves at Ivel Springs and Weston Hills and the wider countryside.
- Movement (Fig.31, p.61) – A framework plan showing transport connectivity within component plans detailing proposals for active travel, public transport and vehicular access along with key principles for parking provision and a range of proposed off-site interventions to be implemented across the wider town including alterations to the Whitehorse Street junction in the centre of Baldock.
- Urban Design Framework (Fig.37, p.71) – identifying a strategic, site wide urban design framework setting out a structure for key frontages onto streets and green spaces, landmark buildings, prominent corners and landscaped edges. This forms the basis of a development structure and sets key design principles and an approach to establishing character which appropriately responds to the architectural qualities of Baldock. Detailed design principles are set to inform plans for the first phase of development on BA2.

- Composite Framework Plan (Fig.44, p.83) which combines the parameters and concepts in the layers above to provide a development framework.
- Indicative Phasing Strategy (Figs 45-48, pp.88-89) – splitting the site into four key phases starting with BA2. Phase B covers the green infrastructure proposals for Walls Field and 'Baldock Mound', the western third of BA1 and the eastern and western edges of the BA10 site. Phase C brings forward the central cores of BA1 and BA10 including full implementation of the primary route through BA1 connecting the A507 to the A505. Phase D implements the eastern area of BA1 and finalises proposals for BA3 and the adjoining Urban Open Land.

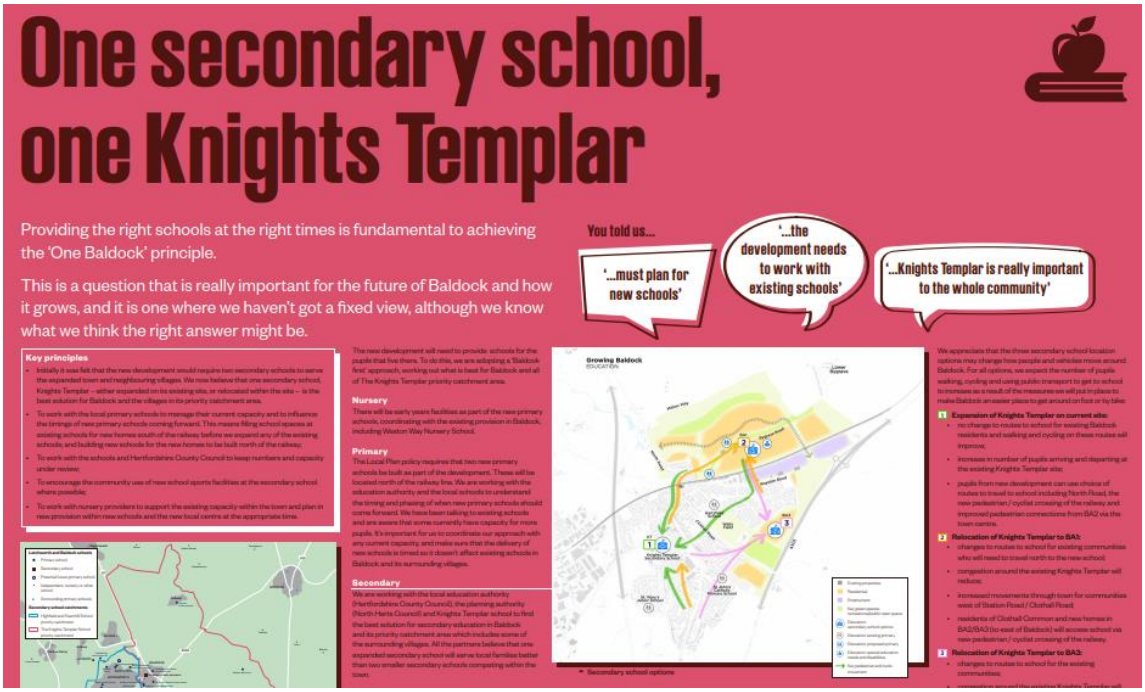
8.19. A summary assessment of the masterplan against the requirements of the relevant site-specific policy is set out later. However, in advance of this, it is equally informative to identify those key areas where the masterplan does not (fully) conform with the expectations of the Local Plan and set out the justification for this. These matters are set out separately but an overall decision on the masterplan should be made 'in the round'.

8.20. Formal assessment of any schemes' compliance with relevant policies will be through any subsequent planning application(s).

Secondary education

8.21. Delivering an appropriate solution for secondary education is critical to the scheme. Baldock and the surrounding villages are currently served by one secondary school. The Knights Templar School (KTS) is a 7FE Academy on the east side of the town. The adopted Local Plan requires up to 8FE of additional secondary education provision on land north of the railway (Site BA1). This was the identified solution at the time of the Local Plan's preparation and examination, guided by and agreed with Hertfordshire County Council.

8.22. Through the masterplan process, member engagement and public consultation a clear preference for a 'One Baldock' approach emerged. This includes seeking a solution that delivers a single secondary school for the expanded town and surrounding villages. This approach was explained in the public consultation in November 2023.



Extract from November 2023 consultation material

8.23. This consultation identified three potential solutions for secondary education:

- Expand KTS on its current site
- Relocate an expanded KTS north of the railway (site BA1)
- Relocate an expanded KTS south of Clothall Common (site BA3)

8.24. The clear feedback of the Project Board at this time, supported by local ward Councillors, was that any final masterplan needed to narrow these choices to a single, preferred solution. This was to provide certainty to the project and the local community. There was a clear preference that the development should facilitate the relocation of KTS to new facilities on the BA3 site.

8.25. Extensive additional work was conducted during 2024 to explore this request, better understand the factors influencing future demand and further understand the feasibility of various options.

8.26. The option of providing a single school for the enlarged town within BA1 has now been discounted. This is primarily because of the substantial land-take that a school of this size would require. Within BA1 this would need to be wholly accommodated within land that might otherwise deliver housing, significantly impacting the number of new homes that might be accommodated by the project. Removing secondary education provision entirely to the north of the railway and away from the existing town would also have significant implications for and impacts on existing communities.

8.27. It is important to make clear that <u>there is agreement between officers and representatives of all parties that one, larger secondary school for Baldock is the preferred option.</u> This builds on the existing strengths of KTS and the 'One Baldock' approach. It allows secondary provision to grow in phases in line with demand and avoids the operational challenges of an additional, smaller secondary school that operated 'in competition' with KTS. The preferred option from HCC, local Councillors and the current school leadership is the relocation of the existing KTS into the Growing Baldock scheme at BA3. This

preference is made clear in the masterplan. Land at BA3 is reserved solely for education while all reasonable efforts are made to deliver this. However, a range of factors prevent this from being identified as the sole solution at this point in the process.

8.28. The current intake at KTS includes an inflow of around 2FE of pupils from Letchworth. There is currently spare capacity in the secondary school estate in Letchworth and admission rules gives priority at KTS to children from Baldock and the surrounding villages. In the early stages of any development, prospective Year 7 children from the Growing Baldock scheme would be prioritised over any applicants from Letchworth. This would reduce the spare capacity available to prospective students from Letchworth who would be 'pushed back' towards Fearnhill, Highfield or other schools identified under parental choice with sufficient capacity.

8.29. Because of this, 2FE of the existing provision at KTS is considered 'available' to serve the Growing Baldock scheme. Under planning rules, U&C cannot be charged for the costs of (re-)providing this in any scheme. It also cannot be charged for the costs of (re-)providing the remaining 5FE of existing provision that presently serves the current population of Baldock and the surrounding villages.

8.30. This leaves a significant funding gap for the delivery of a relocated school for which there is currently no solution. There is no reasonable prospect at this time of that gap being filled by central government funding; relevant budgets are presently wholly directed to permanently removing RAAC (aerated concrete) from affected schools.

8.31. Since adoption of the Local Plan, there have been significant changes in underlying demographics. Birth rates and primary school roll numbers are falling on both a local and national basis. This will see a fall in demand feed through into the secondary school system over time and could further impact on the figures outlined above.

8.32. HCC have a statutory obligation to ensure that every child can be offered a school place. Their modelling of pupil numbers shows a requirement to plan for up to 12FE of secondary education provision across the Baldock and the surrounding villages. However, it is recognised there is also uncertainty surrounding this figure and the actual number of pupils may ultimately be lower.

8.33. The project has explored opportunities for the existing KTS in detail. Expansion is technically feasible and deliverable up to 10FE. This is within the range of possible outcomes but does not achieve the upper end of HCC's planning parameters which must be safeguarded unless and until such time as it can be clearly shown that this level of provision will not be required. There are also significant challenges associated with expanding a school in a 'live' education environment. KTS is an Academy outside the direct control of HCC as Local Education Authority and therefore cannot be compelled to expand against its wishes.

8.34. There are potential costs associated with the maintenance and repair of existing buildings on the KTS site to allow their continued use in the long-term. These maintenance costs are beyond the responsibility of the Growing Baldock scheme and would require funding. HCC, U&C and local ward members have all advised officers that KTS is currently resistant to the idea of expanding in-situ.

8.35. The only fully deliverable option at the current time is therefore a new, second secondary school. This could be fully funded by U&C on land within their control to meet the surplus demand created by the Growing Baldock Scheme. However, this school would almost certainly be smaller than HCC's operational preference for new secondary schools to be at least 6FE in size to deliver a full breadth of curriculum and economies of scale. There would also be challenges around the long-term sustainability of this model. This approach would not reflect the clear feedback of community consultation.

8.36. The *potential* number of pupils could be estimated and recalculated endlessly. However, the *actual* amount of education places that will be needed can only be definitively known once new homes start to be delivered and occupied by real families. And placed against the demand arising from the existing population, influenced by the wider demographic factors above. There will be clear, advanced warning of the requirements as pupils work through the pre-school and primary school system that will allow a final decision to be made in good time; it is well-recognised that new developments generally attract younger and newly-forming families with the peak demand for secondary education trailing some time behind the peak demand for primary education.

8.37. The masterplan therefore includes a flexible approach. It is framed in a way that any of the three options above could be accommodated, namely:

- The expansion of KTS in-situ;
- The relocation of KTS to BA3; and
- A second, small secondary school on BA3

8.38. The masterplan makes clear that the relocation of an expanded KTS to BA3 is the preferred outcome. Sufficient land is reserved unless and until it is conclusively proven that this scheme is not deliverable and / or not required. A final decision will be made later in the development process involving the district and county councils in consultation with local, elected representatives.

8.39. A detailed presentation and Q&A session was held with the Project Board and local ward members in December 2024. At this meeting, the Board recognised the complexities of the situation and agreed that the masterplan could progress for consideration with this flexible approach subject to the position in 8.38 above. This was reiterated at the February and March 2025 meetings.

8.40. Any outline application would currently need to include the flexible approach to ensure a deliverable permission could be issued. Any future s106 legal agreement will contain appropriate review mechanisms, requirements for governance and oversight and triggers that allow a decision to be made and implemented. In the meantime, all parties have agreed to continue to work together and with other key stakeholders including the local MP and DfE to provide the best possible opportunity to implement the preferred solution.

8.41. The table below shows the key implications of the three options. This assessment was prepared by U&C and HCC as part of the options assessment:

Option	Housing Impact on BA3	Transport	Comments	Deliverability
Option 1 - Expansion of Knights Templar School on existing site	Housing delivered on BA3	Greatest impacts on the Icknield Way > Norton Road > Weston Way corridor	Supports a 'One Baldock' approach Feasibility studies have shown potential for expansion to 10fe Limited future additional capacity within Baldock if other housing comes forward S106 – financial contribution to expansion of the existing school	For this option to be delivered, KTS need to consent to expansion on their school site.
Option 2 - Relocation and expansion of KTS onto a new site in BA3	No housing delivered on BA3	Most significant impact on South Road and Wallington Road, and the junction of Clothall Road / South Road and Wallington Road	Supports a 'One Baldock' approach Provides new high-quality buildings Provides potential for up to 12fe S106 – financial contribution to new school (cannot be wholly funded by development)	For this option to be delivered, significant additional funding needs to be secured.
Option 3 - Establish a new second secondary school on BA3	Some housing delivered on BA3	Lower-level impacts than Option 2 so no additional interventions beyond those recommended for Option 2 are required.	This option does not support a 'One Baldock' approach Second smaller secondary school is difficult to operate particularly if standalone. S106 – land and funds to deliver a new school.	Deliverable – land and s106 contributions will be reserved as part of the application.

8.42. Each of these three options will involve a departure from the policy requirements of the Local Plan:

- None of the options would deliver a secondary school on BA1, contrary to Policy SP14(i);
- Two of the three options would see at least part of site BA3 used for education, contrary to Policies HS1 and BA3 which identify this land for housing.

8.43. However, as shown above, this approach has been subject to rigorous exploration and assessment including consideration of new and additional information that was not available at the point the Local Plan was examined.

8.44. Notwithstanding the specific requirements above, both the Local Plan and national planning policies place considerable emphasis on (i) the delivery of new homes, (ii) the provision of appropriate infrastructure to support this and (iii) the provision of sufficient school places. Policy SP14 additionally requires that any masterplan for BA1 is "deliverable".

8.45. Without a flexible approach, the Growing Baldock project would stall. It is already more than two years since adoption of the Local Plan and it is imperative that the Council can demonstrate tangible progress in its implementation. The approach to secondary education is the most appropriate that can be achieved at this point in time. Officers therefore fully support the approach in the masterplan.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) school

8.46. The masterplan includes a commitment to provide a two-hectare site for a SEND school. This is shown on BA3, co-located with the potential secondary school.

8.47. There is not a policy requirement in any of the relevant Local Plan allocations to include a SEND school. The Growing Baldock scheme will not generate sufficient demand for additional SEND school places to justify requesting the entirety of the land and full build costs of a SEND school from U&C as a negotiated developer contribution.

8.48. In recognition of this, HCC have provided additional information and justification to support this land-use element of the proposal. In summary this recognises or includes:

- The County Council's duty to secure provisions for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities;
- The current significant shortfall in places in the sector, and within specific forms of SEND provision. This is forecast to continue rising and has informed inspection findings by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission;
- Adopted HCC strategy which seeks to deliver 300 additional places across the county including 100 spaces in the north of Hertfordshire in response to the geographical spread of forecast demand and requiring planning authorities to take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement;
- The support within Policies SP10 and HC1 of the Local Plan for community facilities including education in appropriate and accessible locations;
- The geographical spread of demand for SEND provision. This includes a recognition that existing needs for the intended form of provision from the three towns at the centre of North Herts - Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock - are currently met in Stevenage;
- Consideration of potential alternate locations for SEND provision within the District. This includes a review of all new primary school sites requested and required through the site allocations in the Local Plan and re-confirmation they remain required for this purpose;
- The operational and co-location benefits of providing SEND alongside mainstream education schools; and
- National planning policy which emphasises the importance of ensuring there is a sufficient choice of school places

8.49. This has been carefully considered as part of the masterplan process. There is a clear and pressing need for additional SEND provision. This is a sector where need has grown rapidly in recent years. This means, in North Herts case, it came after policy and land-use decisions made in the current Local Plan. However, in the absence of specifically allocated sites for SEND that have been factored into the plan-making process, this also means any provision within Baldock comes at the (further) expense of potential housing provision in a scheme that is already balancing numerous demands.

8.50. Having regard to the factors above and the absence of alternative, deliverable sites within the District, the inclusion of land for SEND provision within the masterplan is supported by your officers. The case for SEND provision will continue to be explored and interrogated through the planning application, including any further detail on the consideration of potential alternate sites. The impact on housing numbers is discussed further below but forms part of this consideration.

Health provision within the employment land

8.51. Policy BA14(g) requires the provision of a GP surgery within BA1. The masterplan document recognises that:

> *Baldock will need new health facilities as it grows as the existing medical centre is nearing full capacity. The development will work with health authorities to provide a new 'health hub' with GP and other health facilities, to serve the Baldock community.*

8.52. The developer team have held extensive discussions with the existing GP practice at Baldock surgery and the local Integrated Care Board (ICB). These are continuing and no definitive decisions have been made yet. The masterplan presently shows health provision at the western end of BA10, noting:

> *A health 'hub' could be incorporated at the western end of the employment parcel, adjacent to the active travel crossing. This could include new GP services alongside a wider health offering, potentially combined with small community / retail uses that would connect the employment area to Baldock and create an active and vibrant community facility in this location*

8.53. This is an appropriate location. It would be between, and able to serve, both existing and new communities if required. It is a better location for any facility serving the existing town than BA1. The policies of the Local Plan allow for alternate uses within employment areas provided they bring comparable benefits in terms of employment generation.

8.54. It is also important to note that the employment land allocation at site BA10 was largely justified by the fact that it was making good an anticipated shortfall of employment provision in neighbouring Stevenage. The amount of employment development that has subsequently been delivered in Stevenage has significantly exceeded previous expectations. This includes the delivery of substantial developments associated with the research and development sector and bioscience catalyst on the GlaxoSmithKline site at the south of the town.

8.55. It is not necessary to make a formal planning determination on these matters. It is also not possible to do so until there is further clarity on the scale and nature of the uses that are proposed. These will follow through the planning process. However, in masterplan terms, there is sufficient flexibility in relevant policies and consideration of the wider circumstances for some alternate uses of the nature suggested to prove acceptable in BA10.

8.56. The significant majority of BA10 remains identified for employment uses in the masterplan. This includes the proposed waste uses at the eastern end of site adjoining the A505 junction.

Southern link road

8.57. Policy BA3 includes a requirement to deliver a southern link road connecting the B656 Royston Road to Wallington Road or the A507 Clothall Road within the southern [A505] bypass. This was in response to transport modelling conducted at the time. The approach to transport interventions in the Local Plan was predicated on a 'predict and provide' approach to car- and capacity-based interventions.

8.58. National and local policies now place far greater emphasis on active and sustainable travel. HCC's Local Transport Plan 4 introduced a user hierarchy prioritising these modes over private car.

8.59. The option-testing and Design Review phases of the masterplan explored different approaches to transport infrastructure in 2023. This included consideration of strategic links and all-mode roads. The baseline evidence work revealed there were only limited trips that would benefit from a direct link around the south of the town. Providing a link road as originally envisaged would be likely to induce additional car journeys with a detrimental impact upon conditions on Wallington Road and South Road as well as within BA3 itself. This approach was ruled out at this stage of the masterplan development and has not been pursued.



The options-testing phase considered potential link routes through BA3

8.60. The masterplan document includes bus-only access from Royston Road into and through Clothall Common as well as new active travel crossings of this road. This will allow for sustainable and active travel connectivity between Royston Road, BA3 and Wallington Road. This was also set out in the public consultation held in November 2023. The proposed bus access may provide the opportunity to double as an emergency vehicular access into Clothall Common in the event the existing access from Wallington Road is unavailable. This will be explored as detailed design proposals are developed.

8.61. The proposed approach is in line with broader Local Plan, Local Transport Plan and national policies that prioritise active and sustainable travel. Taking the Local Plan and these wider priorities as a whole, the approach is considered appropriate.

Overall housing numbers

8.62. The Local Plan estimated that 3,245 homes would be provided across sites BA1, BA2 and BA3. The masterplan estimates “around 3,000”, approximately 7.5% fewer.

8.63. The Local Plan is clear that its numbers are either estimates or approximate figures. The Council has already granted planning permissions on many sites allocated in the Local Plan where the number of homes differs from the Local Plan figure – both above and below the initial estimates. Variations on permitted schemes have broadly fallen within a ‘tolerance’ of +/-20% of the original Local Plan estimate. The level of variance at Baldock is, in percentage terms, nothing out of the ordinary. However, given the size of the project this does potentially amount to a relatively significant shortfall in numerical terms.

8.64. The Local Plan figures were not based on detailed analyses of the sites or a worked-up scheme. Through the baseline evidence process it became clear that the figures for the Baldock sites would be difficult to achieve given the level of constraints on the site, particularly on BA1 in relation to archaeology and surface water flooding and drainage.

8.65. There also remains considerable uncertainty in relation to the long-term solution for secondary school provision. As above, this could see a large area of site BA3 given over to this use. That said, school provision on BA3 would be a more efficient option, in terms of housing delivery, than making the same provision within BA1. This is because it would be possible to provide elements of the school playing fields within the adjoining Urban Open Land without conflicting with the relevant policy. As above (see paragraph 8.26), a large secondary school in BA1 would be wholly on land which otherwise would be used for housing. It would additionally be in an area of the site that might support relatively higher densities than BA3.

8.66. As above, the relocated school remains the preferred outcome. But should it ultimately prove possible and preferable to accommodate future secondary needs at the existing Knights Templar site, this land could be ‘released’ and used for housing as originally envisaged by the Local Plan.

8.67. Officers will continue to work with U&C to optimise the housing capacity of the site, whilst still achieving appropriately high levels of design quality. This will be progressed through the Design Code and Key Phases, by exploring the potential for innovative forms of development within BA1 in particular.

8.68. The currently estimated housing numbers are ultimately an output of the associated decisions on other matters explained above, and which officers consider to be justified considering the evidence that has been brought forward through the masterplan process. It follows that officers do not consider the shortfall in housing numbers to be a barrier to the progress of the masterplan.

Assessment against policy requirements

8.69. This masterplan is different from those previously presented as it includes the cumulative consideration of multiple sites. It is also the first masterplan where there is also a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan. Relevant policy requirements from the BBCNP are also included and shown in italics.

8.70. The assessments below work in a clockwise direction through the masterplan area. The land north of the railway is identified as Site BA1, a Strategic Housing Site under Policy SP14 of the Local Plan. This sets out a range of policy requirements. As with other masterplans previously considered by Cabinet and Full Council, a high-level assessment of the masterplan's compliance with this policy is set out. The relevant policies for sites BA2, BA3, BA10, the Urban Open Land and Walls Field contain detailed criteria for consideration later in the planning process. The elements that are considered most relevant to the masterplan are highlighted.

8.71. The policy commentary below relates to site BA1 and relevant parts of the masterplan:

- **A comprehensive and deliverable Strategic Masterplan for the entire allocation is to be prepared and agreed between the landowner/developer and the Council (where applications have already been submitted to the Council a Strategic Masterplan should be agreed prior to the or as part of the grant of planning permission)**

  The masterplan is being presented to this meeting for consideration. The approach to secondary education is explained above. This, and the other matters discussed in this report, ensure the masterplan is deliverable.

- **A new mixed-use local centre/s to provide for a range of day-to-day local needs including additional along with additional neighbourhood level provision of around 500m2 (net) convenience retail provision and 1,400m2 (net) of comparison retail and food and beverage floorspace**
- ***Make provision within the site for indoor community facilities suitable for meetings of local groups, and for additional indoor recreation facilities to serve the expanded town, with sufficient capacity to meet the additional needs generated by the development [BBCNP]***

  There have been significant changes in the retail environment since the Local Plan was prepared, not least during and since the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council's own evidence supporting the forthcoming Town Centre Strategy identifies a substantial drop in future retail floorspace requirements compared to the figures underpinning the Local Plan. However, it also recognises that strategic developments which do not have ready access to existing facilities should still make provision.

The masterplan includes a Local Centre at the heart of the BA1 development. This is shown on the Land Use Framework as a broad location to incorporate mixed use, retail and community use.

The supporting text of the masterplan identifies the Local Centre will meet the day-to-day needs of residents in the new development without competing with the vibrancy and success of the High Street. This complementarity is identified as one of the 'Ten Big Moves' that underpin the masterplan.

The masterplan does not fix floorspace parameters for the Local Centre. The planning process will continue to explore the exact size, nature and mix of uses.

- **Structural planting to create a sense of place, integration into the surrounding landscape and to reinforce a long-term, defensible Green Belt boundary to the north and east;**
- ***Maintain a clear visual and physical gap between the expanded edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave, of sufficient size to integrate development into the surrounding landscape and ensure a sympathetic transition towards Lower Bygrave [BBCNP]***
- ***Incorporate appropriate planting at the periphery of the new development (using a suitable variety of native species, with the mix and density of planting being varied to create a natural appearance) [BBCNP]***
- ***Minimise adverse visual impacts on longer-distance views towards Baldock from Bygrave, by giving careful consideration to the positioning and height of development, as well as to appropriate screening [BBCNP]***

Green Infrastructure forms a key element of the masterplan. This includes extensive provision in the north areas of BA1, proposed as Bygrave Common[2]. These includes scrub and wooded copse planting along the small ridge that marks the highest part of the site. This will also demarcate between more formal forms of open space provision to be contained to the inside of this and natural meadow and wildflower grasslands that will form a natural habitat corridor to the northern boundary where it will meet the agricultural land beyond.

Planting is also proposed along the north-eastern boundary. The plan extract below shows these key design principles.

[2] Any 'names' given to open spaces in the masterplan are working titles.



Figure 23: Bygrave Common Key Design Principles

Further planting is planned on the eastern boundary to the south of Bygrave Road to the railway. A more continuous and substantive woodland belt is shown here. The masterplan identifies this will "*create sheltered movement corridors and foraging routes for wildlife as well as visual mitigation / screening from Lower Bygrave*".

This open space, proposed as the Heritage Park, also helps secure compliance with relevant BBCNP policies on physical and visual separation from Lower Bygrave. These advise a gap of at least 170m between the built edge of site BA1 and the nearest property in Lower Bygrave, with a recognition a 250m gap would be more effective. Recognising the broad, illustrative nature of the framework plans, a separation of approximately 220m is shown between the edges of the closest residential block and the first property in Lower Bygrave.

Details of planting species will follow through the planning process.



Figure 26: Heritage Park Key Design Principles

- **A new link road connecting the A507 North Road to the A505 Baldock bypass including a new bridge across the railway**
- ***Minimise the potential for increased traffic flows through Lower and Upper Bygrave, by providing for an appropriate package of measures such as: suitable access arrangements (including restrictions on heavy vehicles); physical features such as gateways and appropriate road surfaces; speed limits and signage) [BBCNP]***

  A connection between the A507 and A505 is shown within the masterplan as the primary route through the BA1 development. The masterplan process extensively considered the nature and alignment of this route.

  The primary route is envisaged as a low-speed access road into the development, fronted by buildings, high quality footways and a separate cycle path. It will be designed to prioritise active and sustainable travel movement across it, to ensure connectivity between development parcels and open space to the north.

  It is proposed that the primary route links directly into the roundabout at the junction between the A505 and B656 at the eastern end of the Baldock bypass. This follows option testing and archaeological investigation.

  The primary route routes to the south of the existing Bygrave Road at the east of the site. The nature and detailed design of the junction where this intersects with the (connection to) Bygrave Road will be resolved through more detailed planning. This will include consideration of the detailed points in the BBCNP policy.



- **Sustainable transport measures to include:**
  - **i. a secondary rail crossing for pedestrians and cyclists in the vicinity of Ashville Way;**
  - **ii. safe access routes to / from, and upgrades to, Baldock station;**
  - **iii. sensitive integration of Bridleway Baldock 034 / Bygrave 002 as a north-south route through the development;**

iv. **the use of Bygrave Road / Ashwell Road from the south-western edge of the allocated site to the link road as a sustainable transport corridor; and**

v. **comprehensive integration into the existing pedestrian and cycle, public transport and road networks**

- ***Retain and incorporate existing landscape and built features that contribute to the site's history and character, including Bygrave Road/Ashwell Road and trees and hedgerows (while safeguarding the habitat value of the Bygrave Road local wildlife site) [BBCNP]***
- ***Make provision for improved pedestrian and cycle access between Bygrave and Baldock, through a new footpath and cycleway using the route of Bygrave Road/Ashwell Road, designed in a way that maintains as much as possible of its rural character and habitat value [BBCNP]***

The Active Travel plan details key routes. This shows the secondary rail crossing point joining BA1 to BA10 with onward connections southwards into, and through, Clothall Common to BA3 and northwards to the proposed Local Centre. The nature and design of this crossing is being explored. An overbridge in this location would need to be a substantial structure to achieve clearance over the railway and power lines which are embanked. An underpass is being explored with HCC and Network Rail.

The masterplan identifies a key development gateway at the south-west of BA1. This will create a new northern access to the station along with improvements to the station itself.

The Bridleway north from Bygrave Road will be maintained on its current alignment within the proposed Winterbourne Corridor. However, as it ascends the ridge, this is likely to require a diversion to align it with the proposed green infrastructure and development parcels which, in this part of the site, will align with a key vantage point / view corridor to St Mary's Church. Notwithstanding the proposed diversion, this Right of Way will maintain its function as a north-south corridor for active travel across the site to Bygrave Common and the countryside beyond.



The entirety of Bygrave Road through the site is identified as a key pedestrian and cycle connection with the potential to form a key utility route connecting the station access, the primary schools and local centre with residential areas. The masterplan also recognises the potential of this road as public transport route. (The

appropriateness of) vehicular access, including to existing properties within the Strategic Masterplan boundary, will be further considered through design coding and detailed proposals. This will also consider the ecological value and function of Bygrave Road.

Bygrave Road extends for approximately 1.6km (one mile) through the site. It is unlikely that the design approach for this corridor will be 'one-size-fits-all'. The treatment and character is expected to vary and / or accommodate different modes. This will be explored further through the detailed design process.

The planning application process will identify further, detailed mitigations and connections to / on the wider network and secure these through legal obligations. The masterplan identifies a range of interventions recognising these remain subject to ongoing discussions and evaluation with HCC.

- **At least 28 serviced plots for self-build development**
- **Provision of an appropriate site for a care home for older people in Use Class C2 in accordance with the locational criteria in Policy HS4**

The masterplan identifies these policy requirements. No specific locations are identified at this stage given the strategic scale of the plans. This will be further explored and secured through the planning process and associated legal agreement(s) as required.

- **A community hall and GP surgery**

The masterplan identifies that the Local Centre will accommodate community uses with proposals to be developed. The masterplan identifies health provision within the BA10 employment land. The justification for this is discussed above but is considered acceptable in principle.

- **Up to 6 forms of entry (FE) of additional primary-age education provision**

Two locations for primary schools are identified on the Land Use framework, to the east and west of the Local Centre respectively. These would allow for up to two new primary schools of up to 3FE each satisfying the policy requirements.

The exact nature and size of the primary schools will be determined as the scheme progresses having regard to the wider demographic factors discussed above and capacity in existing schools in Baldock.

- **Up to 8 forms of entry (FE) of additional secondary-age education provision…**

This is discussed extensively above. No secondary education provision is now proposed in BA1. This is considered a justified position and approach for the masterplan.

- **Address existing surface water flood risk issues, particularly to the south of Ashwell Road, through SUDs or other appropriate solution**

The masterplan includes a high-level proposed approach to SUDs and drainage.

The baseline evidence recognised that some of the surface water flood risk issues to the south of Ashwell Road arise from existing field boundary features. Removal of these would alleviate (the risk of) flooding in this area. The historic and archaeological investigations also recognise this area lying on the alignment of a historic watercourse.

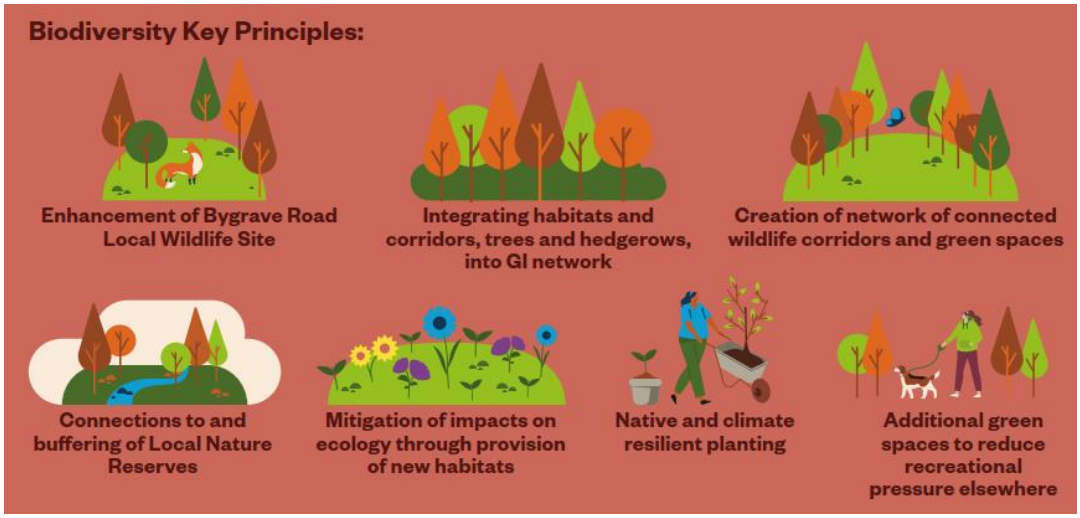
The Green Infrastructure proposals include the proposed Winterbourne Corridor which will incorporate SUDs features potentially leading to a wetland area between Bygrave Road and North Road that will assist in recharging the aquifer that feeds the River Ivel.



▲ Figure 27: Winterbourne Way Key Design Principles

- **Appropriate mitigation, compensation and / or enhancement of key features of biodiversity as informed by detailed assessments including:**
  - **i. Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve;**
  - **ii. Bygrave Road local wildlife site; and**
  - **iii. identified protected species and priority habitats**

There will be an extensive green infrastructure network on-site including strategic provision of new assets such as Bygrave Common and the proposed Baldock Greenway. The masterplan recognises that an explicit purpose of these is to alleviate pressure on the town's nature reserves and provide connective habitat.



As above, the focus of Bygrave Road will most likely shift towards active and sustainable travel to allow enhancement of the Local Wildlife Site. The proposed grasslands on the northern part of Bygrave Common will provide appropriate habitat for the local Corn Bunting population.

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Any future planning applications will be accompanied by detailed surveys and impact assessments to inform any further measures that are required.

- **Built development contained to the south and south-west of the ridgeline that generally extends eastwards from the A507 south of Blackhorse Farm and southwards from Ashwell Road;**

  The masterplan complies with this requirement. The footprint of the proposed development areas are contained within the ridgeline and further buffered by formal open space provision.

- **Sensitive treatment of heritage assets and their settings including:**
  - **i. an access solution from the A507 North Road which satisfactorily addresses potential impacts;**
  - **ii. retaining framed views of St Mary's Church from within and beyond the site;**
  - **iii. using the location of areas of archaeological significance to inform a site-wide green infrastructure strategy.**
  - **iv. Ivel Springs Scheduled Ancient Monument**

  The nature of the primary route, and the access point from North Road were informed in part by consideration of nearby listed buildings. An alignment to the outside of the development would have resulted in the access lying much closer to these. Further consideration will be given to this in the detailed design phases.

  Key views to and from St Mary's Church are identified on the masterplan and inform the location of key vantage points and the green infrastructure corridor for the proposed realignment of the Bridleway Bygrave 002.

  Extensive archaeological investigations have taken place in liaison with HCC experts. These have notably influenced the location and design principles for the

proposed Winterbourne Way. Various options were considered for the location of the primary route and railway bridge to the east of the site. However, detailed trial trenching did not unearth any significant finds in this area that might have required a response in the layout of the site.

More broadly, the masterplan commits to the creation of a heritage trail with signage and interpretation boards linking key assets and celebrating the area's history.

- ***Relate sensitively to the edges of existing residential areas where the site abuts them, reflecting section 3.3 in the accompanying Design Guidelines [BBCNP]***

  The Urban Design Framework recognises this and includes "Integrating the new neighbourhoods with Baldock through the considered design of connections and transitions between old and new" as a key principle. Edge treatments will be explored and set through the Design Code for that part of BA1 adjoining Salisbury Road and Bygrave Road.

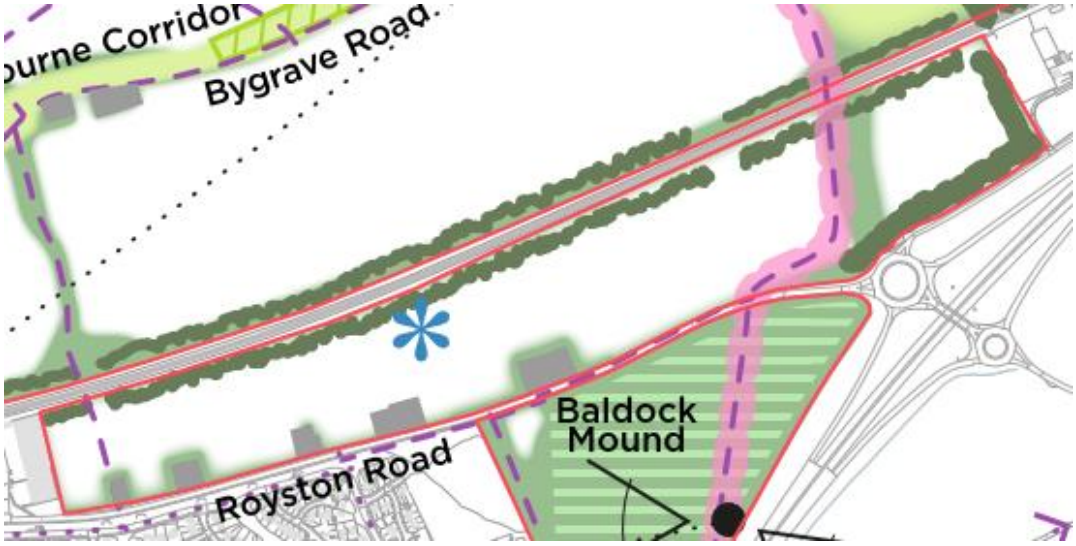
8.72. The commentary below relates to site BA10 and relevant parts of the masterplan:

- **A masterplan to be secured prior to the approval of any detailed matters;**
  The masterplan being presented to this meeting for consideration includes BA10.

- ***Make the [B656] corridor a focus for sustainable travel and provide for an improved footpath and cycleway along Royston Road***
  A range of sustainable transport interventions are proposed along Royston Road. This includes bus-only access into Clothall Common in combination with an active travel crossing and a second active travel crossing point aligned with second rail crossing

- **Address existing surface water flood risk issues, including any run-off through SUDs or other appropriate solution;**
- **Landscaping to enhance the ecological value of the railway corridor and reinforce a defensible Green Belt boundary to the east;**
- ***Incorporate a landscape buffer between development on site BA10 and the railway line…[BBCNP]***

  The Green Infrastructure framework shows a planted edge to the employment area along the railway. More substantial planting is shown at the western end and to the A505 slip roads where the outer edges of the site form the revised inner boundary o the Green Belt around Baldock. A sustainable drainage feature is also shown.



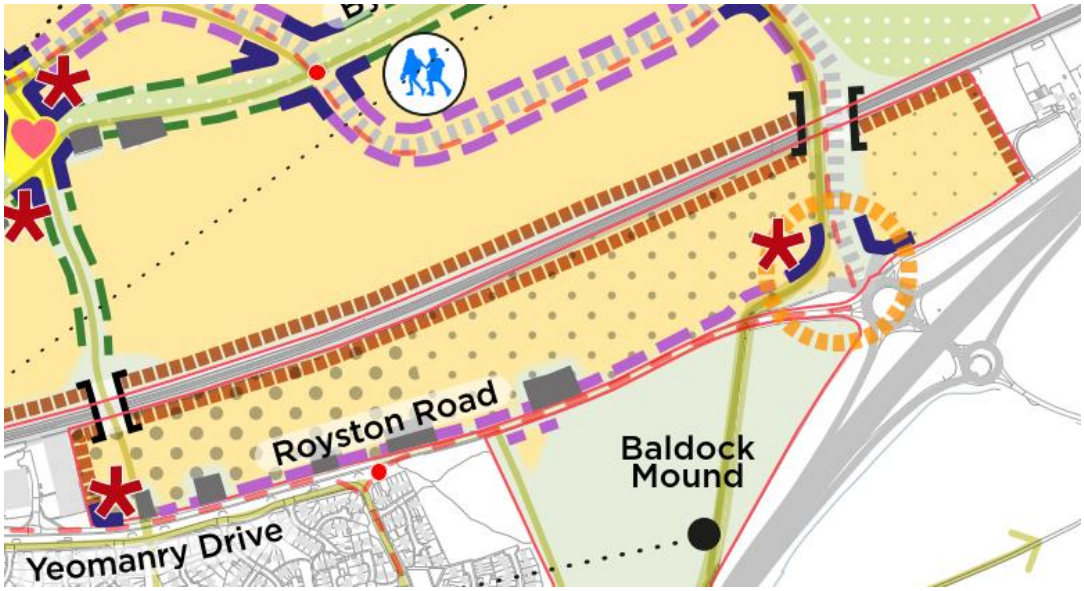
- **Retaining framed views of St Mary's Church from within and beyond the site;**

  There are only glimpsed views of the top of the church spire from the eastern end of Royston Road as it rises towards the A505 junction. No specific view corridor is denoted in the masterplan but this can be managed as appropriate through future design coding or detailed plans.

- ***Create a high quality and distinctive entrance to the town along Royston Road, using well-designed buildings and a consistent approach to landscaping and lighting [BBCNP];***
- ***Relate sensitively to the existing houses fronting onto Royston Road through the scale, massing and landscaping of the new development [BBCNP];***

  The Urban Design Framework sets high-level principles for the built form of the employment area. Landmark buildings will address the key corners of the site with frontages along Royston Road.

  The intensity of development (or grain) within the employment area will decrease from east to west. Larger formats of development will be concentrated around the A505 junction with an increasingly finer grain towards the town. Existing properties are generally concentrated towards the west of BA10 within the 'medium grain' and 'finer grain' areas denoted by the dots.



8.73. The commentary below relates to site BA3 and relevant parts of the masterplan. These requirements were set in relation to a Local Plan allocation which envisages the use of the whole site for residential development with no accompanying infrastructure. At masterplan stage, a flexible approach to land use is proposed for BA3 to potentially accommodate education uses. This could result in all, some or none of BA3 being used for housing. The commentary should be viewed in this context:

- **Deliver a southern link road connecting the B656 Royston Road to Wallington Road or the A507 Clothall Road within the southern bypass;**
- **Provision of suitable vehicle, cycle and pedestrian links to ensure integration with adjoining site BA4;**
- **Consideration of the most appropriate routes and movements for all modes between the allocation site, the existing Clothall Common estate and the wider transport network**

The southern link road is not provided by the masterplan. This is explained above (see paragraphs 8.57 to 8.61).

The Active Travel proposals include a pedestrian and cycle connection connecting south from Royston Road along the inner boundary of BA3. This adjoins the BA4 site and allows for connectivity into it.

As discussed above, the masterplan proposals now include bus access through Clothall Common to the south-western boundary of BA3. Further active travel links are envisaged north-south through Clothall Common along existing green infrastructure links joining BA3 to the proposed health hub and rail crossing into BA1. Indicative vehicular access is shown from Wallington Road.



- **Appropriate solution for short- and long-term education requirements having regard to up-to-date assessments of need**

  See earlier discussion of education matters.

- **Appropriate mitigation measures for noise associated with the A505 to include… maintaining or limited re-profiling of the existing bunding towards the east of the site with no housing permitted on or beyond its (revised) alignment;**
- ***Avoid new buildings on that part of BA3 that comprises raised land to the east of the existing properties on Aleyn Way and Merchants Walk, and to the south of Royston Road (illustrated in Figure 7, including the slopes rising up to the raised land), which should be retained and enhanced as space for informal outdoor recreation [BBCNP]***
- ***Incorporate a landscape buffer between the edge of the developments and the Baldock bypass, using an appropriate mix of native species, to provide visual screening, an enhanced green corridor and noise attenuation [BBCNP]***

  The masterplan retains Baldock Mound as a key area of largely natural habitat with no development proposed. The habitat will be enhanced and consideration given to providing surfaced pathways.

  This will link into a buffer containing planting and the proposed Baldock Greenway with any development offset from the A505 to the inside of this.

  Detailed planting strategies will follow later in the planning process.



8.74. The commentary below relates to the Urban Open Land and Walls Field and relevant parts of the masterplan:

The masterplan proposals are consistent with Policy CGB5 of the Local Plan which sets policies for the Urban Open Land. This restricts the area to low-intensity uses including outdoor sport and recreation and landscaping associated with adjoining allocated sites that maintain openness. As shown on the extract above, the Urban Open Land is proposed as 'Cambrai Field' incorporating sport, allotment provision, play and the Greenway as well as views into the town and out to the wider countryside.

The detailed proposals for this area are intrinsically linked to the outcomes of decisions on education provision. However, the high-level work and land budgets identified to date show it is theoretically possible to accommodate the education proposals within the parameters of the Local and Neighbourhood Plan policies. Any future departure from these would be assessed through the planning process.

Policy G2 of the BBCNP supports, in principle, proposals that would improve the visual and recreational value of both the Urban Open Land and the adjoining Walls Field. As part of the masterplan proposals, Walls Field will be taken out of agricultural use to provide publicly accessible meadow grassland. The masterplan sets key design principles for this area.



Figure 25: Walls Field Key Design Principles

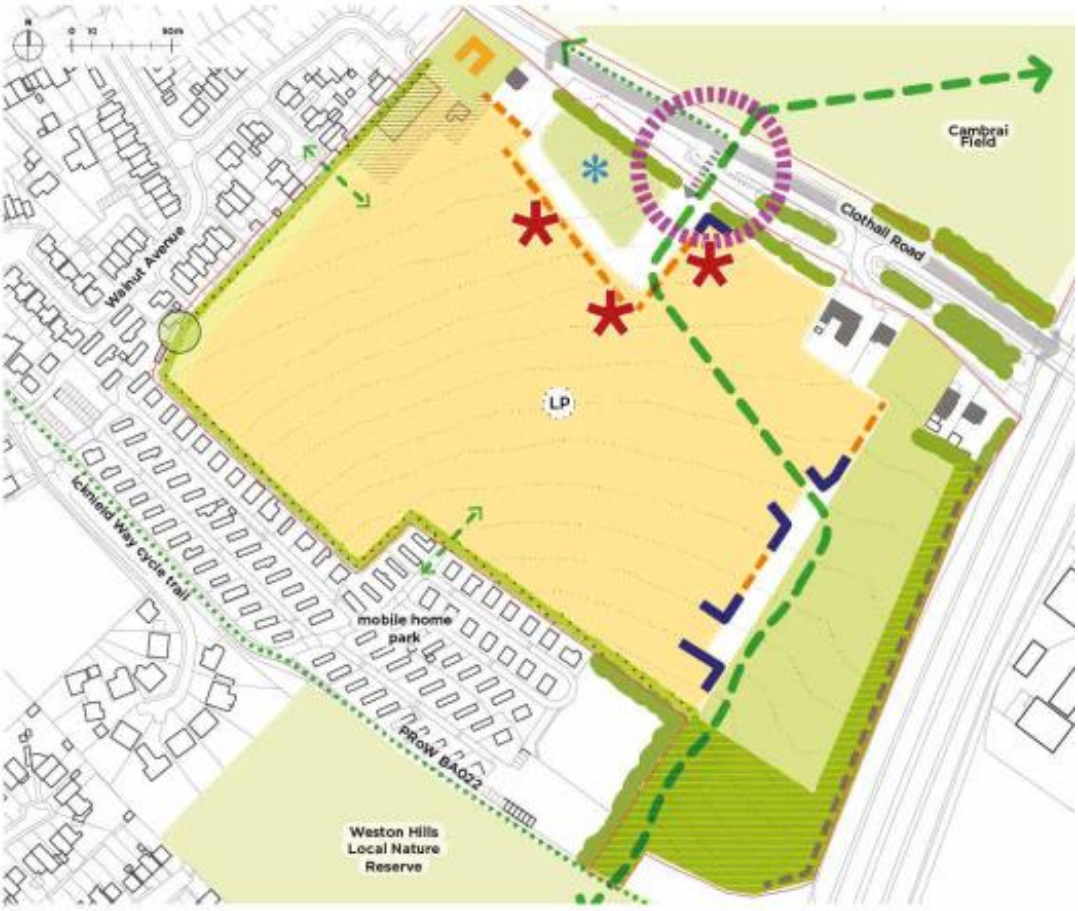
8.75. The commentary below relates to site BA2 and relevant parts of the masterplan. The masterplan includes a greater level of design detail for BA2 than other parts of the site. BA2 is expected to be the first phase of development with detailed plans brought forward ahead of other areas:

- **Creation of appropriate, defensible Green Belt boundary along the south-eastern perimeter of the site**
- **Consider and mitigate against potential adverse impacts upon Weston Hills Local Wildlife Site**
- ***Incorporate a landscape buffer between the edge of the developments and the Baldock bypass, using an appropriate mix of native species, to provide visual screening, an enhanced green corridor and noise attenuation [BBCNP]***

  This is shown in the masterplan. A landscape buffer including any necessary noise-attenuation measures is shown along the boundary with the A505 with development inset from this edge by approximately 50-70 metres.

  This isn't all proposed for planting; a substantial area of semi-natural green space will face the development edge. This will also incorporate the planned Baldock Greenway.

  The provision of this on-site open space, along with connections to other key areas of green infrastructure in the south of the scheme including Walls Field and the Cambrai Field, will help manage potential recreational impacts on the Local Nature Reserve while also providing connecting habitats for species.



▲ Figure 40: BA2 Phase 1 Urban Design Framework

- ***Reinforce the planting between Hillside Park mobile home site and new residential development on site BA2, to provide a stronger green margin and additional screening, using an appropriate mix of native species [BBCNP]***

  The masterplan shows a landscape buffer to existing properties alongside the boundary with Hillside Park.

Sustainability

8.76. In September 2024, Cabinet approved the Council's Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which supports the local plan. This identifies a series of standards against key sustainability themes.

8.77. U&C have carried out an initial-self assessment of the aspirations of the Growing Baldock project and masterplan against the categories and levels in the Sustainability SPD. There is not yet enough detail or information to make definitive judgements. However, they presently anticipate achieving 'gold' against three themes, 'silver' against three themes and 'bronze' against two.

8.78. These will be developed, tested and assessed further through the planning process.

Sustainability measure	Growing Baldock interventions	Score
Optimising passive design & fabric performance	All homes and buildings will be constructed to a high standard of fabric efficiency and airtightness;	
Achieving low carbon energy	Homes and buildings will be highly energy efficient and utilise renewable heat and electricity generating technologies such as Air Source Heat Pumps, and Solar P V. Potential for stand-alone renewable energy infrastructure, such as battery technology, on land at the eastern end of the employment area	
Minimising carbon footprint	Baldock Net Zero – development will be all electric, all buildings to be Net Zero in operational emissions, delivery of Carbon offset fund	
Healthy placemaking	Publicly accessible green space and community facilities to support health and wellbeing, as well as providing passive heating and cooling.	
Promoting biodiversity	Committed to deliver in excess of 10% BNG, provision of wildlife corridors and safeguarding ecologically sensitive areas e.g. Baldock Mound.	
Sustainable travel	Designed to be a place where half of all trips are made on foot, bicycle or by public transport. Town wide improvements to encourage sustainable and active travel.	
Conserving water	Development will help as far as possible to resolve issues facing River Ivel chalk stream – SUDs will allow water to infiltrate and recharge the aquifer, once recharged sufficiently later phases will re-use surface water to reduce overall demand.	
Incorporating sustainable drainage	Sustainable drainage features will be used to either prevent flooding or be located in areas that are known to flood currently	

U&C self-assessment against the Sustainability SPD

Next steps

8.79. Subject to Cabinet approval, the masterplan will be presented to Full Council following the scheduled Hertfordshire County Council elections in May. Any presentation to Full Council will be preceded by a briefing for all Councillors and accompanied by a summary of the key plans and proposals in the Masterplan.

8.80. Subject to Full Council approval, the masterplan will be adopted as a material consideration for any future planning decisions relating to the site. Any existing or future applications will be assessed to ensure they broadly conform to and / or facilitate the implementation of the parameters and principles set out in this document. Any substantive deviation from the masterplan will need to be justified, for example if new information comes to light that isn't available at this stage in the process.

8.81. Through the joint work on the masterplan a series of actions and issues have been identified that will need to be addressed as the scheme progresses towards delivery through the formal planning process. A number of matters are identified in this report. The masterplan provides appropriate 'hooks' to accommodate these matters.

8.82. Subject to relevant approvals, U&C currently expect to formally submit an outline planning application(s) for the development later in 2025. This will be preceded by further public events that will publicise this and outline the proposals which are to be submitted.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under paragraph 5.7.18 of the Council's Constitution, the Cabinet 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 4.8.2(g) of the Constitution contains a general power for Full Council to receive and debate reports from Cabinet.

9.3. There is no statutory definition of 'masterplan'. Unlike, for example, the Local Plan or any Supplementary Planning Documents, they are not formally defined or regulated through relevant planning acts or associated regulations – either in terms of content or process. This means there is discretion as to how, when and whether they are produced and / or approved on the part of both the applicant and the Council.

9.4. Policy SP9 of the Local Plan 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.

9.5. Terms of Reference for the Project Board and guidance on the approval processes for masterplans have been presented to and endorsed by Cabinet, most recently in September 2024 and published on the Council website.

9.6. These set out that Masterplans will be subject to formal approval by Cabinet and Full Council where a masterplan is to be adopted as a material consideration in advance of the determination of the relevant planning application(s).

9.7. Government Planning Practice Guidance states that a material planning consideration is one which is relevant to making the planning decision in question (e.g., whether to grant or refuse an application for planning permission).

9.8. Formal, regulatory approval for any development of the site will be secured through any subsequent planning permission(s). These will be considered through established processes and legislation including presentation to Planning Control Committee.

9.9. Any approval of the Strategic Masterplan is without prejudice to the consideration and determination of any future planning application(s).

9.10. PPAs are made pursuant to Part 1 of Chapter 1 of the Localism Act 2011, Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 and Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 and under associated planning legislation and guidance, including but not limited to the Planning Act 2008. Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 allows local planning authorities to charge for providing discretionary services and the legislation is clear that, where charges are made, they must not exceed the cost of providing the service.

9.11. At its meeting on 16 March 2021, Cabinet resolved (item 109) as part of the Local Plan Implementation report to approve the North Hertfordshire Masterplanning Principles. Within this document paragraph 2.11 states: The Council would normally expect a PPA to be used to support the preparation of Strategic Masterplans and significant development planning applications.

9.12. Under the Council's constitution, paragraph 14.6.4 (ii) authorises the Service Director Regulatory to enter into contracts for the supply of services, in this case the use of consultants to act on the Council's behalf. 14.6.4 (viii) authorises the setting of fees and charges, in this case to seek to recover these costs from the Developer.

9.13. The PPA states that "*Nothing in the [agreement] will restrict or inhibit HCC or NHDC from exercising their statutory functions and views about the development and nothing in this agreement shall predetermine the outcome of any planning application".*

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The Council resources for masterplanning and implementation work are drawn from existing staff, with additional support from specialist consultants as required. The PPA seeks to recover the costs of undertaking this work. The costs will be monitored to ensure on-going cost recovery.

10.2. For any activities that cannot be charged through the PPA, a ring-fenced Masterplanning reserve and / or approved budgets will be used.

10.3. The principle of setting of fees and charges for Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) was agreed by the Service Director: Regulatory in consultation with the Service Director: Finance and the Executive Member for Planning & Transport in January 2022.

10.4. Funding was secured through a PPA to support the Council's input to this masterplan including the recovery of external consultancy costs. Additional resource was funded through the use of approximately £40,000 of Government grant specifically ringfenced for the delivery of sites of at least 2,000 homes. This included funding for Hyas Associates, who specialise in supporting local authorities on large site delivery, and who facilitated the masterplan options workshop.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. 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 and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2. The Council previously monitored a specific Masterplanning risk. However, this was not carried forward in the 2024/25 Council Delivery Plan; progress is dependent on third parties and council activities are considered business-as-usual. Strategic oversight continues via the Project Board and reports to Cabinet and Full Council.

11.3. Notwithstanding, the key risks that were identified remain pertinent to consideration of individual reports and masterplans:

- Risk of poor scheme outcomes that do not appropriately respond to local character and context
- Risk that strategic sites do not maximise contribution to corporate objectives and priorities of climate change, environment, economy and place
- Risk of delay to delivery of strategic sites if masterplan process is delayed or stalled or provides insufficient information to guide subsequent planning applications
- Failure to secure funding to resource the process
- Reduction in pre-application income and delay to income from planning applications
- Failure to retain/recruit sufficiently experienced officers
- Risk of adverse appeal findings on other/non-Local Plan sites if delivery is delayed or stalled

11.4. Positive decisions on officer and / or Project Board-supported masterplans mitigate against many of these factors by maintaining tangible progress on key sites that are essential to delivery of the Local Plan and securing an appropriate design framework against which future planning proposals can be assessed. Adverse decisions are likely to reduce developer confidence in the process, including negative reputational outcomes for the Council, and an increase in schemes which seek to meet the requirements of Policy SP9 directly through the Development Management process.

11.5. The Council cannot presently demonstrate a five-year housing land supply (5YHLS). This is a key requirement of national policy set out in the most recent NPPF. Where there is no 5YHLS Councils can be required, subject to exceptions, to consider applications for development more favourably, including on sites not allocated in their local plans. To be included within the 5YHLS, a site must be considered "deliverable". Recent appeal decisions show that Inspectors can remove any allowances made within the 5YHLS from allocated Local Plan sites where they do not consider sufficient progress is being made. This can exacerbate the shortfall and / or increase the weight which might be given to alternate proposals.

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 site which is subject to this masterplan was allocated for development through the Council's adopted Local Plan. An Equality Impact Assessment was produced in 2017 assessing the plan's compliance with relevant legislation and requirements and submitted to Government as part of the plan's examination.

12.3. No issues with the Equality Impact Assessment were raised by the Inspector throughout the examination report. Paragraph 11 of their report on the plan, issued in 2022, concluded:

> *I* [the Inspector] *have had due regard to the aims expressed in S149(1) of the Equality Act 2010. This has included my consideration of several matters during the examination including the provision of traveller sites to meet need and accessible and adaptable housing.*

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 allocation of the site in the Local Plan (and the Local Plan in general) was informed by a statutory Sustainability Appraisal which considered the potential social, economic and environmental impacts of the Plan. This informed the mitigation measures contained in Policy SP9, the site-specific policy for the site and general policies on matters such as biodiversity and transport.

14.2 Any future outline planning application(s) for this site will be accompanied by a statutory Environmental Statement and impact assessments. These will inform the detailed mitigation measures that will be required as part of the scheme and will be secured through any permission(s) and associated legal agreement(s).

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 None

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Local Plan Implementation - report to Cabinet, March 2021 [*including masterplanning principles and establishment of Project Board*]

18.2 Local Plan adoption – report to Cabinet and Full Council, November 2022

18.3 Strategic Planning Matters – report to Cabinet, September 2024 [*including endorsement of current Project Board Terms of Reference*]

18.4 Council Website – Masterplanning pages

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Growing Baldock

Strategic Masterplan



February 2025

Urban&Civic Hertfordshire

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1.0 Introduction

This Strategic Masterplan provides a framework for the development of land to the north and east of Baldock, in accordance with policy SP9 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2022). The Baldock site is allocated in the Local Plan as a sustainable extension of around 3,000 homes, employment, local centre(s), schools and community facilities, sustainable transport connections and green infrastructure. The Strategic Masterplan has been prepared in stages to align with the North Hertfordshire Strategic Masterplan Brief (2022), including the collation of baseline evidence, options testing and public consultation, culminating in this final Strategic Masterplan report.

Purpose of the Strategic Masterplan

This Strategic Masterplan:

- secures an integrated evidence base that informs the optimal distribution, location and type of land uses, green space and infrastructure to create a high-quality development that meets the requirements of Local Plan policies SP9 and SP14;
- sets a framework for the resolution of planning, infrastructure and delivery issues to expedite implementation;
- supports a collaborative approach and shared vision between the landowner, North Herts Council (NHC), Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), key stakeholders and the community; and
- supports the delivery of a coordinated and integrated place, design quality and phased infrastructure provision.

The Growing Baldock development is being brought forward by master developer Urban&Civic (U&C) in a development partnership with landowners HCC.

The Strategic Masterplan will help shape the development as it is brought forward and defined within an outline planning application, which will be the next step towards delivering the growth of Baldock. This final Strategic Masterplan marks the point at which the Growing Baldock scheme transitions from strategic masterplanning into the planning application stage, moving one step closer to implementation.

Structure of the Strategic Masterplan

The Strategic Masterplan includes the following sections:

- Vision for Growing Baldock
- The Baldock Conversation
- Context & Baseline Evidence
- Land Use Framework
- Green Infrastructure Framework
- Biodiversity Framework
- Movement Framework
- Urban Design Framework
- Sustainability and Energy Framework
- Housing Need and Diversification
- Composite Framework
- Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- Conclusions and Next Steps

The Strategic Masterplan is supported by the following separate documents that were produced in February 2024 and will continue to evolve and be updated to inform the outline planning application:

- Heritage Impact Assessment – Built Heritage
- Heritage Impact Assessment – Archaeology
- Interim Transport Assessment
- Interim Sustainable Drainage Strategy
- Interim Utilities Assessment
- Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation and Feasibility Assessment
- Sustainability and Energy Strategy
- Preliminary Ecological Assessment
- Landscape Character and Sensitivity Appraisal

2.0 Vision for Growing Baldock

Vision

Sustainability is at the heart of the vision for Growing Baldock. U&C, HCC and NHC have jointly prepared a vision which is expressed diagrammatically and in full text opposite:



Figure 01: Growing Baldock Vision

Vision Statement

Growing Baldock will deliver a **new neighbourhood** of open spaces, homes, community facilities and employment areas that is part of and intrinsically linked to the existing town. Baldock will grow in an environmentally, socially and financially sustainable way through excellent planning, design, construction and operation.

The new development will **strengthen Baldock** as a vibrant town with a rich and distinctive history by helping reveal and celebrate the historic environment through the creation of heritage trails, new community assets, public realm and community events and activities.

The Baldock Greenway, will **connect new and existing open spaces** around the town, supporting active travel and healthy lifestyles and providing access to the surrounding countryside. On site provision of green spaces will alleviate pressure on the Ivel Springs and Weston Hills Nature Reserves make substantial new **'space for nature'** and biodiversity net gain.

Growth will be planned so that every resident's first choice of movement can be to walk, cycle, or use public transport to meet their daily needs. This will be reflected in the wider transport strategy for Baldock, working with the council to **improve walking and cycling routes** through and around the town.

New education, health, employment and community facilities will complement and enhance existing provision in Baldock, including strengthening existing education provision before delivering new facilities, and **meeting the needs of all children within Baldock**. Day to day needs will be met on site in locations that are easily **accessible by sustainable modes of travel**, to encourage social interaction, well-being and strong communities. Enhanced **connections to the town centre**, and increased footfall will support the heart of the town and its diversity of shops and businesses.

The development will achieve **net zero** in operational carbon emissions through building design, minimising construction emissions, local renewable energy production and storage (where feasible) and via carbon offsetting.

Framework Key Principles

The Vision will be delivered through the application of the following Framework Key Principles. These are guiding principles that fix key components of the development and are explained further in the Framework sections of the SMP (sections 5–10).

Land Use Key Principles:



High-quality housing to meet the needs of all ages



Meet the educational needs of primary and secondary pupils from the development, in Baldock



Supporting and strengthening Baldock Town Centre

Green Infrastructure Key Principles:



Enhancing inherited assets



Prioritising nature rich places



Celebrating heritage



A Greenway for Baldock



Creating a series of parkland destinations



Landscape-led design



Ensuring 360° access to your '5-a-day'

Biodiversity Key Principles:



Enhancement of Bygrave Road Local Wildlife Site



Integrating habitats and corridors, trees and hedgerows, into GI network



Creation of network of connected wildlife corridors and green spaces



Connections to and buffering of Local Nature Reserves



Mitigation of impacts on ecology through provision of new habitats



Native and climate resilient planting



Additional green spaces to reduce recreational pressure elsewhere

Movement Key Principles:



A place where half of all trips are made on foot, bicycle or public transport



Town-wide improvements to encourage sustainable and active travel



Reclaiming space for walking, cycling and public transport

Urban Design Key Principles:



Respecting and responding to Baldock's unique character and built form



Retaining and enhancing key views towards Baldock and the wider landscape



Integrating the new neighbourhoods with Baldock through the considered design of connections and transitions between old and new



Putting place-making at the heart of the development.



Creating a new gateway into Baldock



A mix of buildings, spaces and character

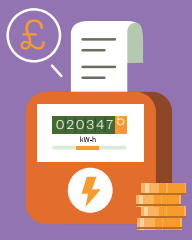
Sustainability Key Principles:



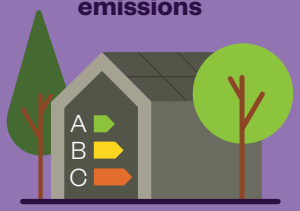
All buildings Net Zero in operational carbon emissions



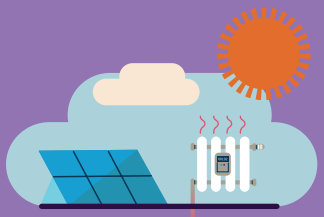
All-electric development



Contributions to carbon offset fund, if required



Highly energy efficient homes and buildings



Use of renewable heat and energy-generating technologies

The vision and principles establish a clear framework for the development, against which the outline planning application, Design Code(s) and detailed applications will be tested, as they are brought forward. The principles are explained in more detail in the thematic chapters of the SMP (sections 5–10) and identify the core components of the Growing Baldock development. Each of these chapters includes a framework plan which identifies one way in which the site might be brought forward, based on the current known constraints and opportunities and applying the framework key principles.

The Ten 'Big Moves'

Ten 'Big Moves' are proposed that form the basis of the Strategic Masterplan, around which the development, and the principles that underpin it, are based. The Ten 'Big Moves' are presented here in no order of preference.

1. Local Centre to Complement High Street

A small local centre will meet the day-to-day needs of residents in the new development without competing with the vibrancy and success of the High Street.

2. Recharging the River Ivel

The development can help address some of the problems facing the River Ivel, by draining surface water from the development into the aquifer, which will help to restore the Ivel.

3. A Healthy and Connected Town – Baldock Greenway

A Greenway for Baldock will provide a continuous green loop around the development and town, connecting to wider walking routes including the Letchworth Greenway and the Etonbury Wheel.

4. Health Hub for Baldock

Baldock will need new health facilities as it grows as the existing medical centre is nearing full capacity. The development will work with health authorities to provide a new 'health hub' with GP and other health facilities, to serve the Baldock community.

5. Achieving Growing Baldock Net Zero

The development will be as sustainable as possible, aiming to be net zero in operational carbon and minimise construction carbon emissions. This is important to how Baldock grows and is a priority of HCC and NHC.

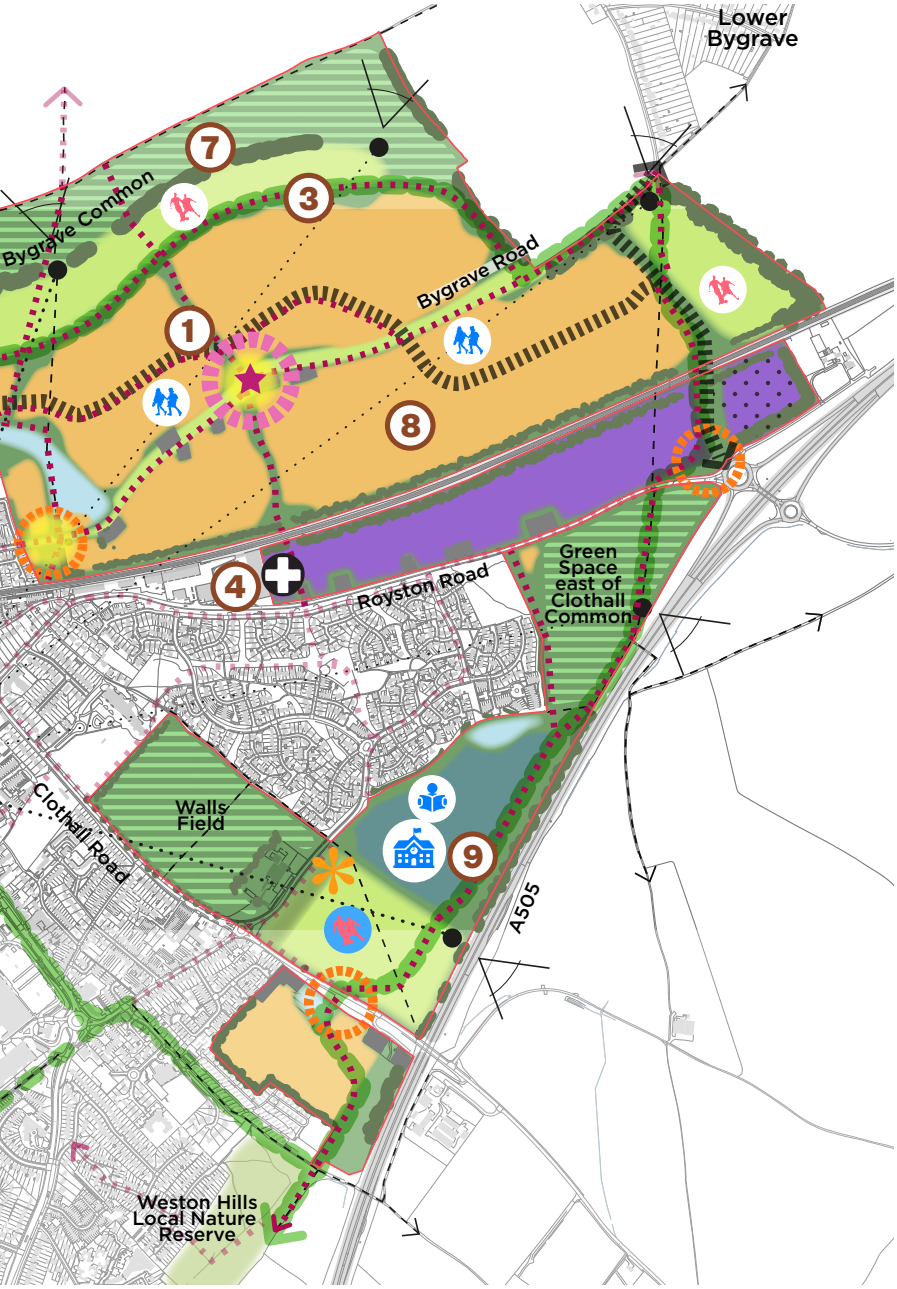
6. Re-interpreting Baldock's History – Heritage Trail

This part of Baldock has a very rich archaeological heritage dating back to Prehistoric and Roman times. This history will be brought to life through the creation of a 'Heritage Trail', a footpath around the development that connects and shares information about the features of archaeological interest, so that people can learn more about the history of human settlement at Baldock.



7. A New Life for Bygrave Common

A new Bygrave Common is proposed for Baldock, reinterpreting the historic common land in this area, and creating a brand-new park for the community. It will connect with the Baldock Greenway and provide spaces for nature and people to enjoy. Bygrave Common will incorporate some areas that are more informal and accessible to people, some that are dedicated to wildlife and biodiversity, and some areas that make provision for sports.



8. Much-needed New Homes for Baldock

Growing Baldock will provide c.3,000 new homes in a new neighbourhood that is strongly connected to the town. It will incorporate a mix of dwelling types, sizes and affordabilities to meet a wide range of needs.

9. Secondary Education to Meet Needs in Baldock

Knights Templar is extremely important to Baldock and the feedback from the community agrees that the preference is that it should remain the one secondary school provider in the town, serving its priority catchment area and where possible expanded, and potentially relocated, to cater for the increase in pupils generated by the development. Options being considered are that Knights Templar could either remain where it is and be expanded or relocated to the new development and expanded, or a new, additional secondary school be provided on-site. The Strategic Masterplan shows the potential for a secondary school on the BA3 parcel, south of Clothall Common. If the agreed solution is a relocated Knights Templar, then the school would need to be of sufficient size to provide for existing need plus any additional spaces required to meet need generated by the new housing growth. This option would mean the school would be larger than it is now, and that the site of the existing school would most likely be considered for redevelopment for new homes.

10. Redistributing Through Ttraffic

Approximately half of the traffic going through Baldock is through traffic that does not stop in the town. The Baldock development aims to repurpose the existing network to allow more sustainable journeys and 'reclaim' the streets for Baldock. It will be easier to walk and cycle through the heart of the town, although this does mean that it will be harder to drive through the town on some roads. Some junctions and roads within the town centre will need to change, in particular at the North Road railway bridge, where the width of the road will be restricted for vehicles and a 'shuttle' system controlled by traffic lights will be introduced. The Strategic Masterplan also suggests preventing cars being able to move from Station Road to Icknield Way/ Football Close to stop rat-running, and a 'modal filter' onto Norton Road where it joins with Icknield Way, to prevent people avoiding the road under the railway bridge.

The Strategic Masterplan also proposes restricting some of the turns that can be made at the Whitehorse crossroads, including a left-turn ban from Whitehorse Street into Station Road. This would stop people using Baldock to get to the A1(M) from Letchworth, but it would inconvenience some residents who would need to approach Station Road from Clothall Road instead.

3.0 The Baldock Conversation

The Strategic Masterplan has been prepared on a staged basis, as set out in the diagram at Figure 02 below:



▲ Figure 02: Strategic Masterplan Production Process

The discussions around the diverse aspects of Growing Baldock have continued as the work on the Strategic Masterplan has progressed and included a range of work streams and discussions with the community, with partners and stakeholders and a range of technical groups. U&C have developed the term 'The Baldock Conversation' to ensure continuity and inter-connectedness across themes as the plans evolve, and to reflect the genuine engagement by all parties to take this ambitious project forward in the right way for new and existing residents.

Given the scale of the new development, in respect to the existing town, and the multi-locational aspect of the allocation, it was essential to ensure that the key stakeholders were mapped and engaged at each stage of the process across statutory partners, key technical and interest groups and the wider community of the town and its surrounding villages. An engagement strategy to achieve this was developed with and signed off by NHC and HCC.

The Baldock Conversation: The Baseline

The conversation started at the Baseline Evidence report stage, with technical studies tested and inputted to by a range of stakeholders.





▲ Members of the public at the Baseline public exhibition, March 2023

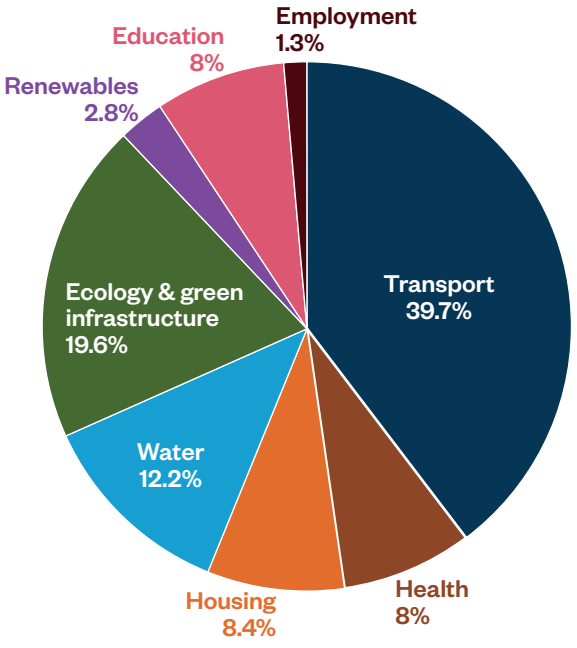
A summary of this baseline work is provided in section 4 of this report and in more detail in the separate Composite Baseline Report. This work was shared with key partners and formed the basis of initial themed workshops with statutory authorities and key interested parties.

The information in the reports was further tested with the local community, in public events in March 2023. This engagement work consisted of:

- targeted promotion to the core stakeholders and interested groups identified for face to face meetings before, during or after the consultation events;
- widespread promotion to the town and local villages for two drop-in consultation events at the Baldock Arts and Heritage Centre;
- an online consultation, supported by social media promotion, using the same core material and hosted on the Growing Baldock website.

The content shared in these events covered the background of the site, including its allocation and local policy; the master developer approach and U&C's role within the project; and asked residents their thoughts on the many aspects of growing a community such as transport, education and ecology as well as their knowledge of the town and how it functions. A full set of the consultation content is available on the Growing Baldock website (www.growingbaldock.co.uk).

A summary of the outcomes of this consultation is presented below:



▲ Figure 03: Key topics raised by the community – March 2023 from 400 comments

Figure 04 below captures the core issues that were raised in the initial public consultation events in March 2023. As the process then moved from baseline investigation and public consultation, the below defines how how the issues were responded to through exploring them further in the options testing and moving forward to a draft strategic masterplan.



▲ Figure 04: Comments arising from consultation, March 2023

1. *Ivel Springs*

We are exploring how sustainable drainage systems within the development can support recharging the aquifer as well as working with the wider local water cycle. We are also talking with the water companies to ensure future water supplies are robust and sustainable for the development and wider area. New homes will also feature water reduction technologies, and encourage sustainable use of water.

2. *Green space*

We will provide not just new areas of accessible green space for people and nature – such as Bygrave Common and Walls Field – but also corridors throughout the development to connect with wider green areas. The Baldock Greenway will be a key part of connecting these new important spaces, alongside enabling sustainable connections to existing Nature Reserves at Ivel Springs and Weston Hills.

3. ***Royston Road***

The team have been meeting with residents of Royston Road individually to discuss the planned approach, and identify issues which need picking up at the right stage of the future development process. The principle is to work with and design around the existing properties: respecting privacy and accesses and establishing landscape buffers where possible between new and existing homes.

4. ***Bygrave Road***

We are proposing to make existing roads such as Bygrave Road better for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. This also enables us to enhance the habitats along the road side.

5. ***Raised land ('Green Space east of Clothall Common')***

This is an important place which people enjoy walking through and want to retain – even though everyone had different names for it! It has also become home to important insects and birds, so we have ensured it remains green space in the plans.

6. ***Development edges***

Our discussions with those living on the boundaries of the new development have varied depending on the location and current and future views/neighbours. We will establish character areas which will explain how the boundaries between new and existing homes will be designed: the spaces between buildings and gardens, what planting might go there, and the design of the new homes. We are not proposing large areas of land between the existing and new homes, as we are looking to create one Baldock where the new development integrates well with the existing, but we will find ways that ensure privacy is protected, and landscape design reduces the negative impact of losing views.

7. ***Clothall Common***

We have developed key principles to ensure our approaches to transport reduce the risk of increased car trips through Clothall Common and improve the opportunities for existing residents to use improved cycling and walking routes, and better bus services to get to town and connect to wider amenities.

8. ***Walls Field***

We recognise the importance of Walls Field to residents and heritage partners, and have evolved plans to ensure this area remains as open green space, with opportunities for a wildflower and grassland setting, heritage information displays and light touch play facilities which reflect the historic setting.

9. ***Medical centre***

Discussions continue to support the existing medical centre and explore timings for a new centre within the development, south of the railway line, so it can be easily accessible by as many people as possible. We will explore the services to be delivered and finalise timings through the planning process.

10. ***Town centre***

The importance of the town centre and the need to strengthen it is clear, and the approach set out today supports improving access to the town centre for all Baldock residents, including for the new homes. It is important that new facilities complement and do not compete with facilities in the town, and make the High Street and surrounding roads better for people to spend time or walk and cycle around.

11. ***Knights Templar school***

The principle set out at the consultation is for one secondary school provider for Baldock to enhance the strong and well loved reputation of Knights Templar. To ensure it has space to grow, options for locations for the larger school were explained to ensure sufficient capacity is provided.

12. ***Whitehorse Street junction***

The proposal is to rework the junction and the wider network, to keep more through traffic out of the centre of Baldock and reduce the number of directions you can travel via the junction. This will discourage "through traffic" vehicles from coming through the junction and the town centre and enable a safer design for those walking and cycling.

13. ***Railway station***

We have drawn on the feedback to explore options that prioritise more inclusive access to the station for wheelchair users, and better access for walking and cycling from the north-east corner of the station, to make traffic flow better through and around the station. We will not put more parking at the station, as we want people to walk, cycle or catch a bus to the station. We are working with Network Rail to explore station improvements.

14. ***Railway bridge***

We are looking at bold measures which take traffic routing through Baldock away from needing to use North Road and making it more of a local route. This will see traffic management put in place and the width reduced to one car lane, controlled by traffic lights, with the rest of the road providing a safe cycle and walking route through to the station and town centre.

The Baldock Conversation: Options testing and preferred option

This phase of work was taken forward in two key ways:

1. working with stakeholders and technical working groups; and
2. through direct discussions with Community Groups and the establishment of a Community Forum.

Technical work

An options workshop involving key stakeholders (NHC and HCC officers) was undertaken in May 2023 during the early stages of options testing and Strategic Masterplan production.

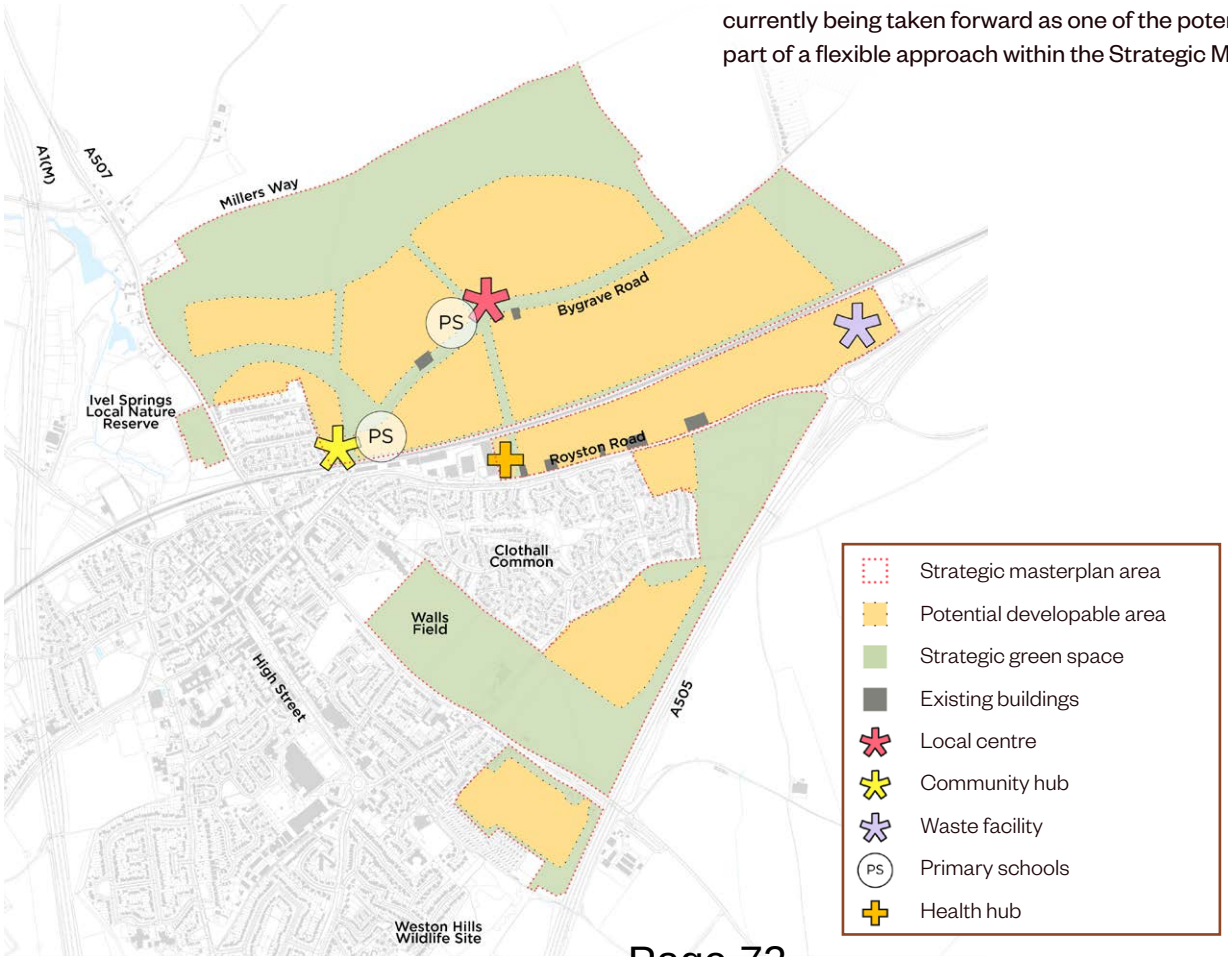
The emerging masterplan was then subject of a Design South East Design Review in July 2023. A further design workshop between U&C, NHC and HCC officers was held in August 2023. Throughout the process, a series of task group meetings themed around movement and access, green infrastructure and land use, took place, involving officers and stakeholders in key design discussions on issues directly influencing the emerging Strategic Masterplan.

In these discussions various iterations of the masterplan were tested against an agreed set of criteria: response to the baseline, compliance with place making objectives, compliance with policy and feasibility and delivery.

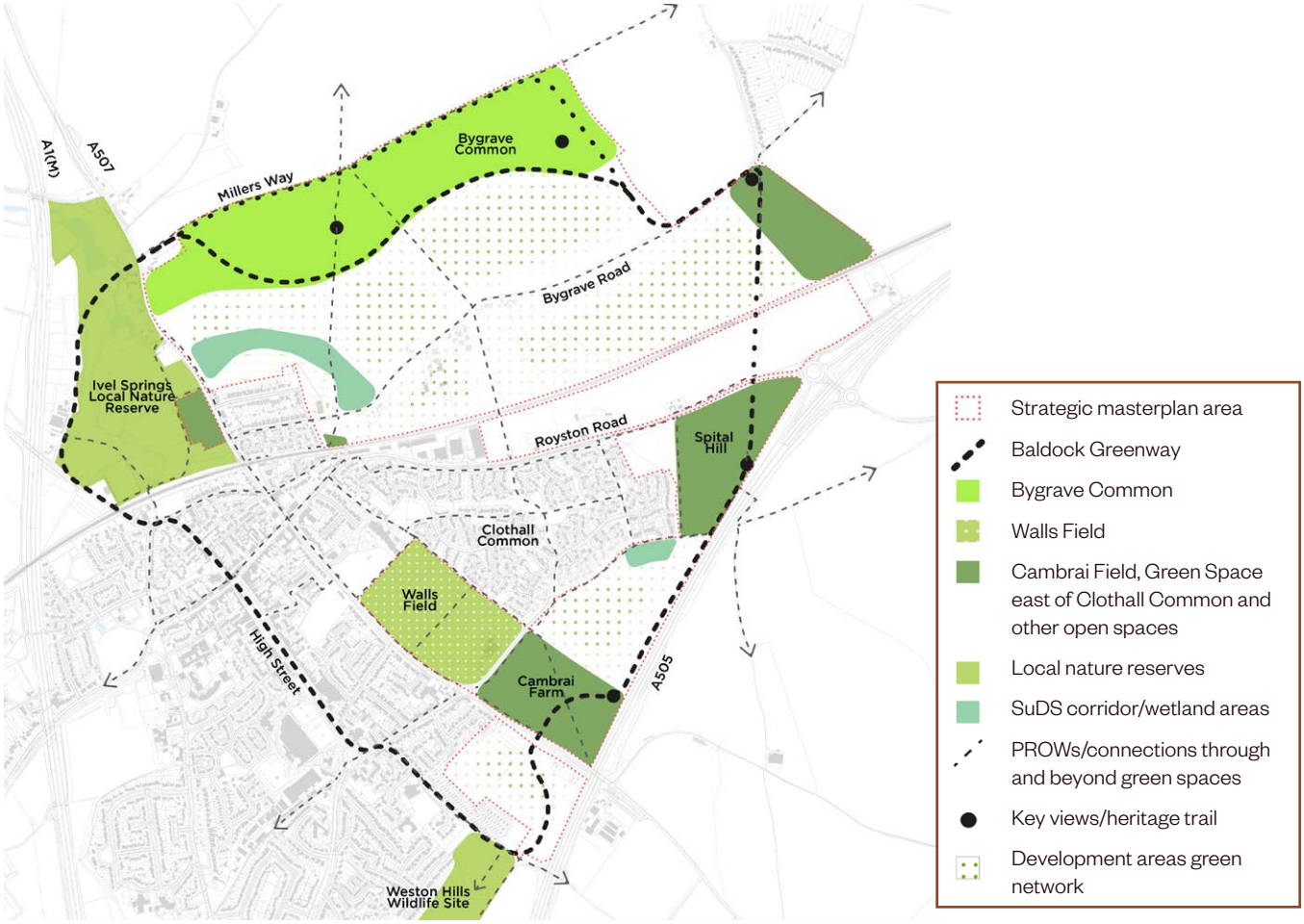
The suite of technical and design inputs discussed and refined over several months culminated in a consensus on various matters, which were presented in the Options Report as 'fixes' (shown in Figures 05 to 07 below). These reflect the status of parameters at the time of the Options Report, some of which have evolved as the SMP has been finalised, and are shown in the Framework Plans in sections 5–10.

The Options Report also identified two areas where further work is required before a 'fix' can be achieved: education, particularly secondary school provision and archaeology.

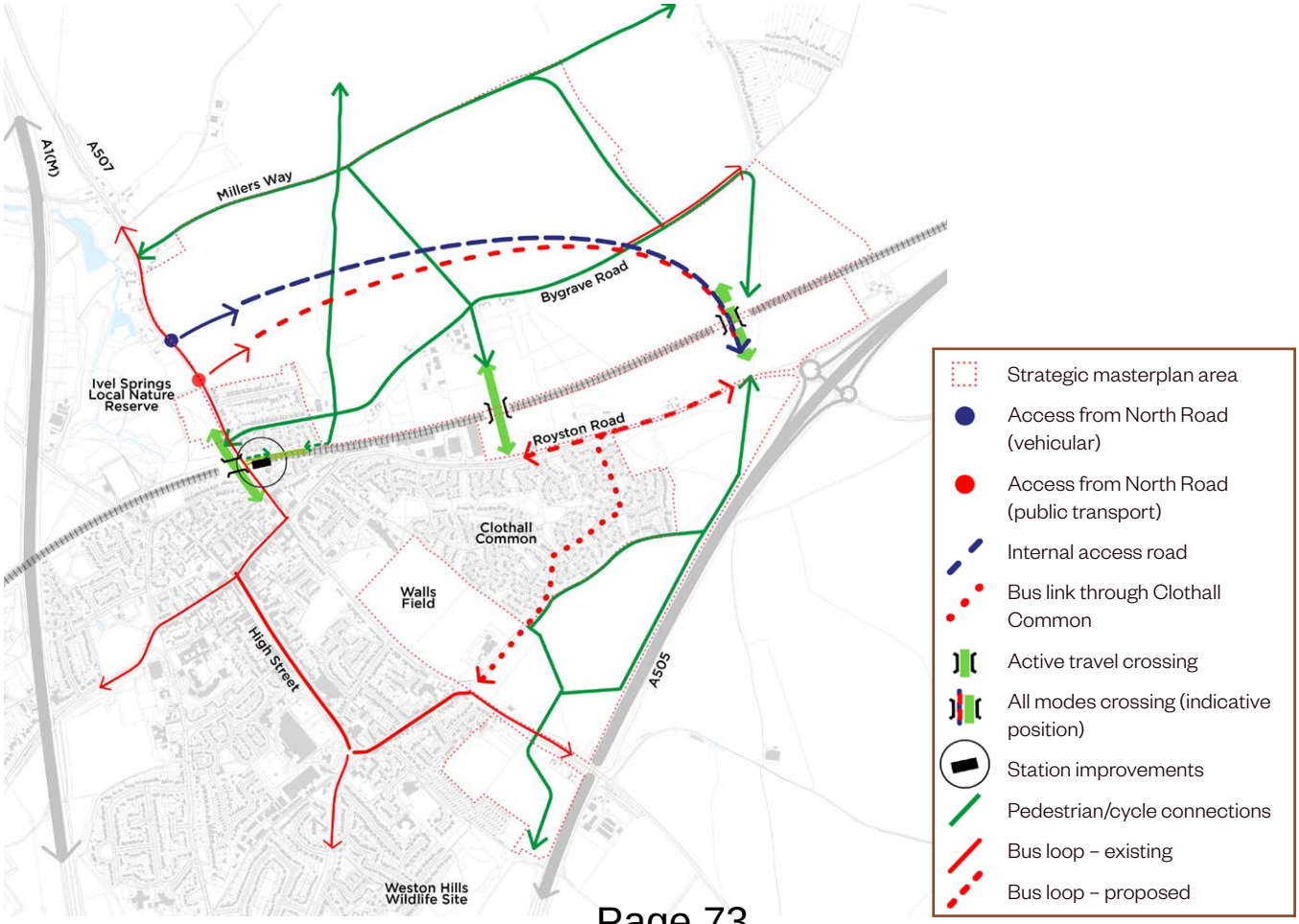
As part of identifying the secondary school as an area where further work was required, an alternative option for the location of the secondary school has been explored, envisaging the secondary school in parcel BA3, rather than BA1. This has been and continues to be the subject of extensive discussion and exploration with NHC and HCC (education and highways) and is currently being taken forward as one of the potential options as part of a flexible approach within the Strategic Masterplan.



▲ Figure 05: Land Use Fixes (Options Report)



▲ Figure 06: Green Infrastructure Fixes (Options Report)



▲ Figure 07: Movement and Access Fixes (Options Report)

Community Engagement

The input of the community and wider interest groups was also brought into the options testing stage through a series of parallel meetings and events. The approach mapped out key representative groups and responded to those who had bought up key issues, ideas and opportunities in discussions on the baseline work.

The approach focused on the setting up of a Growing Baldock Community Forum, which was scoped out and co-run with the NHC Communities Team. This Forum bought together key representative groups who had been heavily involved in both the Neighbourhood Plan for Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall, and the Local Plan, including the Neighbourhood Plan Group, Baldock Beats Waste, business and education representatives and Revlvel. Meetings provided an opportunity to present the latest thinking and options on each theme, share the latest key framework diagrams, and ensure the group's views and inputs were brought into the wider options testing approach.

A schedule of these meetings and themes is set out below:

Date	Topic
26 April 2023	First meeting project introduction
23 May 2023	Transport
19 July 2023	Green Infrastructure
26 July 2023	Community Infrastructure
16 August 2023	Transport
20 September 2023	Water (with Revlvel)

Alongside these meetings the team also held additional meetings and attended events including:

- Baldock Ecofest (May 2023 and September 2024) – meeting residents and answering questions on future plans and particularly ecology and sustainability
- The site's direct neighbours (10 July 2023) – including Salisbury Road, Bygrave Road, Royston Road, Hillside Park – 3 Q&A sessions with over 70 attendees
- Meeting with residents from the Football Close/Icknield Way area to discuss the proposed changes to road access in that area (15 May 2024)
- The Knights Templar School (4 July 2023) – several meetings with the Headmaster and the leadership team, including a sustainability session with the student Green Knights team
- Ashwell residents (4 July 2023) – drop in session sharing the plans for Growing Baldock with the community, providing an opportunity to better understand the interconnections with Baldock for facilities and amenities, and to inform some of the thinking about transport planning. Strong turnout of over 100 people across the four hour session. Attendance at Ashwell Parish Council meeting to speak to residents about SMP in March 2024
- Baldock Area Forum (17 July 2023, 11 September 2023, 15 January 2024 and 2 December 2024) – U&C attendance to provide project overview and updates
- Meeting with Radwell Parish Council and residents on Growing Baldock plans (26 February 2024)
- Meeting with Bygrave residents on Growing Baldock plans (28 November 2024)
- Meetings and site visits with local Councillors
- Meetings with local and national stakeholders including:
  - Baldock Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Association (BALGA) including a site visit (April 2023) and AGM presentation (21 January 2024), meeting and visit to BALGA shop in May 2024
  - Friends of Baldock Green Spaces (FOBGS) (24 July 2023)
  - Baldock Forum (group of Headteachers and Chair of Governors of the schools in Baldock and the surrounding area) (8 November 2023)
  - Baldock and Letchworth Scouts (4 May 2023)
  - Girlguiding Baldock (14 November 2023)
  - Rotary Club of Baldock (26 April 2023)
  - The Baldock Surgery and NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex (23 August, 02 October 2023 and 11 October 2024)
  - Sport England (1 August 2023)
  - Historic England site meeting (12 July 2023)
  - Revlvel (14 March 2023, 13 September 2023 and 26 February 2024)
  - Affinity Water (2 January 2023 and 12 January 2024)
  - British Horse Society (BHS) (10 August 2023 and 3 May 2024)
  - Christchurch Baldock (20 November 2023)
  - Baldock Benefice (including St Mary's Church Baldock) (30 November 2023)
  - Hillside Park (Owner, Manager and Chair of the Residents) (20 October 2023, 30 November 2023 and 1 October 2024) including a site visit

Feedback from the discussions with all stakeholders, members and events, were continually informing the full Strategic Masterplan process, being drawn into the options testing, supporting the refining to a preferred option and concluding on a strategic masterplan.

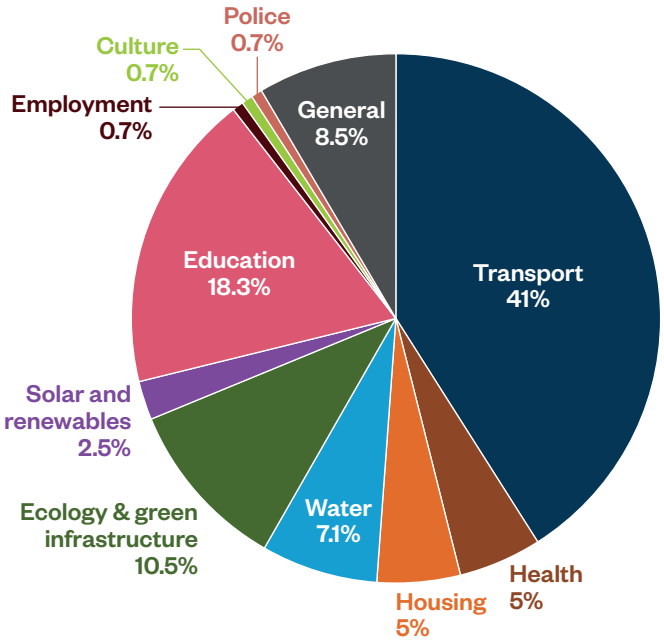
The Baldock Conversation: Draft Masterplan

U&C, HCC and NHC discussed the core remaining issues and finalise the approach for the draft masterplan. In October 2023 the draft masterplan was presented to the North Herts internal Project Board to seek support for public consultation on the draft plan. This was granted.

In November 2023, a series of public consultation events were held to gather public views and preferences regarding the preferred masterplan for the development site. These four face to face exhibition style engagement events, including a session with students at The Knights Templar school, provided the opportunity to demonstrate how the Strategic Masterplan had evolved, and share the preferred options being set out in the draft masterplan. The consultations had a particular focus on:

- feedback and actions taken since the March events (as shown in Figure 4);
- the Baldock Greenway and connecting green and blue infrastructure throughout the town and wider area;
- transport and proposed changes to the local network to support the new homes, and create a culture of active travel;
- education and the secondary school location options; and
- a cohesive approach to planning other community facilities and amenities to work with the town and local villages: termed the "One Baldock" approach.

Across the four events in November over 400 people attended and over 300 comments were received. Below are the core themes of issues covered by those comments.



▲ Figure 08: Key topics raised by the community – November 2023





▲ Preferred options consultation, November 2023

The table below, and figure to the right, show how these issues are being taken forward in the final Strategic Masterplan, and in the work being undertaken to move forward to the next stage of planning in the outline planning application for the development.

	Issue	Detail	Next steps
1.	Future of Bygrave Road	Concern that closure of Bygrave Road will impact on those living in villages and coming into the town.	The scheme will be delivering a new road (together with a required bridge) connecting North Road and Royston Road through the development north of the railway line. Once this is in place, all users of Bygrave Road will use the new connection, enabling two routes from Baldock to the north east neighbouring villages. The new road connection provides a safer vehicular route, and enables Bygrave Road to be safer for walking, cycling or public transport use. The approach will continue to be tested through the planning process, but it is thought to be the right approach for the growth of the town (as set out in the Access and Movement section on page 61).
2.	Parking capacity at the Station	Access to Station Road and parking provision is inadequate. Parking is needed at the northern entrance of the station.	Feedback from the community, as well as the technical transport work, all stress that the car should be less dominant within the town. This requires improving the active travel connections. More parking being provided will encourage more people to drive to the station, and so the approach to building additional capacity at the station is to ensure a safe northern access from the new homes by bike and walking. This will be further tested as the transport strategy is developed in detail but remains the current position to achieve the overall modal shift away from cars.
3a.	Town centre transport interventions	Consider altering the location of the restrictions to Football Close and Icknield Way.	Experience from local residents and regular uses of these routes will helpfully inform how the details of these interventions evolve as the planning process moves into more detail at outline and phased applications and reserved matters applications. A follow up session will be arranged with local residents to explore the issues further to help define the future options of an intervention here.
3b.		Norton Road modal filter	This is under review with the transport consultant team. Detail of the exact location and type of modal filter to follow in the outline planning application. Close collaboration with the Letchworth Heritage Foundation will ensure the plans are not in conflict with planned development north of Letchworth (LG1).
3c.		Left-turn ban Whitehorse Street to North Road	The inclusion of this left-turn ban has been reviewed by our transport consultants who conclude that keeping the left-turn ban whilst allowing access for residents of Football Close and Icknield Way remains the best approach. However, the left-turn ban could be introduced only if other traffic demand measures in the town and A1(M) J9 capacity enhancements are not sufficiently effective.
4.	Secondary School location	Primary concerns were around traffic impact at South Road / Clothall Road junction	Initial transport modelling has confirmed that the Wallington Road/South Road/Clothall Road roundabout can accommodate the additional trips that would be generated by a secondary school on BA3. All opportunities to provide the optimal environment for walking and cycling will be explored.
5.	Access to Clothall Common	Concerns were expressed about the bus only route into Clothall, but no additional vehicle access to the north, especially if the school is located at BA3. Access for emergency vehicles was also raised as a priority for Clothall Common residents.	This is being reviewed by the design team and will inform the outline planning application.
6.	Weight restrictions limit for HCVs	Support for approach to limit HGV use of the town as a cut through. Comments on options to extend the current weight restrictions coming into force to include a wider area including key routes in the town.	This will be further explored with HCC who are managing the process and outcomes of this. There are some challenges with ensuring the restrictions are enforceable and effective so this will be an ongoing discussion as the transport strategy continues to evolve.
7.	Health provision	Concern about ensuring further or relocated provision is accessible for all	The detailed plans on whether there will be an additional surgery or a larger relocated health centre within the development area is still in discussion and will be finalised later in the planning process – with specific consultation around this. Ensuring effective access to the surgery from existing residents as well as the new community will be a fundamental part of this process. This will also be further tested and consulted on as part of outline planning and later detailed planning applications.



Figure 09: Map of comments arising from consultation – November 2023

Transport was the leading area of focus again, with the proposed interventions provoking useful and specific feedback on potential impacts based on people's local knowledge and everyday experience. Further work to assess any unintended consequences of the interventions in key locations is underway. Several comments were made on the need for improvements to the train station, more capacity on trains and the lack of bus services and connections to necessary destinations including Stevenage hospital.

Education was the second most commented on area with the highest number focusing on the options presented for secondary education provision, to which attendees were asked to express their preference. The majority of respondees supported the idea of one new school for Baldock in a new location. There was a strong preference for locating the new school on BA3, albeit with some concerns about impacts on existing roads with the additional traffic this would bring.

Green spaces: There were a number of supportive comments for the Baldock Greenway and improved pedestrian and cycling provision generally. A number of BALGA members commented positively on the proposed increased provision of allotments.

Health: Comments related to the provision of healthcare with a consensus that more was needed and that any new location should consider the mobility of those using the service and provide adequate parking and access by public transport if it was moved out of the high street.

Housing: 5% of comments were linked to housing provision including the need for a high level of affordable housing with a good mix of property types to include bungalows and larger family homes all with a high environmental performance.

Water and the River Ivel received 21 comments albeit this was fewer than the 50 comments received in March. The focus was still predominantly on water extraction and sewage capacity but with recognition that the issue was being taken seriously and the proposed drainage strategy seeks to help recharge the River Ivel.

Other topics with a small number of comments included the need for more policing, a larger cemetery and a splash pad. There were also a number of Ashwell residents who noted their concerns about reduced access to Baldock, particularly the train station by both car and bike and the need for Ashwell to remain in the Knights Templar catchment area.

The consultation was followed up by formal responses from Bygrave, Ashwell and Radwell Parish Councils which also stress additional points on:

- the role of Bygrave Road /Ashwell Road and perceived reduction of vehicular connection with the town (from Bygrave and Ashwell);
- concern around Whitehorse junction changes to journeys from Radwell;
- impacts of controlled flow under the Railway bridge;
- concern around car access and needing more parking to key amenities including the station and doctors surgery;
- concerns that reducing traffic into Baldock will route traffic through the villages;
- needing to plan for farm traffic movements; and
- air pollution around the A507.

A number of key alternate proposals were also put forward which have been worked through by the transport team to shape the final proposals set out in the chapters below.

Conclusion

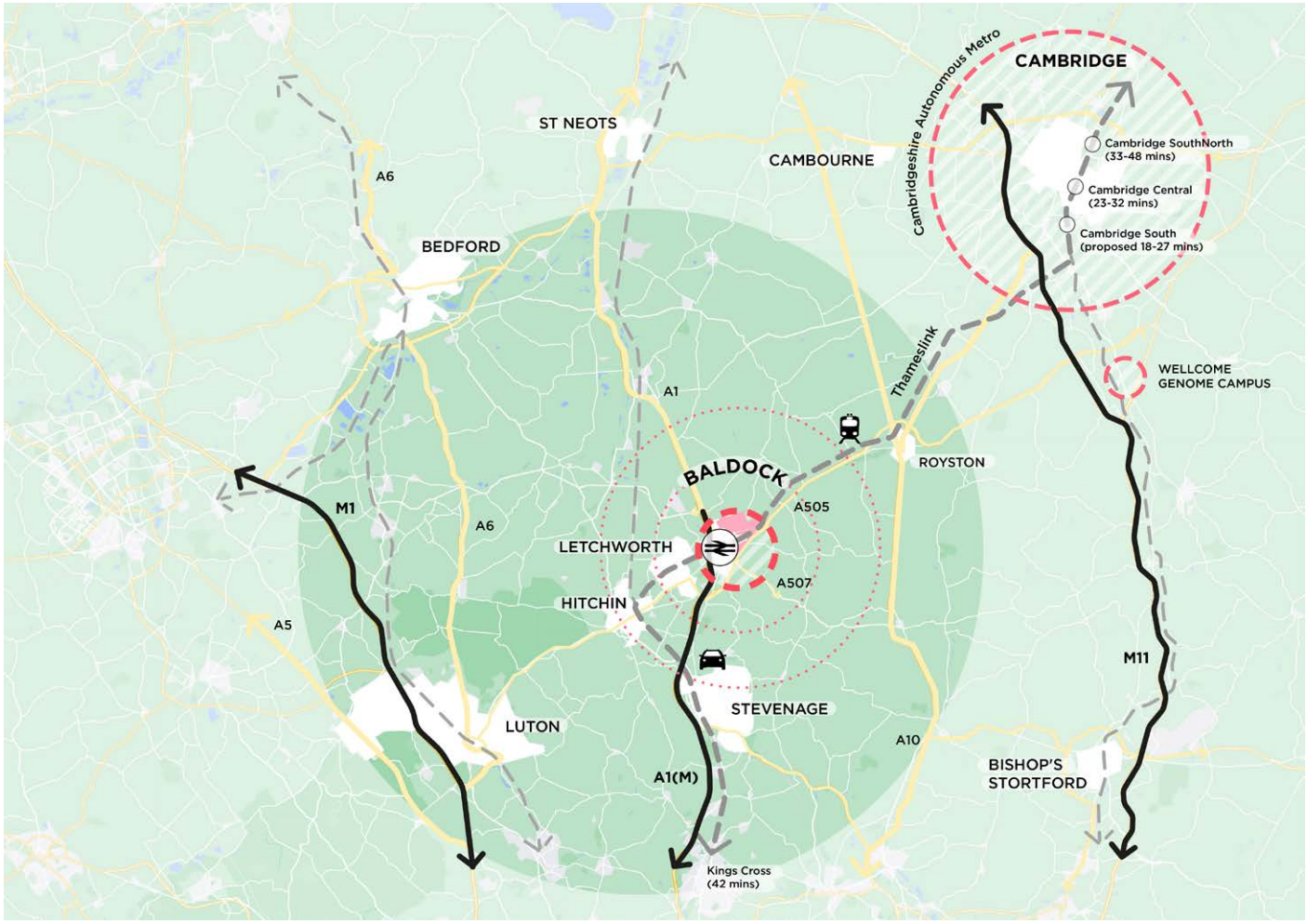
Through both evolution of the Strategic Masterplan and noted points which will flow into the development of the next stage of detail, the team will continue to address the key points raised.

One clear reflection on the Conversation to date has been that people are keen to be engaged, and are feeling listened to by this process. Continuing to ensure that interactive dialogue is maintained and the plans continue to respond to points raised will be key, as well as keeping people informed of the process and timing as the planning process continues.

The Baldock Conversation started through the Masterplan, will continue beyond it, as the plans move to outline and detailed planning. The intention is that it continues into the delivery of the town's expansion and the start of community development and cohesion work as Growing Baldock moves into implementation.

4.0
Context & Baseline – Understanding the Place

Figure 10: Strategic Context



Where Will Baldock Grow

The site is c.220 hectares in size and located to the north and east of the historic market town of Baldock (population c.10,000), within the administrative area of North Hertfordshire. It benefits from a well-connected strategic location on the A1(M) and lies to the north of Stevenage and immediately to the east of Letchworth Garden City and Hitchin (refer to Figure 10). Once an important coaching town, it has been bypassed twice: first by the A1(M) and more recently by the A505 Baldock Bypass, which opened in 2006.

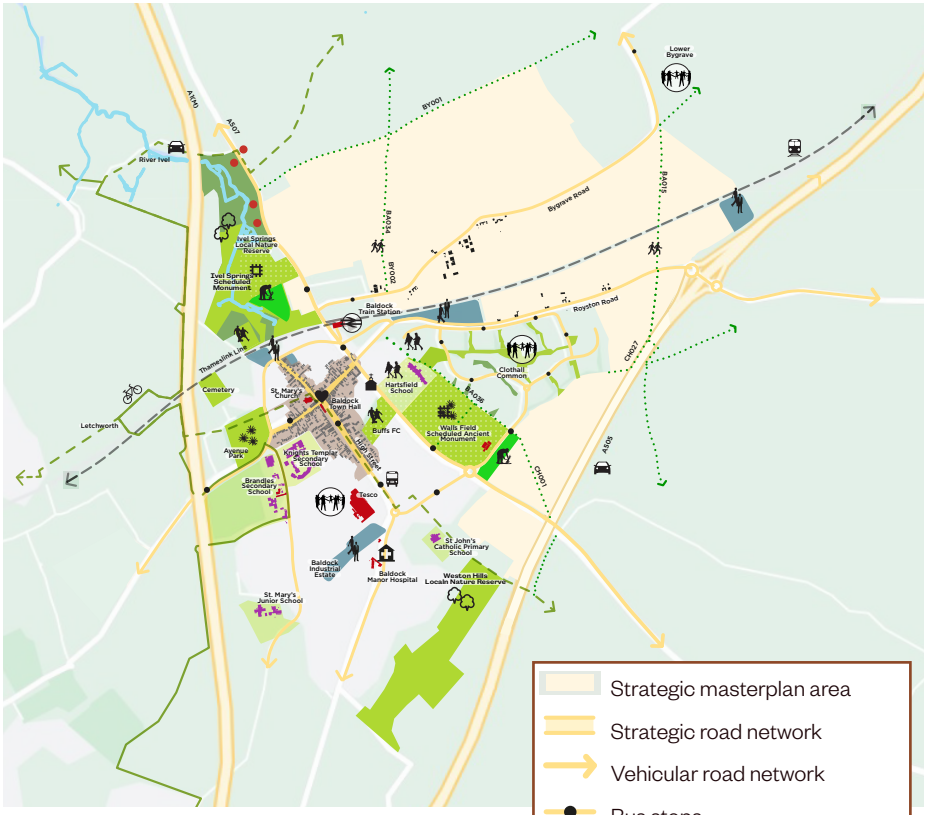
The land to be developed comprises a series of parcels of predominantly agricultural land immediately adjoining the urban area (refer to site features plan at Figure 11). The northernmost, and largest component (BA1) lies to the east of North Road, which connects to the A1(M) junction to the north (the A1 (M) runs in parallel to North Road) and Baldock town centre to the south. The southern boundary is defined by the railway line and the eastern and northern edge by existing field boundaries and footpaths. Bygrave / Ashwell Road runs through this part of the land to be developed, from North Road to the village of Bygrave to the north east.

A narrow strip of land between the railway to the north and Royston Road to the south, forms the central portion of the Baldock development area (BA10). This area incorporates a number of small businesses and private homes. The remaining portion of the land wraps around the eastern side of the settlement, bound to the west by existing development area and to the east by the A505, which travels south west beyond Baldock to connect to the next A1 (M) junction further south. Clothall Road dissects this part of the site, as it runs north west towards the town centre.

The majority of the land to be developed is given over to agricultural tenancies and is therefore rural in character, with field boundaries defined by hedgerows / trees of varying age and quality. There are no watercourses or water bodies present. A network of public rights of way and bridleways traverse this area. The development area is located to the immediate north east of Baldock town centre and Baldock railway station, which provides direct rail connections to Letchworth Garden City and onwards to London. Baldock is a historic market



▲ View of site as existing



▲ Figure 11: Site Features

town comprising a large Conservation Area and numerous listed buildings. A Scheduled Monument (Romano-British town and Late Iron Age settlement – Walls Field) is located off Clothall Road adjacent to (west of) the development site (BA11). A further Scheduled Monument is situated west of the BA1 site and North Road (Ivel Springs).

Planning Context

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2022)

The Strategic Masterplan is a requirement of the adopted North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2022). The Local Plan addresses the key issues in the District including the allocation of at least 13,000 new homes. Just under half of all new homes over the plan period are to be delivered on six Strategic Housing Sites, including at Baldock. Each strategic allocation has a site-specific policy which defines the required components of the development.

The Local Plan identifies land at Baldock as a sustainable extension made up of a series of allocations: BA1 (North of Baldock) for 2,800 homes; BA2 (Land southwest of Clothall Road) for 200 homes; and BA3 (Land south of Clothall Common) for 245 homes (refer to Figure 12). Policy SP8 (Housing) identifies that of the 2,800 homes allocated at parcel BA1, approximately 1,400 of these will be delivered by 2031.

This policy also requires sites to deliver up to 40% Affordable Housing where this is viable, with a broadly even split between smaller (1–2 bed) and larger (3+ bed) properties. Demand for self build development must also be provided on specific sites.

The site-specific policy SP14 relates to strategic site BA1 to the north of Baldock. Planning application(s) for this parcel are to be assessed against its contribution to the Strategic Masterplan and must not prejudice the implementation of the development as a whole.

The Strategic Masterplan covers the sites that are subject to the Local Plan Allocations (BA1, BA2, BA3, BA10) as well as the Urban Open Land, Walls Field Scheduled Monument and a parcel of land to the west of North Road, adjacent to the Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve. A series of requirements are set out for the allocated sites, including up to 3,300 homes, 19.6 hectares of employment land, sustainable and active travel connections, green infrastructure, schools, community and local centre facilities and infrastructure.

Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan (2021)

The Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan was 'made' in June 2021 and now forms part of the Development Plan. It provides policies to guide the growth of Baldock, make improvements to access and parking, maintain strategic green space, achieve high quality design and preserve the character of the town. It also sets out requirements to maintain the separation of Lower Bygrave, creative a distinctive gateway into Baldock from Royston Road and provide landscaped buffers to the development.

Two outline planning applications for the development north (17/04420/OP) and south (17/04417/OP) of the railway were submitted by Hertfordshire County Council in 2017 but were subsequently withdrawn in 2023.

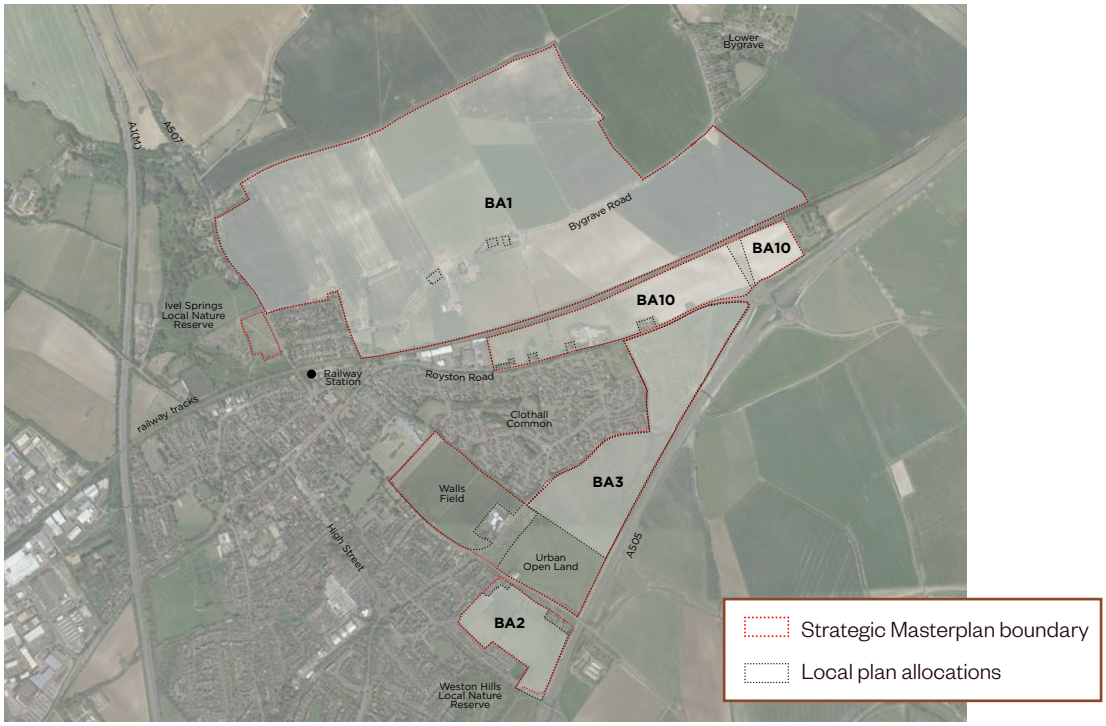


Figure 12: Local Plan Site Allocations

Historical Development

Baldock has a rich history, with traces of human life evident from Palaeolithic and Neolithic eras. The pattern of historic growth of Baldock is illustrated in the plans at Figure 13.

Baldock is an attractive market town with a defined local character derived from a range of architectural and landscape features which could be reinterpreted through the new development. It has an established and active community, meaning its facilities such as community halls are well used. Some, such as the GP surgery, are at capacity. The High Street and the local shops and facilities along it are also highly valued locally.

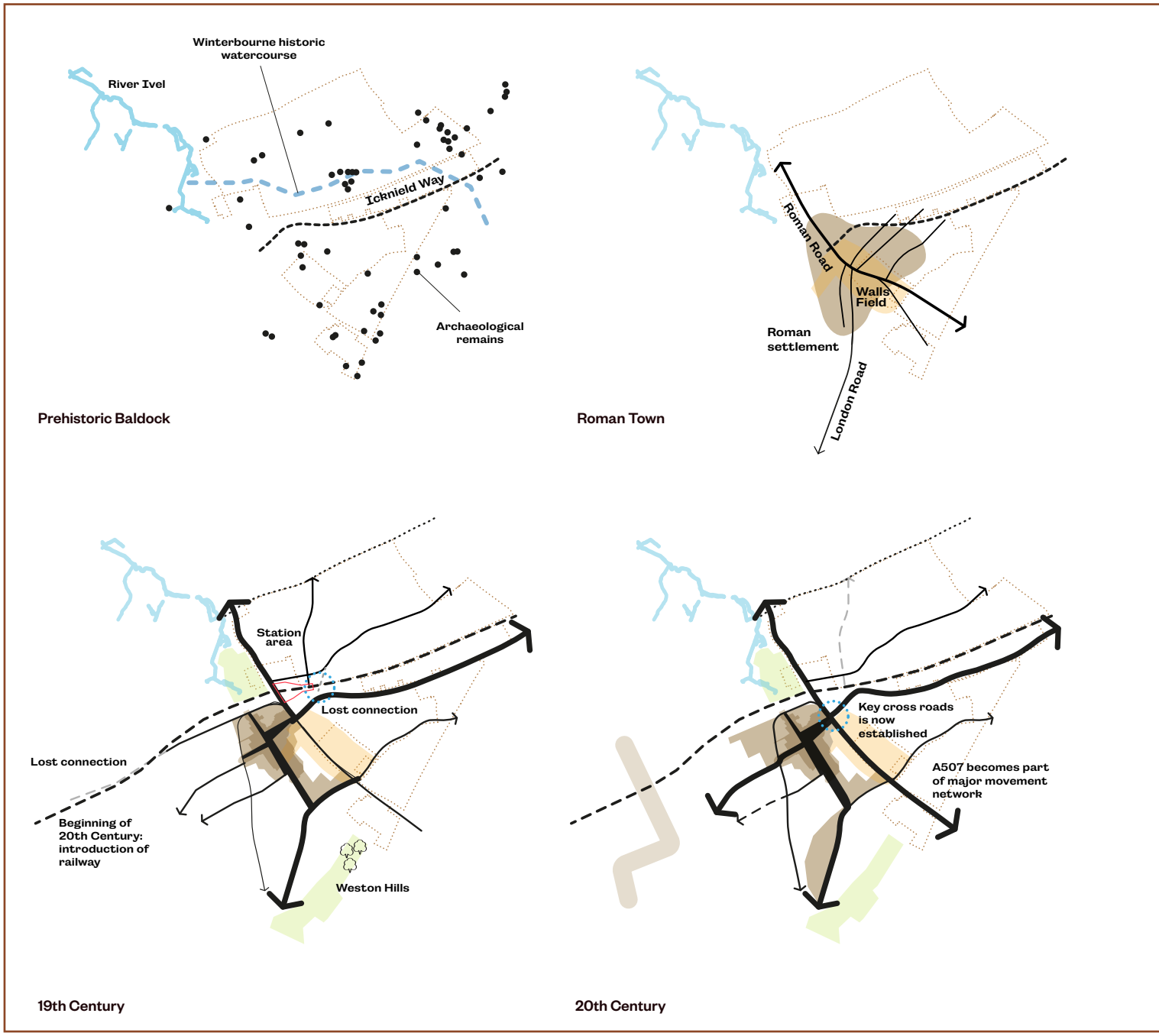


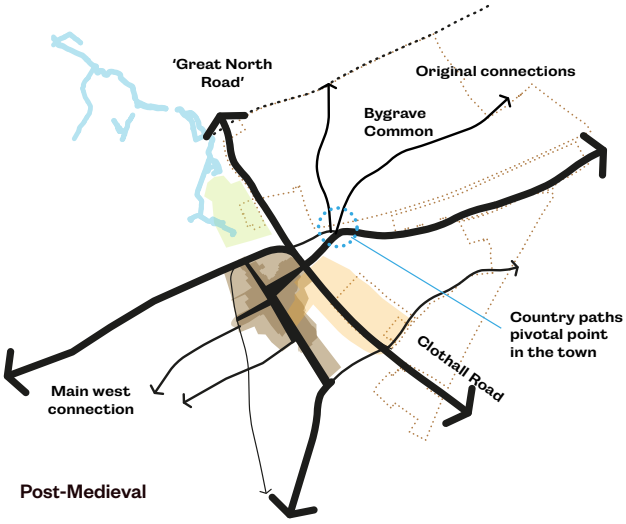
Figure 13: Baldock's Historic Growth

Archaeology

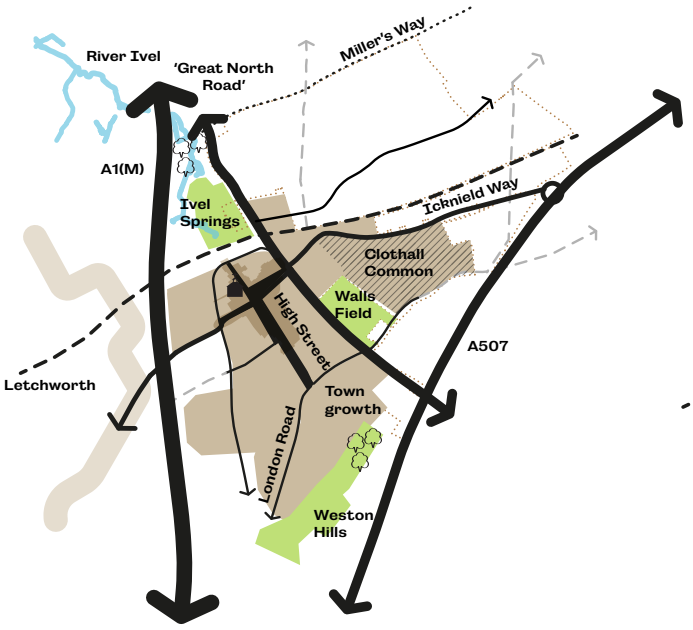
The site has been subject to extensive archaeological evaluation including additional trial trenching and detailed geophysical surveys in 2024, adding to the wealth of existing archaeological information known about the site's human inhabitation from the early prehistoric period onwards. This information will inform a range of mitigation measures, which may include further excavations in some areas, which will be set out in an Archaeological and Heritage Management Plan to be submitted with the outline planning application.



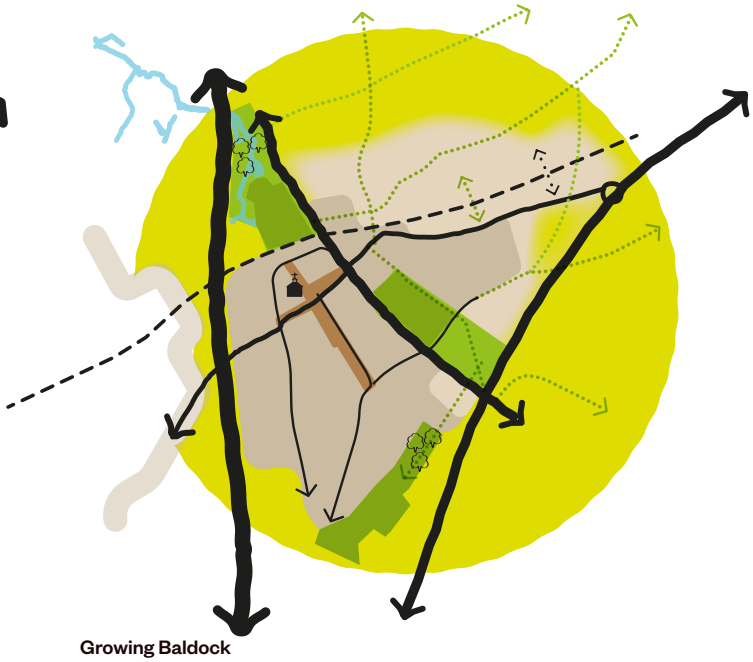
Medieval Town



Post-Medieval



Present Day



Growing Baldock

Constraints and Opportunities

Figures 14 to 16 below summarise the opportunities and constraints revealed by the Composite Baseline Report, which have directly informed the Strategic Masterplan.

Green and Blue Infrastructure

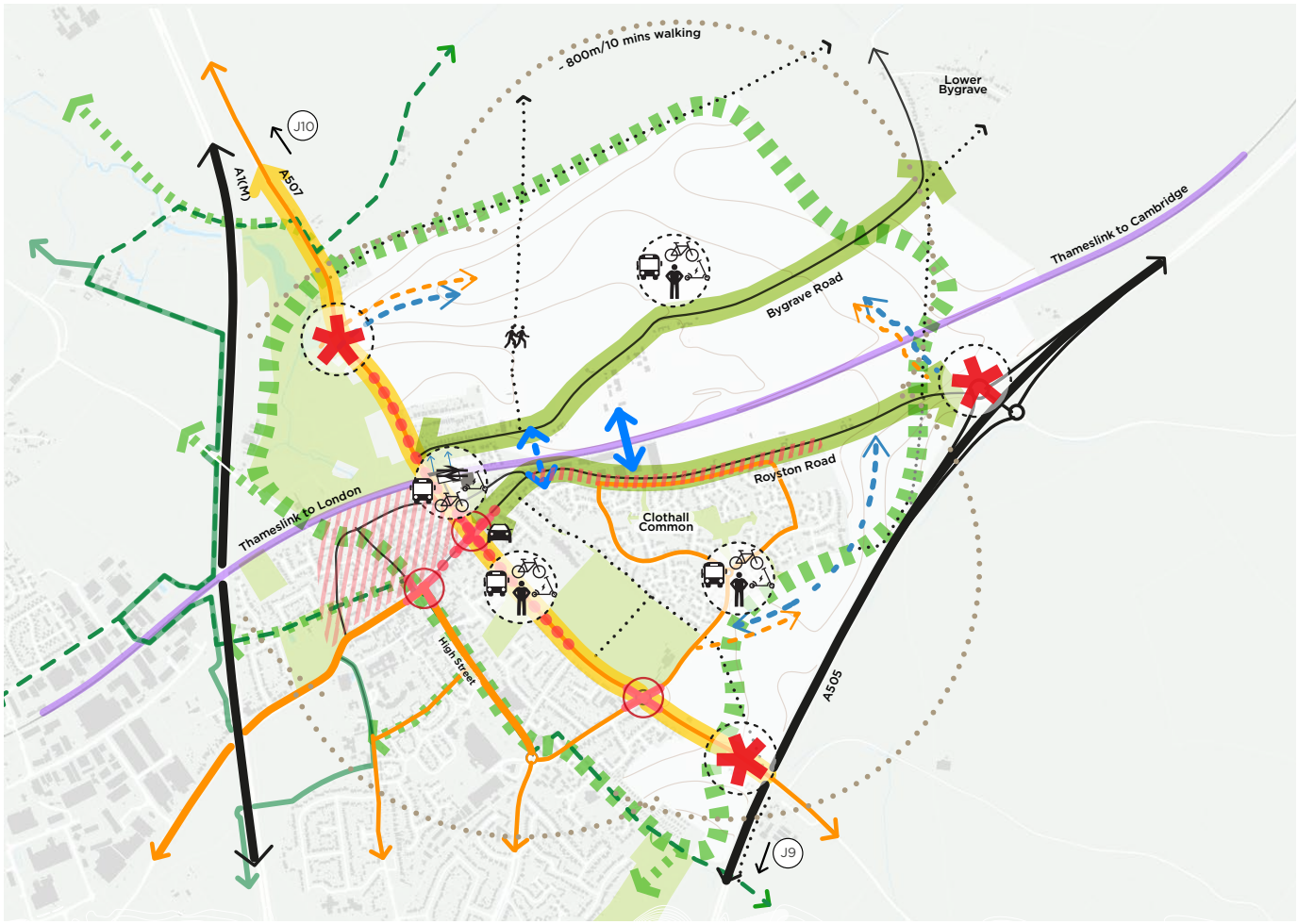
Figure 14: Green and Blue Infrastructure Opportunities identified in Composite Baseline Report (June 2023)



- Presence of large and well-used green spaces (Ivel Spring, Walls Field, Weston Hills), forming a positive asset for the Town with the opportunity to safeguard, buffer and improve connectivity with them as part of a "Baldock Greenway";
- A new "Baldock Greenway" should connect existing well used pedestrian/ cycle connections and public right of ways in Baldock with new established sustainable links in the study area and plug into the "Letchworth Greenway" and "Etonbury Wheel", creating a comprehensive network of accessible green infrastructure in the wider area;
- Potential to establish Bygrave Road as a new landscape corridor, reflecting and enhancing its historic and ecological interest and contributing to the wider sustainable, green network of routes;
- Opportunity to provide a new parkland area for the town on Bygrave Common, at the northern edge of the study area, and connect it to a series of smaller open spaces, all interlinked by green connections. This would establish a "green network" of active travel routes aligning with objectives to deliver a healthy and active development, provide access to nature, and relieve pressure on the Local Nature Reserves (LNRs);
- Opportunity to celebrate the area's rich heritage to positively influence the landscape and reference and interpret some of the area's archaeology within the landscape and movement framework;
- Opportunity to complement and integrate the provision of play areas, sport facilities and community allotments within the network of new open spaces;
- Commitment to protect and enhance areas of elevated ecological value and local wildlife habitats and achieve Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) target;
- Need to reinforce defensible green belt boundary on the northern and eastern edges of the land to be developed;
- Creation of consistent landscape buffers along the edge of the A505, A507 and railway corridor;
- Enhancement and preservation of long distance views to the countryside;
- Retention of the open character of Walls Field, improving the visual and recreational value of this land, in particular the views to open countryside to the south east, and creating a potential green corridor extending from the southern boundary of the Scheduled Monument towards the south;
- Preservation of existing long-distance views to St. Mary's Church Tower from elevated parts of land within the study area;
- Addressing the existing surface water flood risk issues by locating development areas away from surface water flooding risk areas, integrating overland flow into the landscape and the creation of a network of SuDS in areas at higher risk of flooding as part of the wider green infrastructure provision. Also potential to help recharge the River Ivel via the infiltration of surface water into the groundwater.

Access and Movement

Figure 15: Access and Movement Opportunities identified in Composite Baseline Report (June 2023)

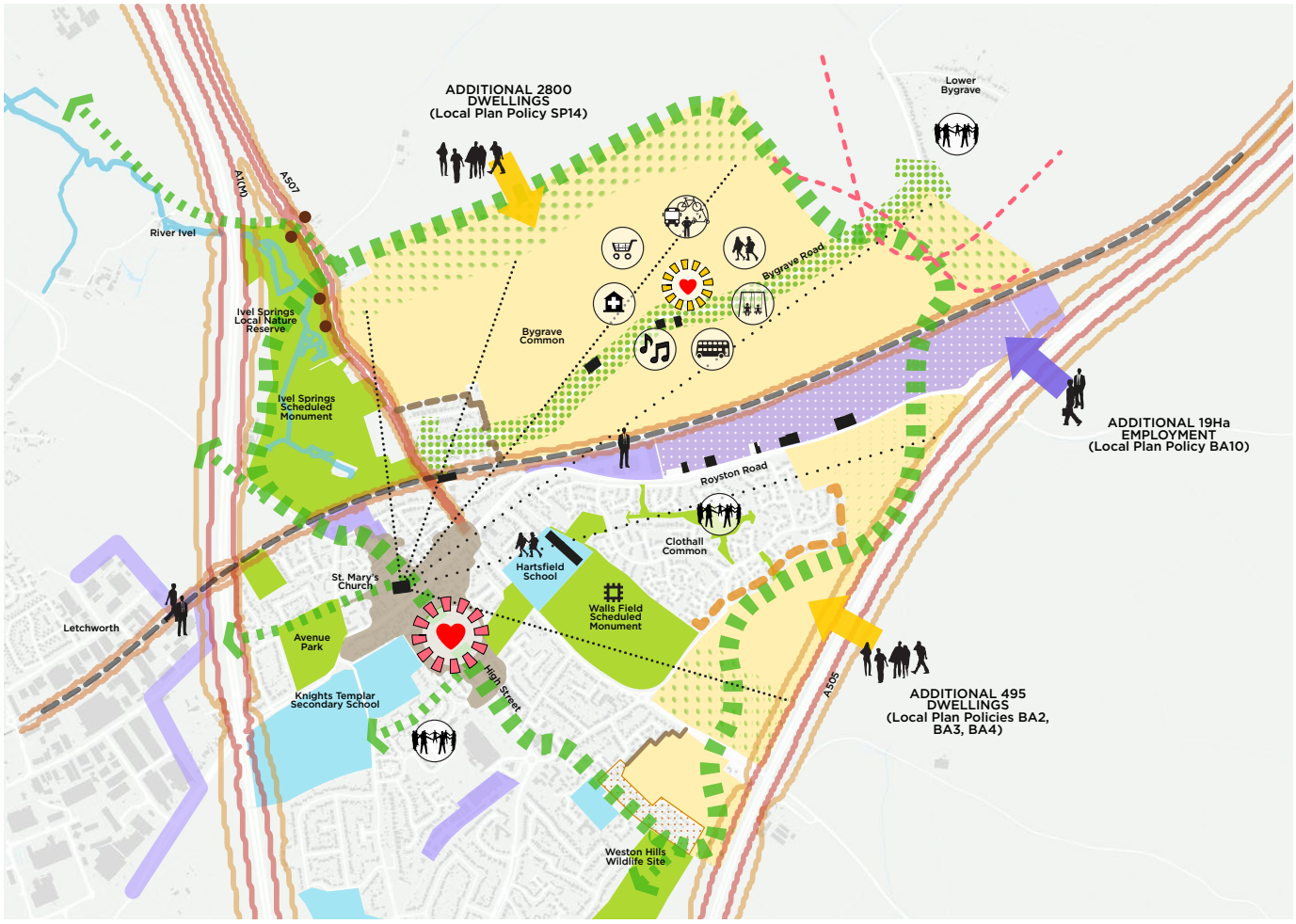


- Strategic Road Network
- Railway severance
- Public Rights of Way with potential to be integrated in emerging movement network
- National Cycle Network Route 12
- Icknield Way Trail
- Existing bus route (4+ services/day)
- Existing bus route (less than 4 services/day)
- Potential for new Public Transport route
- Vehicular congestion
- Congested junctions
- Impermeable network of streets
- Potential to improve pedestrian/ cycling experience + environmental quality
- Potential for town gateway
- New access network (Local Plan)
- Potential for pedestrian/cycle railway crossing (Local Plan)
- Potential for pedestrian/cycle railway crossing
- Potential for sustainable transport corridor
- Opportunity for town-wide green circular connections
- Potential for station improvements and key transport hub
- Potential for key transport hub
- Indicative 10-minute walking distance from key transport hub

- To prioritise the provision of safe, direct and coherent networks for active modes on and off-site, that reduce demand for car travel, combined with off-site improvements that manage existing travel demand and prioritise active and sustainable modes of transport;
- Creation of a network of walking/ cycling/riding routes to complement the existing well-established connections and public right of ways, linking into the existing network of routes in the town and ultimately to the wider sustainable network around the area, such as to the National Cycle Network Route 12;
- Opportunity to reduce traffic dominance in Baldock through a series of off-site interventions that may discourage through traffic and HGV movements along the town road network, and design interventions prioritising local traffic and sustainable movement;
- Potential for Bygrave Road and Royston Road to focus on sustainable and active travel (cycling and walking);
- Potential to improve walking and cycling experience along existing routes such as Station Road/ Clothall Road / Royston Road;
- Prioritisation of buses over private vehicles by providing efficient routes, high quality bus stop infrastructure that connect the development to key destinations such as the railway station, town centre, and the surrounding areas;
- Potential to provide improved access and facilities around the Railway Station, exploring connections towards the northern part of the development to improve permeability between the areas on either side of the railway line. Other improvements to the station should be explored;
- Provision of at least one new pedestrian/ cycle crossing over the railway line to improve the permeability of the area by active modes;
- Opportunity to create distinctive entrances or “gateways” to the town in key locations such as the northern and southern part of North Road/ Clothall Road and the eastern end of Royston Road;
- Potential to introduce a vehicular road serving the new development on the northern side of the development area (and associated new bridge), connecting the A507 to the road network south of the railway line and on the southern side of the land connecting Royston Road and Wallington Road. The character and alignment of both are to be explored at the options stage;
- Opportunity to create a series of key “transport hubs” in close connections to the new residential neighbourhood and the Railway Station, with the aim of offering cycling, e-scooters, taxi, public transport, car clubs facilities.

Land Use

Figure 16: Land Use and Neighbourhood Development Opportunities identified in Composite Baseline Report (June 2023)



- Key prominent views to St. Mary's Church spire
- Distant views to St. Mary's Church spire
- Railway severance
- Existing employment uses
- Local Plan employment allocation
- Local Plan allocations
- Existing properties
- Conservation Area
- Grade II Listed Buildings
- Provision of gap between Bygrave and Baldock (Neighbourhood Plan)
- Areas potentially impacted by road and rail noise (DEFRA road and rail noise 65–69.9dB)
- Areas potentially impacted by road and rail noise (DEFRA road and rail noise 70–74.9dB)
- Existing green assets
- Opportunity for new strategic green infrastructure
- Existing education provision
- Town centre
- Potential for new local/ neighbourhood centre
- Positive residential edge
- Existing residential "backs"
- Park homes
- Additional dwellings (Local Plan) 2,800 north + 495 south
- Additional employment (19ha)
- Opportunity for town-wide green circular connections

- Opportunity to create a new centre(s) complementing and not competing with the existing town centre. The new centre(s) could offer a set of community facilities to serve the day to day needs of the new development alongside complementing the existing offer in Baldock town centre. A new local transport hub could be integral part of the Local Centre;
- New centre(s) to be positioned in such a way to promote the development of "20-minute neighbourhoods", places that are designed so residents can meet their day-to-day needs within a 20-minute walk from their home, via access to safe walking and cycling routes, or by public transport;
- Employment area to support a sustainable community and encourage living and working in close proximity;
- Opportunity to introduce additional education provision (primary and secondary schools) in close connection with the new centre and at walking distance from the new residential developments, at the heart of the new community;
- Opportunity for the new development to reflect and sensitively relate to the historic character and strong identity of Baldock, defined by a its rich history, its landmarks and its strong visual and physical connections to the countryside;
- Preservation of existing long distance views to St. Mary's Church Tower from elevated parts of land within the study area creating a strong visual connection between the new and the old part of Baldock;
- Addressing the sensitive relationship to the edge of existing residential neighbourhoods, with particular attention to creating a visual and physical gap between the proposed expansion and Lower Bygrave (at least 170m gap/ development contained within 80m contour line, as per Neighbourhood Plan policy);
- Opportunity for the new development to complement the southern boundary of Clothall Estate, reflecting its positive characteristics and approach to landscape;
- Effective integration of existing residential properties that are to remain in-situ and protection from any adverse environmental impacts.

Figure 17: Land Use Framework

5.0 Land Use Framework

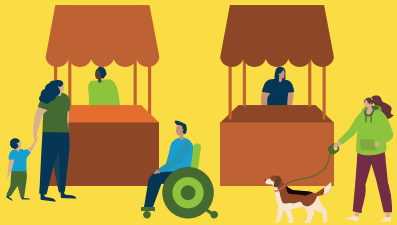
Land Use Key Principles:



High-quality housing to meet the needs of all ages.

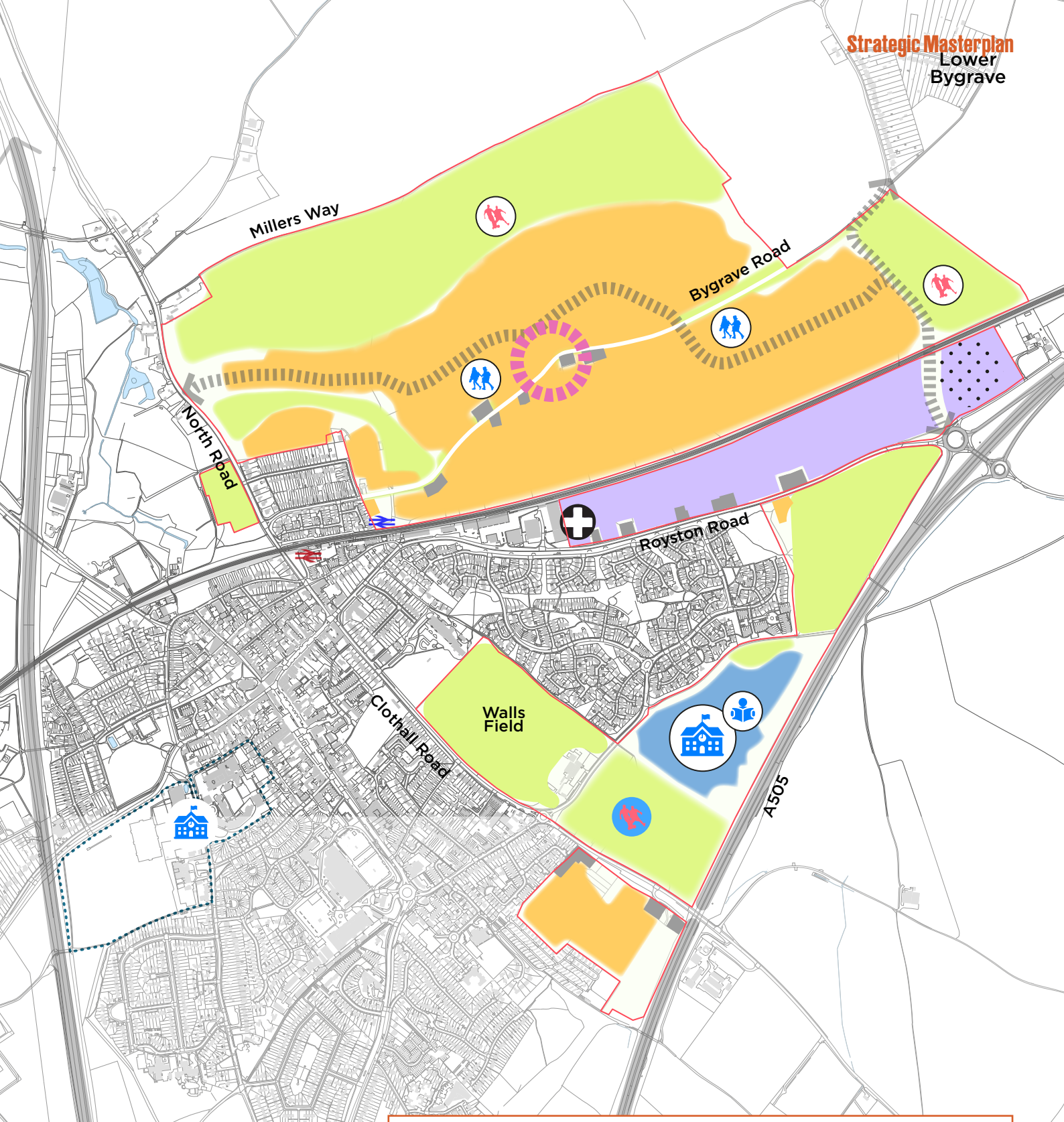


Meet the educational needs of primary and secondary pupils from the development, in Baldock.



Supporting and strengthening Baldock Town Centre by:

- improving connectivity and routes between the development and Baldock High Street and town centre;
- creating new community facilities within the new development, and health facilities between the new and existing homes for all;
- supporting existing businesses to grow and new ventures to be brought to the town, providing jobs and opportunities;
- utilising existing capacity within facilities in Baldock where possible e.g. education, before new provision in the development area; and
- ensuring facilities are provided at the right time, providing early benefits where possible.



- Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Existing properties within Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Residential
- Land reserved for secondary school education option
- Employment
- Employment (energy & waste facilities)
- Local centre (mixed use/retail community)
- Key green spaces – recreation/public open space
- Education: secondary school options
- Education: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities school
- Edication: primary school potential locations
- Potential northern station entrance
- Health provision
- Outdoor sports provision
- Outdoor sports provision (opportunity for dual use as part of school if secondary school provided on BA3)

Land Use Framework Components

Land Use and Social Infrastructure Needs

The Local Plan policies for Growing Baldock set out the following land use requirements, which form the starting point for the Strategic Masterplan land use mix.

- Approximately 3,300 homes
- Local centre(s)
- Structural planting to reinforce defensible green belt boundary
- Link road connecting A505 and A507 and southern link road connecting Royston Road to Wallington Road or A507.
- Vehicle, cycle and pedestrian links
- 19.6ha employment
- 28 self-build plots
- Site for care home
- Community hall and GP surgery
- Up to 6FE primary school provision
- Up to 8FE secondary school provision
- Secondary rail crossing
- Green infrastructure including play
- Urban Open Land

A range of additional uses have been suggested by NHC / HCC and other stakeholders and will be incorporated into the Strategic Masterplan:

- Waste Transfer Station / Vehicle Depot
- Household Waste Recycling Centre (dependent on funding being secured)
- On site utilities infrastructure – foul pumping station and primary substation
- SEND School
- Childcare – pre-school, private nurseries
- Youth provision
- Extra Care and supported housing
- GP Surgery



A network of green and blue spaces improving the quality of the environment as well as people's health and quality of life



Green corridor integrating play, wildlife and routes for walking and cycling

Residential

The Strategic Masterplan has explored options to determine how the site could accommodate a development of up to 3,300 homes, in accordance with the Local Plan policy. It is apparent that due to a combination of site constraints and the requirement to deliver appropriate on-site infrastructure, such as a road network, surface water management and education, that the 3,300 target may not be met. However, a substantial proportion of this figure will be able to be accommodated on site, including a mix of tenures, sizes and types to satisfy policy requirements.

The actual number of new homes that will be delivered will be confirmed through the outline planning application, and will depend on numerous factors including site constraints such as archaeology and the approach to education provision. However, it is considered that around 3,000 new dwellings will be incorporated, including a mix of tenures, sizes and designs predominantly located in areas BA1, BA2 and potentially BA3, including homes for senior living and self and custom build.

Employment

Up to 16 hectares of employment development will be located between Royston Road and the railway. The ambition is for this parcel to accommodate strategic and/or aspirational employment uses. The type of employment development will also be influenced by market demand combined with site constraints and opportunities (e.g. the site size / shape effectively rules out large B8 type logistics buildings).

Green Infrastructure

A network of open spaces and green infrastructure will be provided throughout the development. Refer to section 6 for details of the range of open space typologies to be included.

Waste Facilities

The easternmost end of the employment parcel will also incorporate waste facilities (waste transfer station, vehicle depot and potentially a household waste recycling centre – exact mix to be defined as part of outline planning application).

▼ New green spaces and informal play areas delivered by U&C at Houlton, Rubgy





◀ Bespoke employment space delivered by U&C at The Incubator, Alconbury Weald





▲ Green spaces and sustainable drainage features delivered by U&C at Houlton, Rugby

Education

Primary

Primary age pupils generated by phases of development south of the railway line will attend the existing Baldock primary schools, if there is capacity. Thereafter, up to two new primary schools will be delivered in BA1 to meet the needs of the northern part of the development. The process for determining primary school provision and phasing is illustrated diagrammatically at Figure 18. One primary school will be located in the vicinity of the local centre, at the heart of BA1, with the second school located further east, adjacent to the east–west green corridor. Both will be wrapped in residential uses, with the main school buildings fronting and defining the street.

Secondary

Local Plan policy SP14 identifies the need for secondary school provision as part of the Growing Baldock development. The following options have been explored as part of the SMP process:

1. Additional secondary school at BA1 (as required by Local Plan Policy SP14; considered at SMP options testing stage and not progressed)
2. Expansion and relocation of Knights Templar School to BA3 (new school buildings to serve the whole of Baldock and surrounding villages);
3. Expansion of Knights Templar School on its existing site, with BA3 developed for residential;
4. Additional secondary school on BA3, alongside some residential on the remainder of the parcel.

These have been explored extensively with stakeholders, including HCC Education. At the November 2023 public exhibition, options (2), (3) and (4) were presented as potential ways in which secondary education need could be met.

There is a clear preference for an expanded Knights Templar secondary school on the BA3 site. There are multiple reasons for this, including location and relationship with the existing town. The framework plans reflect this preference and BA3 is to be reserved for a secondary school.

An expanded Knights Templar secondary school on the BA3 site is the preferred option; it is not currently deliverable due to a lack of funding. There are also current uncertainties on the level of future secondary capacity required and exactly how many children will come from the new housing development. All parties will carry on working together on these issues to try and deliver the preferred approach.

The masterplan reserves land on BA3 for education. This will be held, controlled by the outline planning permission and S106 legal agreement, until such a time that all reasonable attempts to fund and deliver the preferred approach have been made and / or it is no longer needed for this use.

To make sure the masterplan is deliverable and the scheme can progress, the SMP also includes two other options: the expansion of Knights Templar School on its existing site and an additional secondary school on BA3.

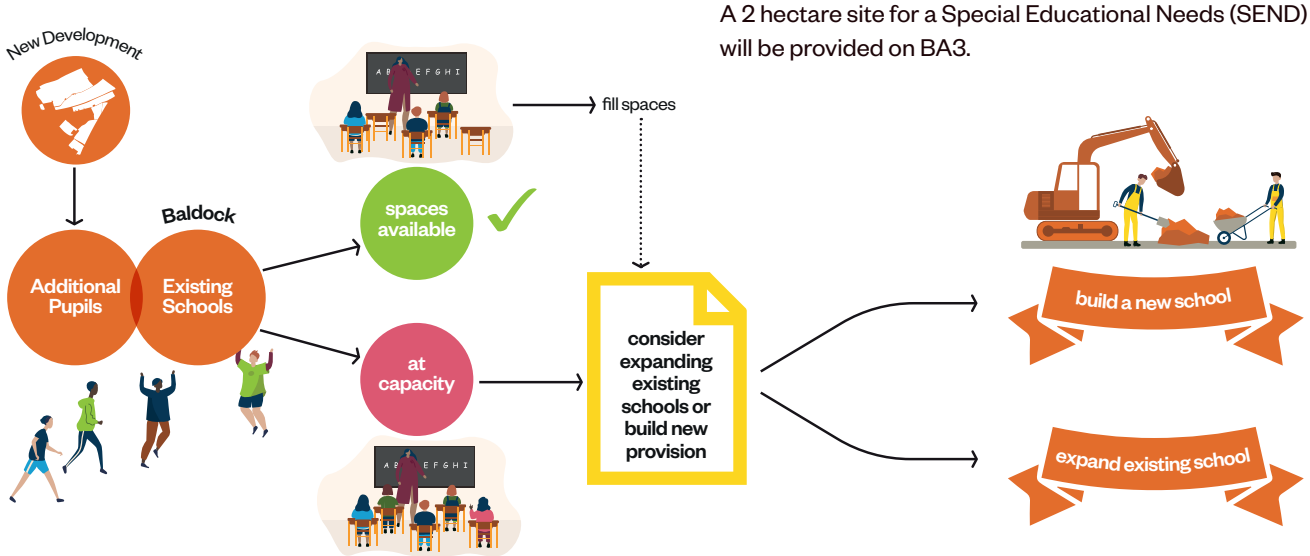
The final decision on the secondary school will be made involving the district and county councils in consultation with local, elected representatives. Appropriate governance and decision-making mechanisms will be secured through the planning process.

Early Years

Nursery facilities will be provided as part of the new primary schools, coordinating with existing provision in Baldock, alongside private commercial nursery facilities.

SEND

A 2 hectare site for a Special Educational Needs (SEND) school will be provided on BA3.



▲ Figure 18: Primary School Provision

Sport facilities at Houlton School, Rugby



Wintringham Primary Academy, Cambridgeshire





School at the heart of community life: Ermine Street Church Academy, Alconbury Weald

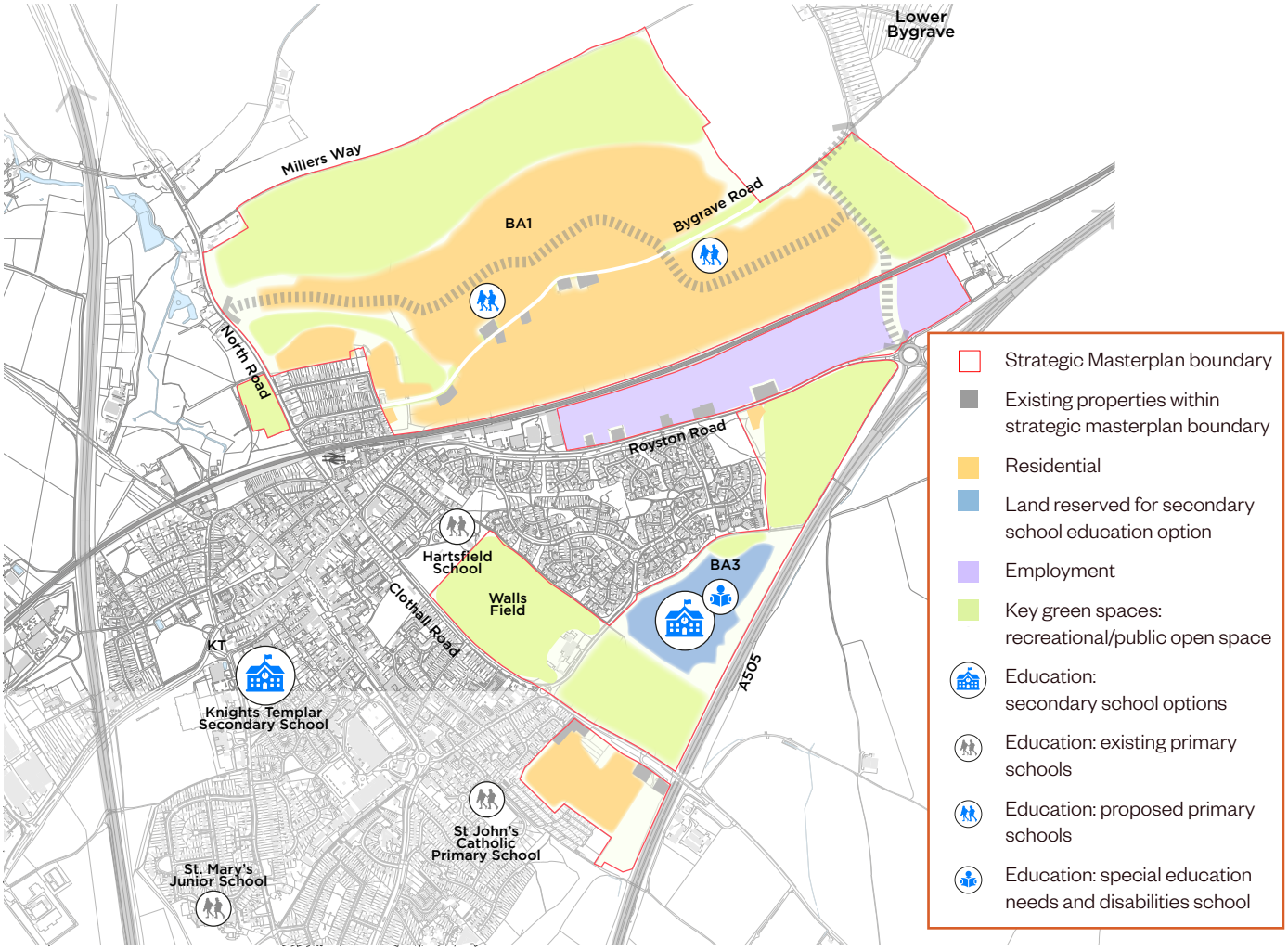


Figure 19: Secondary School Options

Local Centre

A single local centre will be located centrally within BA1, at the confluence of active travel routes through the development. The development is not large enough to sustain a second centre and it is important that the primacy of the town centre as the main retail / leisure offer is not compromised by over provision of these uses within the development. The exact nature and mix of uses within the Local Centre is being explored, but it will likely comprise of local retail and community facilities.

Energy

An area of land could also be reserved at the eastern end of BA10 for potential future energy uses such as battery storage, to facilitate the low carbon nature of the development.

Health

A health 'hub' could be incorporated at the western end of the employment parcel, adjacent to the active travel crossing. This could include new GP services alongside a wider health offering, potentially combined with small community / retail uses that would connect the employment area to Baldock and create an active and vibrant community facility in this location.

Figure 20 opposite identifies the principal development areas within the Strategic Masterplan area, as explained in the preceding paragraphs. These areas and the capacity of the development will be refined further as part of the forthcoming outline planning application.



The Tuning Fork community cafe, Houlton





Community hubs should be designed to offer a range of spaces for different community activities



Community allotments, Alconbury Weald

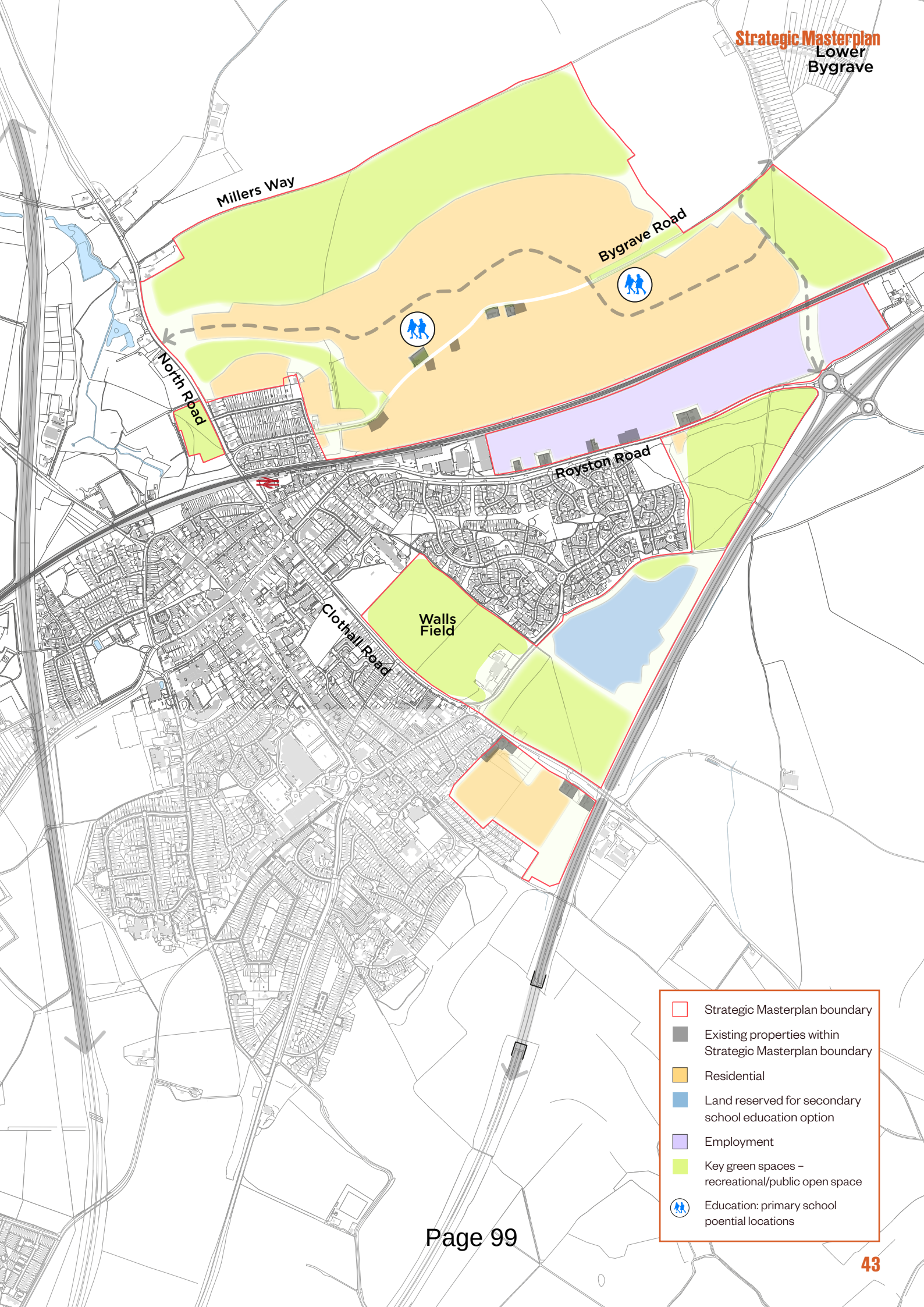

Millers Way
Bygrave Road
North Road
Royston Road
Walls
Field
Clothall Road
Strategic Masterplan boundary
Existing properties within Strategic Masterplan boundary
Residential
Land reserved for secondary school education option
Employment
Key green spaces – recreational/public open space
Education: primary school poential locations

Figure 21: Green Infrastructure framework

6.0 Green Infrastructure Framework

Green Infrastructure Key Principles:



Enhancing inherited assets



Prioritising nature rich places



Celebrating heritage



A Greenway for Baldock



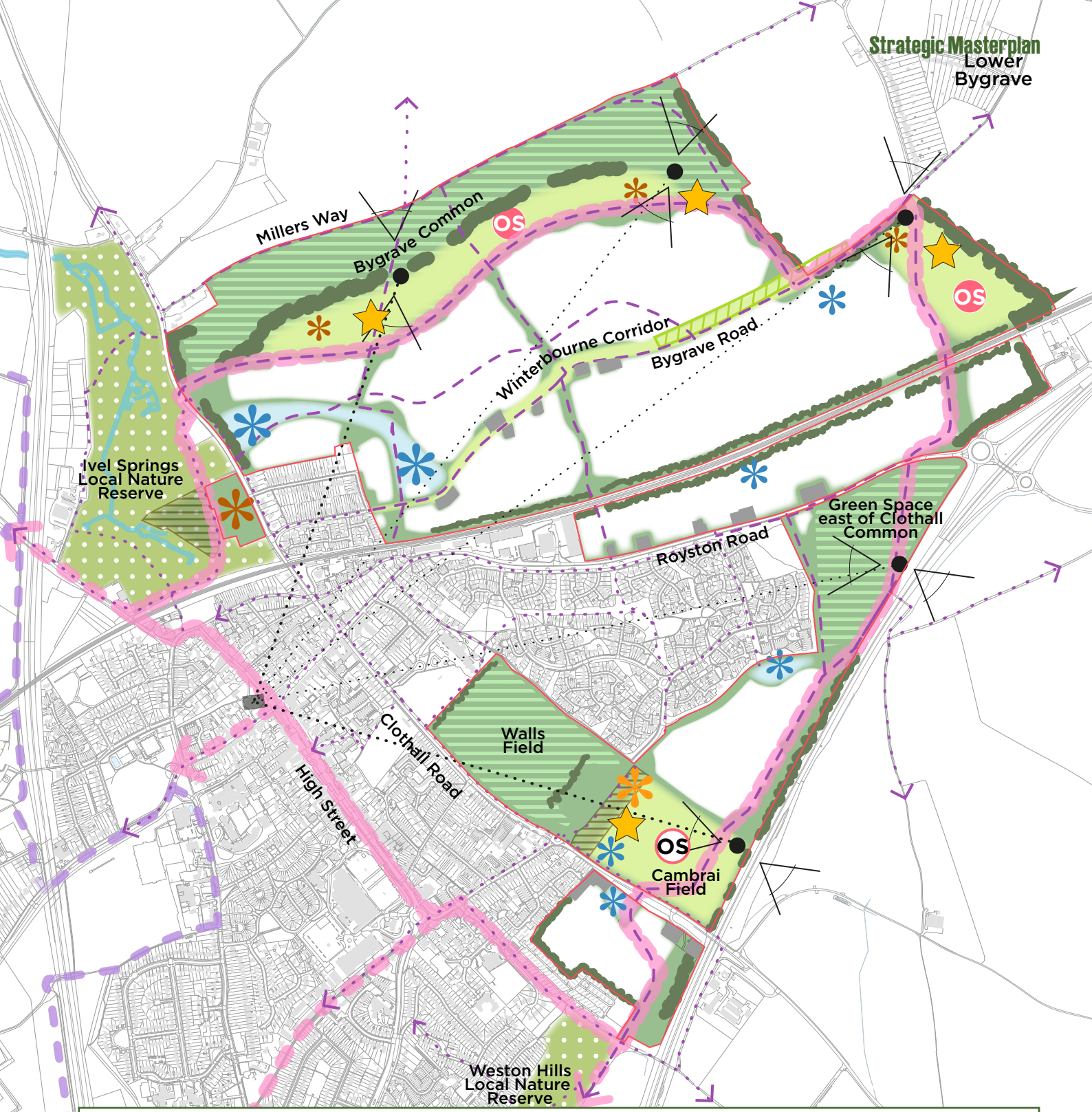
Creating a series of parkland destinations



Landscape-led design



Ensuring 360° access to your '5 a day'

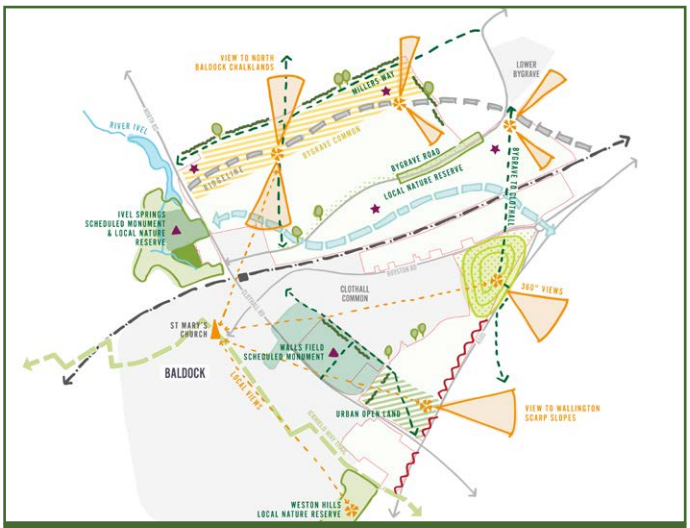


Existing

- Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Existing properties within Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Existing local nature reserve
- Existing local wildlife site
- Existing allotments

Proposed

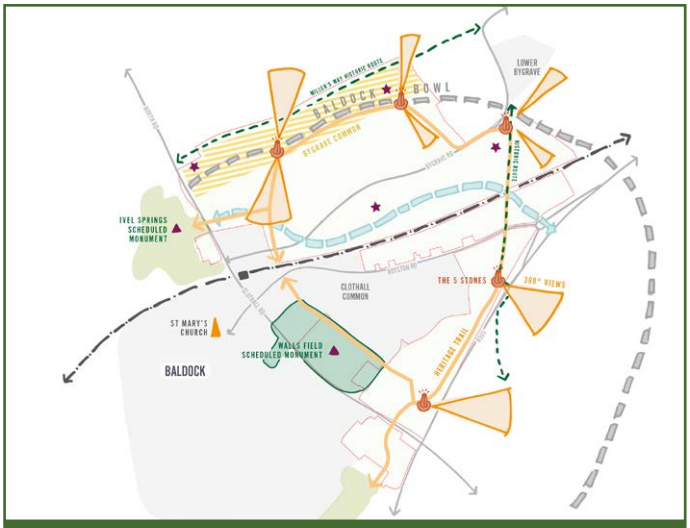
- Key green spaces – recreational/public open space
- Key green spaces – semi-natural
- Key green spaces – wetlands
- Strategic sustainable drainage systems feature
- Outdoor sports provision
- Outdoor sports provision (opportunity for dual use as part of school if secondary school provided on BA3)
- Key on-site pedestrian and/or cycle routes
- Key off-site pedestrian and/or cycle routes
- Key play areas
- Enhanced allotments
- New allotments
- Productive landscape
- Indicative planting buffers
- Key vantage points
- Key views to St. Mary's Church
- Baldock Greenway
- Baldock Greenway additional connections
- Letchworth Greenway



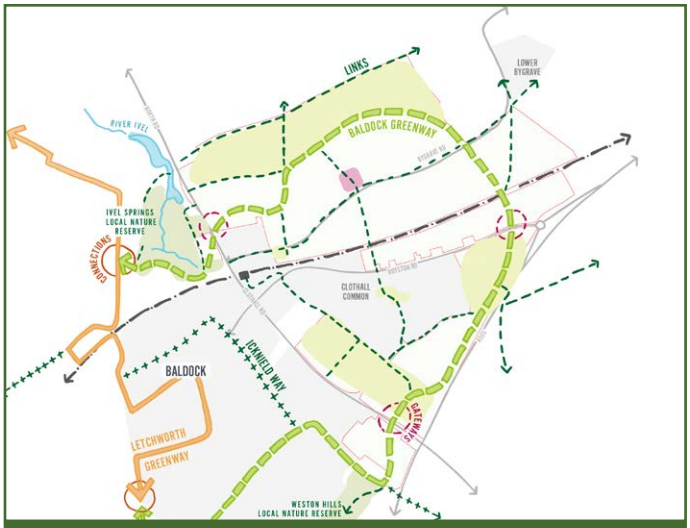
Inherited assets – working with the area's landscape, history and habitats.



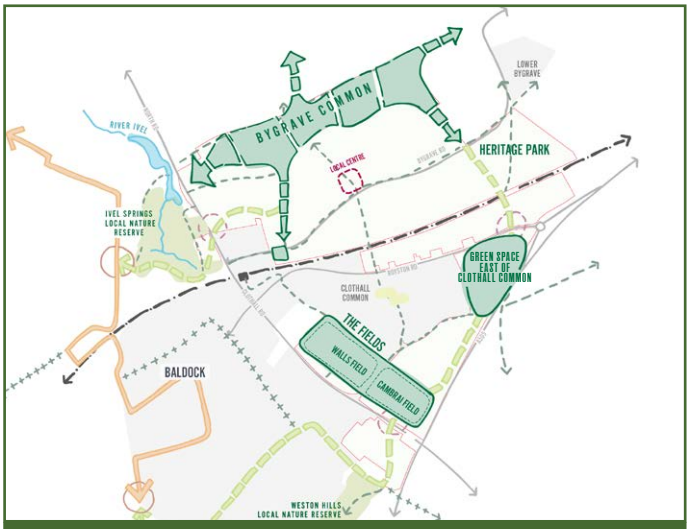
Prioritising nature-rich places – creating and linking a range of habitats and safeguarding the Local Nature Reserves



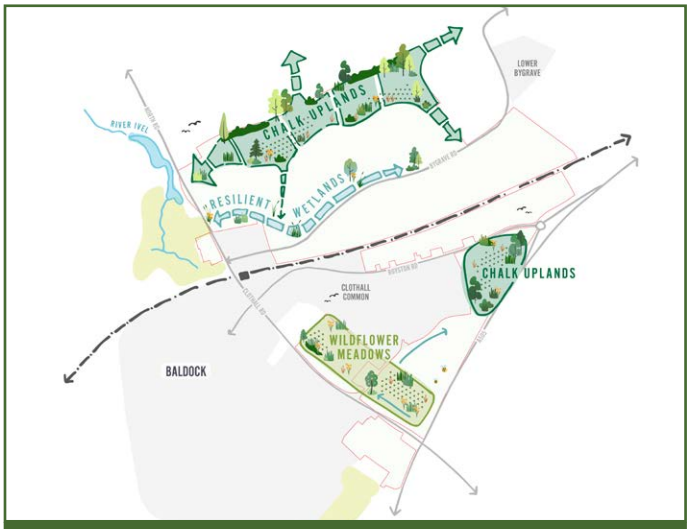
Celebrating heritage – embracing the area's rich archaeological heritage by creating a 'heritage trail', reinterpreting the historic 'winterbourne' and creating a new 'Bygrave Common'.



Getting around – dedicated walking, cycling and horse riding routes through the development and beyond, as part of the new Baldock Greenway.



Parkland destinations – new community green spaces for people to play, exercise, meet, socialize, relax, grow and connect with nature.



Landscape character – creating new landscapes influenced by the surrounding Ivel Valley, chalk uplands, Wallington scarp slopes and Weston Hills.

Green Infrastructure Framework Components

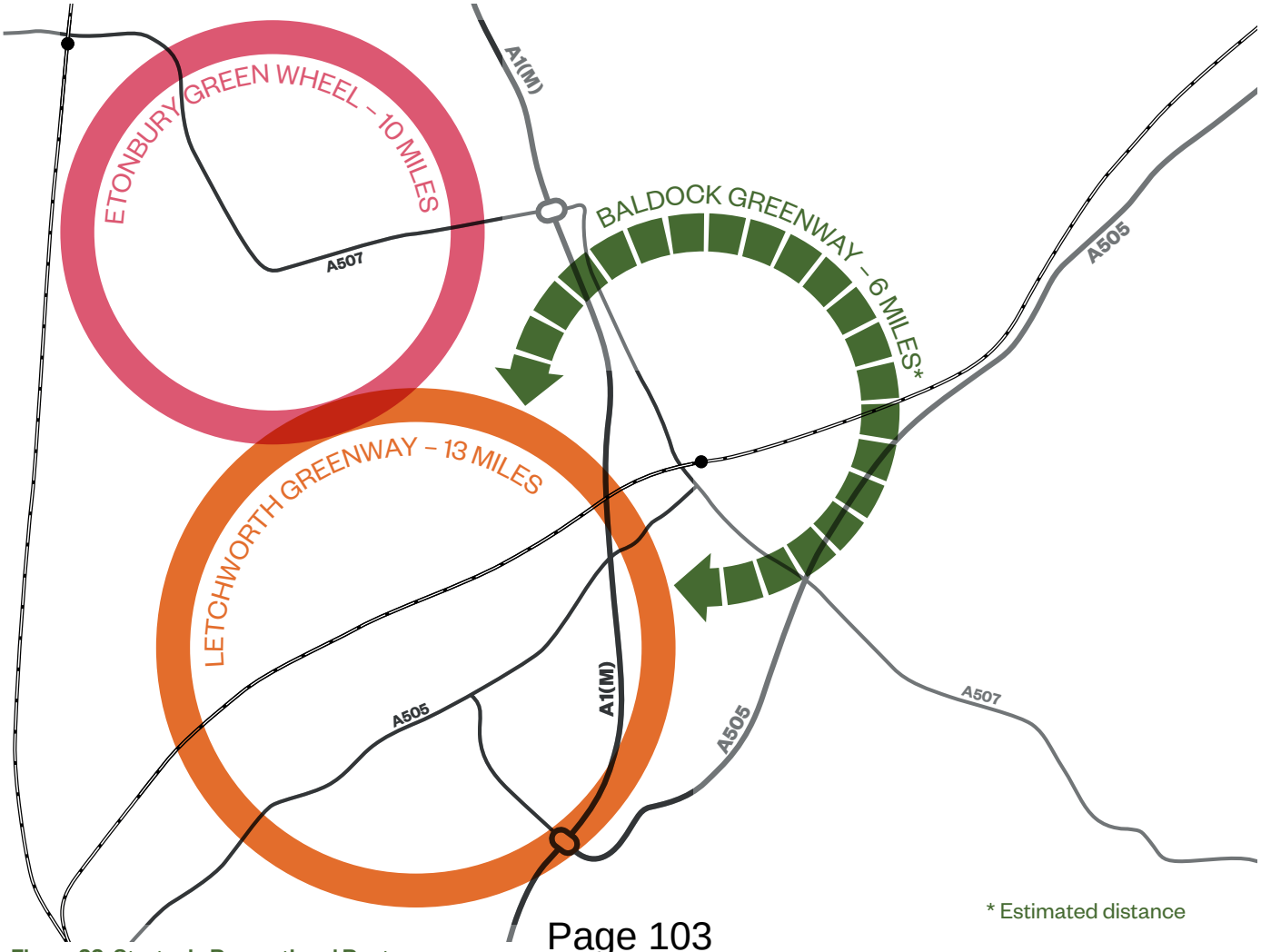
The green infrastructure network will comprise of a series of strategic scale green spaces as well as smaller scale green and open spaces, such as play areas and space for community food production, within and throughout development parcels.

Strategic Green Spaces

Baldock Greenway

A circular walking and cycling route around Baldock, known as the Baldock Greenway, is proposed as part of the development. It will provide a third 'greenway' to connect to the two existing routes: the Etonbury Green Wheel to the north west, and the Letchworth Greenway to the south west.

The route will connect large areas of green space in Baldock such as the Ivel Springs and Weston Hills LNRs, via Bygrave Common and Cambrai Fields through the development, as well as providing strategic connectivity to Letchworth.



▲ Figure 22: Strategic Recreational Routes

Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire





▲ Landmark feature as part of Heritage Trail

Bygrave Common

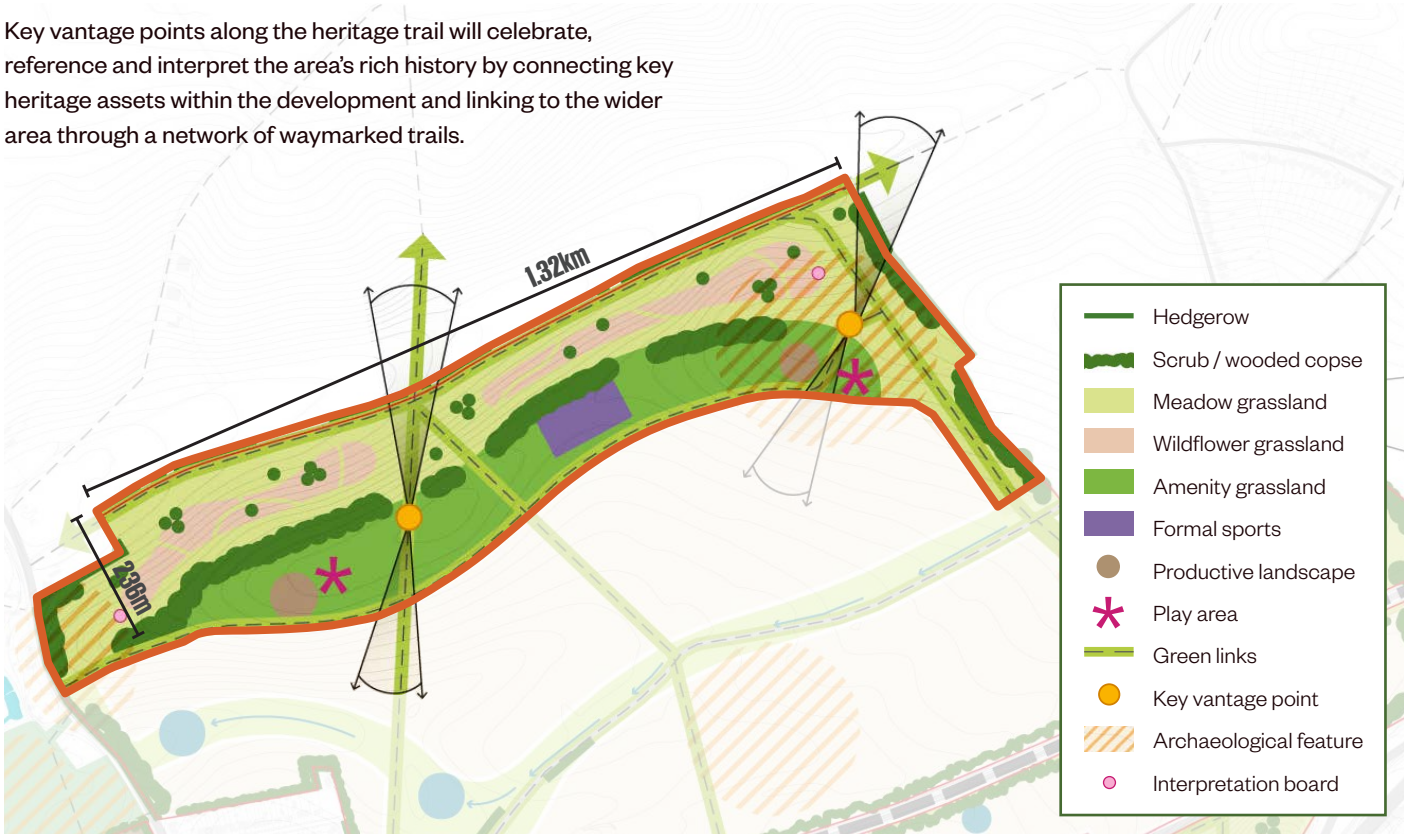
Bygrave Common will deliver a substantial new community public parkland and natural landscape that will ensure that everyone has access to native-rich green space. The park will provide space to relax, exercise and socialise, with the opportunity to experience nature through a range of habitat typologies and biodiversity enhancements. There may be an opportunity to explore including a memorial garden in Bygrave Common.

Recreation focused activities (productive, play and sport) will be located alongside the development edge, whilst the land north of the ridgeline will provide a habitat mosaic that will support a range of species as well as encouraging species to move through the wider landscape, as part of a natural and semi-natural typology.

A new open chalk grassland habitat will be created in the northern area, featuring areas of scattered trees and scrub and providing onsite mitigation for corn bunting. Existing hedgerows should be retained, enhanced and gapped up where necessary with native species rich hedgerow and hedgerow trees.

The historic Millers Way route will be retained as a grass track, with new surfaced routes through Bygrave Common for cyclists, walkers and horse riders, including as part of the Baldock Greenway.

Key vantage points along the heritage trail will celebrate, reference and interpret the area's rich history by connecting key heritage assets within the development and linking to the wider area through a network of waymarked trails.



▲ Figure 23: Bygrave Common Key Design Principles



Key vantage point as part of the '5 stones heritage trail'



Green Space east of Clothall Common
Grassland and scrub habitat to be retained and enhanced at land east of Clothall Common, to provide an ecological stepping stone, which will allow the wider development to be permeable for key species.

Improvements to the informal footpath network through this area could include surfaced pathways for improved pedestrian, cycle and horse rider access. This key vantage point will be celebrated and reference made to Baldock's rich cultural heritage, through the addition of interpretation boards and as part of a heritage trail around Baldock, linking all the heritage open spaces and features.

This area of land will be a public open space/nature park managed for informal recreation and access to nature for the local community.



Figure 24: Green Space east of Clothall Common Key Design Principles



Biodiversity benefits of meadow grassland

Walls Field

Walls Field presents a key opportunity for a new natural and semi-natural open space, featuring meadow grassland. Taking Walls Field out of arable land use would be beneficial to preserve the archaeology associated with the Scheduled Monument.

Walls Field is envisaged as a meadow grassland, managed for biodiversity, amenity and heritage purposes and will likely provide BNG for the wider scheme. Mown pathways through the meadow grassland would control people movement whilst providing attractive recreational routes.

Baldock's rich cultural heritage can also be referenced here, through the addition of interpretation boards and as part of a heritage trail around Baldock, linking all the heritage open spaces and features.

There is also the potential to enhance the Clothall Road edge arrival/gateway further, for instance, through the addition of estate rail fencing, additional tree avenue planting, native hedgerow and meadow grassland.



▲ Meadow grassland



▲ Figure 25: Walls Field Key Design Principles

Sports provision







Community garden

Heritage Park

This will be a local park to serve the north eastern community of Baldock. It will co-locate sports provision alongside other community facilities such as equipped play areas, informal recreation and food production.

Landscape buffer planting (scrub and woodland habitat) should be provided along development boundaries, to create sheltered movement corridors and foraging routes for wildlife as well as visual mitigation / screening from Lower Bygrave.

The park's location, close to archaeology features, could provide the opportunity for heritage landscape interventions and a strong heritage theme, influencing the design of the play areas, interpretation, layout and species planted.



Figure 26: Heritage Park Key Design Principles

Winterbourne Way

The Winterbourne Way will be a linear, open space corridor, focused on the movement of people, water and wildlife, which also reinterprets the historic Winterbourne paleo channel that used to exist here.

The linear corridor incorporates Bygrave Road, passes through the development, accommodates sustainable transport links (pedestrian, cycle and bus) and will vary in width along its length. The linear open space will facilitate multiple uses including biodiversity enhancements, active travel, SuDS, informal recreation and play.

Overlooked by built form on both sides – it serves as a strong interactive and connection space for the community. Existing hedgerow, grassland and Bygrave Road LWS to be retained (where appropriate) and enhanced as part of a wildlife focused and active travel corridor.



▲ Integration of blue infrastructure into Winterbourne Way



▲ Figure 27: Winterbourne Way Key Design Principles

Heritage Trail

The Baldock Heritage Trail will celebrate, reference and interpret the area's rich history by connecting key heritage assets within the development and linking to the wider area through a network of waymarked trails.

The trail will run in part along the Baldock Greenway and destination parks along surfaced paths, connecting important assets and highlighting the area's heritage, through interpretation using either boards / signage, wayfinding, landscape features and / or public art.

The green infrastructure network will interpret the Winterbourne palaeo channel as part of the development's water story and potential SuDS network, incorporating it into the Winterbourne Way linear park.





▲ Green connections, Houlton, Rugby

Play

The play strategy for the Strategic Masterplan interacts with existing and proposed landscape elements and will offer equipped designated play spaces and informal natural play opportunities. Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP), Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play (NEAP) and informal play on the way for Baldock. The Strategic Masterplan will deliver a range of play experiences that suit all ages and abilities and will be connected by a network of active travel routes that encourage social interaction and a healthy community. This could include a water play facility such as a 'splash pad'.

This provision will also include additional informal and natural play spaces along key pedestrian and cycle routes for spontaneous play such as 'play on the way' and pocket parks within development areas, detailed as part of future RMAs. Play spaces, where possible, should:

- Based on Fields in Trust (FIT) benchmark guidelines, policy standards and design requirements for minimum activity zones, buffer zones, and walking distances;
- Be accessible via pedestrian and cycle routes, providing safe, inclusive and sustainable movement between open space destinations;
- Provide adequate seating, be well overlooked and enclosed by landscape features rather than fencing; and
- Respond to the individual character of their setting, landscape and heritage assets and offer unique play experiences that create stimulating spaces to promote imaginative play.



Pocket Parks within a residential parcel ▶ have the potential to facilitate community integration, Alconbury Weald

Sports Provision

NHC have developed a sport strategy to inform the Baldock Strategic Masterplan based on Sport England's playing pitch calculator, to understand future demand for sport generated by population increases arising from new housing developments. The Sport England playing pitch calculator provided a benchmark figure for future sport demand, in addition to a qualitative assessment, and shows that the following outdoor sports provisions may be required within the development:

- Grass adult pitch;
- Grass cricket pitch;
- Grass mini soccer pitches;
- Multiple 3G pitch at the school site; and
- Grass pitch at the school site.

The Strategic Masterplan will work to deliver what is needed to meet the additional need and will incorporate two Sports Hubs – one publicly accessible in the Heritage Park and one on the Urban Open Land. Depending on the eventual use of BA3, either for residential or secondary school use, the Urban Open Land sports facilities will either form part of the school and be accessible to the community outside of core school hours, or publicly accessible as per the Heritage Park.

The strategic open spaces within the development will also include areas of informal sport including outdoor gym facilities, running/walking/cycling trails (2km and 5km loops) and recreation areas for informal kickabouts (e.g. mini soccer pitches on Bygrave Common).

In terms of indoor sports, if a secondary school is delivered in BA3, this will include a sports hall, which will be secured for community use. If Knights Templar is expanded on its current site, a contribution will be made to enhancements to the existing sports hall.

Productive Landscapes

Productive landscapes will provide an accessible growing landscape for residents to cultivate, produce and grow food. The productive landscape strategy for Baldock is to strategically locate facilities, to provide even distribution and walkable access to the existing and new community, complimenting the location of existing productive provision. Productive landscape provision will be located in the following locations and will include:

- **Formal allotments –** to expand and enhance the existing allotment facilities at North Road;
- **Community growing spaces –** create informal community gardens and orchards, co-located within parkland destinations (Bygrave Common and Heritage Park) and next to community facilities; and
- **Informal foraging/edible trails –** informal opportunities will be provided along the greenway and open spaces for the foraging of berries, nuts and herbs.

Productive landscapes should:

- Be accessible via pedestrian and cycle routes, providing safe, inclusive and sustainable movement between open space destinations;
- Include interpretation boards and signage, where located in public open space, to reference species, how to grow and suggested recipes;
- Consider infrastructure requirements where appropriate to facilitate management – water, seating and picnic tables, composting areas and secure storage facilities (sheds); and
- Offer access points for community gardens and allotments for vehicle delivery and servicing, and where necessary appropriate provision of car and cycle spaces.

▼ Grass sports pitch alongside a play area, Houlton, Rugby



▼ Allotments alongside a play area, Alconbury Weald



Strategic SUDS and water

The areas of greatest surface water drainage risk, at the lowest parts of the land, will be the location for a sustainable drainage corridor/wetlands area to convey and store surface water, as well as performing a wider ecological and amenity function. Sustainable drainage features will be used to either prevent flooding or be located in areas that are known to flood currently, to alleviate this. Soakaways will also be incorporated into residential parcels to provide on-plot sustainable drainage.

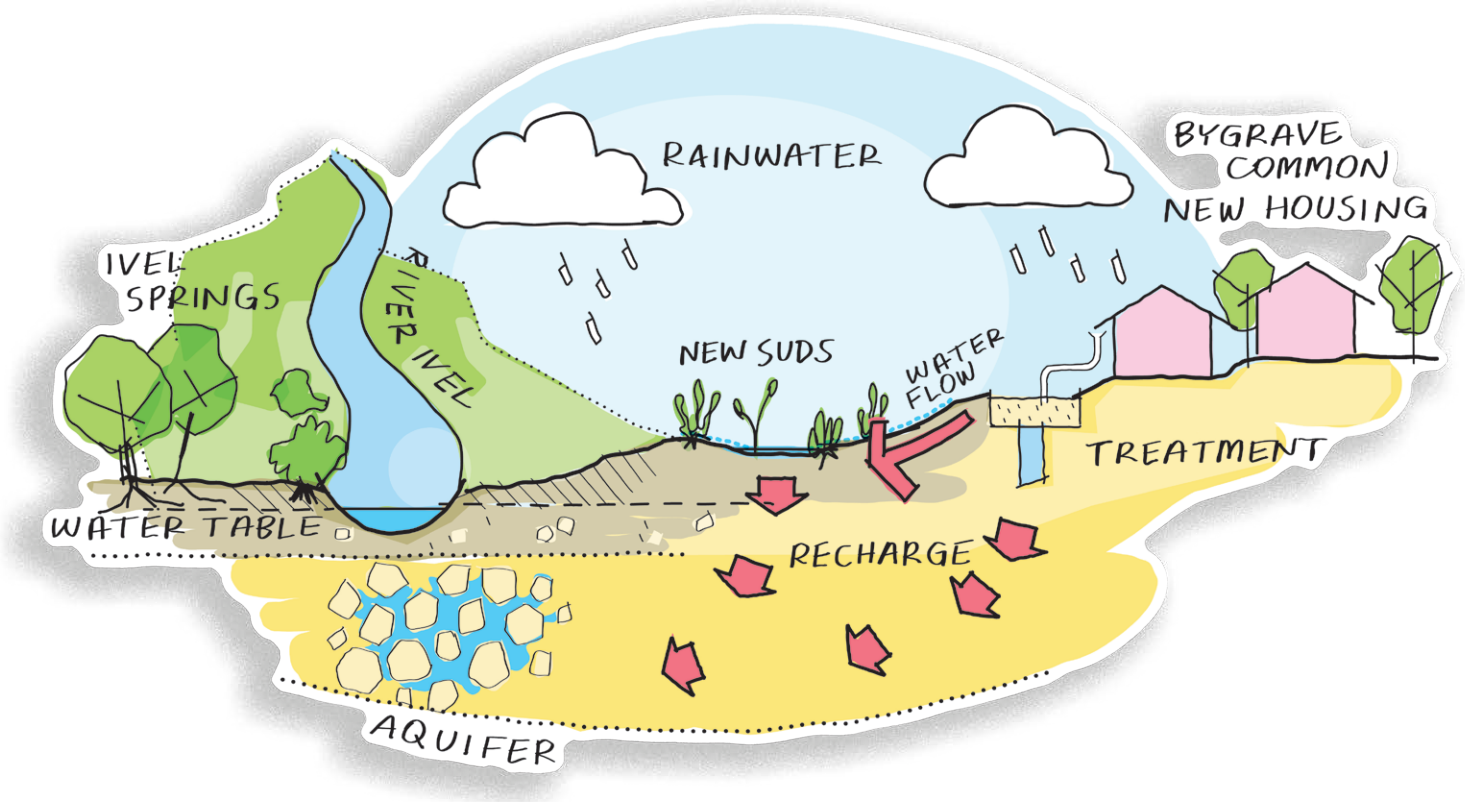
The development will contribute as far as possible to helping resolve the issues facing the River Ivel chalk stream. During the initial phases of development, sustainable drainage features will capture and convey surface water and allow it to infiltrate into the ground. This will help recharge the existing aquifer which feeds the River Ivel and provide ecological benefits to the wider area (see Figure 28 below).

Water levels in the aquifer will be monitored and if the infiltration has helped to recharge it sufficiently, later phases of the development may begin to re-use surface water within the new homes and buildings instead, through water 'harvesting' methods. This would reduce the overall demand for water generated by the new development.

U&C are in discussion with Affinity Water as the water supplier for the area, to ensure that proper plans are in place to supply water to new houses as Baldock grows.

This will involve delivering a supply of water to the new development, but importantly will also have a strong focus on water efficiency measures and the use of water by residents of new homes and people living in and around Baldock. The new homes will incorporate water efficiency measures to ensure that water use is minimised wherever possible.

Affinity Water have set up 'Project Zero' to help achieve water neutrality and to address two problems; to make new homes water efficient and thereby reduce their anticipated water consumption; and to reduce water waste in the community where the new homes are situated. Project Zero aims to develop the world's first water neutral housing developments without increasing the overall water use in the community. Growing Baldock will be influenced by the lessons learnt by Project Zero as it is implemented.



▲ Figure 28: River Ivel Recharge Strategy

Figure 29: Biodiversity Framework ▸

7.0 Biodiversity Framework

Biodiversity Key Principles:



Enhancement of Bygrave Road Local Wildlife Site



Integrating habitats and corridors, trees and hedgerows, into GI network



Creation of network of connected wildlife corridors and green spaces



Connections to and buffering of Local Nature Reserves



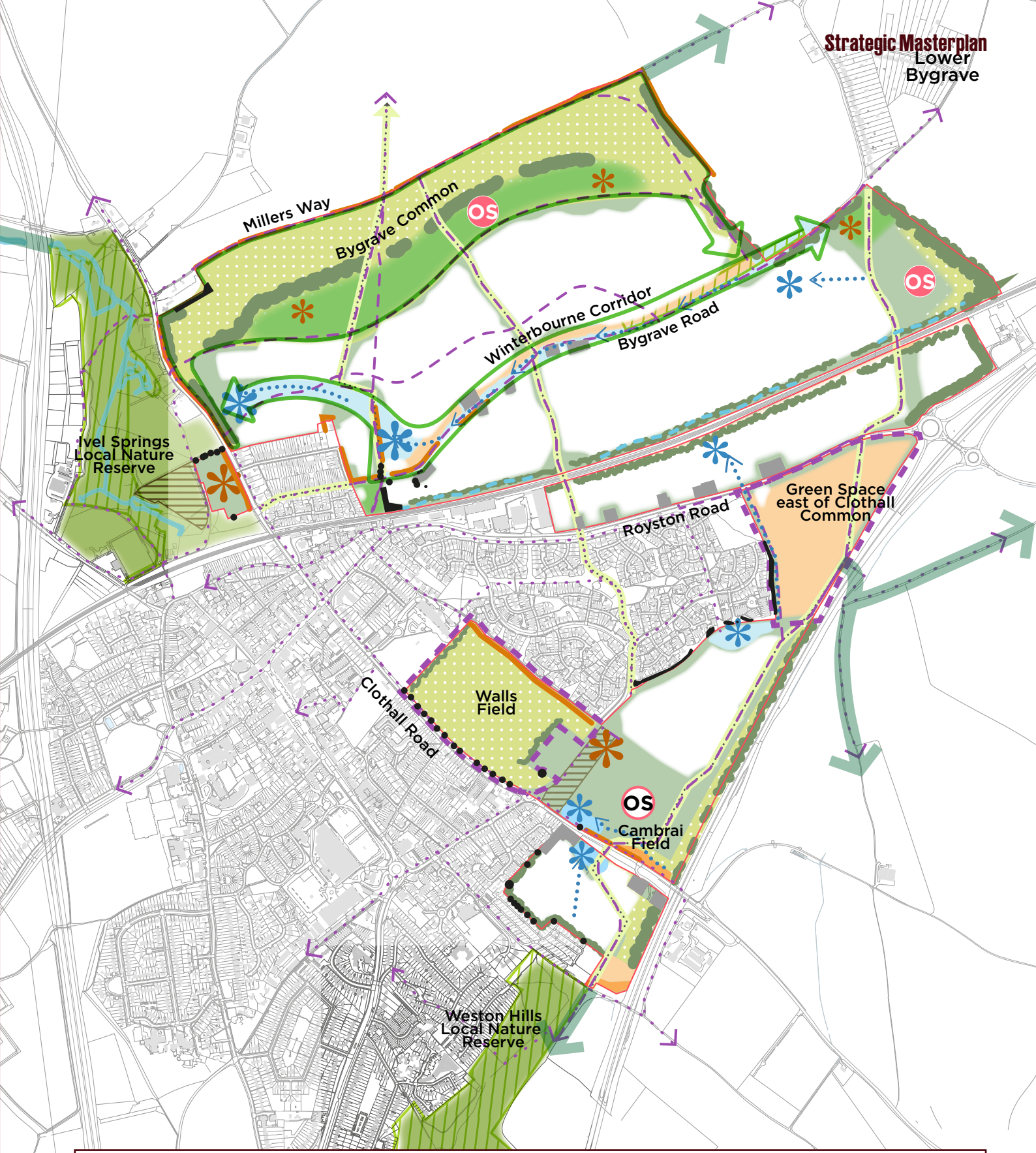
Mitigation of impacts on ecology through provision of new habitats



Native and climate resilient planting



Additional green spaces to reduce recreational pressure



- Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Existing properties within Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Existing local nature reserve
- Existing local wildlife site
- Retained allotments
- Retained grassland
- Retained scrub
- Retained hedgerow
- Retained on-site trees
- Wildlife-focused corridors
- Wildlife-focused areas
- Wider green infrastructure connectivity
- Key green active travel links
- Indicative buffer planting
- Grassland habitat
- Wetland habitat
- Sustainable drainage systems/strategic surface water flow
- Amenity landscape
- Productive landscape
- OS Outdoor sports provision
- OS Outdoor sports provision (opportunity for dual use as part of school if secondary school provided on BA3)



▲ Figure 30: Sowing the Seeds for a Wilder Future



Biodiversity Framework Components

A network of ecological areas and corridors will traverse the development and connect larger green spaces and habitats. These will include the following strategic ecological areas and interventions:



Green Space east of Clothall Common can support reptiles and insects such as the Small Blue Butterfly

Green Space east of Clothall Common

Wildlife focused area to be retained, to protect the existing grassland habitat that supports reptiles and butterflies such as the Small Blue. This area will be designated as land for informal recreation and for the community to access nature.

Wildlife Corridors & Green Links

Wildlife corridors will be incorporated within Bygrave Common and the Winterbourne Way, to provide strategic ecological connections west–east and between large areas of open space and the LNRs. Smaller green links will connect to these corridors, running through development parcels and providing an extra layer to the ecological network that underpins the development.

Bygrave Road Local Wildlife Site and Winterbourne Wetland

A linear corridor of green and blue infrastructure will run east-west through BA1, aligning with the topography of this part of the development, the historic route of the winterbourne channel and incorporating the Bygrave Road Local Wildlife Site. This will form a key wildlife corridor and part of the nature recovery network, protecting existing and providing new habitat areas along its length.

Bygrave Common

The northern part of Bygrave Common will incorporate a grassland habitat that provides a home for ground nesting birds such as corn bunting. This ecological area will be separate from the more active and accessible parts of Bygrave Common to the south, to ensure there is space for both humans and wildlife alike.

Ivel Springs and Weston Hills Local Nature Reserves

Ecological connectivity to the LNRs will be improved through the provision of wildlife corridors incorporating newly created habitat areas in close proximity, including SuDS features, woodland and wildflower grassland.

Walls Field

Walls Field will be taken out of agricultural use and planted as a wildflower meadow, forming a new habitat area.

Biodiversity Net Gain

A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) calculation has been undertaken of the Strategic Masterplan, concluding that the development will deliver a BNG in excess of the 10% statutory requirement.

The site supports around 10% of the singing male corn buntings in Hertfordshire

Figure 31: Movement Framework ▸

8.0 Movement Framework

Movement Key Principles:



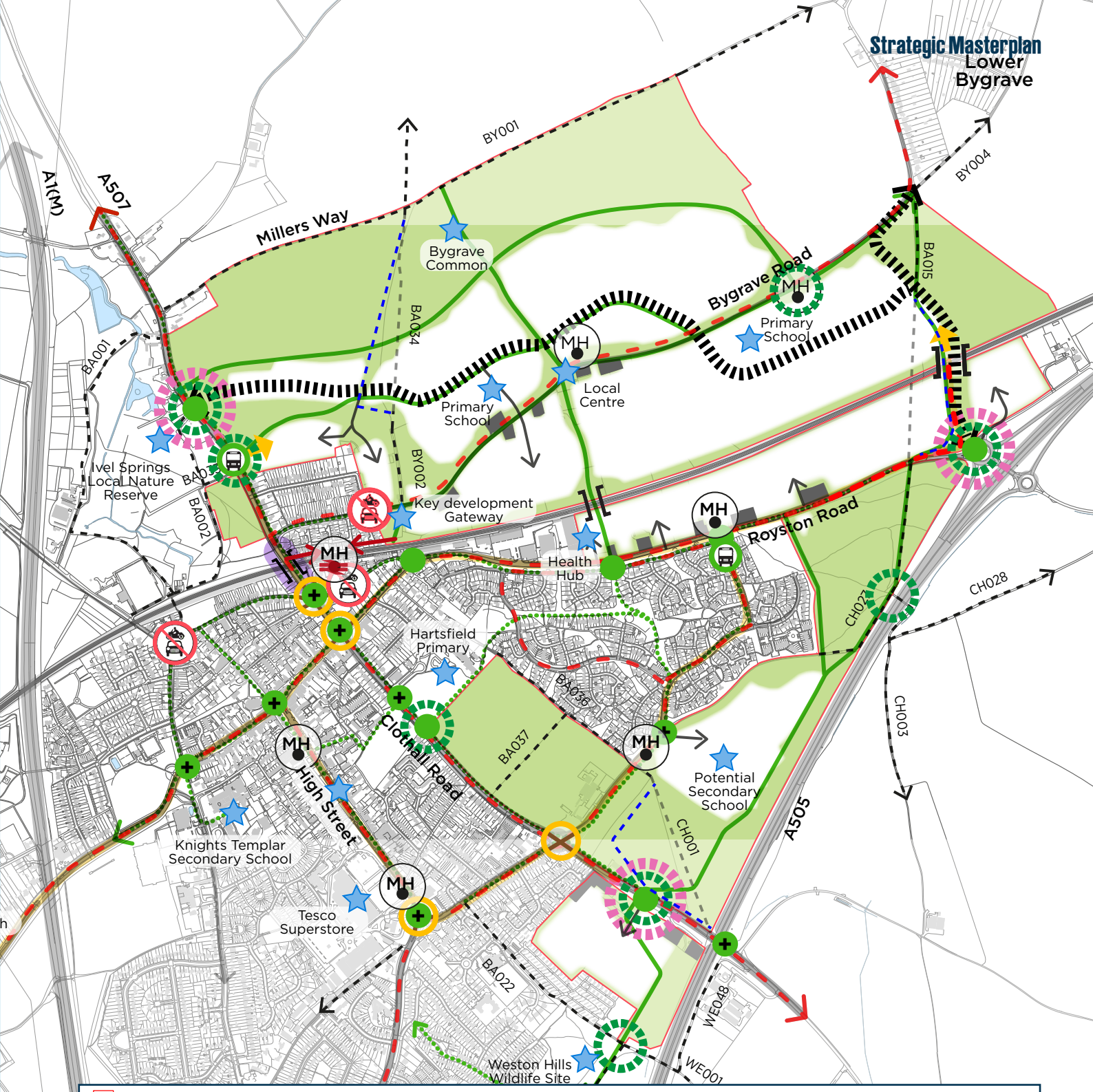
A place where half of all trips are made on foot, bicycle or public transport



Town-wide improvements to encourage sustainable and active travel



Reclaiming space for walking, cycling and public transport



- Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Existing properties within Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Key expanded town destinations
- On-site strategic green infrastructure
- Key existing public rights of way: footpaths/bridleways

Proposed active travel on-site interventions

- Diverted public rights of way
- Key pedestrian & cycle connections
- Pedestrian & cycle gateways

Proposed active travel off-site interventions

- Off-site key pedestrian & cycle connections
- Improved active travel crossing
- New active travel crossing

Proposed public transport on-site interventions

- Primary bus route
- Primary bus access into BA1
- Public transport routes
- Mobility hubs (varying scales/functions)

Proposed public transport off-site interventions

- Existing public transport routes
- Station enhancements
- New station access opportunities
- Bus priority: bus gates

Proposed vehicular on-site interventions

- Primary route (North Road to Royston Road)
- Indicative secondary development access
- Key access junctions and Baldock gateways

Proposed vehicular off-site interventions

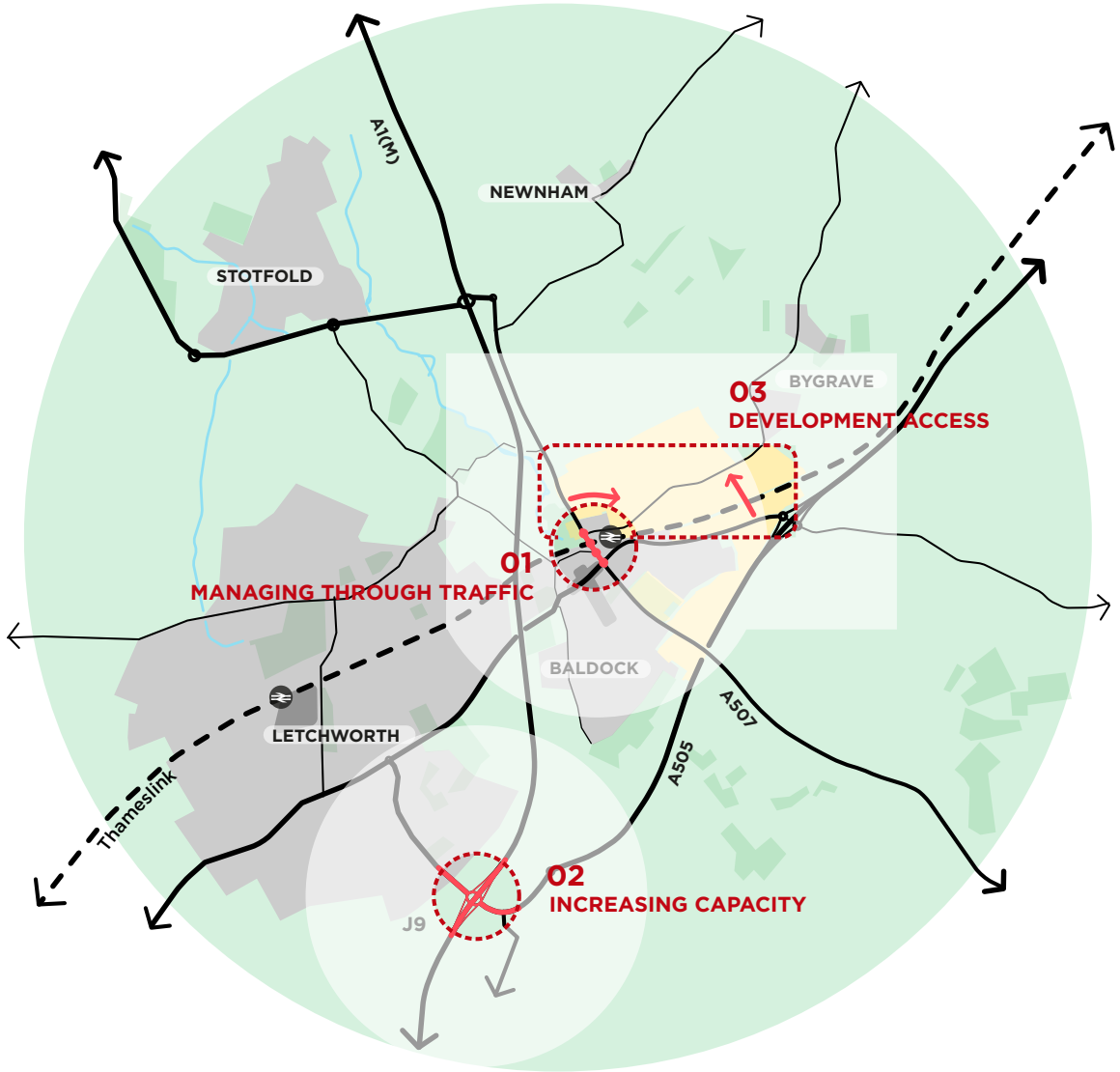
- Junction improvements (active travel priority measures)
- Traffic light controlled one-way 'shuttle' working under railway bridge
- Modal filter to prevent private motor vehicle access

The Strategic Masterplan proposes a package of interventions across the town that will reduce through traffic, allowing conditions to be transformed for walking, cycling and public transport. These measures are being tested and assessed with the HCC Highways team and discussions regarding responsibility for delivery, costs and phasing are on-going. The on and off-site design approach has been informed by three sustainable travel principles:

1. Designing a place where half of all trips are made on foot, bicycle or by using public transport, drawing on best practice across the UK and Europe;
2. Delivering improvements within the town that encourages walking, cycling, wheeling and public transport within and beyond Baldock, creating one connected town; and
3. Encouraging through-traffic to stay on the strategic road network, enabling road space to be used for placemaking, walking, cycling and public transport.

These principles have fed into the following transport objectives for the scheme:

- Reducing car dominance in Baldock;
- Safe, direct and coherent networks for active travel (i.e. walking and cycling);
- Green routes, helping people move away from roads;
- Prioritising buses over private vehicles;
- Excellent rail access;
- Managing freight and logistics; and
- Reducing reliance on the private car.



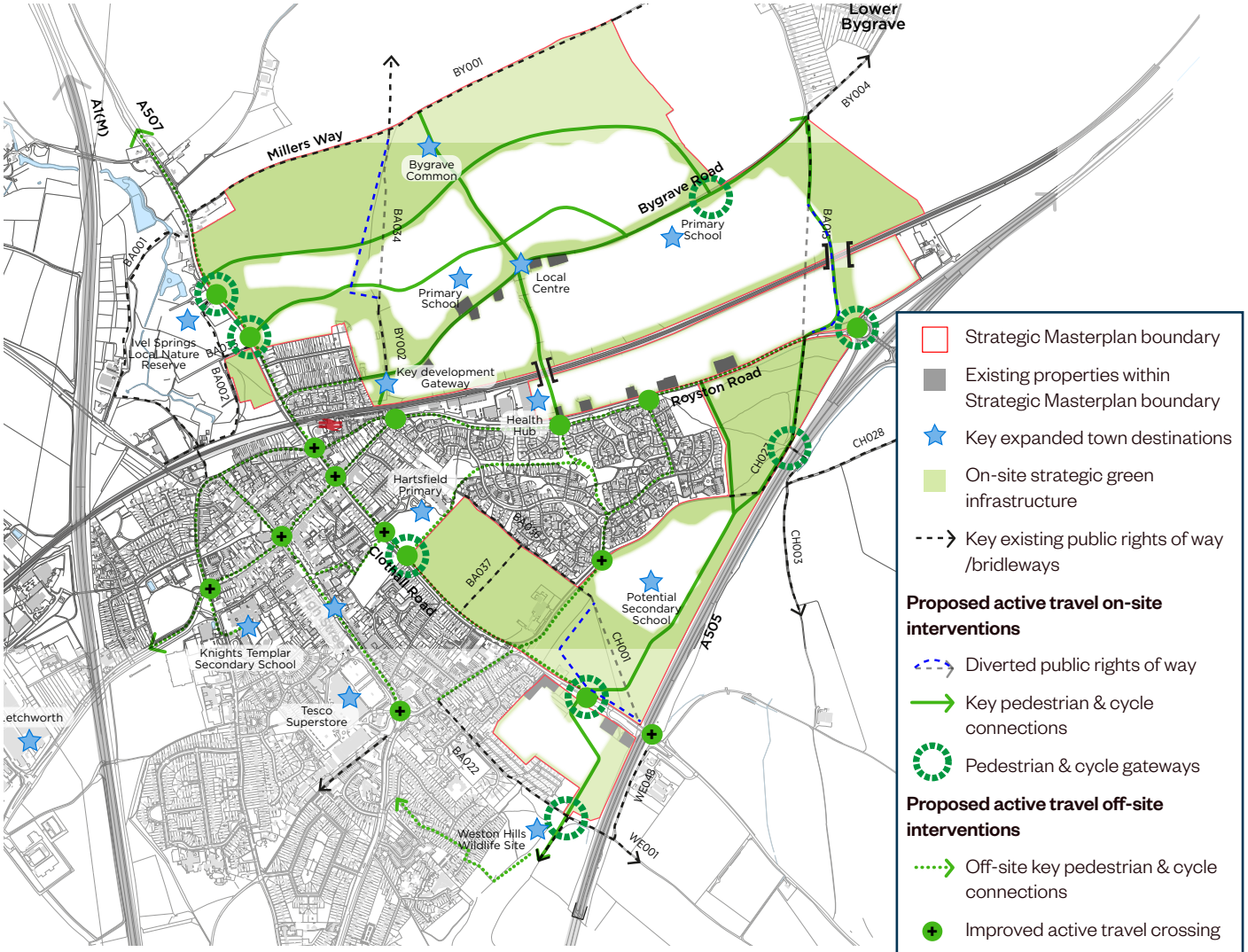
▲ Figure 32: Movement 'Big Moves'

Movement Framework Components

A series of on and off-site interventions will combine to deliver a step change in movement patterns through and within Baldock:

Active Travel (Walking and Cycling)

- safe, continuous and attractive walking and cycling routes will be provided to key local destinations such as the local centre and schools, the employment area, informal play and meeting spaces;
- active travel routes to be more attractive than car routes to key destinations;
- traffic-free routes will be people-centred spaces, overlooked by buildings to enhance personal safety and designed to prioritise walking and cycling, including traffic free cycle routes in busier locations;
- a range of utility and leisure active travel routes will be provided. Utility routes such as the active travel connection between the Local Centre and Health Hub will provide direct and safe access to key destinations. Leisure routes such as the Baldock Greenway will provide opportunities to walk and cycle for pleasure, on longer, circular routes;
- a dedicated walking and cycling route crossing the railway, connecting development either side of the tracks and Clothall Common; and
- new paths and improvements to existing routes will be created.



▲ Figure 33: Active Travel

Public Transport Components

- bus stops will be located within 400m of most new homes and enable bus services to be provided to Baldock town centre and Letchworth, including some traffic-free bus ways, for example, into Clothall Common;
- bus routes to be more direct and attractive than car routes to key destinations;
- bus routes through BA1 should directly serve the local centre and connect North Road to the A505/Royston Road junction;
- a network of 'mobility hubs' will be provided where people can easily switch from one mode of transport to another, to make travelling without a private car easier; and
- a new northern access to the rail station will be created, alongside improvements to the accessibility of the station building.



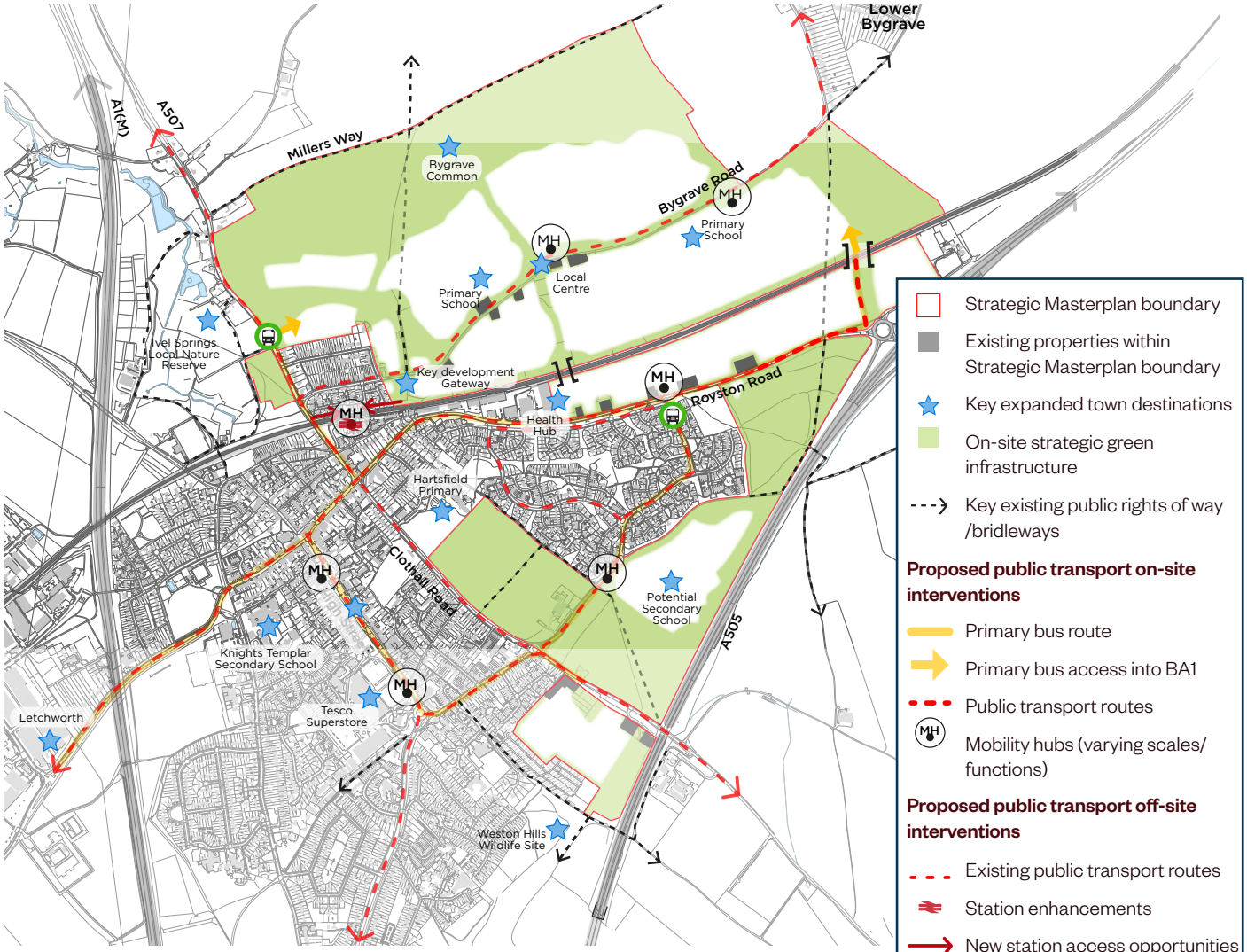
Mobility hubs

- Mobility Hubs bring together a range of transport options in one place, to make travelling without a private car easier;
- A network of mobility hubs will be provided, incorporating a range of options such as bus stops, cycle and scooter hire, cycle parking, car club spaces, cycle repair, shopping pick up / drop-off lockers, EV charging points.



Bus gate

- A bus gate is a section of road along which only buses and other authorised vehicles (such as emergency vehicles) can travel;
- A bus gate is proposed at the entrance to the development on North Road, providing a bus only link into the new community, seperate from the vehicular access from North Road;
- Another is proposed from Royston Road south into Clothall Common.



▲ Figure 34: Public Transport



Modal filter to prevent private car access

- Modal filters can be used to prevent rat-running;
- Modal filters allow pedestrians, cyclists and buses to move along a street while restricting general traffic, with benefits to air quality, safety and quality of life along residential streets



Shuttle working

- The limited space under the Station Road railway bridge means the existing pavements are narrow and there is no space for a dedicated cycle route;
- Narrowing the carriageway under the rail bridge for general traffic to one lane would provide space for pedestrians and cyclists;
- The single lane of traffic would be controlled by traffic lights.

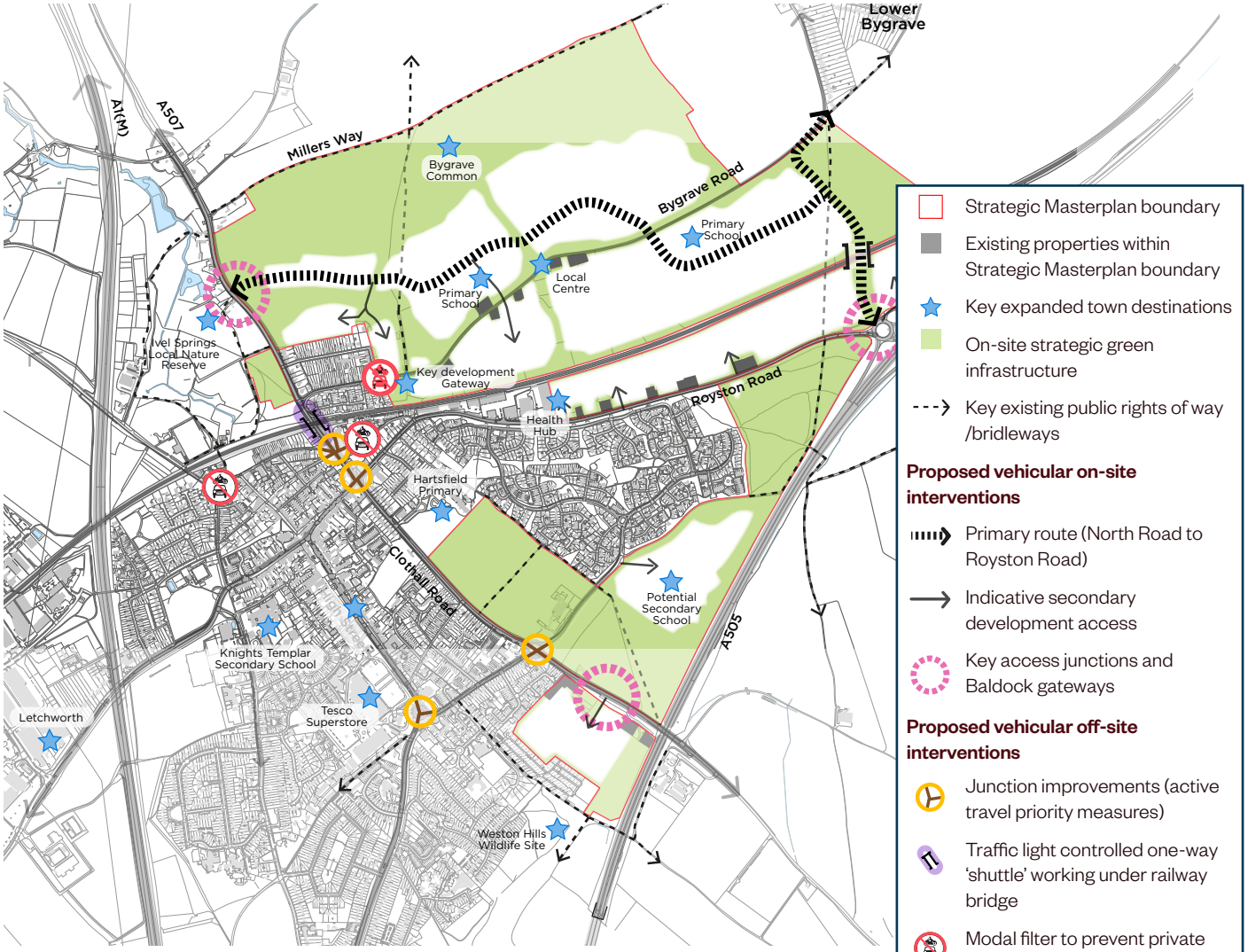


Car club

- Car club cars can be booked by the hour and typically costs less than owning a second or third car;
- Provides comfort that a car will be available if needed, reducing the need to own private cars;
- Car club vehicles are generally newer and less polluting than the average car.

Vehicular Key Components

- access into the development will be via a new road connecting North Road and Royston Road;
- car club cars will form part of the proposals, to reduce the need to own a car;
- car parking will be designed so as not block pavements and to be flexible so parking areas can be used differently in the future, if demand reduces over time; and
- deliveries will be managed via 'consolidation points' and 'pick-up lockers', so that the number of delivery vans and lorries on residential streets is minimised. Dedicated loading bays will be provided to prevent pavements from being blocked.



▲ Figure 35: Private Vehicles

All-modes Access

The number of vehicles on the roads in Baldock were counted as part of the baseline evidence gathering, and the results confirmed that, contrary to early thinking, a new high-speed link road would not remove significant volumes of traffic from the town centre and would be likely to draw more traffic off the major roads, increasing overall traffic volumes. Instead, a new slow speed access road into the development forms a key part of the Strategic Masterplan and will connect the A507 to the A505. This combined with preventing some turns at the Whitehorse Street junction, will take some traffic out of the town centre without increasing overall traffic volumes. The section of this new road that crosses over the railway, linking Bygrave / Ashwell Road and the B656 at the A505 interchange will be designed to enable it to serve a strategic function.

The new slow speed access road into the development will be fronted by buildings, high quality footways and a separate cycle path. It will provide access into BA1 from new junctions on North Road and Royston Road and via a new bridge over the railway, north east of Clothall Common.

The development access will be designed to prioritise active and sustainable travel movement across it, to ensure connectivity between development parcels and open space to the south.



▲ Destinations within the development will be accessible by sustainable modes of transport.



Approach to Parking

A key component for ensuring high levels of active and sustainable mode share is the proper management of car parking, both in terms of the level of car parking provision and how and where it is provided. Some of the key principles for the parking strategy will include:

- overall residential and commercial car parking levels will be guided by policy and reflect the best-practice approach to walking, cycling and public transport;
- residential and commercial car parking levels will be lower where accessibility by non-car modes is at its highest;
- destinations / facilities within the development being more conveniently accessible by sustainable modes, with low levels of parking provision focused on disabled parking;
- a variety of off-plot parking solutions will be explored as a way to encourage modes of transport other than private car use;
- convenient cycle parking at building/dwelling entrances;
- parking bays will be unallocated wherever possible;
- all vehicle parking spaces will be designed so that there is natural surveillance;
- car clubs will be provided to reduce the need for single, or multiple car ownership with the number of vehicles determined in relation to general parking provision;
- vehicle parking will be designed so that the land can be repurposed in the longer term, where possible, responding to changing needs in the future; and
- provide access to electric car charging points for all residential car parking spaces.

Construction Access

Construction access points and routes will be set out within the outline planning application. Construction traffic will avoid the town centre and be routed onto larger roads.



Offering a range of transport options creating a real alternative to private car use (Wolvercote Mill, Oxford)

Off-site Interventions

Walking and cycling conditions within Baldock, between key destinations, will be safer and made suitable for all ages and abilities, through a combination of widened pavements, traffic-free cycle paths and reduced traffic on quieter back streets. Improved junctions and crossings are proposed at key points in the town to enhance the pedestrian and cyclist experience. The Strategic Masterplan incorporates the following main changes to roads and routes outside the Strategic Masterplan area, within Baldock:

- alterations to the Whitehorse Street junction to provide wider pavements , reduced wait-times for pedestrians, improved safety for people cycling, and restricted turns;
- redesign of the Station Road / Icknield Way junction to provide improved access to the station for pedestrians and cyclists, and to create a new east-west cycle route connecting the town with the proposed employment area on Royston Road;
- a new access is proposed into Clothall Common from Royston Road. This would allow access by buses, cyclists and pedestrians, but not private vehicles; and
- provision of additional capacity at Junction 9 of the A1(M).

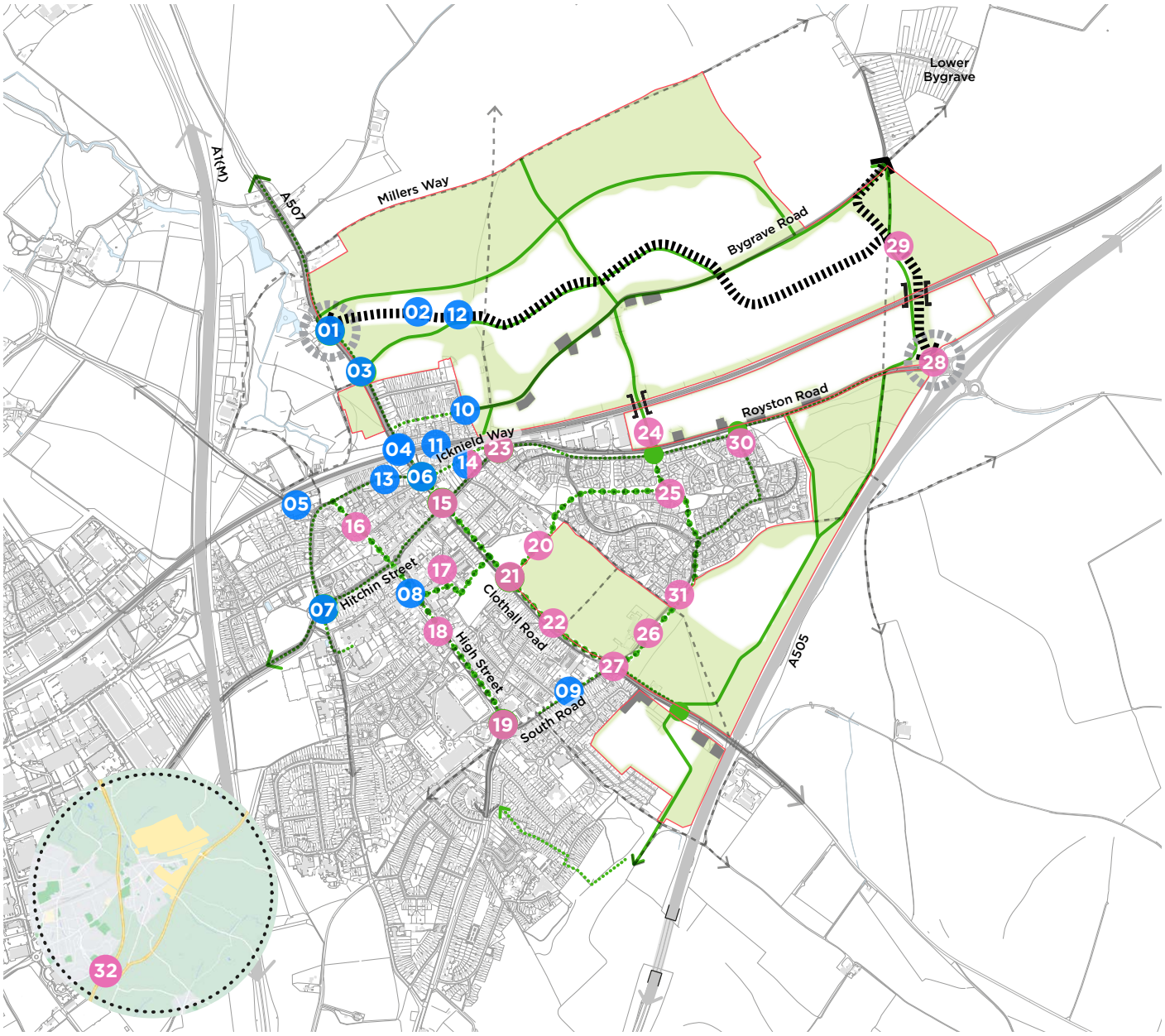
The following interventions are needed in order to allow the improvements above to be delivered:

- modal filters which allow pedestrians and cycles to pass only;
- shuttle running is proposed on Station Road under the railway; and
- restricted turns at the Whitehorse Street junction, including potentially the left turn into Station Road from the High Street to remove the significant through movement from the west and stopping movements between Station Road and Royston Road, to encourage use of the new road through the development.

Taken together the measures above are designed to reduce through-traffic volumes, create more space for walking and cycling and more flexibility in routing buses. Some residents making car trips may be inconvenience, but the benefits should be felt by all residents and visitors to Baldock.

The plan at Figure 36 provides an indication of broadly when the changes which will affect how people move around Baldock might happen – as part of an early or later phase of interventions. The measures, their timing, costs and responsibility for delivery and funding are being discussed in detail with HCC (highways team) and will be tested as part of the outline planning application in due course.

Figure 36: Indicative Access & Movement Interventions Phasing



Early Phase

01. Development access junction
02. Development access road
03. Bus and Cycle only access to BA1
04. Traffic light controlled one-way working under railway bridge
05. Norton Road modal filter to prevent private motor vehicle access
06. Station Road/ Icknield Way crossing and junction enhancements
07. Hitchin Street crossing improvements
08. High Street Mobility Hub
09. South Road public realm and walking improvements and traffic management measures
10. Bygrave Road modal filter to prevent private motor vehicle access
11. Station Mobility Hub
12. Interim arrangement bus loop within BA1 before the new road bridge is open
13. Icknield Way modal filter to prevent private motor vehicle access
14. Icknield Way East public realm improvements

Later Phase

14. Parking controls on Icknield Way East
15. Whitehorse Street junction bans on turns
16. Church Street cycle access
17. Enhanced active travel route to High Street
18. High Street cycleway
19. High Street/ South Road junction improvements
20. Active travel route south of Hartsfield School
21. Clothall Road crossing
22. Clothall Road cycleway
23. Royston Road crossing
24. Active travel crossing
25. Enhanced active travel in Clothall Common
26. Wallington Road cycleway
27. Clothall Road/ South Road junction improvements
28. Multi-modal bridge and development access junction
29. Bus loop connected to the wider bus network
30. Bus-only access to Clothall Common
31. Clothall Common mobility hub
32. Junction 9 capacity enhancement

Figure 37: Urban Design Framework ▸

9.0 Urban Design Framework

Urban Design Key Principles:



Respecting and responding to Baldock's unique character and built form



Retaining and enhancing key views towards Baldock and the wider landscape



Integrating the new neighbourhoods with Baldock through the considered design of connections and transitions between old and new



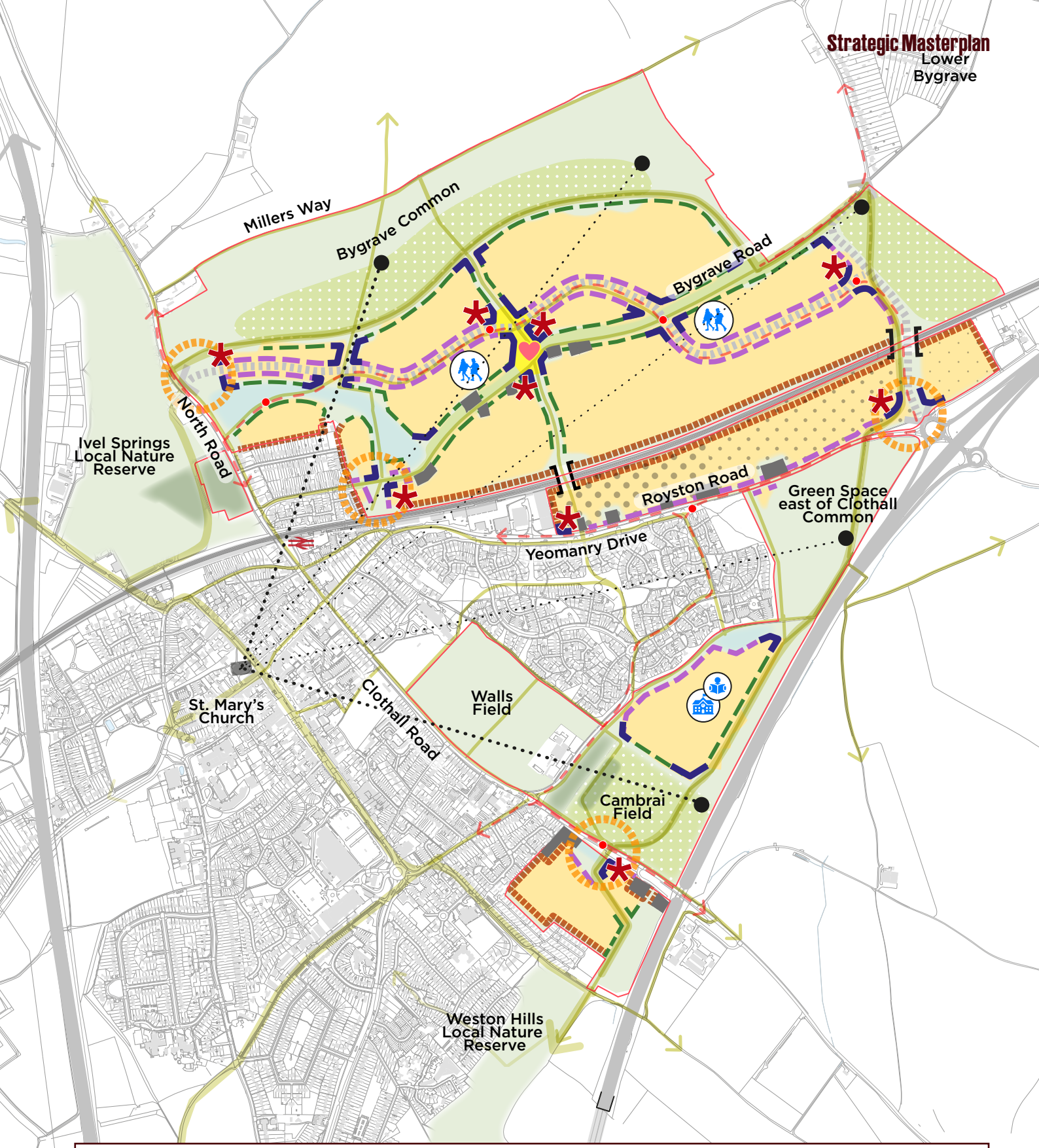
Putting place-making at the heart of the development.



Creating a new gateway into Baldock



A mix of buildings, spaces and character



- Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Existing properties within Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Development block structure
- Gateways
- Landmarks
- Key views to St. Mary's Church
- Key frontages
- Key frontages onto green spaces
- Prominent corners
- Landscaped edges
- Local centre
- Baldock Greenway
- Key active travel links
- Public transport routes
- Access road
- Employment finer grain
- Employment medium grain
- Employment larger grain
- Key green spaces – recreational
- Key green spaces – semi-natural
- Key green spaces – wetlands
- Allotments

The following urban design key principles will shape the design of the Growing Baldock development and will be used to inform the Design Code and forthcoming planning applications:

- Development will respect the character and scale of existing built form in Baldock, drawing on the best local architectural and public realm features to inform the design of new buildings and spaces;
- Built form and block structure to establish a subtle transition from the existing town edge and properties in the Strategic Masterplan area;
- Key views into and out of the development towards Baldock will be maintained and reinforced, connecting it to its wider landscape and the town;
- Development blocks and edges will respond positively to topography and contours, with education and local centre uses falling within the flatter parts of the development area;
- Building heights and density will align with location and accessibility, with higher density development at points of highest accessibility or activity;
- Visual connections to be made to the existing town and in particular to St. Mary's Church spire;
- Plot layouts will be organised to draw views out to the countryside;
- Landmark buildings / features will be located at key interfaces and spaces, such as the Local Centre and Community Hub, to aid legibility and placemaking;
- Gateways will be created at the entrances to the development and Baldock, to signal arrival, assist with legibility and establish high quality routes and spaces into the development;
- Frontages will be clearly defined and varied in character dependent upon whether facing development or green spaces. Key building frontages to be made to important green spaces and create a sense of enclosure;
- Hierarchy of green open spaces of varying sizes and functions;
- Network of active travel connections linking to key destinations and to the proposed Baldock Greenway;
- Variation of tighter urban grain and more disperse and organic layouts, depending on location, to aid identity and sense of place;
- Varied mix of building typologies to accommodate different needs and create a more vibrant environment;
- Building set back and road width to allow for spill-out uses into the public realm around the local centre, community hub and other key spaces;
- Buildings to interact with the street and create sense of enclosure and human-scaled public realm; and
- Special corner treatments and arrangement of plots to extend public realm, orientate buildings to continuously overlook the streetscape and be a prominent feature within the street.

Reinterpretation of Baldock's Architectural Character

The Strategic Masterplan baseline stage included a review of the townscape characteristics of Baldock, to inform elements of the Growing Baldock design. There is an opportunity to reinterpret some of the best local vernacular and design elements in Baldock, to help embed the new development in the town and its history and create characterful new streets, buildings and spaces.

The following elements have been identified as characteristic of Baldock and therefore potentially worthy of reinterpretation through the Growing Baldock development:

Typical Elements

1. Carriage arches, typical of Baldock, representing a distinctive feature of the town.
2. Openings: bay windows, doorways, canopies over front doors.
3. Ornaments: Visually strong window frames, dormers, ornate gables, flat recessed windows on upper storeys.
4. High-pitched roofs, half-hipped roofs (often long so as to be a prominent feature of the building).
5. Large gables facing the street.
6. Facade details variation: from plain to brick detailing.

Typical Materials / Colours

1. Coloured brickwork in varying tones: typical red bricks, including brown, orange and lighter yellows, with bands of different colours.
2. Decorative brickwork.
3. Timber frames and timber cladding.
4. Tile cladding.
5. Plainly rendered houses: in cream or a range of pale oranges colours.
6. Rendered gables, stripes or pediments.



Figure 38: Design Elements



Figure 39: Materials and Colours

Phase 1 – BA2 Character and Design Principles

Indicative development phasing is set out in section 13 of this Strategic Masterplan. The first phase of development will be the residential parcel known as BA2, to the south of Clothall Road, which will deliver c.200 new homes and can be brought forward in advance of the requirement for a strategic sewer connection to the Letchworth Waste Water Treatment Works.

The delivery of homes in parcel BA2 will be expedited as a first phase, via a reserved matters application, submitted upon receipt of the outline planning permission. This allows new homes to be built in Baldock as quickly as possible, responding to the acute housing need across North Herts. The Strategic Masterplan provides the overall vision for the Growing Baldock scheme as a whole, whilst this section provides additional design principles relating specifically to BA2, to guide the preparation of a reserved matters application.

It is imperative that this first area of development sets the design standards for the rest of the scheme and establishes a high-quality gateway into Baldock. The following design principles and framework (at Figure 40) will therefore need to be adhered to in any reserved matters application for BA2:

- Retention of existing hedgerows and vegetation along Clothall Road boundary, where possible, seeking to enhance with additional native buffer planting and offset along this boundary;
- Sensitive edge treatment (including landscape buffer) to Hillside Park (park homes) and houses around the edges of the parcel. Consideration should be given to creating a landscape buffer along these edges, and how this is incorporated into the housing layout to ensure long term management and maintenance;
- Seek to retain and buffer the 'high-value' habitats including existing hedgerows and semi-improved grassland in the south and east of BA2;
- Creation of a nature-focussed landscape buffer olong the A505 boundary to aid movement of species from Weston Hills LNR and a development offset from the A505;
- Incorporation of the Baldock Greenway into the wider green infrastructure setting within BA2;
- Access into and through the parcel via active travel modes to be a priority (over vehicular modes);
- Provision of a range of green space typologies including wetland at the lowest part of the area, a local equipped area for play (LEAP) and further opportunities for informal natural play within the public open space;
- Primary access and gateway into the parcel to be taken from Clothall Road;
- Appropriate and sensitive conversion of the best existing buildings, as appropriate alongside removal of any remaining structures to facilitate development;
- Built form to relate positively to the existing topography and levels;
- Strong built frontage to be established along Clothall Road;
- Excellent design quality in built form and public realm that relates positively to the best of the Baldock vernacular;
- High sustainability performance of buildings and infrastructure established from day one;
- Mix of house types and sizes; and
- Retention of Category A tree and incorporation onto the masterplan.



▲ **Figure 40: BA2 Phase 1 Urban Design Framework**

- Phase 1 (BA2) boundary
- Existing properties – retained
- Existing properties – demolished
- Existing properties – for potential conversion
- Developable area
- Key frontages
- Key corners
- Key buildings
- Development gateway
- Vehicular access from Clothall Road
- Tree-lined street (indicative alignment)
- Baldock Greenway
- PRoWs/pedestrian & cycle connections
- LP Local play within parcel
- Green space – semi-natural
- Primary SuDS
- Existing vegetation
- Landscape buffer/retained grassland
- Noise attenuation measures
- Landscape buffer to existing properties
- Sensitive edge treatment: planting in gardens (min. length 15m)
- High-quality tree to be retained
- 1m contour lines: built form to work with topography

10.0 Sustainability & Energy Framework

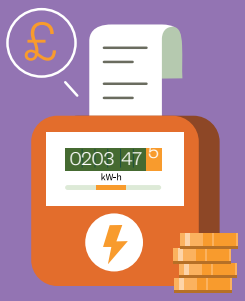
Sustainability Key Principles:



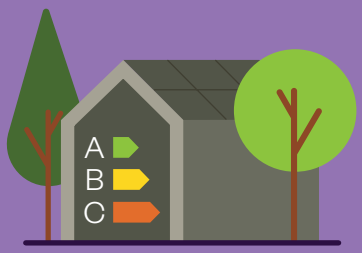
All buildings Net Zero in operational carbon emissions



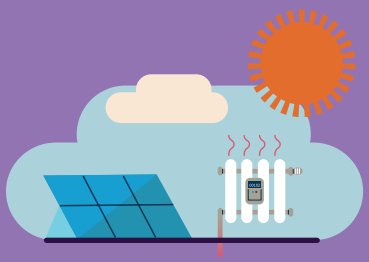
All-electric development



Contributions to carbon offset fund, if required



Highly energy efficient homes and buildings



Use of renewable heat and energy-generating technologies

The Sustainability and Energy Strategy articulates the ambitious approach that will be taken at Baldock in respect of the development's sustainability and energy performance.

Each section of the Strategic Masterplan demonstrates how sustainability has been holistically integrated into the development of the masterplan in the form of:

- Sustainable transport and active travel;
- Biodiversity enhancements; and
- Publicly accessible green space and community facilities to support health and wellbeing.

This section of the Strategic Masterplan is effectively a Framework, albeit one that is not presented through a Framework Plan, like the preceding chapters, but as a series of commitments and principles.

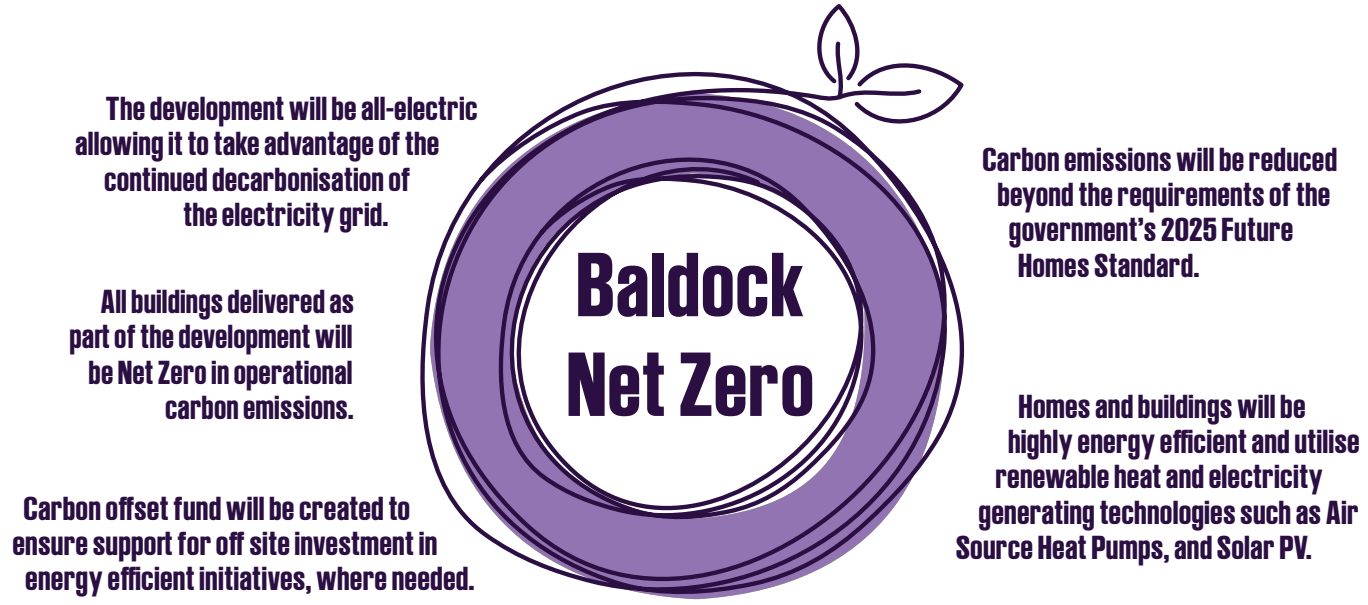
This section of the Strategic Masterplan sets out the carbon and energy strategy for the development, summarising the key points set out within the more detailed Sustainability and Energy Strategy.

The vision for Baldock is to create a development that accelerates the transition towards net zero and provides residents with the infrastructure they require to lead a highly sustainable lifestyle and purchase and occupy a low carbon dwelling that can operate at net zero should they choose.

In relation to construction and buildings, carbon emissions can arise from:

- **Embodied Carbon –** including the materials, components and energy that are required to make up a structure (capital and upfront carbon); and
- **Operational Carbon –** energy consumption in the day to day running of a building or structure.

A range of site-wide and building scale opportunities will be incorporated into the development to reduce both operational and embodied carbon emissions throughout its lifetime.



▲ Figure 41: Baldock Net Zero

Building-scale Opportunities

All buildings will be net zero in operational carbon emissions through the application of the energy hierarchy, which aims to reduce energy demand through passive design measures and a fabric first approach before utilising low carbon energy and the production of on-site renewable energy.

- All homes and buildings will be constructed to a high standard of fabric efficiency and airtightness;
- Buildings will utilise a range of renewable energy technologies such as roof mounted solar PV and/or Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP);
- All dwellings will be powered solely by electricity which will mean that the carbon intensity of each building will reduce over time with the decarbonisation of the grid;
- Any residual carbon emission from operational energy use will be offset through payment into a carbon offset fund, if required, which will be used to fund energy reduction initiatives within Baldock and North Herts; and
- Homes and buildings will also aim to reduce embodied carbon beyond typical practice in line with standards such as RIBA Climate Challenge Embodied Carbon targets or the emerging Net Zero Carbon Building Standard.

Homes and buildings will aim to go beyond the minimum requirements of the Government's Future Homes and Building Standard. This approach is in line with the Hertfordshire Development Charter which recommends that developers commit to a sustainability standard that exceeds minimum current building regulations. Given the extended build out period of the development and evolving sustainability standards (such as the emerging Net Zero Carbon Building Standard, and final Future Homes and Building Standard Specifications), at this stage the strategy for Baldock aims to maintain flexibility around exact energy or carbon performance standards. Therefore, developers will have the option of meeting a sustainability standard that exceeds the Building Regulations in place at the time for both domestic and non-domestic buildings.



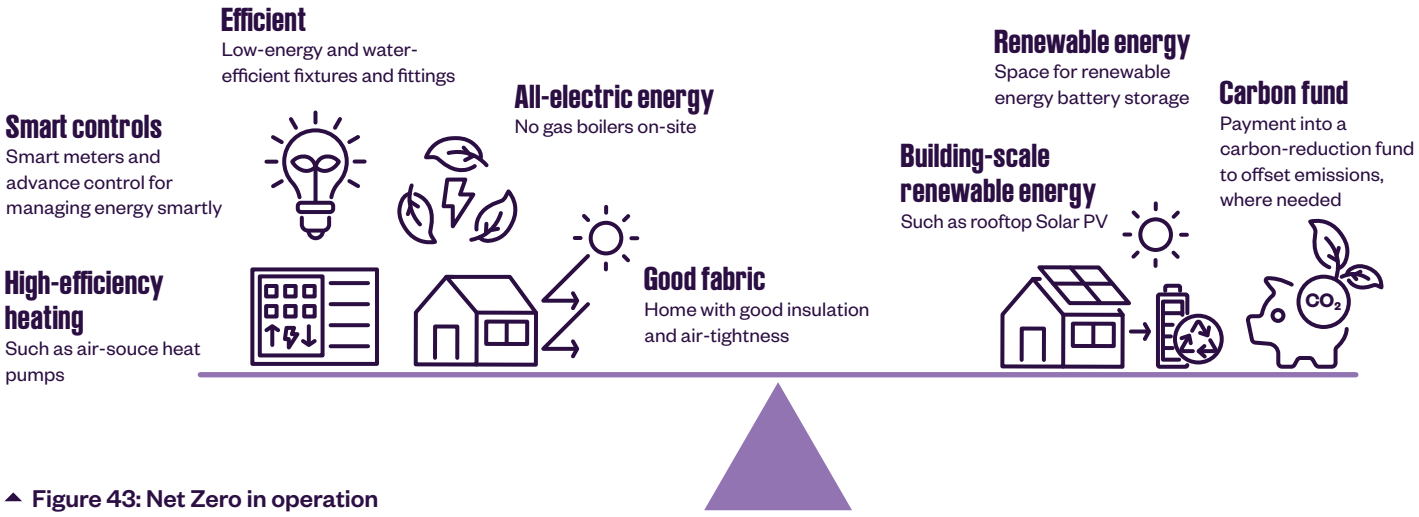
▲ **Figure 42: Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter sets high standards for sustainability performance of new developments**

Development-wide Opportunities

- A low carbon approach to masterplanning has been undertaken which aims to minimise the embodied carbon impacts through optimising the scale of infrastructure that serves the development;
- Potential for stand-alone renewable energy infrastructure, such as battery technology, on land at the eastern end of the employment area. Feasibility will be investigated as part of the forthcoming outline planning application;
- The Strategic Masterplan includes opportunities for future residents to live a low carbon lifestyle through support for sustainable and active transport measures and the provision of extensive areas of green infrastructure to promote passive heating and cooling and encourage healthy lifestyles; and
- Creation of a healthy biodiverse landscape, long-term landscape management, and consideration of best practice soil management techniques to support carbon sequestration benefits.

The Sustainability and Energy Strategy will continue to evolve as design progresses with the outline planning application and each reserved matters application also supported by a more detailed strategy.

Net Zero in operation



▲ Figure 43: Net Zero in operation

11.0 Housing Need & Diversification

The Strategic Masterplan has explored options to determine how Growing Baldock could accommodate a development of up to 3,300 homes, in accordance with the Local Plan policy. It is apparent that due to a combination of site constraints and the requirement to deliver on-site infrastructure that this target may not be met. However, a substantial proportion of this figure (around 3,000 homes) will be able to be accommodated within the development, including a mix of tenures, sizes and types to satisfy policy requirements. Development capacity will be explored further at outline planning application stage.

Housing Mix

The development is of a sufficient size that it can accommodate a broad range of housing sizes and types, from 1 bed apartments to 5 bed homes, including the full breadth of housing typologies in between. The type and size of new homes will vary and reflect the differing character of each part of the development, for instance with higher density homes (terraced houses and apartments) nearer the station and local centre, and larger and lower density detached houses towards the periphery of the development.

Local Plan policy HS3 requires that a range of housing types and sizes are provided on new development taking into account overall targets, local need, the location and accessibility of the land and current delivery. As an edge of settlement site an initial assumption of 60% larger (3+bed) and 40% smaller (1 and 2 bed) homes is suggested by the Local Plan. This will form a starting point for the overall mix which will be explored at outline planning application stage. Housing will be of a high quality design, with provision of appropriate private amenity space.

Housing Type

There is also capacity to incorporate different types of home including senior living, care homes, specialist housing, and self and custom build, dependent on location and the prevailing market. Local Plan policy SP14 requires the delivery of at least 28 serviced plots for self-build development and a site for a care home for older people, whilst policy HS4 requires an appropriate number of sheltered, supported living and extra care housing to be provided (if the criteria of policy HS3 are met).

Housing Tenure

Local Plan policy HS2 requires that 40% of new homes be provided as affordable housing, of which 65% should be rented and 35% in other forms of affordable tenure, subject to viability. The level of affordable housing to be delivered at Baldock will be agreed as part of negotiation of the forthcoming outline planning application, with the amount balanced against other costs such as education provision and sustainability performance, in agreement with the Local Planning Authority. Affordable housing will be designed to be 'tenure-blind', i.e. indistinguishable from market housing, and provided in mixed-tenure streets, distributed throughout the development.

Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire



Houlton, Rugby



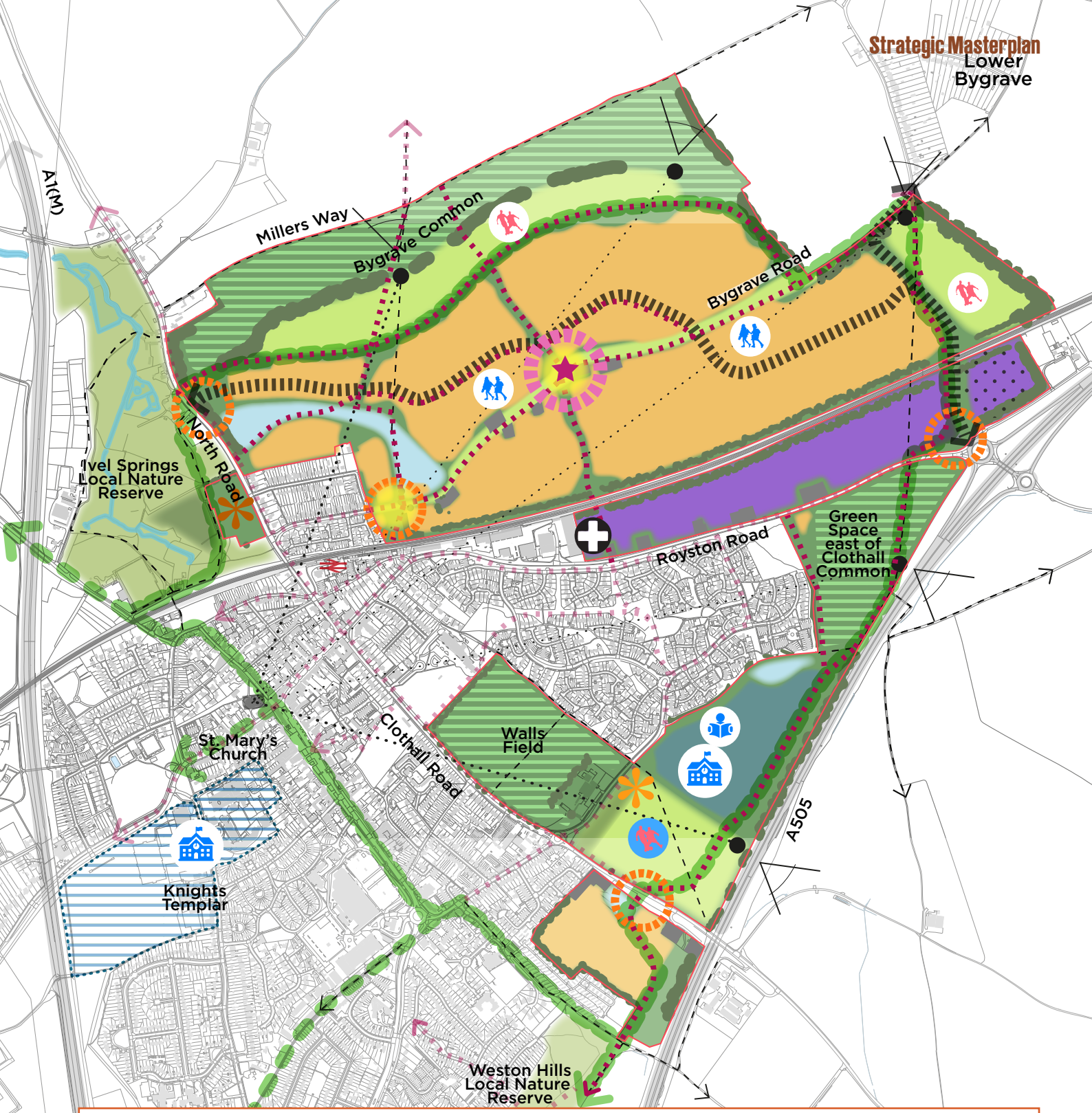


Priors Hall, Corby

Figure 44: Composite Framework Plan ▸

12.0 Composite Framework Plan

The 'Composite Framework Plan' at Figure 44 brings together all the elements of the Baldock development and is the culmination of the Strategic Masterplan document. It sets the overall framework for development, fixing the broad locations for green spaces, built areas, connections across the railway and the centre of the new community, and will help shape the future planning applications for the development.



- Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Development Area: Residential
- Land reserved for secondary school education option
- Development Area: Employment
- Development Area: Employment (Energy + Waste Facilities)
- Existing properties within Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Primary route
- Key existing public rights of way
- Key pedestrian & cycle connections
- Key off-site pedestrian & cycle connections
- Baldock Greenway
- Public spaces
- Development gateway
- Existing local nature reserve
- Key green spaces – recreational/public open space
- Key green spaces – semi-natural
- Key green spaces – wetlands
- Enhanced allotments
- New allotments
- Outdoor Sports Provision
- Outdoor sports provision (opportunity for dual use as part of school if secondary school provided on BA3)
- Indicative buffer planting
- Local centre (mixed-use / retail/ community)
- Education: secondary school options
- Education: primary schools
- Education: special education needs and disabilities school
- Health provision
- Key vantage points
- Key views to St. Mary's Church

13.0 Infrastructure Delivery Plan

This section of the Strategic Masterplan identifies the infrastructure that may be required to support the development. This list will be refined and tested as part of the outline planning application, with key elements secured either by planning condition or legal agreement.

Movement

Off-site	On-site
Public transport provision (including route into site, bus service infrastructure and bus only links into Clothall Common and BA1 from North Road)	Upgrades to existing and provision of new PRoW network
Improvements to Baldock train station	Development access between North Road and Royston Road, including new junctions
Modal filters (Norton Road, Bygrave Road, Icknield Way)	Active travel crossing of railway
One way shuttle system on North Road (under railway)	All modes crossing of railway
Crossing and junction enhancements	Mobility hubs (on and off site)
South Road, Icknield Way and Royston Road improvements	
Whitehorse Street junction improvements	
Enhanced active travel routes to High Street and through Clothall Common	
A1(M) Junction 9 improvements	

N.B. the final package of measures to be agreed with HCC highways and other consultees as part of outline planning application negotiation. These measures have been tested, assessed and concluded as being the appropriate package of interventions, and discussions with stakeholders regarding responsibility for delivery, costs and phasing are on-going and will inform the OPA negotiation.

Utilities

Off-site	On-site
Foul sewer connection to Letchworth Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW)	Primary sub stations
Potential reinforcement works to electricity/potable water infrastructure (TBC)	Foul pumping stations and either gravity sewer or pumped connection around edge of the site (to connect to route to WWTW)
	Necessary utilities diversions within site (TBC)

Early years

Off-site	On-site
	Pre-school provision at primary schools
	Private commercial nurseries

Primary Education

Off-site	On-site
	Up to 2 x primary schools in BA1

Secondary Education

Off-site	On-site
Potential expansion of Knights Templar	Potential secondary school on BA3 including community use of 3G pitches and sports hall outside of school hours (secured by a community use agreement)

SEND provision

Off-site	On-site
	2ha site for SEND school

Health facilities

Off-site	On-site
	Health hub incorporating GP services
	In-built design principles to promote healthy lifestyles e.g. active travel; 20-minute neighbourhood principles

Adult care

Off-site	On-site
	Extra care facility / specialist housing

Waste

Off-site	On-site
	Land for waste facilities including waste transfer station and vehicle depot

Public open space

Off-site	On-site
	Significant areas of open space provision, as part of the green infrastructure led Strategic Masterplan

Indoor/outdoor sports provision

Off-site	On-site
Enhancements to Knights Templar indoor sports facilities if existing school expanded in situ	Sports provision at secondary school, if provided on site (indoor sports hall and 3G pitches to be accessible to community outside of school hours, via a Community Use Agreement), plus grass pitch provision elsewhere on site

Flood risk mitigation

Off-site	On-site
	Sustainable drainage network throughout site

Biodiversity net gain

Off-site	On-site
Corn bunting mitigation areas	Provision of range of habitat areas and protection of existing (e.g. Green Space east of Clothall Common and Bygrave Road LWS)

Sustainability and low carbon measures

Off-site	On-site
Contributions to carbon offset fund where required	Energy infrastructure area
	Innovation areas
	Range of low carbon measures associated with development (refer to section 10)

Noise/air mitigation

Off-site	On-site
	Landscape buffers to railway and strategic road network. ES to test requirement for any additional mitigation e.g. acoustic barriers

Community facilities

Off-site	On-site
	Community facilities in the Local Centre

Stewardship Planning

The new development will bring forward a range of new spaces and places, amenities and facilities which sit within the public realm. Some will be used predominantly by residents of the new homes, but given the integrated nature of the growth of Baldock, it is vital a stewardship approach is set out which is inclusive for both the new and existing parts of the town. The approach will need to be proactive and responsive in designing and planning; ambitious in place-making and for community development and driving environmental and social benefits; whilst effective in ensuring long term management of public assets so they can be enjoyed by present and future generations. U&C recognize the importance HCC and NHC place on an effective strategy being in place, and that it works both with their own approaches to adoption, stewardship and governance, and to ensure public amenities support the delivery of their priorities in a cost effective way.

An overarching vision is that the range of new spaces, places, facilities and overall public realm across the new development in Baldock will be managed to a consistent high quality standard throughout and will be the unifying element that ties together different land uses, character areas and building types.

Mechanisms for management of the estate will be robust and tailored to suit the particular requirements of each type of space, with emphasis being placed on sustainability and the protection of ecological and heritage assets, the integration of the development with existing Baldock, and financial sustainability.

Appropriate stewardship and governance structures will be established from the outset that ensure that quality standards are maintained across the full lifecycle, from early phases of development, through ongoing construction, and through to the last home sold on the scheme. As importantly, quality standards must continue to be maintained through the continued operation of the development within Baldock.

The menu of options for the stewardship structures include Local Authority adoption, management by an U&C Management Company (ManCo), management by a charitable trust, or community ownership and local long-term stewardship. It is anticipated that different components of the development could be subject to a different management regimes, dependent on their individual requirements, and it is also anticipated that the arrangements will evolve over time.

The early thinking on the approach is set out below, drawn from the engagement to date, and will continue to be developed as the Strategic Masterplan moves towards an outline planning application, so it can be fully embedded within the S106, obligations and wider planning framework.

Key aims and objectives of the approach

- to ensure a sustainable approach is set in place for the varied spaces and places coming forward to maximise the social and environmental benefits, whilst ensuring robust, diverse and therefore sustainable funding to minimise cost to the public purse in the short, medium and long term;
- to engage and empower local and neighbouring residents and businesses through inclusive and ongoing community participation so they can continue to shape and care for the public areas and green spaces around them; and
- to ensure complementary approaches that work with the wider town and surrounding area for both the public bodies, charitable bodies and volunteer groups and the wider community.

This will be achieved by:

- collaborative planning and design of physical infrastructure which is sustainable, high quality and responsive and effective for delivering shared aspirations in perpetuity;
- collaborative delivery and ongoing care, to establish the spaces and ensure robust and financially sustainable management and maintenance arrangements in the short, medium and long term;
- exploring and agreeing representative and accountable governance structure or structures to develop, deliver and manage stewardship; and
- inclusive participation with existing groups and the wider community at all stages of the process.

Process to agree the approach

The process to deliver this is as follows:

- agreement of approach through the outline planning application process with NHC and HCC to define the types of spaces coming forward and the menu of stewardship options, approaches to adoption, and discussion on future governance;
- detailed design to be carried out to include future management costs alongside biodiversity and other design principles, to enable discussions and agreement on these future options; and
- community engagement at all stages to ensure input and ownership of the agreed approach and enable a wider volunteering strategy to be a core part of connecting the growth of Baldock to the existing town.

Defining the assets

The assets coming forward which would need to be considered for stewardship arrangements includes:

- Doorstep Green Space and Amenity – e.g. pocket parks, play areas, walk and cycle ways within the development;
- Community amenities and facilities – e.g. community centres, allotments etc.;
- Strategic facilities for resident and wider use – e.g. sports pitches, which provide for the wider town as well as new residents; and
- Strategic green space for resident and wider use – e.g. Bygrave Common, designed to support the wider town, as well as new residents.

Potential approaches for discussion

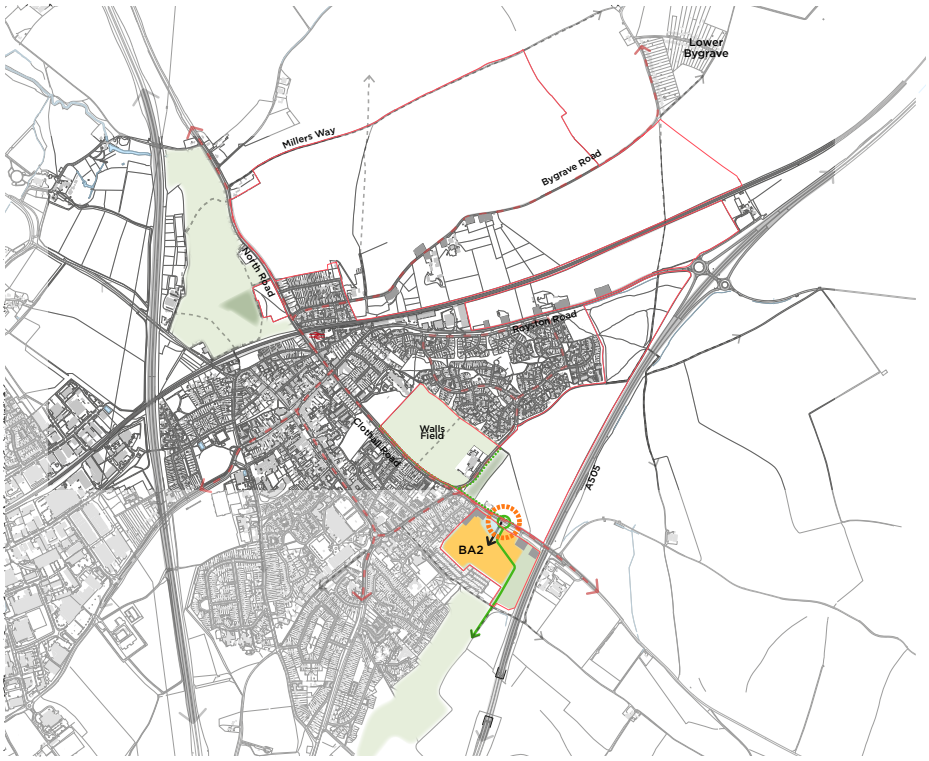
Where U&C have retained management liability of these spaces on their developments, a range of tried and tested models for their management have been adopted, which alongside longer-term management options, provide early management before numbers of new residents are significant enough to enable future governance to be established. U&C have also engaged in meeting pre-adoption commitments. The menu of options will form part of discussions with the local authorities, to explore alongside their existing policies on adoption and other partnership arrangements.

The ManCo/Charitable Trust approach U&C adopts reflects and embeds firstly U&C's company values and secondly, the U&C Sustainability Framework capitals which inform the design, delivery and management of spaces and places. There are huge opportunities to explore how the learning and experience can apply to Baldock, where there is interest and opportunities for the Councils to be involved in core spaces coming forward and existing policies on adoption. Alongside this the thriving existing town and the shared aspiration with local authorities for integration and inclusion, enables further discussions with active groups already engaged in stewardship approaches for existing assets in the town.

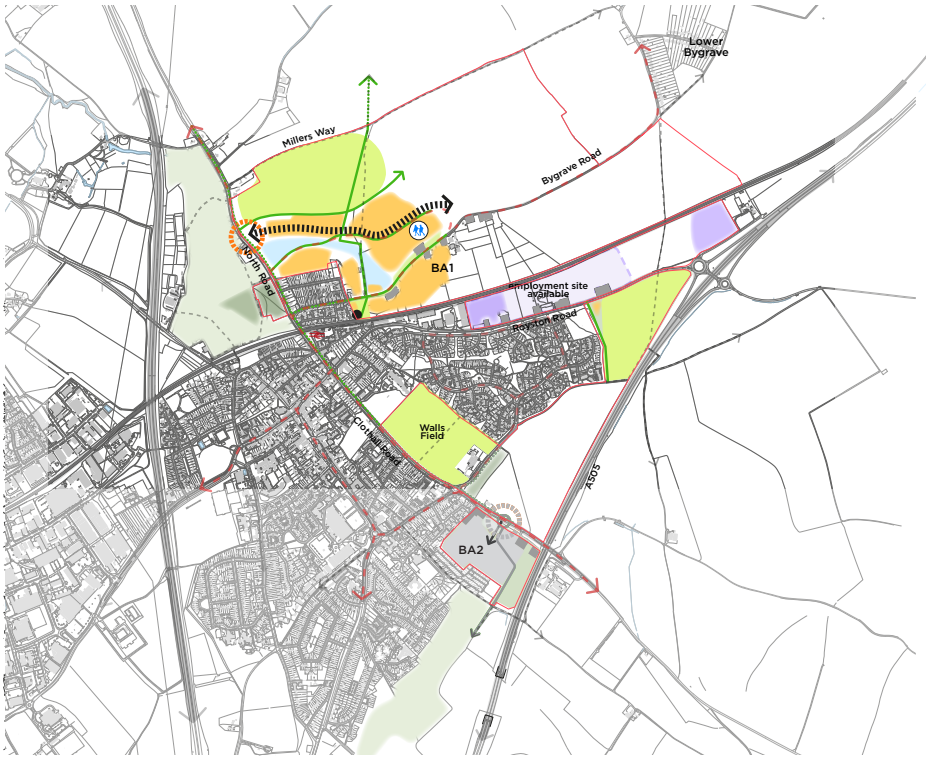
Indicative Phasing

Figures 45 to 48 set out the potential indicative sequencing of development, starting with new homes in BA2, followed by the development of BA1 (new homes, primary schools, local centre and green infrastructure) from North Road, in an easterly direction. The employment parcel (BA10) will be largely market driven on the basis that serviced plots will be made available throughout the construction programme. If a secondary school is to be provided in BA3, it will be delivered in accordance with triggers to be agreed in any future S106 agreement.

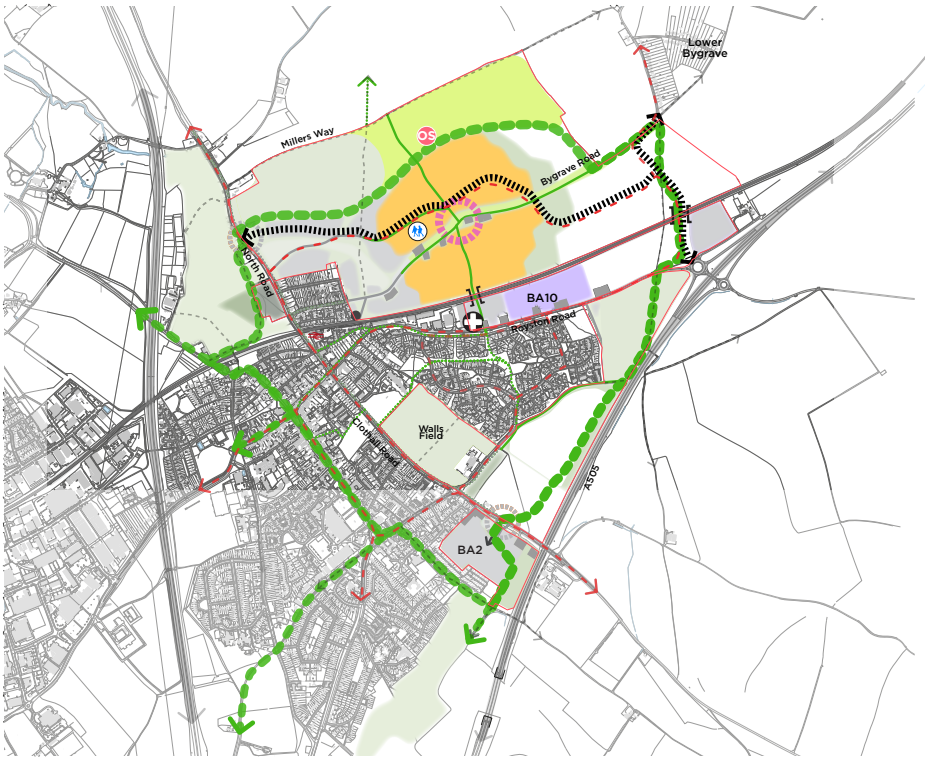
The relationship between development phasing and the timing of delivery of offsite highway interventions (as set out in section 8) will be tested through the transport modelling that will be undertaken to inform the outline planning application.



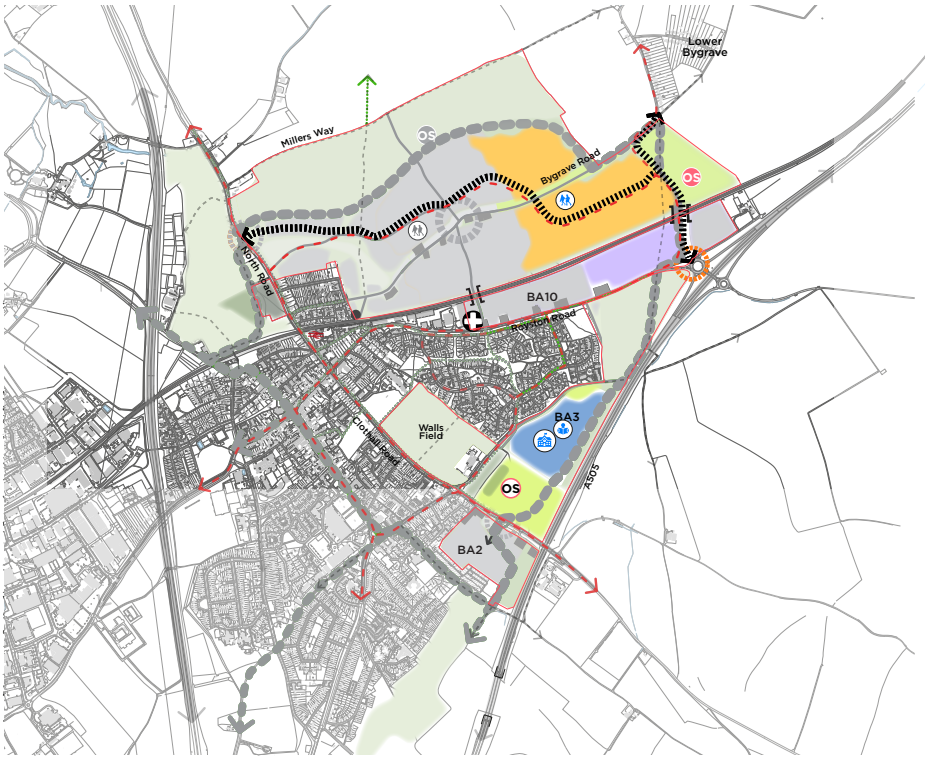
▲ Figure 45: Indicative Phase A



▲ Figure 46: Indicative Phase B



▲ Figure 47: Indicative Phase C



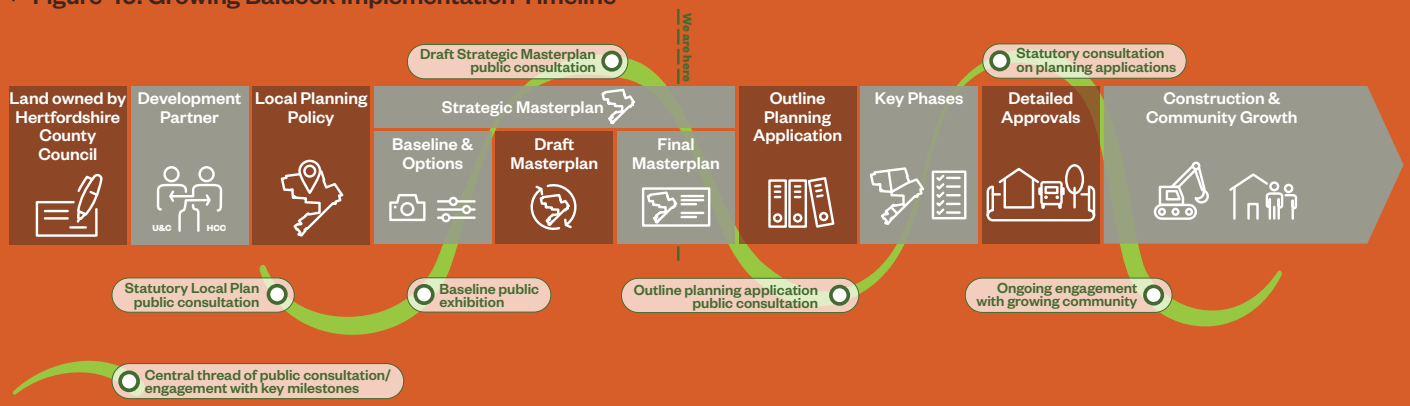
▲ Figure 48: Indicative Phase D

- Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Existing properties within Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Development Area: Residential
- Land reserved for secondary school education option
- Development Area: Employment
- Local centre: (mixed-use/retail/ community)
- Education: secondary school options
- Education: proposed primary schools
- Education: special education needs and disabilities school
- Key green spaces
- Development gateway
- Outdoor Sports Provision
- Outdoor sports provision (opportunity for dual use as part of school if secondary school provided on BA3)
- Health hub
- Key pedestrian & cycle connections
- Key off-site pedestrian & cycle connections
- Baldock Greenway
- New station access opportunities
- Bus priority: bus gates
- Public transport routes
- Primary route

14.0 Conclusions

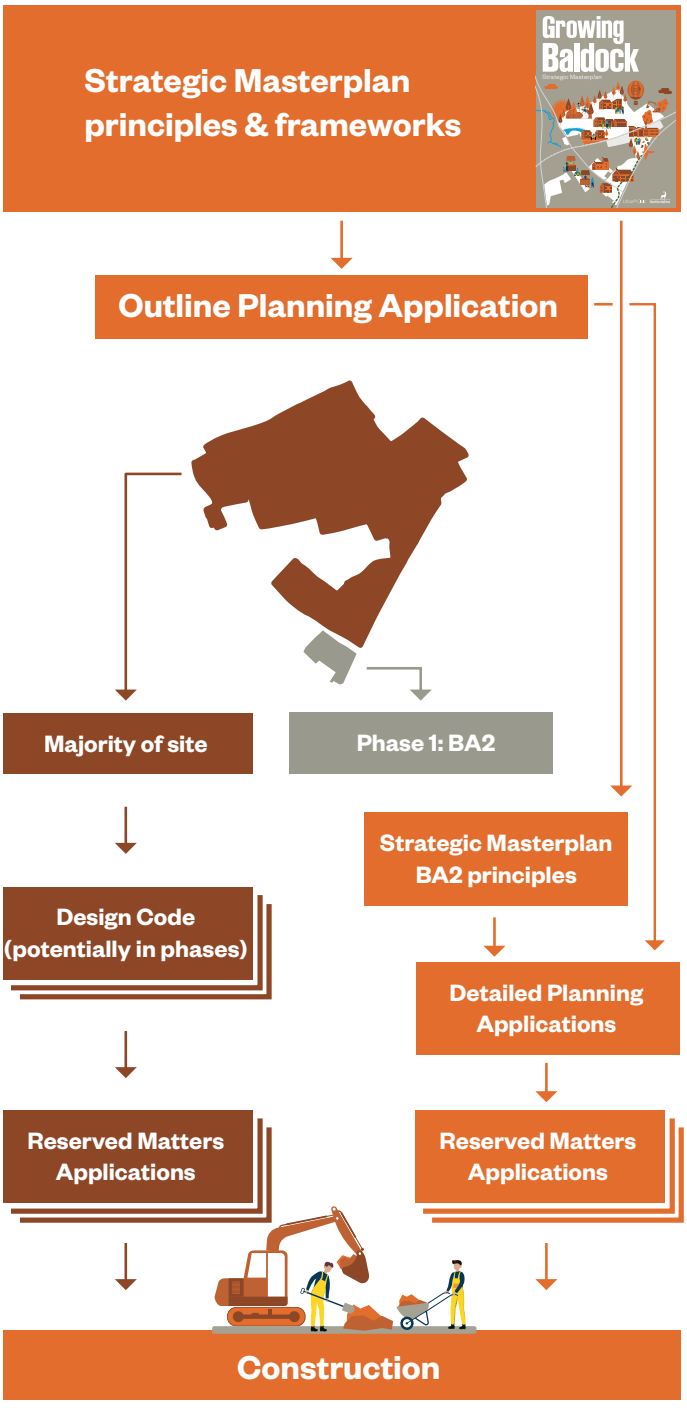
This Strategic Masterplan is the culmination of a comprehensive masterplanning process, involving extensive baseline information gathering, multiple consultation and review events and options testing, working alongside NHC/HCC officers, stakeholders and the community throughout.

Figure 49: Growing Baldock Implementation Timeline



The Strategic Masterplan provides a clear framework for the growth of Baldock. The next stage for the development will be the submission and approval of a series of outline and detailed planning applications that align with the principles set by the SMP.

It is important to note that this final Strategic Masterplan marks the point at which the Growing Baldock scheme transitions from strategic masterplanning into the planning application stage, moving one step closer to implementation. Several further stages of approval will be required before the Growing Baldock development comes to fruition, as shown in Figure 50. The next stage of the planning process for Growing Baldock is the Development Management stage when a series of progressively more detailed planning application submissions will be submitted for approval. This will be followed by any necessary permitting/ licensing, before construction starts on-site, and development becomes operational.



▲ Figure 50: Planning Approval Scenarios

Outline Planning Application (OPA)

This Strategic Masterplan will be followed by an outline planning application which will identify and test parameters that will align with the principles set out in the Strategic Masterplan. At this stage, elements such as the built envelope (the spatial extent and maximum height) of buildings, the location and type of open space and the key access points and primary connections will be fixed and subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA process will provide an assessment of the impacts of the development on the following technical matters (subject to formal agreement with NHC via the EIA Scoping process):

- transport;
- noise and vibration;
- air quality;
- landscape and visual;
- heritage and archaeology;
- hydrology and flooding;
- ecology;
- ground conditions;
- socio-economics and health;
- waste;
- lighting;
- utilities; and
- climate change.

The OPA will also include design principles, illustrative design information and information on phasing and delivery. It will set out planning submission requirements for reserved matters applications, including matters to be controlled by condition such as the Design Code.
A legal agreement will secure scheme benefits and mitigation such as affordable housing, transport and highway improvements, education, health and other community facilities, Biodiversity Net Gain and governance, management and maintenance arrangements.

The OPA will be the subject of further consultation with the local community, via the formal planning process and other events, to be confirmed.

Whether the outline planning application parameters accord with the principles of the Strategic Masterplan will be a material consideration in the determination of the application.

Phase Design Code

Once the outline planning application has been approved, and with it a set of planning conditions and a S106 agreement that secures the mitigation measures and benefits that the development will bring, the majority of the development will be the subject of a Design Code(s). These would set mandatory fixes and guidance for the development to ensure quality design is achieved. The Design Code(s) would identify principles to guide built form, green infrastructure, sustainability and access and movement, building on the strategic principles set out in the Strategic Masterplan and the subsequent outline planning application.

Reserved Matters Applications

Reserved matters applications would then be submitted for individual parcels of development or pieces of infrastructure, to seek approval of their detailed design. These applications would need to demonstrate compliance with all the tiers of design approval above them i.e. the Strategic Masterplan, the design parameters within the outline planning application and the Design Code. Only then will the main development be allowed to start on site and the growth of Baldock can begin.

davidlock.com

CABINET

18 MARCH 2025

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: BARKWAY AND NUTHAMPSTEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – EXAMINERS REPORT

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR DANIEL ALLEN, INTERMIN EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 To consider the examiner's report and the proposed modifications to the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan and to agree that officers make arrangements to conduct a referendum within the designated neighbourhood planning area for Barkway and Nuthampstead.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the Examiner's report for the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan should be noted.

2.2. That following the inclusion of the Examiner's proposed modifications to the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan, as set out in Appendix A, the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan is approved and it is approved to proceed to a referendum.

2.3. That the Counting Officer be instructed to conduct a referendum on the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan.

2.4. That subject to Recommendation 2.3 and the outcome of the referendum, the decision to "make" the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan be delegated to the Service Director – Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport, as previously agreed by Cabinet in July 2018 (Minute 21).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To progress the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan, enable a referendum to take place and if more than 50% of those voting in favour of the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan to "make" the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. There are a number of alternative options which have been considered:

- To propose additional modifications to the neighbourhood plan: The independent examiner's report sets out a number of modifications to the neighbourhood plan and it is considered that no further modifications, other than those, are necessary.

- To reject the examiner's proposed modifications; if the examiner's recommendations are not followed, the Parish Council as the qualifying body could request that the Secretary of State intervenes. Officers do not recommend this option given the recommendations of the examiner.

- The Parish Council, as the Qualifying Body, has a right to withdraw the neighbourhood plan at any time before the local planning authority decides on the examination report. However, the Parish Council has confirmed that it is content with the Examiners recommendations and wishes the neighbourhood plan to proceed to a referendum.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan has been subject to public consultation which is described in paragraph 7.3 below. Members have been kept informed of the progress of this neighbourhood plan through the Strategic Planning reports to Cabinet.

5.2. As this report is being considered as an urgent decision and therefore not subject to call-in, requires consultation with prescribed Members. The Chair of Council (and Vice Chair of Council) as well as the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were notified that the matter was to be considered as urgent, for the reasons as detailed in paragraph 8.8. In addition a notice of reason for urgency was published on 14 February 2025.

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. Barkway Parish Council and Nuthampstead Parish Meeting applied for the designation of the combined parish area as one neighbourhood planning area in April 2014. Consultation on the neighbourhood planning area was undertaken and the neighbourhood planning area designated at a Cabinet meeting on 5 August 2014.

7.2. Barkway Parish Council submitted their neighbourhood plan to North Herts Council on 22 April 2024. Consultation on the Proposed Submission Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 16) took place between 10 May and 25 June 2024.

7.3. A total of 55 representations were received, 4 objections, 8 supporting representations and 43 comments. The plan was then submitted for examination.

7.4. An independent examiner, Edward Cousins KC, was appointed by the Council in consultation with Barkway Parish Council and Nuthampstead Parish Meeting.

7.5. The role of the examiner is to assess whether a neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions and other matters set out in paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). Details about the basic conditions are set out in Part 2: The Statutory Framework of the examiner's report, as attached at Appendix A.

7.6. Following the examination, the examiner must make one of the following recommendations:

- The neighbourhood plan can proceed to a referendum on the basis it meets all the necessary legal requirements;
- The neighbourhood plan can proceed to a referendum subject to modifications; or
- The neighbourhood plan should not proceed to a referendum on the basis it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. The examination of the neighbourhood plan took place between October 2024 and January 2025 and was conducted by written representations, rather than a public hearing. During the examination, the examiner asked a number of clarification questions of both the District and the Parish Council. The responses to those questions of clarification are listed as one of the background papers to this report.

8.2. The examiner's report was issued on 16 January 2025, with the following recommendation: "I therefore recommend to NHDC that the Neighbourhood Plan, subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications as specified, should proceed to referendum".

8.3. The examiner has considered all of the policies and the supporting text in the neighbourhood plan. The examiner has set out a series of modifications which ensure that the neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions and that it can be used in determining planning applications and will provide a practical framework for decision making.

8.4. A schedule of the examiner's proposed modifications has been prepared which is attached as Appendix B. The Parish Council, as the Qualifying Body have confirmed that they are content to accept all of the Examiner's proposed modifications. There are a number of minor modifications proposed which the Examiner did not include in his proposed modifications, but these are limited to typographical and consequential numbering modifications and are noted in the schedule. The schedule of modifications has been prepared in consultation with the Parish Council. Overall, officers consider that the examiner's modifications all help to make the neighbourhood plan clear and one which can be used in determining planning applications.

8.5. The examiner states, that subject to the proposed modifications being made to the neighbourhood plan, he recommends that the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan can go forward to a referendum, as described in the second recommendation in paragraph 7.6 above.

8.6. As part of the examination process, the examiner must also consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood planning area to which it relates. In this case, the examiner considers that there is no reason to alter or extend the area for the referendum.

8.7. Once the decision has been made by the local planning authority to hold a referendum, the Neighbourhood Plan Referendum (NPR) must be held within 56 working days of the decision (or 65 days if the NPR is being combined with a scheduled election). The Referendum is the responsibility of the Counting Officer, who is the person designated as the Council's Returning Officer for local government elections in the area. If the local planning authority orders a Referendum this will be held on Thursday 1 May 2025.

8.8. For cost, efficiency, and resource reasons as well as for the ease of the residents, it is preferable to hold the Referendum on 1 May, alongside the scheduled Hertfordshire County Council elections. However, to do this the decision must be taken as an urgent decision and therefore not subject to call in. The reasons for this are due to the statutory deadlines for when the Information Sheet and the Notice of Referendum must be published (which if not considered urgent fall within the call in period and therefore not be able to be enacted. Meaning that the NPR will be held after 1 May).

8.9. For the Referendum to be successful, a majority of votes is needed, where more than 50% of those voting, vote in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan. The result is binding once it is declared, and the local planning authority must "make" the Neighbourhood Plan within 8 weeks of the referendum. Once the neighbourhood plan is "made", it will form part of the statutory Development Plan. Policies in the neighbourhood plan will be used in determining planning applications within the Barkway and Nuthampstead neighbourhood planning area (see also Paragraph 9.5 below).

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under the Terms of Reference for Cabinet Paragraph 5.6.18 of the Constitution states that the Cabinet should exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority except where functions are reserved by law to the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Service Director: Regulatory.

9.2. The Localism Act 2011 provided a new statutory regime for neighbourhood planning. The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) make provisions in relation to that new regime. It does, amongst other things, set out the Council's responsibility (as the Local Planning Authority) in assisting communities in the preparation of neighbourhood development areas, plans and order and to take plans through a process of examination and referendum.

9.3. At the point where the local planning authority makes the decision on whether the neighbourhood plan should proceed to referendum, it needs to be satisfied that the neighbourhood plan proposal has regard to national policy and guidance, contributes to sustainable development, is in general conformity with the strategic policy of the development plan for the area.

9.4. Regulations 2A and 18A of the Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012 prescribe the relevant time limits referred to in paragraphs 8.6 and 8.7 above respectively.

9.5. As a consequence of receiving the examiner's report for the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan, Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) provides that the local planning authority must have regard to a post examination draft neighbourhood plan, as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications within the parishes of Barkway and Nuthampstead.

9.6. It has been agreed with the Chair of Council and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the decision proposed is reasonable in all the circumstances and that it is being treated as a matter of urgency under the Council's Constitution 6.3.11 (b)(i).

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The cost of the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan examination has been met from the existing Neighbourhood Plan earmarked reserve (balance of £103,300 at February 2025), which came about from previous Government funding following the designation of neighbourhood planning areas and neighbourhood plan referenda. This reserve will also be used to fund the costs associated with the referendum, if the Council is not successful in claiming the £20k grant, which is explained below.

10.2. The local planning authority can claim £20,000 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) once a neighbourhood plan has gone through a successful examination process and a decision statement has been published detailing the intention to hold a referendum. This funding has been confirmed for the 2024/25 financial year. It is not known whether this financial support for neighbourhood plans will continue in future years. However, subject to agreeing the recommendations in this report and issuing the decision statement within the current financial year, a claim for the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan will be submitted.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. 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 and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2. There are no pertinent risks associated with this report. The recommendations provide the opportunity to hold the required referendum on 1 May 2025, thereby achieving the benefits (cost and resource efficiencies) of doing so alongside the scheduled County Council elections.

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. The Council, as “responsible authority”, determines if the neighbourhood plan is likely to have significant environmental effects. It was determined, in a Screening Determination, dated April 2024 that the neighbourhood plan would not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 Holding a referendum for the neighbourhood plan will involve the Electoral Services team in additional work in setting up and running the referendum.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A : Examiner’s report for the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan – January 2025

16.2 Appendix B : Schedule of the examiner’s proposed modifications and responses – March 2025

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Cabinet reports:

Barkway and Nuthampstead Joint Neighbourhood Planning Area – 5 August 2014 (Minute 36)

18.2 The following background papers are all available on the following webpage: Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan | North Herts Council

- Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan and Appendices – Proposed Submission Version – April 2024
- Independent Examiner's Clarification Notes – October and November 2024
- District and Parish Council responses to the Examiner's Clarification Note – November 2024
- Independent Examiner's Report for the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan – January 2025

18.3 Notice of Reasons for Urgency - https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-02/Urgency%20Notice%20-%20NPR%20-%20Barkway%20and%20Nuthampstead%20-%2018.03.25.pdf

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Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012

BARKWAY AND NUTHAMPSTEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2018 – 2031

INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION

Final Report to North Hertfordshire District Council

by Edward F Cousins BA, BL, LLM, Barrister

January 2025

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PART 1

INTRODUCTION

1. This Report comprises the findings of my examination ('*the Examination*') into the draft Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan ('*the Neighbourhood Plan*'). As required by Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 ('*the 2012 Regulations'*) the Neighbourhood Plan was duly submitted for consultation by Barkway Parish Council ('*the Parish Council'*). Subsequently, in accordance with Regulation 16 of the 2012 Regulations the Parish Council formally submitted the Neighbourhood Plan to North Hertfordshire District Council ('*NHDC*'). NHDC then held a consultation which concluded on 25th June 2024. I was then retained as the Examiner commencing 14th October 2024 and the documentation was made available to me by email to enable me to conduct the Examination. I have also accessed NHDC's website. I made an unaccompanied site visit in November 2024.

2. In my judgment, and subject to the modifications set out in this Report, I consider that the Neighbourhood Plan complies with the Basic Conditions and other statutory requirements. I therefore recommend to NHDC that the Neighbourhood Plan, subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications as specified, should proceed to referendum.

My appointment

3. I have been appointed by NHDC to conduct an independent examination into the Neighbourhood Plan. I am independent of the Parish Council and of NHDC. I do not have any interest in any land that may be the subject of the Neighbourhood Plan - nor do I have any professional conflicts of interest.

4. I am a Barrister in practice at Radcliffe Chambers, where additionally I act as a Mediator. I have also joined a set of Chambers in Manchester – Nine St John Street – as an Associate Member. Previously, I was the Principal Judge of the Land Registration Division of the Property Chamber and a Chancery barrister in practice in Lincoln's Inn. Currently I am a specialist property and planning lawyer, with particular expertise in

markets and fairs, including street trading; commons and town and village greens; manorial rights; mines and minerals; and land registration law and practice. I have wide experience examining neighbourhood development plans and, when necessary, conducting public hearings as part of the examination process. In addition to my membership of the Bar of England and Wales, I was also called to the Bar of Ireland at Trinity Term 2001, and I hold a Practising Certificate in Ireland, together with a Practising Certificate in Northern Ireland where I was called in October 2022.

PART 2

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Neighbourhood Planning

The Background

1. Neighbourhood planning is the process introduced by Parliament as enacted by the Localism Act 2011 ('*the 2011 Act*'). The intellectual purpose of neighbourhood planning is to seek to enfranchise those persons living and working in a community by providing the basis through which they can play a more active role in the process of deciding the future of their neighbourhood. It has been described as the ability: -

> '*to give to communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development they need.*'

2. Thus, the 2011 Act gave powers to parish councils to involve their communities in the creation of neighbourhood development plans in order to provide them with a greater say in planning matters. Parish councils are therefore able to play a role in the establishment of general planning policies for the development and use of land in their neighbourhoods. Examples of such involvement are directed to the siting, design and construction of new homes and offices, and the designation of local green space. The neighbourhood development plan sets a vision for the future for the area concerned. It can be detailed, or general, depending on the views of local people.

3. In order to ensure that the new process is workable and effective the 2011 Act introduced the requisite amendments into the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and the Planning and Compensation Act 2004 ('*the 2004 Ac*t').[1]

Qualifying Body

4. At the commencement of the Examination, I required Barkway Parish Council and Nuthampstead Parish Meeting to clarify which of the organisations was the qualifying

[1] The 1990 Act, ss. 61E to 61P, Sch. 4B (neighbourhood development orders); the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, ss. 38A to 38C (neighbourhood plans), as amended by the 2011 Act. These amendments variously came into force on subsequent days in 2012 and 2013 and were supplemented by detailed procedures provided in the 2012 and 2013 Regulations.

body. Given the evidence submitted to me as part of this Examination by NHDC, Barkway Parish Council and Nuthampstead Parish Meeting, I am satisfied that Barkway Parish Council is an appropriate '*Qualifying Body* 'as defined. Barkway Parish Council is authorised to act for that purpose by Nuthampstead Parish Meeting[2]. Barkway Parish Council is therefore entitled to submit to the local planning authority the Neighbourhood Plan as an essential prerequisite to it being '*made*.' Nuthampstead Parish Meeting has been engaged in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan through Joint Planning Committees and Steering Group Meetings. Additionally, both Barkway Parish Council and Nuthampstead Parish Meeting have independently approved the submission of the Neighbourhood Plan to NHDC.

Neighbourhood Plan Area

5. The first step towards producing a neighbourhood plan is for a parish council, or other qualifying body, to define a '*neighbourhood area*' for which it considers that a plan should be prepared and presented.[3] This is part of the process which that body is entitled to initiate for the purpose of requiring the local planning authority in England to make a neighbourhood development plan for the whole or any part of its area specified in the plan.[4] A '*neighbourhood development plan*' is a plan -

> *'.... which sets out policies (however expressed) in relation to the development and use of land in the whole or any part of a particular neighbourhood area*.'[5]

6. I note from the Neighbourhood Plan and NHDC's website that the Neighbourhood Plan area was designated and approved by NHDC on 5th August 2014.

7. The Basic Conditions Statement states that the Neighbourhood Plan Area incorporates the two parishes of Barkway and Nuthampstead. A plan showing the boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan Area is shown in the Neighbourhood Plan on page 6, at Figure 1.

8. For clarity and the avoidance of doubt, I propose a modification to para 1.2.2 of the Neighbourhood Plan to read

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2 See 1990 Act, s.61F(2)
3 See s 38A(1).
4 The 1990 Act, s. 61F(1), (2), applied by the 2004 Act, s. 38C(2)(a).
5 By virtue of 38A(2).

> 'Barkway Parish Council, with the support of Nuthampstead Parish Meeting, submitted the application for the Neighbourhood Plan area. The Neighbourhood Plan area was designated by NHDC on 5th August 2014. Barkway Parish Council is the relevant body for the Neighbourhood Plan. Nuthampstead Parish Meeting has endorsed Barkway Parish Council's role as Qualifying Body in the Neighbourhood Plan process'.

Public Consultation

9. Regulation 14 of the 2012 Regulations sets out the requirements for pre-submission consultation, and Schedule 1 thereto makes reference to the relevant consultation bodies. The Consultation Statement sets out the aim of the consultation activities.

10. The Consultation Statement accompanying the Neighbourhood Plan sets out the pre-submission consultation process. This refers to informal and formal consultation with the community and other stakeholders. This process included an open event in November 2013. The Parish Council also engaged with residents on specific policy areas via a questionnaire; the findings were explained at a public meeting, the date of which is not stated. The draft Neighbourhood Plan was produced in 2015 and went out to 'wider consultation'. It is not clear in the Consultation Statement the extent of that consultation or its impact upon the policies in the draft Neighbourhood Plan.

11. On 7th February 2019, a public meeting was attended by approximately 60 people. A Housing Needs Survey was completed in 2019. The Vision and Objectives were agreed following a public meeting on 29th May 2019 which included the opportunity to complete a feedback form. The policies were presented at a public meeting on 21st September 2019 together with consultation on the potential Local Green Spaces and Views. The Consultation Statement confirms that following the Regulation 14 consultation, letters were sent to owners of the Local Green Spaces, resulting in the reduction of the number of Local Green Spaces.

12. The Regulation 14 consultation period ran from 28th September until 23rd November 2020 together with a meeting event. Following my request at an early part of the Examination, a schedule detailing the complete list of Regulation 14 responses was submitted to me. The Parish Councils' assessment of the main issues is included in the Consultation Statement. I am clear that feedback gathered from the community and

stakeholders shaped subsequent iterations of the Neighbourhood Plan, refining its objectives, and strengthening its policies.

13. Additionally, the Consultation Statement reports that the Regulation 14 version of the Neighbourhood Plan was updated to reflect current legislation, government guidance and the North Herts District Plan. Three new policies were introduced at this time. As part of the Examination, NHDC has confirmed that it considers that there is no requirement for a further pre-submission consultation to be undertaken in respect of these additional policies.

14. The Neighbourhood Plan, and accompanying documents, was submitted to NHDC as required under Regulation 15 of the 2012 Regulations. In accordance with Regulation 16 of the 2012 Regulations, NHDC, as the relevant local planning authority, was required to publicise the Neighbourhood Plan proposal. The Regulation 16 consultation period was 10th May 2024 to 25th June 2024.

15. The consultations generated representations at the Regulation 16 consultations stage. These have been made available to me through NHDC's website and by email. I confirm that all representations on the Neighbourhood Plan received at the Regulation 16 stage have been considered when undertaking this examination. I have considered each of the representations made in reaching my conclusions on whether the Neighbourhood Plan has met the Basic Conditions. Where appropriate, I have made specific reference to the individual comments by the person or organisation.

16. Successful public consultation enables the Neighbourhood Plan to reflect the needs, views and priorities of the local community and help achieve consensus. I have already noted that the Consultation Statement includes a consultation event and engagement with the local community. I am satisfied that the consultation process, as corrected by the subsequent submissions, comply with the requirements for consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan.

THE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

The Detail

Referendum

17. The purpose of the referendum is to decide whether the draft plan should be '*made*,' subject to any changes recommended by the Examiner and accepted by the planning authority. If more than 50% of those voting, vote in favour of the plan, the local planning authority then is under a statutory '*to make the plan*'.

18. Once it comes into force, a neighbourhood development plan forms part of the development plan for the area to which it relates, together with the strategic policies in the adopted local plan, the "*saved*" policies of the relevant local plan, and any plans for minerals and waste disposal. Thereafter it forms an integral part of the policy framework that guides the local planning authority and the Planning Inspectorate, in making all planning decisions in the area.

19. This report includes a recommendation for the Neighbourhood Plan to proceed to Referendum, subject to the inclusion of the recommended modifications. The Plan should proceed to Referendum based upon the neighbourhood plan area, as defined.

Compliance with provision made by or under sections 38A and 38B of the 2004 Act

Section 38A – Meaning of "neighbourhood development plan"

20. Section 38A of the 2004 Act (as amended) provides that any '*qualifying body*' is entitled to initiate a process for the purpose of requiring a local planning authority in England to make a neighbourhood development plan. As noted above, Barkway Parish Council is a Qualifying Bod*y* by virtue of the provisions of 38A(12). Further, as stated above, NHDC is the local planning authority for the purpose of the 2004 Act.

21. Section 38A(2) requires the neighbourhood development plan only to contain policies relating to the development and use of land lying in the neighbourhood area. The policies are set out in Section 4 of the Neighbourhood Plan. I should state at this stage that I am satisfied that the Policies do relate to the use and development of land within the neighbourhood area, and not to extraneous matters.

22. By Section 38(3)(c) of the 2004 Act, a neighbourhood development plan that has been made in relation to an area forms part of the statutory development plan, for the purpose of guiding town and country planning decisions. Under Section 38(6) there is a presumption in favour of determining planning applications in accordance with the neighbourhood development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Section 38B

23. Section 38B of the 2004 Act provides as follows:

> *'38B Provision that may be made by neighbourhood development plans*
> *(1) A neighbourhood development plan—*
> *(a) must specify the period for which it is to have effect,*
> *(b) may not include provision about development that is excluded development, and*
> *(c) may not relate to more than one neighbourhood area.*
>
> *(2) Only one neighbourhood development plan may be made for each neighbourhood area.*
>
> *(3) If to any extent a policy set out in a neighbourhood development plan conflicts with any other statement or information in the plan, the conflict must be resolved in favour of the policy.*
>
> *(4) Regulations made by the Secretary of State may make provision—*
> *(a) restricting the provision that may be included in neighbourhood development plans about the use of land,*
> *(b) requiring neighbourhood development plans to include such matters as are prescribed in the regulations, and*
> *(c) prescribing the form of neighbourhood development plans.*
>
> *(5) A local planning authority must publish each neighbourhood development plan that they make in such manner as may be prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State.*
>
> *(6) Section 61K of the principal Act (meaning of "excluded development") is to apply for the purposes of subsection (1)(b).'*

24. Section 61K provides, so far as is material, as follows: -

> *'61K Meaning of "excluded development"*
> *The following development is excluded development for the purposes of section 61J—*

(a) development that consists of a county matter within paragraph 1(1)(a) to (h) of Schedule 1,

(b) development that consists of the carrying out of any operation, or class of operation, prescribed under paragraph 1(j) of that Schedule (waste development) but that does not consist of development of a prescribed description,

(c) development that falls within Annex 1 to Council Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (as amended from time to time),[6]

(d) development that consists (whether wholly or partly) of a nationally significant infrastructure project (within the meaning of the Planning Act 2008).'

25. I should state at this stage that I am satisfied that the Neighbourhood Plan clearly specifies the period for which it is to have effect (2018-2031); it does not include '*excluded development*'; and it is the only neighbourhood plan for the area.

26. The 2012 Regulations are made under section 38B of the 2004 Act. These prescribe detailed requirements for neighbourhood plan proposals and how they are to be consulted upon, publicised, and submitted.

What must the Examiner examine?

27. Paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act, as modified by section 38C (5) of the 2004 Act, requires the examiner to consider the following:

- whether the draft plan meets the Basic Conditions. These are defined at sub-paragraph (2);
- whether it complies with the provision made by or under sections 38A and 38B of the 2004 Act; and
- whether the area for any referendum should extend beyond the neighbourhood area to which the draft plan relates; and

[6] This must now be taken to refer to codifying Directive 2011/92/EU. This repealed and re-enacted Directive 85/337/EEC and its amending instruments. It states at Article 14 that references to the repealed directive are to be construed as references to the new directive as a matter of consistent interpretation and under the principle of construction codified in relation to domestic law by s.17(2)(a) of the Interpretation Act 1978.

- whether the draft plan is compatible with '*the Convention rights*,' as defined by the Human Rights Act 1998[7].

28. Paragraph 11(2) of Schedule 4B, as modified by section 38C(5)(d) of the 2004 Act provides that:

> *'(2) A draft [plan] meets the basic conditions if—*
> *(a) having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, it is appropriate to make the [plan],*
> *(b)…….*
> *(c)…….*
> *(d) the making of the [plan] contributes to the achievement of sustainable development,*
> *(e) the making of the [plan] is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority (or any part of that area),*
> *(f) the making of the [plan] does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations, and*
> *(g) prescribed conditions are met in relation to the [plan] and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the [plan]"*

29. Basic Conditions (b) and (c), relating to the built heritage, apply to the examination of proposed neighbourhood development orders, but not to that of neighbourhood development plans.

30. Regulations 32 and paragraph 1 of Schedule 2 of the General Regulations, has prescribed a further condition for the purpose of paragraph 8(2)(g) of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act, as follows -

> *'[the] making of the neighbourhood development plan is not likely to have a significant effect on a European site (as defined in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2012) or a European offshore marine site (as defined in the Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 2007) (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects).'*

---

[7] Section 1 of the 1998 Act defines these as the rights and fundamental freedoms set out in Articles 2 to 12 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Articles 1 to 3 of the First Protocol to the Convention, and Article 1 of the Thirteenth Protocol, as read with Articles 16 to 18 of the Convention.

31. Since 28th December 2018, the General Regulations, Schedule 2 paragraph 1, has prescribed a further Basic Condition, namely:

> '*In relation to the examination of neighbourhood development plans the following Basic Condition is prescribed for the purpose of paragraph 8(2)(g) of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act—*
>
> *The making of the neighbourhood development plan does not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.'*

32. It is to be noted that if a proposed neighbourhood development plan is to be made it must meet all of the Basic Conditions specified in paragraph 8(2) - not just some of them.

33. Further, and importantly, the examination process is not intended to put the Examiner into the shoes of the '*qualifying body*' so as to usurp its function and re-make its decisions. The statutory remit of the Examiner is limited.

34. Thus, the examination process is less intrusive than that required in respect of a local development plan document. For instance:

> *'the remit of an examiner dealing with a neighbourhood plan does not include the requirement to consider whether that plan is 'sound' (as in section 20(5)(b) of the 2004 Act), so the requirements of 'soundness' contained in paragraph 182 of the NPPF do not apply to a neighbourhood plan. The Examiner of a neighbourhood plan does not consider whether that plan is 'justified' in the sense used in paragraph 182 of the NPPF. In other words, the Examiner does not have to consider whether a draft policy is the 'most appropriate strategy' compared against alternatives, nor is it for him to judge whether it is supported by a 'proportionate evidence base.'*
>
> - *Whereas under paragraph 182 of the NPPF a local plan needs to be "consistent with national policy" an examiner of a neighbourhood plan has a discretion to determine whether it is appropriate that the plan should proceed having regard to national policy.*
>
> - *The basic condition only requires the examiner to consider whether the draft neighbourhood plan as a whole is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the adopted Development Plan taken together. I am not charged with determining in respect of each particular policy or element whether there is a tension between the local and neighbourhood plans, and if there is such tension in*

places, that may not be determinative of the overall question of general conformity.'[8]

35. The concept of '*soundness*,' referred to by Holgate J in Maynard refers to the text in a former edition of the NPPF. This text has now been superseded in the new edition of the NPPF published in December 2024. This retains a section now referred to as '*Examining plans*' and refers to the same four requirements for 'soundness.' Paragraphs 36 and 37 of the latest edition of the NPPF contains a separate reference to the examination process, notably that neighbourhood plans must meet the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements before they can come into force which '… *are tested through an independent examination before the neighbourhood plan may proceed to referendum*.'

36. Thus, although the Examiner has a general discretion whether to recommend modification to bring the neighbourhood plan into line with national policy if he finds points of departure, it is necessary to bear in mind that it would normally be expected that appeal decisions would follow current national policy where it conflicts with a local or neighbourhood plan. A neighbourhood plan that is at odds with national policy is in danger of becoming otiose. Unless the Examiner considers that there is evidence demonstrating good reason to depart from national policy in the neighbourhood, he would be expected to recommend that it be followed.

37. In essence, therefore, the role of the Examiner is to assess whether the draft plan is compliant with the Basic Conditions and other legal requirements. If in the event that the draft plan does not comply with the various statutory requirements, the Examiner then is obliged to consider whether it can be modified so that it does so comply. Other legal requirements include consideration of the NPPF and the NPPG.

38. The NPPF was updated on 12 December 2024. Paragraph 239 of the NPPF 2024 sets out transitional arrangements for plan-making. Policies in the updated Framework will apply for the purpose of preparing neighbourhood plans from 12 March 2025 unless a

[8] See *R(Maynard) v Chiltern DC* [2015] EWHC 3817 (Admin) at [13] per Holgate J. see also the judgment of Holgate J in *R (Crownhall Estates Limited) v Chichester DC* (Admin) – 21 January 2016 where he makes further comments as to the concept of '*soundness*' [29]. See also paragraph 36 of the latest version of the NPPF where the '*soundness*' of Neighbourhood Plans is discussed.

neighbourhood plan proposal has been submitted to the local planning authority under Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) on or before the 12 March 2025.

39. On this basis, I have had regard to national policies and advice contained in the 2023 version of the NPPF. As the sections on the Legal and Statutory Frameworks draw extensively on the provisions contained in both the NPPF and the NPPG, no further reference will be made to either document at this stage.

The Report

40. The Examiner then produces a report, which contains one of three possible recommendations, namely, whether:

> *' (a) the draft plan is to be submitted to a referendum;*
> *(b) the modifications specified in the report are to be made to the draft plan, and that the draft plan as modified is submitted to a referendum; or*
> *(c) the proposal for a plan is to be refused.'*[9]

41. The recommended modifications can only be those that the Examiner feels are necessary to ensure that the draft plan complies with the Basic Conditions and the other relevant statutory requirements or are needed for the purpose of correcting errors. If the changes are substantial, then they may have to be the subject of a further round of consultation.

42. The further requirements of the Examiner, as defined in the 2012 Regulations, include considering whether the draft plan complies with the definition of a neighbourhood plan, and the provisions that can be made by a neighbourhood plan; and whether the draft plan is compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. The Examiner may also make recommendations on whether the neighbourhood plan area for referendum should extend beyond the neighbourhood plan boundaries. I have determined in paragraph 19 above that the referendum should not extend beyond the neighbourhood plan boundaries.

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[9] 1990 Act, Sch 4B, para 10(2), applied by the 2004 Act, s 38A(3).

43. In this Report, I shall first consider address the European dimension and the question of human rights. I shall then consider the Basic Conditions, and then formal compliance with the provisions contained within sections 38A and 38B of the 2004 Act. Finally, I shall make recommendations as to the modification or amendment of the draft Policies. The modifications or amendments do not include minor updates or consequential changes to the contents and where necessary, Policy, paragraph, and page numbering. It is recommended that this is undertaken by NHDC, the Parish Council, and Parish Meeting where necessary.

European Law obligations

Strategic Environmental Assessment

44. I am still required to check that the making of the Neighbourhood Plan does not breach EU obligations. This means that I must consider whether there has been compliance with the SEA Directive and SEA Regulations.

45. Directive 2001/42/EC - known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive - on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment ('the SEA') - provides by Article 3(2) that an environmental assessment is to be carried out for plans prepared for town and country planning or land use. These set a framework for development consent of certain projects, or which in view of the likely effect on protected sites, have been determined to require assessment under the Habitats Directive. Where a neighbourhood plan determines the use of small areas at local level and makes minor modifications to other town and country planning or land use plans, they require such assessment only where Member States determine that they are likely to have significant environmental effects (by virtue of article 3(3)).

46. NHDC undertook a screening assessment of the draft Neighbourhood Plan in April 2024, to determine whether a SEA of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan should be screened into the SEA process, informed by consultation with the prescribed statutory consultees. The report concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan does not require a SEA because 'there are no sites allocated for development; the neighbourhood plan focuses on protecting the character of the village and its environment; there are no proposals in the neighbourhood plan which are likely to have significant environmental effects on the natural and heritage features in the neighbourhood planning areas; and the

neighbourhood plan does not seek to change the outcomes of the development proposals in the Local Plan to the extent that it might lead to substantively different effects to those which have already assessed'.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

47. Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive[10] requires that any plan which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a protected site but is likely to have a significant effect thereon (meaning that such an effect cannot be excluded beyond reasonable scientific doubt on the basis of objective information), must not be the subject of agreement unless it has been subject to an '*appropriate assessment of the implications for the site*'. Further it must have been ascertained that it will '*not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned*.' If a neighbourhood development plan is assessed and found to cause harm to the integrity of a protected site, Article 6(4) enumerates some conditions under which a plan may exceptionally be approved where the plan must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

48. Those obligations have been transposed into national law by Regulations 102, 102A and 103 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 ('the *Habitats Regulations*'). Regulation 102 states:

> *'(1) Where a land use plan—*
> *(a) is likely to have a significant effect on a European site or a European offshore marine site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects), and*
> *(b) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site,*
> *the plan-making authority for that plan must, before the plan is given effect, make an appropriate assessment of the implications for the site in view of that site's conservation objectives.'*
>
> *(4) In the light of the conclusions of the assessment, and subject to regulation 103 (considerations of overriding public interest), the plan-making authority…*
> *must give effect to the land use plan only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site…'*

[10] Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992.

Regulation 102A states:

> '*A qualifying body which submits a proposal for a neighbourhood development plan must provide such information as the competent authority may reasonably require for the purposes of the assessment under regulation 102 or to enable them to determine whether that assessment is required*.'

49. Regulation 107(1) of the Habitats Regulations then sets out definitions. '*Land-use plan*' is defined to include a neighbourhood development plan. '*Plan-making authority*' is defined to mean '*the local planning authority when exercising powers under Schedule 4B to the TCPA 1990 (as applied by section 38A (3) of the 2004 Planning Act)*'. The term '*competent authority*' is not defined by Regulation 107, but by Regulation 7 it includes (but not be limited to) a '*public body of any description or person holding a public office*'. It includes local authorities and parish councils.

50. Case law establishes that plans cannot be approved in reliance upon the duty to assess the planned projects as and when they come forward, and only approve them at that stage if found not to harm any protected site.[11] Consequently, for instance, the fact that there may be '*boiler plate*' language in the statutory development plan stating that projects cannot be approved if they would harm a protected site, cannot itself be sufficient to enable the plan to be approved without assessment, where it allocates or encourages particular development that is liable to harm a protected site.

51. There is no requirement for any formal decision to be made under the Habitats Regulations whether or not an '*appropriate assessment*' has been required. However, the Parish Council will be in breach of Regulation 102 of the Habitats Regulations if in fact a plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site and has not been assessed.

52. The Basic Conditions Statement states that a Habitats Regulation Assessment screening is not required because the Neighbourhood Plan does not propose any development allocations which are additional or alternate to the sites proposed in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031. Following a request at an early part of the Examination, NHDC confirmed that a HRA screening assessment was completed on

[11] Case C-6/04, *Commission v UK* [2006] Env. L.R. 29 at [51]-[56].

17th January 2024. It confirms that the Neighbourhood Plan is not considered to have the potential to cause a likely significant adverse effect on a European site and no further action is required.

Human Rights

53. The Basic Conditions Statement comments that the Neighbourhood Plan is compatible with human rights legislation. In my view, the Neighbourhood Plan is not likely to lead to increased inequalities or discrimination in the plan area. I have identified that some of the policies are identified as having positive impacts on people who may experience disadvantage by virtue of their age or disability.

PART 3

THE EXAMINATION

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - CHAPTER 2
VISION AND OBJECTIVES

1. Section 2 of the Neighbourhood Plan sets out the community's Vision and objectives. This Vision seeks to ensure that the two villages thrive and meet the housing needs of the community. This is to be supported by respecting and where possible preserving the history prevalent in the built and natural environment.

2. The progression from Issues to Vision and Objectives to Policies is an important part of the provision of the requisite evidence in support of the Neighbourhood Plan as required in the NPPG.

3. The Neighbourhood Plan lists 10 distinct objectives which seek positively to translate and support the vision through to policies. To ensure that the objectives are positive, in accordance with the requirements of NPPF, and reflect the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan, I propose modifications which seek to ensure that the vision's positive approach is reflected in the objectives. I have also recommended modifications for clarity.

4. I am satisfied that the Vision Statement and Strategic Objectives set out in Chapter 2 of the Neighbourhood Plan reflect the aspirations of the community as referred to in the Consultation Document. Its vision and strategic objectives, taken as a whole, seek to support the sustainable growth of the parish whilst at the same time safeguarding the rural character of the village, the qualities of its environment and would contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. I am also satisfied that subject to the adoption of the recommended modifications, set out below, the Vision Statement and the ten Strategic Objectives will meet the Basic Conditions. I recommend the following modifications:

Objective 2 - To preserve or enhance the character, appearance, and settings of all designated and non-designated heritage assets.

Objective 3: To promote biodiversity by protecting valued green spaces within the parish and to support ~~ecosystem services by~~ ~~new builds~~ proposals that are as ecofriendly as possible

Objective 10: To ~~preserve~~ ensure the important views within and around the parish continue to be enjoyed.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - CHAPTER 3
PLAN POLICIES MAP

5. Chapter 3 identifies the Neighbourhood Plan area with each relevant policy depicted on a 1:10,500 scale plan. The supporting text acknowledges that it is difficult to see the policy details on the policies map and refers to an A1 plan on the Parish Council's website. To avoid the potential of different versions of the policy maps being made in separate locations, I propose modifications in section 3, page 15, to delete the reference to the online parish map. Additionally, it is essential that decision makers and stakeholders can accurately identify the areas to which a policy designation applies. NPPG advises that Neighbourhood Plan should be precise. The current maps are ambiguous and confusing and therefore accurate and readable policy maps must be included in the Neighbourhood Plan. The District Council has also highlighted that the labels within the maps are unclear. I recognise that such mapping may incur additional costs. However, I recommend that modifications are made for essential clarity.

Delete sentence: ~~It is not possible to clearly see the detail within Barkway village on an A4 page. An A1 PDF version of the Policies Map can be viewed on the Neighbourhood Plan page of Barkway Parish Council website.~~

Replace deleted sentence with: The details of the policy designations are shown in Figure 4: Barkway Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map and Figure 5: Policies Map Detail of Barkway village. Further details of the

Local Green Spaces, Non-designated Heritage Assets and Important Views can be found in the relevant policies and Appendices.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 must be revised to ensure that the relevant policy areas are accurately and unambiguously defined. The maps must be readable and produced at a scale to ensure that all labels and policy areas can be clearly identified.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - CHAPTER 4
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN POLICIES

Format and Content

6. The construction and presentation of the policies within the Submission Version of the Plan is in general clear and comprehensible.

7. The supporting text to the policies, in some cases, provides limited information, evidence and justification for the detail included within the policy. It is sometimes unclear as to the evidence on which the proposed policy relies. NPPG advises (amongst other things) that policies in Neighbourhood Plans should be '*concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence*'. Furthermore, policies should be distinct to reflect and respond to the unique characteristics and planning context of the specific Neighbourhood Plan area for which it has been prepared. Where the underpinning evidence is lacking, not up to date or not robust, I recommend modifications to the relevant policy.

8. In addition, there is recurring repetition of policies included either within national or Local Plan policy. Policies must serve a clear purpose. Therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan should avoid unnecessary duplication of policies that apply to a particular area. This includes repetition of national policy or references to other policies in the Neighbourhood Plan. In accordance with national guidance, where this repetition occurs, the policy is proposed to be modified to ensure that the Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions.

9. The Neighbourhood Plan is not '*permitting*' development and there are other material considerations that the Local Planning Authority will need to have regard to in the decision making process. Policies should provide a positive planning context in which decisions by the Local Planning Authority are made. The phrase '*permitted*' is recommended to be modified to '*supported*' in all cases. The term '*must*' in policy must be used exceptionally as it does not provide the flexibility required by national policy. I do not repeat these explanations in the Report.

Policy BN H1 Affordable Housing

10. The opening paragraph to this chapter sets out the current spatial strategy for Barkway, the pipeline housing supply and a reference to paragraph 14b of the NPPF. As identified by NHDC, the opening paragraph refers to Barkway and not to Nuthampstead.

11. The Housing Development Strategy is established by Local Plan Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution. It states that at least 13,000 new homes are to be provided across the district between 2011 to 2031. The policy states that approximately 13% of the total housing provision is to be delivered in 5 villages which includes Barkway (a figure of 208 homes is stated in brackets). The implications of the figure in brackets are made clear in Local Plan footnote 33. It states: '*The figures shown in this policy for individual settlements are the total of planned, permitted and completed development for the period 2011-2031. These figures are not a target and do not necessarily represent the maximum number of new homes that will be built.*' Barkway is a focus for development in the rural east of the district. Local Plan policy SP2 also identifies Nuthampstead as a category C settlement where limited affordable housing and facilities for local community needs will be allowed. For accuracy and clarity, I recommend modifications to reflect the adopted spatial strategy for both Barkway and Nuthampstead.

12. The District Council has not provided an indicative housing figure for the neighbourhood plan area.[12] NPPF at paragraph 14b states that where the Neighbourhood Plan contains policies and allocations to meet its identified housing requirement it may benefit from the additional protections offered by national policy.

[12] see paragraph 66 NPPF.

As NHDC has not provided an indicative housing figure, it is inappropriate for the Neighbourhood Plan to suggest that the Neighbourhood Plan has met its identified housing requirement, as set out in paragraph 66 and 67 of NPPF. Policy SP2 is clear that the figure of 208 dwellings for Barkway is not a target. Therefore, to ensure that the supporting text is accurate, in general conformity with strategic Local Plan policy SP2 and does not misrepresent the provisions of NPPF paragraph 14b, I recommend modifications.

13. Local Plan Policy HS2: Affordable housing confirms that 65% of affordable housing provision will be rented and 35% will comprise 'other forms of affordable housing'. The policy advises that the housing needs will be identified by the 'housing register data, Neighbourhood Plans, and settlement of parish level surveys.'

14. In respect of the Neighbourhood Plan, the Barkway and Nuthampstead Housing Needs Survey (2019) is relevant and adds a distinctive layer beyond that provided for in Local Plan policies. It highlights the need for 1 and 2 bedroom accommodation for shared ownership or rent. This includes sheltered accommodation for older people and bungalows. It also concludes that the greatest need is for shared ownership and could include starter homes for young people.

15. To ensure that the policy provides for affordable housing for rent and 'ownership' in conformity with Local Plan Policy HS2; to align with Local Plan Policy HS3: Housing Mix; to bring the clarity required by the NPPF, to avoid an unnecessary overlap with local planning policies and to provide the clarity required by decision makers, I recommend the following modifications:

> Policy BN H1 Affordable Housing
> Affordable homes should include a mix of ~~ownerships~~ sizes and tenures and ~~support~~ include the provision for sheltered, ~~adapted~~ adaptable and bungalow units~~, and a range of sizes - but~~ supporting the ~~locally identified~~ housing need identified in ~~the~~ an up to date Housing Needs Survey or ~~and~~ Strategic Housing Market Assessment. ~~Community-led housing and self-build schemes could be an option to provide for the need for affordable homes.~~

Amend paragraph 4.1.1 - The Neighbourhood Plan does not contain housing site allocations. ~~and is not required to in the Local Plan.~~ The Housing Development Strategy for Barkway and Nuthampstead is established by Local Plan Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution. The strategy states that at least 13,000 new homes are to be provided across the district between 2011 to 2031. Approximately 13% of the total number of homes required is to be delivered in 5 villages which includes Barkway. The adopted NHLP includes two site allocations (policies BK2 and BK3) for a total of approximately 160 homes in Barkway. This will represent an increase of over 40% in the number of homes in Barkway ~~the village~~ since ~~the~~ 2021 ~~census)~~. ~~The number of housing completions and planning permission granted in Barkway since 2011 accounts for an additional 57 homes.~~ Based upon NHDC monitoring data, the total allocated, completed and homes with planning permission in Barkway since 2011 is 224 ~~therefore 217~~, representing a 74% increase in the number of homes in Barkway.

Amend as follows after 4.1.1 - Nuthampstead is defined as a category C settlement in Local Plan policy SP2, where limited affordable housing and facilities for local community needs will be allowed. ~~For the purposes of NPPF, paragraph 14 b) the housing needs of Barkway village have therefore been met for the life of the Neighbourhood Plan.~~

At the end of paragraph 4.1.8 add: Community-led housing and self-build schemes will be supported where such development provides the need for affordable homes.

Policy BN H2 Design and Layout

16. The submission documents include the Barkway and Nuthampstead Design Codes and Guidance 2024. The guidance establishes plan area design guidelines and codes that aim to ensure that any potential development within the Neighbourhood Plan area

follows good design practice and contributes to a sustainable and thriving community. Such an approach aligns with the Design principles set out in national policy.

17. The policy as drafted does not provide the clarity needed for decision makers nor reflect the conclusions of the Design Guidance and Codes. As an example, Part h is contrary to the advice contained in the Design Code, particularly in respect of the Conservation Area Character Area, which highlights that soft boundary treatments degrade enclosure levels and it is important for the character of the area to retain strong enclosure and use characterful boundary treatments. I propose modifications to the policy to ensure consistency with the Design Codes and Guidance, in part by including reference to the document itself in the policy, is positively worded and to provide sufficient clarity and guidance to decision makers as required by national policy. NHDC comment that an additional criterion should be added to ensure development is within the settlement boundary. I am satisfied that the Neighbourhood Plan should not seek to rehearse the existing spatial strategy set out in the Local Plan.

18. I propose modifications as follows:

Amend policy BN H2 to read:

A proposal for ~~residential~~ development~~, including a redevelopment,~~ will be ~~permitted~~ supported provided that it demonstrates that it is guided by the principles set out in the Barkway and Nuthampstead Design Codes and Guidance 2024 ~~all of~~ and the following design criteria are met:

a) It is in keeping with existing local architectural styles ~~(other than unsympathetic 20th century infill~~ so as to contribute to local distinctiveness;

b) It respects and enhances local character with a sufficient variety of styles and heights~~. Preferred styles in the conservation area include timber framing, pargetted walls, thatch, flint and red brick (for more detail see Barkway and Nuthampstead Design Codes and Guidance 2024)~~. Building heights will be no more than three-and-a-half storeys. Good modern design will be acceptable ~~in some cases~~;

c) ~~Development is in proportion to surrounding buildings, especially in terms of~~ The principal elevations should ~~preserving~~ reflect traditional

fenestration details such as ratios of doors and windows ~~to the total frontage area~~;

d) Preferred styles in the Conservation Area include timber framing, pargetted walls, thatch, flint, and red brick. Brickwork, including replacement brickwork should blend in with surrounding walling in both colour and texture;

e) It does not ~~lead to the loss of~~ have a significant adverse impact upon the amenity ~~for~~ of neighbouring users through the loss of privacy, loss of light or visual intrusion;

f) Where appropriate to the scale, location or type of development, the Local Planning Authority agrees a Construction Scheme that safeguards the amenities of nearby residents ~~will be protected~~ during the construction phase;

g) ~~It respects the natural contours of a site while,~~ Where ~~possible~~ appropriate to the scale, location, and type of development, sensitively incorporates~~ing~~ natural features such as trees, hedges, and ponds within the site;

h) ~~Solid boundaries such as fences should be avoided in front gardens to maintain the open feel of the village~~;

i) It creates safe, accessible, and well-connected ~~environments~~ pedestrian and cycle routes that meet the needs of users;

j) All public areas resulting from new development should be designed ~~proposals must be visible and overlooked~~ in accordance with good practice set out in Secured by Design ~~in order~~ to create an environment that feels safe.

Make a minor amendment to paragraph 4.1.12 to amend the reference from BN H2 to BN H3.

Policy BN H3 Sustainable Construction

19. The policy includes a list of far reaching and detailed criteria which seek to ensure sustainable construction for residential development. Although I acknowledge and recognise the key aspirations to secure higher standards of sustainable construction to move to a lower carbon future, the policy criteria often rehearse existing planning

policy; duplicate advice contained in Building Regulations; repeat other Neighbourhood Plan policies; use outdated standards or do not include robust evidence to demonstrate that a distinct and separate approach is required in the Neighbourhood Plan area. I deal with each of the criteria in turn.

20. Local Plan Policy HS5: Accessible and Adaptable housing makes provision for major residential development to contribute to M4(2) and M4(3) accessible and adaptable standards. Policy BN H3 as written does not provide sufficient clarity to decision makers to determine whether a new dwelling would satisfy the policy requirements to be flexible and adaptable and the proportion. The policy is not supported by evidence which demonstrates that further provision is required over and above that required by Local Plan policy HS5.

21. It is not clear what type or amount of 'smart technology' would satisfy the requirements of part b and therefore the policy is not clear to decision makers. I note NHDC's concerns with regard to the cost implications and how such schemes may be implemented.

22. Part c seeks to include provisions which are included in statutory guidance provided in Building Regulations covering fire safety matters within and around buildings. I have no evidence to justify requirements beyond this statutory requirement.

23. The Code for Sustainable Homes was withdrawn by the Government in 2015 whilst some of the standards were included in Building Regulations. I note NHDC suggests that the policy simply refers to heat pumps. However, I am of the view that by using the term 'including' in the policy it allows flexibility required by national policy.

24. Part e – Local Plan policy T2: Parking requires minimum standards set out in Appendix 4. Appendix 4 to the Local Plan includes minimum cycle parking standards. It states: '*provision of 1 secure, covered cycle space per dwelling. None if garage or secure area provided within the curtilage of the dwelling*'. I have no evidence to demonstrate that this policy is not appropriate.

25. Local Plan policy NE8: Sustainable drainage systems require development to reduce the risk of surface water flooding and to ensure that drainage solutions follow the SuDs hierarchy. The supporting text to the Local Plan notes the impact of impermeable surfaces can have on preventing rainwater soaking naturally into the ground and generate additional rainwater runoff. The policy needs to provide flexibility to provide an appropriate solution to site specific conditions. I note the comments by Anglian Water to improve water efficiency and support for measures that address surface water run-off. The policy seeks to enable water conservation and SuDS. I am not required to amend the policy further to meet the Basic Conditions.

26. Local Plan Policy NE11 and its supporting text addresses the issue of Source Protection Zones. It states that certain new activities need to be deterred in sensitive areas based on their intrinsic hazard to sensitive receptors (e.g. Source Protection Zones). Close to sensitive receptors a precautionary approach is likely to be taken even where the risk of failure is low as the consequences may be serious or irreversible. It is not clear from the evidence in the Neighbourhood Plan why such an approach is only appropriate to construction work and as such I consider that the Neighbourhood Plan policy could undermine the approach set out in Policy NE11.

27. I recommend modifications in respect of policy BN H3 Sustainable Construction:

> A proposal for residential development~~, including a redevelopment,~~ will be ~~permitted~~ supported where ~~provided all of~~ the following criteria ~~for sustainable construction~~ are met:
>
> ~~a) Housing should be designed with flexible, adaptable spaces, including for people with mobility problems;~~
>
> ~~b) Social housing should include homes fitted with smart technology to support people with disabilities, including dementia, in support of the aspiration of Barkway and Nuthampstead to be dementia friendly villages;~~
>
> ~~c) The incorporation of best practice fire suppressant technologies to prevent damage and injury from fire will be encouraged;~~
>
> ~~d~~a) ~~The~~ incorporation of micro-energy schemes (including ground source heat pumps, heat exchange systems, solar panels, and emerging

green technology~~), in new homes~~. ~~New homes to be designed and constructed to achieve a minimum level of energy performance set at Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, where this is viable~~;

~~e) Secure cycle storage will be included for all homes to encourage sustainable travel;~~

~~f~~b) The inclusion of facilities to enable water conservation, including consideration of grey water harvesting;

~~g~~c) Proposals for residential development will provide adequate storage for bins and recycling;

d~~h~~) ~~All~~ Where required to address surface water flood risk, new hard standings will be constructed of ~~locally~~ appropriate permeable materials ~~such as stone or brick paving, hoggin and gravel~~;

i) Development will include Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) incorporating storage for natural run-off and run-off from new development. Multi-use above ground SuDs will be encouraged. ~~Funding management and maintenance plans should be secured at the earliest stage~~;

~~j) Construction work must be carried out in accordance with relevant standards and best practice to ensure protection of the groundwater Source Protection Zone~~.

Policy BN H4 Design Codes

28. The policy states that all development should be assessed against the Barkway and Nuthampstead Design Guidance and Code 2024.

29. The Design Guidance and Code is referenced in the policy and is included as an Appendix to the Neighbourhood Plan. The document did not form part of the Regulation 14 consultation and I am not aware that a separate consultation was completed by AECOM during its preparation. I accept that a design led approach should be taken for all proposals, guided by the Design Guidance and Codes. Given the proposed modifications above, the policy duplicates the provisions in Policy BN H2.

30. I recommend modifications to delete this policy and include the supporting text (paragraphs 4.1.15 to 4.1.17) after policy BN H2.

Policy BN H5 Framework for BK3

31. The land identified as BK3 is allocated in the Local Plan. The Local Plan policy includes criteria which are to be addressed through the design of the development. The site also has the benefit of outline planning permission together with an associated S106 agreement and planning obligations. I have reviewed the planning officer's report, the decision notice and the S106 agreement. I note the objection from The Gardens Trust which state that the allocation is within the setting of two important landscape parks and should not be developed. The Neighbourhood Plan should be in accordance with the strategic policies in the Local Plan to satisfy the Basic Conditions. The Neighbourhood Plan would fail to meet the Basic Conditions if it proposed to delete this housing allocation.

32. I recognise and support the Parish Councils' aspirations to ensure that the development is sustainable, reflects the distinctive character of the village and seeks to address the constraints and opportunities presented on the site. Many of the criteria seek to amplify the criteria set out in the Local Plan, the planning permission and address the issues that will be considered as part of the reserved matters applications whilst also taking on board the guidance contained within the Barkway and Nuthampstead Design Guidance and Codes.

33. The District Council has clarified that a contribution for sustainable transport was secured through the S106 agreement which is to be used for the provision and improvement of bus stops; a bus service that runs between Buntingford and Royston via Barkway and public transport initiatives such as Demand Responsive Transport services to encourage less dependence on private cars. Financial contributions to improve walking and bus access between Barkway and Nuthampstead were not secured through the S106 agreement. As such contributions would not be addressed through the reserved matters application process and I have no evidence before me to demonstrate that the financial requirement is necessary or robust to make the development acceptable. I have made the appropriate amendments to ensure the policy satisfies the Basic Conditions.

34. The District Council has raised concerns about the expectation that green roofs should be provided on dwellings on the eastern part of the site as there is no evidence to justify this requirement or indeed to which part of the site the policy should apply. However, I recognise that the Local Plan policy BK3 requires lower density housing on the eastern part of the site. In my view green roofs may soften the impact of the development upon the surrounding area. However, I would endorse the District Council's views that there is no evidence to demonstrate such a requirement and therefore I recommend modifications.

35. I also note that additional land is not allocated, but held as a reserve site, should it be needed for educational purposes. I have no evidence to demonstrate why it is appropriate for the land to remain fallow or in agricultural use whilst the land is held in reserve.

36. The District Council has also raised concerns that criteria 'f' has been superseded as it rehearses a condition attached to the outline planning consent. I also note Local Plan policy NE10 seeks to ensure adequate foul water treatment and disposal already exists or can be provided in time to serve the development.

37. In respect of the other outstanding issues in the policy, it is my view that the Parish Council's judgements are reasonable, and the assessment is proportionate and sufficiently robust for its intended purpose. However, the policies must be positively planned to align with national policy and provide sufficient flexibility. For those reasons I propose the following modifications to both the policy and the supporting text:

> Amend Policy BN H5 Framework for BK3
>
> …..~~in addition to all the~~ Development will be supported where it addresses the following criteria:
>
> a) The design, height and massing of development ~~must~~ should respect views across the site from Cambridge Road and ~~maintain~~ views across surrounding landscapes;
>
> ~~b) Financial contributions will be secured to improve walking and bus access between Barkway and Nuthampstead and surrounding villages,~~

~~notably Barley and the town of Royston where essential services are located, for community use and not just for travel between Barley and Barkway schools. The details will be agreed in consultation with Barkway Parish Council;~~

~~e~~b) Land at the south-west of the site, is secured as a reserve site for primary education~~;. should remain fallow or in agricultural use until such time as it is required for a school, but be clearly~~ and should be ~~delineated~~ separated from the housing site by the planting and maintenance of a native hedgerow;

~~d~~c~~)~~ To reduce impact on the countryside, provision of 'green roofs' on dwellings on the eastern part of the site will be encouraged ~~expected as~~ where it demonstrates sensitivity to the transition between the new village edge and the surrounding open fields;

e) Any public open space ~~must~~ should feature natural pockets of wildlife habitat, trees, hedges, and benches;

f) Unless otherwise agreed with the Local Planning Authority and Local Highways Authority a scheme should be submitted which provides for remedial work along Bridleway 17, to widen the route where the useable width is less than 4 metres, ~~must be carried out~~ to ensure the safety of walkers, cyclists, horses and their riders. Appropriate planting along Bridleway 17 ~~will be required to~~ should ensure the endurance of the wildlife corridor during construction and occupation of the new homes.

~~g) No development shall be commenced until either the sewage works upgrade required to accommodate the additional flows from the development have been completed, or a development and infrastructure phasing plan has been agreed with the Local Authority in consultation with Thames Water to allow development to be occupied.~~

Add to paragraph 4.1.19 The principal of the development has been established. The Neighbourhood Plan can influence the reserved matters applications related to the current outline permission.

Amend final sentence of paragraph 4.1.20 as follows: The local community considers that the retention and enhancement of the trees and hedges around the boundaries of the site is also essential.

Amend second sentence in paragraph 4.1.21 as follows The community considers that a sufficient buffer is needed either side of the bridleway to ensure that the route is kept free and available to bridleway users during the construction period. The outline planning permission includes the requirement for a Construction Management Plan. It is considered important that this plan ~~of intimidation or danger from construction machinery during the build period. In its current state, fencing the bridleway to~~ defines ~~the~~ a space that would be safe for walkers, cyclists, horses, or their riders, ~~due to parts of the route being too narrow.~~

Amend paragraph 4.1.27─Elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Plan, the lack of public transport available in the village and the need to review and improve public transport provision is well documented. The principle of the development at BK3 has been granted. Policies in this Neighbourhood Plan seek to support sustainable transport and improvements to public rights of way. ~~In order to ensure that the development of BK3 is sustainable, this lack of provision, with no alternative to use of the private car, must be addressed before new homes are occupied. It will not be sufficient to rely on increasing active travel modes, for example, for a developer to provide cycle storage for each home when the roads around Barkway are dangerous for cyclists. The lack of public transport must be addressed.~~

Policy BN H6 Infill Development

38. Local Plan Policy SP2 states that housing, along with supporting infrastructure and facilities will be delivered within the adjusted settlement boundaries of Barkway. Limited affordable housing and facilities for local community needs meeting the requirements of Policy CGB2 will be supported in Nuthampstead. Following clarification from Barkway Parish Council, this policy should refer to Barkway only

and to development within its settlement boundary. For clarity, to ensure that the policy is consistent with NPPF and the spatial strategy in the Local Plan, and to avoid unnecessary reference to other parts of the plan (the plan is read as a whole), I propose the following modifications:

> Small-scale and infill development will be supported ~~provided that it is located~~ within the ~~built-up areas~~ settlement boundary of ~~the~~ Barkway village, as shown on the Policies Map~~, is preferably on brownfield sites rather than greenfield sites and~~ where it meets ~~all~~ the following criteria:
> a) It retains views, open spaces and large gardens that contribute to the enjoyment of residents of the village and are important to the character and appearance of the Barkway conservation area;
> b) It does not ~~increase~~ have a significant adverse impact on traffic movements and exacerbate on street parking ~~problems~~ on Barkway High Street;
> c) It is designed to reflect the local vernacular style, village layout, and character ~~in accordance with Policy BNH1.~~

> Add at the end of paragraph 4.1.30 '*Where appropriate, bringing forward brownfield sites will be supported in advance of Green field sites'.*

Policy BN H7 Extensions, Outbuildings and Garages

39. Policy BN H7 seeks to provide additional safeguarding criteria to that provided in Local Plan policy D2 – House extensions, replacement dwellings and outbuildings and D3 – Protecting living conditions.

40. I agree with NHDC that the policy rehearses much of the advice contained with Local Plan policies D2 and D3. Where the policy does not duplicate that advice, I am satisfied that these are detailed elsewhere in the plan. The protection of valued green space is dealt with as Local Green Spaces or Public Open Recreational Spaces. I have no evidence which suggest that 'green spaces' in this policy reflect any other green spaces.

I recommend modifications to delete policy BN H7 and all references to this policy elsewhere in the Plan.

Policy BN H8 Backland Development

41. The context analysis of Barkway describes its linear settlement pattern which I appreciated at the site visit. The policy is positively planned. I have no comments and am satisfied that it meets the Basic Conditions.

Policy BN NE1 Local Green Space

42. I am satisfied that the evidence in Appendix B and the further submissions by Barkway Parish Council demonstrates that the nine Local Green Spaces comply with the assessment criteria in NPPF necessary to identify the sites as Local Green Spaces. The Consultation Statement confirms that the necessary consultation, albeit after the Regulation 14 consultation, has been undertaken with landowners and the appropriate amendments made to the Local Green Spaces designation.

43. The District Council query the inclusion of site L2 (field west of Rushing Wells adjacent to Gas Lane) in the Local Green Space policy as it is quite a large '*extensiv*e' site (3.43 ha). NPPG confirms that there are no hard and fast rules about how big a Local Green Space can be because places are different and a degree of judgment will inevitably be needed. Albeit the photograph of the site in Appendix B of the Neighbourhood Plan suggests a much wider area of land than that identified on the site plan, I am satisfied that the site is a well-defined parcel of land rather than an open swathe of countryside that is valued by the local community.

44. The title of the policy and headings should refer to spaces rather than space. For clarity and for consistency with national policy I make the following modifications to the plan:

Policy BN NE1 Local Green Space<u>s</u>

The areas listed below~~, described in the text above~~ and identified on the Policies Map, are designated as Local Green Spaces. <u>Development on</u>

these sites will not be acceptable unless consistent with national policy for Green Belts.

L1 – Forest school site

L2 – Field to the west of Rushing Wells

L3 – Manyon's field, including Withy Grove

L4 – Carriage Wash and adjoining grass verge

L5 – Barkway village pond

L6 – Land encompassing Three Roods Lane

L7 – Wheatsheaf Meadow Garden

L8 – Windmill Close

L9 – Grove at Caylers Farm, Nuthampstead

~~New development will only be allowed within designated Local Green Spaces where very special circumstances can be demonstrated, in accordance with the National Planning Policy~~

Policy BN NE2 River Quin Protection

45. Local Plan Policy NE9 – Water quality and environment seeks to make appropriate space for water by maintaining a minimum 8 metre wide undeveloped buffer zone from all designated main rivers. This would include the River Quin. The supporting text refers to a submission by the Environment Agency to another Neighbourhood Plan which has provided guidance on a 10 metre boundary around the river. This advice has been extended to the tributaries in policy BN NE2.

46. The Parish Council has provided examples of other Neighbourhood Plan policies which have recognised the importance of safeguarding and enhancing chalk streams supported by the Environment Agency and other stakeholders engaged in water and conservation management. By using this information, I am satisfied that it provides the level of robust evidence which demonstrates the wider benefits of extending the buffer zone by two metres in width and the role it might play in safeguarding the tributaries. I recognise that the River Quin and its tributaries are an important environmental asset and I have recommended that the policy be modified to be positively planned, for consistency and clarity.

47. I recommend modifications to Policy BN NE2 River Quin Protection so that it is amended to read:

> '*The River Quin, which originates in Barkway, is a protected chalk river~~. and no development will be permitted within~~ Any development scheme adjacent to the River Quin should be designed with a naturalised buffer zone of at least 10 metres from the top of the bank of the river, or its tributaries, in order to protect and enhance the conservation value of the watercourse and ensure access for flood defence maintenance'*.

Amend final sentence of paragraph 4.2.7 to read:

> 'Support will be given to ~~have extended~~ extend this protection to the tributaries of the River Quin, of which there are two significant tributaries around Nuthampstead, as any adverse impact on a tributary is likely to have a direct effect, downstream, on the River Quin.'

Amend paragraph 4.2.8 to read:

> '*Despite NHLP requiring ~~only~~ an 8 metre buffer for an average river, the River Quin is both a rare chalk stream and at considerable risk of damage from other sources, including pollution. ~~In this circumstance, the Neighbourhood Plan is requiring~~ The Parish Council and Parish Meeting will work with any development proposal which impacts the buffer zones around the River Quin and its tributaries to secure a level of protection slightly higher than that in the NHLP.' ~~This is a detail which remains in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the Local Plan, to ensure development in the Neighbourhood Plan area is sustainable.~~*

Policy BN NE3 Conserve and enhance biodiversity

48. The Environment Act 2021 sets out the components of mandatory biodiversity gain. For major sites, the requirement came into force on 12th February 2024. For small sites, this requirement came into force on 2nd April 2024. Household applications are exempt from this requirement and therefore the requirement does not apply. As a mandatory

requirement, including the need to use the Biodiversity Metric, the policy should not undermine the purpose of the Environment Act by requiring no net biodiversity loss.

49. NPPF is clear (at paragraph 186) that if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused. Policy BN NE3 should be updated to reflect this national policy to meet the Basic Conditions. I note the reference to the Greenspace Action Plan although I propose modifications to avoid unnecessary repetition. I also note the comments by Anglian Water to include reference to the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy and ambitions to include Swift Bricks in all new developments and secure permanent nest sites. Although I recognise that these represent positive interventions to support sustainable development, I am not required to include these references in the Neighbourhood Plan to ensure it meets the Basic Conditions.

50. I recommend a modification that Policy BN NE3 is updated to read:

> Development will be supported where it:
>
> ~~a) Has a positive impact on designated local wildlife habitats or corridors listed above;~~
>
> ~~b~~a) ~~Aims to~~ Protects and enhances designated local wildlife habitats and corridors ~~wherever possible~~ in accordance with national policy;
>
> ~~c~~b) Seeks to retain and restore existing hedgerows and protect mature trees (in particular trees framing the war memorial in Nuthampstead and the avenue of trees in Bell Lane leading towards The Woodman) and encourages the planting of new hedgerows and woods, ~~on condition that~~ where they do not adversely impact on important views;
>
> ~~d) Results in no net loss of biodiversity;~~
>
> ~~e~~c) ~~Keeps~~ Minimises outside lighting ~~to a minimum~~ to avoid disturbance to nocturnal species and preserves dark skies ~~the view of the night sky~~.
>
> The wildlife site at Barkway Chalk Pit will be protected and managed in accordance with North Herts Council Greenspace Action Plan 2018-2023 and its Appendix 2023-2028.

Schemes that would decrease the biodiversity value of sites which contain habitats listed in Section 41 of the NERC Act should be avoided unless the benefits of development clearly outweigh any impacts, and a mitigation hierarchy is applied. See Appendix D.

Policy BN NE4 Important Views

51. The Neighbourhood Plan identifies fifteen important views in the parish. The Neighbourhood Plan defines the zone of views more closely in Appendix E, and on the policies map. The supporting text sets out 3 criteria against which the views are tested.

52. V5: View from Social Club across meadow is a short distance view of a paddock area which is not on a Public Right of Way, does not contain a feature of artistic merit and is not at the entry to the village. The description in Appendix E expresses the pressure for development on this site and the need to retain its openness. As such I am not satisfied that is accords with the Neighbourhood Plan assessment criteria and I recommend a modification to delete View 5.

53. Further information submitted by the District Council confirms that view 9: View across Duke's Field towards Rokey Wood is identified as a valued view that emphasises the openness of the plateau and contributes positively to the rural setting of Barkway.

54. In all other respects, I am satisfied that the evidence in Appendix E demonstrates that the other 13 views comply with the assessment criteria and it is appropriate to identify the valued views.

55. I recognise that a view which was identified in the Design Guidance and Code has not been included in the Neighbourhood Plan. It would be inappropriate to do so given the advanced stage of the Neighbourhood Plan. To ensure the policy is positively worded and provides sufficient flexibility in accordance with national policy, I propose the following modifications to the final paragraph:

Amend first word of first paragraph to Fourteen.

Amend final paragraph of policy to: Any new development within these important views ~~must~~ should ensure that key features of these views can continue to be enjoyed. ~~Any major~~ Where appropriate to the scale, location and type of development, proposals should ~~must~~ include an assessment of the visual impact of that development on these important views. Proposals where a harmful impact is identified will ~~only~~ be ~~permitted~~ supported where appropriate mitigation measures can be delivered.

Policy BN NE5 Chestnut Avenue Protection

56. I saw from my site visit that these an important natural asset and clearly are important to the local community. For clarity I recommend the following modifications to the policy:

> Amend policy to read: The avenue of chestnut trees on Cambridge Road on the approach to Barkway from the north are an important part of the setting of Barkway and a significant feature of the area. Any development ~~must not have a negative~~ should not have a harmful impact on this group of trees.

Policy BN HA1 Designated Heritage Assets

57. National and Local Plan policy is clear. Where substantial harm to, or loss of significance, of a designated heritage asset is proposed, the Local Planning Authority will refuse consent unless it can be demonstrated that the scheme is necessary to deliver considerable public benefits that outweigh the harm or loss. Importantly, Local Plan policy HE1 requires the submission of a Heritage Impact Statement. I note the broad support from Historic England and support from The Gardens Trust / Hertfordshire Garden Trust to the proposed policy to protect heritage assets including Cokenach Park.

58. However, the policy, as drafted, rehearses the requirements set out in Local Plan policy and as a matter of principle does not accord with the test set out at paragraphs 200 or 201 of NPPF. I make recommended modifications to retitle and amend the policy:

> Policy BN HA1 ~~Designated Heritage Assets~~ Cokenach
> ~~Development proposals which have an impact on designated heritage assets, including all listed buildings and the Grade II listed Historic Park and Garden of Cokenach, will take account of the historic fabric, the significance of the asset and the contribution of its setting to that significance. A statement setting out any adverse impacts on the asset and its setting, along with any proposed mitigation measures will be required. Proposals must preserve, or where possible enhance, the asset and its setting.~~

Development proposals to restore, enhance and facilitate good conservation management through a Conservation Landscape Management Plan for Cokenach will be encouraged.

Policy BN HA2 Non-Designated Heritage Assets

59. The assets listed in the Policy form part of the fabric and heritage of the neighbourhood area. The Parish Council has submitted further evidence in respect of the Tally Ho Pub. In my view, the descriptions indicate that due to their age, rarity, architectural, archaeological, or historic interest or their landmark status, each represents a feature which is reasonably designated as non-designated heritage assets. I note the support from The Gardens Trust / Hertfordshire Garden Trust to the proposed designation of non-heritage assets including Newsells Landscape Park.

60. I note that the Parish Council and District Council have asked for all details of Ashgrove to be withdrawn from the Neighbourhood Plan. I make recommended modifications accordingly.

61. The second part of the Policy simply rehearses Local Plan Policy HE4 Archaeology and therefore I recommend modification whereby this part of the Policy is deleted.

62. For clarity, the location of the non-designated heritage assets and the extent of the parkland associated with Newlands should be included alongside the policy. The recommended modifications are as follows:

Amend paragraph in policy to read: Development proposals which affect these non-designated heritage assets, or are within their setting, should ~~avoid or minimise any harm to their significance.~~ include a proportionate description of their significance and the impact of the proposals ~~on it must be provided by applicants~~, to enable a balanced judgement to be made, having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the asset.

Delete the final paragraph in policy BN HA2 beginning ‘Development proposals affecting a site

Add a policy map extracted from Appendix G of non-designated heritage assets. Include text in policy to make reference to the new policy map and in paragraph 4.3.27

Delete Ashgrove as one of the assets and remove all references including photographs from the Neighbourhood Plan including with reference to Ashgrove in respect of the description of View 11 in Appendix E.

Policy BN HA3 Barkway Conservation Area

63. The policy usefully highlights and elevates the Barkway Conservation Area Character Statement to a policy consideration in the decision making process. I am satisfied that this will contribute to sustainable development and complies with the Basic Conditions.

Policy BN L1 Valued Community Assets

64. The Neighbourhood Plan supports the community aspiration to protect and expand the range of community services and facilities. The Policy helpfully identifies the community facilities that are valued by the community and which are particularly important when considering the provisions of Local Plan Policies ETC7: Local community shops and services in towns and villages and Policy HC1: Community Facilities. I do not agree with NHDC's suggestion that the policy is retitled to Assets of Community Value as this reflects a distinct and separate legislative approach.

65. The policy proposes to add a new criterion against which planning applications for change of use should be assessed. The wording is unclear, ambiguous and to some extent duplicates the criteria set out in Local Plan Policies HC1 and Policy ETC7. Policy ETC7 requires proposals to demonstrate that the unit is no longer required to meet the needs of the community including active marketing for 12 months. I recommend modifications to amend this criterion to ensure that there is clarity for decision makers.

Amend paragraph: ~~Permission~~ Proposals for ~~a~~ change of use of these facilities ~~must~~ should be ~~supported by evidence that the facilities were no longer used with no likelihood that re-use was possible or desirable, or that their active use was to be replaced elsewhere and would still~~

~~benefit village residents,~~ assessed in accordance with North Hertfordshire Local Plan Policies~~y~~ ETC7 and HC1.

Policy BN L2 Existing Pubs

66. The policy seeks to further identify the two public houses that are also identified in Policy BN L1 as Valued Community Assets. Whereas policy BN L1 would assess the reuse of the public house against the needs of the community, policy BNL2 also seeks any proposal to demonstrate that the public house is no longer viable.

67. National policy seeks to enable the retention and development of accessible local services to support the rural economy and to provide social, recreational, and cultural facilities. Additionally, public houses have been identified as a Sui Generis use through the Use Classes Order. The policy seeks to introduce a viability test to demonstrate that the public house use is no longer viable. The need to demonstrate that the use is no longer required by the community duplicates the provisions in Local Plan policy ETC7. However, for clarity, and to ensure the Neighbourhood Plan is positively planned I recommend the following modifications:

Amend the first two paragraphs of Policy BN L2 to read:

The conversion of existing pubs (The Tally Ho in Barkway and The Woodman Inn in Nuthampstead) to any other uses will be supported ~~strongly opposed unless, following viability assessment and public consultation,~~ where it is in accordance with Local Plan policy ETC7 and it can be clearly demonstrated that ~~they are~~ the use is ~~no longer~~ not financially viable ~~and no longer required by the community~~.

Proof of viability must be robust and could include ~~CAMAR's~~ CAMRA's Public House Viability Test or ~~be supported by~~ a District Valuer Services report.

Policy BN L3 Development of the Community Hub

68. National and Local Plan policies encourage the provision of community facilities to support the rural economy and to provide social, recreational, and cultural facilities. The policy clearly reflects the community's ambition to develop a community hub. As

such the policy meets the Basic Conditions by supporting sustainable development and having regard to national policy. The policy seeks to consider improvements to an existing facility as a first option. It is not clear how this mechanism might work in practice. For clarity and accuracy, I recommend modifications.

> Amend policy BN L3 as follows: Proposals that would contribute positively to the development of the community hub to serve the villages of Barkway and Nuthampstead will be encouraged~~. The first option to be considered would be~~ including extensions/improvements to existing facilities. Such proposals ~~must~~ should demonstrate how they will accommodate visitors of all ages and abilities, including those with dementia.

> Delete first two sentences at 4.4.14 ~~Barkway Stud utilises a number of paddocks throughout the village, but the central stables lie at the bottom of Burrs Lane. A successful working stud farm breeding ponies for children, it also provides space for livery and has a ménage in which horses can be schooled.~~

Policy BN L4 Protected Recreational Open Space

69. The Policy supports the protection of valued open spaces and I have had regard to Sport England's advice which seeks to protect and support sports facilities. I am satisfied that the sites are valuable to the community and should be protected in accordance with Local Plan policy.

70. R2 – Windmill Close is also identified in Neighbourhood Plan policy BN NE1 as a Local Green Space. As Local Green Spaces, development on this site would be assessed against the provisions of Green Belt policy as set out in NPPF. Development within a Protected Recreational Open Space is subject to a different set of local tests set out in Local Plan policy NE5. The local tests include the potential that existing Protected Recreational Open Spaces could be replaced by alternative provision where specified conditions are met. Such conditions do not exist in respect of Local Green Space policy. Therefore, I find the proposal for a site to be both a Local Green Space and a Protected Recreational Open Space to be ambiguous; add a layer of uncertainty for decision

makers; and be inconsistent with the Green Belt policies' as far as they apply to Local Green Spaces. As such I recommend modifications to delete R2 Windmill Close from this policy.

Amend Policy BN L4 to delete the reference to R2 Windmill Close, delete paragraph 4.4.16 and amend the policy maps as appropriate.

Amend the word 'permitted' to 'supported.'

Policy BN E1 Preserving and Developing Local Employment Opportunities

71. The policy supports employment opportunities having regard to national policy and reflects the Local Plan policy CGB1: Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt and Policy ETC2: Employment development outside Employment Areas and Employment Allocations BA10 and RY9. This supports the creation of jobs and prosperity appropriate to the scale of the two villages. The first part of the policy provides little additional policy advice but for clarity make reference to policy ETC2 to ensure the proposed development is sustainable.

72. The second part of the policy seeks to ensure that existing industrial operations are accompanied by a detailed emissions reduction plan and best practice in waste management. Local Plan policy D4: Air Quality supports air pollution impact assessments to determine the impact on local air quality. Mitigation is required to address emissions of pollutants to the atmosphere. The supporting paragraph to the Local Plan policy identify types of development where the Council would expect the submission of an air quality impact assessment. I have no evidence as part of this Neighbourhood Plan which demonstrates that such a reduction plan is needed for all industrial operations. I make recommended modifications accordingly.

73. In accordance with the NPPF, support is given to farm diversification subject to three criteria. The NPPF refers to agricultural and land-based rural businesses and so a recommended modification is made to widen the policy to reflect this. I am satisfied that the policy has sufficient safeguards to ensure that any such development is appropriate to the area. Subject to the modification above, the policy meets the basic conditions.

Amend first paragraph as follows: Development proposals that would support the retention of existing businesses and the development of new local employment opportunities within the settlement of Barkway will be encouraged, including artisan businesses, provided that the proposal is appropriate to the location in terms of size, scale, function, catchment area and / or historic and architectural character as identified in Local Plan policy ETC2 ~~they do not conflict with other policies in this plan~~. In Nuthampstead, rural business will be supported in accordance with policies on rural areas beyond the Green Belt including Local Plan policy CGB1.

Amend the second paragraph as follows: Support will be given to employment proposals ~~Expansion of existing industrial operations should be accompanied by an appropriately detailed~~ that include an emissions reduction plan and ~~the adoption of a '~~ adopt best practice ~~approach~~ for emissions control and waste management~~. This must refer to any risk to further pollution of the River Quin.~~

Amend the first sentence of the third section of the policy as follows Proposals for the diversification of agricultural and land-based rural businesses will be supported provided:

Policy BN E2 Internet Infrastructure

74. Policy BN E2 sets out the communities' support for landline, fibre optic broadband to premises and mobile coverage through the parish. NPPF states that high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. The policy is clearly written although it refers to the parish which could lead to some ambiguity. With this minor modification I am satisfied that the policy meets the Basic Conditions.

Delete 'throughout the parish' in the policy.

Schools and Education.

75. The Neighbourhood Plan does not include a policy on schools and education but does provide contextual evidence. Hertfordshire County Council have reported that there are a number of inaccuracies in the text that need to be amended. For clarity I recommend modifications:

> Amend Paragraph 1.9.5 as follows: Barley and Barkway VA Church of England First Schools Federation provides our children with a good primary education. The Published Admission Number (PAN) of Barley Church of England First School is 15 and the PAN of Barkway Church of England First School is 12, so in total the two schools currently offer 27 places. The nursery, Reception and Year 1 pupils are taught at the Barkway School site and Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 pupils are taught at the Barley School site. The two schools are now combining PAN, so there are technically the places for 27 1st preferences. ~~however, the school is having to turn away children at nursery and reception ages because there are only 15 places per year for each of these age groups. Major redevelopment of the Barkway school buildings is required to provide 25 places for nursery and reception and to bring the teaching and learning environment up to modern standards~~.
>
> Amend Paragraph 4.6.1 as follows: ~~There are currently surplus places at most age levels at local schools. The exception is for nursery and reception in the Barley and Barkway VA Church of England First Schools Federation for which only 15 places are available for each year's intake, leading to children having to be turned away.~~ Building works currently proposed at the Barkway School have planning permission and will make the current buildings more fit for purpose as the classrooms are small. These works are funded by the Diocese/school and through S106 contributions. ~~A major redevelopment of the Barkway premises is required to increase capacity to at least 25 for nursery and reception and to update the teaching and learning environment of the school. Pressure on the places for these younger age groups would increase if BK3 were to proceed.~~ Currently,

there are 15 places available and therefore the schools are not at full capacity. Hertfordshire County Council consider there is sufficient capacity to mitigate demand from planned new housing growth.

Policy BN T1 Sustainable Transport

76. The supporting text explains that there is limited public transport provision in the villages. The policy seeks to ensure major developments contribute to the local transport services. Financial contributions are sought for 3 interventions set out in the policy. Given the concern locally that the villages have a lack of choice of sustainable modes of transport, such interventions may help to achieve sustainable development. However, robust evidence has not been submitted which demonstrates that these interventions are appropriate or viable. A shared community autonomous vehicle is yet to be available. I am not clear whether the contributions are required to purchase or operate a minibus service. The priorities are also not comprehensively included in Appendix O – Action Plan. The policy as currently written lacks the clarity needed for decisions makers and does not have the flexibility required by national policy to meet the Basic Conditions. I therefore recommend modifications:

Amend the policy as follows: Major development proposals, ~~must~~ are encouraged to positively contribute towards improvements in the quality of local transport services appropriate to its scale, type, and location, in order to ensure that residents have access to sustainable modes of transport.

~~Financial contributions will be sought for~~ Improvements could include:

• Provision of communal electric car charging points in Barkway village

• Provision of ~~a~~ shared community ~~autonomous vehicles~~ transport

• ~~Contributions towards a village minibus~~

Policy BN T2 Mitigating Traffic Impact

77. The policy supports proposals that improve pedestrian safety, reduce congestion, and improve traffic movement through the villages. The supporting text explains the existing issues and the impact it has upon the local communities. Given the concern locally, the positive wording of the policy, I am satisfied that it meets the Basic Conditions.

Policy BN T3 Public Rights of Way

78. The first part of the policy seeks to resist the loss of Public Rights of Way which includes footpaths, cycleways, and bridleways. The second part seeks to encourage the integration of Public Rights of Way into a larger network. The Local Plan justification also confirms that Public Rights of Way are protected under their own statutory regime. This part of the policy simply duplicates the provisions in Local Plan. For this reason, I recommend its deletion.

79. The second part of the policy seeks to integrate the Public Rights of Way into a larger network. The supporting text does not provide any further evidence on any existing gaps, and where and what the larger network is. I am not required to make reference to a Rights of Way Improvement Plan as requested by a number of representations in order for the Neighbourhood Plan to meet the Basic Conditions. However, I recommend modifications. As follows:

> Replace policy with the following: <u>In order to maintain Barkway and Nuthampstead's close links to the countryside and to ensure permeability between residential areas and services and facilities, development proposals should utilise opportunities to link into the wider footpath and bridleway network where applicable.</u>

Policy BN T4 Safe and Accessible Walking and Cycling Routes

80. The policy seeks to secure a package of walking and cycling routes that link schools, services, and facilities. It does not address bridleways and I am not required to extend the policy to ensure the Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions. I note from the supporting text that there is no footpath or cycleway between Nuthampstead and Barkway School. National policy gives priority to pedestrian and cycle movements and ensure that places are safe, secure, and attractive. To ensure that the policy provides the flexibility required by national policy and to ensure that it is fairly and reasonably related to the proposal, I make recommended modifications.

81. The second part of the policy appears to have two purposes: to ensure pedestrian access to new schools is well lit with wide footpaths and to ensure the location of new schools reduces traffic congestion. Whilst national policy supports safe and suitable access to a

site, the policy as written lacks clarity. It also seeks a new development to not only mitigate its own impact upon traffic congestion but to reduce existing congestion. This is not in accordance with national policy which seeks to ensure that significant impacts from the development on the transport network or on highway safety can be cost effectively mitigated. As currently drafted the policy does not meet the Basic Conditions.

82. The final part of the policy seeks to support developments that incorporate travel plans to improve the safety of local roads to local schools. A travel plan is a strategy that seeks to deliver sustainable transport objectives (NPPF glossary). It is not a road improvement plan. I recommend modifications.

> Amend policy as follows: Major developments should ~~feature an~~ be designed to help create and maintain an appropriate and proportionate package of safe and attractive walking and cycling routes that link schools, services, and facilities such as shops.
> ~~The location and access arrangements of~~ Proposals for new schools should promote safe and suitable access ~~pedestrian safety by~~ including widening existing footpaths and ensuring ~~that they~~ footpaths are well lit~~, and by reducing vehicular congestion~~.
> Proposals which incorporate travel plans ~~that~~ or include measures to improve the safety of local roads leading to local schools will be supported.

Policy BN T5 Vehicle Parking in Residential Development

83. The policy seeks to minimise on street parking particularly in areas where there is considered to be existing issues. Given the concern locally that on street parking is both creating a highway safety issue in areas of the villages, such an approach may help to achieve sustainable development. However, the development proposal is unlikely to, in itself, minimise on street parking. It can only increase off street parking within the development or as part of a wider transport scheme. I recommend modifications.

84. The second part of the policy seeks to require two parking spaces per dwelling. The Council's adopted parking standards requires a minimum of 2 car parking spaces for 2

and 3 bedroom homes. A lower requirement of 1 space is required for 1 bedroom homes. The effect of the policy is to increase the number of parking spaces in 1 bedroom units from 1 to 2 parking spaces. The policy provides flexibility for an applicant to demonstrate why a lower standard for 1 bedroom units is justified. I am satisfied that it meets the Basic Conditions.

> Amend the first part of the policy as follows: New residential development ~~must~~ should seek to ~~minimise on~~ increase off street parking in Barkway and Nuthampstead particularly in Barkway High Street, Cambridge Road, Royston Road, Church Lane, Chapel Close, Windmill Close and Periwinkle Close.

Policy BN 11 Spending Priorities

85. The Implementation and Monitoring section usefully set out the process by which the Parish Councils will evaluate the impact of the policies. I would encourage the Parish Council to establish monitoring targets and an evaluation framework.

86. The Neighbourhood Plan sets out a series of priorities in Appendix O which set out the communities' aspirations for interventions to be supported through contributions from S106 agreements. The British Horse Society comments that the Appendix does not include priority to improve and maintain public rights of way. I am not required to amend the priorities to ensure the Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions. To ensure that the supporting text reflects national policy I recommend modifications. As follows:

> Second paragraph of Policy BN11: The ~~Parish Council will request that these~~ priorities ~~are~~ should be reflected in section 106 agreements, where ~~appropriate~~ necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; directly related to the development; and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development. Additionally, the Parish Council and Parish Meeting ~~and~~ will ~~direct funding~~ support proposals to fund priority schemes identified in Appendix O from ~~any~~ New Homes Bonus, Community Infrastructure Levy, or other funding streams~~,~~ ~~towards projects which fall within these priorities~~.

Paragraph 5.3.2 Barkway Parish Council and the Nuthampstead Parish Meeting team will request these priorities be reflected in s106 agreements, where ~~appropriate~~ necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; directly related to the development; and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development. The Parish Council and Parish Meeting will also direct funding received from any future Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and other funding streams towards projects which fall within these priorities as and when opportunities arise.

Appendices

87. The appendices are a useful set of documents. However, some of the appendices are more relevant to the Basic Conditions Statement and the Consultation Statement and therefore I recommend that they are removed in the final version of the document.

Appendix B – references renumbered if any changes to the Local Green Spaces

Appendix G – amend any references to non-designated heritage assets

Delete Appendix I

PART 4

CONCLUSIONS

1. In essence, subject to the adoption of the various recommended modifications and amendments set out above made in order to address various perceived deficiencies in the draft Neighbourhood Plan, I am satisfied that it should thereafter be compliant with the statutory requirements. The Policies set out in the draft Neighbourhood Plan are broadly justified by legitimate aims protection of the environment; amenity of local people; support for the local economy; conservation of landscape and local heritage. I am also satisfied that they do not strike an intrinsically unfair balance. I am further satisfied that the Policies will in general conform with the existing statutory development plan and support sustainable development.

2. I therefore recommend to NHDC that the Neighbourhood Plan, subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications as specified, should proceed to referendum.

Edward Cousins
Examiner

Radcliffe Chambers

January 2025

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Appendix B : Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan – Schedule of proposed modifications to the neighbourhood plan policies and supporting text

Where the Examiner has recommended modifications to policies, they are shown in **bold text**. Where the Examiner has suggested specific changes to the supporting text, these are shown in ***blue bold italics***. Any proposed deletions, are shown with a strikethrough: ~~strikethrough~~

The proposed modifications to the text and the policies are shown in the order that they appear in the Neighbourhood Plan, rather than the Examiner's report.

Unless there is a specific comment made against the Examiners' recommendations, the District Council is in agreement with the Examiners' proposed modifications to the Barkway and Nuthampstead Neighbourhood Plan.

Policy or paragraph reference	**Examiners Proposed Modifications**	**Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting**
Whole Plan	The phrase 'permitted' is recommended to be modified to 'supported' in all cases. The term 'must' in policy must be used exceptionally as it does not provide the flexibility required by national policy.	Barkway PC have confirmed that this proposed modification has been made throughout the neighbourhood plan.
Para 1.2.2	Amend paragraph 1.2.2 as follows: Delete: ~~Barkway Parish Council as the relevant body, applied for the designation of the area. The joint Neighbourhood Plan Area was designated by NHC Cabinet on 5 August 2014~~ Replace with: ***Barkway Parish Council, with the support of Nuthampstead Parish Meeting, submitted the application for the Neighbourhood Plan area. The Neighbourhood Plan area was designated by NHDC on 5th August 2014. Barkway Parish Council is the relevant body for the Neighbourhood Plan. Nuthampstead Parish Meeting has endorsed Barkway Parish Council's role as Qualifying Body in the Neighbourhood Plan process.***	Barkway PC have confirmed that this proposed modification has been made.

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
Para 1.9.5	Amend paragraph 1.9.5 as follows: Barley and Barkway VA Church of England First Schools Federation provides our children with a good primary education. **The Published Admission Number (PAN) of Barley Church of England First School is 15 and the PAN of Barkway Church of England First School is 12, so in total the two schools currently offer 27 places. The nursery, Reception and Year 1 pupils are taught at the Barkway School site and Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 pupils are taught at the Barley School site. The two schools are now combining PAN, so there are technically the places for 27 1st preferences.** ~~however, the school is having to turn away children at nursery and reception ages because there are only 15 places per year for each of these age groups. Major redevelopment of the Barkway school buildings is required to provide 25 places for nursery and reception and to bring the teaching and learning environment up to modern standards~~.	Barkway PC have confirmed that this proposed modification has been made.
Section 2.3 Objectives 2, 3 and 10	Amend the objectives as follows: **Objective 2** - To preserve ***or enhance*** the character, appearance, and settings of all designated and non-designated heritage assets. **Objective 3**: To promote biodiversity by protecting ***valued*** green spaces within the parish and to support ~~ecosystem services by~~ ~~new builds~~ ***proposals that*** are as ecofriendly as possible **Objective 10**: To ~~preserve~~ ***ensure*** the important views within and around the parish ***continue to be enjoyed.***	Barkway PC have confirmed that this proposed modification has been made.
Section 3	Delete the second sentence:	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map	~~It is not possible to clearly see the detail within Barkway village on an A4 page. An A1 PDF version of the Policies Map can be viewed on the Neighbourhood Plan page of Barkway Parish Council website.~~ Replace with: ***The details of the policy designations are shown in Figure 4: Barkway Neighbourhood Plan Policies Map and Figure 5: Policies Map Detail of Barkway village. Further details of the Local Green Spaces, Non-designated Heritage Assets and Important Views can be found in the relevant policies and Appendices.***	NHC made comments about the clarity of the Policies Maps and welcomes the proposed modifications. Officers and BPC have discussed the most appropriate way to address the Examiner's proposed modification to ensure that the Policies Map is clear. The overall Policies Map has been removed from the Neighbourhood Plan and will be published separately on the website. The village extract has been retained but at a larger scale so that it can be seen clearly and a separate key added to facilitate the larger scale. Figure 4 is now the key for the map.
	Figure 4 and Figure 5 must be revised to ensure that the relevant policy areas are accurately and unambiguously defined. The maps must be readable and produced at a scale to ensure that all labels and policy areas can be clearly identified.	
Para 4.1.1	Amend the first part of paragraph 4.1.1 as follows: The Neighbourhood Plan does not contain housing site allocations. ~~and is not required to in the Local Plan.~~ ***The Housing Development Strategy for Barkway and Nuthampstead is established by Local Plan Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution. The strategy states that at least 13,000 new homes are to be provided across the district between 2011 to 2031. Approximately 13% of the total number of homes required is to be delivered in 5 villages which includes Barkway.*** The adopted NHLP includes two site allocations ***(policies BK2 and BK3)*** for a total of ***approximately*** 160 homes in Barkway. This will represent an increase of over 40% in the number of homes in Barkway ~~the village~~ since ~~the~~ 2021 ~~census)~~. ~~The number of housing completions and planning permission granted in Barkway since 2011 accounts~~	NHC welcomes the modification to ensure that the current situation in Barkway and Nuthampstead is acknowledged.

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	~~for an additional 57 homes.~~ ***Based upon NHDC monitoring data,*** the total allocated, completed and homes ***with planning permission in Barkway*** since 2011 is ***224*** ~~therefore 217~~, representing a 74% increase in the number of homes in Barkway.	
	Delete the last sentence of the paragraph 4.1.1. ~~For the purposes of NPPF, paragraph 14 b) the housing needs of Barkway village have therefore been met for the life of the Neighbourhood Plan.~~ Replace with: ***Nuthampstead is defined as a category C settlement in Local Plan policy SP2, where limited affordable housing and facilities for local community needs will be allowed.***	
Para 4.1.8	Amend paragraph 4.1.8 as follows: Concerns were raised in the survey about the lack of infrastructure and the suitability of local roads to support significant new development. ***Community-led housing and self-build schemes will be supported where such development provides the need for affordable homes.***	
Policy BN H1 Affordable Housing	Amend Policy BN H1 to read: Affordable homes should include a mix of ~~ownerships~~ ***sizes and tenures and*** ~~support~~ ***include*** the provision for sheltered, ~~adapted~~ ***adaptable*** and bungalow units~~, and a range of sizes - but~~ supporting the ~~locally identified~~ housing need ***identified*** in ~~the~~ an up to date Housing Needs Survey ***or*** ~~and~~ Strategic Housing Market Assessment. ~~Community-led housing and self-build schemes could be an option to provide for the need for affordable homes.~~	
Para 4.1.12	Make a minor amendment to paragraph 4.1.12 to amend the reference from BN H2 to BN H3.	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
Policy BN H2 Design and Layout	Amend policy BN H2 to read: A proposal for ~~residential~~ development~~, including a redevelopment,~~ will be ~~permitted~~ ***supported*** provided that ***it demonstrates that it is guided by the principles set out in the Barkway and Nuthampstead Design Codes and Guidance 2024*** ~~all of~~ ***and*** the following design criteria are met: a) It is in keeping with existing local architectural styles ~~(other than unsympathetic 20th century infill~~ so as to contribute to local distinctiveness; b) It respects and enhances local character with a sufficient variety of styles and heights~~. Preferred styles in the conservation area include timber framing, pargetted walls, thatch, flint and red brick (for more detail see Barkway and Nuthampstead Design Codes and Guidance 2024)~~. Building heights will be no more than three-and-a-half storeys. Good modern design will be acceptable ~~in some cases~~; c) ~~Development is in proportion to surrounding buildings, especially in terms of~~ ***The*** principal elevations ***should*** ~~preserving~~ ***reflect*** traditional ***fenestration details such as*** ratios of doors and windows ~~to the total frontage area~~; d) ***Preferred styles in the Conservation Area include timber framing, pargetted walls, thatch, flint, and red brick.*** Brickwork, including replacement brickwork ***should*** blend in with surrounding walling in both colour and texture; e) It does not ~~lead to the loss of~~ ***have a significant adverse impact upon the*** amenity ~~for~~ ***of*** neighbouring users through the loss of privacy, loss of light or visual intrusion; f) ***Where appropriate to the scale, location or type of development, the Local Planning Authority agrees a Construction Scheme that safeguards*** the amenities of nearby residents ~~will be protected~~ during the construction phase; g) ~~It respects the natural contours of a site while,~~ Where ~~possible~~ ***appropriate to the scale, location, and type of development***, sensitively incorporat***es***~~ing~~ natural features such as trees, hedges, and ponds within the site; h) ~~Solid boundaries such as fences should be avoided in front gardens to maintain the open feel of the village~~;	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	i) It creates safe, accessible, and well-connected ~~environments~~ ***pedestrian and cycle routes*** that meet the needs of users; j) All public areas resulting from new development ***should be designed*** ~~proposals must be visible and overlooked~~ in accordance with good practice ***set out in Secured by Design*** ~~in order~~ to create an environment that feels safe.	
After Policy BN H3	Move the paragraphs 4.1.15 to 4.1.17 to be included after Policy BN H2.	In our representations, NHC stated that the Design Code should be given more emphasis. This proposed modification helps to address this.
Policy BN H3	Amend the policy as follows: Policy BN H3 Sustainable Construction: A proposal for residential development~~, including a redevelopment,~~ will be ~~permitted~~ **supported where** ~~provided all of~~ the following criteria ~~for sustainable construction~~ are met: ~~a) Housing should be designed with flexible, adaptable spaces, including for people with mobility problems;~~ ~~b) Social housing should include homes fitted with smart technology to support people with disabilities, including dementia, in support of the aspiration of Barkway and Nuthampstead to be dementia friendly villages;~~ ~~c) The incorporation of best practice fire suppressant technologies to prevent damage and injury from fire will be encouraged;~~ ~~d~~a) ~~The~~ incorporation of micro-energy schemes (including ground source heat pumps, heat exchange systems, solar panels, and emerging green technology~~), in new homes~~. ~~New homes to be designed and constructed to achieve a minimum level of energy performance set at Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, where this is viable~~;	We made several representations in respect of this policy and the Examiner has proposed modifications to those parts of the Policy that we were particularly concerned with, criteria b and d. The Examiner has not explicitly made proposed modifications in respect of the re-numbering of the criteria, but this will be done in order that the Policy makes sense and it does not affect the wording of the Policy. BPC have amended the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	~~e) Secure cycle storage will be included for all homes to encourage sustainable travel;~~ ~~f~~**b**) The inclusion of facilities to enable water conservation, including consideration of grey water harvesting; ~~g~~**c**) Proposals for residential development will provide adequate storage for bins and recycling; **d**~~h~~) ~~All~~ **Where required to address surface water flood risk,** new hard standing**s** will be constructed of ~~locally~~ appropriate permeable materials ~~such as stone or brick paving, hoggin and gravel~~; ~~e~~**i**) Development will include Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) incorporating storage for natural run-off and run-off from new development. Multi-use above ground SuDs will be encouraged. ~~Funding management and maintenance plans should be secured at the earliest stage~~; ~~j) Construction work must be carried out in accordance with relevant standards and best practice to ensure protection of the groundwater Source Protection Zone~~.	
Policy BN H4 Design Codes	Delete this policy and include the supporting text (paragraphs 4.1.15 to 4.1.17) after Policy BN H2.	
Para 4.1.19	Amend paragraph 4.1.19 as follows: BK3 is identified in the NHLP for the development of up to 140 dwellings. Outline planning consent (18/01502/OP) was conditionally granted on 25 July 2023. Local residents continue to be strongly opposed to this development, which is excessive for the size of the village, in which there is a lack of key infrastructure such as good public transport and shops. Barkway Parish Council have objected to the allocation of so many new homes. The Parish Council will now concentrate its efforts on influencing the detail of the development to achieve a characterful and environmentally sensitive design, which reduces the harmful impacts on the village. ***The principal of the development has***	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	been established. The Neighbourhood Plan can influence the reserved matters applications related to the current outline permission.	
Para 4.1.20	Amend final sentence of paragraph 4.1.20 as follows: Site BK3 is located on the Barkway Plateau (Area 230 of the North Herts Landscape Character Assessment) and on the Chiltern Ridge, is valuable Grade II agricultural land, is close to the Newsells Stud which is surrounded by a non-designated garden, and adjacent to Cokenach Grade II Historic Park and Garden. The site and its surroundings are so sensitive that layout, height and massing of development must be carefully planned. Particular attention should be paid to the design and appearance of homes at the edges of the site where they border surrounding green fields and Cokenach Park. The retention and enhancement of the trees and hedges around the boundaries of the site is also essential. ***The local community considers that*** the retention and enhancement of the trees and hedges around the boundaries of the site is also essential.	
Para 4.1.21	Amend second sentence in paragraph 4.1.21 as follows: The popular bridleway, which is in daily use, runs north-south through the site and must remain open and accessible at all times during the development. ***The community considers that*** a sufficient buffer is needed either side of the bridleway to ensure that the route is kept free ***and available to bridleway users during the construction period. The outline planning permission includes the requirement for a Construction Management Plan. It is considered important that this plan*** ~~of intimidation or danger from construction machinery during the build period~~. ~~In its current state, fencing the bridleway to~~ define***s*** ~~the~~ a space ***that*** would be safe for walkers, cyclists, horses, or their riders, ~~due to parts of the route being too narrow.~~	
Para 4.1.27	Amend paragraph as follows:	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	Elsewhere in the Neighbourhood Plan, the lack of public transport available in the village and the need to review and improve public transport provision is well documented. ***The principle of the development at BK3 has been granted. Policies in this Neighbourhood Plan seek to support sustainable transport and improvements to public rights of way.*** ~~In order to ensure that the development of BK3 is sustainable, this lack of provision, with no alternative to use of the private car, must be addressed before new homes are occupied. It will not be sufficient to rely on increasing active travel modes, for example, for a developer to provide cycle storage for each home when the roads around Barkway are dangerous for cyclists. The lack of public transport must be addressed.~~	
Policy BN H5 Framework for BK3	Amend Policy BN H5: Framework for BK3, as follows: ~~Land identified in NHLP 2011-2031 as BK3 (shown on the Policies Map) is planned for the provision of 140 dwellings. Any scheme will have regard to the principles set in Barkway and Nuthampstead Design Codes and Guidance 2024, and take into account the policies in this Neighbourhood Plan relating to design and layout in addition to all~~ **Development will be supported where it addresses the** following criteria: a) The design, height and massing of development ~~must~~ **should** respect views across the site from Cambridge Road and ~~maintain~~ views across surrounding landscapes; ~~b) Financial contributions will be secured to improve walking and bus access between Barkway and Nuthampstead and surrounding villages, notably Barley and the town of Royston where essential services are located, for community use and not just for travel between Barley and Barkway schools. The details will be agreed in consultation with Barkway Parish Council;~~ c) ~~c~~**b**) Land at the south-west of the site, **is** secured as a reserve site for primary education~~,. should remain fallow or in agricultural use until such time as it is required for a school, but be clearly~~ **and should be** ~~delineated~~ **separated** from the housing site by the planting and maintenance of a native hedgerow;	We raised a number of representations in respect of this policy and provided the Examiner with additional information during the examination. We welcome the proposed modifications as the policy now addresses those issues which have yet to be determined as part of a planning application for the site. The Examiner has not explicitly made proposed modifications in respect of the re-numbering of the criteria, but this will be done in order that the Policy makes sense and it does not affect the wording of the Policy. BPC have amended the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	d) ~~dc)~~ To reduce impact on the countryside, provision of 'green roofs' on dwellings on the eastern part of the site will be **encouraged** ~~expected as~~ **where** it demonstrates sensitivity to the transition between the new village edge and the surrounding open fields; e) ~~ed~~) Any public open space ~~must~~ **should** feature natural pockets of wildlife habitat, trees, hedges, and benches; f) ~~fe~~) **Unless otherwise agreed with the Local Planning Authority and Local Highways Authority a scheme should be submitted which provides for** remedial work along Bridleway 17, to widen the route where the useable width is less than 4 metres, ~~must be carried out~~ to ensure the safety of walkers, cyclists, horses and their riders. Appropriate planting along Bridleway 17 ~~will be required to~~ **should** ensure the endurance of the wildlife corridor during construction and occupation of the new homes. ~~g) g) No development shall be commenced until either the sewage works upgrade required to accommodate the additional flows from the development have been completed, or a development and infrastructure phasing plan has been agreed with the Local Authority in consultation with Thames Water to allow development to be occupied.~~	
Para 4.1.30	Amend the paragraph as follows: Infill development within the built-up area of the villages and extensions to existing buildings should be sensitively designed to reflect the character of the existing and adjacent buildings, and their surroundings. It is also important to preserve the amenities of existing residents. ***Where appropriate, bringing forward brownfield sites will be supported in advance of Green field site.***	
Policy BN H6	Amend the policy as follows:	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
Infill Development	Small-scale **and** infill development will be supported ~~provided that it is located~~ within the ~~built-up areas~~ **settlement boundary** of ~~the~~ **Barkway** village, as shown on the Policies Map~~, is preferably on brownfield sites rather than greenfield sites~~ ~~and~~ **where it** meets ~~all~~ the following criteria: a) It retains views, open spaces and large gardens that contribute to the enjoyment of residents of the village and are important to the character and appearance of the Barkway conservation area; b) It does not ~~increase~~ **have a significant adverse impact on** traffic **movements** and **exacerbate on street** parking ~~problems~~ on Barkway High Street; It is designed to reflect the local vernacular style, village layout, and character~~ in accordance with Policy BNH1.~~	
Policy BN H7	Delete policy BN H7 and all references to this policy elsewhere in the Plan.	
Policy BN NE1 Local Green Space	The title of the policy and headings should refer to **spaces** rather than space. Modify the policy as follows: Policy BN NE1 Local Green Space**s** The areas listed below~~, described in the text above~~ and identified on the Policies Map, are designated as Local Green Spaces. **Development on these sites will not be acceptable unless consistent with national policy for Green Belts.** L1 – Forest school site L2 – Field to the west of Rushing Wells L3 – Manyon's field, including Withy Grove L4 – Carriage Wash and adjoining grass verge L5 – Barkway village pond L6 – Land encompassing Three Roods Lane L7 – Wheatsheaf Meadow Garden	BPC have amended the title of the Policy and the relevant appendix.

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	L8 – Windmill Close L9 – Grove at Caylers Farm, Nuthampstead ~~New development will only be allowed within designated Local Green Spaces where very special circumstances can be demonstrated, in accordance with the National Planning Policy~~	
Para 4.2.7	Amend final sentence of paragraph 4.2.7 as follows: The Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust has recommended the identification of all chalk rivers because of their rarity. In addition, both the River Lea Catchment Partnership and the Friends of the Rib and Quin action group will take an active interest in the protection of this river (see Appendix O– Action Plan for proposed actions to protect the river). More specifically, the Environment Agency has recommended the protection of the River Quin and provided guidance on a 10 metre boundary around the river; this was included in feedback to the Braughing Parish Neighbourhood Plan which features the same river. We have extended this protection to the tributaries of the River Quin, of which there are two significant tributaries around Nuthampstead, as any adverse impact on a tributary is likely to have a direct effect, downstream, on the River Quin. ***Support will be given to*** ~~have extended~~ ***extend*** this protection to the tributaries of the River Quin, of which there are two significant tributaries around Nuthampstead, as any adverse impact on a tributary is likely to have a direct effect, downstream, on the River Quin	
Para 4.2.8	Amend paragraph 4.2.8 as follows: Despite NHLP requiring ~~only~~ an 8 metre buffer for an average river, the River Quin is both a rare chalk stream and at considerable risk of damage from other sources, including pollution. ~~In this circumstance, the Neighbourhood Plan is requiring~~ ***The Parish Council and Parish Meeting will work with any development proposal which impacts the buffer zones around the River Quin and its tributaries to secure*** a level of protection slightly higher than that in the NHLP. ~~This is a detail which remains in general~~	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	~~conformity with the strategic policies contained in the Local Plan, to ensure development in the Neighbourhood Plan area is sustainable.~~	
Policy BN NE2 River Quin Protection	Amend Policy BN NE2 as follows: The River Quin, which originates in Barkway, is a protected chalk river~~. and no development will be permitted within~~ ***Any development scheme adjacent to the River Quin should be designed with a naturalised buffer zone of*** at least 10 metres from the top of the bank of the river, or its tributaries, in order to protect and enhance the conservation value of the watercourse and ensure access for flood defence maintenance.	
Policy BN NE3	Amend Policy BN NE3 as follows: Development will be supported where it: ~~a) Has a positive impact on designated local wildlife habitats or corridors listed above;~~ ~~b~~**a**) ~~Aims to~~ Protects and enhances designated local wildlife habitats and corridors ~~wherever possible~~ **in accordance with national policy**; ~~c~~**b**) Seeks to retain and restore existing hedgerows and protect mature trees (in particular trees framing the war memorial in Nuthampstead and the avenue of trees in Bell Lane leading towards The Woodman) and encourages the planting of new hedgerows and woods, ~~on condition that~~ **where** they do not **adversely** impact on important views; ~~d) Results in no net loss of biodiversity;~~ ~~e~~**c**) ~~Keeps~~ **Minimises** outside lighting ~~to a minimum~~ to avoid disturbance to nocturnal species and preserves **dark skies** ~~the view of the night sky~~.	The Examiner has not explicitly made proposed modifications in respect of the re-numbering of the criteria, but this will be done in order that the Policy makes sense and it does not affect the wording of the Policy. BPC have amended the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	The wildlife site at Barkway Chalk Pit will be protected and managed in accordance with North Herts Council Greenspace Action Plan 2018-2023 **and its Appendix 2023-2028**. Schemes that would decrease the biodiversity value of sites which contain habitats listed in Section 41 of the NERC Act should be avoided unless the benefits of development clearly outweigh any impacts, and a mitigation hierarchy is applied. See Appendix D.	
Policy BN NE4 Important Views	Amend policy to delete View 5	The Examiner has not explicitly made proposed modifications in respect of the re-numbering of the criteria, but this will be done in order that the Policy makes sense and it does not affect the wording of the Policy. BPC have amended the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.
	Amend first word of first paragraph to **Fourteen**, to read: ~~Fifteen~~ **Fourteen** important views are identified on the Policies Map and are listed below:	
	Amend the final paragraph to read: Any new development within these important views ~~must~~ **should** ensure that key features of these views can continue to be enjoyed. ~~Any major~~ **Where appropriate to the scale, location and type of** development**,** proposal**s** **should** ~~must~~ include an assessment of the **visual** impact of that development on these important views. Proposals where a harmful impact is identified will ~~only~~ be ~~permitted~~ **supported** where appropriate mitigation measures can be delivered.	
Policy BN NE5 Chestnut Avenue Protection	Amend the policy to read: The avenue of chestnut trees on Cambridge Road on the approach to Barkway from the north are an important part of the setting of Barkway and a significant feature of the area. Any development ~~must not have a negative~~ **should not have a harmful** impact on this group of trees.	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
Policy BN HA1 Designated Heritage Assets	Amend the policy as follows: Policy BN HA1 ~~Designated Heritage Assets~~ **Cokenach** ~~Development proposals which have an impact on designated heritage assets, including all listed buildings and the Grade II listed Historic Park and Garden of Cokenach, will take account of the historic fabric, the significance of the asset and the contribution of its setting to that significance. A statement setting out any adverse impacts on the asset and its setting, along with any proposed mitigation measures will be required. Proposals must preserve, or where possible enhance, the asset and its setting.~~ **Development** proposals to restore, enhance and facilitate good conservation management through a Conservation Landscape Management Plan for Cokenach will be encouraged.	
Para 4.3.27	Include text in paragraph 4.3.27 to make reference to the new policy map	
Policy BN HA2 Non-Designated Heritage Assets	Amend the policy as follows: The following non-designated heritage assets have been identified as having local historic importance: • The Chalk Pit, Royston Road • World War II anti-tank pillar, High Street • Flint House and Chestnut Cottages, Cambridge Road • The Chaise and Pair, 1 High Street • The Coach House, High Street • Stallibrass Almshouses • ~~Ashgrove~~ • The Tally Ho Public House • Newsells Historic Park & Garden	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	Development proposals which affect these **non-designated** heritage assets, or are within their setting, should ~~avoid or minimise any harm to their significance.~~ **include a** proportionate description of their significance and the impact of the proposals ~~on it must be provided by applicants~~, to enable a balanced judgement to be made, having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the asset. ~~Development proposals affecting a site with potential archaeological interest shall be accompanied by an archaeological desk-based assessment informed by an analysis of the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record and, where necessary, a field evaluation.~~	
	Add a policy map extracted from Appendix G of non-designated heritage assets. Include text in policy to make reference to the new policy map and in paragraph 4.3.27	
	Delete Ashgrove as one of the assets and remove all references including photographs from the Neighbourhood Plan including with reference to Ashgrove in respect of the description of View 11 in Appendix E.	The Examiner has proposed the modification to delete Ashgrove from the list of non-designated heritage assets at the request of a local resident. The Parish Council confirmed with the Examiner that it was in agreement with the local resident. BPC have amended the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.
Policy BN L1 Valued Community Assets	Amend the first sentence in the policy as follows: ~~Permission~~ **Proposals** for ~~a~~ change of use of these facilities ~~must~~ **should** be ~~supported by evidence that the facilities were no longer used with no likelihood that re-use was possible or desirable, or that their active use was to be replaced elsewhere and would still benefit village residents,~~ **assessed** in accordance with North Hertfordshire Local Plan Polici**es**~~y~~ **ETC7** and HC1.	Note : this amendment refers to the 1st full paragraph in the policy, rather than the 1st sentence. BPC have amended the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
Policy BN L2 Existing Pubs	Amend the first two paragraphs of Policy BN L2 to read: The conversion of existing pubs (The Tally Ho in Barkway and The Woodman Inn in Nuthampstead) to any other uses will be **supported** ~~strongly opposed unless, following viability assessment and public consultation,~~ **where it is in accordance with Local Plan policy ETC7 and** it can be clearly demonstrated that ~~they are~~ **the use is** ~~no longer~~ **not financially** viable ~~and no longer required by the community~~. Proof of viability must be robust and could include ~~CAMAR's~~ **CAMRA's** Public House Viability Test* or ~~be supported by~~ a District Valuer Services* report.	*the underlining in the last paragraph are hyperlinks to those websites in the electronic version of the Neighbourhood Plan
Policy BN L3	Amend policy BN L3 as follows: Proposals that would contribute positively to the development of the community hub to serve the villages of Barkway and Nuthampstead will be encouraged~~. The first option to be considered would be~~ **including** extensions/improvements to existing facilities. Such proposals ~~must~~ **should** demonstrate how they will accommodate visitors of all ages and abilities, including those with dementia.	
Para 4.4.14	Delete first two sentences at paragraph 4.4.14 ~~Barkway Stud utilises a number of paddocks throughout the village, but the central stables lie at the bottom of Burrs Lane. A successful working stud farm breeding ponies for children, it also provides space for livery and has a ménage in which horses can be schooled.~~ Cokenach cricket ground lies in beautiful surroundings on the edge of the Cokenach Estate. Having moved from its previous ground, the club now has a new pavilion which can be hired for events. The teams (of all ages) play a full calendar of fixtures in the season and there is a thriving coaching programme for youngsters. Many former members now play at District and County level and the club's ECB coaches work with local schools to encourage participation in the sport.	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
Para 4.4.16	Delete paragraph 4.4.16: ~~The communal area behind Windmill Close is a pocket of open land in a residential area which has now been given by NHC on a long-term lease to the Parish Council. It has been used by generations as a safe place in which children can play and also as an area for all ages to hold community barbecues and other social gatherings. The area is accessed through gates in the back gardens of the residents, via a footpath leading from Windmill Close, and is easily accessible from the BK2 housing development.~~	
Policy BN L4 Protected Recreational Open Space	Amend Policy BN L4 to delete the reference to R2 Windmill Close	The Examiner has not explicitly made proposed modifications in respect of the re-numbering of the criteria, but this will be done in order that the Policy makes sense and it does not affect the wording of the Policy. BPC have amended the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.
	Amend the policy maps as appropriate	
	Amend the word 'permitted' to 'supported' in the final sentence: Proposals for development on this land will only be ~~permitted~~ **supported** where it retains or enhances the provision, quality and accessibility of the open space in accordance with Policy NE5 in NHLP.	
Policy BN E1 Preserving and Developing Local Employment Opportunities	Amend first paragraph as follows: Development proposals that would support the retention of existing businesses and the development of new local employment opportunities within the settlement of Barkway will be encouraged, including artisan businesses, **provided that the proposal is appropriate to the location in terms of size, scale, function, catchment area and / or historic and architectural character as identified in Local Plan policy ETC2** ~~they do not conflict with other policies in this plan~~. In Nuthampstead, rural business will be supported in accordance with policies on rural areas beyond the Green Belt **including Local Plan policy CGB1**.	In our representations, we suggested that some additional details were needed in the policy. The Examiner's proposed modifications address the suggestions that were made.

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	Amend the second paragraph as follows: **Support will be given to employment proposals** ~~Expansion of existing industrial operations should be accompanied by an appropriately detailed~~ **that include an** emissions reduction plan and ~~the adoption of a '~~ **adopt** best practice ~~approach~~ **for** emissions control and waste management~~. This must refer to any risk to further pollution of the River Quin.~~	
	Amend the first sentence of the third section of the policy as follows: Proposals for the diversification of agricultural **and land-based rural** businesses will be supported provided: (a) The development is ancillary to the agricultural business or (b) The development supports the viability of the existing farm business (c) The development does not include domestic housing for sale.	
Policy BN E2 Internet Infrastructure	Delete 'throughout the parish' in the policy, to read: Provision of facilities to support the delivery of efficient and effective landline, fibre optic broadband to premises (FTTP) and mobile coverage ~~throughout the parish~~ will be encouraged, provided they are sensitively designed and located in accord with other policies in this Plan.	
Para 4.6.1	Amend Paragraph 4.6.1 as follows: ~~There are currently surplus places at most age levels at local schools. The exception is for nursery and reception in the Barley and Barkway VA Church of England First Schools Federation for which only 15 places are available for each year's intake, leading to children having to be turned away.~~ ***Building works currently proposed at the Barkway School have planning permission and will make the current buildings***	The Examiner's proposed modifications reflect the most up to date position with regards to the school in Barkway provided by Hertfordshire County Council. The Examiner has made an error in the last sentence. The sentence should say 'school

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	more fit for purpose as the classrooms are small. These works are funded by the Diocese/school and through S106 contributions. ~~A major redevelopment of the Barkway premises is required to increase capacity to at least 25 for nursery and reception and to update the teaching and learning environment of the school. Pressure on the places for these younger age groups would increase if BK3 were to proceed.~~ ***Currently, there are 15 places available and therefore the schools are not at full capacity. Hertfordshire County Council consider there is sufficient capacity to mitigate demand from planned new housing growth.***	is' not 'schools are' as the paragraph now only mentions Barkway School. This final sentence of the paragraph should read: ***Currently, there are 15 places available and therefore the school is not at full capacity. Hertfordshire County Council consider there is sufficient capacity to mitigate demand from planned new housing growth.***
Policy BN T1 Sustainable Transport Provision	Amend the policy as follows: Major development proposals, ~~must~~ **are encouraged to** positively contribute towards improvements in the quality of local transport services **appropriate to its scale, type, and location,** in order to ensure that residents have access to sustainable modes of transport. ~~Financial contributions will be sought for~~ **Improvements could include:** • Provision of communal electric car charging points in Barkway village • Provision of ~~a~~ shared community ~~autonomous vehicles~~ **transport** • ~~Contributions towards a village minibus~~	
Policy BN T3 Public Rights of Way	Replace policy with the following: ~~Development proposals that would lead to the loss or disruption of Public Rights of Way will not be permitted. Proposals to support the use of these Public Rights of Way by integrating them into larger network will be encouraged.~~	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	In order to maintain Barkway and Nuthampstead's close links to the countryside and to ensure permeability between residential areas and services and facilities, development proposals should utilise opportunities to link into the wider footpath and bridleway network where applicable.	
Policy BN T4 Safe and Accessible Walking and Cycling Routes	Amend policy as follows: Major developments should ~~feature an~~ **be designed to help create and maintain an** appropriate and proportionate package of safe and attractive walking and cycling routes that link schools, services, and facilities such as shops. ~~The location and access arrangements of~~ **Proposals for** new schools should promote **safe and suitable access** ~~pedestrian safety by~~ **including** widening **existing** footpaths **and** ensuring ~~that they~~ **footpaths** are well lit~~, and by reducing vehicular congestion~~. Proposals which incorporate travel plans ~~that~~ **or** include measures to improve the safety of local roads leading to local schools will be supported.	
Policy BN T5 Vehicle Parking in Residential Development	Amend the first part of the policy as follows: New residential development ~~must~~ **should** seek to ~~minimise on-~~ **increase off** street parking in Barkway and Nuthampstead particularly in Barkway High Street, Cambridge Road, Royston Road, Church Lane, Chapel Close, Windmill Close and Periwinkle Close.	
Para 5.3.2	Amend the paragraph as follows: Barkway Parish Council and the Nuthampstead Parish Meeting team will request these priorities be reflected in s106 agreements, where ~~appropriate~~ ***necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; directly related to the development; and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development. The Parish Council and Parish Meeting*** will also direct funding	

Policy or paragraph reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
	received from any future Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and other funding streams towards projects which fall within these priorities as and when opportunities arise.	
Policy BN I1 Spending Priorities	Amend the second paragraph of Policy BN I1: The ~~Parish Council will request that these~~ priorities ~~are~~ **should be** reflected in section 106 agreements, where ~~appropriate~~ **necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; directly related to the development; and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development. Additionally, the Parish Council and Parish Meeting ~~and~~ will ~~direct funding~~ support proposals to fund priority schemes identified in Appendix O** from ~~any~~ New Homes Bonus, Community Infrastructure Levy, or other funding streams~~, towards projects which fall within these priorities~~.	

Other proposed modifications to the Appendices for the neighbourhood plan

Appendix Reference	Examiners Proposed Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
Appendix B	References renumbered if any changes to the Local Green Spaces	
Appendix G	Amend any references to non-designated heritage assets	BPC have amended the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.
Appendix I	Delete from the Neighbourhood Plan	BPC have amended the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.

Appendix Reference	Additional Modifications	Comments from North Herts Council, Barkway Parish Council or Nuthampstead Parish Meeting
Appendix E	Remove reference to V5 in Appendix E and anywhere else, and re-number views	The Examiner has not explicitly made proposed modifications in respect of Appendix E to delete references to View 5 in Policy BN NE4 (as outlined on Page 14). This will be done in order that the details in the Appendix match the proposed modifications in the Policy. BPC have amended the Neighbourhood Plan accordingly.

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CABINET

18 MARCH 2025

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER – INTERIM PLAN SUBMISSION

REPORT OF: MANAGING DIRECTOR

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 16 December 2024 the Government published its Devolution White Paper, providing details of their plans for local government reorganisation to support devolving power to communities. On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote a letter to the Leaders of all District and Borough Councils in Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire County Council, formally inviting them to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation for the area, setting out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for the process. The first stage is submission of an Interim Plan by 21 March 2025, which has been worked on jointly by the District, Borough and County Councils.

Note an urgency notice is required in relation to this noting under 2.1 and any final decision under recommendation 2.2.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet notes the current draft of the Interim Plan Submission (Appendix B).

2.2. That authority be delegated to the Deputy Leader, in consultation with the Service Director Resources and Service Director Legal and Community, to agree and submit the Interim Plan to Government by 21 March 2025.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To ensure that the Council is complying with the request of the Secretary of State (Appendix A).

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. An alternative option could have been to not submit a response by 21 March 2025, however that would have risked North Herts Council's views not being taken into account by Government and therefore was considered unwise. A second alternative could have been to develop our own submission, however that would not have been feasible due to the work required and would also have been inconsistent with the clear message from Government that areas should work together to seek consensus wherever possible.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Leader of the Council has attended various meetings of the Hertfordshire Leaders Group and also separate meetings with the District and Borough Council Leaders and is therefore fully aware of the approach taken. Members generally have been updated by the Leader and Managing Director as and when there have been significant developments. It is recognised that further engagement with all Members is required, once a clearer picture emerges from the ongoing work. Additionally, in our regular catch ups with the local MPs, we have updated them on progress and canvassed views.

5.2. The Council has emphasised the importance of stakeholder engagement as part of this process and engagement will take place as proposals develop.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 External Counsel's advice has been obtained in the Hertfordshire area and this has confirmed that the decision on this interim plan, is not a key one, and therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. On 16 December 2024, the government published a white paper on English devolution and reform to local government, setting out the potential for the most significant reforms to local government since the Local Government Act 1972 (see link at 18.1 below). The White Paper covers new transport, employment, housing, business and environmental policies, but also focuses on two aspects of reforming and joining up public services through:

- Widening and broadening devolution across England through the creation of new Strategic Authorities and;

- A programme of local government reorganisation to create new unitary councils across two-tier areas.

7.2. The government has made devolution a priority and the White Paper published in December 2024 sets out plans to create a new network of Strategic Authorities that will cover the whole of England. These Strategic Authorities will have populations of at least 1.5 million people and responsibilities linked to transport and local infrastructure; skills and employment; housing and strategic planning (not determining planning applications); economic development and regeneration; environment and climate change; health and wellbeing; and public safety.

7.3. A Strategic Authority will also cover a 'sensible' economic geography with a sense of identity'. It needs to be contiguous for all of the constituent authorities. It is the government's desire for a Mayor to lead a Strategic Authority. They want local areas to propose plans for devolution but will use Ministerial Directives to force this to happen if places do not come up with appropriate proposals. Hertfordshire did not apply to become a Devolution Priority Place (DPP). A DPP area has to commit to have a Mayoral Strategic Authority with a plan to have the elections for the Mayor in 2026. Therefore, there is a little bit more time to develop proposals for a strategic authority covering Hertfordshire and a further update will be provided once firmer proposals are available.

7.4. As part of its plans for devolution, the Government has announced a programme of local government reorganisation that will replace all two-tier county and district councils and small or failing unitaries with new unitary councils that have populations of at least 500,000 people (but recognises there may be exceptions to this scale on a case-by-case basis). These much larger unitary structures would then join together in groups to form Strategic Authorities. Hertfordshire is a two-tier area as there are ten District and Borough Councils and the County Council. The Government believes that local government reorganisation, together with devolution over a big strategic area, will improve public services and support economic growth.

7.5. On 5 February 2025, the Minster of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote a letter to the Leaders of all District and Borough Councils in Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire County Council, formally inviting them to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation for the area, setting out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for the process. A copy of the letter can be found in Appendix A.

7.6. In order to comply with the Government's request, an Interim Plan for local government reorganisation in Hertfordshire is required to be submitted by 21 March 2025 and a full proposal will need to be submitted by 28 November 2025. Officials from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) will then provide feedback on the plan to help support Hertfordshire develop final proposals. As the work to conclude this Interim Plan is ongoing at the time of writing this report and is likely to continue up to the deadline for submission, the latest draft of the Interim Plan will be published prior to the Cabinet meeting, with authority sought to delegate final sign off.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. Discussions have started between all Hertfordshire district and borough councils, Hertfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) about how best to enable devolution and shape plans for local government reorganisation. As made clear in the statement of the Leader of the Council on 11 February 2025 (see North Herts Council respond to local government reform letter | North Herts Council) our priority remains to ensure that any changes genuinely benefit North Herts residents and businesses and to fully explore the impact they may have on localised decision-making and the provision of local services. There are currently differing views on the best model for local government in Hertfordshire, but the Councils are committed to working together to determine how we can best achieve the Government's goals. This also meets the expectation set out in the Minister's letter that he expected *"local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area … rather than developing competing proposals"*.

8.2. A White Paper Working Group involving officers from all district and borough councils as well as the county council and PCC's office has been set up to establish an evidence base for both the devolution and local government reorganisation proposals. This group is also leading on the formulation of the response on the Interim Plan. The White Paper Working Group reports to the Hertfordshire Chief Executive Coordination Group, who in turn reports to Hertfordshire Leaders Group. It is the intention that a single response for the Interim Plan will be submitted for Hertfordshire by 21 March, which is likely to contain multiple options being explored. It should be noted that the March submission is primarily an MHCLG checkpoint to get assurance that councils are working together to develop

proposals in line with the Government's criteria. Any response in March does not prevent further options being developed or explored.

8.3. On 17 February 2025, the Hertfordshire Leaders Group met to discuss how to respond to the Minister's request to produce an interim plan. At this meeting, there was agreement to produce and submit a single response indicating that the following four options were being developed:

- A single unitary Council for Hertfordshire [which would require another area to partner with for the Strategic Authority]
- Two unitary Councils for Hertfordshire
- Three unitary Councils for Hertfordshire
- Four unitary Councils for Hertfordshire

8.4 It should also be noted that for the elections for Hertfordshire County Council will go ahead as scheduled on 1 May 2025. The table below sets out the current timeline.

Status	Date	Event
Confirmed	16 December 2024	Devolution White Paper published
Confirmed	5 February 2025	Statutory invitation received from the government to submit local government reorganisation proposals
Confirmed	21 March 2025	Submit Interim Plan for Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution
Confirmed	1 May 2025	Hertfordshire County Council Elections
Confirmed	28 November 2025	Submit full Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution proposal
Proposed in white paper	May 2027	Elections to shadow unitary authorities
Proposed in white paper	1 April 2028	Vesting day for new unitary council(s)

At this stage it is unclear when the election of Mayor for a new Strategic Authority would take place.

8.5 It should be noted that the dates above could change, either through Government changing them, or (for the latter two dates if Government agrees) if the Hertfordshire authorities requested different dates in order to facilitate the safe and legal transfer of functions to the new unitary authority/ies.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. By virtue of Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Secretary of State has the statutory power to invite proposals for a single tier of local government from any principal authority (which is defined as a county council or district council in England). The Councils across Hertfordshire, has received such an invitation.

9.2. When responding to a request, the Council must have regards to any guidance from the Secretary of State as to what the proposal should seek to achieve and matters that should be taken into account in formulating the proposal. The details of which is set out in the letter received on 5 February 2025.

9.3. External Counsel's legal advice was obtained by Hertfordshire authorities. In summary this confirmed that there was no express statutory provision for an interim plan of the kind requested by the Minister, nor would such a plan have any specific legal status or consequences. Approval of this interim plan (albeit general in nature) was, nonetheless an incidental function, which in the absence of any specific legislative provision, would be the responsibility of the Executive under section 9D(2) Local Government Act 2000.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. External support (with a focus on specialist financial modelling) has been procured to support the White Paper Working Group and to inform the proposals moving forward. This support has been jointly funded across the Councils. The costs up to the March submission can be met from underspends in the current year budgets.

10.2. There will be a need to incur further costs as we move towards the November submission. The level of these costs is currently unknown, but (where necessary) will be covered in future budget monitoring reports.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. 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 and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2. The Council Delivery Plan item on this agenda proposes the adoption of a corporate risk for Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution. This reflects both the long term impacts on the nature of local government for North Herts, as well as the shorter term impacts, especially the resource implications.

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 Equalities Impact Assessment was not completed for the Interim Plan stage, however as plans progress an Equalities Impact Assessment will be developed to inform final local government reorganisation proposals to be submitted to Government in November 2025.

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 Interim Plan.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 Support for the White Paper Working Group has been made available from existing resources, but is having a significant impact on workloads of the Managing Director in particular. Significant resources will be needed to be made available to prepare for the full proposal in November 2025, particularly if competing proposals begin to emerge.

15,2 Local government reorganisation will likely have a direct impact on the Council's recruitment and retention and this will continue to be monitored by the Leadership Team, along with support from Human Resources team.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Letter from Secretary of State for Local Government and English Devolution, 5 February 2025

16.2 Appendix B – Interim Plan Submission for Hertfordshire – TO FOLLOW

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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

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

17.3 Jeanette Thompson, Monitoring Officer
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17.4 Reuben Ayavoo, Policy & Communities Manager
reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4212

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 English Devolution White Paper December 2024 – Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth English Devolution White Paper

18.2 LGA briefing - Devolution White Paper: On-the-day factual briefing | Local Government Association

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Your reference:
Our reference:

To: Leaders of two-tier councils in Hertfordshire

- Broxbourne Borough Council
- Dacorum Borough Council
- East Herts Council
- Hertfordshire Couty Council
- Hertsmere Borough Council
- North Hertfordshire District Council
- St Albans City and District Council
- Stevenage Borough Council
- Three Rivers District Council
- Watford Borough Council
- Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

5 February 2025

Dear Leaders

This Government has been clear on our vision for simpler, more sustainable, local government structures, alongside a transfer of power out of Westminster through devolution. We know that councils of all political stripes are in crisis after a decade of decline and instability. Indeed, a record number of councils asked the government for support this year to help them set their budgets.

This new government will not waste this opportunity to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers. Local leaders are central to our mission to deliver change for hard-working people in every corner of the country through our Plan for Change, and our councils are doing everything they can to stay afloat and provide for their communities day in, day out. The Government will work closely with you to deliver these aims to the most ambitious timeline.

I am writing to you now to formally invite you to work with other council leaders in your area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation, and to set out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for this process. A formal invitation with guidance for the development of your proposals is attached at Annex A. This invitation sets out the criteria against which proposals will be assessed.

Developing proposals for reorganisation

We expect there to be different views on the best structures for an area, and indeed there may be merits to a variety of approaches. Nevertheless, it is not in council taxpayers' interest to devote public funds and your valuable time and effort into the development of multiple proposals which unnecessarily fragment services, compete against one another, require lengthy implementation periods or which do not sufficiently address local interests and identities.

The public will rightly expect us to deliver on our shared responsibility to design and implement the best local government structures for efficient and high-quality public service delivery. We therefore expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.

This will mean making every effort to work together to develop and jointly submit one proposal for unitary local government across the whole of your area. The proposal that is developed for the whole of your area may be for one or more new unitary councils and should be complementary to devolution plans. It is open to you to explore options with neighbouring councils in addition to those included in this invitation, particularly where this helps those councils to address concerns about their sustainability or limitations arising from their size or boundaries or where you are working together across a wider geography within a strategic authority.

I understand there will be some cases when it is not possible for all councils in an area to jointly develop and submit a proposal, despite their best efforts. This will not be a barrier to progress, and the Government will consider any suitable proposals submitted by the relevant local authorities.

Supporting places through change

It is essential that councils continue to deliver their business-as-usual services and duties, which remain unchanged until reorganisation is complete. This includes progress towards the Government's ambition of universal coverage of up-to-date local plans as quickly as possible. To support with capacity, I intend to provide some funds for preparing to take forward any proposal, and I will share further information later in the process.

Considering the efficiencies that are possible through reorganisation, we expect that areas will be able to meet transition costs over time from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

The default position is that assets and liabilities remain locally managed by councils, but we acknowledge that there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices. Where that is the case, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation, and Commissioners should be engaged in these discussions. We will continue to discuss the approach that is proposed with the area.

I welcome the partnership approach that is being taken across the sector to respond to the ambitious plans set out in the White Paper. My department will continue to work closely with the Local Government Association (LGA), the District Councils Network, the County Councils Network and other local government partners to plan how best to support councils through this process. We envisage that practical support will be needed to understand and address the key thematic issues that will arise through reorganisation, including managing service impacts and opportunities for the workforce, digital and IT systems, and leadership support.

Timelines and next steps for interim plans and full proposals
We ask for an interim plan to be submitted on or before 21 March 2025, in line with the guidance set out in the attached Annex. My officials will provide feedback on your plan to help support you to develop final proposals.

I will expect any full proposal to be submitted **by 28 November**. If I decide to implement any proposal, and the necessary legislation is agreed by Parliament, we will work with you to move to elections to new 'shadow' unitary councils as soon as possible as is the usual arrangement in the process of local government reorganisation.

Following submission, I will consider any and all proposals carefully before taking decisions on how to proceed. My officials are available throughout to discuss how your reorganisation and devolution aspirations might work together and what support you think you might need to proceed.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to work together to put local government in your area on a more sustainable footing, creating simpler structures for your area that will deliver the services that local people and businesses need and deserve. As set out in the White Paper, my commitment is that clear leadership locally will be met with an active partner nationally.

I am copying this letter to council Chief Executives. I am also copying this letter to local Members of Parliament and to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,



JIM MCMAHON OBE MP
Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution

Annex A

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007

INVITATION FOR PROPOSALS FOR A SINGLE TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in exercise of his powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act'), hereby invites any principal authority in the area of the county of Hertfordshire, to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government.

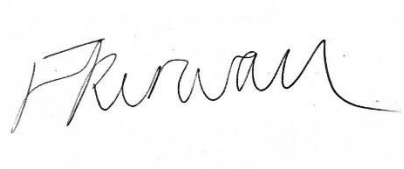
This may be one of the following types of proposal as set out in the 2007 Act:

- Type A – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned
- Type B – a single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts
- Type C – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas
- Combined proposal – a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals.

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with paragraphs 1 to 3:

1. Any proposal must be made by **28 November 2025**.
2. In responding to this invitation an authority must have regard to the guidance from the Secretary of State set out in the Schedule to this invitation, and to any further guidance on responding to this invitation received from the Secretary of State.
3. An authority responding to this invitation may either make its own proposal or make a proposal jointly with any of the other authorities invited to respond.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.



F KIRWAN

A senior civil servant in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

5 February 2025

SCHEDULE

Guidance from the Secretary of State for proposals for unitary local government.

Criteria for unitary local government

1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.

a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.

b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.

c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement.

d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.

b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.

c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.

d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

e) For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.

f) In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation. For areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation.

3. **Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.**

   a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.

   b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.

   c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

4. **Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.**

   a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.

   b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.

   c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

5. **New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.**

   a) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.

   b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.

   c) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

6. **New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.**

   a) Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.

   b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

Developing proposals for unitary local government

The following matters should be taken into account in formulating a proposal:

Boundary Changes

a) Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for your proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.

b) There will need to be a strong public services and financial sustainability related justification for any proposals that involve boundary changes, or that affect wider public services, such as fire and rescue authorities, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation.

Engagement and consultation on reorganisation

a) We expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.

b) For those areas where Commissioners have been appointed by the Secretary of State as part of the Best Value Intervention, their input will be important in the development of robust unitary proposals.

c) We also expect local leaders to engage their Members of Parliament, and to ensure there is wide engagement with local partners and stakeholders, residents, workforce and their representatives, and businesses on a proposal.

d) The engagement that is undertaken should both inform the development of robust proposals and should also build a shared understanding of the improvements you expect to deliver through reorganisation.

e) The views of other public sector providers will be crucial to understanding the best way to structure local government in your area. This will include the relevant Mayor (if you already have one), Integrated Care Board, Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Authority, local Higher Education and Further Education providers, National Park Authorities, and the voluntary and third sector.

f) Once a proposal has been submitted it will be for the Government to decide on taking a proposal forward and to consult as required by statute. This will be a completely separate process to any consultation undertaken on mayoral devolution in an area, which will be undertaken in some areas early this year, in parallel with this invitation.

Interim plans

An interim plan should be provided to Government on or before **21 March 2025.** This should set out your progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance. The level of detail that is possible at this stage may vary from place to place but the expectation is that one interim plan is jointly submitted by all councils in the area. It may be the case that the interim plan describes more than one potential proposal for your area, if there is more than one option under consideration. The interim plan should:

a) identify any barriers or challenges where further clarity or support would be helpful.

b) identify the likely options for the size and boundaries of new councils that will offer the best structures for delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services across the area, along with indicative efficiency saving opportunities.

c) include indicative costs and arrangements in relation to any options including planning for future service transformation opportunities.

d) include early views as to the councillor numbers that will ensure both effective democratic representation for all parts of the area, and also effective governance and decision-making arrangements which will balance the unique needs of your cities, towns, rural and coastal areas, in line with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance.

e) include early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions.

f) include a summary of local engagement that has been undertaken and any views expressed, along with your further plans for wide local engagement to help shape your developing proposals.

g) set out indicative costs of preparing proposals and standing up an implementation team as well as any arrangements proposed to coordinate potential capacity funding across the area.

h) set out any voluntary arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward and to help balance the decisions needed now to maintain service delivery and ensure value for money for council taxpayers, with those key decisions that will affect the future success of any new councils in the area.

CABINET
18TH March 2025

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: Shared Prosperity Fund process and proposed allocation for 2025/26 spend

REPORT OF: Service Director - Enterprise

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Tamsin Thomas – Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts

COUNCIL PRIORITY: A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 A report to set out the delegated approval (for Executive Members and Directors) process for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This report also sets out the proposed plans for the 2025/26 UK Shared Prosperity Fund spend allocation. We are seeking Cabinet's endorsement of the outline proposals set out in the body of this report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet consider and approve the proposed outline distribution of funding allocated to the Council by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for 2025/26 under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF) to specific schemes;

2.2. That Cabinet delegate approval of individual grants and payments relating to schemes funded by UK SPF 2025/26 to the relevant Directors in consultation with the relevant Executive Members as identified with reference to table 8.1.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. North Herts Council will be provided with funding in May 2025 to allocate to schemes proposed in accordance with the revised Guidance for UK SPF for 2025/26 from the MHCLG (provided as Appendix 1 to this report).

3.2. The funds regulations allow considerable flexibility in how the Council allocates funding to each approved Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) activity. On 3rd March, officers presented a report to the Political Liaison Board and to the Senior Leadership team who endorsed the proposal set out.

3.3. We are seeking approval to delegate approval of spend decisions, payments or grants made under the schemes to the relevant Directors in consultation with Executive Members. Once Cabinet approval has been obtained, the individual projects will be managed by the relevant service areas.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. Should the Council not agree an allocation and therefore not spend the funding, the regulations state we must return the funding MHCLG.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Consultation has been undertaken with relevant Directors and officers, who have proposed items for the scheme. The final proposal seeks to reflect a balanced distribution of the funding across Council priorities.

5.2. As the UK SPF allocation has been reduced considerably from the previous year (-48.5%), the focus has been on schemes that are managed within the Council and are aligned with the Council Plan to ensure maximum impact.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains recommendations on a key decision which was added to the Forward Plan on 13th February 2025.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The UK SPF was originally launched by DLUHC (now MHCLG) in April 2021. The SPF has provided funding to every English and Welsh District and Unitary Authority over three years from April 2022 to April 2025.

7.2. MHCLG has indicated that 2025/26 will form a “transition year” for UK SPF, as they organise longer term funding proposals for subsequent years.

7.3. MHCLG has stated that there will be no carry over of funding from previous UK SPF funding years and that any underspend in previous years will be deducted from the 2025/26 allocation (i.e. rather than having to repay the funds).

7.4. The allocation for North Herts Council in 2025/26 is a total £490,564, of which at least £90,574 must be capital expenditure.

7.5. Assessment of the schemes undertaken in the first three years of UK SPF will be conducted in April 2025, to enable the completion of the MHCLG return.

7.6. The only scheme continuing from previous years is the Herts Futures proposal. The Active Communities and Community Wellbeing proposals build on activities that were previously funded from UK SPF in 2024/25. Extracts from the December 2024 Returns Report are included in Appendix 4.

7.7. The structure of the UK SPF allows flexibility in the use of funds, allowing transfers between projects (subject to Cabinet approval) in order to ensure that funding is used efficiently.

7.8. North Herts Council is not required to produce an ‘Investment Plan’ however the Economic Development officer will report the activities through the new MHCLG reporting system.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. It is proposed that the £490,574 funding should be allocated as follows:

Project Title	**Appendix Reference**	**Revenue (£) Budget <=£399,990**	**Capital (£) Budget >=£90,574**	**Directorate**
Active Communities and Community Wellbeing	2	94,000	-	Environment
Economic Development Programme (in line with the strategy)	3	100,000	-	Enterprise
Herts Futures	4	120,000	-	Enterprise
Digital Inclusion Scheme	5	40,000	10,000	Customers
Sustainable Communities Grants	6	25,990	50,574	Environment
Renovation of estate buildings	7	20,000	30,000	Enterprise
Total:		399,990	90,574	

8.2. Active Communities and Community Wellbeing

This project relates to the following themes set out in the criteria:

- Investment Priority: Communities and Place / People and Skills
- Themes: Healthy, safe and inclusive communities / Employability
  Sub-themes:
  E6: Local arts, heritage, cultural and creative activities (including sports) & Healthy – improve health and wellbeing
  E33 & E34: Employment support for economically inactive people & Courses including basic, life & career skills.

The Active Communities and Community Wellbeing teams wish to deliver a programme of wellbeing interventions that build on the success of the £100K programme delivered through UK SPF in 2024/25, and address identified health inequalities in North Herts.

The programme will have the following strands:

1. Strength and balance for individuals at risk from falls and frailty
2. Creative arts to tackle loneliness and social isolation
3. Exercise referral opportunities in the local community

4. Intergenerational interventions utilising the arts to build relationships between our oldest and youngest residents
5. Employability and volunteering interventions.

Element	Cost 2025/26
Community Wellbeing Assistant (20 hours per week, grade 4)	26,000
Strength and balance	15,000
Creative Arts	13,000
Community exercise referral	10,000
Intergenerational arts & culture	10,000
Employability & Volunteering	20,000
Total:	**94,000**

See Appendix 2 for further details.

8.3 Economic Development Strategy Implementation

This relates to: Support and advice for Business (OP10/OC8-17) and Developing the Visitor Economy (OP8,10/OC8-17).

The Economic Development team would like to launch the new Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan to grow and enhance North Herts Council's economic development offering across the District. The strategy is in draft format, with the aim of it being approved by Cabinet in June 2025. Please see below for examples of the proposed work programme:

Building a Local company network in North Herts - increasing online and in-person engagement with and between North Herts businesses (£50K)

Tourism and the Visitor Economy - building on the Place Narrative work (delivered by the Communications Team) and Visit Herts membership, plus supporting activity to promote the District as a tourist destination will cost an estimated (£25K).

Enhancing and closing the skills gap – organising and delivering a school/college/University job fare (£5K).

Supplementary Business Support for Local Companies **–** creating a local Business Hub, organising dedicated awards and offering a series of networking opportunities (£20K).

Total: £100K.

See Appendix 3 for further details.

8.4 Herts Futures

Herts Futures (a part of Hertfordshire County Council) provides a range of Business Support and Skills programmes to businesses and individuals on a Hertfordshire-wide level. These programmes offer comprehensive support and would be uneconomic to provide at district level.

Prior to Britain's withdrawal from the EU, these programmes were funded by a variety of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) funding paid directly to the Herts LEP, together with extra funding from central government and Herts County Council (HCC). The SPF was designed to replace the ERDF and ESF funding but was paid directly to the Districts.

Recognising that Districts have seen circa. 50% reduction in funding this year, they suggest that, to enable programmes to remain viable the following programmes are prioritised for 2025/26. They have prioritised the programmes that are most effective and have suggested two options (note. The 'adjusted ask' is the option that most districts seem to be choosing):

Workstream	Initial Ask	Adjusted Ask
Herts Growth Hub	£30,000	£30,000
Get Enterprising	£30,000	£30,000
HOP/Brokerage	£20,000	£20,000
Herts Film Office	£10,000	£10,000
Inward Investment	£12,500	£10,000
Pathways to Employment	£45,000	£20,000
Total	£147,500	£120,000

The above request would equate to around 25% of our total 2025/26 allocation or 30% of the revenue element.

Herts Futures provide quarterly progress reports showing progress against each of the above workstreams. They also provide us with details of who they have been engaging with using the funding provided. Extracts from the most recent report for quarter 3 2024/25 are included in the Appendix.

See Appendix 4 for further details.

8.5 Digital Skills Training Scheme

The project relates to:

People and Skills/ Skills/Essential skills (including numeracy, literacy, ESOL and digital)
OC23 – number of people with basic skills
OP21 – number of people supported to participate in basic skills courses

This is a North Herts programme to assess the level of digital exclusion in the community and to hold workshops to enable those identified to gain basic understanding and skills.

Total cost £40K Revenue; £10K (Capital).

See Appendix 5 for further details.

8.6 Sustainability Grants

The Sustainable Communities Grant helps communities and businesses in North Hertfordshire to take action on sustainability and climate change. Projects will seek to increase biodiversity; reduce emissions of buildings by installing low carbon heating options or improving energy

efficiency; reduce reliance on fossils fuels in transport; or increase community engagement on sustainability and climate change. This work will support the council priorities of Sustainability and Thriving Communities.

The funding is currently budgeted as £25,990 Revenue and £50,574 Capital spend but may be adjusted to accommodate underspends in other schemes.

See Appendix 6 for further details.

8.7 Renovation of Estate and Community Buildings

The Council estate contains a number of buildings and areas which are in need of renewal and renovation to maximise their potential benefit to the Community as a whole. This scheme aims to transform them into viable, attractive and useful facilities.

See Appendix 7 for further details.

8.8 The Sustainability Grants (8.6) and Renovation of the Estate (8.7), have a flexible budget to enable any underspend to be used within the financial year 2025/26 if required. Quarterly meetings will take place between all the Project leads and Economic Development Officer to ensure that any underspends are quickly identified and reallocated to projects that are able to spend additional funds. These meetings will provide the overall oversight of the UK SPF allocation to ensure that the spend is in line with the proposals. Any reallocation of funds will have to align with any governance arrangements in place for each project These projects cannot operate in isolation and the quarterly meetings must identify any delays or underspend at an early stage and re-assigned with updates to the relevant Directors.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The allocation of grant funding is an executive function. This means that grant funding can, as per section 9E of the Local Government Act 2000, be discharged by the Leader and Cabinet, or by other Executive Members or Officers as delegated in the Council's Constitution. The decision being accords with this principle and the grants are allocated in accordance with the delegated powers of the executive and officers as set out in the table at paragraph 8.1 above.

9.2 Otherwise, Cabinet's remit under section 5.7.28 of its terms of reference in the Council's Constitution allows it to make decisions where a policy or strategy does not exist".

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The terms of the UK SPF grant require that a minimum allocation is spent on capital. For 2025/26 the total allocation is £490,564 and at least £90, 574 must be spent on capital. The anticipated capital expenditure of £90,574 as per table 8.1 and equates to minimum required.

10.2 We anticipate that capital expenditure will exceed the minimums included in the table 8.1 in the case of the Sustainability grants and the Estate and Communities Building

Renovation schemes. This will be monitored to ensure compliance with the grant conditions.

10.3 All payments made will need to be assessed to ensure compliance with the Subsidy Control Act. This has not previously been an issue.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. 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 and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2 There is a risk of having to return funding to the DLUHC if allocated funding is not spent in line with funding requirements (by 31 March 2026). The project Risk Log identifies priority risks and considers potential mitigating activities to help us manage associated threats.

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 proposed projects in this report will benefit all members of the community (including those with protected characteristics) and will help improve equality as well as community facilities, community participation and inclusion and support for both individuals and businesses. They demonstrate positive impact on the community as well as foster good relations. As projects progress, Equality Implications will be considered, and Equality Impact Assessments conducted where relevant and on a project level.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report. Any procurements of goods and services are likely to be at a value where “go local” will need to be considered.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no negative environmental implications arising as a direct result of this report.

14.2 The Sustainability Grants scheme will have positive environmental implications by helping groups and businesses to reduce their impact on the environment.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The Active Communities and Community Wellbeing proposal includes the recruitment of a part-time fixed-term Community Wellbeing Assistant. It is expected that the other proposals will align with Council priorities and be delivered from existing staff resources.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 – Intervention Themes and Outputs & Outcomes set by MHCLG
Appendix 2 - Active Communities and Community Wellbeing.
Appendix 3 - Economic Development Strategy Implementation
Appendix 4 - Herts Futures
Appendix 5 - Digital Training Scheme
Appendix 6 – Sustainable Communities Grant
Appendix 7 - Renovation of estate buildings.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Mapping UK SPF Interventions (2022-2025) to 2025/26 Mission-led Themes and Sub-Themes
UK SPF Indicators 2025/26 – PP1
UK SPF Indicators 2025/26 – PP2 Outcomes
UK SPF Indicators 2025/26 – PP3 Outcomes
Herts Futures – North Herts Feedback Report
Herts Futures – North Herts Case Studies.

Mapping UKSPF Interventions (2022-2025) to 2025-26 Mission-led Themes and Sub-Themes

Background

- As set out in the technical note, for UKSPF delivery in 2025-26 you will no longer be reporting activity under the 2022-25 interventions. Instead, we will now only ask for information from you relating to the five UK-wide themes and twelve sub-themes.
- This document sets out how the 2022-25 UKSPF interventions can map to the new themes and sub-themes. This clarifies the theme and sub-theme under which activities previously funded under a given intervention can now be reported. **You will no longer report at intervention level.**
- As this document demonstrates, all interventions and activity previously eligible for UKSPF funding in 2022-25, remain eligible in 2025-26.

Investment Priority: Communities and Place

Investment Priority:	Theme:	Sub-theme:	UKSPF Interventions 2022-25: (E- England, S – Scotland, W- Wales , NI – Northern Ireland)
Communities and Place	Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities	Healthy: Improve health and wellbeing	• E3 S3 W3 NI3 - Creation of and improvements to local green spaces • E7 S6 W7 NI7 - Support for active travel enhancements • E10 W10 NI10 - Local sports facilities, tournaments, teams & leagues • E13 S10 W13 NI13 - Community measures to reduce the cost of living
		Safe: Reduce crime and the fear of crime	• E5 S4 W5 NI5 - Built & landscaped environment to design out crime
		Inclusive: Bringing communities together, tackling homelessness	• E2 S2 W2 NI2 - Community & neighbourhood infrastructure projects • E6 S5 W6 NI6 - Local arts, cultural, heritage & creative activities • E9 S8 W9 NI9 - Impactful volunteering and/or social action projects • E11 S9 W11 NI11 - Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups • E12 W12 NI12 - Community engagement schemes, local regeneration • E15 S12 W15 NI15 - Investment and support for digital connectivity for local community facilities
	Thriving Places	High streets and town centres improvements	• E1 S1 W1 NI1 - Improvements to town centres & high streets • E16 W16 NI16 - Open markets & town centre retail & service sector
		Development of the visitor economy	• E4 W4 NI4 - Enhancing existing cultural, historic & heritage institutions offer • E8 S7 W8 NI8 - Campaigns to encourage visits • E17 S14 W17 NI17 - Development & promotion of visitor economy
	Cross-cutting		• E14 S11 W14 NI14 - Relevant feasibility studies

Investment Priority: Supporting Local Business

Investment Priority:	Theme:	Sub-theme:	UKSPF Interventions 2022-25: (E- England, S – Scotland, W- Wales , NI – Northern Ireland)
Supporting Local Business	Support for Business	Advice and support to business	• E18 S16 W18 NI18 - Supporting Made Smarter Adoption • E19 S17 W19 NI19 - Investment in research and development at the local level • E20 S16 W20 NI20 - R&D grants supporting innovative product & service development • E25 S21 W25 NI25 - Bid for & host international business events & conferences • E26 S22 W26 NI26 - Growing the local social economy • E27 S23 W27 NI27 - Develop angel investor networks • E28 S24 W28 NI28 - Export grants to grow overseas trading etc • E29 S25 W29 NI29 - Supporting decarbonisation whilst growing the local economy • E30 S26 W30 NI30 - Business support measures to drive employment growth • S15 - SME development grants and support • S20 - Support for expert business advice and support programmes at the local and regional level, including support for decarbonisation, climate adaptation and circular economy advice • S29 - Support for new and existing businesses and start-ups aligned with local, regional and Scottish policy • W32 - Funding to support progression of small businesses into productive medium sized firms • E23 S19 W23 NI23 - Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems • NI25 - Grants to build strategic partnerships with key entrepreneurial ecosystems in other countries, and to help places bid for and host international business events and conferences that support wider local growth sectors. • S28 – Support for business resilience
		Enterprise culture and start up support	• S41 - Funding to support new partnership and project-based entrepreneurial learning between business and education to develop a culture that celebrates entrepreneurship
		Business Sites and Premises	• E21 W21 NI21 - Development of innovation infrastructure at the local level • E22 S18 W22 NI22 - Enterprise infrastructure & employment / innovation sites • E24 W24 NI24 - Training hubs, business support offers, incubators • E32 S30 W33 NI32 - Investment in resilience infrastructure and nature-based solution
	Cross-cutting		• E31 S27 W31 NI31 - Relevant feasibility studies

Investment Priority: People and Skills

Investment Priority:	Theme:	Sub-theme:	UKSPF Interventions 2022-25: (E- England, S – Scotland, W- Wales , NI – Northern Ireland)
People & Skills	Employability	Supporting people to progress towards and into employment	• E33 S31 W34 NI33 - Employment support for economically inactive people • E34 S32 W35 NI34 - Courses including basic, life & career skills • E35 S33 W36 - Enrichment & volunteering activities • S35 - Support for employability, including tailored support for those not supported by mainstream provision • NI35 - Funding for work experience, including internships and activities such as enrichment and volunteering to improve opportunities and promote wellbeing
		Support for young people who are or at risk of being NEET	• S39 - Support for education and skills targeting vulnerable young people leaving school
	Skills	Essential skills (including numeracy, literacy, ESOL and digital)	• E34 S32 W35 NI34 - Courses including basic, life & career skills • E36 S34 W37 NI36 - Increase levels of digital inclusion, essential digital skills • W43 - Funding to support engagement and softer skills development for young people
		Employment related skills	• E37 W38 NI37 - Tailored support for the employed to access courses • E38 S36 W39 NI38 - Local areas to fund local skills needs • E39 S37 W40 NI39 - Green skills courses • E40 W41 NI40 - Retraining support - high carbon sectors • E41 S38 W42 NI41 - Local digital skills • S13 - Support for linking communities together and with employment opportunities with a focus on decarbonisation • S40 - Support for community learning and development • NI42 - Promotion of STEM subjects for women/girls and provision of ongoing support to increase uptake of STEM subjects for women/girls
	Cross-cutting		• E14 - Relevant feasibility studies

Appendix 2 - Active Communities and Community Wellbeing.

As mentioned in the main body of this report, this project relates to the following themes set out in the criteria:

- Investment Priority: Communities and Place / People and Skills
- Themes: Healthy, safe and inclusive communities / Employability
- Sub-themes:
  E6: local arts, heritage, cultural and creative activities (including sports) & Healthy – improve health and wellbeing
  E33 & E34: Employment support for economically inactive people & Courses including basic, life & career skills.

The Active Communities and Community Wellbeing teams wish to deliver a programme of wellbeing interventions that build on the success of the £100K programme we delivered through UK SPF in 2024/25, and address identified health inequalities in North Herts. The programme will have the following strands:

Strength and balance for individuals at risk from falls and frailty*:* Weekly classes have been running since Autumn 2024 in Baldock (x 2), Hitchin (x1), Knebworth (x 1) and Letchworth (x2). These classes are at capacity and support 90x people every week. Participants report improved mobility and strength, increased confidence to leave the house and engage in daily activities, a reduced fear of falls and better social connections in their local community. We will work with existing participants to support them to move on to other physical activity interventions where appropriate (these may be provided through strand 3. below).

Cost to continue (with instructors and venues for 12 months delivery) in 2025/26 = £15K.

Outputs for 2025/26: 288 sessions with a total attendance of 4320 spaces. Target to support 150 unique individuals.

Creative arts to tackle loneliness and social isolation: Various creative activities have been offered in community settings in Royston, Knebworth and Baldock to provide people experiencing social isolation with an opportunity to connect and engage in creative activities. 36 sessions have been provided in 2425 with an uptake of 576 spaces. Participants report improved social connections in their local community and a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing by having a sense of purpose, engaging in something creative and meeting others. Sessions are facilitated by a skilled creative and a Community Wellbeing Assistant from North Herts Council – the presence of the latter has ensured people are signposted to other creative activities in the local area as well as other activities to improve their health and wellbeing. Onwards referral and signposted have included health walks, stop smoking and weight management services, Citizens Advice and exercise referral programmes. We would like to extend these sessions into either Letchworth or Hitchin to provide a more equitable offer across the District.

Cost to offer creative arts once a month in four locations for 12 months (artist, materials and venue hire) = £13K

Outputs for 2025/26: 48 sessions with a total attendance of 768. Target to support 200 unique individuals.

Exercise referral opportunities in the local community*:* Our current leisure provider offers a high-quality exercise referral programme that supports individuals with complex health

conditions to engage in physical activity to improve their physical and mental health. Currently this requires individuals to access opportunities at either Royston Leisure Centre, Hitchin Swim and Fitness or North Herts Leisure Centre. A large proportion of our population find it difficult to access one of our centres due to distance or feel more comfortable accessing activities outside of a traditional leisure setting. There is significant demand for improved opportunities for physical activity in our communities, particularly in the rural areas and particularly for people managing medical conditions, recovering from illness, living with disability and menopause and from people who require a pay as you go option for group sessions. We will work with Everyone Active and a range of local providers to provide community based physical activity opportunities delivered by instructors with specialist knowledge, available on a pay as you go basis at an accessible cost.

Cost to offer weekly classes in 8 locations (with venue hire for 12 months) = £10K

Outputs for 2025/26: 384 sessions with a total attendance of 4608. Target to support 200 individuals.

Intergenerational interventions utilising the arts to build relationships between our oldest and youngest residents: The Community Wellbeing team has delivered successful intergenerational interventions alongside the Garden House Hospice, housing association partners and the North Herts Museum (https://youtu.be/-c76ALiuptc). These interventions tackle loneliness, reduce feelings of anxiety and fear that can exist between older people and young people and build social connections. Arts and cultural activities are used as the medium to bring older and younger people together by providing creative activities, drama, music and museum led reminiscence sessions that they attend together. To date, we have provided three intergenerational projects in Letchworth and would like to extend this opportunity to other areas of the district and run 6 session interventions in Baldock, Royston, Hitchin and Knebworth.

Cost to offer 6 intergenerational sessions in four locations (inclusive of venue hire, refreshments, artists and facilitators) = £10K.

Outputs for 2025/26: 24 sessions with a total attendance of 240 young people and 240 older adults. Target to support 120 unique individuals.

Employability and volunteering interventions: The Community Wellbeing team are about to embark on a remodelled Healthy Hub which will see public health interventions such as smoking cessation and health checks delivered in areas of identified health inequalities, beginning with Royston in 2025/26. We will be working alongside Citizens Advice at the town hall two days a week and wish to extend the offer we can make to local residents to create a community hub that supports residents to gain employability skills and access volunteering opportunities. Working with partners including Create Community, Communities 1st, NHCVS, Mind in Mid Herts and CDA Herts we will facilitate courses including Moving Towards Employment, Managing Self Esteem and Resilience and Budgeting as well as providing a weekly drop in café with visits from experts in digital inclusion and volunteering. Since 2022 the Community Wellbeing has worked with these partners on various projects.

Cost to deliver on average one training session per week and one community café per week for 2025/26 (inclusive of venue hire and facilitators) = £20K.

Outputs for 2025/26: 48 training sessions with a total attendance of 480 people and 48 community cafés with a total attendance of 480 people. Target to support 300 individuals and record how many of these access employment or volunteering opportunities because of the intervention.

To deliver a programme of this scale under very short timescales, the Community Wellbeing team will:

Employ a Community Wellbeing Assistant (Grade 4, 20x hours a week) for 12 months. This individual will be responsible for working with a range of partners to establish, manage and monitor the projects above with the support of the Community Wellbeing Team Leader and Active Communities and Leisure officer. There are currently two individuals in the existing Community Wellbeing Team who have fixed term contracts ending in March 2025 who may want to consider applying for this role and have the relevant skills and experience.

Some of the projects will be directly facilitated by the Community Wellbeing team and others by partner organisations.

Cost for salary, expenses and pay increase = £26K.

Element	Cost 2025/26
Community Wellbeing Assistant (20 hours per week, grade 4)	26,000
Strength and balance	15,000
Creative Arts	13,000
Community exercise referral	10,000
Intergenerational arts & culture	10,000
Employability & Volunteering	20,000
Total	94,000

Information and written account provided by Communities Team - Helen Rae.

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Appendix 3 - Economic Development Strategy Implementation

This relates to**:** Support and advice for Business (OP10/OC8-17) and Developing the visitor economy (OP8,10/OC8-17).

The Economic Development team would like to launch the new Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan to grow and enhance North Herts Council's economic development offering across the District. The strategy is in draft format, with the aim of it being approved by Cabinet in May 2025.

Please see below for examples of the proposed work programme:

Building a Local company network in North Herts
According to the evidence base and research detailed in the new, draft Economic Development strategy the team recognise the need to improve engagement with local businesses and help create networks and partnerships to enable local supply chains and collaboration. An example of this could be creating geographic and sectoral groups to depending on demand, to facilitate networking, collaboration, promote local supply chains etc.

Means of facilitating will include the development of a business CRM system and online Business Hub that can assist the team in directly engaging with businesses (via targeted emails/newsletters etc). The team have explored this functionality at other Councils and are awaiting demonstrations from at least three providers to see if this is suitable. This would also help the team create and organise networking events, match different organisations according to geographic/sectoral/thematic for collaboration, events and networks etc.

Therefore we are proposing a total allocation of £50K to support the above.

Tourism and the Visitor Economy
Continuing the work with Visit Herts and the Place Narrative work from the Comms Team to put North Herts businesses 'on the map' by creating marketing collateral (films, websites etc) to promote the local leisure and tourism industry within North Herts. Utilising the skills and platforms of Visit Herts to emphasis the Place narrative work on why NH is a good place to work, live and leisure. This is also in line with one of the key principles of the Economic Development strategy.

The Visit Herts membership, plus supporting activity to promote NH as a tourist destination will cost an estimated £25K.

Skills
Herts Futures has been leading on a series of jobs fares across the County, sponsored by the relevant district councils. They held one in 2024 in Stevenage and there is an annual school's jobs fare organised by and held at a Letchworth School to which others are invited. We would like to build on this base by holding another fair in 2025/26 to enable other local children to gain an insight into the world of work and to meet some of the leading local companies. This type of activity is also in line with the new Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan.

Based on the amount spend by other districts the estimated cost for this event is £5K.

Supplementary Business Support for Local Companies
Herts Futures provides a range of pan-Herts Business Support and Skills programmes as described in Appendix 4 below. We would like to provide more support delivered locally through the new NH Business Hub including events such as employer seminars to be held

with the DWP, access to local business coaches and mentors and online workshops, courses and programmes such as ‘SEEDL’ to help businesses become more efficient and maintain accreditations. We would also like to recognise local excellence by sponsoring awards for local companies such as the Herts Chamber and FSB awards.

The estimated cost for this work is approximately £20K.

Total amount associated with this workstream: £100K

Information provided by Enterprise – Economic Development - Andrew Figgis.

Appendix 4 - Herts Futures

Herts Futures provides a range of Business Support and Skills programmes to businesses and individuals on basis. These programmes offer comprehensive support and would be uneconomic to provide at district level. See below for a breakdown of the different workstreams that are provided by Herts Futures, and part-funded by UK SPF.

Herts Growth Hub (HGH)
Extract from report: "HGH has had 272 unique relationships with NH businesses, of which 117 are medium assists. 16 of these businesses are new to the portfolio in Q3. Top advice area for the district is People, Training and Development.
HGH published a video case study in December with North Herts based business Ark Wildlife – see https://www.hertsgrowthhub.com/news-case-studies-blogs/case-studies/12-2024/ark-wildlife-video/
In Q3, the service delivered a workshop on implementing AI into businesses titled 'How to use AI for your Business: Practical Applications and Legal Considerations' in October. HGH also delivered a second 'Get Finance Ready' workshop and a one-day workshop on developing exit or succession plans for businesses called 'Growing your business with the end goal in mind'.
For Q4, HGH has planned the following county-wide workshops:
- Get Finance Ready – 22nd January
- Finance Fundamentals for Growing Businesses – 29th January HGH."

Herts Start Up Programme (Get Enterprising)
"The Get Enterprising Programme have engaged with 50 new NH clients this quarter, bringing the current programme total to 329 clients. To date, the programme has successfully delivered a total of 1,464 hours of high-quality, impartial business advice and support.

There is a continued demand for business skills training from pre-start and early-stage businesses has risen this quarter. 48 skills sessions were delivered to North Herts residents and businesses, with Business Planning, How to Simplify Content Creation with ChatGPT and Blogging for Your Business being the most popular topics. Over the programme's duration, 519 sessions have been delivered, helping clients to develop their skillsets as well as personal and professional growth. Clients have gained essential practical skills for starting a business, alongside confidence, decision-making, communication, planning and more. This provides them with the resilience and adaptability needed to start and sustain their business. A further feedback report is available upon request."

Herts Opportunity Programme (HOP)
"Countywide targeted marketing across all HOP socials continued throughout Q3 with an average of 4 per month encouraging Hertfordshire businesses to engage with this funded skills support to enable business growth. Increased support across North Herts continued in Q3 and whilst there is an absence of networking events, various smaller events were attended along with businesses being engaged with through targeted cold calling in person and via phone/email. HOP held a Creative Careers roadshow at NH College engaging local businesses with the future workforce as well as making them aware of the Hertfordshire Opportunities project and skills programmes on offer. HOP also attended DLRC Ltd Lord Lieutenant visit."

HOP engaged with the College to discuss collaborative working around employer support with plans to offer funded skills programmes and focused apprenticeship support to businesses in North Herts. Q4 will focus on engagement with new businesses and move engaged businesses to registrations on skills programmes."

Film Office (HFO)
“HFO continue to offer the one stop shop service connecting businesses with the industry, extending the reach across the county, and raising their profile by attending focus groups and industry events promoting Hertfordshire as a major player. The service has supported 13 businesses in North Herts in Q3 of which all are new to the portfolio. One production has been referred to the district.

The service supported HOP and Sky at North Herts for Creative Careers Event in November and presented to business at Knebworth Barns, All the help you can get event with HGH in December. Other events attended in October were Biz4Biz and Visit Herts Event at Knebworth Barns.

In Q4 the service worked on a Roadshow Event and Launch of the new studio at NH College, NH Council in March 2025.”

Pathways to Employment
“Services for Young People deliver the Pathways to Employment programme to vulnerable groups such as care leavers and young people with SEND.

In North Herts, 8 young people signed up in Q3, (30 overall), 6 mainstream and 2 SEND (1 has an EHCP and 1 is receiving SEND support). In Q3 two young people gained employment within the retail sector. Five young people have taken part in their work experience placements across a variety of sectors including hospitality, motor vehicle and equestrian.” A report on more case studies can be provided upon request.

Inward Investment
NH have not supported the Inward Investment function in previous SPF rounds. However, encouraging and promoting of relevant, worthwhile investments in North Herts is a key theme in our Economic Development Strategy.

Hertfordshire Inward Investment Programme
Mission
To attract business and unlock investment, high quality, sustainable development and promote sector growth, accelerating opportunities across Hertfordshire.

Purpose
Acting as a gateway, for businesses and investors, a team Hertfordshire model works with districts to supplement opportunity led working with a more strategic approach. The service focuses on opportunity and cluster building with a broader regional policy agenda, giving context to place both at a district and county level, on the national and international stage.

The Programme
UKREiiF 24 marked the first phase in development of the Inward Investment service, launching the service with a website, a collective prospectus and a unified countywide brand, seen in the wider context of Hertfordshire’s Inward Investment Plan.

Whilst UKREiiF is seen as an important annual ‘stake in the ground’, the Inward Invest Plan focuses on a broader range of activity planned to engage with family offices, angels, investors, and relevant government departments including The Department of Trade and Industry (DBT) and Department of Industry Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to primarily provide education on relevant growth areas in the County. These departments have expressed a preference for a coordinated approach, overseas foreign direct investment (FDIs) from Government come direct to the Inward Investment team.

Broader activity will include Farnborough International Space Show, UKREiiF 2025, UK Screen Investment Summit, EXPO REAL, Life Sciences Summit, Focus, Film and TV event. These events sit alongside a range of investor roundtables and dinners, focussed events on skills, growing market opportunities and ongoing website development to maximise district profiles and sectors.

The Approach
A pipeline of sites is being developed with clear timelines and investment asks, brought into a Hertfordshire offer.

Exploring more commercial sponsorship, that aligns with site/sector opportunities to partner at relevant events.

Act as a small team that represents the districts in a more cost-effective way. Work with the sector leads to ensure focus is kept on government strategy and to ensure each relevant sector is represented as a key enabler of growth in Hertfordshire.

This one team approach enables consistency when responding to government and developers as well as a proactive strategic approach to promoting districts and more broadly Hertfordshire.

VFM for the Districts:

- A focussed team to champion opportunity sites, collectively
- A website that puts each district in the heart of Hertfordshire drawing on the successes of the collective
- Assistance in preparing opportunity sites for market, commercial property, and managed workspaces in one place. Investhertfordshire.com
- Quarterly stats on commercial property searches by district, property type and size
- An ambassador to organise and attend UKREiiF/ EXPO REAL, sector and focussed events ensuring a collective voice for district opportunities.
- Introductions to potential investors, relevant site details in UK prospectus, assistance with applications to UK Infrastructure Bank/UK Wealth Fund
- Initial contact point for DBT, international and national companies, developers, and investors
- An independent contact for local landowners and businesses to help field queries or ask questions independent of the planning authorities.
- Quick introductions to district decision makers to help investors make informed decisions

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Appendix 5 – Digital Training Scheme

The project relates to: People and Skills/ Skills/Essential skills (including numeracy, literacy, ESOL and digital) / OC23 – number of people with basic skills and OP21 – number of people supported to participate in basic skills courses.

Initial piece of consultancy research and evidence-based analysis to assess the extent of Digital exclusion in NH – circa £5K.

Based on evidence, development of a Digital Inclusion (DI) delivery programme £5K

Delivery of DI programme – Part Time resource to plan, prepare and deliver digital skills across a 10–12-month period. Circa £20K based on 0.5FTE @ Grade 5

Equipment to deliver – selection of laptops, tablets, data only mobile phones to use during delivery sessions £10K (Capital spend)

Costs of Delivery (£7K)

Follow up survey / feedback to measure impact of intervention (£3K)

Total cost £40K Revenue; £10K Revenue.

This information was provided by the Service Director Customers - Johanne Dufficy.

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Appendix 6 – Sustainable Communities Grant

The Sustainable Communities Grant helps communities and businesses in North Hertfordshire to take action on sustainability and climate change. Projects will seek to increase biodiversity; reduce emissions of buildings by installing low carbon heating options or improving energy efficiency; reduce reliance on fossils fuels in transport; or increase community engagement on sustainability and climate change. This work will support the council priorities of Sustainability and Thriving Communities.

Investment priority

- Communities and Place
- Supporting Local Business
- People & Skills

Theme

- Healthy, Safe and Inclusive communities (E3, E13 sub theme)
- Inclusive – Bringing communities together, tackling homelessness (E2, E9, E11, E12)
- Support for Business
- Skills

Sub-theme

- Healthy: Improves health and wellbeing
- Inclusive: Bringing communities together, tackling homelessness
- Advice and support to business
- Employment related skills

Intervention

E3 Creation of and improvements to local green spaces
E13 Community measures to reduce the cost of living

E2 Community & neighbourhood infrastructure projects
E9 Impactful volunteering and/or social projects
E11 Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups
E12 Community engagement schemes, local regeneration

E29 Supporting decarbonisation whilst growing the local economy

E39 Green skills courses
E40 Retraining support - high carbon sectors

Output

OP2 - Amount of green or blue space created or improved
OP5 - Number of amenities/facilities created or improved
OP6 - Number of low or zero carbon energy infrastructure installed
OP7 - Total length of new or improved cycle ways or foot paths
OP12 – Number of local events activities or events supported
OP18 Number of people receiving support to gain employment
OP20 Number of people retraining
OP23 Number of households receiving support

OP24 Number of households supported to take up energy efficiency measures
OP27 Number of volunteering opportunities supported

Money required Revenue or Capital.

£100,000 Revenue
£60,000 Capital

NB: These amounts could be scaled up or down depending on how the rest of the SPF allocation is planned to be spent.

Conditions
This work cannot be completed by existing staff resources. It is therefore imperative that we use additional resource and recommend that a graduate is placed within the Policy & Strategy Team from April to implement this grant fund with assistance from the Policy & Strategy Team and the Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager. Both graduates have informally expressed an interest in a placement with our team previously.

This information was provided by the Policy & Strategy Team.

Appendix 7 – Renovation of estate buildings

The Council estate contains a number of buildings and areas which are in need of renewal and renovation to maximise their potential benefit to the Community as a whole. This scheme aims to transform them into viable, attractive and useful facilities.

Among them is Churchgate Shopping centre has a central open-air walkway linking the Market Square and Biggin Line, with the central parade of shops former the central shopping centre. This provides an important pedestrian route and public realm, as well as supporting the retail outlets, many of which are let to independent outlets for which Hitchin is well known for.

The shopping centre was constructed in the mid 1970's and the previous owners had not invested in the asset. The Council acquired the leasehold interest in 2022 to become direct landlord of the shops. The walkway would benefit from cleaning and decorating the canopies, improved pigeon control measures, installing improved decorative lighting and taking over responsibility from the County Council Highways; installing large flower beds (similar to those already around Hitchin) within the Churchgate Shopping Centre.

These works would play an important part in revitalising this area of town for the benefit of residents, visitors and the retail business.

There are also several Community Halls and venues which require remedial work to enable them to function properly.

The total amount of this work is yet to be costed, however a proposal is being worked on by Phil and the team subject to Cabinet approval.

This proposal responds to the following elements of the criteria:
Investment Priority - Communities and Place
Theme - Thriving Places
Sub -theme - High streets and town centres improvements
Outputs/Outcomes – OP2,3,5,8 and OC4,5

This information was provided by the Estates Team - Phil Doggett.]

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CABINET

18 MARCH 2025

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN

REPORT OF: MANAGING DIRECTOR

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Council recently undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) between 4 and 7 November 2024, where we were visited by a peer team supported by the Local Government Association. The peer team met with a large number of staff and councillors, as well as external stakeholders such as contractual partners, neighbouring authorities and members of our community. The peer team produced a feedback report, which was reported to Cabinet on 14 January 2025. An Action Plan has now been developed, attached at Appendix A.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan be approved.

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 CPC and should therefore seek to gain benefit from that process.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 All staff and councillors who took part in the CPC were invited to attend the feedback session on the final day. That presentation has been made available to all staff and councillors (including those who had not taken part). The Leader, Deputy Leader and the Leadership Team received the feedback report and had the opportunity to raise any questions or clarifications.

5.2 The Action Plan has been developed following discussions with the Leadership Team and Executive Members and was discussed at the Political Liaison Board on 3 March, following which it will be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 March 2025.

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 Local Government Association offers a number of services to authorities, one of them is the CPC and all authorities are encouraged to undertake them every four to five years. The Council's last full CPC took place in January 2020. A focussed review by different peers looking specifically at Overview and Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees was undertaken in late 2022 and reported to both committees on 20 June 2023 and 21 June 2023 respectively. It was decided to undertake another full CPC early in the new political administration in 2024, so that the recommendations could help shape and inform the approach over the four year term.

7.2 The CPC is designed by the Local Government Association to provide a robust and effective improvement tool managed and delivered by the sector, for the sector. Peers are at the heart of the peer challenge process and consist of councillors and senior officers from other District/Borough Councils who provide a 'practitioner perspective' and 'critical friend' challenge. The CPC was at no additional cost to the Council.

7.3 All CPC's look at five core areas for good performance (see section 4.2 of the feedback report). As part of considering Capacity for Improvement we specifically asked that peers look at our digital transformation programme, given its importance to the modernisation of the Council.

7.4. To prepare for the CPC the Council developed a background briefing document which set out our assessment of how the Council performs in certain key areas identified by the LGA. This has been published on the Council's website - Corporate Peer Challenge | North Herts Council

7.5 The approach taken in the CPC is set out in section 4.3 of the feedback report and is therefore not repeated here.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The CPC feedback report covers a range of areas and identifies both the Council's strengths and also areas where it could improve or change approach. In general terms the report is very positive and a fair assessment of the organisation, identifying a number of positive traits including:-

- we perform well, caring for and delivering for our residents;
- we have a clear understanding of the needs, wants and challenges in the district and are passionate about delivering for our communities;
- we generally have a happy workforce who feel supported to do their jobs and have access to learning and development opportunities;

- the administration is ambitious and keen to deliver for the residents of North Herts in their four-year term;
- there was significant goodwill and support for the work of NHC from stakeholders.

8.2 The areas for improvement include:-

- ensuring an effective roll out of the Council Plan, so that everyone is aware of their role in delivering against it;
- a need for clarity on our priorities;
- creating capacity for strategic leadership;
- improve the performance management framework;
- strengthen project and programme management.

8.3 The requirement of any CPC is that an action plan is developed within three months to respond to the recommendations from the peer team (ie by 4 April 2025). There are ten recommendations within the report, set out in section 3. Additionally there is useful feedback and helpful suggestions within the body of the report which it will be important to capture. The action plan has been developed to respond to the ten recommendations and is attached at Appendix A. This follows a similar structure to the Action Plan adopted in 2020. As some of the recommendations contain a number of points, this is reflected in the Action column. It is accepted that at this stage some of the Actions are more narrative in tone, however as plans are developed we would expect more specific details to be captured in the Update column.

8.4 The LGA will arrange for a progress review around September 2025, the report from which needs to be published within 12 months of the original CPC (ie no later than 7th November 2025). This will provide space for the council's senior leadership to update the peer team on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 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.

9.3 The CPC report includes suggestions that relate to the Council's Constitution. These are matters for Full Council to determine in accordance with paragraph 4.4.1(p) of the Council's constitution and would be the subject of a separate report to Council.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Action Plan needs to take into account the cost of any proposals and how these will be funded. This is particularly relevant to recommendations 2 and 10, which relate to creating capacity to deliver projects but also challenging what is realistically achievable.

10.2 Recommendation 1 refers to the need to get to an in-year balanced budget. This will be supported by decisions on future priorities for service delivery. The Medium Term Financial Strategy sets out that this will be supported by resident consultation.

10.3 The recommended minimum level of reserves referred to in the CPC feedback report only applies to General Fund reserves, and this minimum has been set after considering the level of other specific revenue reserves. There would be a very high level of risk in following a strategy that aimed to have reserves at the minimum recommended level, even if the Council was in a position where there was a clear plan as to how to balance funding and expenditure in the medium term. Instead it is recommended by the Chief Finance Officer that a more prudent target level of reserves is considered, and that any spend on time limited projects should not take reserves below that level. The potential financial implications of the proposed action plan will be assessed as the plan develops.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. 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 and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2. The CPC process helps to reduce risk by providing a different perspective on the Council. All the five themes of the CPC process can support specific and strategic risk management.

11.3. The CPC report identified areas where we can utilise our performance management framework more effectively, which could with risk mitigation.

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 CPC report references behaviours which may have particular negative impacts on those with a protected characteristic. The action plan covers how this can be addressed. The CPC report also references the role of our Inclusion Group.

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 are some potential staffing resource implications of some of the recommendations in the CPC feedback report, particularly organisational development and ways of working. There will also be HR implications to increase capacity, e.g. in relation to project management. These implications have been considered in the development of the action plan.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report Action Plan

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Anthony Roche, Managing Director
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17.2 Reuben Ayavoo, Policy & Communities Manager
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17.3 Ian Couper, Service Director Resources
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17.4 Jeanette Thompson, Monitoring Officer
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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 NHDC Peer Review Position Statement.

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North Herts Council Corporate Peer Challenge – November 2024
Action Plan

Number	Recommendation	Action	Led By	Timescale	Update
No 1	Develop the golden thread	We will use the Council Delivery Plan to continue to reflect the major projects that will support the delivery of our Council Plan. We will review our corporate KPIs (supported by an Internal Audit) to assess how they can be improved to reflect our priorities and also provide challenging targets that help to drive improvement	Exec Member & Director – Resources	Report to 24th June Cabinet/ 17th June O&S as part of the annual update of the Council Delivery Plan.	
		Alongside the Council Delivery Plan, we will continue to use internal Service Plans to reflect the other key tasks in each Directorate. These will have a focus on supporting the Council Plan, but will also incorporate other statutory requirements. Where appropriate, we will use Service KPIs to support Service Managers and Directors to assess performance.	Executive Members and Directors	From start of new civic year	
		Leadership Team will review all the projects on the Council Delivery Plan and Service Plans on a quarterly basis. This will help manage the delivery of projects and also ensure that they continue to align with the Council Plan and priorities. Executive Members will also be kept informed of progress against Service Plans. Cabinet (through quarterly updates on the Council Delivery Plan) will have regular opportunities to determine any projects that should be included at that level, as well as assess delivery of existing projects, KPIs and risks.	Executive Members and Directors	From start of new civic year	
		We will carry out a budget consultation exercise during summer 2025 to help		Summer 2025	

		inform our budget setting process for 2026/27 onwards. We will use this alongside the 3-year settlement for 2026-29 to assess our funding priorities. This will inform the areas where we will make savings to achieve a balanced budget.	Exec Member & Director – Resources		
		The Digital Transformation oversight group will review what software and processes should be a transformation priority to maximise the organisational benefits. These could be direct financial benefits or through reducing effort that frees up Officer time.	Director – Customers	April 2025	
		We have carried out a review of the capital programme to assess the likely timing of delivery and any projects no longer needed. The budget setting process for 2025/26 has also provided an opportunity to assess new and existing proposals. We will add new capital projects (e.g. Churchgate) when we have a defined plan and a reliable estimate of timing and costs.	Exec Member & Director – Resources	Ongoing review	
		As staff regular performance reviews are carried out, the priorities within them will be linked to the priorities in the Council Plan, Council Delivery Plan and Service Plans.	All managers	Ongoing	
No 2	Prioritise	We will use the Council Delivery Plan to track progress against our key corporate projects. As well as the formal discussion of this at Cabinet, we will also start to discuss it on a regular basis at Political Liaison Board. We will agree which are the most important priorities for North Hertfordshire. This will allow earlier discussion of how the projects are helping to deliver our priorities and any blockages	PLB	Ongoing	

		to delivery. Where blockages are caused by staffing resources we can assess where there may be opportunities to prioritise projects, based on the staff required (as usually requires specialist knowledge and skills) and relative importance of projects.			
No 3	Place Narrative	Subject to securing suitable funding, we will seek additional capacity to identify the opportunities available to promote our North Herts Place Narrative across the district. The most effective opportunities will then be included in a Marketing & Communications plan that the consultancy will be responsible for creating, executing, and measuring, with support from the North Herts Council communications and Economic Development teams.	Exec Members & Director - Customers, Director – Enterprise	Summer 2025	
No 4	Partnerships	We will continue to look for opportunities with partners, wherever interests can be aligned. We will continue to work closely with Herts Growth Board, HCCSP and others, taking leading roles where appropriate. The new leadership team structure includes a strategic health lead, which seeks to work more closely with the NHS through the work of the ICB.	Cabinet and Leadership Team Cabinet and Leadership Team Director Regulatory	Ongoing Ongoing From 1 April 2025	
No 5	Leadership	A leadership team restructure has been agreed and will be in place from 1 April 2025. There will also be further changes in the leadership team during the course of 2025, with two retirements. We will put in place a learning and development	Chief Executive and Directors	From 1 April 2025	

		programme to integrate new members to the Leadership Team, build relationships and explore ways to re-energise the organisation, with visible officer leadership and more strategic impact. We will look to create opportunities for more in-person communications, for example an annual staff conference, attending different team meetings and visiting front line service areas.	Leadership Team	From 1 April 2025	
No 6	Organisational Development	We will create a new HR strategy that reflects our priorities and how we develop existing staff and recruit new staff to deliver them. As we know that there will be some changes in the Leadership Team over the summer, we will do the majority of this work over the Autumn to ensure that it can capture the views of the new Directors. We will be clear on the importance of learning and development, even when there is a need to reduce our spend. We will use our new Learning Management System to help with accessing training. We will review how we carry out our Regular Performance Reviews (appraisal) to make it simple, effective and aligned to the golden thread. We will use workforce data to inform how we address succession planning, recruitment and retention, with appropriate plans in place.	Exec Member & Director - Resources	Autumn 2025	
No 7	Ways of Working	We will relaunch our values with Officers and Councillors. This includes listening to and considering the views of each other,	Member training champions and Leadership Team	Summer 2025	

		and work together and support each other to be the best organisation we can be. Executive members will present committee reports at meetings We will look at light touch staff surveys to check in with staff, which can also be used to reinforce expectations of behaviour. We will review our approach to whistleblowing training, in order to raise awareness across the organisation. We will consider adoption of any new model Code of conduct for Councillors	 Cabinet Director - Resources Director - Governance Standards committee/ Director - Governance	 Ongoing Summer 2025 and ongoing Start of new civic year When available	
No 8	Performance Management	We have updated the Council Delivery Plan to be clearer on any indicators that do not meet the green performance threshold. The report highlights the actions that will be taken to seek to improve performance, and we will continue to work on the explanations that Cabinet and O&S need. Internal Audit will benchmark our performance indicators to see how the measures and the target values compare to others. We will use that audit report to reflect on how we use the indicators to drive improvement We will also have an annual review of indicators that consistently achieve a green rating to assess how realistic it would be to set a more stretching target, and the benefits to residents that it would provide.	Exec Member & Director – Resources	Completed Report to 24th June Cabinet/ 17th June O&S as part of the annual update of the Council Delivery Plan. Ongoing	

No 9	Modernisation	The digital transformation initiative is a key component of our corporate plan, guided by an Oversight group that provides strategic direction and prioritisation. This programme encompasses the upskilling of staff across the Council and the provision of appropriate tools to support their roles. Several workstreams are currently underway, including a partnership with an apprenticeship provider to develop skills in business transformation, AI, and data insights. A significant aspect of the digital programme involves the review and redesign of Council processes to enhance efficiency. We have recently recruited a dedicated Digital Business Analyst (BA) for this purpose, and through this work, we anticipate the transfer and upskilling of BA skills. Ongoing engagement with staff and Councillors is planned, alongside the development of our rolling communications plan. Additionally, a controlled pilot of using AI (Microsoft Copilot) is underway to identify use cases and assess the potential efficiency impact across various areas within the Council.	Exec Member & Director - Customers	Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing	
No 10	Project Management	See response to recommendation 2, which covers resourcing of ongoing projects. For larger capital projects we will move towards incorporating project management into the capital cost, to reflect the required capacity and ensuring the total cost is considered as part of the overall project appraisal. We have a process for collecting lessons learnt from projects. By improving the	Exec Member & Director - Resources	Ongoing Ongoing	

		project reporting to Leadership Team (included in the response to recommendation 1) we will have better understanding on when smaller projects have completed, so can work with those project managers to ensure that we collate lessons learnt. Having more lessons learnt, which may also be more relevant to a wider audience, will allow us to produce regular updates to share across the Council.			

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CABINET
18 MARCH 2025

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2024-25 (QUARTER 3 UPDATE)

REPORT OF: REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: FINANCE AND IT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents progress on delivering the Council Delivery Plan for 2024-25. This is a Quarter 3 update, but generally reflects progress up to the point that this report was prepared (mid-February). The report includes:

- For the projects identified by Cabinet in March 2024, it details milestones and progress against them.
- The risks in relation to the delivery of those projects, as well as the corporate risks that could impact the delivery of all our projects and services. This includes a proposal for a new corporate risk related to Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution.
- Latest data for the performance indicators identified by Cabinet in June 2024.

There are 8 projects with delayed milestones, 4 projects with new milestones and 2 projects with deleted milestones.

There are two red performance indicators relating to calls answered within 45 seconds and percentage of NNDR (Business Rates) collected in-year. The actions to correct this are set out in paragraph 8.4.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet notes the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan, and approves the changes to the milestones (Appendix A)

2.2 That Cabinet notes the performance against the performance indicators and confirms the actions detailed in paragraph 8.4.

2.3 That Cabinet approves the addition of a new Corporate Risk for Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet, with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks, or opportunities. Overview and Scrutiny are trialling having a focus on a specific Executive Member area of responsibility at each meeting. For their March meeting it is Planning and Transport. An extract of the Council Delivery Plan has therefore been provided for their meeting (i.e. focused on Planning and Transport projects, KPIs and risks), but the overall Council Delivery Plan will be publicised to all Members via the Members Information Service.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 In developing the CDP, it was agreed that Cabinet would receive quarterly updates. The updates are made available 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 Directors and Service Managers have provided updates on progress and will have made Executive Members aware of progress made.

5.2 A draft of the Quarter 3 update was provided to Risk and Performance Management Group (RPMG) in February. The Group has a standing invite to the Executive Member for Finance and IT (has responsibility for performance monitoring), 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. RPMG were asked to comment on the Q3 update. There were no specific issues raised by the group.

5.3 The CDP is able to be reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and they can make comments and recommendations to Cabinet. Although their change of approach is detailed in paragraph 3.1 above.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision first notified on the Forward Plan on the 13 December 2024.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 The CDP brings together projects, risks, and performance indicators together in one document. The projects to be included in the 2024/25 Council Delivery Plan were agreed by Cabinet in March 2024, following a project prioritisation exercise. The performance indicators that are included were determined by Cabinet in June 2024.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Appendix A provides an update on the progress made in delivering the Council Delivery Plan 2024-25. Whilst it is labelled as a Quarter 3 update, it generally reflects the latest position at the time that the report was written (mid February). Milestones are set as far ahead as possible, but are not included where there is too much uncertainty over the scope or timing of the milestone.

8.2 In previous years the report included a percentage completed. This has now been removed as it over-simplified the position. As there are now fewer projects on the Council Delivery Plan, the focus is on providing a description of the progress made. Projects are still rated on overall progress, i.e. shown as completed, on track, some delays, significant delays. Where there are delays, Cabinet will be asked to consider revisions to milestones. For this report:

- Two projects (Engaging the Community on our Finances and Oughtonhead Common Weir) have milestones proposed for deletion. These are highlighted in green in Appendix A.
- Eight projects have proposed changes to dates of milestones. These are highlighted in yellow in Appendix A.
- Four projects (Town Centre Strategies, Waste and Street Cleansing Contract, Churchgate and Pay on Exit parking) have new milestones. These are highlighted in blue in Appendix A.
- Overall 6 projects are rated as amber and 5 are rated as green. King George V Skate Park has moved from green to amber since the Q2 report.

8.3 Our performance indicators now reflect the overall performance of the Council. Performance levels are rated as either green (achieving or exceeding the target), amber (not achieving the target level and need to look at actions to get back on track) and red (urgent action needed to get back to the target performance). For this report:

- 10 indicators are rated green.
- 2 indicators are rated amber.
- 8 indicators do not have a target.
- 2 indicators are rated red.

8.4 For the indicators that are rated red or amber, the following actions are being taken:

- Percentage of NNDR collected in year (85.68% against a target of 88%). We have a number of payments still in suspense accounts, waiting to be posted, which has resulted in all recovery action being suspended until this is cleared. The Revenues and Accounts Teams are working together to get these payments cleared from suspense. The number of NNDR payments still in suspense is reducing and is being monitored. As we will not be re-commencing recovery of NNDR debt until after 1 April 2025, in-year collection against profiled target may not improve by the end of 2024/25. We would still expect to ultimately collect the same amount of NNDR income.

-  Percentage of Customer Service Centre calls answered within 45 seconds (62% against a target of 80%, and a decline in performance from 68% at Quarter 2). As previously referenced in the Q2 2024/25 update, the CSC has faced ongoing staff shortages due to annual leave, sickness and leavers. An action plan is in place, with ongoing recruitment, fast track training, and allocating temporary members of staff to manage enquiries in reception. With annual billing and the garden waste subscription period coming up, the CSC is due to face another busy period, but we will continue working towards an improvement in service level in line with the action plan. Importantly, although the percentage of calls answered with 45 seconds is below the target level, a high percentage of calls were answered - 93% between April and December 2024
-  Working days lost due to short-term absence per FTE (4.26 days against a target 4, broadly in line with performance of 4.22 days at Q2). We will continue to develop ways to support employee health and wellbeing as part of our response to the staff survey. We have offered flu vaccines to help reduce winter absences. It should also be noted that there is a national trend for increasing levels of employee absence.
-  Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting (58.45% against a target of 58.5%). This is a profiled target and varies over the year to reflect differing volumes of garden waste over the year. This continues to be a very small shortfall so we will continue to keep it under review, especially as this is a provisional total and it might improve. Actions and initiatives to encourage more recycling by residents will continue.

8.5 Appendix B details a new risk in relation to Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution. The Risk and Performance Management Group recommended to Cabinet that they should approve this as a corporate risk due to the range of potential impacts on project delivery.

8.6 The Council Delivery Plan is intended to be a live document. Councillors and Officers can access Ideagen for the latest position. New projects can be added to the Plan, if they are a strategic priority and there are resources available to deliver them. Projects will be removed when they are completed, or if they are no longer a priority.

8.7 Overview and Scrutiny can ask for more detail on any of the Council Delivery Plan projects. That can either be provided as a written update or can be included as part of the next quarterly update, to support discussion in the meeting.

Access to Ideagen (previously known as Pentana)

8.8 All the detail behind the projects, risks and performance indicators is available to view in Ideagen, the Councils performance and risk software. A guest login is provided on the intranet for any member to use, along with a procedure note and short video on how to view the data.

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” (Section 5, paragraph 5.7.3). Cabinet’s consideration of this report therefore falls within its constitutional remit.

9.2 There are no specific legal implications arising from the CDP. However, there may be individual legal implications for some of the projects outlined (e.g. in relation to contracts for procurements). 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 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 and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2 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 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report. Equalities analysis will have been completed for relevant projects referred to in this report.

12.3 As the Customer Service Centre are not meeting the target standard for call answering, there is a concern that this could have a negative impact on those who share a protected characteristic. The report sets out measures to address the current performance.

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.

14.2 The actions in relation to the CSC are being supported by HR.

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.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Council Delivery Plan 24-25 Q3 Monitoring Report

16.2 Appendix B- Risk- Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERSI

18.1 Council Delivery Plan projects for 2024-25 agreed by Cabinet (March 2024): https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s24602/Council%20Delivery%20Plan%20Q3%20update%20and%20projects%20for%202425.pdf

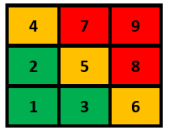
18.2 Performance Indicators for 2024-25 agreed by Cabinet (June 2024): https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s25289/KEY%20PERFORMANCE%20INDICATORS%20202425.pdf

18.3 Council Plan 2024-28 https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/council-plan

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Council Delivery Plan – Status Key

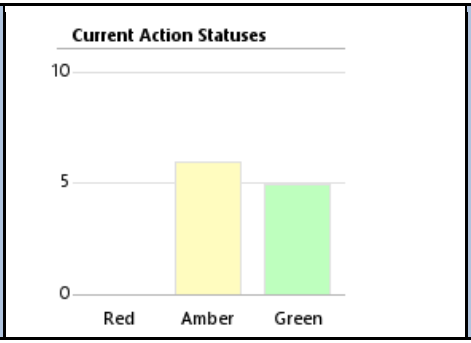
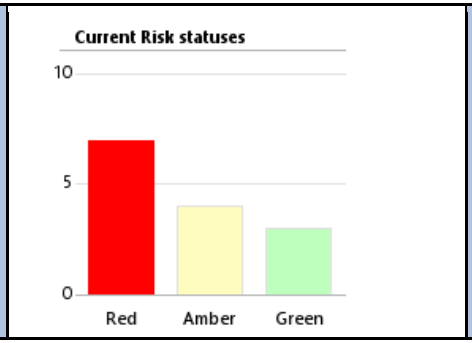
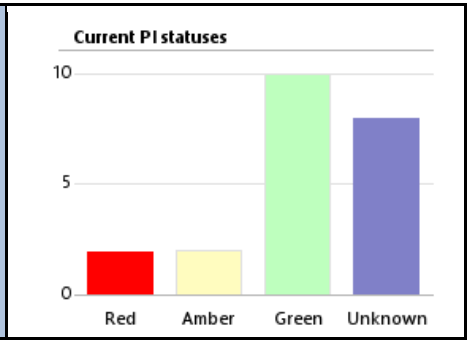
Status	Description
Projects	
	The project (and all recorded milestones) has been completed.
	All ongoing milestones have not reached their due dates (or do not have due dates).
	There is at least one ongoing milestone that has not been completed by the due date, but the overall project due date has not 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.
Risks	
	Assessed as a low risk.
	Assessed as a medium risk.
	Assessed as a high risk.
KPIs	
	Data value has met or exceeded the target figure. Performance is at an acceptable level.
	Data value has not achieved the target figure. Need to consider appropriate action to return performance to an acceptable level.
	Data value has not achieved the target figure. Urgent action required to return performance to an acceptable level.
	Data value is reported for 'information only' and there is no requirement to set targets for the KPI.
	Ideagen cannot calculate a status, as officers have not entered a target figure for the period.
	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.
	Ideagen cannot calculate a direction of travel, as previous data is not available for comparison.



Project Statuses

Project	Status	Risk Level
Engaging the community on our finances and how we spend our money, via the 'Prioritising our Pounds' Digital Budget Hub		
King George V Skate Park		
Leisure Centre Decarbonisation		
Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks		
Town Centre Strategies		
Waste and Street Cleansing Contract		
Churchgate		
Digital Transformation		
Local Plan Review		
Oughtonhead Common Weir		
Pay on Exit Parking		

Status Summaries

Projects Summary	Risks Summary	PIs Summary
		

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

KPI	Lastest Update	Value	Target	Status	Trend (Compared with the same time last year)
Percentage of council tax collected in year	January 2025	91.31% (year to date)	91%	✓	↓ (91.89%)
Percentage of NNDR collected in year	January 2025	85.68% (year to date)	88%	●	↓ (90.10%)
Council's Scope 1-3 emissions (tonnes CO2e)	2023/24	3,147.76	N/A Data Only		↓ (3,133.95)
Number of Stage 1 complaints	Q3 2024/25	144 (year to date)	N/A Data Only		↓ (111)
Percentage of Stage 1 complaints resolved within 10 working days	Q3 2024/25	89% (year to date)	80%	✓	↑ (81%)

KPI	Lastest Update	Value	Target	Status	Trend (Compared with the same time last year)
Percentage of Stage 2 complaints resolved within 20 working days	Q3 2024/25	75% (year to date)	70%		 (70%)
Total number of alarm calls in a given period	December 2024	288,378 (year to date)	N/A Data Only		 (294,451)
Percentage of non-urgent installations completed within 20 working days	December 2024	100% (year to date)	100%		 (N/A)
Rolling number of Careline service users supported under the HCC contract	January 2025	7,015	N/A Data Only		 (6,867)
Percentage of CSC calls answered	Q3 2024/25	93% (year to date)	90%		 (N/A)
Percentage of CSC calls answered within 45 seconds	Q3 2024/25	62% (year to date)	80%		 (N/A)
Sign-ups to the Digital Budget Hub	Q3 2024/25	239 (year to date)	N/A Data Only		 (N/A)
Average number of penalty points awarded per Grounds Maintenance contract monitoring inspection. (Lower numbers are good.)	December 2024	4.93 (year to date)	N/A Data Only		 (2.06)
Working days lost due to short-term sickness absence in the last 12 months per FTE employee	December 2024	4.26	4.00		 (4.24)
Working days lost due to long-term sickness absence in the last 12 months per FTE employee	December 2024	4.94	N/A Data Only		 (3.30)
Staff turnover - rolling 12-month percentage	December 2024	7.25%	15%		 (12.11%)
Percentage of advertised vacancies filled in first round	Q3 2024/25	76.8% (year to date)	75%		 (82.5%)
Number of visits to leisure facilities	December 2024	1,305,810 (year to date)	1,105,256		 (1,199,889)

KPI	Lastest Update	Value	Target	Status	Trend (Compared with the same time last year)
Percentage of all planning applications determined within the relevant statutory or agreed time periods	Q3 2024/25	86.2% (year to date)	80%		 (85.22%)
Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting	Q3 2024/25	58.45% (year to date)	58.5%		 (58.90%)
Number of collections missed per 100,000 collections of domestic household waste	December 2024	50 (year to date)	N/A Data Only		 (65)
Performance against revenue budget (projection against original budget)	Q3 2024/25	-10.0%	0%		 (N/A)

Projects / Risks

	**Engaging the community on our finances and how we spend our money, via the 'Prioritising our Pounds' Digital Budget Hub**	**Due Date**	28-Feb-2026	**Original Date**	28-Feb-2026
Project Summary	To help the community understand how we set our budget, what affects the funding that we receive, why we have less funding than we used to and the implications of that. To engage the community on the choices that we will need to make to ensure that our spend matches our funding, so that we are financially sustainable, and to enable our community to be part of future budget conversations.				
Latest Update	06-Feb-2025 Decided not to launch a mini survey and two-way conversations on the Digital Budget Hub in December 2024, as this will now be incorporated into the more substantial and detailed consultation planned for Summer 2025. Following approval of the Medium Term Financial Strategy in September 2024, a publishable version has been designed and is available on the NHC website. Risk level re-assessed as high, due to expected delay in funding direction announcements from Government and potential impact of local government reorganisation. This aligns with the assessed risk level of the 'Financial Sustainability' corporate risk.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Update the Digital Budget Hub content to highlight the funding pressures we face and likely implications.	31-Aug-2024	Yes	Updates: - Homepage copy amended to reflect current situation. - 'How we set our budget' graphic created and added (to show residents the process we go through). - 'Did you know' film created and promoted, showing what services residents' council tax helps to provide. Above promoted across our social media channels and ENewsletters.
Approve our Medium Term Financial Strategy.	30-Sep-2024	Yes	Council agreed adoption of the MTFS 2025-30 on 19 September 2024.
Launch mini survey and two-way conversations on the Digital Budget Hub, including thoughts on valued services and generating income through fees and charges.	31-Dec-2024	No	Propose to delete this milestone. Now decided to incorporate this with the more substantial and detailed consultation planned for Summer 2025. Following approval of the MTFS in September 2024, a publishable version has been designed and is available on the NHC website.
Update content (Digital Budget Hub and other communications) through process for setting the 2025/26 budget.	28-Feb-2025	No	
Further update of Digital Budget Hub content to align with the start of the 2025/26 financial year.	18-Apr-2025	No	
Carry out detailed consultation on spend priorities and savings options for 2026/27 onwards (starting in May 2025).	31-Jul-2025	No	
Consider feedback in setting the revised Medium Term Financial Strategy and approve the Strategy.	30-Sep-2025	No	
Consider consultation feedback in forming budget proposals for the 2026/27 budget and approve the 2026/27 budget.	28-Feb-2026	No	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: 1. Timing of Government announcements over future funding makes it difficult to engage residents in the scale of the budget gap and the savings that will be required. 2. Lack of engagement means that the consultation doesn't reflect a wide range of views. 3. The scale of the budget gap makes it feel like there are no choices. When making choices it then feels like not taking on board feedback.		8	7	2

	King George V Skate Park	Due Date	31-Aug-2025	Original Date	31-Mar-2025
Project Summary	Following complications with the initial procurement exercise in 2023/24, complete a procurement exercise to appoint a contractor to replace the existing King George V skate park and oversee delivery of the completed project.				
Latest Update	28-Jan-2025 The procurement process was completed, and the contract was awarded in mid-December 2024. We are waiting for NHC Legal to conclude a review of the contract, prior to the contract being formalised and the project plan/timings being finalised. Now expect this to happen by the end of February 2025. To help inform the project schedule, we have requested that the contractor conducts a site visit to assess current ground conditions, in order that on-site project delivery starts at the optimum time. Until the contract is signed and the project plan is agreed, we are unable to confirm precise timings for project delivery milestones. However, the contractor has confirmed a 15-week delivery window, and we currently estimate the new skate park being completed and open for use by the end of Summer 2025. The risk level continues to be assessed as low. The risk of a procurement challenge is no longer applicable and the delays to initial project delivery estimates are only relatively low impact. The project will deliver a much improved facility on budget, which meets the needs and expectations of stakeholders, albeit slightly later than first envisaged.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
01. Finalise formal SLA with Groundwork relating to the management of procurement processes.	12-Jul-2024	Yes	
02. NHC Legal to review relevant procurement documentation prior to Groundwork commencing tender process.	18-Aug-2024	Yes	Legal review of procurement documentation undertaken. This took slightly longer than originally envisaged and was completed in September 2024 rather than August 2024.
03. Groundwork confirms procurement timetable.	11-Oct-2024	Yes	Timetable confirmed following Legal review of relevant procurement documentation.
04. Commence tender process.	14-Oct-2024	Yes	ITT published on 14 October 2024.
05. Award contract following evaluation of tender responses.	17-Dec-2024	Yes	Following evaluation of tenders in November 2024, the contract was awarded mid-December 2024.
06. Contractor confirms project plan and timings.	02-Jan-2025	No	Due date to change to 28 February 2025. Contract currently being reviewed by NHC Legal. Now expect contract to be signed and project plan/timings to be agreed by the end of February 2025.
07. Contractor to commence on-site project delivery.		No	To be confirmed. Awaiting formalisation of contract and agreement of project plan/timings.
08. Contractor to conduct further communication/consultation during the early stages of project delivery.		No	Due date to be confirmed - will be confirmed when the delivery plan is agreed with the contractor.
09. Contractor completes on-site works.		No	Due date to be confirmed - will be confirmed when the delivery plan is agreed with the contractor.
10. New skate park officially opened to the public.		No	Due date to be confirmed - will be confirmed when the delivery plan is agreed with the contractor. Likely to be towards the end of Summer 2025.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: - Until precise timings are confirmed, there is a risk that the project will not be completed in line with stakeholder expectations. - As with all procurement processes, there is a risk that the outcome will be challenged (risk removed, as the outcome was not challenged).		2	2	1

	Leisure Centre Decarbonisation	Due Date	15-Apr-2026	Original Date	02-Feb-2026
Project Summary	Using a combination of external funding and NHC capital funding, deliver a project to decarbonise our three leisure centres. The main activities are replacing end of life gas boilers with Air Source Heat Pumps and installing Solar PV panels to enable on-site generation of electricity. Replacing gas heating for our leisure centres with low carbon alternatives is the single most effective action we can take towards meeting our target of being carbon neutral by 2030.				
Latest Update	28-Jan-2025 On 15 January 2025, Council agreed that Willmott Dixon should be instructed to design and order larger, bespoke heat pumps for the leisure centres, and approved the additional forecast capital and ongoing revenue costs. The need for this decision and the associated changes to plans, has resulted in previously reported target dates for key milestones being amended (highlighted changes to milestone due dates reflect this). Now expect to formalise the construction contract with Willmott Dixon and obtain planning permission for all sites by the end of May 2025. We have managed risks associated with obtaining planning permission by submitting pre-applications and engaging early with relevant stakeholders e.g., LGCHF. However, there remains uncertainty, especially surrounding potential planning conditions for Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre that could affect currently estimated timings. Works are now expected to start in June 2025 and finish in April 2026. This will involve some element of closure/disruption at all sites, and we have already engaged with Willmott Dixon and Everyone Active on the best way to manage this. There remain potentially significant risks associated with the project, such as a delay in Salix approving the required change request, paying up front for the larger heat pumps, capital costs continuing to increase until detailed designs have been finalised, and failure to meet Salix evidence requirements/deadlines for Year 1 spend. Work is ongoing with relevant partners to manage these risks. However, the overall project risk level is still currently assessed as 'high'.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Council approves an increase in capital expenditure for the decarbonisation work and revenue expenditure for the termination and removal fees of gas CHPs.	11-Jul-2024	Yes	
Pre-Construction Services Agreement with Willmott Dixon signed.	29-Jul-2024	Yes	Agreed and signed on 2 August 2024.
Appoint external Quantity Surveyor to oversee NHC's interests.	30-Aug-2024	Yes	Appointed Varsity Consulting to act as the Employers Agent for North Herts Council on the leisure decarbonisation project. This includes carrying out tasks of Quantity Surveyor, Cost Consultant and Contract Administrator. Decision taken 24 September 2024. Decision notified 27 September 2024.
Project Board - hold point to decide whether to continue the project.	04-Nov-2024	Yes	Project Board approved a number of recommendations allowing the project to move into the next phase.
Complete Stage 3 design phases.	11-Nov-2024	Yes	Willmott Dixon's latest update shows that Stage 3 has been completed.
Council decision on preferred option.	15-Jan-2025	Yes	
Willmott Dixon Construction submit contract offer.	21-Jan-2025	No	Due date to change to 20 March 2025. Until this point, there remains risks associated with project costs and potential budget implications.
Planning permissions obtained.	13-Feb-2025	No	Due date to change to 31 May 2025 to reflect the revised project plan. Delayed due to awaiting the Council decision on the preferred option. Planning submissions for each site and subsequent determinations scheduled to take place by the end of May 2025.
Enter into construction contract with Willmott Dixon.	10-Mar-2025	No	Due date to change to 31 May 2025 to reflect the revised project plan.
Provide Salix with required project updates.	01-Apr-2025	No	Any changes to proposed energy savings, evidence relating to the size of radiators and heat distribution systems, and calculations supporting the size of selected heat pumps.
Commence de-carb works at Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre.	07-Apr-2025	No	Due date to change to 1 September 2025 to reflect the revised project plan. There is the potential for this start date to come forward, although this will be dependent on any conditions associated with the planning decision.
Commence de-carb works at North Herts Leisure Centre.	28-Apr-2025	No	Due date to change to 23 June 2025 to reflect the revised project plan.

Commence de-carb works at Royston Leisure Centre.	02-May-2025	No	Due date to change to 17 June 2025 to reflect the revised project plan.
Complete de-carb works at Royston Leisure Centre.	31-Oct-2025	No	Due date to change to 5 December 2025 to reflect the revised project plan.
Complete de-carb works at North Herts Leisure Centre.	17-Nov-2025	No	Due date to change to 27 January 2026 to reflect the revised project plan.
Complete de-carb works at Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre.	24-Nov-2025	No	Due date to change to 15 April 2026 to reflect the revised project plan.
Provide Salix with finalised project data (including costs and energy values) and details of carbon savings monitoring and reporting arrangements.	02-Feb-2026	No	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: - NHC responsible for funding all project costs beyond agreed grant funding. - NHC paying up front for the larger Air Source Heat Pumps. - Unforeseen detailed survey findings require changes to project specifications and lead to additional financial costs. - Failure to obtain required planning permissions. - Delays obtaining required Distribution Network Operator/Planning approvals lead to delays in commissioning/completing project works. - Failure to deliver project in line with agreed grant conditions leads to loss of grant funding. - Short programme delivery timeframes impact the ability to drawdown Year 1 2024/25 Salix grant funding within the agreed financial year leading to loss of funding. - Disruption to day-to-day operations during works leads to customer dissatisfaction.	🛑	8	8	6

	Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks	Due Date	31-May-2025	Original Date	31-Mar-2025
Project Summary	Finalise contract/leases with private sector partner and subsequently install new EV charging points in our outdoor surface car parks. OZEV grant secured to deliver the project, although the funding is only available until March 2025. *Project carried over from the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan.*				
Latest Update	10-Feb-2025 Contract with private sector partner finalised on 7 January 2025. Completion of relevant leases for the length of the contract still ongoing, although we are due to issue letters of authority-to-proceed shortly, which will authorise the contractor to commence works prior to the completion of the leases. Expect leases to be finalised by the end of May 2025. In the agreed indicative programme, works are scheduled to commence on 3 March 2025, although the contractor has advised that they are unable to mobilise until they receive the letters of authority-to-proceed. There is a 12-week installation programme for completing works, so installation of all new EV charging points is expected by the end of May 2025. However, the timeframe for connecting power to the new charging points is reliant on the relevant Distribution Network Operators completing required tasks in a relatively short delivery timeframe, so the May 2025 target date may be subject to change. In view of the delayed start and finish dates, we have written to the Department for Transport setting out the revised programme and requesting an extension to the 31 March 2025 grant funding deadline. We are still to hear back from them. Although outside of the scope of this Council Delivery Plan OZEV ORCS funded project (installation of new EV charging points in our outdoor surface car parks), the Council's property insurer has now confirmed that we can replace existing charging points in our multi-storey car parks as well. In view of the project now being scheduled to be completed later than March 2025 and not yet receiving confirmation that the grant funding deadline can be extended, the overall project risk level continues to be assessed as 'medium'.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
NHC to start promoting project.	31-Oct-2024	Yes	Our investment in EV charging infrastructure was included in the Winter 2024 edition of Outlook magazine, which was published in early December 2024.
Contract finalised with private sector partner.	31-Dec-2024	Yes	Contract finalised 7 January 2025. Contract amended to enable the OZEV ORCS funded project (installation of new EV charging points in our outdoor surface car parks) to progress in advance of the further project to replace existing charging points in our multi-storey car parks, which was delayed by the need to satisfy the Council's property insurer regarding potential fire risks.
Complete relevant leases with contractor for the length of the contract.	17-Jan-2025	No	Due date to change to 31 May 2025. Although completion of relevant lease agreements has been further delayed, authority-to-proceed letters are due to be issued in early February 2025 to allow works to commence prior to the leases being finalised.
Contractor to commence works.	17-Jan-2025	No	Due date to change to 3 March 2025. There is a 12-week delivery programme. Contractor has advised that they are unable to mobilise until the authority-to-proceed letters have been received. However, the infrastructure and capacity are ready to start installing charging points as soon as they are received.
Installation of all new EV charging points completed.	31-Mar-2025	No	Due date to change to 31 May 2025. This is due to delays completing earlier milestones. Timeframe for connecting power to the new charging points is reliant on the relevant DNOs completing required tasks in a relatively short delivery timeframe, so there is a risk that the May 2025 target date may be missed. We have written to the Department for Transport setting out the revised programme and requesting an extension to the 31 March 2025 grant funding deadline.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: 1. Not successful in obtaining grant funding (no longer a risk). 2. Unable to identify/procure a private sector partner (no longer a risk). 3. Unable to agree contract conditions/relevant lease arrangements with contractor. 4. Unable to deliver project in accordance with OZEV requirements. 5. Unable to schedule required DNO upgrades in line with implementation programme. 6. Insurance requirements lead to changes to installation plans (no longer a risk).		5	5	1

7. Unable to reach agreement with Garden Square Shopping Centre regarding the replacement of existing charging points in Letchworth multi-storey car park (outside scope of OZEV project and no longer a risk). *Risk entry carried over from the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan.*				

	Town Centre Strategies	Due Date	31-Jul-2025	Original Date	31-Mar-2025
Project Summary	Progress development of an overarching Town Centre Strategy, including guidance on developing strategic plans for individual town centres. *Project carried over from the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan.*				
Latest Update	05-Feb-2025 Retail evidence base now completed. To manage losing the previous temporary Regeneration Officer resource, the consultants have now been instructed to review the wider evidence base and prepare the draft Strategy. Currently expect the draft Strategy to be ready by the end of May 2025. This will then have to go to Project Board before being presented to Cabinet in Summer 2025 (precise meeting date still to be confirmed). The draft Strategy will include sections for each town, providing guidance on developing individual strategic plans. If Cabinet are happy with the report recommendations, we will then move on to the public consultation phase followed by formal adoption by Cabinet. Precise timings for milestones that follow presentation of the draft Strategy to Cabinet are still to be confirmed. As there remains uncertainty regarding the outcomes from future Project Board/Cabinet meetings and that without a Strategy, there remains a risk of speculative development due to a lack of strategic direction, the overall project risk level continues to be assessed as 'medium'.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
1. Undertake work to complete evidence base.	31-Jul-2024	Yes	Consultants presented initial report on evidence base and stakeholder workshop held to review findings.
2. Further review/refinement of evidence base and final sign-off.	20-Dec-2024	Yes	Finalised retail evidence base in December 2024. Consultants to review wider evidence base for draft Strategy. To be published as supporting evidence base when consulting on the draft Town Centre Strategy.
3. Development and finalisation of draft Strategy.	31-Jan-2025	No	Due date to change to 31 May 2025. Having lost the previous temporary Regeneration Officer resource, we have now instructed the consultants to review the wider evidence base and prepare the draft Strategy. This is expected to delay completion of the draft Strategy until May 2025.
4. New milestone - Project Board review and approval of draft Town Centre Strategy.	30-Jun-2025	No	
5. Present details of draft Strategy, including guidance sections for each town, to Cabinet.	18-Mar-2025	No	Due date to change to 31 July 2025. Aim to submit the Strategy to Cabinet in early Summer 2025, although the exact meeting date is still to be confirmed.
6. Consultation on draft Town Centre Strategy.		No	Due date to be confirmed, as dependent on outcome of Summer 2025 Cabinet meeting.
7. Cabinet adopt Town Centre Strategy.		No	Due date to be confirmed. Exact timing dependent on Cabinet approval to proceed to consultation and findings of the consultation exercise.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
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. *Risk entry carried over from the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan.*		5	5	1

	Waste and Street Cleansing Contract	Due Date	31-Aug-2025	Original Date	31-Aug-2025
Project Summary	Complete procurement of the new Waste and Street Cleansing contract and commence mobilisation. Prepare to implement agreed service changes included in the contract.				
Latest Update	04-Feb-2025 Formal contract award phase (finalisation and signing of contract) now expected to be completed by the end of February 2025. Negotiations continue on finalising outstanding points. Regular mobilisation meetings being held with Veolia, and Project Board meetings being held monthly. Key activities over the coming months include procurement/delivery of new fleet vehicles, new bins, and new EV charging infrastructure, finalisation/integration of new online forms, and procurement of a new MRF contract. Government published details of its Simpler Recycling policy in late 2024 and this aligns with the contract specification. This removes the previously identified risk of the contract differing from statutory guidance. Risk likelihood score continues to be assessed as 'medium', reflecting there remains uncertainty regarding the timing and outcome of key tasks in a relatively short timeframe, and so the overall assessed risk level of the project remains 'high'. However, as the project progresses and key activities are completed, the risk level is expected to decrease.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Evaluation of final tenders and production of Evaluation Report.	17-Jun-2024	Yes	
Project Board sign off of Evaluation Report and award recommendation.	21-Jun-2024	Yes	
Executive and Cabinet approval to award the contract to the preferred bidder.	09-Jul-2024	Yes	Cabinet agreed to award the contract to the preferred bidder, contingent upon the completion of the Letchworth depots lease assignment from the incumbent provider to the Council. The assignment of the Letchworth depots lease was subsequently completed.
End of contract award standstill period.	12-Aug-2024	Yes	
First meetings held with preferred bidder.	15-Aug-2024	Yes	
Intention to award contract phase completed.	31-Aug-2024	Yes	Milestone completed and communicated in September 2024 that we will be re-establishing a partnership with Veolia.
Press communication.	10-Sep-2024	Yes	
Commence procurement of new fleet vehicles.	15-Nov-2024	Yes	We have approved capital funding of £5.285 million (excluding VAT) for the purchase of waste and street cleansing vehicles for the new contract. This has allowed the procurement process for NHC vehicles to commence.
Develop IT specifications.	30-Nov-2024	Yes	Full specifications for the garden waste platform and additional forms have been developed. We have also commenced relevant build processes. From a technical standpoint, we have the information we need to have scoped and planned the project and will soon know exactly what data we need to provide.
Finalisation and signing of contract (formal contract award).	31-Dec-2024	No	Due date to change to 28 February 2025. Currently negotiating final details.
Confirmation of final delivery plans and H&S arrangements.	04-Mar-2025	No	Delivery plans to be finalised in line with the finalisation of the contract. H&S arrangements to be confirmed two months prior to the mobilisation of the new contract.
New milestone - Member briefing session (March 2025).	31-Mar-2025	No	Precise date to be confirmed.
Finalise new service collection rounds.	01-Apr-2025	No	This relates to finalising collection rounds for the agreed service changes included in the contract.

Condition surveys and demobilisation of depots.	03-May-2025	No	On target. This is with Estates, who are currently awaiting comments from NHC Legal.
Commence mobilisation of new contract.	04-May-2025	No	New contract to start in May 2025.
New milestone - New bin and caddy deliveries start.	06-May-2025	No	Bin and caddy deliveries expected to take place prior to and up to commencement of the new services.
New milestone - Member briefing session (July 2025).	31-Jul-2025	No	Precise date to be confirmed.
New bin and caddy deliveries completed.	04-Aug-2025	No	Bin and caddy deliveries expected to take place prior to and up to commencement of the new services.
New services to commence.	04-Aug-2025	No	New services to commence in August 2025.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: - Delay in completing the assignment of Letchworth depot lease delays contract award (no longer a risk, as lease assignment completed). - Insufficient resources/capacity to deliver mobilisation work in the shortened mobilisation timeframe. - Final Government Resources & Waste Strategy differs from contract specification (no longer a risk, as contract specification aligns with new Simpler Recycling policy published late 2024). - Uncertainty over certain cost elements, including new MRF contract. - Delays cause mobilisation challenges e.g., a shortened window to procure new fleet vehicles for Day 1 of the contract. - Capability to develop online forms and integrate these with new systems (NHC income management system and preferred supplier systems). - EV charging infrastructure is not in place for start of contract (Building Services leading this project). - Public confusion around contract mobilisation and service changes.	🛑	9	8	6

	Churchgate	Due Date	22-May-2025	Original Date	31-Mar-2025
Project Summary	Progress the long-term regeneration of the shopping centre and surrounding areas. Project likely to span several years. *Project carried over from the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan.*				
Latest Update	04-Feb-2025 Consultation findings were presented to Project Board on 4 December 2024. Since this meeting, we have been undertaking a detailed evaluation of the findings and a financial options appraisal. These activities are nearing completion and a decision on the overarching direction of the project will be made soon. Work is also ongoing to prepare a report providing the public/stakeholders with feedback on the second stage public consultation. Once all these activities have been completed, we should then be in a position to commence procurement of a development partner. The risk level remains high, due to the number of variables associated with the project and the uncertainty this creates. However, the project management arrangements currently in place enable us to manage these risks as well as we can, albeit that certain external factors are out of our control.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Start of engagement.	02-Sep-2024	Yes	
Run workshops.	16-Sep-2024	Yes	Hitchin Market Board workshop held 9 September 2024. Hitchin Forum workshop held 9 September 2024 (in the evening). Tenants workshop held 12 September 2024.
Start public consultation.	17-Sep-2024	Yes	
Public consultation ends.	01-Oct-2024	Yes	The consultation period was extended to 3 November 2024 to take into account the leaflet drop to all North Hertfordshire households.
Open 'in-person' Churchgate Regeneration Hub on market days, up to the end of the consultation period.	17-Oct-2024	Yes	Churchgate Regeneration Hub opened in an unused Churchgate unit.
Feedback to Project Board.	29-Oct-2024	Yes	October 2024 Project Board meeting re-scheduled. Update on progress presented to Project Board on 14 October 2024.
Feedback to Project Board.	26-Nov-2024	Yes	Project Board meeting re-scheduled to 4 December 2024. Consultation findings were presented to Project Board at this meeting.
Start procurement process for development partner.	31-Mar-2025	No	Proposed new target date still to be confirmed. Procurement of a development partner to help deliver the regeneration project will follow the detailed evaluation of consultation findings, full financial assessment of options, and a Project Board decision on high-level vision and preferred pathway. Timings for these activities also to be confirmed, although likely to occur in early 2025.
New milestone - Attend UKREiiF 2025.	22-May-2025	No	
New milestone - Complete detailed evaluation of consultation findings and financial options appraisal.		No	Due date to be confirmed.
New milestone - Project Board decision on overarching direction and preferred pathway.		No	Due date to be confirmed.
New milestone - Publish second stage public consultation feedback report.		No	Due date to be confirmed.
New milestone - Procurement process for development partner ends and contract awarded.		No	Due date to be confirmed.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: 1. The regeneration will not meet expectations of stakeholders.		9	8	6

2. Regeneration of the Centre and surrounding area is not cost effective/not affordable. Including impacts of high inflation and likely recession. 3. Availability of specific funding for consultants beyond the three-year funding already agreed. *Risk entry carried over from the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan.*				

	Digital Transformation	Due Date	30-Sep-2025	Original Date	31-Mar-2025
Project Summary	Invest in and develop a low code digital platform that can be used to transform our services and applications. Programme to span a number of years, with the Council Delivery Plan project focussing on key activities planned during 2024/25.				
Latest Update	29-Jan-2025 The majority of programme resources have been focussed on delivering the Waste related projects by the relevant deadline dates (garden waste portal (February 2025) and new documents/integration with contractor's software (May 2025)). This has resulted in the delivery dates for the grants database and burials application being changed to later in 2025. We continue to work with the Waste team and Veolia on the Waste related projects, and good progress is being made. The previously reported issue relating to data from Veolia's system not being available until mid-April 2025 still applies, which does create a time pressure for matching data with our platform and testing, ready for 'go live' in May 2025. Resources are in place to deliver current projects to revised timescales and to continue delivering the programme over the coming years. Longer-term, the programme is also likely to benefit from the Multiverse apprenticeship programme that NHC is participating in, which aims to develop the digital skills of the wider workforce. We also continue to engage with stakeholders and NHC teams on potential future projects.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Scope and investigate replacement of Burials system.	30-Jun-2024	Yes	Initial scoping for the replacement of the current in-house database completed. Decision made to provide a replacement system via the new digital platform.
Integrate Netcall into Microsoft Azure for wider integration capabilities.	30-Sep-2024	Yes	The Azure tenancy is ready to go and can facilitate single sign on for customers to sign in via MyAccount or for staff to sign into any applications created.
Commence development of waste services processes and preparations for integration with new contractors' software.	01-Oct-2024	Yes	Work commenced and plans have now been agreed with Veolia.
Hitchin Town Hall booking system developed.	31-Oct-2024	Yes	The Hitchin Town Hall application has been completed and handed over.
Development and delivery of a Grants database.	28-Mar-2025	No	Due date to change to 30 April 2025.
Waste Services - integrations with contractors' software.	26-Apr-2025	No	
Waste Services - project delivery.	01-May-2025	No	
Develop and deliver a Burials application.	28-Jul-2025	No	Due date to change to 30 September 2025.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: 1. Resources within key teams available to deliver. 2. Unexpected limitations within new digital platform. 3. Unexpected delays or limitations relating to the new waste contract/contractor. Data from Veolia's Echo system not being available until mid-April 2025 leaves a very limited timeframe matching data with our platform and testing, ready for 'go live' at the start of May 2025.		6	6	3

	Local Plan Review	Due Date	31-Dec-2027	Original Date	31-Dec-2027
Project Summary	To undertake an update of the Council's statutory Local Plan as agreed in principle by Cabinet in January 2024.				
Latest Update	07-Feb-2025 Central Government published the updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024, and we are now awaiting the secondary legislation. Whilst this provides an element of stability in the planning system, the lack of legislation still makes it difficult to determine the expectations of what we should be delivering within the provisional timescales. The Local Development Scheme (LDS) was published and approved in January 2025 and sets out our timescales for the update of the Local Plan. The Strategic Planning Team continue to update evidence studies and prepare in the meantime. There is likely to be an ongoing risk of having insufficient resources to accomplish the Local Plan update, as highlighted by the unsuccessful outcome from the last round of recruitment (Autumn 2024), with limited interest in the role due to salary vs experience expectations not being in line with other local authorities in the area. There are also risks associated with not having a clear and agreed direction and vision from Council.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
01. In principle approval that Local Plan review is undertaken.	16-Jan-2024	Yes	Approved by Cabinet in January 2024.
02. Approval of Local Development Scheme.	14-Jan-2025	Yes	Approved by Cabinet in January 2025.
03. Notice of start of plan-making given to Secretary of State.	30-Jun-2025	No	Due date entered in line with approved LDS.
04. Complete 'Gateway 1' advisory assessment.	30-Sep-2025	No	Due date entered in line with approved LDS.
05. Complete first mandatory public consultation.	30-Nov-2025	No	Due date entered in line with approved LDS.
06. Complete 'Gateway 2' advisory assessment.	30-Sep-2026	No	Due date entered in line with approved LDS.
07. Complete second mandatory public consultation.	30-Nov-2026	No	Due date entered in line with approved LDS.
08. Complete 'Gateway 3' assessment and submit for examination.	28-Feb-2027	No	Due date entered in line with approved LDS.
09. Receipt of examination outcome.	30-Nov-2027	No	Due date entered in line with approved LDS.
10. Finalisation and adoption of digital plan.	31-Dec-2027	No	Due date entered in line with approved LDS.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: - Government fails to provide regulations and guidance in a timely fashion. - Government introduces different or new or substantive reforms to the planning system and / or national policy. - Failure to retain/recruit sufficiently experienced officers to implement required programme of work. We were unsuccessful in our last round of recruitment (Autumn 2024) with limited interest in the role due to salary vs experience expectations not being in line with other local authorities in the area. - Internal complexities that delay putting necessary resources in place in a timely fashion. - Lack of general resource to accomplish the Local Plan update. - Lack/confliction of direction and vision from Council. - Failure to secure funding to resource the process.		5	5	3

- Failure to obtain political and / or Government approval at key stages or gateways. - Government intervention if inadequate progress is made upon Local Plan Review. - Inadequate guidance leads to scheme outcomes that do not appropriately respond to, or contribute towards, corporate objectives and priorities of climate change, environment, economy and place. - Poor scheme outcomes that do not appropriately respond to local character and context. - Adverse appeal findings on other/non-Local Plan sites if progress on the Local Plan Review is delayed or stalled.				

	Oughtonhead Common Weir	Due Date	30-Nov-2025	Original Date	30-Sep-2024
Project Summary	Replace the collapsed weir. *Project carried over from the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan.*				
Latest Update	28-Jan-2025 Required Environment Agency permits obtained in December 2024, as well as confirmation that the project can go ahead under permitted development. Therefore, there is no longer a need to obtain planning permission, and the related project milestones have been removed from the schedule. Following a further site visit, Fishtek Consulting have now been asked to do some further modelling, as the proposed work upstream from the weir is no longer considered necessary. Dependent on the revised modelling, it is likely that we will be able to deliver a better environmental outcome (e.g., less disruption to the existing habitat and improved water quality) at a substantially lower cost. Although this further modelling is delaying the start of subsequent project phases, we still expect works to commence in Summer 2025 and to complete Autumn 2025. Until the modelling is complete, we are unable to confirm precise timings for further communication with the public and commencing the tender process, although both will happen as soon as we have agreed what will be delivered. CMS will be responsible for managing the tender process. There remains a risk that the project may not be completed in line with current estimated timings and stakeholder expectations, and effective communication of the project and related improvements will be key to managing this. However, the impact of any delay in completing the project is assessed as low, as any further deterioration of the existing weir is unlikely to result in significant environmental damage. In fact, water quality has actually improved since the damage to the existing weir occurred.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
01. Conduct the further modelling requested by the Environment Agency.	31-Aug-2024	Yes	Cost of completing further modelling circa £3k.
02. Obtain required Environment Agency permits.	31-Dec-2024	Yes	Permits obtained in December 2024.
03. Undertake further communication with the public regarding plans.		No	Due date to be confirmed - timings to be confirmed once further modelling completed.
04. Submit planning application - milestone to be deleted.		No	To be deleted. Project to proceed under permitted development.
05. Planning permission granted - milestone to be deleted.		No	To be deleted. Project to proceed under permitted development.
06. Commence tender process for undertaking required works.		No	Due date to be confirmed - timings to be confirmed once further modelling completed. CMS to prepare tender documentation and manage tender process.
07. Appoint contractor(s) to undertake required works.		No	Due date to be confirmed.
08. Successful contractor confirms project plan and timings.		No	Due date to be confirmed.
09. Commence work on-site.		No	Due date to be confirmed.
10. Works on-site completed.		No	Due date to be confirmed.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: - External funding from HCC, EA and residents is not available leading to full allocated Capital budget being used. - Existing situation deteriorates prior to any works being undertaken requiring further urgent temporary solutions to manage an immediate changing situation. - Failure to obtain Environment Agency permits or planning permission (no longer a risk). - Lack of contractor appetite to undertake works prolongs procurement process and delays project delivery. - Without confirmed plans for the procurement process and project delivery, there is a risk that the project will not be completed in line with currently anticipated timescales. *Risk entry carried over from the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan.*		4	2	1

	Pay on Exit Parking	Due Date	31-Mar-2026	Original Date	31-Mar-2026
Project Summary	Replace existing parking machines and update tariff boards to implement pay on exit in all our town centre car parks. Capital budget approved to deliver the project over two years - 2024/25 and 2025/26. *Project carried over from the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan.*				
Latest Update	10-Feb-2025 A full implementation programme, with changes being phased on a town-by-town basis, was agreed in December 2024 with some minor modifications. Work to replace existing parking machines is scheduled to start mid-February 2025 and to be completed by the end of March 2025. The update of TROs is ongoing, with the majority due to become effective mid-February 2025. The TROs for Norton Common and Hitchin Swimming & Fitness Centre are due to become effective a little later by the end of March 2025. As parking machines are replaced, relevant entrance and information signage will be updated to reflect the changes in payment options. Existing tariff boards will be temporarily updated to reflect the new tariffs coming into effect from April 2025, with the design and installation of new tariff boards expected to happen between May and July 2025, although this is still to be agreed with the contractor. Therefore, works expected to be fully completed by March 2026 in line with approved Capital funding. Key risks are our ability to bring the separate project elements together (i.e., installation of parking machines, entrance/information signage, and tariff boards) and negative public reaction to changes and disruption during works. The latter is being managed in partnership with the contractor via a comprehensive communications plan., with targeted comms coinciding with the phased town-by-town programme. Overall, the assessed project risk level remains 'low'.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Procure supplier to replace tariff boards.	30-Aug-2024	Yes	Procurement complete. Supplier appointed on 2 September 2024.
Draft implementation programme received from contractor.	30-Nov-2024	Yes	
Full implementation programme agreed with contractor.	31-Dec-2024	Yes	Full implementation programme agreed in December 2024 with some minor modifications finally agreed early February 2025. Installation of new parking machines scheduled to start mid-February 2025.
Update TROs.	14-Feb-2025	Yes	Due date to change to 18 February 2025. The majority of updated TROs became effective on 18 February 2025. Updated TROs introduced alternative methods of payment, virtual permits and season tickets, and reviewed the definitions and length of stay for electric vehicle parking bays within the Council's car parks.
New milestone - Commence installation of new parking machines on a town-by-town basis, along with new entrance/information signage.	17-Feb-2025	Yes	Rollout commenced in Hitchin.
New milestone - Complete installation of new parking machines and new entrance/information signage.	31-Mar-2025	No	
New milestone - Norton Common and Hitchin Swimming & Fitness Centre TROs updated.	31-Mar-2025	No	
New milestone - Installation of new tariff boards completed.	31-Jul-2025	No	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: 1. Budget implications of selected scheme. 2. Inability to procure suppliers within approved budget (no longer a risk, as procured suppliers within budget). 3. Negative public reaction to changes and disruption during works. 4. Loss of income during associated works. 5. Failure to bring together separate project elements to achieve seamless project delivery. *Risk entry carried over from the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan.*		1	1	1

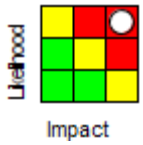
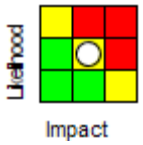
Corporate Risks

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Resourcing **Risks:** Ability to recruit and retain staff, as well as supporting new priorities and external pressures, affects delivery of the projects and actions in the Council Delivery Plan and service plans. This is particularly relevant for certain service areas where it is especially difficult to recruit and retain staff. Also, impacts of emergency planning events on staff resources.		8	9	5
Cyber Risks **Risks:** Prolonged widespread disruption to/failure of IT infrastructure/systems. Possible causes: - Deliberate and unauthorised breaches of security e.g., ransomware, denial of service. - Unintentional/accidental breaches of security e.g., action of individual staff/Members. - Weakness/failure of essential IT infrastructure e.g., loss of internet access. - Evolving risk appetite/profile associated with IT systems, as we pursue increased use of hosted systems and associated risks to individual systems are transferred to suppliers. Leading to: - Inability to deliver services/projects. - Unbudgeted costs to enable recovery. - Reputational damage.		8	8	8
Financial Sustainability **Risks:** 1. Funding reductions as a result of new funding formula. 2. Sales, fees, and charges income shortfalls, either due to rates not tracking inflation and/or reductions in demand. 3. Not able to make the required decisions to deliver budget savings required. 4. Increases in costs (reductions in income) as a result of inflationary increases. 5. Uncertainty over levels of pay inflation required.		9	9	5

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

Generated on: 24 February 2025

Risk Code	CDP15 (2024/25)	**Risk Title**	Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution
Risk Owner	Ian Couper	**Updated By**	Ian Couper
Year Identified	2025	**Council Objective**	All
Risk Description	The Government have published a White Paper and written to all Local Authorities. This requires Local Authorities to work together to come up with a proposal that results in unitary rather than 2-tier Councils. It also seeks a Combined Authority structure that allows devolution of powers to a Mayor. Those powers including "housing, planning, transport, energy, skills, employment support and more". The risks relate to this being a very substantial project requiring significant change. Specific risks include: • The work to get to a proposal on a unitary structure (noting the need for this to be agreed across 11 Councils) is significant in terms of the negotiations needed and the collation of information and analysis to support that decision making process. • If there is an inability to agree a new structure, it may prolong the period above, or lead to a structure being imposed upon Hertfordshire. • After a new structure is agreed, there would be even more significant work to move towards the implementation of that new structure. • Efficiency is mentioned as one of the reasons for moving to a unitary structure. This may lead staff to believe that their job may be at risk. Alternatively, the additional work of moving to unitary status may be seen as too much. • Focusing on a new structure may lead to decision making that is too short-term (getting things done before they can be de-prioritised by a new larger Council with wider priorities) or too long-term (avoid making decisions and leave them to the new unitary Council). • Ensuring that the views of stakeholders continue to be heard during the transition process and within the new structure.		
Opportunities	▪ There is an opportunity to shape the new structure and also play a key part in how a new Unitary would operate to take advantage of what we (North Herts) do well. ▪ A Unitary structure avoids the confusion over which services are delivered by which Council and may make sense to residents.		
Consequences	Failure to address the risks could lead to: ▪ Resourcing: The additional work affects the delivery of our services and leads to projects being delayed or needing to be abandoned. If staff decide to leave due to the workload/ uncertainty then that will further exacerbate the problem. ▪ In addressing/ preventing the above there may be a need to use consultants to deliver reorganisation work which comes with a financial impact. This may also be needed where specialist knowledge or skills are needed. ▪ A focus on short-term decision making leads to sub-optimal decisions, which could fail to take account of the resources available both before and after a new structure is in place. ▪ A focus on delaying decisions could (for example) result in a failure to address sustainability (financial or environmental) or deliver responsible growth.		
Work Completed	▪ The Council is part of the County-wide White Paper Working Group, which aims to provide the information required for a decision on future structure. ▪ Staff have been provided with regular updates and chances to ask questions, this has included reassurance that services will still need to be delivered under any structure.		
Ongoing Work	Controls and Further Mitigating Activities: ▪ To support White Paper Working Group sub-groups with providing relevant information for North Herts. ▪ Continued support for staff. ▪ Engagement and communication with stakeholders to seek views on outcomes and explain outcomes.		

	▪ Maintain processes for decision making and ensure decisions are taken in the best interests of North Herts (irrespective of future structure).		
Current Overall Risk Score	9		
Current Impact Score	3	**Current Likelihood Score**	3
Current Risk Matrix		**Target Risk Matrix**	
Date Reviewed	09-Feb-2025	**Next Review Date**	09-May-2025
Latest Note	New risk entry created.		

CABINET
18 March 2025

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: THIRD QUARTER INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) REVIEW 2024/25

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: FINANCE AND I.T.

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILTY

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 To update Cabinet on progress with delivering the capital and treasury strategy for 2024/25, as at the end of December 2024.

1.2 To update Cabinet on the impact upon the approved capital programme for 2024/25 – 2033/34. The current estimate is a decrease in spend in 2024/25 of £0.583M and an increase in spend in 2025/26 of £0.627M. The most significant individual changes to the forecast spend in 2024/25 relate to the reprofiling into future years of £0.300M Hitchin Fitness Member Change and Relaxation Area Refurbishment and £0.150M Royston Leisure Centre Changing Village Refurbishment.

1.3 To inform Cabinet of the Treasury Management activities in the first nine months of 2024/25. The current forecast is that the amount of investment interest expected to be generated during the year is £2.955M. This is an increase of £0.155M on the estimate reported in the 2nd quarter report.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet notes the forecast expenditure of £16.816M in 2024/25 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.

2.2 That Cabinet approves the adjustments to the capital programme for 2024/25 onwards, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend in 2025/26 by £0.627M.

2.3 That Cabinet notes 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.

2.4 Cabinet is asked to note the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of December 2024.

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 updates and meetings with Treasury advisors (MUFG, previously known as 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 15th November 2024.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 In February 2024, Council approved the Integrated Capital and Treasury Strategy for 2024/25 to 2033/34. To be consistent with the strategy, the monitoring reports for Capital and Treasury are also integrated.

7.2 MUFG are contracted to provide Treasury advice. 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 £122.0M of capital assets that it currently owns. 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. There have been no significant changes in relation to these since the last quarter.

Capital Programme 2024/25

8.2 The full capital programme is detailed in Appendix A and shows the revised costs to date, together with the expected spend from 2024/25 to 2034/35 and the funding source for each capital scheme.

8.3 Capital expenditure for 2024/25 is estimated to be **£16.816M**. This is a decrease of **£0.583M** on the forecast in the 2nd quarter report (reported to Cabinet on 14th January 2025). Table 1 below details changes to capital programme.

Table 1- Current Capital Estimates

	2024/25 £M	2025/26 £M	2026/27 to 2034/35 £M
Original Estimates approved by Full Council February 2024	**22.623**	**15.110**	**12.039**
Changes approved by Cabinet in 3rd Qrt 2024/25	0.960		
Changes approved by Cabinet in 2023/24 Capital Outturn report	2.654	0.193	
Revised Capital estimates at start of 2022/23	**26.237**	**15.303**	**12.039**
Changes approved by Cabinet in March 2024:			
Redistribution of Shared Prosperity Fund	-0.083		
Solar Together	0.563		
Changes approved by Full Council July 2024:			
Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund	2.400		
Royston Leisure Centre Gym Extension	0.250		
Changes at Q1	1.048	0.948	
Changes approved by Full Council Sept 2024	0.672	-0.672	
Executive Member – Finance and I.T. approved additional Expenditure Hitchin Fitness Gym Lift	0.020		
Reprofile Leisure Budgets		0.550	-0.400
Changes at Q2	-13.708	9.810	2.000

	2024/25 £M	2025/26 £M	2026/27 to 2034/35 £M
Changes approved by Full Council 27/02/2025 - Investment Strategy 2025-35		**-4.876**	**9.921**
Changes at Q3	**-0.583**	**0.627**	
Current Capital Estimates	**16.816**	**21.690**	**23.560**

8.4 Table 2 lists the schemes in the 2024/25 Capital Programme that will now start or continue in 2025/26 and onwards:

Table 2: Scheme Timetable Revision:
(Key: - = reduction in capital expenditure, + = increase in capital expenditure)

Scheme	2024/25 Working Budget £'000	2024/25 Forecast £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2025/26 onwards £'000
Hitchin Fitness Member Change and Relaxation Area Refurbishment	300	0	-300	There has not been capacity within the leisure team to procure for the project this financial year and therefore it will be completed in 2025/26	300
Royston Leisure Centre Change Village Refurbishment	150	0	-150	Works will be carried out at the same time as Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund project	150
North Herts Leisure Centre Lift Replacement	90	0	-90	Property Services have advised a consultant should be appointed to specify and procure the lift project, this has resulted in a delay in delivering the project until 25/26.	90
Priory Memorial Gardens Mult-Use Games Area (MUGA)a	55	0	-55	Project has slipped following research into options for the replacement of the fencing around the muga to ensure that a suitable product is identified within budget. This process took longer than expected and has caused a delay in commencing the procurement process.	55

Scheme	2024/25 Working Budget £'000	2024/25 Forecast £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2025/26 onwards £'000
Riverside walkway Biggin Lane	53	0	-53	The Council has procured a topographical survey of the proposed route of the Riverside Walk and an outline proposal for the planned walkway improvements and bridge crossing is being prepared by an external firm of consultant engineers. Unfortunately, delivery of this and subsequent works on site have been delayed. It is hoped that a preliminary proposal will be available from the structural engineers during February. This will be reviewed internally and then will be consulted on. Finalisation of the proposed route will also be subject to various statutory consents, including planning, highways and the environment agency before work can begin on site.	53
Home Repair Assistance	100	75	-25	The use of these grants has reduced. We will be reviewing the terms of the grants to increase eligibility. So requesting a carry-forward to support more households during 2025/26.	25
Other minor changes			-68		68
Total Revision to Budget Profile			**-741**		**741**

8.5 There are also changes to the overall costs of schemes in 2024/25. These changes total a net increase of £0.158million and are detailed in Table 3

Table 3: Changes to Capital Schemes Commencing in 2024/25:
(Key: - = reduction in capital expenditure, + = increase in capital expenditure)

Scheme	2024/25 Working Budget £'000	2024/25 Forecast Spend £'000	Difference £'000	Comments
SPF Community and Place	130	194	+64	The grant funding for these projects is split over Capital and Revenue. There will be an equivalent underspend in Revenue to fund this additional expenditure.
Community Facilities Refurbishment	0	48	+48	This budget was reprofiled into 25/26 in the Q2 report. Pirton Parish Council have fulfilled the conditions sooner than expected to enable of the grant and will commence the build of the project in February 2025.
Oughtonhead Common Weir	0	40	+40	This budget was reprofiled into 25/26 in the Q2 reportt but consultants costs have been incurred in 24/25
S106 Projects	12	40	+28	To date a total of £40K of S106 funds have been released for community schemes.
Other minor changes			**-22**	
Total revision to scheme spend			**158**	

8.6 Table 4 below shows how the Council will fund the 2024/25 capital programme.

Table 4: Funding the Capital Programme:

	2024/25 Balance at start of year £M	2024/25 Forecast Additions £M	2024/25 Forecast Funding Used £M	2024/25 Balance at end of year £M
Useable Capital Receipts and Set-aside Receipts	4.914	0.0	(4.749)	0.165
S106 receipts			(0.567)	
Other third party grants and contributions			(8.127)	
Revenue Contribution			(0.030)	

	2024/25 Balance at start of year £M	2024/25 Forecast Additions £M	2024/25 Forecast Funding Used £M	2024/25 Balance at end of year £M
Borrowing			(3.343)	
Total			**(16.816)**	

8.7 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.

8.8 The Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) at 31st March 2024 was negative £2.58M. Based on current forecasts it will become positive during 2024/25 as the Council does not have sufficient funding (e.g. Capital Receipts) to finance the Capital programme. This means the Council will have to borrow to fund the programme in this year, with MRP (Minimum Revenue Provision) charged to the General Fund in 2025/26.

Treasury Management 2024/25

8.9 The Council invests its surplus cash in accordance with the Investment Strategy (see paragraph 4.2). This surplus cash is made up of capital funding balances, general fund balance, other revenue reserves and provision balances and variations in cash due to the timing of receipts and payments. During the first nine months of 2024/25, the Council had an average investment balance of £57.0M and invested this in accordance with the treasury and prudential indicators as set out in the Integrated Capital and Treasury Management Strategy and in compliance with the Treasury Management Practices.

8.10 The Council generated £2.8M of interest in 2024/25 from investments already made during the first nine months of the year (and accrued interest from deals made in 2023/24). This includes the interest that will be earned during the final three months of the year on investments that have already been made. The average interest rate on all outstanding investments at the 31st December was 5.04%. (30th September was 5.17.%). Based on current investments and forecasts of interest rates and cash balances for the remainder of the year, it is forecast that the Council will generate £2.955M of interest over the whole of 2024/25.

8.11 As at 31st December 2024, the split of investments was as shown in the table below.

Banks	10%
Building Societies	0%
Government	5%
Local Authorities	85%

8.12 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 31st December 2024. The most risky investment has a historic risk of default of 0.013%. 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 the Council took on less risk.

Borrower	Principal Invested £M	Interest Rate %	Credit Rating	Days to Maturity at 31 Dec	Historic Risk of Default %
Lloyds Bank	0.5	4.62	A+	1	0.000
Shropshire Council	2.0	5.35	AA-	2	0.000
Australia & New Zealand Bank	1.0	5.26	AA-	5	0.000
Nat West	1.0	5.17	A+	5	0.001
DMO	2.0	4.71	AA-	16	0.001
City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council	2.0	4.8	AA-	16	0.001
North Tyneside Council	2.0	5.05	AA-	19	0.001
Nat West	1.0	5.13	A+	26	0.003
Stoke on Trent City Council	1.0	5.75	AA-	27	0.002
London Borough of Barking & Dagenham	3.0	5.05	AA-	29	0.002
Central Beds Council	2.0	5.25	AA-	33	0.002
Australia & New Zealand Bank	2.0	4.96	AA-	40	0.002
DMO	1.0	4.7	AA-	43	0.003
Cheshire East Council	2.0	4.9	AA-	47	0.003
Folkestone & Hythe District Council	2.0	5.05	AA-	54	0.003
Flintshire County Council	2.0	5.0	AA-	57	0.004
City of Bradford MDC	1.0	5.1	AA-	58	0.004
London Borough of Barking & Dagenham	1.0	5.07	AA-	64	0.004
Cheltenham Borough Council	2.0	5.0	AA-	71	0.004
Liverpool City Council	2.0	5.25	AA-	78	0.005
Lancashire County Council	1.0	5.05	AA-	96	0.006
Reading Borough Council	2.0	4.75	AA-	96	0.006
Blackpool Council	3.0	4.75	AA-	113	0.007
Gravesham Borough Council	1.0	5.2	AA-	114	0.007
Leeds City Council	2.0	5.05	AA-	114	0.007
Lancashire County Council	3.0	5.2	AA-	119	0.007
Highland Council	2.0	5.1	AA-	125	0.008
Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole Council	2.0	4.8	AA-	131	0.008
Cheshire East Council	2.0	5.2	AA-	141	0.009
West Berkshire District Council	2.0	4.95	AA-	141	0.009
West Berkshire District Council	2.0	5.1	AA-	148	0.009

Borrower	Principal Invested £M	Interest Rate %	Credit Rating	Days to Maturity at 31 Dec	Historic Risk of Default %
Northumberland County Council	2.0	4.85	AA-	168	0.010
Liverpool City Council	2.0	4.85	AA-	209	0.013
	58.5	5.04			0.005

DMO credit rating is the UK credit rating.

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 Council 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 around £5.2M higher than the budgeted £62.065M.

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. £1.0M currently earns the Authority approximately £50k per year in interest. The general fund estimates are routinely updated to reflect changes in 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 2024 was negative £2.58M.

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 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 and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2 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 Oversight Group (if applicable). The key risks arising from the project may be recorded on IdeaGen (the Council's Performance & Risk management software).

11.3 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 2024/25 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 2024/25 onwards.

16.2 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/s24164/INVESTMENT%20STRATEGY%20INTEGRATED%20CAPITAL%20AND%20TREASURY.pdf
https://srvmodgov01.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s24165/FAR%20Appendix%20A-%20Integrated%20Capital%20and%20Treasury%20Strategy.docx.pdf

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									Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 Funding £	2029/30 Funding £	2030/31 - 2034/35 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	12,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12,000
Air conditioning at Hitchin Town Hall	Enterprise	0	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000
Air Handling Humidification	Enterprise	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,000
Alternative to safeword tokens for staff/members working remotely	Customers	9,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9,900
An alternative set of 25 machines that are outside of the Windows Environment for Disaster Recovery	Customers	0	15,000	0	0	15,000	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	60,000
Audio Improvements to Mountford Hall	Enterprise	0	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,000
Avenue Park Floodlights	Place	1,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,000
Avenue Park Splash Park	Place	0	70,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	70,000
Baldock Road Recreation Ground Letchworth	Place	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Bancroft & Priory Splash Pads	Place	13,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13,200
Bancroft Lighting	Place	0	45,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45,000
Broadway Gardens Resurfacing	Place	0	250,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	250,000
Burymead Road Transfer Facility	Place	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000	0
Cadcorp Local Knowledge & Notice Board Software	Customers	5,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200	5,200
CCTV at DCO & Hitchin Town Hall	Customers	14,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14,900
CCTV Control Room Upgrade	Resources	0	45,000	0	0	0	0	45,000	0	0	0	0	90,000
CCTV Replacement	Customers	131,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	131,900
Charnwood House	Enterprise	19,800	370,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	390,600
Community Centres Flat Roof Safety Barriers	Resources	43,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43,000
Conference Calling Solutions in Large Meeting Rooms at District Council Offices	Customers	13,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13,000
Council property improvements following condition surveys	Resources	165,200	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	250,000	0	0	0	0	665,200
Cyber Attacks - Events Monitoring Software Solution	Customers	2,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,000
Cycle Strategy implementation (GAF)	Regulatory	0	278,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	278,000	0	0	0
DR Hardware Refresh Inc UPS Battery Pk (unit 3)	Customers	8,000	57,000	0	0	16,000	0	32,000	0	0	0	0	113,000
Email Encryption Software Solution	Customers	17,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17,700
Environmental Improvements	Place	78,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	78,300
EV Charging at the existing Letchworth Depot	Place	0	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000
Fibre Waste Bins	Place	0	1,170,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,170,000
Green Infrastructure implementation (GAF)	Regulatory	0	185,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	185,000	0	0	0
Grounds Maintenance Vehicles & Machinery	Resources	315,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	315,000
Hitchin Lairage car park - cosmetic coating to four stairwells and replacement windows and doors	Resources	75,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	75,000
Hitchin Swim Centre Café	Place	19,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19,000
Hitchin Swimn Centre Pool View	Place	70,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	70,000
Hitchin Swim Centre Reception Toilet Refurbishment	Place	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Hitchin Swim Centre: Archers Member Change and Relaxation Area Refurbishment	Place	0	300,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300,000
Hitchin Swim Centre: Changing Village Refurbishment	Place	0	0	225,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	225,000

									Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 Funding £	2029/30 Funding £	2030/31 - 2034/35 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: Fitness Equipment Replacement	Place	391,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000	0	0	0	381,700
Hitchin Town Hall Kitchen Enhancement	Enterprise	0	0	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
Howard Park Kiosk Refurbishment	Enterprise	15,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,400
Howard Park Letchworth Path Resurfacing	Place	6,200	13,800	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Infrastructure Hardware	Customers	375,000	0	18,000	18,000	190,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	601,000
Installation of trial on-street charging (GAF)	Regulatory	0	50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	50,000	0	0	0
Ivel Springs Footpaths	Place	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000
King George V Muga Hitchin	Place	0	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,000	0	0
John Barker Place, Hitchin	Regulatory	1,096,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	270,400	0	825,600
Laptops - Refresh Programme	Customers	40,000	319,000	49,000	35,000	40,000	349,000	234,000	0	0	0	0	1,066,000
Leased Cars	Resources	141,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	141,000
Letchworth OD Pool Café	Place	53,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	53,000
Local Authority Housing Fund Pt 2	Regulatory	300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300	0	0	0
Match funding for Electric Vehicle charging	Regulatory	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000
Mel Tax Offices, Royston	Enterprise	0	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
Members Laptops Refresh Programme	Customers	0	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Microsoft Enterprise Software Assurance	Customers	0	679,000	0	0	747,000	0	1,494,000	0	0	0	0	2,920,000
Museum Storage Facility	Enterprise	1,350,000	650,000	2,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,000,000
New Market Road Royston Skatepark & Access	Place	88,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	88,500	0	0
NH Museum & Community Facility	Enterprise	0	48,300	0	0	0	0	0	48,300	0	0	0	0
NH Museum Chiller	Enterprise	0	80,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	80,000
NHLC Air Handling Units	Place	250,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	250,000
NHLC Café	Place	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
NHLC Gym Platform Lift Replacement	Place	15,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,700
NHLC Gym Equipment	Place	434,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	434,000
NHLC Gym Refubishment	Place	292,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	292,000
NHLC Lift Replacement	Place	0	90,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	90,000
NHLC Male, Female and Accessible Wet Change Refurbishment	Place	0	250,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	250,000
NHLC Pool Flume Replacement	Place	0	300,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300,000
NHLC Pool View	Place	110,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	110,000
Northern Transfer Station	Place	0	0	0	0	3,000,000	3,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	6,000,000
Norton Common Bowls Pavilion	Place	0	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28,000	0	27,000
Norton Common Footpaths	Place	0	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000
Norton Common Letchworth Tennis Courts	Place	0	48,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	48,700
Off Street Car Parks resurfacing and enhancement	Resources	20,000	19,000	43,000	77,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	159,000
Old Hale Way Allotments Hitchin	Place	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Oughtonhead Common Footpaths	Place	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Oughtonhead Common Hitchin Weir	Place	40,200	323,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	363,600
Oughtonhead Common Signage and Interpretation	Place	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000
Parking Charging, Payments & Management	Regulatory	235,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	235,000
Parking Machines Replacement	Regulatory	291,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	291,200
Parking Machines Upgrade - Contactless Payment Facility Installation	Regulatory	56,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	42,000	0	0	14,000
PC's - Refresh Programme	Customers	26,600	7,000	8,000	5,000	8,000	5,000	8,000	0	0	0	0	67,600
Playground Renovation District Wide	Place	140,500	360,000	180,000	180,000	180,000	180,000	900,000	0	0	0	0	2,120,500
Priory Gardens Bandstand	Place	0	50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50,000

									Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 Funding £	2029/30 Funding £	2030/31 - 2034/35 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
Priory Memorial Gardens MUGA Royston	Place	0	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,000
Private Sector Grants	Regulatory	75,000	189,700	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	300,000	0	0	0	0	804,700
Provide housing at market rents.	Enterprise	3,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,000
Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund	Place	8,590,100	5,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	7,730,100	0	0	5,860,000
Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund Phase 2	Place	0	730,000	2,001,000	423,000	0	0	0	0	1,172,000	0	0	1,982,000
Ransoms Rec Footpaths, Gates and Railing	Place	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Refurbishment and improvement of community facilities	Legal and Community	47,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	47,800
Refuse and Recycling Bins	Place	130,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	450,000	0	0	0	0	1,030,000
Remote testing equipment - Emergency Lights and Water Temperature Monitoring	Resources	0	13,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13,000
Renovate skate park at KGV Hitchin	Place	0	248,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	248,700
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	73,400	1,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	75,000
Resurface Lairage Car Park	Resources	0	346,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	346,300
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	150,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	150,000
RLC Cafe	Place	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Royston Leisure Centre Dry Side Toilet Refurbishment	Place	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Royston Leisure Centre extension	Place	250,000	1,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	168,000	0	1,082,000
RLC Pool View	Place	70,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	70,000
RLC Gym Equipment	Place	0	349,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	349,800
RLC Gym Refubishment	Place	0	452,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	452,000
Royston Leisure Centre Members Changing Refurbishment	Place	200,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200,000
S106 Projects	Various	40,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,300	0	0
S016 Funding for additional social housing	Regulatory	0	192,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	192,500	0	0
Security - Firewalls	Customers	23,600	0	18,000	0	18,000	0	54,000	0	0	0	0	113,600
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Intervention: Community Engagement Schemes	Enterprise	193,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	193,800	0	0	0
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Intervention: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces	Enterprise	50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50,000	0	0	0
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Intervention: Local sports facilities, tournaments, teams and leagues	Resources	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000	0	0	0
Solar Together	Place	0	563,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	44,000	0	0	519,000
St Johns Cemetery Footpath	Place	29,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29,600
Swinburne Recration Ground Hitchin	Place	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Tablets - Android Devices	Customers	13,900	10,000	10,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	8,000	0	0	0	0	53,900
Technology One Financial System	Resources	155,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	155,800
Thomas Bellamy House, Hitchin	Enterprise	0	6,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,000
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	0	300,000	0	0	0	0	250,000	0	37,000	0	13,000
Waste and Street Cleansing Data Mgmt	Place	0	470,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	470,000

									Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 Funding £	2029/30 Funding £	2030/31 - 2034/35 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
Waste and Street Cleansing Vehicles	Place	0	4,800,000	0	0	0	0	5,500,000	0	0	0	3,200,000	7,100,000
Weston Hills Baldock	Place	12,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12,200
Weston Hills LNR Footpath Renovation	Place	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
WiFi Upgrade	Customers	0	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Wilbury Hills Cemetery Footpaths	Place	9,400	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39,400
		16,815,500	**21,689,600**	**5,147,000**	**952,000**	**4,418,000**	**3,738,000**	**9,305,000**	**308,300**	**10,095,200**	**879,700**	**3,230,200**	**47,551,700**

Treasury Management Update

Quarterly report

31st December 2024

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Treasury Management Update
Quarter Ended 31st December 2024

The CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Code of Practice for Treasury Management 2021 recommends that members be updated on treasury management activities at least quarterly. This report, therefore, ensures this Council is implementing best practice in accordance with the Code.

1. Economics update

- The third quarter of 2024/25 (October to December) saw:
  - GDP growth contracting by 0.1% m/m in October following no growth in the quarter ending September;
  - The 3myy rate of average earnings growth increase from 4.4% in September to 5.2% in October;
  - CPI inflation increase to 2.6% in November;
  - Core CPI inflation increase from 3.3% in October to 3.5% in November;
  - The Bank of England cut interest rates from 5.0% to 4.75% in November and hold them steady in December.
  - 10-year gilt yields starting October at 3.94% before finishing up at 4.57% at the end of December (peaking at 4.64%).
- The 0.1% m/m fall in GDP in October was the second such decline in a row and meant that GDP would need to rise by 0.1% m/m or more in November and December, for the economy to grow in Q4 as a whole rather than contract. With on-going concern over the impact of the October budget and drags from higher interest rates and weak activity in the euro zone, our colleagues at Capital Economics have revised down their forecast for GDP growth in 2025 to 1.3% (it was initially 1.8% in the immediate wake of the Budget.)
- This quarter saw the composite activity Purchasing Manager Index (PMI) dip below the level of 50 that separates expansion from contraction for the first time since October 2023. Although December's composite PMI came in above this level, at 50.5, this was still consistent with the 0% rise in real GDP in Q3 being followed by a flat-lining, or potential contraction, in the final quarter of 2024. However, the economy is unlikely to be quite as weak as that given that the PMIs do not capture rises in government spending, but the data does underline the continued divergence in trends between the manufacturing and services sectors. The manufacturing PMI fell for its fourth consecutive month in December, from 48.0 in November to 47.3. That's consistent with manufacturing output falling by 1.5% q/q in the final quarter of 2024 after flatlining through the summer months. This weakness in the manufacturing sector was offset by a rebound in the services sector. The services PMI rose from 50.8 in November to 51.4 in December, which is consistent with non-retail services output growth increasing from +0.1% q/q to +0.3% for October - December. This suggests that more of the recent slowdown in GDP is being driven by the weakness in activity overseas rather than just domestic factors. Additionally, the services output prices balance rose for the third consecutive month, from 55.4 in November to 56.9, showing signs that price pressures are reaccelerating.
- After rising by 1.4% q/q in July - September, the retail sector had a difficult final quarter of the year. Indeed, the bigger-than-expected 0.7% m/m fall in retail sales in October (consensus forecast -0.3% m/m) suggested that households' concerns about expected tax rises announced in the Budget on 30th October contributed to weaker retail spending at the start of the quarter. The monthly decline in retail sales volumes in October was reasonably broad based, with sales in five of the seven main sub sectors slipping. However, the potential for seasonally adjusted sales to rise in November - if October's figures were impacted by the timing of the school half term – combined with a rebound in consumer confidence and rising real incomes, points to some promise to the final quarter of 2024
- The Government's October budget outlined plans for a significant £41.5bn (1.2% of GDP) increase in taxes by 2029/30, with £25bn derived from a 1.2% rise in employers' national insurance contributions. The taxes are more than offset by a £47bn (1.4% of GDP) rise in current (day-to-day) spending by 2029/30 and a £24.6bn (0.7% of GDP) rise in public investment, with the latter being more than funded by a £32.5bn (1.0% of GDP) rise in public borrowing. The result is that the Budget loosens fiscal policy relative to the previous government's plans - although fiscal policy is still being tightened over the next five years – and that GDP growth is somewhat stronger over the coming years than had previously been forecasted. By way of comparison, the Bank of England forecasts four-quarter GDP growth to pick up to almost 1¾% through 2025 (previously forecast to be 0.9%) before falling back to just over 1% in 2026.

- December's pay data showed a rebound in wage growth that will likely add to the Bank of England's inflationary concerns. The 3myy rate of average earnings growth increased from 4.4% in September (revised up from 4.3%) to 5.2% in October (consensus forecast 4.6%) and was mainly due to a rebound in private sector pay growth from 4.6% to 5.4%. Excluding bonuses, public sector pay stagnated in October and the 3myy rate fell from 4.7% to 4.3%.
- The number of job vacancies also fell again from 828,000 in the three months to October to 818,000 in the three months to November. This marks the first time it has dropped below its pre-pandemic February 2020 level of 819,000 since May 2021. Despite this, the Bank of England remains concerned about the inflationary influence of high wage settlements as well as the risk of a major slowdown in labour market activity.
- CPI inflation has been on the rise this quarter, with the annual growth rate increasing from 1.7% in September to 2.3% in October, before rising further to 2.6% in November. Although services CPI inflation stayed at 5.0% in November, the Bank had expected a dip to 4.9%, while the timelier three-month annualised rate of services CPI rose from 5.0% to 5.1%. That shows that there currently isn't much downward momentum. Moreover, the wider measure of core CPI inflation rose from 3.3% to 3.5% in November. Both services and core inflation are currently at rates well above those consistent with the 2.0% target and are moving in the wrong direction. Capital Economics forecast that after dipping to 2.5% in December, CPI inflation will rise further in January, perhaps to 2.8%. Although CPI inflation is expected to be back at close to the 2.0% target by the end of 2025, given that a lot of the rise in inflation in the coming months will be due to base effects that won't persist, the potential for a broader set of tariffs to arise from the US as well as the constant threat of geo-political factors to impact energy and food prices suggest risks remain very much to the upside.
- Throughout the quarter gilt yields have risen. The 10-year gilt yield increased from 3.94% at the start of October to 4.57% by the year end (and has subsequently risen to 4.64% early in 2025). As recently as mid-September 10-year gilt yields were at their low for the financial year, but since then, and specifically after the Budget at the end of October, yields have soared. Overall, the reaction to the UK Budget highlights how bond markets are both fragile and highly attentive to news about the fiscal outlook.
- The FTSE 100 started off this quarter at 8,276, before finishing up at 8,121. In particular, UK markets have continued to fall further behind US equities, a trend which has accelerated since Trump's election victory in November, partly due to the UK stock market being less exposed to AI hype, and it being weighed down by its relatively large exposure to the energy and materials sectors.

MPC meetings: 7th November & 18th December 2024

- On 7 November, Bank Rate was cut by 0.25% to 4.75%. The vote was 8-1 in favour of the cut, but the language used by the MPC emphasised "gradual" reductions would be the way ahead with an emphasis on the inflation and employment data releases, as well as geo-political events.
- At the 18 December meeting, another split vote arose. Members voted 6-3 to keep Bank Rate on hold at 4.75%, but dissenters (Dhingra, Ramsden and Taylor) were keen for rates to be cut further as concerns over the slowing down of the UK economy took root, despite near-term inflation fears remaining.
- The MPC again stated that "a gradual approach" to rate cuts "remains appropriate" and that policy will "remain restrictive for sufficiently long".

2. Interest rate forecasts

The Council has appointed Link Group as its treasury advisors and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The PWLB rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012. For Housing Revenue Account authorities, the lower Housing Revenue Account (HRA) PWLB rate has also been available since 15 June 2023 (standard rate minus 60 bps) but is available for HRA borrowing only.

The latest forecast, updated on 11th November, sets out a view that both short and long-dated interest rates will start to fall once it is evident that the Bank of England has been successful in squeezing excess inflation out of the economy, despite a backdrop of stubborn inflationary factors and a tight labour market.

Following the 30th October Budget, the outcome of the US Presidential election on 6th November, and the 25bps Bank Rate cut undertaken by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on 7th November, we significantly revised our central forecasts for the first time since May. In summary, our Bank Rate forecast is now 50bps – 75bps

higher than was previously the case, whilst our PWLB forecasts have been materially lifted to not only reflect our increased concerns around the future path of inflation, but also the increased level of Government borrowing over the term of the current Parliament.

If we reflect on the 30th October Budget, our central case is that those policy announcements will be inflationary, at least in the near-term. The Office for Budgetary Responsibility and the Bank of England concur with that view. The latter have the CPI measure of inflation hitting 2.5% y/y by the end of 2024 and staying sticky until at least 2026. The Bank forecasts CPI to be 2.7% y/y (Q4 2025) and 2.2% (Q4 2026) before dropping back in 2027 to 1.8% y/y.

The anticipated major investment in the public sector, according to the Bank, is expected to lift UK real GDP to 1.7% in 2025 before growth moderates in 2026 and 2027. The debate around whether the Government's policies lead to a material uptick in growth primarily focus on the logistics of fast-tracking planning permissions, identifying sufficient skilled labour to undertake a resurgence in building, and an increase in the employee participation rate within the economy.

There are inherent risks to all the above. The worst-case scenario would see systemic blockages of planning permissions and the inability to identify and resource the additional workforce required to deliver large-scale IT, housing and infrastructure projects. This would lead to upside risks to inflation, an increased prospect of further Government borrowing & tax rises, and a tepid GDP performance.

Our central view is that monetary policy is sufficiently tight at present to cater for some further moderate loosening, the extent of which, however, will continue to be data dependent. We forecast the next reduction in Bank Rate to be made in February and for a pattern to evolve whereby rate cuts are made quarterly and in keeping with the release of the Bank's Quarterly Monetary Policy Reports (February, May, August and November). Any movement below a 4% Bank Rate will, nonetheless, be very much dependent on inflation data in the second half of 2025.

Regarding our PWLB forecast, the short to medium part of the curve is forecast to remain elevated over the course of 2025, and the degree to which rates moderate will be tied to the arguments for further Bank Rate loosening or otherwise. The longer part of the curve will also be impacted by inflation factors, but there is also the additional concern that with other major developed economies such as the US and France looking to run large budget deficits there could be a glut of government debt issuance that investors will only agree to digest if the interest rates paid provide sufficient reward for that scenario.

Moreover, Donald Trump's victory in the US President election paves the way for the introduction/extension of tariffs that could prove inflationary whilst the same could be said of any further tax cuts and an expansion of the current US budget deficit.

Invariably the direction of US Treasury yields in reaction to his core policies will, in all probability, impact UK gilt yields. So, there are domestic and international factors that could impact PWLB rates whilst, as a general comment, geo-political risks abound.

In summary, regarding PWLB rates, movement in the short-end of the curve is expected to reflect Link's Bank Rate expectations to a large degree, whilst medium to longer-dated PWLB rates will remain influenced not only by the outlook for inflation, domestically and globally, but also by the market's appetite for significant gilt issuance (£200bn+ for each of the next few years). As noted at the Link November Strategic Issues webinars, there is upside risk to that part of our forecast despite the Debt Management Office skewing its issuance to the shorter part of the curve.

Link Group Interest Rate View	11.11.24												
	Dec-24	Mar-25	Jun-25	Sep-25	Dec-25	Mar-26	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27
BANK RATE	4.75	4.50	4.25	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
3 month ave earnings	4.70	4.50	4.30	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
6 month ave earnings	4.70	4.40	4.20	3.90	3.90	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
12 month ave earnings	4.70	4.40	4.20	3.90	3.90	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
5 yr PWLB	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.60	4.50	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.20	4.10	4.00	4.00	3.90
10 yr PWLB	5.30	5.10	5.00	4.80	4.80	4.70	4.50	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.20	4.20	4.10
25 yr PWLB	5.60	5.50	5.40	5.30	5.20	5.10	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.70	4.60	4.50	4.50
50 yr PWLB	5.40	5.30	5.20	5.10	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.70	4.60	4.50	4.40	4.30	4.30

- Money market yield forecasts are based on expected average earnings by local authorities for 3 to 12 months.
- The Link forecast for average earnings are averages i.e., rates offered by individual banks may differ significantly from these averages, reflecting their different needs for borrowing short-term cash at any one point in time.

3. Annual Investment Strategy

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2024/25, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy, was approved by the Council on 29/02/24. In accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice, it sets out the Council's investment priorities as being:

- Security of capital
- Liquidity
- Yield

The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity, aligned with the Council's risk appetite. In the current economic climate, over and above keeping investments short-term to cover cash flow needs, there is a benefit to seeking out value available in periods up to 24 months.

As shown by the interest rate forecasts in section 2, investment rates have remained relatively elevated during the third quarter of 2024/25 but are expected to fall back in due course if inflation falls through 2025 and the MPC loosens monetary policy more substantially.

Creditworthiness.
There have been few changes to credit ratings over the quarter under review. However, officers continue to closely monitor these, and other measures of creditworthiness to ensure that only appropriate counterparties are considered for investment purposes.

Investment counterparty criteria
The current investment counterparty criteria selection approved in the TMSS is meeting the requirement of the treasury management function.

CDS prices
For UK and international banks, these have remained low, and prices are not misaligned with other creditworthiness indicators, such as credit ratings. **Nevertheless, it remains important to undertake continual monitoring of all aspects of risk and return in the current circumstances.**

Investment balances
The average level of funds available for investment purposes during the quarter was **£56.6m**. These funds were available on a temporary basis, and the level of funds available was mainly dependent on the timing of precept payments, receipt of grants and progress on the capital programme. The Council holds **£20m** core cash balances for investment purposes (i.e., funds available for more than one year).

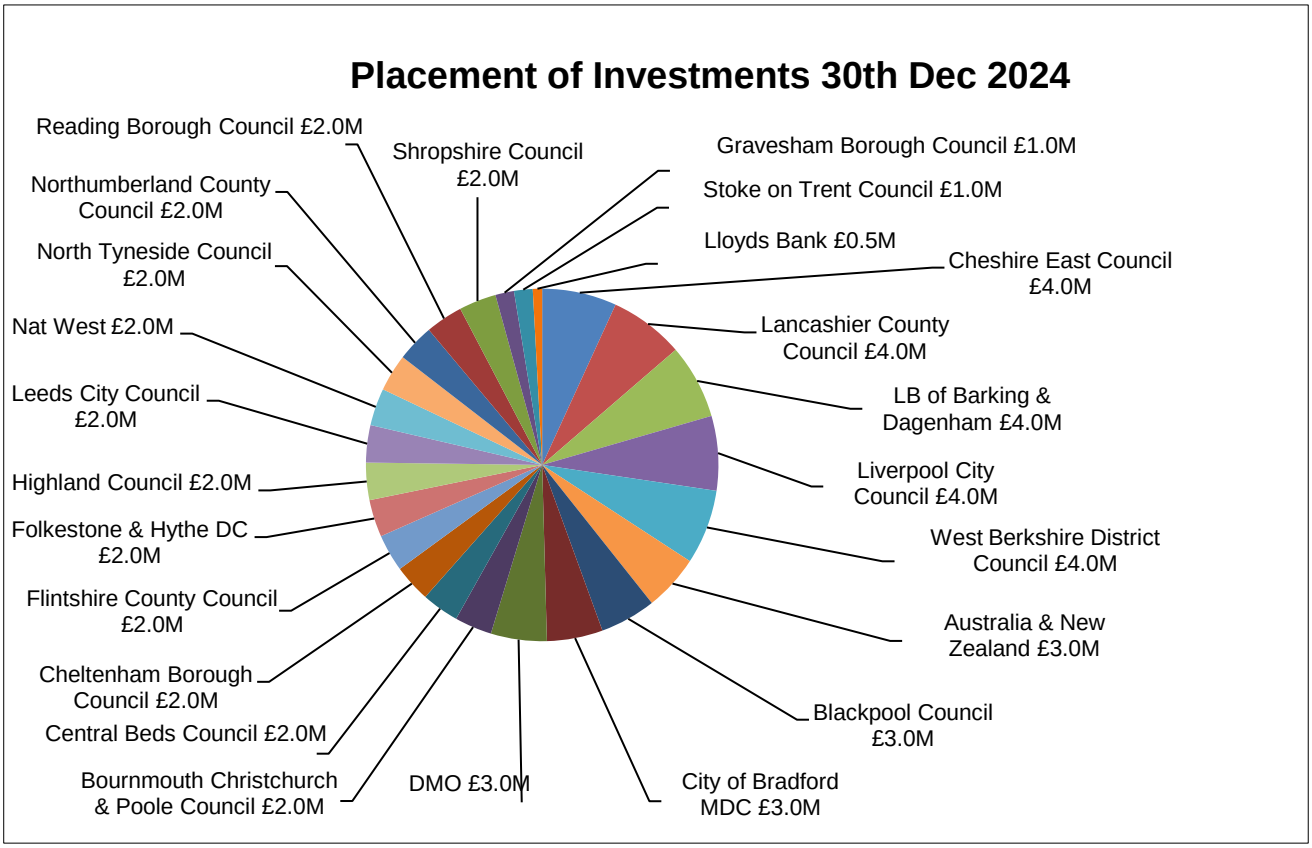
	Amount	Average
	£	Interest Rate %
Managed By NHC		
Banks	5,500,000	5.13
Building Societies	0	0
Local Authorities	50,000,000	5.04
Government	3,000,000	4.70
Total	**58,500,000**	**5.04**

In percentage terms, this equates to:

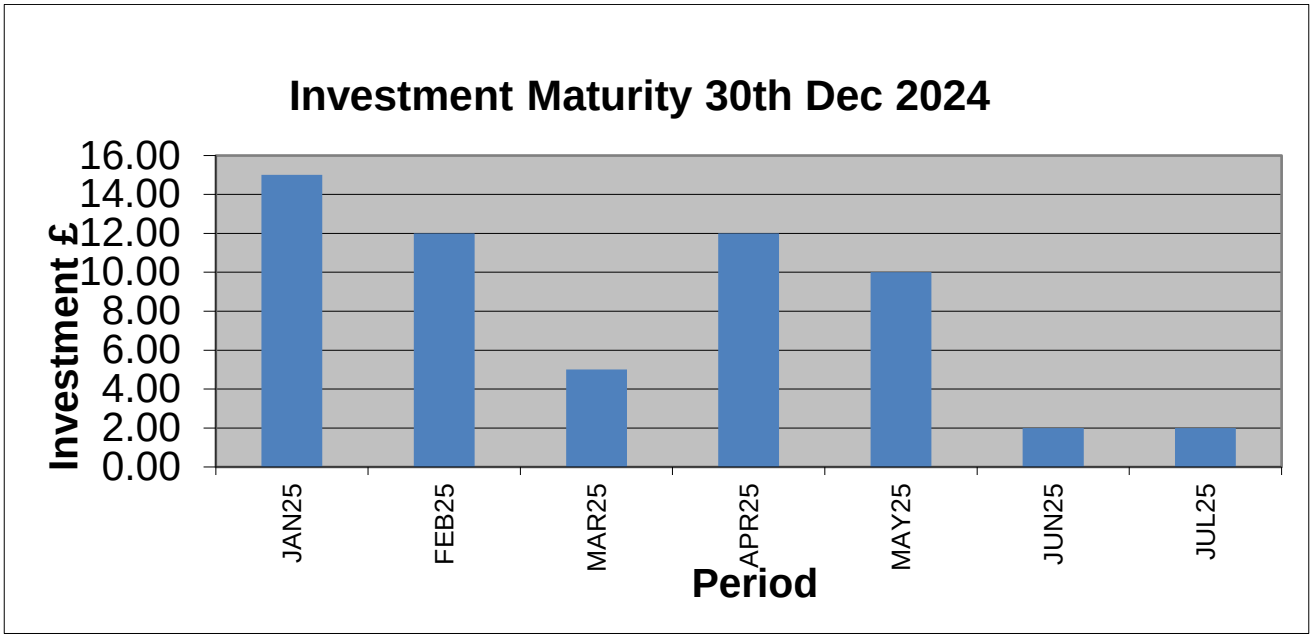
	Percentage
Government	5
Banks	10
Local Authorities	85
Building Societies	0

The approved 24/25 strategy is that no more than 60% of investments should be placed with Building Societies and Property Funds with a maximum value of £15M. The value at 30 December was zero.

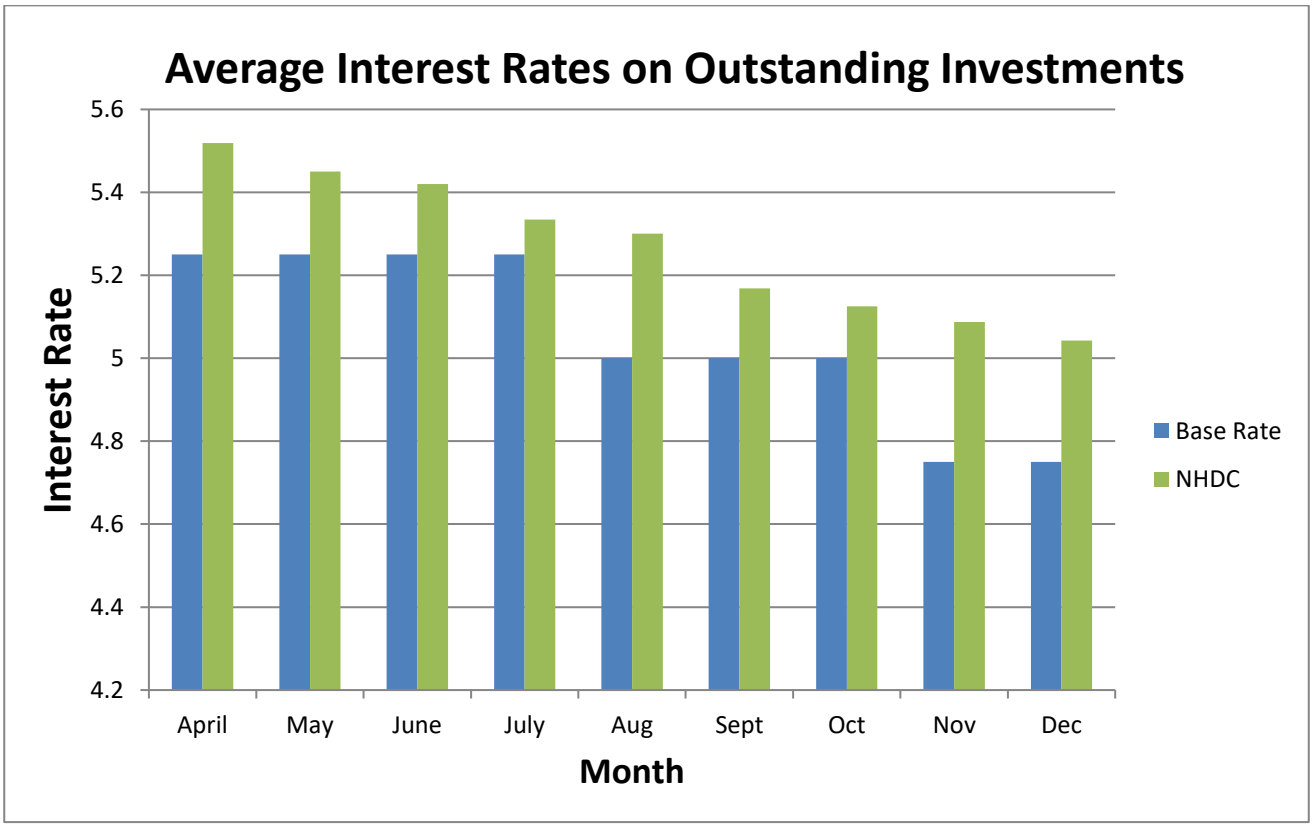
The pie chart below shows the spread of investment balances as at 30 December 2024. This is a snapshot in time that demonstrates the diversification of investments.



The chart below shows the Council's investment maturity profile.



The graph below shows the average rate of interest on outstanding investments at 31 December.



Approved limits
Officers can confirm that the approved limits within the Annual Investment Strategy were not breached during the quarter ended 31st December 2024.

4. Borrowing

No borrowing was undertaken during the quarter ended 31st December 2024.
It is anticipated that new borrowing will be undertaken during this financial year but this is dependant on the spend in the Capital Programme.

Loans Outstanding at 31 December 2024:

	Amount	Average Interest Rate
	£	%
Public Works Loans Board	£336k	10.60

Estimated outstanding debt:

Year	Forecast Borrowing £m	Forecast other long-term liabilities £m *	Less: Internal Borrowing £m	Forecast Total External Debt £m	Operational Boundary £m	Authorised Limit £m
31st March 2025 (Forecast)	3.668	0.562	3.343	0.887	2.0	7.0
31st March 2026 (Forecast)	20.843	5.984	20.538	5.929	8.0	13.0
31st March 2026 (Forecast)	20.828	5.122	20.538	5.412	7.0	12.0
31st March 2028 (Forecast)	20.813	4.258	20.538	4.533	6.0	11.0
31st March 2029 (Forecast)	22.661	3.395	22.396	3.66	5.0	10.0

* Comprises the finance lease relating to Letchworth Multi-storey car park and impact of the finance lease for waste vehicles.

The external borrowing forecast can be used to give an indication of the borrowing that may be required, which is combined with outstanding existing borrowing. The Council will also borrow for short-term cash-flow needs if required. The actual borrowing that is taken out will depend on the latest forecasts and the offers that are available at the time that it is required. There will also be a consideration of when any other borrowing becomes due, with the aim of achieving a spread of these dates. This is to try and avoid refinancing risk. The Council is required to set indicators for the maturity structure of its borrowing. Given the low level of borrowing that the Council currently has and is forecast to have, it is considered appropriate to maintain full flexibility as to the exact duration of any borrowing undertaken.

To manage refinancing risk, the Council sets limits on the maturity structure of its borrowing. However, these indicators are set relatively high to provide sufficient flexibility to respond to opportunities to repay or take out new debt (if it was required), while remaining within the parameters set by the indicators.

Maturity Period	Lower %	Upper %
Under 12 months	0	100
12 months to 2 years	0	100
2 years to 5 years	0	100
5 years to 10 years	0	100
10 years to 20 years	0	100
20 years and above	0	100

The Prudential Indicator below considers the cost of borrowing as a % of the net revenue budget of the Council.

Year	Estimated cost of borrowing £m	Forecast net revenue budget £m	Estimated cost of borrowing as a % of net revenue budget
2024/25	0.036	18.749	0.192
2025/26	0.184	23.523	0.782
2026/27	0.957	21.972	4.356
2027/28	0.956	21.830	4.379
2028/29	0.955	21.368	4.470

The Council is required to set a prudential indicator that estimates financing costs (cost of borrowing less income from investments) as a percentage of its net revenue budget.

Year	Estimated cost of borrowing £m	Less: Forecast of interest earned £m	Net Financing Costs £m	Forecast net revenue budget £m	Estimated cost of borrowing as a % of net revenue budget
2024/25	0.036	2.955	-2.919	18.749	-15.569
2025/26	0.184	0.892	-0.708	23.523	-3.009
2026/27	0.957	0.445	0.512	21.972	2.330
2027/28	0.956	0.381	0.575	21.830	2.634
2028/29	0.955	0.292	0.663	21.368	3.103

5. Debt rescheduling

No debt rescheduling was undertaken during the quarter.

6. Compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits

The prudential and treasury Indicators are shown in Appendix 1.

It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review the affordable borrowing limits, During the quarter ended 31st December 2024, the Council has operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2024/25. The Director of Resources reports that no difficulties are envisaged for the current or future years in complying with these indicators.

All treasury management operations have also been conducted in full compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

APPENDIX 1: Prudential and Treasury Indicators for 2024-25 as of 31st December 2024

Treasury Indicators	2024/25 Budget £'000	31.12.24 Actual £'000
Authorised limit for external debt	7,000	312
Operational boundary for external debt	2,000	312
Gross external debt	347	312
Investments	25,564 Average for year	58,500
Net borrowing	-25,217	58,188

Maturity structure of fixed rate borrowing - upper and lower limits		
Under 12 months	21	21
12 months to 2 years	21	21
2 years to 5 years	40	40
5 years to 10 years	15	15
Over 10 years	250	250

Upper limit for principal sums invested over 365 days	7,000	0

Prudential Indicators	2024/25 Budget £'000	31.03.24 Actual £'000
Capital expenditure	16,816	2,122
Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	11,856	-2,342
In year borrowing requirement	3,343	0
Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream	-2.92%	-9.42%

CABINET
18 March 2025

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: THIRD QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2024/25

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 forecasts for the financial year 2024/25, as at the end of the third quarter. The forecast variance is a £840k decrease in the net working budget of £19.589million, with an ongoing impact in future years of a £76k increase. There are also requests to carry forward £731k of unspent budget to fund specific projects and initiatives in the next financial year. Explanations for all the significant variances are provided in table 3.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet note this report.

2.2. That Cabinet approves the changes to the 2024/25 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £840k decrease in net expenditure.

2.3. That Cabinet approves the changes to the 2025/26 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £807k increase in net expenditure.

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.

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 15th November 2024.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. Council approved the revenue budget for 2024/25 of £19.933million in February 2023. As at the end of Quarter Three, the working budget has decreased to £19.589million. 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 2024/25 approved by Full Council	19,933
Quarter 3 2023/24 Revenue Budget Monitoring report – 2024/25 budget changes approved by Cabinet (March 2024)	410
2023/24 Revenue Budget Outturn Report – 2024/25 budget changes approved by Cabinet (June 2024)	634
Community Governance Review Terms of Reference report - additional budget required for the use of the Association of Electoral Administrators consultancy service to assist with delivering the Community Governance Review – approved by Council (July 2024)	20
First Quarter Revenue Monitoring 2024/25 report - 2024/25 variances approved by Cabinet (September 2024)	(858)
Second Quarter Revenue Monitoring 2024/25 report - 2024/25 variances approved by Cabinet (January 2025)	(550)
Current Working Budget	**19,589**

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 budget allocations published in the Quarter Two revenue monitoring report. The other budget transfers during the quarter primarily relate to the allocation of the Corporate Apprenticeship Scheme resource to the relevant service areas.

Table 2 – Service Directorate Budget Allocations

Service Directorate	**Original Budget 2024/25** **£k**	**Changes approved at Quarter One** **£k**	**Other Budget Transfers** **£k**	**Current Net Direct Working Budget** **£k**
Managing Director	(378)	(298)	(329)	(1,005)
Customers	4,466	(128)	54	4,392
Enterprise	(26)	(9)	48	13
Housing & Environmental Health	2,162	(225)	48	1,985
Legal & Community	2,574	(21)	92	2,645
Place	7,199	8	38	7,245
Regulatory Services	1,078	143	0	1,221
Resources	3,064	(20)	49	3,093
TOTAL	**20,139**	**(550)**	**0**	**19,589**

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. Service Managers are responsible for monitoring their expenditure and income against their working budget. Table 3 below highlights those areas where there are forecast to be differences. An explanation is provided for each of 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 (2025/26) budget:

Table 3 - Summary of significant variances

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Forecast Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2025/26 £k
Managing Director Apprenticeship Scheme	300	253	(47)	Forecast underspend is due to the turnover of apprentices during the year, with several apprentices either leaving the authority or successfully applying for substantive posts elsewhere within the Council. This meant apprentice positions were vacant while a new recruitment process took place. It is requested that the unspent budget is carried forward to help fund the costs of the apprenticeship scheme in the next financial year.	47	0
Managing Director Treasury Investments Interest Income	(2,800)	(2,955)	(155)	Increase in estimated interest income receivable is a combination of interest rates falling by less than estimated during the quarter and higher cash balances available for investment than estimated due to capital expenditure in the quarter being lower than anticipated.	0	0
Managing Director External Audit Fees	172	198	+26	External Audit Fees are expected to be more than the working budget provision. In recent years, government has provided some support for authorities with the additional audit fees associated with the implementation of the recommendations of the Redmond review via the allocation of the Redmond Review Local Audit Grant. The Council has however not been notified of any allocation for 2024/25. This was identified as a financial risk when the original budget was approved by Council last year.	0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Forecast Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2025/26 £k
Customers Directorate Staffing Costs	6,425	6,297	(128)	Underspend on staffing is due to a combination of vacant posts, staff reducing hours and several retirements. £53k of the unspent budget is requested to be carried forward to finance the anticipated temporary staffing pressure in the Customer Service Centre associated with the waste service changes from May. A further £36k is requested to be carried forward to fund the costs of a temporary IT helpdesk position. Budget was carried forward last year for the cost of this role, which has been recruited to as a part-time 24-month post. The unspent budget in this financial year is therefore requested to be carried forward to meet those costs falling in future years.	89	0
Customers Court Summons Fees Income	(171)	(131)	+40	Income is forecast to be lower than budgeted this year as recovery was suspended with the transition to the new financial system during the year. No further court summons notices are expected to be issued before the end of the financial year.	0	0
Enterprise Projects Team Staffing Costs	157	117	(40)	Forecast underspend on salaries is due to vacancies held pending the preparation of a restructure proposal that will be tailored to meet the team's current and future needs.	0	0
Enterprise Royston Town Council Annexe Redevelopment	20	0	(20)	The delay in progressing this project has been due to the lack of a formal vehicular access to the rear of the Royston Town Hall annexe. Estates Officers are liaising with Hertfordshire County Council, who own the adjoining car park, to come to a suitable arrangement for a formal access route that would enable redevelopment options for the site to be looked at. It is therefore requested that the unspent budget is carried forward to fund the appointment of an architect in the next financial year.	20	0
Enterprise DCO 2nd Floor Letting Income – Rechargeable Items	(39)	(15)	+24	Reduction in this income primarily relates to the business rates cost chargeable to the tenant. A business rates valuation of the 2nd floor was arranged this year, with the tenant receiving a business rates bill directly rather than being recharged by the Council under the terms of the lease. The corresponding reduction in the Council's business rates expenditure was included in the forecast outturn reported at Quarter Two (within the other minor variances total in table 3). In addition, other chargeable costs to the tenant, such as energy and repairs and maintenance, have been lower than estimated.	0	24

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Forecast Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2025/26 £k
Enterprise Cultural Services Catering Income	(132)	(90)	+42	Howard Park Kiosk was brought under the management of Cultural Services this year, alongside the Bancroft Gardens Kiosk and the café within North Herts Museum. While a worse than expected summer from a weather standpoint was a particular issue at both the park-based kiosks this year, levels of demand have generally been lower than anticipated in the budget, with an adjustment to the ongoing income expectation recommended.	0	21
Legal & Community Directorate Staffing Costs	1,654	1,706	+52	Difficulty in recruiting to several vacant positions within Legal Services has meant that the team have had to employ agency staff during the year to cover the vacant posts at a higher cost than the original budget provision. This was identified as a financial risk when the original budget was approved by the Council in February 2024.	0	0
Legal & Community Community Governance Review	30	7	(23)	Work on the Community Governance Review is ongoing and will not be completed before the end of the current financial year. The unspent budget is therefore requested to be carried forward to fund the work remaining in the next financial year.	23	0
Place Burial Grounds Income	(347)	(280)	+67	Forecast variance is indicative of a relative reduction in burials in favour of cremation, which is a more affordable option for families. This has impacted income for the purchase of graves, memorials and exclusive rights of burial, which have all reduced. Local competition from the crematoria at Harwood Park and Holwell is also likely to have made the financial impact more acute. This will be kept under review during 2025/26 to see if a permanent budget adjustment is needed.	0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Forecast Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2025/26 £k
Place Commingled Recyclates – Net cost of Haulage and Processing	381	482	+101	Marked decreases in the basket price achieved for the sale of the recyclates in the second half of the financial year, most notably glass and plastic, has contributed significantly to the forecast increase in net cost. In addition, new MRF legislation, which requires enhanced sampling of materials, has led to an increase in the volumes identified of non-recyclable materials collected, which has increased processing costs. Adverse movement in material prices and changes in the material composition increasing the net cost of recycling services was identified as a financial risk when the original budget was approved. Due to the volatility in the market, there is not currently an assumption of an ongoing impact.	0	0
Place Waste and Recycling Contract Expenditure	6,322	6,177	(145)	Forecast underspend relates to the adjustment of contract prices for inflation. The additional cost from indexation applied to the contract in each of the last two years has been lower than the provision for contract inflation included in the budget. With the new waste contract commencing in May 2025, overall budget provision required going forward was considered in the financial planning process for 2025/26 and beyond.	0	0
Place Garden Waste Service Income	(1,029)	(1,096)	(67)	Forecast overachievement of income is indicative of a higher number of subscribers to the service than anticipated in the budget estimates, with new subscribers registering during the financial year.	0	0
Regulatory Directorate Staffing Costs	3,251	3,146	(105)	Projected salary underspend is due to various vacancies within the Planning Service during the year. While most of the vacancies have since been recruited to, recruitment for two key remaining vacancies to support the Local Plan Review and Town Centre Strategies has not been successful on multiple occasions. The unspent budget is requested to be carried forward to fund the cost of agency staff covering these positions in the next financial year.	105	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Forecast Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2025/26 £k
Regulatory London Luton Airport Development Consent Order application	20	0	(20)	The Secretary of State deadline for the decision has been extended to 3 April 2025 (and may be extended again) to allow appropriate time to fully consider the application before making a determination. The investment budget was approved to support work arising from the Secretary of State decision and is therefore requested to be carried forward given the delay in the decision date.	20	0
Regulatory Planning Policy - Transport Policy Expenditure	97	13	(84)	The £97k working budget comprises £6k to support the transport user forum, £41k for the Hitchin Rail Station eastern access project, £30k relating to the Sustainable travel town initiative and £20k for the development of Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure plans. Progress with all of these is ongoing, so it is requested that the £84k remaining is carried forward to meet associated costs in the next financial year.	84	0
Regulatory Planning Policy – Local Plan Review	244	55	(189)	Cabinet approved a full review of the Local Plan in January 2024. Delivery was contingent on new legislation and guidance from Government. Following the 2024 General Election, this has not been produced. A proposed timetable and way forward for the Local Plan was presented to Cabinet in January 2025. This will see substantial work and external costs being incurred from 2025/26 onwards. The financial approach is in line with approved budget bids for this project. These made clear that underspends were anticipated in early years which would be carried-forward to safeguard against significant additional budget pressures later in the process. This prudent approach is reinforced by the latest Medium Term Financial Strategy that states the Local Plan should be delivered from within currently identified resources.	189	0
Regulatory Planning Policy – Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)	152	30	(122)	To date most of the work on documents and processes supporting the Local Plan have been carried out in-house. This includes the adopted SPDs on Developer Contributions and Sustainability as well as work to support Biodiversity Net Gain. The early stages of work on the Design Code SPD have been completed in 2024/25, following the successful creation of a small Urban Design team within the Planning service. As this project will continue into the new financial year, it is requested that the unspent budget is carried forward.	122	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Forecast Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2025/26 £k
Regulatory Planning Policy – Chilterns National Landscape	10	0	(10)	The timetable for the review of the application for the extension of the Chilterns National Landscape (formerly the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)) is controlled by Natural England and not by the Council. Natural England have advised formal consultation on draft proposals is currently planned for Spring 2025. The whole budget is therefore requested to be carried forward.	10	0
Regulatory On Street Parking Lines and Signs	60	37	(23)	There has been spend on this budget in this financial year in delivering the ongoing maintenance programme for the replacement of lines and signs as required across the district. It is requested that the remainder is carried forward to facilitate any additional signage and lines in association with on-going surveys and potential tariff reviews. Work on these projects will commence in the next financial year, subject to Cabinet decisions.	23	0
Regulatory Planning Control – Specialist Planning Advice	105	55	(50)	The Council has a Service Level Agreement with Herts County Council (HCC) for the provision of Landscape Architectural advice, Ecological advice and appraisal of biodiversity net gain proposals, Archaeological advice, Design review panel, and Strategic sustainability and planning advice (LEADS). HCC advised at the beginning of the year that the annual service cost would be £104k. However North Herts Council has made less use of the service than anticipated and so the contribution required for this year has been reduced by HCC. The agreed cost for 2024/25 is £55k and for 2025/26 onwards is £82k, resulting in a saving of £50k for 2024/25 and an annual saving on existing budget estimates of £23k for future years.	0	(23)
Resources Insurance premiums expenditure	227	257	+30	Expenditure relating to insurance premiums this year is higher than budgeted across all insurance categories, providing an indication of general insurance market conditions. The largest variance is for insurance relating to Council employees, with an increase in total staff headcount contributing to the increase in the cost of the premium.	0	30

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Forecast Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2025/26 £k
Resources District Council Offices Ground Rent	11	51	+40	North Herts Council and Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation are working together on a rent review for the District Council Offices in Letchworth. The rent review covers the period from April 2014 onwards and, based on provisional calculations, North Herts Council will be liable for £40k of a backdated rent uplift, with an increase of £9k to the annual budget required going forward.	0	9
Resources Council Offices and Operational Buildings – Electricity & Gas Expenditure	121	91	(30)	Forecast underspend is primarily due to energy prices this year being lower than anticipated. Original budget for electricity and gas charges included provision for price inflation of 5% in 2024/25. Gas prices have however been around 40% lower than 2023/24, with electricity prices 1% lower. Ongoing impact of these price changes was included in the contractual growth estimate within the revenue budget for 2025/26.	0	0
Total of explained variances	**15,241**	**14,405**	**(836)**		**732**	**61**
Other minor balances	4,348	4,344	(4)		(1)	15
Overall Total	**19,589**	**18,749**	**(840)**		**731**	**76**

8.2. Cabinet are asked to approve the differences highlighted in the table above (a £840k decrease in spend), as an adjustment to the working budget (recommendation 2.2). Cabinet are also asked to approve the estimated impact on the 2025/26 budget, a £807k increase in budget, including requests to carry forward unspent budget totalling £731k for specific projects next year (recommendation 2.3).

8.3. The original approved budget for 2024/25 (and therefore working budget) included efficiencies totalling £699k, which were agreed by Council in February 2024. Any under or over delivery of efficiencies will be picked up by any budget variances (table 3 above). However, there can be off-setting variances which mean that it is unclear whether the efficiency has been delivered. Where this is the case, this will be highlighted. The forecast at Quarter Two was a net underachievement of £264k. This forecast is unchanged at the end of Quarter Three.

8.4. The working budget for 2024/25 includes budgets totalling £1.456million 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 2023/24 but was delayed into 2024/25. At Quarter Two, it was forecast that £355k of the budget carried forward will not be spent in this year. At Quarter Three, it is forecast that £603k of budget carried forward will not be spent in this financial year. The £248k movement in the forecast at Quarter Three relates to:

- Temporary IT Staff. £58k (£6k increase on Q2 forecast) of the £69k budget carried forward will not be spent in this year, as noted in table 3.
- Redevelopment of Royston Town Hall Annexe. The £20k budget carried forward will not be spent, as highlighted in table 3.
- Community Governance Review. £3k of the £10k budget carried forward will not be spent, as noted in table 3.

- Local Plan Supplementary planning documents. £122k of the £144k budget carried forward will not be spent, as highlighted in table 3.
- Local Plan post adoption review. £53k of the £108k budget carried forward will not be spent, as highlighted in table 3.
- Extension of Chilterns National Landscape. The £10k carry forward budget will not be spent this year, as highlighted in table 3.
- Transport User Forum. The £6k carry forward budget is forecast not be spent this year, as noted in table 3.
- Sustainable travel towns. The £20k budget carried forward will not be spent this year, as noted in table 3.
- Hitchin Rail Station Eastern Access Project. £8k of the £21k budget carried forward will not be spent, as noted in table 3.

All the unspent carry forward budget reported at Quarter Three is requested to be carried forward again to 2025/26.

8.5. Six corporate 'financial health' indicators have been identified in relation to key sources of income for the Council in 2024/25. Table 4 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 they are forecast to match or exceed the budgeted level of income. An amber indicator means that there is a risk that they will not meet the budgeted level of income. A red indicator means that they will not meet the budgeted level of income.

8.6. At the end of Quarter Two, three of the indicators were green and three of the indicators were red. This position is unchanged at the end of Quarter 3. The projected outturn for planning income is lower than the actual income recorded to date because the projection includes the estimated impact of the accounting adjustment required at the end of the financial year to comply with relevant accounting standards around income recognition. As such, the final planning income total will capture only those fees received from applications resolved during 2024/25.

Table 4 - Corporate financial health indicators

Indicator	Status	Original Budget £k	Actual to Date £k	Projected Outturn £k	Variance £k
Leisure Centres Management Fee Income	Red	(1,130)	(649)	(778)	+352
Garden Waste Collection Service Subscriptions	Green	(1,029)	(1,096)	(1,096)	(67)
Commercial Refuse & Recycling Service Income	Red	(1,282)	(1,239)	(1,242)	+40
Planning Application Fees (including fees for pre-application advice)	Red	(1,186)	(1,419)	(986)	+200
Car Parking Fees	Green	(1,948)	(1,592)	(1,948)	0
Parking Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)	Green	(573)	(398)	(573)	0

8.7. Table 5 below indicates current 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 5.

Table 5 - Corporate financial health indicators – activity drivers

Indicator	Activity Measure	Performance Q3 2024/25	Performance Q3 2023/24	Percentage Movement	Direction of Trend
Leisure Centres Management Fee	Number of Leisure Centre visits in quarter	1,305,810	1,199,889	+8.8%	
Garden Waste Collection Service	Number of bin subscriptions at end of quarter	33,860	30,413	+11.3%	
Commercial Refuse & Recycling Service	Number of customers at end of quarter	1,015	1,034	-1.8%	
Car Parking Fees	Car park tickets sold / average ticket price sold during quarter	871,308 / £1.78	861,970 / £1.70	+1.1% / +4.7%	
Parking Penalty Charge Notices	Number of PCNs issued during quarter	11,733	11,510	+1.9%	

FUNDING, RISK AND GENERAL FUND BALANCE

8.8. 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 2024 of the amount of New Homes Bonus, Services Grant and Funding Guarantee Grant it could expect to receive in 2024/25 and planned accordingly.

8.9. 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 deficit for the prior year and will receive in this year its share of the Business Rates Collection Fund surplus for the prior year, as estimated in January 2024. As reported previously, this means a contribution from the General Fund of £24k to the Council Tax Collection Fund and a contribution to the General Fund of £416k from the Business Rates Collection Fund. While the repayment of the Council Tax deficit amount of £24k is included in the funding total in table 7, the business rates surplus will be transferred to reserve and used to mitigate the impact of deficits recorded, and/or changes to the rates retention scheme, in future years. It is also reviewed as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and budget process to assess whether it can be used to support the General Fund budget.

8.10. The Council's share of the Council Tax Collection Fund is forecast to be a surplus balance of £144k at the end of the year. A contribution of £144k will be transferred from the Collection Fund to the General Fund in the next financial year and this will therefore increase the amount of Council Tax funding available in 2025/26, as was shown in Appendix C to the Budget 2025/26 report. Any difference between this forecast and the actual position recorded at the end of the financial year will affect the calculation of the surplus / deficit position for 2025/26 and therefore impact the level of Council Tax funding available in 2026/27.

8.11. The current forecast for the Council's share of the Business Rates Collection Fund at the end of the year, as declared in the NNDR1 return submitted to Government in January, is an overall surplus position of £98k. The surplus amount of £98k will be transferred to the General Fund in the next financial year. Any difference with the final outturn for 2024/25 will affect the following financial year's calculated surplus / deficit position.

8.12. 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 2024/25 the Council is a member of the Hertfordshire Business Rates Pool with Hertfordshire County Council and two 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. Based on projected net Business Rates income in 2024/25, as declared to government in January 2024, the Council is estimated to gain by around £0.7million from being part of the pool. The gain to the Council is however not guaranteed and the exact value will depend on the actual level of rates collected by both North Herts Council as well as the two other collection authorities in the Pool. The contribution to the pool required for 2024/25 will therefore not be known until all the pool authorities have declared their business rates income amounts to government following the end of this financial year. In any case, the Council's contribution to the pool will be funded from grant held in reserve and as such will have a net zero impact on the General Fund balance at the end of the year.

8.13. 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 final amount of grant the Council can retain depends on the actual level of reliefs applied during the year. The Council currently expects to receive a total grant allocation of £5.282m for reliefs in 2024/25, which includes an amount of £589k received as compensation for the Government's previous decisions to cap the increases in the business rates multiplier. The multiplier compensation is included in the funding total in table 7 below. The rest of the grant received is held in reserve. Some of the amount held in reserve will be used to fund the business rates levy payable for this year, while a further £2.7 million will be used to top up the business rates income charged to the General Fund in 2024/25 to the baseline funding amount anticipated when the budget was set. In addition, as shown in table 7 below, there will be the planned release of £1.727million from the reserve to the General Fund in 2024/25 to bridge the funding gap anticipated when the budget was set.

8.14. The government published local authority allocations for distribution of the business rates levy account surplus for 2024/25 on February 3rd 2025. The Council will receive its allocation of £22,861 before the 31st March. This additional funding amount is included in table 7 below.

8.15. Table 7 below summarises the impact on the General Fund balance of the position at Quarter Three detailed in this report.

Table 7 – General Fund impact

	Working Budget **£k**	**Projected Outturn** **£k**	**Difference** **£k**
Brought Forward balance (1st April 2024)	**(14,057)**	**(14,057)**	**-**
Net Expenditure	19,589	18,749	(840)
Funding (Council Tax, Business Rates, NHB, Services Grant, Funding Guarantee)	(18,206)	(18,229)	(23)
Funding from Reserves (including Business Rate Relief Grant)	(1,727)	(1,727)	0
Carried Forward balance (31st March 2025)	**(14,401)**	**(15,264)**	**(863)**

8.16. 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 £1,060k, and at the end of the third quarter a total of £289k has come to fruition. The identified risks realised in the third quarter relate to:

- Legal team resources - requirement due to recruitment/retention issues to use agency staff, as highlighted in table 3 above - £52k.
- Increase in the net cost of recycling services - adverse changes in the market price for commodities and change in material composition, as explained in table 3 above - £101k
- Increase to the annual external audit fee, as highlighted in table 3 above - £26k

Table 8 – Known financial risks

	£'000
Original allowance for known financial risks	**1,060**
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 1	(50)
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 2	(60)
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 3	(179)
Remaining allowance for known financial risks	**771**

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 recommendations contained within this report are to comply with the council's financial regulations with attention drawn to significant budget variances as part of good financial planning to ensure the council remains financially viable over the current fiscal year and into the future. Local authorities are required by law to set a balanced budget for each financial year. During the year, there is an ongoing responsibility to monitor spending and ensure the finances continue to be sound. This means there must be frequent reviews of spending and obligation trends so that timely intervention can be made ensuring the annual budgeting targets are met

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.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. 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 and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2. 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. None.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1. None.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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CABINET
18 March 2025

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: Acquisition of Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City for the Museum Storage Facility

REPORT OF: Culture and Facilities Service Manager & Principal Estates Surveyor

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member for Enterprise and the Arts

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report follows the Museum Storage Options Appraisal presented to Cabinet on 19th November. Cabinet approved the use of up to £20K of the allocated budget to pursue the possible acquisition of a suitable existing property, should one become available. Cabinet also approved the use of £30K of the allocated £4M capital budget to pursue the building of a new unit at Bury Mead Road, Hitchin. This report is in respect of a proposed acquisition.

Unit 1, City Park, Letchworth Garden City has become available to purchase on a long leasehold basis at a peppercorn (ie nil) rent. Negotiations have taken place, and terms agreed for the acquisition, subject to Cabinet approval, contract, building survey & due diligence. Approval is now sought for the acquisition based on the terms agreed and Budget Cost Plan for the adaption and upgrade of the property in Part 2.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That Cabinet approve the acquisition of Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City on the terms set out in the Part 2 report and noting the detailed Budget Cost Plan for adapting, fitting out and upgrading the building for museum storage.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. A limited number of modern buildings of this age and size become available to purchase or lease in Letchworth Garden City and surrounding area, particularly one on a long lease at a peppercorn rent for the full term, with an expiry date in 2150. Unit 1 includes land fronting Works Road and to the side of the unit, plus a large part of the car park with the ability to erect a fence to separate the area from the rest of the car park used by adjoining units. In addition, the Council already owns the long leasehold interest in Unit 3 City Park, Letchworth Garden City, having acquired it in June 2016 with that building being used for general archive storage, IT servers, offsite disaster recovery, careline business continuity and legal department storage.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 The alternative options were outlined in the report that was presented to Cabinet on 19th November 2024.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts, and the Executive Member for Finance and IT have been kept fully briefed and are in support of this potential acquisition.

5.2. The Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts, Executive Member for Finance and IT, Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health and Executive Member for Community / Partnership all viewed the property on 21st January 2025.

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 15th July 2024.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. This report updates Cabinet on action undertaken since the Museum Storage Options Appraisal was considered at Cabinet on 19th November 2024 and further to Minute number 64 where it was RESOLVED: That Cabinet: (1) Noted the current projected costs, advantages and disadvantages of each option. (2) Approved use of £30k of the allocated £4m budget in the current capital programme for this project to develop more detail on the costs of Option D and to acquire the necessary details for a planning application to be made. (3) Approved use of £20k of the allocated £4m budget in the current capital programme for this project to develop more detail on the costs of Option E, should a suitable property become available. (4) Considered and gave approval for officers to apply for grant funding towards the investigations mentioned in 2.2 and 2.3 and recognise the need to align investigations with grant funding timetables in this instance. (5) Resolved to discount options A, B and G and recommend that they are no longer developed or explored further. (6) Indicated that Options C, F and H outlined within the report should be pursued further.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. A copy of the agents details for Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City are attached at Appendix B. The long leasehold interest in the property is currently owned by Certs Assured Holdings Ltd, who are in administration. Prior to negotiating the acquisition of the unit, a pre-purchase report was obtained from Brown & Lee Property Consultants, and this is attached at Appendix C.

8.2. Terms have been agreed (subject to contract and approval) with the administrator's agent for the acquisition, by way of a premium for assignment of the lease dated 17th March 2000 for a term of 150 years expiring on 14th March 2150 at a peppercorn rent. The immediate landlord is City Electrical Factors Ltd who occupy Unit 4 City Park, Letchworth Garden City. The freehold of the estate is owned by Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

8.3. The property is currently occupied by Citysprint (UK) Ltd on a lease expiring on 8th January 2026 at a rent of £64,000 per annum. The tenant does not have security of tenure and vacant possession can be obtained at that point. Should the Council agree to acquire and reconfigure the building for the purposes of museum storage, the tenant will be given substantial notice to enable them to secure another property elsewhere. The building did not appear to be fully used on our inspection.

8.4. The intention is for the long leasehold interest to be acquired by 31st March, which will give the council over 9 months to work up detailed plans for the upgrade and adaptation of the unit to suit the Museum Storage requirements. Work could then commence upon vacant possession.

8.5. During the period between the end of March 2025 and January 2026 the Council will receive the current rent of £64,000 per annum, with Citysprint remaining responsible for business rates. In addition, the tenant will be required to leave the building in good repair and condition subject to a Schedule of Condition.

8.6. Acquisition of Unit 1, City Park will enable the letting or sale of the current site at Bury Mead Road following relocation of the facility. The potential letting and sale values have been previously reported. This will be the subject of future reporting and decision.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 confirm the Council's statutory power to operate and maintain a museum and by default a museum storage facility.

9.2. The Local Government Act 1972 (s111) confirms that a local authority has the power to do anything (including in relation to finance and property) which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of its functions.

9.3. The Terms of Reference at section 5.7.15 of the Council's Constitution states that the Cabinet may by resolution 'oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council.' The provision of museum services (and therefore the provision of an associated storage facility) is not a function reserved to the Council.

9.4. Under Section 5.7.20 of the Constitution the Cabinet may approve the purchase or appropriation of land and buildings where the sale price, premium or initial annual rent (after the expiry of any rent-free period) exceeds £500,000 (or such higher figure as is determined in any adopted Asset Management Strategy) but does not exceed £2,500,000. The Cabinet is permitted therefore to consider the matter.

9.5. In addition to Cabinet approval, the purchase is subject to contract, building survey and due diligence. The acquisition will only be completed once we have a satisfactory report on the purchase of the long leasehold interest from the legal department and received the results of the building survey. In both instances, no issues are expected as a similar process was followed for the acquisition of the long leasehold interest in Unit 3 City Park, LGC. However, if any major unforeseen issues arise, officers will engage further with members.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. Approval is required for the acquisition of the property. At the November Cabinet meeting approval was given to spend up to £20K for pursuing a suitable property.

10.2. In addition, if the acquisition of the long leasehold interest can be completed by the end of March 2025, we will then have over 9 months to work up detailed proposals for the adaption and upgrade of the unit to suit the Museum Storage requirements before vacant possession can be achieved. As there is currently a tenant in occupation and a requirement to complete the purchase in a reasonable period, we are restricted on the time available to obtain costings for the adaptation and improvements to the property. We have obtained high level figures for the adaption; upgrading of the unit with a view to achieving as close as practicable to an A+ EPC rating; installation of a mezzanine floor; and fitting out works. The estimated capital cost of these works is set out in detail in Appendix A (Part 2 Report).

10.3. The Cabinet report of 19 November 2024 includes a financial appraisal of all the options under consideration. The original estimates for a purchase and conversion of an existing building were capital spend of around **£2.8m**. The estimated capital cost for the proposed purchase of Unit 1, including the estimates to upgrade and fit out is around **£2.5m**. Whilst we can estimate some of the likely revenue (ongoing) costs at this stage, including an additional annual cost of circa £17,000 for rates and higher servicing costs for the mechanical & electrical equipment installed, these costs cannot be calculated until further detailed work has been carried out. However, the costs for compliance checks and contents insurance are likely to broadly the same as the existing site. Extensive and comprehensive refurbishment of the building will help to manage the future utilities and maintenance costs, but these will not be known until more detailed design work has taken place. Overall, the running costs are likely to be similar for any comparable building acquired, subject to being built with or converted to having high energy standards. These costs are likely to be higher than the existing costs, as was highlighted in the November report. The saving on capital costs (estimated to be **£1.5m** compared to the current allocated budget) and the corresponding saving on revenue costs of capital will help to manage down any increase.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. 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 and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2. There is an ongoing risk to the museum storage collection by allowing the artifacts to remain in the current facility at Bury Mead Road as reported to Cabinet on 19th November 2024. The recommendation in this report provides an opportunity for the Council to remove this risk in a relatively short period of time and earlier compared with some of the other options included in the previous report.

11.3. At this stage we are working on outline budget costings for the upgrade and adaption of Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City. However, we have sought to incorporate sufficient contingencies into the figures. There is, however, a risk of additional expenditure being required arising from issues as yet unknown or unexpected. The Council did, however, acquire Unit 3 City Park, Letchworth Garden City in 2016 and there are no known issues or defects with that unit.

11.4. Once acquired, appropriate insurance arrangements will need to be in place to transfer the financial risks associated with any future loss of or damage to the property.

11.5. The total yearly costs for operating the new building will not be known until the building has been completed.

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 A combined Environmental and Equalities Impact Assessment has previously been undertaken for all the options put forward, based upon and addressing all the criteria within the Councils usual corporate template and is included in the background papers for 18 November Cabinet report. The primary equalities disadvantage with the current museum storage facility is that it is not accessible, but it is intended to address this by incorporating a lift to access the mezzanine and existing first floor area and there is an existing accessible toilet in Unit 1 City Park, LGC. A further Equalities Analysis at (Appendix E) has been completed for this report and covers the same issues raised previously, as well as an additional community consideration regarding the location of the facility.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to the acquisition.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. A combined Environmental and Equalities Impact Assessment has previously been undertaken and completed based upon the criteria within the Councils usual corporate templates and is included in the background papers for 19th November Cabinet report. A phase 1 environmental assessment report is being prepared for the proposed acquisition of Unit 1 City Park, LGC. A further Environment Implications Assessment Analysis at (Appendix F) has been completed for this report and provides more detail on the new unit and it's impacts.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 No direct Human Resource implications have been identified for this report.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Detailed Budget Cost Plan by Hollis for upgrading the building to improve the energy efficiency in line with the Council's aim to achieve net zero by 2030 for the council's own operations and for the adaption and conversion of the building to suit the museum storage requirements (Part 2).
16.2 Appendix B - Copy of agent's details for Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City.
16.3 Appendix C - Pre-purchase report from Brown & Lee (Part 2).
16.4 Appendix D - Heads of Terms (Part 2).
16.5 Appendix E - Equality Analysis.
16.6 Appendix F - Environmental Impact Assessment.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Robert Orchard, Culture and Facilities Service Manager robert.orchard@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4287
17.2 Philip Doggett, Principal Estates Surveyor philip.doggett@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4141
17.3 Shah Mohammed, Service Accountant shah.mohammed@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4240
17.4 Ros Allwood, Cultural Services Manager ros.allwood@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4236
17.5 Ian Couper, ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4243
17.6 Jo Keshishian, HR Operations Manager jo.keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4314
17.7 Ellie Hollingsworth, Policy & Strategy Officer ellie.hollingsworth@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4220
17.8 Reuben Ayavoo, Policy & Communities Manager reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4212
17.9 Tim Everitt, Performance & Risk Officer tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4646
17.10 Douglas Traill-Stevenson, Property Lawyer, acting Legal Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer douglas.traill-stevenson@north-herts.gov.uk ext 4643

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Cabinet meeting held on 19th November 2024 and further to Minute number 64.
18.2 Equalities and Environmental Impact Assessment Table attached to Cabinet report on 19th November 2024.

Davies
01707 274237

Industrial
FOR SALE

Appendix B



A HIGH-QUALITY END OF TERRACE INDUSTRIAL UNIT WITH FIRST FLOOR OFFICES.

6,558 SQ FT

Price: £1,250,000 excl. rates & VAT

Unit 1 City Business Park
Works Road
Letchworth Garden City
Herts
SG6 1FH

- Close to A1(M)
- Eaves 5.9m
- 10 parking spaces
- Gated Estate
- Currently let to Citysprint (UK) Ltd until 9/01/2026 at a rent of £64,000 per annum.

UNIT 1 CITY BUSINESS PARK, WORKS ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, HERTS, SG6 1FH

Location
Letchworth is located in north Hertfordshire adjoining junction 9 on the A1(M). The A505 provides an east west link between the M1 at Luton and the M11 at Cambridge.

Letchworth station provides a fast rail service to London Kings Cross.

There is a busy town centre and an extensive out of town retail area including a Sainsbury's superstore a short distance from the property.

Letchworth Business Park comprises over 50 acres of modern office and production accommodation and includes a major Sainsbury's superstore, a leisure centre and retail park.

The property is located at the north eastern end of Works Road within the principle commercial area.

The most convenient access is from Baldock Road turning into Jubilee Road close to where the road runs under the A1(M) at Baldock and then turning right at the T Junction into Works Road.

Accommodation
Built in 2002 the property forms part of a small high quality modern development of four light industrial / warehouse units.

It is constructed of a steel portal frame providing clear space internally with an eaves height of approx. 5.9 m.

There is a full height loading door providing access to the principle area alongside which are fully fitted two storey offices.

The four units in City Business Park which share a large yard and car parking area with a perimeter security fence and gate.

	Sq Ft	Sq M
Ground Floor- Warehouse / Production	4,714	437.93
Ground Floor- Offices	922	85.65
First Floor- Offices	922	85.65
TOTAL	**6,558**	**609.24**

Tenure
Available for sale on the basis of a 150-year ground lease from March 2000 at a peppercorn rent.

Price £1,250,000 plus VAT.

The property is currently let to Citysprint (UK) Ltd on a lease expiring 9/01/2026 at a rent of £64,000 per annum.

Business Rates
Please see the Valuation Office Agency website (www.voa.gov.uk). Indicated assessment £54,500.

Rates payable approx. 54.6% for the y/e 31/3/2025.

Other Information
Unless otherwise stated all prices, rents or other stated costs are subject to VAT.

Energy Performance Certificate: Category D (84)





For further information please contact Davies & Co on 01707 274237.

Daniel Hiller
d.hiller@davies.uk.com

Clay Davies
c.davies@davies.uk.com

Disclaimer: These particulars are for general information purposes only and do not represent an offer of contract or part of one. Davies & Co. has made every attempt to ensure that the particulars and other information provided are as accurate as possible and are not intended to amount to advice on which you should rely as being factually accurate. You should not assumed that the property has all necessary planning, building regulations or other consents and AP property have not tested any services, facilities or equipment. Any measurements and distances given are approximate only. Purchasers must satisfy themselves of all of the aforementioned by independent inspection or otherwise.

Appendix E
Equality Analysis

1. Name of activity:	Acquisition of Unit 1, City Park, Letchworth, to create a new museum storage facility.
2. Main purpose of activity:	To create a new museum storage facility.
3. List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:	Previous committee reports and assessments, knowledge of the existing building and location, staff knowledge.

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** The museums storage facility must be located somewhere and this will be easier to access from some locations in the district than others. That said, Letchworth is fairly central to the geographical remit of the museum service. **Positive** As the Museum is based in Hitchin, it is advantageous to have the storage facility in the other main urban conurbation of Letchworth so that Cultural Services have a presence in both of the main population centres.
A person living with a disability	☐	☐	X	**Negative** **Positive** The current store is not accessible, whereas the new store will have level access and a passenger lift to other floors, meaning anyone working for the service or visiting the stores should find improved access compared to the current position.
A person of a particular race	X	☐	☐	**Negative** **Positive**
A person of a gay, lesbian or bisexual sexual orientation	X	☐	☐	**Negative** **Positive**
A person of a particular sex, male or female,	X	☐	☐	**Negative**

including issues around pregnancy and maternity				**Positive**
A person of a particular religion or belief	X	☐	☐	**Negative**
				Positive
A person of a particular age	☐	☐	X	**Negative**
				Positive
				Whilst old age does not have a direct relationship with access needs, there is a correlation and the greater ease of access at a new store should be a positive over the current setup of the museum storage facility. In addition, those with children or groups visiting with children should find a preferable layout with less hazards a more suitable destination to visit as a family or as a youth group for young children.
Transgender	X	☐	☐	**Negative**
				Positive

5 Results

	Yes	**No**	
Were positive impacts identified?	X	☐	
Are some people benefiting more than others? If so explain who and why.	X	☐	.The main improvement through the introduction of a new store is around access which will be of primary benefit to those with physical access needs.
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	X	☐	.Geographically, the store may now be further away from some members of the community than others.

6. Consultation, decisions, and actions

If High or very high range results were identified who was consulted and what recommendations were given?
N/A
Describe the decision on this activity
.To proceed as planned and as advised within the relevant committee report.
List all actions identified to address/mitigate negative impact or promote positively

Action	Responsible person	Completion due date
Ensure access in the form of lifts and level access are maintained throughout the fit out design process.	Rob Orchard and Phil Doggett	Mid 2026
When,how and by whom will these actions be monitored?		

We plan to engage with a local access group for feedback and suggestions on how to enhance any opportunities further.	
7. Signatures	
Assessor (Report Author)	
Name: Robert Orchard	Signature** 
Validated by (relevant Senior Manager)	
Name: Steve Crowley	Signature** 
Forward to the Policy & Strategy Team	
Signature** Reuben Ayavoo	
Assessment date: 26/2/2025	Review date: 26/02/2026

** **Please type your name to allow forms to be sent electronically. Please send to corporatepolicy@north-herts.gov.uk for review by the team.**

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.

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Appendix F
Environmental Implications assessment

1. *Name of activity:*	*Acquisition of Unit 1, City Park, Letchworth to create a new Museum Collection Archive*				
2. *Main purpose of activity:*	*To establish a new fit for purpose archive through the purchase and refit of a local industrial warehouse unit.*				
3. *List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:*	*Previous related committee reports, staff knowledge, location and nature of the proposed unit to be acquired.*				
Area of Potential Impact	***Examples to Consider*** *(non-exhaustive)*	***Neutral*** *(X)*	***Negative*** *(X)*	***Positive*** *(X)*	*Describe the contribution/impact on the area that the decision may have - assess whether this impact is a* ***negative or positive or neutral one.*** ***Negative: What are the risks?*** ***Positive: What are the benefits?***
1. Impact on greenhouse emission and support adaption to the effects of climate change	Will energy needs be met through renewable sources? Will it reduce emissions through retrofitting new technology? Will it reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing energy consumption and the need to travel?		X	X	***Negative*** The current storage unit at Bury Mead Road has very little energy use, however this is only as a result of the unit not being ideally suited to the storage of museum artefacts. The refit of the unit in Letchworth will introduce greater environmental stability controls however some of this will introduce new demands for energy which do not currently exist at the current store. ***Positive***

					The proposed acquisition of the unit in Letchworth will involve a refit to introduce new environmental stability controls for the care of the collection. Whilst these will have new demands, it is anticipated that the refit will involve adding more insulation and utilising modern technologies such as the introduction of air source heat pumps and PV panels. By comparison the current store on Bury Mead Rd has a gas boiler.
2. Use of natural resources including water and energy	Will it reduce water consumption? Will it reduce energy consumption?		X	X	***Negative*** The increased accessibility of a new store will lead to more visitor throughput and therefore more use of water. There will also be greater energy consumption as the unit will be equipped with environmental stability controls and associated mechanical and electrical plant not currently in place at the existing store. ***Positive*** The new mechanical and electrical units should be highly energy efficient and we will seek to use greener methods such as air source heat pumps and PV panels to power this where possible with the aim of achieving an A+ EPC rating.
		X			***Negative***

3. Minimisation of flood risks to the area (i.e. promotion of SUD's. protect surface and ground water quality)	Will it minimise flood risk from all sources of flooding? Will it reduce property damage due to storm events/ heavy rainfall by improving flood resistance and flood resilience?				We are not changing the building or run off areas. A moderate risk of surface water flooding was highlighted along the Works Road frontage in the pre-purchase report. Officers will be exploring whether any mitigation measures are required as part of the detailed building survey, Phase 1 Environmental Assessment and associated works. ***Positive*** We are not changing the building or run off areas. A moderate risk of surface water flooding was highlighted along the Works Road frontage in the pre-purchase report. Officers will be exploring whether any mitigation measures are required as part of the detailed building survey, Phase 1 Environmental Assessment and associated works.
4. To protect, enhance and create environments that encourage and support biodiversity	Will it protect, enhance and increase biodiversity and protect habitats? Will it improve access to and promote educational value of sites of biodiversity interest?	X		X	***Negative*** We are not changing the building or surrounding areas. ***Positive*** We are not changing the building or surrounding areas, however it could be said that greater access to the museums collection, which documents the impact of climate change on biodiversity locally will improve public understanding of these issues, leading

					to indirect benefits in behavioural changes and knowledge. The plot of land encompasses a small parcel of land which will be considered as part of a wider biodiversity analysis across the Councils wider property ownership.
5. To improve Air Quality *(air quality describes how polluted the air we breathe is)*	Will it improve air quality? Will it reduce emissions of key pollutants?		X	X	***Negative*** It could be argued that the proximity of the new store to the museum, in addition to its greater potential for outreach, will result in more vehicular activity. ***Positive*** There is currently a gas boiler at the existing storage facility in Bury Mead road however it is proposed that the new store is powered through greener technologies.
6. To reduce need to travel, the use of private motorised vehicular transport as well as encourage walking, cycling, and use of public transport	Will it encourage increased walking, cycling and use of public transport? Will it increase the proportion of journeys using modes other than a car?		X		***Negative*** Fit out contractors will need to transport the necessary materials to the site. In addition, the current store is visited very infrequently, whereas a new store would be intended to enhance outreach and engagement with the local community, who would need to travel to the facility. In addition, staff will need to travel to Letchworth from the museum. ***Positive***

7. To reduce waste production and increase recycling, recovery and reuse of waste	Will it lead to reduced consumption of materials and resources? Will it reduce household waste? Will it reduce construction waste? Will it increase recovery recycling and re-use?		X		***Negative*** The fit out works will result in waste generation from the bi products of the fit out materials introduced. There could be additional litter generated by increased visitors however it could be argued that they would only be generating the same amount of litter domestically had they not come to the new store. Consumption of food waste on site would also be minimised, given the risk of food and packaging in attracting pests. ***Positive***
8. To enhance the public realm and street improvements	Will it reduce litter? Will it enhance the quality of public realm?	X			***Negative*** There could be additional litter generated by increased visitors however it could be argued that they would only be generating the same amount of litter domestically had they not come to the new store. There will be no impact on the public realm other than facilitating

					the potential rejuvenation of the existing site at Burymead, though that is not the subject of this assessment it is a potential indirect benefit. ***Positive*** There will be no impact on the public realm other than facilitating the potential rejuvenation of the existing site at Burymead, though that is not the subject of this assessment it is a potential indirect benefit.
9. To protect, enhance and seek opportunities to increase open space	Will it improve open space? Will it improve landscape character? Will it minimise development on Greenfield sites?	X			***Negative*** ***Positive***
10. To reduce noise and impact of noise	Will it reduce noise pollution from vehicles?		X		***Negative*** There will be additional vehicles during the fit out through contractors undertaking works, along with the public visiting in greater numbers. ***Positive***

6.0 Results			
	Yes	**No**	
Were positive impacts identified?	*X*	☐	*See above.*
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	*X*	☐	*See above.*

7.0 Consultation, decisions and actions

Describe the decision on this activity (refer to section 3.2)

The negative and positive impacts of this activity are likely to be similar no matter which ultimate solution for museum storage is arrived at and therefore the outcome of this assessment has not altered the intention over how to proceed.

List all actions identified to address/mitigate negative impact or promote positive impact

Action	*Responsible person*	*Completion due date*
Provide recycling bins and collections on site once operational. This will follow best practice in terms of recyclables and collection patterns.	*Ros Allwood, Cultural Services Manager*	*Mid 2026*
Seek to encourage use of public transport to the store once operational within any marketing documentation.	*Ros Allwood, Cultural Services Manager*	*Mid 2026*
Attempt to limit unnecessary vehicular transport by combining trips to and from the store by staff and collaborating with the wider team on the need for multiple trips.	*Ros Allwood, Cultural Services Manager*	*Mid 2026*
Explore ways in which the use of modern green alternatives can be utilised to maximise the efficiency and EPC rating of the building.	*Phil Doggett, Principal Estates Surveyor*	*Mid 2026*

When, how and by whom will these actions be monitored?

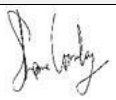
Rob Orchard, Culture and Facilities Service Manager to monitor museum actions.
Michael Clark, Building & Facilities Manager and James Lees, Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager to engage with Phil Doggett, Principal Estates Surveyor on efficiency measures.

8.0 Signatures

Assessor (report author):

Name: ***Rob Orchard,***	*Signature*** 

Validated by (line manager):

Name: Steve Crowley	*Signature*** 

Forward to Policy & Strategy Team: corporatepolicy@north-herts.gov.uk

*Signature** Reuben Ayavoo*

Assessment date: 26/02/2025	*Review date:26/02/2026*

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