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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

3 July 2024

Our Ref Council 11 July 2024
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To: The Chair and Members of North Hertfordshire District Council

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

to be held in the

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

on

THURSDAY, 11TH JULY, 2024

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 - 23 MAY 2024 7 - 18

To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 23 May 2024.

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. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

To consider any questions submitted by Members of the Council, in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11 (b).

7. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

To consider any motions, due notice of which have been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.

8. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES 19 - 30

To consider any items referred from other Committees.

8A) Annual Report on Risk Management Governance – **to be considered with item 12**

8B) Referral from Cabinet: Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) End of Year Review 2023/24 - **to be considered with item 13**

8C) Referral from Cabinet: Revenue Budget Outturn 2023/24 – **to be considered with item 14**

8D) Annual report of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee **– to be considered with item 17**

8E) Referral from Cabinet: Leisure Investment Options – **to be considered with item 20**

Any further referrals from other Committees will be circulated as soon as they are available.

9. KEY DECISIONS - LEADER'S ANNUAL REPORT ON CASES OF SPECIAL URGENCY 31 - 36

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

To inform the Council of any occasions over the past year where provisions relating to "Special Urgency" have been used in connection with the publication of an intention to make a Key Decision, as required by legislation.

10. DISREGARD OF WAR DISABLEMENT INCOME 37 - 52

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – CUSTOMERS

To consider the adoption of a policy which ensures that members of the armed forces who have been disabled during service or the widows, widowers or surviving civil partner of those who died in service are recognised and not financially penalised when calculating entitlement to housing benefit.

11. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE 53 - 74

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER

For Council to agree the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review (CGR) - to signify the formal start of the Review and launch of the first stage of consultation.

12. ANNUAL REPORT ON RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE 2023-24 75 - 98

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

A year end report on the Councils' Risk Management Governance for 2023/24.

13. INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) END OF YEAR REVIEW 2023/24 99 - 132
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

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

14. REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2023/24 133 - 152
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

To consider the Revenue Budget Outturn 2023/24.

15. LAND TO THE NORTH OF THE GRANGE (LG1) - STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK 153 - 312
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

To approve the Strategic Masterplan Framework for land to the north of Letchworth Garden City.

16. NORTH STEVENAGE STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK 313 - 436
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

To approve the Strategic Masterplan Framework for land to the north of Stevenage.

17. FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24 437 - 450
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

To consider the Annual Report of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the 2023/24 Civic Year.

18. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24 451 - 462
REPORT OF THE VICE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2023-24

To consider the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the 2023-24 Civic Year.

19. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE 463 - 474
REPORT OF MONITORING OFFICER

This is the Annual Report in relation to ethical standards for the last year. It covers the work of the Committee as well as the issues that have arisen locally and nationally on ethical standards matters.

20. LEISURE INVESTMENTS AND DECARBONISATION PROJECT 475 - 488
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – PLACE

This report provides an update to Council on Phase 3c of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) project for the Council's three leisure centres and seeks approval to take the next steps to deliver the project. It also seeks an increase in the capital allocation for the fitness extension at Royston Leisure Centre.

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3JF
on Thursday, 23rd May, 2024 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: *Councillors: Clare Billing (Chair), Tina Bhartwas (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Daniel Allen, David Barnard, Matt Barnes, Sadie Billing, Ruth Brown, Cathy Brownjohn, Val Bryant, Rhona Cameron, David Chalmers, Jon Clayden, Ruth Clifton, Sam Collins, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, Emma Fernandes, Joe Graziano, Dominic Griffiths, Chris Hinchliff, Keith Hoskins, Steve Jarvis, Tim Johnson, Chris Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Sean Nolan, Steven Patmore, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Sean Prendergast, Martin Prescott, Emma Rowe, Claire Strong, Tamsin Thomas, Tom Tyson, Paul Ward, Laura Williams, Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby, Claire Winchester, Dave Winstanley, Donna Wright and Daniel Wright-Mason.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Isabelle Alajooz (Legal Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Jo Doggett (Service Director - Housing & Environmental Health), Caroline Jenkins (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Jeevan Mann (Scrutiny Officer), Callum Reeve (Democratic Services Apprentice), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager) and Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer).*

ALSO PRESENT:

The High Sheriff of Hertfordshire, Annie Brewster.

There were 10 Members of the public present.

286 ELECTION OF THE CHAIR OF COUNCIL FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2024-25

Audio recording – 2 minutes 42 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair, called for nominations for the position of Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2024-25.

Councillor Daniel Allen nominated Councillor Clare Billing for the Chair of the Council 2024-25. This was seconded by Councillor Nigel Mason.

N.B Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason entered the Chamber at 19:36

Councillor Ruth Brown nominated Councillor David Chalmers for the Chair of the Council 2024-25. This was seconded by Councillor Tom Tyson.

Councillor Ruth Brown requested a recorded vote.

The vote for Councillor Clare Billing was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	:	25
ABSTAIN	:	0
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	25

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Daniel Allen	YES
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	YES
Cllr Amy Allen	YES
Cllr Cathy Brownjohn	YES
Cllr Chris Hinchliff	YES
Cllr Clare Billing	YES
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	YES
Cllr Dave Winstanley	YES
Cllr Donna Wright	YES
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	YES
Cllr Emma Fernandes	YES
Cllr Emma Rowe	YES
Cllr Ian Albert	YES
Cllr Ian Mantle	YES
Cllr Laura Williams	YES
Cllr Mick Debenham	YES
Cllr Nigel Mason	YES
Cllr Rhona Cameron	YES
Cllr Sadie Billing	YES
Cllr Sean Nolan	YES
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	YES
Cllr Tamsin Thomas	YES
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	YES
Cllr Val Bryant	YES
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	YES

The vote for Councillor David Chalmers was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	:	25
ABSTAIN	:	0
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	25

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Bryony May	YES
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	YES
Cllr Chris Lucas	YES
Cllr Claire Strong	YES
Cllr Claire Winchester	YES
Cllr David Chalmers	YES
Cllr David Barnard	YES
Cllr Dominic Griffiths	YES
Cllr Joe Graziano	YES
Cllr Jon Clayden	YES

Cllr Keith Hoskins	YES
Cllr Louise Peace	YES
Cllr Martin Prescott	YES
Cllr Matt Barnes	YES
Cllr Michael Muir	YES
Cllr Paul Ward	YES
Cllr Ralph Muncer	YES
Cllr Ruth Brown	YES
Cllr Ruth Clifton	YES
Cllr Sam Collins	YES
Cllr Sean Prendergast	YES
Cllr Steve Jarvis	YES
Cllr Steven Patmore	YES
Cllr Tim Johnson	YES
Cllr Tom Tyson	YES

As a result of a tied vote Councillor Daniel Allen, as Chair, used his casting vote, and it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Clare Billing be elected as Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2024-25.

Councillor Clare Billing took the Chair then read and signed the Statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office and took possession of the Chain of Office. Councillor Billing thanked the Council for her election as Chair.

Having been proposed by Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, and seconded by Councillor Nigel Mason it was:

RESOLVED: That the Council placed on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Councillor Daniel Allen for his service as Chair of the Council during the past year and also to his Consort Councillor Amy Allen for her help and support during his term of office.

287 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 18 Minutes 50 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lisa Nash.

288 ELECTION OF THE VICE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2024-25

Audio recording – 19 minutes 14 seconds

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2024-25.

Councillor Daniel Allen nominated Councillor Tina Bhartwas for Vice-Chair of the Council 2024-25. This was seconded by Councillor Tamsin Thomas.

Councillor Ruth Brown nominated Councillor Sean Prendergast for Vice-Chair of the Council 2024-25. This was seconded by Councillor Tom Tyson.

Councillor Ruth Brown requested a recorded vote.

The vote for Councillor Tina Bhartwas was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	:	25
ABSTAIN	:	0
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	25

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Daniel Allen	YES
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	YES
Cllr Amy Allen	YES
Cllr Cathy Brownjohn	YES
Cllr Chris Hinchliff	YES
Cllr Clare Billing	YES
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	YES
Cllr Dave Winstanley	YES
Cllr Donna Wright	YES
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	YES
Cllr Emma Fernandes	YES
Cllr Emma Rowe	YES
Cllr Ian Albert	YES
Cllr Ian Mantle	YES
Cllr Laura Williams	YES
Cllr Mick Debenham	YES
Cllr Nigel Mason	YES
Cllr Rhona Cameron	YES
Cllr Sadie Billing	YES
Cllr Sean Nolan	YES
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	YES
Cllr Tamsin Thomas	YES
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	YES
Cllr Val Bryant	YES
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	YES

The vote for Councillor Sean Prendergast was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	:	25
ABSTAIN	:	0
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	25

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Bryony May	YES
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	YES
Cllr Chris Lucas	YES
Cllr Claire Strong	YES
Cllr Claire Winchester	YES
Cllr David Chalmers	YES
Cllr David Barnard	YES
Cllr Dominic Griffiths	YES
Cllr Joe Graziano	YES
Cllr Jon Clayden	YES

Cllr Keith Hoskins	YES
Cllr Louise Peace	YES
Cllr Martin Prescott	YES
Cllr Matt Barnes	YES
Cllr Michael Muir	YES
Cllr Paul Ward	YES
Cllr Ralph Muncer	YES
Cllr Ruth Brown	YES
Cllr Ruth Clifton	YES
Cllr Sam Collins	YES
Cllr Sean Prendergast	YES
Cllr Steve Jarvis	YES
Cllr Steven Patmore	YES
Cllr Tim Johnson	YES
Cllr Tom Tyson	YES

As a result of a tied vote Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, used her casting vote, and it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Tina Bhartwas be elected as Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2024-25.

Councillor Tina Bhartwas then read and signed the Statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office and took possession of the Chain of office. Councillor Bhartwas thanked the Council for her election as Vice-Chair and advised that her Consort for the year would be Shane Dangar.

289 MINUTES - 18 APRIL 2024

Audio Recording – 26 minutes 59 seconds

The Chair advised that although the Minutes of the previous meeting could be moved and seconded by members who were not present at that meeting, it is preferable that those who were not present should abstain from voting.

Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 April 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

290 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 28 minutes 6 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 that the normal procedure rules in respect of debate and times to speak will apply.

(5) The Chair advised that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting. A comfort break would be held at an appropriate time, should proceedings continue at length.

(6) The Chair welcomed and congratulated the newly elected Members following the elections on 2 May: Councillors Tina Bhartwas, Sadie Billing, Rhona Cameron, David Chalmers, Jon Clayden, Ruth Clifton, Emma Fernandes, Joe Graziano, Tim Johnson, Caroline McDonnell, Steven Patmore, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Martin Prescott, Emma Rowe, Paul Ward, Laura Williams, Stewart Willoughby, Claire Winchester and Donna Wright. Thursday, 23rd May, 2024

(7) The Chair congratulated those Councillors successfully re-elected: Councillors Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Daniel Allen, David Barnard, Matt Barnes, Clare Billing, Ruth Brown, Cathy Brownjohn, Val Bryant, Sam Collins, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, Dominic Griffiths, Chris Hinchliff, Keith Hoskins, Steve Jarvis, Chris Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason Bryony May, Michael Muir, Ralph Muncer, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Louise Peace, Sean Prendergast, Claire Strong, Tamsin Thomas, Tom Tyson, Alistair Willoughby, Dave Winstanley and Daniel Wright-Mason.

(8) The Chair thanked former Councillors Richard Thake, Gerald Morris, Mandi Tandi, Adam Compton, Michael Weeks, Raj Bhakar, Terry Tyler, James Denselow, Daniel Marsh and Tom Plater who did not stand for re-election.

(9) The Chair thanked former Councillors Simon Bloxham, Juan Cowell, Faye Frost, Terry Hone, David Levett, Ian Moody and Phil Weeder who were unsuccessful in being re1elected.

(10) The Chair reminded Members to complete their Register of Interest forms by the 31 May 2024.

(11) The Chair reminded Members to complete their election expenses by 7 June 2024.

(12) The Chair encouraged Members, Agents and Election Candidates to complete the post-Election survey by the 31 May 2024.

(13) The former Chair confirmed the amount raised for his chosen charities Feed Up Warm Up and Resolve, during the civic year 2023-24 and presented a cheque to a representative from Resolve.

(14) The Chair advised that her chosen charity for the Civic Year 2024-25 would be Sands.

(15) The Chair offered thanks to Penny Copestake, Chair's Secretary, on behalf of former Chair Daniel Allen, and announced that a bouquet would be sent in recognition of her hard work and support.

(16) Members paid tribute followed by a silence for former Councillor Michael Weeks.

The following Members paid tribute:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor David Barnard
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

291 DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTION RESULTS (INCLUDING ALL POLLS) - 2 MAY 2024

Audio recording – 48 Minutes 28 seconds

The Returning Officer presented the report regarding the results of the District Council, Police and Crime Commissioner for North Hertfordshire and the uncontested Town and Parish Council elections.

The following Members thanked all the staff involved in the elections:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the report of the Returning Officer regarding the election results of the District Council, Police and Crime Commissioner for North Hertfordshire and the uncontested Town and Parish Council elections was noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To inform Members of the results of the elections held on 2 May 2024.

292 ELECTION OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL 2024-28

Audio recording – 51 minutes 42 seconds

Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, called for nominations for the position of Leader of the Council 2024-28.

Councillor Nigel Mason nominated Councillor Daniel Allen for the Leader of the Council 2024-28. This was seconded by Councillor Val Bryant and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Daniel Allen be elected as Leader of the Council for 2024-2028.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Daniel Allen, proposed and Councillor Clare Billing seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Council placed on record its sincere thanks and appreciation to Councillor Elizabeth Allen for her service as Leader of the Council 2021-2024.

293 APPOINTMENT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER OF COUNCIL AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET FOR 2024/25

Audio recording – 54 minutes 17 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council to move the report regarding the appointment of the Deputy Leader and Members of the Cabinet for the Civic Year 2024-25.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Nigel Mason seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

(1) That the appointment of the Deputy Leader of the Council for the Civic Year 2024/25 was noted as Councillor Val Bryant.

(2) That the Members appointed as Executive Members of the Cabinet for 2024/25 and the areas for which they will be responsible as detailed in Appendix A, provided as a supplementary document, was noted.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 and Sections 4.8.1 (a) (vii), 5.2 and 5.3.4 of the Council's Constitution.

294 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF COMMITTEES, JOINT COMMITTEES AND PANELS FOR 2024/25

Audio recording – 56 minutes 30 seconds

The Chair noted that the Conservative Group Leader had advised of the following appointments:

- Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Substitute would be Councillor Claire Strong.
- Planning Control Committee Substitute would be Councillor Joe Graziano.
- Standards Committee Substitute would be Councillor Ralph Muncer.

The Group Leaders were invited by the Chair to appoint members to the remaining vacancies. The Group Leaders informed the Chair that they would advise the Proper Officer of the appointments at a later date.

The Leader of the Council, Daniel Allen confirmed that the Deputy Leader, Councillor Val Bryant would be the substitute on the Herts Growth Board.

The Chair invited Councillor Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council to move the report regarding the appointment of the Members of Committees, Sub-Committees, Working Groups and Panels for 2024-25.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

(1) That, for 2024/25, the seats allocated to each political group on the Committees to which Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 applies and the seats allocated to each political party on the bodies to which Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 does not apply, as set out in Appendix A of the report, was noted.

(2) That, for 2024/25, Members be appointed to the various Committees and other bodies in accordance with the wishes of the individual political groups, as detailed in Appendix B provided as a supplementary document, to this report, with the addition of:

- Councillor Claire Strong as Conservative Substitute on the Finance Audit and Risk Committee.
- Councillor Joe Graziano as the Conservative Substitute on the Planning Control Committee.
- Councillor Ralph Muncer as the Conservative Substitute on the Standards Committee.
- The Deputy Leader as the Substitute on the Herts Growth Board.

(3) That, for 2024/25, each political group leader be appointed to the Constitutional and Governance Working Group and the Community Governance Review Working Group, as detailed in 8.6 of the report.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the provisions of Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

295 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRS AND VICE-CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES FOR 2024/25

Audio recording – 1 hour 1 minute 14 seconds

The Chair noted that the Liberal Democrat Group Leader had advised of the following appointments:

- Councillor Ruth Brown as the Vice-Chair of the Employment Committee.
- Councillor Ruth Brown as the Vice-Chair of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

The Chair invited Councillor Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council to move the report regarding the appointment of Chair and Vice-Chairs of Committees for the Civic Year 2024-25.

The Leader advised of the following appointments:

- Councillor Ian Albert as the Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee.
- Councillor Daniel Allen as the Chair of the Employment Committee.
- Councillor Chris Hinchliff as the Chair of the Employment Appeals Committee.
- Councillor Nigel Mason as the Vice-Chair of the Employment Appeals Committee.

A vote was taken as two nominations had been received for the position of the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Councillors Tom Tyson and Martin Prescott. Following the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees (except Community Forums) for 2024/25 be appointed in accordance with the details set out in Appendix A provided as a supplementary document of the report, with the addition of:

- Councillor Tom Tyson as the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Councillor Ruth Brown as the Vice-Chair of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee.
- Councillor Ruth Brown as the Vice-Chair of the Employment Committee.
- Councillor Ian Albert as the Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee.
- Councillor Daniel Allen as the Chair of the Employment Committee.
- Councillor Chris Hinchliff as the Chair of the Employment Appeals Committee.
- Councillor Nigel Mason as the Vice-Chair of the Employment Appeals Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with the provisions of Standing Order 4.8.1(a)(ix) of the Council's Constitution.

296 ADJOURNMENT

Audio recording 1 hour 7 minutes 5 seconds

The meeting of the Annual Council was adjourned at 20:40 to allow meetings of each Community Forum to convene to elect Chairs and Vice-Chairs for the Civic Year.

The meeting of the Annual Council reconvened at 21:11.

297 KEY DECISIONS - LEADER'S ANNUAL REPORT ON CASES OF SPECIAL URGENCY

Audio recording 1 hour 37 minutes 58 seconds

This item was deferred to the Council meeting of the 11 July 2024.

298 SCHEDULE OF COUNCIL MEETINGS 2024/25

Audio Recording – 1 hour 38 minutes 38 seconds

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council to move the report in respect of the Programme of Ordinary Meetings of the Council for the Civic Year 2024-25.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager stated that:

- The April 2025 Council meeting was scheduled for the Thursday before Easter. However, this date could be revised following approval of the Calendar of Meetings.
- The Council meeting date in April had historically been scheduled to avoid the May elections, and to avoid being too close to the February Budget setting Council meeting. The date in April also allowed for any Constitutional amendments to be brought ahead of a new Civic Year.
- The date could be reviewed following consultation with the Group Leaders.

There was some concern expressed regarding ratifying the Calendar of Meetings with the inclusion of the current Council meeting date in April. Therefore, it was suggested by the Democratic Services Manager that the programme be approved with the exception of the Council meeting date in April 2025.

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed the amended recommendation and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Calendar of Meetings for 2024/25, as attached as Appendix A, was approved with the exception of the Council Meeting of the 17 April 2025, the date for which was to be confirmed.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable Members to agree a programme of ordinary meetings of the Council for 2024/25.

299 NOMINATION OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS AND OTHER BODIES FOR 2024/25

Audio recording – 1 hour 44 minutes 28 seconds

The Chair confirmed the withdrawal of Councillor Brownjohn as nominee to the Royston Old People’s Day Care Centre.

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council to move the report in respect of the Nomination of Representatives on Outside Organisations and Other Bodies for 2024-25 as set out in Appendix A.

Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, proposed that the uncontested nominations listed in Appendix A be approved. Councillor Val Bryant seconded and following a vote that motion was carried.

Councillor Michael Muir confirmed his withdrawal from the Baldock Town Twinning Association.

Votes were subsequently conducted on each contested nomination as highlighted in Appendix A of the report, with the results recorded as per those listed below.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the list of nominations of representatives on Outside Organisations and Other Bodies for 2024/25, as set out in Appendix A provided as a supplementary document to the report was approved with confirmation that:

- The Council's representatives to Baldock Town Twinning Association be Councillors Alistair Willoughby and Stewart Willoughby.
- The Council's representatives to Baldock United Almshouses Charities be Councillors Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby and Emma Rowe.
- The Council's representatives to Baldock Youth and Community Association be Councillors Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby and Emma Rowe.
- The Council's representative to Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny Committee be Councillor Tina Bhartwas.
- The Council's representatives to Letchworth Civic Trust be Councillors Emma Fernandes and Daniel Allen.
- The Council's representative to Letchworth Garden City BID be Councillor Tamsin Thomas.
- The Council's representative to Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation be Councillor Ian Mantle.
- The Council's representative to Letchworth Garden City Town Twinning Association be Councillor Mick Debenham.
- The Council's representative to London Luton Airport Consultative Committee be Councillor Mick Debenham.
- The Council's representative to Police and Crime Panel be Councillor Val Bryant
- The Council's representative to Royston Old People's Day Centre (Royston Old Barn) be Councillor Bryony May.

(2) That Political Group Leaders notify the Democratic Services Manager of nominations to the remaining vacancies or any changes to the existing representatives on outside organisations.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the provisions of Standing Order 4.8.1(b)(iv) and (v) of the Council's Constitution.

300 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 1 hour 59 minutes 25 seconds

Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: 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).

301 PART 2 MINUTES - 18 APRIL 2024

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recording is available.

The Chair advised that although the Minutes of the previous meeting could be moved and seconded by members who were not present at that meeting, it was preferable that those who were not present should abstain from voting.

Councillor Clare Billing, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Daniel Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Part 2 Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 April 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

N.B. The meeting returned from restricted session to confirm the outcome of the vote on the Part 2 Minutes from the meeting of 18 April 2024.

The meeting closed at 9.35 pm

Chair

Item No	Referred from:	Cabinet
8A	Date:	25 June 2024
	Title of item:	Annual Report on Risk Management Governance
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Agenda Item 12

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 25 June 2024 can be viewed here: Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 25th June, 2024, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL: That Council note the report.

REASONS FOR DECISION: To ensure Council has oversight of the management of risks for which Cabinet is responsible.

Audio recording – 10 minutes 12 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 general discussion around:

- This new Civic Year, the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee had a few new Members who had a background in risk management which would be a strength to the Committee.
- Understanding the risk following the Baldock Fire and what this represented to the Council.
- Risk and legislation following post Brexit legislation changes from EU laws and any potential changes following the General Election.
- Understanding scoring systems and how risks were kept.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Annual Report on Risk Management Governance' and advised that:

- Risk management was a vital part of the work of the Council and ensured it was operating effectively.
- This report detailed the various aspects of work carried out on risk management over the year.
- Risk management also covered a range of link topics which were health and safety, insurance and business continuity.
- A visual risk profile of key Corporate Risks could be found in paragraph 8.2.5
- Details of the high scoring service level risks, which were also documented and which sat below corporate risks, could be found in paragraph 8.2.6.
- The Senior Management Group had carried out an exercise in relation to risks including cyber-attacks, which had resulted in the setting up of a new Cyber Board, as highlighted in paragraph 8.5.3.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Dave Winstanley seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted this report.

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL: That Council note the report.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

(1) The responsibility for ensuring the management of risks is that of Cabinet.

(2) This Committee has responsibility to monitor the effective development and operation of Risk Management.

Item No	Referred from:	Cabinet
8B	Date:	25 June 2024
	Title of item:	Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) End of Year Review 2023/2024
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Agenda Item 13

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 25 June 2024 can be viewed here: Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 25th June, 2024, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

(1) To approve the actual 2023/24 prudential and treasury indicators.

(2) To note the annual Treasury Report for 2023/24.

(3) To approve a change to the Investment Strategy allowing investments to be placed on Lloyds Call Account so the combined total of Current Account and Call Account is up to £5M.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

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

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

Audio recording – 21 minutes 52 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 general discussion around:

- Helping the new Members of the Committee to understand the financial situation of the Council over the last couple of years.
- The new Lloyds bank Call Account which offered a higher interest rate of 5% for savings and which would help to support the finances of the Council going forward.
- That higher interest rates would not last much longer and how the capital reserves were disappearing, so extra borrowing would need to be considered in the future.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) End of Year Review 2023/24' and advised that:

- The first part of the report related to the capital spend and the second part detailed how surplus cash had been invested in line with the Investment Strategy.
- The changes in the last quarter and the reasons for these changes were detailed in Tables 2 and 3.

- Explanation of how the capital programme was funded could be found in Table 4.
- The revenue costs of capital would put a strain on the revenue budget in the coming years.
- There would be a full review of capital spend to make sure it is achievable and deliverable within the 2025/26 budget setting process.
- The Council had complied with all legislative and regulatory requirements throughout the year.
- Most investments were Local Authority loans and building society loans and the Investment Strategy would continue to be studied throughout the year.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted expenditure of £2.409million in 2023/24 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.

(2) Approved the adjustments to the capital programme for 2024/25 as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2, increasing the estimated spend by £2.655million and £0.193million in 2025/26.

(3) Noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.7 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

(4) Approved the application of £1.313million of capital receipts/set aside towards the 2023/24 capital programme, paragraph 8.7 refers.

(5) Noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of March 2024.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

(1) To approve the actual 2023/24 prudential and treasury indicators.

(2) To note the annual Treasury Report for 2023/24.

(3) To approve a change to the Investment Strategy allowing investments to be placed on Lloyds Call Account so the combined total of Current Account and Call Account is up to £5M.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

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

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

Item No	Referred from:	Cabinet
8C	Date:	25 June 2024
	Title of item:	Revenue Budget Outturn 2023/24
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Agenda Item 14

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 25 June 2024 can be viewed here: Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 25th June, 2024, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: To approve the net transfer to earmarked reserves, as identified in table 9, of £2.028million.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(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.

(2) Changes to the Council's balances are monitored and approved.

Audio recording – 15 minutes 41 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 general discussion around:

- The value of income from car parking fees for the Council.
- The Leisure Management Centres fees following the new contract and what impact this would have on income in future years.
- The variances in planning fees due to the size of developments.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Finance and IT, presented the report entitled 'Revenue Budget Outturn 2023/24' and advised that:

- The budget was reviewed each quarter to provide a revised estimate of spend in the year.
- This report reflected the end of year position for the Council.
- Explanation of significant changes from the last quarter following requests to carry forward balances for items not completed were detailed in Table 3.
- Significant variances and the extra work required by external auditors to meet new regulatory and compliance standards were set out in Table 2.
- A summary of the variances over the whole year was set out in Appendix A. There had been higher returns on cash investments due to higher interest rates.
- The key sources of income were detailed in Tables 5 and 6.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted this report.

(2) Approved a decrease of £194k in the 2023/24 net General Fund expenditure, as identified in section 8, to a total of £16.494million.

(3) Approved the adjustments to the 2024/25 General Fund budget, as identified in table 4 and paragraph 8.3, a total £634k increase in net expenditure.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: To approve the net transfer to earmarked reserves, as identified in table 9, of £2.028million.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(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.

(2) Changes to the Council's balances are monitored and approved.

Item No	Referred from:	FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE
8D	Date:	19 JUNE 2024
	Title of item:	FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Agenda item 17

The report considered by Finance, Audit and Risk Committee at the meeting held on 19 June 2024 can be viewed here Agenda for Finance, Audit and Risk Committee on Wednesday, 19th June, 2024, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: The Annual Report of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (as amended) be noted.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To enable the Committee to consider the report before it is presented to Full Council. To provide Full Council with assurance as to the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

Audio recording – 5 minutes 40 seconds

The Service Director – Resources presented the report entitled 'Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report 2023-24' and highlighted that:

- The report provided Council with a performance overview of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FAR) for the civic year 2023-24.
- The report described the role of the Committee, with the main achievements for 2023-24, being the approval of the accounts for 2021-22 and the report regarding the external audit backlog.
- There was a national backlog of external audits, partly due to the strengthening of the rules and regulations of the Financial Reporting Council after recent failures at both companies and public organisations and this had meant more detailed work was required.
- The audit sector had been experiencing resourcing issues both within their teams and at various Councils and this had impacted on the backlog. North Herts had a backlog of 1 year and a stable team available to assist with the accounts.
- In January 2024 there had been a proposal to resolve the backlog and introduce backstop dates for approval of accounts. It was proposed that for all years up 2022-23 that any remaining accounts would be approved at the end of September 2024, even if the audit work was not fully completed, with further backstop dates being put in place for future years.
- The approval of an uncompleted account would lead to extra work for the subsequent audit year and this would led to an increase in auditor fees.
- This backstop date was now uncertain as the legislation was stalled following the dissolution of Parliament ahead of the General Election.
- The proposed reporting dates for 2024-25 were listed on page 184 of the report, however these were now likely to change due to the delays in passing the legislation.
- The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) was linked to the statement of accounts, and this was now likely to be presented at a later date.
- Amendments to the table on page 184 of the report would be made prior to this report being presented to the July Council meeting.

- Ernst and Young were auditors for the Council for Civic Year 2022-23.
- KPMG were now the auditors for the Financial year 2023-24 onwards.
- This Committee set the internal audit plan at the end of each financial year and monitored the progress of the plan throughout the year.
- The Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) were a shared service hosted by the County Council with the aim to investigate, prevent and detect fraud from staff and the public. SAFS used specialist staff, data bases and information to investigate fraud, SAFS also provided information regarding the prevention of fraud.
- Throughout the year key financial and risk reports were presented to FAR. The Committee were then able to question the Officer, focusing on financial elements and controls and comment on the report prior to the item being referred to Cabinet.
- The Committee received the draft budget setting report to its January meeting for the following Civic Year and looked at the Medium-term Financial Strategy at the November meeting.
- The table on page 182 of the report detailed the reports the Committee received in the Civic Year 2023-24.
- The peer support recommendations for the Committee were highlighted on pages 180 and 181 of the report with the appropriate action points.
- This report belonged to the Chair of the Committee.

The Chair, Councillor Sean Nolan, noted his thanks to the internal auditors, external auditors and Officers for their support over the year and to previous Committee Members for their input and service.

In response to a question from Councillor Paul Ward, the Service Director – Resources advised:

- There had been no impact on staffing levels in relation to the backstop audits, however the timings of the work had moved slightly.
- The backstop fees for the 2022-23 audit were as yet unknown, but as this was a limited scope audit with less work involved, it was anticipated that these would be less than previously forecasted. However the new auditors KPMG would be required to complete more work than previously expected due to this limited scope backstop audit.

Councillor Stewart Willoughby proposed and Councillor Paul Ward seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered and commented on the Annual Report of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee as attached at Appendix A and noted that there may be delays to some of the Planned Work for 2024-25, detailed on page 184, and this would be updated by the Service Director – Resources.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: The Annual Report of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (as amended) be noted.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To enable the Committee to consider the report before it is presented to Full Council. To provide Full Council with assurance as to the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

Item No	Referred from:	Cabinet
8E	Date:	25 June 2024
	Title of item:	Leisure Investment Options – Part 1
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Agenda Item 20

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 25 June 2024 can be viewed here: Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 25th June, 2024, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

(1) An increase in capital expenditure of £2.4m into the capital programme for the decarbonisation work to the three leisure centres. The overall budget will be profiled across 2024/25 and 2025/26.

(2) An increase in the capital budget of £250k for the Royston Leisure Centre (RLC) gym extension, to ensure the extension is built to net zero carbon standards.

(3) Approval of revenue expenditure of up to £757k for termination and removal fees of the gas CHPs at North Herts Leisure Centre and Hitchin Fitness and Swimming Centre. This would be funded from General Fund reserves. To take this Part 2 report into consideration when reaching the decisions detailed in Part 1.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) North Herts Council passed a climate emergency motion in May 2019. This declaration asserted the council's commitment toward climate action beyond current government targets and international agreements. This is currently pursued through the North Herts Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 which sets out what the council will aim to do to reduce its own carbon emissions to achieve Carbon Neutrality for the Council's own operations by 2030 and a Net Zero Carbon district by 2040.

(2) Gas use from our leisure centres is a significant contributor towards the Council's own emissions. In 2022-23, gas use across the three leisure centres accounted for 1,428 tonnes CO2e. This equates to 45% of the Council's Scope 1-3 emissions. Taking action to replace 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.

(3) There is currently a capital allocation in the 2024/25 budget to build a gym extension and learner pool (subject to business case) at Royston Leisure Centre.

(4) During the procurement for the leisure and active communities contract, the Council committed to deliver the gym extension project which is incorporated in to the contractual management fee. The initial tender stage returns showed that extension would generate additional income of at least £150k per year, and subject to inflationary increases. The latest estimate is that the capital costs will be £1.25m. This is an increase from the initial estimate of £1m and includes making the extension net-zero. The income generated will still exceed the revenue cost of capital (at around £90k per year), but in line with the financial regulation the increased capital spend needs to be approved by Cabinet.

(5) The business case for the learner pool has not yet been agreed and is included in the Part 2 report.

Audio recording – 44 minutes 28 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Barnes advised:

- The grant from Centrica must be used by March 2026 as there was penalty clause in the contract.
- There was no objection to the gym extension at Royston Leisure Centre and section 106 funding had been applied to this.
- The business case for the learner pool at Royston Leisure Centre was unfavourable on a financial basis.
- Swimming lessons were oversubscribed at Royston Leisure Centre and the Council should be mindful of their motion on health initiatives.
- The construction of a learner pool at Royston should not be removed from budget and the Council should continue to explore alternative areas of funding to make the business case more favourable.

In response to a question from Councillor Chris Hinchliff, the Service Director – Place, advised that the amount of s106 funding to be applied to the gym extension at Royston Leisure Centre was roughly £170K.

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:

- The penalty charge associated with the contract with Centrica was a risk to finances.
- A decision must be reached now on spending the grant otherwise the opportunity would be lost.
- The cancellation fee should not be the reason to stop the whole programme going ahead and therefore was not a good reason to remove this from the budget.

The Executive Member for Environment and Leisure presented the report entitled ‘Leisure Investment Options – Part 1’ and advised:

- In February 2024 the Council advised that the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme had been successful and the Council was awarded over £7.7 million in grant funding.
- Emissions from leisure centres accounted for 45% of the total emissions of the Council.
- After decarbonisation at leisure centres the carbon savings would be over 50% as detailed in paragraph 8.1.
- Upon confirmation of the grant, Wilmot Dixon were commissioned to carry out a feasibility study for the works. This feasibility study identified some technical issues which led to cost increases as detailed in paragraph 8.6.
- The cost increases for the gym extension and learner pool to ensure they were built to net zero carbon standards were tabled in paragraph 8.15. There was an error in the table where the cost increase for the learner pool is shown at as £200K rather than the correct figure of £220K. However, the total figure of £470k was correct.
- There were strict conditions in the Salix Grant that all funds must be spent in the relevant year of the project with no flexibility in this. For 2024/25 the grant was around £6.2 million and for 2025/2026 was around £1.6 million.

Councillor Daniel Allen thanked Officers for their pro-active work on this and reported how this would assist the Council in achieving the aim to be zero carbon by 2030.

Councillor Ian Albert advised that there would be a full review of the capital programme and that it was an aspiration to achieve a learner pool at Royston Leisure Centre. Councillor Albert added that within the report it recommended to bring in external expertise from a Quantity Surveyor to oversee the interests of the Council.

Councillor Mick Debenham proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Agreed in principle to terminate the Combined Heat and Power Centrica contracts at North Herts Leisure Centre (NHLC) and Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre (HSFC) at the appropriate time during the PSDS project and recommend to Council as per 2.6 below regarding the termination fee.

(2) Expressed its profound disappointment at the position taken by Centrica over the cost of the CHP contract termination, given the company's stated position as "Energising a greener, fairer future" and requests that the Council continues to raise, and seek solutions to, the issue of long-term inflexible agreements for gas CHPs with Salix and Government, which will inevitably prevent many public sector organisations from achieving their net zero ambitions.

(3) Did not approve the business case for Royston Leisure Centre Learner Pool at this time due to matters identified in the Part 2 report.

(4) Agreed that the Project Board would review the business case for the Royston Learner Pool, after further work had taken place to explore any other funding options that were realistically available. That review would then feed into the planned review of the Councils capital programme, as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

(1) An increase in capital expenditure of £2.4m into the capital programme for the decarbonisation work to the three leisure centres. The overall budget will be profiled across 2024/25 and 2025/26.

(2) An increase in the capital budget of £250k for the Royston Leisure Centre (RLC) gym extension, to ensure the extension is built to net zero carbon standards.

(3) Approval of revenue expenditure of up to £757k for termination and removal fees of the gas CHPs at North Herts Leisure Centre and Hitchin Fitness and Swimming Centre. This would be funded from General Fund reserves. To take this Part 2 report into consideration when reaching the decisions detailed in Part 1.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) North Herts Council passed a climate emergency motion in May 2019. This declaration asserted the council’s commitment toward climate action beyond current government targets and international agreements. This is currently pursued through the North Herts Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 which sets out what the council will aim to do to reduce its own carbon emissions to achieve Carbon Neutrality for the Council’s own operations by 2030 and a Net Zero Carbon district by 2040.

(2) Gas use from our leisure centres is a significant contributor towards the Council’s own emissions. In 2022-23, gas use across the three leisure centres accounted for 1,428

tonnes CO2e. This equates to 45% of the Council's Scope 1-3 emissions. Taking action to replace 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.

(3) There is currently a capital allocation in the 2024/25 budget to build a gym extension and learner pool (subject to business case) at Royston Leisure Centre.

(4) During the procurement for the leisure and active communities contract, the Council committed to deliver the gym extension project which is incorporated in to the contractual management fee. The initial tender stage returns showed that extension would generate additional income of at least £150k per year, and subject to inflationary increases. The latest estimate is that the capital costs will be £1.25m. This is an increase from the initial estimate of £1m and includes making the extension net-zero. The income generated will still exceed the revenue cost of capital (at around £90k per year), but in line with the financial regulation the increased capital spend needs to be approved by Cabinet.

(5) The business case for the learner pool has not yet been agreed and is included in the Part 2 report.

ANNUAL COUNCIL
23 MAY 2024

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: KEY DECISIONS - ANNUAL REPORT ON CASES OF SPECIAL URGENCY

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of any occasions over the past year where the provisions relating to "Special Urgency" have been used in connection with the publication of an intention to make a Key Decision, as required by legislation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the report be noted.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To comply with Regulation 19 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 ("the Regulations").

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 None.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 None.

6. FORWARD PLAN

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

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 came into force on 10 September 2012. The Regulations, inter alia, revised the procedures for publicity in connection with Key Decisions.

7.2 A Key Decision means an executive decision which is likely –

(a) to result in the relevant local authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the relevant local authority's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or

(b) to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards or electoral divisions in the area of the relevant local authority.

7.3 The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, Regulation 9(2) requires that at least 28 clear days notice is given by the Council before a Key Decision is made. This requirement is ordinarily met at North Herts Council by the regular publication of the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

7.4 Regulation 10 requires that, where the publication of the intention to make a Key decision under regulation 9(2) is impracticable, that decision may only be made –

(a) where the proper officer has informed the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee or, if there is no such person, each member of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee by notice in writing, of the matter about which the decision is to be made;

(b) where the proper officer has made available at the offices of the relevant local authority for inspection by the public and published on the relevant local authority's website, if it has one, a copy of the notice given pursuant to sub-paragraph (a); and

(c) after five clear days have elapsed following the day on which the proper officer made available the notice referred to in sub-paragraph (b).

7.5 In cases of Special Urgency, Regulation 11 requires that where the date by which a key decision must be made, makes compliance with regulation 10 impracticable, the decision may only be made where the decision maker has obtained agreement from -

(a) the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee; or

(b) if there is no such person, or if the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee is unable to act, the Chair of the relevant local authority; or

(c) where there is no Chair of either the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee or of the relevant local authority, the Vice-Chair of the relevant local authority, that the making of the decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred.

7.6 Regulation 19(1) requires that the Executive Leader must submit to the relevant local authority at such intervals as may be determined by the relevant local authority a report containing details of each executive decision taken during the period since the last report was submitted to the authority where the making of the decision was agreed as urgent in accordance with Regulation 11.

7.7 As contained within the Council's Constitution it is stated that the Executive Leader will submit a report annually to Council on the Cabinet decisions taken under the special urgency provisions.

7.8 Regulation 19(2) requires that a report submitted for the purposes of Regulation 19(1) must include –

(a) particulars of each decision made; and

(b) a summary of the matters in respect of which each decision was made.

7.9 Regulation 19(3) requires that the Executive Leader must submit at least one report under Regulation 19(1) annually to the relevant local authority.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 In 2023/24, the following Key Decisions required the Special Urgency procedure outlined in Regulation 11 to be invoked:

8.2 **Subject Matter: Local Authority Housing Fund Round Two**

Decision:

(1) That Cabinet noted the update on the Local Authority Housing Fund and wished to support round two of the scheme if it can.

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

Decision Taker: Cabinet

Date of Decision: 27 June 2023

Reason for Urgency:

This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision, which has not been notified to the public in the Forward Plan as the Council were notified of the allocation on 7 June 2023.

It is not possible to defer consideration of this decision because the deadline for responding to Government is 5 July 2023.

The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny was informed that the making of the decision was considered urgent and could not reasonably be deferred for the reasons outlined above.

8.3 **Subject Matter: Trading Company Update – Part 2**

Decision: That the Cabinet Sub-Committee (Local Authority Trading Companies Shareholder) noted the content of the part 2 report before consideration of the part 1 recommendations.

Decision Taker: Cabinet Sub-Committee (Local Authority Trading Companies' Shareholder)

Date of Decision: 19 March 2024

Reason for Urgency:

A decision by the sub-committee is imperative to authorise the initiation of operations for the Council owned entity, Broadwater Hundred Property Management Limited. This step is crucial for enabling the leasing of Harkness Court. Upon obtaining the necessary approval, the Enterprise Team will be positioned to commence commercial activities on this project. Furthermore, the approval for a financial loan is essential; in its absence, the Company's operational commencement would be significantly hindered. Both Council-affiliated enterprises (Broadwater Hundred Property Management Limited and Broadwater Hundred Limited) will face initial expenditures and necessitate adequate cash flow to kickstart operations.

Should the business case's financial forecasts receive approval, the subsequent phase will involve the revision of critical legal and governance documentation, including the Articles of Association and the Shareholder Agreement. Due to the specialised nature of these documents, external legal expertise will be required. This phase cannot proceed without the sanction of a Council-provided loan to the Company.

In light of the Council's acquisition of Building Control approval on 17 January 2024, any delay in advancing this project would be commercially imprudent. The costs associated with property vacancy are likely to escalate if action is not taken promptly.

The Part 2 documentation serves to update and enhance the information previously presented to the sub-committee under Part 2, ensuring all members are fully informed of the current project status and forthcoming steps.

The Council obtained the agreement of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to waive compliance with the Regulations for this meeting for the reasons outlined above.

8.5 All Notices of Special Urgency can be viewed on the Council's Website here: Notices of Urgent Decisions | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 This report is a requirement of the Council Procedure Rules as set out in Part 15.16.3 of the Council's Constitution which provides that the Leader of the Council will submit an annual report to the Council on Cabinet decision taken in the circumstances set out in 15.15 (special urgency) in the preceding year. The report will include the number of decisions so taken and a summary of the matters in respect of which those decisions were taken.

9.2 The requirements of the Regulations are set out in the main body of this report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. In the event of the use of Special Urgency procedures, financial (and other) implications would be considered in the decision-making process and reported to Full Council.

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. Each year the Council undertakes a review of outside bodies, including whether Members are insured or indemnity provided by the outside body. This is a relevant consideration when nominating any Member to an external organisation.

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 This is a noting report, the intention of which is to ensure transparency of decision making. Considerations with regards to equalities implications, in relation to each decision, will have been set out in the reports concerned.

12.3 There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14 HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no human resource implications.

15. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

15.1. Considerations with regards to environmental implications, in relation to each decision, will have been set out in the reports concerned.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 None.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Author

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Contributors

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None.

COUNCIL
11 July 2024

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: DISREGARD OF WAR DISABLEMENT INCOME

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR - CUSTOMERS

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND IT, COUNCILLOR IAN ALBERT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Council currently disregards in full war widows and war disablement pensions when calculating entitlement to Housing Benefit.

1.2 The purpose of this report is to document the existing working practices by way of a policy.

1.3 The policy is to ensure that members of the armed forces who have been disabled during service or the widows, widowers or surviving civil partner of those who died in service are recognised and not financially penalised when calculating entitlement to housing benefit.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Council adopt the policy at Appendix B.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The Housing Benefit Regulations make provision for the first £10 of a war disablement or war widow's pension to be disregarded when calculating an applicant's income relating to an application for housing benefit. The cost of this disregard is fully reimbursed to the Council by government.

3.2 The legislation also allows the Council to disregard any other part of these pensions and this Council has wholly disregarded the payments for a number of years when calculating housing benefit or council tax reduction entitlement.

3.3 The Council's council tax reduction scheme is aligned to housing benefit regulations and disregards war disablement or war widow pension.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 The policy reflects existing working practices that date back many years. The alternative option to not implement this policy would have a negative financial impact on any housing benefit claimants in receipt of war widows and war disablements pensions.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 Consultation has been carried out with the Executive member for Finance and IT, Cllr Ian Albert and with the previous Deputy Executive Member, Cllr Matt Barnes.

5.2 Consultation has also taken place with the Money Advice Unit and Citizens Advice.

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 Nationally the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) disregard £10 a week of this income, however councils have the discretion to increase the disregard. North Herts Council have disregarded the income in full for many years to acknowledge the service given by war veterans.

7.2 Historically the Council have disregarded in full certain war disablement and war widow incomes that are paid to war veterans. Although this has been the case for a number of years, we are unable to locate a formal policy that relates to this.

7.3 The Council has to appoint a Reporting Accountant for Housing Benefit, who report to the DWP on the payments that we have made. This process requires us to have a formal policy in relation to these disregards.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 This policy does only apply to those claimants receiving Housing Benefit who are also in receipt of a war veterans' income. The income is paid by the veteran's agency and not the DWP and therefore comes under different legislation than other legacy benefits for disablement.

8.2 Appendix A lists the war disablement and war widows' incomes that are disregarded.

8.3 North Herts Council is a member of the Hertfordshire armed forces covenant which was signed on 13 December 2011. A reaffirmation of the covenant took place in June 2022 at Hertfordshire County Hall.

8.4 An armed forces covenant is a promise to ensure that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly. Local authorities and the armed forces community are encouraged to work together to establish a community covenant in their area to, amongst other things, recognise and remember the sacrifices faced by the armed forces community.

8.5 This policy recognises and remembers the service and sacrifices faced by the armed forces community.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Regulations providing for this are the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 paragraph 40(2) and schedule 5, and Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the qualifying age for state pension credit) Regulations 2006 paragraph 33(9).

9.2 Sections 134 and 139 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 provide the Council with the discretion to modify the Housing Benefit scheme by disregarding a further amount, or all, of specified war disablement pensions and payments.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Council receives 75% subsidy for housing benefit war widow payments and in 2023/24 our expenditure was £6744.88. As in practice, these amounts are already being disregarded, the cost of these disregards are already reflected in existing budgets.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

7.1. 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.

7.2 This policy reflects what has been happening in practice for many years, there is a risk that without a documented policy supporting working practices there could be uncertainty regarding entitlement and or challenges.

7.3 The Council has to appoint a Reporting Accountant for Housing Benefit, who report to the Department for Work and Pensions on the payments that we have made. As we have not been able to provide the Reporting Accountant with evidence of an approved policy in relation to these disregards, they have advised that they would need to include it in the report that they make on our Housing Benefit reimbursement claim. Having a documented policy will mean that this will not need to happen for future claims.

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 has been completed and attached as a separate appendix.

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 decision as set out in this report.

15. HUMAN RESOUCES IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no Human Resource implications in this report.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – List of war disablement disregards

16.2 Appendix B – War Pension Disregard Policy

16.3 Appendix C – Equality Analysis Impact Assessment

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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17.4 Sedem Amegashie-Duvon, Trainee Solicitor
Sedem.Amegashie-Duvon@north-herts.gov.uk ext. 4429

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

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None

Appendix A

The following war disablement and war widows' incomes will be disregarded.

1. A war disablement pension.

2. War widow's/widower's pension.

3. A pension payable a person as a widow, widower or surviving civil partner under any power of Her Majesty otherwise than under an enactment to make provisions about pensions, for or in respect of persons who have been disabled or have died in consequence of service as members of the armed forces of the Crown.

4. Guaranteed Income Payments (GIPs) under the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme (AFRFCS) payments.

5. A payment made to compensate for the non-payment of such a pension as is mentioned in any of the preceding sub-paragraphs.

6. A pension paid by the government of a country outside Great Britain which is analogous to any of the pensions or payments mentioned in preceding paragraphs.

7. Any comparable payment paid by the government of a country outside Great Britain a pension paid under the law of the Federal Republic of Germany or Austria to victims of National Socialist persecution.

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Housing Benefit War Pension Disregard Policy

(Modified Scheme)

Contents

Introduction 1

Objectives of this policy..... 2

Administration of the scheme 3

Modified Scheme Policy 4

Governing Legislation 5

Appendix A 6

1. Introduction

1.1 The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 make provision for the first £10.00 of income from War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme to be disregarded in any benefit assessment.
The cost of this disregard is fully reimbursed to the Council.

1.2 The Social Security Administration Act 1992 gives the Council discretion to disregard any amount it chooses in addition to the statutory provision in accordance with its approved Modified Scheme.

2. Objectives of this policy

2.1 The continued 100% disregard of funds received as War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme awards is intended to

- To ensure that members of the armed forces who have been disabled during service or the widows, widowers or surviving civil partner of those who died in the service of their country, should not be penalised by having their pensions or payments made in relation to their service, considered in the calculation of their Housing Benefit entitlement.
- Ensure income paid via these funding streams is treated consistently when assessing entitlement to Housing Benefit
- To ensure continued alignment between treatment of these incomes under the Housing Benefit scheme set by the Department for Works and Pensions, and North Herts Councils' own Council Tax support scheme.
- Promote a clear and transparent assessment methodology.
- Provide clarity to reporting accountants on North Herts Council approval of the disregard.

3. Administration of the scheme

3.1 A statutory disregard of £10 is required from current payments of War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme in accordance with the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006. These payments include.

- War disablement pension
- War Widows/widower's pension
- Guaranteed Income Payments (GIP's) under the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme (AFRFCS) payments
- Service Attributable Penson (SAP) injury or illness attributable to service on or before April 1975
- Any comparable payment paid by Government of a country outside Great Britain
- A pension paid under the law of the Federal Republic of Germany or Austria to victims of National Socialist Persecution

But **not** pre-1973 War Widow's Special Payments which are already disregarded in full.

4. Modified Scheme Policy

4.1 The Council will continue to disregard War Widows (Widowers)/War Disablement Scheme and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme awards in full, see 3.1.

4.2 Deductions from war veterans' income for third party compensation will be disregarded.

5. Governing Legislation

5.1 The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 paragraph 40(2) and schedule 5.

5.2 Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the age qualifying for the State Pension Credit) Regulations 2006 paragraph 33(9) and schedule 5

5.3 Social Security Administration Act 1992 Sections 134 and 139, which provide the Council with the discretion to modify the Housing Benefit scheme by disregarding a further amount, or all, of specified war disablement pensions and payments.

5.4 The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (War Pension Disregards Regulations 2007 (as amended) prescribe which pensions and payments these are. See Appendix A.

Appendix A

THE SCHEDULE Regulations 2 and 3 War disablement and war widow's pensions

PART 1

War disablement pensions

1. The war disablement pensions prescribed are —

(a) any retired pay or pension or allowance payable in respect of disablement under an instrument specified in section 639(2) of the Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions)

Act 2003(**a**).

(b) any retired pay or pension payable to a member of the armed forces of the Crown in respect of a disablement which is attributable to service, under—

(i) an Order in Council made under section 3 of the Naval and Marine Pay and Pensions Act 1865(**b**),

(ii) the Army Pensions Warrant 1977(**c**),

(iii) any order or regulations made under section 2 of the Air Force (Constitution)

Act 1917(**d**),

(iv) any order or regulations made under section 4 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996(**e**),

(v) any instrument amending or replacing any of the instruments referred to in paragraphs (i) to (iv), or

(vi) any power of Her Majesty otherwise than under an enactment to make provision about pensions for or in respect of persons who have been disabled.

or have died in consequence of service as members of the armed forces of the Crown; and

(c) a payment made under article 14(1)(b) of the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) Order 2005(**f**).

PART 2

War widow's pensions

2. The war widow's pensions prescribed are —

(a) any pension or allowance payable to a widow, widower or surviving civil partner under an instrument specified in section 639(2) of the Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Act 2003 in respect of the death or disablement of any person.

(b) a pension payable, to a widow, widower or surviving civil partner of a member of the armed forces of the Crown in respect of death, which is attributable to service, under—

(i) an Order in Council made under section 3 of the Naval and Marine Pay and Pensions Act 1865,

(**a**) 2003 c. 1. Subsection (2) was inserted by section 19(4) of the Finance Act 2005 (c. 7).

(**b**) 1865 c. 73 (28 & 29 Vict). Section 3 was amended by the Armed Forces Act 2006 (c. 52), Schedule 16, paragraph 2 and by the Armed Forces (Pension and Compensation) Act 2004 (c. 32), section 4.

(**c**) This is available from The Stationery Office.

(**d**) 1917 c. 51 (7 & 8 Geo 5). Section 2 was amended by the Armed Forces Act 2006 Schedule 16, paragraph 13.

(**e**) 1996 c. 14. Section 4 was amended by the Armed Forces Act 2006, Schedule 14, paragraph 26.

(**f**) S.I. 2005/439.

3.

(ii) the Army Pensions Warrant 1977,

(iii) any order or regulations made under section 2 of the Air Force (Constitution)

Act 1917,

(iv) any order or regulations made under section 4 of the Reserve Forces Act 1996,

(v) any instrument amending or replacing any of the instruments referred to in paragraphs (i) to (iv), or

(vi) any power of Her Majesty otherwise than under an enactment to make provision about pensions for or in respect of persons who have been disabled.

or have died in consequence of service as members of the armed forces of the Crown; and

(c) a payment made under article 21(1)(a) of the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) Order 2005.”

Equality Analysis Template

1. Name of activity:	**War disablement income disregard for Housing Benefit entitlement**
2. Main purpose of activity:	**To disregard all war disablement pension income that is paid to people that are in receipt of the war veterans income and to disregard war widow pension income for the purpose of calculating Housing Benefit entitlement**
3. List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:	**War disablement policy**

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)	√☐	☐	☐	**Negative** **Positive**
A person living with a disability	☐	☐	√☐	**Negative** Only recipients of war veterans income will be able to benefit from the disregard **Positive** This will give war veterans and their families more financial stability
A person of a particular race	√☐	☐	☐	**Negative** **Positive**
A person of a gay, lesbian or bisexual sexual orientation	√☐	☐	☐	**Negative** **Positive**
A person of a particular sex, male or female, including issues around pregnancy and maternity	√☐	☐	☐	**Negative** **Positive**
A person of a particular religion or belief	√☐	☐	☐	**Negative** **Positive**

A person of a particular age	☐	☐	√☐	**Negative** **Positive**
Transgender	√☐	☐	☐	**Negative** **Positive**

5 Results

	Yes	No	
Were positive impacts identified?	☐	☐	Some disabled people who are in receipt of a pension from the war veterans agency will be positively impacted as this income will be disregarded in full for Housing Benefit purposes
Are some people benefiting more than others? If so explain who and why.	☐	☐	Only claimants that are in receipt of this income will benefit as the Local Authority has the power to do so, Other disability benefits are paid by the Department of Work & Pensions/Pension Service and the treatment of that income is governed by Housing Benefit legislation which we have to adhere to.
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	☐	☐	We are able to use a discretionary Housing Payment fund where claimants in receipt of benefits are suffering severe hardship.

6. Consultation, decisions and actions

If High or very high range results were identified who was consulted and what recommendations were given?

No consultation was done, this is a scheme that NHC has applied for over 30 years and we didn't have the policy to hand to document this. Consultation has taken place with the following - Money Advice Unit, Citizens Advice and other District Benefit Managers who are all in agreement with the policy.

Describe the decision on this activity

Many years ago the decision was taken by leaders of the council to disregard the war veterans income in full to recognise their service in addition to the national £10 weekly disregard recommended by the DWP.

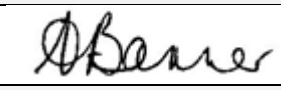
List all actions identified to address/mitigate negative impact or promote positively

Action	Responsible person	Completion due date
DHP could be offered if a clamant thinks they are affected by this policy	Anne Banner	1/4/2024

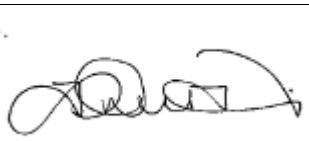
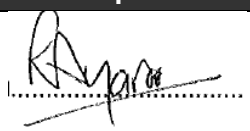
When, how and by whom will these actions be monitored?

7. Signatures

Assessor

Name: **Anne Banner**	Signature** 

Validated by

Name: **Jo Dufficy**	Signature** 
Forward to the Corporate Policy Team	
Signature** 	
Assessment date: **26/06/2024**	Review date: 26/06/2025

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

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

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COUNCIL
11 July 2024

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Functions related to community governance – Non-Executive function. (Electoral Services: Community and Partnerships)

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST/ SUSTAINABILITY/ A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Following the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) review of district wards, it is necessary to undertake a Community Governance Review (CGR) to ensure parish electoral arrangements across the district reflect the communities they serve.

1.2 To signify the formal start of the CGR, and launch the first stage of consultation, the Council must agree the Terms of Reference.

1.3 Any changes made as a result of the CGR will take effect from the May 2026 scheduled elections onwards.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Council agree the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review, signifying the formal start of the Review and commencement of the first stage consultation.

2.2. Approve the additional budget of £20k required for the use of the Association of Electoral Administrators consultancy service to assist with delivering the Community Governance Review.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The Council is required to keep parish electoral arrangements under review. Following the LGBCE review of district electoral arrangements (Council size and warding patterns), it is necessary to review parish arrangements across the district to bring them into alignment, ensure they remain fit for purpose, and to ensure they continue to reflect local needs.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 The Council should undertake a CGR and has previously advised parish councils that this would commence post May 2024 elections[1]. If the Council decided not to do so, a petition[2] from local electors could be submitted, resulting in a potentially limited Review on timescales that are not conducive to effective management and with a restricted deadline.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. A Consultant from the Association of Electoral Administrators has been instructed to be the day-to-day lead for organising and co-ordinating the CGR. The Consultant is able to provide specialist, experienced knowledge to assist in the delivery of the review at this time. Current budget for use of the Consultant is limited and Members are requested to extend the budget, as explained within paragraph 10.

5.2. A Community Governance Review Working Group has been established where relevant officers (and the Consultant going forward) meet on a regular basis with the Group Leaders.

5.3. The Working Group met on 19 June 2024 to consider the Terms of Reference of the CGR along with the format of the consultation, as attached as Appendix A and B. Appendix C has subsequently been added at the request of the Working Group, for information.

5.4. The Managing Director has met with Hitchin Initiative, who indicated an aspiration of the formation of a Town Council in Hitchin. Although initially Hitchin Initiative indicated that they would be submitting a petition to instigate a CGR (and have been provided with the petition template), following reassurance that the CGR would be district wide and include consideration of potential town council(s), a petition has not yet materialised.

5.5 In addition, the district ward boundary review by the LGBCE resulted in revised parish electoral arrangements for Bygrave Parish Council and Royston Town Council. Bygrave was divided into two parish wards - Bygrave East and Bygrave West. Royston Town Council was divided into six parish wards – Royston Garden Gate; Meridian, Palace, South, West, and WIllowside.

5.6 Royston Town Council, along with some District Councillors, have expressed dissatisfaction at this warding arrangement. Royston Town Council submitted to the LGBCE the following preference for three wards with no change to the total number of Town Councillors (15):

- Royston Heath Ward – to include the wards for Royston West, Royston Willowside and Royston Garden Lane - allocated 5 Town Councillors.

[1] 'Community Governance Review and Parish, Town and Community Councils in the North Herts District' Information Note circulated to District Councillors and Clerks and subsequently posted on the Council's website. Electoral cycle changes | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

[2] Note is it still possible to receive and have to act upon a petition, if the Terms of reference approved do not cover the area under review, unless this has previously been reviewed within the relevant preceding 2 year period.

- Royston Palace Ward – to remain as is - allocated 4 Town Councillors.

- Royston Meridian Ward – to include the wards for Royston Meridian and Royston South - allocated 6 Town Councillors.

5.7 Royston Town Council have been informed and were reassured that the warding arrangements for the Town Council would be included within the district wide CGR and given the new parish wards would not come into effect until the next ordinary elections for Royston Town Council (2026) would provide sufficient time to remedy the situation via the planned CGR.

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 Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) undertakes periodic reviews of local boundaries. Electoral reviews can recommend new patterns of wards or electoral divisions so that each councillor represents about the same number of electors. Reviews also aim to make sure that the pattern of wards reflects community ties and identities and promotes effective and convenient local government.

7.2. As there had not been a Review undertaken for this District since 2006 and following several requests to undertake a review, one commenced in 2021. This concluded with an increase in the number of District Councillors (49 to 51), changes to ward names and boundaries, an increase in wards (from 24 wards to 25 wards) and a change in the electoral cycle (from election by thirds to whole council elections to enable multi member wards). Now the District Council has six 3-member wards, fourteen 2-member wards and five 1-member wards. The reports presented to Full Council throughout the review are detailed in paragraph 18 – background reports. Given the various changes made to the District Council in the review, it is now necessary to consider arrangements for the various town, community and parish councils within the district.

7.3. The Council has authority to take decisions about parish electoral governance arrangements under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The Council is required to monitor these arrangements, with good practice indicating a formal review should be undertaken every 10-15 years. This formal review process is known as a Community Governance Review (CGR). A CGR reviews only parish-level electoral arrangements. It does not consider or amend district ward-level governance arrangements.

7.4. A CGR is the process by which parish electoral arrangements are formally reviewed. The Council has considerable powers to review and amend governance arrangements without further referral to an external body, provided the statutory process is followed. Decisions are usually made by Full Council, unless appropriate delegations are in place, given the importance of parish governance arrangements across the local authority area.

7.5. A CGR must be undertaken:

- in accordance with the relevant legislation (Chapter 3 of the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007);

- have due regard to guidance published by the Secretary of State and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), last published in March 2010 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8312/1527635.pdf; and

- comply with the Terms of Reference that the Council adopts.

7.6. The statutory guidance (Guidance on Community Governance Reviews 2010) sets out the broad criteria for a CGR, but notes that it is not appropriate to apply a 'one size fits all' approach. A CGR includes periods of consultation, and it is important that any consultation is open, transparent and fair.

7.7. References in legislation to a 'parish' also includes a parish which has an alternative style (such as 'town', 'village' or 'community' council) and parish meetings.

7.8. Following the review of warding arrangements by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) it has become apparent that some changes to parish arrangements may be required to ensure they remain fit for purpose and reflect the local communities as explained in paragraphs 5.4 – 5.7. As a result of the LGBCE review, it is advisable that this Community Governance Review remains broad and covers the whole of the district.

7.9. A CGR may review any aspect of community governance including, for example, the creation or naming of a parish, the establishment of a separate parish from an existing parish, alteration of parish boundaries, abolition or dissolution of a parish, change to parish electoral arrangements (the number of councillors to be elected to the council; the year when the ordinary election of parish councillors are held, whether the parish should be divided into wards) or parish grouping.

7.10. Legislation and statutory guidance set out the requirements for a CGR. These include that the Council must;

- draw up Terms of Reference (ToR) for the review, specifying the area/s under review and any consequential matters that need to be considered.

- consult local government electors for the area under review and any other person or body (including a local authority) who appears to have an interest in the review.

- have regard to the need to secure that community governance within the area under review "reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area and is effective and convenient".

- take into account any representations received in connection with the review.

- publish recommendations as soon as practicable after making them and take steps to ensure that those who may be interested in the review are informed of those recommendations.

7.11. Subject to these duties, it is for the Council to decide how to undertake the review.

7.12. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 sets out two statutory criteria:

> "The principal council must have regard to the need to secure that community governance within the area under review —
>
> (a) reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area, and
>
> (b) is effective and convenient."

7.13. A CGR is largely a technical project, following statutory processes to understand the interests and identities of local residents and their preferred community governance arrangements. Whilst final discussions and decisions will be made by Full Council, it is useful to maintain a small cross-party Working Group for detailed discussions. This helps ensure proposals made to Council are supported and appropriate.

7.14. Whilst Members are advised to read the DCLG guidance in its entirety, some key extracts are included below. Essentially, the guidance supports the 2007 Act requiring that local people are consulted, and that their views are taken into account during the CGR. Whilst Councillors are the decision-makers, those decisions must be based on evidence submitted through the CGR consultation process. Numbers refer to paragraph numbers in the DCLG guidance; emphasis added for clarity:

'7. The guidance supports and helps to implement key aspects of the 2006 white paper. The 2007 Act ***requires that local people are consulted during a community governance review, that representations received in connection with the review are taken into account*** *and that steps are taken to notify them of the outcomes of such reviews including any decisions.'*

*'58****. It is clear that how people perceive where they live*** *- their neighbourhoods - is significant in considering the identities and interests of local communities and depends on a range of circumstances, often best defined by local residents. Some of the factors which help define neighbourhoods are the geography of an area, the make-up of the local community, sense of identity, and whether people live in a rural, suburban, or urban area.'*

'59. Parishes in many cases may be able to meet the concept of neighbourhoods in an area. Parishes should reflect distinctive and recognisable communities of interest, with their own sense of identity. Like neighbourhoods, the ***feeling of local community and the wishes of local inhabitants are the primary considerations.'***

'95. The ***recommendations must take account of any representations received and should be supported by evidence which demonstrates that the recommended community governance arrangements would meet the criteria set out in the 2007 Act****.*
Where a principal council has conducted a review following the receipt of a petition, it will remain open to the council to make a recommendation which is different to the recommendation the petitioners wished the review to make. This will particularly be the case where the recommendation is not in the interests of the wider local community,

such as were giving effect to it would be likely to damage community relations by dividing communities along ethnic, religious or cultural lines.'

'97. The aim of the 2007 Act is to open up a wider choice of governance to communities at the most local level. However, the Government considers that there is sufficient flexibility for principal councils not to feel 'forced' to recommend that the matters included in every petition must be implemented.'

7.15. It is important to note that it is the Council who decide community governance arrangements. Therefore, where difficult decisions must be made, consideration must be given to opposing and differing views in light of legislation, best practice, and official guidance. Best practice guidance includes, for example, not having 'island' or 'donut' parishes or parish wards which are wholly surrounded by one other parish or parish ward: and using identifiable markers for boundaries (such as rivers, railways, roads and the edges of properties).

7.16. Essentially proposals for change should first identify the identities and interests of the communities, and then consider the governance arrangements for that area.

7.17. Members are invited to note that the course of appeal is by way of Judicial Review, a potentially expensive and damaging mechanism open to local stakeholders if there is a failure in the decision-making process. For example, a failure to consult properly, or a failure not to take into account relevant consideration, or conversely irrelevant issues are taken into account in reaching a decision. In other words, it is important to ensure that community governance decisions can be justified both evidentially and procedurally to avoid potential legal challenge.

7.18. It is also important to recognise that the number of responses received is not necessarily indicative that a particular approach should be taken. It is true that stakeholders preferring the status quo may not make representations until and unless there is a suggestion of significant change that they would otherwise oppose. Therefore, where little response has been received, it cannot be assumed that local people are in favour of supporting the change proposed by a few submissions; they may well currently be unaware of those suggestions and happy with no change.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. The Terms of Reference for a CGR set out the scope of the review and the timetable for the work. Once agreed by Council, the Terms of Reference must be published and they form one of the foundations for the CGR.

8.2. In some cases a CGR can be very targeted at one particular parish, to resolve specific issues. However, given the changes made through the LGBCE review of district wards, it is prudent to review the whole area.

8.3. Additionally, a CGR can be limited in options to focus solely on one aspect of community governance (such as parish boundaries, or to resolve the number of parish councillors sitting in a council).
However, given the length of time since the last review and the consequential changes from the LGBCE review it is prudent to ensure a wide range of options are open for discussion at the start of the CGR.

8.4. The CGR will consider a hierarchy of topics, each dependent on and related to the other:

a. Parish areas

i. Boundary alterations between existing parishes – this is considered likely in areas where the new District Wards deviate from parish boundaries.
ii. Grouping parishes under a common council or dissolving groups
iii. Parish name changes
iv. Alternative styles for any new parishes, including the creation of new parish councils in unparished areas.

b. Electoral arrangements

i. The size of the Council (how many Councillors shall serve on the Council) – this takes the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) recommendations regarding the number of Councillor per elector into account.
ii. Whether to ward the parish or not.
iii. Developing parish ward boundaries – Changes to parish wards are considered likely in those parishes where the LGBCE review divided existing parish wards.
iv. Allocating councillors to the wards
v. Dates of election – Changes to election dates may be valuable for some parishes.

c. Consequential matters

i. In some cases, changes to parish-level arrangements may have an impact on ward-level arrangements. These are 'consequential matters' are resolved by the LGBCE during their review. Note, however, district ward boundaries created through the recent LGBCE review cannot be changed through this process.

8.5 The draft Terms of Reference, including the timetable for the review, are set out in Appendix A. Members are invited to consider and agree these Terms of Reference. Once approved, the Terms of Reference shall be published, signifying the formal start of the CGR, and a public consultation shall commence.

8.6. The broad stages of a CGR are:

a. Publication of Terms of Reference, signifying the start of the review.
b. Public consultation, inviting submissions of how parish electoral arrangements could be amended.
c. Analysis of responses, and development of Draft Recommendations (based on the consultation responses and Officer-led considerations of local issues and the statutory criteria), and subsequent agreement by Council.
d. Public consultation of the Draft Recommendations.
e. Analysis of responses, and development of Final Recommendations.
f. Consideration of Final Recommendations by Council.
g. Laying of Community Governance Order based on Council decisions.
h. Changes to parish electoral arrangements take effect.

8.7. Appendix B shows the wording for the public consultation.

8.8. When undertaking a CGR, the authority is required to consult with residents and interested parties. The initial consultation invites comments and suggestions to support

the CGR, with no prior recommendations or options offered for comment. That is, the initial consultation will be a ‘blank sheet’.

8.9. We will consult with the following by sending details of the CGR and a link to the online feedback form:

- all householders, via the authority-held mailing lists and links from the home page of the website
- all parish councils
- all District Councillors
- all relevant County Councillors
- local political parties
- Members of Parliament
- Police & Crime Commissioner

8.10. It is important to note that some suggestions made through the initial consultation may not be taken forward. However, it is important that consultation responses from local residents on relevant aspects of this local governance review are given due consideration, and progressed as appropriate.

8.11. Following a review of responses, Draft Recommendations will be developed by officers, discussed by the CGR Working Group and agreed by Full Council. These will set out specific recommendations for each parish area under review. In some cases, the draft recommendation may be for no change; in others boundary changes may be recommended; in others the number of parish councillors may be adjusted; or new parish councils created. There is no assumption or expectation that any given area will be changed.

8.12. Once approved by Council, the Draft Recommendations will be taken to consultation. In this second consultation, options are more limited and focussed on the Draft Recommendations. If individual households are affected by potential boundary changes, they will receive information about the Draft Recommendations and consultation in the post, in addition to the broad public consultation process.

8.13. Following the consultation, officers will review all responses received and take these into account in developing the Final Recommendations. These will be presented, along with the submissions received, to the CGR Working Group before presentation to and discussion by Council, with the final decisions due to be made before the end of 2025. The Final Recommendations, once approved, become enacted by a formal reorganisation Order. Any changes to governance arrangements (including boundaries, parish names, and numbers of Councillors) take effect from the next scheduled elections.

8.14 Timetable for the Review – it is intended to complete the CGR within 12 months. However, the indicative timetable for the Review below may change depending on local circumstances, although implementation ahead of May 2026 is anticipated.

Date	Action
11 July 2024	Full Council approves the Terms of Reference, signifying the start of the CGR.
19 July to 7 October 2024	First public consultation, lasting 11 weeks. Longer than usual to accommodate consulting over school holidays and to allow Parishes to meet in September to feed into the consultation.
November 2024 to December 2024	Review by Officers and development of Draft Recommendations. CGR Working Group meetings will be held as appropriate to discuss, prior to consideration by Council.
23 January 2025	Draft Recommendations to be considered by Council and approved for second round of consultation.
31 January 2025 to 28 March 2025	Second public consultation, on Draft Recommendations.
	Review by Officers and development of Final Recommendations. CGR Working Group meetings will be held as appropriate to discuss, prior to consideration by Council.
July 2025	Full Council discuss and agree Final Recommendations.
July 2025	Reorganisation Order made.

8.15

At this stage no assumptions are made as to what the Draft or Final Recommendations may be. The Terms of Reference are broad, enabling submissions about any aspects of local governance. However, it is expected that submissions and Officer-led analysis may include the following:

a. Some communities within unparished areas have expressed an interest in forming a new Town or Parish council, and they are invited to submit a response to the first stage consultation. Any community that does not have a parish council at present may request to have a parish council. There are implications of this, including local council tax precepts, which will be explained more fully at the second stage of consultation as appropriate.

b. Some tidying up of parish and parish ward boundaries is anticipated following the LGBCE review. The LGBCE review created new parish wards in existing parishes, without removing the existing parish wards. As a result, some parishes have more parish wards than necessary, and the combination of boundaries has resulted in complex patterns of small parish wards. These can be tidied-up through a CGR, although it is important to note that district wards cannot be changed through this process.

c. A review of the number of Parish Councillors to bring them in line with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) recommendations. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) publishes recommendations of the number of parish councillors needed to adequately represent a given number of electors. There may be circumstances where these guidelines do not adequately reflect local needs, although they form a ‘starting point’ for consideration. Where populations have grown or changed, a review of Council Size may be important.

d. Adjustment of parish election dates, following the decision by this Council to move from elections by thirds to all-out elections. This Council now elects through all-out election, held in May 2024, 2028 and every four years hence. Parish councils elect in different years for a four-year term in 2024, 2026 or 2027 and therefore may benefit from bringing the election dates into alignment with the District to make things simpler for electors and reduce costs for parish councils and, therefore, local people.

8.16 If following a CGR, the electoral cycle of parish, town and community councils are brought into alignment with those of North Herts, the changes would take place at the scheduled elections from May 2026 onwards. This would mean:

- Parishes electing in 2026 would have a shortened term of office (2 years) so their term of office expires in 2028.
- Parishes electing in 2027 would have an extended term of office to 5 years to bring them in line with the 2032 elections.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Council, as principal council, has authority to take decisions about parish electoral governance arrangements under Sections 79 and 102(2) the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

9.2 A District Council that is undertaking a review, must notify the County Council that the review for its area is to be undertaken and the terms of reference (including any modifications to those Terms), as per section 79(3).

9.3 Sections 81 – 84 of the said Act cover relevant aspect of the Terms of reference for the review. These are to be the Terms under which the review is to be undertaken and approved by the Council. The Terms must specify the area under review and any modifications to make to them, for example, following petition that may be received during the course of the review. As per the Guidance, there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach, nevertheless on general principles, the Terms of reference should set out clearly the matters on which a community governance review is to focus. As soon as practicable after deciding the Terms, they must be published.

9.4 A petition may still be received and there be a duty under section 84 or power to respond under section 85 of the Act, dependent on the Terms of reference approved.

9.5 Section 102(6) provides (6) The Terms of reference of a community governance review “allow for a community governance petition or community governance application to be considered” if the terms of reference of the review are such that—(a) the area under review includes the whole of the petition area or application area; and (b) the recommendations to be considered by the review include all of the petition's or application's specified recommendations.

9.6 14.5.1 Council Functions states that functions relating to Community governance are reserved to Council as referred in the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Council is required to undertake regular reviews of community governance at its own cost. The costs or savings associated with the outcome of a CGR are met by parish councils. Members are invited to note that the first round of consultation is largely electronic; however any Draft Proposals that would make changes for specific properties (such as changes to external parish boundaries, or the creation of new parish councils) require printed materials to be delivered to the affected properties with print and distribution costs attached.

10.2 As a guide, if the proposals affected every household in the district, based on 60k households (there is currently 59,868 households) it would cost circa £33k to print and post a one page letter using the current printers used to supply the election and canvass material. Note this does not account for VAT or the anticipated Royal Mail postage increase.

10.3 There is already some limited carry over budget (circa £10k) previously identified for use of the Association of Electoral Administrators consultancy service to assist in delivering the CGR, which may have been sufficient had the CGR been limited and focused on one aspect of community governance (such as parish boundaries, or to resolve the number of parish councillors sitting in a council). Since the proposed CGR will be wide ranging and district wide, the added work and complexities which arise from the Review, this budget will be insufficient.

10.4 An estimation of the amount of time required for a district wide CGR with the creation of an additional parish has been obtained, and it is estimated that an additional £20k budget will be required. However, it is difficult to estimate as there are many factors, such as the number of responses, suggestions made and how contentious any proposals may be, which may result in an over or under spend.

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. Government guidance states that it is good practice to conduct a full review at least every 10 – 15 years and keep the area under review in the interim. Given the level of development and residential growth, and the recent review of District Wards since the last review, it is now timely to formally review the parish governance arrangements throughout the area.

11.3. If the Council chooses not to undertake a CGR, local people and/or parish councils may submit a petition (note above regarding terms of reference and potential for petition during a review). In so doing, the requirement to undertake a CGR is triggered and the Council has no further choice in the matter or the timing. In addition, a CGR launched due to a petition must be completed within 1 year, which can be challenging if there are delays or complexities during the process.

11.4. There may be changes in the indicative timetable provided for the Review, depending on local circumstances i.e. by-elections, staff leave, consequential matters as a result of a general election being called so close to the local elections, although implementation ahead of May 2026 is anticipated.

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 review of community governance will not impact on the requirement of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

12.3 Parish and Town Councils are the most local tier of government in England and play an important role in terms of community empowerment at a local level. A CGR offers an opportunity for both existing parishes and local people to feed into this process and offer proposals for any changes.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report as this is not a procurement exercise or contract.

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 significant demands on the Democratic Services Team including the first all-out elections and associated induction of members, the snap General Election and enacting the changes from the Elections Act. The appointment of the consultant to assist with the CGR will alleviate some of the pressure within the service and ensure the service continues to run effectively.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Terms of Reference

16.2 Appendix B – Consultation questions

16.3 Appendix C – Parish, Town, Community Councils, Parish Meetings and Unparished Areas within North Hertfordshire District

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Guidance on Community Governance Reviews
Guidance on community governance reviews (publishing.service.gov.uk)

18.2 Council – 23 September 2021 – Electoral Cycle Consultation – Minute No. 52 refers
https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=2614

18.3 Council - 7 December 2021 - Agenda for Council on Tuesday, 7th December, 2021, 7.30 pm - North Hertfordshire District Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

18.4 Council – 20 January 2022 – Council Size Submission to Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LBGCE) – Minute No.78 refers

18.5 Council – 14 July 2022 – Warding Arrangement Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) - Minute No.134 refers

18.6 Council – 19 December 2022 – Electoral Review – Response to Local Government Boundary Commission for England on Proposed Warding Arrangements – Minute No. 162 refers

APPENDIX A

Terms of Reference - Community Governance Review

A review of parish electoral arrangements under the
Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

Introduction

North Hertfordshire District Council has decided to undertake a Community Governance Review (CGR) under the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ("the 2007 Act"), to consider parish boundaries, parish ward boundaries, parish election dates and councillor representation throughout the local authority area.

Why undertake a Community Governance review?

A CGR provides an opportunity for district councils to review and make changes to community governance within their area. Such reviews can be undertaken when there have been changes in population or in reaction to specific, or local, new issues to ensure that the community governance for the area continues to be effective and convenient and it reflects the identities and interests of the community.

The government has emphasised that ultimately recommendations made in a CGR ought to bring about improved community engagement, more cohesive communities, better local democracy and result in more effective and convenient delivery of local services.

Government guidance further states that it is good practice to conduct a full review at least every 10– 15 years and keep the area under review in the interim. Given the level of development and residential growth, and the recent review of District Wards since the last review, it is now timely to formally review the parish governance arrangements throughout the area.

Scope of the review

North Hertfordshire District Council has decided to undertake a CGR to consider whether governance arrangements across the **whole** of the local authority area are:

a) reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area; and

b) effective and convenient to the community in that area.

In doing so the review is required to take into account:

a) the impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion; and

b) the size, population and boundaries of the local community or parish.

The review will also consider whether it is appropriate to parish unparished wards, including whether to create new parish council(s) or make changes to existing parish arrangements, and whether election dates should be amended for parish councils, with the potential outcomes of the review that are covered and any recommendations as set out under sections 87-92 of Act [Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (legislation.gov.uk)]

Who will undertake the community governance review

As the principal authority, North Hertfordshire District Council (as principal council) is responsible for undertaking any CGR within its electoral area.

The review will comply with the legislative and procedural requirements set out in the 2007 Act, as well as statutory guidance and best practice models. This includes guidance produced jointly by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). This review will follow the approach set out in these Terms of Reference, including the indicative timetable.

A timetable for the review

The indicative timetable for the review is as follows. Depending on local circumstances some dates may change, although implementation ahead of May 2026 is anticipated.

Date	Action
11 July 2024	Full Council approves the Terms of Reference, signifying the start of the CGR.
19 July to 7 October 2024	First public consultation, lasting 11 weeks.
November 2024 to December 2024	Review by Officers and development of Draft Recommendations. CGR Working Group meetings will be held as appropriate to discuss, prior to consideration by Council.
23 January 2025	Draft Recommendations to be considered by Council and approved for second round of consultation.
31 January 2025 to 28 March 2025	Second public consultation, on Draft Recommendations.
	Review by Officers and development of Final Recommendations. CGR Working Group meetings will be held as appropriate to discuss, prior to consideration by Council.
July 2025	Full Council discuss and agree Final Recommendations.
July 2025	Reorganisation Order made.

Consultation

Before making or publishing Final Proposals, in line with legislative requirements, the Council will take full account of the views of local people. The Council will comply with legislative requirements by;

a) consulting local government electors for areas under review;

b) consulting any other person or body (including a local authority or elected representative) which appears to the principal council to have an interest in the review; and

c) taking into account any representations received in connection with the review.

When taking account of written representations, the Council is bound to have regard to the need to secure that community governance within the area under review is;

a) reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area; and

b) effective and convenient to the community in that area.

In order to ensure that this review is conducted transparently, as soon as practicable the Council will publish its recommendations and take such steps as it considers sufficient to ensure that persons who may be interested in the review are informed of the recommendations and the reasons behind them.

The value of local councils

The Council believes that local parish and town councils play an important role in terms of community empowerment at a local level and want to ensure that local governance in the areas subject to this review continue to be robust, representative and enabled to meet the challenges that lie before it.

Parish and town councils have a key role to play in representing the views, promoting the needs, of the borough's local communities and neighbourhoods and that every opportunity should be afforded to them to express such views to the Council prior to any decisions taken which might affect local circumstances.

Parish boundaries

The Council considers that 'natural' settlements or settlements as they are defined in the Local Development Framework should not in normal circumstances be partitioned by parish boundaries.

The Council considers that the boundaries between parishes should where possible either reflect the 'no-man's land' between communities represented by areas of low population or by identifiable physical barriers. These physical barriers might include natural boundaries such as rivers or man-made features such as railways or roads.

In reaching conclusions on the boundaries between parishes, the Council will take into account community identity and interests in an area and will consider whether any particular ties or linkages might be broken by the drawing of particular boundaries. Equally, the Council, during its consultations will be mindful that proposals which are intended to reflect community identity and local linkages should be justified in terms of sound and demonstrable evidence of those identities and linkages.

In any event the Council will endeavour to select boundaries that are, and are likely to remain, easily identifiable as well as taking into account any local ties which might be broken by the fixing of any particular boundaries.

Parish and Town Council level of membership

The Council notes that legally the number of parish councillors for each parish council shall not be less than five and that there is no maximum number. In the instance of parish wards, any warded parish must have at least one parish councillor per ward. Furthermore, each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to its population, geography and the pattern of communities.

It is an important democratic principle that each person's vote should be of equal weight so far as possible, having regard to other legitimate competing factors, when it comes to the election of councillors.

Whilst it will not be possible, nor desirable, to create absolute uniformity in councillor representation at a parish level it is the policy of the Council to provide an equality of representation across the area as far as possible.

Whilst the Council is keen to ensure that the allocation of councillors to parish councils is equitable across the borough using NALC guidelines, it acknowledges that local circumstances may occasionally merit variation. Therefore, in exceptional circumstances, or in the case of parish warding, the Council accepts that it may be appropriate to increase or decrease the allocation of councillors to a parish council to reflect local circumstances.

Whilst the Council has discretion in this matter and will be mindful to apply the NALC guidelines it will, wherever possible, fully consider and take into account the wishes of the local area and the existing levels of representation which have stood the test of time before arriving at a decision.

Parish election dates

North Hertfordshire District Council previously elected 'by thirds', with elections taking place in three out of every four years. In line with these arrangements, scheduled parish elections also took place in three out of every four years, with some parish councils electing in each of those three years. The Council now elects all District Councillors in one scheduled election every four years, following a resolution by Council.

It may be prudent for scheduled elections for parish councils to be aligned with the District Council election dates. This can save considerable money for parish councils, who will then all share their election dates, and makes the democratic process easier and more accessible for electors. If election dates change for any parish council, the term of office for parish councillors in affected parishes will be shorter or longer than four years in the first scheduled election after the completion of the Review. Full details will be prepared and shared alongside any Draft Recommendations for consultation.

How to contact us

If you would like to say how you view potential future arrangements under these Terms of Reference please respond to the online consultations on the North Hertfordshire District Council website, https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/

APPENDIX B

Consultation questionnaire

North Hertfordshire District Council is undertaking a review of parish electoral arrangements, known as a Community Governance Review (or CGR). You can read the full terms of reference here [link].

As part of the Review, the Council is inviting you to have your say on current electoral arrangements. We will use the information you provide, along with analysis by specialist staff, to develop proposals for changes where they are necessary. There will be more consultation about those draft proposals before any changes are made.

You are welcome to tell us about the current arrangements, and to suggest any changes you would like to see. Some of the things that you might want to think about include:

- Do the parish boundaries reflect your local community?
- Are there the right number of parish councillors to serve your community? Note that parish councillors are not paid for the work they do on the parish council.
- Have there been any changes locally that mean parish arrangements should change?
- If your area does not have a parish council, do you want one to serve your community?
- Would you prefer election dates for the parish council and the district council (North Hertfordshire District Council) to be on the same date in future?

Please answer the questions below to help us understand your views. The deadline for responses is 7 October 2024.

The information you provide in this questionnaire will be used to inform the Community Governance Review, by North Hertfordshire District Council in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 You can read the Council's privacy policy, how we control your data and your rights on our website.

Your details – we want to hear from local people within the district so please tell us the following information.

Your name (optional)	
Your email address (optional) If you provide your email address, we will email you when the public consultation about the Draft Recommendations starts, early in 2025.	
Your postcode (required)	

How you are responding to this consultation

In what capacity are you responding to this consultation? (please tick all that apply)	☐ I'm responding in my capacity as a resident ☐ I'm responding in my capacity as a District Councillor ☐ I'm responding in my capacity as a parish/ Town councillor ☐ I'm responding on behalf of a parish or Town council* ☐ I'm responding on behalf of a residents/community association ☐ I'm responding on behalf of another organisation (such as a business)
If you are responding on behalf of a parish council, residents / community association, business or organisation: Name of organisation Your position Is this response the official response of your organisation (yes/no)	

Your response

Which parish or area are you responding about?	[Drop down list of all parish/town councils, plus the unparished areas, plus 'unsure' and 'all']
What would you like to tell us about the current parish electoral arrangements in this area? Include any suggestions for changes, information about what works well, and how the arrangements or change affect you. You are encouraged to think about the following in your response - Do the current arrangements reflect the identities and interests of the local community? If not, what changes could be made to improve that? - Are the current arrangements effective and convenient for local people? If not, what changes could be made to improve them? - Are the current Parish and Town boundaries in the right place, or are some properties divided from their communities?	
Would you like to tell us about arrangements in other areas? [Yes/No]	
[If yes, repeat this section]	

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this consultation.

The consultation responses received will be published on the council's website as part of a report to Council. Your name and address will not be published. This information is collected to identify the areas that consultation responses have been received.

North Herts

Parish, Town, Community Councils, Parish Meetings and Unparished areas

Parish/Town Councils	Ward	Seats
Ashwell		12
Barkway		7
Barley		6
Bygrave		5
Caldecote and Newnham	Caldecote	2
	Newnham	4
Codicote	(East)	2
	(Village)	8
Graveley		5
Great Ashby	**Community Council**	12
Hinxworth		5
Holwell		5
Ickleford		8
Kimpton		8
Kings Walden	(Breachwood Green)	6
	(Kings Walden)	2
Knebworth		12
Lilley		7
Offley	(Cockernhoe)	4
	(Offley)	5
Pirton		9
Preston		7
Reed		5
Royston Town	(Meridian)	5
	(Palace)	5
	(South)	2
	(West)	3
Rushden and Wallington	Rushden	3
	Wallington	2
Sandon		6
St. Ippolyts	(North)	3
	(South)	5
St. Paul`s Walden		7
Therfield		7
Weston		9
Wymondley	(Great Wymondley)	2
	(Little Wymondley)	5
	(Todds Green)	1

Parish Meetings
Clothall
Hexton
Kelshall
Langley
Nuthampstead
Radwell

Unparished Areas

Baldock

Letchworth

Hitchin

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COUNCIL
11 July 2024

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: ANNUAL REPORT ON RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: FINANCE AND IT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: ALL

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To provide the Committee with an update on the effectiveness of the Risk Management Governance arrangements at North Herts Council. The review is referred on to Cabinet and Council to ensure that there is effective oversight of the governance arrangements that are in place.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Full Council notes the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The responsibility for ensuring the management of risks is that of Cabinet, they are assisted by Finance, Audit and Risk Committee who monitor the effective development and operation of Risk Management.

3.2. The Risk Management Strategy and Financial Regulations determine that Council should have overall oversight of Risk Management.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. There are no alternative options that are applicable.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Consultation has been undertaken with Leadership Team and the Risk and Performance Management Group (RPMG). The Executive Member for Finance and IT (as Risk Management Member Champion), the Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny are all invited to RPMG, as well as key Officers.. Lead Officers discuss risks with the relevant Executive Member.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision. It was referred to on the Forward Plan dated 28 March 2024, as it may have been necessary to make a recommendation (e.g. changes to our risk framework) that could have been a key Executive decision.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 In March 2022, Cabinet agreed that risks impacting on the delivery of the Council Plan and linked projects would be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee, along with details of projects and associated performance indicators. This forms part of the now established process in relation to the Council Delivery Plan, along with performance monitoring arrangements. This Committee will focus on its role (as set out in the Constitution) of "monitor[ing] the effective development and operation of risk management". To achieve this, the Committee receives a mid-year (in December) and end of year (in June) report. The June report will focus on the Annual Report of Risk Management, which will also go to Full Council.

7.2 The Executive Member for Finance and IT in their role as the Member Risk Management Champion was a regular attendee at the quarterly RPMG meetings. The items discussed at these meetings informed the content of the committee reports.

7.3 The RPMG is chaired by the Service Director – Resources, the Officer Champion for Risk Management, who is responsible for the risk management function at a strategic and operational level. This function is delivered by the Controls, Risk and Performance Manager and the Performance and Risk Officer, including the provision of training and support to Officers and Members. The terms of reference for the group were reviewed in May 2024 and are included as Appendix A. The change reflects that Service Directors will now all attend the RPMG on a cyclical basis.

7.4 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) delivers the Council's insurance services and their Risk and Insurance Manager attends RPMG meetings. This enables the Council to obtain an insight into emerging risks and issues at both HCC and other Hertfordshire local authorities. The SIAS Client Audit Executive also attends RPMG meetings, helping to inform the group's understanding of wider risk issues.

7.2 These reports provide a wider commentary on Risk, the broader risks and mitigations, and to provide assurance that risk governance arrangements are working, and that effective risk management processes are in place.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE

8.1.1 The Councils Risk Management Framework (RMF) requires us to

- Identify and document key risks in all areas of our business, understand them and seek to proactively manage them.
- Assess each risk, identify existing controls, and further actions required to reduce the risk.
- Have Business Continuity Plans in place for each of our service areas, which identify the key functions, what the risks are and how they can be mitigated to allow them to continue operating.
- Develop capacity and skills in identifying, understanding, and managing the risks facing the Council.
- Regularly review the Risk Management Framework and update it in line with statutory and best practice requirements.

8.2 Risk Identification and Assessment

8.2.1 The Corporate Risks are the responsibility of the Leadership Team and Cabinet, with Cabinet ensuring the risks are managed appropriately and proportionately. These key risks are those that cut across the delivery of all services, related to key projects or could significantly affect the delivery of Council objectives. They are likely to require a high level of resources to manage and needed to be monitored at a strategic level.

8.2.2 The reporting of Corporate Risks to Cabinet via the half yearly FAR Committee report and the Quarterly O&S Council Delivery Plan updates, allows details of the top risks facing the Council and how we were managing them to be approved and monitored accordingly.

8.2.3 At the start of the 2023-24 year there was a risk assessment in place for each of the projects in the Council Delivery Plan. There was also an over-arching risk in relation to staff resource. Of these, 7 were rated as high (red), including the staff resourcing risk. Each risk has been assessed on IdeaGen, and shows an initial risk score, current risk score and a target risk score. The controls and mitigating actions column, sets out how officers are proposing to either reach the target risk score, or maintain the existing risk score, if it has been decided the risk cannot be managed any lower. It should therefore be noted that some risks have been managed as low as possible and the residual risk must therefore be accepted.

8.2.4 The following diagram highlights the definitions of likelihood and impact used in the Risk Management Framework.

4 Likelihood High (3) **Impact Low (1)** Chance of it happening -More than 60% Consequences - Minor	**7 Likelihood High (3)** **Impact Medium (2)** Chance of it happening - More than 60% Consequences - Noticeable effect on the Council	**9 Likelihood High (3)** **Impact High (3)** Chance of it happening - More than 60% Consequences - Significant impact on the Council
2 Likelihood Medium (2) **Impact Low (1)** Chance of it happening – between 20 – 60% Consequences - Minor	**5 Likelihood Medium (2)** **Impact Medium (2)** **Chance of it happening – between 20 – 60%** **Consequences – Noticeable effect on the Council**	**8 Likelihood Medium (2)** **Impact High (3)** Chance of it happening – between 20 – 60% Consequences – Significant impact on the Council
1 Likelihood Low (1) **Impact Low (1)** Chance of it happening – less than 20% Consequences - Minor	**3 Likelihood Low (1)** **Impact Medium (2)** Chance of it happening – less than 20% Consequences – Noticeable effect on the Council	**6 Likelihood Low (1)** **Impact High (3)** Chance of it happening – less than 20% Consequences – Significant impact on the Council

8.2.5 The year-end Council Delivery Plan monitoring report contained the following risks, which have been plotted on the Corporate Risk Matrix to show a visual risk profile of the Plan:

Likelihood	1 - Low	2 - Medium	3 - High
3 - High	**4**	**7**	**9** - Financial Sustainability - Resourcing - Waste and Street Cleansing Contract Procurement - Waste Depots
2 - Medium	**2** - Oughtonhead Common Weir	**5** - Charnwood House - Local Plan Delivery and Review - Museum Storage - New Ways of Delivering Housing on Council Land - EV Charging in our Car Parks - Solar PV on Leisure Centres - Master Planning - Pursue Commercial Leasing Opportunity for Royston Town Hall Annexe - Shared Prosperity Fund - Town Centre Strategies	**8** - Churchgate - Cyber Risks - Increased Levels of Homelessness
1 - Low	**1** - Cycling Network - Empty Homes Strategy - Enterprise Strategy - Finalise Pay on Exit Parking Review - Local Authority Housing Fund - Playground Renovation Programme - Royston LC Solar Thermal - Town Centre Recovery	**3** - Health Inequalities - Leisure Contract Procurement	**6** - Digital Transformation
	1 - Low	**2 - Medium**	**3 - High**
		Impact	

8.2.6 In addition to Corporate Risks, we also document and review service risks. At the end of 2023/24 there were 33 service risks. Nine (9) of these were rated as high (red) risks, 15 as medium (amber) and 9 as low (green) risks. The high rated risks related to:

- Legal Team resources
- Introduction of the Procurement Act 2023 (from Autumn 2024)
- Management of open space in new strategic sites developments
- Sale of recyclable materials

- Increasing groundwater levels at Kimpton
- Delivery of the Waste Collection and Street Cleansing Services contract
- Residual waste transfer arrangements post 2026
- Increased provision of electric vehicle charging on Council premises increasing fire risk
- Implementing a new combined financial management system by the planned August 2024 'go live' date

8.3 **Review of Risks**

8.3.1 Risk reviews are scheduled within IdeaGen, (our performance and risk software, previously known as Pentana) and automated reminders are sent to service areas when risks are due to be reviewed, in line with the RMF requirements. Red Risks are reviewed most regularly – every 3 months, with Amber risks every 6 months and Green risks being reviewed at least once a year. Service areas are assisted by the Performance and Risk Officer to ensure that information is captured in line with the RMF.

8.3.2 During 2023/24, all Corporate Risks were reviewed and updated on a quarterly basis, regardless of the assessed risk level. These reviews were undertaken with the Performance and Risk Officer, as part of preparations for the quarterly Council Delivery Plan monitoring reports.

8.3.3 At the end of 2023/24, out of the 33 service risks, 31 were up to date. These risks had been reviewed during the year and had not yet reached their scheduled next review dates. Two risks were overdue for review. The Procurement Act risk was assessed as high risk and had last been reviewed on 19 December 2023. The scheduled review has now been undertaken (on 17 April 2024), with the delay caused by resourcing issues. The management of open space in new strategic site developments was also assessed as high risk and was last reviewed on 28 November 2023. Again, the scheduled review has now been undertaken (on 22 April 2024), with the delay caused by numerous officers having input into the review process and the review not being finalised until all officer contributions had been considered.

8.4 **New and Archived Risks**

8.4.1 Archived risks for the year are included as Appendix B. Archived risks are risks which have been managed down to business as usual, as per the RMF, or have been replaced by more relevant risks.

8.4.2 New risks for the year are included as Appendix C. New risks are often linked to new projects or events that take place.

8.5 **Risk Awareness and Appetite**

8.5.1 The Council is committed to the proactive identification and management of key external and internal risks that may affect the delivery of objectives. This allows us to be risk aware, understanding that risks may increase as services evolve and more commercial opportunities are developed and undertaken.

8.5.2 The Council's risk appetite is its willingness to accept risks to realise opportunities and achieve objectives. We must take risks and 'be brave' to evolve and to continue to deliver services effectively, deciding what risks we want to take and what ones we want to avoid, whilst acknowledging that we cannot or should not avoid all risks. The Risk Management Framework recognises that risks accompany all new objectives and opportunities, and it provides guidance on managing them appropriately.

8.5.3 In December 2023, the Senior Management Group did an exercise on horizon scanning in relation to risks and opportunities. The results of this were reviewed by the RPMG in February. The risks and opportunities included:

Risks

- Impact of General Election
- The role of our Town centres and the location of employment
- Budget cuts
- Policy direction
- Post Brexit-legislation e.g. in relation to Environmental Health
- Staffing retention – use of agency/consultants
- Cyber attacks
- LATCo (Local Authority Trading Company)- their role and governance
- Skills and knowledge
- Retirements – developing new managers
- Climate change- severe weather events
- Future growth
- Council Tax base
- Infrastructure

Opportunities

- Churchgate regeneration
- New skills and new knowledge
- Four-year administration
- Joint partnerships- working together with other Local Authorities

8.5.4 The RPMG discussed what we should record on IdeaGen in relation to climate change risks, and agreed it should be linked to the next update to the climate change strategy. It also concluded that none of the others needed to be added to the risk register, but were worth keeping an eye on. It was also considered that it was a useful exercise to do, and should be repeated on a regular basis (at least every year).

8.5.5 The Council will have a range of different appetites for different risks depending on the circumstances and these will vary over time. The Risk Management Framework specifies that we will actively manage and monitor risks scoring 4 or higher on the risk matrix. This includes monitoring the completion of risk management activities and assessing their effectiveness.

8.5.6 The FAR Committee has a role in monitoring how effectively the Council delivers against its strategic approach to risk appetite.

9 Insurance Review

9.1 Hertfordshire County Council continued to handle the Council's insurance arrangements under a shared service arrangement. Due to the contract for Engineering Inspection and Insurance ending on 31 March 2024 a tender exercise was carried out and the contract was retained by Zurich Municipal. All other policies were renewed from 1 April 2024. Due to the rising cost of claims in the insurance market, rates were increased by the liability and motor insurers.

9.2 The Council transfers some financial risks to its insurers. Public liability insurance provides the Council with insurance cover for claims made by the public for personal injury and/or property damage. These types of claim are subject to a £10,000 excess that is charged to the responsible service area. Areas that have been subject to a claim are identified and wherever possible, action is taken to prevent future damage to property or personal injury.

9.3 As of 31 March 2024, five insurance claims were received from the public relating to the policy year 2023/24. Although claims are made, these are not always successful for the claimant, as payments of compensation are made only when there is a proven legal liability.

9.4 The Municipal Mutual Insurance (MMI) Scheme of Arrangement was triggered in 2013 and the Council now pays 25% of any new claims dating back to the period that MMI was the Council's insurer (1974 to 1993). The Council's Financial Risks make provision for any new claims and any further levy demands relating to the period that MMI were the Council's insurers. As at 31 March 2024, there are no outstanding claims with MMI.

10 Business Continuity

10.1 Business Continuity Planning (BCP) continues to be a key focus for the Council.The Council has a statutory responsibility under the Civil Contingencies Act to maintain business continuity plans. Our comprehensive structure consists of a number of plans including the main Resilience Plan that provides direction on the Council's corporate response to an emergency/major business disruption and plans at a corporate cross-Council level and operational level.

10.2 During 2023, a new Service Continuity Plan template was developed and issued to critical services, as identified from the previous 2022/23 full Business Impact Assessment (BIA) review process. This examined service functions, impacts of service interruption, key risks for consideration, and dependencies. The Council's list includes 17 critical functions, which were agreed by Leadership Team, and these must be prioritised in the event of a major internal business disruption.

10.3 These 17 Service Continuity Plans have now been completed and the Resilience Team have been working through these and liaising with managers on any areas that require further information. Following completion of the plans, the BCP training schedule will recommence, including training for staff, and a series of exercises to test the new arrangements e.g., tabletop and discussion-based exercises to test corporate arrangements, and service level exercises during 2024/25.

10.4 The review of all Resilience Plans includes taking into account learning from recent exercises, incidents and responses. We have held debriefs for the Baldock industrial estate fire (July 2023) and the DCO Power Outage (Jan 2024), which required Careline to relocate to the Disaster Recovery site. Debrief reports have been produced with actions and recommendations to incorporate into the planning cycle.

10.5 There is continual development of procedures for key business interruption risks e.g., national power outage, loss of IT, cyber attacks, and adverse weather.

10.6 Every year we support the Business Continuity Institutes (BCI) annual Business Continuity Awareness Week (BCAW) campaign. For May 2024, the theme is 'Business Continuity and Resilience Awareness' and we will once again be utilising this campaign to promote information to staff and the public via various communication channels.

10.7 BCP information is available on the Intranet and the Council's website, along with links to additional advice and guidance from HCC and Government.

11 Health and Safety

11.1 We were given notice by the supplier of our compliance contract (including health and safety compliance) that they would terminate their contract early. The termination date was the end of February 2024, but an ongoing core service was provided by HTS until new arrangements came fully into place. The contract provides a H&S compliance servicing regime to both Council properties and community centres. To provide greater resilience the new contract into 3 lots. New contractors were appointed following a tender process and this started on 1st April 2024. Some parts of the old contract have now been taken up by the community centre managers, the Green Space team and Property Services staff.

11.2 A new approach to reviewing legionella risk assessments has been undertaken by Property Services. It has been decided that where the water systems within buildings are currently rated as low risk and have no water due to local isolation (void buildings) or the water system is of simple layout i.e., limited WCs/sinks then the review will be undertaken by in-house staff. If a building is still considered low risk but has a more complex water system i.e., multiple outlets/showers then the review will be put out to our existing contractor.

11.3 We are trying to increase the membership of our staff Health and Safety Group. This includes promoting what the Group is about and the benefits of being a part of the group. This has been through other groups (e.g. Staff Consultation Forum and Leadership Team) and via the intranet.

12 **Actions for 2023/24**

12.1 Last year's Annual Report detailed the following key actions for 2023/24 to enhance our Risk Management processes:

Action	Due Date	Comments
Undertake the annual review of Risk Management Framework documentation.	31/12/23	No change required
Update the Risk Management E- Learning Module on Growzone to reflect the updated Strategy	30/09/23	No change required
Develop Member Training on Risk and deliver to key members of FARC and O&S	31/12/23	Finance and risk training made available to all members in June 23. To carry out more detailed training in 24/25.
Continue to refine the new Council Delivery Plan	31/03/24	It has continually evolved and for 24/25 will have a change of approach for performance indicators.

13 **Actions for 2023/24**

13.1 The following actions are planned for 2024/25 to help ensure the continued development of risk management:

Action	Due Date
Undertake the annual review of Risk Management Framework documentation.	31/12/24
Assess how well the cyclical attendance of Service Directors at RPMG works	31/12/24
SMG review of emerging risks and opportunities	31/12/24
Training for O&S (also open to other Members) on using IdeaGen	30/09/24
Training for FAR (also open to other Members) on carrying out a risk assessment	30/09/24
Continue to refine the Council Delivery Plan	31/03/25

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 The Committee's Terms of Reference include "to monitor the effective development and operation of risk management and corporate governance, agree actions (where appropriate) and make recommendations to Cabinet" (Constitution 10.1.5 (u)).

15. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, it should be noted that there are issues linked to the Resourcing risk (e.g., Cost of Living and inflation) that will affect the Council's financial situation.

16. RISK IMPLICATIONS

16.1 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.

16.2 The Risk and Opportunities Management Strategy requires the Finance Audit and Risk Committee to consider regular reports on the Councils Corporate Risks. Failure to provide the Committee with regular updates would conflict with the agreed Strategy and would mean that this Committee could not provide assurance to Cabinet that the Councils identified Corporate Risks are being managed.

17. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

17.1 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.

17.2 Reporting on the management of risk provides a means to monitor whether the Council are meeting the stated outcomes of the district priorities, its targets or delivering accessible and appropriate services to the community to meet different people's needs. The risks of NHDC failing in its Public Sector Equality Duty are recorded on the Risk Register. The Councils risk management approach is holistic, taking account of commercial and physical risks. It should also consider the risk of not delivering a service in an equitable, accessible manner, and especially to its most vulnerable residents, such as those who are homeless.

18. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

19. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

20. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

20.1 The proposed Resourcing risk highlights the potential impact on staff of taking on new tasks.

21. APPENDICES

22.1. Appendix A: Terms of Reference for RPMG
Appendix B: Archived risks
Appendix C: New risks

22. CONTACT OFFICERS

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Jeanette Thompson, Service Director: Legal and Community
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23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

23.1 None

Risk and Performance Management Group - Terms of Reference

Introduction

Following the endorsement of a Risk & Opportunities Management Strategy and Policy, North Herts Council established a Risk Management Group as part of its corporate governance arrangements. The development of a new Council Delivery Plan, linking risks to projects and performance indicators, further increased the remit of the Group to cover Performance alongside Risk. This led to a change of name to the Risk and Performance Management Group (RPMG).

Purpose

To operate under Terms of Reference that address Leadership Team's approved Risk Management Framework and Performance Management Framework.

Membership

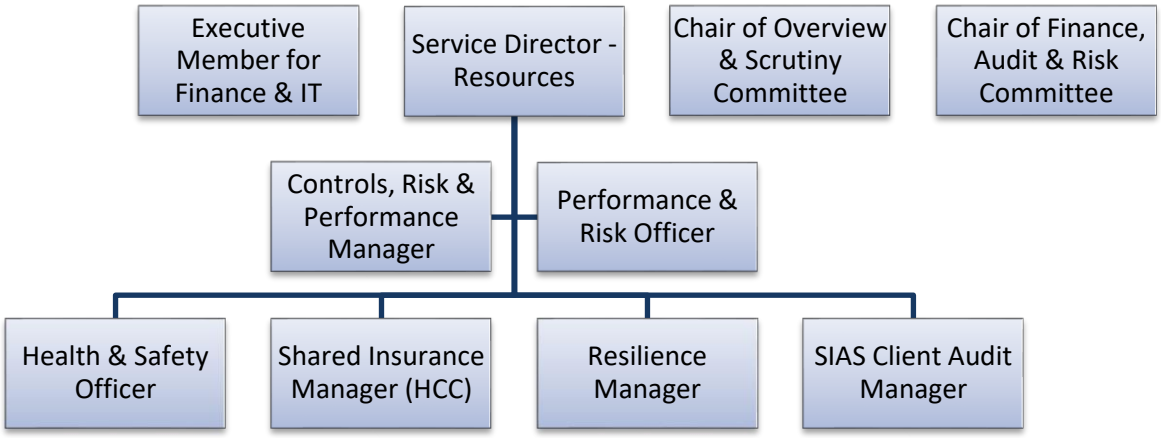
Core RPMG members are Managers and Officers with strong operational knowledge of the Authority's functions who are committed to process and service improvement, and Members fulfilling specific roles (see structure). The RPMG will invite all Service Directors to attend meetings on a rolling basis to provide an overview of key projects and challenges relating to their service areas. Each Service Director will attend at least one meeting per year, in line with the agreed rotation. Where possible, attendance will be scheduled to align with the setting of milestones or assessment of risks for key projects. Other Officers may also be invited, including support functions such as Finance, Legal, and Human Resources, to provide information or give advice and support. A standing invite is also extended to Members of the Overview & Scrutiny and Finance, Audit & Risk Committees. Representatives will:

- Attend meetings.
- Implement the Terms of Reference of the Group.
- Consult other parties as required.
- Communicate the activities of the Group.

Authority

The RPMG is authorised by the Leadership Team to carry out any activities within its approved Terms of Reference.

Core Structure



Duties

The objective of the RPMG is to oversee North Herts Council's Risk and Performance Management Frameworks. The RPMG seeks to focus and coordinate risk and performance management activities throughout the Authority to facilitate the identification, evaluation and management of all key risks and opportunities which may impact on the Council's ability to deliver its Council Plan objectives. To achieve this, the following responsibilities have been set:

1. Maintain risk and performance management as part of the culture at North Herts Council

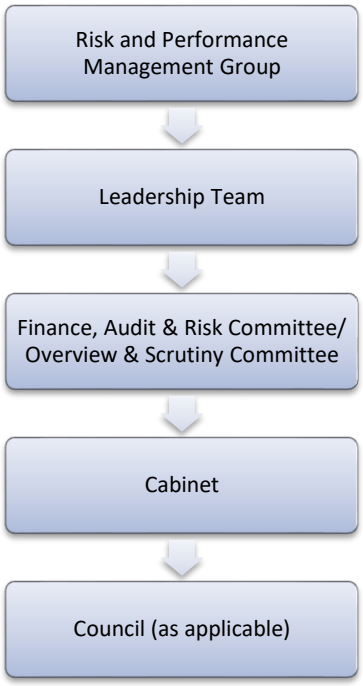
- Maintain the mechanism for risk management to be discussed and disseminated across the Authority.
- Present a comprehensive register of projects and risks to the Leadership Team and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee at least four times a year.
- Provide an update on the effectiveness of the Risk Management Governance arrangements to the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee at least twice a year.
- Support the Controls, Risk & Performance team to effectively implement the Risk Management Framework and the Performance Management Framework, including reviews of risk and performance management training.
- Ensure actions required are given the appropriate level of support and priority.
- Ensure risk identification and actions are included as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.
- Continuously monitor the Risk Register to ensure timely compliance with remedial action and the identification of overlapping risks.
- Ensure Members are involved in the risk and performance management process.
- Provide advice and support to Officers and Members.

2. Targets

Targets	By Whom	Dates
Update individual risks on the Risk Register	Risk Owners/ Service Managers	In line with the frequency set out in the Risk Management Framework, which is determined by the assessed risk level
Identify and assist in prioritising the Corporate Risks and Projects included in the Council Delivery Plan, for consideration by Leadership Team, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet	RPMG	Four times per year – November, February, May, and August
Review the Risk Management Framework and the Performance Management Framework at least every three years and in response to significant corporate changes	RPMG	November (when required)
Provide training to the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee, Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Members, Managers, and Staff	Controls, Risk & Performance Manager/ Performance & Risk Officer	Ongoing (as required or as requested)
Annual Report to Full Council	RPMG/ FAR Committee/ Cabinet	May/June

3. Report Procedures

- The Service Director – Resources/Controls, Risk & Performance Manager will present to Leadership Team and Finance, Audit & Risk Committee a progress report on the governance of risk management at North Herts Council and the activities of the Group. These reports are to be on a half-yearly basis, with an Annual Report from Cabinet to Council. Any major significant issues will be reported to Cabinet/Council as soon as possible.
- The Service Director – Resources/Controls, Risk & Performance Manager will present to Leadership Team and Overview & Scrutiny Committee a quarterly progress report on performance against the Council Delivery Plan. Any major significant changes will be reported to Cabinet/Executive Members as soon as possible. Changes required to the base budget are reported by quarterly budget monitoring reports to Cabinet.



4. Meeting Frequency

The RPMG will meet at least four times per year.

5. Core Roles

Service Director – Resources - Chair
To chair the RPMG and to ensure meetings are held on a regular basis and the minutes are recorded accurately. To champion risk and performance management throughout the Council. To facilitate risk management awareness and improvement at senior management and Member level.

Executive Member for Finance & IT
To champion risk and performance management and facilitate risk management awareness and improvement at Member level. To present the Annual Report to Full Council.

Chair of Finance, Audit & Risk Committee
To comment on the reports presented to highlight any issues and to provide Officers with the opportunity to make relevant changes prior to finalising the reports to Committee.

Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee
To comment on the reports presented to highlight any issues and to provide Officers with the opportunity to make relevant changes prior to finalising the reports to Committee.

Controls, Risk & Performance Manager
To report to RPMG any issues arising from the implementation of the Risk Management Framework and the Performance Management Framework. To write and present Risk Management Governance and Council Delivery Plan reports on the RPMG's behalf. To provide support and advice on risk and performance management issues.

Performance & Risk Officer
To produce the agenda, reports, and minutes for each meeting. To report to RPMG any issues relating to the day-to-day implementation of the Risk Management Framework and

the Performance Management Framework. To prepare Council Delivery Plan monitoring reports. To provide support and guidance on risk and performance management issues.

Health & Safety Officer
To report to RPMG any issues relating to the health and safety of the Council's employees or the public from their employment or use of Council assets.

Shared Insurance Manager (HCC)
To report to RPMG any issues or updates relating to the Council's insurance arrangements and claims. To provide RPMG with advice and information from a wider insurance and risk perspective.

SIAS Client Audit Manager
To provide RPMG with advice and guidance from an internal audit perspective and to highlight significant issues resulting from the internal audit process. To provide wider insight from shared learning.

Resilience Manager
To report to RPMG any issues relating to the Council's Business Continuity functions, and to provide advice and guidance from a Business Continuity perspective.

Reviewed: May 2024
Next Review: May 2027 or sooner if required

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Archived Risks

24 risk entries have been archived since 1 April 2023.

Code	Title	Summary
CDP02	Tourism Strategy	Superseded by new 'Enterprise Strategy' CDP risk for 2023/24.
CDP03	Business Recovery: Grants	Related project completed in 2022/23.
CDP06	Economic Development Strategy	Superseded by new 'Enterprise Strategy' CDP risk for 2023/24.
CDP09	EV Charging for Council Vehicles	Related project completed in 2022/23.
CDP14	Customer Portal	Related project completed in 2022/23.
CDP16	Supplier Self-Service	Originally envisaged CDP project ceased, as new supplier portal being incorporated into the implementation of a new joint cash management and financial system. Implementation due to be completed in 2024/25.
CDP20	Local Plan Implementation	Residual risks managed via new ‘Local Plan Delivery and Review’ CDP risk for 2023/24.
CDP23	Full Review of Council Tax Reduction Scheme	Related project completed in 2022/23.
CDP24	Response to Government Resources and Waste Strategy	Superseded by two new CDP risks for 2023/24 – ‘Waste and Street Cleansing Contract Procurement’ and ‘Waste Depots’.
CDP25	Green Space Management Strategy	Related project completed in 2022/23.
CDP28	Local Government Boundary Review	LGBCE published final recommendations. Approved by Parliament November 2023.
RR320.1	Grounds Maintenance Contract - SLA with settle	New SLA with settle signed and sealed in May 2023.
RR383	Gypsy and Traveller Sites	Following adoption of the Local Plan, we are now able to demonstrate sufficient Gypsy and Traveller provision.
RR484	Renewal of Lease Agreements for Community Facilities	One outstanding community centre lease renewal completed in March 2023. There are no more holding over leases relating to community facilities.
RR493	IT Disaster Recovery	IT disaster recovery arrangements adequate for the organisation and provide fall back options, although it is an ever-evolving issue. Generally, a duplication of the new ‘Cyber Risks’ CDP risk for 2023/24 and adequate response options already in place.

Code	Title	Summary
RR548	Sustainability of Careline Business Model	Risk created in 2014 and no longer represents a significant risk. Now assessed at the target risk level, as risks have been mitigated and new contract with HCC in place. Residual risks managed by business-as-usual activities.
RR558	Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency	HHIA has now been operating for six years. Significant improvements made and an effective management structure in place. Satisfied suitable control measures are in place.
RR568	Regulatory - Staffing	Risk entry out of date due to the referenced service areas now being in two separate directorates. Risks now covered by the 'Resourcing' CDP risk, with effective mitigations likely to be applied corporate wide.
RR577	Impact of Anti-Social Behaviour on Council Facilities	This is an ongoing issue (typically low level) requiring a business-as-usual response. The specific impact on Council property is being substantially managed. Any further controls or mitigating activities will be informed by the number and location of incidents, the level of anti-social behaviour being experienced, and our ability to introduce proportionate measures within available budgets.
RR579	Pool Chemical Shortage	No longer issues with the availability of pool chemicals and supply chain arrangements back to normal.
RR582	Cyber Risks	Superseded by new 'Cyber Risks' CDP risk for 2023/24.
RR586	National and Regional Planning Issues	Risk originally created in 2013 and now out of date due to progress made over the last decade and the adoption of the Local Plan in 2022. Significant items will continue to be reported to Cabinet via Strategic Planning Matters reports. If relevant, individual risk entries to be raised for specific key areas.
RR587	Neighbouring Authorities	Risk originally created in 2013 and now out of date due to changing threats, progress made over the last decade, and the adoption of the Local Plan in 2022. Significant items will continue to be reported to Cabinet via Strategic Planning Matters reports. If relevant, individual risk entries to be raised for specific key areas.

Code	Title	Summary
RR589	Area wide loss of power impacts Careline	The rollout of V3 laptops to Careline staff completed all associated actions to improve the management of this risk. We have now implemented all reasonably practicable controls/measures.

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New Risks

16 new risk entries created since 1 April 2023.

Code	Title	Summary
CDP31	Create and Communicate a Place Narrative for North Herts	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24 – now complete.
CDP32	Enterprise Strategy	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24.
CDP33	Local Plan Delivery and Review	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24.
CDP34	Oughtonhead Common Weir	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24.
CDP35	Playground Renovation Programme	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24.
CDP36	Waste and Street Cleansing Contract Procurement	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24.
CDP37	Waste Depots	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24.
CDP38	Local Authority Housing Fund	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24.
CDP39	Leisure Contract Procurement	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24 – now complete.
CDP40	Solar PV on Leisure Centres	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24 – to be superseded by a new CDP risk for 2024/25 relating to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.
CDP42	Digital Transformation	Introduced alongside new CDP project for 2023/24.
CDP44	Cyber Risks	Included in the CDP for 2023/24, as a significant threat to the delivery of services and projects corporate wide.
RR591	Baldock Industrial Estate Fire	Risks associated with the fire on the Baldock Industrial Estate. Although potentially significant immediately after the event, risk level now reducing.
RR592	Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)	Risks relating to an incomplete picture of RAAC in NHC buildings. Risk level reduced by undertaking a programme of inspections. No RAAC identified.
RR594	EV Charging Points	Increased fire risk to premises associated with an increased provision of EV charging points and risk to future insurance cover should adequate controls not be in place.

Code	Title	Summary
RR595	New Combined Financial Management System	Risks to successful implementation of new combined financial management system and planned August 2024 'go live' date – limited tolerance in project schedule, data extraction, resourcing.

COUNCIL
11 July 2024

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) END OF YEAR REVIEW 2023/24

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: FINANCE AND I.T.

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 As at the end of financial year 2023/24, there is a reduction in Capital spend compared to quarter 3 of **£4.122million**. The majority of this change is due to revisions to the profile of planned project spend, with **£2.851million** that will now instead be incurred in 2024/25 and beyond. In addition, £1.150M of Local Authority Housing Fund was not required.

1.2 During the year the Council has generated **£2.941million** of interest from its investments. This is as budgeted for at Quarter 3 (£2.940M), but significantly more than the original budget of £1.602million.

1.3 The Council has repaid £0.020million of borrowing during the year as it has matured. The Council has £0.347million of remaining borrowing. This borrowing is at a fixed rate for a fixed period. The premium incurred from repaying this borrowing early means that it is not worthwhile to do so.

1.4 The Council complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements throughout the year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Council approve the actual 2023/24 prudential and treasury indicators.

2.2 That Council notes the annual Treasury Report for 2023/24.

2.3 That Council approves a change to the Investment Strategy allowing investments to be placed on Lloyds Call Account so the combined total of Current Account and Call Account is up to £5M.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.

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

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 Options for capital investment are considered as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

4.2 The primary principles governing the Council's investment criteria are the security of its investments (ensuring that it gets the capital invested back) and liquidity of investments (being able to get the funds back when needed). After this the return (or yield) is then considered, which provides an income source for the Council. In relation to this the Council could take a different view on its appetite for risk, which would be reflected in the Investment Strategy. In general, greater returns can be achieved by taking on greater risk. Once the Strategy has been set for the year, there is limited scope for alternative options as Officers will seek the best return that is in accordance with the Investment Strategy.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 Consultation on the capital expenditure report is not required. Members will be aware that consultation is incorporated into project plans of individual capital schemes as they are progressed.

5.2 There are regular meetings with Treasury advisors (Link).

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 28th May 2024.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 In February 2023, Council approved the Integrated Capital and Treasury Strategy for 2023/24 to 2032/33.

7.2 The Council will seek opportunities to utilise capital funding for 'invest to save' schemes. This is one way the Council will allocate resources to support organisational transformation that will reduce revenue expenditure. Capital spend will also be necessary to ensure the continued provision of services and delivery of priorities.

7.3 Link Asset Services Ltd were first contracted to provide Treasury advice for the financial year 2012/13 and this arrangement has been extended until 2025/26. 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 £122.3 million of capital assets that it currently owns (as at 31 March 2024). This has decreased from £124.5 million as at 31 March 2023. 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 Strategy was set.

Capital Programme 2023/24

8.2 The full capital programme is detailed in Appendix A and shows the revised costs to date, together with the actual spend from 2023/24 to 2033/34 and the funding source for each capital scheme.

8.3 The Outturn Capital expenditure for 2023/24 is **£2.409million**. This is a reduction of **£4.122million** on that reported at the end of the third quarter. The decrease in spend is largely due to re-profiling spend into future years. Table 1 below details the changes from what was reported at Quarter 3.

Table 1- Current Capital Estimates

	2023/24 £M	2024/25 £M	2025/26 to 2033/34 £M
Original Estimates approved by Full Council February 2023	**8.516**	**7.427**	**15.624**
Changes approved by Cabinet in 3rd Qrt 2022/23	1.554	0	0
Changes approved by Cabinet in 2022/23 Capital Outturn report	1.221	0	0
Revised Capital estimates at start of 2023/24	**11.291**	**7.427**	**15.624**
Changes at Q1	-0.853	0.686	0.585
New Financial System - Council Approved 28/09/23	0.200	0	0
Changes at Q2	-2.413	1.789	2.109
Executive Member – Finance and I.T. approved additional Expenditure EV Charging Point at the DCO	0.023	0	0
Executive Member – Finance and I.T. approved additional Expenditure NHLC Gym Platform Lift Replacement	0.030	0	0
Changes approved by Full Council 29/02/2024 - Investment Strategy 2024-34	-0.788	12.731	8.832
Changes recommended at Q3	-0.969	0.960	0
Changes approved by Full Council 29/02/2024 - Bring forward £10K of the PSDF capital budget in to 23/24	0.010	-0.010	0
Changes since Q3 (as detailed in this report)	-4.122	2.654	193
Outturn 2023/24	**2.409**	**26.237**	**27.343**

8.4 Table 2 lists the schemes in the 2023/24 Capital Programme that will start or continue in 2024/25:

Table 2: Scheme Timetable Revision:
(Key: - = reduction in capital expenditure, + = increase in capital expenditure)

Scheme	2023/24 Working Budget £'000	2023/24 Outturn £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2024/25 onwards £'000
Local Authority Housing Fund Pt2	1,424	274	-1,150	As at 31st March, three properties had been delivered, with one expected to be completed in April. The original allocation was for 8 properties and reflected interest from a number of Registered Providers. In the end only settle were able to deliver their allocation (of 4 properties). One of the properties was the capital refurbishment of an existing property which therefore cost less than acquiring/ building a property. The other three properties also cost less than the total amount available from the grant. The grant has funded around 50% of the total cost, with the remainder coming from settle.	107
Cycle Strategy Implementation	278	0	-278	Currently working in partnership with HCC following adoption of the Local Cycling Walking & Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in September 2023 to move the spend of this fund forward in 24/25.	278
Transport Plans Implementation	250	0	-250	Work is ongoing with regard the preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents including sustainable transport measures which will be used to identify possible schemes that could be part funded from this budget.	250
Parking Charging Payments Management	235	0	-235	The procurement process for the new parking machines is complete. The locations and installation of the new machines is now being worked through with the supplier.	235
S106 Funding for additional Social Housing	385	192	-193	Payments are made in two tranches, 50% at start on site and 50% at practical completion. The remaining £192K will be paid in December 2025/ January 2026.	193

Scheme	2023/24 Working Budget £'000	2023/24 Outturn £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2024/25 onwards £'000
Green Infrastructure Implementation	185	0	-185	Following the legislative changes around 'Biodiversity Net Gain', consideration will be given to the future spend of the fund.	185
Technology One Implementation	200	44	-156	Project always planned to continue in to 24/25 with a go-live date of August 24. All the budget was allocated in to 2023/24 to provide flexibility over when it could be spent.	156
Playground Renovation 23/24	180	28	-152	Due to supply chain issues and particularly wet ground conditions the commencement of works was later than anticipated. The wet weather impacted the appointed contractors anticipated commencement due to unforeseen impacts on other contracts outside North Herts. Since works have started on site several days have also been lost due to the ongoing wet weather.	152
Parking Machines Replacement	150	9	-141	The procurement process for the new parking machines is complete. The locations and installation of the new machines is now being worked through with the supplier for installation to commence in 24/25	141
CCTV Replacement	190	58	-132	Upgrade works in Letchworth and Hitchin will take place in April / May 2024. Royston and Baldock have been completed.	132
Match Funding Electric Vehicle charging	100	0	-100	The procurement exercise in appointing an EV ChargePoint supplier is near completion as is the submission for Government grant funding. Subject to a successful bid and grant funding still being available the implementation of EV Charge points across our car parks will commence in the 24/25 financial year.	100
Environmental Improvements to Leisure Centres	147	69	-78	Due to delays, works were not carried out by the previous leisure operator (SLL) prior to 31 March 2024. Therefore, request to carry forward spend to enable new operator Everyone Active to carry out outstanding elements in 2024/25.	78

Scheme	2023/24 Working Budget £'000	2023/24 Outturn £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2024/25 onwards £'000
Newark Close Road Replacement	65	0	-65	Ongoing review to finalise the extent of the works required. So the actual works will take place in 24/25.	65
Property Improvements	100	35	-65	The underspend is due to a number of reasons. 1) Some works identified by previous surveys as being required in the future have found not to be necessary by our Building Surveyor and a variety of works that were previously funded from this capital budget do not meet the criteria to be capitalised and consequently are funded through the revenue budget. 2) Some premises are awaiting longer term strategic decisions from Estates on their future. 3) Resourcing in the team creates delays, with timing based on assessed priorities.	65
Upgrade 25 Parking Machines	56	0	-56	The procurement process for the new parking machines is complete. The locations and installation of the new machines is now being worked through with the supplier. It is anticipated some existing machine will remain to cater for a cash option.	56
Install On Street Charging	50	0	-50	This project has been put on hold while undertaking a detailed feasibility study on alternative methods of payment which links in with the overall Parking Charging Payments Management System.	50
Community Facilities Refurbishment	94	46	-48	The final applicant has made some amendments to the original specification. Once planning permission has been agreed then funding will be spent in 24/25	48

Scheme	2023/24 Working Budget £'000	2023/24 Outturn £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2024/25 onwards £'000
Off Street Car Parks Resurfacing	40	-8	-48	The car parks are assessed for future planned works in order to set capital budgets. However, the condition of car parks is regularly checked and if found to be in reasonable condition, capital works are pushed back. The planned works in 23/24 were not required and can now take place in 24/25. Note that the negative outturn figure is due to an over provision of an accrual from 22/23.	40
Oughtonhead Common Weir	80	36	-44	Currently seeking appropriate permissions from Environment Agency and also Planning Permission before tendering delivery of the works.	44
Charnwood House	50	9	-41	Works in progress, delayed due to requirement to move telephone cables.	41
Bancroft & Priory Splash Pads	35	0	-35	Works have commenced and will be complete as part of the getting ready for the new season.	35
Bury Mead Road Transfer Facility	30	0	-30	Delays to the building of a Northern Transfer Station by HCC mean that this facility will continue to be needed and will require investment. It is likely that we will need to contribute towards that investment.	30
Resurface Lairage Car Park	30	0	-30	Our Building Surveyor has met with suppliers to discuss the proposed works and they have all have raised concerns around access to the site which will hinder material delivery and are unable to provide quotations. Our Building Surveyor is currently exploring alternative material surface covering and suppliers.	30

Scheme	2023/24 Working Budget £'000	2023/24 Outturn £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2024/25 onwards £'000
Infrastructure Hardware 2	28	0	-28	We are currently in the process of changing our Cyber Protection software and Email Protection software. We wish to carry forward the relevant hardware spends to purchase technology that will be more compatible and enhance some of the features of the new software that we will have in May 2024. Purchasing the hardware more suited to the new technology will return greater value.	28
Home Repair Assistance	30	3	-27	The Carry forward will enable more of our residents the opportunity to seek financial assistance should they need to, and should they qualify. The underspend is due in part to the limited number of qualifying applicants who contacted us during 2023/24, but also due to our limitation in being able to publicise and promote the resource to a wider range of our residents as much as we would otherwise wish to due to our long-standing and protracted staffing issues.	27
Total Minor (under £25k) slippage on other projects	423	140	-283		285
Changes to 24/25 Budget					-3
Total Revision to Budget Profile			**-3.900**		**2.848**

8.5 There are also changes to the overall costs of schemes in 2023/24. These changes total a net decrease of £0.404million and are detailed in Table3.

Table 3: Changes to Capital Schemes Commencing in 2023/24:
(Key: - = reduction in capital expenditure, + = increase in capital expenditure)

Scheme	2023/24 Working Budget £'000	2023/24 Spend £'000	Difference £'000	Comments
S106 Projects	31	127	96	A total of £127k of S106 funds have been released for community schemes.
Shared Prosperity Fund	20	66	46	The Shared Prosperity Fund is a mixture of revenue and capital funding, with a minimum that must be spent on capital but capital spend can be higher than the minimum amount. This is funding for town centre improvements, and more of it relates to capital than expected. It will still be fully funded from the available grant,
Local Authority Housing Fund	543	248	-295	One of the properties was the capital refurbishment of an existing property, which therefore cost less than acquiring/ building a property. The other two properties also cost less than the total amount available from the grant. Three properties were successfully delivered by Settle, in line with the grant. The grant has funded around 50% of the total cost, with the remainder coming from Settle.
Mrs Howard Hall Boiler/windows	63	0	-63	Budget no longer required. Original budget was to fund works to the boilers, windows and floors as part of a new lease. However, the costs were covered by a £36,000 Community Facility Grants Fund and the granting of an extended rent-free period to the tenant. Consequently, the allowance in thecapital budget is not required.
Centros Integra Upgrade	0	-41	-41	Over provision of accruals in 22/23.
Other minor changes			**35**	
Total revision to scheme spend			**-222**	

8.6 The following capital schemes have been completed during 2023/24:

- Completion of all remaining works on the Playground Renovation projects for 22/23
- Avenue Park Floodlights
- Bancroft Kiosk
- Electric Vehicle Charging Points at DCO
- Howard Gardens Splashpad

- Icknield Way Cemetery Resurfacing
- Lairage Lifts Refurbishment
- NHLC Gym toilets refurbishment
- NHLC Reconfiguration of Reception
- NHLC Soft Play
- Renovate Howard Park Play Area
- RLC Swim Showers and Change Village
- Thomas Bellamy House Structural works

Capital Programme 2023/24 Funding onwards

8.7 Table 4 below shows how the Council have funded the 2023/24 capital programme.

Table 4: Funding the Capital Programme:

	2023/24 Balance at start of year £M	2023/24 Additions £M	2023/24 Funding Used £M	2023/24 Balance at end of year £M
Useable Capital Receipts and Set-aside Receipts	5.477	0.750	(1.313)	4.914
S106 receipts			(0.344)	
Other third party grants and contributions			(0.752)	
Revenue Contributions / IT Reserve			0	
Planned Borrowing			0	
Total			**(2.409)**	

8.8 The availability of third party contributions and grants to fund capital investment is continuously sought in order to reduce pressure on the Council's available capital receipts and allow for further investment. Additional capital receipts are dependent on selling surplus land and buildings. Ensuring that the Council gets best value from the disposal of land and buildings can take a long time and therefore the amounts that might be received could be subject to change.

8.9 The Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) at 31st March 2024 was negative £2.583 million (negative £2.719 million 31st March 2023). As the CFR is negative the Council does not have a need to borrow to fund capital spend. However, should the Capital programme be fully spent in 24/25 there will be a potential need to borrow £11.7M. This will have an impact on the revenue budget by way of a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) charge in 25/26. We will look to borrow internally against cash reserves, so as the money is spent it will reduce the income we generate from treasury investments (which is currently over 5%, but is expected to decrease over time).

Treasury Management 2023/24

8.10 The Council has operated both within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and in compliance with the Treasury Management Practices.

8.11 The Council generated £2.941M of interest during 2023/24. The average interest rate agreed on new deals during the year was 5.34%. The average interest rate on all outstanding investments at the 31st March was 5.57%.

8.12 The Council's activities expose it to a variety of risks (credit, liquidity and market). The Treasury Strategy sets out the Authority's appetite for the level of exposure to these risks.

8.13 **Security Risk** – The possibility that other parties fail to pay amounts due to the Authority.

The Council's counterparty list for 2023/24 comprised UK building societies and UK banks with a Fitch (a credit rating agency) credit rating greater than BBB, non-UK banks with a credit rating greater than AA- with a AAA Country rating, other Local Authorities and Public Corporations. It also includes smaller Building Societies that do not have a credit rating.

8.14 **Liquidity Risk** – the possibility that the Authority may not have funds available to meet its commitments to make payments.

8.15 **Market Risk** - the possibility that financial loss might arise as a result of changes in interest rates.

Investing long term (greater than one year) currently achieves lower interest rates than short term deals. The risks of long term deals are:

(i) The longer the time period the longer the investment is exposed to default.
(ii) If the investment has a fixed interest rate, interest rates could rise and the potential to invest at a higher rate will be lost until the investment matures. Conversely, rates could fall and it is better to have locked in to a higher rate.

8.16 Members have indicated that they are prepared to accept this risk within the limits expressed in the Treasury Strategy, which allows no more than £17M of outstanding investments to be invested for longer than 365 days at any one time. At the end of the year the Council had one investment for £2M invested for longer than 365 days (commencing 20/03/24). This reflects that interest rates have continued to rise during the year and not wanting to lock in to a longer term fixed rate that was too low.

8.17 **Interest (Yield)** – The Bank of England increased Bank Rate three times during 2023/24 starting the year at 4.25% and ending at 5.25%. With investments being kept relatively short the yield on investments increased as the year went on. £2.941million of interest was received during the year compared to £1.310million in 2022/23.

8.18 The investments outstanding at the 31 March 2024 were £46.0million. This compares to a balance of £50.5million at 31 March 2023. Investment in capital projects will continue

during 2024/25 and the estimated investment interest for 2024/25 was set at £1.150million. This estimate will be revised in the 1st quarter monitoring report to reflect a higher level of balances available to invest due to capital slippage and a higher interest rate than anticipated.

Call Account

8.19 We can now access a Call Account that is provided by Lloyds Bank alongside our current account. The Call Account allows fee-free transfers from and to our current account. Funds can be moved in to the Call Account for any period, including overnight. The Call Account currently pays interest at around 5%, compared to 2% for the current account,. We have been using the Call Account and treating it as an investment with Lloyds Bank. This has been done in accordance with the Investment Strategy which (for 24/25) allows up to £3m to be invested with any bank. For Lloyds Bank this is on top of the £5m current account limit. The way we have been using the Call Account is partly instead of our current account i.e. we have regularly transferred some of the balance that would otherwise have been in the current account to generate more interest. Therefore it is proposed (in the recommendation to Council) that the Call Account should form part of an overall £5m limit jointly with the current account.

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.

9.5 Council's terms of reference at paragraph 4.4.1 (dd) state that it will "determine those financial matters reserved to Council by the Financial Regulations". The Financial Regulations at paragraph 13.2 include that Council will receive and Annual Review of the Treasury Management Strategy. In relation to the proposed change to the Investment Strategy for the current year, the Council's terms of reference at paragraph 4.4.1 (cc) state that it will "approv[e] the Treasury Management Strategy".

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The main financial implications are covered in section 8 of the report.

10.2 The Authority operates a tolerance limit on capital projects that depends on the value of the scheme and on this basis over the next ten-year programme it should be anticipated that the total spend over the period could be £4.665million higher than the budgeted £53.580million.

10.3 The capital programme will need to remain under close review due to the limited availability of capital resources and the affordability in the general fund of the cost of using the Council's capital receipts. When capital receipts are used and not replaced the availability of cash for investment reduces. Consequently interest income from investments reduces. £1.0million currently earns the Authority approximately £53k per year in interest (5.3%). The general fund estimates are routinely updated to reflect the reduced income from investments. When the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) reaches zero the Council will need to start charging a minimum revenue provision to the general fund for the cost of capital and will need to consider external borrowing for further capital spend. The CFR at the 31 March 2024 was negative £2.583million. This may turn positive in 24/25 if the capital programme is fully spent.

10.4 The Council also aims to ensure that the level of planned capital spending in any one year matches the capacity of the organisation to deliver the schemes to ensure that the impact on the revenue budget of loss of cash-flow investment income is minimised.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 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 Board (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 2023/24 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 2023/24 onwards.
Appendix B, Treasury Management Update.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Investment Strategy (Integrated Capital and Treasury Strategy)
https://srvmodgov01.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s21481/INVESTMENT%20STRATEGY%20INTEGRATED%20CAPITAL%20AND%20TREASURY.pdf
https://srvmodgov01.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s21482/Final%20Council%20Appendix%20A-%20Integrated%20Capital%20and%20Treasury%20Strategy.docx.pdf
https://srvmodgov01.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s21567/Appendix%20A1%20-%20Full%20Capital%20Programme%202022-23v4.pdf

									Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2023/24 Funding £	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 Funding £	2029/30 - 2033/34 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	0	12,000	14,000	0	0	16,000	0	0	0	0	0	42,000
Air Handling Humidification	Enterprise	0	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,000
Alternative to safeword tokens for staff/members working remotely	Customers	0	9,900	0	3,000	0	19,000	0	0	0	0	0	31,900
Audio Improvements to Mountford Hall	Enterprise	0	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,000
Avenue Park Floodlights	Place	2,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,400
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
Baldock Town Hall project	Legal and Community	4,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,100
Bancroft & Priory Splash Pads	Place	0	35,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35,000
Bancroft Kiosk	Place	800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	800
Bancroft Lighting	Place	0	45,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45,000
Burials Database System	Place	0	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,000
Burymead Road Transfer Facility	Place	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Cabinet Switches - 4 Floors	Customers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cadcorp Local Knowledge & Notice Board Software	Customers	0	5,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200	5,200
Careline Laptops	Customers	5,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	5,100	0	0	0	0
CCTV at DCO & Hitchin Town Hall	Customers	5,100	14,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
CCTV Replacement	Customers	58,100	131,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	190,000
Charnwood House	Enterprise	9,400	390,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	400,000
Community Centres Flat Roof Safety Barriers	Resources	0	43,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43,000
Conference Calling Solutions in Large Meeting Rooms at District Council Offices	Customers	0	13,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13,000
Council property improvements following condition surveys	Resources	34,800	165,200	100,000	100,000	85,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	485,000
Cyber Attacks - Events Monitoring Software Solution	Customers	0	2,000	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
Data Switch Upgrade	Customers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disabled Facilities Grant	Regulatory	-5,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-5,700
DR Hardware Refresh Inc UPS Battery Pk (unit 3)	Customers	0	0	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,000
Email Encryption Software Solution	Customers	2,700	17,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,400
Enhancements to Hitchin Swim Centre facility	Place	58,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	58,900
Environmental Improvements	Place	69,000	78,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	147,300
EV Charging Point at the DCO	Resources	24,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24,900
Fibre Waste Bins	Place	0	0	1,170,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,170,000
Former Public Convenience Portmill Lane	Enterprise	0	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
Green Infrastructure implementation (GAF)	Regulatory	0	185,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	185,000	0	0	0
Grounds Maintenance Vehicles & Machinery	Resources	0	315,000	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	0	75,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	75,000
Hitchin Swim Centre Café	Place	0	19,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19,000
Hitchin Swimn Centre Pool View	Place	0	70,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	70,000
Hitchin Swim Centre Reception Toilet Refurbishment	Place	0	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Hitchin Swim Centre: Archers Member Change and Relaxation Area Refurbishment	Place	0	0	300,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300,000

									Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2023/24 Funding £	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 Funding £	2029/30 - 2033/34 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: Changing Village Refurbishment	Place	0	0	0	225,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	225,000
Hitchin Swim Centre: Fitness Equipment Replacement	Place	0	0	371,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	371,700
Hitchin Town Hall Kitchen Enhancement	Enterprise	0	0	0	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
Howard Gardens Splashpad	Place	17,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17,400
Howard Park Kiosk Refurbishment	Enterprise	15,400	14,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Howard Park Letchworth Path Resurfacing	Place	0	20,000	0	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Icknield Way Cemetery Letchworth Road and Path Resurfacing	Place	100,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,500
Infrastructure Hardware	Customers	0	375,000	0	18,000	18,000	190,000	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
Inrtegra Centros	Resources	-41,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-41,200
Ivel Springs Footpaths	Place	0	10,000	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	0	0	55,000
John Barker Place, Hitchin	Regulatory	0	1,096,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	270,400	0	825,600
Lairage Multi-Storey Car Par - Structural wall repairs	Resources	2,800	111,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	113,900
Lairage Lifts Refurbishment	Resources	-2,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-2,400
Laptops- Refresh Programme	Customers	43,900	40,000	319,000	49,000	35,000	40,000	443,000	0	0	0	0	969,900
Lease Cars	Resources	0	141,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	141,000
Leisure Condition Survey Enhancements	Place	58,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	58,800
Letchworth Multi-storey Car Park - parapet walls, soffit & decoration	Resources	0	129,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	129,000
Letchworth OD Pool Café	Place	0	53,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	53,000
Local Authority Housing Fund	Regulatory	247,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	247,500	0	0	0
Local Authority Housing Fund Pt 2	Regulatory	273,700	107,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	380,700	0	0	0
Match funding for Electric Vehicle charging	Regulatory	0	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000
Members Laptops Refresh Programme	Customers	29,900	0	0	30,000	0	0	60,000	0	0	0	0	119,900
Microsoft Enterprise Software Assurance	Customers	18,600	0	679,000	0	0	747,000	747,000	0	0	0	0	2,191,600
Museum Storage Facility	Enterprise	0	2,000,000	2,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,000,000
Newmarket Road Royston Skatepark & Access	Place	24,400	75,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000	0	0
NH Museum & Community Facility	Enterprise	0	48,300	0	0	0	0	0	48,300	0	0	0	0
NHLC Air Handling Units	Place	0	250,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	250,000
NHLC Café	Place	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
NHLC Gym Platform Lift Replacement	Place	14,300	15,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
NHLC Gym Equipment	Place	0	434,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	434,000
NHLC Gym Refubishment	Place	0	292,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	292,000
NHLC Gym toilets and accessible toilet refurbishment	Place	39,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	39,200
NHLC Interactive Water Feature	Place	0	0	0	0	120,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	120,000
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	0	0	250,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	250,000
NHLC Pool Flume Replacement	Place	0	0	0	0	0	150,000	0	0	0	0	0	150,000
NHLC Pool View	Place	0	110,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	110,000
NHLC Reconfiguration of Reception Area	Place	28,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28,500
NHLC Soft Play	Place	112,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	112,500
Northern Transfer Station	Place	0	0	0	3,000,000	3,000,000	0	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

									Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2023/24 Funding £	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 Funding £	2029/30 - 2033/34 Funding £	Funded from Other Grants	Funded from Government Grant	Funded from s106 contributions	Funded from Revenue / IT Reserve	Balance funded from Capital Receipts/ Set-aside receipts/ Borrowing
Norton Common Footpaths	Place	0	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000
Norton Common Letchworth Tennis Courts	Place	0	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
Off Street Car Parks resurfacing and enhancement	Resources	-7,500	100,000	50,000	59,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	201,900
Old Hale Way Allotments Hitchin	Place	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Oughtonhead Common Footpaths	Place	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Oughtonhead Common Hitchin Weir	Place	36,400	363,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	400,000
Oughtonhead Common Signage and Interpretation	Place	0	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000
Parking Charging, Payments & Management	Regulatory	0	235,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	235,000
Parking Machines Replacement	Regulatory	8,800	291,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300,000
Parking Machines Upgrade - Contactless Payment Facility Installation	Regulatory	0	56,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	42,000	0	0	14,000
PC's - Refresh Programme	Customers	2,700	26,600	7,000	8,000	5,000	8,000	13,000	0	0	0	0	70,300
Playground Renovation District Wide	Place	111,900	331,700	180,000	180,000	180,000	180,000	900,000	0	0	0	0	2,063,600
Priory Memorial Gardens MUGA Royston	Place	0	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,000
Private Sector Grants	Regulatory	3,400	204,700	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	300,000	0	0	0	0	748,100
Provide housing at market rents.	Enterprise	13,000	22,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35,100
Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund	Place	12,900	10,790,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	7,730,100	0	0	3,072,900
Ransom 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	46,000	47,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	93,800
Refuse and Recycling Bins	Place	149,700	90,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	270,000	0	0	0	0	869,700
Remote testing equipment - Emergency Lights and Water Temperature Monitoring	Resources	0	0	13,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13,000
Renovate skate park at KGV Hitchin	Place	1,300	248,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	250,000
Replacement of Newark Close, Royston	Enterprise	0	65,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	65,000
Replacement of the timber access bridge at Norton Common	Place	0	75,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	75,000
Resurface Lairage Car Park	Resources	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 swim showers and change village toilet refurbishment	Place	88,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	88,400
RLC Café	Place	0	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Royston Leisure Centre Dry Side Toilet Refurbishment	Place	0	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Royston Leisure Centre extension	Place	0	1,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	168,000	0	832,000
RLC Pool View	Place	0	70,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	70,000
RLC Gym Equipment	Place	0	0	349,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	349,800
RLC Gym Refubishment	Place	0	0	452,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	452,000
RLC Learner Pool	Place	0	2,500,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,500,000
Royston Leisure Centre Members Changing Refurbishment	Place	0	200,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200,000
S106 Projects	Various	126,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	126,700	0	0
S016 Funding for additional social housing	Regulatory	192,500	0	192,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	385,000	0	0
Security - Firewalls	Customers	0	23,600	0	18,000	0	18,000	0	0	0	0	0	59,600

									Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2023/24 Funding £	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 Funding £	2029/30 - 2033/34 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
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Intervention: Community Engagement Schemes	Enterprise	0	163,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	163,000	0	0	0
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Intervention: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces	Enterprise	66,100	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	166,100	0	0	0
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Intervention: Local sports facilities, tournaments, teams and leagues	Resources	109,900	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	209,900	0	0	0
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Interventions	Resources	50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50,000	0	0	0
St Johns Cemetery Footpath	Place	0	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Swinburne Recration Ground Hitchin	Place	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Tablets - Android Devices	Customers	22,800	13,900	10,000	10,000	4,000	4,000	12,000	0	0	0	0	76,700
Technology One Financial System	Resources	44,200	155,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200,000
Telephony system	Customers	3,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,200
Thomas Bellamy House, Hitchin	Enterprise	58,300	6,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	64,300
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 Vehicles	Place	0	0	8,500,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,200,000	5,300,000
Weston Hills Baldock	Place	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Weston Hills LNR Footpath Renovation	Place	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
WiFi Upgrade	Customers	0	0	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Wilbury Hills Cemetery Footpaths	Place	15,200	10,000	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,200
		2,409,300	**26,237,300**	**15,303,000**	**4,165,400**	**3,607,000**	**1,522,000**	**2,745,000**	**303,400**	**9,752,300**	**1,115,100**	**3,200,200**	**41,618,000**

Annual Treasury Management Review
2023/24

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Annual Treasury Management Review 2023/24

Purpose

This Council is required by regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 to produce an annual treasury management review of activities and the actual prudential and treasury indicators for 2023/24. This report meets the requirements of both the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management, (the Code), and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, (the Prudential Code).

During 2023/24 the minimum reporting requirements were that the Full Council should receive the following reports:

- an annual treasury strategy in advance of the year (Council 23/02/2023)
- a mid-year, (minimum), treasury update report (Council 25/01/2024)
- an annual review following the end of the year describing the activity compared to the strategy, (this report)

In addition, Cabinet and the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee have received quarterly treasury management update reports.

The regulatory environment places responsibility on members for the review and scrutiny of treasury management policy and activities. This report is, therefore, important in that respect, as it provides details of the outturn position for treasury activities and highlights compliance with the Council's policies previously approved by members.

This Council confirms that it has complied with the requirement under the Code to give prior scrutiny to all of the above treasury management reports by the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee before they were reported to Cabinet / Full Council . Members are provided with an annual training session on Local Government finance, which takes place in June each year. All members are invited, with a focus on new members attending. Members of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee are provided with a short training session before most meetings. The content of these sessions is guided by Members needs, and treasury management will be considered as a topic for 2024/25.

Executive Summary

During 2023/24, the Council complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements. The key actual prudential and treasury indicators detailing the impact of capital expenditure activities during the year, with comparators, are as follows:

Prudential and treasury indicators	31.3.23 Actual £m	2023/24 Original £m	31.3.24 Actual £m
Capital Expenditure	6.923	8.516	2.409
Capital Financing Requirement	-2.719	-1.500	-2.583
Gross borrowing	0.367	0.347	0.347
External debt	0.367	0.347	0.347
Investments	50.500	40.685	46.000
Net borrowing	-50.133	-40.338	-45.653

Other prudential and treasury indicators are to be found in the main body of this report. The Director of Finance also confirms that no new borrowing was undertaken and the statutory borrowing limit, (the authorised limit), was not breached.

Introduction and Background

This report summarises the following:-

- Capital activity during the year;
- Impact of this activity on the Council's underlying indebtedness, (the Capital Financing Requirement);
- The actual prudential and treasury indicators;
- Overall treasury position identifying how the Council has borrowed in relation to this indebtedness, and the impact on investment balances;
- Summary of interest rate movements in the year;
- Detailed debt activity; and
- Detailed investment activity.

1. The Council's Capital Expenditure and Financing

The Council undertakes capital expenditure on long-term assets. These activities may either be:

- Financed immediately through the application of capital or revenue resources (capital receipts, capital grants, revenue contributions etc.), which has no resultant impact on the Council's borrowing need; or
- If insufficient financing is available, or a decision is taken not to apply resources, the capital expenditure will give rise to a borrowing need.

The actual capital expenditure forms one of the required prudential indicators. The table below shows the actual capital expenditure and how this was financed.

£m General Fund	31.3.23 Actual	2023/24 Budget	31.3.24 Actual
Capital expenditure	**6.923**	**8.516**	**2.409**
Financed in year	5.192	7.610	2.273
Unfinanced capital expenditure	**1.731**	**0.906**	**0.136**

2. The Council's Overall Borrowing Need

The Council's underlying need to borrow for capital expenditure is termed the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). This figure is a gauge of the Council's indebtedness. The CFR results from the capital activity of the Council and resources used to pay for the capital spend. It represents the 2023/24 unfinanced capital expenditure (see above table), and prior years' net or unfinanced capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for by revenue or other resources.

Part of the Council's treasury activities is to address the funding requirements for this borrowing need. Depending on the capital expenditure programme, the treasury service organises the Council's cash position to ensure that sufficient cash is available to meet the capital plans and cash flow requirements. This may be sourced through borrowing from external bodies, (such as the Government, through the Public Works Loan Board [PWLB], or the money markets), or utilising temporary cash resources within the Council.

The Council's 2023/24 MRP Policy, (as required by DLUHC Guidance), was approved as part of the Treasury Management Strategy Report for 2023/24 on 23/02/2023.

The Council's CFR for the year is shown below, and represents a key prudential indicator.

CFR (£m): General Fund	31.3.23 Actual £m	2023/24 Working Budget £m	31.3.24 Actual £m
Opening balance	-4.446	-2.375	-2.719
Add unfinanced capital expenditure (as above)	1.731	0.906	0.136
Less Finance Lease Repayments	0.004	0.004	0.004
Closing balance	-2.719	-1.465	-2.579

The negative closing balances mean that the Council does not have a need to borrow.

Borrowing activity is constrained by prudential indicators for gross borrowing and the CFR, and by the authorised limit.

Gross borrowing and the CFR - in order to ensure that borrowing levels are prudent over the medium term and only for a capital purpose, the Council should ensure that its gross external borrowing does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the capital financing requirement in the preceding year (2023/24) plus the estimates of any additional capital financing requirement for the current (2024/25) and next two financial years. This essentially means that the Council is not borrowing to support revenue expenditure. This indicator allows the Council some flexibility to borrow in advance of its immediate capital needs. The table below highlights the Council's gross borrowing position against the CFR. The Council has complied with this prudential indicator as all borrowing is historic and it is not economical to repay it.

	31.3.23 Actual £m	2023/24 Budget £m	31.3.24 Actual £m
Gross borrowing position	0.367	0.347	0.347
CFR	-2.719	-1.465	-2.579

The authorised limit - the authorised limit is the "affordable borrowing limit" required by s3 of the Local Government Act 2003. Once this has been set, the Council does not have the power to borrow above this level. The table below demonstrates that during 2023/24 the Council has maintained gross borrowing within its authorised limit.

The operational boundary – the operational boundary is the expected borrowing position of the Council during the year. Periods where the actual position is either below or over the boundary are acceptable subject to the authorised limit not being breached.

Actual financing costs as a proportion of net revenue stream - this indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital, (borrowing and other long term obligation costs net of investment income), against the net revenue stream.

	2023/24 £m
Authorised limit	7.0
Maximum gross borrowing position during the year	0.367
Operational boundary	2.0
Average gross borrowing position	£0.358m
Financing costs as a proportion of net revenue stream	-15.77%

3. Treasury Position as of 31st March 2024

The Council's treasury management debt and investment position is organised by the treasury management service in order to ensure adequate liquidity for revenue and capital activities, security for investments and to manage risks within all treasury management activities. Procedures and controls to achieve these objectives are well established both through member reporting detailed in the summary, and through officer activity detailed in the Council's Treasury Management Practices. At the end of 2023/24 the Council's treasury position was as follows:-

DEBT PORTFOLIO	31.3.23 Principal £m	Rate/ Return	31.3.24 Principal £m	Rate/ Return
Fixed rate funding:				
-PWLB	0.367	10.28%	0.347	10.48
-Market	0		0	
Variable rate funding:				
-PWLB	0		0	
-Market	0		0	
Total debt	**0.367**	**10.28%**	**0.347**	**10.48**
CFR	**-2.719**		**-2.579**	
Over / (under) borrowing	**3.086**		**2.926**	
Total investments	**50.5**	**4.19%**	**46.0**	**5.57%**
Net debt	**50.133**		**45.653**	

The maturity structure of the debt portfolio was as follows:

	31.3.23 Actual £'000	31.3.24 Actual £'000
Under 12 months	21	21
12 months and within 24 months	21	20
24 months and within 5 years	50	40
5 years and within 10 years	25	15
10 years and above	250	250

INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO	31.3.23 Actual £m	31.3.22 Actual %	31.3.23 Actual £m	31.3.23 Actual %
Treasury investments				
Banks	11.0	22	2.0	4
Building Societies - rated	8.0	16	0.0	0
Building Societies – unrated	0.0	0	0.0	0
Local authorities	29.0	57	44.0	96
DMADF (H M Treasury)	2.5	5	0.0	0
TOTAL TREASURY INVESTMENTS	50.5	100%	46.0	100%

The maturity structure of the investment portfolio was as follows:

	31.3.23 Actual £m	31.3.24 Actual £m
Investments Longer than 1 Year	2.0	2.0
Investments Up to1 Year	48.5	44.0

4. The Strategy for 2023/24

The strategy in 2023/24 was to continue lending to UK banks, building societies, money market funds and Local Authorities and allow investments with non-UK banks with a credit rating greater than AA- with a AAA Country rating. Only UK banks that met credit rating criteria ("BBB" or above for longer term deals, and F3 or above for short term deals) were on the Council's lending list. (These are Fitch definitions of ratings). Not all building societies are credit rated but this did not preclude them from the lending list as lending to a building society was dependant on their asset size. Where a society did have a rating, this was considered at the time of the deal taking into account the amount of investment and the length of the deal.

4.1 Investment strategy and control of interest rate risk

Investment returns picked up throughout the course of 2023/24 as central banks, including the Bank of England, continued to respond to inflationary pressures that were not transitory, and realised that tighter monetary policy was called for.

Starting April at 4.25%, Bank Rate moved up in stepped increases of either 0.25% or 0.5%, reaching 5.25% by August. By the end of the financial year, no further increases were anticipated. Indeed, the market was pricing in a first cut in Bank Rate in either June or August 2024.

The upward sloping yield curve that prevailed throughout 2023/24 meant that local authorities continued to be faced with the challenge of proactive investment of surplus cash, and this emphasised the need for a detailed working knowledge of cashflow projections so that the appropriate balance between maintaining cash for liquidity purposes, and "laddering" deposits on a rolling basis to lock in the increase in investment rates as duration was extended, became an on-going feature of the investment landscape.

With bond markets selling off, UK equity market valuations struggled to make progress, as did property funds, although there have been some spirited, if temporary, market rallies from time to time – including in November and December 2023. However, the more traditional investment options, such as specified investments (simple to understand, and less than a year in duration), have continued to be at the forefront of most local authority investment strategies, particularly given Money Market Funds have also provided decent returns in close proximity to Bank Rate for liquidity purposes. In the latter part of 2023/24, the local authority to local authority market lacked any meaningful measure of depth, forcing short-term investment rates above 7% in the last week of March.

While the Council has taken a prudent approach to investing surplus monies, it is also fully appreciative of changes to regulatory requirements for financial institutions in terms of additional capital and liquidity that came about in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008/09. These requirements have provided a far stronger basis for financial institutions, with annual stress tests by regulators evidencing how institutions are now far more able to cope with extreme stressed market and economic conditions.

4.2 Borrowing strategy and control of interest rate risk

The policy of avoiding new borrowing by running down spare cash balances which has served well over the last few years continued during 23/24.

Interest rate forecasts initially suggested further gradual rises in short, medium and longer-term fixed borrowing rates during 2023/24. Bank Rate had initially been forecast to peak at 4.5% but it is now expected to have peaked at 5.25%.

By January it had become clear that inflation was moving down significantly from its 40-year double-digit highs, and the Bank of England signalled in March 2024 that the next move in Bank Rate would be down, so long as upcoming inflation and employment data underpinned that view. Currently (at February 2024) the CPI measure of inflation stands at 3.4% but is expected to fall materially below 2% over the summer months and to stay there in 2025 and 2026. Nonetheless, there remains significant risks to that central forecast, mainly in the form of a very tight labour market putting upward pressure on wages and continuing geo-political inflationary risks emanating from the prevailing Middle East crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

5. Borrowing Outturn

Borrowing
No new borrowing was undertaken during the year

Borrowing in advance of need
The Council has not borrowed more than, or in advance of its needs, purely in order to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed.

Rescheduling
No rescheduling was done during the year as the approximate 1% differential between PWLB new borrowing rates and premature repayment rates made rescheduling unviable.

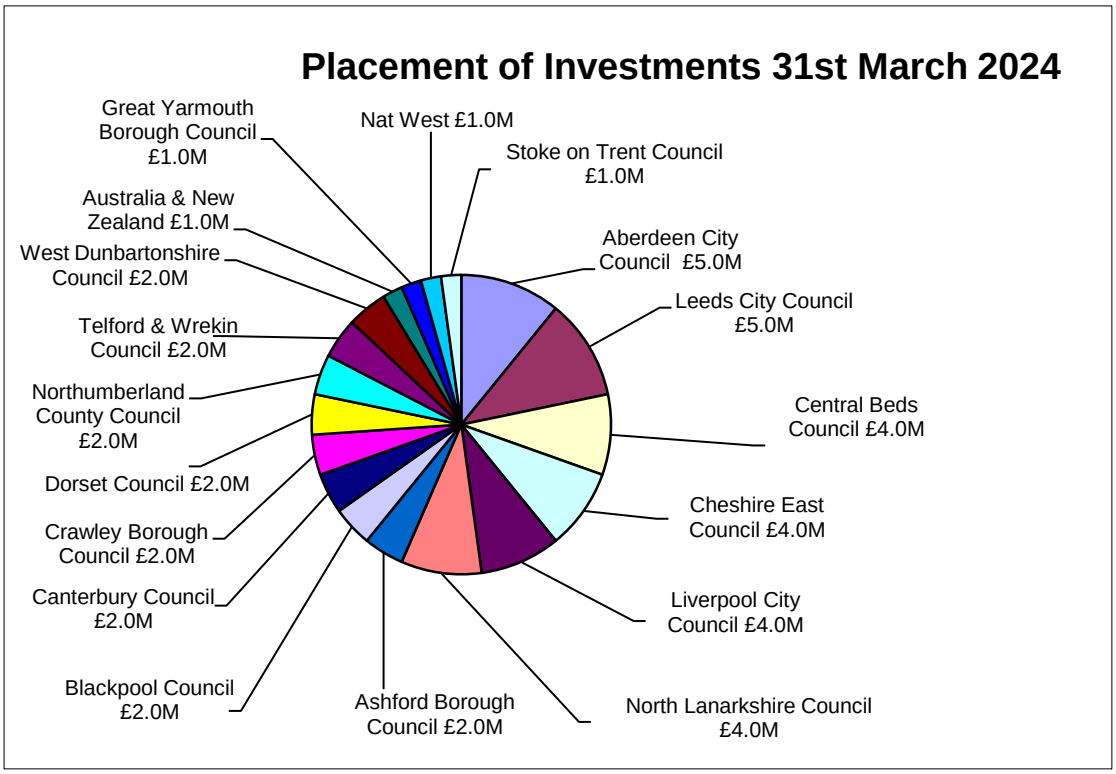
Repayments
£20K of PWLB loans were repaid during the year, as they became due.

6. Investment Outturn

Investment Policy – the Council's investment policy is governed by DLUHC investment guidance, which has been implemented in the annual investment strategy approved by the Council on 23 February 2023. This policy sets out the approach for choosing investment counterparties and is based on credit ratings provided by the Fitch credit rating agency for banks and asset size for building societies.

The investment activity during the year conformed to the approved strategy, and the Council had no liquidity difficulties.

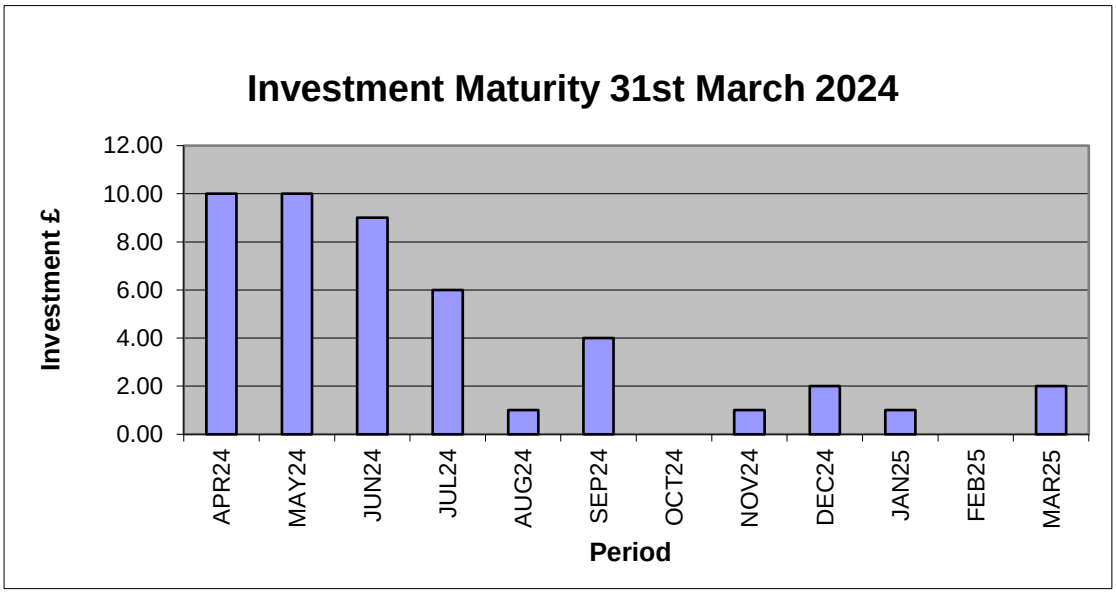
The pie chart below shows the spread of investment balances as at 31 March 2024. This is a snapshot in time that demonstrates the diversification of investments.



The average daily balance of investments was £57.0m with balances varying between £46m and £72.0m.

£2.941m of interest was generated from investments during the year. This is as budgeted for at Quarter 3 (£2.940M), but significantly more than the original budget of £1.602million.

The graph below shows the maturity profile of investments at 31st March 2024.



The level of risk of any investment will be affected by the riskiness of the institution where it is invested and the period that it is invested for. Where an institution has a credit rating this can be used to measure its riskiness. This can be combined with the period remaining on the investment

to give a historic risk of default percentage measure. The table below shows the Historic Risk of Default for outstanding investments at 31 March. The most risky investment still has a risk of default of only around 0.044%. It should also be noted that in general the interest rate received is correlated to the risk, so the interest income received would be less if it took on less risk. All investments have been made in accordance with the Investment Strategy. The risk of default is also affected by the length of the investment.

Borrower	Interest Rate %	Principal	Days to Maturity from 31/03/24	Risk of Default %	Expected Credit Loss £
Telford & Wrekin Council	5.7	2,000,000	15	0.001	0
Ashford Borough Council	5.65	2,000,000	17	0.001	0
Cheshire East Council	5.5	2,000,000	22	0.001	0
Central Beds Council	5.45	2,000,000	23	0.001	0
Crawley Borough Council	5.55	2,000,000	26	0.002	0
Aberdeen City Council	5.7	3,000,000	33	0.002	0
Blackpool Council	5.5	1,000,000	37	0.002	0
Central Beds	5.5	2,000,000	43	0.003	0
North Lanarkshire Council	5.55	2,000,000	54	0.003	0
Aberdeen City Council	5.55	2,000,000	60	0.004	0
Leeds City Council	5.5	5,000,000	64	0.004	0
Cheshire East Council	5.5	2,000,000	64	0.004	0
Canterbury Council	5.65	2,000,000	78	0.005	0
Australia and New Zealand Bank	5.51	1,000,000	93	0.011	113
Nat West	5.26	1,000,000	93	0.011	113
Dorset Council	5.51	2,000,000	99	0.006	0
Liverpool City Council	5.55	2,000,000	121	0.008	0
Blackpool Council	5.9	1,000,000	144	0.009	0
North Lanarkshire Council	5.8	2,000,000	170	0.011	0
Northumberland County Council	5.55	2,000,000	183	0.012	0
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	5.6	1,000,000	227	0.014	0
West Dunbartonshire Council	5.7	2,000,000	260	0.017	0
Stoke on Trent City Council	5.75	1,000,000	303	0.019	0
Liverpool City Council	5.25	2,000,000	354	0.023	0
Total	**5.57**	**46,000,000**		**0.006**	**226**

Under IFRS 9, the Code does not recognise a loss allowance where the counterparty is central government or a local authority since relevant statutory provisions prevent default.

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COUNCIL
11 July 2024

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2023/24

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 at the end of the financial year 2023/24. The net outturn of £16.494million represents a £194k decrease from the net working budget of £16.688million. Explanations for all the significant variances are provided in table 4. There are corresponding requests to carry forward £487k of unspent budget to fund specific projects that will now take place or continue into 2024/25. There is a further forecast impact on the 2024/25 base budget of a £147k increase.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Council approves the net transfer to earmarked reserves, as identified in table 9, of £2.028million.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

3.2. Changes to the Council's balances are monitored and approved.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. Budget holders have considered the options to manage within the existing budget but consider the variances reported here necessary and appropriate.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Consultation on the budget monitoring report is not required. Members will be aware that there is wider consultation on budget estimates during the corporate business planning process each year.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1. The report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 28th May 2024.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. Council approved the revenue budget for 2023/24 of £18.496million in February 2023. As at the end of the financial year, the working budget has reduced to £16.688million. 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 2023/24 approved by Full Council	18,496
Quarter 3 2022/23 Revenue Budget Monitoring report – 2023/24 budget changes approved by Cabinet (March 2023)	549
2022/23 Revenue Budget Outturn Report – 2023/24 budget changes approved by Cabinet (June 2023)	(47)
First Quarter Revenue Monitoring 2023/24 report - 2023/24 variances approved by Cabinet (September 2023)	(1,119)
Second Quarter Revenue Monitoring 2023/24 report - 2023/24 variances approved by Cabinet (January 2024)	(475)
Month 8 revenue monitoring included within 2024/25 budget report – 2023/24 variances approved by Cabinet (February 2024)	(301)
Quarter 3 2023/24 Revenue Monitoring report - 2023/24 variances approved by Cabinet (March 2024)	(415)
Current Working Budget	**16,688**

7.2. The Council is managed under Service Directorates. Table 2 below confirms the current net direct resource allocation of each Service Directorate and how this has changed from the original net direct budget allocations for 2023/24.

Table 2 – 2023/24 Service Directorate Budget Allocations

	Managing Director	Customers	Enterprise	Legal & Community	Place	Regulatory Services	Resources	**Total**
	£k	£k	£k	£k	£k	£k	£k	£k
Original Budget	**490**	**4,298**	**(87)**	**2,658**	**6,132**	**2,079**	**2,926**	**18,496**
Q3 2022/23	400	(5)	16	0	57	53	28	**549**
Outturn 2022/23	97	(205)	25	22	(1)	15	0	**(47)**
Budget at start of 2023/24	**987**	**4,088**	**(46)**	**2,680**	**6,188**	**2,147**	**2,954**	**18,998**
Q1 2023/24	(1,280)	138	56	31	(145)	58	23	**(1,119)**
Q2 2023/24	(573)	(67)	(161)	(29)	327	111	(83)	**(475)**
Month 8 2023/24	0	(320)	5	0	0	9	5	**(301)**
Q3 2023/24	(33)	(132)	(22)	15	58	(225)	(76)	**(415)**
Other Changes	(496)	38	99	188	78	117	(24)	**0**
Current Budget	**(1,395)**	**3,745**	**(69)**	**2,885**	**6,506**	**2,217**	**2,799**	**16,688**

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. Cabinet are asked to approve the net expenditure on the General Fund in 2023/24 of £16.494million (recommendation 2.2). This is a net decrease of £194k on the working budget of £16.688million. Table 3 below confirms the net expenditure for each Service Directorate and the variance with the current working budget. The major changes reported during the year are recorded at Appendix A.

Table 3 - 2023/24 Revenue Outturn by Service Directorate

Directorate	**Net Direct Working Budget**	**Net Direct Outturn***	**(Under) / Overspend**
Managing Director	(1,395)	(1,549)	(154)
Customers Directorate	3,745	4,065	320
Enterprise Directorate	(69)	53	122
Legal & Community Directorate	2,885	2,835	(50)
Place Directorate	6,506	6,450	(56)
Regulatory Services Directorate	2,217	1,897	(320)
Resources Directorate	2,799	2,743	(56)
TOTAL	**16,688**	**16,494**	**(194)**

* Directorate outturn totals exclude year-end finance lease accounting entries. These entries have a net zero impact on the Council's General Fund, but their inclusion would distort the Directorate performance indicated in the table.
During the year, part of the Regulatory service was split off in to Housing and Environmental Health. For consistency over the year this is still shown under the overall Regulatory heading.

8.2. Table 4 below highlights and explains the most significant variances, which are generally more than £25k. The final columns detail if there is expected to be an impact on next year's (2024/25) revenue budget.

Table 4 - Summary of significant variances

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2024/25 £k
Managing Director Strategic Priorities Fund	76	0	(76)	This fund was created to enable short-term investments in Council priorities, including testing out new ideas and where there is an invest-to-save opportunity. There are amounts committed in future years to cover community engagement software, improving automation of waste charging and maintaining the Social Value Portal.	76	0
Managing Director Staffing Costs Carry Forward	25	0	(25)	Underspend represents unallocated balance of the £300k of staffing underspend in 2022/23 carried forward to 2023/24 to create capacity to deliver Council projects and priorities and improve resilience. The allocation of the carry forward budget was detailed in the delegated decision notice published in June 2023. It is requested to carry this forward to provide external support for the setting of the new Council Plan.	15	0
Managing Director External Audit Fees	65	187	+122	Increase in External Audit fees is indicative of the additional work required from External Auditors to meet regulatory and compliance audit requirements, with amendments to auditing standards and changes to the requirements in respect of the Value for Money assessment. Estimated ongoing impact is based on the published audit scale fee of £150k for 2023/24 and the most recent quote for the housing benefit subsidy audit.	0	107
Redmond Review Local Audit Grant	0	(21)	(21)	The Council was notified in May 2024 of its allocation of the Redmond Review Local Audit Grant for 2023/24. The grant is intended to support authorities with the additional audit fees associated with the implementation of the recommendations of the Redmond review. It had been hoped that it would provide a greater contribution towards the additional costs. While external audit fees are not expected to reduce going forward, there is currently no basis for assuming that this grant contribution will continue in future years.	0	0
Managing Director Income Receipts held in the suspense account	0	(49)	(49)	Outturn represents income received in the Council's bank account more than 18 months ago where it has since not been possible to allocate the funds due to there being no reference or details. Should a business or individual come forward with evidence of payment at some point in the future, the income receipt will be reallocated accordingly.	0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2024/25 £k
Managing Director Joint Waste Contract with East Herts DC - Overhead Charging	0	(65)	(65)	As part of the operation of the joint waste contract, an annual contribution has been expected to be paid to East Herts for the use of the Buntingford office and recycling shed, while an annual contribution has been expected from East Herts for the support services and management costs associated with the client team operated by North Herts as the lead administrative authority for the contract. The estimated annual income and liability amounts have been prudently accrued in recent years. Given the similar amounts due to and from East Herts, it is proposed to cease accruing for these charges with a view to reassessing the position when the new contract commences in May 2025.	0	0
Customers IT Staffing Costs	574	554	(20)	A carry forward of salary underspend was requested at Quarter Two to fund the costs in 24/25 of two additional fixed term posts to cover IT staff working on projects. At the time it was anticipated these posts would be recruited during the final quarter of 23/24, however due to other priorities the posts were not advertised before April. It is therefore requested to carry forward a further £20k of unspent salary budget to fund the additional months of the two posts now falling in 2024/25.	20	0
Customers Careline Telephony Upgrade	134	102	(32)	The project to replace the current ISDN phone lines with SIP (Session Initiation Protocol) lines, as the ISDN lines are now obsolete and telecommunications firms are phasing them out, was due to commence in 23/24. The project however has been delayed due to supplier delays and wider hardware supply issues. It is requested to carry forward the unspent budget into 2024/25 to fund those project costs that will now fall in the next financial year.	32	0
Customers Careline Service – income contributions from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)	(2,906)	(2,934)	(28)	Increase in this income stream is due to an increase in the number of client referrals received from HCC.	0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2024/25 £k
Customers Contribution to the sundry debtors bad debt provision	10	110	+100	The higher contribution required to the bad debt provision is primarily due to the ageing of an outstanding commercial property debt. The debt was originally raised following a rent review, the outcome of which is disputed by the tenant. The ageing of the debt has increased the level of provision required to 75% of the amount raised. Officers are seeking to resolve the dispute as soon as possible.	0	0
Customers Housing Benefit Overpayments income	(275)	(193)	+82	Reduction in overpayments income raised in year is attributed to a combination of both the fall in the total amount of housing benefits paid, reducing by more than 25% over the last two years as working age housing benefit claimants migrate to the Universal Credit scheme, and ongoing improvements to systems and processes helping to minimise overpayment values.	0	82
Customers Contribution to the Housing Benefit Overpayments bad debt provision	50	326	+276	Where working age Housing Benefit clients have migrated to Universal Credit (UC), administered by the DWP, the Council can no longer collect overpayments debt from deductions to ongoing housing benefit payments. This has contributed to a reduction in overpayments debt collected during the year and an increase in the provision required. The Council has the option to apply for UC deductions, however other debts such as Council Tax and utility bills take priority with overpayments 13th on the list of debts to be repaid, and the Council can also apply for deductions from earnings via HMRC, however only a prescribed amount can be taken, which is dependent on salary.	0	0
Enterprise Net Income from North Herts Community Lottery	(3)	(12)	(9)	Income from the lottery in 2023/24 has surpassed that expected in the original business case. The Council receives 10p from every ticket sold and a further 50p from each ticket where North Herts Community Lottery Fund has been selected as the chosen good cause. North Herts Council has paid out more than £45k in 2023/24 to local good causes via the Community Forums, with the allocation of an extra £25k to Community Forum budgets approved by Council in February to support local good causes in 2024/25.	0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2024/25 £k
Enterprise Net Rental Income from Churchgate Shopping Centre	(224)	(133)	+91	Shortfall on anticipated net income is mainly due to related expenditure exceeding the provision in the budget. Significant items of expense include repairs and maintenance required at the premises, the business rates liability for vacant units, and the calculated contribution required from the General Fund to the bad debt provision for rental debts outstanding at the end of the year.	0	0
Legal & Community Community Forum Grants Expenditure	47	39	(8)	The carry forward of £7.9k of unspent Community Forum budgets is requested. This total is comprised of £2.1k for Hitchin, £2.2k for Baldock, £2.9k for Southern Rural and £0.7k for Letchworth.	8	0
Legal & Community Legal Services Income	(35)	(74)	(39)	Surplus income reflects primarily a significant increase in the number of instructions received by Legal during the year. The growth in instructions has been driven by the Council's commercial and Estates activities, with the legal team raising income for work undertaken in respect of, for example, the sale of land, the lease of land, licences to sublet or licenses to change use.	0	0
Legal & Community Community Safety Grant Funded Projects	13	4	(9)	Unspent expenditure budget on Community Safety Initiatives is requested to be carried forward to fund activities planned for 2024/25.	9	0
Place Waste Management IT Systems integration	20	0	(20)	The work on the integration of waste management IT systems and online reporting for residents has not yet begun pending the award of the new waste contract. The underspend is therefore requested to be carried forward to complete this work in the next financial year.	20	0
Place Garden Waste Collection Service Income	(1,211)	(1,244)	(33)	Overachievement of income is indicative of a higher number of subscribers to the service than anticipated in the budget estimates. This may be due to the extended 18-month subscription period offering enhanced value to residents.	0	0
Place Leisure Consultants	111	100	(11)	The unspent budget is requested to be carried forward to cover the professional fees anticipated in the next financial year related to the final minor amendments and land searches requested for the leases for the new leisure centre management contract.	11	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2024/25 £k
Place Leisure Management Contract Fee Income	(533)	(775)	(242)	Under the terms of the Leisure contract in 2023/24 the risk in respect of energy costs was shared between the Council and the leisure contractor SLL, with the Council responsible for energy costs over and above a base level. Based on procured energy prices and anticipated energy consumption, the contract income budget total was reduced by an estimated energy cost liability of £240k. The liability value payable will however be calculated using actual energy usage. With the actual value currently unknown, it is proposed that the £240k is transferred to earmarked reserve and used to mitigate the impact of any agreed liability ultimately payable in the next financial year.	0	0
Transfer to earmarked reserve	0	240	+240		0	0
Place Climate Change and Sustainability Consultants	75	57	(18)	The unspent budget is requested to be carried forward to fund the delivery of both an updated emissions assessment to track progress towards our 2030 net zero target and climate change projects aligned with our Climate Change Strategy.	18	0
Regulatory Planning Policy Staffing	556	507	(49)	Underspend is due to the use of DEFRA biodiversity grant to fund the cost of the Senior Ecologist post in 2023/24 rather than the existing salary budget provision. It is requested that the unspent budget is carried forward to extend various agency workers contracts to vacancies where recruitment has been unsuccessful.	49	0
Housing and Env Health (shown under Regulatory) Environmental Health Staffing	313	213	(100)	Covid Recovery Grant of £100k from the Health Protection Board at HCC has been used to fund Environmental Health staff carrying out Covid recovery work, resulting in an underspend on the existing staffing budget. It is requested that the unspent staffing budget is carried forward to fund the costs of a proposed 4-year Environmental Health Officer Apprentice post, to be appointed prior to the forthcoming academic year.	100	0
Regulatory Town Centre Strategies	30	20	(10)	Retail consultants have been appointed on a six-month contract to prepare the necessary background evidence for the preparation of an overarching Town Centre Strategy. The consultants have started the work and are in the process of evidence gathering with the aim of producing a draft Town Centre & Retail study by May/June this year. The £10k of unspent budget is therefore requested to be carried forward to fund the completion of the study in the next financial year.	10	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2024/25 £k
Regulatory Hitchin Rail Station Eastern Access Project	30	9	(21)	Hertfordshire County Council have been leading on this project and have employed consultants to undertake an options appraisal, with North Herts Council contributing to the cost. The remainder of the £30k investment budget is anticipated to be required in working with Network Rail and HCC in refining the options in 2024/25 and therefore the carry forward of the unspent revenue investment budget is requested.	21	0
Regulatory Supplementary Planning Documents	37	23	(14)	An update on the programme of work for supplementary planning documents (SPDs) to support the adopted Local Plan was included in the Strategic Planning Matters report presented to Cabinet in March 2024. Following successful recruitment, preparatory work on a District-Wide Design Code SPD has begun with an initial pilot project in Hitchin. Work on this project will be progressed further in 2024/25 and it is requested that the unspent budget is carried forward to support this.	14	0
Regulatory Extension of the Chilterns Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	10	0	(10)	The timetable for the AONB review is controlled by Natural England and not by the Council. Natural England have advised formal consultation on the AONB proposals is currently planned for Spring 2024. The £10k revenue investment budget is therefore requested to be carried forward.	10	0
Regulatory (managed by Place) Highways Verge Maintenance	297	261	(36)	Underspend variance is due to the implementation of reduced mowing regimes in accordance with the standards within the agency agreement with Herts Highways.	0	0
Regulatory Parking Lines and Signs maintenance	51	12	(39)	Budget was earmarked for the replacement and upgrading of the tariff boards associated with both the project to install electric vehicle charging points across the Council's car parks and with the alternative methods of payment project. Suppliers have now been appointed for both projects and the implementation work on both will commence in the next financial year 2024/25. It is therefore requested that the unspent budget is carried forward to support the implementation.	39	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2024/25 £k
Regulatory (managed by Resources) Letchworth Multi-Storey Car Park lighting	25	0	(25)	With lighting failures becoming more frequent, the options for alternative light fittings have been investigated during the year. Costs are now anticipated for consultant lighting designers to evaluate the proposed lighting changes, trial the replacement fittings on suitable areas, and the preparation of a specification for the potential replacement of all the existing lighting at the car park. A carry forward of the unspent revenue investment budget is therefore requested to fund these costs in the next financial year.	25	0
Regulatory Contribution to Parking PCN bad debt provision	162	229	+67	A higher level of PCNs being issued, and non-payment of them, has meant that it has been necessary to write-off some of the amounts owed and also make an increased bad debt provision for those amounts where still seeking payment to be made. The Council actively chases all PCN debts and write-off is a last resort.	0	0
Resources CCTV Maintenance and Monitoring	136	107	(29)	The Council's contribution to the running costs of the Hertfordshire CCTV Partnership is based on the number of cameras monitored in the district as a proportion of the total number of cameras maintained by the Partnership. With other authorities in the Partnership increasing the number of cameras in their localities, this has meant a relative reduction in the contribution required from North Herts Council.	0	(29)
Resources Social Value Portal	11	8	(3)	The Social Value portal has been implemented and maintained on a three-year contract at a cost of £8k per annum, with the expenditure budget for the cost of the portal originating from one-off Brexit transition grant received. It is requested that the unspent expenditure budget is carried forward to contribute to the cost of the portal in 2024/25, with the remaining budget required in the next financial year coming from the Strategic Priorities Fund.	3	0
Total of explained variances	**(2,329)**	**(2,392)**	**(63)**		**480**	**160**
Other minor balances	19,017	18,886	(131)		7	(13)
Overall Total	**16,688**	**16,494**	**(194)**		**487**	**147**

8.3. Cabinet are asked to approve the estimated impact on the 2024/25 budget, an overall increase in budget of £634k (recommendation 2.3), which comprises;

- £487k of budget carry-forwards from 2023/24 to 2024/25 for projects that were not completed by the end of the financial year. These are shown in the penultimate column of table 4 above. This will take the total budget carried forward to £1.456million, after including those reported and approved at quarter 1, quarter 2, month 8 and quarter 3.

- £147k increase in budget to reflect the estimated net impact in 2024/25 and beyond of variances identified at Outturn. These are shown in the final column of table 4 above.

8.4. The original approved budget for 2023/24 (and therefore working budget) included efficiencies totalling £1.521million, which were agreed by Council in February 2023. At the end of the year a net total of £2.800m of efficiencies have been achieved in 2023/24, representing a net overachievement of planned efficiencies of £1.279m. The forecast at the end of Quarter Three was a net overachievement of £1.367million. The decrease since Quarter Three of £88k relates to;

- £91k underachievement of the additional income anticipated from the acquisition of Churchgate shopping centre, as highlighted in table four above.

- £3k overachievement of the additional income originally anticipated from the North Herts Lottery in 2023/24, as highlighted in table four above.

- £5k overachievement of the anticipated saving on the cost of the printing and photocopying function from the reduction in the number of Multi-Functional Devices (MFDs) in operation (included in the other minor variances total in table 4).

- £5k underachievement of the rent income budgeted from the letting of the former public convenience at Portmill Lane, Hitchin (included in the other minor variances total in table 4). With staffing capacity limited during the year due to vacancies, Estates officers will seek to progress this in the next financial year.

8.5. The working budget for 2023/24 includes budgets totalling £1.107million 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 2022/23 but was delayed into 2023/24. At Quarter Three it was forecast that £532k of the budget carried forward will not be spent in this year. At the end of the year £683k of the budget carried forward has not been spent. The increase of £151k relates to budgets carried forward for:

- Staffing pressures. The unallocated £25k remaining of the £300k budget carried forward was not spent in this year, as noted in table 4 above.

- Strategic Priorities Fund. £76k of the £83k carry forward budget was unspent at the end of the year and is requested to be carried forward again, as explained in table 4 above.

- Supplementary Planning Documents. £14k of the budget carried forward was not spent during the final quarter and is requested to be carried forward again, as explained in table 4 above.

- Town Centre Strategy Reviews. £10k of the budget carried forward was not spent during the final quarter and is requested to be carried forward again, as explained in table 4 above.

- On-street parking lines and signs. £18k of the £30k budget carried forward was not spent during 2023/24 and is requested to be carried forward again, as itemised in table 4 above.

- Housing Stock Condition Survey. The £20k budget carried forward has not been spent in 2023/24. The survey is due to be carried out in a framework agreement with neighbouring authorities. £15k was requested to be carried forward again in the budget monitoring review at month 8 included in the 2024/25 Revenue Budget report and the remaining £5k is now requested to be carried forward (included in the other minor variances in table 4 above).

- Brexit grant funded expenditure. £3k of the £11k expenditure budget carried forward was not spent in the year and is requested to be carried forward again, as noted in table 4 above.

8.6. Six corporate 'financial health' indicators have been identified in relation to key sources of income for the Council in 2023/24. Table 5 below shows the performance for the year. A comparison is made to the original budget to give the complete picture for the year. Each indicator is given a status of red, amber, or green. A green indicator means that income recorded matched or exceeded the budgeted level of income. A red indicator means that the outturn has not met the budgeted level of income. An amber indicator is only used during the year to highlight that there is a risk that the budgeted level of income may not be met.

8.7. At the end of the financial year, two of the indicators are green and four are red. The summary indicators are therefore unchanged from that reported at Quarter Three. In respect of the red indicators for Leisure management fee income and car parking fees, provision amounts of £80k for Leisure and £100k for parking fees were included in the budget at the start of the year to recognise that variances in these income streams were more likely due to the ongoing recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic. The outturn for leisure centre management fee income in table 5 is net of the £240k transferred to earmarked reserve, rather than charged to the General Fund balance, as highlighted and explained in table 4.

Table 5 - Corporate financial health indicators

Indicator	Status	Original Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k
Leisure Centres Management Fee Income	Red	(599)	(535)	64
Garden Waste Collection Service Subscriptions	Green	(1,140)	(1,244)	(104)
Commercial Refuse & Recycling Service Income	Red	(1,269)	(1,238)	31
Planning Application Fees (including fees for pre-application advice)	Red	(1,008)	(858)	150
Car Parking Fees	Red	(2,026)	(1,780)	246
Parking Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)	Green	(573)	(730)	(157)

8.8. Table 6 below indicates activity levels during the year, where these drive financial performance, and how these compare to the prior year to indicate the direction of current trends. As performance against the planning applications fee income budget is generally determined by the number of large applications resolved in the year (rather than the total number of applications received), and this distinction is not captured in the data available, this indicator is omitted from table 6.

Table 6 - Corporate financial health indicators – activity drivers

Indicator	Activity Measure	Performance 2023/24	Performance 2022/23	Percentage Movement	Direction of Trend
Leisure Centres Management Fee	Number of Leisure Centre visits	1,609,760	1,465,319	+9.9%	
Garden Waste Collection Service	Number of customers	31,082	28,928	+7.4%	
Commercial Refuse & Recycling Service	Number of bin subscriptions	1,064	1,042	+2.1%	
Car Parking Fees	Car park tickets sold / average ticket price sold	1,136,408 / £1.72	1,128,375 / £1.65	+0.7% / +4.2%	
Parking Penalty Charge Notices	Number of PCNs issued	15,395	13,775	+11.8%	

FUNDING, RISK AND GENERAL FUND BALANCE

8.9. The Council's revenue budget is funded primarily from Council Tax and Retained Business Rates income. The Council was notified by Central Government in February 2023 of the amount of New Homes Bonus and Services Grant it could expect to receive in 2023/24 and planned accordingly.

8.10. Council Tax and Business Rates are accounted for in the Collection Fund rather than directly in our accounts, as we also collect them on behalf of other bodies. Each organisation has a share of the balance on the Collection Fund account. The Council has received in this year its share of the Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Fund surpluses for the prior year, as estimated in January 2023. As reported previously, this means contributions to the General Fund of £138k from the Council Tax Collection Fund and £452k from the Business Rates Collection Fund.

While the Council Tax surplus amount of £138k is included in the funding total in table 7, the business rates surplus has been transferred to reserve and used to mitigate the impact of deficits recorded, and/or changes to the rates retention scheme, in future years.

8.11. The Council's share of the Council Tax Collection Fund at the end of the year is a deficit balance of £12k. This represents a decrease of £12k on the forecast deficit of £24k estimated in January. The improvement in the position in the final quarter will be incorporated in the calculation of the surplus/deficit position for 2024/25 and hence impact the level of Council Tax funding available in 2025/26. It is the forecast deficit of £24k that will be transferred from the General Fund to the Collection Fund in the next financial year and this will therefore reduce the amount of Council Tax funding available in 2024/25, as was shown in Appendix C to the Revenue Budget 2024/25 report.

8.12. The Council's share of the Business Rates Collection Fund at the end of the year is an overall surplus balance of £51k. This represents a reduction of £365k on the estimated surplus of £416k declared in the NNDR1 return submitted to Government in January. The reduction in the surplus at the end of the year is primarily due to an increase in the calculated provision required at the end of the year for the impact of business rates appeals. Like the Council Tax Collection Fund, it is the forecast surplus amount of £416k that will be transferred to the General Fund in the next financial year.

8.13. The Council is also subject to a business rates levy from Central Government as it collects more in business rates than the baseline level determined by Central Government. At the end of the year the calculated business rates levy liability for 2023/24 is £536k, which is lower than the forecast of around £800k at Quarter Three. This is due

to the reduction in the final surplus position recorded for 2023/24, as explained above. The levy amount payable for 2023/24 has been funded from grant held in reserve and therefore there is a net zero impact on the General Fund balance at the end of the year.

8.14. The Council receives compensation in the form of a grant from Central Government for business rate reliefs introduced, which goes into our funds rather than the Collection Fund. The total grant amount receivable for 2023/24 is £4.721m, which includes an amount of £482k received as compensation for the Government's previous decisions to cap the increases in the business rates multiplier. It also includes £47k of compensation in respect of the Green Plant and Machinery exemption, with the government publishing local authority allocations earlier this year. The multiplier compensation is included in the funding total in table 7 below, with the rest of the grant received transferred to reserve. Some of the amount held in reserve has been used to fund the business rates levy payable for this year, while a further amount of £2million has been used to top up the business rates income charged to the General Fund in 2023/24 to the baseline funding amount anticipated when the budget was set. In addition, as shown in table 7 below, £1.144million has been transferred from the reserve to the General Fund in 2023/24 to bridge the funding gap anticipated when the budget was set, as explained originally in the MTFS 2023-2033.

8.15. In February 2024 the Government announced the distribution to Local Authorities for the 2023/24 financial year of £100million of the business rates levy account surplus. The allocated amount to North Herts Council of £22,861 is included in the outturn funding amount in table 7 below.

8.16. Table 7 below summarises the impact on the General Fund balance of the outturn position detailed in this report. It should be noted however that the accounts for 2023/24 are yet to be audited and changes to the General Fund balance may arise as a result of the final accounts audit.

Table 7 – General Fund impact

	Working Budget	**Outturn**	**Difference**
	£k	**£k**	**£k**
Brought Forward balance (1st April 2023)	**(11,990)**	**(11,990)**	**-**
Net Expenditure	16,688	16,494	(194)
Funding (Council Tax, Business Rates, NHB, Services Grant)	(17,394)	(17,417)	(23)
Funding from Reserves (including Business Rate Relief Grant)	(1,144)	(1,144)	0
Carried Forward balance (31st March 2024)	**(13,840)**	**(14,057)**	**(217)**

8.17. The minimum level of General Fund balance is determined based on known and unknown risks. Known risks are those things that we think could happen and we can forecast both a potential cost if they happen, and percentage likelihood. The notional amount is based on multiplying the cost by the potential likelihood. The notional amount for unknown risks is based on 5% of net expenditure. There is not an actual budget set aside for either of these risk types so, when they occur, they are reflected as budget variances (see table 3). We monitor the level of known risks that actually happen, as it highlights whether there might be further variances. This would be likely if a number of

risks come to fruition during the early part of the year. We also use this monitoring to inform the assessment of risks in future years. The notional amount calculated at the start of the year for known risks was £1,215k, and at the end of the year a total of £804k has come to fruition. The identified risks realised in the final quarter relate to:

- Housing benefit bad debt provision increasing with the managed migration of working age housing benefit clients to Universal Credit, as highlighted and explained in table 4 - £276k.

- Annual external audit fees exceeding the additional related grant funding received from government as highlighted and explained in table 4 - £101k.

Table 8 – Known financial risks.

	£'000
Original allowance for known financial risks	**1,215**
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 1	(34)
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 2	(374)
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 3	(19)
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 4	(377)
Remaining allowance for known financial risks	**411**

EARMARKED RESERVES

8.18. The Council has a number of earmarked reserves, which have been used to fund revenue expenditure during the year. These are detailed in Table 9 below. A total of £6.073million has been contributed to the reserves in 2023/24 and a total of £4.045million has been transferred out of the reserves to the General Fund.

Table 9 – Earmarked Reserves

	Balance at 1 April 2023	**Contributions to reserve**	**Transfers out from reserves**	**Balance at 31 March 2024**
	£'000	**£'000**	**£'000**	**£'000**
Childrens Services Reserve	47	0	(37)	10
Churchgate Development Reserve	138	0	(15)	123
Climate Change Grant Reserve	19	0	(2)	17
DLUHC Grants Reserve	4,354	4,559	(3,178)	5,735
Elections Admin Grant Reserve	19	48	0	67
Environmental Health Grants Reserve	84	57	(23)	118
Growth Area Fund Reserve	24	0	0	24
Homelessness Grants Reserve	352	192	(146)	398
Housing & Planning Delivery Reserve	887	0	(196)	691
Information Technology Reserve	23	0	(23)	0
Insurance Reserve	34	0	0	34
Land Charges Reserve	12	0	0	12
Leisure Management Maintenance Reserve	68	240	0	308

	Balance at 1 April 2023	Contributions to reserve	Transfers out from reserves	Balance at 31 March 2024
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Museum Exhibits Reserve	14	0	0	14
Neighbourhood Plan Reserve	115	40	(23)	132
Paintings Conservation Reserve	11	0	0	11
Shared Prosperity Fund Grant Reserve	17	15	(5)	27
Street Name Plates	16	0	0	16
Syrian Refugee Project	619	189	(71)	737
Taxi Licences Reserve	11	0	0	11
Town Centre Maintenance	77	8	0	85
Traffic Regulation Orders	376	0	(4)	372
Waste Reserve	836	0	0	836
Waste Vehicles Reserve	1,850	606	0	2,456
Welfare Reform Grants Reserve	658	119	(322)	455
Total Revenue Reserves	**10,661**	**6,073**	**(4,045)**	**12,689**

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. Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require that the Annual Statement of Accounts be approved and published.

9.3. The requirement for financial reserves is acknowledged in statute. Sections 31A, 32 42A and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 require billing and precepting authorities in England and Wales to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement. The Council must ensure sufficient flexibility to avoid going into deficit at any point during the financial year. The Chief Financial Officer is required to report on the robustness of the proposed financial reserves, under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003.

9.4. Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires every local authority to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs. The level of the general reserve is a matter for the Council to determine having had regard to the advice of the S151 Officer. This is a requirement of the Council Procedure Rules as set out in Part 4.4.1 (b) and 4.4.1 (k) of the Council's Constitution.

9.5. Council's terms of reference at paragraph 4.4.1 (dd) state that it will "determine those financial matters reserved to Council by the Financial Regulations". The Financial Regulations at paragraph 10.2 include that "[t]he creation and movements in reserves need to be formally approved by Full Council, which is incorporated in to Revenue Budget Outturn report".

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. Members have been advised of any variations from the budgets in the body of this report and of any action taken by officers.

10.2. The General Fund balance of £14.057million (table 7) meets the recommended minimum balance of General Fund reserves agreed when the budget was set. The Statement of Accounts is however yet to be audited and changes to the General Fund balance may arise as a result of the final audit. As the Housing Benefit claim is also yet to be audited, the relevant values included in the reported outturn are based on un-audited figures. Although note the balance is significantly above the recommended minimum of £2.5million.

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. Appendix A - Significant Revenue Budget Variances in 2023/24.

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1. None.

Appendix A - Significant Revenue Budget Variances in 2023/24

Directorate	Significant Service Area Variances	Net Direct Budget at April 2023	Net Direct Outturn	(Under) / Overspend	Summary Explanation	Relevant Report
Managing Director	Treasury Investments Interest Income	(1,602)	(2,941)	(1,339)	Increase primarily due to the changes to the Bank of England base rate since the preparation of the income budget estimate in January 2023.	Q1, Q2 & Q3 2023/24
	External Audit Fees	65	166	101	Additional work required from External Auditors to meet regulatory and compliance audit requirements. Outturn is net of £21k grant received from central government to support authorities with additional audit fees.	Outturn 2023/24
	Covid-19 Central Provision	450	0	(450)	Contingency budget helped to mitigate impact of identified Covid-19 impacts, including the parking and AFM income shortfalls itemised below.	Q1 & Q2 2023/24
	Other variances under £100k	1,577	1,226	(351)		
	Directorate Total	**490**	**(1,549)**	**(2,039)**		
Customers Directorate	Customers Directorate Staffing Costs	3,942	3,788	(154)	Underspend results from various vacant posts due to difficulty in recruiting temporary and permanent staff in the MSU, IT Services and the Customer Service Centre.	Q2 & Q3 & Outturn 2023/24
	Contribution to Sundry Debtors Bad Debt Provision	10	110	100	Primarily due to the ageing of an outstanding commercial property debt, which increased the level of provision required to 75% of the amount raised.	Outturn 2023/24
	Housing Benefit Overpayments Income - Contribution to bad debt provision	50	326	276	Where working age Housing Benefit clients have migrated to Universal Credit (UC), the Council can no longer collect overpayments debt from deductions to ongoing housing benefit payments. This contributed to a reduction in overpayments debt collected during the year and an increase in the provision required.	Outturn 2023/24
	Careline Equipment	743	542	(201)	Significant increase in the refurbishment and reuse of returned alarms has reduced expenditure on new equipment.	Month 8 2023/24
	Other budgets with variances under £100k	(619)	(701)	(82)		
	Directorate Total	**4,126**	**4,065**	**(61)**		
Enterprise Directorate	**Directorate Total (all budgets have variances under £100k)**	**54**	**53**	**(1)**		
Legal & Community Directorate	**Directorate Total (all budgets have variances under £100k)**	**2,869**	**2,835**	**(34)**		
Place Directorate	Domestic Waste & Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract Expenditure	6,432	6,125	(307)	The budget assumed a contract indexation of 10%, based on the respective contractual indices at that time. Mainly due to subsequent decreases in the fuel price index, the final calculation resulted in an increase to contract prices of 3.5%.	Q1 2023/24
	Commingled recycling processing and haulage costs	401	514	113	The cost of processing and haulage had an inflationary uplift of 10% applied from May 2023, equating to an additional cost of around £100k. The impact was not mitigated by increases to sale prices obtained for materials.	Q2 2023/24
	AFM Income	(395)	(278)	117	Greater levels of residual waste generated across Hertfordshire since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the overall costs of disposal incurred by HCC and reduced the total AFM amount shared with collection authorities.	Q1 2023/24
	Other budgets with variances under £100k	(172)	89	261		
	Directorate Total	**6,266**	**6,450**	**184**		

Directorate	Significant Service Area Variances	Net Direct Budget at April 2023	Net Direct Outturn	(Under) / Overspend	Summary Explanation	Relevant Report
Regulatory Services Directorate	Regulatory Services Directorate Staffing Costs	4,627	4,271	(356)	Grants received have been used to fund staffing costs, which has resulted in an underspend on existing staffing budgets.	Month 8 & Outturn 2023/24
	Housing Services Net Transfer to Earmarked Reserve	(151)	46	197	Underspend on Housing Services salaries budget, due to funding staffing costs from Homelessness Prevention Grant received, transferred to reserve to fund two Homelessness Advisor posts to March 2027	Month 8 2023/24
	Supplementary Planning Documents	167	23	(144)	Draft Sustainability SPD, prepared in-house, presented to Cabinet in December. Remaining Biodiversity SPD and Design Code SPD delayed due to staffing capacity issues and the need to wait for relevant legislation and Government guidance.	Q2, Month 8 & Outturn 2023/24
	Local Plan Review	118	9	(109)	Budget to support work on an early review of the Local Plan. The narrative supporting the budget bids identified that there maybe year-on-year underspends so carry forwards would be required to help mitigate or reduce further growth bids as the Plan reaches key points.	Q2, Month 8 & Q3 2023/24
	Town Centre Strategy	120	20	(100)	Progress on delivery was hindered by three unsuccessful attempts at recruiting a Town Centre planning officer. Retail consultants have been appointed on a six-month contract to prepare the necessary background evidence for the preparation of an overarching Town Centre Strategy.	Q2, Month 8 & Outturn 2023/24
	Planning Applications Income	(1,008)	(858)	150	Material reduction in the number of minor applications received, which is a national trend, likely to be the result of interest rate increases and increases in the cost of construction materials.	Month 8 2023/24
	Car Parking Penalty Charge Notice Income	(573)	(730)	(157)	Number of penalty charge notices issued exceeded the assumption in the budget, with the Civil Enforcement Officer team managing higher levels of traffic offences within and around the town centres.	Q2 & Q3 2023/24
	Car Parking Fees Income	(1,926)	(1,780)	146	Income receipts at approximately 90% of the level observed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Income shortfall may be in part a consequence of greater levels of homeworking, with the reduction in daily commuters also increasing the availability of free on-street parking	Q2 & Month 8 2023/24
	Car Parking Season Tickets Income	(325)	(173)	152	Income shortfall attributed to greater levels of home working adopted since the Covid-19 pandemic.	Q2 2023/24
	Other budgets with variances under £100k	1,215	1,069	(146)		
	Directorate Total	**2,264**	**1,897**	**(367)**		
Resources Directorate	**Directorate Total (all budgets have variances under £100k)**	**2,929**	**2,743**	**(186)**		
OVERALL TOTAL		**18,998**	**16,494**	**(2,504)**		

FULL COUNCIL
11 July 2024

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: LAND TO THE NORTH OF THE GRANGE (LG1) STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK

REPORT OF: IAN FULLSTONE, SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR CHRIS HINCHLIFF, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING & TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report asks Cabinet to positively recommend the approval of the Strategic Masterplan Framework for land to the north of Letchworth Garden City to Full Council. This site is allocated for development in the Council's adopted Local Plan (Site LG1, Policy SP15) as a strategic site for approximately 900 homes and supporting infrastructure.

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

This report and its considerations are subject to a positive referral by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 July 2024.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That, subject to referral by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 July 2024, the Strategic Masterplan Framework for Land to the North of the Grange (LG1), 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 facilitate the delivery of a strategic site within the Council's adopted Local Plan. To accord with policy requirements of the Local Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None. Officers and the Council's Project Board consider that the Strategic Masterplan Framework (hereafter 'masterplan') has been appropriately prepared in accordance with

national and local policy and guidance. It has been prepared under the Council's preferred approach; the Local Plan and associated guidance encourage the preparation and approval of masterplans for strategic sites in advance of and separate to any planning decisions. It contains an appropriate level of detail for the stage the project has reached.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Preparation of this masterplan has been overseen by the Council's internal, informal Strategic Planning Project Board. 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 Project Board is chaired by the Executive Member for Planning & Transport. Local ward members have been invited to participate in relevant meetings of the Board.

5.2. As the promoter of the site, Letchworth City Heritage Foundation have been fully engaged in the masterplan's production and have consulted extensively with other stakeholders, including the general public. All parties have been invited to comment on the masterplan through a range of public consultation events.

5.3. The final masterplan was considered by the Project Board at its meeting of 24 June 2024. The Project Board were provided with a draft of this report and its appendices. Council officers and the developer team presented the masterplan and addressed questions from the Board. The Board endorsed the masterplan and recommended that the Service Director: Regulatory present it to Cabinet and Full Council for adoption.

5.4. The referral sheet from Cabinet will be published as a supplementary agenda as soon as it is available.

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 Council's Local Plan was adopted in November 2022. This sets out the Council's strategy for meeting the development needs of the District over the period to 2031. The Plan makes provision for at least 13,000 new homes. A significant proportion of these 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.

7.2. 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 implementation is essential to raising delivery rates of new homes above historic averages and addressing the acute need for housing.

7.3. 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.

7.4. 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.

7.5. 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.

7.6. 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).

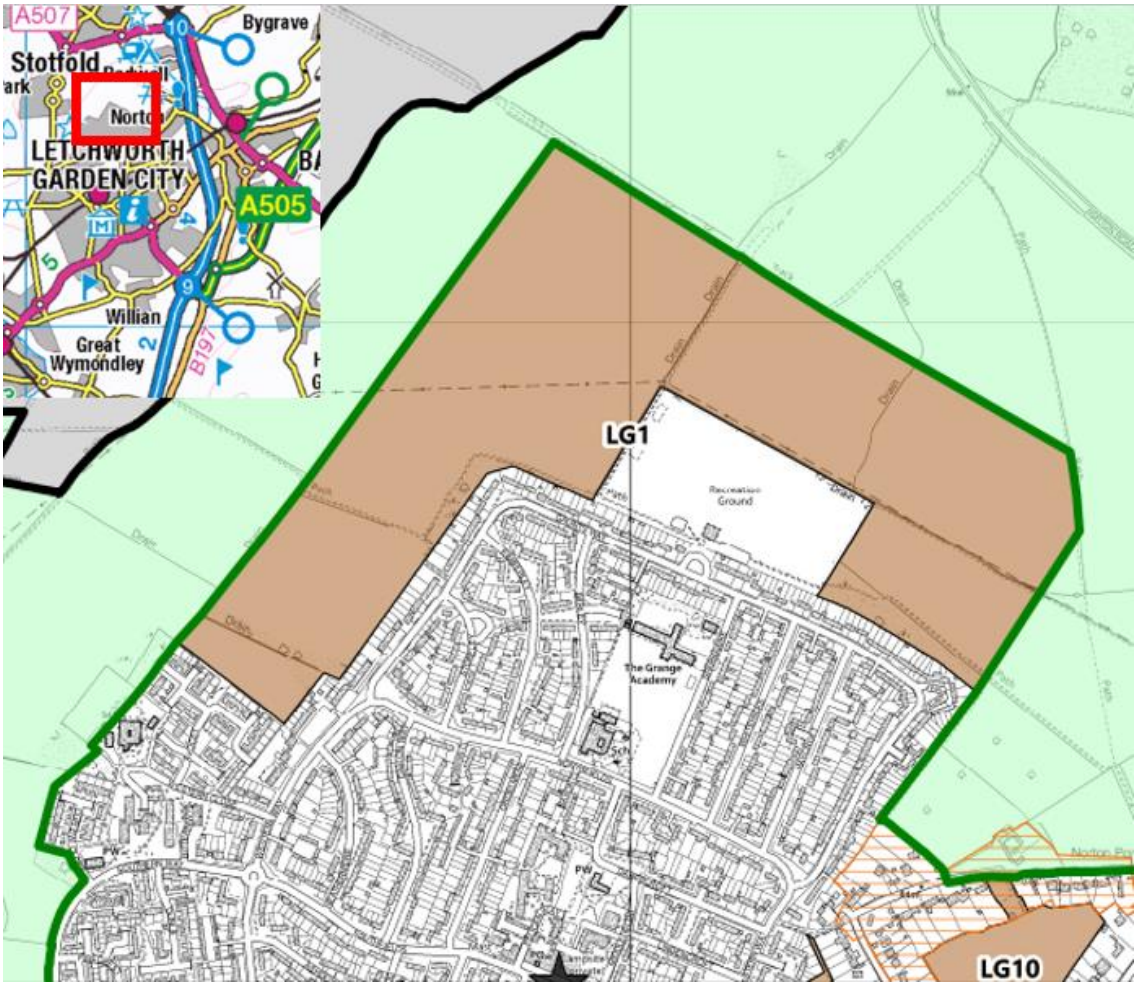
7.7. These say masterplans produced and approved before the submission of a planning application or prior to the determination of a planning application will follow the final approval process below (subject to a positive outcome at each step):

- 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

7.8. The masterplan provides a high-level spatial and 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. Formal regulatory approval 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.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. Site LG1 consists of approximately 45 hectares of agricultural land sited to immediately to the north of Letchworth, close to the northern boundary of North Herts District Council and Central Bedfordshire Council. An extract of the Local Plan Policies Map is shown below.



8.2. The site is immediately adjacent to the Grange Estate and the Grange Recreational Ground which is owned and maintained by the Council. A separate, Council-led project is ongoing to develop a design vision for the future of the Grange Recreation Ground that will benefit both existing and future residents and complement the proposed development of LG1. An update on this project is provided in the Strategic Planning Matters report to Cabinet (July 9 2024).

8.3. The masterplan for North Letchworth has been produced by Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, who are the landowners, with control of the entire allocation site as well as land to the north of the site that will provide a proposed highway connection to Norton Road. The Foundation are in the process of appointing a delivery partner to bring forward an outline planning application and ultimately implementation of the site. The Foundation intend to remain as landowners in perpetuity and would therefore be in

control of subsequent stages of the planning and design process, through to delivery.

8.4. The masterplan aligns with the National Planning Policy Framework and the National Model Design Guide, as well as meeting the requirements of Policy SP15 of the local plan. Its production has followed the key stages set out in the Council's approved masterplanning guidance and this has included:

- Establishing an officer group with representatives from the District Council and Hertfordshire County Council, 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 testing of key spatial options for the masterplan
- Independent design review by Design South-East
- Presentation to the Council's Project Board at draft masterplan stage
- Public consultation; and
- Refinement of proposals in response to the steps above to produce the final masterplan.

8.5. It is important to highlight that the current masterplannning work is pre-outline planning application stage. This has allowed the Foundation to work with the Council and key stakeholders, to create a clear strategic framework for the site and define the qualities of place to be delivered and provide a 'prospectus' that sets clear ambitions and expectations for LG1 in the Foundation's subsequent search for a development partner.

8.6. The masterplan recognises that the formal planning processes will need to allow for further development and refinement of its proposals and will be informed by the appointment of a delivery partner (anticipated at the end of 2024). This should be borne in mind when considering the masterplan; it is not an 'absolute fix' of the proposals, but does seek to define a clear framework for the development, including:

- A Vison and set of placemaking objectives.
- Site wide design principles, to inform the next stage of masterplanning.
- A movement framework – fixing key access points and the location of the primary street, together with key sustainable routes and connections.
- A green and blue infrastructure framework – with strong emphasis on retaining natural habitats and improving biodiversity, to create a strategic green and blue structure and network across the site, that links into and complements The Grange Recreation Ground.
- A landuse framework – defining key parcels and range of uses across the site.
- An urban design framework – identifying key design features and influences, to ensure a place of quality and focussing on the appropriate relationship with The Recreation Ground.
- A set of design principles – to define the characters across the site and ensure a variety of built form that is appropriate to Letchworth Garden City.

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

8.8. Emerging material from the masterplan framework was subject to formal Design Review by Design South-East in January 2024, using their North Hertfordshire-specific panel of experts (DRP). The DRP's feedback informed further development of the draft scheme and their report has been published on the Council's website (see Section 18).

8.9. In February 2024, the draft masterplan was presented to the Council Project Board. The Project Board endorsed the work undertaken to that date as an appropriate basis for public consultation.

8.10. Extensive consultation had been undertaken by the Foundation, as part of the emerging masterplan, dating back to June 2022. Following the Project Board in February, further consultation was undertaken with the local community over February and March 2024, in relation to the preferred masterplan option for the site. The masterplan document includes a full explanation of the engagement to date.

8.11. Following consultation, the landowner and Council have worked to further refine the masterplan and confirm further details regarding the preferred option, including

- Clarifying the relationship between the masterplan and subsequent planning application and design development, through the planning process, design coding and onto delivery.
- Clarifying the design principles, to underpin the outline planning application and design code.
- Further explanation of how the development will relate to The Grange Recreation Ground (which is subject of separate design work by the Council, as landowner).
- Clarifying the position with the proposed primary school site, in terms of safeguarding it for future school use, which will be clarified through the outline application process.
- Proposing potential 'meanwhile' uses for the school site.
- Providing greater detail on the proposed character areas, including setting design principles.
- Clarifying the approach to phasing and the early delivery of a construction access from Norton Road.
- Confirming details relating to the primary route, integration of SUDS and site wide approach to parking.
- Committing to further engagement at the Design Code stage

8.12. A summary assessment of the masterplan against the requirements of the relevant site-specific policy is set out in the table below. Formal assessment of any schemes' compliance with relevant policies will be through any associated planning application(s).

Policy SP15: Site LG1 – North of Letchworth Garden City	
Criteria	**Comment**
The most appropriate points of vehicular access considering landscape and traffic impacts	The masterplan proposes access points from Norton Road and Western Way, as detailed in the Transport & Accessibility Report. These access points are subject to agreement on the detailed planning case and design with NHC and HCC and the masterplan commits to further discussions, including Central Bedfordshire Council to ensure

	well-integrated access with the surrounding area and future development sites. A number of factors are being investigated in greater detail by the consultant team, ensuring that the chosen access points minimise landscape and traffic impacts, while optimising safety and connectivity.
Comprehensive integration into the existing pedestrian and cycle, public transport and road networks;	The masterplan demonstrates a commitment to comprehensive integration into existing pedestrian and cycle, public transport, and road networks. Strong pedestrian and cycle permeability is emphasised, aligning with natural desire lines and extending the existing Public Rights of Way (PRoW) network to facilitate access to the Grange Estate. Furthermore, the framework identifies key areas for enhancing walking and cycling infrastructure to improve connectivity with surrounding destinations. These enhancements include the identification of crucial crossing points, and improvements to the existing Greenway and National Cycle Network (NCN) route 12. This route serves as a strategic link to Letchworth railway station and the town centre. Moreover, ongoing discussions with the main landowner of the Grange Estate, aim to safeguard the NCN12 route through the Pelican Way Local Centre, ensuring continuity and accessibility within the wider pedestrian and cycle network.
An appropriate education solution which delivers a new 2FE primary school on-site;	The masterplan designates a reserve site for a 2FE primary school. This ensures that the infrastructure can accommodate future educational needs as the development progresses and population grows. The strategic masterplanning process has considered the adaptability of the reserve school site. Meanwhile uses include consideration of a training and apprenticeship centre to facilitate local upskilling and employment relating to the phased delivery of the site.
Measures required to address nearby heritage assets including the Scheduled Ancient Monument at Radwell Lodge and the Croft Lane and Norton Conservation Areas;	The masterplan acknowledges the historical significance and archaeological value of the site, emphasising the opportunity to integrate interpretation of its history into the public realm network. A Heritage Baseline Appraisal was previously prepared, addressing the nearby heritage assets including the Scheduled Ancient Monument at Radwell Lodge and the Croft Lane and Norton Conservation Areas. This appraisal was signed off and accepted by the Council, ensuring thorough scoping of any potential impacts on these heritage assets.
The approach to existing trees and hedgerows around and within the site, with the	The masterplan aligns well with this criterion, by emphasising the preservation and enhancement of the site's natural hedgerows, shelterbelts, and

presumption that trees will be retained and any hedgerow losses kept to a minimum;	mature trees. Recognising these elements as key characteristics contributing to placemaking, the masterplan commits to protecting and enhancing these natural assets. It includes provisions for additional tree (2,000) and hedgerow planting, with a focus on reinstating previously lost hedgerows and increasing tree density, particularly along the western boundary, to enhance enclosure and mitigate coalescence risks. The Green Infrastructure (GI) framework within the masterplan further supports this approach, ensuring that the existing natural capital, including hedgerows, shelterbelts, woodlands, and mature trees, is both protected and enhanced, thus fulfilling the policy requirement.
Neighbourhood-level retail and community facilities providing around 900m2 (net) of retail and food and beverage floorspace and a GP surgery;	The masterplan satisfies this by including approximately 900m² of neighbourhood-level retail and community facilities. These facilities will be designed to create a vibrant neighbourhood centre that encourages social participation and fosters a stronger sense of community. Additionally, the masterplan incorporates a sustainable mobility hub, further enhancing the appeal and functionality of the neighbourhood. The proposed facilities are intended to complement, rather than compete with, the renewed local centre of the Grange Estate, ensuring a balanced and integrated approach to local development. Additionally, the masterplan supports the provision of a GP surgery, contingent upon the requirements of local NHS providers. LGCHF commits to collaborating with the NHS and North Hertfordshire Council (NHC) to potentially include flexible space for a GP surgery within the development.
At least 9 serviced plots for self-build development;	The masterplan designates 1% of the development to self-build properties. By including self-build plots, the masterplan supports diverse housing tenures and encourages community involvement in the development process, thereby fulfilling the policy requirement for at least 9 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 subject to up-to-date assessment of likely future needs and existing supply;	The masterplan addresses this by planning for a 50-60 unit senior living scheme within the market component of the development. This initiative is designed to meet the identified need for elderly accommodation and provide potential relocation opportunities for existing residents. While this scheme will not be an extra care facility, it will consist of self-contained units for individuals over 60, led by a private developer. The masterplan acknowledges that the Policy SP15 requirement for a care home has been met elsewhere, hence the

	focus on private elderly accommodation. This approach aligns with the policy's intent to cater to the housing needs of older people, even though it differs in format by not including a traditional care home in Use Class C2.
Incorporate ordinary watercourses (and any appropriate measures) within comprehensive green infrastructure and / or SUDs approach;	The underlying baseline includes a drainage strategy that proposes incorporation of the ordinary watercourses and using these to discharge surface water flows from site subject to agreement of the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA). The baseline summary report identifies key design implications arising from the drainage strategy. The masterplan reflects this by incorporating a series of attenuation basins and a SuDS drainage network integrated with the landscape and GI framework, to deal with surface water runoff.
Structural planting to create a sense of place, integration into the surrounding landscape and a long-term, defensible Green Belt boundary, particularly to the north-west and east;	The masterplan effectively addresses this by incorporating structural planting, to enhance the sense of place and integrate the development into the surrounding landscape. To minimise the visual impact of car parking, street sections will feature integrated structural planting, particularly in areas with on-street and off-plot parking typologies. The "Avenue" character area will showcase a strong approach to structural planting with prominent street trees. Furthermore, the entire development is framed by a multi-functional, nature-rich green buffer designed to structure and screen long-distance views. This buffer includes wetlands, ponds, and attenuation basins, enhancing ecological value while providing additional footpaths and play areas. This green buffer also creates a long-term, defensible Green Belt boundary ensuring the development is well-integrated into the broader landscape.
Diversion and / or re-provision of the Letchworth Greenway to provide a revised route around the new urban edge; and	The masterplan prioritises the maintenance and enhancement of the existing footpath network, with a specific focus on the Letchworth Greenway. The masterplan includes improvements to the Greenway's route, such as better surfacing and additional amenities like benches, picnic tables, and natural play areas, promoting walking, cycling, and leisure activities. A new loop will be added to the northwest of LG1, offering walkers an alternative route around, rather than through, the new development. This adjustment aims to preserve the rural character of the Greenway while integrating it into the new urban edge. The comprehensive network of paths will ensure direct access to the Grange Estate and connections to Letchworth town centre, as well as rural recreational routes to surrounding settlements,

	Radwell Meadows, and the Etonbury Green Wheel. Detailed proposals for the pedestrian and cycle network are outlined in the Movement Framework section of the masterplan, demonstrating a thorough and considered approach to re-routing and enhancing the Letchworth Greenway to meet the policy requirements.
Undertake a detailed odour assessment to demonstrate no adverse impact on future residents and occupants of non residential buildings.	This will be submitted as part of the outline planning application, but no issues have been identified at this stage of the masterplanning work that would have an adverse impact on the development.

Sustainability

8.13. In June 2022, Cabinet endorsed a series of sustainability principles, produced in consultation with the Project Board, to guide the assessment of masterplans. These recognise that sustainability is multi-faceted including consideration of social and green infrastructure and transport alongside resource use.

8.14. A high-level assessment of the masterplan against the sustainability principles is attached as Appendix B. This shows that the masterplan for LG1 successfully meets the the identified principles in a manner that is proportionate and appropriate to this stage of the masterplanning process. The remaining principles will be resolved as the scheme progresses through the formal planning stages and further detail becomes available.

Next steps

8.15. Subject to Cabinet and Full Council approval, the masterplan will be adopted as a material consideration for any future planning decisions relating to the site. Any 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.

8.16. 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. The masterplan provides appropriate 'hooks' to accommodate these matters but the subsequent planning processes are the most appropriate place for these to be resolved and secured. These matters include (but are not limited to):

- Developing a detailed phasing plan.
- Preparing a design code to support an outline planning application.
- Ensuring alignment between the masterplan and the finalised design vision for The Grange Recreation Ground and any subsequent project(s), recognising that design work in relation to The Rec is ongoing by the Council.
- Confirming access details and secondary road network, including further detail on parking solutions.
- Evolving the detail of enhancements required to off-site routes and subsequent Section 106 contributions.
- The provision of a site wide sustainable travel plan.

- Understanding the conclusions of further modelling of vehicular movements, to ensure the appropriate balance of traffic from Western Way to Norton Road and a suitable design response to the internal road network (as may be required).
- Identifying specific projects for off-site contributions, towards matters such as The Grange Rec (wider sports facilities) and sustainable travel improvements.
- The provision of a suitable stewardship and management strategy.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under the Terms of Reference for Cabinet, Section 5.7.18 of the Constitution states that it may exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority and receive reports on strategic planning matters (except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Service Director: Regulatory).

9.2. Section 4.8.2(i) of the Constitution contains a general power for Full Council to receive and debate reports from Cabinet.

9.3. There is no statutorily set definition of a '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 2011-2031 (adopted November 2022) 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 June 2023 (see link in Section 18 of this report) 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 (2014) 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 the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Government Acts 1972, 2000 and 2003 and under associated planning legislation and guidance, including but not limited to the Planning Act.

9.11. 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.

9.12. 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.

9.13. Under the Council's constitution, paragraph 14.6.4(ii) authorises the Service Director Regulatory to enter into contracts for the supply of services, relevant in this case for the use of consultants to act on the Council's behalf in the preparation of the masterplan.

9.14. 14.6.4(viii) authorises the Managing Director and Service Directors to set fees and charges in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations and relevant policies, in consultation with the Executive Member, relevant in this case to seek to recover these costs from the Developer.

9.15. 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.

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. In April 2022, a specific Masterplanning risk was created and included in the Council Delivery Plan. This has been periodically updated and reported upon. This identified and described the following:

- 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

11.3. Key mitigations have included:

- Adoption of the Local Plan by Full Council on 8 November 2022
- The internal restructure of teams within the planning service and recruitment to additional posts identified in budget Growth Bids
- Securing external consultant resources to provide additional capacity and discipline-specific expertise;
- Delivering funding for resources through Planning Performance Agreements
- Monthly Project Board meetings to monitor and escalate any barriers to progress
- Ongoing monitoring of workload and service-wide budgets

11.4. This item will not be included in the 2024/25 Council Delivery Plan, as progress is dependent on third parties and the Council activities involved are considered business-as-usual. Strategic oversight will continue via the Project Board and Strategic Planning Matters reports to Cabinet having regard to the above broad framework.

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 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 examining Inspector. Paragraph 11 of their report on the plan 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 The applicant and / or Council will need to consider whether any future planning application(s) for this site require further statutory environmental assessment. This, and the supporting evidence that will be required 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 – North of the Grange (LG1) Strategic Masterplan Framework

16.2 Appendix B – Assessment against approved Sustainability Principles

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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, July 2023 [*including endorsement of current Project Board Terms of Reference and process notes*]

18.4 North Herts Council Website – Masterplans [*See North of Letchworth page for baseline evidence summary report and Design Review Panel report]*

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Strategic Masterplan Framework Report

Version 3
5 June 2024

The aim of the report is to provide a strategic masterplan framework in relation to the Land north of the Grange (LG1), addressing current and emerging issues whilst supporting Letchworth's well-loved character; in accordance with The Foundation's adopted vision, local plan policies and the characteristics of context and identity supported through the National Design Guide.

The outcome of this report includes framework plans and supporting illustrative drawings and narrative to support a coordinated high-quality design development process for the next stages of work. It demonstrates conformity with Policy SP9 (Design and Sustainability), Policy (SP15 Site LG1 – North of Letchworth Garden City) and Appendix 5 (Letchworth Garden City Design Principles) of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011-2031).

Prepared by

EcoResponsive Environments

Prepared on behalf of

Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

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1

Introduction

1. Introduction

Executive summary

1.1 This strategic masterplan framework report has been prepared on behalf of the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation (LGCHF) and is in accordance with the provisions of Policy SP9 of the adopted North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031[1]. It is in support of proposals for the development of Land to the north of the Grange (referred to as Site LG1) located on the northern boundary of Letchworth Garden City. This strategic 45 ha (112 acre) housing site is allocated in the Local Plan for a new neighbourhood of approx. 900 homes and the planning objectives are described in Policy SP15.

1.2 This report, accompanying plans and technical evidence base provides documentation aligned with North Herts Council's (NHC) requirements for a strategic masterplan framework in relation LG1. It demonstrates conformity with Policy SP9 (Design and Sustainability), Policy SP15, Appendix 5 (Letchworth Garden City Design Principles) of the NHC Local Plan and the characteristics of context and identity supported through the National Design Guide.

1.3 It will create a high-level framework that will inform future planning applications for the development of this site, once LGCHF has appointed a partner to bring forward the development.

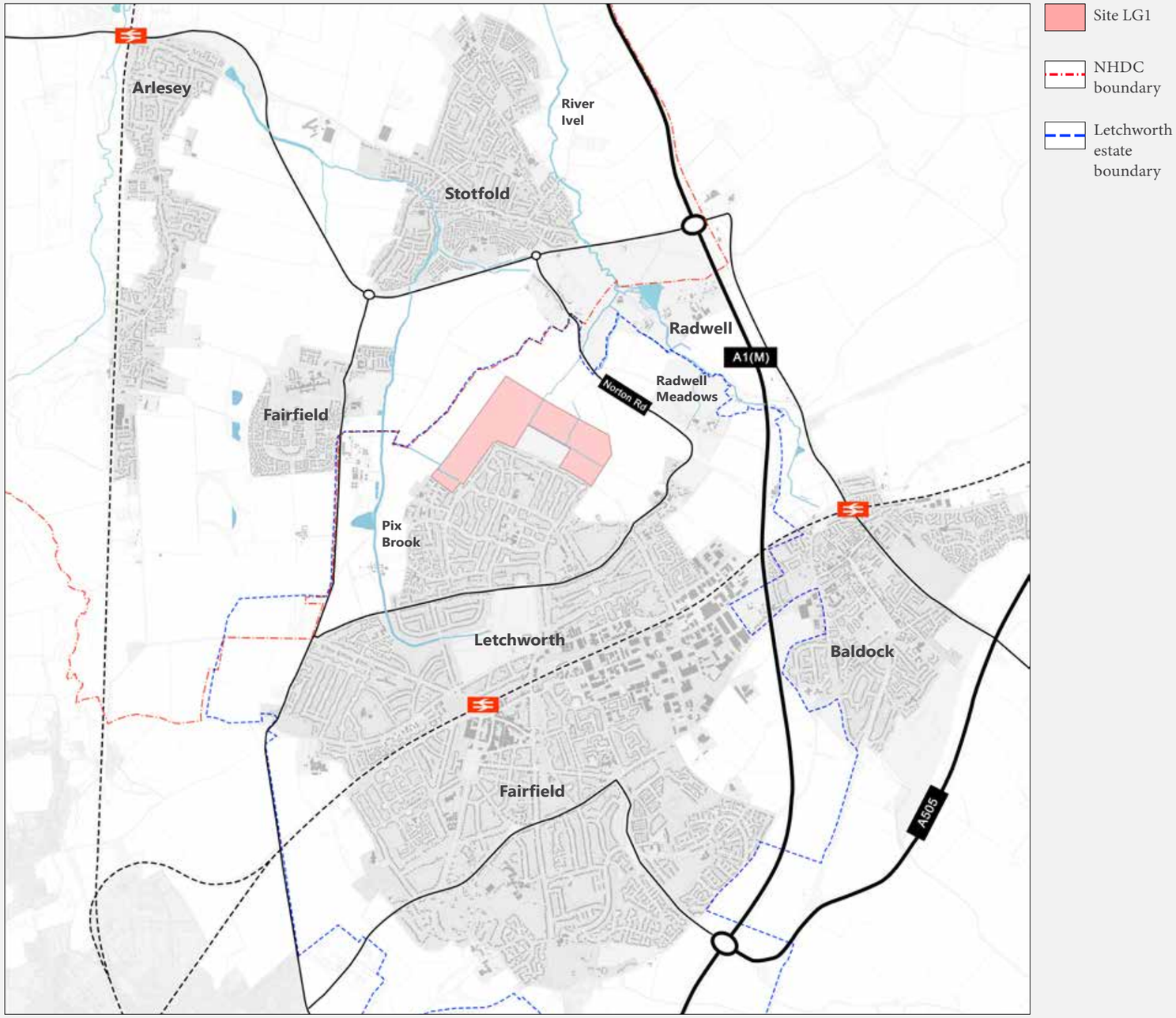


Fig. 1.1: Site location and study area boundary

References:

1. NHC (2022) Local Plan 2011-2031, adopted 8 November 2022. See: https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/North%20Hertfordshire%20Local%20Plan%202011-2031.pdf

Site location
1.3 LG1 is located close to the northern boundary of NHC and Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC). The study area for the strategic masterplanning process has encompassed the immediate and wider context (Fig. 1.1).

Re-imagining the Garden City
1.4 The LG1 development is a greenfield extension masterplan and a once in a generation expansion of the world's first Garden City: Letchworth. Designing to 'balance the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country', Garden City pioneers had transformed the lives of people attracted to towns in search of work, as technology eroded agricultural employment in early 1900s. In terms of masterplanning, it's long-lasting success stems from the pioneer designers' embrace of complexity; weaving together natural landscape, public space, plots and buildings across multiple scales of space and time, underpinned by land value capture for reinvestment into the local community. The LG1 strategic masterplan re-imagines this multi-layered approach in the context of the current and emerging challenges of 21st century living.

1.5 Unlike the original garden city, however, this is expanding an existing place. The Garden City ethos seeks for each layer of the new place to support the existing resident's interests. To this end, the project has been underpinned by extensive community and stakeholder engagement over many years, from site allocation to the development of the strategic masterplan framework. Refer to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) for further details (May 2024, Appendix C).

1.6 In addition to the input of our project team, we have also worked in close collaboration with NHC, Hyas and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to develop the strategic masterplan framework. This was undertaken through regular meetings and wider Project Working Group workshops at key stages of the project aligned with the PPA process.

How to read the document
1.7 LG1's Strategic Masterplan Framework Report (SMFR) is structured as outlined below. The various sections should be read in relation to each other, aligned with the hierarchy of design documentation undertaken so far for LG1 (Fig. 1.2, overleaf) and the included appendices.

Part 2: Understanding the place
1.8 Drawing from baseline reports, it summarises LG1's contextual analysis, site constraints and opportunities.

Part 3: Vision and placemaking objectives
1.9 Outlines the design vision for LG1, the placemaking objectives that further inform design principles and the masterplan options development summary, concluding in the proposed strategic masterplan.

Part 4: Landscape and GI framework
1.10 Provides an overview of LG1's existing landscape structure, outlines the proposed green infrastructure framework and public open space provision for LG1.

Part 5: Habitat and biodiversity framework
1.11 Outlines the ecological opportunities and constraints for the site and the Biodiversity Net Gain baseline calculations for the proposed strategic masterplan.

Part 6: Movement framework
1.12 Summarises the transport infrastructure context for LG1 and the key design aspects of the proposed movement framework, including street typologies.

Part 7: Land use framework
1.13 Outlines the policy context, the proposed amount and distribution for the LG1 masterplan and main informants of its neighbourhood-level local centre.

Part 8: Urban design framework
1.14 Outlines the urban design characteristics and placemaking qualities that embody Garden City design and underpin LG1's strategic masterplan framework.

Part 9: Character Areas
1.15 Summarises five key character areas of the LG1 masterplan, what makes them special and the design principles that will underpin its further development.

Part 10: Sustainability
1.16 Sets out a high-level holistic approach for LG1's sustainable development, including a wide range of determinants: water, landscape, active travel, community wellbeing, energy, air quality, materials and waste.

Part 11: Housing need and diversification
1.17 Summarises the need for housing across tenures to meet existing and emerging need, both in North Herts and more specifically Letchworth, and the approach taken for the LG1 masterplan.

Part 12: Infrastructure Delivery Plan
1.18 Sets out an initial overview of how LG1 may be delivered and the key principles that underpin its phasing strategy.

Appendices
1.19 The report must be read in conjunction with the following Appendices, as submitted with this report:

- App. A – Baseline Report (Feb 2024)
- App. B – Urban Design study (Feb 2024)
- App. C – SCI (May 2024)
- App. D – Landscape Character Study (Feb 2024)
- App. E – Green Infrastructure Audit (Jul 2023)
- App. F – Ecological Desk Study (Aug 2023)
- App. G – PEA report (Dec 2023)
- App. H – Hedgerow Assessment (Dec 2023)
- App. I – Feasibility Stage BNG Report (Dec 2023)
- App. J – Tree Constraints Report (Aug 2023)
- App. K – Transport and Accessibility study (Mar 2024)
- App. L - Flood Risk Assessment (Jan 2023)
- App. M –Housing Needs Assessment (May 2022)
- App. N –Housing Needs Survey (March 2019)
- App. O – LG1 Strategic Masterplan Framework Plans

Fig. 1.2: Hierarchy of design documentation for LG1: the highlighted aspects have been covered in this SMF report.

	Document	Description	Status	Part of strategic masterplan
1	LGCHF Vision	Provides high level framework setting out LGCHF's aspirations for the LG1's development.	Adopted	Y
2	LGCHF Transport Vision	Provides vision and principles supporting LGCHF's approach to transport and modal shift for LG1.	Adopted	N
3	LGCHF GI Vision	Provides vision and principles supporting LGCHF's green infrastructure strategy for LG1.	Adopted	N
4	Placemaking objectives	Provides 8 core design values agreed by both LGCHF and the NHC, setting out the initial approach in terms of design outcomes.	Agreed	Y
5	Strategic masterplan framework	Provides key framework plans supporting the proposed strategic masterplan for the development of LG1.	Draft for NHC comments	Y
6	Character Areas	Sets out areas with distinct, recognisable characters within the proposed LG1 strategic masterplan, how they relate and interact with each other and the wider context.	Agreed	Y
7	Design Principles	Sets out a design approach for developing each of LG1's character areas in further detail.	Draft for NHC comments	Y
8	Sustainability strategy	Sets out high level principles on the approach to sustainability for the development of LG1.	Draft for NHC comments	Y
9	Development Brief	It will set out LGCHF's aspirations that will underpin the agreement with a developer partner.	Not started	N
10	Design Code	It will be a joint document between LGCHF and the appointed development partner, setting out the detailed design requirements and approach across the LG1 development. It will be used to consider future planning applications and detailed design proposals.	Not started	N

1.20 The purpose of this report is to set out a comprehesive and robust strategic design framework that will inform future planning applications for the development of this site, once LGCHF has appointed a partner to bring forward the development. To this end, the main contents of the the highlighted design documentation items on the table alongside (Fig. 1.2) have been summarised and included in this report. This will serve as the basis for the project's next stages which will be undertaken in coordination with NHC, HCC, CBC and other relevant stakeholders, including consultation with the local community.

1.21 Please note that aligned with the strategic nature of this document, a range of design aspects including but not limited to landscape character, offsite improvements, parking strategy, open space character, block configurations and massing modulations, phasing and implementation will require further exploration, discussions and development as part of the project's next stages. These have been highlighted, where relevant, across the various sections of the report, aligned with the feedback received from NHC dated 23rd May.

2

Understanding the place

2. Understanding the place

Historical development

Introduction

2.1 The purpose of historical analysis is to understand Letchworth's past evolution, in order to inform the future development of LG1 (Fig. 2.1, 2.2). We therefore focus on understanding the reasons why Letchworth's character has changed over time, as well as identifying the more constant factors which give the place the historical continuity that underlies its townscape identity.

2.2 In response to changing political-economic issues, Letchworth has inevitably evolved a range of forms over time; generating distinct character areas that together constitute a unique but constantly-developing overall identity.

2.3 Through the following sequence of time-periods, structured around key events (refer p.8), we analyse this evolution for Letchworth (Fig. 2.3, 2,4) and its surrounding settlements; focusing on the layers of landscape, public routes and spaces, land uses and buildings that cumulatively create the settings for everyday life and local place identity. For more details on the historical analysis please refer to the Urban design analysis, townscape assessment and characterisation study.[1]

2.4 We conclude by identifying character areas (Fig. 2.5) from each time-period that offer lessons for addressing current and emerging issues in ways that best support Letchworth's identity and a future for LG1 that is rooted but not stuck in the past. This is analysed in further detail in the Urban design analysis, townscape assessment and characterisation study.[2]



Fig. 2.1: Aerial view of LG1
Source: LGCHF

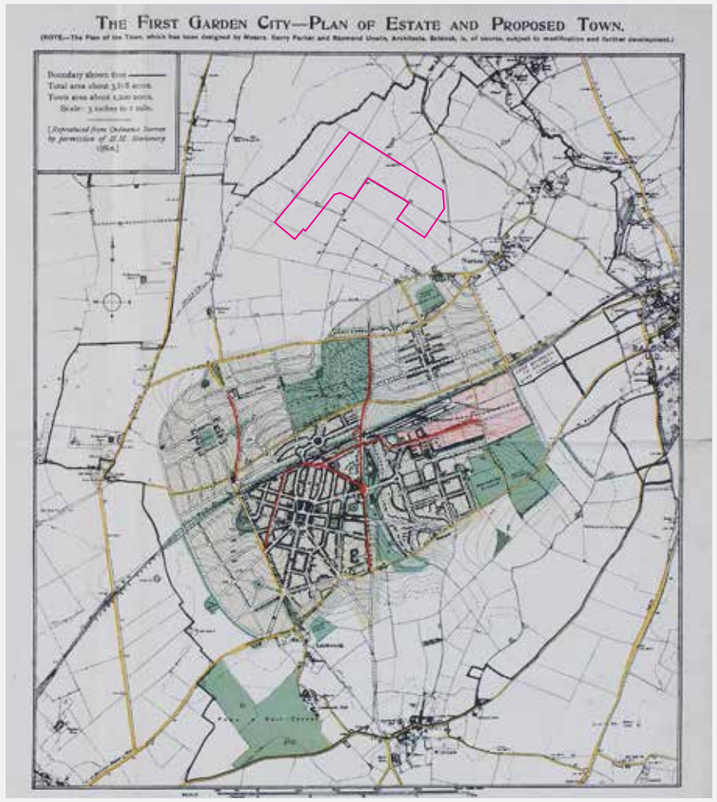


Fig. 2.2: Parker and Unwin's Proposed First Plan of Letchworth
Source: Garden City Collection

The purpose of historical analysis is to understand Letchworth's past evolution, in order to inform the future development of LG1 through the master planning process. We focus on understanding the reasons why Letchworth's character has changed over time, as well as identifying the more constant factors which give the place the historical continuity that underlies its townscape identity.

References:

1. EcoResponsive Environments (February, 2024; v3.0) Urban design, townscape assessment and characterisation study, p.14-50.

2. EcoResponsive Environments (February, 2024; v3.0) Urban design, townscape assessment and characterisation study, p.96-132.

Key events summary

Pre-1800

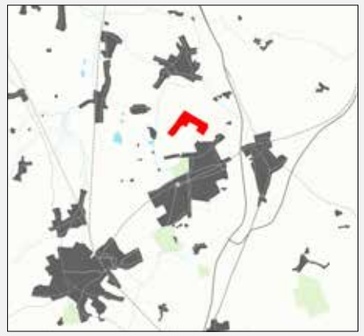
- Valleys of River Ivel and Pix Brook produced evidence of prehistoric settlements such as Norton village, dominated by agrarian economy
- lcknield Way established in prehistoric times
- c.1086 Domesday survey lists Letchworth with 15 households
- c.1086 Domesday survey lists village of Norton
- c.1100 St. Nicholas Church in Norton, surviving today
- c.1130-40s Baldock and Great North Road established

1800-1905



- 1825 - Enclosure Act
- 1901 - Letchworth's population was 96
- Great Northern Railways established
- 1856-60 - Fairfield Hospital built
- 1898 - Howard's Garden City vision published
- 1903 Howard set up First Garden City Ltd.
- 3,800 acres of land purchased to develop Letchworth

1905-1920



- 1905 - Letchworth station gained full passenger service
- 1905-1907 - Cheap cottages exhibition
- 1914-1918 - World War 1
- 1912-1920 - Spirella building constructed
- Letchworth well under construction by 1918
- Letchworth Urban Design Council (LUDC) formed in 1919.

1920-1946



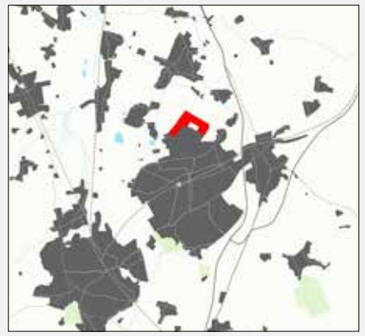
- 'Homes fit for heroes' campaign after World War 1
- 1929-31 - Great Depression
- 1931 - Low interest rates, Letchworth expands
- State-of-art industrial premises with electricity attracting businesses
- 1939 - Letchworth's total population 17,400
- 1939-1945 - World War 2

1946-1974



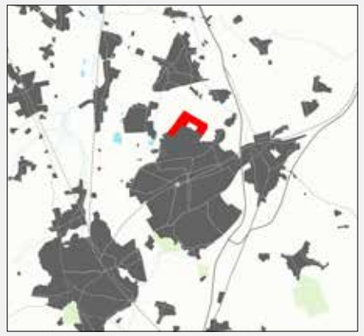
- 1947 - Town & Country Planning Act
- LUDC gains CPO powers post WWII in the TCPA 1947
- Housing delivery led by public sector
- Grange, Jackman and Lordship estates constructed
- 1963 - Letchworth Garden City Corporation formed, in debt till 1974
- 1967 - A1 junctions 8-10 opened

1974-2000



- 1980s - Several key community facilities are built in Letchworth.
- Letchworth expands west of Grange Estate; small-scale infill sites developed
- Surrounding settlements expand
- National politics context: Out-of-town retail, Right to Buy policies
- 1995 - LGCHF formed

2000-present



- Housing crisis
- Climate change crisis
- 2003 - Garden City Greenway opened
- 2008-2020 - Several small-scale infill sites developed in Letchworth
- Development of Fairfield Park with approximately 2000 homes, and other extension developments in Stotfold

Historical development summary

2.5 The plan below outlines the growth of Letchworth over time in relation to LG1 and the surrounding settlements. For detailed analytical narrative, refer to the 'Urban design analysis, townscape assessment and characterisation study' p.14-50.

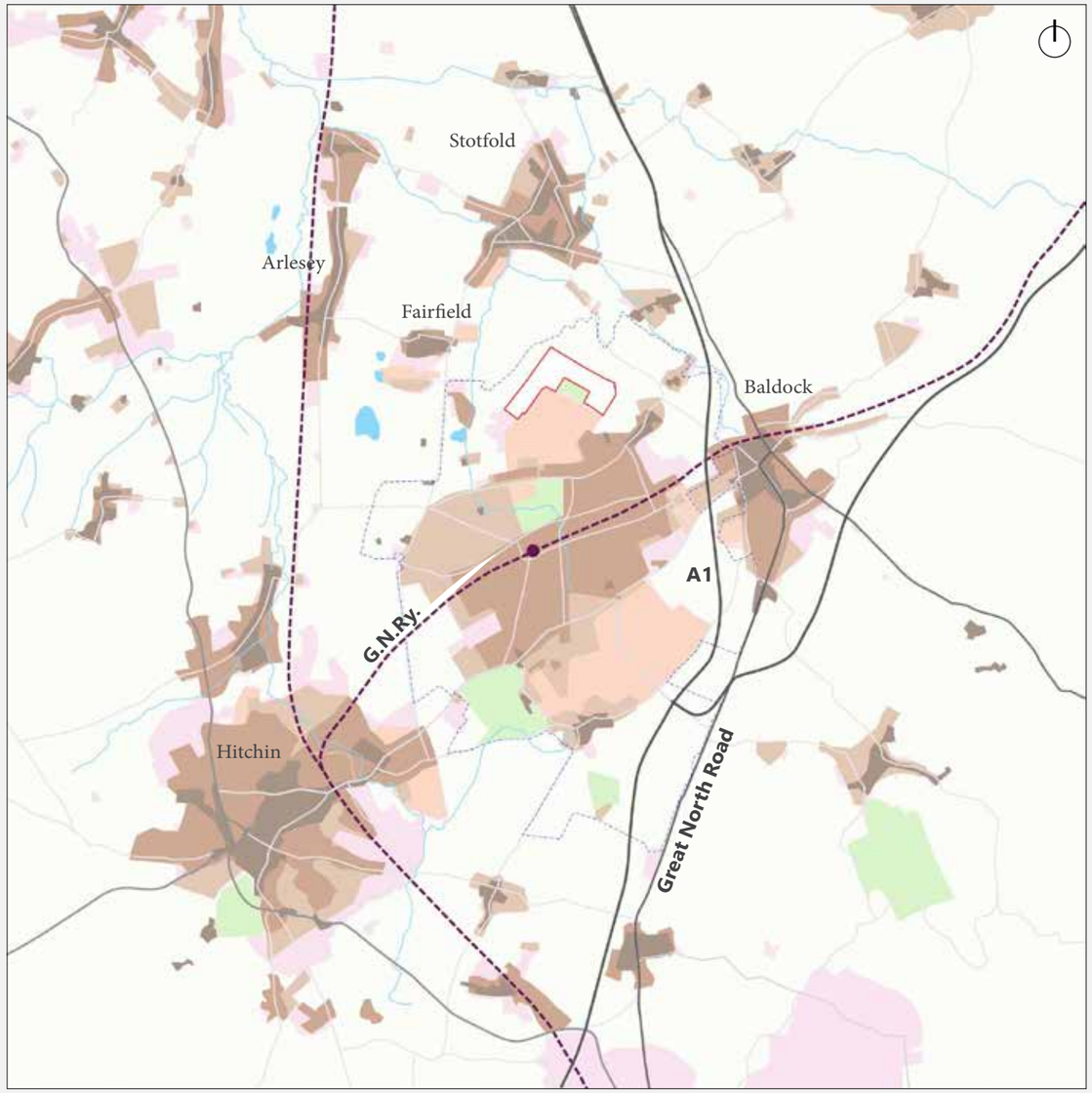


Fig. 2.3: LG1 in relation to the wider context, 1974-2000

Key green spaces
1800-1900
1900-1920
1920-1946
1946-1974
1975-2000

2.6 The detailed evolution of LG1's local context over time is illustrated below. For detailed analytical narrative, refer to the 'Urban design analysis, townscape assessment and characterisation study' p.14-50.

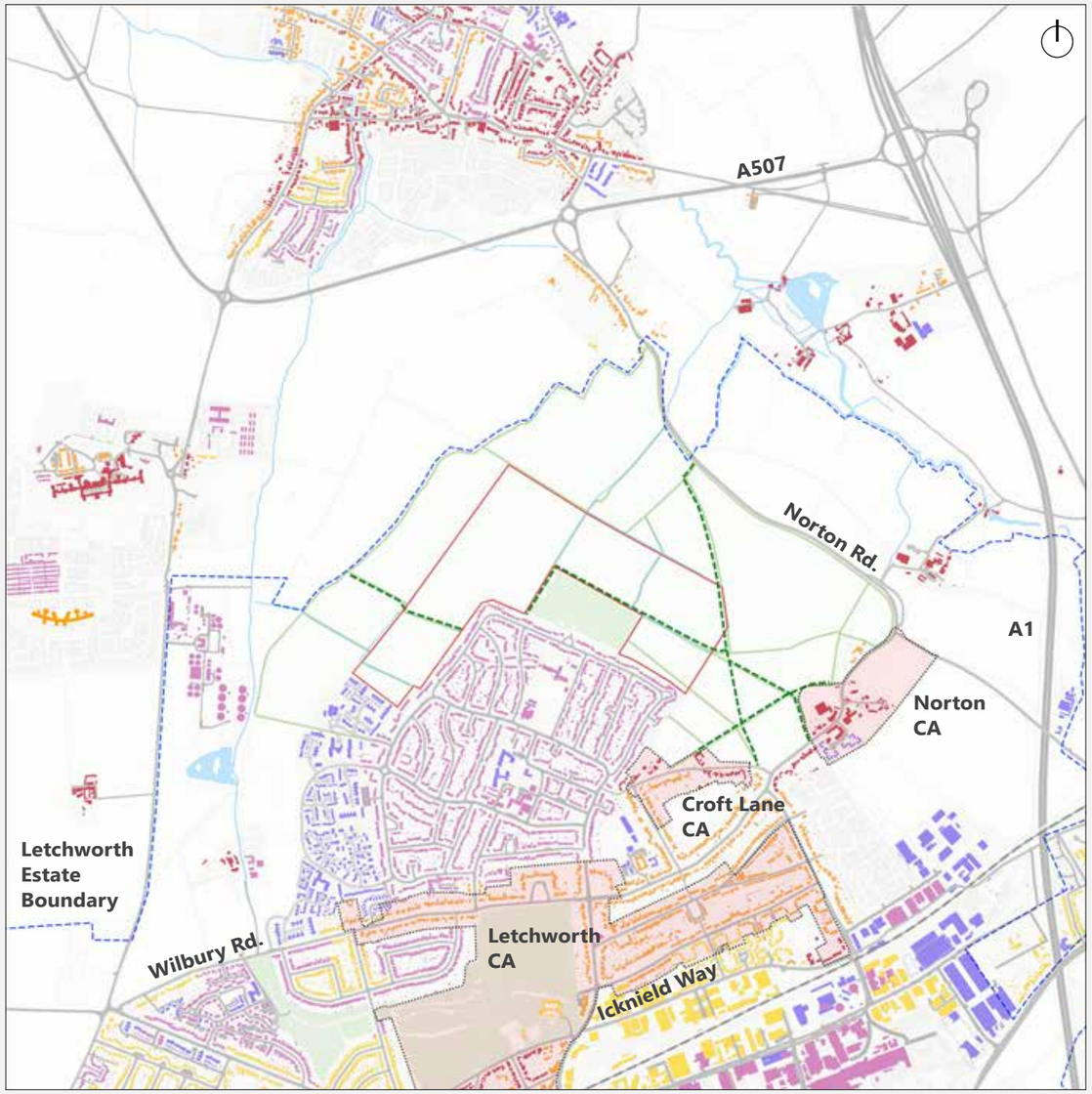


Fig. 2.4: LG1 in relation to the local context, 1974-2000

Key green spaces
1800-1900
1900-1920
1920-1946
1946-1974
1974-2000
Footpath
Field boundaries
LG1
Conservation area (CA)

Key conclusions

2.7 The Letchworth Garden City Estate was previously formed of three parishes, Letchworth, Willian and Norton. Of most relevance to the LG1 site – located at the interface between urbanity and countryside – is the historic village of Norton, offering lessons with regarding rustic country streetscapes, urban grain and housing typologies that underlie its distinctive rural charm. The pre-1905 period also highlights historic buildings such as the Fairfield Hospital with current intervisibility of the culpae of the hospital/spire of the church from LG1.

2.8 Character areas of Letchworth from 1905-1946 establishes and reinforces the fundamental principles of the original Garden City ethos in terms of form, layout and town planning. It provides the foundation for masterplanning LG1's urban design and townscape character as a modern-day Garden City.

2.9 The period from 1946-1974 focuses on two major public sector led expansions of Letchworth, namely Grange Estate and Jackmans Estate, and the private development of Lordship Estate. The Grange Estate offers urban design and townscape lessons in relation to the sensitive integration of LG1's masterplan with its adjacent context, whilst Jackmans Estate, reflects a radical departure from key original Garden City principles in terms of its street layout, block and plot configuration.

2.10 Developments post-1980s focus on a number of smaller in-fill and extension sites within Letchworth e.g. developments along Cade Close, Kristiansand Way, Manor Park and more recent schemes such as Hartington Place, Maddon Gardens, Wissen Drive and Lindsell Avenue. In general, they represent continued exploration of integrating modern-day needs with garden city principles. Hartington Place, in particular, offers lessons on how a contemporary scheme can fit well into the Garden City story, whilst addressing issues related to parking, refuse, energy efficiency and lifetime homes.

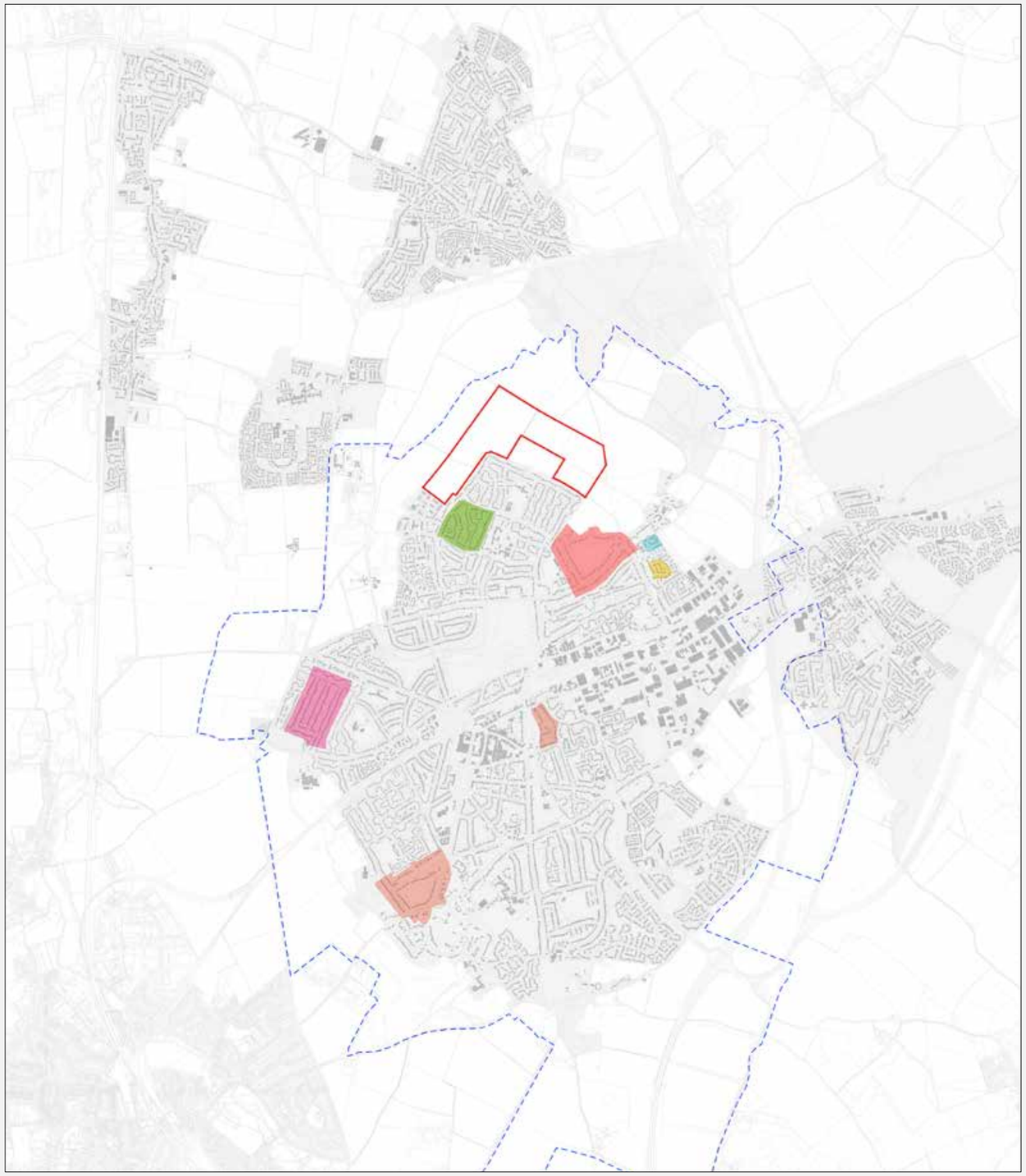


Fig. 2.5: Selected character areas that encapsulate the evolution of Letchworth's character, helping identify the more constant factors which give the place the historical continuity that underlies its townscape identity. Source: Based on Ordnance Map data received from LGCHF

Contextual analysis

2.11 A detailed character and contextual analysis of LG1 in relation to its local and wider context has been undertaken as part of the Baseline Stage[3,4]. Drawing from various baseline reports, a clear distillation of the urban design and townscape implications of the site's local characteristics are summarised here (refer p.14-19). This encompasses design implications for landscape and environmental character; transport, landuse and urban structure; and built form and architecture that should be considered in the development of LG1's strategic masterplan framework.

Landscape and environmental character

2.12 The landscape and environmental character analysis includes a review of the strategic green infrastructure of the wider context (Fig. 2.9) and LG1's local landscape structure (Fig. 2.10) including topography, hydrology and geology, views and visibility, footpaths, rights of way (Fig. 2.6) and access to recreational facilities, ecology and habitat (Fig. 2.7), to inform design implications for LG1's landscape infrastructure. Refer p.14-15.

Transport, landuse and urban structure

2.13 Transport and landuse analysis includes review of the urban structure of LG1's context and review of the land use and social infrastructure needs, aligned with Local Plan policy requirements (Fig. 2.13-2.15). Informed by the Garden City principles, it concludes design implications for LG1 in terms of countryside integration, facilitating multi-modal access to facilities, and achieving legible (Fig. 2.8) and active street scenes that support resilience through urban form. Refer p.17-20.

Built form and architecture

2.14 Built form and architectural analysis draws from the historical evolution of Letchworth's architectural characteristics (Fig. 2.18) to inform design implications for LG1's built form as a contemporary interpretation of the Garden City principles. Refer p.21-22.



Fig. 2.6: Letchworth Garden City Greenway
Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 2.7: Mature oaks along northern boundary of LG1
Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 2.8: Open views west to Fairfield Park from LG1
Source: Peter Neal

A detailed contextual analysis of the site's local characteristics in relation to its wider context undertaken in the Baseline Stage resulted in a clear distillation of urban design and townscape implications for LG1; this included landscape and environmental character, transport, landuse and urban structure, built form and architecture.

Cumulatively, this sets a foundation for the creative reinterpretation of the original Garden City principles for 21st century as part of LG1's strategic masterplan development process.

References:

3. EcoResponsive Environments (February, 2024; v3.0) Baseline Report: Constraints, opportunities, design vision and placemaking objectives.

4. EcoResponsive Environments (February, 2024; v3.0) Urban design, townscape assessment and characterisation study.

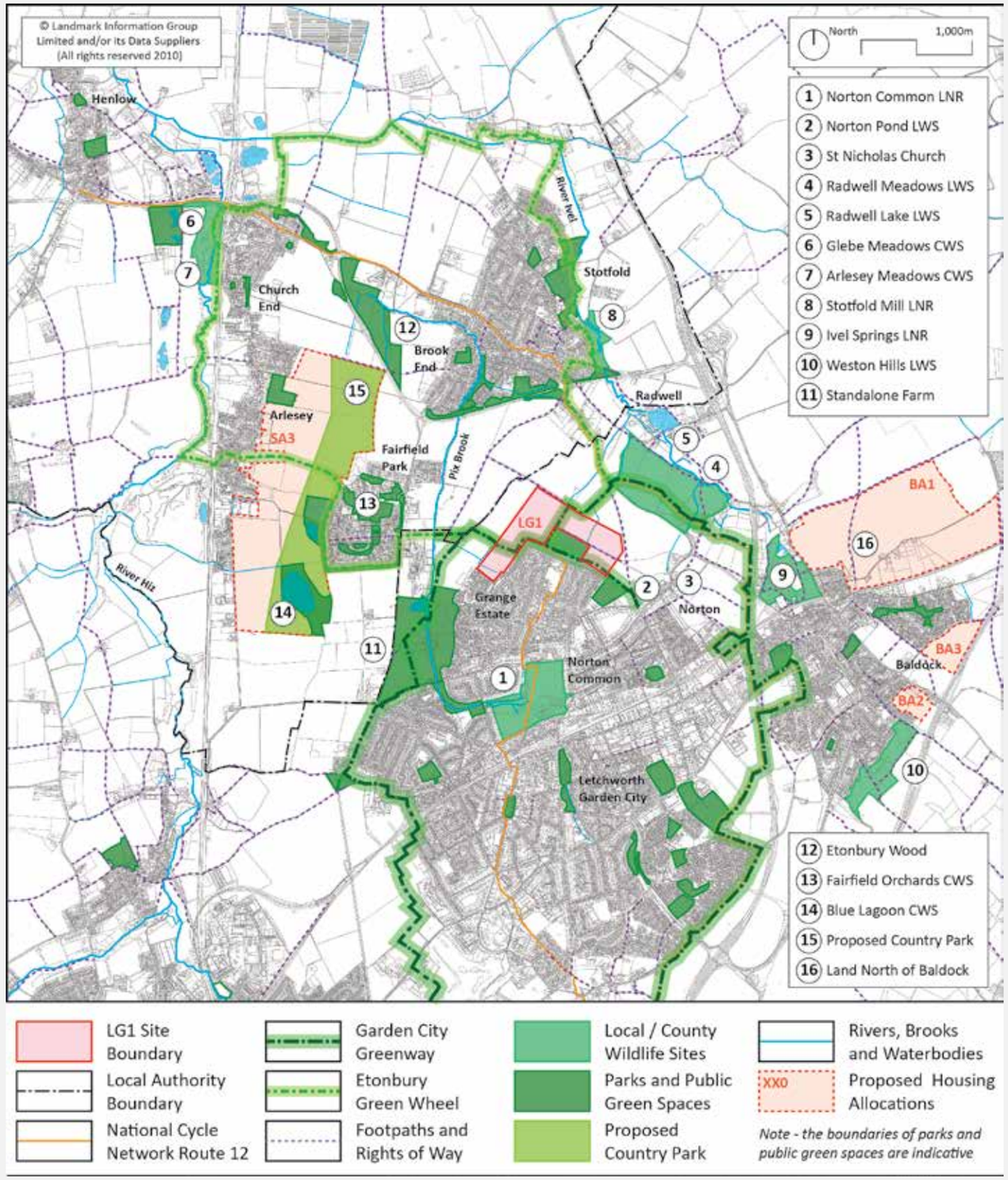


Fig. 2.9: Strategic green infrastructure network
Landscape Character and Sensitivity Study, February 2024, p.18

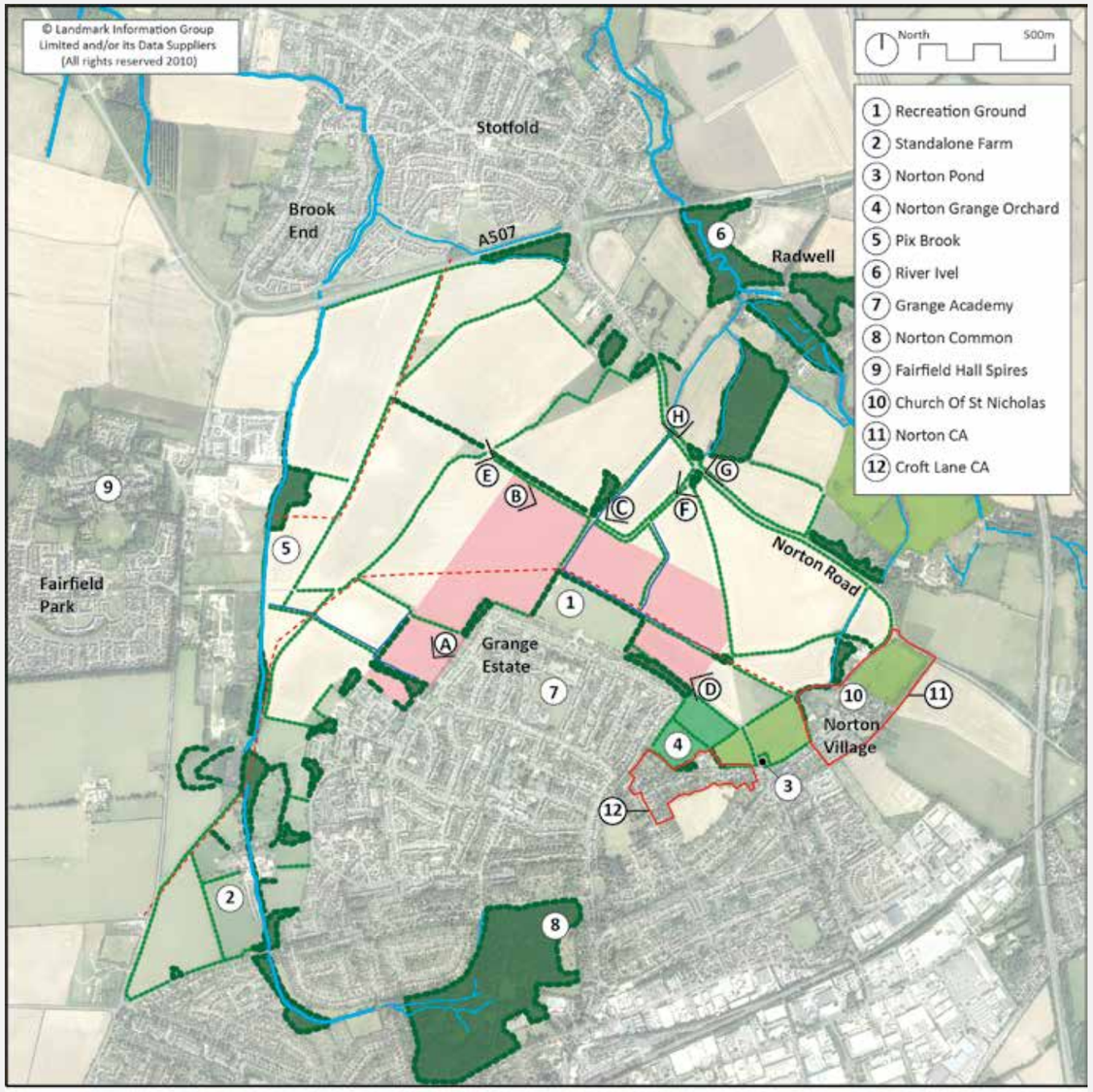


Fig. 2.10: LG1 existing landscape framework
Landscape Character and Sensitivity Study, February 2024, p.32

Landscape and environmental character: Design implications[5,6]

❶	Embrace Garden City Principles in the landscape masterplan. This should include a generous landscape setting and promoting additional tree planting within green spaces and streets contributing to a comprehensive GI framework, creating a clear sense of place integrated with its surrounding landscape.
❷	Strengthen existing landscape buffers. A long-term, active and productive peripheral landscape buffer and defensible Green Belt Boundary should be established immediately to the west, north and east of LG1 and new planting should be used to strengthen existing vegetated screening and protect existing views, particularly towards the western and eastern boundaries from adjacent settlements.
❸	Protect and enhance the Garden City Greenway, and where feasible enhance to establish a linear park to support dwell activities, enlarging the network of walking and cycling routes including maintaining and increasing connectivity with the Etonbury Green Wheel and other recreational destinations.
❹	Expand recreational facilities and resources. Enhance current provision and recreational offer of the Grange Recreation Ground through S106, where feasible, particularly for children and young adults (Fig. 2.11).
❺	Strengthen ecological networks and increase habitat diversity to meet the statutory requirement to deliver biodiversity net gain (BNG) as well as emerging policy for establishing local nature recovery networks.
❻	Protect, maintain and enhance the existing hedgerow network and existing mature trees. They make an important contribution to landscape character and connectivity, articulating views, providing screening and defining visual envelopes within the site.
❼	Integrate sustainable drainage within existing drainage pattern. The relatively flat or gently sloping topography provides limited constraint on development and access within the site. In this respect, careful attention should be paid to drainage and surface water management.
❽	The site naturally drains to the north and to the west through an existing network of ditches (Fig. 2.12) aligned with field boundaries. This pattern should inform the introduction of a gravity-fed sustainable drainage strategy, improving climate-resilience.
❾	Extend the diversity of habitats and provide additional amenity and ecological value with swales, wetlands and areas of open water as part of the Sustainable Urban Drainage strategy. This may include semi-naturalised habitats, including permanent areas of water, native aquatic and marginal planting and varying bank grading, providing breeding habitat for amphibians.
❿	Explore viability of sustainable drainage interventions at a plot and building scale that contribute to further slowing of surface water runoff e.g. through permeable paving, rain gardens and/or rainwater harvesting.
⓫	Consider existing drainage issues on the Grange Recreation Ground when planning for environmental improvements and an enhanced recreational offer.
⓬	Introduce grasslands and wildflower meadows that include opportunities to protect, create and enhance chalk grasslands, where feasible, to reflect prevailing National and North Hertfordshire landscape character profiles and objectives.
⓭	Create new areas of species-rich wildflower meadow, native woodland and native scrub on-site to complement and strengthen these existing habitats.
⓮	Incorporate additional man-made habitat features including hibernacula, log piles, bat, bird and invertebrate boxes within the development proposals to improve refuge opportunities for a range of species.
⓯	Respect views towards locally prominent landmarks.
⓰	Strengthen the Pix Brook corridor, beyond the site boundary, that contributes to an important ecological network by maintaining and extending connectivity with hedgerows, shelterbelts and woodland copses.



Fig. 2.11: Play and fitness equipment, Grange Recreation Ground
Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 2.12: Existing drainage ditches along field boundaries
Source: EcoResponsive Environments

References:

5. EcoResponsive Environments (February, 2024; v3.0) Baseline Report: Constraints, opportunities, design vision and placemaking objectives, p.9-23.

6. EcoResponsive Environments (February, 2024; v3.0) Urban design, townscape assessment and characterisation study, p.51-69.

Transport infrastructure and local destinations: Key analysis map

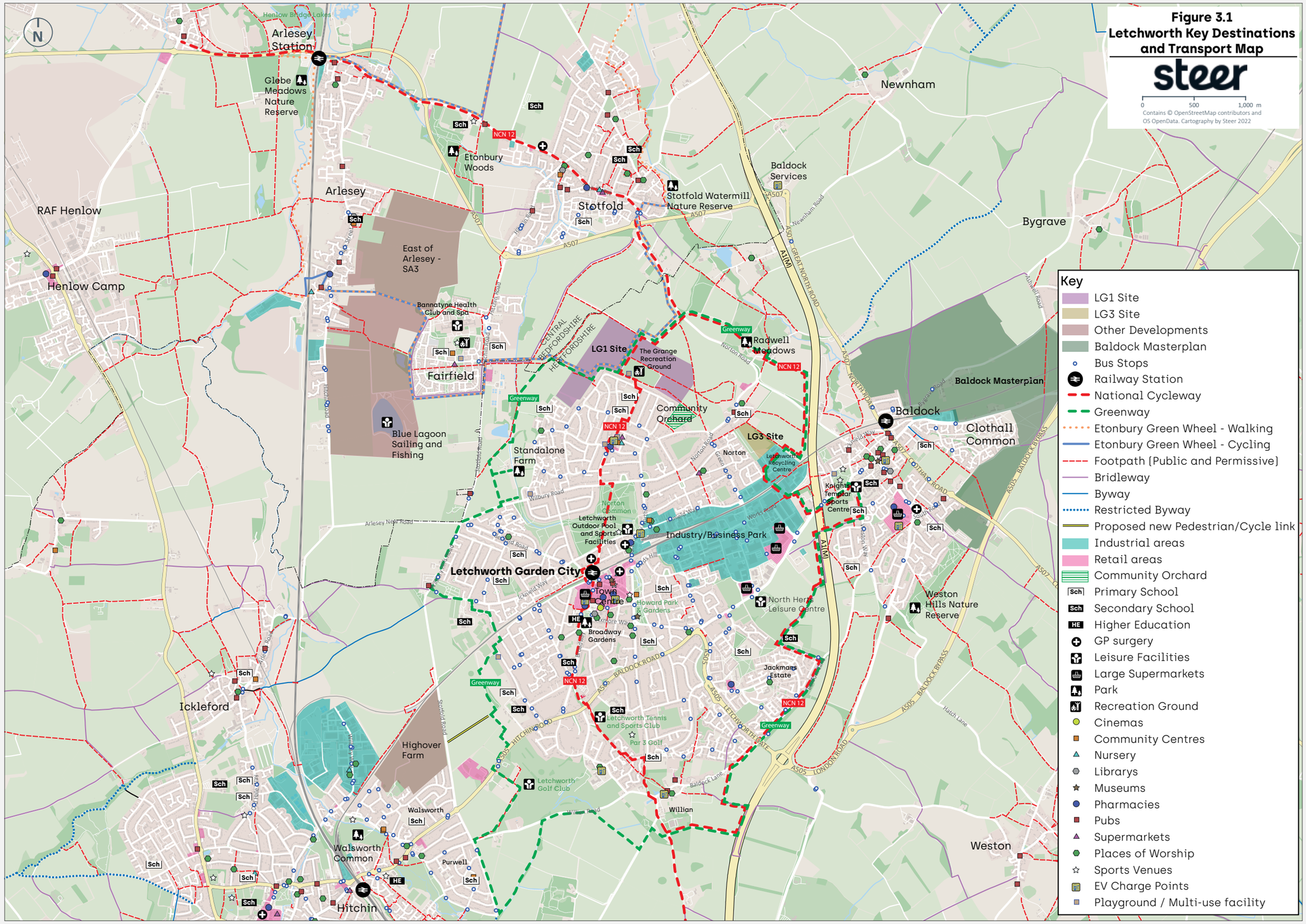


Fig. 2.13: Key Destinations and Transport Map
Transport & Accessibility report, June 2023, p.17

Existing routes to key destinations: Key analysis map

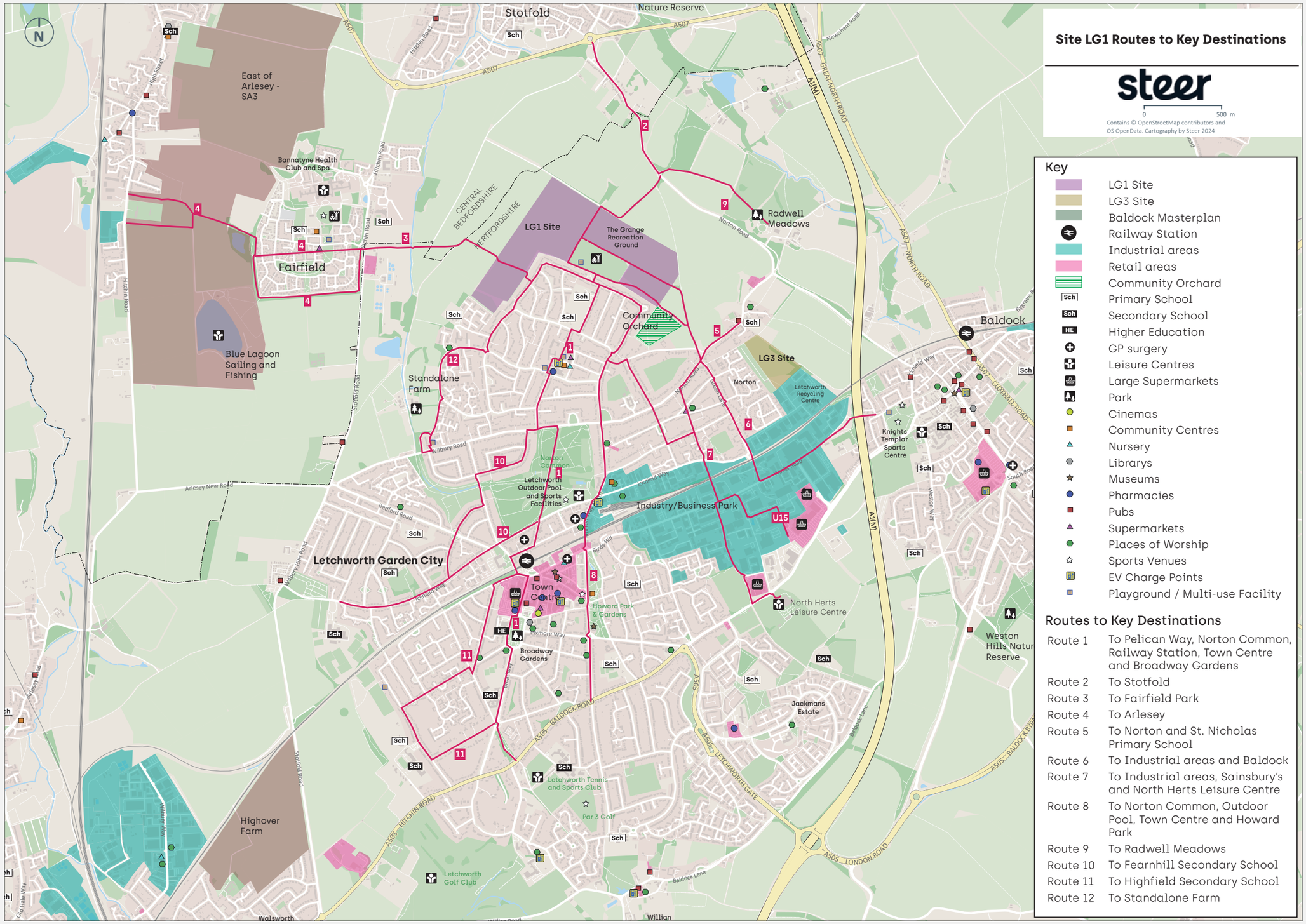
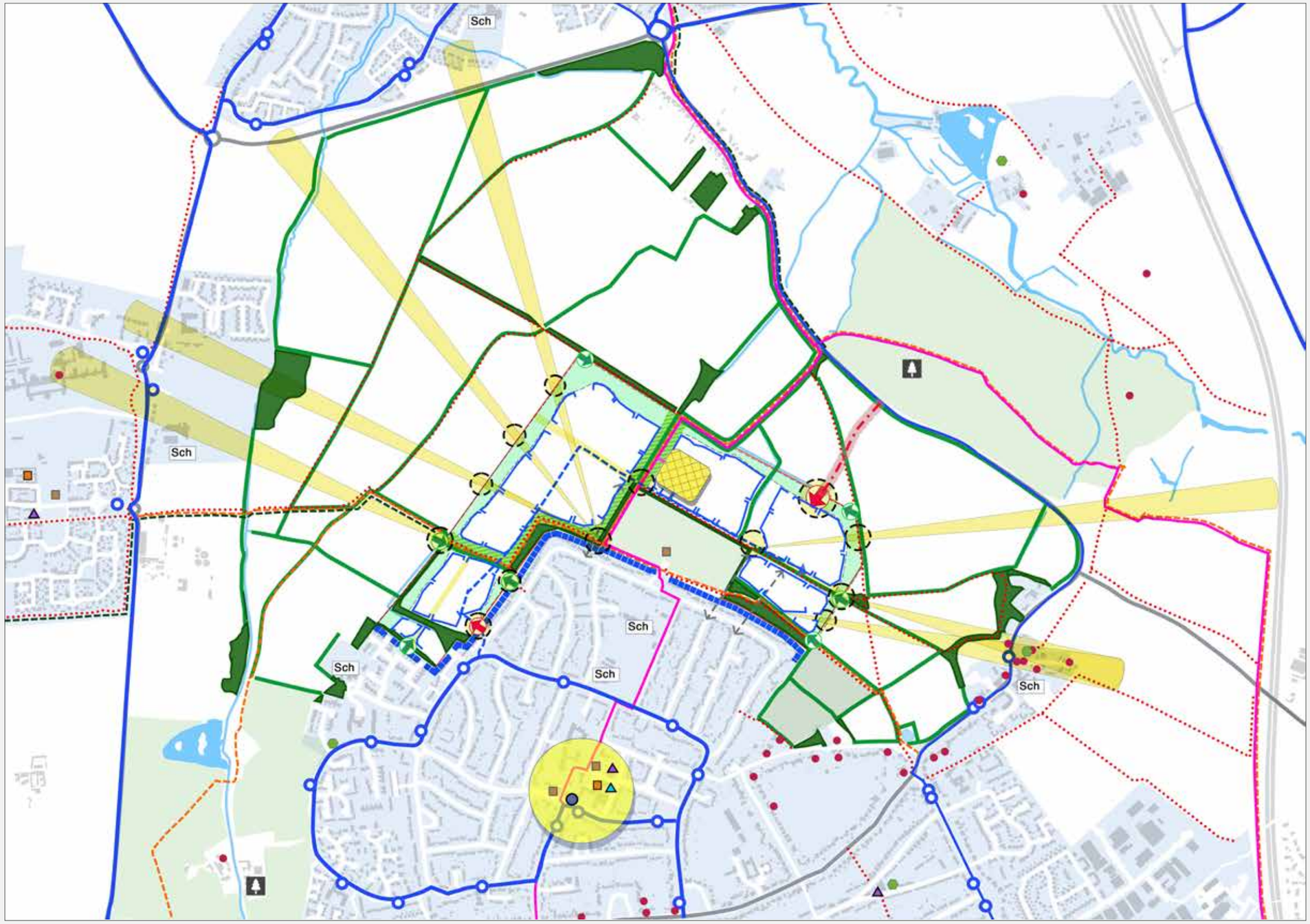


Fig. 2.14: Existing routes to key destinations.
Source: Steer

Land use, social infrastructure and urban structure: Key analysis map



	Site boundary
	Garden City Greenway
	National Cycle Network Route 12
	Etonbury Greenwheel
	Footpaths and Right of Ways
	Key nodes and gateways
	Long distant views
	Backs of adjacent plots
	Potential active edges
	Vehicular access point
	Pedestrian/ cycle access point
	Listed structures
	Bus route and stops
	Pelican way local centre
	Potential LG1 neighbourhood centre/ hub to be aligned with the Local Plan (Policy SP15) in relation to the land use and social infrastructure needs. Key elements include a new 2FE primary school and neighbourhood-level retail/ community facilities providing 900sqm (net) floorspace.
	Grange Recreation Ground
	Greenway Linear Park
	Proposed peripheral landscape buffer
	Existing shelterbelts/copses/ hedgerows

Fig. 2.15: Consolidated urban design analysis including LG1's landuse and social infrastructure needs and its contextual sensitivities in relation the Grange Estate.
Urban design, townscape assessment and characterisation study, February 2024, p.93

Transport, land use and urban structure: Design implications[7,8]

❶	Adopt an integrated multi-modal approach to LG1's movement and transport networks stitched into the wider context (Fig. 2.13), providing a sustainable extension to Letchworth that facilitates opportunities for active travel, healthy lifestyles and 10% modal shift.
❷	Create a mobility hub on LG1 for facilitating opportunities for easy interchange between sustainable modes of travel.
❸	Protect and enhance the public rights of way network (Fig. 2.16) through and around the site and consider opportunities for the creation of safe, direct and legible walking and cycling routes to/from The Grange, Norton, Fairfield Park, local primary and secondary schools, Letchworth station and town centre (Fig. 2.14).
❹	Develop a sustainable public transport strategy for the site that also benefits the adjacent Grange Estate and connectivity to and from the Letchworth town centre.
❺	Create a connected, landscape-integrated, multi-modal street network that prioritises active travel, whilst incorporating appropriate design measures to mitigate rat-running of vehicles through Grange Estate.
❻	Consider issues associated with parking overspill near the Grange Recreation Ground (on match days) and wider Grange Estate.
❼	Adopt a coordinated approach to a Sustainable Travel Plan with Settle (main landowner in the Grange) and North Herts Council, in relation to upgrading the local cycling and pedestrian networks, through the allocation of S106 contributions.
❽	Co-locate retail, community centre, mobility hub and school in the most accessible location to create a vibrant local centre (Fig. 2.15). Take a coordinated approach with Settle aligned with Pelican Way regeneration strategy.
❾	Maintain and frame key views towards locally prominent landmarks (Fig. 2.15).
❿	Provide opportunities for an improved understanding of cultural assets discovered from archaeological investigations through interpretation using art and heritage trails anchored around new public realm. Consider implications of the archaeology that is relatively shallow, in terms of the nature of landscaping and character of the proposed attenuation basins.
⓫	Establish a sense of gateway to/from LG1 from Norton Road, Western Way and Grange Rec with a hierarchy of nodes along LG1's street and public space networks for easy way-finding (Fig. 2.15).
⓬	Create character variation rooted in the Garden City planning principles of 'vista, closure, grouping and accent', for a gradual transition to the rural countryside with a mix of formal and informal settings.
⓭	Support safety of public outdoor spaces by maximising LG1's street and public space networks (including the Grange Rec, Greenway linear park and the peripheral green belt) to have active frontage through built form.
⓮	Place key community and civic facilities foregrounded as landmarks of appropriate relative significance and enhance memorability of street intersections through corner buildings designed as minor landmarks and distinguish street typologies through building elements and tree species.
⓯	Maintain the privacy of existing Grange Estate properties that back onto the site boundaries (Fig. 2.17) by protecting and extending the existing shelterbelts adjacent to Grange Estate and ensuring appropriate privacy distances between existing and new dwellings.
⓰	Locate residential uses/typologies to capitalise and maximise on green views.
⓱	Future open space provision should meet or exceed FIT planning standards for amenity green space, natural spaces, play areas and parkland to provide a set of connected and multifunctional spaces supporting recreation, active travel and biodiversity.



Fig. 2.16: Greenway path along southern boundary
Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 2.17: Field edge adjacent to Grange Estate
Source: Peter Neal

References:

7. EcoResponsive Environments (February, 2024; v3.0) Baseline Report: Constraints, opportunities, design vision and placemaking objectives, p.24-41.

8. EcoResponsive Environments (February, 2024; v3.0) Urban design, townscape assessment and characterisation study, p.70-95.

Built form and architecture: Key analysis maps

Fig. 2.18: Built form and architectural analysis draws from the historical evolution of Letchworth's architectural characteristics to inform design implications for LG1's built form as a contemporary interpretation of the Garden City principles.



1
(1800-1905)



2
(1905-1920)



3
(1905-1920)



4
(1920-1946)



5
(1946-1974)



6
(2000-present)

Built form and architecture: Design implications[9,10]

❶	Create blocks that support walkability, with entrances fronting the street, in particular, along LG1's southern boundary where existing residential properties back onto it.
❷	Explore design, viability and stewardship models for not only providing front green spaces with grouped building layouts, but also, secure communal spaces within blocks, where relevant and/or possible, to offer safe play spaces, local food production and socialisation potentials.
❸	Create a variety of well-crafted, human-scale block configurations with built edges that follow the line of roads (with slight fluctuations), and capitalises on the site's landscape assets, building setbacks and grouped layouts around attractive greens spaces to create vistas and accents, achieving coherence despite variety in built form.
❹	Create corner plots that relate to streets in terms of frontage, natural surveillance, enhancing local legibility and wayfinding, aligned with Letchworth Garden City's town planning principles.
❺	Design the scale of houses to complement the size and location of the plot with adequate space between terraces and/or larger dwellings to create visual gaps offering views of landscape.
❻	Integrate existing and new landscape within LG1's streets and plots using green verges, trees-lined streets and hedgerows, where possible, to ensure that landscape remains integral to LG1's townscape.
❼	Develop a design approach that integrates modern day functional needs such as car and cycle parking and refuse storage within landscaped-integrated streets and plots, so as to not visually clutter LG1's 'street pictures'.
❽	Design individual house types to reflect the key Garden City architectural principles such as maximising privacy, sunlight and airspace and create functional design devoid of unnecessary ornamentation through use of simple geometric forms and harmonious materials.
❾	Use Garden City architectural features (Fig. 2.19 - asymmetrical forms, dominant roofs with overhanging eaves and chimneys, rectangular forms with prominent gabled and/or hipped red tiled roofs, enlivened with dormers, bays windows and gabled projections) to create a balance between unity and variation within LG1's built form.
❿	Focus LG1's architecture on key characteristics that people notice about buildings and street scenes (Fig. 2.20 - skylines, vertical and horizontal subdivisions of building facades, window types and groupings, entrances, colours and textures of materials, ground level details including 'soft' plot boundaries, substantial green space within front gardens and street details such as trees, lights, refuse bins, seats and signs) and use contemporary materials and detailing to achieve the multi-scale richness that underpins Unwin's 'street pictures' for a modern day Garden City.
⓫	Establish sustinable building stock which require limited energy to heat or cool, and external environments which are comfortable and resilient in extreme weather.
⓬	For LG1's architecture to meet today's needs of high-quality, adaptable and climate-efficient homes, the sustainability targets and specific delivery requirements should be agreed with LGCHF and development partner, and incorporated into the design principles and design code for this development.



Fig. 2.19: Westholm, Letchworth
Source: Garden City Collection



Fig. 2.20: Buildings and hedges reinforcing the line of the roads at Pixmore Way, Letchworth. Source: EcoResponsive Environments

References:

9. EcoResponsive Environments (February, 2024; v3.0) Baseline Report: Constraints, opportunities, design vision and placemaking objectives, p.40-41.

10. EcoResponsive Environments (February, 2024; v3.0) Urban design, townscape assessment and characterisation study, p.96-132.

Site constraints

2.15 The key site constraints for LG1 are summarised below and illustrated in plan (Fig. 2.21, overleaf). We creatively engage with the site constraints in coordination with the wider design team to transform them into design opportunities that support a sustainable masterplan framework for LG1.

Site constraints are creatively engaged with through a trans-disciplinary design process to transform them into design opportunities for LG1.

Land form and hydrology

2.16 The site is located on high ground to the north of Letchworth and falls gently to the north and west. It drains via existing ditches towards the river corridors of the Pix Brook and River Ivel. Future development should take account of the objectives of the ResillienTogether flood management project along the Pix Brook (www.resilientogether.org.uk). It should also respect the prominent setting and these natural drainage patterns informing the location of the proposed attenuation basins. The Drainage and Flood Risk assessment presents the site as sustainable in terms of flood risk and compliant with the criteria set out in the NPPF.

Existing hedgerows, trees and shelterbelts

2.17 The field boundaries are marked by mature hedgerows, trees and shelterbelts. Several hedgerows are considered important in relation to the Hedgerow Regulations as they mark historic field boundaries and have ecological interest. Future development should respect these natural features and accommodate them wherever possible, minimising the loss of hedgerows, Cat A and Cat B trees together with their Root Protection Zones.

Strategic pathways and cycle routes

2.18 The site is bisected and surrounded by a network of footpaths and cycleways providing access to surrounding areas and a well-used recreation resource. The route of the Garden City Greenway should be protected in the future masterplan along with access to the Etonbury Green Wheel and the National Cycling Network Route 12.

Prominent views and visual sensitivity

2.19 The site provides elevated views to the west of Fairfield Park and the spires of Fairfield Hall. To the east the tower of the Church of St Nicholas is visible and framed by surrounding mature vegetation. The north western boundary of the site is visually sensitive to middle distance views from the settlements of Stotfold, Fairfield, the Hitchin Road and the A507 and the southern boundary is lined with backs of existing residential properties of the Grange Estate. Future development should respect these prominent view and their wider settings.

Access

2.20 Access points from Norton Road and Western Way are the location we are currently working to as indicated in the Transport & Accessibility Report. This however, is subject to agreement with NHC and HCC. Further discussions will be held with the NHC, HCC and Central Bedfordshire Council to ensure that the strategic masterplan is well integrated with the surrounding area and future development sites in terms of access.

2.21 Key constraints to inform the final choice of the Norton Road access point (from a wider area of search) considers traffic safety and visibility splays, sensitivities associated with the existing landscape and ecological assets, existing land form and drainage implications, and existing pathways and cycle routes. This is currently being investigated in further detail by the consultant team in coordination with NHC and HCC.

Archaeologically sensitive zones

2.22 In terms of site's archaeology, consultant advice is that the findings are not of such significance that HCC will require any preservation in-situ as an absolute constraint. Due to its shallow nature, however, open-area excavation as mitigation might be required by condition on planning consent. Opportunities associated with the site's archaeology are discussed in the following section.

Utility pipelines and associated infrastructure

2.23 Gas, water, electricity and telephone/internet statutory undertakers were consulted using the likely scope of development in accordance with the SP15 policy in the Local Plan. This exercise indicated that there is capacity in the network to serve the development, subject to standard interventions as part of the development. Investigations confirmed that both the gas pipeline and OHL can be relocated/ buried but would be subject of an additional cost as part of the development. Currently we are working on the basis that the gas pipeline remains where it is, whilst the OHL will be buried along the proposed street layout. This will, however, need to be tested for commercial viability.

Initial noise assessment implications

2.24 The noise assessment found that the risk of noise to the proposed dwellings would be negligible in the greater proportion of the site and low for a small proportion of the site closest to the motorway close to the north east boundary. This has implications such as not locating the school in the North Eastern zone of the site. With the adoption of a 'Good Acoustic Design Process', however, noise standards can be comfortably met.

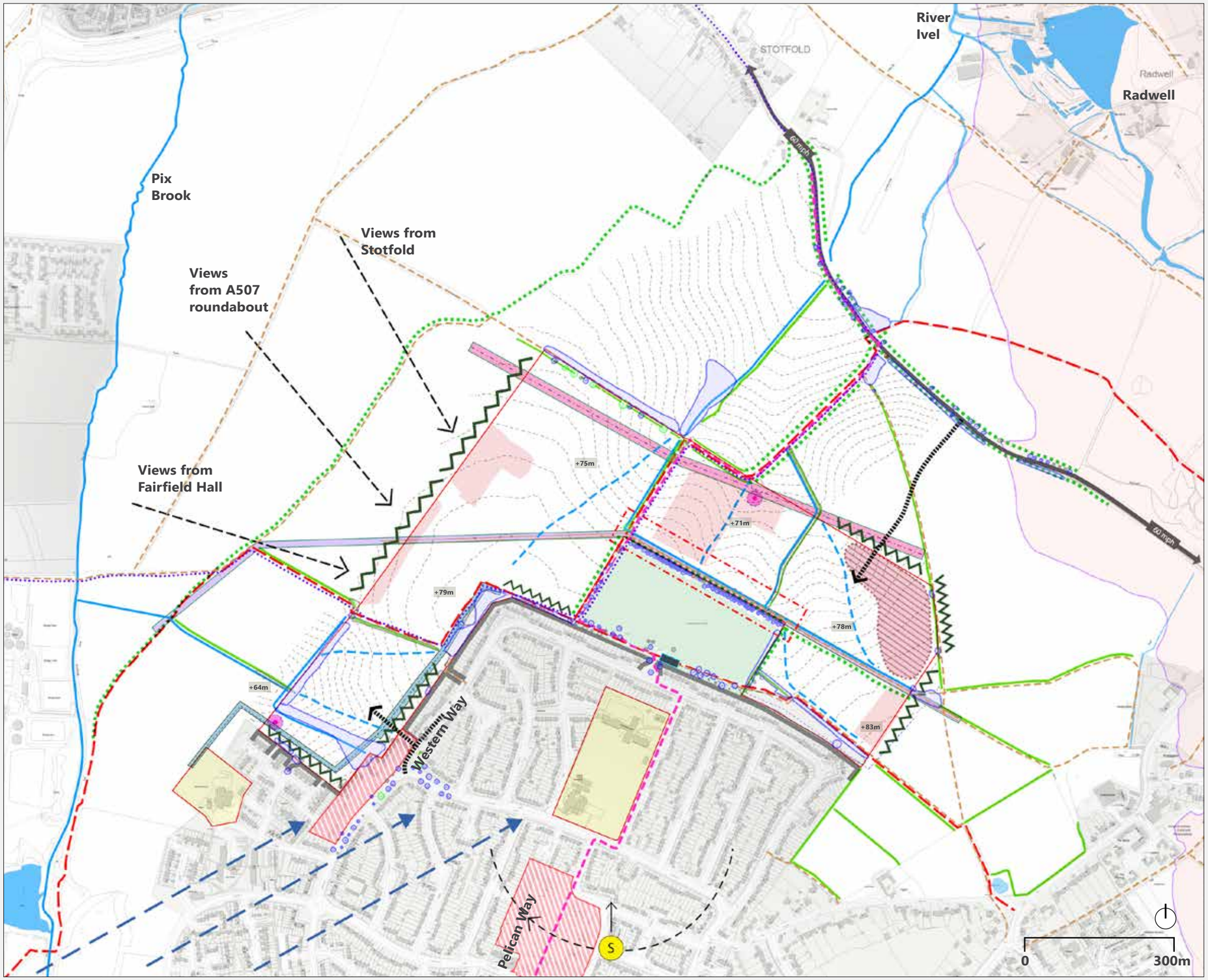
Dominant wind direction and sun path

2.25 Lastly, the masterplan framework should consider the direction of the wind, in particular winter winds and the site's solar orientation to optimize the alignment of the streets, plots and buildings in a balanced approach with the other site constraints.

Fig. 2.21 The key site constraints are summarised in the plan diagram.

Key

	Site boundary
	Contour lines
	Existing hedgerows with 12m protection buffer
	'Important' hedgerows (Hedgerow Regulations 1997) with 12m protection buffer
	Category A (high quality) trees
	Category B (moderate quality) trees
	Category C (low quality) trees
	Prominent views towards LG1
	Dominant winter wind direction
	Visually sensitive boundary
	Brooks, rivers and ditches
	Existing surface runoff
	Garden City Greenway
	Etonbury Green Wheel
	Other footpaths
	National Cycle Network Route 12
	Norton Road (60 mph and ped/cycle paths on one side)
	Adjacent residential edge
	Gas easement (6m either side)
	OHL easement (3m either side)
	Zone for OHL retention (TBC)
	Sewer easement (3m either side)
	Indicative foul water pump with 15m cordon sanitare
	Vehicular entrances to site
	Archaeologically sensitive zones
	Adjacent settlements
	Road traffic noise impact from A1
	Indicative exclusion zone for school
	Recreation ground car parking
	Western Way and Pelican Way development site boundaries (TBC)



Site opportunities

2.26 The key design opportunities for LG1 are summarised below and illustrated in plan (Fig. 2.22, overleaf). These are rooted in a deep understanding of LG1's character and contextual analysis to support a sustainable masterplan framework.

Site opportunities are rooted in a deep understanding of the site's character and contextual analysis, to support a sustainable strategic resilient masterplan framework for LG1.

Strengthening boundaries and green buffers

2.27 Several site boundaries are screened by existing shelter belts, mature trees and hedgerows. Additional structural landscape and planting of native species along the northern, western and eastern boundaries should provide a strong green buffer to the site integrated with ecological and recreational potentials of sustainable urban drainage systems following the natural drainage pattern of the land form. Further discussions on drainage sensitivities and green buffers to existing shelterbelts will need to be undertaken in the next stages of design development. Planting along boundaries with the Grange Estate should be strengthened and where there are gaps within the existing edges of the site, these should be filled in with native planting fronted by new public space/ housing or align with 'new' back gardens to ensure that future development does not undermine privacy of existing residents. In discussions with NHC, the SMF establishes a 6m buffer on either side of existing hedgerows/shelterbelts. This is measured from the centre line of the hedgerows and shelterbelts. In many locations the width of this 6m buffer is exceeded.

Protecting and extending hedgerows and trees

2.28 A key characteristic of the site is its natural hedgerows, shelterbelts and mature trees that can directly contribute to the placemaking. These assets should be protected and enhanced with additional tree and hedgerow planting where possible, considering opportunities to reinstate hedgerows that have been lost in the past. Additional tree planting, particularly along the western boundary will help develop a sense of enclosure and mitigate risks associated with coalescence.

Creating ecological networks and BNG

2.29 The site and its surrounding context have a varied mosaic of habitats including broad-leaved woodland, dense scrub, and semi-improved grassland. Much of the existing agricultural and arable land has limited ecological interest. Additional native planting and particularly new drainage features and wetlands can make a significant contribution to climate resilience and adaptation whilst improving ecological corridors and biodiversity net-gain (BNG).

Enhancing the Greenway

2.30 The existing footpath network provides an important recreational resource and there is clear potential to strengthen and extend the route of Garden City Greenway, connecting this to surrounding footpaths and cycleways. Where this passes through development it may potentially form part of an enhanced linear park with improved seating, play and recreational features.

Creating landscape-integrated gateways

2.31 Learning from Barry Parker's Parkway concept there is an opportunity to create a parkway-inspired multi-modal 'gateway' access route into LG1 and wider Letchworth from Norton Road. The link from Western Way, however, should be designed to minimise any sense of exclusion from the Grange Estate: the masterplan should seek a seamless transition between Grange Estate and LG1 through built form and landscape; requiring a wider coordinated approach with Settle, the main landowner in the Grange.

Creating green streets within LG1

2.32 Street tree planting with distinct landscape features and SUDs where appropriate should be a key feature of the future street network. This will draw on the precedents and historic characteristics of the original Letchworth Garden City to development modern-day streets typologies that encourage walking, cycling, other forms of sustainable travel modes, socialisation potentials and accommodating children's play where appropriate, whilst being rooted in Letchworth's DNA.

Celebrating archaeological and historic value

2.33 Although, any preservation in-situ is not required for the archaeological areas of significance identified through survey as an absolute constraint, there is an opportunity to celebrate the site's history and archaeological value through interpretation as an integrated part of the existing and future public realm network.

Creating a vibrant neighbourhood centre

2.34 Key local facilities such as a new 2FE primary school, neighbourhood-level retail and community facilities of around 900sqm (aligned with the Policy SP15 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan) and a sustainable mobility hub can be to create a vibrant neighbourhood centre, in ways that makes productive social participation more attractive and fosters a greater sense of community. This would, however, need to complement (not compete) with the renewed local centre of the Grange Estate as part of Settle's redevelopment plans for the Pelican Way site.

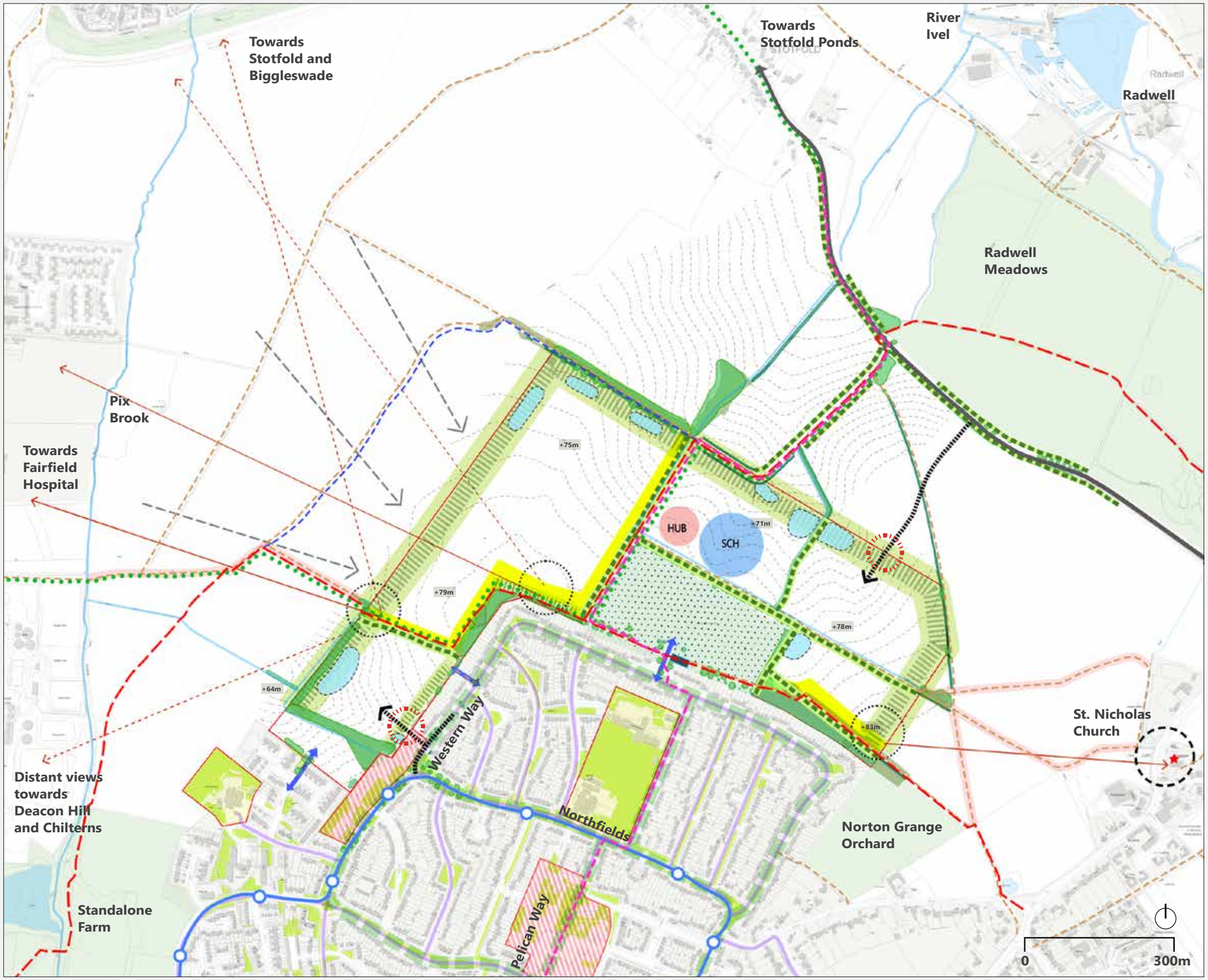
Enabling Grange Estate environmental and public realm improvements

2.35 Lastly, the connections between the new and the existing communities can be strengthened with additional landscape areas, attractive planting and public realm improvements as noted in the Accessibility Audit of existing streets. Potential new and/or improved ped/ cycle links with Avocet, Western Way, Grange Rec and Norton Grange Orchard all seek to integrate the new neighbourhood with the Grange Estate, providing more choice for local walking and cycling. To minimise a sense of exclusion between the two areas, all existing links are connected with. There are also clear opportunities to enhance the recreational provision and visual appeal of the Grange Recreation Ground, as required under S106, enabling this to become a central public park and open space benefiting both existing and new residents over time.

Fig. 2.22 The key site opportunities are summarised in the plan diagram.

Key

	Site boundary
	Contour lines
	Green buffer with additional tree and hedgerow planting
	Protect and enhance existing hedgerows
	Protect and enhance existing trees and/or shelterbelts
	Grange Recreation Ground improvement opportunities
	Brooks, rivers and ditches
	Potential location of open spaces with key views out
	Indicative attenuation basins
	Potential alignment of vehicular, walking and cycling access
	Public realm improvement of existing streets (Steer/2022, fig 5.2)
	Potential environmental improvement of existing streets
	Potential and improved pedestrian and cycle links only
	Garden City Greenway
	Potential Greenway extension
	Linear park along Greenway
	Etonbury Green Wheel
	Other footpaths
	National Cycle Network Route 12
	Potential location of Sustainable Mobility Hub, Bus Interchange and Neighbourhood Centre
	Potential location of School (TBC)
	Recreation Ground car parking
	Western Way and Pelican Way development site boundaries (TBC)



Approach to community consultation

2.36 Public consultation is a vital element of the planning and development process. Good pre-application engagement offers local communities the opportunity to get involved and help shape proposals so that the subsequent planning application takes into consideration, where appropriate and possible, their opinions. LGCHF is committed to work with the local community (Fig. 2.23), not only through the planning stages, but through the detailed design and construction phases.

2.37 LGCHF commenced its community engagement on this site in 2013. This was a town wide debate about whether Letchworth should have more housing, undertaken in partnership with the University of Herts. The results of this were considered by Governors and Trustees, before the LGCHF Board agreed to support the potential Local Plan allocation of the LG1 site by NHC.

2.38 NHC undertook the statutory stages of consultation related to the Local Plan process from 2013 to 2017, with the associated Public Examination commencing in 2017. It was felt that LGCHF's consultation should seek as far as practicable to not prevent any clash or confusion with the Local Plan processes.

2.39 LGCHF subsequently re-commenced its own consultation programme in 2018, which sought to understand the important attributes that future development in Letchworth should exhibit. This included a Young Designer competition and a national design competition, in partnership with the RIBA. The following year the next stage of consultation took place, which focussed more on the LG1 and LG3 sites and included comments and votes on the shortlisted entries to the RIBA design competition with the winner being the preferred shortlisted entry by the local community. This also led to ERE team being appointed as lead master planner.









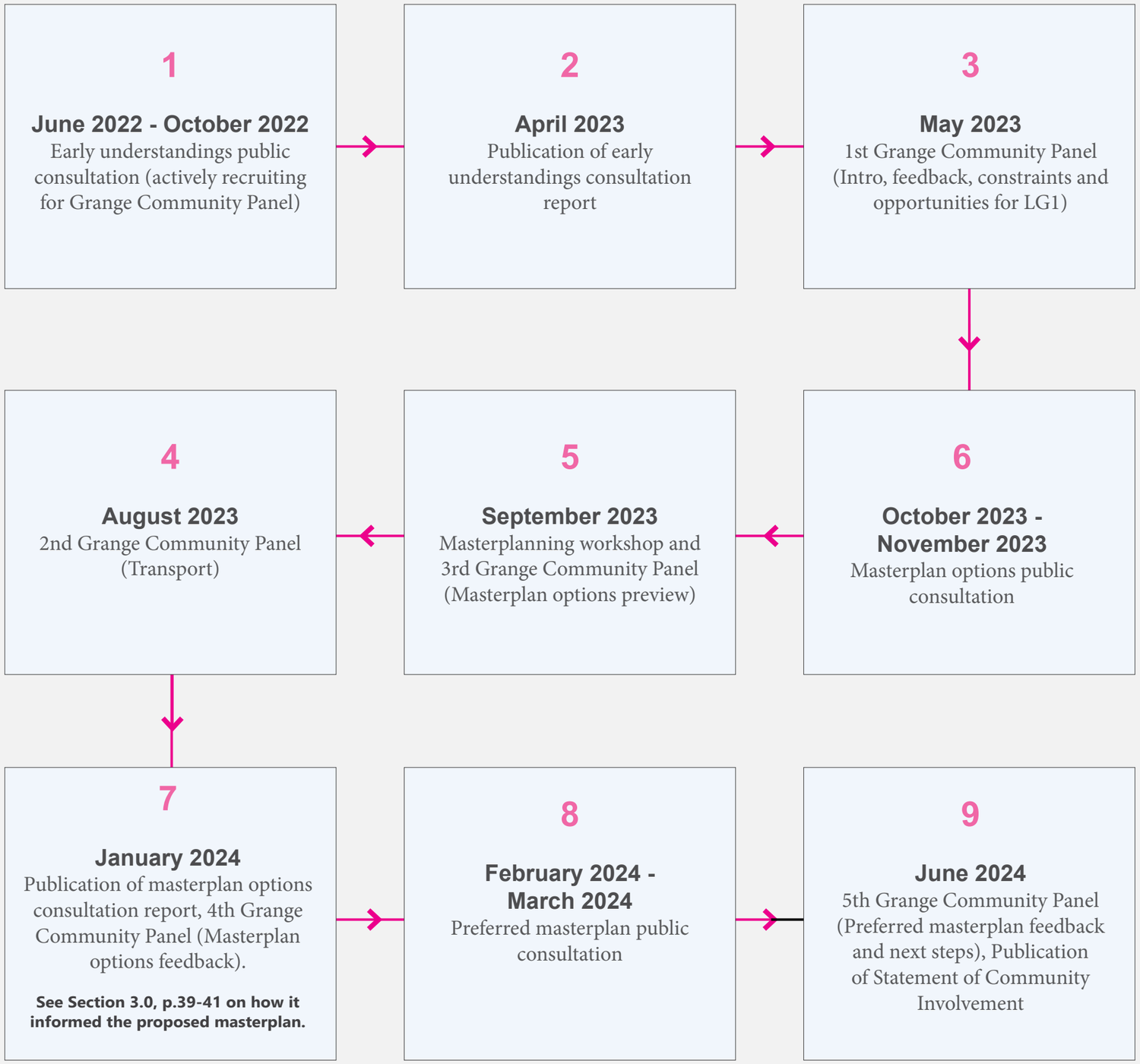
Fig. 2.23 (clockwise from top left photo): Grange Community Panel sessions and masterplanning workshop. Source: Kanda Consulting

2.40 Consultation to support the strategic master planning process commenced in 2022 (Fig 2.24). This sought to engage members of the local community in order to make a positive contribution to the master planning process. LGCHF believes that the best development will happen with input from local stakeholders and those who understand the local area best. The programme of stakeholder engagement and public consultation has provided interested stakeholders and local residents with an opportunity for constructive engagement with leading members of the development team.

2.41 Over the course of each consultation - early understandings, masterplan options (see, Section 3.0, p.39-41) and preferred masterplan, we engaged extensively with key stakeholders and members of the local community (including those who live on the Grange Estate and elsewhere in Letchworth). This also occurred in between defined consultation periods through the Grange Community Panel and other website blog posts on key updates. These panels, and other engagement, enabled LGCHF to carry out continuous engagement to constantly be a transparent and prominent presence in the community and answer any questions at any time about the proposals for LG1 Engagement was carried out both online and in-person to enable as far wide a reach as possible to local people and stakeholders about the LG1 masterplan. Refer the SCI for further details.

2.42 This exercise enabled the design team to embed some core values and principles and to have a greater understanding of what should and shouldn't be included in the master plan. An example of this was early feedback about vehicular access, highlighted as a major concern by local residents, ensuring that the option with a new access road to Norton Road is incorporated. Other matters such as the importance of the Greenway, the Grange Rec, open and green space, mixed tenure and opportunities for local people also consistently featured strongly, along with a desire for a high quality development that reflects Garden City design principles and values.' See p.39-44 for details.

Fig. 2.24 Consultation timeline summary. See SCI (Appendix C/ May 2024) for further details.



3

Vision and placemaking objectives

3. Vision and placemaking objectives

Design vision

3.1 The proposed vision for LG1(Fig. 3.1, overleaf) is in accordance with The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation's adopted vision for the site, framed by the local plan policies (NHC's adopted Local Plan 2011-2031) and the characteristics of context and identity supported through the National Design Guide.

LGCHF's adopted vision

3.2 The Foundation's Board of Trustees adopted the following vision that forms the basis of the development of LG1:

'To create a new landscape-led residential development of land north of Letchworth Garden City (LG1) to help address the housing needs of the town's population and drive sustainable economic growth, whilst achieving substantial community benefit and a net gain in biodiversity.

In consultation with and shaped by the needs of the local community, LG1 will deliver imaginatively and well designed flexible living space for all ages and stages of life together with a primary school, community and cultural facilities and substantial new open spaces for the benefit of all residents, applying a modern interpretation of Garden City design.

With new jobs, training and apprenticeships and an emphasis on walking, cycling and improved sustainable transport linking the whole of the Grange with the rest of the town. LG1 will create opportunities for local people within a vibrant and connected neighbourhood.

Innovative design solutions will be showcased such as modern sustainable construction methods, including self build and community house building to meet a range of housing needs, with at least 40% to be affordable (rent, shared ownership or community land trust).

Land value will be captured and re invested for the benefit of the wider community , creating a legacy for future generations in line with Garden City principles.'

3.3 This adopted vision is supplemented by LGCHF's Green Infrastructure and Transport Infrastructure vision statements[1,2] and core principles, as set out in 2021, to support and guide the evolution of LG1's strategic masterplan in collaboration with NHC, HCC, the local community and other stakeholders.

'To create a new landscape-led residential development of land north of Letchworth Garden City (LG1) to help address the housing needs of the town's population and drive sustainable economic growth, whilst achieving substantial community benefit and a net gain in biodiversity.'

National Design Guidance

3.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (MHCLG/2021)[3] and National Design Guide (NDG) (MHCLG/ 2021)[4] provides the current national planning framework and design guidance for LG1. Aligned with the NPPF, as part of the Government's documentation of planning practice guidance, the NDG outlines the priorities for well-designed places in the form of ten characteristics.

Local Planning Context

3.5 The NHC adopted Local Plan 2011-2031[5], and in particular, Policy SP9 on Design and Sustainability, Policy SP15 on LG1, and Appendix 5 on Letchworth's Garden City design principles provide the current local planning context for LG1's strategic masterplan. The latter is of particular significance for the site, it being a once in a generation expansion of the world's first Garden City.

References:

1. LGCHF (2022) Green Infrastructure Workshop Feedback paper, based on a workshop held in August 2021 with LGCHF's Housing Development Committee.

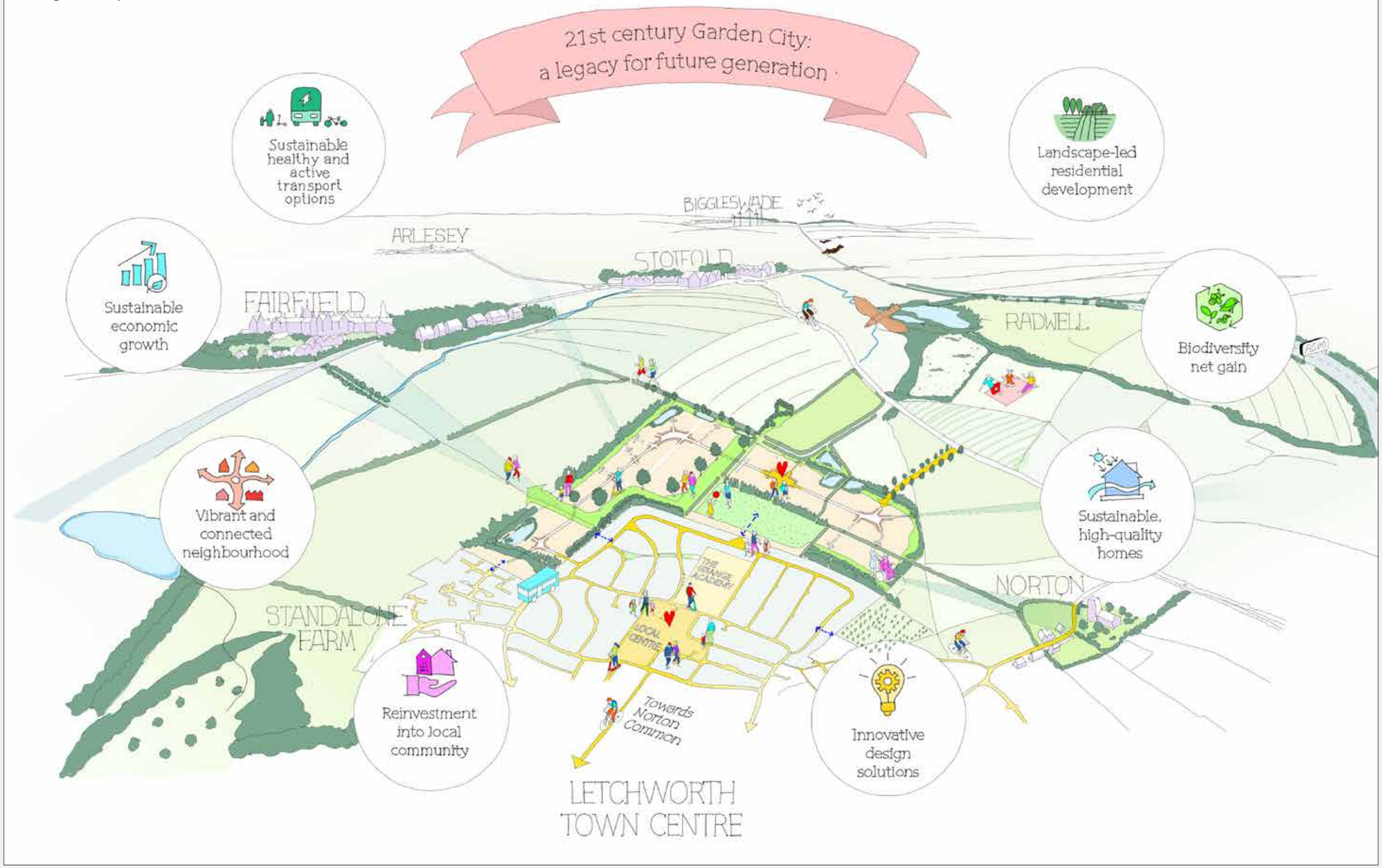
2. LGCHF (2022) Transport Infrastructure Workshop Feedback paper, based on a workshop held in November 2021 with LGCHF's Housing Development Committee.

3. MHCLG (2021) NPPF, September 2023, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. See: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20230929144819/https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2.

4. MHCLG (2021) National Design Guide, January 2021, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962113/National_design_guide.pdf

5. NHC (2022) Local Plan 2011-2031, adopted 8 November 2022. See: https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-12/North%20Hertfordshire%20Local%20Plan%202011-2031.pdf

Fig. 3.1: Illustrative design vision for LG1's strategic masterplan framework



Placemaking objectives

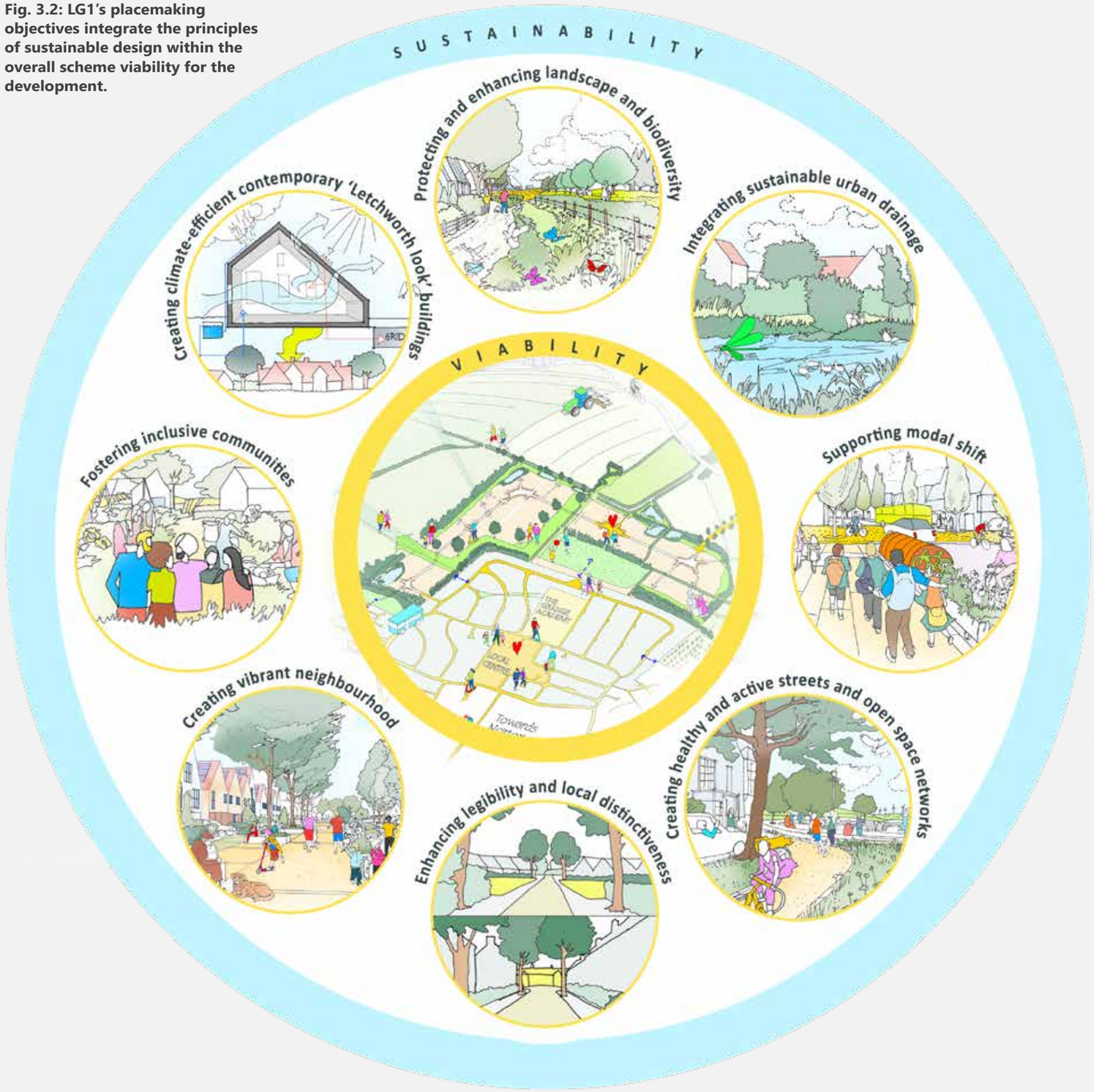
3.6 To achieve the proposed vision for a landscape-led development of LG1 as a 21st century Garden City, eight Placemaking Objectives (POs) are proposed to support a holistic design approach for the development of a strategic masterplan (Fig. 3.2). Each objective carries equal weightage and integrates the principles of sustainable and climate-resilient design relevant to that theme, within the overall scheme viability for the development. For details, see Baseline Report (Appendix A/ February 2024).

3.7 These objectives form part of the strategic master plan documents for LG1, as required by the North Herts Council and will be adopted through its Project Board. These are not only tailored to the site's unique constraints and opportunities, but also aligns with the local planning policy context and best practice design guidance as outlined in the National Design Guide, relating in particular to the themes of Context and Identity.

3.8 Cumulatively, the POs set out a high-level design framework; an overall approach to the design of the streets and buildings and the type and form of LG1's strategic masterplan. Its purpose is to be a creative springboard for the project team and a future development partner, as well as a consistent point of reference that guides further development of LG1's masterplan as a modern-day Garden City.

3.9 LGCHF will be developing further design guidance to support the evolution of the development. This will be within the framework of the POs and site-wide Design Principles (DPs) outlined in the following page. Outside of the strategic master planning process, LGCHF will develop its thinking around the design of the scheme in discussion with the NHC team, which will inform the brief used to help find a suitable partner. As part of an outline or hybrid planning application it is expected that a joint design code will be formulated by the appointed developer partner and LGCHF for consideration.

Fig. 3.2: LG1's placemaking objectives integrate the principles of sustainable design within the overall scheme viability for the development.



Site-wide design principles

3.10 The Design Principles (DPs) add further substance to LG1's Placemaking Objectives (PO), aligned with LGCHF's general design guidance for new housing. It's design implications will relate to the specifics of each character area (See Section 9.0).

PO1



Protecting and enhancing landscape and biodiversity

DP1: Use the existing landscape assets to inform the position and layout of streets, spaces and development.

DP2: Protect and expand the existing hedgerow network, tree lines and shelterbelts to support biodiversity value.

DP3: Establish a strong green perimeter strip around the outer edge of the site to provide ecological and amenity value, manage visual impact and to support the transition to wider countryside.

PO2



Integrating sustainable urban drainage

DP4: Integrate surface water management into the green infrastructure and street network to support sustainable drainage and ecological benefits. This can be provide opportunities for placemaking and play-on-the-way.

PO3



Supporting modal shift

PO4



Creating healthy and active streets and open space networks

PO7



Fostering inclusive communities

DP5: Design the movement network, streets and spaces to embed pedestrian priority and support active travel, helping to deliver a minimum 10% modal shift.

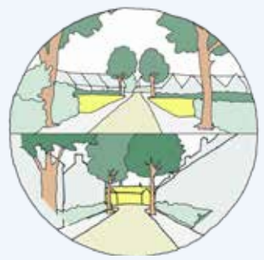
DP6: Establish the main street/ avenue as the focus for public transport and as a place for people and social interaction.

DP7: Embed recreational activities and amenity value across the green infrastructure network and create focal points aligned with intersecting routes, children's play and local community facilities.

DP8: Provide parking as a mix of on-plot, on-street and off-plot typologies which can be repurposed if needed. On-street parking to be in clusters integrated with planting. Off-plot parking, where required, to be in parking courts designed for safe use.

DP9: Integrate convenient cycle parking in garages or dedicated cycle storage units next to front doors, or for apartments, in secure communal cycle parking areas within or adjacent to apartment buildings in convenient locations.

PO5



Enhancing legibility and local distinctiveness

PO6



Creating a vibrant neighbourhood

PO8



Creating climate-efficient, resilient buildings as a modern interpretation of the 'Letchworth look'

DP10: Integrate key views out to existing landmarks into the layout and create attractive vistas within the development to underpin a Garden City sense of place.

DP11: Create well-crafted, collective compositions with vistas, closure, accents and attractive common spaces as a contemporary interpretation of Garden City design.

DP12: Establish variety in terms of density, heights and housing typologies with active frontage and features reflective of Garden City design e.g. soft hedged plot boundaries. There will be height variance in the street scene, in particular, where taller buildings are included.

DP13: Establish exemplar buildings which require limited energy to heat or cool, and external environments which are comfortable and resilient in extreme weather.

DP14: Provide structured space for bins storage (on-plot/communal) to mitigate visual clutter on streetscape.

Options development summary

Design and evaluation framework

3.11 To inform the design development of the strategic masterplan options for LG1 aligned with the baseline analysis, LGCHF's adopted vision, placemaking objectives and NHC's Local Plan (2011-2031) the following design and evaluation framework was adopted.

Natural infrastructure criteria	
N1	Establish peripheral green belt and landscape buffer incorporating sustainable drainage features to improve climate-resilience including attenuation basins, wetlands and ponds providing amenity, recreational and ecological benefit. Connect the peripheral buffer attenuation ponds to swales in areas of high drainage sensitivities and existing overland flows, aligned with the site's natural drainage patterns.
N2	Protect mature trees (Category A) and strengthen hedgerows as ecological networks incorporating 6m buffer zones.
N3	Create a Linear Park along greenway, incorporating additional recreational facilities including seating, picnic areas and interpretation, supporting various activity programmes.
N4	Strengthen landscape buffers adjacent to existing areas of housing.
N5	Protect and enhance existing natural habitats including woodland, scrubland and grassland to adapt to the impacts of climate change and achieve at least a 10% net gain in biodiversity.
N6	Promote additional tree planting within green spaces and along streets to provide at least 2,000 additional trees of a variety of species.

Transport/ movement infrastructure criteria	
T1	Maintain and enhance connectivity with the wider footpath and cycle network and to key destinations for both new and existing residents.
T2	Establish a direct N-S walking and/or cycling link from Grange Estate across the Grange Rec to improve pedestrian connectivity and support Criteria 1.
T3	Create LG1's main street configuration to mitigate rat-running for cars whilst not compromising on direct/ easy routes for walking and cycling.
T4	Maximise the infrastructure investment for main street with development either side.
T5	Create a permeable and landscape-integrated (trees/ SUDs) street network following natural desire lines that improves accessibility, in particular to/from the N-W and S-E corners of LG1, facilitating a modal shift to walking/ cycling for local journeys. Supplement these with surgically-designed light-touch links through hedgerows, as needed.
T6	Create street typologies for the main street that enable easy bus access from the development connecting to wider destinations and public transport interchanges.
T7	Create a mobility hub on LG1 for facilitating the opportunity for easy interchange between sustainable modes of transport and consider its wider integration with the Pelican Way local centre, Letchworth town centre and key Letchworth destinations to support both local trips and longer-distance travel.

Landuse, urban structure and form criteria	
U1	Provide a 2.1 Ha regular-shaped, relatively flat plot for the school; including careful consideration of its relationship with new and existing uses.
U2	Create a car-free zone interfacing the school, promoting a positive interface with the local centre, the Greenway linear park the Grange Rec.
U3	Co-locate and relate the retail, community centre, mobility hub with the school with due consideration to safety and phasing implications, in the most accessible location to create a vibrant local centre.
U4	Maintain and frame key views to Fairfield, St. Nicholas Church and the countryside.
U5	Establish a sense of arrival/ gateway, to/from LG1 from Norton Road, Western Way and Grange Rec with a hierarchy of nodes/ vistas along LG1's street and public space networks for easy way-finding.
U6	Create a variation in character through massing and a diversity of housing typologies to support criteria 5, emphasising a gradual transition in character from an urban setting to a rural countryside interface.
U7	Maximise LG1's street and public space networks (including the Grange Rec, Greenway linear park and the peripheral green belt) to have active frontage through built form.
U8	Locating residential use/ typologies to capitalise on green views.

Masterplan options description

3.12 Using the outlined design and evaluation framework, in collaboration with NHC, Hyas and HCC, three strategic masterplan options were consolidated and consulted upon, as summarised below. For details on each option and its evaluation, see Fig. 3.3-3.5 (p. 36-38).

Option 1

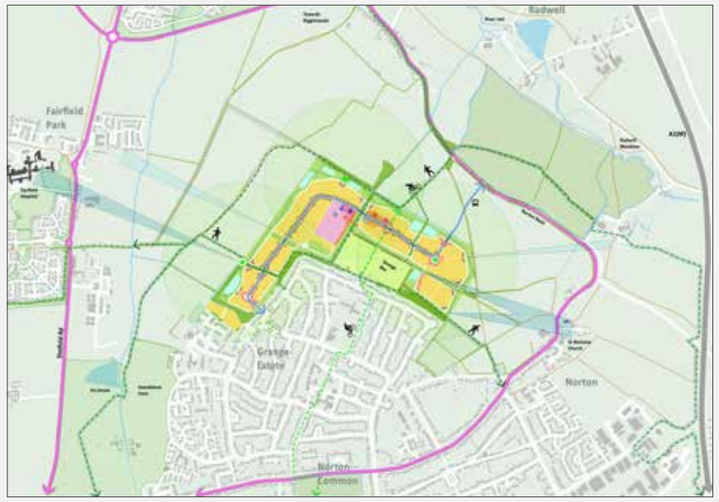


Fig. 3.3: Refer p.32 for further detail

- School (rectangular site) frontage onto the Greenway Linear Park provides direct car-free access for pedestrians, particularly when approaching from the Grange Estate, as the primary road runs through the middle of LG1. The childcare facility is co-located with school site.
- Facilitates delivery of direct pedestrian/ cycle link through the Grange Rec with connection to NCN12.
- Western section of the Greenway running from the west of the Grange Rec is framed by development parcels providing a more urban character than other options.
- Northern Biggleswade visual axis is significantly constrained, if not unachievable, by the existing shelterbelt on the northern boundary of the site.

Option 2

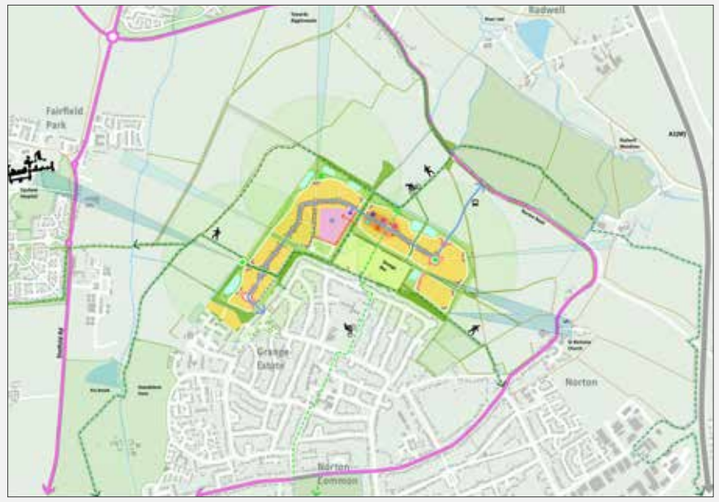


Fig. 3.4: Refer p.33 for further detail

- School (trapezoidal site) is sleeved by residential use on two sides to maximise active frontage onto streets. It requires additional connections across the Greenway Linear Park and mature hedgerow to access the local centre uses, similar to Option 1. The childcare facility is co-located with the local centre uses and not with the school.
- Western section of the Greenway running from the west of the Grange Rec incorporates an open space as part of the enhanced linear park, supporting a semi-rural character.
- Long distance N-W Biggleswade axis is maintained and partially strengthened by secondary street.
- The primary street is more convoluted to further deter rat running through LG1 and support low-speeds.

Option 3

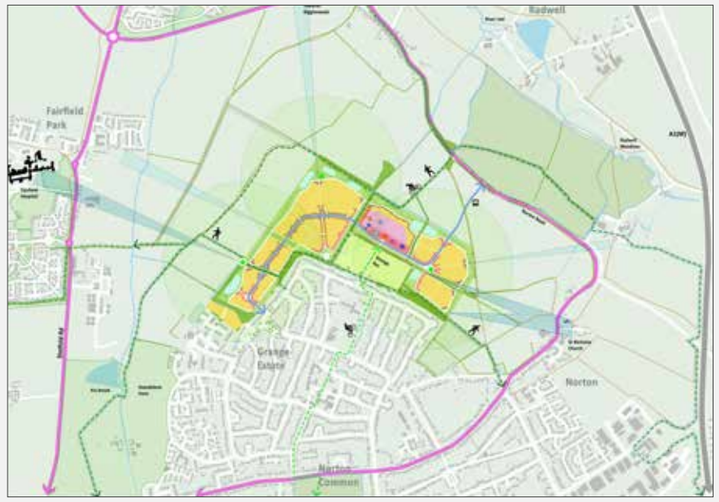
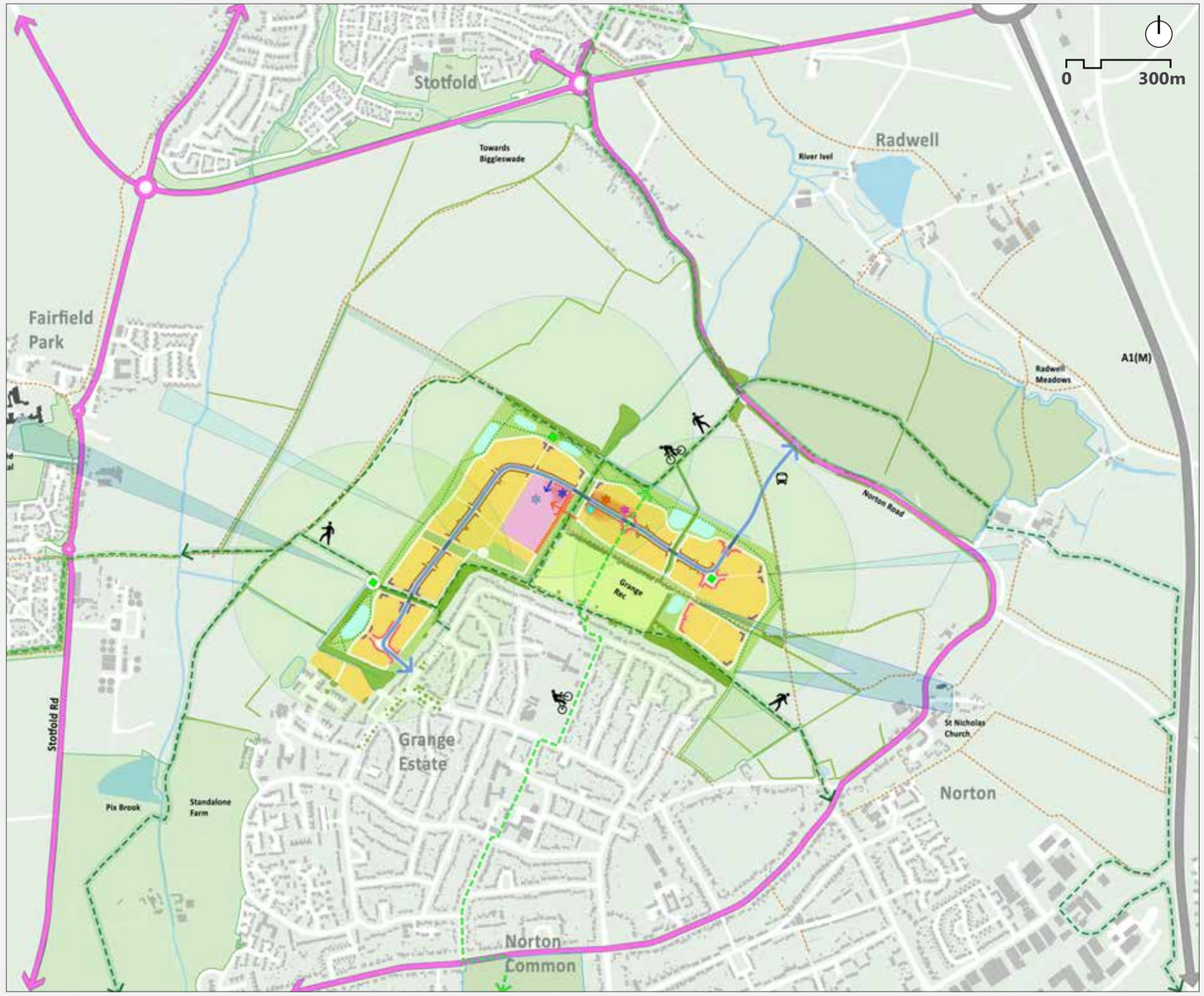


Fig. 3.5: Refer p.34 for further detail

- Neighbourhood centre uses are clustered within a central block which will be dependent on the school (rectangular site) being phased early in the development programme. Pedestrian access to the school requires a crossing over the primary street.
- Central axis through the Grange is constrained by the location of the school and is unable to provide a direct connection to the Greenway. The school location also conflicts with sensitive N-S drainage alignments.
- Green space provides frontage to neighbourhood centre and primary road generating a higher intensity of vehicular use adjacent to the northern boundary of the Grange Rec.
- Alignment of long distance Biggleswade axis provides formal urban form incorporating a formal green space.

Option 1: Design development and evaluation



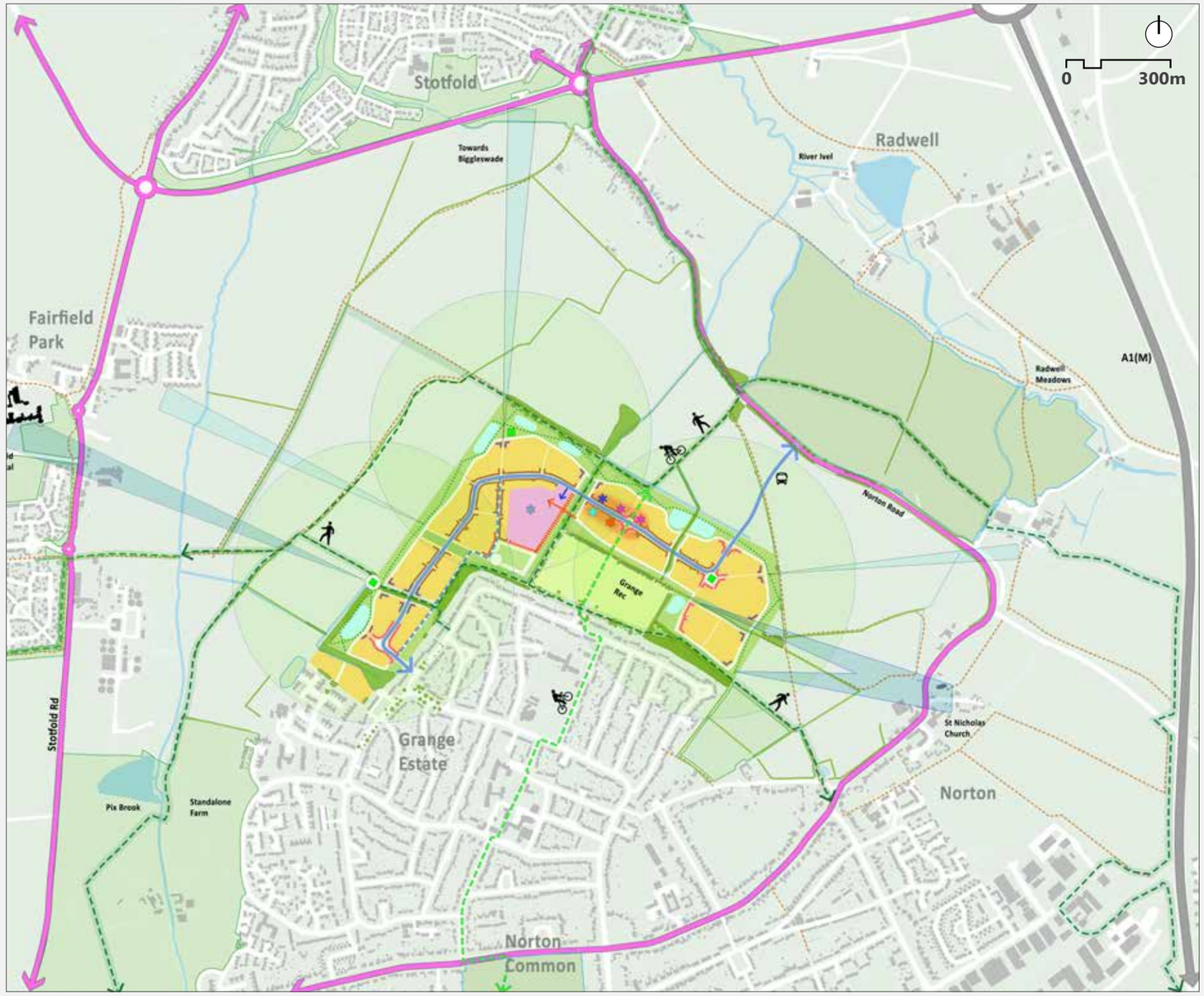
Natural infrastructure		
N1	Establish peripheral green belt, align SUDs with land form	●
N2	Protect Cat A trees and strengthen hedgerows	●
N3	Create linear park along Greenway	●
N4	Strengthen landscape buffer adjacent to existing housing	●
N5	Provide LEAPs at key focal points	●
N6	Protect and enhance existing natural habitats	●
N7	Promote additional tree planting	●
Transport and movement infrastructure		
T1	Enhance connectivity with ProWs & key destinations	●
T2	Establish direct N-S link across the Grange Rec	●
T3	Main street to mitigate rat-running & support active travel	●
T4	Maximise land/cost efficiency of main street	●
T5	Create permeable, landscape-integrated street network	●
T6	Create street typologies to enable easy bus access	●
T7	Create mobility hub to facilitate sustainable travel	●
Landuse, urban structure and form		
U1	Provide 2.1ha, relatively flat, regular shaped school plot	●
U2	Create car-free zone interfacing school and green spaces	●
U3	Co-locate and relate local centre with school positively	●
U4	Maintain and frame key views	●
U5	Establish gateways & legible street/ open space hierarchy	●
U6	Create urban-rural character variation through built form	●
U7	Maximise active frontage & positive countryside interface	●
U8	Locate residential use to capitalise on green views	●

Fig. 3.3 Strategic Masterplan Option 1

Key

	Existing trees, hedgerows		Walking/ cycle route		Car-free school access		Childcare facility		Primary frontages	●	Criteria met
	Peripheral green belt		Garden City Greenway		Vehicular access to school		Retail		Secondary frontages	●	Criteria not met
	LEAPs		Etonbury Green Wheel		School		Community hub		Primary views	●	Criteria partially met and can be resolved through design
	Primary/ main street		Public Right of Way		Mobility hub		Frontage along main street		Secondary views		

Option 2: Design development and evaluation



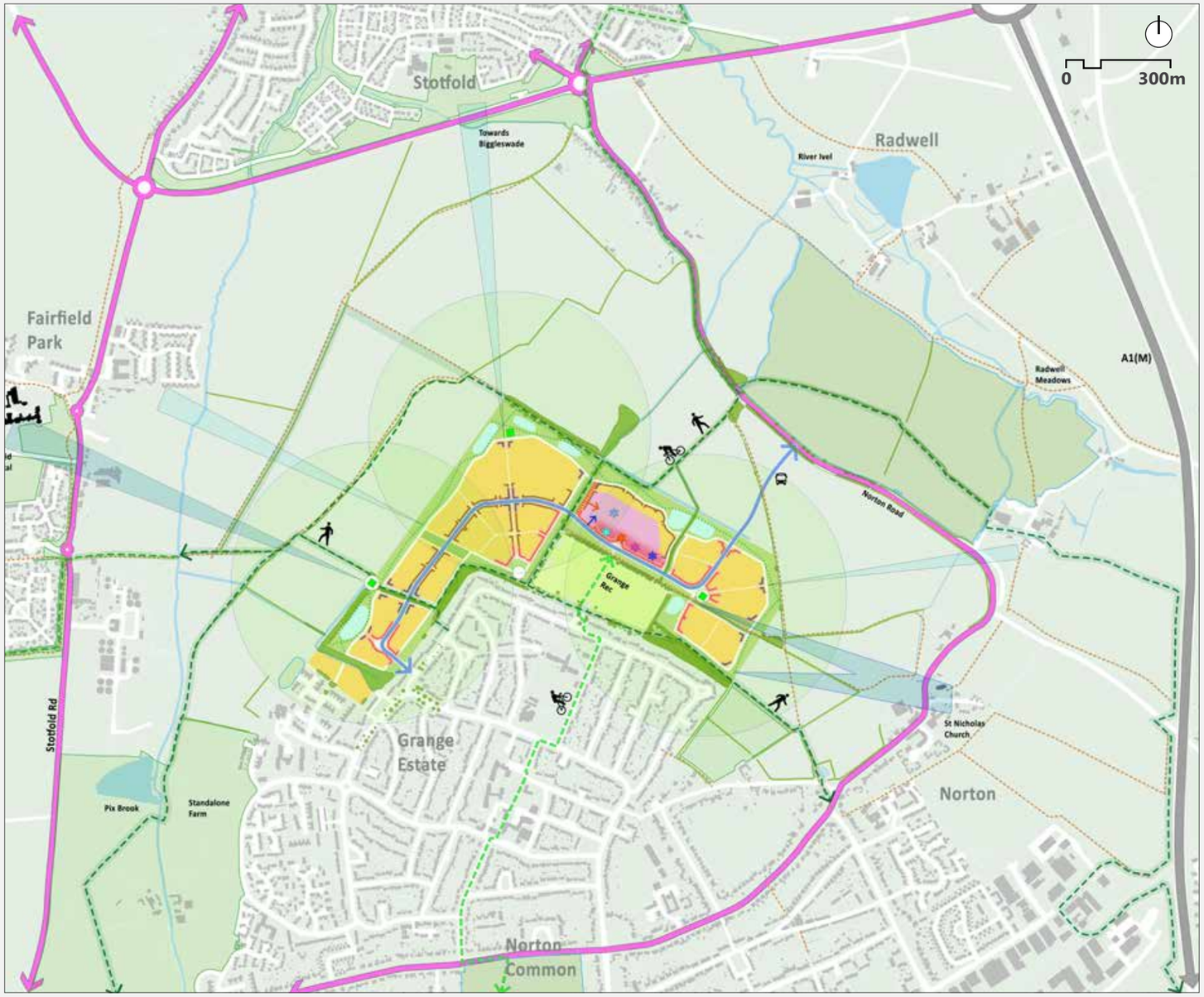
Natural infrastructure		
N1	Establish peripheral green belt, align SUDs with land form	●
N2	Protect Cat A trees and strengthen hedgerows	●
N3	Create linear park along Greenway	●
N4	Strengthen landscape buffer adjacent to existing housing	●
N5	Provide LEAPs at key focal points	●
N6	Protect and enhance existing natural habitats	●
N7	Promote additional tree planting	●
Transport and movement infrastructure		
T1	Enhance connectivity with ProWs & key destinations	●
T2	Establish direct N-S link across the Grange Rec	●
T3	Main street to mitigate rat-running & support active travel	●
T4	Maximise land/cost efficiency of main street	●
T5	Create permeable, landscape-integrated street network	●
T6	Create street typologies to enable easy bus access	●
T7	Create mobility hub to facilitate sustainable travel	●
Landuse, urban structure and form		
U1	Provide 2.1ha, relatively flat, regular shaped school plot	●
U2	Create car-free zone interfacing school and green spaces	●
U3	Co-locate and relate local centre with school positively	●
U4	Maintain and frame key views	●
U5	Establish gateways & legible street/ open space hierarchy	●
U6	Create urban-rural character variation through built form	●
U7	Maximise active frontage & positive countryside interface	●
U8	Locate residential use to capitalise on green views	●

Fig. 3.4 Strategic Masterplan Option 2

Key

	Existing trees, hedgerows		Walking/ cycle route		Car-free school access		Childcare facility		Primary frontages	●	Criteria met
	Peripheral green belt		Garden City Greenway		Vehicular access to school		Retail		Secondary frontages	●	Criteria not met
	LEAPs		Etonbury Green Wheel		School		Community hub		Primary views	●	Criteria partially met and can be resolved through design
	Primary/ main street		Public Right of Way		Mobility hub		Frontage along main street		Secondary views		

Option 3: Design development and evaluation



Natural infrastructure		
N1	Establish peripheral green belt, align SUDs with land form	🔴
N2	Protect Cat A trees and strengthen hedgerows	🟢
N3	Create linear park along Greenway	🟢
N4	Strengthen landscape buffer adjacent to existing housing	🟢
N5	Provide LEAPs at key focal points	🟢
N6	Protect and enhance existing natural habitats	🟢
N7	Promote additional tree planting	🟢
Transport and movement infrastructure		
T1	Enhance connectivity with ProWs & key destinations	🟢
T2	Establish direct N-S link across the Grange Rec	🔴
T3	Main street to mitigate rat-running & support active travel	🟢
T4	Maximise land/cost efficiency of main street	🔴
T5	Create permeable, landscape-integrated street network	🟢
T6	Create street typologies to enable easy bus access	🟢
T7	Create mobility hub to facilitate sustainable travel	🟢
Landuse, urban structure and form		
U1	Provide 2.1ha, relatively flat, regular shaped school plot	🟡
U2	Create car-free zone interfacing school and green spaces	🟢
U3	Co-locate and relate local centre with school positively	🟡
U4	Maintain and frame key views	🟢
U5	Establish gateways & legible street/ open space hierarchy	🟢
U6	Create urban-rural character variation through built form	🟢
U7	Maximise active frontage & positive countryside interface	🟢
U8	Locate residential use to capitalise on green views	🟢

Fig. 3.5 Strategic Masterplan Option 3

Key

	Existing trees, hedgerows		Walking/ cycle route		Car-free school access		Childcare facility		Primary frontages	🟢	Criteria met
	Peripheral green belt		Garden City Greenway		Vehicular access to school		Retail		Secondary frontages	🔴	Criteria not met
	LEAPs		Etonbury Green Wheel		School		Community hub		Primary views	🟡	Criteria partially met and can be resolved through design
	Primary/ main street		Public Right of Way		Mobility hub		Frontage along main street		Secondary views		

Community consultation feedback (October 2023 - November 2023)

3.13 The three masterplan options were consulted with the wider community from 17th October to 17th November 2023. The feedback received was systematically mapped (Fig. 3.6-3.11) aligned with the previously established three key themes of design (p.34): landscape and natural infrastructure, transport and movement infrastructure, land use and urban design. Key feedback and responses to the consultation are summarised below. Further detail is outlined in the SCI (April 2024/ Appendix C - p.90-93, p.171-173).

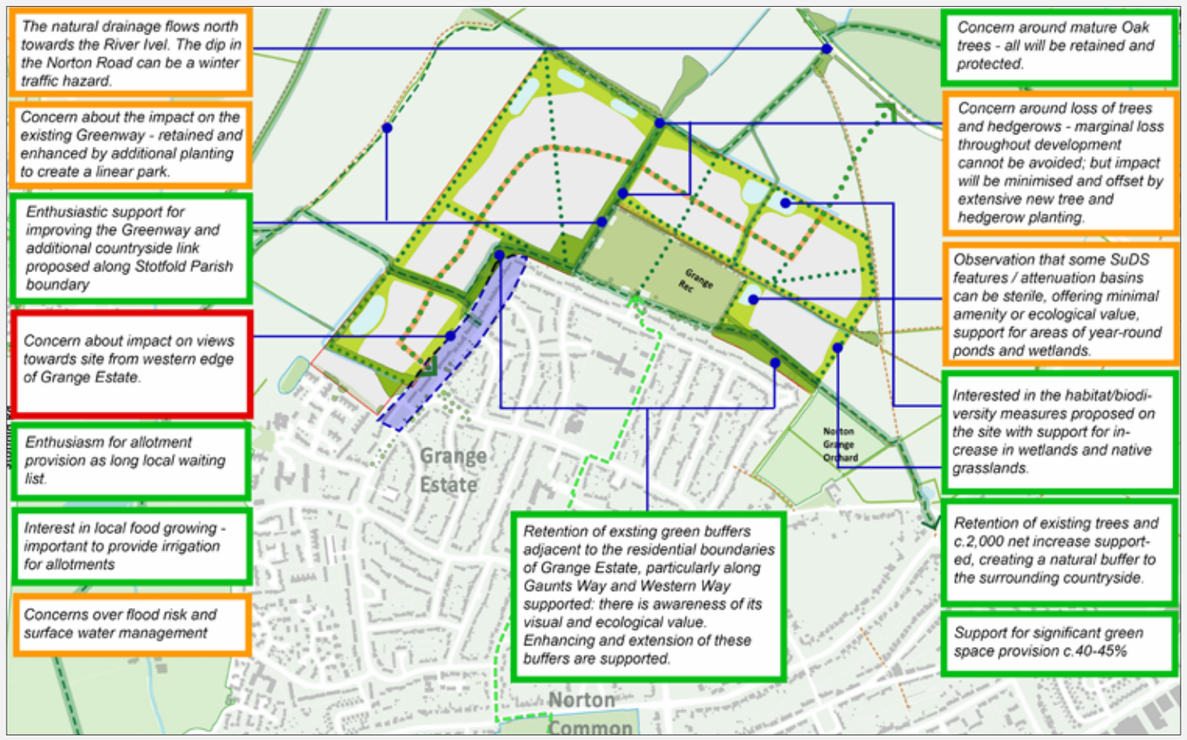
Landscape and natural infrastructure theme

3.14 A common theme in the feedback was the importance of including and maintaining open spaces on the site and nearby. A core value of the masterplan options is for there to be a landscape-led approach. This includes a landscape buffer around the site, enhancing the Greenway with 3 Local Equipped Play Areas (LEAPS) in the development and enhancements to a village green in options 2 and 3. These commitments, along with planting over 2,000 new trees on the site, are part of the approach that will enable the scheme to reflect Garden City Principles. Positive feedback was also received regarding improving the Greenway and additional countryside link along the Stotfold Parish boundary.

3.15 There was much support for more planting and landscaping to encourage more biodiversity and wildlife on LG1. All options contribute to c.40% of net amount of greenspace within LG1 boundaries including areas of wetlands, native grasslands and other habitats that contribute to BNG. The feasibility stage BNG assessment comfortably exceed the commitment of achieving a 10% net gain within LG1. See Section 5.0 for details.

3.16 There were concerns over flood risk and surface water management as well as SUDs features offering little amenity or ecological value. In response it was clarified that the proposals are informed by baseline technical re-





Fig, 3.6 (Top) LGCHF & the project team at the masterplan options exhibition on 15th November 2023 at Grange Academy, Sparhawke, SG6 4PY. Source: Kanda Consulting

Fig. 3.7 Landscape theme: Consultation feedback on masterplan options. (Based on the consolidated feedback received from Kanda Consulting post consultation and discussions undertaken on the day with members of the community during events).

ports leading to a surface water strategy within the strategic masterplan framework that incorporates a series of attenuation basins. Dialogue with HCC has commenced, and further work will be undertaken. LGCHF will ensure that the correct drainage and flood risk assessments take place, and all surface water is properly managed as part of the proposals for the LG1 masterplan.

Transport and movement infrastructure theme

3.17 There were concerns about traffic both on LG1 and further into the Grange Estate and the knock on effect of additional cars on existing roads and environmental quality. This was often mentioned in conjunction with the access strategy and whether two points are enough. In response, the LGCHF team have worked closely with HCC to agree the access points from Norton Road and Western Way. Alternatives to car travel which will reduce the demand for car usage and benefit the whole town are also being explored. This has resulted in proposals for enhanced and improved walking and cycling routes through and around the site, with opportunities for improvements to Norton Common and into Letchworth town centre. This will also include consideration of promoting active travel as well as bus services, cycle storage and repair facilities and car clubs as part of a mobility hub.

3.18 Residents were supportive of new and enhanced active travel routes but were concerned that there would not be enough provision for cars and that would lead to overspill parking in the Grange. Balancing car dependency with provisions for active travel is difficult, but in response to these concerns, the potential for a low parking scheme was dropped and the masterplan options have been developed with these considerations in mind, and in accordance with NHC parking standards. This will enable car travel whilst providing enhanced opportunities for more sustainable modes of transport. The proposed mobility hub on the site will aid active travel and alternative travel methods as well as providing bus facilities. This was positively received when discussed at consultation events.



Fig, 3.8 (Top) LGCHF & the project team at the masterplan options exhibition on 15th November 2023 at Grange Academy, Sparhawke, SG6 4PY. Source: Kanda Consulting

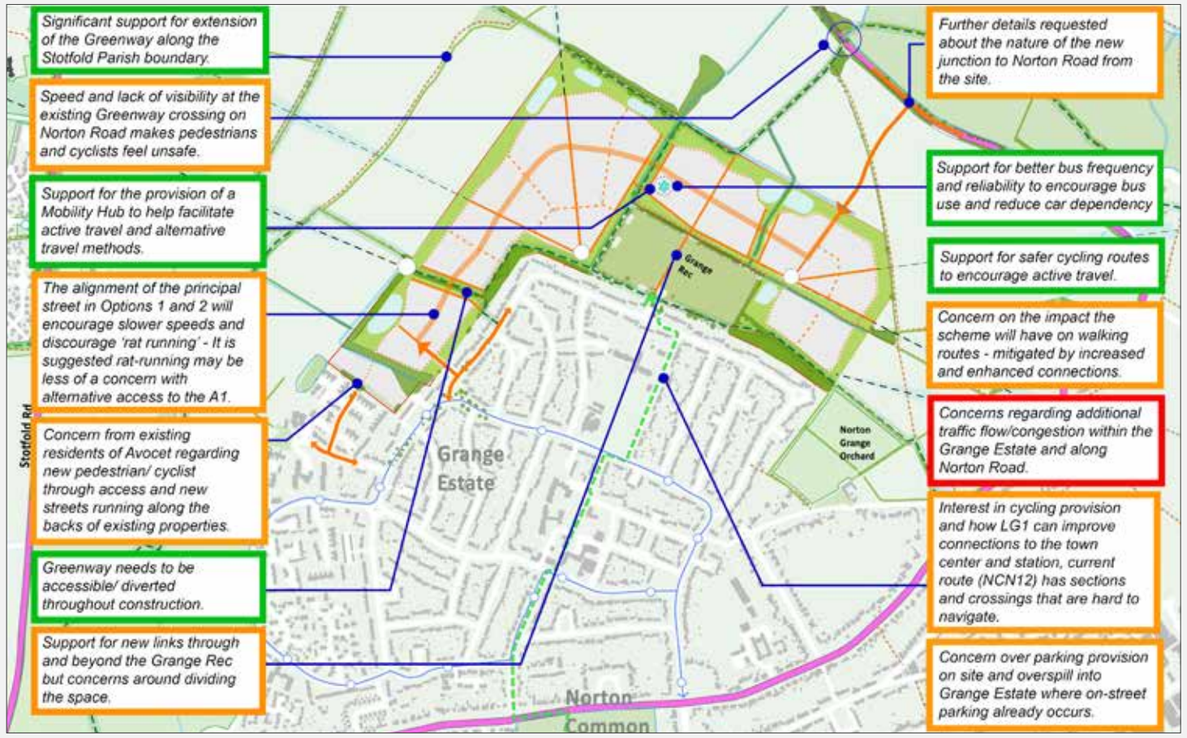


Fig. 3.9 Transport theme: Consultation feedback on masterplan options. (Based on the consolidated feedback received from Kanda Consulting post consultation and discussions undertaken on the day with members of the community during events).

3.19 We fully understand traffic concerns and that the above measures alone will not address all of the concerns raised. LGCHF will continue to work with NHC and HCC to agree a series of measures in line with their requirements, supported by the masterplan.

Land use and urban design theme

3.20 There was a lot of feedback on the supporting infrastructure, particularly on the primary school and the lack of GP surgery in the masterplan options. When the site was allocated in NHC's local plan, the policy includes the provision of a 2FE primary school. Therefore, the masterplan for LG1 includes a reserve site to meet this HCC requirement. The provision of a GP surgery is outside the jurisdiction of LGCHF, but such a facility would be supported if required by the local NHS providers and accommodated in the masterplan. LGCHF will work with the NHS and NHC to support the potential inclusion of flexible space as well as ensuring that there is appropriate community space, looking at the Grange as a whole, working with partners including NHC and settle.

3.21 Maintaining the key views from the site towards Biggleswade, Stotfold, Fairfield and St Nicholas Church is a priority for respondents and helped to inform their opinion on which option they preferred. The masterplan options have been designed to provide variety. However, all three contain the views towards Stotfold, St. Nicholas Church and towards the North-East. However, in option 1, the view towards the North-West to Biggleswade is not maintained due to the layout of the school and blocked by existing trees on the northern boundary of the site.

3.22 Residents were supportive of 40% affordable housing on the site but questioned what 'affordable' actually meant and whether the homes would genuinely be so. LGCHF are committed to providing 40% of affordable housing on the site, as is the policy of NHC, who will have nomination rights for these homes. LGCHF is also working with Eastern Community Homes to grasp opportunities for local self-build, co-operative and community land trust homes for local people to provide access to affordable housing opportunities for local people.

3.23 Cumulatively, based on consultation feedback, a mix of the best aspects of each of the three options, in particular Option 1 & 2, resulted in the consolidation of the preferred masterplan option. This was further reviewed at a Quality Review Panel in January 2024.



Fig, 3.10 (Top) LGCHF & the project team at the masterplan options exhibition on 4th November 2023 at the Three Horseshoes 102 Norton Rd, SG6 1AG.
Source: Kanda Consulting

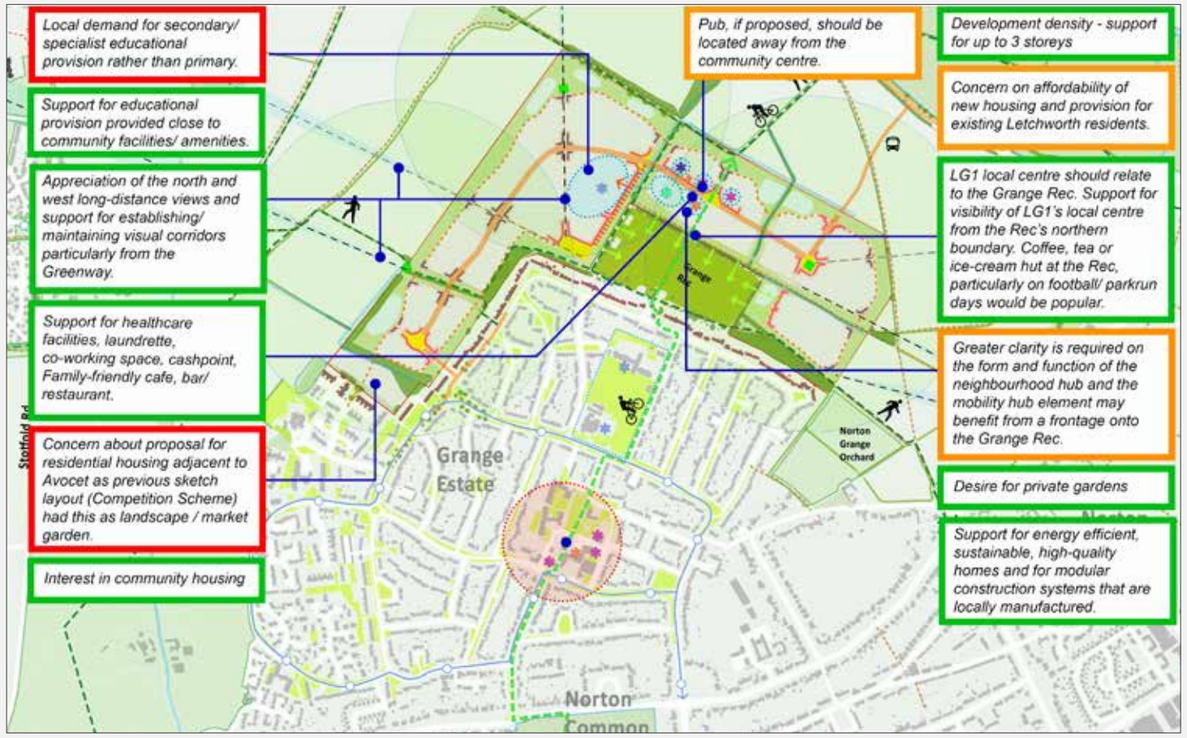


Fig. 3.11 Land use theme: Consultation feedback on masterplan options.
(Based on the consolidated feedback received from Kanda Consulting post consultation and discussions undertaken on the day with members of the community during events).

Quality Review Panel 1 (January 2024)

3.24 Key QRP feedback with direct design implications on the strategic masterplan development are summarised below. The design actions were coordinated and agreed with NHC.

	DSE QRP comment	Design action taken
1.	Co-locate multi-functional non-residential units with attractive public space along the northern edge of the recreation ground to improve its setting and to encourage inter-community movement along the new pedestrian/ cycle link.	A south-facing public square is introduced along the Rec's northern boundary to improve its setting and supported by multi-functional non-residential uses to encourage community interaction and dwell (See, Fig. 3.12).
2.	In addition to co-locating the non-residential elements of the scheme with attractive public space, the design team should seek to strengthen the 'local centre' by ensuring that buildings such as the school (if delivered) and senior living accommodation are multi-purpose in providing additional public facilities.	The local centre uses are envisaged as multi-purpose and multi-functional spaces that can adapt to the evolving needs of the local community.
3.	Another concern on the preferred option is that the configuration of the primary street appears to limit opportunities for south-facing open space, resulting in a lack of attractive public space for social integration at the heart of the scheme.	A south-facing open space is introduced along the Rec's northern boundary to support social integration. This space is open to the east/west ensuring solar exposure all-day and partial shade from the treeline to the south.
4.	Structuring the scheme around the site's NI is a very positive starting point. Given that the site's main asset is its landscape offer - best experienced at the site's edges - we suggest that the design team explore layout options that create social function and activity along the site's 'inner' edges and focus the 'outer' edges on enjoyment of the surrounding landscape and views.	The proposed strategic masterplan creates social function and activity with the local centre uses along the site's 'inner' edges along main avenue/ streets and focus the 'outer' green/ landscaped edges on enjoyment of the surrounding landscape, recreational uses, dwell spaces in nature-rich environments and framed views at strategic locations (See, Fig. 8.6).
5.	The existing condition of houses backing onto the Rec does not create a positive frontage to open space. However, the green buffers proposed to the remaining three edges of the Rec could create a similar sense of separation to the new development. To avoid this, the team must carefully consider the design of these green edges to appear as an extension to the Rec, which could in turn allow this space to read as a village green at the heart of the two communities.	The proposed green buffers surrounding the Grange Recreation Ground are envisaged as 'seams that integrate' and not 'barriers that isolate'. This is ensured by having a variety of activity spaces that function as an extension of the Recreation Ground.
6.	Given that viable retail use for a development of this size is likely to comprise only one or two units, reference to a 'local centre' could be misleading; however, this should still form an attractive and important part of the scheme. Given the uncertainty regarding the quantum and nature of the non-residential elements, it could be helpful to start with the design of an attractive public space which would activate the edge of the Rec and allow flexibility for the scheme to develop around it as more certainty about uses is given.	The proposed non-residential uses and senior living stem from the new south-facing open space along the northern boundary of the Rec, activating it and wraps around the main avenue/ primary road (See, Fig. 3.12).
7.	Consider a more 'Letchworth' character to the main vehicular road and prioritise taller buildings and continuous frontage to the recreation ground.	Taller buildings and continuous frontage have been prioritised along the recreation ground, in particular along its northern edge (See, Section 8 & 9).

	DSE QRP comment	Design action taken
8.	In designing a main vehicular route with low traffic speeds and a character that complements the proposal, the option of running the main vehicular route along the northern edge of the recreation ground could be re-considered. The design team should explore precedents of similar configurations and test how this could potentially create a more welcoming edge to the Rec.	It was discussed and agreed with NHC that having the main vehicular road running alongside the Rec might result in an more urban character along this green space with ecological sensitivities. It would also not support access to the new south-facing open space without crossing the primary road. Hence, was not pursued further.
9.	We support the intention for modal shift towards more sustainable transport options and welcome the work that has been done so far to explore regular bus access to the new development and flexible car parking strategies that respond to demand. We strongly encourage the client to commit to the delivery of these aspirations by embedding them into their masterplan framework. Providing residents with free membership of an on-site car club could also help as a step-change towards this.	This has been embedded into the Masterplan Framework Report (See, Section 6.0 & 12.0) and will be further considered and developed in collaboration with NHC, HCC and the appointed development partner in the next design stages.
10.	We find it unlikely that the primary street will be used as a 'rat-run' to the A1; however, its intended purpose should be reinforced through its design. We recommend that the transport planner works around a street width set by the architects/urban designers, and that a separate cycle route is provided to limit the width of the vehicular road.	The street widths are developed in coordination with the wider project team (See, Section 6.0) and embrace a landscape-integrated approach. A separate cycle route (i.e. primary active travel routes) are proposed along key desire lines (See, Fig. 6.3)
11.	It is commendable that the scheme addresses the existing pRoWs; however, the importance of the Greenway and the NCN12 appears overstated.	It is agreed with NHC that the Greenway and NCN12 are important travel routes for daily commute to the town centre and station, and not just for recreational uses.

	DSE QRP comment	Design action taken
12.	The design team have identified some attractive views from the site and have indicated from where in the development these can be enjoyed. The design team should conduct a study of the extent, angles, and any flexibility of these views and formalise them in the masterplan to ensure their eventual delivery.	A study of the extent, angles and flexibility of these views have been conducted aligned with the baseline Landscape Character and Sensitivity Study. The views are formalised into the proposed strategic masterplan to support eventual delivery (See, Fig. 3.12).
13.	It would be positive if the view towards Fairfield Hospital could be drawn in further so that it could be enjoyed from within the development, rather than only from the edge of the site.	View towards Fairfield Hospital are drawn in further so that it could be enjoyed from within the development, rather than only from the edge of the site.
14.	The Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) proposed in the east of the site could be moved further south for better integration with the recreation ground and greater proximity to the Grange Estate, to encourage use by the established community here.	The Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) proposed in the east of the site has been moved further south adjacent to the attenuation basin along the Rec's eastern edge for better integration and greater proximity to the Grange Estate (See, Fig. 3.12).
15.	The development should establish the Rec as the geographical and functional heart of the two communities. This fundamental shift in purpose should be supported by a design that makes the Rec a welcoming space for all.	The development establishes the Rec as a central green space for both the existing and new communities. This is reflected in Landscape framework (See, Section 4, para 4.7) and Charater Area 1 (See, Section 9).
16.	The aspiration for the final scheme should be for each block or group of homes to offer something special that collectively contributes to a modern interpretation of the Garden City. More detailed testing of the development blocks is required to ensure that such aspirations are deliverable.	Testing of the development blocks resulting in illustrative configurations have been undertaken (See, Section 9) to ensure that development contributes to a modern interpretation of the Garden City.

	DSE QRP comment	Design action taken
17.	Generally, the proposed character zones appear promising; however, in order to refine these further, the design team should consider how the residents of each house will experience the site and whether they would identify as living in an urban, suburban, or countryside part of the development. More consideration is also needed for how aesthetic character will vary within these broader areas – for example, how dwellings along the northern edge of the site should differ from those along the western edge, despite both having height, density, and typology consistent with the 'countryside living' character area.	Character Areas have been further refined and local sensitivities and proximities that will inform aesthetic character variation is highlighted for further consideration in the next stages of the project. See, Section 9 for further details.
18.	The 'local centre' does not evoke the sense of somewhere in Letchworth, where main streets are defined more by their green verges and trees than by the height and continuity of their frontage. Locating taller buildings fronting the Rec would create a more locally appropriate character along the main street and would allow building heights to step up with the natural topography, ameliorating views into the site.	Design development of the main street takes a landscape-integrated approach inspired by streetscapes of Letchworth. It is envisaged as a tree-lined avenue aligned with provision of adequate space for walking, cycling, cars, parking and other utilities. See, Section 6 for details. This approach will be further developed in the next stages of design development. Taller buildings are proposed to front to the Rec with building heights gradually stepping down towards the countryside (See, Section 9).
19.	The character of the main vehicular road will contribute significantly to the development, so its material treatment should be carefully considered. Kerb height would be minimised to create a sense of the road gently edging out into the landscape. To ensure a softer impact, the route should work with the existing topography and provision for pedestrians should be provided separately.	

	DSE QRP comment	Design action taken
20.	If the OA is submitted in partnership with a master developer, with reserved matters schemes subsequently delivered by housebuilders, there is the potential for issues to arise in terms of the flexibility of the outline proposal. LGCHF should ensure that they are able to maintain sufficient control, should this path be taken. The use of a design code may be worth exploring to ensure that the overall vision is delivered, along with looking at locations that have successfully delivered using similar models e.g. Newhall, Harlow.	A design code will be developed as part of the OA. It will be a joint document between LGCHF and the appointed development partner, setting out the detailed design requirements and approach across the LG1 development. It will be used to consider future planning applications and detailed design proposals. (See, p.7 and Section 12.0 for further details).

3.25 The key design actions stemming from the QRP for the strategic masterplan stage, as summarised above, has informed the production of the final proposed strategic masterplan (Fig. 3.13, see overleaf) and other illustrative material included in this report.

3.26 Further feedback received in the QRP that pertains to either subsequent design stages such as development of design code, further development of the sustainability strategy and/or elements that are outside of LGCHF's direct control (e.g. reviewing need for a school within LG1 and the design development of the Rec) have been duly noted for discussion with relevant stakeholders.

Proposed strategic masterplan

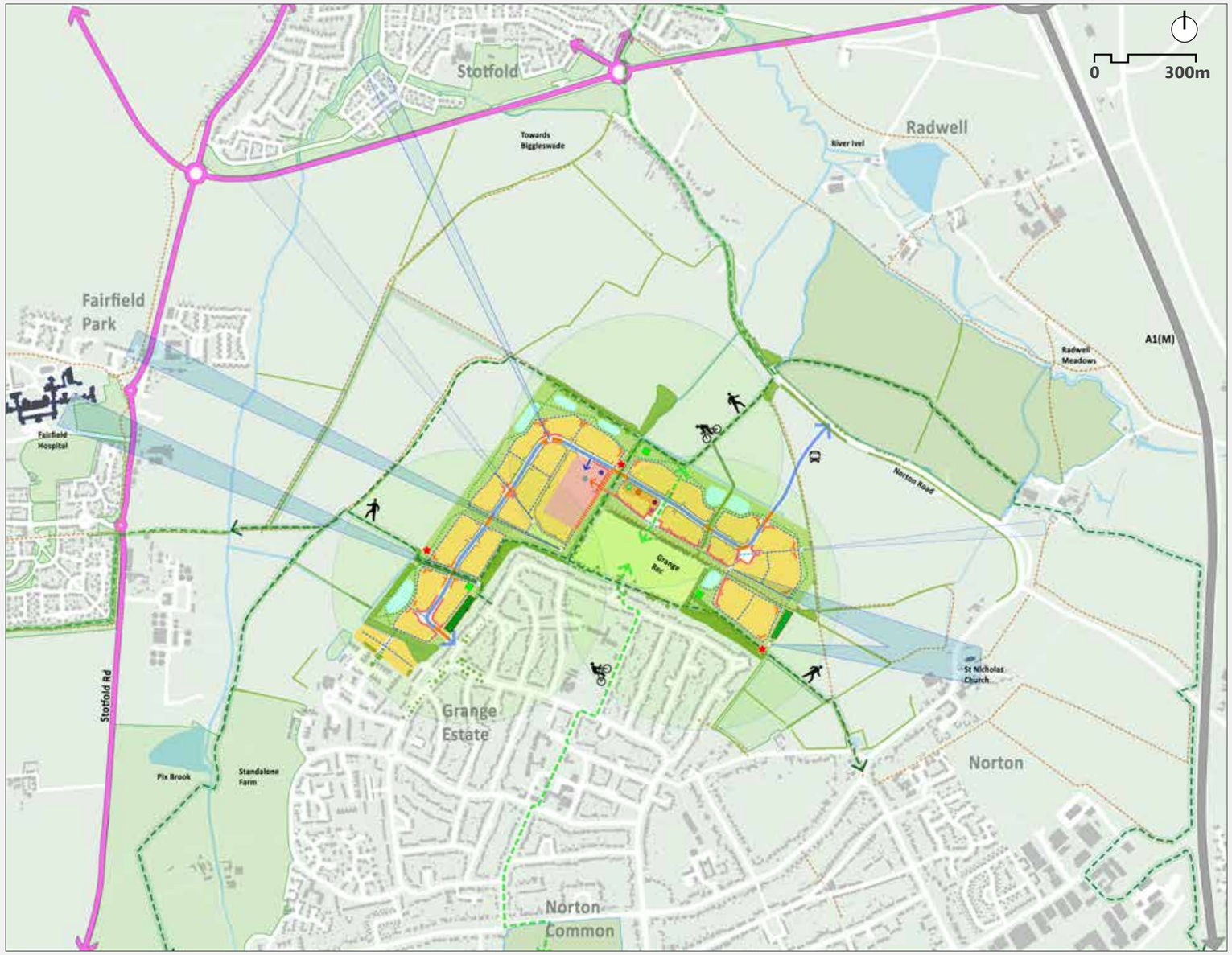


Fig. 3.12 Proposed strategic masterplan framework

Key

	Existing trees, hedgerows		Walking/ cycle route		Car-free school access		Childcare facility		Frontage along main street		Primary views
	Peripheral green belt		Garden City Greenway		Vehicular access to school		Retail		Primary frontages		Secondary views
	LEAPs		Etonbury Green Wheel		School		Community hub		Secondary frontages		Community allotment
	Primary/ main street		Public Right of Way		Mobility hub		Senior living		Traffic calming		Pop-up event/activity hot spot

Design development

3.27 The strategic masterplan embraces a landscape led-approach to design development reflecting best practice and the desire for a high quality development that reflects Garden City design principles and values.

3.28 Aligned with the PPA requirements, the proposed strategic masterplan framework is explained in further detail in the following chapters supported by framework plans, illustrations and precedent images.

3.29 In addition to the extensive community consultation that underpins this project as detailed in the SCI, we have also worked in close collaboration with NHC, Hyas and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to develop the strategic masterplan framework. This was undertaken through regular meetings and wider Project Working Group workshops at key stages of the project aligned with the PPA process. Two milestone Project Working Group (PWG) workshops were also undertaken in September and December 2023, respectively, to discuss the masterplan options and direction of travel for the preferred option with NHC, Hyas and HCC.

3.30 This was further supported by an internal peer review with Allies and Morrison in November 2023 and a formal QRP in January 2024 as summarised on p.42-44.

4

Landscape and green infrastructure framework

4. Landscape and green infrastructure framework

Landscape and green infrastructure context

Introduction

4.1 The existing landscape structure and green infrastructure framework of the LG1 site is predominantly agricultural in character with a mosaic of arable fields bounded by native hedgerows, several distinctive mature oak trees, small areas of native scrub, woodland and linear shelterbelts. The wider catchment of the site encompasses a variety of urban, suburban and rural qualities. This includes the Grange Recreation Ground, a prominent and popular open space that provides several football pitches and children's play facilities which will in time be bounded on three sides by the residential development.

4.2 The site is served by an extensive network of footpaths, including the Garden City Greenway and a national cycle route (NCN12). There is a community orchard to the east, modest river corridor of the Pix Brook to the west and the more prominent River Ivel to the north, with small areas of wetland, established areas of woodland and a small number of local wildlife sites and nature reserves. The site sits in an elevated position offering long-distance views to the north and west across a prominent pattern of settlements, new areas of housing, rolling countryside and a distinctive windfarm, located close to Biggleswade in the north.

Landscape baseline studies

4.3 Two detailed landscape studies have been prepared to provide a technical assessment of the site and inform the development of the Strategic Masterplan Framework.

4.4 A Landscape Character and Sensitivity Study (February 2024/ Appendix D) provides a description of the green infrastructure context of the site and surroundings. This includes an analysis of the historic field pattern, identifying important hedgerows that are predominately located on the northern and southern boundaries of the site. A preliminary visual assessment highlights the importance of views west to the historic spires of Fairfield Hall and east to the tower of St Nicholas Church. The most sensitive views towards the site are from Stotfold, the Norton Road, the A407 and along adjacent footpaths. An assessment of Landscape and Visual Sensitivities of the site identifies that the north of the site has the greatest sensitivity (assessed as medium sensitivity) taking account of topography, visual prominence from the north and west, limited screening and proximity to the settlements of Fairfield Park and Norton Village.

4.5 A Green Infrastructure Audit (July 2023/ Appendix E) provides an assessment of the existing provision of green infrastructure and public open space. It follows NHC planning standards that are based on Fields in Trust Guidelines for Outdoor Sport and Play in England (FIT/2020). 91 sites were surveyed within the agreed catchment of the study that total approximately 168 Ha of public open space. From this total, 70 sites (135 Ha) are within North Herts and 21 sites (33 Ha) are within Central Beds. The audit included a preliminary assessment of quality, in total 16 sites were recorded as being of high quality, 67 sites as medium quality and 8 sites as low quality. The Green Infrastructure Audit provides an initial benchmark for establishing the open space provision for LG1 based on FIT standards and these have been used to structure the network of open spaces within the strategic masterplan framework.

Existing landscape structure

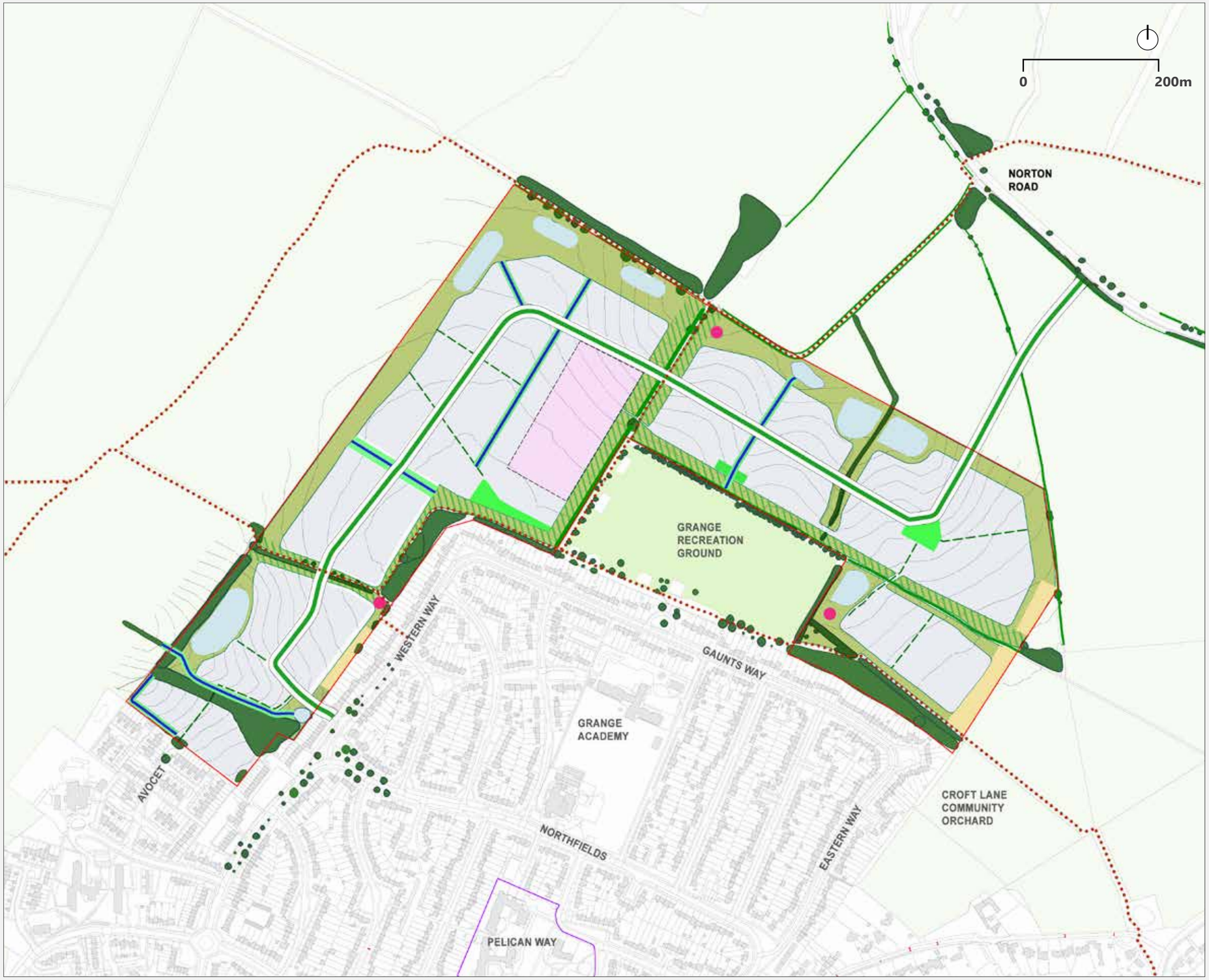
4.6 The main landscape features of LG1 are defined by a synthesis of factors including land form, hydrology, ecology and agricultural production. The field pattern is formed by mature, well managed hedgerows and dense shelterbelts driving much of the site's current identity. The topography and field pattern contribute to the character and environmental form of the site, framing and restricting both near and long-distance views. The Garden City Greenway provides the main structure for the footpath network crossing the west, central and eastern sections of the site. This is supplemented by additional footpaths that connect to the surrounding settlements of Fairfield Park, Stotfold and Norton Village and link to the adjacent Etonbury Green Wheel. Mature hedgerows generally run along each path providing a partial sense of enclosure, serving as ecological corridors and providing seasonal and wildlife interest. Some paths are registered Public Rights of Way whilst others are more informal in nature and have become established along field margins.

Proposed green infrastructure framework

Overview

4.7 The Strategic Green Infrastructure Framework (see Fig. 4.1) demonstrates how the site provides a pivot between garden, or countryside, and city. It provides a direct connection between Letchworth and the Grange Estate, surrounding agricultural fields and the adjacent settlements of Fairfield Park, Stotfold, Radwell and Norton Village. The framework protects and enhances the existing natural capital of the site including hedgerows, shelterbelts, woodlands and mature trees. It provides additional open spaces for recreation and amenity

Fig. 4.1: Proposed landscape and green infrastructure framework plan



Key

	Site boundary
	Existing trees, hedges and vegetation
	Attenuation basin (SuDS)
	Linear park
	Streets with swales (SuDS)
	Peripheral green buffer
	Tree-lined avenue
	Amenity public space
	School building and play ground
	Local Equipment Area for Play (LEAP)
	Allotments
	Greenway
	Pedestrian friendly secondary streets

Note: The proposed framework plan takes account of the preliminary assessment of the Surface Water Flooding Constraints and Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy (January 2023/ Appendix L). This is further being reviewed by Stantec (January 2024 onwards) in response to initial discussions with the County Council (response letter December 2023). More detailed assessment and design coordination for Flood Risk and Surface Water Management will be required at subsequent design stages.

including a new linear park, allotments and play areas. Green spaces surrounding the Rec will complement and extend this central green space, improving connectivity with LG1. The landscape framework also incorporates additional native habitat to improve ecological connectivity and deliver a biodiversity net gain. Planting should promote climate-resilience. The entire development is framed by a multi-functional nature-rich green buffer to structure and screen long-distance views, incorporating wetlands, ponds and attenuation basins, and providing additional footpaths and play areas

Public open space provision

Fields in Trust Open Space Guidelines

4.8 NHC planning policy follows the Fields in Trust Open Space Guidelines and Standards for public open space provision for residential development, and is measured by hectares per 1,000 head of population (HOP). NHC uses a benchmark of 2.4 people per house (NHC LGC Open Space Settlement Profile, Nov 2022) which provides a projected population of 2,160 new residents for the site (900 homes x 2.4 people). The FIT Quantity Guidelines are therefore multiplied by 2.16 to establish the baseline level of provision for different types of open space and this is illustrated in the table alongside (Fig. 4.2). The spatial distribution of these Open Space typologies are shown on the land use framework (Fig 7.1). Taking account of the immediate proximity of sports pitches on the Grange Recreation Ground the table of open space provision does not include playing pitches for outdoor sport.

Public parks and gardens

4.9 Public Parks and Gardens in LG1 will provide places for people to meet and socialise and support a variety of informal recreation activities. They will make an important contribution to the quality of life and will be designed to promote more active and healthy lifestyles. Within the Masterplan Framework the main public park provision will be the creation of a new linear park along the route of the Greenway that will serve to connect

	Table of FIT Public Open Space Standards and Actual Provision for LG1				
		Quantity Guideline (Hectares per 1,000 HOP)[1]	**Walking Guideline (Metres from dwelling)[1]**	**FIT Standard of Open Space Provision for LG1 (x 2.16)[2]**	**Actual provision in the Strategic Masterplan Framework**
1.0	Public Parks and Gardens	0.80 Ha	710m	1.73 Ha	3.269 Ha
2.0	Amenity Green Space	0.60 Ha	480m	1.30 Ha	3.131 Ha
3.0	Natural and Semi-Natural	1.80 Ha	720m	3.89 Ha	8.373 Ha
4.0	Allotments[3]	0.30 Ha	800m	0.65 Ha	0.656 Ha
5.0	Equipped Play Areas	0.25 Ha	As below	0.54 Ha	0.54 Ha
5.1	Local Area for Play (LAP)		100m		
5.2	Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP)		400m		
5.3	Neighbourhood Equipped Area Play (NEAP)		1,000m	Provided in Grange Recreation Ground	
6.0	Other Outdoor Provision[4]	0.30 Ha	700m	0.65 Ha	0.65 Ha
	Total public open space	**4.05 Ha**		**8.76 Ha**	**16.619 Ha**
1	Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play / Fields in Trust Guidelines (October 2015)				
2	Assumes 1 House has 2.4 people / NHC LGC Open Space Settlement Profile, Nov 2022				
3	Fields in Trust recommends 0.30 Ha per 1,000 HOP for Allotments but does not set an access standard - 800m walking distance is proposed / NHC Open Space Settlement Profile, Nov 2022				
4	Other Outdoor Provision relates to play areas and is for MUGAs and skateboard parks				

Fig. 4.2 Table of FIT Public Open Space Standards and Actual Provision for LG1
(Note: Including LG1's primary street, the total proposed open space % is approx. 43%; excluding the primary street it is approx. 37%)

individual neighbourhoods with the central hub and proposed school. This is seen as a central part of the placemaking strategy, both continuing and evolving the green space traditions of Letchworth and will help to fulfil the sustainable design objectives of LG1. 1.73 Ha will be required to meet the Local Plan (FIT) standard of provision - the Strategic Masterplan Framework provides 3.269 Ha of Public Parks and Gardens.

Amenity green space

4.10 The provision of Amenity Green Spaces within the existing Grange Estate are generally uniform and of average quality but offer little recreational or environmental benefit. Such green spaces in LG1 will be located and used to strengthen key gateways, boundaries and pedestrian routes. They will increase biodiversity by including meadow grassland, pollinator rich perennial planting and generous planting of native and fruiting trees. These spaces should also contribute to surface water management and sustainable drainage networks by using raingardens, swales and attenuation basins. 1.30 Ha will be required to meet the Local Plan (FIT) standard of provision - the Strategic Masterplan Framework provides 3.131 Ha of Amenity Green Space.

Natural and semi-natural green space

4.11 This is the largest type of public open space by area within the masterplan framework, providing a substantial green buffer or frame around the outer boundaries of the site. This will make a strong contribution to both the landscape character and biodiversity net gain of the site, incorporating existing hedgerows and wooded shelterbelts along with the native scrub boundaries that already provide mature natural buffers to areas of housing within the Grange Estate. This will also improve ecological connectivity between existing natural and semi-natural green spaces and establish new wildlife corridors and the design will provide native habitat for priority plant and animal species. 3.89 Ha will be required to meet the Local Plan (FIT) standard of provision - the SMF provides 8.373 Ha of Natural and Semi-natural Green Space.

Children's play areas

4.12 FIT standards of provision for Children's Play include LAPs, LEAPs and NEAPs along with other play provision that includes Multi-Use Games Areas (MUGA), ball courts and skateparks. The principal objectives for play will be to ensure there is an even distribution of accessible play across the masterplan framework to appeal to boys and girls across the age groups and meeting defined access standards and that these facilities can be shared by both existing residents of the Grange Estate and the new neighbourhoods within LG1. The focus will be on providing three LEAPs within LG1 and a NEAP within the Grange Recreation Ground to significantly upgrade the existing play facilities. A limited number of smaller LAPs will be located within individual residential blocks to provide play equipment for toddlers close to home. Up to 1.19 Ha will be required to meet the Local Plan (FIT) standard of provision - the Strategic Masterplan Framework provides 0.54 Ha for both Children's Play areas and other play spaces.

Allotments

4.13 Allotments and other provision for community food growing will be incorporated within the open space network of LG1 following an assessment of the demand for such provision from both existing and new residents. Two allotment sites are provided within the Masterplan Framework; one to the west providing a boundary with the existing housing of the Grange Estate along Western Way; and one to the east complementing the Croft Lane Community Orchard and strengthening the green boundary or buffer adjacent to the Norton Village Conservation Area. 0.65 Ha will be required to meet the Local Plan (FIT) standard of provision - the Strategic Masterplan Framework provides 0.65 Ha of Allotments.

Playing pitches and outdoor sports

4.14 Outdoor Sports provision including sports pitches for active recreation are already provided on the Rec, including five natural turf football pitches and a changing pavilion. Rather than creating additional sports pitches it is proposed that, subject to agreement on the planning contributions from LG1, funding will be used to enhance the quality of existing provision within the Rec. In addition and again subject to agreement, contributions towards indoor sports provision will be used to improve existing sports facilities across Letchworth.

The Greenway and footpath network

4.15 Maintaining and enhancing the existing footpath network is a key objective of the masterplan to promote walking and cycling, support leisure activities and encourage active travel. The route of the Greenway will be improved with better surfacing and additional facilities including benches, picnic tables and natural play. A new loop will be added to the north-west of LG1 to provide walkers with an option to walk around rather than through LG1 in the future, thereby maintaining the rural character of this pedestrian route. This network of paths provides direct access to the Grange Estate and onward towards the centre of Letchworth as well as rural recreational routes to surrounding settlements, Radwell Meadows and the Etonbury Green Wheel. Detailed proposals for the entire pedestrian & cycle network are provided in section 6.0 - Movement Framework.

Strategic drainage network

4.16 The surface water SuDS drainage network will be integrated within the landscape and green infrastructure framework to reflect its multi-functional role in placemaking. The principal components will be a series of swales aligned with the street network and a set of attenuation basins that are principally located within the outer boundary and green buffer of the site and particularly along the western and northern edges. This drainage network will supplement the existing pattern of ditches within the site that run alongside hedgerows and drain west toward the Pix Brook and north towards the River Ivel. The wider SuDS system will be gravity-fed, where possible, and include additional drainage features including wetlands and ponds, rain gardens, filtration strips, filtration drains and permeable paving.



Fig. 4.3: Derwenthorpe, York. Enclosed courtyard planting within a residential neighbourhood. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 4.4: Bicester Eco Town, Oxfordshire: Raised bed allotment plots available to residents to rent annually. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 4.5: Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire: Housing located close to a SuDS attenuation basin and wetland. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 4.6: Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire: Children's play area located within a green space close to housing. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 4.7: Upton, Northampton. SuDS Swale with native bullrush planting integrated within the street network. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 4.8: Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire: Linear park with strong landscape framework and integrated areas for play. Source: Peter Neal

5

Habitat and biodiversity framework

5. Habitat and biodiversity framework

Habitat and biodiversity context

Introduction

5.1 The LG1 site is largely composed of arable fields with some poor semi-improved grassland field boundaries with boundary hedgerows, some of which are also associated with ditches and scattered trees. Small areas of scrub, plantation broad-leaved woodland, bare ground and introduced shrub are also present within the site. There are several public rights of way across and through the site while most of the field boundaries have permissible path networks. Notable habitats within and adjacent to the site include deciduous broad-leaved woodland (S41) and good quality semi-improved grasslands. These are local priority habitats and Habitats of Principal Importance (HPI) but not subject to direct impacts from the development. Small areas of traditional orchard (S41) are found adjacent to and 360m south of the site. Other habitats including semi-natural broad-leaved woodland, lines of trees, plantation broad-leaved woodland and scattered broad-leaved trees.

5.2 Three statutory wildlife sites of local significance have been found within 2km of the site (Norton Common, Stotfold Mill Meadows and Ivel Springs, local nature reserves). There are 15 non-statutory locally designated sites within 2km of the site. Of those, Norton Pond, Radwell Meadows, Radwell Lake and River Ivel at Nortonbury may be the subject of indirect impacts. None of the 15 non-statutory locally designated sites are expected to be directly impacted by the development.

Biodiversity baseline studies

5.3 A set of baseline ecology studies have been prepared by TEP for the site including an Ecological Desk Study (August 2023), a Preliminary Ecological Assessment (December 2023), a Hedgerow Assessment (December 2023) and a Feasibility Stage Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Report (December 2023). These are supported by a series of species surveys including a Badger Survey (August 2023), Reptile Survey (October 2023), Amphibian Survey (August 2023), Water Vole and Otter Survey (December 2023), Dormouse Survey (October 2023), Bat Survey (October 2023), Breeding Bird Survey (December 2023), and Winter Bird Survey Report (September 2023).

5.4 Great Crested Newt (GCN) has been located within Norton Pond 350m to the southeast of LG1, however Natural England mitigation licence will not be required as the pond is unlikely to be impacted by the proposals.

5.5 No badger sett(s) were identified but evidence of badger activity was identified on site, as badger scat present in April 2023. Prior to works commencing a further walkover badger survey will be required to ascertain current status of badgers in vicinity of the works.

5.6 No reptiles found during main survey. Survey on land to the north of Norton Road found two slowworms and a single grass snake. This is a major road and considered to present a significant barrier to reptile movement.

5.7 No evidence of water vole was recorded within the surveyed area of Pix Brook and the survey identified that the Brook provides low suitability for water vole. Three otter spraints were recorded on the first survey visit, approximately 450m southwest of the site. No evidence of potential holts was recorded during the surveys. The desk study returned no records of dormice within 2km of the site and no evidence of dormouse was found during the nest tube surveys. Commuting and foraging bat species recorded on site include the Common pipistrelle, the Soprano pipistrelle and the Brown long-eared bat. Rarer species include Leisler's bat, the Nathusius' pipistrelle and the Barbastelle. The Bat Survey report (TEP/Oct 2023, Para 5.6 and Sec 6), provides detail on further survey and mitigation measures. The principle for the Masterplan Framework is to retain bat foraging and commuting habitats where possible and to provide additional habitat enhancements particularly along the northern boundary which records the highest suitability for bat roosts.

Ecological opportunities and constraints

5.8 Following the completion of the Desktop Study, Preliminary Ecological Assessment and protected species survey data, an Opportunities and Constraints Plan (G9546.08.001 / PEA, TEP - December 2023) has been produced for the site, which also takes account of the Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) Ecological Networks Map for the LG1 site and surrounding area.

5.9 The main constraints, that are recorded as Medium to Low level, include the network of hedgerows across the site, small areas of plantation woodland and mature trees that offer bat roost potential. Of these, 3 trees were found to have high bat roost potential, 6 trees with moderate bat roost potential and 11 with low roost potential. All these trees are located within the northern boundary of the site and adjacent plantation and along the hedgerow within the centre of the site that runs adjacent to the Greenway.

5.10 Key ecological opportunities for the site will be to protect and enhance existing hedgerows to establish productive wildlife corridors that can form part of a wider local nature recovery network. The design intent is to provide a protective buffer alongside these hedgerows of native scrub, wildflower grassland and drainage ditches or swales that will provide additional habitat for invertebrates, pollinators, small mammals and birds. The

areas of native scrub adjacent to the Grange Estate and tree-lined shelterbelts, referred to as plantation woodland, offer particular value for breeding birds, foraging bats and small mammals. These are to be retained within the Strategic Masterplan Framework and should be actively managed in the future to enhance their biodiversity benefit. Beyond the site boundary an area of Swamp reedbed (S41) to the north of the small plantation could be enhanced and semi-improved grassland along the Norton Road offer beneficial habitat for invertebrates including pollinating insects.

5.11 Some hedgerows will be subject to some losses as part of the proposals to provide access routes through the site. Replacement hedgerow planting will be incorporated into the development to mitigate for any losses occurring and there will be significant net gain in hedgerow and tree planting including a commitment to plant an additional 2,000 trees. Some of the small areas of semi-improved and poor semi-improved grasslands may be lost, but this habitat loss can be mitigated within the proposed development. All the arable field margin habitats are expected to be lost as part of the proposals although these losses are small and can be mitigated on site. This represents a small proportion of over 2,000 acres of agricultural estate owned by LGCHF on the periphery of the urban area. It is recommended that a Construction Management Plan, Precautionary Working Method Statement, and a habitat management plan should be produced for the site. This will include precautionary working measures to avoid impacts on a range of species.

Proposed habitat and biodiversity framework

Overview

5.12 The preliminary ecological framework and allocation of habitats for the Strategic Masterplan Framework is shown on the Biodiversity and Habitat Framework Plan (Fig. 5.2, overleaf). This provides a synthesis of the baseline and proposed habitat assessment plans provided in the BNG Report and reflects the ecological design principles of the Proposed UK Habitats Plan (DWG G9546.05.005A / TEP December 2023). This retains the principal habitat features of the site including hedgerows, scrub, mature trees, woodland and plantation shelterbelt. The native planted green buffer will include new areas of broadleaved woodland, mixed scrub, hedgerows, meadows, attenuation basins, wetlands and ponds as part of the sustainable drainage system. The linear parkland will include areas of neutral grassland and, where feasible, calcareous grassland at the detailed design stage.

Biodiversity Net Gain baseline calculation

5.13 The Scheme was assessed using Biodiversity Metric 4.0 in line with the user guide and technical supplement provided and a full BNG report has been prepared (TEP, Feasibility Stage Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Report / December 2023). The principles of biodiversity net gain as set out in the Biodiversity Net Gain Good Practice Guidelines have been considered throughout this assessment process. Post-development calculations have been based on the emerging Strategic Masterplan Framework (Option 2). The most appropriate UK Habitat Classification type for each habitat parcel was assigned based on the landscape design, and a target condition was assigned for each parcel based upon the condition assessment criteria for habitats within the Biodiversity Metric 4.0 Technical Supplement. The target condition for habitat types varied depending upon their location, likely levels of use and management measures required.

5.14 The majority of woodland, hedgerows and mature oak trees will be retained within the Strategic Masterplan Framework and the BNG assessment takes account of the following habitats that will be created, including neutral grassland (8.35ha), broadleaved woodland (1.31ha), mixed scrub (1.18ha), biodiverse Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) ponds (1.69ha), and Modified (Amenity) grasslands for outdoor play space and parkland (0.69ha). In summary the scheme area totals 47.01ha of which 3.88ha will be retained, the majority of which will be existing hawthorn scrub (0.79ha), mixed scrub (0.78ha), other broadleaved woodland (0.76ha). The following table (Fig. 5.1) provides the headline results for this Feasibility Stage Assessment.

Table of BNG headline result based on application area only			
On-site baseline	Habitat Units	125.43	
	Hedgerow Units	30.76	
	Watercourse Units	0.00	
On-site post intervention (including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat Units	148.08	
	Hedgerow Units	30.76	
	Watercourse Units	0.00	
On-site net change (units and percentage)	Habitat Units	22.65	18.06%
	Hedgerow Units	5.95	19.34%
	Watercourse Units	0.00	0.00%

Fig. 5.1 Table of BNG headline result based on application area only.

5.15 Based on the Scheme footprint as it stands, the headline results indicate a Net Gain of 18.06% which equates to 22.65 Biodiversity Units (BU) for area-based habitats and a Net gain of 19.34% (5.95 BU) for linear habitats/hedgerows. Full details of the conversion from the High-level Plans to the UK Habitat classification along with the target condition are provided in the Assessor Comments within the completed Biodiversity Metric 4.0 spreadsheet (TEP December 2023 / Excel File).

Fig. 5.2: Proposed habitat and biodiversity framework plan



Key

	Site boundary
	Existing native broadleaved woodland, dense scrub and native hedgerows
	Proposed native green buffer incorporating broadleaved woodland, mixed scrub, hedgerows and species-rich grassland
	Neutral grassland (linear parks)
	Modified grassland (play areas)
	Attenuation pond (SuDS system)
	Swale (SuDS System)
	Allotments
	Developable land parcels

Note: Refer to TEP Feasibility Stage BNG Report and analysis drawings for detailed habitat descriptions including: Baseline UK Habitats (G9546.05.003A) and Proposed UK Habitats G9546.05.005A),December 2023 or revised.

Note: The proposed framework plan takes account of the preliminary assessment of the Surface Water Flooding Constraints and Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy (January 2023/ Appendix L). This is further being reviewed by Stantec (January 2024 onwards) in response to initial discussions with the County Council (response letter December 2023). More detailed assessment and design coordination for Flood Risk and Surface Water Management will be required at subsequent design stages.

Habitat and biodiversity - Precedents



Fig. 5.3: Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire: Informal native grassland edge to neighbourhood. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 5.4: Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire: Native green planted buffer with integrated footpath and play. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 5.5: Upton, Northampton. Wetland attenuation pond and reedbed adjacent to housing area. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 5.6: Great Notley, Essex: Footpath crossing a mature native hedgerow. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 5.7: Derwenthorpe, York. Retained native hedgerow incorporating an active travel corridor. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 5.8: Abbotswood, Romsey. Attenuation pond and reedbed managed for amphibians and biodiversity value. Source: Peter Neal

6

Movement framework

6. Movement framework

Transport infrastructure context

Introduction

6.1 The site is situated approximately 2km north of Letchworth Garden City Rail Station (a key commuter link) and town centre which can be accessed in approximately 25 minutes on foot and in approximately 10 minutes by bicycle. It is well connected to local pedestrian and cycle networks with the Garden City Greenway, Etonbury Green Wheel, National Cycle Network Route 12 (NCN12), Footpath 32 and a number of other permissive footpaths directly serving the site.

6.2 Arriva Bus Route 55 is the only bus route serving the Grange Estate, south of LG1. The route links the Grange Estate with central and eastern Letchworth (including the town centre and rail station), Lister Hospital and central Stevenage.

6.3 The location of the primary vehicular access has been agreed in principle on Norton Road c200m to the east of the double hedgerow which includes NCN12, the Greenway and Etonbury Green Wheel. There has recently been a submission to the HCC Speed Management Group to reduce the speed limit on Norton Road from 60mph to 50mph, which has been approved.

Transport baseline studies

6.4 A comprehensive Transport and Accessibility Audit (March 2024/ Appendix K) has been prepared to provide a technical assessment of the site and inform the development of the Strategic Masterplan Framework. The audit considers the site's location within the strategic wider setting in relation to key destinations, other future development sites and the multi-modal transport networks, highlighting the strategic importance of the Greenway, Etonbury Green Wheel and National Cycle Route 12 alignments to support active travel to/from LG1 (Fig. 3.1, Appendix K).

6.5 The report also includes detailed accessibility audits of principal pedestrian and cycle routes between Site LG1 and surrounding destinations identifying key locations for public realm and streetscape improvements, in relation to pedestrian crossings, junction improvements, safety and wayfinding, for further consideration by local authorities.

6.6 An evaluation has also been undertaken of transport opportunities and constraints for LG1, together with an overview of previous transport studies and how these cumulatively inform the emerging multi-modal movement framework for LG1, including consideration of a sustainable mobility hub.

Proposed movement framework

Overview

6.7 The Strategic Movement Framework (Fig. 6.1, overleaf) demonstrates how the site seeks to maximise opportunities for sustainable modes of travel – buses, walking and cycling – within LG1 and connecting to key destinations within the surrounding area, aligned with the draft Hertfordshire Place & Movement Planning and Design Guidance (P&MPDG). Aligned with LG1's design vision and placemaking objectives, the movement framework supports at least a 10% modal shift target.

Walking and cycling

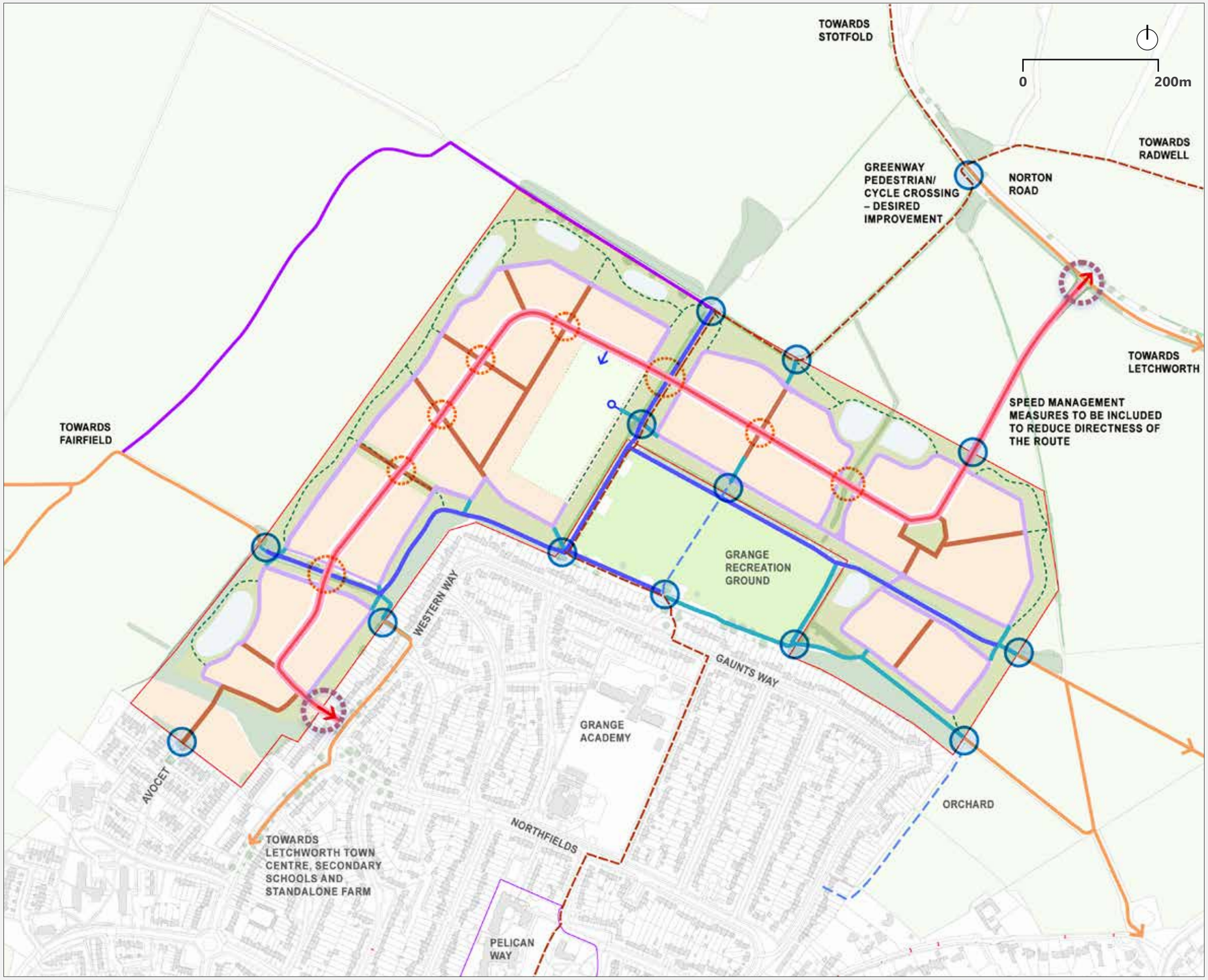
6.8 Walking (Fig. 6.2) and cycling (Fig. 6.3) are supported and promoted within the scheme through a wide range of measures. The framework provides a permeable, connected street pattern and block structure with a clear hierarchy of routes that are legible and safe with natural surveillance from surrounding built form. Strong pedestrian and cycle permeability is aligned with natural desire lines that link into and extend the existing PRoW network to support access to the Grange Estate, main destinations and recreational movement. Additionally, a Greenway extension link to the west (outside the LG1 boundary), preserves the rural character of the existing Greenway, giving users the option of using the Greenway without passing through the new development.

6.9 Dedicated primary north-south and east-west active travel routes with a 3m dedicated cycle track following existing desire lines and projected movement patterns provide connections to the Greenway/ NCN 12 and Etonbury Green Wheel. The proposed secondary active travel routes are 'shared pedestrian and cycling routes' that link to the primary network, Site LG1's access points and key destinations within Letchworth, surrounding settlements and key open spaces. The framework also identifies strategic locations for wayfinding.

6.10 The design of all street typologies within LG1 is proposed to support shared use of cyclists as part of the carriageway and pavements for pedestrians within a low-speed 20 mph environment to promote active travel. The primary vehicular north-south access route between Norton Road and LG1, will also include a shared use footway/ cycleway to one side of the road. For details please refer to the street typologies section (p.67-86).

6.11 In terms of linking LG1 with the wider context, the framework identifies important opportunity areas for improving wider walking and cycling infrastructure and connectivity to surrounding destinations. This includes

Fig. 6.1: Movement framework plan

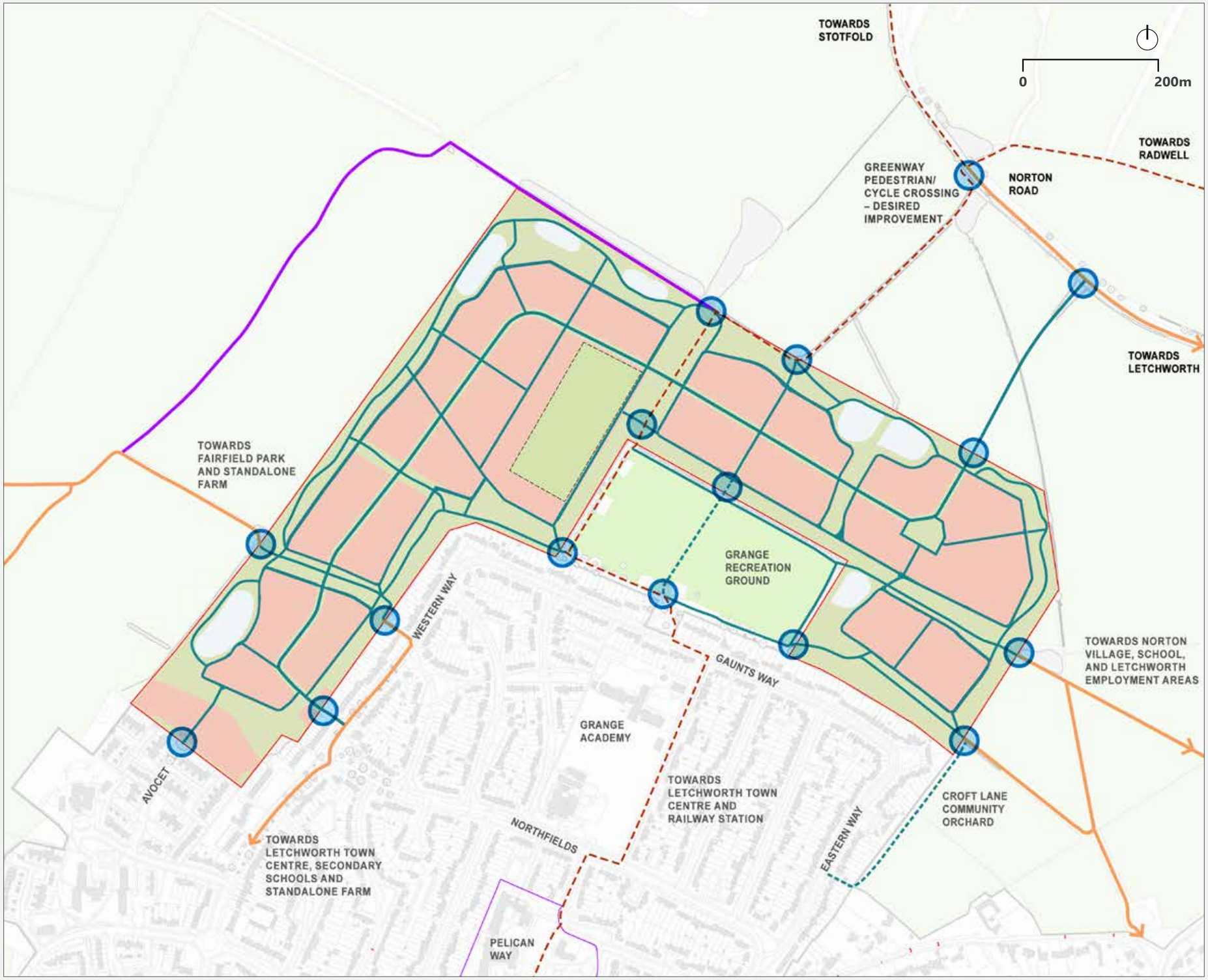


Key

	Site boundary
	Green open space
	Developable land parcels
	Primary active travel route (3m dedicated cycle path)
	Secondary active travel route (walking and cycling)
	Main street (for bus access and shared usage by cyclists)
	Secondary street (segregated footways with cycling on-street)
	Edge street (shared surface including walking and cycle)
	Pedestrian trail
	Potential cycle / pedestrian link
	National Cycle Network (NCN) 12
	Primary gateways
	Potential wayfinding markers
	Active travel priority junctions/ speed management measures
	Vehicular entrance to school
	Pedestrian / cycle entrance to school
	Upgrade to Greenway standard
	External active travel route connection to key destinations

Note: The proposed framework plan takes account of the preliminary assessment of the Surface Water Flooding Constraints and Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy (January 2023/ Appendix L). This is further being reviewed by Stantec (January 2024 onwards) in response to initial discussions with the County Council (response letter December 2023). More detailed assessment and design coordination for Flood Risk and Surface Water Management will be required at subsequent design stages.

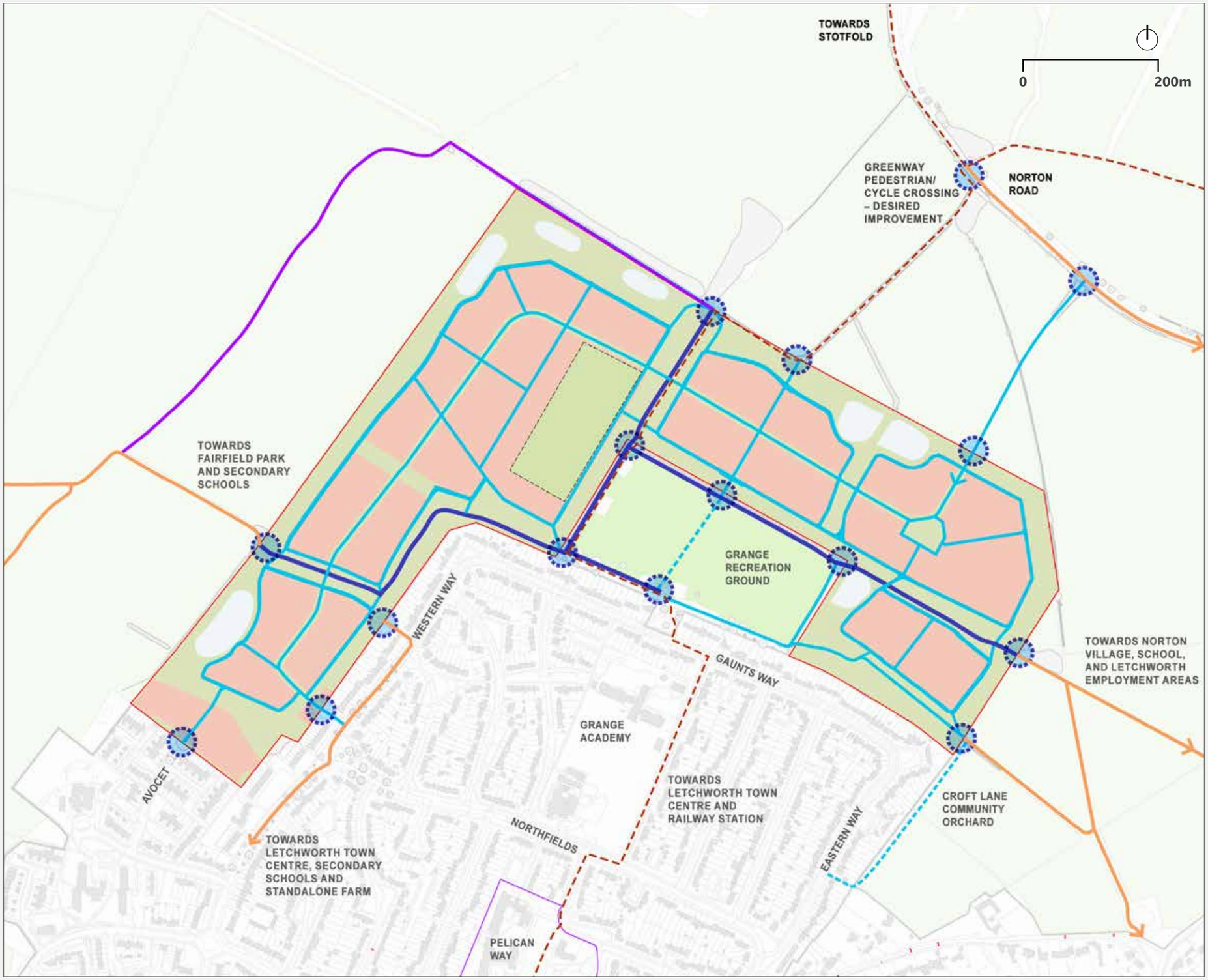
Fig. 6.2: Movement framework plan: Walking routes



Key

	Site boundary
	Green open space
	Developable land parcels
	Walking route
	Potential walking route
	Pedestrian gateway with potential for wayfinding markers
	Upgrade to Greenway standard
	External active travel route connection to key destinations
	National Cycle Network (NCN) 12

Fig. 6.3: Movement framework plan: Cycling routes



Key

	Site boundary
	Green open space
	Developable land parcels
	Primary active travel route (3m dedicated cycle path)
	Secondary active travel route (walking and cycling)
	Potential new active travel route
	Cycle gateways with potential for wayfinding markers
	Upgrade to Greenway standard
	External active travel route connection to key destinations
	National Cycle Network (NCN) 12

Note: The primary cycle route will be hard surfaced with an appropriate material reflecting the surrounding conditions and safety requirements in agreement with HCC. We will work with NHC and HCC to ensure that an appropriate lighting strategy of the cycle route is implemented, which will also consider its environmental impact and long term management as part of the wider sustainable transport contributions.

key crossing points as highlighted in the framework plan, aligned with Steer's Accessibility Audit Report (Chapter 5, see Appendix K), and enhancements to the existing Greenway and National Cycle Network (NCN) route 12 which is the key strategic pedestrian and cycle link to Letchworth railway station and town centre. Further discussions are to be undertaken with settle (main landowner of Grange Estate) to safeguard NCN12 route through the Pelican Way regeneration site.

6.12 The framework provides safe routes to school with a car-free zone along the proposed enhanced Greenway linear park to the west of the existing Grange Recreation Ground, and the school's vehicular entrance provided from the main avenue.

6.13 In terms of cycle parking, a planning compliant approach to provision for all land uses will be adopted. Cycle parking provision will be in front of houses for easy and convenient access and to support modal shift. They will be provided within secure covered space(s) within the plot curtilage and/or use of garages for cycle storage. Provision of visitor cycle parking will be in clusters on-street or within key open spaces.

Bus access and route

6.14 To support public transport, primary street and associated junctions will be designed to accommodate bus access, supporting bus links to Letchworth town centre and railway station.

6.15 The masterplan layout will support all homes to be within 400m walking distance to a bus stop, and include designated bus stops along the main avenue (positions to be agreed). An adequate bus turning area will be provided within the site using the internal road network as a 'loop' and/or a turning circle.

6.16 The subsequent planning submission will include further details regarding the above, and an indicative bus access strategy setting out the above design principles, minimum routing requirements and indicative costs to facilitate a minimum viable bus service (shuttle to Letchworth town centre and railway station). It is envisaged that a HertsLynx-esque service will serve the development from the outset until the point a standard bus service can be introduced. Further discussions with HCC and CBC Passenger Transport Units to consider re-instatement of school buses for 'entitled' secondary school age pupils are to be undertaken.

Sustainable mobility hub

6.17 The transport framework includes a mobility hub within LG1 to join shared transport measures with public transport and active travel in a high-quality public realm space. Key components will include a bus stop, car club, cycle hire, lockers, electric vehicle charging points, centralised delivery lockers and potentially a co-working space and small café. It will be located in a central location in proximity to the Grange Recreation Ground, the neighbourhood centre and the Letchworth Greenway/ NCN12 for easy access. It will also be in proximity to the 'reserve' school site to support access to/from school using active travel modes (Fig. 6.4-6.7, overleaf).

6.18 Adopting a coordinated approach with settle's Pelican Way regeneration scheme and the Letchworth station improvements will help maximise its positive impacts, enable modal shift and support commercial viability.

Vehicular access and movement

6.19 To support active travel and sustainable transport modes, the whole site will be a low-speed vehicular environment of 20 mph.

6.20 This will be supported by traffic and speed management measures 'designed-into' the masterplan layout, in particular, along the central and unifying Avenue (i.e. primary street) to deter potential rat-running through the site. This will also include active travel priority junctions and traffic calming measures at key locations including intersections with active travel routes and hedgerows, using design features such as raised tables, pedestrian/ cycle crossing facilities, pinch points with reduced carriageway widths, structured planting and chicanes with cycle bypasses. These are to be further tested and considered during subsequent highway design stages. All secondary and tertiary streets will be designed as home zones to share vehicular space with cyclists and separate footways for pedestrians.

6.21 Learning from the Garden City pioneers, the Norton Road access route and junction will be designed as a multi-modal 'parkway-inspired' gateway into LG1 and wider Letchworth. It will support a shared pedestrian and cycle access. See p.82-84 for further details on this street typology. Further studies to explore its potential realignment to reduce the directness of this access route and further support low speeds through the LG1 development, allow on carriage-way cycling on the primary avenue within LG1 and enhance the overall attractiveness of the walking environment will be explored in the next design stages.

6.22 The two new 'gateway' junctions with Western Way and Norton Road will provide vehicular access to the site integrated with sustainable modes and create a high-quality experience. The exact form and layout of these junctions are to be confirmed subsequently through detailed trip generation and capacity assessments. Emergency access will be provided from both the Norton Road and Western Way junctions. Construction access will be provided from Norton Road. For details on the phasing and infrastructure delivery plan, see section 12.0.

Car parking and placemaking implications

6.23 In terms of car parking, the development will comply with the standards in the NHC Local Plan, with potential for shared use of spaces for non-residential uses. Any consideration of reduced car parking ratios (including visitor parking) will be thoroughly tested against evidence of lower parking needs for specific housing typologies e.g. affordable housing and/or senior living.

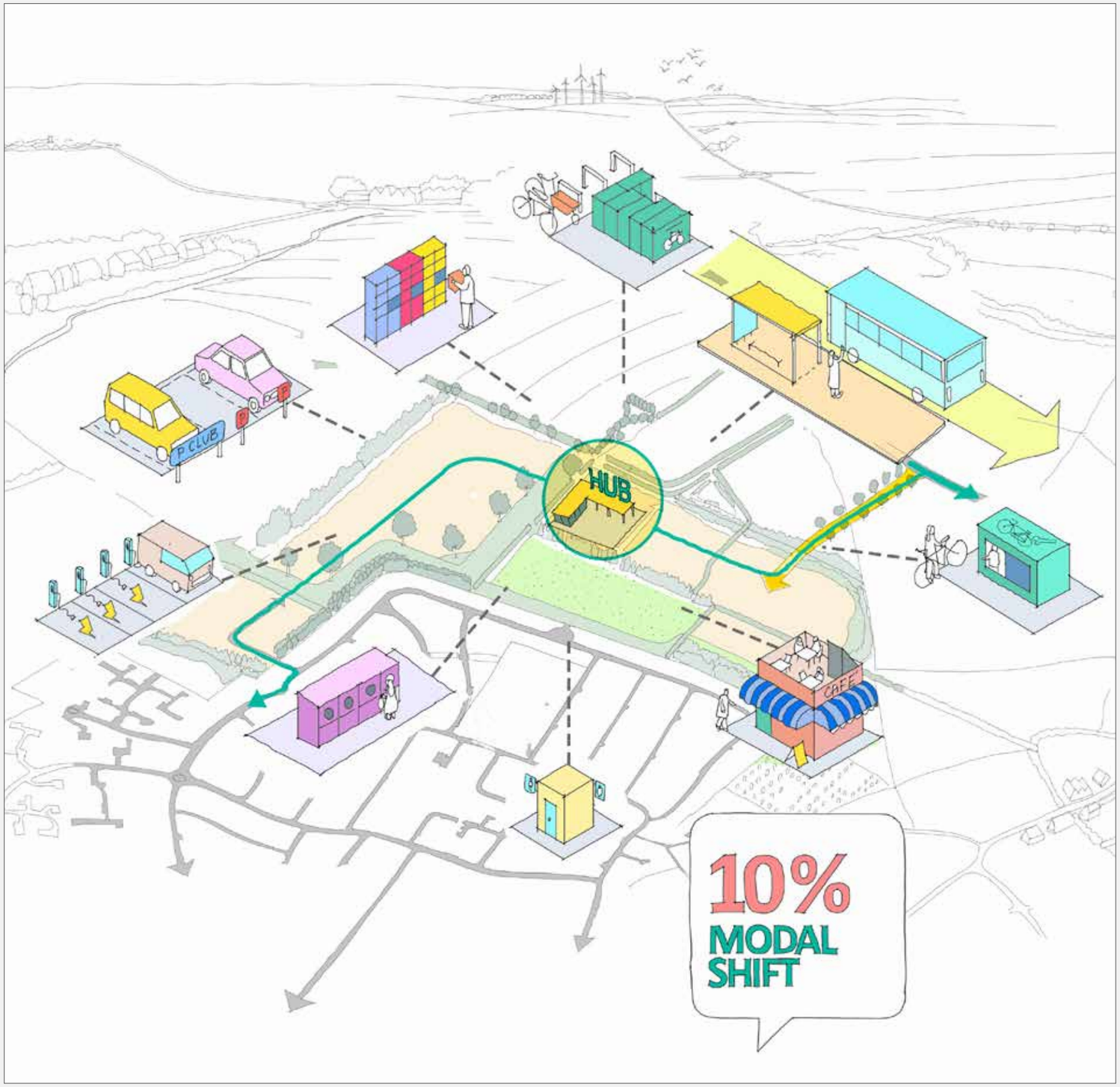


Fig. 6.4: Proposed Mobility Hub to support achieving a 10% modal shift.



Fig. 6.5: Precedent - Mobility hub, Bike hire. Source: CoMoUK



Fig. 6.6: Seabrook Orchard, Devon: Mobility Hub. Source: CoMoUK



Fig. 6.7: Seabrook Orchard, Devon: Mobility Hub. Source: CoMoUK

6.24 There is a need for additional car parking spaces for the Grange Recreation Ground for football and events, which will need to be considered further in collaboration with NHC. This should balance the need between parking provision and promoting non-car modes of travel, as well as the opportunity to share parking with other users. For example, peak times for the recreation ground may be when the school is not in use.

6.25 To minimise the visual impact of car parking in streetscapes, in particular, for on-street and off-plot parking typologies, street sections will be integrated with structural planting. Refer to street typologies (p.67-86).

6.26 Should car use reduce over time and the demand for parking fall as a result of a change in habits and/or the sustainable travel strategy, there will be the option to re-use these spaces (subject to local demand) as productive allotments/raised beds, opportunities for doorstep play, and/or space for social interaction (Fig. 6.8-6.10). Consideration will also be given to appropriateness of innovative communal approaches to car parking (Fig. 6.11) e.g. car barns with PV/ green roofs, attractively designed for safe use in the next design stages (See DP8, p.33). A robust access, maintenance and stewardship strategy for such spaces will be required to ensure safety. There will be provision of EV charging for all modes. Residents will be provided with a minimum of one active EV charging point per dwelling from the outset.

6.27 A comprehensive Outline Residential Travel Plan will be submitted as part of the planning application, with a Detailed Travel Plan to be produced pre-occupation. This will be secured by s106 agreement. The Travel Plan will promote sustainable travel modes to the site through an extensive integrated package of measures and by setting mode share targets, that will be informed by post occupation multi-modal transport surveys. The surveys will be undertaken 6 months (or at 75% occupation of units), two years and five years post occupation to monitor progress against targets.



Fig. 6.8: Southampton city centre: Car parking space reclaimed as sit-out space, rented by adjacent cafe. Source: Meristem Design



Fig. 6.9: Cambridge: Cyclehoop parking. Source: WSP report to Greater Cambridge Partnership joint assembly



Fig. 6.10: Waltham Forest, London: Car parking reclaimed as a parklet. Source: https://walthamforestecho.co.uk/



Fig. 6.11: Derwenthrope, York: Communal car parking, some with PVs on roofs. Source: EcoResponsive Environments

Car parking strategy

6.28 The Foundation's approach to car parking on the LG1 development has been informed by the following:

- Commercial input
- Planning policy
- Community consultation
- General connectivity

6.29 This influences the amount of parking that should be provided. Once this is defined, the typologies can then be considered (Fig. 6.12-6.14). When the LG1 scheme was in its formative stages, consideration was made to a low parking scheme, placing a greater reliance on active travel and public transport. This was tested in consultation with the community and our advisors.

6.30 First and foremost, there was strong concern by the local community during our consultation exercise about the impact of a low parking scheme on existing residents. This focused on overspill car parking on the Grange, where there are issues with on-street parking on the northern section of the Grange particularly on Gaunts Way. This has been a consistent theme during consultation events.

6.31 Our commercial advice is that low parking schemes are attractive to the market in highly accessible locations, such as town centre developments and we have seen how this can work well in town centre schemes in Letchworth. However, the nature of the LG1 site is that although there are transport links and opportunities for enhancement, a low parking scheme in this location would be less attractive in terms of the viability of the development.

6.32 Policy T2 of the Local Plan states:
Planning permission will be granted provided that:
a) Parking for residential development is provided in accordance with the minimum standards set out in Appendix 4 of this Plan;
b) Parking for non-residential development is provided having regard to the standards for non-residential development set out in the relevant Supplementary Planning Document;
c) Proposals have regard to relevant Supplementary Planning Documents, strategies or advice and;
d) Applicants clearly identify how they provide for all likely types of parking demand and demonstrate that parking will be safe and of a design and layout that will function satisfactorily.
Variations from these standards will only be considered where applicants can demonstrate that the accessibility, type, scale, mix and use of the development; the availability of and opportunities for public transport; local car ownership levels; and on-street conditions justify such variations.

6.33 Appendix 4 of the Local Plan sets out the amount of parking required:

- 1 bedroom; 1 space per dwelling
- 2–3 bedrooms; 2 spaces per dwelling

6.34 In addition, 0.25 to 0.75 visitor parking spaces will be required (with higher standard applied where there are no garages and lower standard applied for every dwelling with a garage). Some of this provision should be covered or in a secure parking court if there is no on-plot or covered parking to serve dwellings. Reference is made to a Supplementary Planning Document, yet to be adopted.

6.35 It is our view that the most appropriate approach with respect to this development, considering the site-specific circumstances and commercial advice, is to be compliant with the adopted Policy T2 of the Local Plan. We do not believe that the site meets the tests in this policy for reduced parking provision, even with the proposed improvements envisaged to the local transport and active travel infrastructure. We believe that this reflects the balanced approach which will reduce the potential for overspill parking in the Grange, whilst not promoting car use. It will also ensure that the car parking strategy will not detract from the attractiveness of the site for potential partners.



Fig. 6.12: On-plot integrated garages best suited for wider plots with both a front door and a habitable room with window fronting to the street for surveillance. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 6.13: On-street parking integrated with structural planting to soften visual impact. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 6.14: Off-plot parking courts: well designed and surveilled. Source: www.ciht.org.uk/media/4395/guidance_note_-_residential_parking.pdf

Off-site improvements

6.36 Potential off-site interventions are identified within Chapter 5 of the Accessibility Audit (Appendix K/ March 2024) and are aligned with the existing routes and desire lines to local destinations (Fig. 6.15) to identify priorities for improvements in coordination with NHC, HCC and CBC. Some key areas for further consideration and discussion are listed below:

- Enhancement of the northern pedestrian/cycle crossing of Norton Road. This would be a desired improvement location.
- A co-ordinated approach with NHC will be required for the parking to serve the Grange Rec. This may include an addition to existing parking provision, but should in any case incorporate additional cycle parking. This will form part of the Grange Improvement Plan that NHC is formulating, who will also be responsible for its design and implementation. In discussions with HCC it is considered that a Travel Plan may be utilised to assist with the future travel to and from the Rec, which would necessitate NHC to undertake this. NHC will also need to take the lead when considering detailed matters such as lighting and surfacing within the Rec area.
- The Heritage Foundation promotes the upgrade of Norton Common to ensure that it can be enhanced as an active travel route as part of the package of off-site sustainable transport contributions. This is under the ownership of NHC and would therefore require their support along with careful consideration and design of measures to ensure that an upgrade does not have a harmful ecological impact.
- Chapter 5 of the Accessibility Audit also includes a comprehensive audit of the routes from Site LG1 to Fearnhill and Highfield Secondary Schools and identifies potential improvements.

6.37 These improvements are a series of suggested areas for further consideration by local authorities as part of the strategic master planning process which will be developed in more detail in discussion with HCC and NHC. This will include a review of the sustainable transport Section 106 contribution and what can be reasonably funded through this requirement, along with consideration of land ownership, ecological and other implications. The implementation, management and stewardship of any improvements will also need to be clarified. This process will include prioritisation of those most important improvements that can be delivered within the parameters of available funding (S106, NHC and HCC).

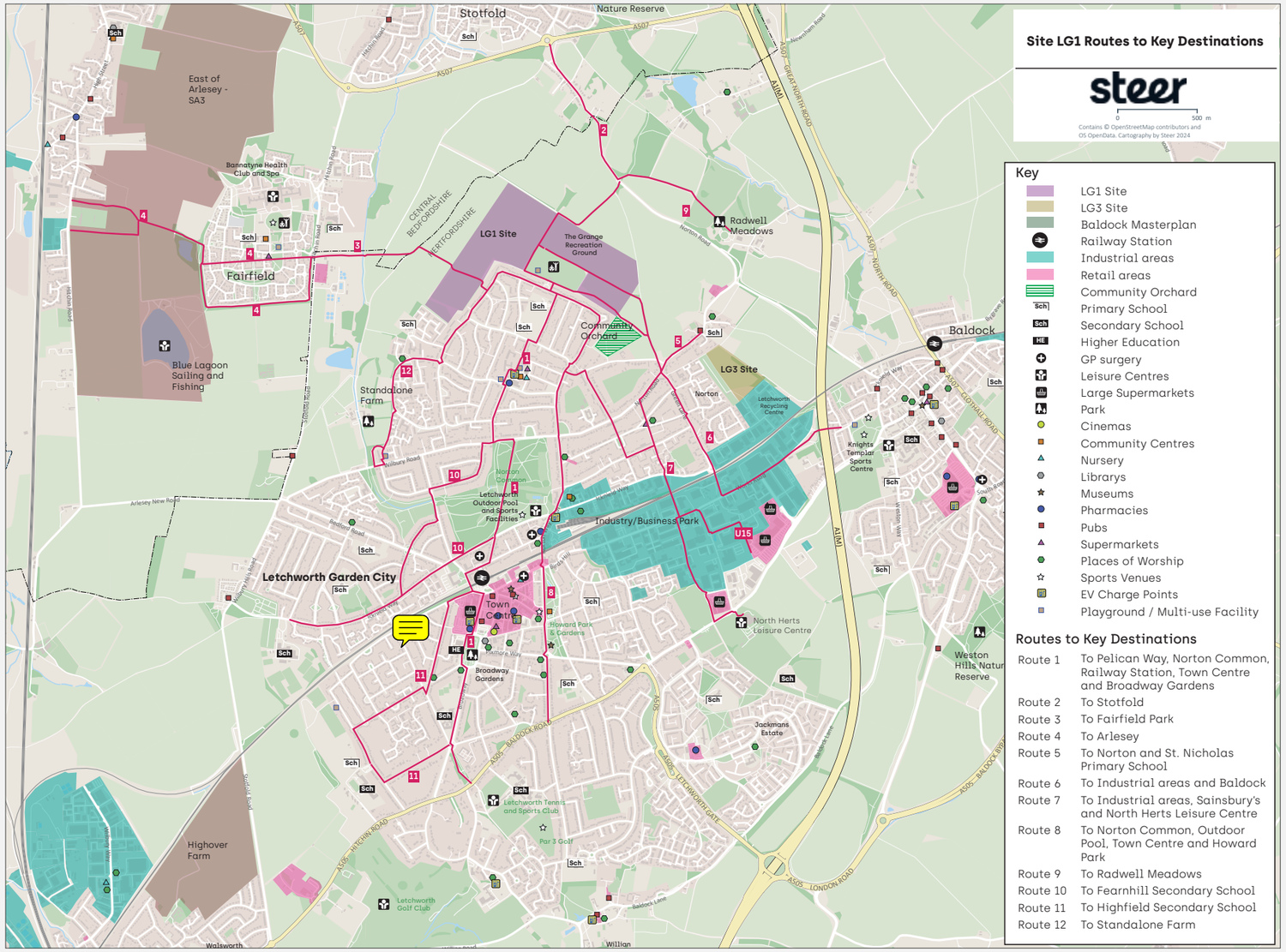


Fig. 6.15: Existing routes to key destinations.
Source: Steer

Street typologies

Type 1 - Primary Street

6.38 The intended character of this multi-modal street is that of a 20mph avenue that unifies the masterplan. The illustrative typical section (Fig. 6.16) and plan (Fig. 6.17, overleaf) with key dimensions tabulated below provides guidance on how this typology can balance a wide range of functions: on-street parking, access to plots, bus stops, light columns, crossing points, structured planting and traffic management measures to deter rat-running.

1	Carriageway (2 lanes, integrated with speed management measures)	6m
2	Cycling provision (in carriageway, no dedicated cycling lane)	n/a
3	Footway Width (x2)	2.0m
4	Minimum parking space	2.5m
5	Structured planting zone	2.5m
6	Tree offset from building facade	Min 5m
7	Tree offset from kerb edge	Min 1.2m
8	Hedgerows zone (within plot curtilage, protected by covenants)	1m
9	Street lighting (to be designed in coordination with street trees)	n/a

*** Utilities to be located under footway
Note 1: Street trees illustrated after 25 years
Note 2: Speed management measures are set out in the HCC Design guide 'Part 4 – Detailed Design and Specification, Chapter 8 – Speed Management'.

Fig. 6.16 Type 1 - Typical illustrative section

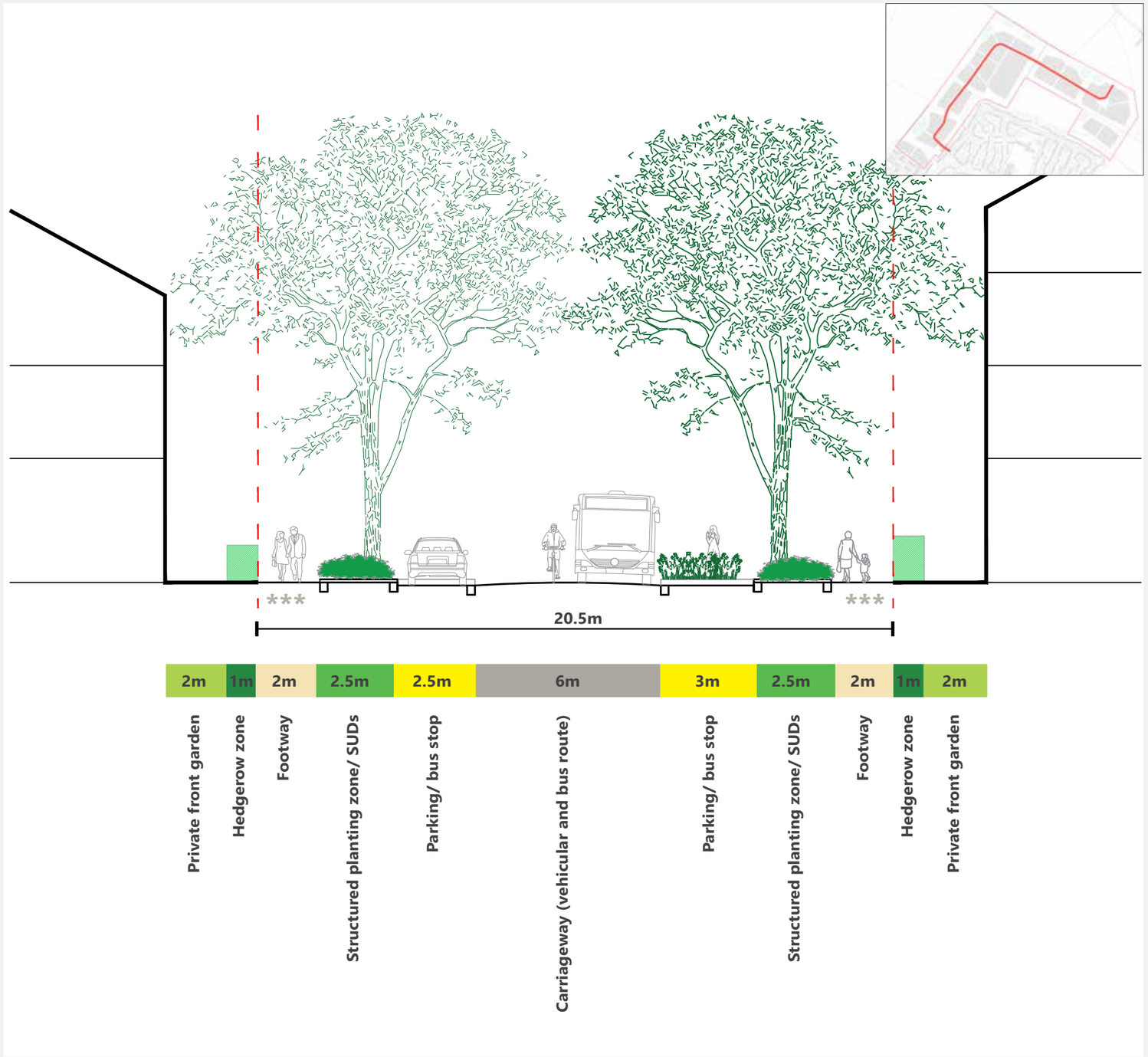
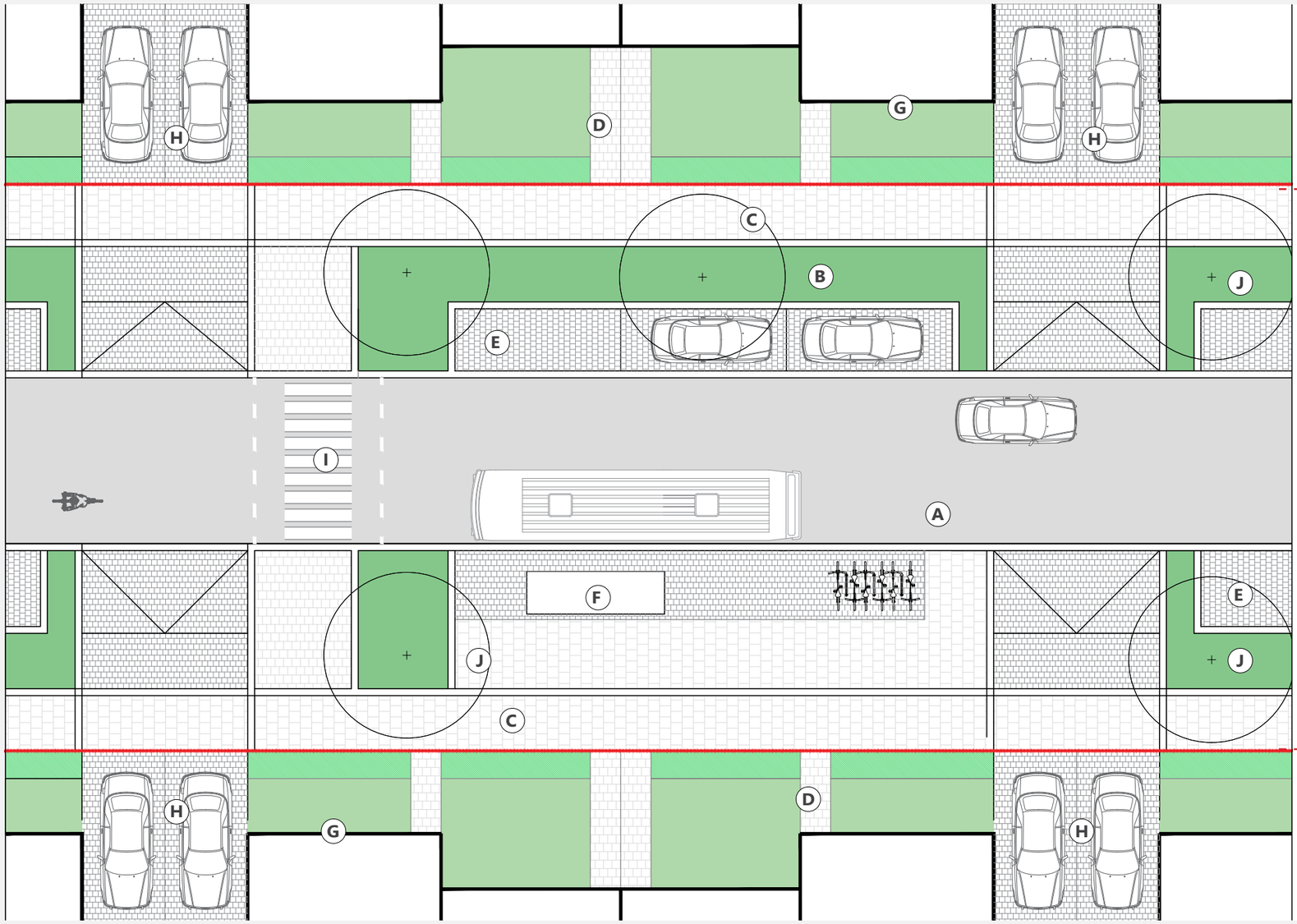


Fig. 6.17 Type 1 - Typical illustrative plan



2m Private front garden
1m Hedgerow zone
2m Footway
2.5m Structured planting zone/ SUDs
2.5m Parking/ bus stop
6m Carriageway (vehicular and bus route).

Note: Locations where the carriageway intersects with walking/cycling routes or hedgerows, speed management measures will be incorporated to slow cars, prioritising active travel and ecology.

3m Parking/ bus stop
2.5m Structured planting zone/ SUDs
2m Footway
1m Hedgerow zone
2m Private front garden

(A) Carriageway - tarmac surface material for shared use of cyclists, vehicular traffic and bus route through the site.

(B) Green verges including semi-mature trees, shrub planting and/or SUDs features integrated with street lights, cycle parking.

(C) Footpath on both sides - continuous level footway surface to be provided throughout.

(D) Direct access to dwellings from roadway.

(E) On-street parking (cars and cycles) in clusters punctuated by structured planting. Car parking bays will be 2.5m x 6.0m.

(F) Bus stop with bus bay on carriageway.

(G) A largely continuous building frontage with strong enclosure utilising soft hedgerow boundaries to the plot boundaries.

(H) On-plot parking is positioned at well-spaced intervals to ensure the dominance of the building line and its visual continuity to secure an attractive streetscape along the primary street.

(I) Accessible crossing point.

(J) Street lights and EV charging points are to be designed in coordination with street trees early in the design process.

(K) There will be some flexibility within the primary route street section to accommodate a 3m wide shared use footway on one side of the road if required.

Type 1 - Primary street - Precedents



Fig. 6.18: Letchworth: Tree-lined streets with soft boundaries to plots, example for main avenue. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 6.19: Letchworth: Seasonal variation of tree-lined streets with verges and soft boundaries to plots for distinct character, example for main avenue. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 6.20: Bromley-by-Bow, London: Structured planting softens parking impact, example for LG1's avenue. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 6.21: Fairfield Park: Raised table to slow cars at active travel route intersections, example for main street. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 6.22: London: Trees and material change at crossings contribute to speed management, example for LG1's avenue. Source: treesforstreets.org

Type 2 - Secondary Street

6.39 These act as the main circulation routes acting as internal distributors and are proposed to be design as homezones. The illustrative typical section (Fig. 6.23) and plan (Fig. 6.24, overleaf) with key dimensions tabulated below provides guidance on how this typology can balance a wide range of functions including on-street parking, access to plots, traffic calming and integration of structured planting and/or SUDs features (Fig. 6.29-6.33).

1	Carriageway (2 lanes)	**5.5m**
2	Cycling provision (in carriageway)	**n/a**
3	Footway Width (x2)	**2.0m**
4	Planted verge/ SUDs/ parking (tree spacing varies - see plan for reference)	**2.5m**
5	Traffic calming buildout zone (leaving clear carriageway width of 3.7m, see note 2 below.)	**Max 1.8m**
6	Tree offset from building facade	**Min 5m**
7	Tree offset from kerb edge	**Min 1.2m**
8	Hedgerows zone (within plot curtilage, protected by covenants)	**1m**
9	Street lighting (to be designed in coordination with street trees)	**n/a**

*** Utilities to be located under footway
Note 1: Street trees illustrated after 25 years
Note 2: For further details see HCC design Standards Part 4 Detailed Design and Specification, Chapter 8 - Speed Management Features.

Fig. 6.23: Type 2 - Typical illustrative section

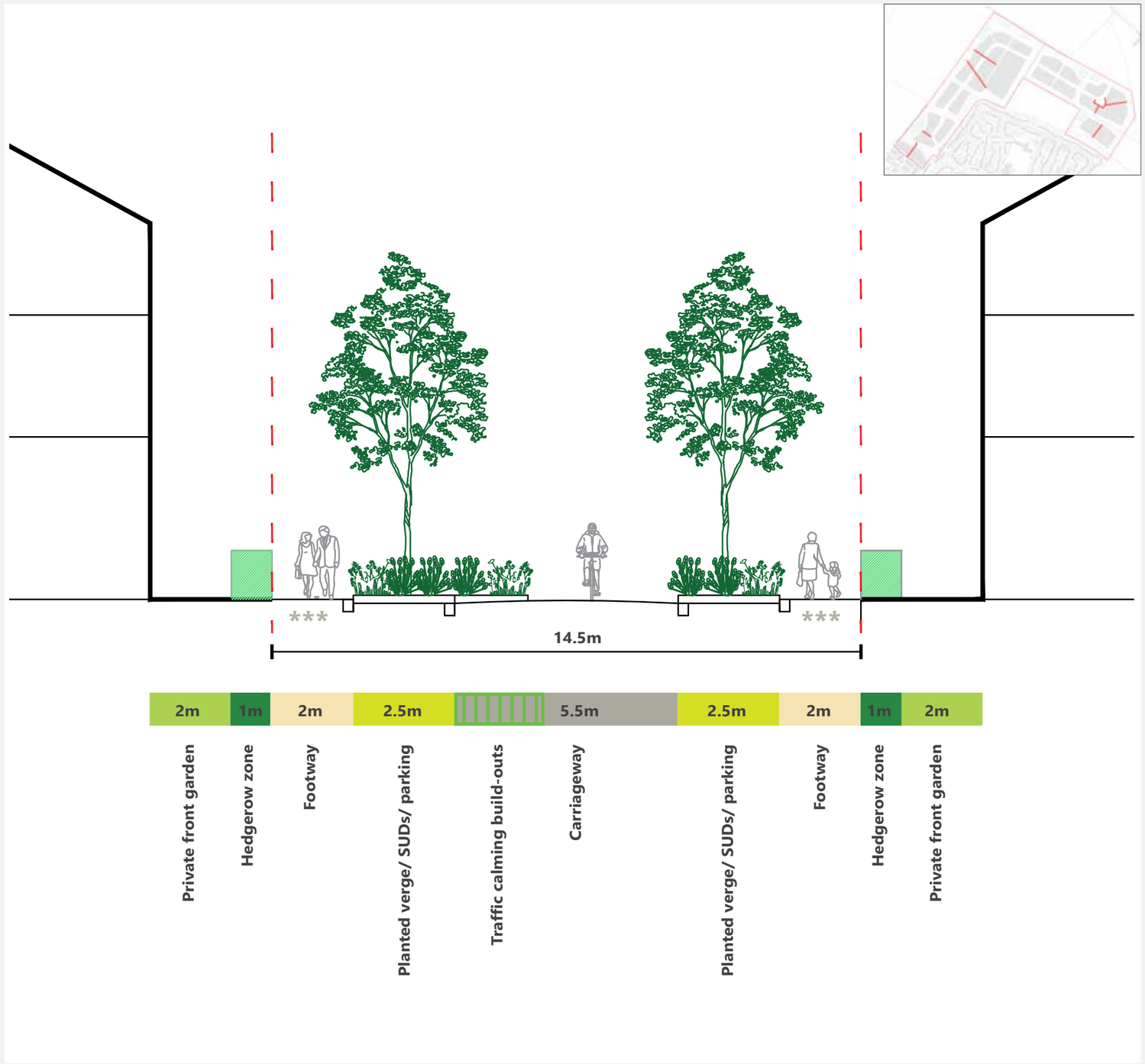
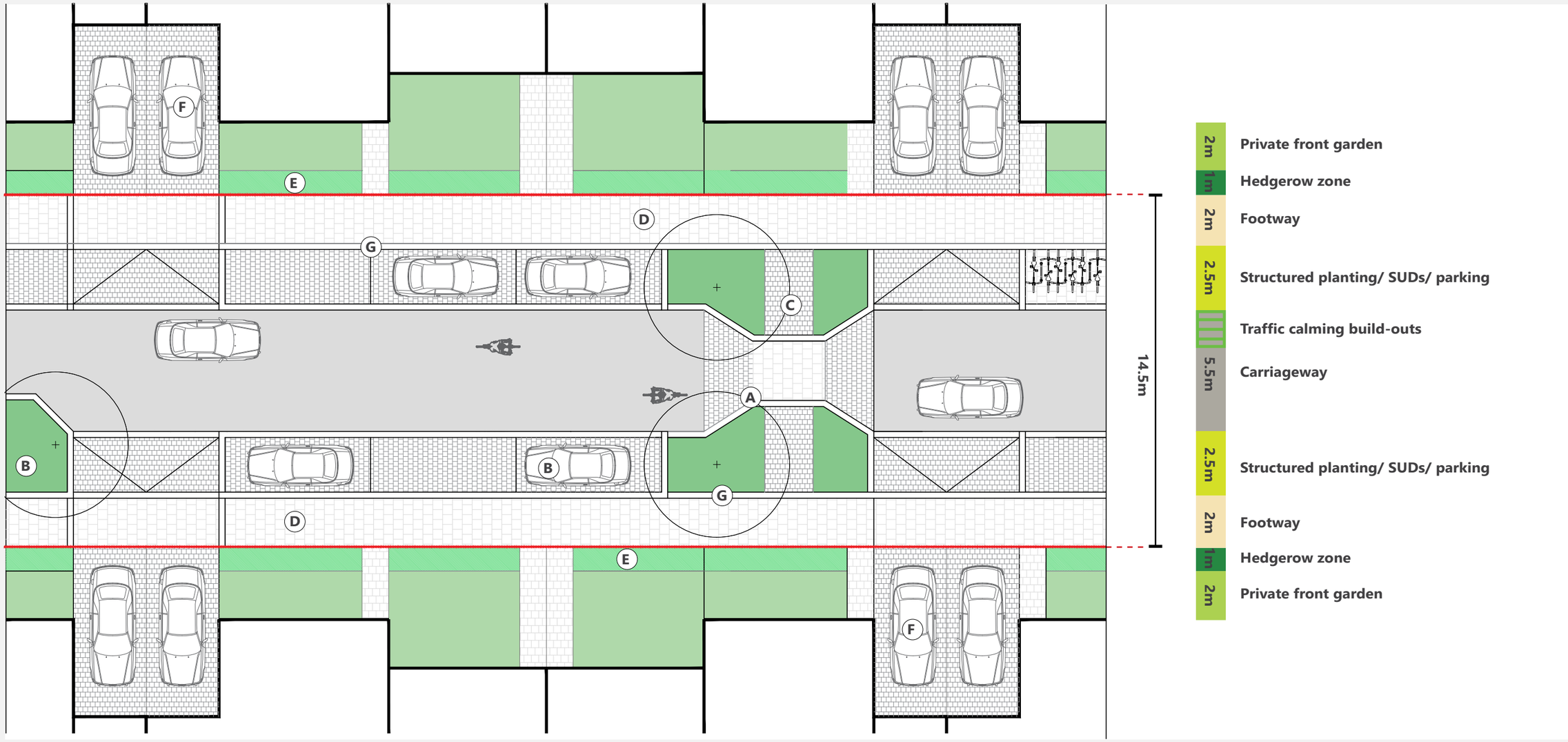


Fig. 6.24: Type 2 - Typical illustrative plan



A	Carriageway - Localised narrowing permitted to accommodate street trees, contribute to traffic calming and add variety and informality to the street scene. Cyclists are to share the carriageway.
B	Structured planting integrated at varied intervals between parking and on-plot access. Upto 3-4 parallel parking bays in single line on the road before it is broken by verge or tree.
C	Build-outs for traffic calming can also provide spaces for cycle parking or social seating. For detailed guidance of build outs with cycle parking please see HCC Design guide part 4, Chapter 6 - designing for parking.
D	Footways - Permeable surface material or block paving to differentiate from carriageway.
E	A largely continuous building frontage with strong enclosure utilising soft hedgerow boundaries to the plot boundaries.
F	On-plot parking are positioned at well-spaced intervals to ensure the dominance of the building line and its visual continuity to secure an attractive streetscape along the primary street.
G	Street lights and EV charging points are to be designed in coordination with street trees early in the design process.

Type 2A - Secondary Street (swale in middle)

6.40 These secondary streets not only act as internal distributors and are proposed to be HomeZones, but also, play an active role in the site wide sustainable urban drainage strategy, designed to integrate with the wider systems managing stormwater. The illustrative typical section (Fig. 6.25) and plan (Fig. 6.26, overleaf) with key dimensions tabulated below provides guidance on how this typology can balance a wide range of functions (Fig. 6.29-6.33).

1	Carriageway (1 lane x 2)	3.7m
2	Cycling provision (in carriageway)	n/a
3	Footway Width (x2)	2.0m
4	Planted verge/ parking (tree spacing varies - see plan for reference)	2.5m
5	Swale (pedestrian crossings across it are subject to detail design - see plan)	Min. 5m
6	Tree offset from building facade	Min. 5m
7	Tree offset from kerb edge	Min. 1.2m
8	Hedgerows zone (within plot curtilage, protected by covenants)	1m
9	Street lighting (to be designed in coordination with street trees)	n/a

*** Utilities to be located under footway
Note 1: Street trees illustrated after 25 years
Note 2: Trees to be planted in soft verges wherever possible. Alternatively, root-able soil volume above to be provided by suspended pavement system.

Fig. 6.25: Type 2A (swale in middle) - Typical illustrative section

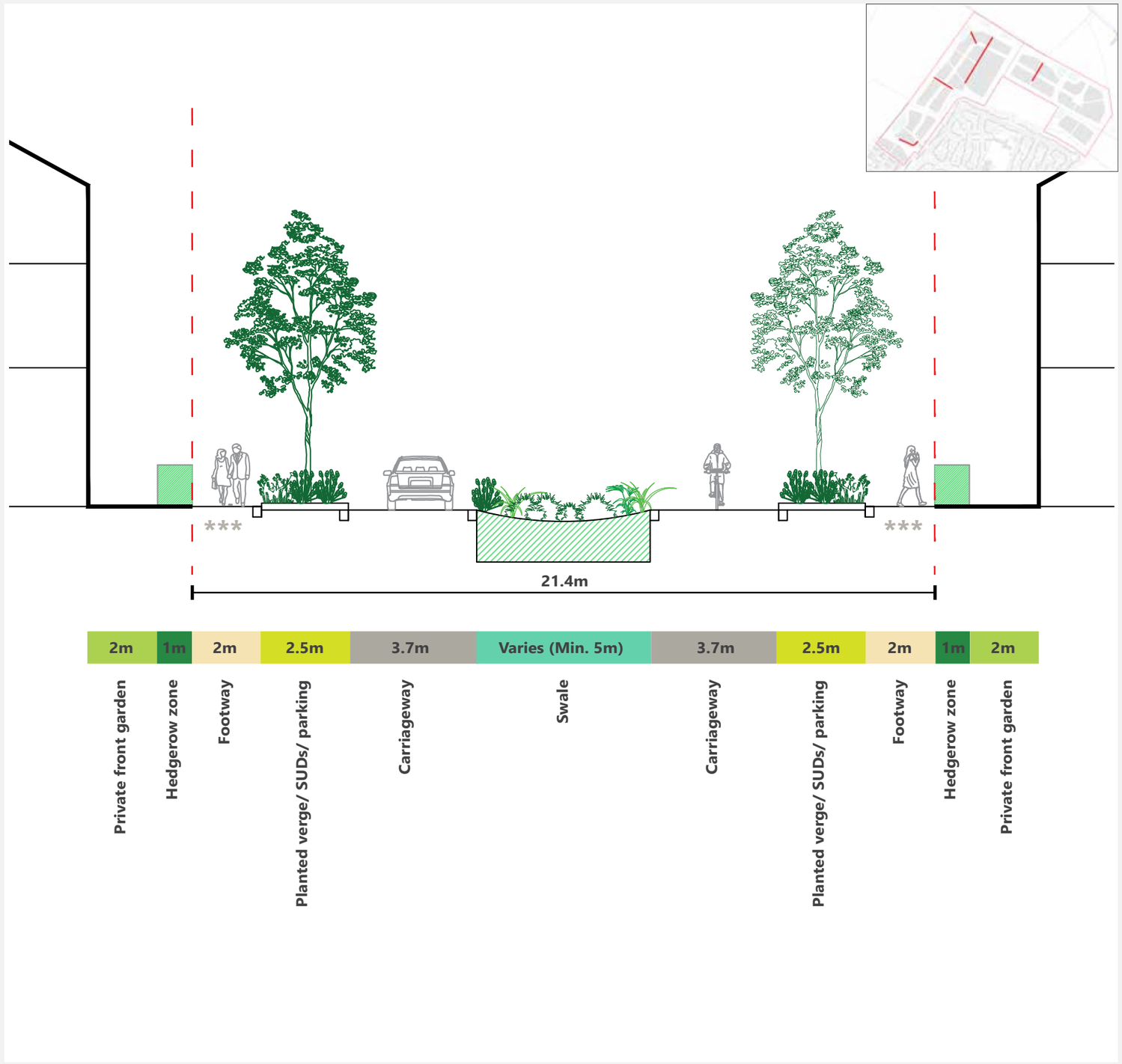
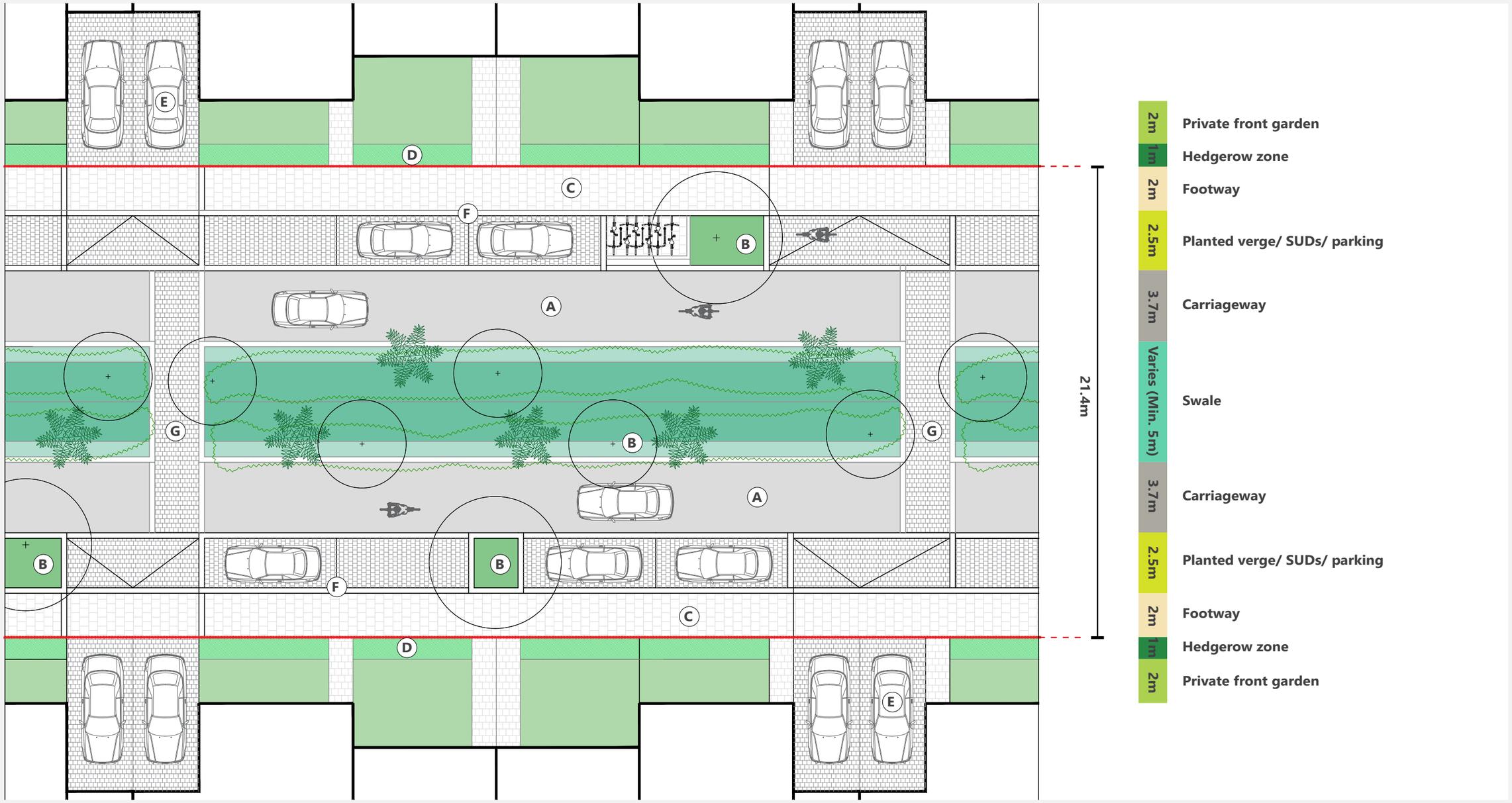


Fig. 6.26: Type 2A (swale in middle) - Typical illustrative plan



(A) **Carriageway - Cyclists are to share the carriageway. Primary surface material reflective of HomeZones; reduced kerb heights.**

(B) **Structured planting integrated at varied intervals between parking and on-plot access and additional planting along swale**

(C) **Footways - Permeable surface material or block paving to differentiate from carriageway.**

(D) **A largely continuous building frontage with strong enclosure utilising soft hedgerow boundaries to the plot boundaries.**

(E) **On-plot parking is positioned at well-spaced intervals to ensure the dominance of the building line and its visual continuity to secure an attractive streetscape along the street.**

(F) **Street lights and EV charging points are to be designed in coordination with street trees early in the design process.**

(G) **Width of swale can vary, subject to discussions with the Local Lead Flooding Authority. Pedestrian crossings across swale is subject to detail design.**

Type 2B - Secondary Street (swale on one side)

6.41 Consideration will also be given to the appropriateness of swales on one side in the next design stages. This will have to be balanced with parking requirements and access to homes. In addition to playing an active role in the site wide sustainable urban drainage strategy, these may also offer potential for play-on-the-way. The illustrative typical section (Fig. 6.27) and plan (Fig. 6.28, overleaf) with key dimensions tabulated below provides guidance on how this typology can balance a wide range of function.

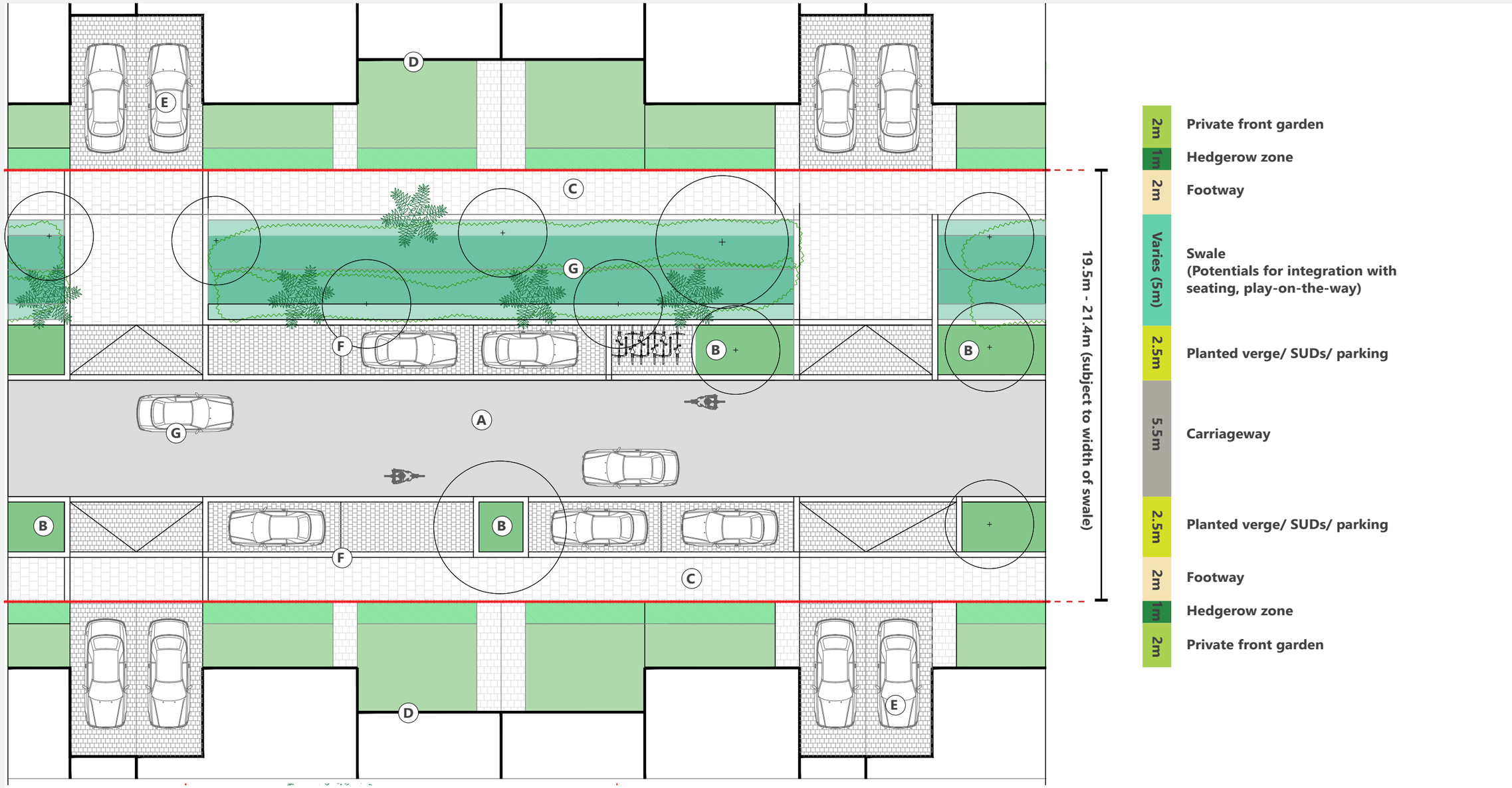
1	Carriageway (1 lane x 2)	**5.5m**
2	Cycling provision (in carriageway)	**n/a**
3	Footway Width (x2)	**2.0m**
4	Planted verge/ parking (tree spacing varies - see plan for reference)	**2.5m**
5	Swale (pedestrian crossings across it are subject to detail design - see plan)	**Min. 5m**
6	Tree offset from building facade	**Min. 5m**
7	Tree offset from kerb edge	**Min. 1.2m**
8	Hedgerows zone (within plot curtilage, protected by covenants)	**1m**
9	Street lighting (to be designed in coordination with street trees)	**n/a**

*** Utilities to be located under footway
Note 1: Street trees illustrated after 25 years
Note 2: Trees to be planted in soft verges wherever possible. Alternatively, root-able soil volume above to be provided by suspended pavement system.

Fig. 6.27: Type 2B (swale on one side) - Typical illustrative section



Fig. 6.28: Type 2B (swale on one side) - Typical illustrative plan



(A) Carriageway - Cyclists are to share the carriageway. Primary surface material reflective of homezones; reduced kerb heights.	(D) A largely continuous building frontage with strong enclosure utilising soft hedgerow boundaries to the plot boundaries.	(F) Street lights and EV charging points are to be designed in coordination with street trees early in the design process.
(B) Structured planting integrated at varied intervals between parking and on-plot access and additional planting along swale	(E) On-plot parking is positioned at well-spaced intervals to ensure the dominance of the building line and its visual continuity to secure an attractive streetscape along the primary street.	(G) Width of swale can vary, subject to discussions with the Local Lead Flooding Authority. Pedestrian crossings across swale is subject to detail design. Opportunities for seating, socialisation and play-on-the-way will be explored in the next stages.
(C) Footways - Permeable surface material or block paving to differentiate from carriageway.		

Type 2 - Secondary street - Precedents



Fig. 6.29: Upton, Northamptonshire: Local streets with swales fronted by housing, example for LG1's swale streets. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.30: Upton, Northamptonshire: Tree-lined and planted swale streets for biodiversity, example for LG1's swale street. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.31: Eddington, Cambridge: A SuDS Swale feature located along the side of a street, Eddington, Cambridge. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.32: Anstelveen, Amsterdam: Shared streets create a desirable neighbourhoods for families with kids, example for LG1's local streets. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 6.33: Marmalade Lane, Cambridge: Streets as social spaces with opporunities for play, example for LG1's local streets. Source: TOWN

Type 3 - Tertiary Street

6.42 These tertiary streets are edge streets running along the proposed peripheral landscape buffer interfacing with the countryside and/or existing shelterbelts adjacent to Grange Estate. They function as HomeZones with a rural and informal character. The illustrative typical section (Fig. 6.34) and plan (Fig. 6.35, overleaf) with key dimensions tabulated below provides guidance on how this typology can balance a wide range of functions (Fig. 6.38-6.43).

1	Carriageway (varies in width)	**3.7-7.5m**
2	Cycling provision (in carriageway)	**n/a**
3	Footway (flushed kerb and integrated with carriageway)	**2.0m**
4	Planted verge/ parking (tree spacing varies - see plan for reference)	**2.5m**
5	Tree offset from building facade (varies)	**Min 4m**
6	Tree offset from kerb edge	**n/a**
7	Hedgerows zone (within plot curtilage, protected by covenants)	**1m**
8	Street lighting (to be designed in coordination with street trees)	**n/a**
9	Traffic calming buildout zone (varies - see plan for reference, must maintain carriageway of 3.7m)	**Max 3.8m**

*** Utilities to be located under footway
Note 1: Street trees illustrated after 25 years
Note 2: Trees to be planted in soft verges wherever possible. Alternatively, root-able soil volume above to be provided by suspended pavement system.

Fig. 6.34: Type 3 - Typical illustrative section

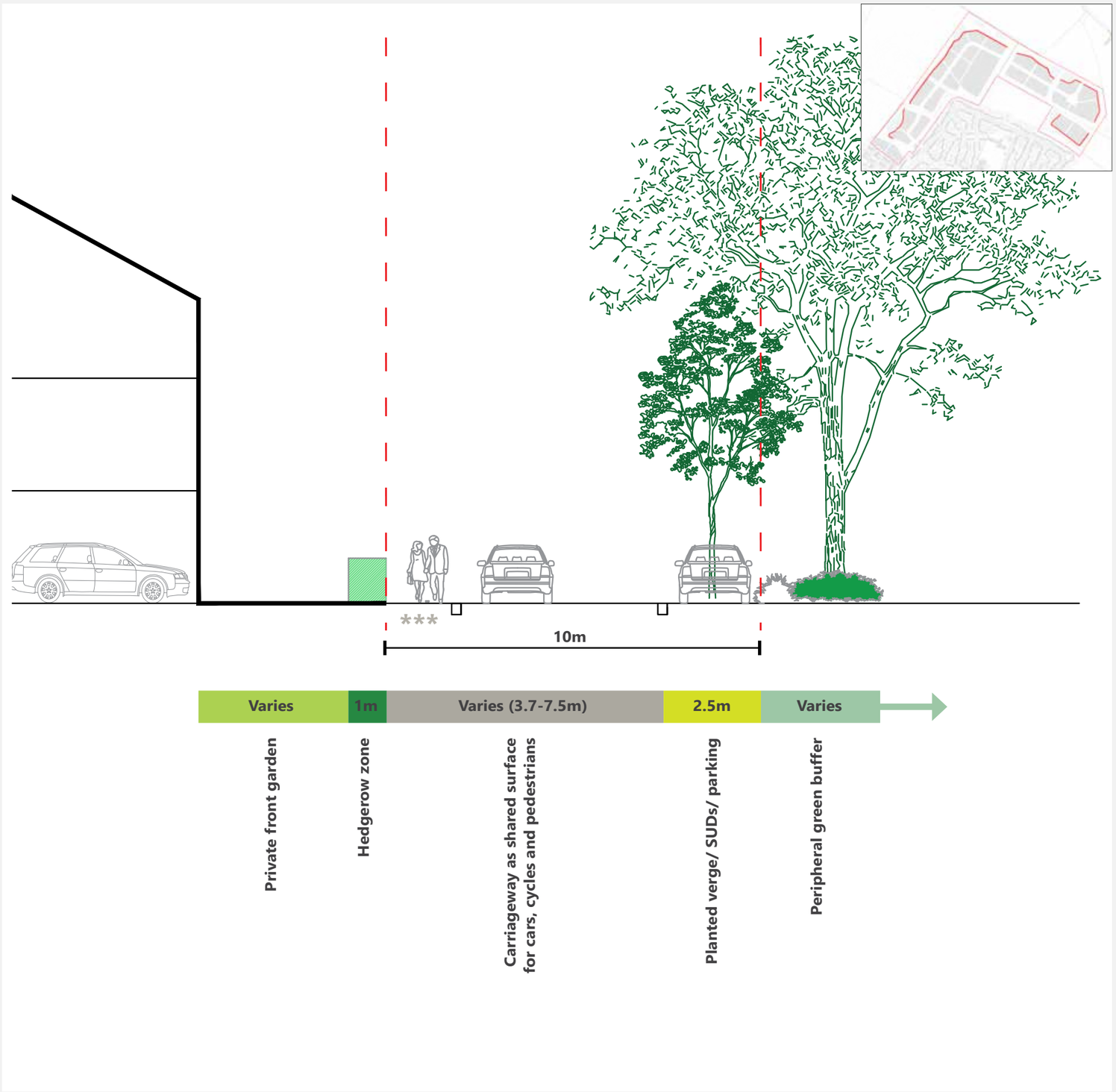
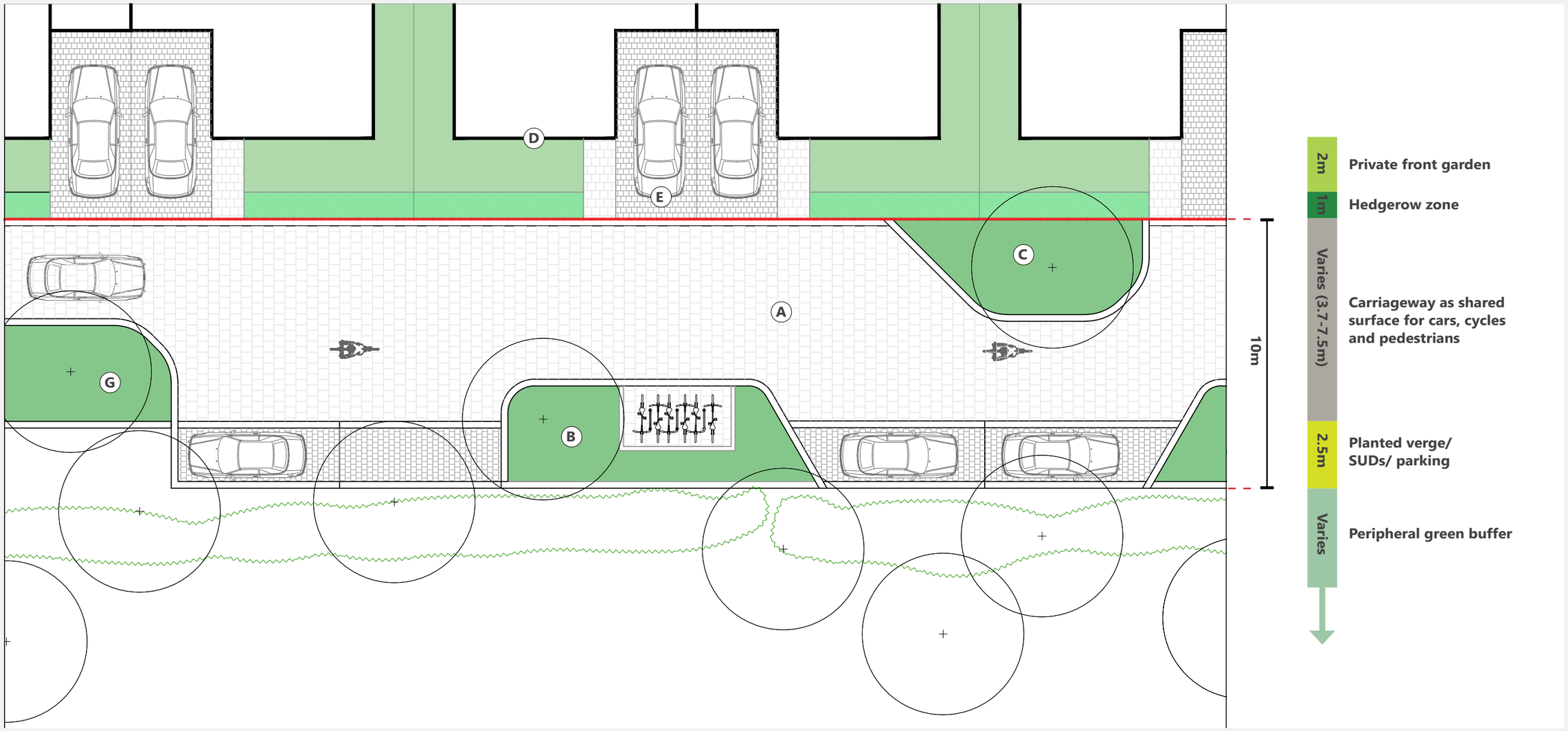


Fig. 6.35: Type 3 - Typical illustrative plan



A Carriageway - Proposed as a shared surface (kerb-free) for cars, cycles and pedestrians. Variation in overall width adds variety and informality to the street scene. Permeable surface material or block paving, subject to detail design.

B Structured planting integrated at varied intervals between parking and on-plot access.

C Build-outs for traffic calming can also provide spaces for cycle parking, SUDs, social seating and/or play.

D A largely continuous building frontage with strong enclosure utilising soft hedgerow boundaries to the plot boundaries.

E On-plot parking is positioned at well-spaced intervals and partly recessed to ensure the dominance of the building line and its visual continuity and to secure an attractive streetscape along the primary street.

F Street lights and EV charging points are to be designed in coordination with street trees early in the design process.

G Consideration will be given to including planting, trees or raised verges to prevent vehicles parking on verges in the next design stages

H On-plot parking will likely be the main parking typology for tertiary streets supplemented by on-street parking. However, consideration will be given to the appropriateness of innovative communal approaches to car parking e.g. car barns with PV/ green roofs, in the next design stages.

Type 3A - Tertiery Street (along hedgerows)

6.43 These secondary streets, run alongside existing hedgerows, act as internal distributors and are proposed to be HomeZones. They play a key role in the site's ecological networks. The illustrative typical section (Fig. 6.36) and plan (Fig. 6.37, overleaf) with key dimensions tabulated below provides guidance on how this typology can balance a wide range of functions.

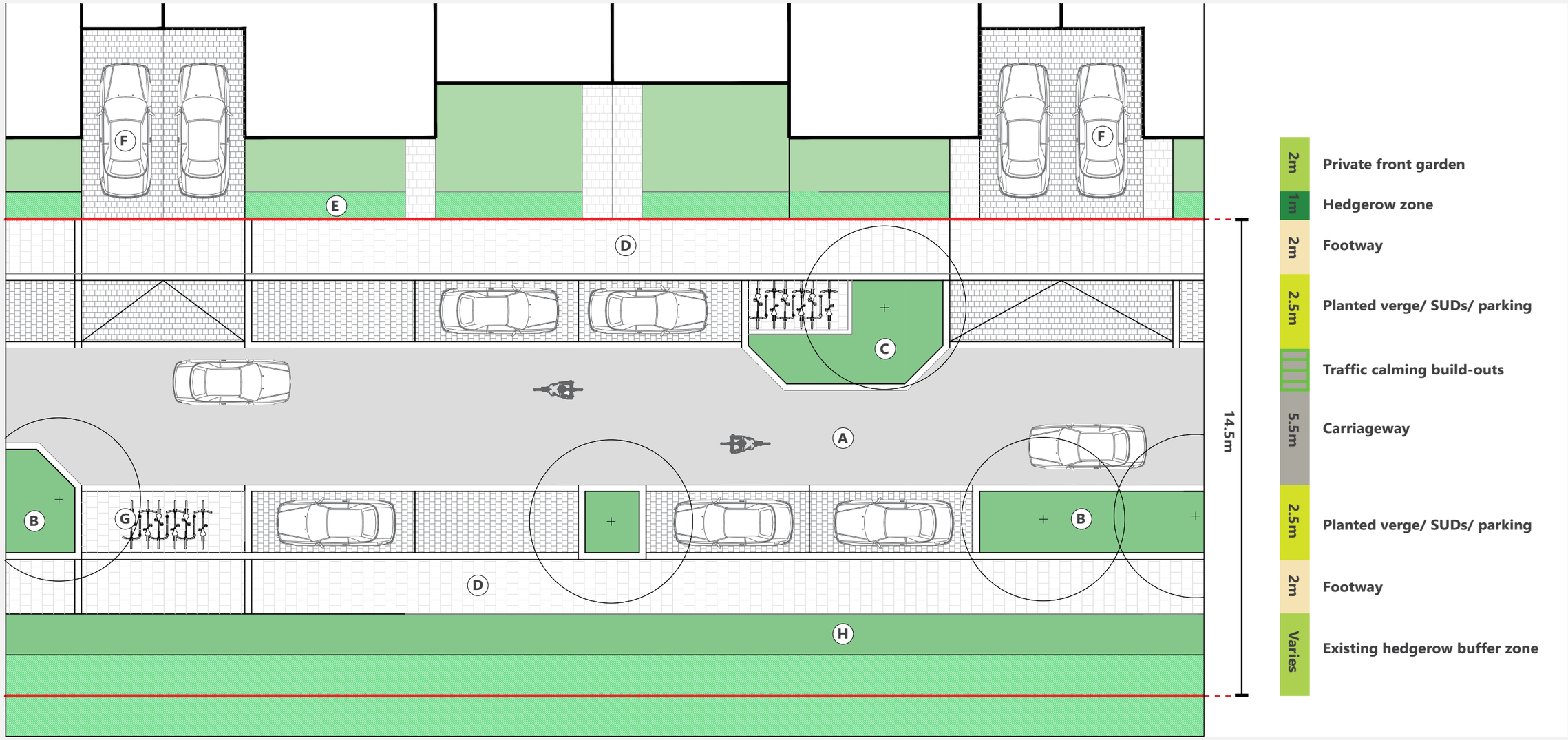
1	Carriageway (2 lanes)	**5.5m**
2	Cycling provision (in carriageway)	**n/a**
3	Footway Width (x2)	**2.0m**
4	Planted verge/ SUDs/ parking (tree spacing varies - see plan)	**2.5m**
5	Traffic calming buildout zone	**Max 1.8m**
6	Tree offset from building facade	**Min 5m**
7	Tree offset from kerb edge	**Min 1.2m**
8	Hedgerows zone (within plot curtilage, protected by covenants)	**1m**
9	Existing hedgerow buffer (either side from hedgerow centreline)	**Varies (Min 6m)**
10	Street lighting (to be designed in coordination with street trees and with sensitivity to hedgerow habitats)	**n/a**

*** Utilities to be located under footway
Note 1: Street trees illustrated after 25 years
Note 2: Trees to be planted in soft verges wherever possible. Alternatively, root-able soil volume above to be provided by suspended pavement system.

Fig. 6.36: Type 3A - Typical illustrative section



Fig. 6.37: Type 3A - Typical illustrative plan



(A) Carriageway - Localised narrowing permitted to accommodate street trees, contribute to traffic calming and add variety and informality to the street scene. Cyclists are to share the carriageway. Primary surface material macadam with reduced kerb heights.	(E) A largely continuous building frontage with strong enclosure utilising soft hedgerow boundaries to the plot boundaries.
(B) Structured planting integrated at varied intervals between parking and on-plot access.	(F) On-plot parking are positioned at well-spaced intervals to ensure the dominance of the building line and its visual continuity to secure an attractive streetscape along the primary street.
(C) Build-outs for traffic calming can also provide spaces for cycle parking or social seating. See HCC Design guide part 4, Chapter 6.	(G) Street lights and EV charging points are to be designed in coordination with street trees early in the design process.
(D) Footways - Permeable surface material or block paving to differentiate from carriageway.	(H) Hedgerow buffer zones to be aligned with Hedgerow Regulations Act 1997 and local planning policy.

Type 3 - Tertiary street - Precedents



Fig. 6.38: Trumpington Meadows, Cambridge: Houses fronting to countryside, example for LG1's peripheral edge. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.39: Derwenthorpe, York: Informal character of street and landscape, example for LG1's edge streets. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.40: Derwenthorpe, York: Picturesque streets framed by landscape, example for LG1's edge streets. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 6.41: Upton, Northamptonshire: Warmer toned materials to exemplify rural character, example for edge streets. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.42: Derwenthorpe, York: A landscaped street edge, example for LG1's interface with peripheral buffer. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 6.43: Trumpington Meadows, Cambridge: Shared kerb-free streets fronting landscape, example for LG1's peripheral edge. Source: Peter Neal

Type 4 - Parkway approach road

6.44 Learning from the original master planning of the Garden City, this street typology celebrates a parkway-inspired multi-modal northern access gateway into LG1 and wider Letchworth from Norton Road. The illustrative typical section (Fig. 6.44) and plan (Fig. 6.45, overleaf) with key dimensions tabulated below provides guidance on how this typology can balance a wide range of functions and modes of movement (Fig. 6.46-6.50).

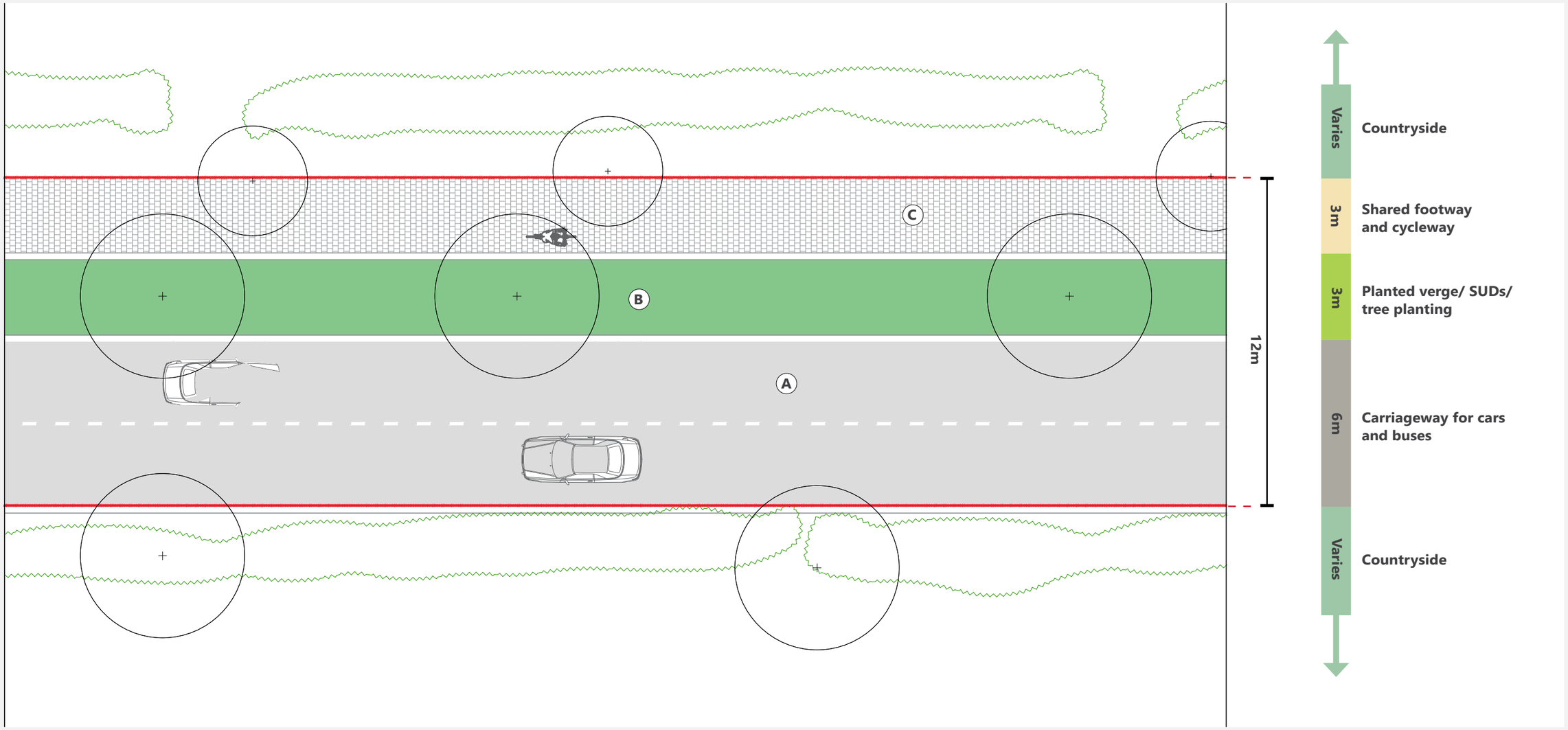
1	Carriageway (2-way, supports bus and emergency access)	6m
2	Shared footway for pedestrian and cyclists	3.0m
3	Planted verge/ SUDs/ tree planting (tree spacing varies)	3.0m
4	Tree offset from kerb edge	Min 1.2m
5	Street lighting (to be designed in coordination with street trees)	n/a
6	Car and cycle parking provision (no parking space requirement assumed)	n/a

*** Utilities to be located under footway
Note 1: Street trees illustrated after 25 years
Note 2: Trees to be planted in soft verges wherever possible. Alternatively, root-able soil volume above to be provided by suspended pavement system.

Fig. 6.44: Type 4 - Typical illustrative section



Fig. 6.45: Type 4 - Typical illustrative plan



A Carriageway - tarmac surface material, principally for vehicular traffic and bus route through the site.

B Green verges including trees, shrub planting, wildflower meadow and/or SUDs features integrated with street lighting.

C A shared pavement for pedestrians and cycles only on one side of the carriageway.

Type 4 - Parkway approach - Precedents



Fig. 9.46: Minneapolis Parkway, US: Strong tree-lined access road with green verges defining spaces for vehicles and people. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.47: Minneapolis Parkway, US: Strong tree-lined access road with green verges defining spaces for vehicles and people. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.48: Cambourne, Cambridgeshire: Landscape integrated access route with soft spaces on either side of the road. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.49: Letchworth: Generous landscaped verges, mature trees and informal planting along the route. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.50: Letchworth: Generous landscaped verges, mature trees and informal planting along the route. Source: Peter Neal

Type 5 - Shared pedestrian and cyclist routes

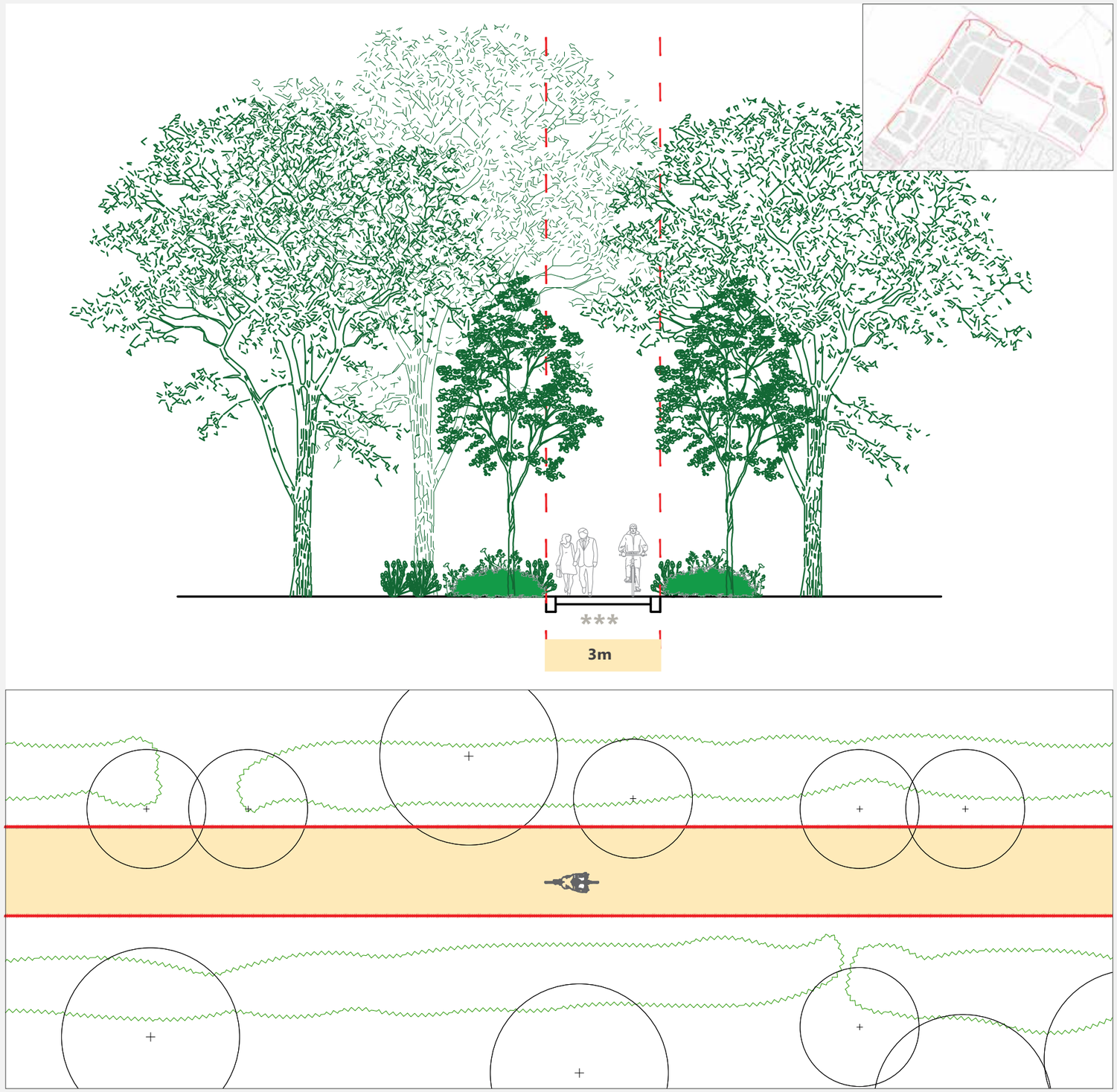
6.45 The character of active travel routes will vary across the masterplan as indicated in the framework plans (Fig. 6.1-6.3). The network will be a mix of primary (with 3m dedicated cycle path) and secondary active travel routes which are shared between pedestrians and cyclists. The shared routes form the majority of the proposed active travel network, whilst the primary routes are focused along key desire lines where flows will be highest.

6.46 An illustrative typical section and plan (Fig. 6.51) with key characteristics tabulated below are of shared active travel routes. This may need to be reviewed in areas of higher use or flow (to provide a 3m wide cycle track and 2m footway), where there may be an increased risk of conflict, aligned with Non-Motorised User (NMU) Guidance emerging HCC design guide.

1	Shared footway for pedestrian and cyclists	**3m**
2	Planted verge/ SUDs/ tree planting width alongside the shared footway (spacing varies subject to location)	**n/a**
3	Tree offset from kerb edge	**Min 1.2m**
4	Street lighting (to be designed in coordination with street trees)	**n/a**
5	Cycle parking provision (intermittent along adjacent streets)	**n/a**

*** Utilities to be located under footway
Note 1: Street trees illustrated after 25 years
Note 2: Trees to be planted in soft verges wherever possible. Alternatively, root-able soil volume above to be provided by suspended pavement system.

Fig. 6.51: (Above) Type 5 - Typical illustrative section, (Below) Typical illustrative plan



Type 5 - Pedestrian and cycle only paths - Precedents



Fig. 6.52: Milton Keynes: Paths lined with native grassland, example for LG1's peripheral trail, predominantly for pedestrians. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.53: Trumpington Meadows, Cambridge: Housing fronts onto paths for safety, example for LG1's shared routes. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.54: Cambourne, Cambridgeshire: Natural surveillance of paths by buildings, example for LG1's shared routes. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.55: Eddington, Cambridge: Dedicated cycle lane, example for LG1's primary active travel routes. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.56: Derwenthorpe, York: Materiality change from street to path emphasises rural quality, example for peripheral path. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 6.57: Milton Keynes: Shared routes along green networks, example for routes along existing hedgerows/shelterbelts. Source: Peter Neal

7

Land use framework

7. Land use framework

Land use context

Introduction

7.1 The allocation of the LG1 site followed an exhaustive alternative site assessment by LGCHF, in response to NHC demonstrating a need for additional housing within the Local Plan period. This included consideration of land to the south, west and east of the existing urban area, as well as the LG1 site and its environs. It also included consideration of a densification of existing residential neighbourhood, particularly parts of the early master plan area that are of a lower density and re-development of employment areas.

7.2 Following this review, it was agreed that there would be some re-development of employment areas, particularly on its periphery, for housing, some regeneration incorporating new homes in the town centre and the allocation of some greenfield land, as part of a balanced approach, including the LG1 site, which is the largest of the allocation.

7.3 The decision to support the LG1 site was on the basis of the least harm in terms of nearby Conservation Areas and coalescence with adjoining settlements, as well as the potential to link into existing and enhanced multi-modal transport links and provide a quantum of development that would support investment into local services and facilities.

7.4 The site is situated approximately 2km north of Letchworth Garden City Rail Station (a key commuter link) and town centre (a destination for retail and wide range of community facilities) which can be accessed in approximately 25 minutes on foot and in approximately 10 minutes by bicycle.

7.5 Strategically, the train station and bus services provide easy access to London and to other more local centres of employment and entertainment from Letchworth. Supporting these longer distance journeys as well as local cycle trips to areas of employment and local facilities, the north-south National Cycle Network (Route 12) is a strategic link that runs through LG1 linking it to Letchworth town centre and railway station, via Grange Estate and Norton Common.

7.6 This is further supported by good access to the countryside and nearby settlements via a network of public right of ways. Additionally, both Letchworth Greenway and the Etonbury Green Wheel give LG1 access to the multiple leisure and recreational destination and nature reserves within the wider context.

7.7 More locally, the closest neighbourhood-level local centre is located in the Grange Estate at Pelican Way. This can be accessed in approximately 15min walk from the site.

Policy context

7.8 In relation to land use, Policy SP15 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011-2031) outlines that the LG1 development proposals should provide the following planning and masterplanning requirements:

- Provision of upto 900 homes, with 40% affordable housing.
- An appropriate education solution which delivers a new 2FE primary school on-site.
- Neighbourhood-level retail and community facilities providing around 900m2 (net) of retail and food and beverage floorspace and a GP surgery.
- At least 9 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 subject to up-to-date assessment of likely future needs and existing supply.

Proposed land use framework

Overview

7.9 The proposed land use framework (Fig. 7.1, overleaf) demonstrates how the LG1 development would not only address the Local Plan requirements, but also, flexibly respond to the emerging context of the Grange Recreation Ground enhancements, possible regeneration within Grange Estate and delivery of the primary school.

Amount and distribution

7.10 The proposed land use amount and distribution are set out in the development framework plan (Fig. 7.2). The net developable area is approx. 24 ha including residential and local centre uses. This excludes structural green space (approx. 17ha) aligned with the Fields In Trust Standards of open space provision for LG1 (see Section 4.0 for details), the primary street and the school site (2.1ha, aligned with HCC requirements).

7.11 Upon discussions with NHC, HCC and wider stakeholders including head teachers of local schools within Grange Estate on available capacity, the school site within the LG1 strategic masterplan is designated as a ‘reserve site’. The strategic masterplanning process has considered the adaptability of the ‘reserve’ school site for residential use as part of the strategic masterplanning process, in the scenario, that the school is not required to come forward. Meanwhile uses for the ‘reserve’ school site include consideration of a training and apprenticeship centre to facilitate local upskilling and

Fig. 7.1: Land use framework plan



Key

	Site boundary
	Attenuation basins (SUDs)
	Public parks and gardens (3.269Ha)
	Amenity green space (3.131Ha)
	Natural and semi natural (8.373Ha)
	Allotments (0.656Ha)
	Equipped play areas (LEAPs) (0.54Ha)
	Mixed use: Neighbourhood-level facilities (0.09Ha)
	Residential (23.511Ha)
	'Reserve' 2FE primary school site (need and timeline for delivery to be confirmed by HCC)
	Childcare facility
	Car free zone for school along the enhanced Greenway linear park
	Potential new north-south link through the Grange Rec to be confirmed by NHC
	New south-facing public square along Rec's northern boundary
	Opportunity for a cafe spilling out over new public square aligned with the new N-S link through Rec
	Mobility hub adjacent to the school
	Neighbourhood centre/ Community hub
	50-60 unit senior living scheme

Fig. 7.2: Development area framework plan



Key

	Site boundary
	Net developable area (excludes structural green space, primary roadway and school site
	Structural green space
	'Reserve' 2FE primary school site

employment relating to the phased delivery of the site and opportunities for productive and edible landscapes. Meanwhile uses will be temporary in nature aligned with the phasing of the development. This is to be further discussed in coordination with NHC, HCC, local stakeholders and institutions, where possible, throughout the project's life-cycle.

7.12 The residential land use for LG1 will include 40% affordable (refer to Section 11.0 for details on housing needs and mix), a total of at least 9 custom-build plots and the consideration of a 50-60 unit scheme for independent senior living in the 'heart of the development' in response to local demand (refer Section 11.0). Aligned with LGCHF's adopted vision, housing innovation will be showcased by part of the site being utilised to highlight different construction and design methods and tenures, including self-build and community housing within a designated part of the development. This will in part contribute to the affordable allocation.

7.13 The distribution of housing within LG1 will create mixed and balanced communities. Housing will include a range of house types and sizes, with the affordable allocation being led by NHC's housing team, which will include a proportion of single person and small households to meet local need. It will provide active frontage to streets and public open spaces with frequent front doors, support adequate provision of residential amenity with inclusive access and include careful considerations of edges and interfaces where existing Grange Estate properties back onto LG1's site boundary. This is outlined further in Section 8.0.

A vibrant neighbourhood-level local centre

7.14 LG1 will be supported by a vibrant neighbourhood hub of co-located facilities as the heart of the community, capitalising on the site's most accessible location, in relation to its wider context, in particular, the Grange Estate. Aligned with Local Plan requirements, it will include neighbourhood-level retail, community amenities, a mobility hub and inter-generational space to meet the needs of all ages anchored around new high-quality landscape-integrated people-centric public realm. This also includes a new 'south-facing sunny square' along the northern edge of the Rec, contributing towards the integration of new and existing residents and cultivation of a shared sense of community. This new open space is envisaged to have good solar exposure due to additional eastern and western open aspect. The treeline to the south will provide partial shading throughout the day. Cumulatively, this presents good microclimate opportunities for the space to be use for 'dwell' activities. Optimising the social and environmental performance of this space will need further technical analysis in the next stages to support a vibrant local centre.

7.15 LG1's neighbourhood hub is represented as a hatched zone within the framework plan. Although the location of it's key components are indicatively highlighted (Fig. 7.1), more certainty is required on three key aspects to further inform it's configuration. These are outlined below.

7.16 Firstly, the new north-south shared pedestrian and cycle pathway through the Grange Recreation Ground, as explored in a joint workshop in March 2024, led by NHC. This link will facilitate easy access between the LG1 local centre, the Grange Estate and wider Letchworth along natural movement desire lines, supported by wayfinding at strategic locations. It directly impacts the proposed location of the new south-facing square. For details, refer to the 'Workshop Summary Report' circulated by NHC on 27th March 2024. Further design development of the Grange Recreation Ground will be led by NHC and should respond to the community engagement undertaken so far, led by LGCHF, related to the enhancements on the Rec as part of the strategic masterplanning stage. See SCI (Appendix C/ May 2024, p.73-77) for further details.

7.17 Secondly, delivery of the 2FE primary school site. Should there be a demonstrable need for a new school, it will be located within the strategic masterplan to ensure easy accessibility from not only within LG1, but also the wider Grange Estate, aligned with the North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2011-2031). The proposed sustainable mobility hub is currently located in proximity to the 'reserve' school site whilst being adjacent to the proposed enhanced Greenway Linear Park and the primary street. In the scenario that the school is not required on LG1, the location of the mobility hub will need to be reviewed.

7.18 Thirdly, an understanding of possible future regeneration proposals within the Grange Estate, in particular related to the existing local facilities and amenities. This is to ensure that the LG1 proposals complements and strengthens the existing local center offer at the Grange Estate.

7.19 To facilitate LG1's neighbourhood hub as a focus for day-to-day 'needs', it will also include consideration of uses such as café, bus stop, shops, other community amenities, a 50-60 units scheme for senior living and flexible multi-functional space to support current and future needs (e.g. small businesses, flexible workspaces, productive landscape opportunities, cultural events and public services such as healthcare as included in the Local Plan), supporting the principle of a sustainable, intergenerational and resilient neighbourhood. This draws from the feedback received from NHC/Hyas, the Quality Review Panel (January 2024), community and stakeholder consultation undertaken to shape and inform LG1's strategic masterplan to date and current market trends in Letchworth. Please refer to the Statement of Community Involvement (April 2024/ Appendix C) for details.

7.20 LG1's neighbourhood hub and its evolution over time will also include consideration of the site's phased delivery, with each phase functioning as a place in its own right to support a high-quality sustainable extension to Letchworth. Refer to Section 12.0, for details on the phasing strategy.

8

Urban design framework

8. Urban design framework

Urban design context

Introduction

8.1 The urban design context for LG1's strategic masterplan is framed by the existing adjacencies to Grange Estate, surrounding interface with countryside, proximities to the historic Norton Village, links to settlements within the wider context (Fairfield, Baldock, Stotfold and Arlesey) and most importantly the planning and design principles that underpin the structure and layout of wider Letchworth: world's first Garden City.

Urban design baseline study

8.2 A comprehensive Urban Design Analysis, Townscape Assessment and Characterisation Study (February 2024 Appendix B) has been prepared to provide a holistic understanding of LG1 in relation to its surrounding context, to inform the development of its Strategic Masterplan Framework. Drawing from other relevant baseline reports, it includes a detailed analysis of the site's historical evolution, and an integrated review of its landscape structure and environmental character, transport infrastructure, land use and urban structure, built form and architecture.

8.3 The study focuses on seeking lessons for LG1 in relation to the overall urban structure and layout, block configurations, plot types and building disposition, housing typologies, massing variations, streetscape character and key architectural characteristics to inform the development of the strategic masterplan. It would also inform the development of character areas and design principles in the next project stages, as a contemporary interpretation of the Garden City character.

8.4 The study underscores the importance of embracing a landscape-led approach to LG1's strategic masterplanning process rooted in an in-depth understanding of the site's landscape assets. It highlights the key Garden City principles emphasised in the Local Plan policy (SP15 and Appendix 5/ NHC, 2022) such as the unifying role of landscape within urban layouts, vistas, accents, building groupings, plot boundary treatments and key architectural elements that provide Letchworth its historical and townscape continuity (Fig. 8.1-8.5) for the creative reinterpretation of the original Garden City principles for 21st century.

8.5 It identifies the need to maximise links and 'stitch the site' with the Grange Estate and wider Letchworth to facilitate an integrated approach to masterplanning and support easy access to local facilities using active travel, achieve legible and active street scenes and overall resilience of the LG1 development through urban form. It also highlights the importance of homes having front doors facing the countryside and public realm for active and safe interfaces with streets and open spaces.

8.6 Lastly, the historical analysis of Letchworth's architectural DNA focuses on key spatial characteristics– asymmetrical forms, corner building typologies, low slung roofs, entrance porches, arrangement of window types and their groupings etc.. These can be used to inform LG1's built form and architecture and achieve the multi-scale richness, providing a modern interpretation of the original 'street pictures' first developed by the Raymond Unwin, the original architect of the Garden City.

Proposed urban design framework

Overview

8.7 This section should be read in conjunction with other framework plans included in this report as listed below:

- Section 4.0 - Landscape framework
- Section 5.0 - Habitat and biodiversity framework
- Section 6.0 - Movement framework
- Section 7.0 - Land use framework

8.8 Aligned with the proposed vision for LG1 (refer section 3.0), the urban design framework (Fig. 8.6) demonstrates how LG1's strategic masterplan is underpinned by key Garden City layout principles to inform the creation of a contextually-responsive, visually varied yet coherent character gradient: from town to countryside. This will include a blend of formal and informal spaces within the masterplan, created through variations in massing and building heights, densities, built form and open space configurations, rooted in an understanding of Letchworth's landscape and townscape character.

Development blocks

8.9 The urban design framework proposes perimeter block development across the masterplan layout with built form contributing to active frontage of streets and public space through frequent front doors and active habitable rooms (living room, dining rooms and kitchens). This will support safety of public outdoor spaces by maximising natural surveillance onto LG1's street and key public space networks (including but not limited to the Grange Recreation Ground, the enhanced Greenway linear park and the peripheral green belt).



Fig. 8.1: Letchworth: Focal building facade create accents, terminating vistas along streets. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 8.2: Letchworth: Strong tree-lined streets are a distinctive feature of the townscape. Source: Peter Neal



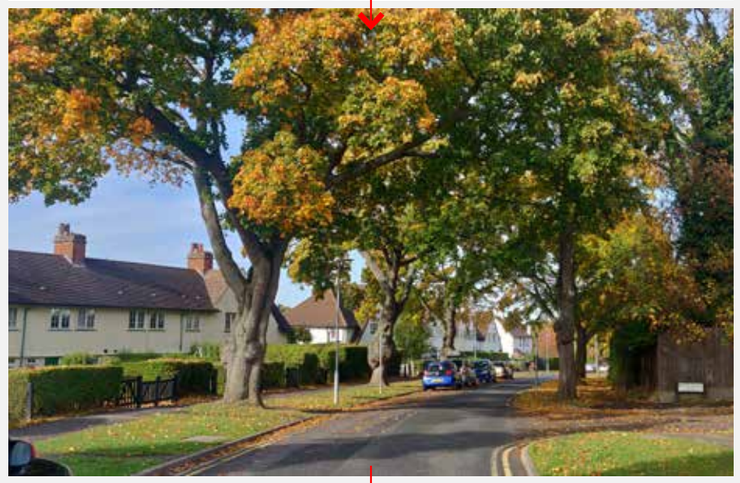




Fig. 8.5: Integration of landscape across multiple scales (green infrastructure networks, streets and plots), Letchworth.



Fig. 8.3: Letchworth: Tree-lined streets with verges and soft boundary treatments at Grange Estate. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 8.4: Letchworth: Picturesque building groupings and hedged plot boundaries at Westholm. Source: EcoResponsive Environments

Fig. 8.6: Urban design framework plan



Key

	Site boundary
	Existing trees, hedges and vegetation
	Attenuation basin (SUDs)
	Green open space
	Development blocks
	'Reserve' 2FE primary school site
	Primary access
	Primary frontage
	Landmark buildings
	Marker buildings
	Key groupings
	Primary views
	Secondary views
	Opportunities to frame views from the development using landscape
	Primary public open space
	Secondary public open space
	Focal point
	Activity hotspots / pop-up event space
	Primary gateway
	National Cycle Network (NCN) 12

8.10 Corner plots, in particular, will relate to the street in terms of active frontage, natural surveillance and contribute to enhancing local legibility and wayfinding through architectural characteristics, aligned with Garden City's principles. Combined with landscape-integrated multi-modal street typologies (see section 6.0), LG1's underlying layout will contribute as the cornerstone of a sustainable landscape-led extension to Letchworth, setting robust foundations for a modern-day Garden City.

8.11 There is also an opportunity to explore the viability of secure communal spaces within residential and/or mix-use development blocks as part of the next design development stages. Studies show a range of examples in Letchworth where secure communal spaces are presently used for a diverse range of uses, opening up opportunities for allotments and local food production, outdoor learning and sports, doorstep play and socialisation.

Public open spaces

8.12 The proposed open space network protects, strengthens and enhances the setting of LG1's existing landscape structure and key movement desire lines in relation to its wider context, in particular, along main activity corridors such as the Greenway, NCN 12, Etonbury Green Wheel and the existing Rec.

8.13 LG1's primary open spaces as highlighted in Fig. 8.6 are integrated as part of the site's wider green infrastructure network and strategically located to support wayfinding and orientation, integrate mature trees within the proposed layout, create opportunities for interaction and gathering along natural movement routes and provide 'breathing space'. For example, the open space adjacent to the south western corner of the existing Grange Recreation Ground located at a critical junction of busy active travel routes (The Greenway/ NCN12/ Etonbury Green Wheel) and the Rec can also be defined as an extension to the linear park with capacity to accommodate additional play facilities should these be required. It draws on the characteristics of existing public green spaces in Letchworth bounded by housing e.g. Westholm, Eastholm, Lammas Way. The south-facing square is aligned with the opportunity for a new north-south link through the Rec, and the eastern open space defines an arrival square from Norton Road access and the peripheral landscape.

8.14 The proposed secondary open spaces mark key nodes, intersections and gateway points with opportunities for framed views and drawing in the countryside deeper into the masterplan layout. These act as focal points and are distributed throughout the development to aid legibility and reinforce key spaces, junctions and nodal points. This will contribute in creating a hierarchy of open spaces within this 'edge of town' site to support picturesque transitions from town to country.

8.15 Proposed play areas within the public open space and green infrastructure network are located to facilitate equitable access to residential amenity, for example, two of the three proposed Local Equipped Areas of Play (LEAPs) are located in proximity to the Grange Estate for easy access by existing and new residents.

8.16 Development blocks with active frontage onto open spaces will ensure its safe use and encourage life in public space, whilst providing visual amenity for the surrounding homes. An inclusive and pedestrian priority design approach with use of high-quality materials will further contribute to its attractive setting.

8.17 The wider peripheral landscape buffer around LG1 and the north-south alignment of street starting from the new square along Rec's northern edge upto the Greenway framed by the double hedgerow, also provides opportunities for an improved understanding of cultural assets discovered from archaeological investigations through interpretation using art and heritage trails anchored around new public realm.

8.18 At the closest focus, the next design development stages will distinguish particular identities of LG1's individual streets and open spaces through further development of the character areas, design principles and a joint design code with the appointed development partner. This will include a wide range of place-making elements including the relationship with key building elements (height, on-plot setbacks, boundary treatment etc..) and landscape species.

Edges and interfaces

8.19 To facilitate the integration of existing and new residents, it is important for LG1's edges and interfaces with the Grange Estate and the Grange Recreation Ground to act as seams and not barriers. This has three implications for LG1's strategic masterplan.

8.20 Firstly, the strategic masterplan framework proposes relevant activity spaces around the Grange Rec fronted by built form. This includes the proposed enhanced Greenway Linear Park along the Rec's western edge, a new south-facing public space and the east-west primary active travel route along the Rec's northern edge, and a more naturalistic and recreational setting of an attenuation basin and LEAP along the Rec's eastern edge. Cumulatively, this provides the setting for a wide range of activities along natural movement desire lines and reinforces the focal role of the Grange Recreation Ground as a Central Park for North Letchworth. This will contribute in cultivating a shared sense of community and is required to be supported by opportunities for enhanced and improved facilities and amenities within the Rec itself, as currently being explored and led by NHC.

8.21 Secondly, the southern and western interface where Grange Estate properties back onto LG1 are characterised by existing mature landscape and native habitat including grassland, hedgerows, scrubland, shelterbelts and mature trees. These will be retained and enhanced where possible, forming part of the wider green infrastructure network and fronted on by new housing. These interfaces form

important privacy thresholds between the existing Grange Estate and LG1 development. New housing will therefore be sensitive and respectful of existing residents' privacy needs, in terms of its form and layout, using existing landscape features as a positive buffer for privacy screening between existing and new homes.

8.22 Thirdly, new homes will front onto the countryside accessed through tertiary streets providing 'eyes on the street' and natural surveillance onto the peripheral linear buffer. See Section 9.0 on character areas for further detail.

Nodes and gateways

8.23 The masterplan layout establishes three key gateways to/from LG1 into the wider context. Firstly, the primary vehicular access route from Norton Road, secondly the link from Western Way and thirdly the potential new north-south link through the Grange Rec integrating the new neighbourhood into Grange Estate. A hierarchy of nodes along LG1's primary street and public open space network link these gateways for easy way-finding and legibility. The Norton Road and Western Way gateways include vehicular access, whilst the potential link through the Rec will be for pedestrians and cyclists only.

8.24 Learning from the original master planning of the Garden City, the Norton Road gateway celebrates a parkway-inspired multi-modal northern entrance into LG1 and wider Letchworth, whilst the link from Western Way to LG1, should be designed to maximise the sense of integration with the Grange estate: the masterplan should seek a seamless transition between them through built form and landscape defining this threshold.

Framed views and vistas

8.25 The masterplan layout frames key views towards the countryside and prominent landmarks (west towards Fairfield, and east towards St. Nicolas Church in Norton) to support legibility and locally-distinctive townscapes. These are directed along key streets and public open spaces. Where linear routes establish a vista within the layout, it ends either in a defined public space, a visual building marker and key frontage or framed by landscape features along LG1's peripheral buffer. This buffer also serves to screen sensitive views towards the site.

Building heights, landmarks and frontages

8.26 The character and density of built form will vary across the masterplan (Fig. 8.9), from being strong and fairly continuous along the primary and secondary streets to more informal and looser along tertiary streets. Buildings heights will generally be upto 3 storeys, stepping up to 5 storeys at key nodes, with height variance where taller buildings are included. See Section 9.0 for details.

8.27 LG1's built form will use this variation in character to maximise legibility, with key community facilities foregrounded as landmarks of appropriate relative significance and street intersections given memorability through corner buildings designed as minor landmarks. All buildings located at junctions will need to be designed to turn the corner appropriately, through use of building form and architectural features including roof profiles, entrances and carefully considered fenestration to add visual interest and diversity to an otherwise fairly coherent streetscape, in particular, along the main avenue.

8.28 This is reflected in the framework plan (Fig. 8.6) as a hierarchy of frontages: primary frontage along the avenue, secondary marker buildings in corners, potentials for landmark building around LG1's local centre and building groupings around key nodes. Landmark buildings will vary in height, density, form and/or materials from the surrounding development to create a clear focal point.

8.29 Learning from Garden City principles, key nodes and open spaces present the opportunity to be framed by building groupings as visual markers reflecting consistent building line, order, repetition and rhythm and high degree of enclosure. This may also include consideration of set piece symmetrical arrangements, as an integrated part of the overall townscape.

8.30 Cumulatively, these urban design elements (development blocks, open spaces, edges, nodes, gateways, views, landmarks and frontages) set a robust foundation for the creative reinterpretation of the original Garden City principles for 21st century.



Fig. 8.7: Trumpington Meadows, Cambridge: Vista to historic local landmark along streets, example for LG1's streets. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 8.8: Buildings and hedges reinforcing the line of the roads at Pixmore Way, Letchworth. Source: EcoResponsive Environments

Fig. 8.9: Density and building heights framework plan



Key

	Site boundary
	Density zone 1 (approx. 30 dph)
	Density zone 2 (approx. 45 dph)
	Density zone 3 (approx. 70 dph)
	'Reserve' school site
	upto 4-5 storeys. Note: there will be variation in building heights even in zones marked for higher density housing. We envisage the taller sections at the end of the blocks forming corner features, rather than a single unbroken mass.
	upto 3 storeys
	2-2.5 storeys (remaining massing)





Fig. 8.10: Hampstead Garden Suburb: Building groupings fronting open space, example for LG1's public spaces. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 8.11: Derwenthorpe, York: Homes overlooking landscaped activity spaces, example for LG1's key open spaces. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 8.12: Derwenthorpe, York: Mature trees integrated within masterplan layout, example for LG1's open spaces. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 8.13: Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire: Outdoor areas for dwell activities, example for LG1's Greenway linear park. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 8.14: Fairfield Park: Active frontage overlooking play areas, example for LG1's green open spaces. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 8.15: Trumpington Meadows: Village green with residential fronts, example for open space south of the school. Source: Peter Neal

9

Character areas and design principles

9. Character areas and design principles

Overview

Area 1: Grange Rec/ Central Park

9.1 Focuses on the central role of the existing Grange Recreation Ground and its surrounding edges (within LG1) as a means to integrate existing and new residents: cultivating a shared sense of community. To this end, whilst the Rec itself is outside the LG1 boundary, it needs to be considered as an integrated part of the design development process through collaboration with NHC.

Area 2: Grange Meadows

9.2 Characterised by the presence of existing mature landscape and native habitat including grassland, hedgerows, scrubland, shelterbelts and mature trees, it interfaces between the LG1 site boundary and the existing back gardens of residential properties within the Grange Estate.

Area 3: The Avenue

9.3 With its strong approach to structural planting and prominent street trees, this area seeks to be the unifier of the masterplan, embodying key Garden City planning principles of vista, accent, closure and groupings.

Area 4: Countryside Periphery

9.4 Characterised by a predominantly suburban-rural character, it interfaces the countryside and the surrounding agricultural estate. Opportunities for framing views towards historic local landmarks are key.

Area 5: Parkway Approach

9.5 Learning from the original master planning of the Garden City, this area celebrates a parkway-inspired multi-modal northern access gateway into LG1 and wider Letchworth.

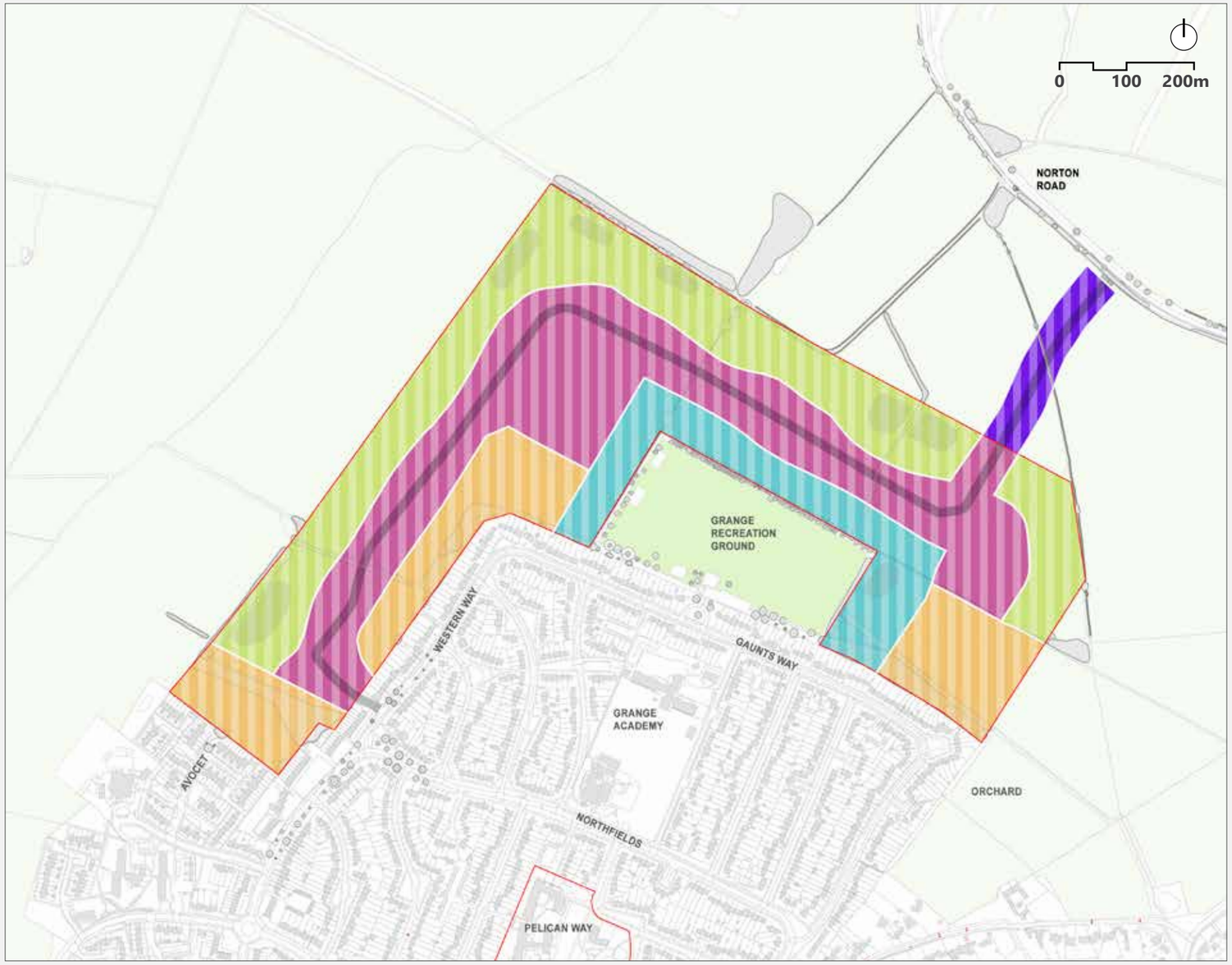


Fig. 9.1: Character area framework plan

	Area 1: Grange Rec/ Central Park		Area 2: Grange Meadows		Area 3: The Avenue
	Area 4: Countryside Periphery		Area 5: Parkway Approach		Site boundary



Variation in character areas

9.6 The character areas will vary in density (Fig. 8.9), massing, building heights and in its relationship with the wider landscape setting (Fig. 9.2-9.6).

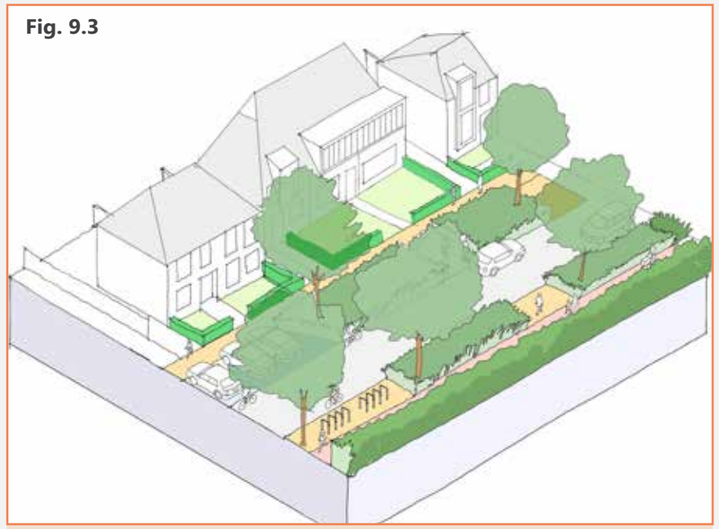
Fig. 9.2



Area 1: Grange Rec/ Central Park

Net density: approx. 70 dph (see, Fig. 8.9, p.85).
Building Heights: 3-5 storeys

Fig. 9.3



Area 2: Grange Meadows

Net density: approx. 30 dph (see, Fig. 8.9, p.85).
Building height: 3-4 storeys

Fig. 9.4



Area 3: The Avenue

Net density: Generally approx. 45 dph and upto approx. 70 dph around the local centre (see, Fig. 8.9, p.85).
Building height: 3-5 storeys

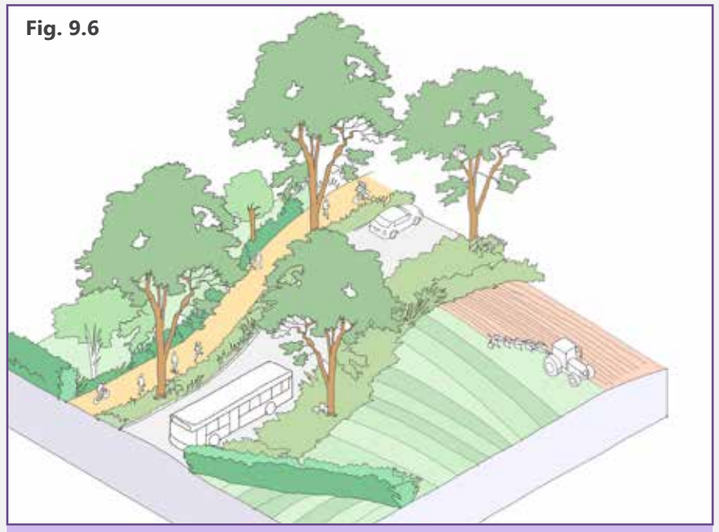
Fig. 9.5



Area 4: Countryside Periphery

Net density: approx 30 dph (see, Fig. 8.9, p.85).
Building height: 2-2.5 storeys

Fig. 9.6



Area 5: Parkway Approach

Net development density: n/a
Building height: n/a

Note: Please read the information on net development density in conjunction with the 'density and building height' framework plan (Fig. 8.9, p.85).

Landscape as the unifier

9.7 As illustrated in the site-wide sections (Fig. 9.7-9.9), the mediation between character areas will be through picturesque townscape transitions: with gradual shifts in massing, and the overall landscape structure as the glue that knits the masterplan together across its phased delivery, where a mix of character areas might be delivered in the same phase.

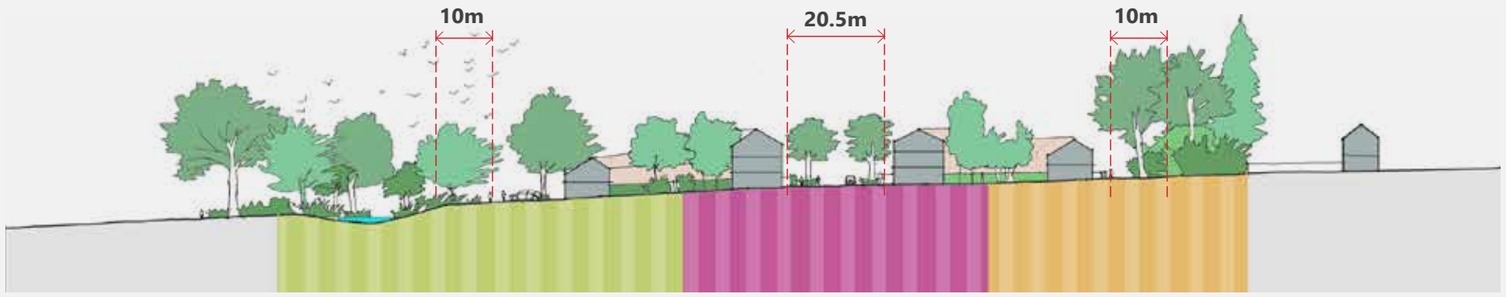


Fig. 9.7: Section A-A

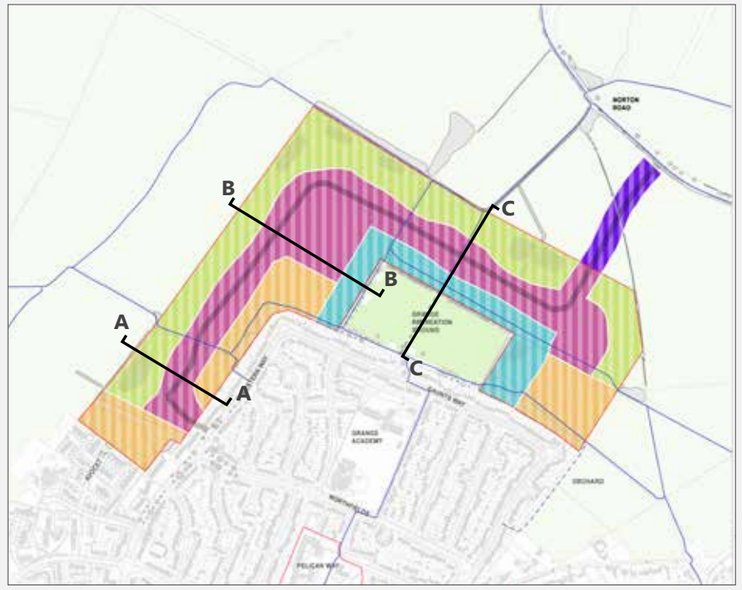




Fig. 9.8: Section B-B

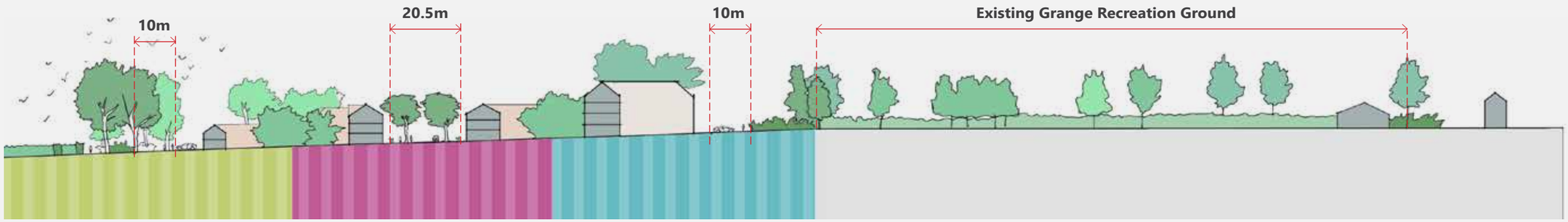


Fig. 9.9: Section C-C

Area 1: Grange Rec/ Central Park



Key informants and design principles

Landscape and open space

9.9 A series of activity focused spaces (to the north, west and east of the Rec) will form the seam between LG1, the Rec and wider Grange Estate. Each space will vary in character, whilst providing the space and aspect needed for the existing tree and hedgerows. The choice of tree species will complement the existing native planting and the role and function of each space.

9.10 On the north side, a more formal set of rectilinear spaces including a focal 'south-facing' square aligned with Rec's existing tree line and the potential north-south central link will create the setting for a strong built edge frontage.

9.11 On the west side, a generous corridor (approx. 20-25m on either side of existing hedgerow) will establish a Linear Park along the existing Greenway route with new planting to strengthen the existing tree and hedgerows, as well as providing seating, play and recreational facilities.

9.12 On the east side, a generous and wilder recreational space will form the seam to the residential edge behind. This will include a significant drainage feature as well as natural play spaces.

Density and building heights

9.13 Net development density: Approx. 70 dph (see density and building height framework plan, Fig. 8.9, p.85).

9.14 Building heights: Generally 3 storeys, stepping up to 5 storeys at key nodes.

Building form and character

9.15 All buildings will front onto the Rec and active travel routes, supporting active frontage to maximise natural surveillance.

9.16 The northern edge, in particular, should present a strong, active and picturesque building frontage and groupings in relation to the proposed public realm and open spaces, aligned with the Garden City town planning principles.

9.17 The western edge frontage is currently related to the 'reserve' school site, aligned with the car-free zone along the enhanced Greenway Linear Park. Should the reserved school site be adapted for residential development, the building frontage and housing typologies should maximise natural surveillance onto the Linear Park and the Grange Rec.

9.18 The eastern edge frontage should continue the strong framing of the open spaces. Housing typologies will focus on larger family dwellings (larger terrace grouping and semi-detached houses).

Transport

9.19 Primary active travel routes will run east-west to the north of the Rec (aligned with existing PRoW) and north-south to the west of the Rec (aligned with the existing Greenway). The existing pedestrian and cycle only route along the southern edge of the Rec (part of the Greenway) will be supported.

9.20 Following existing movement desire lines, a new north-south pedestrian-cycle link through the centre of the Rec connecting Grange Estate with LG1's neighbourhood centre and further north with the existing Greenway will be supported. It will align with the new 'sunny square' along the Rec's northern boundary, and be designed in relation to existing drainage sensitivities for this area.

Area 1: Grange Rec/ Central Park - Precedents



Fig. 9.10: Fairfield Park: Strong frontage overlooking a green park, example for Rec's northern edge. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 9.11: Upton, Northampton: Higher density housing fronting a green park, example for northern edge. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.12: Mill Road, Cambridge: Higher density terraced homes at 3 storeys, an example for northern edge. Source: Allies and Morrison



Fig. 9.13: Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire: Frontage along green route, example for Rec's western edge. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.14: Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire: Buildings framing a tree-lined open space, example for eastern edge. Source: Allies and Morrison



Fig. 9.15: Zaanhof, Amsterdam: Strong building frontage with terraced housing onto recreational/play space, example for Rec's northern edge. Source: EcoResponsive Environments

Area 1: Grange Rec/ Central Park - Illustrative sketch



Fig. 9.16: Proposed Greenway Linear Park alongside the western boundary of the Grange Recreation Ground, aligned with the car-free zone of the 'reserve' school site.

Area 2: Grange Meadows



Key informants and design principles

Landscape and open space

9.21 The existing landscape features (mature shelterbelts, hedgerows, native grassland habitat and mature trees) will be retained and enhanced where possible, forming part of the wider green infrastructure network.

9.22 The south-western parcel is enclosed by a mature shelterbelt to its north and existing mature trees interfacing back gardens of houses along Avocet. It also has drainage sensitivities, which will be considered in the next stages of design.

9.23 The western edge is lined by some existing mature trees along some of the back gardens of the Grange Estate. This will be extended upto the proposed access at Western Way, and enhanced to include allotments and a play space serving existing and new residents.

9.24 The eastern parcel has a belt of trees and native hawthorn scrub interfacing gardens of houses along Gaunts Way, which will be retained. The landscape character will also respond to the proximity with Norton Village and the Community Orchard with potentials for allotments in the peripheral open spaces.

Density and building heights

9.25 Net development density: Approx. 30 dph (see density and building height framework plan, Fig. 8.9, p.85).

9.26 Building heights: Generally up to 3 storeys, stepping up to 4 storeys at key nodes.

Building form and character

9.27 The form and character of new homes will create continuous building lines fronting onto existing trees, shelterbelts and associated new public realm. Housing typologies will be a mix of terraces, semi-detached and apartments.

9.28 These areas form important privacy thresholds between the existing Grange Estate and LG1 development. New housing will therefore be sensitive and respectful of existing residents' privacy needs, in terms of its form and layout, using existing landscape features as a positive buffer for privacy screening between existing and new homes.

Transport

9.29 Streets will be shared surface to support walking and cycling (refer Street Type 2, p.58-64). The existing pedestrian and cycle only route along the southern edge of the Rec will be supported and continued through this character area.

9.30 The access road into the south-western area will be aligned to minimise impact on the existing shelterbelt to the north of this land parcel. No vehicular access from Avocet, link for pedestrian and cyclists only.

Area 2: Grange Meadows - Precedents



Fig. 9.17: Fairfield Park: Continuous building frontage overlooking landscape, example of western edge. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 9.18: Derwenthorpe, York: Strong yet varied building line overlooking landscape, example for western edge. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.19: Derwenthorpe, York: Housing fronting onto local tree-lined street, example for S-W parcel. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.20: Letchworth: Homes at Hartington Place front onto local street, example for S-W parcel. Source: EcoResponsive Environments



Fig. 9.21: Marleigh, Cambridge: Mid-density homes along active travel route/ open space, example for eastern area. Source: Allies and Morrison



Fig. 9.22: Hampstead Garden Suburb: Homes front a strong landscape edge, example for eastern edge. Source: EcoResponsive Environments

Area 2: Grange Meadows - Illustrative sketch



Fig. 9.23: Grange Meadows is characterised by the sensitive integration of existing landscape features (mature shelterbelts, hedgerows, native grassland habitat and mature trees) with houses fronting onto them. This also provides privacy screening to existing properties on Grange Estate.

Area 3: The Avenue



Key informants and design principles

Landscape and open space

9.31 Structural planting, prominent street trees and SUDs features will be key elements of this character area, acting as unifiers for the masterplan.

9.32 There will be variance between the east-west and north-south sections of this character area, reflective of its land uses and the wider context it responds to.

9.33 The east-west section will be tree-lined with a strong linear quality, punctuated by generous landscape moments that establish a sense of arrival from Norton Road, support the integration of existing hedgerows and SUDs in areas with drainage sensitivities, enable people-centric intersections with active travel routes (e.g. the proposed enhanced Linear Park along existing Greenway) and frame key corners that open up to long-distance views (e.g. N-W views towards Biggleswade and surrounding countryside).

9.34 The north-south section will be a series of tree-lined street segments integrated with structural planting that frame long-distance views west towards Fairfield Park with secondary streets to support local distinctiveness and define the gateway from Western Way.

Density and building heights

9.35 Net development density: Generally approx. 45 dph and up to approx. 70 dph around the local centre (see density and building height framework plan, Fig. 8.9, p.85).

9.36 Building heights: Generally 3 storeys, stepping up to 5 storeys near local centre and key nodes.

Building form and character

9.37 Overall, the built form will support a continuous, strong and regular building line with high-density housing typologies. It will provide active frontage and frame and accentuate vistas and serial views terminating in building groupings and/or landmark spaces where appropriate.

9.38 The residential character of the east-west section will be punctuated by non-residential uses e.g. neighbourhood centre uses (retail, mobility hub, commercial space) and the school (should it come forward), resulting in a variation in the townscape. In contrast, the north-south section will predominantly be residential with a mix of higher density typologies contributing to variation in character.

9.39 Several local streets will stem from the main avenue contributing to further variation in 'street pictures'. Strong building frontage along these local streets will be a mediator between adjacent character areas for picturesque townscape transitions. All variations in built form character will be united by a strong approach to structural planting, prominent street trees, SUDs and, in particular, soft hedged plot boundary treatments.

Transport

9.40 The Greenway will cross through this character area, providing north-south cycle access to the wider area. The main street will support bus access, emergency access and shared usage by cyclists on the carriageway (refer Street Type 1, p.55-57).

9.41 Locations where the main avenue/ primary street intersects with walking/cycling routes or hedgerows, speed management measures will be incorporated to slow cars and mitigate rat-running through the development, prioritising active travel and ecology.

9.42 All secondary streets stemming from the main avenue will be shared surface, functioning as homezones (refer Street Type 2, p.58-64)

Area 3: The Avenue - Precedents



Fig. 9.24: Broadway, Letchworth: Tree-lined street creating a strong sense of enclosure and vista, example for main avenue. Source: LGCHF



Fig. 9.25: Cambourne, Cambridge: Tree-lined streets with green verges soften impact of cars, example for main avenue. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.26: Meadow Way, Letchworth: Prominent street trees and soft hedged plot boundaries, example for main avenue. Source: LGCFH



Fig. 9.27: Upton, Northampton: Swale street with strong frontage, example of local street stemming from main avenue. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.28: Hampstead Garden Suburb: Vista along tree-lined residential streets, example for LG1 layout. Source: EcoResponsive Environments





Fig. 9.29: Hampstead Garden Suburb: Building corners, nodes and groupings, example for overall layout. Source: EcoResponsive Environments

Area 3: The Avenue - Illustrative sketch



Fig. 9.30: The main avenue as a landscape-integrated multi-modal street with structural planting, prominent street trees and active fronts to support active and healthy lifestyles.

Area 3: The Avenue - Illustrative sketch



Fig. 9.31: A local residential street type stemming from the main avenue integrated with swale and structural planting, and framing views of the peripheral landscape buffer and countryside.

Area 4: Countryside periphery



Key informants and design principles

Landscape and open space

9.43 Views across the open countryside and towards historic local landmarks (Fairfield Hall, Norton Village and Church) are key to the character of this area.

9.44 The peripheral buffer will be integrated with areas of native planting and the sustainable urban drainage network, following the site's land form and natural drainage pattern.

9.45 A trail will weave through the landscape buffer space overlooked by houses fronting onto it and integrated with viewing and resting spaces at strategic points. It will also be dotted with opportunities for 'play on the way' incorporating natural play, with one dedicated play space as an activity anchor along the northern edge adjacent to the Greenway.

Density and building heights

9.46 Net development density: Approx. 30 dph (see density and building height framework plan, Fig. 8.9, p.85).

9.47 Building heights: 2-2.5 storeys

Building form and character

9.48 The homes will front onto the peripheral landscape buffer contributing to active frontage and natural surveillance of public realm for a sense of safety. They will be accessed by edge streets that are rustic and naturalistic in character.

9.49 In contrast to the other character areas, the building line along the periphery will be more informal with soft plot boundaries, contributing to picturesque serial views along the route framed by landscape. Together with the character of edge streets, they would create 'street pictures' that complement and add to the area's rural charm.

9.50 Most homes in this area will be larger family dwellings (semi-detached, detached and/or larger terrace groupings) with generous plots.

Transport

9.51 Periphery routes giving access to housing properties will be tertiary streets - more of a lane than a street. It will be a shared surface supporting cycling and walking as well as vehicular access (refer Street Type 3, p.65-67).

9.52 A pedestrian trail will weave through the peripheral landscape buffer and link up to wider active travel routes and street networks.

Area 4: Countryside periphery - Precedents



Fig. 9.32: Barton Park, Oxford: SUDs integrated within wider landscape setting, example for peripheral attenuation ponds. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.33: Derwenthorpe, York: SUDs integrated within wider landscape setting, example for peripheral attenuation ponds. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.34: Trumpington Meadows, Cambridge: Countryside interface with active frontage, example for edge streets. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.35: Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire: Trail route linking 'play on the way', example for peripheral trail routes . Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.36: Alconbury Weald, Cambridge: Countryside interface with SUDs and naturalistic streetscape, example for edge streets. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.37: Derwenthorpe, York: Framed views filtered through landscape, example for peripheral buffer. Source: Peter Neal

Area 4: Countryside periphery - Illustrative sketch



Fig. 9.38: Proposed peripheral landscape buffer overlooked by houses fronting the edge streets and integrated with sustainable urban drainage, leisure and recreation trails incorporating 'play on the way', resting spaces and viewing decks at strategic points.

Area 5: Parkway approach



Key informants and design principles

Landscape and open space

9.53 Sinuous/naturally planted and semi-formal tree lined corridor with a strong landscape structure reflecting the characteristics of the original Letchworth Garden City gateways and the immediate rural context of this location.

9.54 Potential for wildflower meadow verges including chalk grasslands where possible to reflect prevailing National and North Hertfordshire landscape character profiles and objectives.

9.55 Potential for the landscape alongside the access road to contribute to SUDs, to be considered in the next stages of design.

Density and building heights

n/a

Building form and character

n/a

Transport

9.56 The approach road will be a multi-modal route with shared pedestrian and cycleway that will run parallel to the carriageway, separated by landscaped verge. (refer Street Type 4, p.68-70)

9.57 This road will support bus access and emergency access. Car and cycle parking provision are assumed as not required.

Area 5: Parkway approach - Precedents



Fig. 9.39: Minneapolis Parkway, US: Strong tree-lined access road with green verges defining spaces for vehicles and people. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.40: Minneapolis Parkway, US: Strong tree-lined access road with green verges defining spaces for vehicles and people. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.41: Cambourne, Cambridgeshire: Landscape integrated access route with soft spaces on either side of the road. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.42: Letchworth: Generous landscaped verges, mature trees and informal planting along the route. Source: Peter Neal



Fig. 9.43: Letchworth: Generous landscaped verges, mature trees and informal planting along the route. Source: Peter Neal

Area 5: Parkway approach - Illustrative sketch



Fig. 9.44: Learning from the pioneers, we propose a parkway-inspired gateway from Norton Road into LG1 and wider Letchworth.

Illustrative block configuration

9.58 This is a sample block illustrating the translation of design principles associated with relevant character areas into spatial layout. Aligned with the strategic masterplan, it is the most irregular and tightest block in terms of its form and configuration, hence chosen for this exploration.





Fig. 9.45: Sample block illustrating the translation of design principles associated with relevant character areas into spatial layout.

Area 3: The Avenue	
Landscape and open space	
3.1	Tree-lined street
3.2	Swale (SuDS)
3.3	Framing key corners that open up to long-distance views (N-W views towards Biggleswade)
Density and building heights	
3.4	Building heights: upto 3 storeys
3.5	Net density: approx. 45 dph
Building form and character	
3.7	Continuous, strong and regular building line with active fronts.
3.8	Higher density typologies including terraces and flats.
Transport	
3.9	Primary streets with bus access, emergency access and shared usage by cyclists.
3.10	Mix of on-plot and on-street car parking for houses.
3.11	On-street parking in clusters punctuated by structural planting and trees soften visual impact.
3.12	Cycle parking within garages or in secure on-plot cycle storage units (integrated with bin stores) adjacent to the front door.

Area 4: Countryside periphery	
Landscape and open space	
4.1	Views across countryside, west towards Fairfield Park.
4.2	Peripheral buffer with integrated sustainable urban drainage.
4.3	Pedestrian-cycle trail through peripheral buffer overlooked by houses fronting onto it.
Density and building heights	
4.4	Building heights: upto 2.5 storeys
4.5	Net density: approx. 30 dph
Building form and character	
4.7	Informal building line with active fronts along the periphery with soft plot boundaries.
4.8	Semi-detached and detached houses with generous plots.
Transport	
4.9	Houses accessed by informal rustic edge lanes
4.10	On-plot car parking for houses.
4.11	On-street parking clusters punctuated with landscape
4.12	Cycle parking within garages or in secure on-plot cycle storage units (integrated with bin stores) adjacent to the front door.

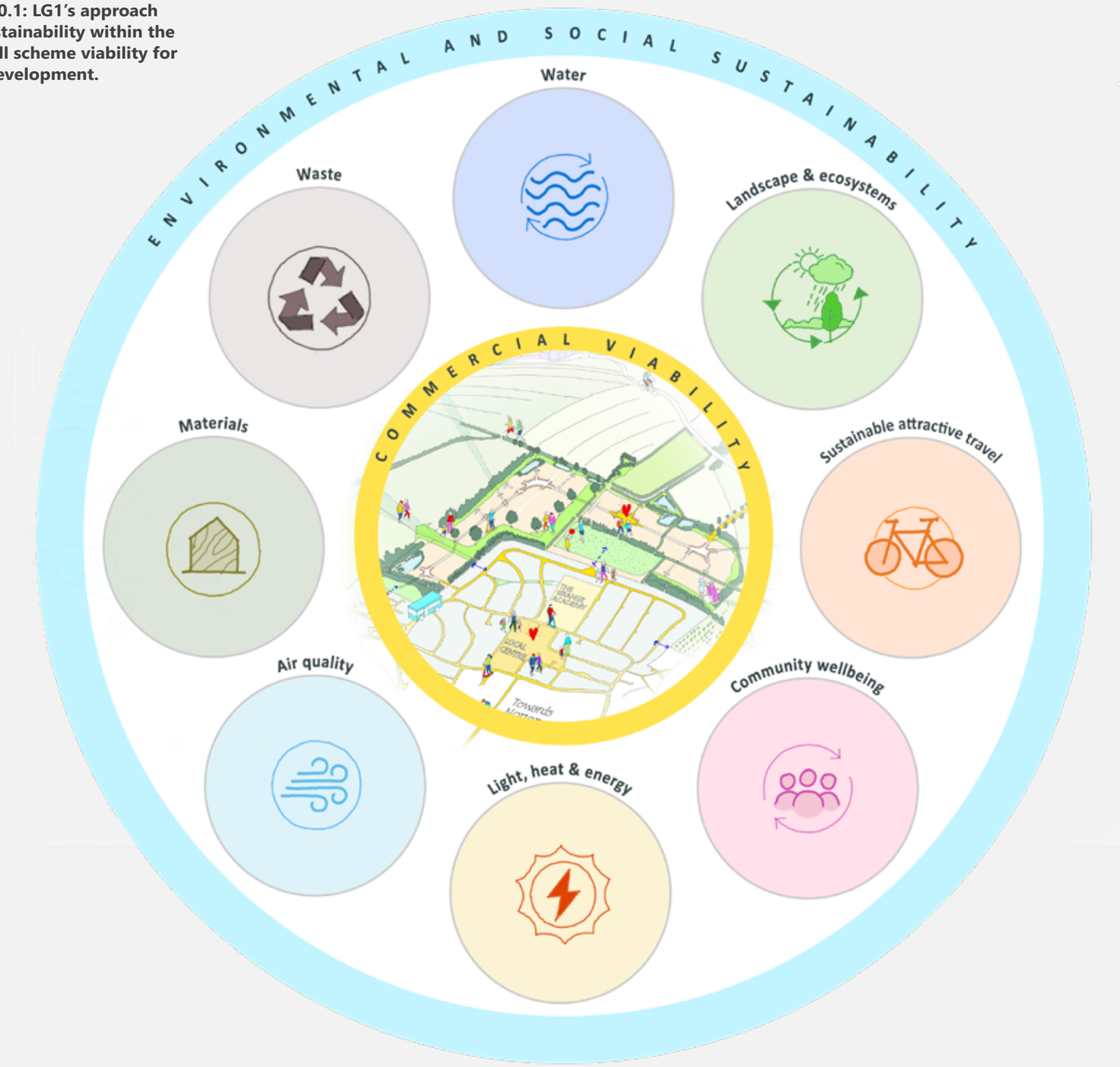
10

Sustainability

10. Sustainability

10.1 Sustainability is at the heart of the Garden City model and LG1 takes a whole site approach encompassing the principles set out in Fig 10.1. It is of importance that when discussing sustainability this does not solely focus on building technologies, but a wider range of determinants. This is demonstrated by Fig 10.2 and underpinned by community engagement over many years. This approach to sustainability for LG1 development will align with LGCHF's Sustainability policy (November 2023) and the adopted Local Plan (2011-2031) policies, in particular, Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability and NHC's Sustainability SPD (updated March 2024).

Fig. 10.1: LG1's approach to sustainability within the overall scheme viability for the development.



Future Homes Standard

10.2 A new standard for energy-efficient homes will come into force in 2025 onwards. Homes built under the Future Homes Standard are expected produce 75-100% less carbon emissions compared with 2019 standards. The LG1 development will work towards being zero carbon ready in discussions with NHC and the appointed development partner as part of the next project stages. This would include consideration of opportunities where 'Future Homes Standard' benchmarks might be exceeded aligned with the commercial viability assessment for the development and potential for certifications within the development (e.g. BREEAM, BHL Commendation, and other emerging wellbeing assessment accreditations).

Key topic areas

10.3 To provide further guidance on adopting a holistic multi-scalar approach to integrating sustainability within the LG1 development as part of the next work stages, eight topic areas (Fig. 10.1) have been summarised for further development and exploration. These have been outlined in further detail setting out a high-level approach to design (Fig. 10.2, overleaf).

Fig. 10.2: LG1 sustainability topic areas for further development and exploration

Water

Support ground water recharge through the management of surface water.

Manage and mitigate surface water flood through sustainable urban drainage.

Explore opportunities for reuse and recycling of wastewater, through grey water and rainwater harvesting.

Light, heat and energy

Optimise indoor health and wellbeing: well lit and ventilated homes and thermal comfort.

Design energy efficient building form, following the energy hierarchy to minimise operational energy.

Integrate renewable energy technologies e.g. PVs, ASHP as relevant and explore opportunities for resource sharing (e.g. micro-grids) for energy efficiency.

Enable low energy travel via EV charging.

Waste

Adopt circular principles in design and delivery including; construction waste management policies to minimise waste sent to landfill and consideration of modern methods of construction.

Landscape & ecosystems

Use the co-benefits of blue and green systems (e.g. SUDs) to support habitat creation and ecological value.

Create connected nature-rich network of green spaces using native, climate-resilient and adaptive species linking from the wider countryside. Use sensitive construction and management methods (e.g. timing of works) to avoid and mitigate seasonal constraints. Create new habitats achieving atleast 10% biodiversity net gain and 2,000 new trees.

Explore opportunities for local food production and for natural infrastructure to function as social learning systems.

Air quality

Create an extensive network of green open spaces and street typologies integrated with structural planting and trees.

Promote active travel for everyday life needs, minimising vehicular emission and impact on air quality.

Design homes for good ventilation to support occupant health and wellbeing, in particular for summer months.

Sustainable & attractive travel

Create safe and attractive active travel networks, effectively linking into the surrounding wider context and develop a robust public transport strategy, in discussion with NHC/ HCC.

Create permeable landscape-integrated streets that minimises detours and dead-ends for walking and cycling. Integrate traffic/ speed management measures through the avenue to prioritise active travel, slow cars and prevent rat-running.

Maximise co-location of facilities accessible by walking and cycling, to support natural exercise.

Enable opportunities for a sustainable mobility hub e.g. EV, car club, bike share from early phases, to support at least 10% modal shift. Should car use reduce over time and the demand for parking fall as a result of a change in habits and/or the sustainable travel strategy, there will be the option to re-use these spaces for alternative uses.

Materials

Explore opportunities to incorporate low embodied carbon materials.

Explore a circular approach to construction materials, including creating and engaging with local supply chains.

Community wellbeing

Support mixed and balanced communities with mix of housing types and tenures in each phase including tenure-blind homes, including provision of resilient, accessible and adaptable homes.

Co-locate local centre uses (retail, school, community facilities) in most accessible location to maximise walkable interactions. Ensure the delivery of training and apprenticeship programmes for local people in partnership with North Herts College, the LEP and appointed developer partner. This will include consideration of the temporary use of the 'reserve' school site for training and associated meanwhile activity.

Working with NHC and Settle, understand the need for community space within the Grange and LG1 development, in order to create a co-ordinated approach to providing flexible community space that meets the needs of existing Grange residents and the LG1 scheme.

Create extensive green open space networks as spaces to 'dwell' aligned with active travel routes and integrated with play to support outdoor intergenerational interaction.

Explore opportunities for food production e.g. allotments, community garden in public realm.

Incorporate opportunities for communal spaces within residential development parcels to combat social isolation, enhance social interactions and support doorstep play.

11

Housing need and diversification

11. Housing need and diversification

Introduction

11.1 In its approach to bringing forward this site, LGCHF has taken a data-led approach, influenced by the founding principles of the Garden City, a strong desire to create a great quality place and the need to be attractive to future commercial investors in order to provide a return to reinvest for the benefit of the wider local community.

11.2 In 2012, to inform the community conversation about whether LGCHF should support the potential allocation of land for housing in the emerging Local Plan, sessions with the community were facilitated by the University of Hertfordshire. This was supported by a series of background studies that were shared with the local community in order that they had available the same information that the Foundation's Trustee and Governor group were privy to.

11.3 This included a report by Lichfields that sets out the economic and housing implications of various growth scenarios. These reports were subsequently updated to support submissions to the Local Plan and the Public Examination and informed LGCHF's Housing Strategy.

11.4 In order to inform the strategic master planning process, LGCHF commissioned a further update in 2022 (Appendix A) that focused on the housing components of the initial report. This is also supported by a town wide survey undertaken by Lichfields on behalf of LGCHF in 2019 (Appendix B). This was undertaken due to the specific circumstances in Letchworth differing from that of the remainder of North Herts and the absence of data to understand this in more detail. Previous studies also influenced LGCHF's published Housing Strategy 2018-21, which will shortly be updated.

North Herts and Stevenage Joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment

11.5 Reference is made below to the North Herts and Stevenage Joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment[1] (SHMA) updates (the most recent being in 2023), for the reasons stated above this is of less relevance due to the unique circumstances found in Letchworth compared to the remainder of these two districts.

11.6 Key messages from the SHMA are as follows:

11.7 The overall housing requirement for North Herts is 11,600 (excluding Luton), with 7,888 required in the remaining plan period.

11.8 There are 1,908 households in North Herts living in unsuitable housing, whilst being unable to afford their own housing. Of these, 681 occupy affordable housing that does not meet current needs, highlighting the need to be able to provide additional accommodation to enable them to vacate in order that a more suitable tenant can be found. This leads to a net need of 1,227 households in North Herts.

11.9 In the period 2022–31 it is projected an annual increase in households able to afford housing costs in North Herts will be 144, with 482 new households a year unable to afford housing costs. The total North Herts affordable housing need combining those unable to afford private homes and those in affordable housing need aspiring to home ownership is 6,877 (Fig. 11.1-11.3).

Fig. 11.1: Total need for affordable housing 2022-31

North Herts	Affordable Housing Need Households unable to afford	Affordable Housing Need Households aspiring to home ownership	Overall Affordable Housing Need
Current housing need in 2022	1,227	3,212	4,439
Future housing need 2022-31	1,292	1,147	2,439
Total Housing Need	2,519	4,358	6,877

Source: SHMA 2023

11.10 When broken down, this shows the greatest need for 3-bedroom units and is summarised below:

Fig. 11.2: Overall affordable housing need 2022-31 in North Herts

North Herts	Affordable Housing Need Households unable to afford	Affordable Housing Need Households aspiring to home ownership	Affordable Housing (Households)
1 bedroom	242	190	432
2 bedrooms	671	279	951
3 bedrooms	1,307	122	1,429
4+ bedrooms	299	-	299
Total Housing Need	2,519	591	3,110

Source: SHMA 2023

References:

1. See: https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/2024%2003%2005%20North%20Herts%20and%20Stevenage%20Final.pdf.

11.11 The SHMA considers the overall need for market and affordable housing, incorporating those able to afford First Homes with the 30% or 50% discount.

Fig. 11.3: Overall need for market and affordable dwellings 2022-31

	Unable to afford market rents	Unable to afford market ownership but able to afford First Homes with a 50% discount, but not a 30% discount	Unable to afford market ownership but able to afford First Homes with a 30% discount	Affordable Housing	Total Market Housing	Total Housing
1 bedroom	**244**	**77**	**132**	**453**	**335**	**787**
2 bedrooms	**676**	**86**	**221**	**983**	**677**	**1,660**
3 bedrooms	**1,317**	**134**	**-**	**1,451**	**2,191**	**3,642**
4+ bedrooms	**301**	**-**	**-**	**301**	**1,343**	**1,644**
Dwellings	**2,538**	**297**	**353**	**3,190**	**4,540**	**7,734**
Dwellings to reconcile population and households	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**154**	**154**
LHN	**2,538**	**297**	**353**	**3,190**	**4,694**	**7,888**

Source: SHMA 2023

11.12 The SHMA highlights the need for older person accommodation, with a projection that 398 specialist older person dwellings would be needed.

Letchworth Garden City

11.13 Letchworth has seen little population growth, with it reaching a peak of circa 35,000 in 2017 before this declined. It has seen a slower growth rate compared to the remainder of North Herts and there is a clear trend of ageing and with a high proportion of older residents. Although there is a prevalence of in wealthier cohorts, there are areas within Letchworth that have high levels of deprivation. Households are typically larger and there is a high proportion of socially rented accommodation, a larger proportion of over 65s and a smaller proportion of single households. There is evidence of under-occupation and overcrowding. House prices have increased at a high rate over the past 10 years, but are lower than the North Herts averages, whilst there is some evidence of rents being higher. There is declining affordability as prices rise disproportionately to wages.

11.14 Letchworth currently represents approximately a quarter of North Herts' population and has seen a growth 4.4% between 2012 and 2022 to 34,308, although this represents a slight drop from the peak of 34, 697 in 2017.

11.15 The trend is that recent additional housing has seen more families moving into Letchworth, but a decline in the 19-44 age group reflects the number of young adults that have moved out, linked to higher education and seeking employment.

Population

11.16 Letchworth has seen an increase of 12.6% in the above 65 age group between 2010 to 2020, which is reflective of national trends, but should be compared against a population growth of 3% in the same period and reflects an ageing of the Letchworth community (Fig. 11.4, 11.5).

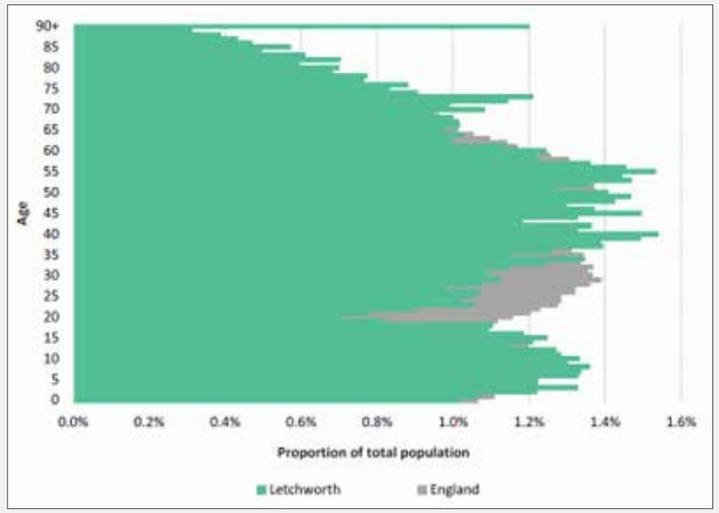
Fig. 11.4 Letchworth's age profile

Age	Letchworth	North Herts	England
0-18	23.3%	22.8%	22.5%
19-44	29.9%	30.7%	33.4%
45-64	26.2%	27.2%	25.6%
65+	20.7%	19.4%	18.5%

Source: Lichfields based on ONS estimates

11.17 This is shown in the following diagram (Fig. 11.5):

Fig. 11.5 Age structure 2020



Source: Lichfields

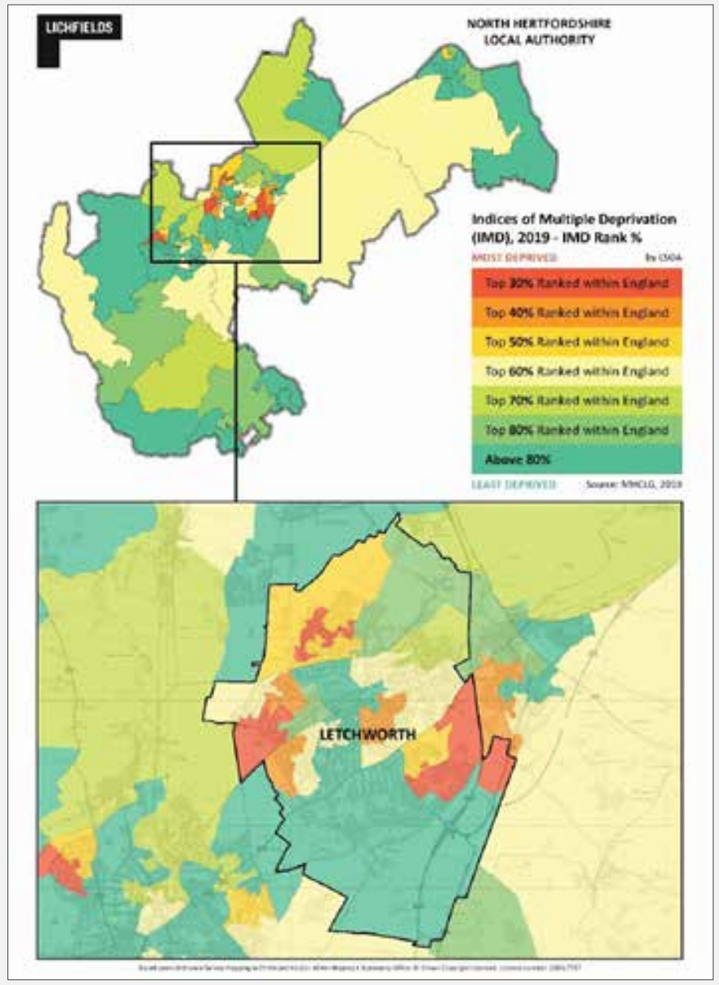
11.18 It could be argued that the reduced amount of this part of the population can have a negative impact on the vibrancy and vitality of the town and its commercial attractiveness.

11.19 Mosaic data shows that 'Domestic Success', 'Prestige Positions' and 'Aspiring Homemakers' score highest in North Herts, but in Letchworth there is also a greater representation of 'Family Basics' and 'Transient Renters', which reflects the higher proportion of affordable housing.

11.20 With respect to deprivation (Fig. 11.6), Letchworth contains pockets of deprivation including areas that are within the top 30% most deprived in England, as well as areas that are 20% least deprived.

11.21 Single people over 65 are some of the most likely to live in affordable accommodation in Letchworth (over 40%), 31% of which have long term medical conditions or disability.

Fig. 11.6 Indices of deprivation



Source: Lichfields based on IMD 2019

11.22 The above identifies clusters of deprivation, which includes parts of the Grange Estate, Wilbury and Jackmans, with southern and central areas being the least deprived. This emphasises the view that Letchworth is a tale of two towns in terms of deprivation. This is also reflected by the tenure split, where although house size and types generally align with North Herts and England, there is a significant difference in terms of socially rented accommodation in Letchworth compared to North Herts and England, with Letchworth having 31% of households falling within this category, compared to 19% in North Herts and 18% in England.

11.23 The number of homes owned outright or subject to a mortgage in Letchworth combined is 59%, notably lower than North Herts (67%) and England (64%).

11.24 There is also a lower private rented sector at 10% of homes in Letchworth, compared to 14% in North Herts and 18% in England. This suggests a reduced choice, particularly for younger people.

Housing stock

11.25 56% of dwellings in Letchworth are smaller (flats or terraced housing), higher than North Herts and England at 45%. This is primarily due to a high proportion of terraced homes (35%) - higher than North Herts and England by approximately 10%.

11.26 The highest proportion of homes is 3 bedroom (46%) a little higher than North Herts and England (41%), whilst there is the lowest proportion of 2-bedroom homes at 23%, lower than North Herts and England (25% and 28% respectively).

11.27 Letchworth does also have a higher proportion of over 65 residents and a lower proportion of single households.

11.28 There is in part a mismatch between stock and need. This represented by the issue of overcrowding, with 352

families and 251 other households living in overcrowded accommodation, whilst data also shows that there is an issue of under-occupancy with 868 single people living in homes with 3 or more bedrooms and a further 978 in homes with 2 bedrooms.

11.29 The Lichfields survey in 2019 flagged that there is an issue with the lack of adaptability of existing homes to meet existing and future needs, with 46% of respondents raising this as an issue.

Cost of housing

11.30 Letchworth's median house price in 2021 was £372,000, higher than the national and regional average, but of importance is that prices have over the previous 10 years risen by 44% (compared to 42% in North Herts and 37% in England).

11.31 In terms of affordability, according to the ONS North Herts employees can expect to spend 12 times their salaries (in 2012) in purchasing a home, 50% more than the average in England.

11.32 For private rental property Letchworth is higher than other parts of North Herts, although this may be as a result of a limited supply. In 2022 it was found on average 1 bed private rental properties were £60 to £100 a month more expensive and circa £500 more expensive for 4-bedroom houses.

Housing growth

11.33 In the period up to 2035, it is expected that there will be in the region of 1600 new homes arising from the Local Plan. This will lead to a population growth of approximately 7% to 36,683, which will address the decline highlighted previously.

11.34 It is however estimated that due to demographic trends (life expectancy, birth rates etc.), the ageing population and number of over 65s will continue to grow (Fig. 11.7).

Fig. 11.7 Letchworth's projected population age profile

Age (yrs)	2020	2035	Change	Change (%)
0-4	2,002	1,979	-23	-1%
5-11	3,143	2,851	-292	-9%
12-18	2,833	2,846	13	0%
19-64	19,237	20,494	1,257	7%
65+	7,093	8,513	1,420	20%
Total	34,308	36,683	2,375	7%
Median age	42.6	44.3	+1.7	+4%

Source: Lichfields analysis

11.35 It is projected that Letchworth's population will continue to see a reduction in the number of children and although there will be some growth in the 25-35 from new housing, the trend of out-migration of young adults will continue along with patterns of ageing.

11.36 Using the existing occupancy pattern as a guide, along with interviews with local agents as part of the 2019 survey and further contextual analysis, following sensitivity testing an initial mix assessment is summarised (private housing only, Fig. 11.8):

Fig. 11.8 Private housing mix

	Flat 1 bed	Flat 2+ bed	House 2-3 bed	House 4 bed	House 5+ bed
Market assessment	6%	8%	64%	18%	5%
	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4+ bed	5 bed
Sensitivity - North Herts	12%	25%	42%	16%	5%
Sensitivity - Letchworth	15%	23%	45%	13%	3%

Source: Lichfields analysis

11.37 This leads to the following initial suggested range:

	1 bed*	2 bed*	3 bed	4+ bed
Suggested range	0-10%	10-20%	50-60%	15-20%

Source: Lichfields analysis - *can include flats and houses.

11.38 Consideration will also be required on the role of older people, where there is scope to release family housing if suitable accommodation for older residents becomes available.

11.39 The above was produced in 2022, so in 2023 a further review was undertaken by land agents, who found the broad ranges to continue to be acceptable, subject to further testing and the input of a future commercial partner.

11.40 In developing the strategic master plan, we have incorporated these ranges, but this is in the absence of a developer partner who will undertake their own market review.

11.41 Furthermore, in response to comments regarding the ageing population and lack of availability of suitable accommodation, we are intending to provide a 50 – 60 sheltered housing scheme as part of the private housing mix to meet this identified need.

Affordable housing

11.42 The Foundation is committed to providing 40% affordable accommodation as part of the housing mix, with the Council having sole nomination rights.

11.43 As indicated previously, there is a disproportionate amount of socially rented accommodation in Letchworth, which could be reflected in the final affordable housing mix to give a broader range of opportunity to meet local need.

11.44 In addition to the assessment of local need, discussion has been held with Council's Housing Supply Team to understand their aspirations.

11.45 Our initial review found that based on a maximum spend of income on housing being 35% in 2020 there is a need for 6,935 affordable homes in Letchworth (Fig. 11.9), although if a lower income of 30% threshold this increases to 7,975.

11.46 This also indicates that 84% of single person households are in need of affordable rented housing and data suggests that single people and couples without children are less able to access affordable housing, whilst a large proportion of families in need (consisting of couples or lone parents with children) are currently being housed in affordable housing, although a clear need for this accommodation continues to exist in Letchworth and North Herts. In the 2019 survey, a lack of adaptability of existing dwellings was also raised and the limited size of accommodation, meaning that evolving needs cannot be simply met and reflecting the age of much of the stock in Letchworth

11.47 This also flags that approximately half of the Letchworth population are unlikely to be able to afford entry level rent.

Fig. 11.9 Estimate of current affordable housing need in Letchworth

	No. of households in 2020	Of which unable to afford at...			
		30% threshold		35% threshold	
Single person	4,389	84%	3,686	73%	3,204
Couple	3,933	39%	1,534	34%	1,337
Couple w. children	2,763	38%	1,050	33%	912
LP w. children	977	80%	782	69%	674
Other	2,309	40%	923	35%	808
Total	14,370	55%	7,975	48%	6,935

Source: Lichfields using PopGroup, Census, ONS, CACI

Fig. 11.10 Estimated future need

	At 30% income threshold			At 35% income threshold		
	Households unable to afford in 2020	Households unable to afford in 2035	Change	Households unable to afford in 2020	Households unable to afford in 2035	Change
Single person	3,686	4,178	492	3,204	3,631	427
Couple	1,534	1,713	180	1,337	1,494	156
Couple w. children	1,050	1,128	78	912	979	68
LP w. children	782	840	58	674	724	50
Other	923	1,026	103	808	898	90
Total	7,975	8,886	910	6,935	7,727	792

Source: Lichfields analysis

11.48 The Lichfields assessment of housing need in Letchworth shows 2,600 to 3,600 households, but this is quite a crude calculation and based on a gross need, but a more appropriate calculation is based on household growth as set out below (Fig. 11.10), and suggests an additional need of circa 800 to 900 affordable homes in the period between 2020 and 2035. This is however still in excess of the delivery in Letchworth expected in the Local Plan.

11.49 This does not however meet existing unmet need and after the projected developments in the Local plan, in 2035 it is expected that unmet need will be between 4,541 (30% income threshold) to 3,383 (using 35% income threshold).

11.50 In the 2022 Lichfields report the existing waiting list was assessed and this found the highest proportion of those on the waiting list are smaller households (Fig. 11.11).

11.51 The estimated need factoring in household growth has been calculated and again shows a need for a high proportion of smaller dwellings (Fig. 11.12).

Fig. 11.11 Affordable housing waiting list - Letchworth 2022

	Total	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed
Number of households	778	422	220	88	48
Mix	-	54%	28%	11%	6%

Source: NHC (households that have expressed a preference for Letchworth)

Fig. 11.12 Estimated need for affordable housing by size

	Current need Total - 3,630	Future need Total - 910	Total Total - 4,541
Single person	56%	54%	55%
Couple	25%	20%	24%
Couple w. children	8%	9%	8%
LP w. children	3%	6%	4%
Other	8%	11%	8%
1-bed	80%	74%	79%
2+ bed	20%	26%	21%

Source: Lichfields

11.52 This does not acknowledge that some smaller households may have a need for an additional room but shows the high level of need for smaller accommodation in Letchworth.

11.53 In order to meet Letchworth's specific needs, the following mix has been calculated, which differs from District wide needs (Fig. 11.13).

Fig. 11.13 Letchworth's affordable housing projected need in new developments

1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed
60-80%	20-30%	0-5%	

Source: Lichfields

11.54 It is also important to factor that there is a proportion of over 65s with long term health conditions and disabilities and across the whole of the Letchworth community 11% fall into this category.

Discussions with North Herts Council

11.55 In 2023 the Heritage Foundation engaged with the Housing Supply Team at North Herts Council to get an initial indication of the Council's opinion on the mix of affordable housing that should be provided.

11.56 The initial response sought the following rented mix of accommodation (Fig. 11.14, 11.15):

Fig. 11.14 NHC rented accommodation proposed split

Accommodation	Percentage
1-bedroom flats	21%
2-bedroom flats	12%
2-bedroom houses	26%
3-bedroom houses	35%
4+bedroom houses	6%

Source: NHC

Fig. 11.15 NHC intermediate proposed split

Accommodation	Percentage
1-bedroom flats	8%
2-bedroom flats	8%
2-bedroom houses	20%
3-bedroom houses	54%
4+bedroom houses	10%

Source: NHC

Community Land Trust and Self-Build

11.57 The North Herts Local Plan has a requirement for 1% of plots on strategic sites to be allocated for self-build and Policy SP15 specifies 9 such plots for LG1. The accompanying text for Policy HS2 confirms that affordable housing can be provided by co-operative housing schemes and Community Land Trusts.

11.58 112 respondents to the 2019 Housing Needs Survey indicated an interest in CLT or self-build. The Foundation has also reviewed the number of people who have registered for self-build which includes over 100 residents and partnered with Eastern Community Homes who specialise in community housing models to investigate this opportunity further.

11.59 An event was held earlier this year to explore this further, attended by 28 local people which highlighted an interest in this type of project.

11.60 Community housing models was one of the founding principles attached to Garden Cities and in Letchworth there are a series of developments from its founding years by co-operatives. We also believe that this creates an opportunity for investigating innovation in part of the development site, which may be of wider interest.

Summary and masterplan approach

11.61 Letchworth Garden City's socio demographic circumstances differ from the remainder of North Herts as can be seen from a comparison of the SHMA and the Letchworth specific data. It is however clear that there is a need for housing across tenures to meet existing and emerging need, both in North Herts and more specifically Letchworth. The legacy of slow or a lack of delivery has seen issues of under supply exacerbate existing challenges for both the local community and economy, particularly with regard to access to housing and affordability.

11.62 In order to understand Letchworth's challenges and opportunities, the Foundation has commissioned a series of studies on the local housing market and housing need and in order to respond to an absence of Letchworth specific data undertook its own Housing Needs Survey in 2019.

11.63 Letchworth has seen an increase and then decline in population since 2017 and is set for growth linked to the Local Plan.

11.64 In determining the Foundation's approach to private housing and LG1 in particular, this will be market led, alongside an understanding of local need and existing socio demographics.

11.65 From the data, it is our understanding that Letchworth has a disproportionate amount of socially rented accommodation, which is valued, with pockets of high earning, high value homes and areas of relatively high deprivation. There is an ageing population and many homes that exceed the requirements of occupiers in terms of rooms, whilst a growing issue of overcrowding.

11.66 There is a need for homes across tenures and affordability remains a significant issue, particularly for existing residents and households forming during the Local Plan period up to 2031. This creates a requirement for smaller households, particularly in the affordable housing sector, which will help meet existing and emerging need, as well as providing opportunity for voluntary re-location from tenants of under-occupied homes.

11.67 Issues of affordability also highlight the need to ensure that homes are affordable to live in and energy efficient, both from an environmental and affordability context.

11.68 We are also of the view the self-build and community housing models create an opportunity to help meet some of the need for the growing group who do not qualify for affordable housing but cannot afford to purchase or privately rent.

Proposed Approach

11.69 Our strategy will be subject of market and viability testing and will be reviewed when a partner is appointed, however for the purposes of the strategic master planning process we are incorporating an initial approach that comprises the following:

11.70 The Foundation will comply with the policy requirement for 40% of homes to be allocated for affordable purposes. We will however continue to engage with NHC to promote the specific need of Letchworth communities, accepting that the Council has obligations to meet District wide needs.

11.71 In order to meet local needs, we will seek to include a higher proportion of small household/single person units as part of the affordable provision as part of the development in line with our assessment in this section. This may also help reduce the leakage of a younger age cohort out of the town. This would require further analysis and we appreciate will require some balancing with North Herts wider needs.

11.72 We will seek to include private elderly accommodation within the market component of the development. We understand that the Policy SP15 requirement for a care home has been met elsewhere, so the master plan is being formulated on the basis for a 50-60-unit senior living scheme. This is in order to meet the identified need and provide possible re-location opportunities for existing residents. This will not be an extra care facility, but a private developer led scheme with self-contained units for the over 60s.

11.73 5% of the development will be linked to an innovation quarter for the development. This will be in order to provide alternative tenures including for self-build, co-operative and Community Land Trust, providing a range of opportunities for the local community to participate in community led housing

11.74 Subject to further review, the private housing provision will sit broadly within the following parameters: 1 bed (0-10%), 2 bed (10-20%), 3 bed (50-60%), 4+ bed (15-20%).

11.75 There is an inherent issue of adaptability of homes in Letchworth to meet future needs, which was a particular issue in the 2019 survey. We will therefore work with our developer partner to ensure that homes are adaptable for future needs.

11.76 We will continue to review Building Regulations, emerging national advice and guidance, the advice of consultant team and partners to ensure that homes are net carbon zero ready and affordable to live comfortably, particularly in terms of energy and water use and cost.

11.77 For further details refer to the following appendices: Appendix M: Lichfields Housing Needs Assessment Update 2022, and Appendix N: Lichfields Housing Needs Survey 2019.

12

Implementation, stewardship & infrastructure delivery

12. Implementation, stewardship and infrastructure delivery

12.1 The LG1 development will support the delivery of a comprehensive, sustainable and well-connected new community with each phase functioning as a place in its own right.

12.2 The Heritage Foundation is yet to appoint a development partner who will undertake the detailed design and delivery of the site. This, along with uncertainty over the timing of the school, commercial centre and senior living components of the scheme, means we are unable to be precise over the phasing of the development at this stage. We have, however, produced the parcels of land that we believe will form the phases of the development (Fig 12.1), but the timing of these will be the subject of future discussion and set out in more detail in a future outline planning application and/or design code. Each phase is likely to be between 200 and 300 dwellings.



Fig. 12.1 The plan below indicatively sets out parcels of land that will form the phases of the development for LG1. The timing of these will be subject to future discussion and set out in the outline application.

12.3 The key principles which will underpin the future phasing strategy are outlined below:

Phasing principles

- All phases of the development should be part of a comprehensive master and delivery plan. Each phase should be formulated in order that it will integrate the existing context and in particular the Grange Estate as well as the new development to ensure LG1 is delivered as a socially cohesive extension to Letchworth Garden City, with a positive experience for residents as part of the settlement from the day of first occupation.

- As part of the first phase, we will provide construction via a new access from Norton Road, minimising disruption to existing Grange Estate residents as part of a construction methodology to be agreed in the outline planning application.

- The first phase will include the Greenway extension, to ensure that a continuous route remains available should the existing Greenway be disrupted during construction activity. We will work with ParkRun and other users to provide safe temporary routes and connections that allow valued community activities to continue where possible.

- All phases will ensure that built infrastructure and measures for sustainable travel modes (bus, walking and cycle access) are available for residents and workers on the site. This will include access to existing primary and secondary schools. This will be developed in partnership with the District and County Councils, bus operators and other partners, and may include a temporary travel hub/bus stop before the completed facility is in place. This will also include pedestrian and cycle links into the Grange Estate and key destinations, attractive for all-day and all-year round use, based on a strategy to be agreed with the Councils.

- We will work with the District and County Councils to agree the timing of off-site highway improvements, including those that promote active travel and incorporate this into the detailed phasing plan that will be part of the outline planning application.

- Early phases of the development will carefully incorporate a positive relationship with the Grange Recreation Ground reinforcing its focal role as 'central park' and linking into the existing social infrastructure of the Grange Estate (facilities, open spaces, active travel routes towards Letchworth town centre).

- The phasing plan will support advanced structural landscaping, tree and hedgerow planting to enable early establishment of green infrastructure networks and native buffer planting for the phased delivery of new open spaces and SUDs aligned with phasing boundaries. This will require further discussions on drainage and precautionary working methods to avoid impact on ecological receptors.

- Each phase will deliver a mix of housing type/tenures.

- Each phase will provide access to new and existing open space and recreational facilities.

- The site reserved for a potential primary school will be retained and not transferred to HCC until this is formally drawn down. This may mean that it will be included in a later phase of the development to ensure that it can be comprehensively planned and laid out. The location of the reserve site does also facilitate an

earlier implementation of the school if needed, due to its siting in relation to the spine road. By retaining ownership of this land, it provides opportunities for meanwhile uses such as a training and apprenticeship centre and productive landscape. These uses will be solely linked to the construction phase of the development and are not be based on a longer-term requirement. As such any activities or associated buildings will be removed from the reserve site prior to the development of a primary school, if required.

Community reinvestment, stewardship and management strategy

12.4 The Heritage Foundation reinvests surplus from its portfolio of investments for the benefit of the communities in Letchworth Garden City by way of its charitable commitments. The development of LG1 creates opportunities for long term income streams for reinvestment back into the local community.

12.5 As well as securing long term income, the LG1 development presents opportunities for wider community benefit. This will be through Section 106 contributions covering a wide range of community investment and working with local partners such as Settle and North Herts Council to facilitate enhancements to the Grange Estate. This will also be the case with the Letchworth Greenway, owned and maintained by the Heritage Foundation.

12.6 A key component of the Foundation's reinvestment strategy is in training and development. This aspiration is set out in more detail in the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation Strategic Plan 2028, which includes priorities for the Foundation over the next five years to 2028:

- To provide opportunities for local people to develop skills and,
- that Letchworth becomes a great place to grow up.

12.7 In order to maximise the benefit of the development, it will be a requirement for a developer partner on this site to enter into a formal agreement to provide training and apprenticeship programmes for Letchworth residents, working with North Herts College and the Hertfordshire LEP. This will initially focus on 16 to 18-year olds, but also create opportunities for those residents on Job Seekers Allowance and Universal Credit. There will also be a requirement for the appointed partner to attend local secondary schools to promote careers and training opportunities.

12.8 This reinvestment will be at cost to the Foundation by reason of a reduced land value.

12.9 Stewardship is at the heart of the Garden City model and of significance to the Foundation.

12.10 A site wide stewardship strategy is also being developed to ensure a coordinated and sustainable approach to the management of green spaces, public realm and community spaces that delivers the planning and design objectives set out in the Strategic Masterplan. The tenets of the stewardship for the site will be:

- The maintenance of the non-adopted highways, footpaths, open spaces and landscape/ecological attributes, ensuring that the core aspirations of the strategic masterplan are protected and retained;
- Work with partners and stakeholders, such as North Herts District and Herts County Councils and Settle Housing Association on areas of shared interest;
- Provide a cost-effective solution for residents across tenures; and
- Ensure that the development does not have a disproportionate impact on the Foundation's community reinvestment for the whole of the Garden City Estate.

12.11 A comprehensive Outline Residential Travel Plan is seen as an important stewardship tool. This will be submitted as part of the planning application, with a Detailed Travel Plan to be produced pre-occupation. This will be secured by S106 agreement. The Travel Plan will promote sustainable travel modes to the site through an extensive integrated package of measures and by setting mode share targets, that will be informed by post occupation multi-modal transport surveys. The surveys will be undertaken 6 months (or at 75% occupation of units), two years and five years post occupation to monitor progress against targets. The Travel Plan surveys could also be used to monitor the uptake of car parking spaces within the Masterplan and used to determine whether any spaces can be converted to other uses in the future.

12.12 The content of the Outline Travel Plan and associated strategy will be agreed at planning application stage with HCC and NHC.

Next Steps

12.13 The Heritage Foundation has appointed CBRE to assist with the selection of an appropriate partner. In order to support this process, the Foundation will be producing a development brief that will set out the requirements for a potential partner.

12.14 The development brief will include the Foundation's more detailed provisions, some of which will be beyond the remit of planning policy. This will include the training and apprenticeship programme, an approach to sustainability and building technologies, a modern interpretation of Garden City design, the inclusion of an innovation quarter component to the development and of importance to this document, compliance with this strategic masterplan. Submissions by shortlisted companies will be expected to provide their architectural concept for the site for consideration.

12.15 It is expected that this marketing process will commence Autumn 2024, with an initial selection several months later, followed by detailed contractual discussions and the confirmation of the appointment. This will be based on compliance with the development brief and the Foundation's adopted vision, as well as price in order to provide best consideration for reinvestment back into the local community.

12.16 The partner will then work with the Foundation in consultation with NHC and HCC to agree a joint design code that will be adhere to the design principles and place making objectives incorporated into this document. This will then form the basis of a planning application, which will be a joint submission with the Foundation in accordance with the design code. To this end, it will entail further discussions, in coordination with NHC, HCC and CBC on a wide range of aspects including offsite improvements, community consultation strategy and design development regarding landscape character, open spaces, sustainable transport and built form. It is hoped that this application will be submitted in 2025, with work commencing on site the following year.

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Appendix B: North Hertfordshire Sustainability Principles – Assessment

Site: Land to the north of the Grange (LG1)

Principle		*Commentary*
Transport		
1. New development should be planned around walkable 20-minute neighbourhoods so every home can walk or cycle to meet their daily needs (including primary schools, local shops and mobility hubs)	Met	The masterplan addresses this by emphasising the creation of a development with garden city principles where residents can easily access key local facilities by walking or cycling. The plan includes a new 2FE primary school, neighbourhood-level retail and community facilities, and a sustainable mobility hub, all designed to form a vibrant neighbourhood centre. One of the core principles of the masterplan is to maximise the co-location of these facilities to ensure they are easily accessible on foot or by bicycle. By placing the local centre uses (such as retail, school, and community facilities) in the most accessible locations, the masterplan aims to support natural exercise and foster walkable interactions among residents. This strategic co-location ensures that daily needs can be met within a short walk or cycle ride from any home within the development. The masterplan's approach promotes a healthy, active lifestyle while reducing reliance on cars, thereby supporting sustainable urban living.
2. Active travel should be prioritised over other modes of transport. Walking and cycling should be the safest easiest and most direct forms of transport linking key destinations. The dominance of vehicles on main routes will be reduced and managed through tools such as filtered permeability.	Met	The masterplan strongly aligns with this criteria by prioritising sustainable and active travel as a core principle of the development. Several key strategies are proposed to ensure that walking and cycling are the safest, easiest, and most direct forms of transport linking key destinations: Active Travel Networks: The masterplan emphasises the creation of safe and attractive active travel networks that effectively link the development to the surrounding wider context. This includes developing a robust public transport strategy in collaboration with North Hertfordshire Council (NHC) and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).

Principle		Commentary
		Permeable Streets: Streets are designed to be permeable and integrated with the landscape, minimising detours and dead-ends for walking and cycling. This design ensures direct and efficient routes for active travel. Traffic Management: Traffic and speed management measures will be integrated, particularly along the avenue, to prioritse active travel, slow down cars, and prevent rat-running. This approach reduces the dominance of vehicles and enhances safety for pedestrians and cyclists. Co-location of Facilities: By co-locating facilities such as retail, schools, and community centre in accessible locations, the masterplan maximises opportunities for walking and cycling, supporting natural exercise and reducing reliance on cars. Sustainable Mobility Hub: The masterplan proposes the early implementation of a sustainable mobility hub, including features like electric vehicles (EV), car clubs, and bike shares, to support at least a 10% modal shift towards sustainable transport. This hub will evolve over time to accommodate changing travel habits, potentially repurposing parking spaces for alternative uses as car use declines. Pedestrian Priority: Site-wide principles are set to design the movement network, streets, and spaces to embed pedestrian priority and support active travel, helping to deliver a minimum 10% modal shift. Overall, the masterplan's comprehensive approach to promoting active travel and managing vehicle dominance through filtered permeability and other measures ensures alignment with the policy requirement to prioritise walking and cycling as primary modes of transport.
3. The active travel network of pedestrian and cycle routes should incorporate a series of	Met	The masterplan effectively aligns with the principle by promoting walking and cycling through a permeable and connected street pattern, facilitating safe and

Principle		Commentary
direct commuter routes to key destinations and facilities and slower and more tranquil green routes for recreational trips aligned to a connected green space network.		legible routes. It establishes direct commuter routes to key destinations and facilities while preserving tranquil green routes for recreational trips. The design integrates natural desire lines, linking into the existing Public Rights of Way network and extending to surrounding settlements, Radwell Meadows, and the Etonbury Green Wheel. Additionally, a Greenway extension link preserves the rural character of existing greenways, allowing users to bypass the new development. This comprehensive approach ensures accessibility to both urban amenities and rural recreational areas, promoting active travel and enhancing the overall quality of the environment.
4. Cycle infrastructure should meet the core design principles and requirements of LTN 1/20 alongside protecting existing and providing new trees and landscape.	Met	Cycle routes are proposed through the new development, accommodating the national cycle way and Letchworth Greenway. Strong pedestrian and cycle permeability is aligned with natural desire lines that link into and extend the existing PRoW network to support access to the Grange Estate, main destinations and recreational movement.
5. Public transport stops with a frequent service should be provided in general no more than 400 m from each house	Partially Met *(detail to follow)*	The masterplan aims to ensure that all homes are within a 400-meter walking distance to a bus stop. The intention is to strategically place designated bus stops along the main avenue. However, details regarding bus service frequencies and specific bus stop locations are still under consideration. Additionally, provisions for an adequate bus turning area within the site are planned, utilising the internal road network as a loop and/or a turning circle to facilitate efficient bus routes and accommodate frequent service
6. Flexible and durable high-quality streets accessible for a wide range of users should be designed to prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport, effectively integrating the design of sustainable waste collection and designed in accordance with the most recent edition of Manual for Streets.	Partially Met *(detail to follow)*	The primary street is defined and multi-functional and a network of cycling and walking routes are established, but will require more detail and definition at the outline application stage.
7. Car parking provision should be located so it does not detract from the streetscene and	Met	The masterplan addresses this by integrating structural planting within street sections to blend parking areas with the landscape, proposing additional

Principle		Commentary
designed to ensure active, public and shared modes of travel remain the most convenient and accessible modes of transport for most people when leaving their home		parking for the Grange Recreation Ground with shared use during off-peak times, and considering communal parking solutions like car barns with PV panels and green roofs. These measures ensure parking does not detract from the street scene and support active, public, and shared modes of transport as the most convenient options for residents.
8. 100% of parking (both on plot and communal) should include a choice of electric vehicle charging informed by site suitability and assessment.	Met	The masterplan commits to the provision of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure for all modes of transport. Specifically, it ensures that each dwelling will have a minimum of one active EV charging point from the outset.
Community		
9. Community, education and retail uses and flexible space should be co-located with green space to form community hubs and support social interaction, health and well-being and linked trips. These spaces should be provided early on in the development to support community cohesion.	Met	The masterplan co-locates key local facilities, such as a new 2FE primary school, neighbourhood-level retail, community facilities, and a sustainable mobility hub, to create a vibrant neighbourhood centre. These facilities are situated next to a public square along the Grange recreation ground boundary, enhancing opportunities for social interaction and linked trips. The early phases of the development will emphasise integrating these spaces with the Grange Recreation Ground, reinforcing its role as a central park and connecting it to the existing social infrastructure of the Grange Estate.
10. For larger scale development mobility hubs should be provided to connect multiple sustainable modes of travel with people, such as public transport, electric vehicles, electric bike infrastructure and clubs, delivery service pick-ups alongside other neighbourhood centre facilities (such as food stores, cafes, child care facilities, GP surgeries, home working hubs and community space)	Met	The development will include a mobility hub within LG1, designed to connect various sustainable modes of travel with people. This hub will serve as a high-quality public realm space, integrating shared transport measures with public transport and active travel. Key components of the mobility hub will include a bus stop, car club, cycle hire, lockers, electric vehicle charging points, centralised delivery lockers, and potentially a co-working space and small café. Strategically located in proximity to the Grange Recreation Ground, the neighbourhood centre, and the Letchworth Greenway/NCN12, the mobility hub will ensure easy access for residents. Additionally, its proximity to the 'reserve' school site will support access to and from school using active travel modes.
11. Neighbourhoods should be designed with a range of densities that define their character responding to local character and context.	Met	The masterplan aligns with this principle by incorporating a number of character areas with blend of formal and informal spaces, with variations in massing, building heights, densities, built form, and open space configurations. The

Principle		*Commentary*
Higher densities should be located in and around the neighbourhood centres/community hubs. Lower densities around countryside edges.		character and density of built form vary across the masterplan, with stronger and fairly continuous development along primary and secondary streets, transitioning to more informal and looser development along tertiary streets. Higher densities are concentrated around the neighbourhood centre and community hubs, fostering a vibrant and active urban core. In contrast, lower densities are situated around the countryside edges, respecting the rural character and preserving open landscapes.
Green Infrastructure		
12. A connected and accessible multi-functional green space network should be created and distributed across the development carefully combining active travel routes, recreational, play, sport, allotment, sustainable urban drainage and ecological enhancements and achieve the maximum benefits for people, wildlife and the wider environment.	Met	The masterplan outlines in its Strategic Green Infrastructure Framework it that integrates various elements to create a connected and accessible multi-functional green space network. This framework serves as a pivot between garden and city, connecting Letchworth with the Grange Estate, agricultural fields, and adjacent settlements. It protects and enhances existing natural features such as hedgerows, shelterbelts, woodlands, and mature trees, while also providing additional open spaces for recreation and amenity, including a new linear park, allotments, and play areas. Surrounding green spaces will complement and extend the central green space, enhancing connectivity within the development. Moreover, the landscape framework incorporates additional native habitat to improve ecological connectivity and deliver a biodiversity net gain, with planting aimed at promoting climate resilience.
13. The amount, type and location of green space should be informed by the application of the Fields in Trust Standards where sport, recreation and play facilities (including buildings) should be located in prominent and accessible locations so they can serve the community well.	Met	Extensive work has been undertaken to comply with the Fields in Trust requirements and collaborative work has been progressed with the Council in relation to the Grange Rec and how this can be enhanced. Further detail will be required at the outline application stage, including clarification on Section 106 contributions
14. Green infrastructure should actively mitigate any unavoidable harmful environmental impacts of development on soil or air quality and minimise light pollution	Met	The masterplan is landscape led, with a clear GI structure that has regard to the context, surroundings and enhances the natural environment.

Principle		*Commentary*
15. Sustainable urban drainage should use above ground features to manage flood risk, mimic natural drainage patterns, maintain the natural water cycle improve water quality and include measures to enhance habitat creation through aquatic and marginal planting.	Partially Met (further details at the outline stage)	A commitment is in place to deliver a SUDS solution and the framework can accommodate this. Further detail will be required at the outline application stage on the SUDS design.
16. Existing ecological assets should be retained, protected and enhanced and connected through links, corridors and stepping stones with existing and planned ecological features and networks within and beyond the site boundary to enhance ecological functionality and connectivity	Met	The masterplan aims to protect and enhance existing hedgerows to create wildlife corridors that contribute to a local nature recovery network. The plan includes protective buffers of native scrub, wildflower grassland, and drainage features to provide habitats for invertebrates, pollinators, small mammals, and birds. The retention and active management of native scrub areas, tree-lined shelterbelts, and plantation woodlands within the site are designed to enhance biodiversity. Additionally, the masterplan proposes new areas of broadleaved woodland, mixed scrub, hedgerows, meadows, wetlands, and ponds as part of the sustainable drainage system, ensuring ecological connectivity and functionality both within and beyond the site boundary.
17. New development should deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain within the site boundary or where this cannot be achieved off site habitat enhancement and creation on land under control by the developer within a local distance to the site or a council owned site in a nature opportunity/recovery area	Met	The masterplan effectively meets this principle by prioritising biodiversity net gain (BNG) within the development. Through assessments using the Biodiversity Metric and following guidelines provided, the masterplan demonstrates a significant net gain of biodiversity. The varied mosaic of habitats within and surrounding the site, including woodland, scrub, and grassland, provides an opportunity for enhancement. Additional native planting and the incorporation of new drainage features and wetlands contribute not only to climate resilience and adaptation but also to the improvement of ecological corridors and biodiversity net gain. The assessment indicates a substantial net gain of 18.06% for area-based habitats and 19.34% for linear habitats and hedgerows, surpassing the required 10% threshold.
18. All streets should be designed to incorporate nature-rich green and blue infrastructure and connect people with nature, provide urban	Met (detail to follow)	The street network integrates structured planting and sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDs) features to enhance ecological value and connect people with nature. Secondary streets are designed to include swales, either in the middle or on the sides, to manage surface water sustainably while providing

Principle		*Commentary*
cooling and sustainably manage surface water.		urban cooling. More detail on the type of trees and SUDs detail will be required as part of subsequent stages.
19. All streets should include tree planting that is best able to absorb carbon and airborne pollutants, attenuate surface water run-off, cool the atmosphere and provide shade and shelter	Met (detail to follow)	While the specific types and species of trees and planting will be determined in later stages, the strategic masterplan clearly emphasises the ambition to incorporate these benefits through thoughtful planting and drainage strategy across the development.
20. New development should avoid invasive species and maximise the use of native species in site and plot boundaries streets and green spaces to appropriate to local soil conditions and landscape character, ensuring both species and vegetation diversity	Met (detail to follow)	The masterplan highlights the use of native species in site and plot boundaries, streets, and green spaces. It aims to complement existing native planting and ensure diversity by selecting tree species appropriate to landscape character. It also emphasises creating a connected nature-rich network of green spaces using native, climate-resilient, and adaptive species, thereby promoting biodiversity and enhancing ecological connectivity. More detail will follow as part of a design code and/or planning application.
21. All new development should utilise domestic scale features to support wildlife such as integral bird nests, bat roosts and invertebrate boxes across the site	Met (detail to follow)	One of the design implications of landscape and environmental character is to incorporate additional man-made habitat features, such as hibernacula, log piles, and bat, bird, and invertebrate boxes within the development. These features aim to enhance refuge opportunities for various species. While the strategic masterplan provides a strategic overview, more detailed plans for implementing domestic scale features to support wildlife will be provided as part of the outline planning application.
22. The management and maintenance of green space and other community infrastructure should be agreed in the early stages of planning and design to ensure the proposed condition, quality, functionality and benefits of the green space in the long term.	Partially met (detail to follow)	The masterplan highlights and acknowledges the importance of stewardship and coordinated management of green spaces and community infrastructure. It highlights the development of a site-wide stewardship strategy aimed at ensuring a sustainable approach to managing green spaces, public realm, and community spaces in line with the objectives outlined in the Strategic Masterplan. Key tenets of the stewardship strategy include maintaining non-adopted highways, footpaths, open spaces, and landscape/ecological attributes to protect and retain the core aspirations of the masterplan.

Principle		*Commentary*
Energy & Water		
23. New development should demonstrate how carbon emissions will be minimised and energy efficiency maximised through fabric performance, passive design and using renewable technologies such as photovoltaics, solar thermal, biomass, ground/air source heat pumps, wind and hydro. The choice of renewables should be informed by site assessment and suitability. Achieving standards beyond the minimum requirements of building regulations is strongly encouraged.	Met (detail to follow)	The masterplan has the ambition to minimise carbon emissions and maximise energy efficiency by aiming to adhere to and potentially exceed the Future Homes Standard, which will take effect in 2025. The LG1 development is committed to being zero carbon ready, incorporating discussions with North Herts Council and the appointed development partner. The plan also considers opportunities to surpass these benchmarks, aligning with commercial viability and potential certifications like BREEAM and BHL Commendation. Additionally, the masterplan outlines eight topic areas for further development and exploration in later stages, to ensure a holistic approach to sustainability.
24. New development should minimise carbon emissions through reducing embodied energy through the selection of construction and building materials and processes. The use of sustainable construction standards such as BREAAM, Housing Quality Mark and Passivhaus are encouraged to demonstrate processes that are environmentally responsible and resource efficient.	Met (detail to follow	The masterplan showcases housing innovation by dedicating parts of the site to demonstrate various construction and design methods, as well as different tenures. The masterplan encourages the use of sustainable construction standards to ensure environmentally responsible and resource-efficient practices. Furthermore, the masterplan explores eight key topics (as mentioned above), that include the mention of sensitive construction methods, modern methods of construction, and a circular approach to construction materials, which will be further developed in subsequent stages.
25. All new development should meet or exceed nationally prescribed water efficiency standards and include measures to reduce water consumption including water efficient appliances and water recycling systems.	Not addressed at this stage	One of the sustainability eight topics to be further explored in the next stages of the project is water efficiency. This exploration will include supporting groundwater recharge through the management of surface water, managing and mitigating surface water flood through sustainable urban drainage, and exploring opportunities for the reuse and recycling of wastewater.

FULL COUNCIL
11 July 2024

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: NORTH STEVENAGE STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK

REPORT OF: IAN FULLSTONE, SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR CHRIS HINCHLIFF, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING & TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report asks Full Council to positively recommend the approval of the Strategic Masterplan Framework for land to the north of Stevenage to Full Council. This site is allocated for development in the Council's adopted Local Plan (Site NS1, Policy SP16) as a strategic site for approximately 900 homes and supporting infrastructure.

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

This report and its considerations are subject to a positive referral by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 July 2024.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That, subject to referral by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 July 2024, the Strategic Masterplan Framework for North Stevenage, 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 facilitate the delivery of a strategic site within the Council's adopted Local Plan. To accord with policy requirements of the Local Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None. Officers and the Council's Project Board consider that the Strategic Masterplan Framework (hereafter 'masterplan') has been appropriately prepared in accordance with national and local policy and guidance. It has been prepared under the Council's preferred approach; the Local Plan and associated guidance encourage the preparation

and approval of masterplans for strategic sites in advance of and separate to any planning decisions.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Preparation of this masterplan has been overseen by the Council's internal, informal Strategic Planning Project Board. 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 Project Board is chaired by the Executive Member for Planning & Transport. Local ward members have been invited to participate in relevant meetings of the Board.

5.2. As the promoter of the site, Croudace Homes have been fully engaged in the masterplan's production. Graveley Parish Council and other stakeholders, including the general public, have been invited to comment on the masterplan through public consultation.

5.3. The final masterplan was considered by the Project Board at its meeting of 24 June 2024. The Project Board were provided with a draft of this report and its appendices. Council officers and the developer team presented the masterplan and addressed questions from the Board. The Board endorsed the masterplan and recommended that the Service Director: Regulatory present it to Cabinet and Full Council for adoption.

5.4. The referral sheet from Cabinet will be published as a supplementary agenda as soon as it is available.

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 Council's Local Plan was adopted in November 2022. This sets out the Council's strategy for meeting the development needs of the District over the period to 2031. The Plan makes provision for at least 13,000 new homes. A significant proportion of these 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.

7.2. 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 implementation is essential to raising delivery rates of new homes above historic averages and addressing the acute need for housing.

7.3. 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.

7.4. 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.

7.5. 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.

7.6. 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).

7.7. 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):

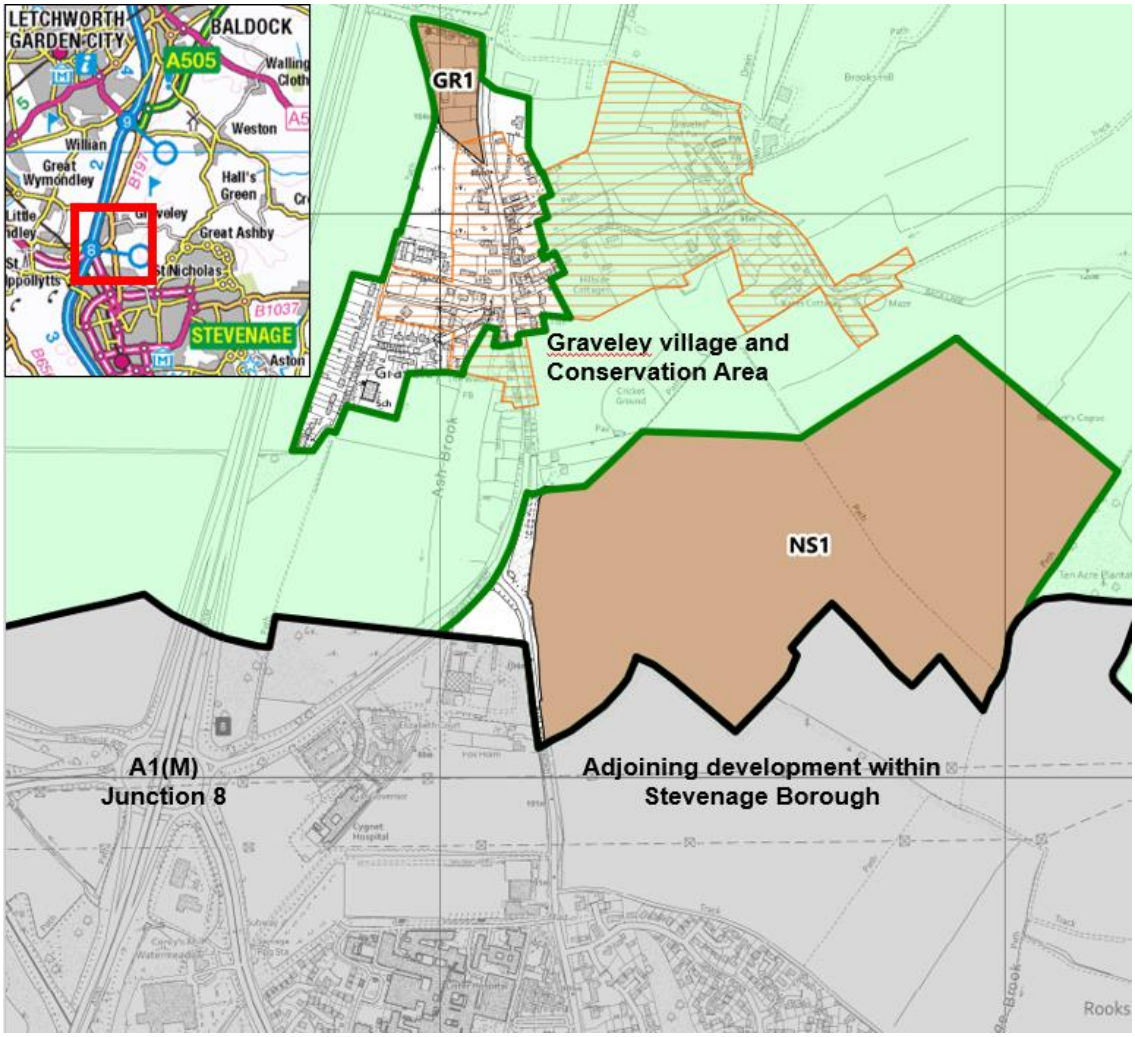
- Project Board recommendation to Service Director
- Service Director recommendation to Cabinet
- Cabinet recommendation to Full Council
- Adoption by Full Council as a material consideration in the determination of any relevant planning applications

7.8. 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. Formal regulatory approval 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.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. Site NS1 consists of approximately 43 hectares of agricultural land sited to the south-west of Graveley and lying between the village and the administrative boundary with Stevenage Borough to the south. An annotated extract of the Local Plan Policies Map is shown below.

8.2. The adjoining land within Stevenage Borough is allocated in their own Local Plan and benefits from planning permission for a residential-led development of approximately 800 homes with associated community facilities, including a primary school, and green infrastructure, including a proposed country park which adjoins the NS1 to the south-east. The site in Stevenage Borough is under construction.



8.3. The masterplan for North Stevenage has been produced by Croudace Homes. Croudace Homes are a regional housebuilder and the intended developer of the site. It is presently Croudace Homes' intention to deliver the entirety of the North Stevenage site. They have control of the entire allocation site to the relevant highway boundaries and connection points and submitted an outline planning application in December 2023 (planning reference 23/02935/OP). This is presently under consideration.

8.4. In parallel to the masterplan and application, Croudace Homes have agreed in principle to prepare a Design Code for the site. Design Codes are recognised and encouraged by Government guidance, including the National Planning Policy Framework. The glossary of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2023, Annex 2) defines Design Codes as follows:

> **Design code:** A set of illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area. The graphic and written components of the code should build upon a design vision, such as a masterplan or other design and development framework for a site or area.

8.5. The masterplan recognises that the Design Code and formal planning processes allow for further development and refinement of its proposals. This should be borne in mind when considering the masterplan; it is not an 'absolute fix' of the proposals.

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

- Establishing an officer group with representatives from the District Council and Hertfordshire County Council 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 testing of key spatial options for the masterplan
- Independent design review by Design South-East
- Presentation to the Council's Project Board at draft masterplan stage
- Public consultation; and
- Refinement of proposals in response to the steps above to produce the final masterplan.

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

8.8. Emerging material from the masterplan framework was subject to formal Design Review by Design South-East in February 2023 using their North Hertfordshire-specific panel of experts (DRP). The DRP's feedback informed further development of the draft scheme. The DRP report was published as part of the planning application for the site and is also available on the Council's masterplanning webpages.

8.9. In May 2023, the draft masterplan was presented to the Council Project Board. The Project Board endorsed the work undertaken to that date as an appropriate basis for public consultation.

8.10. Consultation included a public exhibition at Stevenage Town Rugby Club in July 2023. Invites were sent to local councillors, stakeholders and residents including all addresses in Graveley village and properties along Back Lane. This was accompanied by a website (http://northstevenage.croudacehomes.co.uk/) which has remained available since with the consultation material and contact details. A Statement of Community Involvement

was as part of the outline planning application which contains further detail on engagement and is available through the link in paragraph 8.8.

8.11. Following consultation, the landowner and Council have worked to further refine the masterplan and address issues raised including

- Clarifying the relationship between the masterplan and subsequent design development through the planning process and design coding
- Aligning the development objectives to the national model design code
- Further explanation of how the existing landscape context will influence proposals
- Ensuring site-wide, connected routes for utility journeys by foot and bike
- Rationalising formal routes in the proposed green corridors to allow more sympathetic treatments and to complement their ecological function
- Providing more information on potential street types
- Simplifying the presentation of green infrastructure to allow for design development through the Design Code and planning processes
- Ensuring consistency and compatibility of the various masterplan layers
- Providing clear frontages around development parcels and key routes
- Expanding the high-level sustainability and energy framework section
- Simplifying the approach to character areas within the site to provide an appropriate starting point for a future Design Code and ensuring these cover both built form and green infrastructure
- Committing to further engagement at the Design Code stage

8.12. The masterplan has focussed upon establishing an appropriate spatial framework for the site through a clear series of plans setting out the proposed approaches to:

- Land Use – identifying the areas of the site to be used for residential, structural green space, a primary school and community hub
- Development – identifying the built / non-built areas
- Movement and Access – identifying a hierarchy of routes for vehicles, the proposed bus route and utility and leisure routes for pedestrians and cyclists (both on-road and off road) with illustrative sections and design principles
- Green infrastructure – identifying a series of key spaces in and around the site with associated design principles aligned to the Council's open space standards
- Biodiversity – identifying key assets to be retained and enhanced and dark corridors and light-sensitive zones to be considered in developing the green infrastructure proposals
- Height and density – showing variation from two-storeys at the more sensitive edges to the site to a maximum of four storeys along the gateway street and south-western quarter of the site
- Urban Design – identifying a block structure which will provide clear definition of the street hierarchy with landmark buildings at key points to aid legibility
- Illustrative masterplan – showing how the parameters could be combined and the site developed
- Character areas – four broad areas are identified within the site where different forms of development and green infrastructure might be appropriate in response to the site context and proposed development layout. These will form the starting point for a subsequent design code.

8.13. A summary assessment of the masterplan against the requirements of the relevant site-specific policy is set out in the table below. Formal assessment of any schemes' compliance with relevant policies will be through any associated planning application(s).

Policy SP16: Site NS1 – North of Stevenage	
Criteria	**Comment**
A comprehensive and deliverable Strategic Masterplan for the entire allocation is to be prepared and agreed between the landowner/developer and the Council	The masterplan is being presented to this meeting for consideration
Integration with adjoining development in Stevenage Borough including site-wide solutions for access, sustainable travel, education, retail, and other necessary medical and social infrastructure to include:	The masterplan shows the main access route entering from North Road, serving the key facilities at the centre of the site and connecting to the development in Stevenage at a point which has been agreed and fixed by the permissions for that development. See below for commentary on the remaining elements of this criterion.
2FE of primary-age education provision either wholly within the site or in conjunction with the adjoining land allocated for development in Stevenage Borough ensuring adequate primary school capacity across both sites over the lifetime of the developments;	A site for a two-form entry (2FE) primary school is identified on the flattest land at the centre of the site. This is supported by the County Council subject to the detailed technical investigations that will be required as part of any planning permission and land transfer agreement. A separate primary school site has already been permitted within the Stevenage Borough site to provide places for those homes. The phasing and delivery of the school site will be further considered and managed through the planning application and design code processes. Consideration will be given to any appropriate 'meanwhile' uses of the site until such time as the school is required.
Travel provision designed having regard to the Stevenage Mobility Strategy and including: • Effective links into the existing pedestrian and cycle, public transport and road networks; and • an upgraded junction at the intersection of Graveley Road / North Road	The masterplan layout has been designed to prioritise active and sustainable modes of travel. A bus loop will connect through the NS1 site and the adjoining development in Stevenage including a proposed car free section adjoining the school and community hub. Multiple points of walking and / or cycling connection are provided between the two sites providing onward links into the established pedestrian and cycle network in Stevenage.

	Links in the north-west and south-west corners of the site connect into Graveley and the B197 North Road. Outside of the masterplan process, works have recently been completed to signalise the Graveley / North Road intersection. Work is ongoing to design and deliver a wider, shared-use path alongside the B197 between Stevenage and Graveley, and upgrading the National Cycle Network route 12, which runs through Graveley and up to Letchworth and Baldock. The masterplan facilitates a potential routing of this link inside the western site boundary potentially providing a more direct and amenable route than via the Graveley Road / North Road intersection.
Neighbourhood-level retail facilities subject to an up-to-date assessment of local demand and supply;	The evidence supporting the masterplan identifies there is now unlikely to be sufficient demand to support retail provision. This takes account of existing retail in the area, facilities which have already been approved or allocated within Stevenage and changes in retail habits since the production of the evidence which underpins the Local Plan. The masterplan therefore includes an appropriate, central location within the NS1 site for a community hub co-located opposite the school and proposed play facilities. The masterplan identifies a range of possible uses including co-working spaces, meeting rooms, small cafe, health, childcare and a community hall. Detailed proposals will be developed as the scheme progresses.
A detailed drainage strategy identifying water infrastructure required and mechanism(s) for delivery	Sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDs) are provided within the site. The masterplan identifies 'in principle' solutions for wastewater drainage. These will be secured through the planning process and / or separate agreements between the developer and wastewater providers.
At least 9 serviced plots for self-build development	This is not explicitly addressed at this stage. Appropriate locations for self-build will be identified through the Design Code and / or planning approvals.
Structural planting to create a sense of place, integration into surrounding landscape and a long-term, defensible Green Belt boundary to the north	The landscape and green infrastructure proposals are central to the overall structure of the masterplan layout. A landscape buffer along the northern perimeter is proposed that is sensitive to the landscape setting of the site allowing it to integrate into its surroundings. This will consist of a mix of hedgerow and tree planting. The open space in the masterplan layout exceeds the Council's overall standards by approximately

	20%. Guidelines are provided for different types of open space. The indicative plans show a Biodiversity Net Gain of at least 10% can be achieved on site with opportunities to exceed this to be explored as detailed elements of the scheme are fixed and / or further development.
Integration of existing public rights of way to provide routes through the site to the wider countryside… including: • Footpath Graveley 006 and Bridleway Gravely 008 along the perimeter of the site; and • Footpath Graveley 007 as a south-east to north-west route through the site and link path from the urban area to the Stevenage Outer Orbital Path	Generous landscape buffers are proposed along the north-west and eastern edges of the site incorporating the perimeter Rights of Way. The 'central park' area along the Hertfordshire Way corridor is a key defining feature of the masterplan. This significant area of open space will incorporate footpath Graveley 007, link through to the proposed country park in Stevenage and adjoin the proposed school and community hub.
Sensitive consideration of existing settlements, landscape features and heritage assets including: i. Graveley village and Conservation Area; ii. the St Nicholas & Rectory Lane Conservation Area including the Grade I listed St Nicholas Church and Rook's Nes iii. Chesfield Park. iv. Church of St Etheldreda v. Manor Farm	The masterplan is supported by a wide-ranging evidence base including landscape and heritage studies. The approach to the northern boundary – which lies closest to the Graveley Conservation Area – and eastern boundary – which adjoining the St Nicholas & Rectory Lane Conservation Area – have been informed by these studies.
Detailed design and layout of the site to be informed by site-specific assessments to mitigate any landscape, heritage and Green Belt impacts to the fullest reasonable extent	See above. This criterion refers to 'detailed design and layout' this will follow later in the planning process. However, the masterplan sets an appropriate framework for these requirements to be achieved. The outline planning application for this site is 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).

Sustainability

8.14. In June 2022, Cabinet endorsed a series of sustainability principles, produced in consultation with the Project Board, to guide the assessment of masterplans. These recognise that sustainability is multi-faceted including consideration of social and green infrastructure and transport alongside resource use.

8.15. A high-level assessment of the masterplan against the sustainability principles is attached as Appendix B. This shows that the masterplan for NS1 successfully meets the majority of the identified principles (19 out of 25). Of the remainder, three have been partially met at this point with further detail to follow and three have not been addressed at this stage of the scheme development as the scheme has not yet reached the relevant stage of design development. These matters will be resolved as the scheme progresses through the formal planning stages.

Next steps

8.16. Subject to Cabinet and Full Council approval, the masterplan will be adopted as a material consideration for any future planning decisions relating to the site. Any 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.

8.17. 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. The masterplan provides appropriate 'hooks' to accommodate these matters but the subsequent planning processes are the most appropriate place for these to be resolved and secured. These matters include (but are not limited to):

- Developing detailed proposals for:
    - The mobility hubs including ensuring compatibility with any (emerging) schemes in Stevenage for car clubs and bike hire
    - The precise nature and specification of the walking and cycle connection from the north-east of the site towards Graveley
    - Uses to be accommodated in the community hub; this is to include liaison with the NHS to ensure sufficient GP capacity is provided across the wider Stevenage area having regard to the cumulative impact of development proposals around the town
- Identifying specific projects for off-site contributions towards matters such as sports provision and sustainable travel improvements
- Clarifying the potential phasing and delivery of the school site and, at the request of the Project Board, considering appropriate 'meanwhile uses' for this land if it is not anticipated to come forward until later in the scheme
- Considering and securing the most appropriate management and stewardship model for the social, green, blue [water] and transport infrastructure that will be provided

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under the Terms of Reference for Cabinet, Section 5.7.18 of the Constitution states that it may exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority and receive reports

on strategic planning matters (except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Service Director: Regulatory).

9.2. Section 4.8.2(i) of the Constitution contains a general power for Full Council to receive and debate reports from Cabinet.

9.3. There is no statutorily set definition of a '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 2011-2031 (adopted November 2022) 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 June 2023 (see link in Section 18 of this report) 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 (2014) 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 the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Government Acts 1972, 2000 and 2003 and under associated planning legislation and guidance, including but not limited to the Planning Act.

9.11. 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.

9.12. 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.

9.13. Under the Council's constitution, paragraph 14.6.4(ii) authorises the Service Director Regulatory to enter into contracts for the supply of services, relevant in this case for the use of consultants to act on the Council's behalf in the preparation of the masterplan.

9.14. 14.6.4(viii) authorises the Managing Director and Service Directors to set fees and charges in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations and relevant policies, in consultation with the Executive Member, relevant in this case to seek to recover these costs from the Developer.

9.15. 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.

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. In April 2022, a specific Masterplanning risk was created and included in the Council Delivery Plan. This has been periodically updated and reported upon. This identified and described the following:

- 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

11.3. Key mitigations have included:

- Adoption of the Local Plan by Full Council on 8 November 2022
- The internal restructure of teams within the planning service and recruitment to additional posts identified in budget Growth Bids
- Securing external consultant resources to provide additional capacity and discipline-specific expertise;
- Delivering funding for resources through Planning Performance Agreements
- Monthly Project Board meetings to monitor and escalate any barriers to progress
- Ongoing monitoring of workload and service-wide budgets

11.4. This item will not be included in the 2024/25 Council Delivery Plan, as progress is dependent on third parties and the Council activities involved are considered business-as-usual. Strategic oversight will continue via the Project Board and Strategic Planning Matters reports to Cabinet having regard to the above broad framework.

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 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 examining Inspector. Paragraph 11 of their report on the plan 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 The outline planning application for this site is 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 – North Stevenage Strategic Masterplan Framework

16.2 Appendix B – Assessment against approved Sustainability Principles

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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, July 2023 [*including endorsement of current Project Board Terms of Reference and process notes*]

18.4 North Herts Council Website – Masterplans [*See North of Stevenage page for baseline summary report, statement of consultation and Design Review Panel report*]

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Strategic Masterplan Framework

May 2024

North Stevenage

Stantec

croudacehomes

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Branding inspired by E.M. Forster's work as an author, particularly 'A Room with a View' and also the beautiful surrounding countryside.

From 1883 to 1893 E.M. Forster lived at "Rooks Nest" a house past St. Nicholas church in Stevenage.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Purpose and Status of the Document

Introduction

Land to the north of Stevenage has been identified in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan for the development of approximately 900 homes and supporting facilities and infrastructure.

This Strategic Masterplan Framework Document shows how the scheme can be designed and delivered so as to create a successful and vibrant community on the site which integrates with the proposed development to the south and respects the character of other nearby areas, notably including Graveley village to the north and the proposed Forster Country Park to the south-east.

The masterplan summarises the work which has been done to assess the ecology, landscape, local character and transport networks of the area, alongside other opportunities and constraints. It then presents a proposed masterplan framework which responds to all these considerations to create a new neighbourhood with a community hub, Primary School, open spaces and housing, and considers how the character of different parts of the site will respond to their setting and function. The masterplan will then inform subsequent planning applications, which will develop the concept from the masterplan into more detailed proposals.

This Strategic Masterplan Framework has been subject to extensive consultation with officers at North Hertfordshire District Council and identified stakeholders. This process also included discussion at a Design Review Panel in February 2023 and subsequent progress and updates were presented to the Council's Growth Board in May 2023.

Site Location

The site is located east of North Road, north of the urban edge of Stevenage. The southern boundary also lies adjacent to land within Policy H03 of the Stevenage Local Plan which has planning consent for 800 new homes and is presently under construction.

Purpose of Document

The purpose of the following document is:

- To set out how design proposals align with Policy SP9 Design and Sustainability and Policy SP16 Site NS1 - North of Stevenage and national and local plan policy. This includes delivery of 900 homes, a 2FE Primary School and Community Uses.
- To provide a development framework based on a set of clear design parameters that will guide high quality placemaking on the site
- To show the site is linking into the consented site at HO3 within Stevenage Borough Council
- To constitute a material consideration that will form the basis of an Outline Planning Application
- Clarify the parameters and principles for which planning approval will be sought
- Provide a framework to secure design quality and support co-ordinated high-quality development

The proposals in the Strategic Masterplan Framework will be subject to further, detailed investigations as the scheme progresses. This may result in elements of the masterplan being refined or altered.

Structure of Document

The document begins by setting out an exciting Vision for the site informed by a clear contextual analysis identified in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 then develops a Masterplan Framework comprised of 'design parameters' focused on green infrastructure, access and place making.

An illustrative masterplan is explored in Chapter 5 which represents one illustration of how the design parameters can be delivered on the site.

The final chapter is Chapter 6. This provides an illustrative exploration of Character Areas with design principles based on density, materials, landscape, built form and housing typologies.





Site Location Plan



Chapter 2

Vision and Placemaking Objectives

2.1. The Vision

Our vision is to create a sustainable northern extension to Stevenage with its own distinctive character that provides a new and permanent northern edge to the town, reflects the transition from town to country and respects the adjoining historic village of Graveley.

The scheme will deliver a new primary school, community uses and high-quality homes.

An extensive network of green spaces, centered around a generous linear park along the Hertfordshire Way, will help connect the site with Graveley, adjoining development in Stevenage, the proposed Forster Country Park and the wider rights of way network with an attractive and walkable new neighbourhood for residents and visitors.



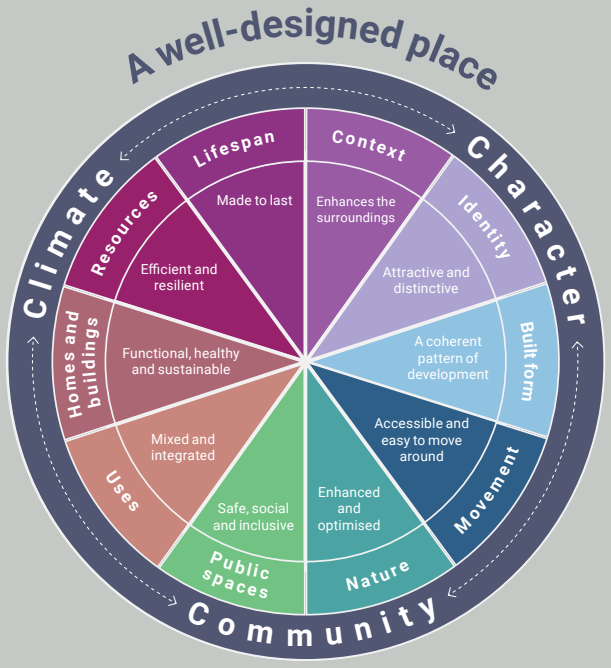


Illustration of the Community Hub and School

2.2. Placemaking Themes and Objectives

In order to deliver the Vision, we are following a set of placemaking themes and objectives that will address the well-designed place characteristics defined in the National Model Design Code and National Design Guide.

These are as follows:



10 Characteristics as identified in the National Design guide

Context

The development will address the existing natural features and context of the site, including sloping topography, landscape character and areas of existing planting such as Ten Acre Plantation. In addition, new development will respond to and interpret the historic local character including Graveley and adjacent parts of north Stevenage.

Identity

The development will draw on the existing vernacular around Graveley and Stevenage to inspire the site identity. However, it will aim to establish an identity of its own. This will be achieved through appropriate scale buildings, considered architectural treatment and a series of formal and informal green spaces including a well-defined street hierarchy to create a distinctive, legible and attractive neighbourhood. A set of character areas responding to key generators will help strengthen the overall identity but also provide some local variation.

Built Form

The density and heights of the proposed buildings will address the sensitivity around the rural edges and partial site visibility as well as enhance placemaking opportunities around key spaces, streets and vistas. Landmark buildings, such as the primary school and community hub, will be established at the centre of the development helping to create a legible community heart.





Movement

A proposed network of green connections will integrate with the existing Public Right of Way (PROW) network linking Graveley with the proposed Country Park, the H03 site and further connections to Stevenage. The attractive, legible and direct routes will create a walkable/cyclable and well connected network to minimise the need for journeys by private vehicles. An improved bus connection will be brought into the site, alongside a mobility hub integrating the site with the wider urban context.

Nature

Existing biodiversity around the development edges, which includes the woodland belt to the south and adjacent plantations and hedgerows around the periphery will be well incorporated into the overall design. Additional green infrastructure through parkland, street tree planting and water attenuation will be introduced to enhance overall biodiversity and placemaking.

Public Spaces

The development will feature a network of streets and public open spaces to enhance the attractive character of the proposed uses as well as to mitigate the rural edges. The Community Hub will include a well integrated and attractive market square. Also, the Central Core will feature a shared space with filtered traffic to favour active and sustainable modes of transport with school drop-off being permitted and managed. Smaller open spaces will feature within housing areas and provide play facilities.

Uses

Taking account of a new local retail centre at HO3, a new primary school and community hub will be established on site, which will be located at the centre of the development. A key theme is to ensure new housing for all encourages a strong sense of community and by creating safe places for people to meet, be socially interactive and to feel a sense of ownership.

Resources

The development will seek to ensure an efficient use and overall reduction of resources that will help to contribute towards climate change mitigation and adaptation. The development will need to be resilient to future climate challenges through future-proofed design, which responds to government policy, including the Future Homes Standard.

Lifespan

An attractive and well-designed place will ensure that the development can stand the test of time through quality and simplicity.



Chapter 3

Context and Site Analysis

3.1. Strategic Connectivity

Public Transport

The site benefits from good public transport services, which include a 5-10min walk from the proposed site entrances to services 55 and 100/101. The 55 service provides regular half-hourly connections between Letchworth and Stevenage town centre, accessible via Graveley, while the 100/101 service provides regular 40min services between Hitchin and Stevenage, via Lister Hospital.

The bus and railway stations are located approximately 3km from the site and are directly accessible via bus and cycle connections, in around 15-20mins. The railway station is within a walking distance to the bus station and it is served by Great Northern, LNER and Thameslink services with frequent and direct connections to Brighton, Cambridge, London King's Cross and St Pancras, York, Leeds and beyond. London connections are available approximately every 10 mins.

Cycling

The site is linked to a National Cycle Route 12 (NCR12), which provides off-road connections to Stevenage Town Centre, railway station and beyond, including to Letchworth Garden City to the north. A bridleway link to the south of the site forms a traffic free connection to the NCR 12, facilitating an off-road journey to Stevenage. North Road will undergo road improvements as part of the NS1 and the H03 schemes, which will deliver a (partial) segregated/off-road route and consequently provide more direct cycling links to the extensive network of cycle lanes in Stevenage.

Walking

The site is well linked to the adjacent areas of Graveley and north Stevenage, as well as the wider countryside. The area contains an extensive network of PROWs connecting the site to the surrounding services, recreation areas and landmarks.

The existing pedestrian network places the Old Town, within a 15-20min walk. A number of schools, including primary and secondary are accessible via the same routes along with a 6th Form College.

A number of public houses are also accessible via the PROW network to the south and north towards Graveley.

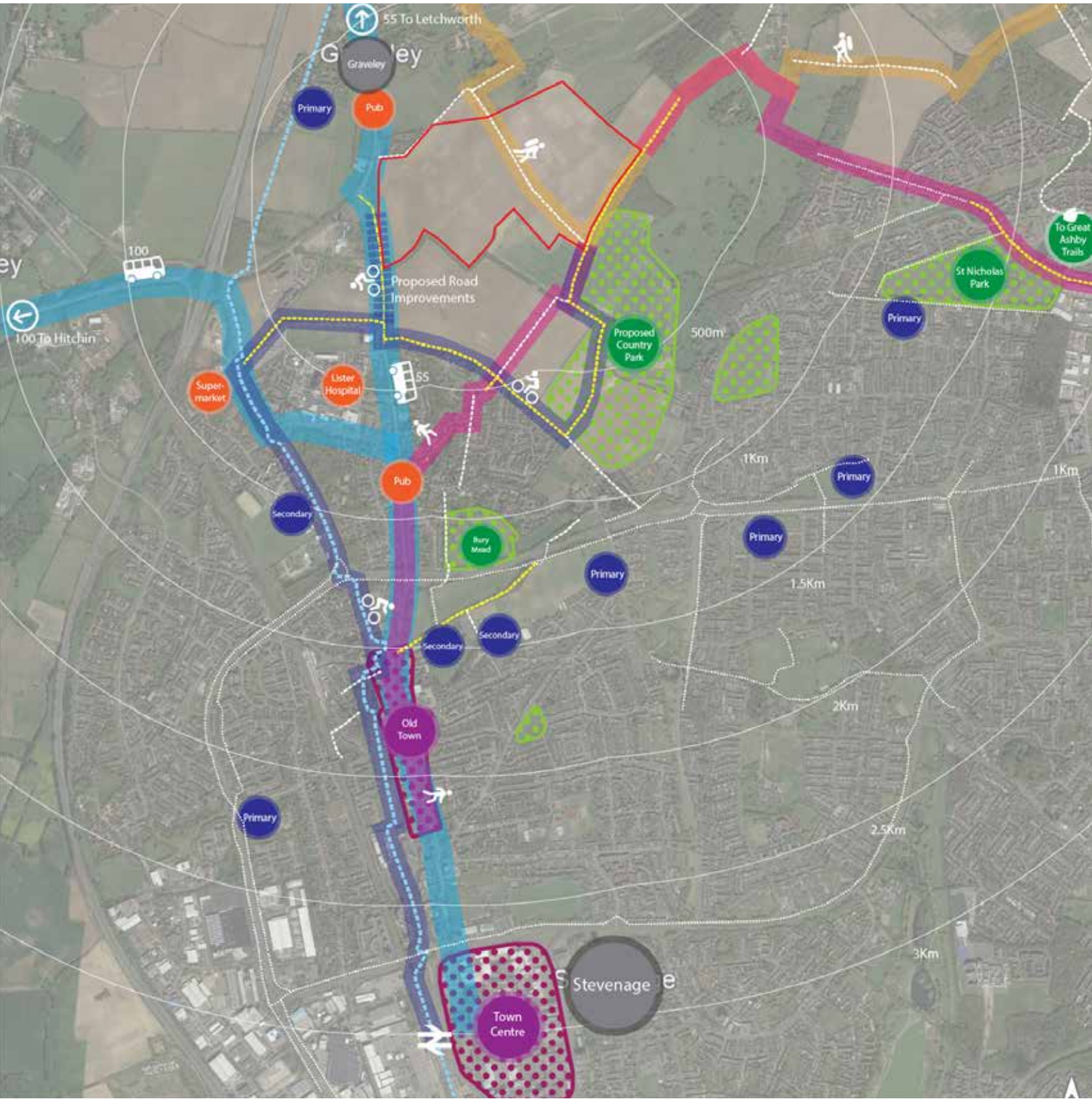
In addition, a supermarket is accessible along an existing bridleway to the west, within a 10min walk. The site is served by Hertfordshire Way - a long distance trail, which runs through the centre of the site and generally runs in the easterly direction towards Great Ashby, where further forest trail opportunities exist.

The site is an excellent location for recreation opportunities as well as important services and creates an opportunity to further improve these links.

Local Services and Facilities

The site enjoys a number of facilities within a walking distance, which should reduce the day to day reliance on private car. These include Lister hospital with on site pharmacy services, a large Sainsbury's supermarket to the west of the hospital and a number of pubs within Graveley and Stevenage.




55 To Letchworth
Graveley
Primary
Pub
100
100 To Hitchin
Proposed Road Improvements
Proposed Country Park
500m
St Nicholas Park
To Great Ashby Trails
Super-market
Lister Hospital
55
Pub
Secondary
Bury Mead
Primary
1Km
1.5Km
2Km
2.5Km
3Km
Secondary
Secondary
Old Town
Primary
Stevenage
Town Centre

3.2. Green Infrastructure Network

The development will provide a network of green infrastructure relating to, and influenced by existing:

- Public Open Space and Recreation
- Landscape Character
- Views and Visual Amenity
- Wildlife and Biodiversity

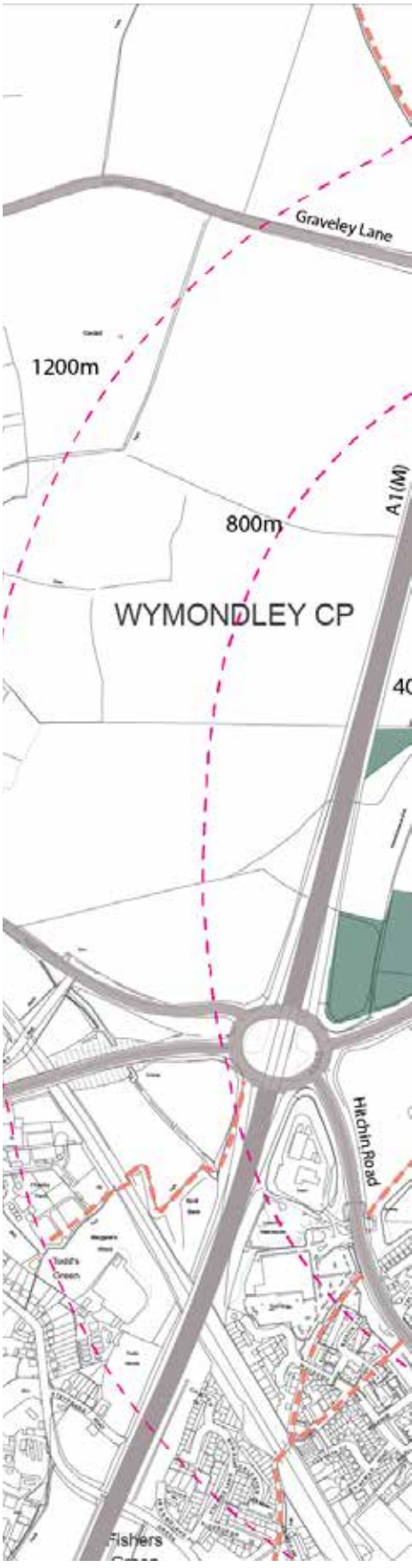
Public Open Space and Recreation

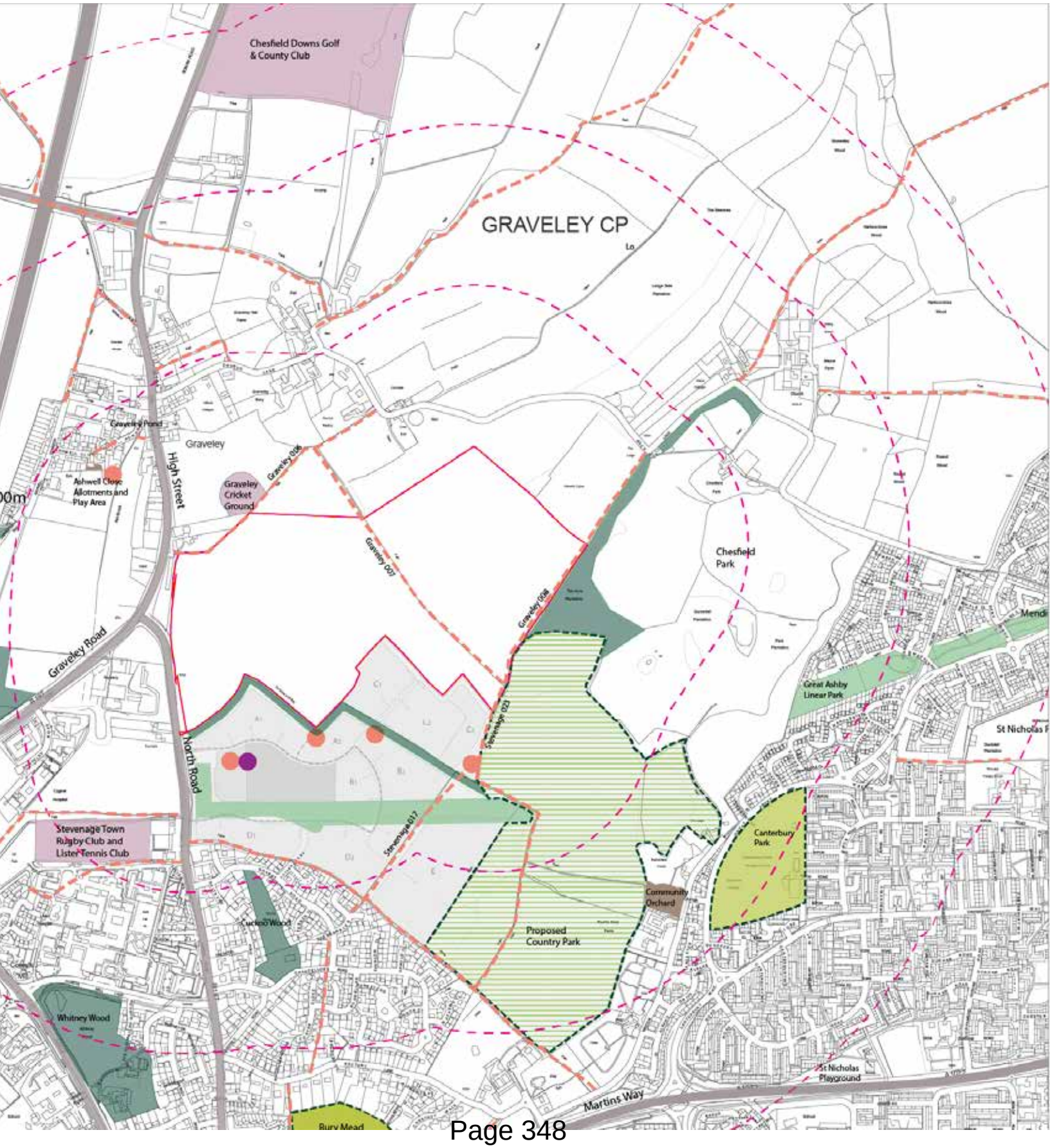
There are a number of existing recreational assets close to the Site and within recognised catchment distances. Facilities for outdoor sports include the Graveley Cricket Club to the north and Stevenage Town Rugby Club to the southwest. Playing fields associated with nearby secondary schools may provide opportunities for community use. There are small allotments, amenity and play area spaces in Graveley Village to the north-west serving local needs.

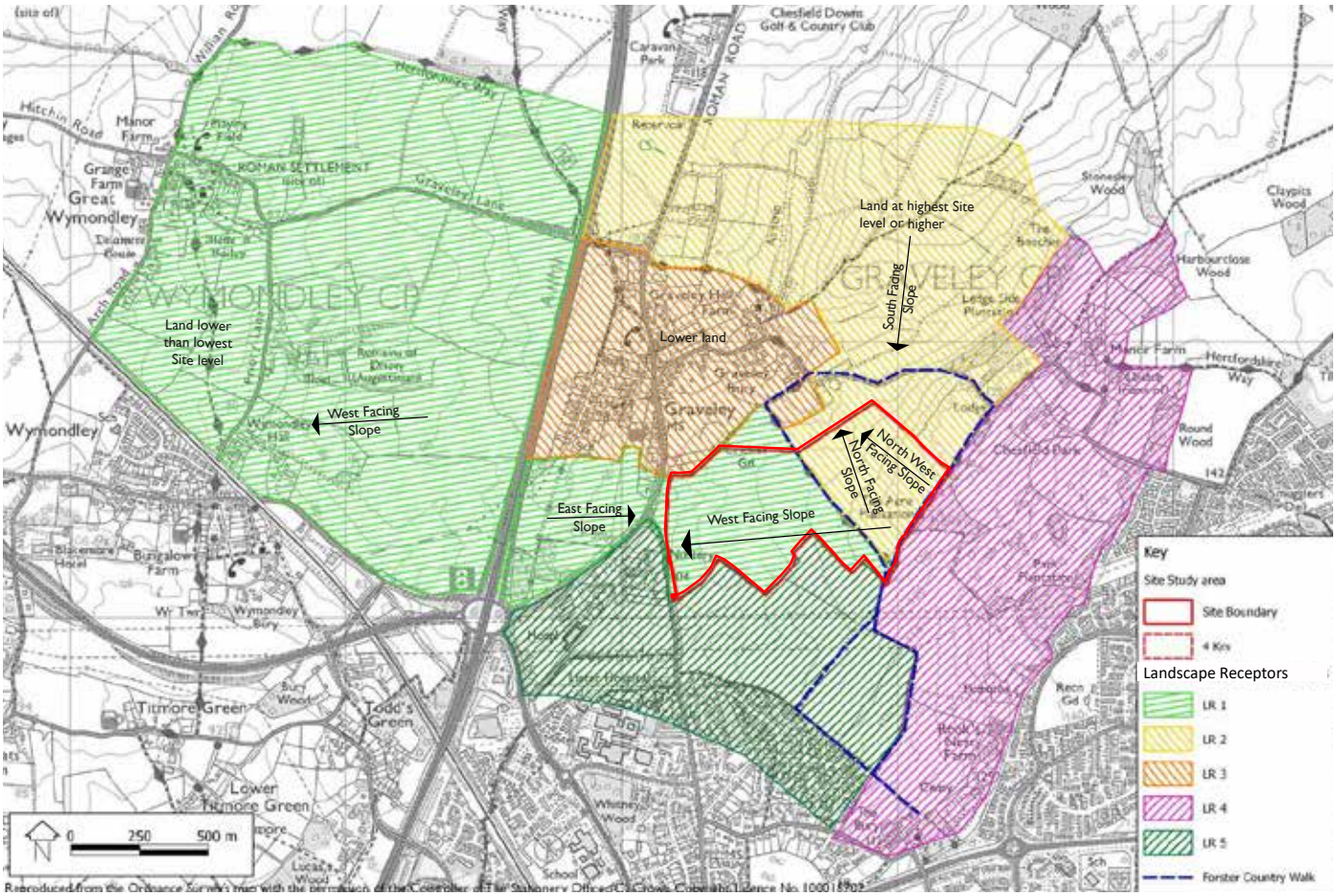
There are pockets of natural and semi-natural woodland within the urban area of Stevenage though these are not publicly accessible. Access to the wider countryside and associated natural environment is provided by several PROWs footpaths and bridleways, which cross the site. These provide connectivity with nearby settlements and include the Hertfordshire Way and Forster Country Walk circulating along footpath numbers 006, 007 and 008.

There are presently no parks and gardens in the immediate area, reflecting the edge of town location.

A significant area of public open space is to be provided as 'Forster Country Park' to the immediate south-east of the site as part of the adjoining development in Stevenage. Proposals for this site are currently under consideration and are expected to be predominantly natural and semi-natural in type. The adjoining site will also provide equipped play and a central green corridor within its developed area.




Chesfield Downs Golf
& County Club
GRAVELEY CP
Graveley Pond
Graveley
High Street
Ashwell Close
Allotments and
Play Area
Graveley
Cricket
Ground
Graveley 006
Graveley 007
Graveley 008
Chesfield
Park
Graveley Road
North Road
Stevenage 023
Great Ashby
Linear Park
St Nicholas
Stevenage Town
Rugby Club and
Lister Tennis Club
Stevenage 017
Canterbury
Park
Community
Orchard
Cuckoo Wood
Proposed
Country Park
Whitney Wood
St Nicholas
Playground
Martins Way
Bury Mead



Landscape Character Plan

Landscape Context

The Site slopes down in two directions – generally down towards both the northern and western boundaries.. Undulations in the landform create minor ridges and dips. The topographic variation of the site and its surroundings, in combination with existing land uses and landscape features, contributes to subtly different local landscape character areas that provide the local landscape context. These comprise:

Landscape Receptor 1:

Large chalk agricultural fields on the urban edge, including tree-lined transport routes. The character area is a predominantly agricultural landscape containing several discordant features including the A1(M) motorway and motorway junction, and the main road network connecting through to Stevenage and Graveley. Local landscape assets include hedges, hedgerow trees and occasional small pockets of woodland plantation.

The landscape character encompasses the western part of the Site - a large, open arable field, bounded to the west by highway vegetation alongside North Road and Graveley Road, and to the south by plantation trees within a shelter belt.

Locally, the character transitions gradually towards the village of Graveley and away from the higher parts of the Site in the south-east. To the eastern edge, on higher ground, the character is more open. This boundary is marked by the Forster Country Walk/ Hertfordshire Way National Trail.

At its southern boundary, the character becomes influenced by a woodland plantation belt situated beyond the Site. Beyond this, the character area will be framed by a new settlement edge (development within Policy H03 within Stevenage Borough Council).

Towards the northern part of the Site the character becomes influenced by the existing settlement edge of the village of Graveley. Here, the site is bounded by a hawthorn

hedge and sycamore tree forming the boundaries of a small number of private gardens and the Graveley Cricket Club. This boundary provides an abrupt transition to the adjoining local character area to the north (LR3).

Landscape Receptor 2:

A clayland agricultural landscape on the rural edge, containing pockets of small woods.

A rolling arable landscape located between parkland landscapes to the southeast and the Chesfield Downs Golf and Country Club to the northwest.

The land rises to a height of approximately 140m AOD in the north-west, dipping to 100m AOD towards the edge of Graveley before rising again through and beyond the Site's eastern boundary to a height of approximately 135m AOD.

The character area encompasses the eastern parts of the Site.

Locally, this character area forms a north-west facing slope, running from the edge of Ten Acre Plantation and Chesfield Park down towards Back Lane and the eastern part of the settlement of Graveley to the north. This part of the Site has a visual relationship to the opposing slopes to the north, both of which are formed of arable fields, partially framed by remnant hedges and occasional small, wooded areas.

It features smaller fields than are found in adjoining character areas. These follow the contours of the hillside. This trait becomes less distinctive to the south (within the Site) where the slope is gentler.

Within the Site, the local character shares similar traits to the adjacent LR1 character area. However, it is distinguished by the subtle influence of a local ridgeline running northwest towards Graveley, forming distinct aspects. The ridgeline is followed by the Forster Country Way/ Hertfordshire Way National trail.

Locally, the character area plateaus alongside Ten Acre Plantation, which lies immediately outside the Site but forms a distinctive and positive boundary feature.

The arable field running down the slope within the Site towards Back Lane, is framed by a short section of poorly maintained hawthorn hedgerow with occasional elm. This forms the eastern boundary of the Site.

Beyond the Site, three additional landscape characters can be identified within the immediate surroundings. These have the potential to influence or be influenced by the development proposals. They include:

Landscape Receptor 3:

Comprising the settlement of Graveley and adjoining open spaces and paddocks, sited adjacent to the north of the Site.

The village contains several Listed buildings including the Grade I listed Church of St Mary, and the Grade II Listed buildings at Crow End on the eastern side of the historic settlement.

Collectively the village is designated as a Conservation Area (CA), although additional related open spaces to the west of the village and to the south (Graveley Cricket Club) are also included within this receptor area.

Landscape Receptor 4: Parkland landscapes

Located to the south-east of the Site and contiguous with the Site boundary.

It comprises the parkland landscapes of Chesfield Park, and fields near Rook's Nest House (E.M. Forster's childhood home), which are part of Forster Country and proposed to be developed into a Country Park. This Country Park will be sited to the south-east of the Site and forms part of the St Nicholas/ Rectory Lane Conservation Area (CA) landscape.

Chesfield Park is well-enclosed by plantation woodland along its boundaries. To the south-west, this includes 'Park Plantation' and to the north-west, the estate is framed by Ten Acre Plantation.

Ten Acre Plantation follows a local ridge line running in a south westerly direction towards Stevenage. This focuses Chesfield Park on a south-easterly aspect, with the house located centrally within the Park and locally set within mature trees.

North of Chesfield Park, Back Lane cuts across the hilltop plateau, giving way to Manor Farm beyond and its complex of Grade II and Grade II* Listed buildings. Once more, these buildings and their landscape settings are well enclosed by mature vegetation, including Ledge Side Plantation to the northeast, Harbourclose Wood to the north and Roundwood to the east.

Landscape Receptor 5

Located to the south-west of the Site. It comprises the existing built urban edge of Stevenage, including existing residential areas as well as the proposed new residential development at H03. The parameters for this new residential development permit housing, a Local Centre, and areas of public space throughout the existing fields between the Site and the existing settlement edge.

The character area encompasses Lister Hospital and various brownfield uses such as the nursery to the west of the Site.

The character of this receptor area is strongly influenced by the existing and proposed urban edge, and by the prevalence and dominance of discordant features including Lister Hospital buildings and large overhead pylons and cables which traverse the fields south of the Site. Whilst it is noted that the northernmost cable route is to be undergrounded, in part, by the proposed residential development. Nonetheless, these remain notable detractors on the landscape.

Positive landscape features include the plantation woodland forming the southern boundary of the Site, the proposed Country Park to the east (partly within this character area), and the framework of new public open spaces within the proposed Stevenage Borough Council residential development.

Views and Visual Amenity

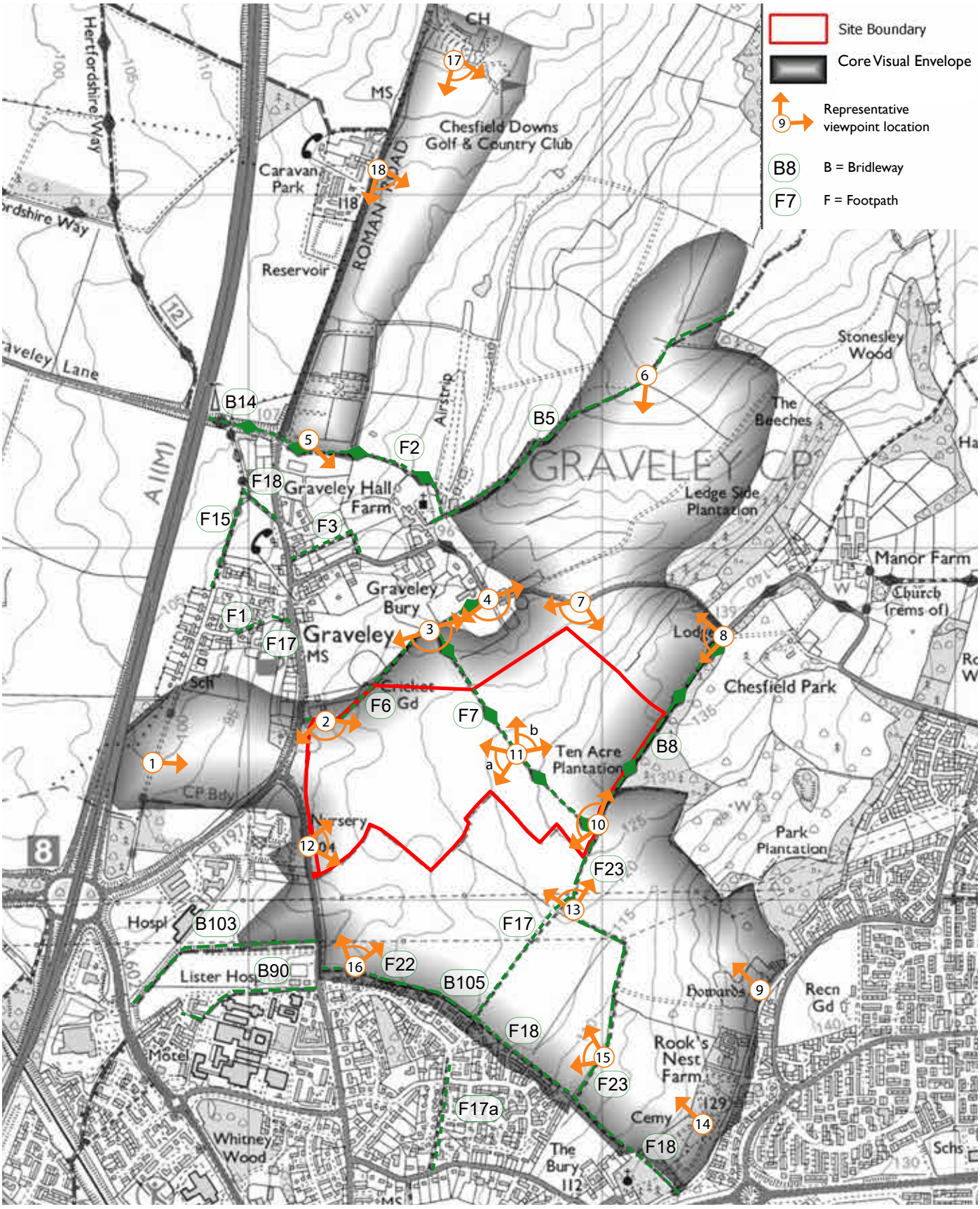
The visibility of the Site from the surrounding landscape is locally reduced by:

- Built form – existing and proposed.
- Substantial trees within the settlement of Graveley.

Existing vegetation adjacent to the field boundaries external to the Site. These include Robert's Copse and the adjacent hedgerow to the east of the Site; Ten Acre Plantation and the woodland plantation shelter belt to the south of the site; hedgerow and other vegetation between the site and the B197 (North Road) to the west; and the outgrown hedgerow to the northwest of the Site.

Residual publicly accessible views to the Site relate mainly to:

- Views from recreational paths within the agricultural landscape to the northeast.
- Views from the south - from public rights of way and from the proposed new Stevenage Borough Council residential development.
- Limited and partial or filtered views from the south east including from Weston Road Cemetery; from Rook's Nest House; and views from the existing settlement edge of Stevenage. Such views will be further limited by the proposed intervening SBC development.
- Views from the west including from Ashwell Common and filtered views from the B197 (North Road).
- Filtered views from the north-west, including from the B197 (North Road), Graveley Fruit Farm/ Car Boot fields; a section of the Hertfordshire Way recreational trail; and the Chesfield Golf and Country Club.



Visual Framework Plan

3.3. Site Analysis – Constraints and Opportunities

Site Analysis

The masterplan process has been informed by a number of technical reports undertaken. These workstreams have identified the opportunities and constraints within and across the site. The key matters include the following summarised below and set out on the accompanying plans.

Topography

The site slopes continually uphill from west to east. This will inform the shape and location of streets and residential parcels. It also sets out the most appropriate location for drainage attenuation, assuming a gravity-led system is proposed. The topography is however considered to assist in providing an appropriate location for the community hub, tied to the location of the primary school, given the County Council requirements to have as flat a site as possible.

Landscape

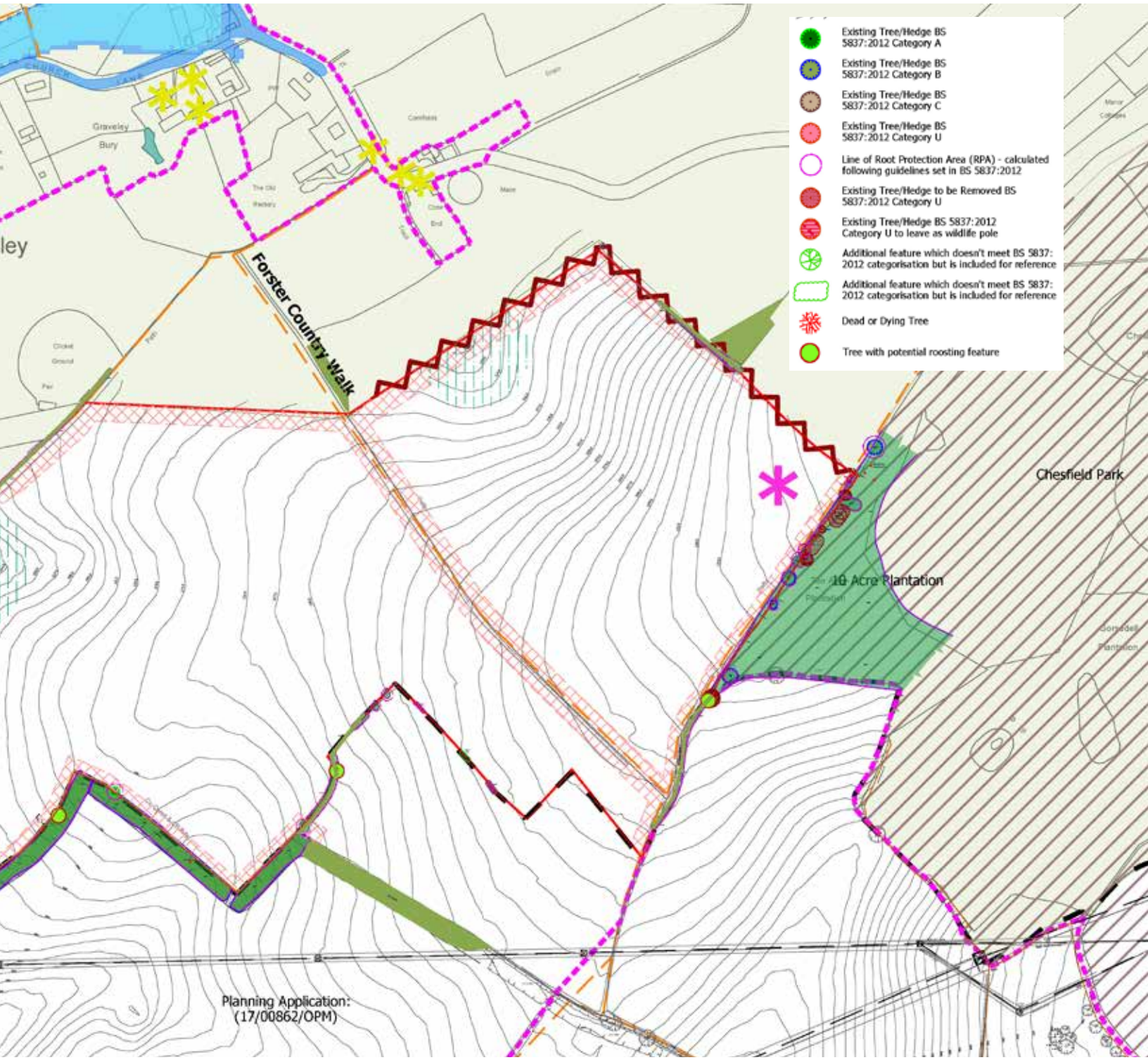
The site itself comprises an arable landscape, largely devoid of structural vegetation with the exception of the boundaries. From the north-west, west, south and south-east, existing boundary vegetation plays an important role in framing the site, providing a back-drop to views and a sense of local enclosure. Development must therefore seek to respect this planting and provide associated clearance and buffers to allow root areas to be protected. To the north-east the landscape is open to the rolling countryside beyond. This open aspect, reinforced by the defunct nature of traditional field hedgerow boundaries elevates the landscape sensitivity of the eastern half of the site requiring a more considered development approach.

As well as the parcels, the landscape will inform the potential planting areas across the site and areas of open space. This is particularly key to the north and north-east of the site. Here supplementary planting can be used to help reinforce the visual separation of the development from the village of Graveley, reinstate defunct field boundaries, and improve wildlife connectivity. At the same time, the provision of new hedges, trees and shrubs can be appropriately located to enhance the character and appearance of the new development whilst retaining key views and vistas.



Constraints Plan

Site Boundary
Flood Zone 2
Flood Zone 3
Green Belt


Existing Tree/Hedge BS 5837:2012 Category A
Existing Tree/Hedge BS 5837:2012 Category B
Existing Tree/Hedge BS 5837:2012 Category C
Existing Tree/Hedge BS 5837:2012 Category U
Line of Root Protection Area (RPA) - calculated following guidelines set in BS 5837:2012
Existing Tree/Hedge to be Removed BS 5837:2012 Category U
Existing Tree/Hedge BS 5837:2012 Category U to leave as wildlife pole
Additional feature which doesn't meet BS 5837: 2012 categorisation but is included for reference
Additional feature which doesn't meet BS 5837: 2012 categorisation but is included for reference
Dead or Dying Tree
Tree with potential roosting feature
Forster Country Walk
Chesfield Park
10 Acre Plantation
Planning Application: (17/00862/OPM)
Listed Building - I
Listed Building - II*
Listed Building - II
Existing Public Rights of Way
National Cycle Route 12
Existing Pylons and Overhead Lines
District Boundary
Conservation Area
Non-designated Heritage Asset
Sensitive Edge viewed from the north
Enhance Connectivity and Create Dark Corridors (Min 12m offset)
Site high point
Site low point
Existing Woodland
Existing Hedge
Existing Pond

Landscape Considerations for Character Zones

1. A transition area of landscape contrast between a defined settlement edge and open fields. Here is an opportunity to retain the footpath as a green link marking a clear separation from the new development to the existing village edge.

2. A low-lying and less visually prominent part of the site, tending to be well-screened from the edge of Graveley and North Road by existing vegetation. This area has capacity to accommodate taller and denser built form. The low-lying position also lends itself to receiving surface water drainage features that could provide additional amenity and wildlife value.

3. A well enclosed and visually screened area of the Site on lower ground, with greater proximity and association to the adjoining Stevenage settlement edge. This area has capacity to accommodate taller and denser built form.

4. An area of rising ground and increasing visibility to and from the surrounding countryside. Enclosed to the south by an existing woodland belt. The increased visual sensitivity and existing sense of openness provides an opportunity to connect new community buildings located centrally within the site with adjoining key open spaces. Building heights should be restricted at areas of higher ground.

5. A local ridgeline followed by the Hertfordshire Way, serving as a boundary between subtly contrasting character areas to the south-west and north-east. There is an opportunity to enhance the Hertfordshire Way as a focal green space, integrating the new development with its wider setting. To the south-east, on higher ground, development should be limited and restricted in height, retaining a notable area of open space as an enhanced gateway to and from the adjoining proposed Country Park.

6. An area of low-lying ground with a strong visual interrelationship with the open countryside to the north-east. Tall and high-density development would be inappropriate in this location. New development should be set back from the site boundary allowing targeted new planting to strategically screen and frame retained views. The low-lying position also lends itself to receiving surface water drainage features that could provide additional separation between the existing village edge to any new development.

7. An area of elevated ground, with a strong visual relationship between the arable hillsides and wooded ridges on either side of the local valley to the north. Generously proportioned landscape buffers should be retained in this area, integrating the existing bridleway which follows the edge of Ten Acre Plantation. New native planting would enhance the connectivity between the Plantation and Robert's Copse at the north-west boundary of the Site. New development should be of restricted height and density due to the visual prominence of this higher ground.



Opportunities Plan


Graveley
Forster Country Walk
10 Acre Plantation
New Country Park
Planning Application:
(17/00862/OPM)
Site Boundary
Existing Public Rights of Way
National Cycle Route 12
District Boundary
Green Buffer (Min 12m offset)
Site low point and potential attenuation
Existing Woodland and Trees
Existing Hedge
Existing Pond
1m Contours
Green link
Potential vehicular access (including buses)
Potential pedestrian/cycle access
Main gateway
Potential community facilities on flattest terrain
Potential open space
Potential new active travel connections
Landscape Character Zones
Pub
Care Facility
Garden Centre
Primary School
Recreation

Ecology

The site itself is largely in agricultural use and therefore has limited ecological value. It is utilised by a small number of breeding birds. The boundary planting described previously has more ecological value given the nature and continuation of the trees and hedgerows, and their relationship with neighbouring land. This is particularly the case with the Ten Acre Plantation to the east of the site, which forms a large area of mature tree planting. Trees with potential bat roosting features have also been identified. The central Public Right of Way has been identified as a potential forraging corridor. Existing planting will be respected and strengthened where appropriate in order to protect its ecological value.

Green Infrastructure

An existing right of way runs north to south through the site, linking those rights of way extending beyond. This has the opportunity to provide a wider green corridor through the heart of the site, creating a natural setting for the benefit of residents and wildlife. It will encourage healthy and active lifestyles and reduce the need to use the private car, whilst also linking directly to the centrally placed community hub and primary school.

The theme of a north to south connection could also be utilised to the west linking Graveley Village with the H03 development to the south. This will provide a direct route to the wider footpath network, whilst also creating a green swathe of land through the site.

There is a strong planted boundary along the western part of the site's southern boundary. In order to respect this area, there is the opportunity for either additional planting and/or a landscape buffer in this area. This will allow the existing planting belt to retain its ecological function and ensuring that built form and ancillary factors such as lighting do not impact on this function.

The majority of the northern boundary of the site does not follow the field boundary and is therefore currently open. The development provides an opportunity to provide an appropriate planting belt in this area to respect the existing rights of way and the village of Graveley. This is not envisaged to be a strong planting belt seeking to screen the development, but a more disaggregated planting belt, featuring mainly hedgerow with strategically placed trees. This respects the heritage of the area and its previous agricultural function.

The site's topography offers the opportunity to provide long-distance views over the surrounding area. High points should be incorporated into the open space network.

Heritage and Archaeology

There are a number of heritage assets identified around the site, none of which are situated within the site itself. There are a number of listed buildings in Graveley to the north and associated with Chesfield Park to the east. There is also a Conservation Area in close proximity within Graveley, and North Hertfordshire District Council are seeking to bring forward a new Conservation Area around Chesfield Park, which would border the site. This Park is currently a non-designated heritage asset.

The footpath through the centre of the site is part of the Forster Country Walk. This links to author E.M Forster. Whilst Forster Country is not considered to be a designated or non-designated heritage asset in its own right, it forms part of the landscape setting of both the St Nicholas & Rectory Lane Conservation Area and Rook's Nest assets and is integral to the significance of the listed building (Rooks Nest House).

Further archaeological investigation will be carried out as the scheme progresses. Potential areas of interest have been identified at the north and south-west of the site. The results of more detailed surveys will inform the approach to, in particular, green infrastructure as well as any intepretation, signage or equivalent that might be provided within the site to help residents and visitors better understand the historic environment.

Access and Movement

The main vehicular access into the site is from North Road at the western boundary. Given the nature of the existing road and land ownership in the vicinity, there is little flexibility as to this location. This point allows for a focussed gateway area into the site, with strong character setting the tone for the development at its entrance. It also provides the opportunity to connect to upgraded cycling facilities on North Road.

A further vehicular access will link to the development site (H03) to the south. The location of this connection is fixed by the approved Reserved Matters application for the adjoining site. Further pedestrian and cycle links are shown.

These seek to reduce journey times to destinations such as proposed shops and the proposed country park, and encourage the use of sustainable forms of transport. They would also shorten sustainable transport journeys to wider destinations such as local schools, Lister Hospital etc. There are existing bus links along North Road, and the proposal allows an opportunity for buses to run through the site and link through the proposed development to the south.

The wider movement plan also seeks to utilise the existing rights of way within or along the site boundaries. To the north, public footpaths link the site to Graveley and High Street to the west. Along the eastern boundary, direct access is available to the existing right of way, which links to the Hertfordshire Way to the east and the existing built edge of Stevenage to the south.

Drainage

Informed by a technical study at the site, two attenuation areas are proposed on site. These are situated on identified suitable parts of the site to allow for gravity flows into the proposed basins. The largest basin would be situated in the northwest corner of the site. Its location allows a more natural buffer for the neighbouring properties. Appropriate uses can then be located around what will be a large area of land, which will also have an ecological function where possible.

The smaller attenuation basin is situated along the northern boundary. Again, its final size and shape will be determined by its functional requirement. However, this will also factor in its role as a green space and ecological functions will be incorporated in and around where possible.

The Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) will be a statutory consultee for any future planning application. They will assess the suitability of the proposed drainage strategy, in terms of both its method(s) and the location / size of attenuation features shown in the masterplan. Any substantive changes required by the LLFA may impact upon the solutions and locations presently shown in this document.

Foul Water

The greenfield site does not contain any existing foul sewers, since there are no existing foul flows. Anglian Water asset plans do not show any public sewers passing through the Site, and the topographic survey did not record any foul sewers within the site boundary. The nearest public foul water sewer to the Site is approximately 300m from the southwest boundary, south of Lister Close junction along North Road. It is a 225mm diameter sewer and the nearest manhole is reference 2700. Anglian Water have confirmed there is sufficient capacity at this sewer to accept foul effluent from.

From existing manhole reference 2700 the Anglian Water foul water sewer continues to flow south for approximately 670 metres before entering the Thames Water foul water network. Beyond this point Thames Water sewers continue to convey foul effluent from the Development to the Rye Meads Wastewater Treatment Works located just south of Stanstead Abbotts, approximately 15 miles to the south west of Stevenage.

Effluent discharge will be achieved by constructing a new type 3 adoptable foul pump station and constructing a new rising main in North Road to identified point of connection. Anglian Water confirmed the Pre-Planning Assessment Report can be submitted to accompany a foul drainage strategy for the Development should it seek planning permission.



Chapter 4

Masterplan Framework

4.1. Land Use Framework

The Land Use Framework for the development has been designed to respond to the adjacent context and local need.

Design Principles:

- Landscape-led development to incorporate and enhance adjacent green spaces;
- Neighbourhood level facilities located centrally in the most accessible location;
- A Community Hub that includes co-working spaces, meeting rooms, cafe and community hall;
- A centrally located Primary School that is easily accessible and to reinforce the area as a landmark. The location of the school is primarily focused around the user needs related to flatter topography as well as being located centrally within the site;
- A network of multi-functional open spaces, play areas, allotments and SuDS taking account of and reinforcing localised constraints and opportunities, which will enable site-wide accessibility and recreation opportunities and encourage walking;
- A neighbourhood square, mobility hub and shared central street adjacent to the school and community uses to enable community level outdoor uses and activities.

Further consideration will be given with stakeholders to how the delivery of the scheme is phased, particularly with respect to identifying the point in the development when the school needs to be delivered, but also more widely to ensure that from the first occupation by new residents they have adequate access to the infrastructure and facilities required.

The proposed school site will be subject to further technical assessment as the site progresses to ensure it meets HCC requirements for the identification and transfer of land.




Graveley
Bury
Hillside
Cottages
The Old
Rectory
Cornfields
Maze
Crow
End
Track
Graveley
Cricket
Ground
Pav
Path
Robert's Copse
Ten Acre
Plantation
Path
C1
C2
C3
A1
A2
B1
B2
Site Boundary 42.7ha
Structural Green Space 15.7ha
Residential 23.8ha
Primary School 2ha
Community Hub 0.2ha
Infrastructure 0.1ha
Movement Corridors

4.2. Development Framework

This section describes the amount and distribution of development for which approval is sought and the factors helping to shape the extents.

Design Principles:

- 12m ecology habitat offset to development from the edge of retained hedgerows, trees and woodland.
- Basin areas to the north east and north west accommodating attenuation.
- Setback from the northern boundary to enable recreation activities and sustainable movement around the edges and to help the development transition into the countryside through filtered views.
- Eastern offset adjacent to Ten Acre Plantation due to site high point.
- Central green corridor running in the north-south direction to form a dumbbell shaped gateway to the proposed Country Park to the south.
- Western green corridor running in the north-south direction to connect into the existing tree belt to the south with further connections to the H03 site and Country Park.
- Localised green spaces to assist with neighbourhood placemaking
- The total development will amount to approximately 27ha, with the remaining 15.7ha being allocated for structural green space to aid with landscaping and ecology.




Graveley
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Ground
Pav
Path
Robert's Copse
Ten Acre
Plantation
Path
C1
C2
C3
A1
A2
B1
B2
Site Boundary 42.7ha
Structural Green Space - 15.7ha
Net Development Area (Including Primary School and Community Uses) - 27ha

4.3. Movement and Access Framework

Wider Network Constraints

The highway network in this area of Stevenage can be congested at peak times so it will be important that the development is designed to encourage sustainable and active forms of travel as far as possible and in accordance with the principles of Hertfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan 4.

The highway network on North Road will be significantly altered by the addition of the traffic signal controlled access junction, together with the further traffic signal controlled junctions associated with access into the neighbouring H03 development. Further alterations will be introduced onto North Road associated with Active Travel Funding which has been awarded to Hertfordshire County Council, which will include improvements to cycle and pedestrian infrastructure on North Road to the south of the development site. It is also understood that the North Road/Graveley Road junction will be converted to traffic signal control as part of the mitigation proposed for the H03 development.

To assess the impact of the development on the wider highway network a full modelling assessment will be carried out using both standalone and microsimulation modelling and appropriate mitigation will be agreed if necessary. This study will include an assessment of Junction 8 of the A1 (M) and the main carriageway of the A1(M).

Movement

The movement strategy has been designed around maximising sustainable travel options. A multi-user active travel network within the site will provide attractive walking and cycling routes to destinations in Stevenage, Graveley and the surrounding countryside.

The development will have a clear street hierarchy that prioritises walking, cycling and buses. Street design will comply with best practice set out in HCC's Place and




The Old Rectory
Maze
Crew End
Track
Cricket Ground
Path
Robert's Copse
Primary School
Community Hub
Ten Acre Plantation
A
C1
C2
C3
A1
A2
B1
B2
Site Boundary
Development Blocks
Structural Green Space
Gateway Street
Community Street
Neighbourhood Street
Central Street and High Quality Public Realm
Lane
Edge Lane
Green Lane
Multi-Use Utility Active Travel Route
Emergency Access and Multi-Use Utility Active Travel Route
Recreational Active Travel Route
Informal Active Travel Route (Mown Path)
Public Footpath
Bridleway
Pedestrian/Cycle Access Point
Vehicular Access Point
Lane to meet adoptable standard
Indicative location of Mobility Hub

Movement Planning Design Guide, the National Model Design Code and Manual for Streets (including companion or successor editions). Internal design of the streets will be in accordance with the revised guidance as it emerges.

The general layout principles will ensure that active travel is prioritised and promoted site-wide to encourage take up of these modes of travel.

Eleven points of access into and out of the site are identified. These will provide connectivity to and from the site to surrounding facilities and destinations including the centre of Stevenage, Graveley, the adjoining development in Stevenage Borough – including the proposed school and Country Park, National Cycle Route 12 (to Letchworth) and the rights of way network and wider countryside. Key Movement proposals include:

- All homes being as close as possible to a 400m walking distance of a centrally located bus route;
- Restricted traffic movement within primary routes to discourage vehicular traffic convenience and to encourage walking and cycling locally;
- A modally filtered Central Street allowing for direct bus and active travel movements only alongside attractive public realm past the school and community hub;
- Provision of two vehicular access points, one to the H03 development to the south and the other on North Road alongside proposed highways improvements to North Road, which will enable integrated public transport opportunities;
- Emergency access to be provided between the eastern and western parcels
- Strong pedestrian and cycle permeability through and around the development connecting to the existing PROW and bridleway network to strengthen connections between Graveley and Stevenage. This will include investigating potential for a utility connection within the western site boundary as part of wider aspiration to deliver continuous walking and cycling links along B197;
- Multiple new pedestrian/cycle access points into the H03 scheme to the south.
- Junction layout to be designed in a way that ensures continous and seamless cycling and pedestrian connectivity .

Parking

The development will adhere to parking standards set out in NHDCs Local Plan. The policy states a minimum of 1 space per 1 bedroom dwelling and 2 spaces per 2 or more bedroom dwellings.

It should be noted that where parking is to be provided on-plot, parking should be provided behind the building line designed so as to ensure such parking has adequate natural surveillance.

Mobility Hubs

A mobility hub would be provided within the central community hub which may typically include gathering together facilities such as bus stops, car club parking spaces, bike and scooter hire and online parcel collection points. This hub may include a shared workplace and facilities such as cycle repair stations. The facilities provided within the community hub are yet to be defined at this stage of development, though the principle of a Mobility Hub has been included within the Masterplan design.

A smaller minihub will be provided centrally in the eastern parcels to rebalance any walking distances exceeding a 400m to the main mobility hub, which includes public transport services. The minihub may include facilities such as a car club and cycle/scooter parking.

Street Sections

The following pages set out a series of indicative cross-sections and principles for the street hierarchy. They are not the final street configurations and are provided for illustrative purposes at the masterplan stage.

These will be used to inform further development of the street typologies as the scheme progresses. This will include further consideration of the site-wide parking strategy, junctions and interfaces between street types and street-scale approaches to drainage, utilities and landscape.

Detailed requirements will be agreed and secured in a subsequent Design Code for the site which has regard to the street characteristics and hierarchies set out in the National Model Design Code, the Hertfordshire Place & Movement Design Guide and other relevant guidance.



Example of a Mobility Hub

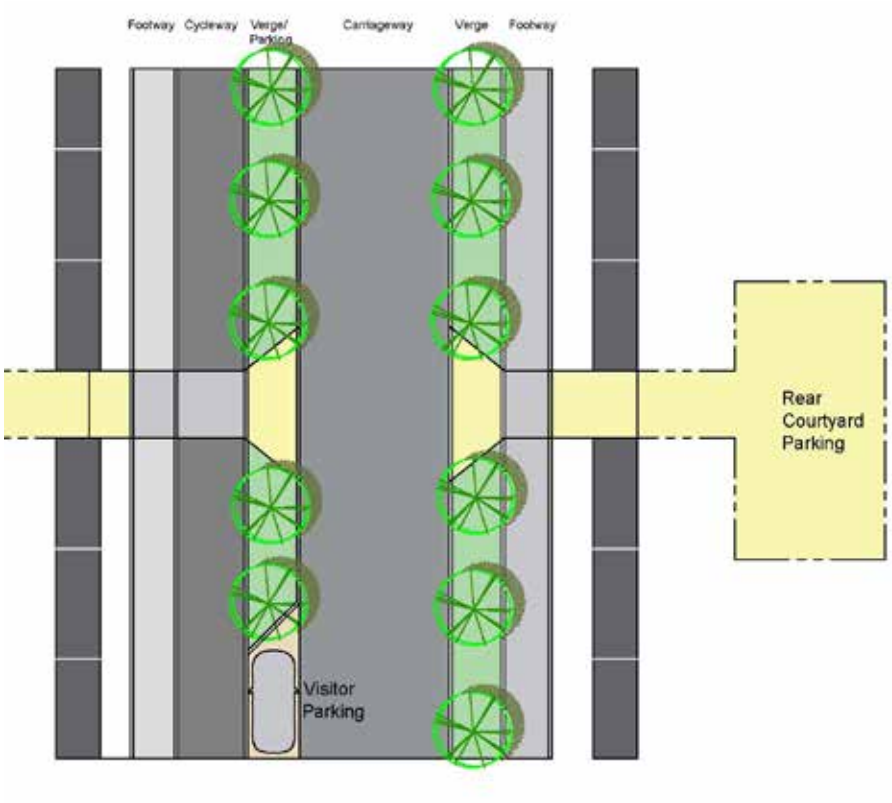


Example of a Minihub

Gateway Street

- Carriageway up to 6.75m wide – tarmac surface material, primarily for vehicular traffic including buses.
- Two approx. 2m verges to both sides – to include tree planting and visitor parking.
- 2m footway and 3m cycleway to one side protected by the verge.
- 2m footway – permeable surface material or block paving to differentiate from carriageway.

The street should limit direct access to dwellings from carriageway through accommodating occasional rear parking, in particular adjacent to the cycleway. Also, the street will be bound by strong, direct and continuous frontage enforcing clear sight lines and strong legibility.



Plan View of Gateway Street

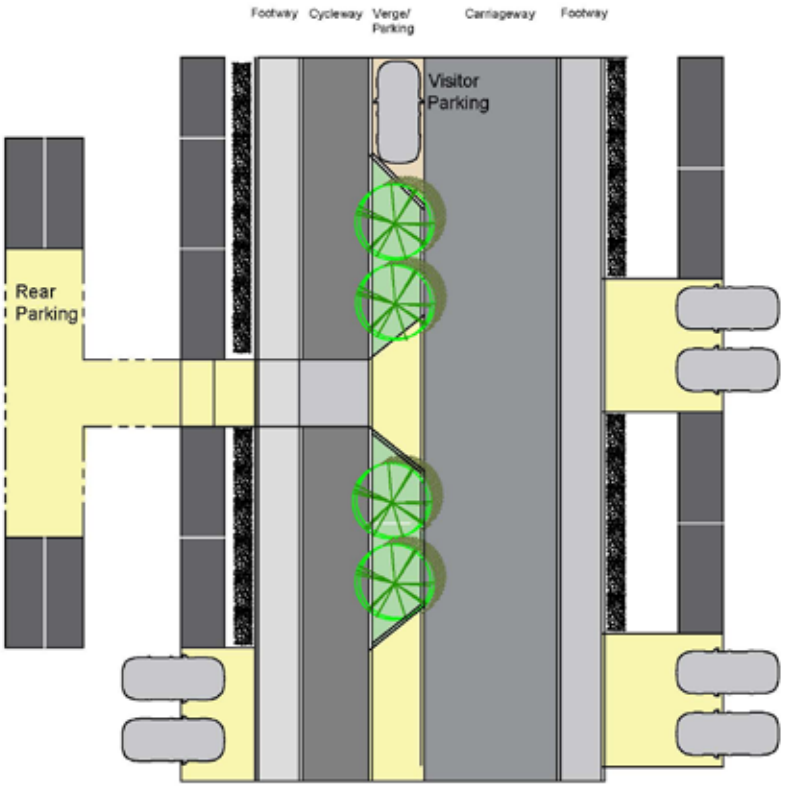


3D View of Gateway Street

Community Street

- Carriageway up to 6m wide – tarmac surface material
- Approx. 2m verge to one side – to include tree planting and visitor parking.
- 2m footway and 3m cycleway to one side protected by the verge, where cycling is not accomodated on street.
- 2m footway – permeable surface material or block paving to differentiate from carriageway.

The street should permit direct access to dwellings from carriageway, with occasional terracing requiring rear or on-street parking located within the verge. On-plot parking should be recessed behind the building line to maintain street continuity and attractive streetscape. The street has been deliberately designed to take private cars on a less-direct route to prioritise and encourage the use of active travel within and beyond the site.



Plan View of Community Street

Road narrowing may be accommodated at intersections to green spaces to reduce the impact on these as well as encouraging reduced traffic speeds.

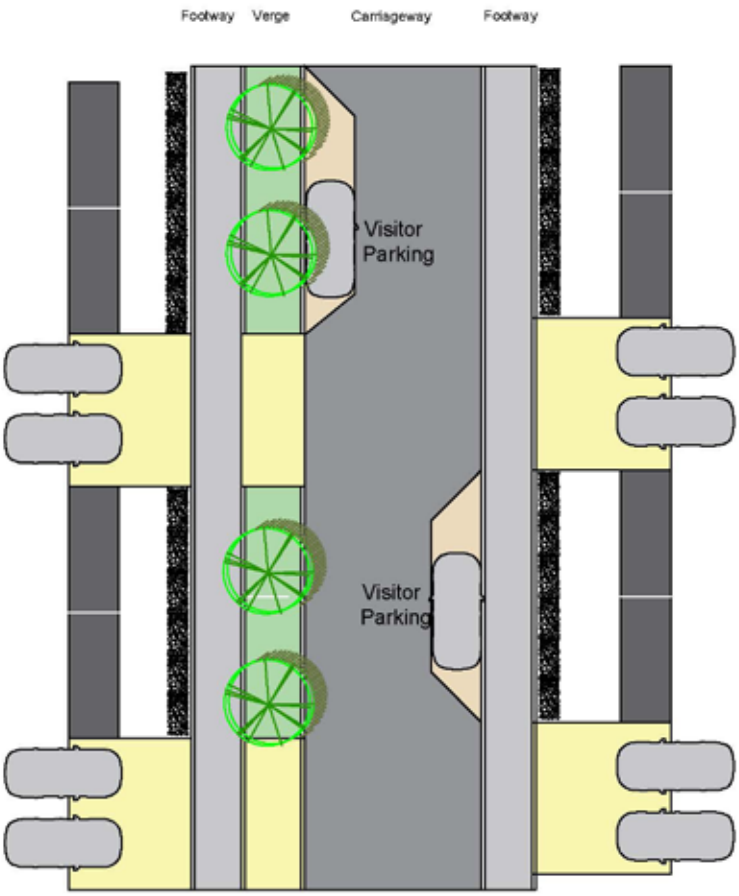


3D View of Community Street

Neighbourhood Street

- Carriageway up to 7m wide – tarmac surface material to include on-street parking.
- Approx. 2.5m verge to one side – to include tree planting.
- Two 2m footways – permeable surface material or block paving to differentiate from carriageway.

The street should permit direct access to dwellings from carriageway, with occasional terracing requiring rear or on-street parking. On-street parking should be accommodated into the street layout through localised narrowing, which will encourage reduced traffic speeds and an interest to the street. Road narrowing may be accommodated at intersections to green spaces to reduce the impact on these as well as encouraging reduced traffic speeds.



Plan View of Neighbourhood Street

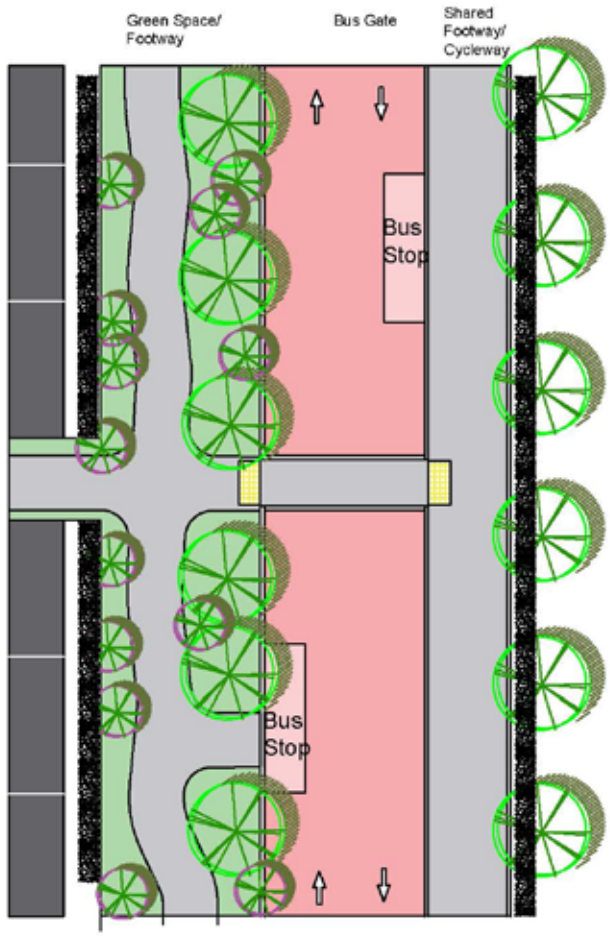


3D View of Neighbourhood Street

Central Street

A bus gate permitting active travel with extensive landscaping and public realm works. The street should establish direct east-west active travel links serving the eastern parcels and the mixed-use centre.

The 15m corridor should comprise of a 3m shared footway/cycleway, 6m bus carriageway and a 6m greenway, which is to accommodate a landscaped linear space with a 2m informal footway to be integrated with the walking network. No car travel or access to adjacent blocks should be permitted to prioritise active travel.



Plan View of Central Street



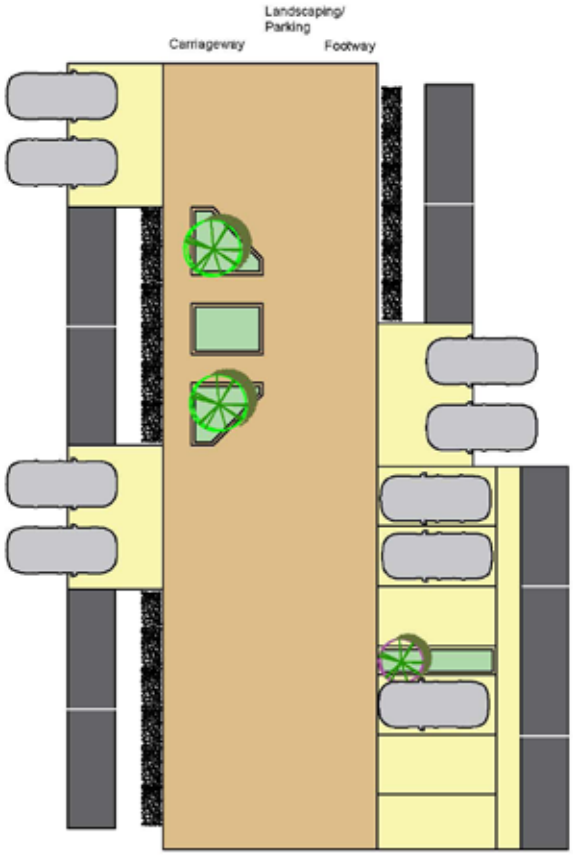
3D View of Central Street

Lanes

- Shared space carriageway and footway – width ranging from 4.2m minimum (6m to frontage parking egress) to 9m maximum.

Block paved surface finish to create an attractive single surface street. Low level shrub planting should be accommodated within buildouts, which may alternate between each side to create visual interest and a green break in development. The buildouts will also encourage reduced traffic speeds through reducing direct vehicular routes through the space.

The streets ends should be incorporated into the wider active travel network.



Plan view of Lane



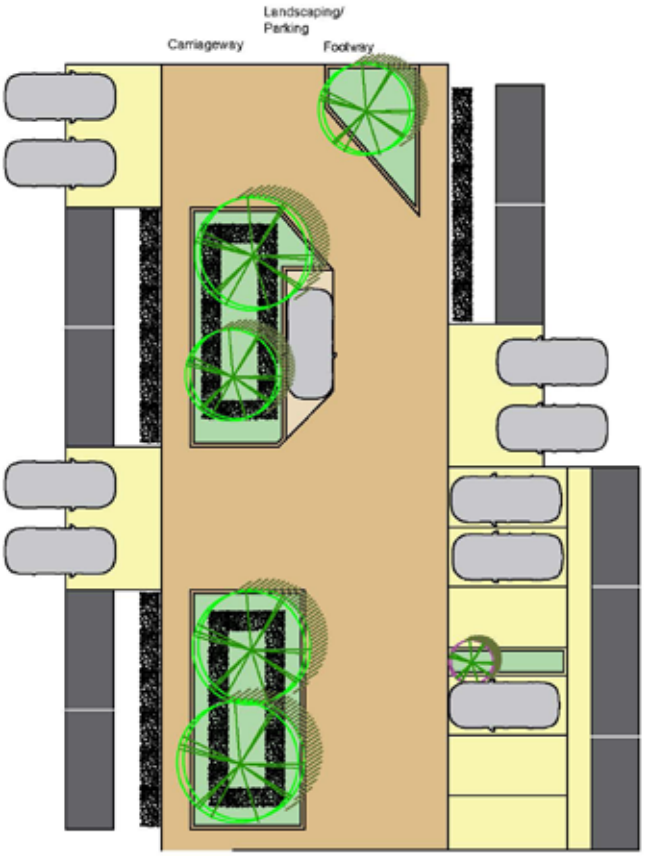
3D View of Lane

Green Lanes

- Shared space carriageway and footway – width ranging from 4.2m minimum to 12m maximum.

Block paved surface finish to create an attractive single surface street. Tree and shrub planting and on-street visitor parking should be accommodated within buildouts, which may alternate between each side to create visual interest and a green break in development. The buildouts will also encourage reduced traffic speeds through reducing direct vehicular routes through the space.

The streets ends should be incorporated into the wider active travel network.



Plan View of Green Lane



3D View of Green Lane

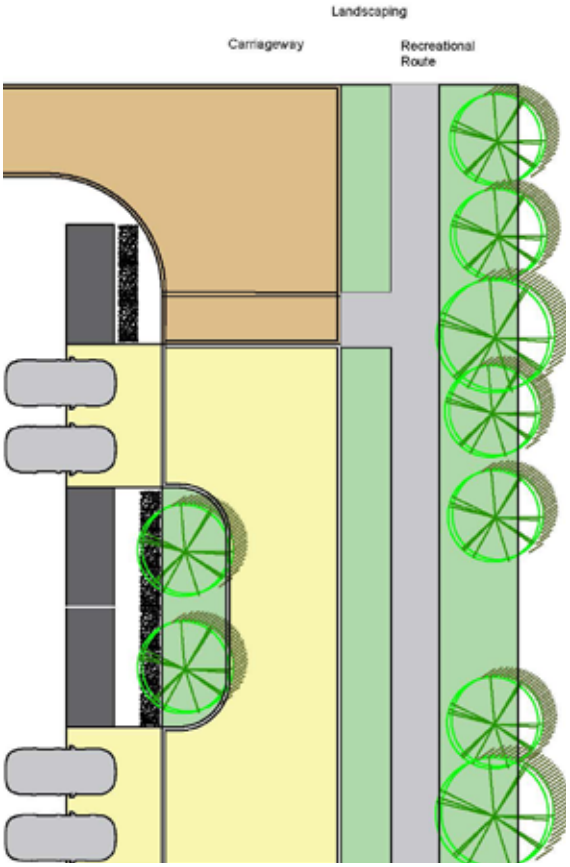
Edge Lanes

- Shared space carriageway and footway – width ranging from 4.2m minimum to 5.5m maximum.

Block paved surface finish to create an attractive single surface street. Pedestrian and cycle continuity must be retained around the edges, with routes provided alongside, where private drives may be used.

Where Cul-de-sacs are to be provided, openness to street ends and clear sight lines are to be maintained with avoidance of built obstructions, such as garages.

The streets should be incorporated into the wider active travel network.



Plan View of Edge Lane



3D View of Edge Lane

Cycle/Footway Network

The development also intends to establish an active travel route hierarchy across the site to strengthen links within the site and to the adjacent areas.

Utility Routes

The development will establish key movement axis, primarily with east-west and north-south movement, linking into Graveley and the H03 scheme. These routes will utilise a metalled or hard 3m surface to enable cycling and walking and take account of higher volumes of movement.

These links will be central to the design and connect most parts of the site with the mixed-use centre. A key connection to the existing bridleway to the south will be upgraded along the existing PROW running through the centre of the development. Appropriate lighting will need to be considered. A 3m link across the southern half of the Central Park will be created to introduce a second connection between the eastern and western parcels. This will typically be used as a utility route, but will additionally be designed and constructed to an adoptable standard for emergency use.

Recreational Routes

The site will also utilise routes, which will generally run through peripheral green spaces and connect to the local lanes around the development. These routes are envisioned to be 2m gravel surfaces taking account of the lower volumes of movement. Appropriate lighting will need to be considered.

Informal Routes

Lastly, the development will include an informal mown path along the southern boundary adjacent to the existing tree belt. Any lighting will need to be minimised to take account of the sensitive local biodiversity, in particular, along bat corridors.

Image of a Recreational Route



Image of an Informal Route



4.4. Green Infrastructure Framework

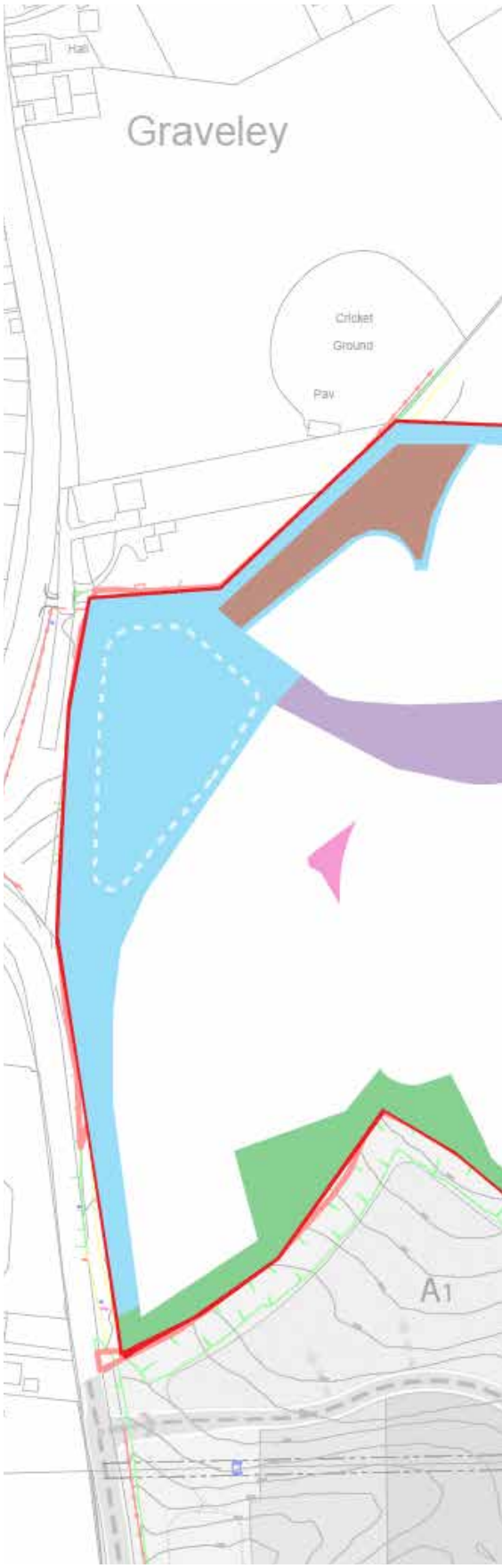
The overall Green Infrastructure Framework sets out a network of Parks, Greenways and associated green infrastructure areas that will form a network of varied open space.

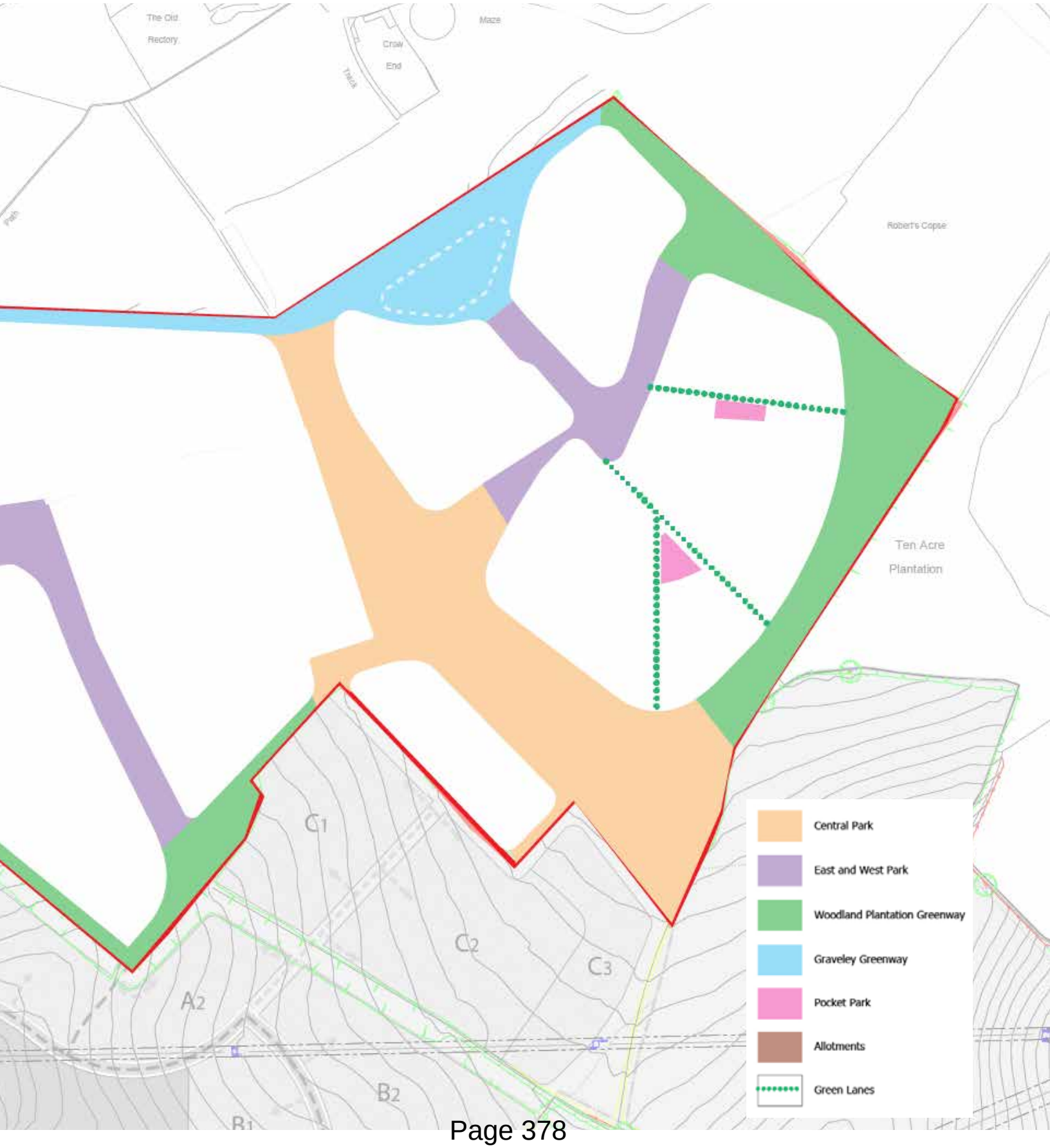
Design Principles

- Promoting Active and Healthy Lifestyles
- Integrating Development into the Landscape
- Promoting Biodiversity

Embracing the spirit of the Local Plan, the proposed Green Infrastructure Framework will establish a network of multifunctional open spaces that are informed by the following site-specific design principles:

- Enhance and expand the existing rights of way through the provision of a network of routes that encourage access and enjoyment of the Site's open spaces and good sustainable connections beyond the Site.
- Provide a central green corridor through the Site - linking the village of Graveley to the north with the proposed new Country Park to the southeast.
- Provide accessible and universally designed formal play opportunities for children and youths of all ages and abilities.
- Provide allotments and community orchards for sustainable food production and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.
- Provide tree-lined streets to assist with integration of the new built form and to assist with micro-climatic resilience.
- Retain, strengthen, and connect existing habitats, including boundary hedgerows and woodland.
- Create new grassland habitats.
- Provide at least a 10% biodiversity net gain.
- Enhance the diversity of flora on the site for the benefit of wildlife and public amenity, and to increase resilience and adaptability to future climate-related impacts.
- Utilise the Site's varied topography to provide sustainable drainage features in low-lying areas, and open and expansive landscapes on elevated ground.




The Old Rectory
Maze
Croaw End
Track
Path
Robert's Copse
Ten Acre Plantation
C1
C2
C3
A2
B2
B1
Central Park
East and West Park
Woodland Plantation Greenway
Graveley Greenway
Pocket Park
Allotments
Green Lanes

The Green Infrastructure framework comprises a range of open space typologies that will provide the new community and nearby residents with multi-functional benefits. Whilst the character of individual open spaces relates to its locality and context, the Green Infrastructure framework has also been developed in accordance with the requirements set out within the 'Developer Contributions' SPD. (See Table below)

Central Park

- A Community **Park** providing a range of recreational functions and high public value opportunities for informal recreation and community events located close to the community hub.
- Centrally located in order to be easily accessible incorporating a network of PRoWs and foot/cycle utility ,and recreational routes.
- **Equipped and Designated Play** areas through a Multi-use Games Area (MUGA) and locally landscaped area of play of similar size and function to a Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play (NEAP). Inclusion of supporting incidental play feature or trim trail.
- Expansive **Natural and Semi-Natural** areas to include a range of informal grassland and meadows and planting areas selected for seasonal visual amenity and wildlife value.
- Inclusion of a small-scale **community orchard.**

East and West Linear Parks

- Linear **Parks** running through the built development providing additional informal recreational functions
- Integrating **Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAP)** with provisions for both younger and older children with greater independence.
- **Natural and Semi-Natural** areas to include a range of informal grassland and meadows and tree and shrub planting areas that are attractive for visual interest but also support wildlife.

Pocket Parks

- **Amenity Greenspace** provision through doorstep access to open spaces and to enhance the kerb appeal of adjoining dwellings.
- **Natural and Semi-Natural** space comes through small scale tree and shrub planting areas.

Graveley Greenway

- **Amenity Greenspace** created where built development edges are pulled back from the boundaries to form wide buffer zones and generously proportioned recreational routes. Buffers are minimum 12m zones provided to all retained boundary vegetation and proposed new linear planting features.
- Provision of a **community allotment.**

Table of Open Space Standards & Site Provisions

Open Space Typology	Requirements per 1,000 persons	Persons per average household	No. of Units	Estimated Population	Space Required (ha)	Space Provided (ha)
Playing pitches	1.2	2.4	900	2,160	2.592	n/a*
Other outdoor sports	0.4	2.4	900	2,160	0.864	n/a*
Equipped/ designated play	0.25				0.540	0.248*
Other outdoor provisions (MUGA)	0.3	2.4	900	2,160	0.648	0.101*
Parks and Gardens	0.8	2.4	900	2,160	1.728	2.898
Amenity Green Space	0.6	2.4	900	2,160	1.296	3.747
Natural & Semi-natural	1.8	2.4	900	2,160	3.888	6.958
Allotments	0.3	2.4	900	2,160	0.648	0.648

*Where the Council considers it appropriate a financial contribution to be paid in lieu of on-site provision, towards new or enhanced provision off site within the vicinity of the development will be considered where the need arises directly from the development. Such financial contributions in lieu may be considered where the full amount of required open space cannot be realistically delivered on-site.

- **Natural and Semi-Natural** provison is achieved where buffers include informal grassland, tree and shrub planting areas, for visual interest and supporting wildlife. Addition of new boundary hedgerows and tree belts to integrate with existing boundary vegetation to reinforce the separation of the new development from the village to the north. Inclusion of SuDS attenuation feature on lower ground designed for positive visual amenity and wildlife benefit.

Wooded Plantation Greenway

- **Amenity Greenspace** through minimum 12m buffer zones provided to all retained boundary vegetation and proposed new linear planting features. and open spaces.
- **Natural and Semi-Natural** provision throughbuffer zones to include paths running through 'field margin' grassland, with areas of meadow grassland where green space is more open and expansive. Supplementary boundary hedgerows and tree planting provided to ensure continuity of existing habitat features. Hedgerow and scattered tree planting designed to formalise the boundary whilst preserving the inter-visibility with the countryside beyond.
- Additional planting along the eastern edges of the site to strengthen linkages between Ten Acre Plantation and Roberts Copse whilst retaining Chesfield Parks distinct historic boundary and outline.

Allotments

- A dedicated **community allotment** site is to be provided to the north of the Site, overlooked by adjacent new dwellings, and easily accessed by the new highway network and public right of way footpath 'Graveley 006'. The nature of the allotment provision will be subject to further consultation with the Local Authority. It is sized and located to accommodate a range of formal half and quarter-sized plots, raised beds and associated storage and watering facilities.
- An additional area located alongside the Community Hub shall provide a small orchard for community use.

Green Lanes

- Enhanced shared streets to provide legibile active travel connections between key green spaces and nodes.
- Providing doorstep landscape and **amenity green space** role**.**
- Mix of ornamental and native tree, shrub, clipped hedging, and perennial planting areas, selected for seasonal visual amenity and wildlife value.
- A series of build-outs to accommodate additional rain gardens/planting and traffic calming.



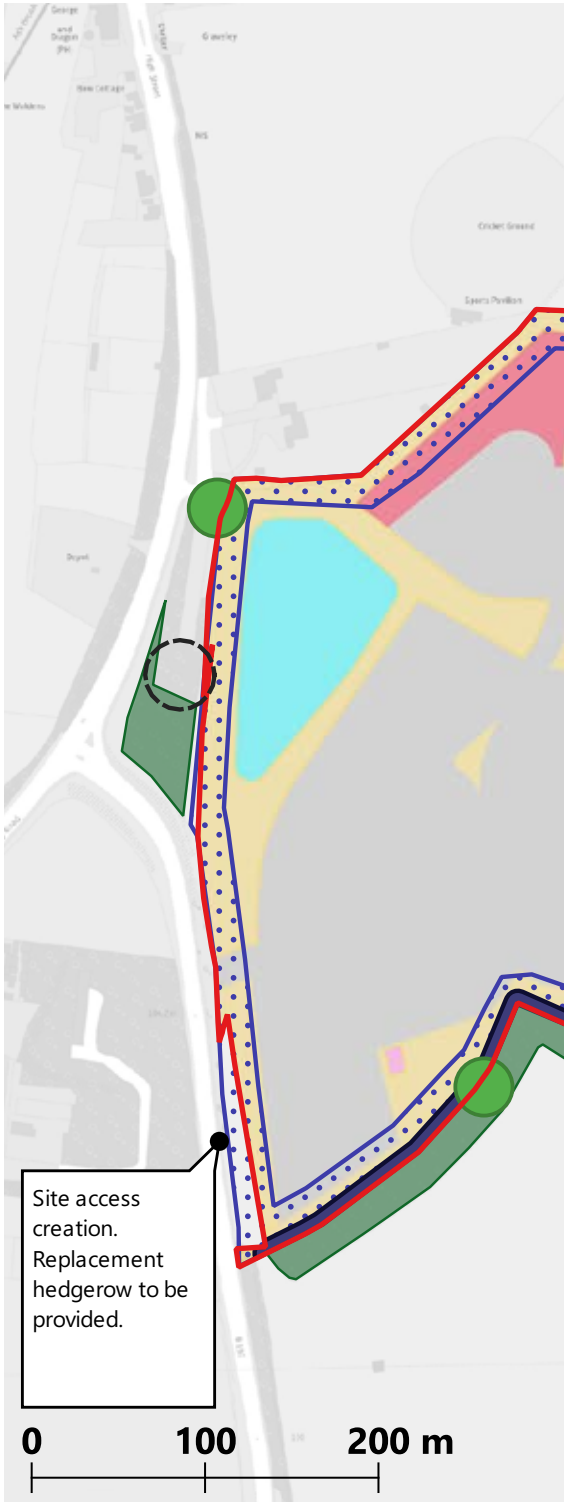


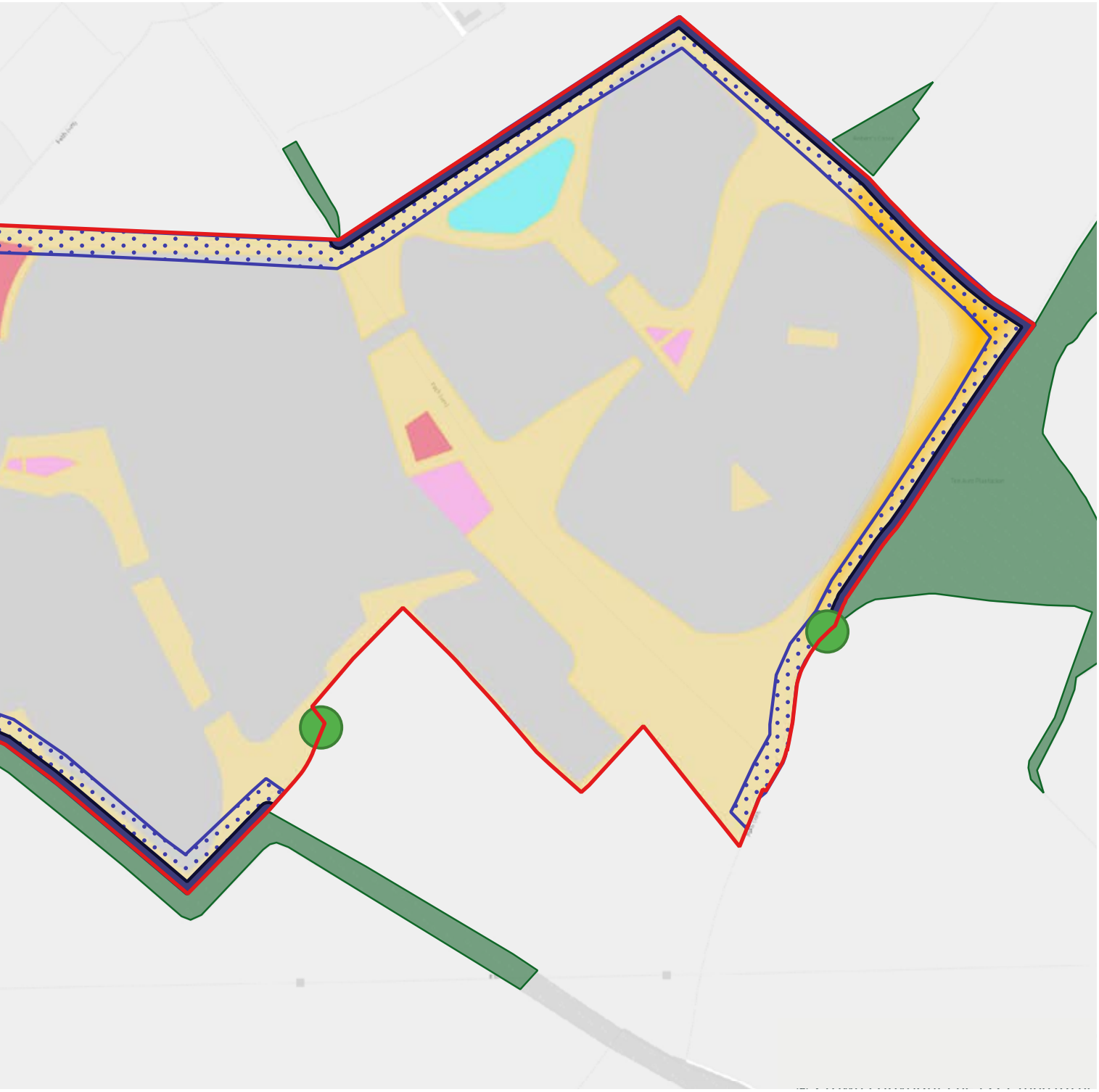
4.5. Biodiversity Framework

The Biodiversity Framework shall be part of a network of open spaces that integrate the built development into its landscape setting; enhance the character, appearance and appeal of open spaces; and expand and enhance the mosaic of habitats and species diversity for the benefit of wildlife.

Design Principles

- Existing boundary hedgerows and trees will be retained where possible with development set well back in accordance with Local Plan policy requirements. Where viable, existing linear features will be supplemented with additional planting to strengthen green movement and wildlife corridors throughout the development
- Additional planting along the eastern edges of the site to strengthen linkages between Ten Acre Plantation and Robert's Copse, whilst retaining Chesfield Park's distinct historic boundary and outline.
- New attenuation basins, forming a component of the Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS), will be designed to provide a range of new aquatic habitats and an attractive asset to enhance the experience of the community using the green spaces or living in nearby dwellings.
- Spaces will be well-designed to create an attractive and natural landscape setting for buildings, as well as being multi-functional.
- Sensitive lighting zones have been identified alongside existing and proposed woodland and hedges to provide dark corridors to allow movement of wildlife around the site boundaries.
- Native species will form a core aspect to new planting and tree schemes, reflecting local context and character. Where beneficial additional non-native species will be used to bolster species-diversity, amenity value, resilience and food/foraging opportunities for wildlife.





Red Line Boundary

Dark corridor, 7m wide, to retain cohesive ecological network for light sensitive species

Sensitive Lighting Zone

Trees with features of moderate or above suitability for roosting bats

Woodland and tree planting to buffer offsite woodland and enhance ecological connectivity

Ecology Protection Zone

Existing Woodland

Habitat Classes (for BNG)

Allotments

Developed area including roads,school, community hub, houses and gardens

Play

Attenuation. Grassland with potential to contain water

Other POS, including meadows, amenity, paths, scrub and woodland

- A network of local green corridors will be formed, linking new residents and wildlife to key multi functional spaces and nearby assets such as the proposed Country Park.
- Areas of wildflower grassland, native shrub and tree planting will be integrated into the open space to provide biodiversity net gain.
- Open spaces will be designed to reflect the existing character of the landscape whilst recognising and enhancing the variations in character of the new communities, aiding legibility.



Biodiversity Net Gain

A biodiversity metric calculation has been undertaken using the Defra Metric 4.0. Land use types were estimated from the Green Infrastructure Framework although it is acknowledged that at this stage the planting proposals for the Site are high level and indicative. The land use types identified are summarised in the table below. They demonstrate that a Biodiversity Net Gain of at least 10% can be achieved at the Site.

Opportunities to exceed this minimum statutory requirement for both habitat and hedgerows will be explored in further detail as the scheme is developed.

The site will result in the permanent loss of the existing agricultural land which presently host a number of ground-nesting species. Compensatory measures will be delivered off-site.

Area	Indicative land use type	Habitat class as shown on Biodiversity Framework Plan	Proposed habitats (used in metric calculation)
1.1ha	Native woodland copses	Other POS	Other woodland, broadleaved
6.9ha	Wildflower semi-natural grassland or native shrub planting	Other POS	Other neutral grassland
3.2ha	Mown amenity grassland or ornamental planting	Other POS, play	Modified grassland
0.6ha	Allotments	Allotments	Allotments
1.7ha	Attenuation basins and surroundings, with wildflower grassland or permanent water bodies	Attenuation	Other neutral grassland
23.7ha	Developed land including residential buildings, roads, community buildings, hard play areas and footpaths	Developed areas, Play	Developed land; sealed surface
5.5a	Gardens	Developed areas	Vegetated garden
110 small trees	Urban trees	Not shown	Urban Tree
At least 0.15km	New species rich hedgerow with trees	Not shown	Species-rich native hedgerow with trees

Estimated Land Use Types Table

BNG Metric	Habitat Units	Hedgerow Units
On-site baseline	87.83	7.30
On-site post-intervention	97.11	8.08
On-site change in units	9.28	0.78
On-site net % change	10.56	10.69

Headline Results for Biodiversity Metric Calculation

4.6. Height and Density Framework

Density

The development densities will be reflective of the surrounding vernacular, which will take account of edge conditions to the north and future urban context to the south on the H03 site. The central park will broadly divide the densities in half with the eastern parcels and northern boundary generally comprising of lower density, which will take account of sensitive edge conditions and rural context at around 25-35dph. The western parcels will comprise of higher densities at 35-40dph to take account of a more urban setting and a sustainable location adjacent to the Mixed-Use Centre and mobility hub.

Building Heights

The building heights will address the surrounding context and local character, in particular relating to the surrounding visual sensitivity.

In general, the western parcels will allow for greater flexibility in terms of building heights due to little impact on the surrounding visual context. The area will generally comprise of 2-3 storey buildings, however buildings up to 3-4 storeys will be permitted around key routes and key spaces to provide adequate enclosure and to aid legibility.

The central parcels, adjacent to the Mixed-Use Centre will allow for reduced flexibility in terms of heights due to a relative high point and increased visual sensitivity from the east. Therefore, generally 2 storeys will be permitted with 2.5 storeys permitted at key corners and primary frontages to enable strong placemaking. It should be noted that a higher density will be reflected in these areas through urban form.

The eastern parcels will generally consist of 2 storeys with 2.5 storey buildings permitted at key spaces and key buildings due to the more visually sensitive constraints.




Bury
The Old Rectory
Crow End
Mere
Cricket Ground
Pav
Path
Robert's Copse
Ten Acre Plantation
C1
C2
C3
A1
A2
B1
B2
D1
Site Boundary
Residential 35 - 40 dph
Residential 25 - 35 dph
Mixed Use (Community Hub and School)
2 Storeys
2 - 2.5 Storeys
2 - 4 Storeys

4.7. Urban Design Framework



This section sets out the Urban Design Framework for the site. The framework sets out the design principles for the future development of the Site.

Development Blocks

The development will be arranged around a back-to-back block structure to define open spaces and routes and to create a sense of enclosure with sufficient natural surveillance. The block structure will enable easy edge to edge connectivity through the site and a seamless connection between open green spaces.

The development blocks have been largely formed around the site contours. The steepest areas have been designed to ensure that the built form sits parallel or perpendicular to the level changes. This has resulted in a series of curved and informal blocks reflecting the site context. Equally, the flattest areas have been deemed most appropriate for community uses with the school in particular influencing the surrounding block layout This has resulted in a more rectilinear formal grid. Due to these constraints, the resulting development has naturally evolved into a more informal eastern area and a more formal western core, each comprising distinct block arrangements.

Public Realm and Key Green Spaces

The development will establish a network of landscaped and hardscaped spaces to aid the legibility and distinctiveness of the development.

A market square will be established adjacent to the community centre to facilitate outdoor community uses and as a place to gather. The square will be well integrated with active travel links and exhibit attractive and high-quality materiality to form a distinctive and attractive sense of place to the overall development.

Pocket Parks will feature alongside main streets and close to key green links. The spaces will be well-enclosed and well-landscaped to form distinctive local features, facilitating local meeting places.


The Old Rectory
Crow End
Maze
Trees
Path
Robert's Copse
The Lodge
BACK LANE
138m
Ten Acre Plantation
Path
C1
C2
C3
A2
B2
B1
Site Boundary 42.7ha
Structural Green Space
Development Parcels
Multifunctional Green Space
Public Transport Route
Tree Lined Verge
Primary Frontage
Secondary Frontage
Rural Frontage
Key Building
Landmark Building
Pedestrian/Cycle Access Point
Main Access Point
Trim Trail
Market Square
Active Travel Routes
Public Right of Way / Bridleway
Public Right of Way
Key Views

The Central Park will form a landmark space through the centre of the development and form a major north-south axis. The space will be well-enclosed by appropriate urban form and scale and feature natural landscaping alongside larger play facilities, opportunities for informal/naturalistic play spaces and trim trails. The space will act as a gateway to the proposed country park so the landscaping and urban form will create a strong sense of arrival.

Frontages

The frontages across the development will be designed to reflect the adjacent street types, open spaces and surrounding character. Generally, public spaces will be well-enclosed with sufficient natural surveillance and built form that reflects the appropriate scale and openness/enclosure.

Primary Frontages - Strong and continuous building lines will be placed around primary circulation routes and key spaces to create a well defined character and legible space. The central areas will exhibit taller frontages to reflect an urban and distinctive character, which will add a visual interest and focal point to the overall development streetscape.

Secondary Frontages - More variation in building lines will be placed around secondary circulation routes and spaces to create a more informal character.

Rural Frontages - Informal building arrangements with wider gaps between buildings will be placed around the edges of the development to form a considered and softened transition into the open countryside.

All corners will be carefully considered with appropriate building types to ensure adequate surveillance all around.

Landmarks

Key landmarks in the centre of the development will be focussed around a mix of uses, which will comprise of a primary school and community centre. Density around this focal point will be increased to facilitate a more urban character at the heart of the development. A high-quality and more contemporary built form will be encouraged to ensure a distinct sense of place at the heart of the development.

Additionally, corners and ends of vistas along main movement corridors and key green spaces will be strengthened by key buildings which will vary in architectural treatment, scale and layout to increase visual interest in the streetscape and to form legible and distinct neighbourhoods.

Views

The development has been designed to apply good urban design standards, which includes direct and legible routes facilitating long distance views. Streets where possible, have been designed around straight vistas directed towards key spaces or key buildings to enhance safety and wayfinding. In addition, the radial layout of smaller streets ensures that green spaces are often in sight drawing in the landscape character of the surrounding context.

External views towards the site have also been carefully considered in relation to the topography. The northern and eastern edges, where the topography is lower will ensure a softened transition from built form to the open countryside and any impacted views through gapped building lines and filtered tree planting.

Focal Points

Focal points will be distributed around the development to enhance local wayfinding, define key spaces and add to the distinctiveness of the development. The development will utilise variation in heights, form, set-back, boundaries and materials to differentiate focal points.

Existing and new landscape features, such as tree belts, attenuation, play areas and trim trails will be incorporated to enhance focal points and to define routes through and around the development. .

Gateways

The development will have two well-defined vehicular gateways; first around the access to North Road and the second adjoining the H03 development to the south. The gateway importance to the overall street connectivity will be defined through integration of bus provision, active

travel links and attractive landscaping, which includes formalised hedge planting, large trees and arrangement of buildings to define key corners. Furthermore, the H03 gateway has been enhanced through running the Gateway Street around the outside of the block alongside the Central Park to create a sense of arrival to the development.

Pedestrian gateways will include points of access to the existing PROW and bridleway network, which will be enhanced through attractive informal landscaping and small focal features, such as trim trails and public art. Key buildings will also be laid out to enhance a sense of arrival.

Central Street

An east-west modal filter will remove private vehicular use from the Central Street bringing active travel and bus connections together with attractive landscaping and placemaking. The street will create direct, attractive and safe links through the mixed-use centre at the heart of the development with connections to the wider active travel network to encourage localised walking and cycling. The street will enhance the school and community centre uses along with a new market square for outdoor community uses. A linear green space will run along the course of this street.

Active Travel Routes

A network of active travel routes will run throughout the development to connect each area with the wider green space network as well as link to the existing PROWs and bridleways. A hierarchy of routes will be established to support the anticipated uses and movement volumes, as well as to enhance wayfinding and placemaking. These will include utility routes for larger volumes of cycling, recreational routes for pedestrian connectivity and low volume movement and informal paths to support local biodiversity while maintaining the active travel network.



Reinforcing Gateways with Public Art



Landmark Building



Attractive Public Realm

4.8. Sustainability and Energy Framework

This section sets out the Sustainability and Energy Framework for the site, responding to national and local policy requirements. The framework presents a set of principles that will guide sustainability and energy aspects on the site, and opportunities aligned to the three pillars of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental.

Sustainability Framework

This site provides an opportunity to deliver a high-quality development of a primary school, community centre, housing, and green spaces incorporating low carbon principles. North Stevenage is ideally located to deliver a sustainable community that embraces best practice design and construction approaches.

Design Principles

The development will follow a set of future-focussed principles that are designed to mitigate and adapt to a changing climate, enhance biodiversity, create walkable neighbourhoods to connect people and nature, and contribute positively to economic growth. Overarching environmental design principles are provided below.

Environmental Design Principles

- New homes will be designed to use less than 105 litres of water per person per day. This will be achieved by specifying water efficient and low flow fittings to all areas.
- Opportunity for construction phase to support the local economy with employment, training, and supply of materials. Where possible, materials will be sourced locally
- The development will incorporate a diversity of flora on the site for the benefit of wildlife and public amenity, and to increase reliance and adaptability to future climate-related impacts
- A biodiversity net gain of at least 10% will be provided
- Open spaces will be designed to reflect the existing character of the landscape whilst recognising and enhancing the variations in character of the new communities, aiding legibility
- Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) will be integrated within the landscape framework, and will provide flood alleviation, water management, and biodiverse habitats
- Charging infrastructure for electric vehicles (EVs) will be installed to dwellings in line with Approved Part S of the Building Regulations, facilitating residents' use of EVs
- Filtered traffic measures will be incorporated to favour active and sustainable modes of transport

Social Design Principles

- The development will encourage a strong sense of community by creating safe places for people to meet, be socially interactive and to feel a sense of ownership
- A series of public open spaces will be provided to enhance the character and proposed uses
- The site is linked to National Cycle Route 12, providing cycle access to amenities and locations outside the site
- The site contains an extensive network of Public Right of Way (PRoW) routes and bridleways connecting the development to the surrounding services, recreation areas, and landmarks
- Provision of high speed data network, enabling residents to work flexibly and ensure digital inclusion for all population groups

Economic Design Principles

- New residents will generate increased demand for local goods and services and provide additional council tax revenue
- Sustainable placemaking principles create a sense of community and social cohesion, improving wellbeing and reducing demand on local support services

- The Community Hub will include a well-integrated and attractive market square
- Bus and railway stations are located 3km from the site and include connections between Letchworth, Stevenage, and Hitchin.
- New primary school to make use of accessibility opportunities and to enforce the area as a landmark
- A mobility hub will be provided within the central community area which includes bus stops, car club parking spaces, e-bike and scooter hire and online parcel collection points
- Easy nearby access to services and amenities such as a secondary and primary school, Lister hospital with on site pharmacy services, a large Sainsbury's supermarket and a number of pubs within Graveley and Stevenage.

Energy Framework

The development will maximise opportunities for reducing energy consumption and supplying energy through low and zero carbon technologies, adopting the principles of the Energy Hierarchy. This nationally recognised framework first promotes the reduction of energy demand, then the provision of clean and green energy supplies.

Energy demand reduction will be achieved using passive and active design measures which will improve insulation, reduce heat loss and avoid excessive requirements for heating and cooling. Measures will also be incorporated to prevent overheating and ensure adequate ventilation.

Energy will be supplied through low and zero carbon technologies. A range of sustainable energy options have been assessed for their potential use on the site (see below). These options will continue to be tested through the subsequent planning and design process as a preferred option has not yet been agreed.

By designing for the use of all-electric heating and hot water systems, in line with the anticipated Future Homes Standard, the homes will become net zero in operation when the UK electricity grid decarbonises.





Low and Zero Carbon Technologies:

Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP)

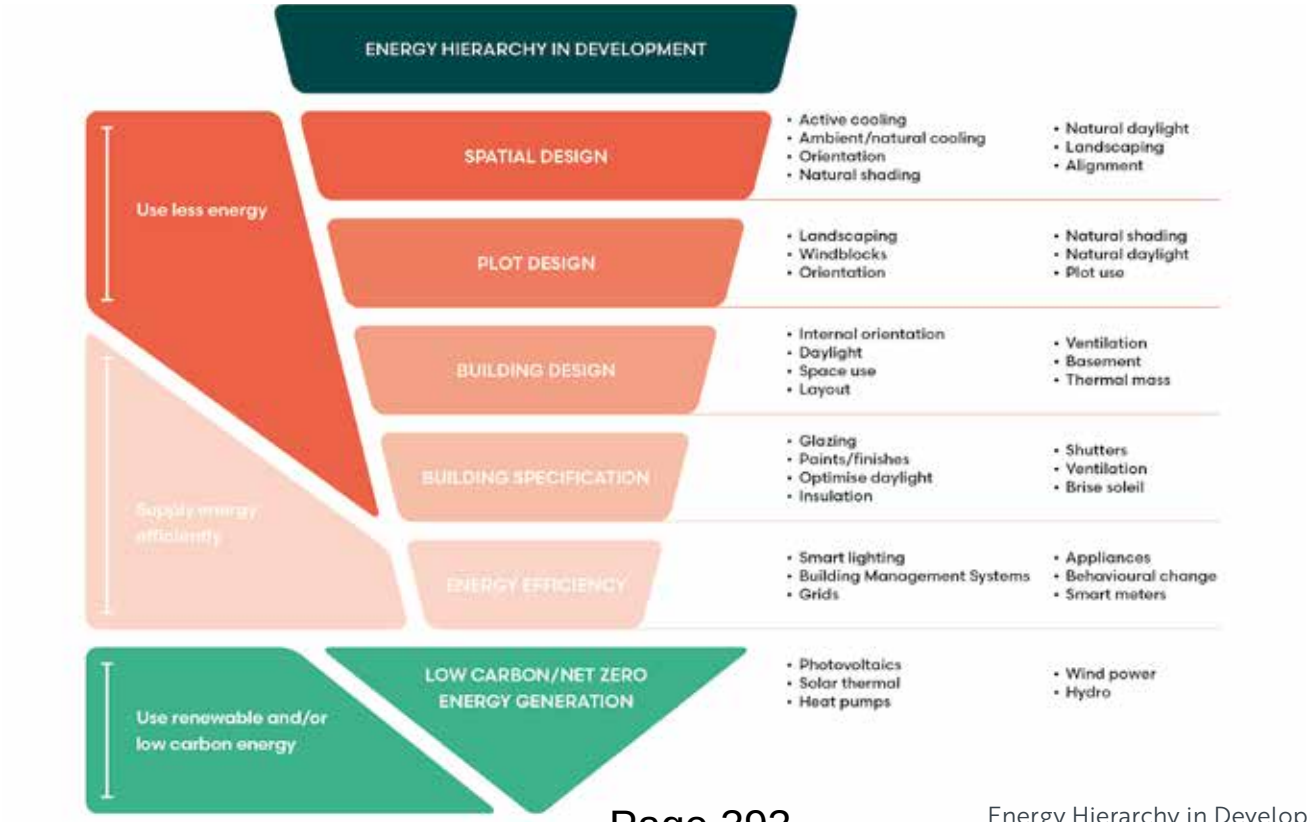
ASHPs extract heat from the external air and condense this energy to heat a smaller space within a dwelling or non-domestic building. A pump circulates a refrigerant through a coil to absorb energy from the air. This refrigerant is then compressed to raise its temperature which can then be used for space heating and domestic hot water. ASHPs can feed either low-temperature radiators or underfloor heating and often have electric immersion heater back-up for the winter months. ASHPs are able to extract heat when temperatures are as low as -15°C; however, they are subject to fluctuating air temperatures and use more electricity to produce heat in the cooler months. Average temperatures in the region are approximately 9.5°C, with winter averages of around 6-8°C. This is within the acceptable range for use of an ASHP. The ASHPs would need to be fitted to outside walls or placed on the ground.

Ground Source Heat Pump (GSHP)

GSHPs extract heat from the ground, taking advantage of the moderate temperatures in the ground to boost efficiency and reduce the operational costs of heating and cooling systems. The GSHP could be installed on site, providing renewable energy, however they require access to suitable ground conditions and collection areas. Whilst installation is invasive, maintenance is low once installation is completed. There is potential for GSHPs to be included as part of a hybrid energy strategy, subject to further investigation on ground conditions to assess the feasibility of installing the required components.

Water Source Heat Pumps (WSHP)

WSHPs work similarly to GSHP, however, instead of extracting heat from the ground, they extract heat from water sources such as lakes, ponds, rivers, springs, wells or boreholes. Dependent on the water source used, the temperature can fluctuate from season to season, impacting the reliability of a WSHP. Should further investigation determine a high-water table, there may be potential to explore water source heat pumps as part of a hybrid energy strategy for the development site.



Energy Hierarchy in Development

Solar Photovoltaics

North Stevenage is located in an area with an average of 2.85 kWh/kWp of daily solar energy, on the upper end of the UK average. As such, the site has the potential to use solar photovoltaics (PV) as a source of renewable power. These could be located either on individual roofs, or as part of a larger array at ground level. The use of PV panels would complement the electric only energy strategy as the renewable energy generated could be used to supply the heating and hot water demands.



Example Air Source Heat Pump



Example PV Cells



Chapter 5

Illustrative Masterplan

5.1. Illustrative Masterplan

The illustrative masterplan opposite sets out one illustration of how the design parameters could be interpreted and how the site could be developed.

Key Elements

- Up to 900 new homes
- A Two Form Entry Primary School at the heart of the new development
- A Community Centre adjacent to the school which could include meeting rooms, a hall, co-working spaces and a cafe.
- Extensive Public Open Spaces that includes Children's Play Spaces, Recreational Greenspaces, Allotments and areas of enhanced biodiversity
- Market Square including a Mobility Hub that links to a bus only/active travel link through the heart of the site
- Permeable street network aimed at pedestrians and cyclists






Buried HV cables
Overhead HV cables
Overhead HV cables



Chapter 6

Character Areas

6.1. Character Generators

The new development will create its own sense of character and place, drawing upon influences from the site and surrounding area. The plan opposite sets out a number of Character Generators identified both from the existing local context but also some key design proposals as part of the masterplanning approach. The response to these generators informs a number of emerging character areas set out on the following pages.

Key Character Generators

Summary of key overarching character generators informing the character areas:

- Identified visual sensitivity related to rural setting and long-distance views.
- Presence of a mix of community facilities and their ancillary uses, in addition to public transport/active travel hub at the heart of the development.
- Network of green spaces including significant Parkland running through the centre of the site.
- Topography particularly in the eastern side of the site, where changes in level are more significant.
- North Road on a key route into Stevenage and the beginning of the urban context.
- Graveley Village and the relationship with the northern edge of the development site.
- Key primary streets running through the site.



Site Boundary
Existing Road
Existing Trees/Hedges
Development Parcel
Primary School
Community Centre
High Quality Public Realm
Graveley Village
Open Countryside
Strategic New Open Spaces
Proposed and Existing Urban Area
Local Greens
Graveley Village Boundary


acular
Open Countryside
Long Distance Views
Hedge/Treebelt
Graveley Village Boundary
School
Community Hub
Central Street
Woodland
Wooded Plantation
Parkland
Development

6.2. Character Areas

The development will be broken down into a series of distinct areas, each responding to related character generators, informing the scale, density, height and materials used. The identity of each area has drawn on the townscape appraisal, set out in the baseline review. This included an assessment of built form, layout, materials and architectural details.

These will be used to inform further design development as the scheme progresses. Detailed requirements for the site's character areas will be agreed and secured in a subsequent Design Code for the site.

The Masterplan has identified the following Character Areas:

- Central Core;
- North Road Gateway;
- Woodland View; and
- Village Edge.



Central Core

Woodland View

Village Edge

North Road Gateway


Buried HV cables
Overhead HV cables
Overhead HV cables

6.3. Central Core

Context

This character area is predominantly defined by an east-west axis forming a rectilinear pattern and flatter topography allowing a formal grid block typology. The presence of the Central Street results in occasional courtyard blocks due to priority for active travel. The scale of buildings has required consideration relative to a site high point with visual sensitivity to the surrounding countryside. Also, densities have been influenced by being in a sustainable location next to the community hub and mobility hub

Uses

This character area will contain a centrally located 2FE primary school, which benefits from the flattest terrain across the site. The school will be a landmark building located adjacent to the Central Park and the community hub.

The community centre will be a landmark building and accommodate community-level facilities, which may include co-working spaces, meeting rooms, small cafe, health, childcare and a community hall.

Built Form

This will be formed mainly around 2-2.5 storey buildings at higher densities of 35-40dph to make best use of the location. To address surrounding visual sensitivities. 3-4 storey buildings will only be permitted around key spaces, for key buildings and along main corridors.

A more rectilinear formal perimeter block pattern will be visible due to a flatter topography and movement constraints. Also, a degree of rear courtyard blocks will be established to allow more continuous and direct active travel routes.

In terms of the built form, this character area will exhibit stronger and more continuous building lines with reduced or no building gaps with shallow set backs. Housing typologies will be mainly terraced buildings with occasional apartments and semi-detached houses.



Movement and Parking

This area is largely formed around the Central Street, which will allow bus and active travel movement only. As a result, the blocks directly adjacent to the street will require rear courtyard blocks to provide parking for some of the dwellings.

Aside from that, generally Neighbourhood Streets and Lanes will provide a clear and legible movement pattern with a range of on-plot, frontage and on-street parking solutions.

Active travel movements, including cycleways will be designed into the neighbourhood streets with direct links to other cycle routes, ensuring direct and legible movement patterns. Cycle parking will be incorporated within the dwelling curtilage as well as the public realm. Substantial cycle parking provisions will be provided adjacent to the mobility hub and community centre as part of the public realm design.

Public Space

The inclusion of a formal, well enclosed market square allowing a range of community activities; Green character to Central Street with use of formal street tree planting in regular intervals and extensive landscaping

Tree-lined streets to provide lines of visual interest and integration of the built form; Public spaces to be enriched by visually-attractive and diverse planting; Play areas to comprise engaging and stimulating planting, transitioning to naturalistic planting towards the central Central Park.

Identity

Plot Boundaries - Boundary treatments will be a combination of low walls or railings forming the edges of key spaces and movement corridors.

Architectural Approach and Materials - Generally, more contemporary and formal architectural approach. Use of red/buff brick, occasional white/off-white render will form the majority of the residential built form. However elements of black timber weatherboarding along with contemporary treatments such as fibre cement cladding will be encouraged for key and landmark buildings. The community use buildings will have a more flexible approach in terms of materiality.

In terms of roofscapes, generally red tiles will be used with grey tiles/slate around key spaces.

Landscape

A network of open spaces integrating the Central Core development with the wide landscape. Characteristics respond to and complement the adjoining landscapes, including the retention and expansion of recreational routes, and habitat corridors. Specifically, the landscape will comprise:

Central Park: Centrally located for ease of access and providing a range of recreational functions, this space would fulfil many of the functions of the 'Parks & Gardens' open space typology. Its location provides active engagement with the adjacent community hub, with scope to include a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) and locally landscaped area of play – of equivalent scale and provisions to a Neighbourhood Equipped Area of Play (NEAP) but naturalistic in character. Play facilities would be designed for children and youths of all ages, and abilities. The spaces would act as both a destination and a stepping-stone to access wider open space network. It will incorporate the existing Hertfordshire Way footpath, with scope to upgrade or provide a complimentary route to enable use by cyclists and horse riders, and with potential for signed heritage trails. The central park would include a range of accessible informal grassland and meadows, and a mix of ornamental and native tree, shrub, and perennial planting areas, selected for seasonal visual amenity and wildlife value. A small-scale orchard would further enhance its value to the community.







Local Precedents

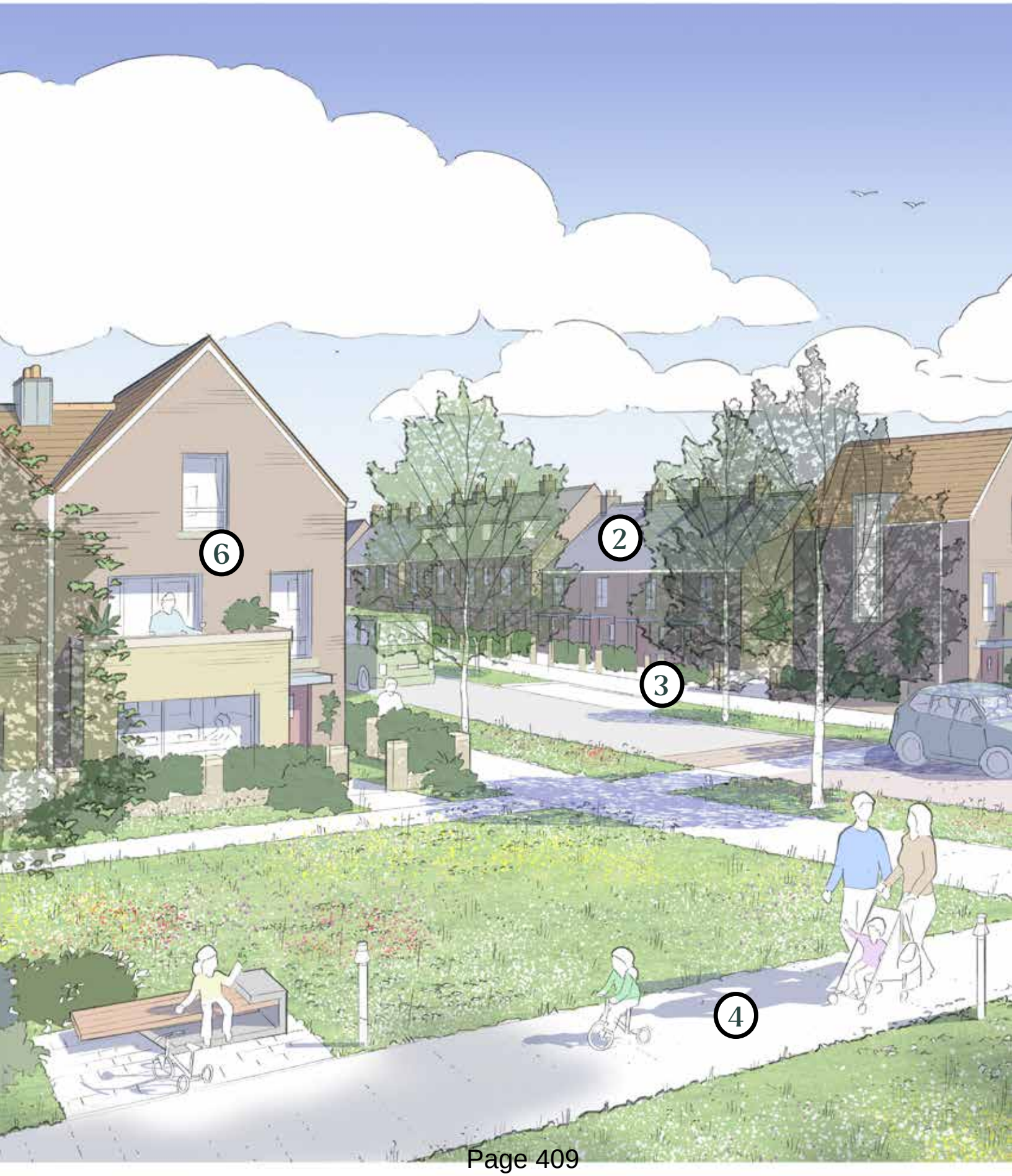
Country Park Gateway. Connecting with the central park, a new gateway space would be created adjacent to the proposed Country Park. The gateway would be an expansive semi-natural open space drawing people along the Hertfordshire Way (Graveley 007) and bridleway (Graveley 008) through to the adjoining country park. A mixture of meadows and pockets of native tree and shrub planting, to frame views and enhance the existing wooded skyline backdrop in views from the north, will be provided. These would complement the open amenity spaces that will include an incidental play feature or trim trail.

Western Green Corridor. A green corridor weaving through the Central Core will provide new public access and habitat connectivity for wildlife. The corridor will provide a series of spaces or 'rooms' of subtly different typologies, relating to the adjoining built edge. These will create variation and interest and draw users through the space. As well as new multi-user and footpaths to promote access to the wider open space network and nearby facilities, the corridor will include a range of habitats. These will include accessible informal grassland and meadows, a mix of ornamental and native tree, clipped hedging, shrub, and perennial planting areas, selected for seasonal visual amenity and wildlife value.

Wooded Boundary: Where the Central Core dovetails with existing wooded boundaries, a minimum 12m buffer zone is provided to ensure that existing trees are not impacted by the development and its lighting. These buffer zones will integrate pedestrian paths with 'field margin' grassland, and supplementary tree planting.






6
2
3
4



1. Considered frontage increase legibility and maintain natural surveillance to green spaces
2. Denser and more formal building types, including terraces
3. Gateway street accommodating bus travel
4. A shared footway/cycleway extending active travel provisions through green corridors
5. Well-landscaped and planted verges to improve legibility
6. More contemporary and formal architectural approach. The use of red/buff brick, and occasional white/off-white render will form the majority of the residential built form. However elements of black timber weatherboarding along with contemporary treatments such as fibre cement cladding will be encouraged for key and landmark buildings

View of Central Core Character Area

6.4. North Road Gateway

Context

This character area will be defined by more flexibility in terms of scale and building typology as a result of reduced visual sensitivity due to the area sloping downwards with good enclosure from existing site boundary vegetation. The area will accommodate enhanced active travel links between Graveley and H03 as well as incorporating gateway features at the intersection with North Road, which will be an urban continuation of Stevenage heading north.

Uses

The area will comprise of residential uses with a complimentary green network and play spaces.

Built Form

This character area will comprise of higher density around 35-40dph to reflect a more urban setting. Generally, building heights will comprise of 2-3 storeys, however an opportunity exists for permitted heights being up to 3-4 storeys around key spaces, key buildings and main corridors, reflecting the visual enclosure and the least visually sensitive areas of the site.

The area will comprise of a range of block types including more rectilinear and formal perimeter blocks around the central areas to accommodate direct active travel movement connections and informal curved blocks reflecting the shifting topography constraints.

The built form will reflect strong and continuous building lines and smaller building gaps to accommodate an urban character and higher densities. This will be achieved through a flexible use of semi-detached, detached and terraced buildings and well as apartment blocks at gateways and key spaces.



Movement and Parking

Gateway Streets with adjacent rear courtyard parking; Neighbourhood Streets with on-plot and rear parking; Lanes with on-plot and frontage parking. Visitor parking and landscaping integrated within highway design. Cycle Parking integrated within public realm; Designated cycleway in street design.

Public Space

The use of local green spaces to provide legibility to residential areas. Neighbourhood Streets with active travel links, informal on-street parking and formal tree planting in verges; informal planting in Lanes. Gateway Streets with double verges with formal tree planting.

Site boundary vegetation retained and proactively managed, where possible; new native planting alongside new highway junctions, forming linear continuity; Tree-lined streets and green spaces; Green spaces to include accessible lawns and enriched by visually-attractive and diverse planting beds; Play areas to comprise engaging and stimulating planting.

Identity

Plot Boundaries - Boundary treatments will include a mix of railings, hedges and low walls.

Architectural Approach and Materials - Generally, traditional architectural approach but influenced by the more formal building frontage found in Graveley, particularly along the High Street. Use of red/buff brick, elements of white/off-white render or tile-hanging.

In terms of roofscapes, red tiles will be used with grey tiles/ slate to emphasise key spaces.

Landscape

A network of landscapes that establish a new gateway into the site; that respond positively to local context; and that invites engagement with the new community assets. The new landscape will retain and manage existing highway vegetation to frame the development either side of a new highway junction. New native tree and shrub planting will be provided to re-frame the highway. Where existing vegetation can be retained, including the woodland belt which follows the southern boundary, minimum 12m buffer zones will be provided to ensure that it is not adversely impacted by new development and its lighting. A range of informal grassland will be provided, in combination with a mix of ornamental and native tree, clipped hedging, shrub, and perennial planting areas – all selected for seasonal visual amenity and wildlife value.

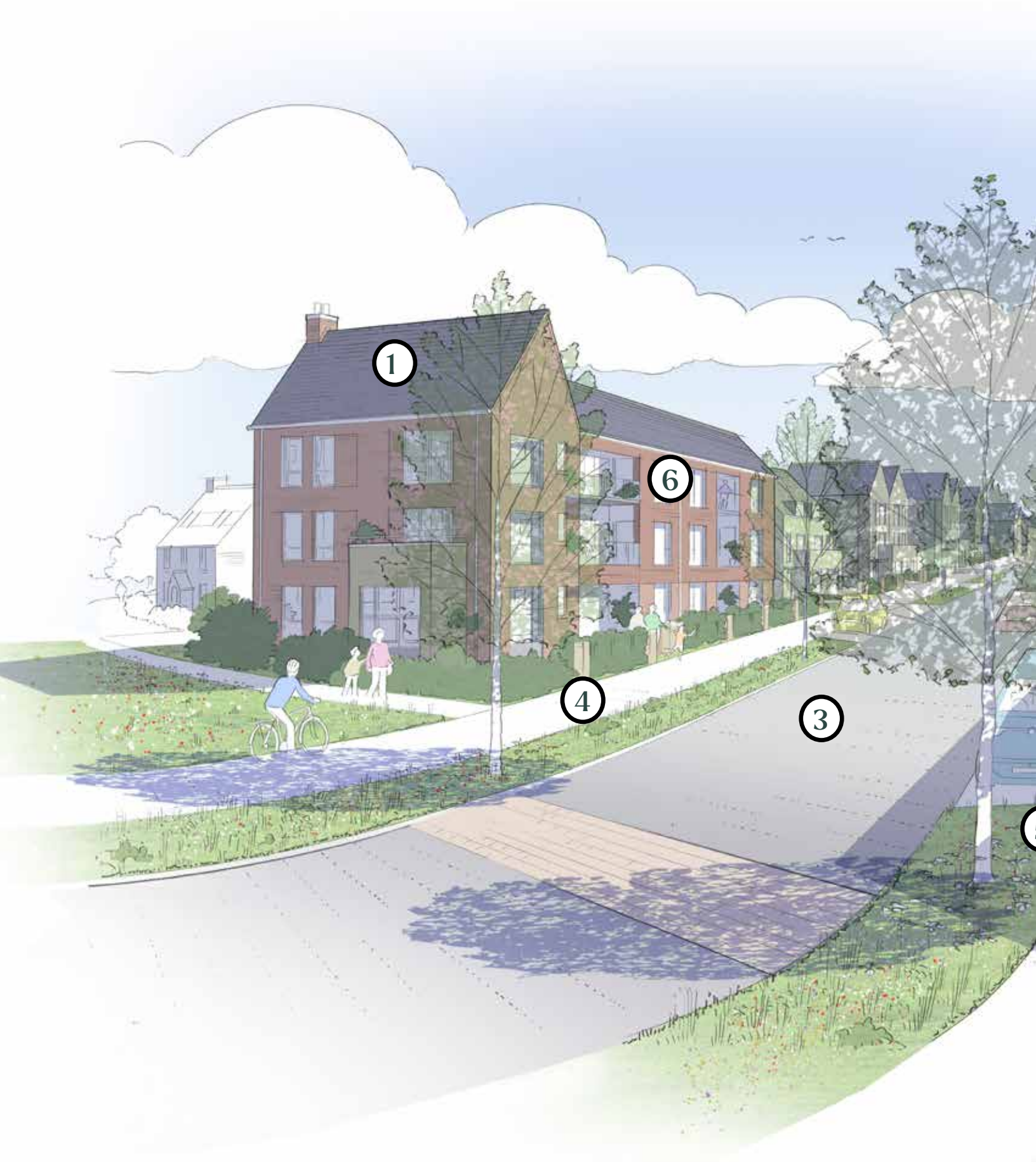
Towards the existing edge of Graveley village, development will be significantly pulled back to ensure separation of the new and existing built form. This provides an opportunity to provide a new attenuation basin, designed for positive visual amenity and wildlife benefit. 3-3.5m accessible paths to the perimeter of the basin encourages access to enjoy the habitat as well as facilitating maintenance. The existing footpath (Graveley 006) will also be retained along the settlement edge, with opportunities to enhance the route for improved accessibility.

Extending eastwards towards the Central Core character area, a green corridor will draw people between the new attenuation basin and village footpath, and the new community assets within the development. Here a Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) will serve as a stepping stone destination along the route.





Local Precedent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1. Larger scale to reflect the gateway to the site, reflecting morphology observed in Graveley
2. A range of housing types, including terraced houses and apartments
3. Gateway street accommodating bus travel
4. A segragated cycleway extending active travel provisions through the site
5. Well-landscaped and planted verges to improve legibility
6. Traditional architectural approach but influenced by the more formal building frontage found in Graveley, particularly along the High Street. Use of red/buff brick, elements of white/off-white render or tile-hanging.

View of North Road
Gateway Character Area

6.5. **Woodland View**

Context

This character area will be defined by a considered approach to the sensitivities around the surrounding landscape and more sensitive views into the site. The surrounding countryside, steeper topography and a clear separation from the higher density areas will form a key influence on the proposed built form.

Uses

The area will comprise of residential uses with a complimentary green network and play spaces.

Built Form

This character area will present a medium to low density of 30-35dph with heights being limited to 2 storeys to address the visual sensitivity and potential views to the surrounding landscape. 2.5 storeys will be permitted around focal spaces, key buildings and vista ends to address good placemaking and a sense of legibility and enclosure.

The block typology will present as informal curved blocks, which have been shaped to compliment the existing topography to minimise the need for large retaining walls. Due to a unique landform, the blocks will be distinct from the more urban and formal western areas carrying a different identity.

The area will also display a less formal built form arrangement through mixed building lines, larger gaps between buildings and increased setbacks to emulate an increasingly rural setting. The area will comprise of mostly semi-detached and detached dwellings, with some terracing around focal spaces.

Movement and Parking

The area will be formed around the Neighbourhood Streets and Lanes, which have been designed to run parallel or perpendicular with the site contours to minimise landform manipulation, where possible. The streets will have a range of parking types, including on-plot and on street.



The area will have a network of direct and attractive active travel links encouraging take up of these movement patterns, which will be formed around natural desire lines to main site access points.

Cycle parking will be incorporated into the public realm and appropriate storage within individual plots.

Public Space

The character area will utilise a variety of different green spaces with varying functions, such as pocket parks and greenways. The spaces have been located around key desire lines and main movement corridors to enhance the active travel movements.

Formal tree planting in verges on neighbourhood streets and both formal and informal planting along lanes will green the character area further creating an attractive environment.

Tree-lined streets to provide lines of visual interest and integration of the built form; pocket parks and greenways to comprise open and accessible lawns framed with visually-attractive and diverse planting beds and trees; Play areas to comprise engaging and stimulating planting, tending to naturalistic planting.

Identity

Plot Boundaries - Boundary treatments will be a mix of low walls and hedges; include landscaping and tree planting.

Architectural Approach and Materials - Generally, more traditional and informal architectural approach. Walls will incorporate a mixture of materials commonly found around Stevenage. Generally, red/buff brick, white/off-white render or half rendered finish will be used.

In terms of roofscapes, red tiles will be used with grey tiles/ slate to emphasise key spaces.



Local Precedent

Landscape

The new built development will be framed by a wide margin of landscaped spaces, serving as a buffer to the adjoining Graveley village edge, the open countryside and to Ten Acre Plantation. New clipped native hedgerows and scattered tree planting will be provided to formalise the boundary whilst preserving the inter-visibility with the countryside beyond. The boundaries will integrate retained bridleways (Graveley 008), new pedestrian paths, 'field margin' grassland, and native planting to strengthen the connectivity between Robert's Copse and Ten Acre Plantation, for wildlife benefit. Development will be set back from existing vegetation by at least 12m to minimise direct impacts on trees and indirect impacts on wildlife from lighting. To the north, a new attenuation basin will be provided, designed for positive visual amenity and wildlife benefit.

Small-scale pocket parks will be integrated within the development areas together with corridors of open space that serve to connect the new housing with the wider site networks. Within these corridors space will be safeguarded for a new Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP). Such amenity spaces will include a mix of ornamental and native tree, shrub, clipped hedging, and perennial planting areas, selected for seasonal visual amenity and wildlife value.


6
3



1. Informal layout reflecting a more rural character
2. Mostly detached and semi-detached housing types
3. Neighbourhood Street with integrated on-street parking creating traffic calming opportunities
4. Pedestrian/cycle routes around the periphery with good connections to the development
5. Pocket Park planted with native and ornamental tree species
6. Traditional architectural approach with more iformal building frontage with use of red/buff brick and occasional white/off-white render.

View of Woodland View Character Area

6.6. Village Edge

Context

A considered scale, density and building spacing in response to Graveley and the visual sensitivity to the surrounding countryside. This leads to the use of larger gardens to help retain the open character of the landscape; visual filtering to blend built form with the countryside edge; topography has also influenced drainage opportunities.

Uses

The area will comprise of residential uses with associated green-blue network, including attenuation basins and allotments.

Built Form

This character area will comprise of lower density around 25-30dph with building heights limited to 2 storeys to address the adjacent rural and open context by tapering the built form.

The block typology will comprise of informal curved blocks, which have been shaped to compliment the existing topography to minimise the need for large retaining walls. The block arrangement will provide a good sense of passive surveillance to the green network.

The built form will include informal and varied building lines along with larger building gaps, which will consist predominantly of semi-detached and detached dwellings. More terraced forms of houses will generally be used around green corridors and spaces to the south of the character area. The break-up of the built form in combination with planting form will ensure a considered transition to the open countryside.



Movement and Parking

Mainly Lanes leading to block edges. Cycle/footpaths adjoining active travel routes through public open spaces.

Public Space

The use of lanes adjacent to green spaces. Hedge and tree planting to blend with public open space.

Identity

Plot Boundaries – Boundary treatments will comprise of hedges to soften the outward appearance.

Architectural Approach and Materials – Generally, a more traditional and informal architectural approach. Use of a mixture of traditional materials commonly found around Graveley. Generally, red brick, occasional white/off-white render will be used with elements of black timber weath-erboarding for key buildings and vista ends to reflect the local vernacular and create visual interest.

In terms of roofscapes, generally red tiles will be used with grey tiles/slate to emphasise key spaces.

Landscape

The new built development edge will be set back from the adjoining garden and cricket ground boundaries to form wide buffer zones and generously proportioned recreational routes. These spaces will incorporate the existing footpath (Graveley 006) together with new complimentary routes to encourage non-vehicular travel.

The landscape will also provide a new community allotment.

New access paths will encourage enjoyment of these assets and facilitate site maintenance. New boundary hedgerows and tree plantings will integrate with existing boundary vegetation and reinforce the separation of the new development from the village to the north.





Local Precedent


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3



1. Informal built form creating a more filtered appearance from Graveley
2. A range of detached, semi-detached and to a small degree terraced dwelling types
3. Site boundary enforced with hedge and tree planting with filtered views towards Graveley
4. Traditional architectural approach with more informal building frontage with use of red/buff brick, occasional white/off-white render and timber weatherboarding.

View of Village Edge Character Area



Chapter 7

Summary

Summary

Our proposals at North Stevenage will deliver a strong vision that aims to:

- create a sustainable urban extension to Stevenage with its own distinctive character
- deliver much needed new local housing, a Primary School and other community uses
- provide a significant amount of green open space accessible to all comprised of recreational areas, allotments and grow spaces, play areas and places for biodiversity

This Strategic Masterplan Framework document sets our overall vision for North Stevenage and provides:

- Alignment with local policies to deliver 900 homes, a 2FE Primary School and Community Uses.
- A development framework based on a set of clear design parameters that will guide high quality placemaking on the site
- Supporting connections into the consented site at HO3 within Stevenage Borough Council
- A material planning consideration, against which the Outline Planning Application submitted in 2023 by Croudace Homes and any subsequent planning decision can be tested.
- A high level site wide design framework to secure design quality and support co-ordinated high-quality development

The proposals in the Strategic Masterplan Framework will be subject to further, detailed investigations as the scheme progresses.

Future engagement on the proposed Design Code to support development at the site will be agreed between parties and undertaken accordingly.





croudacehomes

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Appendix B: North Hertfordshire Sustainability Principles – Assessment

Site: NS1, North of Stevenage

Principle		Commentary
Transport		
1. New development should be planned around walkable 20-minute neighbourhoods so every home can walk or cycle to meet their daily needs (including primary schools, local shops and mobility hubs)	Met	Within the scheme, a community hub that could provide co-working spaces, meeting rooms, café and community hall is proposed in a central location. A Primary School and mobility hub is also proposed next to the community hub to create a local neighbourhood centre. The site is within a reasonable walking or cycling distance to a range of local services and facilities. This includes Lister hospital, a supermarket, pubs and the Old Town High Street.
2. Active travel should be prioritised over other modes of transport. Walking and cycling should be the safest easiest and most direct forms of transport linking key destinations. The dominance of vehicles on main routes will be reduced and managed through tools such as filtered permeability.	Met	Direct utility pedestrian and cycle links are provided from all areas of the site to the proposed central hub and into the adjoining Stevenage scheme. Filtered permeability will remove private vehicles from the centre of the scheme. The site is linked to the pedestrian and cycle network in Stevenage and National Cycle Route 12 which provides an off-road cycle path to Stevenage Town Centre. This route also connects to Letchworth. The active travel route hierarchy will be further developed through the Design Code for NS1.
3. The active travel network of pedestrian and cycle routes should incorporate a series of direct commuter routes to key destinations and facilities and slower and more tranquil green routes for recreational trips aligned to a connected green space network.	Met	The masterplan shows a series of formal active travel routes, informal routes through green space, edge and green lanes, public footpaths and pedestrian/cycle access points which provide key routes within the scheme and to connect to key places outside of the site. The masterplan contains illustrative plan views of street types which show the layout of the road, footpaths, cycle paths and tree planting. A more detailed active travel network framework will be provided in the Design Code.

Principle		Commentary
4. Cycle infrastructure should meet the core design principles and requirements of LTN 1/20 alongside protecting existing and providing new trees and landscape.	Met	The sections for the Gateway Street and Community Street provide segregated cycleways. On lower order streets, safe on carriageway cycling and / or shared spaces will be supported.
5. Public transport stops with a frequent service should be provided in general no more than 400 m from each house	Met	A bus route is included that will encourage sustainable travel for new residents. The proposed bus route balances accessibility with the potential attractiveness of the service. The significant majority of homes will be within 400m of a stop; some homes at the eastern edge of the site may fall just outside of this.
6. Flexible and durable high-quality streets accessible for a wide range of users should be designed to prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport, effectively integrating the design of sustainable waste collection and designed in accordance with the most recent edition of Manual for Streets.	Met	The scheme includes streets that allow for pedestrians and cyclists and public transport (bus route from the west to the new local centre) to travel. A range of sections and principles are set out. Street design will be further refined and fixed through the Design Code and detailed permissions.
7. Car parking provision should be located so it does not detract from the streetscene and designed to ensure active, public and shared modes of travel remain the most convenient and accessible modes of transport for most people when leaving their home	Partially met *(detail to follow)*	The masterplan proposes a mix of parking facilities such as: • Rear courtyard parking • On-plot parking is proposed • Frontage parking Further information on parking will be provided through the Design Code for NS1.
8. 100% of parking (both on plot and communal) should include a choice of electric vehicle charging informed by site suitability and assessment.	Partially met *(detail to follow)*	The scheme proposes that charging infrastructure for electric vehicles will be installed to dwellings in line with Approved Part S of the Building Regulations.
Community		
9. Community, education and retail uses and flexible space should be co-located with green space to form community hubs and	Met	The masterplan co-locates uses. The proposed community hub and primary school are located at the centre of the site. A proposed civic space is shown outside the community hub to contain a mobility hub and

Principle		Commentary
support social interaction, health and well-being and linked trips. These spaces should be provided early on in the development to support community cohesion.		interfacing with formal open space and play provision (play area, multi-use games area and community orchard) that will act as a gateway to the central green corridor and as the key active travel link between the two residential villages. Phasing will be set out and secured through subsequent planning approvals.
10. For larger scale development mobility hubs should be provided to connect multiple sustainable modes of travel with people, such as public transport, electric vehicles, electric bike infrastructure and clubs, delivery service pick-ups alongside other neighbourhood centre facilities (such as food stores, cafes, child care facilities, GP surgeries, home working hubs and community space)	Met	It is envisaged that the mobility hub at the centre of the site will provide a site for a bus stop, club car parking spaces, bike and scooter hire. A smaller minihub will be provided centrally in the eastern area of the site, in part to offset the fact that a small number of properties in this area may be located more than 400m from the hub.
11. Neighbourhoods should be designed with a range of densities that define their character responding to local character and context. Higher densities should be located in and around the neighbourhood centres/community hubs. Lower densities around countryside edges.	Met	The masterplan provides a framework for building heights and density. The proposed density scales are reflective of the landscape topography. The proposed Central Park will divide the scheme with the eastern and northern parcels providing lower density of 25-35 dwellings per hectare. This takes into consideration the rural context/countryside edges. The western parcels will provide 35-40 dwellings per hectare to create an urban setting next to the school site, mobility hub and community hub. A series of high-level character areas and principles are established. These will be further evolved and refined through the Design Code.
Green Infrastructure		
12. A connected and accessible multi-functional green space network should be created and distributed across the development carefully combining active travel routes, recreational, play, sport, allotment, sustainable urban drainage and ecological enhancements and	Met	A green infrastructure framework is included in the masterplan. It demonstrates how the scheme will provide a green infrastructure network linking public open space and recreation spaces. Green corridors are proposed through the scheme linking residential areas to the proposed local neighbourhood centre, Graveley, Stevenage's housing scheme H03 and the new Forster Country Park. Included within the green space network is multi-functional open spaces, play areas, allotments and SUDs.

Principle		Commentary
achieve the maximum benefits for people, wildlife and the wider environment.		A landscape buffer for existing hedgerows and trees is also proposed to maximise and protect existing wildlife and habitats.
13. The amount, type and location of green space should be informed by the application of the Fields in Trust Standards where sport, recreation and play facilities (including buildings) should be located in prominent and accessible locations so they can serve the community well.	Met	Green space provision is informed by, and exceeds, the Fields in Trust standards. Sport England have advised and agreed that contributions should be made to off-site formal sports provision. Open space is well distributed through the site.
14. Green infrastructure should actively mitigate any unavoidable harmful environmental impacts of development on soil or air quality and minimise light pollution	Met	Landscape buffers are proposed to prevent any harm to existing trees and hedgerows. The Biodiversity Framework identifies a sensitive lighting zone around the site perimeter. Utility walking and cycling routes have been directed to the edges of the green corridors rather than through their centre.
15. Sustainable urban drainage should use above ground features to manage flood risk, mimic natural drainage patterns, maintain the natural water cycle improve water quality and include measures to enhance habitat creation through aquatic and marginal planting.	Met	The scheme includes two proposed drainage attenuation basins to manage flood risk and provide water drainage. These are sited at the north-east corner of the site, close to the pedestrian and cycle access point to Graveley, and along the northern boundary. These locations are informed by the topography of the site and a gravity-led approach to drainage. The Design Code will provide the opportunity to consider detailed, street-scale interventions such as swales and rain gardens that will complement these and provide pathways towards them. The Lead Local Flood Authority did not participate in the masterplan but will be a statutory consultee on future planning applications. Any responses will inform the further design development of the sustainable urban drainage strategy.
16. Existing ecological assets should be retained, protected and enhanced and connected through links, corridors and stepping stones with existing and planned ecological features and networks within and beyond the site	Met	The majority of the ecological interest is to the perimeter of the site as the central areas have been long-standing agricultural uses. Existing hedges and trees will be retained where possible. Additional planting will be provided along the eastern boundary in particular to reinforce the Ten Acre Wood while respecting the heritage interest of the adjoining Chesfield

Principle		Commentary
boundary to enhance ecological functionality and connectivity		Park. 12m buffers are shown provided around the site boundaries in line with Local Plan policy.
17. New development should deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain within the site boundary or where this cannot be achieved off site habitat enhancement and creation on land under control by the developer within a local distance to the site or a council owned site in a nature opportunity/recovery area	Met	The masterplan demonstrates at least 10% BNG can be delivered within the site. The calculations at this stage take a precautionary approach. They show gains of 10.6%-10.7% based upon the assumptions and level of detail that are appropriate and available at this stage. The masterplan commits to seeking opportunities to enhance this baseline position as elements of the scheme design, such as the access point and the precise nature of the proposed open spaces, are evolved through the Design Code and fixed through any detailed application(s).
18. All streets should be designed to incorporate nature-rich green and blue infrastructure and connect people with nature, provide urban cooling and sustainably manage surface water.	Met	The masterplan provides information on landscape and character which includes the provision of green and blue infrastructure. The illustrative street sections show space for trees and planting. Detailed information on this will be included in the Design Code for NS1.
19. All streets should include tree planting that is best able to absorb carbon and airborne pollutants, attenuate surface water run-off, cool the atmosphere and provide shade and shelter	Met	Tree planting is proposed throughout the scheme and shown in the street plans, sections and scheme illustrations. Further details will be set out in the Design Code.
20. New development should avoid invasive species and maximise the use of native species in site and plot boundaries streets and green spaces to appropriate to local soil conditions and landscape character, ensuring both species and vegetation diversity	Met	The masterplan commits to native species being a core aspect of new planting and tree schemes reflecting local context and character. Where beneficial, additional non-native species will be used to bolster diversity, amenity value, resilience and food / foraging opportunities for wildlife.
21. All new development should utilise domestic scale features to support wildlife such as integral bird nests, bat roosts and invertebrate boxes across the site	Not addressed at this stage	Domestic-scale design measures to support wildlife will be included in the Design Code and / or secured by condition on relevant permissions.

Principle		Commentary
22. The management and maintenance of green space and other community infrastructure should be agreed in the early stages of planning and design to ensure the proposed condition, quality, functionality and benefits of the green space in the long term.	Not addressed at this stage	The management approach has not been set at masterplan stage for this scheme. Stewardship will be considered and secured through the outline planning application and associated legal agreement.
Energy & Water		
23. New development should demonstrate how carbon emissions will be minimised and energy efficiency maximised through fabric performance, passive design and using renewable technologies such as photovoltaics, solar thermal, biomass, ground/air source heat pumps, wind and hydro. The choice of renewables should be informed by site assessment and suitability. Achieving standards beyond the minimum requirements of building regulations is strongly encouraged.	Partially met (*detail to follow)*	The masterplan includes a Sustainability and Energy Framework for the site which responds to national and local policy requirements. Passive and active design measures will be incorporated to improve insulation, reduce heat loss and avoid excessive requirements for heating and cooling. Electric heating and water systems will be installed which would make the homes net zero in operation when the UK electricity grid decarbonises. Further information on renewable technologies such as heat pumps and solar panels will be included in the Design Code for NS1. The masterplan includes a clear commitment to investigating the feasibility of these technologies.
24. New development should minimise carbon emissions through reducing embodied energy through the selection of construction and building materials and processes. The use of sustainable construction standards such as BREAAM, Housing Quality Mark and Passivhaus are encouraged to demonstrate processes that are environmentally responsible and resource efficient.	Not addressed at this stage	See above. Information on construction, building materials and processes will be included in the Design Code for NS1.
25. All new development should meet or exceed nationally prescribed water efficiency standards and include measures to reduce	Met	The masterplan commits to designing new homes to use less than the Local Plan's enhanced target of 105 litres of water per day per person. It will exceed these nationally prescribed standards, by specifying water

Principle		Commentary
water consumption including water efficient appliances and water recycling systems.		efficient and low flow fittings to all areas. Further information will be included in the Design Code for NS1.

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COUNCIL
11 JULY 2024

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR: RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: NON-EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To consider the Annual Report of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the 2023/24 Civic Year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Council note the Annual Report of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee as attached at Appendix A.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To provide Full Council with assurance as to the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None, the constitution requires an Annual Report to be provided to Council.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Chair of the FAR Committee (who was also Chair during 203/24) has been consulted on the content of the report.

5.2. The current Members of the FAR Committee have been provided with an opportunity to comment on the Report before it is presented to Full Council.

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 Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee reports to Full Council each year providing an overview of the work that has been done over the previous Civic Year. It also provides a summary of the work planned for the forthcoming year.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The Annual Report for 2023-24 is attached at Appendix A. The Annual Report is intended to provide Full Council with assurance as to the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Constitution (4.4.1 (ee)) states that Full Council will receive an Annual Report from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Providing Full Council with assurance over the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee gives confidence that the areas of its work (including financial management) are being manged effectively.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. Providing Full Council with assurance over the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee gives confidence that the areas of its work (including oversight of risk) are being manged effectively.

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 equalities implications arising from this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A- Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report 2023-24.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Reports to and minutes of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee during the Civic Year 2023-24, in particular the LGA Review Action Plan (https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s22334/LGA%20Review%20Action%20Plan.pdf)

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Finance, Audit and Risk Committee

Annual Report 2023-24

Contents

Introduction from the Chair of the Committee

Role of the Committee

Effectiveness

Members of the Committee

Meetings in 2023-24

Main achievements

Planned work for 2024-25

Introduction from the Chair of the Committee

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Finance, Audit & Risk (FAR) Committee which describes the Committee's work and achievements over a 12 month period to March 2024.

At the start of every meeting, I highlight the importance of this Committee in relation to good governance. Good governance supports effective decision making, improve performance, and respond to risks and opportunities. I hope that this Annual Report helps to demonstrate this, and the importance of the role of the Finance Audit & Risk Committee

All of our meetings are open to the public and I would encourage residents to come along and see the Committee in action.

As well as elected members, the Committee is supported by the Service Director: Resources, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader in approving and reviewing the Annual Governance Statement. Similarly representatives from the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS), the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) and our External Auditors regularly attend the meetings of the Committee.

I would like to thank those Members of the Committee from last year, especially those that have supported the Committee over a number of years.

Councillor Sean Nolan

May 2024

Role of the Committee

The purpose of the FAR Committee is to provide independent scrutiny and assurance of finance, audit and internal control matters and to provide effective scrutiny of financial matters. This also encompasses corporate governance and risk management.

The Committee provides comments on relevant reports to Cabinet, including quarterly finance reports and budget-setting reports. The work of the Committee provides assurance to Council on the annual accounts, risk management, audit and internal control.

The full Terms of Reference for this Committee are provided in the Council's Constitution. https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/S.10_0.pdf

Effectiveness

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) produced a publication on "Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police". This recommends that Audit Committees should consider their effectiveness and provides an self-evaluation tool to facilitate this. The Council asked the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) to undertake such a review in July 2021, which was reported to Committee at the July 2021 meeting (https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s16780/Appendix%20A%20-%20SIAS%20Review%20of%20the%20effectiveness%20of%20the%20Finance%20Audit%20and%20Risk%20Committee.pdf).

The findings of the 2021 review (and progress made against the recommendations) were:

- **Independent Member (non-political appointment)**. The Committee now has an Independent Member, who has been in place since September 2022.
- **Forward Work Plan**. This document provides a forward work plan (see the Planned Work section). Members of the Committee are also encouraged to recommend future agenda items.
- **Learning and Development**. See the Main Achievements section below for details of training provided during 2023/24.
- **Terms of Reference.** The Terms of Reference for Council confirm that this Annual Report is considered by a meeting of Full Council.

During 2022/23 we received peer support to look at improving the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (as well as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee). The recommendations of that process (and progress made against the recommendations) were:

- **All-Member training on Finance and Risk (2023/24)**. Training provided in June 2023.
- **Introductive to Local Government Finance training (2024/25)**. External trainer commissioned for training to be provided in June 2024.
- **Regular training before FAR meetings**. Has been in place during 2023/24 when there has been sufficient interest. Planned to continue during 2024/25 onwards.
- **Reassure Members that additional support is available.** Offer has been made and some Members have taken up the offer.
- **Move the review of finance monitoring reports (refereed to as Finance Scrutiny) to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.** Agreed that recommendation was premature when it was made, but that would be reviewed again 2024/25.
- **If split above goes ahead, ensure that Members of the Audit Committee are clear on the scope of the Committee-** To be progressed if action above is taken forward.
- **Group Leaders to promote the role of FAR-** Group Leaders contacted in advance of Annual Council highlighting the importance of the Committee.

- **Short explanation of the role of the Committee to be read out before each meeting.** Complete and now part of the Chair's script.
- **Explanation added to the website to explain the role of the Committee.** Complete.
- **Easier ways of accessing the risk register.** It was promoted in the Finance and Risk training in June 2023, as well as via Members Information Service. To be promoted again during Summer 2024 via e-mail and in Members Information Service.
- **Support Members with understanding the risks that the Council faces.** Was part of training in June 2023. To carry out more training during 2024 with a focus on FAR and Cabinet Members.
- **Meeting minutes reflect agreed actions.** This is in place for all meetings.
- **Consideration of future discussion topics.** This is on the agenda for each meeting and has been discussed regularly.
- **Skills audit/ regular training for FAR members**. Has been addressed through regular training sessions before FAR meetings. Topics are guided by relevant agenda items and requests for Members.

The SIAS review of this committee is included in the audit plan for this year (2024/25), and is expected to take place early in the civic year.

Members of the Committee

The following Members were appointed to the Committee for 2023/24:

Councillor Sean Nolan	Labour and Co-operative	Chair
Councillor Terry Tyler	Liberal Democrat	Vice-Chair
Councillor Terry Hone	Conservative	
Councillor Chris Lucas	Liberal Democrat	
Councillor Tom Plater	Labour and Co-operative	
Councillor Mandi Tandi	Conservative	
Councillor Tamsin Thomas	Labour and Co-operative	
John Cannon	Independent (non-voting)	

Substitutes:

Councillor Matt Barnes	Liberal Democrat
Councillor Clare Billing	Labour and Co-operative
Councillor Sam Collins	Liberal Democrat
Councillor Adam Compton	Conservative
Councillor Juan Cowell	Conservative
Councillor Daniel Marsh	Labour and Co-operative

To support Members appointed to the Committee, assistance was readily available from relevant Officers**.**

Meetings

A work plan was set out at the start of the year, which included review of the following:

- Governance reports, including the Annual Governance Statement
- Reports of the External Auditor (Ernst and Young)
- Internal Audit Reports (Shared Internal Audit Service – SIAS) to enable monitoring of the delivery of the internal audit service
- Anti-fraud reports (Shared Anti-Fraud Service- SAFS) to enable monitoring of the effectiveness of anti-fraud activity
- Risk Management Updates
- Financial monitoring including Revenue budget and the Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury)

As and when required, the planned Agenda is supplemented by reports where the Committee has requested additional information or assurance. The Chief Finanec

The Committee met six times in the year and the following reports were presented and discussed:

	Jun 2023	Sep 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024	Mar 2024
Annual Governance Statement	Draft AGS 22/23	Annual Governance Statement 22/23				Local Code of Governance and AGS Action Plan update
Reports from External Auditors (Ernst and Young)		Audit Results Report 21/22 and Annual Audit Report 21/22				
Statement of Accounts		Statement of Accounts 21/22				
Internal Audit (SIAS) progress reports	Annual Report 22/23	Progress Report 23/24	Progress Report 23/24		Progress Report 23/24	Audit Plan 24/25 and 23/24 Progress
Anti-Fraud (SAFS) reports		Annual Report 22/23 and progress 23/24		Progress Report		24/25 Plan and 23/24 Progress
Budget monitoring reports	Outturn for 22/23	Q1 23/24		Q2 23/24		Q3 23/24
Risk Management	Annual Report on Risk Governance			Mid-year update		
Budget setting reports			Medium Term Financial Strategy	Draft Budget 24/25	Revenue Budget 24/25	

					Investment Strategy 24/25 onwards	
Other reports	FAR Annual Report 22/23 LGA Review Action Plan					Clearing the External Audit backlog

Main Achievements

As an Audit Committee, it is important that FAR undertakes its key and regular tasks to ensure good governance. Training helps in understanding the topics, as well as developing skills to help analyse the reports thar are presented.

It was pleasing to see that FAR was able to approve the Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 in September 2023. The pension issue (that was outside the Council's control) was finally resolved. Whilst this is a delay on when the accounts are supposed to be, relatively the Council is in a good position. The report on the External Audit backlog (March 2024) set out the national plans on how to address the situation. Ernst and Young (current auditors up to 2022/23) and KPMG (new auditors from 2023/24) both supported the Committee by detailing the implications of the proposed plans. We are planning on the basis of the actions being put in place, but still waiting for confirmation that it will actually happen.

In June there was a training session open to all Members covering finance and risk. In November there was another all-Member session from the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS). In advance of FAR meetings, we have had mini-training sessions which have covered topics including Internal Audit, budget-setting and good governance. The topics were determined by FAR Members and the topics being discussed.

Planned work for 2024-25

The Committee will receive the items that ensure it covers its remit. This is expected to include the following items:

	Jun 2024	Early Sep 2024	End Sept 2024	Nov 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Mar 2025
Annual Governance Statement	Draft AGS 23/24		AGS 23/24				
Reports from External Auditors (Ernst and Young)	Value for Money report 22/23		22/23 Audit Report (limitation of scope opinion)				
Reports from External Auditors (KPMG)	Audit Plan 23/24				TBC 23/24 Audit Report (expected with some limitation of scope)		
Internal Audit (SIAS) progress reports	Annual Report 23/24	Service Report 23/24 and update 24/25		Progress Report			Audit Plan 25/26 and 24/25 Progress
Anti-Fraud (SAFS) reports		Annual Report 23/24 and progress 24/25			Progress Report		25/26 Plan and 24/25 Progress
Budget monitoring reports	Outturn for 23/24	Q1 24/25			Q2 24/25		Q3 24/25
Risk Management	Annual Report				Mid-year update		
Budget setting reports				Medium Term Financial Strategy	Draft Budget 25/26	Revenue Budget 25/26 Investment Strategy 25/26 onwards	
Other reports	FAR Annual Report 23/24	Contract and Procurement Rules		Financial Regulations			

The review of the Contract and Procurement Rules is due to the new Procurement Act 2023 that will need to be implemented from the end of October 2024. The review will also consider how we can simplify the rules.

The Financial Regulations will be reviewed to ensure that they still work well in balancing the need for good governance with being productive.

Members of the Committee can also make recommendations of other topic areas that they would like to discuss/ be reported on.

The training sessions immediately prior to each meeting will continue. The first topic will be on carrying out risk assessments as that was a topic that was requested at the end of last year.

All Members of the Committee are encouraged to take advantage of the various offers of training and development that will be made by Officers, as well as any relevant external courses that are available. All Members are also able to contact the Service Director: Resources for any support that they require.

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COUNCIL
11 JULY 2024

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2023-24

REPORT OF THE VICE-CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2023-2024

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: NOT APPLICABLE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 To consider the Annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the 2023/2024 Civic Year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023/2024 as attached at Appendix A be noted.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To enable Council to consider and comment on the report of the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the work of the Committee in the 2023/2024 Civic Year.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have had the opportunity to consider and comment on the report prior to this meeting.

5.2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and commented on the draft report prior to consideration by Council, at the meeting of the Committee on 12 March 2024.

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 Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports each year to Annual Council giving a brief overview of the work undertaken by that Committee in the previous Civic Year.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The report at Appendix A sets out the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the Civic Year 2023/2024.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Although it is not specifically referred to in the Constitution and is not a legal requirement, Full Council has routinely received an Annual Report from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no capital or revenue implications arising from the content of this report.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

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

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.

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 are no direct Human Resource Implications arising from this report.

14.2 The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Team supports the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

14.3 The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertakes the role of Scrutiny Officer.

15. APPENDICES

15.1 Appendix A – Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023/2024.

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

16.1 James Lovegrove
Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager
James.lovegrove@north-herts.gov.uk
01462 474204

16.2 Melanie Stimpson
Democratic Services Manager
Melanie.stimpson@north-herts.gov.uk
01462 474208

17. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 Reports to and Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the Civic Year 2023/2024.

Browse meetings - Overview and Scrutiny Committee | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT
2023/2024

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Vice-Chair's Foreword

I would like to thank all Members who served on the Committee this year; officers who were involved in preparation for our meetings, and both officers and members of Cabinet who presented reports.

It is an important step forward for us to have a dedicated, part-time Scrutiny Officer appointed to help us with our forward planning. I think that the role will allow us to expand our critical friend role in a non-political, supportive way.

This year we finally received the past Chair's report on the Lord Lister call to account, September 2022. The Harkness Court call to account was instigated and completed in 2023. The Chair's report for Harkness Court is now available.

Cabinet have continued to be receptive to the recommendations from this Committee and our aim should be to continue to be a critical friend to Cabinet by providing responses that are helpful and challenging; both at the beginning and end of important decision cycles.

The Committee has set up a work programme which provides focused Member oversight, encourages open debate and seeks to achieve service improvement through effective policy development and meaningful policy and service change. The importance of Members being able to drill down into the detail of an aspect of the work programme is met within the Pentana and Ideagen software. Training materials for this are in preparation in time for the 2024 induction session.

Val Bryant
Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2023-24

1. Overview and Scrutiny at North Hertfordshire Council

1.1 The depth and breadth of the Council's work means that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must use its resources efficiently and effectively in order to scrutinise topics in the time available. It does so by:

- Considering a number of issues during its Committee meetings and making recommendations to Cabinet;

- Appointing dedicated task and finish groups which can examine issues in depth and make recommendations to improve services;

2. Methods of Scrutiny

2.1 The Committee can scrutinise issues in a number of ways:

- By considering reports from, and questioning officers and Executive Members about different aspects of the Council's business;

- By submitting written questions which require a written answer, and which members can follow up by asking supplementary questions in Committee;

- By interviewing and questioning Executive Members about their respective portfolios;

- By calling in decisions which are of great concern to members or to the public;

- By inviting representatives from outside bodies to talk about topics of interest to the public in North Hertfordshire.

3. Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.1 There were six scheduled meetings this year and all proceeded as planned, in person in the Council Chamber, making effective use of the facility for officer presentations to be delivered remotely.

3.2 There was one extraordinary meeting of the Committee this year.

3.3 The Committee has considered a range of topics including scrutinising key decisions going to Cabinet, checking whether the Council has met its performance indicators and reviewing other issues which the Committee has decided would benefit from closer scrutiny.

4. Call-In

4.1 The call-in process allows the Chair of the Committee, or five members of the Council, to call in a decision which is the responsibility of the Executive, which has been made but not implemented. The Committee can ask the Executive to reconsider the decision or can refer it to Council.

4.2 There have been no called in items this year.

5. Presentations by Executive Members

5.1 The Committee has in general continued with its decision not to invite Executive Members to speak on their portfolios on a rolling basis and to instead invite them only to present reports from their relevant portfolio that were of interest to the Committee or to address specific issues.

5.2 Executive Members have taken leadership on presenting relevant reports to the Committee during this Civic Year, with Officer support being limited to answering specific or detailed questions.

5.3 Executive Members are also welcomed when attending meetings and encouraged to take part in the meeting when appropriate.

5.4 The Committee are grateful to the Executive Members for making presentations and attending meetings this year.

6. Crime & Disorder Scrutiny

6.1 The Committee is also the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee for North Hertfordshire which is required to meet at least once a year.

6.2 The Committee chose this year to invite Hertfordshire Constabulary and North Herts Citizens Advice to discuss Hate Crimes in North Herts.

6.3 Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed here.

7. Safeguarding

7.1 The Committee continued to take a close interest in safeguarding matters and received its annual update on the Council's safeguarding performance in September 2023.

7.2 Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed here.

8. Statistics

8.1 In total, the Committee has considered 47 items at its scheduled meetings this year.

8.2 It has made 17 recommendations on 15 topics to Cabinet. At every meeting the Committee also considered the resolutions previously made, referrals onto Cabinet and their outcome and the work programme.

8.3 No written questions were submitted this year.

9. Task and Finish Groups

9.1 Following discussions with the Chair, Vice-Chair and lead Officers, it was agreed that, due to the length of time since the request to hold a Task and Finish Group on Communications Policy, it would no longer be suitable to proceed with this. It

was agreed that the policy itself would be reviewed by the Committee and then further monitored once the policy had been implemented.

9.2 Group Leaders have been provided with a document to circulate to their Members outlining the process and function of the Task and Finish Groups. This will allow groups to create a 'pool' of Members who have indicated they wish to sit on a future Task and Finish Group.

10. Public Participation

10.1 The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation.

10.2 Four members of the public attended the Committee's meetings to make presentations this year.

10.3 Although physical attendance at the actual meetings was extremely low, recordings of the meetings on YouTube have received a total of 517 views. The average view duration of a recording was 8 minutes 51 seconds.

10.4 Some of the ways for the public to get involved include suggesting a topic for investigation as a task and finish group; providing evidence to or at a meeting; and being co-opted on to a topic group. The Committee is keen to see more public participation both in its task and finish groups and in its committee meetings.

11. Peer Review 2022

11.1 In 2020 the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) undertook a review, the review report and Action Plan were agreed through Cabinet on 24 March 2020 and 23 June 2020, respectively. A follow up review was undertaken by different LGA CPC Peers during 2022 and a further LGA Peer Committee Support report was issued in January 2023 and a number of further recommendations were made.

11.2 Their initial findings included several recommendations which were first presented to the Committee as an Action Plan at the meeting on 20 June 2023 for consideration and was referred onto Cabinet to approve. The Action Plan was agreed by at the meeting on 27 June 2023.

11.3 Since this the Action Plan was approved, this have been presented throughout the year to the Committee for consideration at each meeting under the Work Programme item.

11.4 Some of the key recommendations included in the Action Plan were:

- To ensure effective training is provided for Members, as well as specific training to opposition Councillors.
- To urgently fund and recruit a dedicated Scrutiny Officer.
- To establish clear lines of questioning and associated processes.

- To develop clear reporting lines between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny, including providing updates on referrals made.

12. Call to Account – Harkness Court

12.1 A Call to Account too place at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 7 November 2023, which looked at the Harkness Court Refurbishment undertaken by the Council.

12.2 The Officers involved in the Call to Account were:

12.2.1 Steve Crowley – Service Director – Enterprise
12.2.2 Nafees Parkar – Building Surveyor

12.3 No Members were requested to provide their account to the Committee.

12.4 A Chair's Report on the Call to Account was not provided before the end of the 2023/24 Civic Year and therefore the recommendations could not be considered by members of the Committee.

12.5 The Vice Chair for the Civic Year 2023/24 produced a report on this which was presented at the first meeting of the Committee in the Civic Year 2024/25. Further details on this Vice Chair's report, including the report itself, the Minutes from the meeting and the recording, can be found here: Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 18th June, 2024, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

12.6 Further details on the Call to Account, including documents presented, the Minutes from the meeting and the recording, can be found here: Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 7th November, 2023, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk).

13. Further Information and Membership

13.1 Further information about the work of scrutiny and contact details can be found here: Overview and Scrutiny | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

13.2 Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2023/2024:

Members of the Committee:

Councillor Adam Compton (Chair)
Councillor Val Bryant (Vice-Chair)
Councillor David Levett
Councillor Matt Barnes
Councillor Clare Billing
Councillor Mick Debenham
Councillor Ian Moody
Councillor Nigel Mason
Councillor Ralph Muncer
Councillor Dominic Griffiths
Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason

Substitutes:

Councillor Daniel Allen
Councillor David Barnard
Councillor Raj Bhakar
Councillor Sam Collins
Councillor James Denselow
Councillor Lisa Nash
Councillor Sean Nolan
Councillor Mandi Tandi

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FULL COUNCIL
11 July 2024

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	**AGENDA ITEM No.**

TITLE OF REPORT: ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

REPORT OF MONITORING OFFICER

THE CHAIRMAN OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST/SUSTAINABILITY/ A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This is the Annual Report in relation to ethical standards for the last year. It covers the work of the Committee as well as the issues that have arisen locally and nationally on ethical standards matters.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Council receives and notes the Annual Report, as Appendix A.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 In line with recommended good governance practice to report the work of Standards Committee to the full Membership, to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and to demonstrate a strong commitment to ethical values.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 The Alternative would be not to produce an annual report, but this would be contrary to the Committee on Standards in Public Life 2019 recommendations.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 Consultation has taken place with the Chair and Vice Chair during the year, on the topics within this report; and where relevant/ applicable with the Standards Committee as part of their deliberations on the topics detailed. Group Leaders are also kept informed of any relevant developments as part of their monthly briefings with the Monitoring Officer. Quarterly meetings are also scheduled between the Monitoring Officer, Deputies, Chair, Vice Chair with the Independent Persons, to discuss standards matters.

6. FORWARD PLAN

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

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 See attached report at Appendix A.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 See attached report at Appendix A.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Full Council receives an annual report as per 4.4.1 (ee). Whilst there is no overriding legislation that requires an annual report, this was introduced as part of Full Councils remit, following the CSPL report, as it is good practice to report such matters to the whole membership.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no capital or revenue implications arising from the content of this report.

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 Appropriate policy frameworks help to ensure good governance of the Council and therefore reduce risk of poor practice or unsafe decision making.

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. There are no direct equalities implications from this report.

12.2 Good governance and high ethical standards of conduct ensure that local government decisions are taken in the public interest.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” policy do not apply to this report as this is not a procurement or contract.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are no financial implications to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 None other than again highlighting the ongoing resource implications for the complaints received.

16. APPENDICES

15.1 Appendix A – Standards Committee Annual Report 2023/24

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

16.1 Jeanette Thompson Service Director: Legal and Community (& Monitoring Officer): Jeanette.thompson@north-herts.gov.uk ext. 4370

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

17.1 None other than those referred to in Appendix A (and associated links) none.

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North Herts Council

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

FOREWORD

Councillor Ruth Brown
Chair the Standards Committee 2023-24

I am pleased to present this Annual Report which provides a summary of activities in 2023/24 of the Standards work and work of the Committee.

The Committee was able to review and recommended changes relating to the Member Planning Code of Good Practice – to provide clear direction on how Councillors should involve themselves in the District's planning and development control. We know that complaint handling is important, to all those involved in the process – so I am gratified that the Committee, Chair, Vice Chair and Officers (and Independent Persons) has continued to look to improve its practices and enhance public confidence by responding to representations and considering best practice – most recently by updating the Councillor Complaints Handling Procedure. While specific numbers of complaints do not always correspond to the work involved, its essential to deal with these fairly and proportionately and note that the complaint numbers have significantly fallen over time.

Going forward, I am sure that the Committee will continue to promote and maintain high Councillor standards, whilst noting the individual responsibility that all Councillors (including Parish, Town, and Community Councillors) have for ensuring they act appropriately.

I would like to thank our Independent Persons Nicholas Moss OBE and the Reserve Independent Persons Peter Chapman and John Richardson, the Parish Councillor co-optees, for their assistance to the Council during this period. I would also like to thank the Monitoring Officer and Deputy for their work during this time.

I recommend that Council receives this report.

Cllr Alistair Willoughby
Chair of Standards Committee 2024-25

As Chair this year, I am delighted with the progress we made last year in promoting local ethical standards.

Our commitment to transparency, integrity, and accountability has strengthened the way we deal with Councillor actions and complaints. Looking ahead, I eagerly anticipate collaborating with the Committee to address ethical matters, enhance public trust, to uphold the highest standards for our residents.

1. **Introduction**

1.1 This report covers the civic year 2023/24. During that year, the Committee met twice, on 1 November and 27 March. During the meetings, the Committee considered local and national standards issues, complaints, training, the Complaints Handling Procedure, and the Planning Code of Good Conduct.

2. **Role of the Standards Committee**

2.1 The Standards Committee's terms of reference are set out in section 7 of the Council's Constitution [click here for website page]. As such the main Committee is an overseeing body in relation to general ethical and standards matters. Specific complaints are largely dealt with by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy in conjunction with the Independent Person (IP) and Reserve Independent Persons (ResIPs). If a complaint progresses to a hearing stage, then a Sub Committee of the main Committee would consider this under the adopted Procedure.

3. **Members of the Committee**

3.1 The Committee should have up to 14 members comprising of 12 District Councillors and a maximum of 4 non-voting co-opted Parish, Town & Community Council members. In 2023/24, the membership was:

Councillor Ruth Brown	Chair
Councillor Ian Albert	Vice-Chair
Councillor Raj Bhakar	Committee Member
Councillor Clare Billing	Committee Member
Councillor Cathy Brownjohn	Committee Member
Councillor Val Bryant	Committee Member
Councillor Juan Cowell	Committee Member
Councillor Dominic Griffiths	Committee Member
Councillor Gerald Morris	Committee Member
Councillor Ralph Muncer	Committee Member
Councillor Sean Prendergast	Committee Member
Councillor Richard Thake	Committee Member
Councillor Alistair Willoughby	Committee Member

Co-opted, non-voting, Members:-

Parish Councillor Rebecca Elliott (St Ippolyts)
Parish Councillor Martin Griffin (Graveley Parish Council)

3.2 The Committee meetings are also attended by the IP and ResIPs, who attend in an advisory (non-voting) role.

Nicholas Moss OBE	IP
Peter Chapman	ResIP
John Richardson	ResIP

4. **Monitoring Officer/Support to the Committee**

4.1 Jeanette Thompson is the Council's Monitoring Officer and Service Director Legal & Community. The Monitoring Officer is a statutory role that:-

- Supports the Standards Committee and the IP and ResIPs
- Maintains systems and processes for dealing with allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members
- Investigates and reports to the Standards Committee on allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct for Members
- Has rights of access to any information from Members and/or officers in connection with a standards complaint
- Maintains registers of Councillors' interests
- Acts a point of contact for advice and/or queries by elected members
- Maintains and updates the Constitution.
- Together with other statutory officers, contributes to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct within the Council and advises on various issues, including administrative and governance issues

4.2 During the report period in question, there were 2 Deputies (up to October 2023) and then one, Isabelle Alajooz, providing further support, together with the Committee Services team.

4.3 The Council is required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 Act to provide the Monitoring Officer with "such staff, accommodation and other resources as are, in their opinion, sufficient to allow those duties to be performed". Where internal resource is limited, or there are potential conflict situations, support can be obtained externally.

5. Complaints

5.1. Changes to the Standards regime were introduced in July 2012 following the Localism Act 2011. Although it was no longer a statutory requirement to have a Standards Committee, Full Council approved the retention of a Committee to deal with the post investigation hearing of complaints and adopted a new Councillor Code of Conduct and a Procedure for dealing with standards complaints. Each Parish, Town & Community Council also adopted a Code of Conduct and the District Council has the responsibility for dealing with any Code of Conduct complaints about Parish, Town & Community Councillors.

5.2. This Council has reviewed its Code on a number of occasions since, most recently adopting the Local Government Association model (with minor local adjustments) in 2021. This version can be found in section 17 of the Constitution [click here]. This version was then adopted by most local Councils within the North Herts district, providing a degree of consistency across our area.

5.3. There is a statutory requirement to have arrangements in place to deal with Complaints for District and Parish, Town, or Community Councillors. The Procedure for handling Standards Complaints was first adopted by Full Council in July 2012 and has been amended by the Standards Committee, often yearly (in the light of experience of dealing with complaints/ lessons learnt). It was reviewed in March 2023, and most recently a report was taken in March 2024 to the Standards Committee [click here]. The Procedure was subsequently considered/ reviewed by the Chair, Vice Chair, IP, and ResIPs, Monitoring Officer and Deputy, in the light of The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Code published in February 2024 (applicable from April 2024), its website covering complaint handling, and Local Government Association's Guidance on Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints Handling, other

representations made, before an updated version being approved on 25 June [click here Delegated Decision]. The updated Procedure can be found on the relevant Councillor Complaints page: https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/complain-about-councillor. The Delegated Decision sets out the matters considered and the rationale for any of the amendments made.

5.4 In terms of complaints received, these are recorded by calendar, as opposed to civic year. During 2023 the Council received 11 complaints, and to date 7. Summaries of these complaints can be found in the Standards Matters reports to the Committee from November and March [1 November 2023 report click here & 27 March 2024 report click here]. At the point of preparing this Annual report, none are outstanding. Whilst the numbers appear to be low, that does not necessarily reflect the time associated with the complaints, and whilst most are dealt with in-house, one was referred out for external consideration/ decision.

6. Independent Persons

6.1 The Council is required to appoint an Independent Person and should have at least another as a reserve to provide support in terms of conflicts, or as a nominated contact for Councillors subject to a complaint. Nicholas Moss OBE is the IP and Peter Chapman and John Richardson the ResIPs for the year in question. They were appointed by Full Council on 24 September 2020, for a term of up to 4 years (at 2 year / a review and extension for a further 2 years). Their term currently expires on 23 September 2024. Their role has been and continues to be, to provide independent input into the standards process, as required by the Localism Act 2011. An IP is consulted on complaints received and prior to a decision being reached.

6.2 Mr Moss OBE, as the primary IP, has provided the following comments, regarding the past Standards year:

> "In the past year I have continued to attend each meeting of Standards Committee and other regular meetings involving the chair of the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer. I have been reassured by those discussions that Members appreciate the importance of the code of conduct: common sense principles to guide them in their role and to set out for the public the standard of conduct they can expect from their elected representatives.
>
> As set out elsewhere in this report there have been relatively few complaints, given the substantial numbers of District and parish Members for which this authority has complaints responsibility. That said, there have been incidents at both levels indicating that some Members' grasp of their responsibilities towards declarations of interest has not been as clear as it might be. There were no instances of lapses so serious that they have led to criminal proceedings. Nevertheless, those that have arisen suggest that this is an aspect of the code that would benefit from further study, via the new on-line training video.
>
> I have noted also instances of Members complaining about other Members. I have wondered if they were prompted by political considerations rather than as well-founded matters of conduct. I have wondered, too, if the public might ask themselves the same question.
>
> Conversely, I have offered my views on complaints from members of the public asserting that councillors had breached the code when, in fact, the complaints had been prompted by their dissatisfaction with a properly-made Council decision. Redress for the former is through the complaints process. For the latter it is through the ballot box.

Of course, the unfettered right of a member of the public to make a complaint is fundamental but I am pleased that the complaints procedure makes clear that distinction. The clarification reflects the fact that the code is not intended to hobble members as they carry out the duties for which they were elected.

I have contributed also to a number of reviews of instruments related to Member conduct, most recently the Planning Code of Good Practice. Again, I am encouraged the Council has adopted an updated version in an area of its responsibilities that can be particularly contentious. At the time of writing, the current edition of the complaints procedure is under review and I am confident that the revised version will reflect considerations that have come to officers' attention since the last review. I have been pleased to contribute to that process, also.

I understand that, as part of the Council's imminent governance review, it will contemplate the future of the Standards Committee. I hope that any changes that might be proposed will not give a mistaken impression to the public that it serves that the Council's commitment to promoting and to maintaining high standards has been diluted.

Nicholas Moss
Independent Person
June 17th 2024"

6.3 The Chair, Vice Chair and Monitoring Officer are currently undertaking a recruitment exercise for the IP and ResIPs and any recommendations they make following this will be brought to Full Council for approval on 19 September 2024.

7. Parish, Town, and Community Councils

7.1 The Monitoring Officer provides advice and support to the Parish, Town, and Community Councils in the district and this includes the Standards complaints dealt with in 2023/24 referred to in the reports. This covers advice, where relevant, on standards and complaint matters, although with resources or requests made, this may not be to the level that some of the local Councils desire. That said, the Council provided general Code of Conduct training on line, during the 2023 period, liaised with Hertfordshire Association of Parish & Town Councils to provide additional support and attempts to assist, where resources allowed. In respect of 2024 training/ other requirements, see below.

8. Training and Development

8.1 During 2023, post-election Code of Conduct training was provided in a live on line session to District and Parish, Town, and Community Councillors, with a recorded version of this available on the Council's Growzone resource for District Councillors.

8.2 As part of the agreed Standards Committee approach for 2024, a new recorded on line version was made available – prepared by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy and this was delivered with the assistance of AI, with an online test at the end of the session.

8.3 Councillors will note that as part of the March 2024 meeting, the Standards Committee recommended that all Parish, Town, or Community Councillors undertake training within 2 months of election or co-option. This was confirmed to the local Councils and the resource made available on the Council's YouTube (and confirmed to the Councils) on 17 June.

8.4 Standards Committee also recommended to full Council that mandatory training, be undertaken by all District Councillors (newly or re-elected) within 2 months of election (or provision of the online resource). At its meeting on 18 April 2024, Full Council resolved:

RESOLVED: That all District Councillors undertake post, all-out election training on the Code of Conduct within 2 months of their election (or availability of the training) whichever is the later date.

8.5 This is a presentation and test format. Both elements must be completed to meet the mandatory requirement, and this is monitored through the Council's learning and development team. This was made available and confirmed to District Councillors on 30 May.

8.6 At the point of preparing this report, only 10 of the 51 District Councillors have undertaken the training, therefore any Councillor who has not done so, should access and complete both elements of the mandatory training ***before 30 July***.

9. Other Areas of Work

9.1 The Monitoring Officer, with the assistance of the Monitoring Officer's PA, Penny Copestake, has tried to ensure that all new Councillors have submitted their Register of Interests within the statutory period. District Councillors are obliged to do this via the on-line form and should have done so within 28 days of election. Failure to do so is a potential criminal offence. Those re-elected should confirm that their interests remain the same or update them within the same period. The requirement to make such a disclosure is statutory and Code based. This means that the deadline for this to be undertaken was ***by 31 May***. Since the election various emails/ calls have been made to encourage completion/ information. At the point of preparing this report 5 District Councillors have not done confirmed their interests.

9.2 There are also a number of other election/ Local Councillor related activities that are undertaken, including receipt of declaration of acceptance of office and Registers of Interest received from local Councillors (in any given period 200 – 300), with the requirement to update paper based forms and return these to the Monitoring Officer within 28 days. Such information is then made available on the Council's website via the relevant local Council page.

9.3 The Monitoring Officer maintains a regular dialogue with the Council's other Statutory officers to consider and review governance arrangements. The Monitoring Officer also maintains regular dialogue around Governance with her equivalents across Hertfordshire and the wider region through the Public Law Partnership (which she Chaired from 2023- 2024) and Eastern region of Lawyers in Legal Government.

9.4 The Monitoring Officer has published a number of briefing/advice notes in the Members Information Service in 2023/24 including on the issues of Pre-Election Restricted Periods.

10. Lessons Learned

10.1 The learning from dealing with the complaints made since 2023/24, has been incorporated into the revised Procedure for handling Standards Complaints.

These, as indicated, have been summarised in the Delegated Decision of 25 June (see above). In summary, these centred around informal resolution of complaints, the perceived need for greater guidance / transparency relating to those – including specific concerns raised over the nature and time for apologies. Whilst complaints dealt with under informal resolution remain confidential (because no decision of breach of the code has been reached) it is believed that the additional information within the amended Complaints Handling Procedure shall assist those making complaints, those subject to them and those handling them.

11. The Year Ahead

11.1 The Committee is scheduled to meet twice during 2024/25 and will receive updates on Standards Matters.

11.2 Council will note that there is no specific legal requirement to retain a Standards Committee, although North Herts has retained one since the legislative changes come into force in 2012. It is still important to keep that role and remit of the Committee (link at 2.1) under review and as such it shall be reviewed as part of the Constitutional & Governance Working Group for 2024/25. This could include consideration of the format of the Committee and whether this remains a 'stand-alone' decision / or recommending body.

12. Recommendation

12.1 That Council receives this report on the work on standards matters and notes the issues being reviewed in 2024/25.

Council
11 July 2024

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: LEISURE INVESTMENTS AND DECARBONISATION PROJECT

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE: CLLR MICK DEBENHAM

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides an update to Council on Phase 3c of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) project for the Council's three leisure centres and seeks approval to take the next steps to deliver the project. It also seeks an increase in the capital allocation for the fitness extension at Royston Leisure Centre.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Council approves an increase in capital expenditure of £2.4m into the capital programme for the decarbonisation work to the three leisure centres. The overall budget will be profiled across 2024/25 and 2025/26.

2.2 That Council approves an increase in the capital budget of £250k for the Royston Leisure Centre (RLC) gym extension, to ensure the extension is built to net zero carbon standards.

2.3 That Council approves revenue expenditure of up to £757k for termination and removal fees of the gas CHPs at North Herts Leisure Centre and Hitchin Fitness and Swimming Centre. This would be funded from General Fund reserves.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 In May 2019, North Herts Council passed a climate emergency motion. This declaration asserted the council's commitment toward climate action beyond current government targets and international agreements. This is currently pursued through the North Herts Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 which sets out what the council will aim to do to reduce its own carbon emissions to achieve Carbon Neutrality for the Council's own operations by 2030 and a Net Zero Carbon district by 2040.

3.2 Gas use from our leisure centres is a significant contributor towards the Council's own emissions. In 2022-23, gas use across the three leisure centres accounted for 1,428 tonnes CO_2e. This equates to 45% of the Council's Scope 1-3 emissions.

Taking action to replace 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.

3.3 There is currently a capital allocation in the 2024/25 budget to build a gym extension at Royston Leisure Centre.

3.4 During the procurement for the leisure and active communities contract, the Council committed to deliver the gym extension project which is incorporated in to the contractual management fee. The initial tender stage returns showed that extension would generate additional income of at least £150k per year, and subject to inflationary increases. The latest estimate is that the capital costs will be £1.25m. This is an increase from the initial estimate of £1m and includes making the extension net-zero. The income generated will still exceed the revenue cost of capital (at around £90k per year), but in line with the financial regulation the increased capital spend needs to be approved by Cabinet.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 Not proceed with the decarbonisation project. This option is not recommended as the Council will not be able to meet its 2030 carbon reduction targets. The council will also need to commit its own capital expenditure to install the proposed technology (or similar) at a later date. The gas boilers at the leisure centres are at the end of their life and are in need of replacement. If the PSDS project does not proceed, they will have to be replaced, meaning the council will not be eligible for further rounds of funding. There is an option that the council could complete scaled back energy efficiency works and install solar PV and not change the heating source from gas, however this would also not be recommended as the council will not meet its decarbonisation objectives.

4.2 Proceed with a scaled back version of the decarbonisation project (i.e. only progressing with decarbonisation at one or two of the centres), to lower the Council's capital contribution to the overall project. However, this would mean a significant reduction in the grant value allocated to the council and would mean the Council would also be ineligible for future rounds of funding for the other sites, due to the need to replace the gas boilers at the sites, which are end of life. There is also a significant risk that Salix would not accept such a large change to the original application. This option would also mean that the council would not make as significant progress towards meeting 2030 net zero carbon targets.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. A project board has been established for consultation on the leisure decarbonisation project and RLC options. The project board includes senior officers and the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, Cllr Debenham and Cllr Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT. The Service Director – Place is Project Executive and a representative from SIAS (Shared Internal Audit Service) is also included to ensure good project management governance.

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 In November 2023, the Council submitted an application for Phase 3c of the PSDS. The application included details of existing buildings and heating systems and high-level proposals to enable substantial decarbonisation of the three major leisure centres.

7.2 In February 2024, the Council was advised its application was successful, securing £7.74m to assist in replacing end of life gas boilers with Air Source heat pumps and on-site generation of electricity through installing Solar PV panels. Other measures such as new air handling units and external and internal insulation also form part of the project at the three leisure centres; North Herts Leisure Centre (NHLC), Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre (HSFC) and Royston Leisure Centre (RLC).

The following table details the total project value and the total grant value.

Total Project Value	£8,799,119.00
Total Grant Value	£7,743,224.00

7.3 During development of the PSDS application, costs were developed based on the findings of Heat Decarbonisation Plans which had been produced. At this stage, very early design stages were submitted. Additional costs incurred during the delivery of a project, such as preliminary costs are not incorporated into the application. A value for money metric is also applied by Salix during their review process, costs supplied were therefore reflective of market prices at the time of submission. Further capital was therefore secured to cover these additional costs, plus the Council's own match funding contribution required as part of the grant award criteria. The total capital allocation for 2024/25 is £10,803,000 (including the grant). In the capital programme (agreed in February 2024) this was made up of the following items:

Capital Programme item	**Amount (£000)**
HSC Boiler replacement	200
HSC PV panels	142
NHLC Boiler replacement	200
NHLC PV panels	338
RLC Boiler replacement	100
RLC Solar Thermal	67
RLC PV panels	241
PSDS Top-up	9,515
TOTAL	**10,803**

7.4 The 2024/25 Revenue Budget assumed a decrease in energy costs equal to the revenue costs of capital from undertaking the decarbonisation works. That was based on the element that wasn't covered by the PSDS grant and a cost of capital at 7.5%.

7.5 **Royston Leisure Centre Developments**
To save on preliminary construction costs, it is planned that any Royston Leisure Centre developments will be carried out at the same time as the PSDS works. There is currently a capital allocation in the 2024/25 capital budget to build a gym extension (£1m) and learner pool (£2.5m) at the centre.

The 2024/25 Revenue Budget incorporates the management fee from the contract with Everyone Active (EA), inclusive of inflationary increases. This incorporates the increased income that EA expect the fitness extension to generate. The 2024/25 Budget also included assumed income equal to the revenue costs of capital from building the learner pool. That was based on a capital cost of £2.5m and a cost of capital at 5%. A lower cost of capital was used to reflect that any additional income generated would increase in line with inflation.

7.6 The business case for the gym extension was tested as part of the procurement of the Council's Leisure and Active Communities contract and it was agreed to proceed with this element as part of the process. It was however agreed that the business case for the learner pool be brought back to Cabinet, once the capital costs had been through feasibility stage.

7.7 At its meeting on 25 June 2024, Cabinet resolved:

That Cabinet:

(1) Agreed in principle to terminate the Combined Heat and Power Centrica contracts at North Herts Leisure Centre (NHLC) and Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre (HSFC) at the appropriate time during the PSDS project and recommend to Council as per 2.6 below regarding the termination fee.

(2) Expressed its profound disappointment at the position taken by Centrica over the cost of the CHP contract termination, given the company's stated position as "Energising a greener, fairer future" and requests that the Council continues to raise, and seek solutions to, the issue of long-term inflexible agreements for gas CHPs with Salix and Government, which will inevitably prevent many public sector organisations from achieving their net zero ambitions.

(3) Did not approve the business case for Royston Leisure Centre Learner Pool at this time due to matters identified in the Part 2 report.

(4) Agreed that the Project Board would review the business case for the Royston Learner Pool, after further work had taken place to explore any other funding options that were realistically available. That review would then feed into the planned review of the Councils capital programme, as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

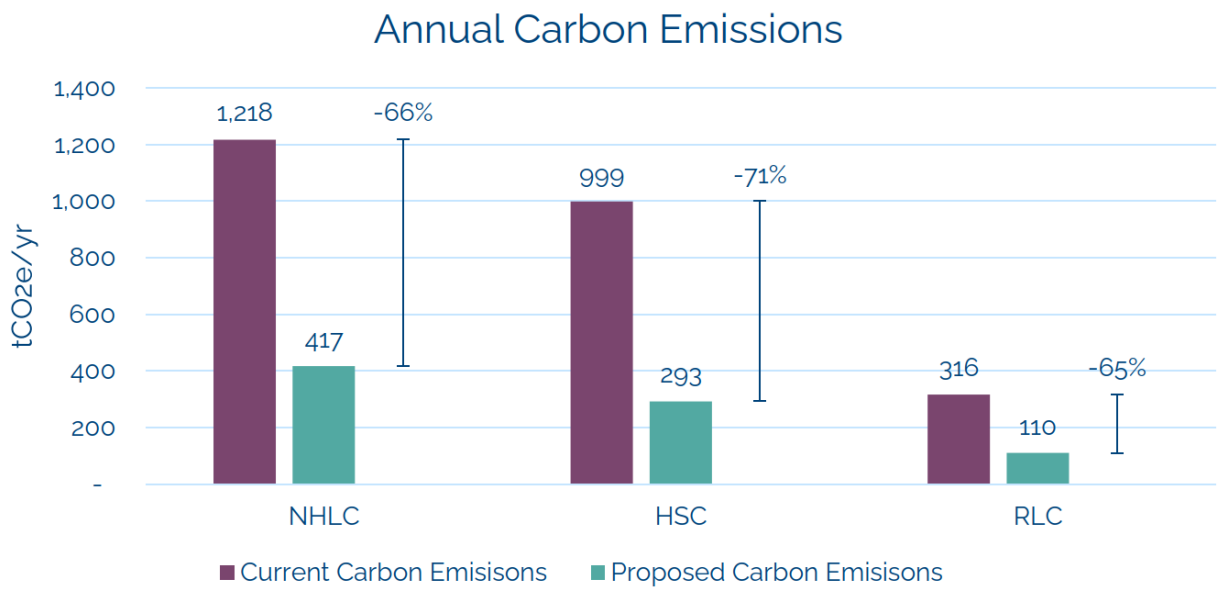
(1) An increase in capital expenditure of £2.4m into the capital programme for the decarbonisation work to the three leisure centres. The overall budget will be profiled across 2024/25 and 2025/26.

(2) An increase in the capital budget of £250k for the Royston Leisure Centre (RLC) gym extension, to ensure the extension is built to net zero carbon standards.

(3) Approval of revenue expenditure of up to £757k for termination and removal fees of the gas CHPs at North Herts Leisure Centre and Hitchin Fitness and Swimming Centre. This would be funded from General Fund reserves.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The annual carbon emissions before and after low-carbon interventions have been calculated using the 2023 UK government carbon factors, published by DESNZ. The proposed carbon emissions include both the additional grid import due to the loss of CHP-generated electricity, and PV generation. After the decarbonisation measures, there would be over 60% reduction in CO2e emissions for all sites. There are still some carbon emissions for each site, partly due to residual emissions from energy consumption. These will reduce year-on-year as the UK's power grid transitions to renewable sources, in line with the Government's 2050 net-zero target. NHLC also has gas boilers for the learner pool which are not included in the project, due to the boilers not being eligible for funding, as they are not end of life (less than 10 years old). At Hitchin, the emissions include those from the outdoor pool which also are not included in the project, due to the boilers being too new to qualify. The following graph demonstrates the carbon savings at each facility following completion of the decarbonisation project:



8.2 Once the works are complete there will be anticipated revenue savings from lower energy consumption, of approximately £32,000 per year (based on the leisure operator's current energy prices). Due to current low gas prices and the decarbonisation project leading to a higher reliance on grid electricity, the anticipated savings based on current prices are low.

8.3 The future savings will be affected by any change in gas and electricity prices, especially where the changes are relatively different. Electricity has the potential to be produced with a lower (or zero) carbon impact, relative to gas. Electricity production can also be achieved without using limited resources. This could be an indication that electricity prices are more likely to move downwards relative to any movement in gas prices.

The heatmap below shows a comparison of estimated current usage (pre decarbonisation interventions) and estimated future energy usage (after decarbonisation interventions). Each usage estimate is costed at various relative prices for gas and electricity. The difference between the total cost is shown (in £000's) and shaded as green to red. Green shows cost decreases and red shows cost increases. The £32k annual cost reduction is highlighted at that shows the impact at current prices. Under the leisure contract, the Council takes on the risk and reward in relation to energy prices. If energy prices increase with general inflation, then it is estimated that they would increase by around 20% over a 10 year period. In that scenario the estimated savings would actually reduce slightly to £26k annually. In paragraph 8.13 it shows a revenue cost of capital of around £450k. The heatmap shows that there would need to be a significant increase in gas prices (80%+ increase) and a significant fall in electricity prices (20%+ decrease) to move to a point where the cost of capital would be covered by energy savings.

COMPARING COST OF CURRENT USAGE WITH FORECAST USAGE (POST DECARBONISATION) AT VARIOUS PRICE POINTS FOR ELECTRICITY AND GAS																
Amounts are £000		ELECTRICITY PRICES AS A PERCENTAGE OF CURRENT														
		60%	70%	80%	90%	100%	110%	120%	130%	140%	150%	160%	170%	180%	190%	200%
GAS PRICES AS A PERCENTAGE OF CURRENT	60%	-46	-12	22	56	89	123	157	191	225	259	293	327	360	394	428
	70%	-77	-43	-9	25	59	93	127	161	194	228	262	296	330	364	398
	80%	-107	-73	-39	-5	29	62	96	130	164	198	232	266	300	333	367
	90%	-137	-104	-70	-36	-2	32	66	100	134	167	201	235	269	303	337
	100%	-168	-134	-100	-66	-32	2	35	69	103	137	171	205	239	272	306
	110%	-198	-164	-131	-97	-63	-29	5	39	73	107	140	174	208	242	276
	120%	-229	-195	-161	-127	-93	-59	-26	8	42	76	110	144	178	212	245
	130%	-259	-225	-191	-158	-124	-90	-56	-22	12	46	80	113	147	181	215
	140%	-290	-256	-222	-188	-154	-120	-86	-53	-19	15	49	83	117	151	185
	150%	-320	-286	-252	-218	-185	-151	-117	-83	-49	-15	19	53	86	120	154
	160%	-351	-317	-283	-249	-215	-181	-147	-113	-80	-46	-12	22	56	90	124
	170%	-381	-347	-313	-279	-245	-212	-178	-144	-110	-76	-42	-8	26	59	93
	180%	-411	-378	-344	-310	-276	-242	-208	-174	-140	-107	-73	-39	-5	29	63
	190%	-442	-408	-374	-340	-306	-273	-239	-205	-171	-137	-103	-69	-35	-2	32
	200%	-472	-438	-405	-371	-337	-303	-269	-235	-201	-167	-134	-100	-66	-32	2

8.4 The issue with the heatmap above is that it is comparing relative costs, and in some cases both impacts would be unaffordable against current budgets. The revised heatmap below compares the costs at various gas and electricity prices, with the cost of current usage at inflated current prices. The inflation that has been added is based on 10 years of general price inflation, which is estimated at around 22%. This shows that we get towards the right size of savings (to cover the revenue costs of capital) when there is a fall in electricity prices by 40%, with a lower impact from any change in gas prices.

COMPARING COST OF FORECAST USAGE (POST DECARBONISATION) AT VARIOUS PRICE POINTS FOR ELECTRICITY AND GAS WITH ESTIMATED IMPACT OF INFLATION (2% PER YEAR OVER 10 YEARS) ON CURRENT USAGE AND PRICES																
Amounts are £000		ELECTRICITY PRICES AS A PERCENTAGE OF CURRENT														
		60%	70%	80%	90%	100%	110%	120%	130%	140%	150%	160%	170%	180%	190%	200%
GAS PRICES AS A PERCENTAGE OF CURRENT	60%	-469	-402	-334	-267	-199	-132	-64	3	71	138	206	273	341	408	476
	70%	-465	-397	-330	-262	-195	-127	-60	8	75	142	210	277	345	412	480
	80%	-461	-393	-326	-258	-191	-123	-56	12	79	147	214	282	349	417	484
	90%	-456	-389	-321	-254	-186	-119	-51	16	84	151	219	286	354	421	489
	100%	-452	-385	-317	-250	-182	-115	-47	20	88	155	223	290	358	425	493
	110%	-448	-380	-313	-245	-178	-110	-43	25	92	160	227	295	362	430	497
	120%	-443	-376	-308	-241	-173	-106	-38	29	96	164	231	299	366	434	501
	130%	-439	-372	-304	-237	-169	-102	-34	33	101	168	236	303	371	438	506
	140%	-435	-367	-300	-232	-165	-97	-30	38	105	173	240	308	375	443	510
	150%	-431	-363	-296	-228	-161	-93	-26	42	109	177	244	312	379	447	514
	160%	-426	-359	-291	-224	-156	-89	-21	46	114	181	249	316	384	451	519
	170%	-422	-354	-287	-219	-152	-85	-17	50	118	185	253	320	388	455	523
	180%	-418	-350	-283	-215	-148	-80	-13	55	122	190	257	325	392	460	527
	190%	-413	-346	-278	-211	-143	-76	-8	59	127	194	262	329	397	464	531
	200%	-409	-342	-274	-207	-139	-72	-4	63	131	198	266	333	401	468	536

8.5 The PSDS application included details of high-level site surveys for existing buildings and heating systems and high-level proposals to generate the required technical appraisals to support the application. Following the grant award, the Council commissioned Willmott Dixon (WD) to carry out further detailed feasibility studies to ensure the decarbonisation measures set out in the application could be achieved. WD also carried out feasibility for the gym extension and the learner pool at Royston.

8.6 During feasibility, WD identified a technical issue regarding the proposal to insulate the underside of the roofs at all three centres. These would have carried a significant risk of condensation and are not therefore deemed viable options. This option would also have meant the pools would have to be closed for several weeks while the works are carried out. Due to this, the proposal is now to install new roofing systems on the outside of all three roofs, which has led to a significant increase in costs. In addition, there have been amendments to the cladding replacement required at Royston Leisure Centre. Temporary plant costs have also been added to ensure any closures to the leisure facilities are kept to a minimum.

8.7 The Council would need to fund these additional costs using its own capital, as the Salix grant conditions do not allow an increase to the overall grant value under any circumstance.

8.8 Council funding of £3.060m was agreed last year, in addition to the grant value, giving a total of £10.803m. This budget included original estimates for the works to the leisure centres at £10.55m plus provisional costs associated with required upgrades to the electricity network. Following detailed feasibility works and as a result of the issues identified at 8.6, WD have advised of an increase in budget of £2.24m.

The following table details the budget costs by leisure centre.

Leisure Centre	Previous Budget	Revised Budget	Cost Increase
NHLC	£3,920,815	£4,215,742	£294,927
HSFC	£3,308,226	£4,187,520	£879,294
RLC	£3,324,819	£4,388,591	£1,063,772
Total	**£10,553,860**	**£12,791,853**	**£2,237,993**

8.9 As part of the PSDS application, high level site surveys were undertaken across all three centres to generate the required technical appraisals to support the application. Two of these sites, NHLC and HSFC, have Combined Heat and Power (CHP) units installed. CHP's use gas to generate electricity and additionally gives the opportunity to use the excess heat for heating and hot water. It was originally intended that the units would remain in place as emergency backups, with the primary source of heating being switched to Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs).

8.10 At the detailed feasibility stage of the project, it was identified that 15-year Discount Energy Purchase (DEP) Agreements are in place for both CHPs with Centrica, which end in 2035. These agreements also have a minimum usage requirement of 19 hours a day and therefore it is not feasible to keep the CHPs in place as emergency backup only, under the terms of the agreement. There are financial penalties of £737k (as of 31 March 2025) for early termination of these agreements, plus fees of approximately £10,000 per site for removal of the CHPs. The Council did attempt to negotiate with Centrica on these fees, however the have advised that they will not change their position. The termination fee per centre can be found below:

Date	Location	Amount
31 March 2025	NHLC	£434,523
31 March 2025	HSFC	£302,201

8.11 The proposed PSDS works would see improvements to some of the building fabric (e.g. walls, glazing and roofing) at each of the leisure centres. These improvements may mean that future works to these areas are not required or can be significantly delayed. This could therefore mean that this investment is providing future capital savings. However, there is no capital budget currently allocated for any such works to the building fabric.

Project management and Quantity Surveyor costs

8.12 Due to the scale of the projects and limited officer technical expertise and resource, it is recommended that the Council appoint an external Quantity Surveyor (QS) to oversee North Herts Council's interests. Services would include reviewing and negotiating the Contractor's second stage tender price, agreeing any variations and producing cost update reports. The cost of appointing a QS to the project is up to £170,000 (this could be reduced depending on appointment date).

These costs directly relate to the delivery of the capital project so can be treated as capital expenditure. These costs take the increase up to £2.4m as detailed in recommendation 2.4.

Financial Summary

8.13 With the latest forecasts, the total capital spend that the Council would need to fund is around £5.5m. Assuming a 7.5% cost of capital this gives an annual cost of capital of £413k. Whilst the buy-out of the CHP is not capital expenditure, it is a significant payment that has not been budgeted for. At a 5% interest rate, £737k would generate annual income of £37k. The current annual cost is therefore estimated at £450k.

8.14 As detailed in paragraph 8.2, the estimated energy cost savings are forecast to be around £32k per year. Paragraphs 8.3 and 8.4 show how these savings could be impacted by future movements in energy prices. They focus on the scenarios where price changes would enable the costs of capital to be covered by savings. However, the heatmaps also show the impact of energy prices making the financial situation worse. This is also covered in the risk implications (section 11). Overall, the decision on whether to proceed with the leisure sector decarbonisation project has to be made on the basis of environmental sustainability, and noting that it will come at a significant financial cost. As detailed in section 10, this will require financial savings to be made on other areas of revenue spend.

Royston Leisure centre investments

8.15 Following feasibility assessments, WD have advised an increase in budget of £470k for the learner pool and gym extension at Royston. This increase is primarily due to the building upgrades needed to ensure they are built to net zero carbon standards.

Project	**Previous Budget**	**Revised Budget**	**Cost Increase**
Gym Extension	£1m	£1.25m	£250k
Learner Pool	£2.5m	£2.72m	£220k
Total	**£3.5m**	**£3.97m**	**£470k**

As referenced in paragraph 3.4, there is still a viable business case for the gym extension.

8.16 EA have provided a forecast of additional income from the building of a learner pool at Royston Leisure Centre. This forecast reflects the impact of the closure of the Ward Freman Pool in Buntingford (East Herts). They have also advised that the closure of the pool at Melbourn (South Cambs) could further increase income, but it is not certain whether that pool will stay closed, so they cannot commit to that further additional income. In accordance with the contract, the increase from the learner pool would increase by inflation each year (using CPI).

8.17 WD have provided an estimate of the capital cost of building a learner pool at Royston, which is £2.72 million. That estimate is based on a previous design, and WD have advised that it is likely to be necessary to change the roof design and they would also recommend some internal layout changes. They have not been able to advise on the impact of those changes, except to say that they would increase the build costs. It would therefore be prudent to assume build costs of at least £3 million.

8.18 As detailed in paragraph 10.2, capital investment has a revenue cost. Based on a revenue cost of capital of 7.5% (2.5% MRP and 5% interest) this is an annual cost of £225k.

8.19 The revenue implications of the £3m build cost are far higher than the forecast additional management fee income in the short and long-term. The average annual revenue loss from the learner pool is forecast to be over £100k per year on an ongoing basis.

8.20 The non-financial benefits were considered by Cabinet and include:

- Capacity for more swimming lessons. Royston is current at capacity for stage 1 and 2 classes. These are the first two stages for school age children. The centre is also at 86% capacity for pre-school classes.
- The teaching pool would also add value to school swimming lessons, increasing capacity and providing a more comfortable environment for non swimmers.
- The teaching pool could also be used for under 5s fun swimming (to build water confidence), quiet adult swimming (which may be of particular benefit to those living with dementia and those who are neurodivergent) and quiet family swimming (which may be of particular benefit to those living with SEND, those who are neurodivergent or people living with other long term health conditions).

8.21 Cabinet made the decisions detailed in paragraph 7.7, which included carrying out further work assessing funding options. The business case viability could change with the following factors:

- Further increases in income projections e.g. from greater certainty over the Melbourn pool and/or greater demand from population growth.
- Relative reductions in construction costs.
- Improvements in interest rates.
- External funding (e.g. s106 contributions).
- To promote the potential non-financial benefits and see if there is the opportunity for alternative funding (e.g. suitable central government, lottery or sports body grant funding), especially in relation to the quiet adult and quiet family sessions.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Cabinet has remit as per section 5.7.3 of the Cabinet's terms of reference "*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."*. Where budget is required, then appropriate recommendations to Council should be made.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The financial implications are generally covered in the body of this report.

10.2 The Council has a reasonable level of financial reserves but is currently budgeting to spend more than its forecast funding whilst it identifies the decisions that it needs to take to achieve a balanced budget. Any decision that results in an increase in expenditure above that currently reflected in the budget, will further increase the level of savings that will need to be identified and delivered.

It is therefore vital that decisions reflect Council priorities, as there will be an inherent need for other services/ projects to have a lower priority attached to them.

10.3 The Council is moving to a position where it has a need to borrow to fund its capital spend (i.e. it cannot fund them from previous capital receipts). This does not mean that the Council has to borrow externally, as it can initially borrow against its internal cash reserves. But in the longer term those reserves will run out and external borrowing will be required. The revenue costs of the capital spend are then made up of (1) lost interest that would have been generated from investing those cash reserves or in the longer term the cost of external borrowing, and (2) a requirement to charge a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) which spreads the capital investment over the life of the asset.

10.4 For a new building or significant alternation works it can be reasonable to assume a useful life of 40 years, which gives an annual MRP charge of 2.5% of the capital cost. There is some risk with assuming a 40 year life for the works covered by this report as they are change to buildings that are already fairly old (e.g. RLC is 20 years old and NHLC is over 40 years old. But this is mitigated by the fact that we continue to invest in the building and carry out condition surveys.

10.5 Air Source heat pumps will have a shorter expected useful life of around 20-25 years. Using a 20 year life equates to an annual MRP charge of 5%. However the PSDS grant will fund the costs of the heat pumps. As that means that the Council funded element will be on building fabric works, it is appropriate to use a MRP charge of 2.5%.

10.6 Interest rates remain high and currently borrowing rates and investment returns are both around 5%. We had expected that we would see a drop in interest costs by now, but economic conditions have not yet enabled that to happen. The Council can borrow from the Public Works Loan Board and they publish borrowing rates for various durations of borrowing. There is currently very little variation between across the various borrowing terms (e.g. around 5.2% for 10 years, 5.4% for 20 years and 5.7% for 40 years). Based on that we cannot assume that there will be a drop in borrowing rates.

10.7 If the decision is taken to proceed with the leisure centre decarbonisation, then it needs to be accepted that it comes with an annual revenue cost of around £400k per year. The forecasts in the Medium Term Financial Strategy are that the Council already needs to make significant savings, so this will add to that requirement, and require further decisions in relation to service changes, income generation (including increases in fees and charges) and reduced capital spend. Most of the capital spend that will be funded from Council resources will not be incurred until 2025/26, so there will not be a need to revise the current Council Investment Strategy.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The decisions contained within this report cannot be made on a financial basis, due to the capital costs involved and relatively low value of the energy savings that will be generated. The decision needs to therefore be based on relative priorities, whilst also considering risk. Risks that would favour making a decision to continue with the decarbonisation works are:

- By not progressing we will lose access to the substantial PSDS funding, and (due to the need to replace the boilers) would not have access to any such funding in the future.

- The work by WD and the Quantity Surveyor may identify capital cost savings.
- Gas prices may increase by more than projected, which makes the move to electricity more economically viable (note: this improves the business case but doesn't actually help the Council's budget)
- Electricity prices may drop by more than projected, which helps reduce the cost of heating generated by electricity.
- As we approach national net zero targets (which we're not currently on track to achieve), one aspect that may drive behavioural change, may come in the form of a carbon tax, which could financially penalise bodies for carbon emitted over baseline/benchmark values. However, this is not a current policy direction which has been set by Government.

Risks that would **not** favour making a decision to continue with the decarbonisation works are:

- We have already seen cost increases, and there is the potential that further capital cost increases could be identified.
- Gas prices may increase by less than projected (or even fall), which makes the move to electricity relatively even more expensive.
- Electricity prices may not drop as much as projected (or could increase) which increases the relative cost of heating generated by electricity.
- There is a low risk that alternative, non-fossil fuel-based heating sources, such as hydrogen, will emerge as commercially viable options in the long term. However, the UK Government has indicated that the use of technologies such as heat pumps will be "the primary means of decarbonisation for the foreseeable future."

11.2 A representative from SIAS will sit on Project Board to mitigate project risks and ensure good governance of the project.

11.3 There are numerous risks relating to the delivery of decarbonisation schemes, including risks associated with the installation and operation of measures as well as programme related risks, such as delays resulting from supply chain issues. Salix Finance, as the fund administrator, sets extremely short project delivery timescales, with a completion date set of 31 March 2026.

11.4 The risks relating to these programmes have been captured in a risk register, which sets out the risk owners and mitigation strategies. The risk registers will be kept up to date and reported to the Project Board, which will have oversight of the project.

11.5 Otherwise, 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.

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 Council has a responsibility to achieve a balanced budget in order to provide a wide range of services to residents in North Hertfordshire. There is already a provision for swimming lessons at Royston which provides an opportunity for those who wish to learn. However, it is acknowledged at paragraph 8.20 that a learner pool may increase participation opportunities. If the learner pool provision is to be kept under review, these opportunities should be taken into consideration, in conjunction with consideration of the council's priorities.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1 As the recommendations in the report relate to a contract above £50,000, Social Value will be incorporated in the procurement process.

13.2 The Public Services (Social Values) Act 2012 imposes an active duty on relevant contracting Authorities to consider the economic, environmental and social benefits that can be achieved through commissioning. It does so by requiring consideration of the improvements of economic, environmental and socio-economic of the procurement to wider society.

13.3 The Council will be using the SCAPE Procure Regional Construction Framework for the procurement and social value is integral to SCAPE's approach and operations. Utilisation of the Framework ensures Social Value outcomes; for example, utilising a 'go local' approach to spend which benefits the local economy.

13.4 SCAPE unlocks social value at scale, through procurement solutions and innovative joint ventures, which engender long-term collaborative relationships with framework delivery partners and with the Council, creating scope to plan sustainably and invest for the future. SCAPE generates social value both directly, through its activities; and indirectly, by regulating supplier behaviour through procurement and thought leadership.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. Section 8 highlights that whilst there are carbon costs associated with construction, the project is solely focused on improving the energy efficiency of the sites and implementing renewable energy solutions to substantially decarbonise the sites. This should lead to an overall reduction in operational carbon emissions as identified at the graph at 8.1. Section 8.11 identifies that fabric work (glazing, new roofing, cladding etc) may prolong the life of the buildings, reducing the risk of needing to demolish and replace buildings from scratch, which may have a higher carbon cost. Additionally, the proposed gym extension will be built to net zero carbon standards.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 A project of this size will have considerable resource implications internally. To ensure resource can be appropriately managed, a Project Manager has been appointed to support the project and the costs of appointing a quantity surveyor to act on the council's behalf are included in recommendation 2.3.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 None

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None