

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



6 June 2025

Our Ref Council 16 June 2025
Contact. Committee Services
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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

MONDAY, 16TH JUNE, 2025

at

7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Thompson
Director – Governance

****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. | 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. | |
| 3. | CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS <u>Climate Emergency</u> 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. <u>Ecological Emergency</u> 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.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.

5. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

5 - 8

5A) Cabinet – Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan – **to be considered with Item 6.**

5B) Employment Committee – Director Recruitment – **to be considered as a standalone item.**

6. GROWING BALDOCK STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR – PLACE

9 - 108

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

7. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE 2024-25 REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

109 -
124

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.

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| Item No | Referred from: | Cabinet |
| 5A | Date: | 18 March 2025 |
| | Title of item: | Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan |
| To be considered alongside agenda item: | | Agenda Item |

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 11 February 2025 can be viewed here: [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 18th March, 2025, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

NOTE: since consideration by the Cabinet a revised version has been prepared and uploaded as a separate report – see Agenda Item No. 6.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That the Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan attached at Appendix A, is approved and adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning decisions relating to the site.

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

Audio recording – 30 minutes 59 seconds

N.B. Cllr Ian Albert declared an interest in this item due to his appointment as a Hertfordshire County Councillor but advised that he had received dispensation from the Monitoring Officer and was allowed to remain to participate in and vote on this item.

In the absence of the Interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, the Strategic Planning Manager presented the report entitled 'Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan' and advised that:

- This report included the number of sites around Baldock highlighted for development as outlined in the Local Plan.
- All the identified sites were owned by Hertfordshire County Council.
- Council Officers had worked closely with developers in the production of the Masterplan.
- This was a large and complex project and this Masterplan contained areas in the scheme which were different to the Local Plan. Reasons for the changes were detailed in the report.
- This report was just one of the multiple stages required in delivery of this site.
- Following the Hertfordshire County Council Elections on 1 May, the Masterplan would be presented to Council in July supported with briefings from local developers.

In response to a question from Councillor Dave Winstanley, Councillor Val Bryant advised that the delay in bringing this Masterplan to Council was to give time for the various project boards to seek to reach agreement on contentious points, which would provide assurance for developers.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Mick Debenham

Points raised during the debate included:

- Whether this item should be discussed again at Cabinet in June before being referred on to Council in July. Consensus that an update would be provided in the standing Strategic Planning report.
- This was a good report, but there were still outstanding issues which needed to be resolved.

In response to a point raised during the debate, the Strategic Planning Manager advised that the funding required for the new schools was complicated, but there was agreement from all parties to work together to resolve the funding gap.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That the Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan attached at Appendix A, is approved and adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning decisions relating to the site.

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

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|---|----------------|----------------------|
| Item No | Referred from: | EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE |
| 5B | Date: | 4 JUNE 2025 |
| | Title of item: | DIRECTOR RECRUITMENT |
| To be considered alongside agenda item: | | REFERRAL ONLY |

The public report considered by the Employment Committee at the meeting held on 4 June 2025 can be viewed here: [Agenda for Employment Committee on Wednesday, 4th June, 2025, 10.00 am | North Herts Council](#)

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That following interview of the candidate to the role of Director Governance, the Employment Committee recommend to Full Council the appointment of Isabelle Alajooz to the role of Monitoring Officer.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: The appointment of the Monitoring Officer is a function of Full Council under 4.4.1(i) of the Council's Constitution.

N.B. The content of this referral solely relates to the appointment of the Monitoring Officer which is the matter for consideration by Full Council, and does not include reference to other decisions made by the Employment Committee on 4 June 2025.

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

The Chief Executive presented the report entitled 'Director Recruitment' setting out the process for the recruitment to the posts of Director Place and Director Governance (including the Monitoring Officer).

The second Candidate to be interviewed by the Employment Committee was for the Director Governance role (including the Monitoring Officer function).

The Candidate provided the Committee with a presentation, supported by visual slides, on the topic 'Local Government Reorganisation – Impact on Governance Directorate'.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Bryony May

The Employment Committee then asked the candidate formal interview questions as part of the interview process.

The Chair thanked the Candidate for their presentation, following which, the Candidate left the Council Chamber.

Councillor Keith Hoskins, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That following interview of the candidate to the role of Director Governance, the Employment Committee recommend to Full Council the appointment to the role of Monitoring Officer.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: The appointment of the Monitoring Officer is a function of Full Council under 4.4.1(i) of the Council's Constitution.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the recommendations from the Head of Paid Service set out in the report be noted.
- (2) That following interview of the candidate, the Employment Committee agreed to appoint to the role of Director Governance and delegate to the Head of Paid Service to confirm to the successful candidate that this will proceed to the next stage and be subject to Full Council approval of the Monitoring Officer role and satisfactory completion of the notification requirements under the Council Constitution.
- (3) That following interview of the candidate, the Employment Committee agreed to appoint to the role of Director Place and delegate to the Head of Paid Service to offer the role of Director Place to the successful candidate subject to the satisfactory completion of the notification requirements under the Council Constitution.

REASON FOR DECISION: As detailed in section 8 of the Part 2 report.

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| FULL COUNCIL 16 JUNE 2025 |
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| PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT |
|---------------------------------|

TITLE OF REPORT: GROWING BALDOCK STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN

REPORT OF: NIGEL SMITH, INTERIM DIRECTOR: PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR DONNA WRIGHT – EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLACE

COUNCIL PRIORITIES: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. The Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan (hereafter 'masterplan') has, in officers' view, been appropriately prepared in accordance with national and local policies, guidance and advice. It has been prepared under the Council's preferred approach; the Local Plan and associated guidance encourage the preparation of masterplans for strategic sites in advance of and separate to any planning applications or decisions. The Council is currently behind schedule in delivering the homes required by the Local Plan. It is important that the strategic sites progress expediently through the planning system.
- 4.2. The alternative is to not approve the masterplan. This is not recommended for the same reasons as above. There would be planning, financial and reputational risks if Full Council decided not to proceed. These are explored in Section 11 of this report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The Council's internal, informal Strategic Planning Project Board has overseen preparation of this masterplan. This includes cross-party representation from all political groups recognising that the implementation of strategic sites are long-term projects which may span administrations of the Council. The Executive Member for Planning & Transport chairs the Project Board. Local ward members have been invited to participate in relevant meetings of the Board.
- 5.2. During its preparation, the Growing Baldock project was presented to and / or considered by the Project Board at its meetings of March 2022, February 2023, March 2023, September 2023, October 2023 and December 2024
- 5.3. Urban & Civic (U&C) presented to the Project Board in February 2023 in advance of a first round of public engagement. The Preferred Option masterplan was presented to the Project Board at its meeting of 30 October 2023 in advance of a second round of public consultation held in November 2023.
- 5.4. These more formal stages of consultation have been accompanied by a rolling programme of engagement with local communities and stakeholders. This has included frequently appearing at the Baldock Area Forum / Area Committee, establishing a U&C-led community forum, meeting with surrounding Parish Councils and focussed events for those who might be directly impacted by the proposals including direct neighbours of the sites, residents of the Icknield Way / Football Close area and the existing GP practice.
- 5.5. All Councillors were invited to a briefing and 'Q&A' session on the Local Plan and the general principles of masterplanning and design on 8 July 2024.
- 5.6. In August 2024, Project Board advised upon amendments to the Project Board Terms of Reference. These included recommendations for the future reporting of masterplans to Councillors. The updated Terms of Reference were endorsed by Cabinet in September 2024 and have been followed in preparing and presenting this item. This includes additional Councillor representation on the Board and seeking Board feedback on any views from their wider groups and preparation of a summary document, which is attached as Appendix B.

- 5.7. The final masterplan was presented to and considered by the Project Board at its meeting of 24 February 2025. The Board requested further, detailed amendments on secondary education options. These have been updated, and the Board supported the masterplan progressing to Cabinet at a reconvened meeting on 4 March 2025.
- 5.8. On 18 March 2025 Cabinet agreed to refer the masterplan to Full Council for approval. The masterplan was not presented to Full Council at its April 2025 meeting as this took place during the pre-election period for the Hertfordshire County Council elections held on 1 May.
- 5.9. All Councillors were invited to a briefing session in advance of this meeting. This took place on 6 June 2025.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 5 January 2024.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The Council's Local Plan (the Plan) was adopted by Full Council in November 2022. It forms part of both the Council's adopted Policy Framework and the statutory Development Plan for the District.
- 7.2. The Plan sets out the Council's strategy for meeting the development needs of North Hertfordshire over the period to 2031. The Plan makes provision for at least 13,000 new homes. A significant proportion of the District's overall housing target are to be delivered on six Strategic Housing Sites – defined as sites of more than 500 homes – around the main towns in and adjoining the District. These are supplemented by a range of Local Housing Allocations which range in size up to approximately 300 homes within and around the District's towns and villages.
- 7.3. The Inspector examining the Local Plan was clear that deciding where and how housing needs should be met was an extremely complex issue. The arguments for, and the potential benefits of, new development were extensively scrutinised and carefully balanced against the inevitable harm that will arise from the release of this land.
- 7.4. All the Strategic Housing Sites are greenfield locations. They contain agricultural land, leisure routes and Public Rights of Way enjoyed by residents as well as habitats of importance for flora and fauna. However, the examination concluded that the imperative to boost housing supply – in terms of both local evidence of acute housing need and national policy directions – meant these developments should proceed. Key paragraphs from the Inspector's conclusions are shown below for context:

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

...

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

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

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

[North Hertfordshire Local Plan Inspector's Report, September 2022](#)

- 7.5. The Strategic Housing Sites are of a greater size and complexity than any developments that have taken place in the District over the last twenty years. They are critical to the overall strategy of the Plan. Their delivery is essential to increase the number of homes being built above historic averages and address the acute need for housing.
- 7.6. Policy SP9 of the Local Plan sets out the Council's approach to Design and Sustainability. This states the Council will require the production of Strategic Masterplans for Strategic Housing Sites and other significant development. Significant development generally comprises development of 100 homes or more. The policy states that masterplans may be required to consider the cumulative impact of more than one site to support a co-ordinated and integrated approach to place-making and design.

- 7.7. Policy SP9 also sets out a series of design principles to be followed in masterplans and applications for development meeting these thresholds. It contains documentation requirements and sets out the approaches to approval. The Local Plan encourages the submission of masterplans for agreement before the submission of a planning application. Where applications have already been submitted, the Policy also allows for masterplans to be agreed with the Council prior to their determination.
- 7.8. Masterplans are a recognised 'good practice' tool as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Government Planning Practice Guidance explains a masterplan as follows:

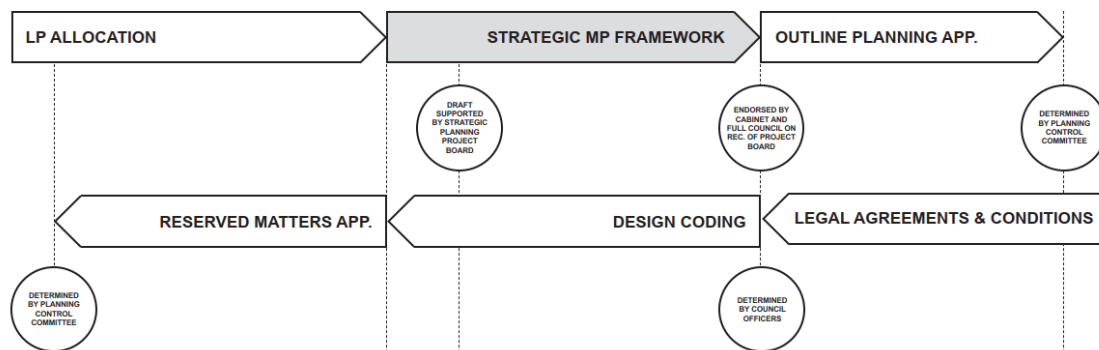
What are masterplans?

Masterplans set the vision and implementation strategy for a development. They are distinct from local design guides by focusing on site specific proposals such as the scale and layout of development, mix of uses, transport and green infrastructure. Depending on the level of detail, the masterplan may indicate the intended arrangement of buildings, streets and the public realm. More specific parameters for the site's development may be set out in a [design code](#), which can accompany the overall masterplan.

A range of other plans and technical reports may be needed alongside a masterplan, to provide supporting evidence and set out related proposals, such as a local character study, landscape assessment, transport assessment and proposals for securing biodiversity net gain. An implementation strategy could also be included, especially where development is expected to be brought forward in a number of phases.

- 7.9. To support the Council's masterplanning approach, Cabinet agreed in March 2021 to establish an informal, internal Project Board to provide corporate oversight and strategic direction. This is not a formal committee or decision-making body. Through Project Board a range of associated procedural guidance has been produced and subsequently endorsed by Cabinet (see links in Section 18).
- 7.10. These say masterplans produced and approved before the submission of a planning application or prior to the determination of a planning application will follow the final approval process below (subject to a positive outcome at each step):
- Project Board recommendation to Service Director
 - Service Director recommendation to Cabinet
 - Cabinet recommendation to Full Council
 - Adoption by Full Council as a material consideration in the determination of any relevant planning applications

- 7.11. Consideration of the masterplan does not necessitate any further debate upon the general principles of whether the development should take place in the first instance. Neither should it lead to debate on the fact that, at a strategic level, the development will result in some harm to the local area or may lead to more congestion or delay on local roads. These matters have been considered through examination and adoption of the Local Plan. Some adverse impacts are 'priced in' as the cost of ensuring the needs of existing and future residents are appropriately met. Relevant policies in the Local Plan identify site-specific and general measures that should be included to mitigate the impacts of development. These matters will be subject to further technical consideration through detailed assessments at the formal planning stages.
- 7.12. In this context, officers are not asking Councillors to confer any greater or lesser weight to the idea of development on this site than already exists; the masterplan provides a high-level design framework against which any future planning applications for the site can be considered. The level of design detail will increase as proposals move through the planning process.
- 7.13. The masterplan is the second stage in a (broadly) six-step approach to securing the planning, regulation and delivery of a site through a combination of statutory and discretionary measures. This process should be viewed holistically as a means of collectively securing design quality, setting out the vision, community engagement, on-site infrastructure and off-site contributions for the successful planning and delivery of the project.



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

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

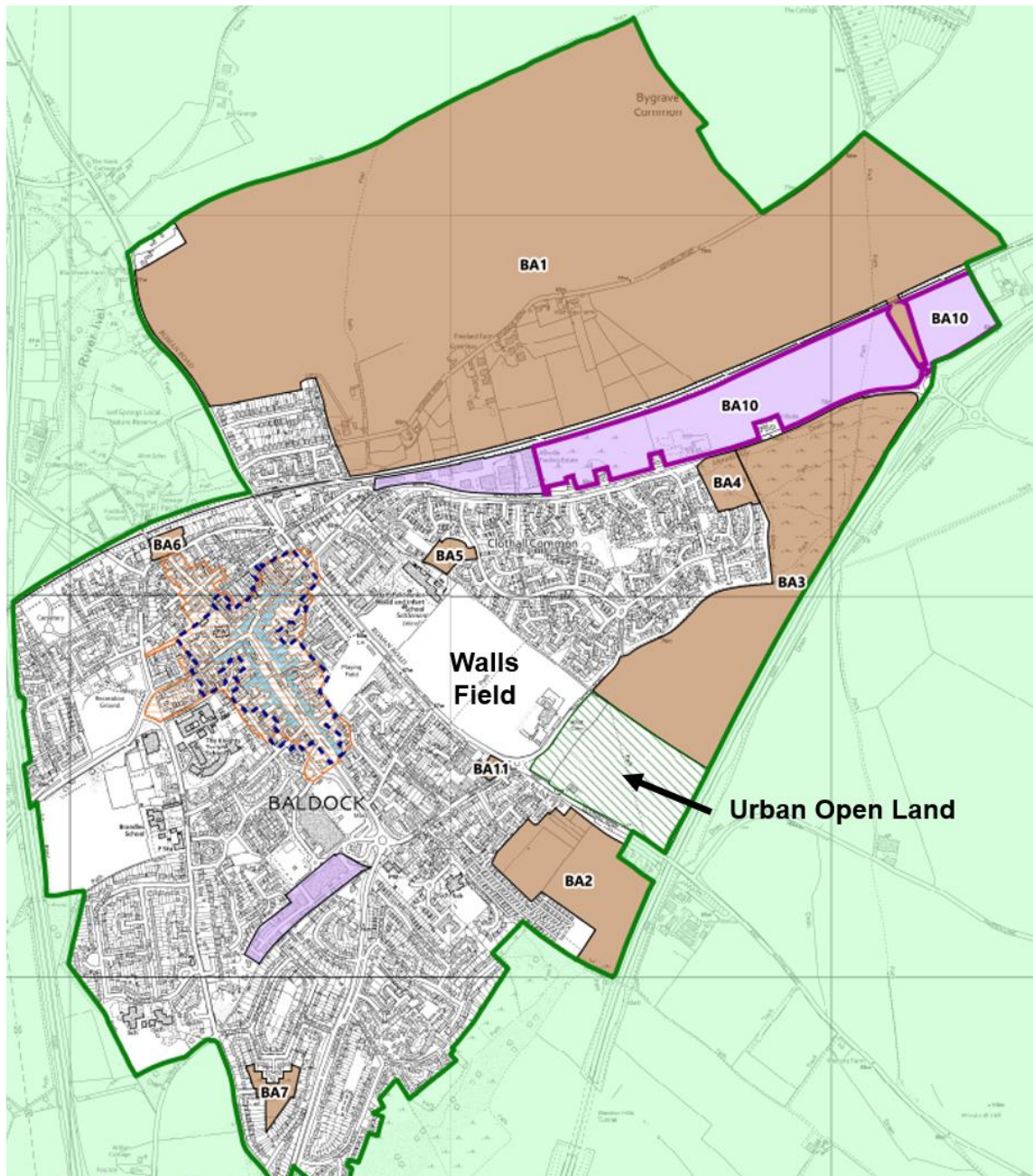
8.1. The Local Plan allocates several sites around the north, east and south-east of Baldock for development. These are identified in the Local Plan as:

- Site **BA1**, which consists of approximately 142 hectares of predominantly agricultural land to the north of Baldock within Bygrave parish. The south-west of the site adjoins existing residential properties on Salisbury Road and Bygrave Road. Bygrave Road continues through the site becoming Ashwell Road, linking Baldock with the villages of the same name. There are a small number of existing properties along Bygrave Road which do not form part of the development agreement between Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and U&C but which are included within the Local Plan allocation. Site BA1 is allocated by Policy SP14 of the Local Plan for a strategic-scale development of approximately 2,800 homes with supporting infrastructure including a new, mixed-use local centre, a community hall and GP surgery, up to 6 forms of entry (FE)¹ of additional primary-aged education provision and up to 8FE of additional secondary-age education provision.
- Site **BA2**, which consists of approximately nine hectares of agricultural land to the south-east of Baldock, and south-west of the A507 within Clothall parish. The north-west of the site adjoins existing residential properties on Walnut Avenue and Laxton Gardens. Baldock Park Homes, an extensive mobile home site, lies to the south-west. The south-east of the site is bounded by the A505 Baldock bypass with a small number of residential properties and the A507 to the north east. Site BA2 is identified as a Local Housing Allocation under Policy HS1 of the Local Plan. Policy BA2 identifies detailed, site-specific criteria and a dwelling estimate of approximately 200 homes..
- Site **BA3**, which consists of approximately twenty-five hectares of land to the south-east of Baldock lying between the Clothall Common development and the A505 Baldock bypass. The north-eastern area of the site contains an informal area of habitat and walking routes on a man-made bund resulting from excavation and earthworks associated with the construction of the bypass. The south-west of the site is in agricultural use. Site BA3 is a Local Housing Allocation under Policy HS1 of the Local plan. Policy BA3 identifies detailed, site-specific criteria which include making clear that no housing is to be permitted on the bund and a dwelling estimate of approximately 245 homes; and
- Site **BA10**, which consists of approximately twenty hectares of land to the east of Baldock lying between the B656 Royston Road and the railway in predominantly agricultural use. The west of the site adjoins the existing employment area at the Ashville Trading Estate. There are a number of existing properties along Royston Road which do not form part of the development agreement between HCC and U&C and which are excluded from any Local Plan designation (though the site occupied by Watts Roofing Supplies is included). Site BA10 is an employment land allocation under Policy SP3 of the Local Plan. Policy ETC1 states that employment allocations

¹ A form of entry is a class of 30 pupils across each year group. An 8FE secondary school would, once fully implemented, have 1,200 pupils aged 11-16 across school Years 7 to 11 (8 classes x 30 x 5 years).

should provide office, research & development, industrial processes, industrial and / or storages & distribution uses. Policy BA10 identifies detailed, site-specific criteria which include a requirement for a masterplan prior to the approval of any detailed matters.

- 8.2. The annotated extract from the Local Plan Policies Map on the following page shows the allocations. The Baldock, Bygrave & Clothall Neighbourhood Plan (BBCNP, 2021) also applies to this area. The Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the statutory Development Plan for its area alongside the Local Plan. The BBCNP contains relevant policies, including specific requirements in relation to sites BA1, BA2, BA3 and BA10. Some requirements broadly mirror Local Plan policies. Neighbourhood plan policies are referred to where relevant through this report.
- 8.3. These sites, as well as further, surrounding land are all owned by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). In March 2022, HCC selected Urban & Civic as its development partner for these proposed new neighbourhoods. Urban & Civic are a 'master developer' specialising in the delivery of large-scale sites.
- 8.4. A master developer typically brings a large site through several stages of the planning process including the masterplanning, outline application, legal agreement, design coding and certain detailed matters. The master developer will often deliver site-wide infrastructure such as key roads, green spaces, schools and utilities. They will then sell smaller, discrete parcels of land within the development to a range of housebuilders who then bring forward detailed reserved matters applications and build the homes along with (where applicable) neighbourhood streets, small-scale play facilities and open spaces. The overall coherence of the site is secured through (as applicable) masterplans, design codes, contractual obligations between the housebuilders and master developer and appropriate, long-term management and stewardship arrangements.

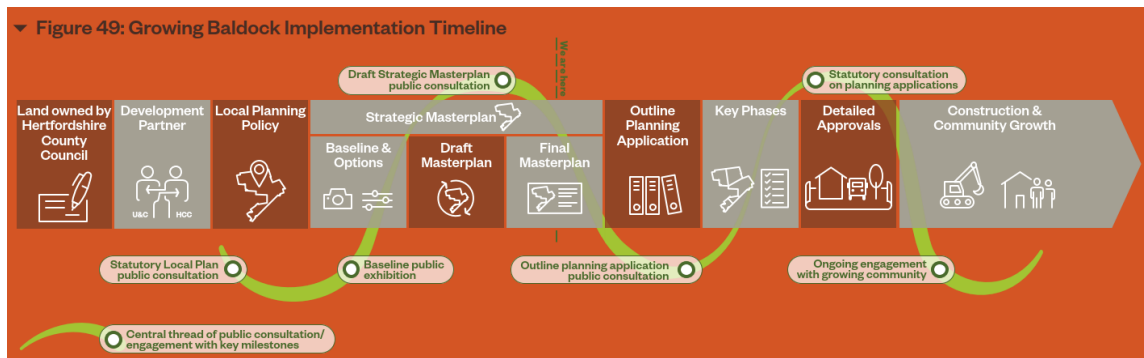


- 8.5. The sites were subject of previous planning applications, submitted in 2017 by HCC to help secure the allocations in the Local Plan. These were subsequently withdrawn.

- 8.6. As set out above (see Paragraph 7.6), the Local Plan says that masterplans may need to consider the cumulative impact of multiple sites. Following the appointment of U&C, officers worked to identify the most appropriate boundaries for the masterplan. The Growing Baldock masterplan covers the four local plan allocations above. It also includes:
- Land to the south of BA3 between the site and the A507 / Clothall Road. This is approximately ten hectares in size. There are allotments along the western boundary with Wallington Road with the remainder in agricultural use, bisected by a Public Right of Way. This land is Urban Open Land under Policy CBG5 of the Local Plan. This places restrictions on its use that aim to broadly maintain its openness and visual connection with the surrounding countryside. Policy G2 of the BBCNP identifies this area, along with adjoining Walls Field, as a Strategic Green Space and similarly aims to maintain its predominantly open character;
 - Walls Field – approximately eleven hectares of undeveloped land lying between the A507 / Clothall Road and the Clothall Common development. Hartsfield School lies to the north-west and Tapps Garden Centre to the south-east. This area is not subject to any designation or allocation in the Local Plan but is nationally protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It is the site of a Roman small town and Late Iron Age settlement. As above, Policy G2 of the BBCNP applies to both the Urban Open Land and Walls Field; and
 - Approximately 1.5 hectares of undeveloped land to the east of the A507 North Road and opposite Salisbury Road. This is adjacent to, but outside of, the Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve within the Green Belt.
- 8.7. Urban & Civic have produced the masterplan. In developing the masterplan, U&C have collectively referred to the masterplan area and this project as 'Growing Baldock'. Where appropriate, the Growing Baldock masterplan also identifies or refers to (potential) interventions beyond this boundary.
- 8.8. Production of the masterplan has followed the key stages set out in the Council's approved masterplanning guidance. This included:
- Establishing an officer group with representatives from the District Council and HCC supported by external capacity and expertise on key issues;
 - Agreement of a masterplan brief for the site setting out key issues;
 - Preparation of a multi-disciplinary evidence base on matters such as ecology, landscape, heritage and transport & access to inform proposals;
 - Consideration and / or testing of key spatial options for the masterplan, informed by a bespoke workshop facilitated by Hyas Associates. This included (but was not limited to) options for the location, nature and / or alignment of:
 - i. The main road access to BA1 and the connection to the B656 / A505 at the east of the site
 - ii. The second, active travel crossing of the railway
 - iii. Secondary school provision;
 - Design review;

- Presentation to the Council's Project Board at preferred option masterplan stage;
 - Public consultation; and
 - Refinement of proposals in response to the steps above to produce the final masterplan.
- 8.9. The landowner team have worked with officers from the District and County Council (and their representatives) under a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) since September 2022 to develop the masterplan.
- 8.10. Emerging material from the masterplan framework was previously subject to formal Design Review in July 2023 using the Council's preferred partner Design South-East using their bespoke North Hertfordshire panel of experts.
- 8.11. The preferred option masterplan was presented to the Council Project Board in October 2023. The Project Board endorsed the work undertaken to that date as an appropriate basis for public consultation recognising that further refinement of the proposals would be required. In particular, and at that stage, the Project Board made clear that the final masterplan would need to resolve the options around secondary education to present a single solution.
- 8.12. Public consultations took place in March and November 2023 and invites were sent to local councillors, stakeholders and residents. U&C held in-person public events at Baldock Arts & Heritage Centre. The consultation was accompanied by a website (www.growingbaldock.co.uk) which has been maintained and updated throughout the process and remains 'live'.
- 8.13. Following the November 2023 consultation, extensive additional work was undertaken to explore the feasibility of the potential solutions for secondary education (discussed in detail below), reported to the Project Board in December 2024. The Council's officer project team provided detailed feedback on a full draft of the Masterplan document in February 2025.
- 8.14. Following Design Review and the public consultations, and through the process more generally, the developers/landowners and the Council have worked together to refine the masterplan and address issues raised. Key changes and refinements to the masterplan, include:
- Realignment of the primary route through BA1 as a low-speed route through the site (rather than a 'bypass') and, following archaeological investigation, connecting to the existing roundabout junction at eastern end of the Baldock bypass;
 - Rationalising the spatial options for secondary school provision so that it is made either at the existing Knights Templar site or on BA3;
 - Making Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) school provision on BA3;
 - Introducing greater flexibility over the nature of the second, active travel crossing of the railway between Clothall Common and BA1 to allow further investigation of providing an underpass rather than an overbridge; and

- Redistributing potential primary school provision within BA1 to provide one school to the west of the proposed local centre and one to the east, both located in close proximity to the primary route and the Bygrave Road corridor.
- 8.15. The size of the project, the nature of Urban & Civic's delivery model and the need to ensure flexibility on matters which cannot be resolved now have shaped the masterplan. The overall aim has been to establish key principles and objectives which can form a framework for the assessment of future, more detailed proposals.
- 8.16. The masterplan includes framework plans but these are strategic in scale. This masterplan does not set out, for example, a detailed street network for the site. This should be borne in mind when considering the masterplan and the level of detail it contains; it is not an 'absolute fix' of the proposals. This is recognised within the masterplan document which shows how the design process will continue and evolve through to implementation in the diagram below (see pp.91-93 of the masterplan document). A summary document highlighting key plans and concepts from the masterplan document has been prepared by officers to aid Councillors' consideration and is attached to this report



- 8.17. The masterplan has focussed upon and provides:
- A written vision, key objectives and thematic design principles for the site. These provide a clear basis for testing future proposals as they continue to evolve and work their way through the planning process;
 - High level spatial frameworks for key layers such as land use and transport; and
 - More detailed illustrative material and written concepts for those parts of the site where there is a greater level of certainty. This includes key areas of green infrastructure and the 'BA2' site south of Clothall Road which is expected to be the first phase of development with detailed plans to be brought forward in advance of other areas of the site.
- 8.18. The key plans in the masterplan are:
- Land Use (Fig.17, p.37) – identifying the areas of the site to be used for residential, open space and sports provision, primary schools, reserve land for secondary education, SEND provision, employment uses and a local centre.
 - Green infrastructure (Fig.21, p.45) – identifying a series of key spaces in and around the sites and town with associated open space typologies, precedent images, concept plans and strategic water and drainage strategy which aims, as a key principle, to recharge the existing aquifer feeding the River Ivel.

- Biodiversity (Fig.29, p.57) – identifying key habitat assets that will be provided, retained and enhanced. These include significant new areas of grassland habitat at the north of BA1 and at Walls Field and providing connectivity with the Local Nature Reserves at Ivel Springs and Weston Hills and the wider countryside.
 - Movement (Fig.31, p.61) – A framework plan showing transport connectivity within component plans detailing proposals for active travel, public transport and vehicular access along with key principles for parking provision and a range of proposed off-site interventions to be implemented across the wider town including alterations to the Whitehorse Street junction in the centre of Baldock.
 - Urban Design Framework (Fig.37, p.71) – identifying a strategic, site wide urban design framework setting out a structure for key frontages onto streets and green spaces, landmark buildings, prominent corners and landscaped edges. This forms the basis of a development structure and sets key design principles and an approach to establishing character which appropriately responds to the architectural qualities of Baldock. Detailed design principles are set to inform plans for the first phase of development on BA2.
 - Composite Framework Plan (Fig.44, p.83) which combines the parameters and concepts in the layers above to provide a development framework.
 - Indicative Phasing Strategy (Figs 45-48, pp.88-89) – splitting the site into four key phases starting with BA2. Phase B covers the green infrastructure proposals for Walls Field and ‘Baldock Mound’, the western third of BA1 and the eastern and western edges of the BA10 site. Phase C brings forward the central cores of BA1 and BA10 including full implementation of the primary route through BA1 connecting the A507 to the A505. Phase D implements the eastern area of BA1 and finalises proposals for BA3 and the adjoining Urban Open Land.
- 8.19. A summary assessment of the masterplan against the requirements of the relevant site-specific policy is set out later. However, in advance of this, it is equally informative to identify those key areas where the masterplan does not (fully) conform with the expectations of the Local Plan and set out the justification for this. These matters are set out separately but an overall decision on the masterplan should be made ‘in the round’.
- 8.20. Formal assessment of any schemes’ compliance with relevant policies will be through any subsequent planning application(s).

Secondary education

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

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

One secondary school, one Knights Templar

Providing the right schools at the right times is fundamental to achieving the 'One Baldock' principle.

This is a question that is really important for the future of Baldock and how it grows, and it is one where we haven't got a fixed view, although we know what we think the right answer might be.

You told us...

- '...must plan for new schools'
- '...the development needs to work with existing schools'
- '...Knights Templar is really important to the whole community'

Key principles

- Initially a new site for the new development would require two secondary schools to serve the expanded town and surrounding villages. We now believe that one secondary school, Knights Templar – either expanded on its existing site, or relocated within the site – is the best solution for Baldock and the villages in its priority catchment area.
- To work with the local primary schools to manage their current capacity and to influence the timing of new primary schools coming forward. This means being school spaces at existing schools for new homes south of the railway before we expand any of the existing schools and building new schools for the new homes to the north of the railway.
- To work with the schools and Hertfordshire County Council to keep numbers and capacity under review.
- To encourage the community's use of new school sports facilities at the secondary school where possible.
- To work with nursery providers to support the existing capacity within the town and plan in new provision within new schools and the new local centre at the appropriate time.

Primary

There will be early years facilities as part of the new primary schools, coordinating with the existing provision in Baldock, including St Martin's Nursery School.

Secondary

The local planning authority requires that two new primary schools be built as part of the development. These will be located north of the railway line. We are working with the education authority and the local schools to understand the timing and phasing of when new primary schools should come forward. We have been talking to existing schools and we agree that some currently have capacity for more pupils. It is important for us to coordinate our approach with the current planning and make sure that the delivery of new schools is timed so it doesn't affect existing schools in Baldock and its surrounding villages.

Secondary

We are working with the local education authority, Hertfordshire County Council, the planning authority (North Herts Council) and Knights Templar school to find the best solution for secondary education in Baldock and its priority catchment area which includes some of the surrounding villages. All the partners believe that one comprehensive secondary school will serve most families better than two smaller secondary schools competing within the town.

Secondary school options

The options for the three secondary school locations may change from people and vehicles moving around Baldock. For all options, we expect the number of pupils walking, cycling and using public transport to go to school to increase as a result of the measures we will put in place to make Baldock an even greener place to get around or live in. We believe that the three options will get around or live in. We believe that the three options will get around or live in.

1 Expansion of Knights Templar on current site

- no changes to routes to school for existing Baldock residents and walking and cycling on these routes will improve.
- increase in number of pupils arriving and departing at the existing Knights Templar site.
- pupils from new development can use existing routes to school including North Road, the new pedestrian/cycle crossing of the railway and improved pedestrian connections from BA2 via the town centre.

2 Relocation of Knights Templar to BA1

- changes to routes to school for existing communities who will need to travel north to the new school.
- improvement around the existing Knights Templar will reduce.
- increased movement through town for communities east of Station Road / Church Road.
- residents of Church Common and new homes at BA2/BA3 (to east of Baldock) will access school via new pedestrian/cycle crossing of the railway.

3 Relocation of Knights Templar to BA3

- changes to routes to school for the existing communities.

Extract from November 2023 consultation material

- 8.23. This consultation identified three potential solutions for secondary education:
- Expand KTS on its current site
 - Relocate an expanded KTS north of the railway (site BA1)
 - Relocate an expanded KTS south of Clothall Common (site BA3)
- 8.24. The clear feedback of the Project Board at this time, supported by local ward Councillors, was that any final masterplan needed to narrow these choices to a single, preferred solution. This was to provide certainty to the project and the local community. There was a clear preference that the development should facilitate the relocation of KTS to new facilities on the BA3 site.
- 8.25. Extensive additional work was conducted during 2024 to explore this request, better understand the factors influencing future demand and further understand the feasibility of various options.
- 8.26. The option of providing a single school for the enlarged town within BA1 has now been discounted. This is primarily because of the substantial land-take that a school of this size would require. Within BA1 this would need to be wholly accommodated within land that might otherwise deliver housing, significantly impacting the number of new homes that might be accommodated by the project. Removing secondary education provision entirely to the north of the railway and away from the existing town would also have significant implications for and impacts on existing communities.

- 8.27. It is important to make clear that there is agreement between officers and representatives of all parties that one, larger secondary school for Baldock is the preferred option. This builds on the existing strengths of KTS and the 'One Baldock' approach. It allows secondary provision to grow in phases in line with demand and avoids the operational challenges of an additional, smaller secondary school that operated 'in competition' with KTS. The preferred option from HCC, local Councillors and the current school leadership is the relocation of the existing KTS into the Growing Baldock scheme at BA3. This preference is made clear in the masterplan. Land at BA3 is reserved solely for education while all reasonable efforts are made to deliver this. However, a range of factors prevent this from being identified as the sole solution at this point in the process.
- 8.28. The current intake at KTS includes an inflow of around 2FE of pupils from Letchworth. There is currently spare capacity in the secondary school estate in Letchworth and admission rules gives priority at KTS to children from Baldock and the surrounding villages. In the early stages of any development, prospective Year 7 children from the Growing Baldock scheme would be prioritised over any applicants from Letchworth. This would reduce the spare capacity available to prospective students from Letchworth who would be 'pushed back' towards Fearnhill, Highfield or other schools identified under parental choice with sufficient capacity.
- 8.29. Because of this, 2FE of the existing provision at KTS is considered 'available' to serve the Growing Baldock scheme. Under planning rules, U&C cannot be charged for the costs of (re-)providing this in any scheme. It also cannot be charged for the costs of (re-)providing the remaining 5FE of existing provision that presently serves the current population of Baldock and the surrounding villages.
- 8.30. This leaves a significant funding gap for the delivery of a relocated school for which there is currently no solution. There is no reasonable prospect at this time of that gap being filled by central government funding; relevant budgets are presently wholly directed to permanently removing RAAC (aerated concrete) from affected schools.
- 8.31. Since adoption of the Local Plan, there have been significant changes in underlying demographics. Birth rates and primary school roll numbers are falling on both a local and national basis. This will see a fall in demand feed through into the secondary school system over time and could further impact on the figures outlined above.
- 8.32. HCC have a statutory obligation to ensure that every child can be offered a school place. Their modelling of pupil numbers shows a requirement to plan for up to 12FE of secondary education provision across the Baldock and the surrounding villages. However, it is recognised there is also uncertainty surrounding this figure and the actual number of pupils may ultimately be lower.
- 8.33. The project has explored opportunities for the existing KTS in detail. Expansion is technically feasible and deliverable up to 10FE. This is within the range of possible outcomes but does not achieve the upper end of HCC's planning parameters which must be safeguarded unless and until such time as it can be clearly shown that this level of provision will not be required. There are also significant challenges associated with expanding a school in a 'live' education environment. KTS is an Academy outside the direct control of HCC as Local Education Authority and therefore cannot be compelled to expand against its wishes.

- 8.34. There are potential costs associated with the maintenance and repair of existing buildings on the KTS site to allow their continued use in the long-term. These maintenance costs are beyond the responsibility of the Growing Baldock scheme and would require funding. HCC, U&C and local ward members have all advised officers that KTS is currently resistant to the idea of expanding in-situ.
- 8.35. The only fully deliverable option at the current time is therefore a new, second secondary school. This could be fully funded by U&C on land within their control to meet the surplus demand created by the Growing Baldock Scheme. However, this school would almost certainly be smaller than HCC's operational preference for new secondary schools to be at least 6FE in size to deliver a full breadth of curriculum and economies of scale. There would also be challenges around the long-term sustainability of this model. This approach would not reflect the clear feedback of community consultation.
- 8.36. The *potential* number of pupils could be estimated and recalculated endlessly. However, the *actual* amount of education places that will be needed can only be definitively known once new homes start to be delivered and occupied by real families. And placed against the demand arising from the existing population, influenced by the wider demographic factors above. There will be clear, advanced warning of the requirements as pupils work through the pre-school and primary school system that will allow a final decision to be made in good time; it is well-recognised that new developments generally attract younger and newly-forming families with the peak demand for secondary education trailing some time behind the peak demand for primary education.
- 8.37. The masterplan therefore includes a flexible approach. It is framed in a way that any of the three options above could be accommodated, namely:
- The expansion of KTS in-situ;
 - The relocation of KTS to BA3; and
 - A second, small secondary school on BA3
- 8.38. The masterplan makes clear that the relocation of an expanded KTS to BA3 is the preferred outcome. Sufficient land is reserved unless and until it is conclusively proven that this scheme is not deliverable and / or not required. A final decision will be made later in the development process involving the district and county councils in consultation with local, elected representatives.
- 8.39. A detailed presentation and Q&A session was held with the Project Board and local ward members in December 2024. At this meeting, the Board recognised the complexities of the situation and agreed that the masterplan could progress for consideration with this flexible approach subject to the position in 8.38 above. This was reiterated at the February and March 2025 meetings.
- 8.40. Any outline application would currently need to include the flexible approach to ensure a deliverable permission could be issued. Any future s106 legal agreement will contain appropriate review mechanisms, requirements for governance and oversight and triggers that allow a decision to be made and implemented. In the meantime, all parties have agreed to continue to work together and with other key stakeholders including the local MP and DfE to provide the best possible opportunity to implement the preferred solution.

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

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

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

- None of the options would deliver a secondary school on BA1, contrary to Policy SP14(i);

- Two of the three options would see at least part of site BA3 used for education, contrary to Policies HS1 and BA3 which identify this land for housing.
- 8.43. However, as shown above, this approach has been subject to rigorous exploration and assessment including consideration of new and additional information that was not available at the point the Local Plan was examined.
- 8.44. Notwithstanding the specific requirements above, both the Local Plan and national planning policies place considerable emphasis on (i) the delivery of new homes, (ii) the provision of appropriate infrastructure to support this and (iii) the provision of sufficient school places. Policy SP14 additionally requires that any masterplan for BA1 is “deliverable”.
- 8.45. Without a flexible approach, the Growing Baldock project would stall. It is already more than two years since adoption of the Local Plan and it is imperative that the Council can demonstrate tangible progress in its implementation. The approach to secondary education is the most appropriate that can be achieved at this point in time. Officers therefore fully support the approach in the masterplan.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) school

- 8.46. The masterplan includes a commitment to provide a two-hectare site for a SEND school. This is shown on BA3, co-located with the potential secondary school.
- 8.47. There is not a policy requirement in any of the relevant Local Plan allocations to include a SEND school. The Growing Baldock scheme will not generate sufficient demand for additional SEND school places to justify requesting the entirety of the land and full build costs of a SEND school from U&C as a negotiated developer contribution.
- 8.48. In recognition of this, HCC have provided additional information and justification to support this land-use element of the proposal. In summary this recognises or includes:
- The County Council’s duty to secure provisions for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities;
 - The current significant shortfall in places in the sector, and within specific forms of SEND provision. This is forecast to continue rising and has informed inspection findings by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission;
 - Adopted HCC strategy which seeks to deliver 300 additional places across the county including 100 spaces in the north of Hertfordshire in response to the geographical spread of forecast demand and requiring planning authorities to take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to meeting this requirement;
 - The support within Policies SP10 and HC1 of the Local Plan for community facilities including education in appropriate and accessible locations;
 - The geographical spread of demand for SEND provision. This includes a recognition that existing needs for the intended form of provision from the three towns at the centre of North Herts - Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock - are currently met in Stevenage;
 - Consideration of potential alternate locations for SEND provision within the District. This includes a review of all new primary school sites requested and required through the site allocations in the Local Plan and re-confirmation they remain required for this purpose;

- The operational and co-location benefits of providing SEND alongside mainstream education schools; and
- National planning policy which emphasises the importance of ensuring there is a sufficient choice of school places

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

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

Health provision within the employment land

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

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

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

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

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

- 8.54. It is also important to note that the employment land allocation at site BA10 was largely justified by the fact that it was making good an anticipated shortfall of employment provision in neighbouring Stevenage. The amount of employment development that has subsequently been delivered in Stevenage has significantly exceeded previous expectations. This includes the delivery of substantial developments associated with the research and development sector and bioscience catalyst on the GlaxoSmithKline site at the south of the town.
- 8.55. It is not necessary to make a formal planning determination on these matters. It is also not possible to do so until there is further clarity on the scale and nature of the uses that are proposed. These will follow through the planning process. However, in masterplan terms, there is sufficient flexibility in relevant policies and consideration of the wider circumstances for some alternate uses of the nature suggested to prove acceptable in BA10.
- 8.56. The significant majority of BA10 remains identified for employment uses in the masterplan. This includes the proposed waste uses at the eastern end of site adjoining the A505 junction.

Southern link road

- 8.57. Policy BA3 includes a requirement to deliver a southern link road connecting the B656 Royston Road to Wallington Road or the A507 Clothall Road within the southern [A505] bypass. This was in response to transport modelling conducted at the time. The approach to transport interventions in the Local Plan was predicated on a 'predict and provide' approach to car- and capacity-based interventions.
- 8.58. National and local policies now place far greater emphasis on active and sustainable travel. HCC's Local Transport Plan 4 introduced a user hierarchy prioritising these modes over private car.
- 8.59. The option-testing and Design Review phases of the masterplan explored different approaches to transport infrastructure in 2023. This included consideration of strategic links and all-mode roads. The baseline evidence work revealed there were only limited trips that would benefit from a direct link around the south of the town. Providing a link road as originally envisaged would be likely to induce additional car journeys with a detrimental impact upon conditions on Wallington Road and South Road as well as within BA3 itself. This approach was ruled out at this stage of the masterplan development and has not been pursued.



The options-testing phase considered potential link routes through BA3

- 8.60. The masterplan document includes bus-only access from Royston Road into and through Clothall Common as well as new active travel crossings of this road. This will allow for sustainable and active travel connectivity between Royston Road, BA3 and Wallington Road. This was also set out in the public consultation held in November 2023. The proposed bus access may provide the opportunity to double as an emergency vehicular access into Clothall Common in the event the existing access from Wallington Road is unavailable. This will be explored as detailed design proposals are developed.
- 8.61. The proposed approach is in line with broader Local Plan, Local Transport Plan and national policies that prioritise active and sustainable travel. Taking the Local Plan and these wider priorities as a whole, the approach is considered appropriate.

Overall housing numbers

- 8.62. The Local Plan estimated that 3,245 homes would be provided across sites BA1, BA2 and BA3. The masterplan estimates “around 3,000”, approximately 7.5% fewer.
- 8.63. The Local Plan is clear that its numbers are either estimates or approximate figures. The Council has already granted planning permissions on many sites allocated in the Local Plan where the number of homes differs from the Local Plan figure – both above and below the initial estimates. Variations on permitted schemes have broadly fallen within a ‘tolerance’ of +/-20% of the original Local Plan estimate. The level of variance at Baldock is, in percentage terms, nothing out of the ordinary. However, given the size of the project this does potentially amount to a relatively significant shortfall in numerical terms.

- 8.64. The Local Plan figures were not based on detailed analyses of the sites or a worked-up scheme. Through the baseline evidence process it became clear that the figures for the Baldock sites would be difficult to achieve given the level of constraints on the site, particularly on BA1 in relation to archaeology and surface water flooding and drainage.
- 8.65. There also remains considerable uncertainty in relation to the long-term solution for secondary school provision. As above, this could see a large area of site BA3 given over to this use. That said, school provision on BA3 would be a more efficient option, in terms of housing delivery, than making the same provision within BA1. This is because it would be possible to provide elements of the school playing fields within the adjoining Urban Open Land without conflicting with the relevant policy. As above (see paragraph 8.26), a large secondary school in BA1 would be wholly on land which otherwise would be used for housing. It would additionally be in an area of the site that might support relatively higher densities than BA3.
- 8.66. As above, the relocated school remains the preferred outcome. But should it ultimately prove possible and preferable to accommodate future secondary needs at the existing Knights Templar site, this land could be 'released' and used for housing as originally envisaged by the Local Plan.
- 8.67. Officers will continue to work with U&C to optimise the housing capacity of the site, whilst still achieving appropriately high levels of design quality. This will be progressed through the Design Code and Key Phases, by exploring the potential for innovative forms of development within BA1 in particular.
- 8.68. The currently estimated housing numbers are ultimately an output of the associated decisions on other matters explained above, and which officers consider to be justified considering the evidence that has been brought forward through the masterplan process. It follows that officers do not consider the shortfall in housing numbers to be a barrier to the progress of the masterplan.

Assessment against policy requirements

- 8.69. This masterplan is different from those previously presented as it includes the cumulative consideration of multiple sites. It is also the first masterplan where there is also a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan. Relevant policy requirements from the BBCNP are also included and shown in italics.
- 8.70. The assessments below work in a clockwise direction through the masterplan area. The land north of the railway is identified as Site BA1, a Strategic Housing Site under Policy SP14 of the Local Plan. This sets out a range of policy requirements. As with other masterplans previously considered by Cabinet and Full Council, a high-level assessment of the masterplan's compliance with this policy is set out. The relevant policies for sites BA2, BA3, BA10, the Urban Open Land and Walls Field contain detailed criteria for consideration later in the planning process. The elements that are considered most relevant to the masterplan are highlighted.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

development, as well as to appropriate screening [BBCNP]

Green Infrastructure forms a key element of the masterplan. This includes extensive provision in the north areas of BA1, proposed as Bygrave Common². These includes scrub and wooded copse planting along the small ridge that marks the highest part of the site. This will also demarcate between more formal forms of open space provision to be contained to the inside of this and natural meadow and wildflower grasslands that will form a natural habitat corridor to the northern boundary where it will meet the agricultural land beyond.

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



▲ Figure 23: Bygrave Common Key Design Principles

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

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

Details of planting species will follow through the planning process.

² Any ‘names’ given to open spaces in the masterplan are working titles.



▲ Figure 26: Heritage Park Key Design Principles

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

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

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

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

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



- **Sustainable transport measures to include:**
 - i. a secondary rail crossing for pedestrians and cyclists in the vicinity of Ashville Way;
 - ii. safe access routes to / from, and upgrades to, Baldock station;
 - iii. sensitive integration of Bridleway Baldock 034 / Bygrave 002 as a north-south route through the development;
 - iv. the use of Bygrave Road / Ashwell Road from the south-western edge of the allocated site to the link road as a sustainable transport corridor; and
 - v. comprehensive integration into the existing pedestrian and cycle, public transport and road networks
- ***Retain and incorporate existing landscape and built features that contribute to the site's history and character, including Bygrave Road/Ashwell Road and trees and hedgerows (while safeguarding the habitat value of the Bygrave Road local wildlife site) [BBCNP]***
- ***Make provision for improved pedestrian and cycle access between Bygrave and Baldock, through a new footpath and cycleway using the route of Bygrave Road/Ashwell Road, designed in a way that maintains as much as possible of its rural character and habitat value [BBCNP]***

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

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

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



The entirety of Bygrave Road through the site is identified as a key pedestrian and cycle connection with the potential to form a key utility route connecting the station access, the primary schools and local centre with residential areas. The masterplan also recognises the potential of this road as public transport route. (The appropriateness of) vehicular access, including to existing properties within the Strategic Masterplan boundary, will be further considered through design coding and detailed proposals. This will also consider the ecological value and function of Bygrave Road.

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

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

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

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

- **A community hall and GP surgery**

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

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

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

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

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

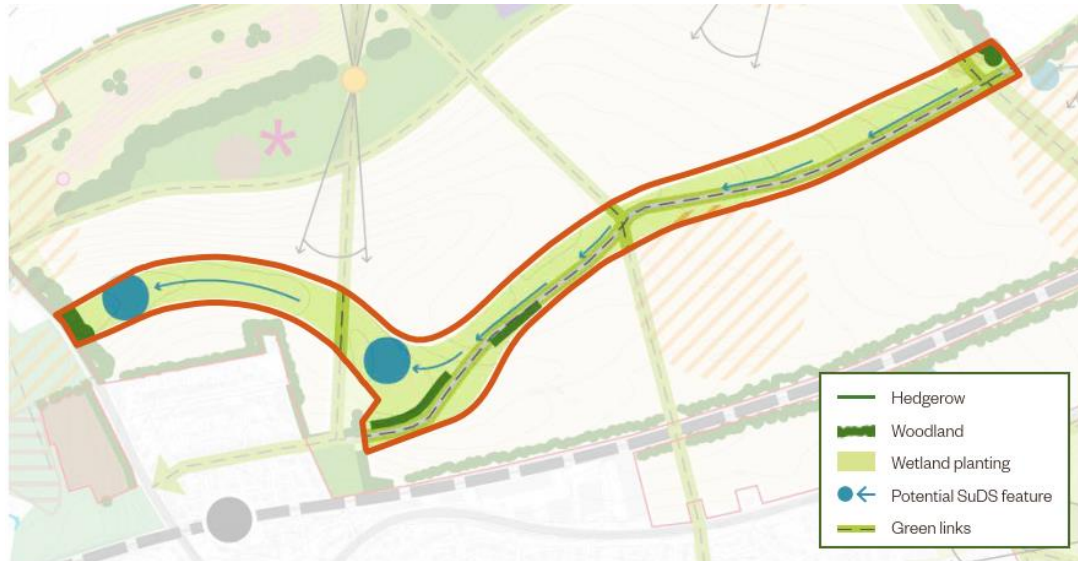
This is discussed extensively above. No secondary education provision is now proposed in BA1. This is considered a justified position and approach for the masterplan.

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

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

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

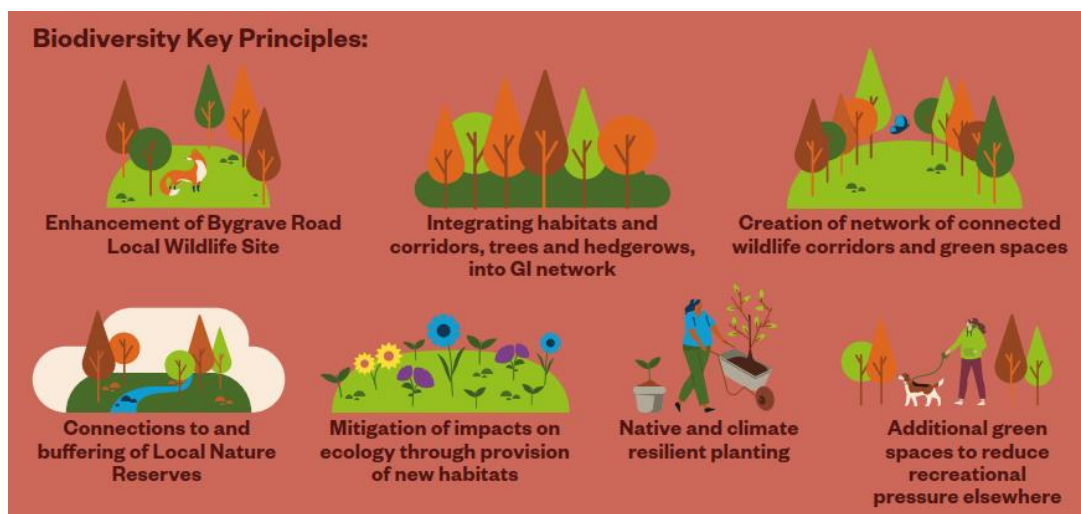
The Green Infrastructure proposals include the proposed Winterbourne Corridor which will incorporate SUDs features potentially leading to a wetland area between Bygrave Road and North Road that will assist in recharging the aquifer that feeds the River Ivel.



▲ Figure 27: Winterbourne Way Key Design Principles

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Extensive archaeological investigations have taken place in liaison with HCC experts. These have notably influenced the location and design principles for the proposed Winterbourne Way. Various options were considered for the location of the primary route and railway bridge to the east of the site. However, detailed trial trenching did not unearth any significant finds in this area that might have required a response in the layout of the site.

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

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

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

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

- **A masterplan to be secured prior to the approval of any detailed matters;**
The masterplan being presented to this meeting for consideration includes BA10.
- ***Make the [B656] corridor a focus for sustainable travel and provide for an improved footpath and cycleway along Royston Road***
A range of sustainable transport interventions are proposed along Royston Road. This includes bus-only access into Clothall Common in combination with an active travel crossing and a second active travel crossing point aligned with second rail crossing
- **Address existing surface water flood risk issues, including any run-off through SUDs or other appropriate solution;**
- **Landscaping to enhance the ecological value of the railway corridor and reinforce a defensible Green Belt boundary to the east;**
- ***Incorporate a landscape buffer between development on site BA10 and the railway line...[BBCNP]***

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



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

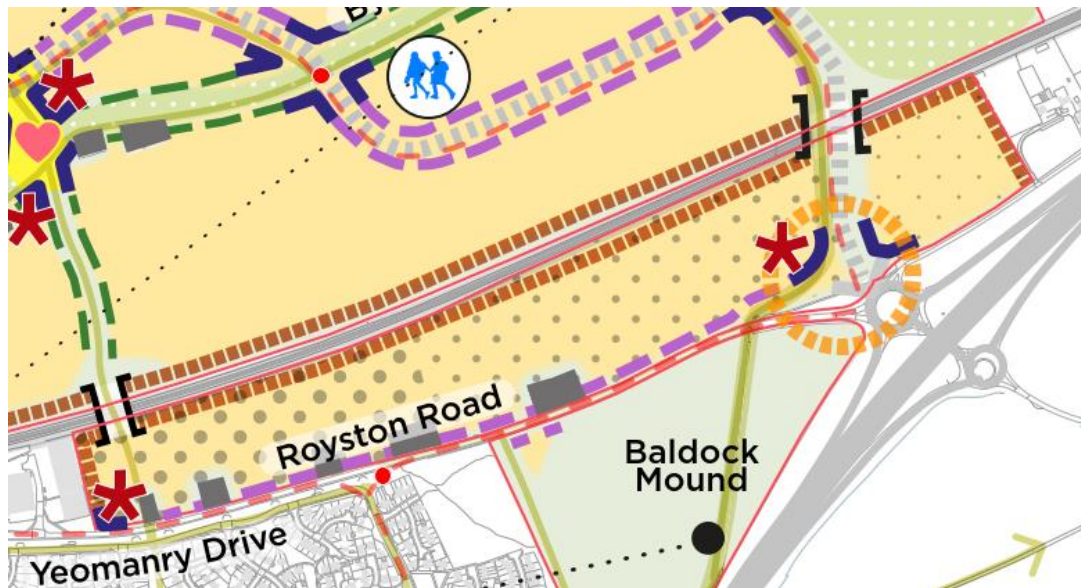
There are only glimpsed views of the top of the church spire from the eastern end of Royston Road as it rises towards the A505 junction. No specific view corridor is denoted in the masterplan but this can be managed as appropriate through future design coding or detailed plans.

- ***Create a high quality and distinctive entrance to the town along Royston Road, using well-designed buildings and a consistent approach to landscaping and lighting [BBCNP];***

- ***Relate sensitively to the existing houses fronting onto Royston Road through the scale, massing and landscaping of the new development [BBCNP];***

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

See earlier discussion of education matters.

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

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

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

Detailed planting strategies will follow later in the planning process.



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

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

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

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



• Figure 25: Walls Field Key Design Principles

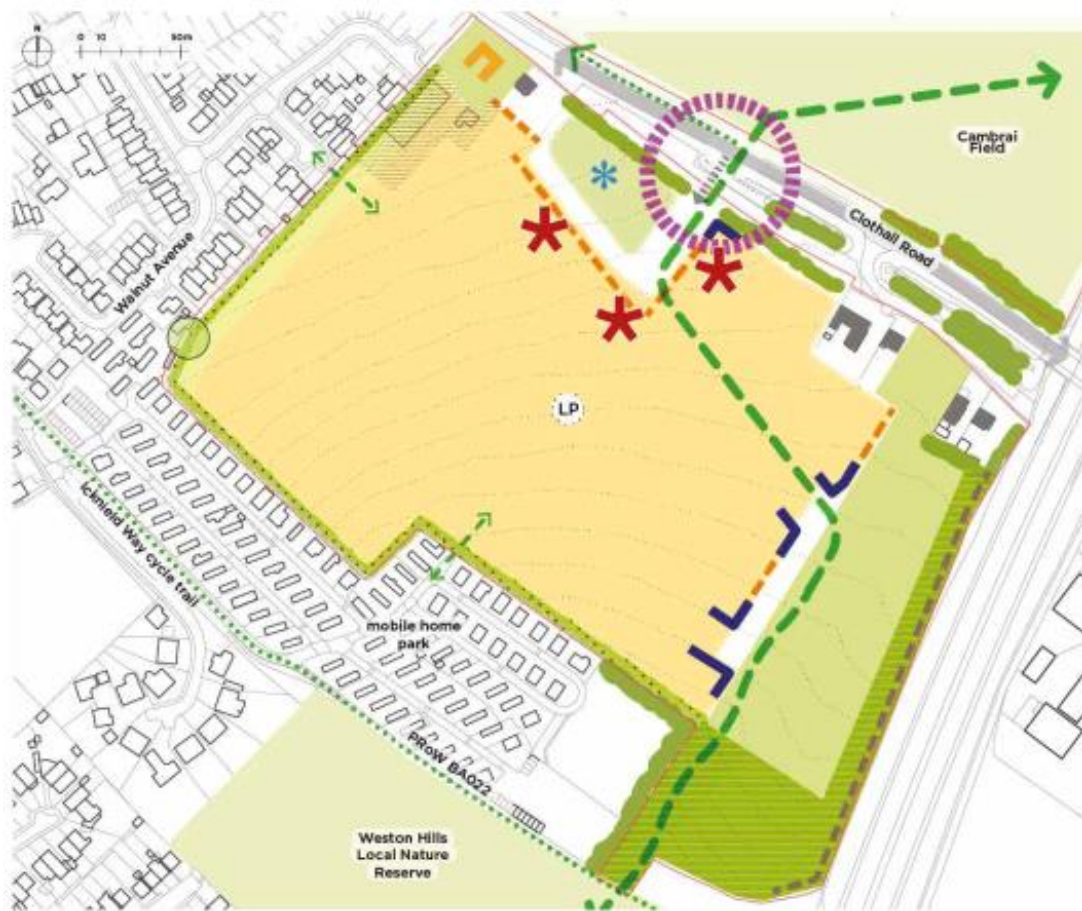
8.75. The commentary below relates to site BA2 and relevant parts of the masterplan. The masterplan includes a greater level of design detail for BA2 than other parts of the site. BA2 is expected to be the first phase of development with detailed plans brought forward ahead of other areas:

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

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

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

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



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

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

Sustainability

- 8.76. In September 2024, Cabinet approved the Council's Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which supports the local plan. This identifies a series of standards against key sustainability themes.
- 8.77. U&C have carried out an initial-self assessment of the aspirations of the Growing Baldock project and masterplan against the categories and levels in the Sustainability SPD. There is not yet enough detail or information to make definitive judgements. However, they presently anticipate achieving 'gold' against three themes, 'silver' against three themes and 'bronze' against two.
- 8.78. These will be developed, tested and assessed further through the planning process.

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

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

U&C self-assessment against the Sustainability SPD

Next steps

- 8.79. Subject to Full Council approval, the masterplan will be adopted as a material consideration for any future planning decisions relating to the site. Any existing or future applications will be assessed to ensure they broadly conform to and / or facilitate the implementation of the parameters and principles set out in this document. Any substantive deviation from the masterplan will need to be justified, for example if new information comes to light that isn't available at this stage in the process.
- 8.80. Through the joint work on the masterplan a series of actions and issues have been identified that will need to be addressed as the scheme progresses towards delivery through the formal planning process. A number of matters are identified in this report. The masterplan provides appropriate 'hooks' to accommodate these matters.
- 8.81. Subject to relevant approvals, U&C currently expect to formally submit an outline planning application(s) for the development later in 2025. This will be preceded by further public events that will publicise this and outline the proposals which are to be submitted.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Under paragraph 5.7.18 of the Council's Constitution, the Cabinet may exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority and receive reports on strategic planning matters (except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Director: Place).
- 9.2. Section 4.8.2(g) of the Constitution contains a general power for Full Council to receive and debate reports from Cabinet.

- 9.3. There is no statutory definition of 'masterplan'. Unlike, for example, the Local Plan or any Supplementary Planning Documents, they are not formally defined or regulated through relevant planning acts or associated regulations – either in terms of content or process. This means there is discretion as to how, when and whether they are produced and / or approved on the part of both the applicant and the Council.
- 9.4. Policy SP9 of the Local Plan provides a clear policy definition within the Council's statutory Development Plan of what is expected within a masterplan and the design outcomes that should be achieved.
- 9.5. Terms of Reference for the Project Board and guidance on the approval processes for masterplans have been presented to and endorsed by Cabinet, most recently in September 2024 and published on the Council website.
- 9.6. These set out that Masterplans will be subject to formal approval by Cabinet and Full Council where a masterplan is to be adopted as a material consideration in advance of the determination of the relevant planning application(s).
- 9.7. Government Planning Practice Guidance states that a material planning consideration is one which is relevant to making the planning decision in question (e.g., whether to grant or refuse an application for planning permission).
- 9.8. Formal, regulatory approval for any development of the site will be secured through any subsequent planning permission(s). These will be considered through established processes and legislation including presentation to Planning Control Committee.
- 9.9. Any approval of the Strategic Masterplan is without prejudice to the consideration and determination of any future planning application(s).
- 9.10. PPAs are made pursuant to Part 1 of Chapter 1 of the Localism Act 2011, Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 and Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 and under associated planning legislation and guidance, including but not limited to the Planning Act 2008. Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 allows local planning authorities to charge for providing discretionary services and the legislation is clear that, where charges are made, they must not exceed the cost of providing the service.
- 9.11. At its meeting on 16 March 2021, Cabinet resolved (item 109) as part of the Local Plan Implementation report to approve the North Hertfordshire Masterplanning Principles. Within this document paragraph 2.11 states: The Council would normally expect a PPA to be used to support the preparation of Strategic Masterplans and significant development planning applications.
- 9.12. Under the Council's constitution, paragraph 14.6.4 (ii) authorises the Directors for the respective service areas to enter into contracts for the supply of services, in this case the use of consultants to act on the Council's behalf. 14.6.4 (viii) authorises the setting of fees and charges, in this case to seek to recover these costs from the Developer.
- 9.13. The PPA states that "*Nothing in the [agreement] will restrict or inhibit HCC or NHDC from exercising their statutory functions and views about the development and nothing in this agreement shall predetermine the outcome of any planning application*".

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The Council resources for masterplanning and implementation work are drawn from existing staff, with additional support from specialist consultants as required. The PPA seeks to recover the costs of undertaking this work. The costs will be monitored to ensure on-going cost recovery.
- 10.2. For any activities that cannot be charged through the PPA, a ring-fenced Masterplanning reserve and / or approved budgets will be used.
- 10.3. The principle of setting of fees and charges for Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) was agreed by the (then) Service Director: Regulatory in consultation with the Service Director: Resources and the Executive Member for Planning & Transport in January 2022.
- 10.4. Funding was secured through a PPA to support the Council's input to this masterplan including the recovery of external consultancy costs. Additional resource was funded through the use of approximately £40,000 of Government grant specifically ringfenced for the delivery of sites of at least 2,000 homes. This included funding for Hyas Associates, who specialise in supporting local authorities on large site delivery, and who facilitated the masterplan options workshop.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. The Council previously monitored a specific Masterplanning risk. However, this was not carried forward in the 2024/25 Council Delivery Plan; progress is dependent on third parties and council activities are considered business-as-usual. Strategic oversight continues via the Project Board and reports to Cabinet and Full Council.
- 11.3. Notwithstanding, the key risks that were identified remain pertinent to consideration of individual reports and masterplans:
 - Risk of poor scheme outcomes that do not appropriately respond to local character and context
 - Risk that strategic sites do not maximise contribution to corporate objectives and priorities of climate change, environment, economy and place
 - Risk of delay to delivery of strategic sites if masterplan process is delayed or stalled or provides insufficient information to guide subsequent planning applications
 - Failure to secure funding to resource the process
 - Reduction in pre-application income and delay to income from planning applications
 - Failure to retain/recruit sufficiently experienced officers
 - Risk of adverse appeal findings on other/non-Local Plan sites if delivery is delayed or stalled

- 11.4. Positive decisions on officer and / or Project Board-supported masterplans mitigate against many of these factors by maintaining tangible progress on key sites that are essential to delivery of the Local Plan and securing an appropriate design framework against which future planning proposals can be assessed. Adverse decisions are likely to reduce developer confidence in the process, including negative reputational outcomes for the Council, and an increase in schemes which seek to meet the requirements of Policy SP9 directly through the Development Management process.
- 11.5. The Council cannot presently demonstrate a five-year housing land supply (5YHLS). This is a key requirement of national policy set out in the most recent NPPF. Where there is no 5YHLS Councils can be required, subject to exceptions, to consider applications for development more favourably, including on sites not allocated in their local plans. To be included within the 5YHLS, a site must be considered “deliverable”. Recent appeal decisions show that Inspectors can remove any allowances made within the 5YHLS from allocated Local Plan sites where they do not consider sufficient progress is being made. This can exacerbate the shortfall and / or increase the weight which might be given to alternate proposals.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. The site which is subject to this masterplan was allocated for development through the Council’s adopted Local Plan. An Equality Impact Assessment was produced in 2017 assessing the plan’s compliance with relevant legislation and requirements and submitted to Government as part of the plan’s examination.
- 12.3. No issues with the Equality Impact Assessment were raised by the Inspector throughout the examination report. Paragraph 11 of their report on the plan, issued in 2022, concluded:

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

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

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

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 None

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan
- 16.2 Appendix B – Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan Summary Document

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 [Local Plan Implementation - report to Cabinet, March 2021](#) [*including masterplanning principles and establishment of Project Board*]
- 18.2 [Local Plan adoption – report to Cabinet and Full Council, November 2022](#)
- 18.3 [Strategic Planning Matters – report to Cabinet, September 2024](#) [*including endorsement of current Project Board Terms of Reference*]
- 18.4 [Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan – report to Cabinet, March 2025](#)

18.5 [Council Website – Masterplanning pages](#)

Growing Baldock

Strategic Masterplan



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Introduction

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

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Purpose of the Strategic Masterplan

This Strategic Masterplan:

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

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

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

Structure of the Strategic Masterplan

The Strategic Masterplan includes the following sections:

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

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

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

2.0

Vision for Growing Baldock

Vision

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



Figure 01: Growing Baldock Vision

Vision Statement

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

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

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

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

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

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

Framework Key Principles

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

Land Use Key Principles:



High-quality housing to meet the needs of all ages



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



Supporting and strengthening Baldock Town Centre

Green Infrastructure Key Principles:



Enhancing inherited assets



Prioritising nature rich places



Celebrating heritage



A Greenway for Baldock



Creating a series of parkland destinations



Landscape-led design



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

Biodiversity Key Principles:



Enhancement of Bygrave Road Local Wildlife Site



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



Creation of network of connected wildlife corridors and green spaces



Connections to and buffering of Local Nature Reserves



Mitigation of impacts on ecology through provision of new habitats



Native and climate resilient planting



Additional green spaces to reduce recreational pressure elsewhere

Movement Key Principles:



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



Town-wide improvements to encourage sustainable and active travel



Reclaiming space for walking, cycling and public transport

Urban Design Key Principles:



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



Retaining and enhancing key views towards Baldock and the wider landscape



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



Putting place-making at the heart of the development.



Creating a new gateway into Baldock



A mix of buildings, spaces and character

Sustainability Key Principles:



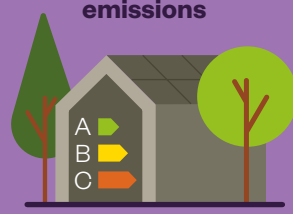
All buildings Net Zero in operational carbon emissions



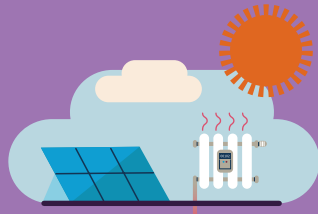
All-electric development



Contributions to carbon offset fund, if required



Highly energy efficient homes and buildings



Use of renewable heat and energy-generating technologies

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

The Ten ‘Big Moves’

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

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1. Local Centre to Complement High Street

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

2. Recharging the River Ivel

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

3. A Healthy and Connected Town – Baldock Greenway

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

4. Health Hub for Baldock

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

5. Achieving Growing Baldock Net Zero

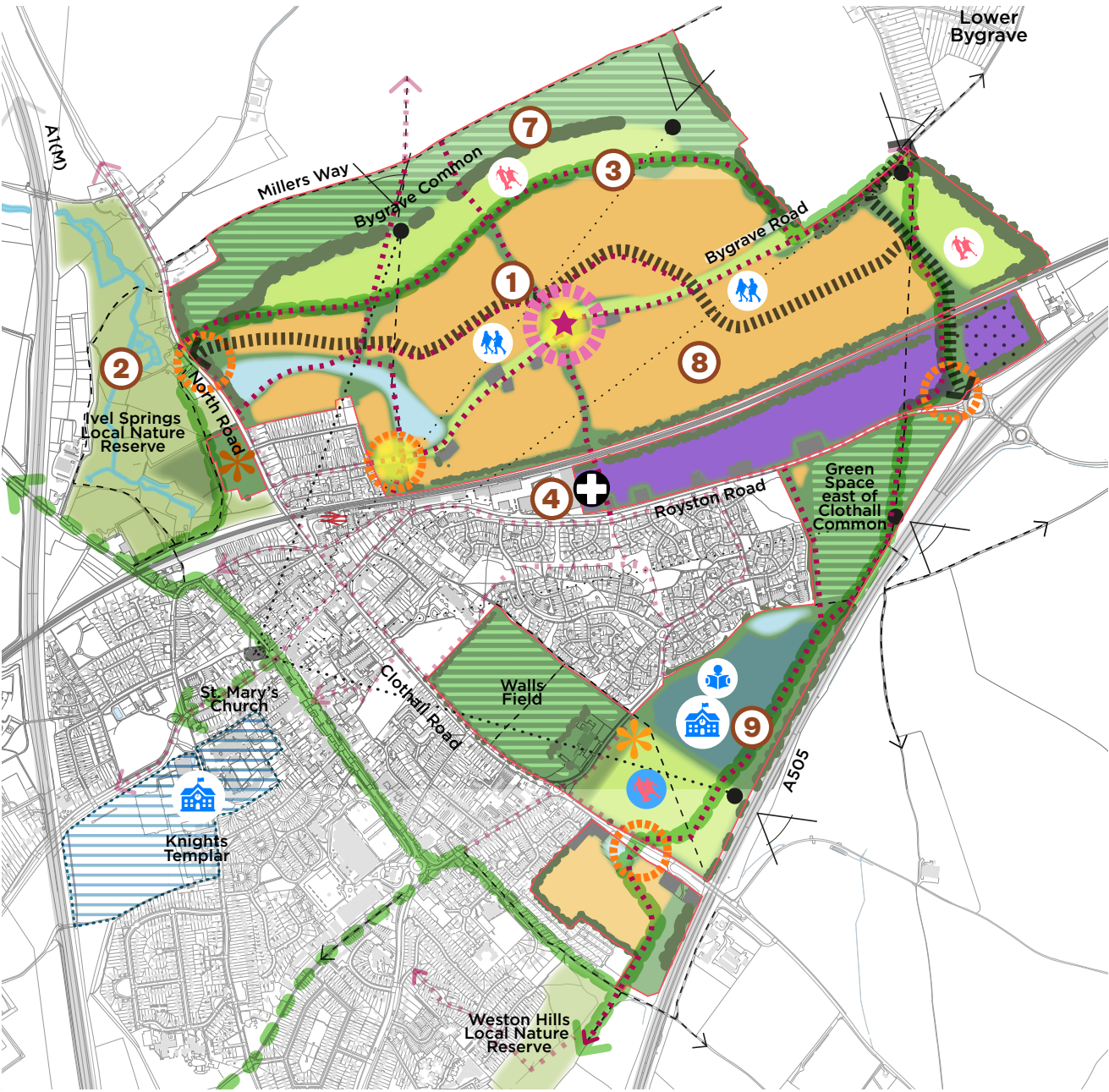
The development will be as sustainable as possible, aiming to be net zero in operational carbon and minimise construction carbon emissions. This is important to how Baldock grows and is a priority of HCC and NHC.

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

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

7. A New Life for Bygrave Common

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



8. Much-needed New Homes for Baldock

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

9. Secondary Education to Meet Needs in Baldock

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

10. Redistributing Through Traffic

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

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

The Baldock Conversation

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



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

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

The Baldock Conversation: The Baseline

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



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

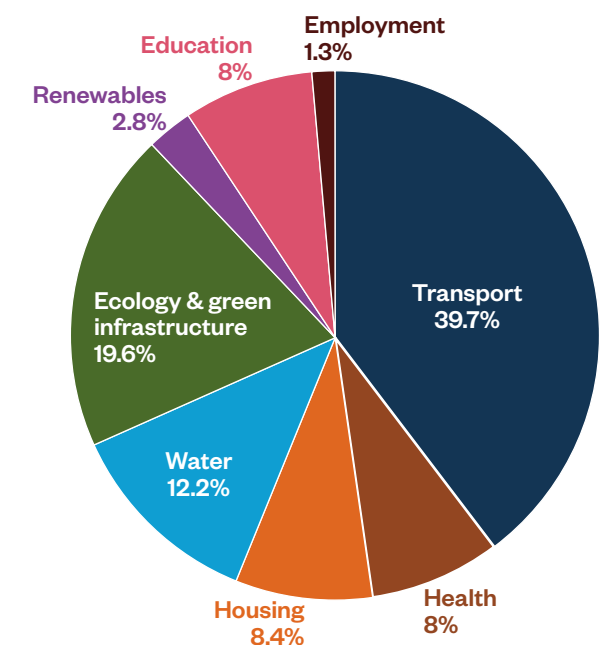
A summary of this baseline work is provided in section 4 of this report and in more detail in the separate Composite Baseline Report. This work was shared with key partners and formed the basis of initial themed workshops with statutory authorities and key interested parties.

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

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

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

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



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

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



▲ Figure 04: Comments arising from consultation, March 2023

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

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

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

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

5. Raised land ('Green Space east of Clothall Common')
This is an important place which people enjoy walking through and want to retain – even though everyone had different names for it! It has also become home to important insects and birds, so we have ensured it remains green space in the plans.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Baldock Conversation: Options testing and preferred option

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

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

Technical work

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

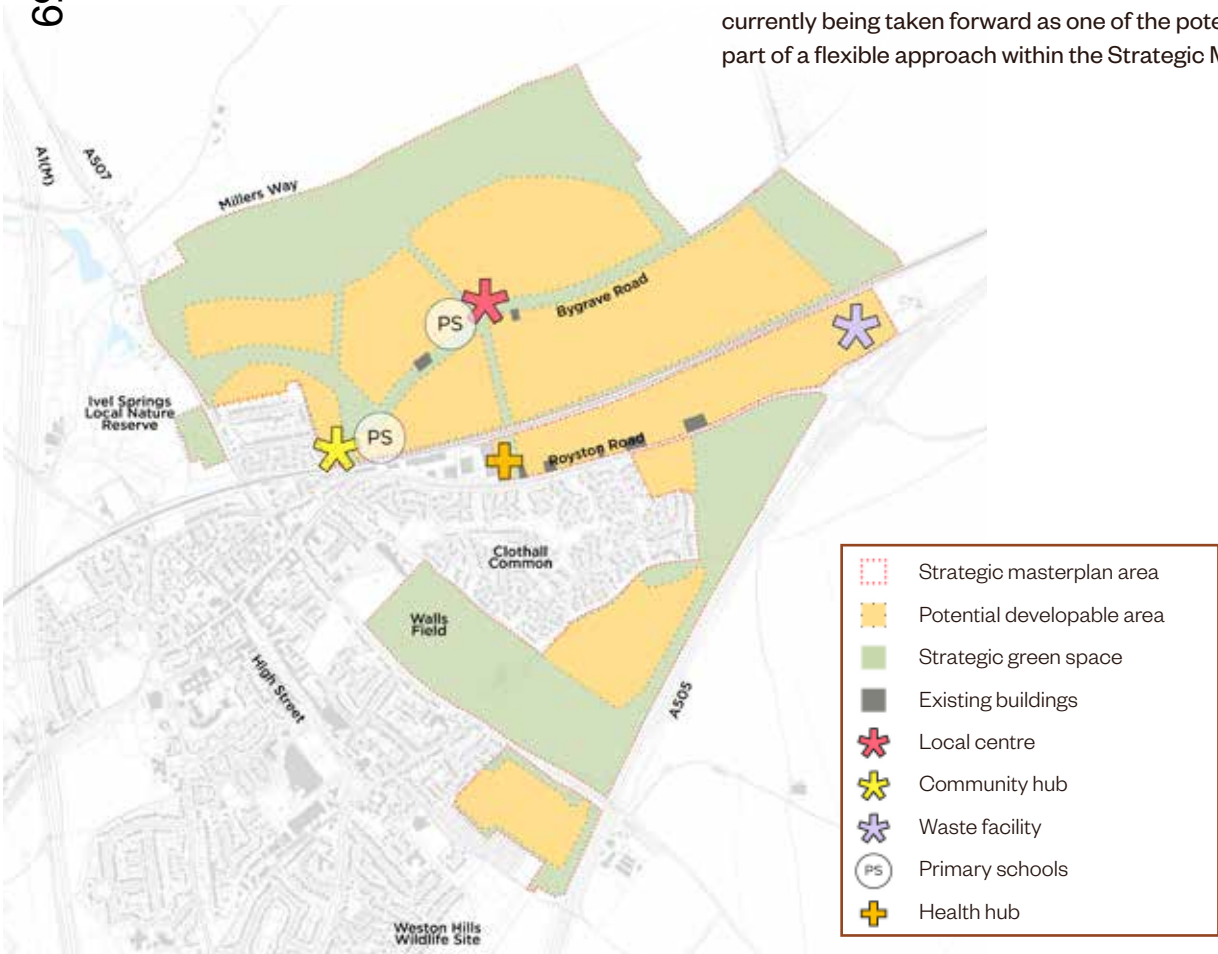
The emerging masterplan was then subject of a Design South East Design Review in July 2023. A further design workshop between U&C, NHC and HCC officers was held in August 2023. Throughout the process, a series of task group meetings themed around movement and access, green infrastructure and land use,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

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

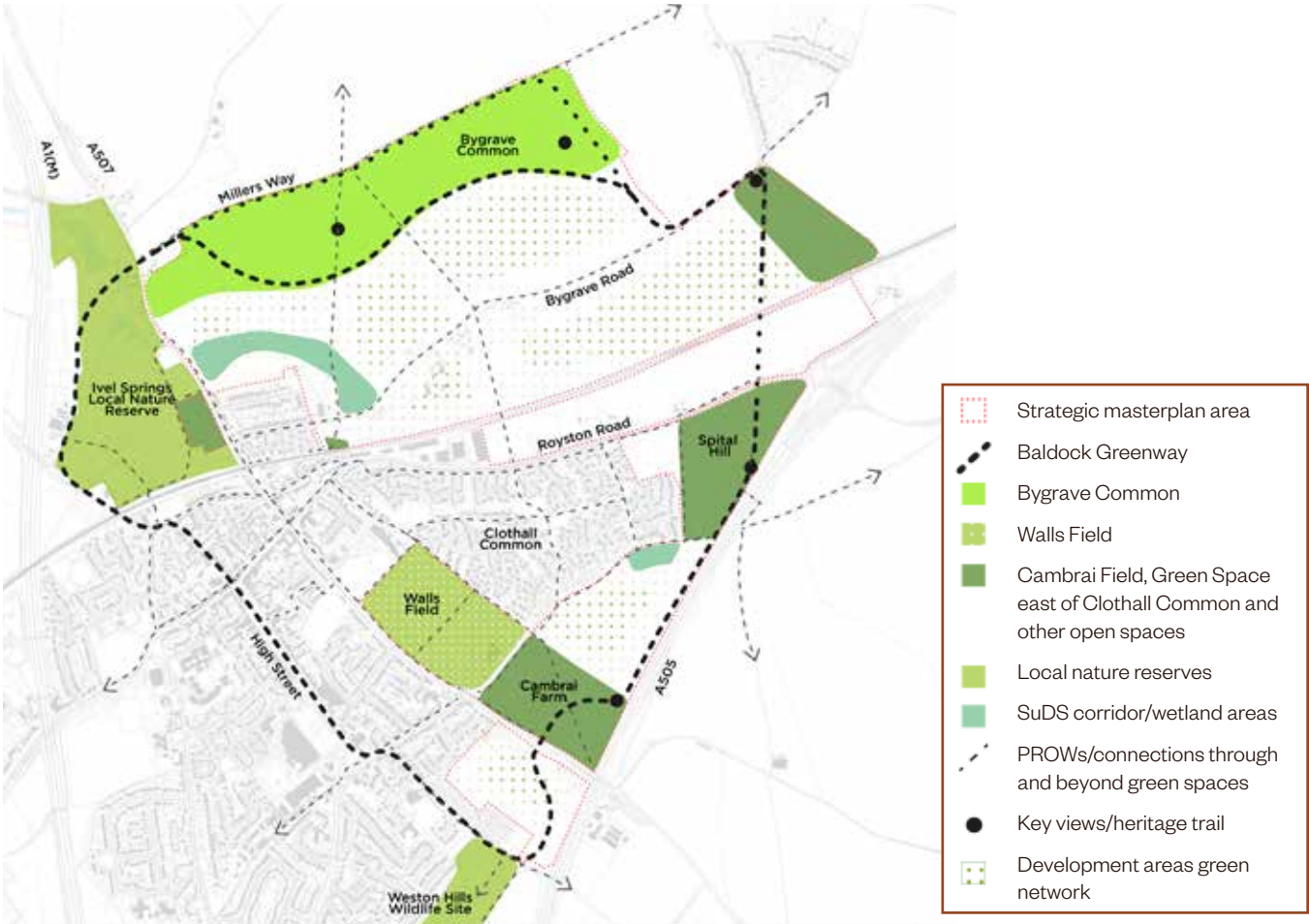
The suite of technical and design inputs discussed and refined over several months culminated in a consensus on various matters, which were presented in the Options Report as 'fixes' (shown in Figures 05 to 07 below). These reflect the status of parameters at the time of the Options Report, some of which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

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

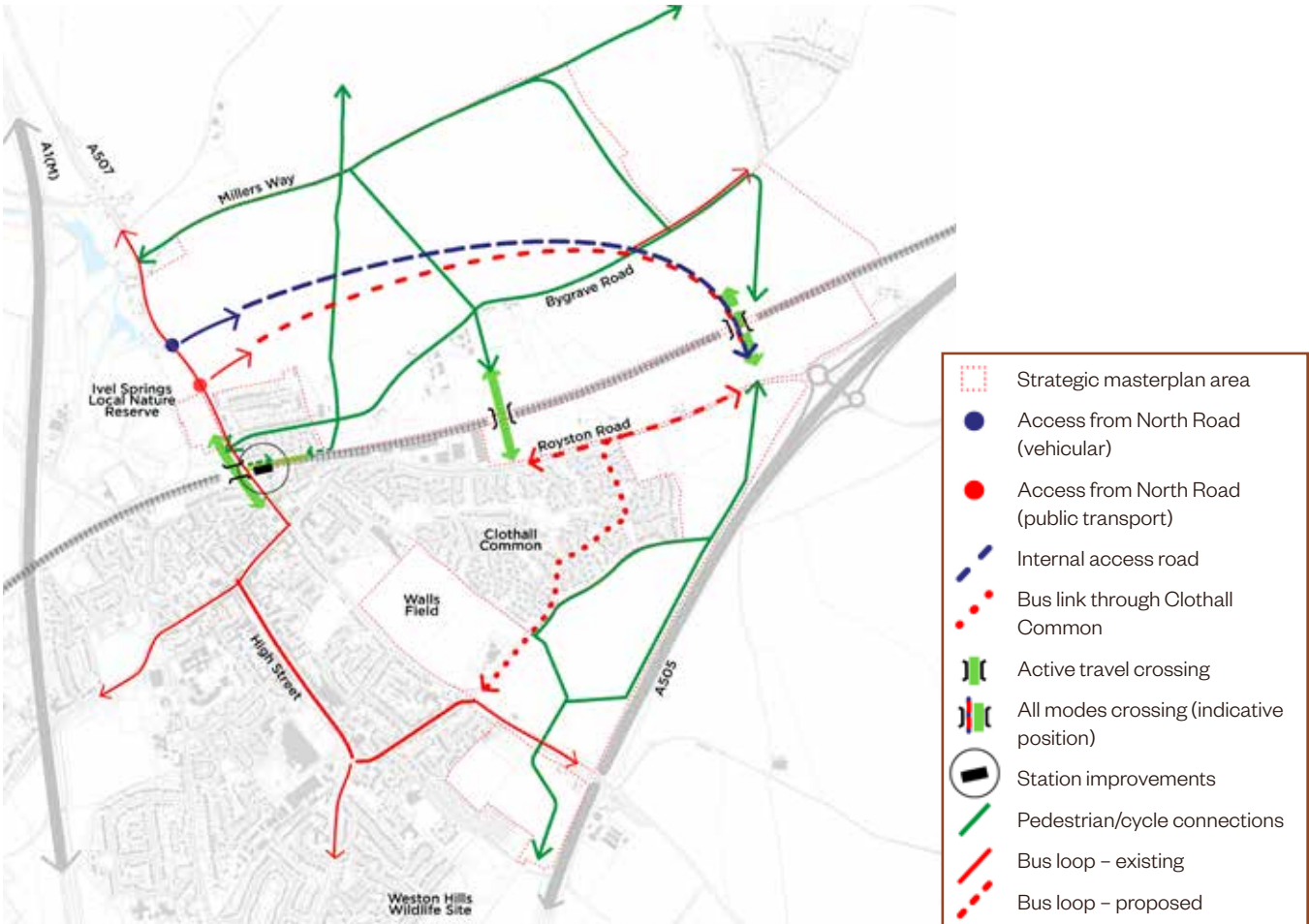
As part of identifying the secondary school as an area where further work was required, an alternative option for the location of the secondary school has been explored, envisaging the secondary school in parcel BA3, rather than BA1. This has been and continues to be the subject of extensive discussion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



▲ Figure 05: Land Use Fixes (Options Report)



▲ Figure 06: Green Infrastructure Fixes (Options Report)



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

Community Engagement

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

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

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

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

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

- Baldock Ecofest (May 2023 and September 2024) – meeting residents and answering questions on future plans and particularly ecology and sustainability
- The site's direct neighbours (10 July 2023) – including Salisbury Road, Bygrave Road, Royston Road, Hillside Park – 3 Q&A sessions with over 70 attendees
- Meeting with residents from the Football Close/Icknield Way area to discuss the proposed changes to road access in that area (15 May 2024)
- The Knights Templar School (4 July 2023) – several meetings with the Headmaster and the leadership team, including a sustainability session with the student Green Knights team

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

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

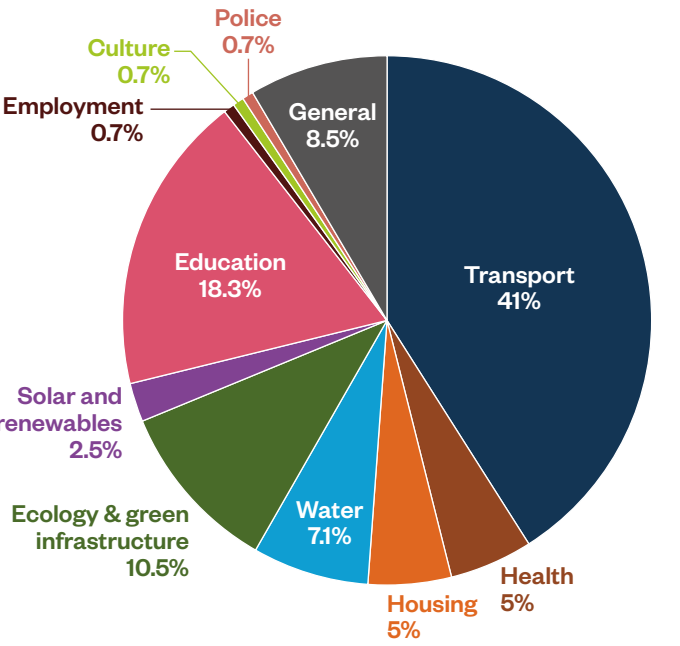
The Baldock Conversation: Draft Masterplan

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

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

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

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



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



▲ Preferred options consultation, November 2023



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

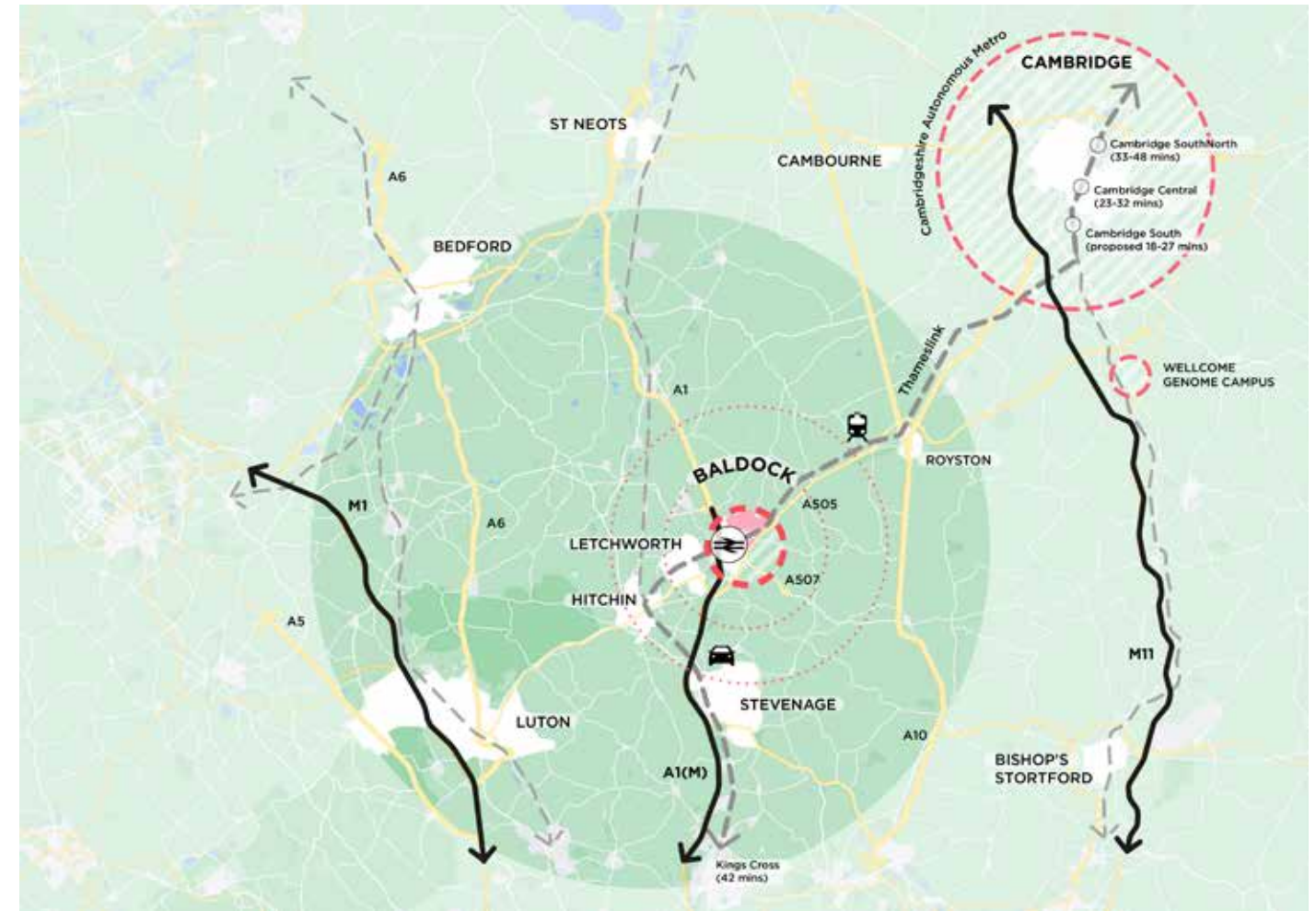
Through both evolution of the Strategic Masterplan and noted points which will flow into the development of the next stage of detail, the team will continue to address the key points raised.

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

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

Context & Baseline – Understanding the Place

▼ Figure 10: Strategic Context



Where Will Baldock Grow

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

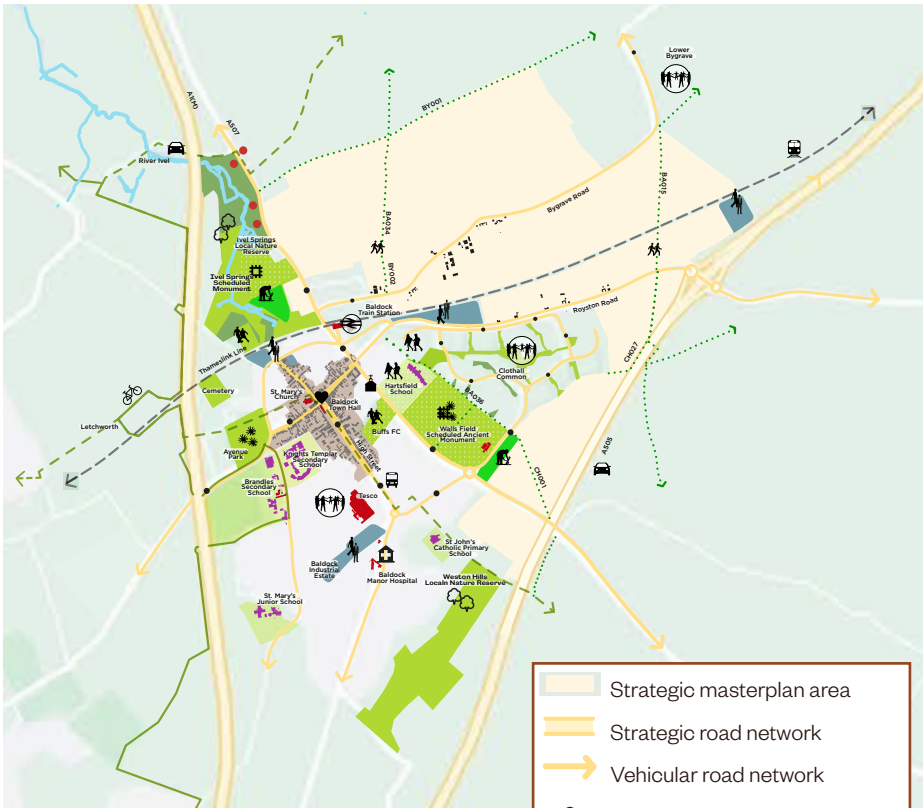
The land to be developed comprises a series of parcels of predominantly agricultural land immediately adjoining the urban area (refer to site features plan at Figure 11). The northernmost, and largest component (BA1) lies to the east of North Road, which connects to the A1(M) junction to the north (the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

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

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



▲ View of site as existing



▲ Figure 11: Site Features

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

- Strategic masterplan area
- Strategic road network
- Vehicular road network
- Bus stops
- Railway line
- Icknield Way trail
- National cycle network 12
- PROWs
- Town centre conservation area
- Employment areas
- Primary and secondary schools
- Buildings of local importance
- Key open spaces
- Allotments
- Scheduled monuments
- Grade II listed buildings along North Road

Planning Context

North Hertfordshire Local Plan (2022)

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

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

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

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

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

Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan (2021)

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

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



▲ Figure 12: Local Plan Site Allocations

Historical Development

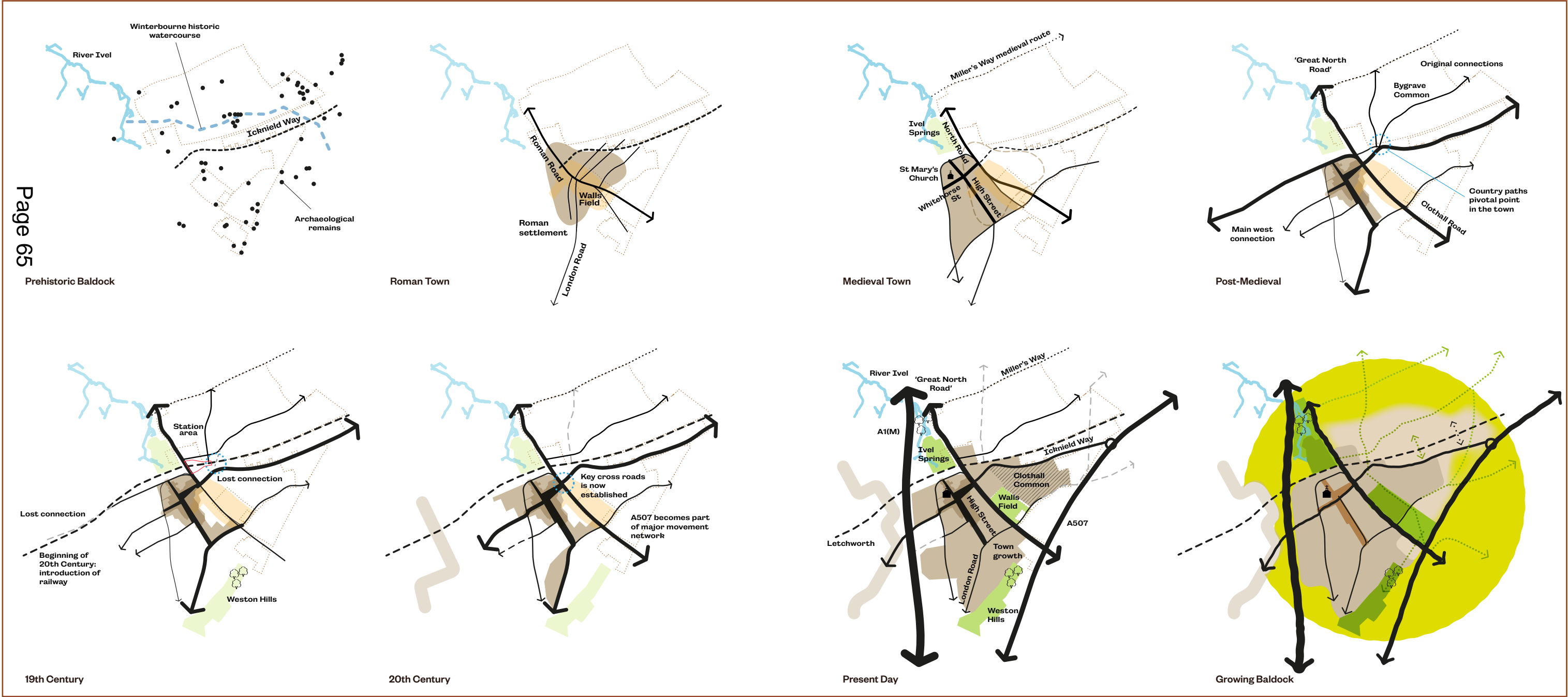
Baldock has a rich history, with traces of human life evident from Palaeolithic and Neolithic eras. The pattern of historic growth of Baldock is illustrated in the plans at Figure 13.

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

Archaeology

The site has been subject to extensive archaeological evaluation including additional trial trenching and detailed geophysical surveys in 2024, adding to the wealth of existing archaeological information known about the site's human inhabitation from the early prehistoric period onwards. This information will

inform a range of mitigation measures, which may include further excavations in some areas, which will be set out in an Archaeological and Heritage Management Plan to be submitted with the outline planning application.

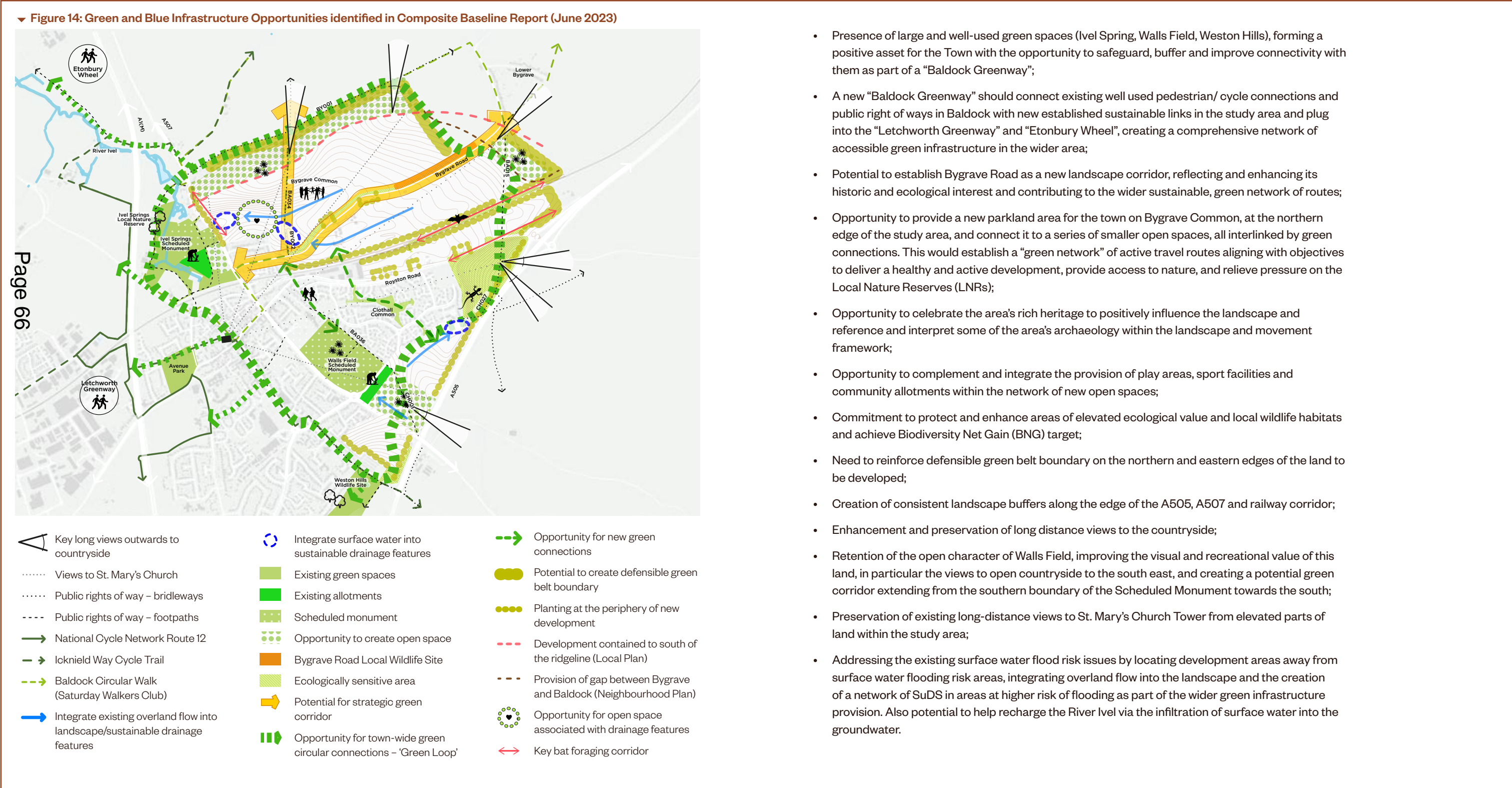


▲ Figure 13: Baldock's Historic Growth

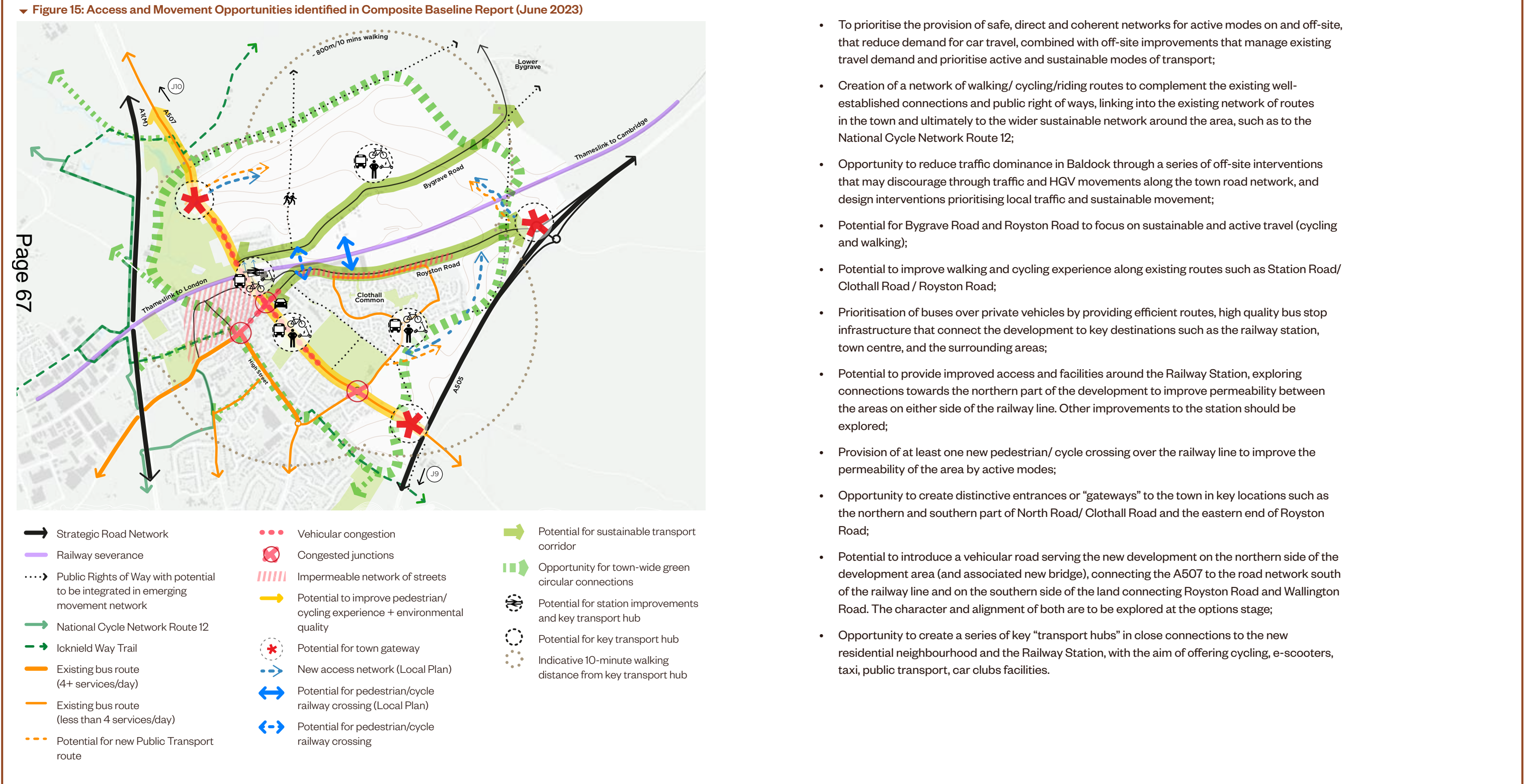
Constraints and Opportunities

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

Green and Blue Infrastructure

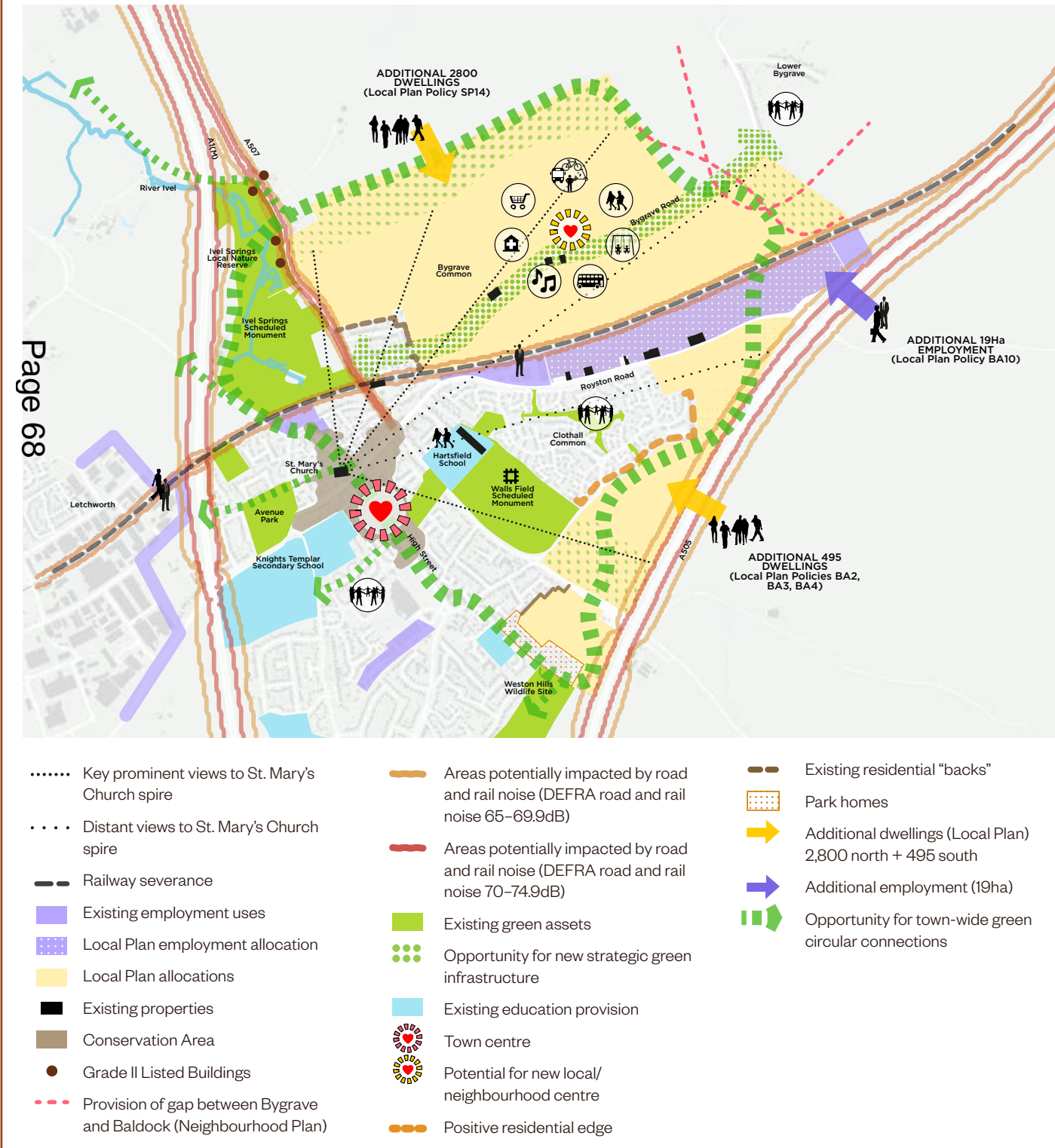


Access and Movement



Land Use

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



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

Land Use Framework

Land Use Key Principles:

Page 69



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



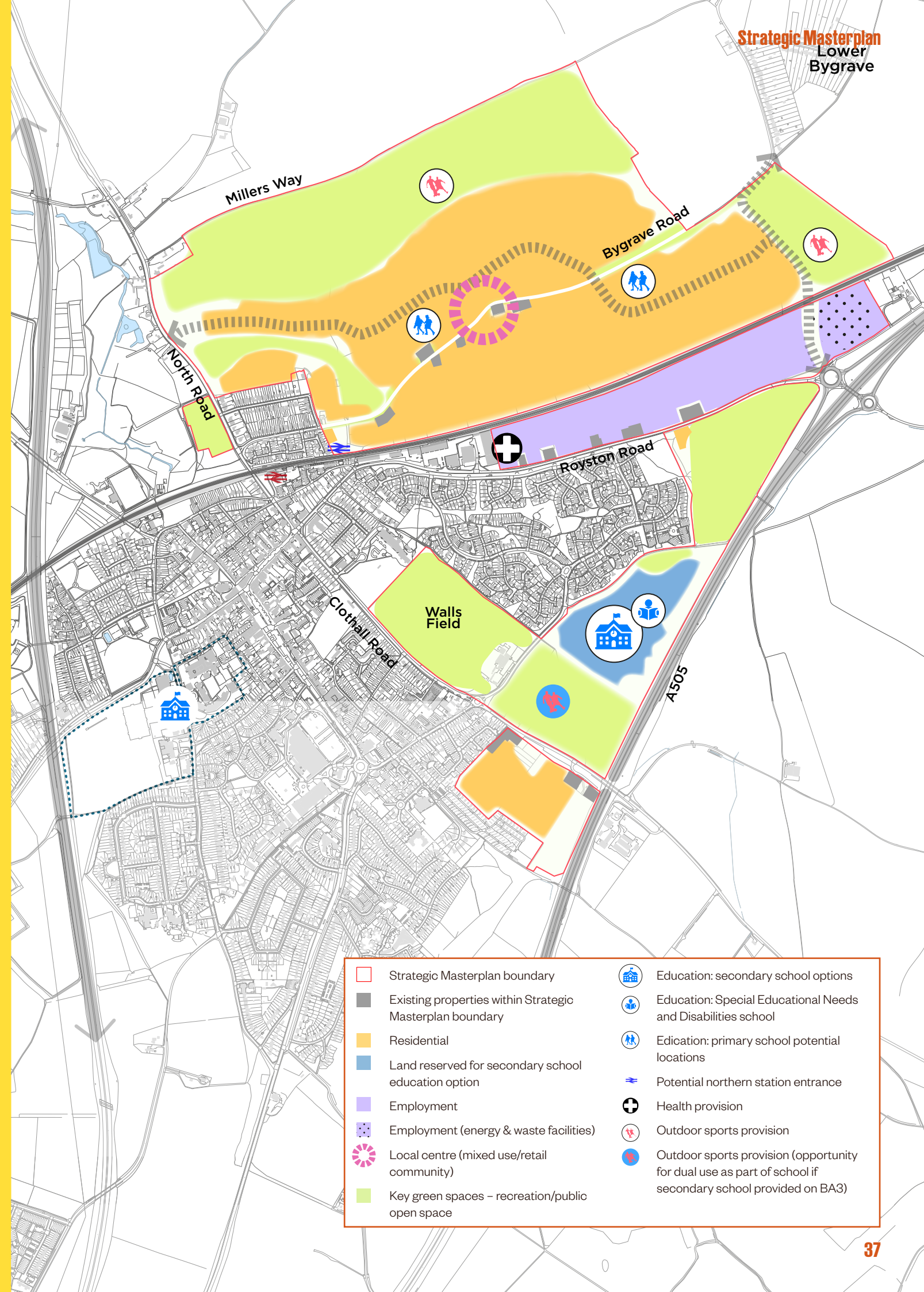
Meet the educational needs of primary and secondary pupils from the development, in Baldock.



Supporting and strengthening Baldock Town Centre by:

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

Figure 17: Land Use Framework ▶



Land Use Framework Components

Land Use and Social Infrastructure Needs

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

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

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

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

Residential

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

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

Employment

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

Green Infrastructure

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

Waste Facilities

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

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



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



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



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



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

Education

Primary

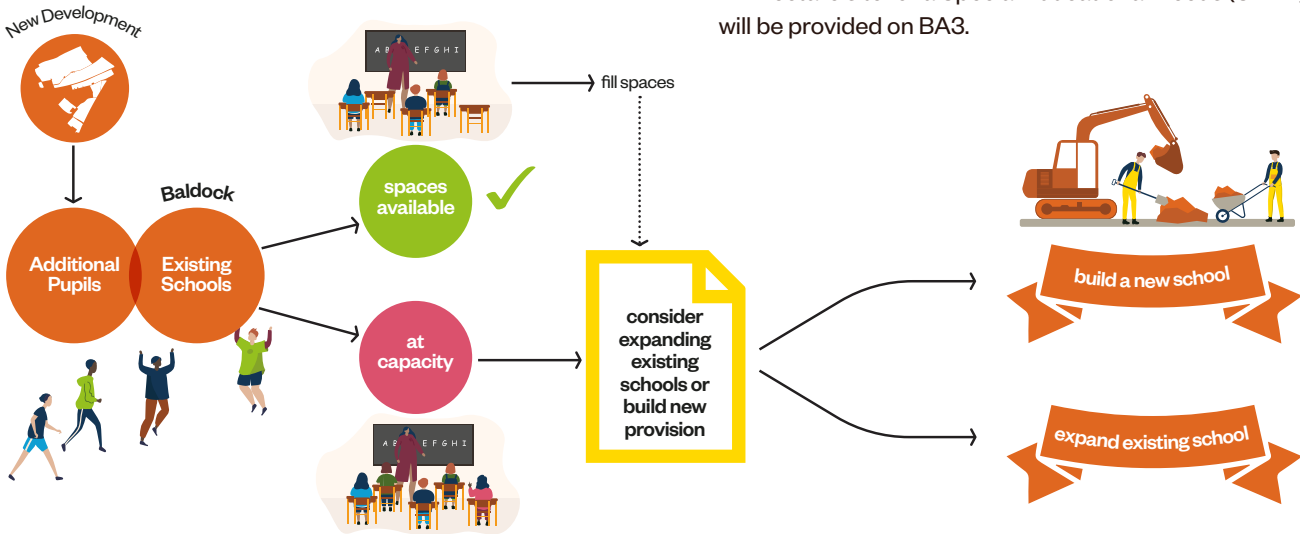
Primary age pupils generated by phases of development south of the railway line will attend the existing Baldock primary schools, if there is capacity. Thereafter, up to two new primary schools will be delivered in BA1 to meet the needs of the northern part of the development. The process for determining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

Secondary

- Local Plan policy SP14 identifies the need for secondary school provision as part of the Growing Baldock development. The following options have been explored as part of the SMP process:
1. Additional secondary school at BA1 (as required by Local Plan Policy SP14; considered at SMP options testing stage and not progressed)
 2. Expansion and relocation of Knights Templar School to BA3 (new school buildings to serve the whole of Baldock and surrounding villages);
 3. Expansion of Knights Templar School on its existing site, with BA3 developed for residential;
 4. Additional secondary school on BA3, alongside some residential on the remainder of the parcel.

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

There is a clear preference for an expanded Knights Templar secondary school on the BA3 site. There are multiple reasons for



▲ Figure 18: Primary School Provision

this, including location and relationship with the existing town. The framework plans reflect this preference and BA3 is to be reserved for a secondary school.

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

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

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

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

Early Years

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

SEND

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

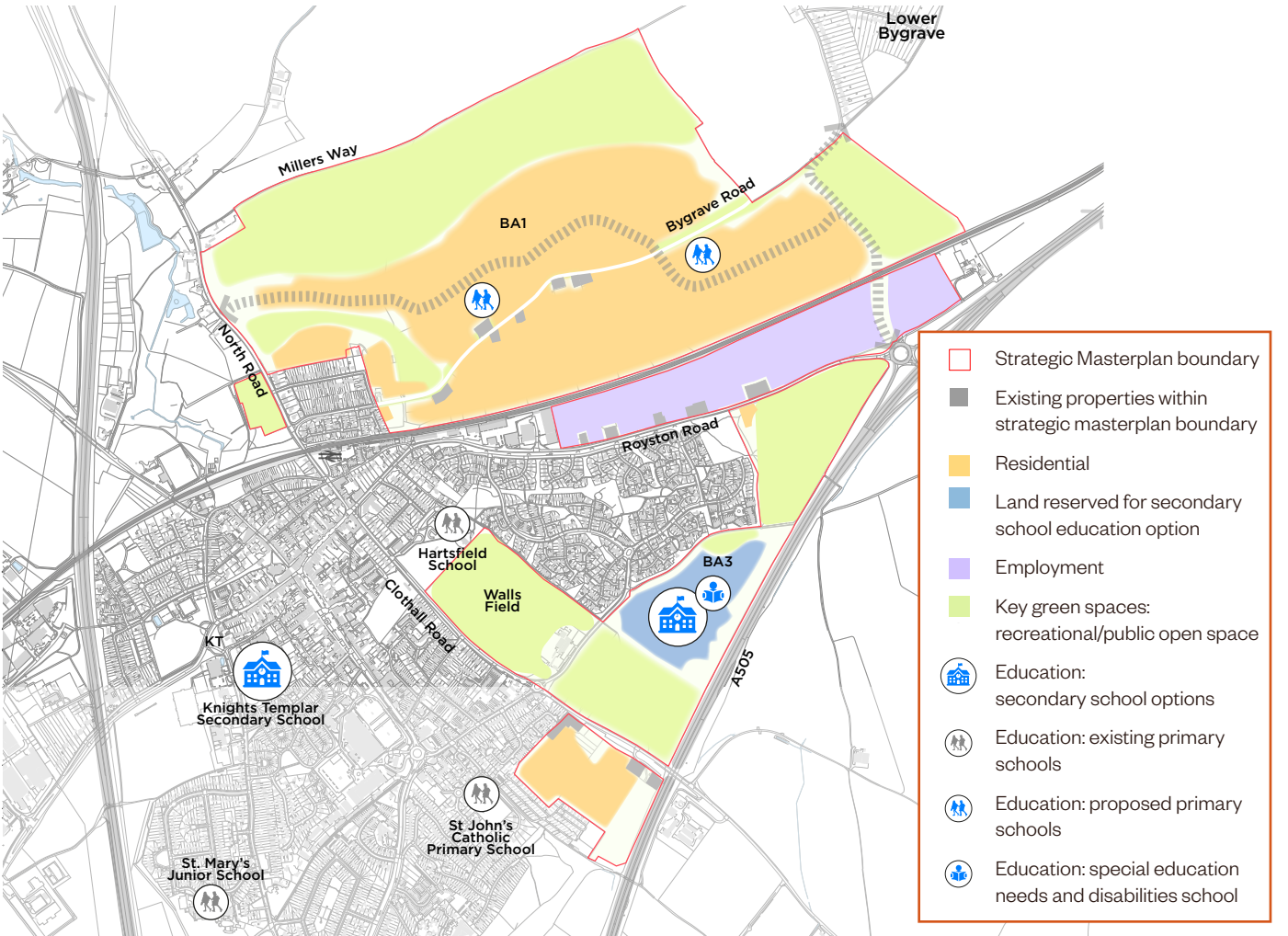
Sport facilities at Houlton School, Rugby ▶



▼ Wintringham Primary Academy, Cambridgeshire



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



▲ Figure 19: Secondary School Options

Local Centre

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

Energy

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



◀ The Tuning Fork community cafe, Houlton



◀ Community allotments, Alconbury Weald



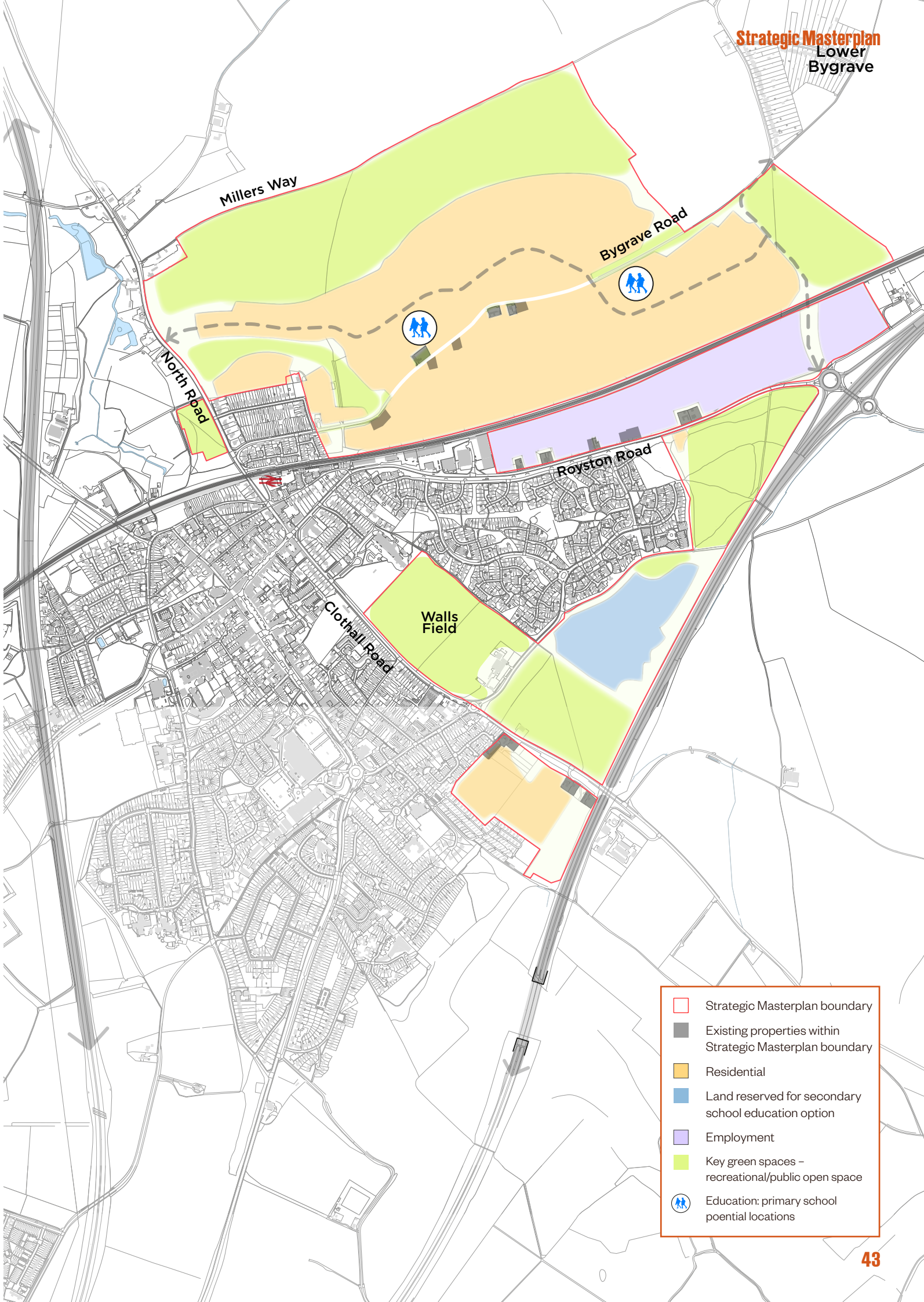
◀ Community hubs should be designed to offer a range of spaces for different community activities

Figure 20: Development Areas plan ▶

Health

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

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



Green Infrastructure Framework

Green Infrastructure Key Principles:



Enhancing inherited assets



Prioritising nature rich places



Celebrating heritage



A Greenway for Baldock



Creating a series of parkland destinations

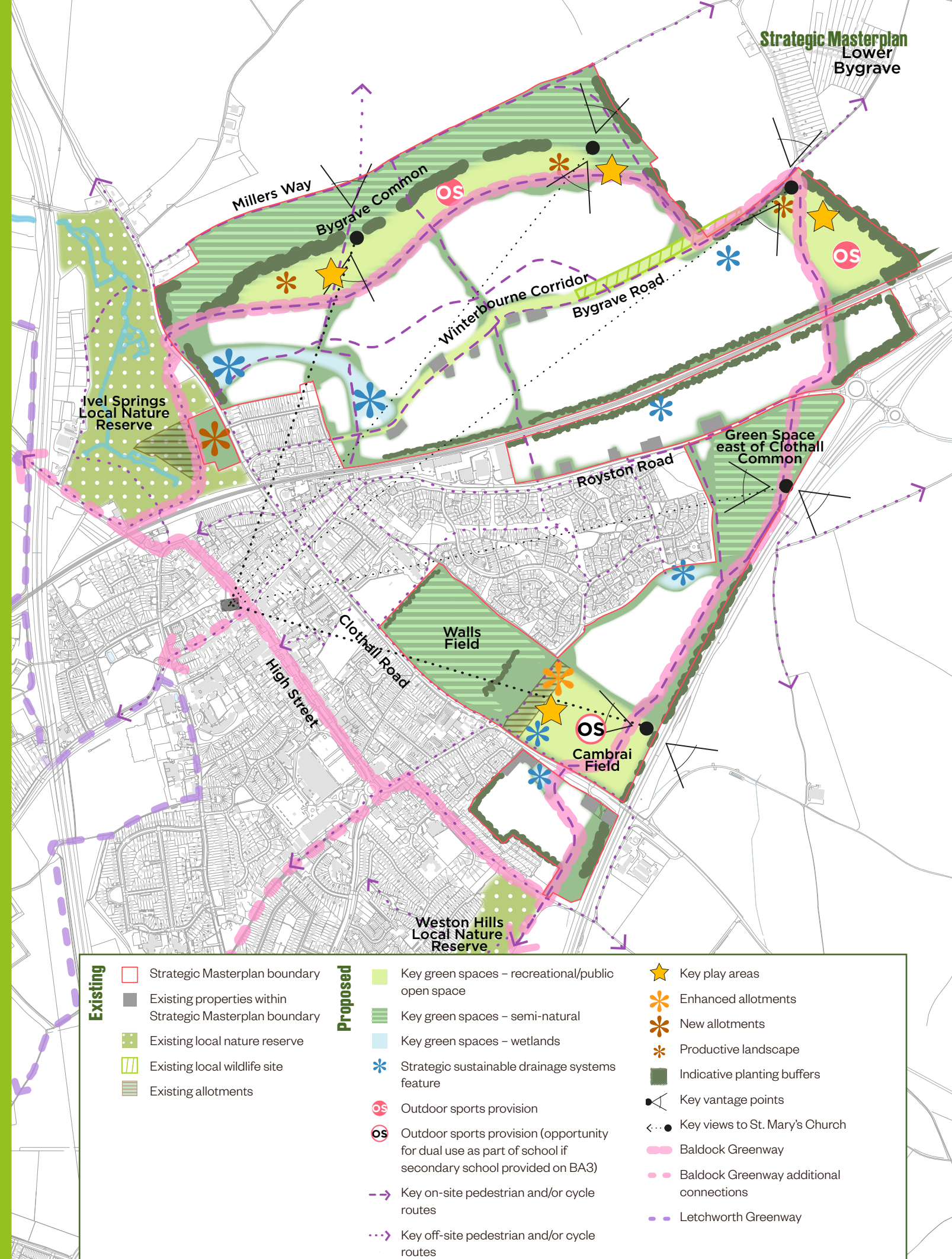


Landscape-led design



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

Figure 21: Green Infrastructure framework

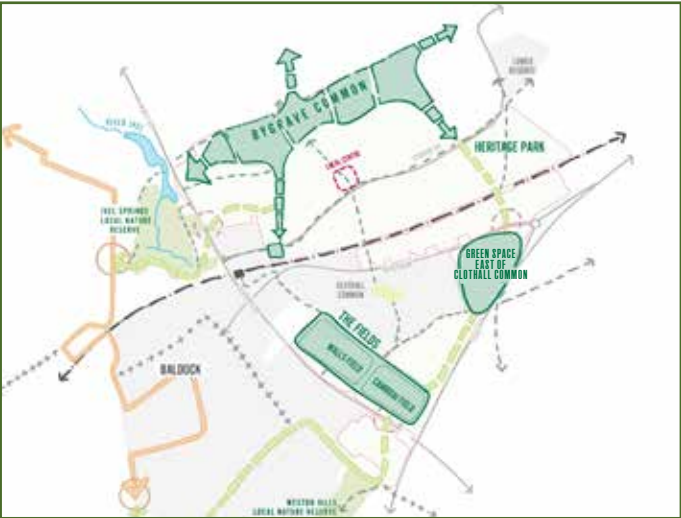




Inherited assets – working with the area’s landscape, history and habitats.



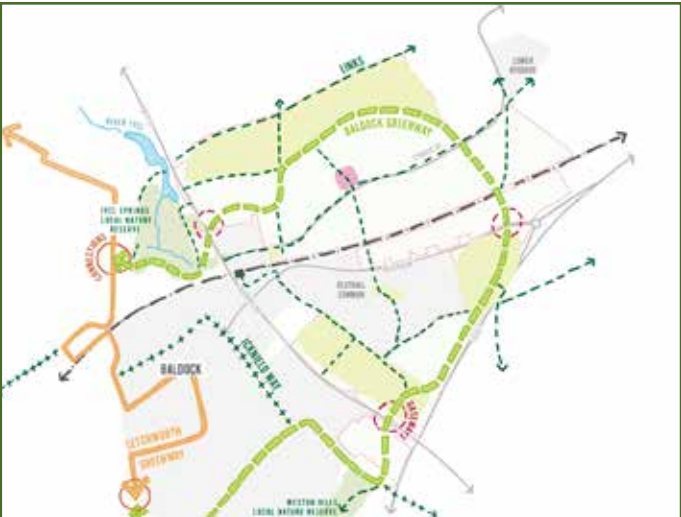
Celebrating heritage – embracing the area’s rich archaeological heritage by creating a ‘heritage trail’, reinterpreting the historic ‘winterbourne’ and creating a new ‘Bygrave Common’.



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



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



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



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

Green Infrastructure Framework Components

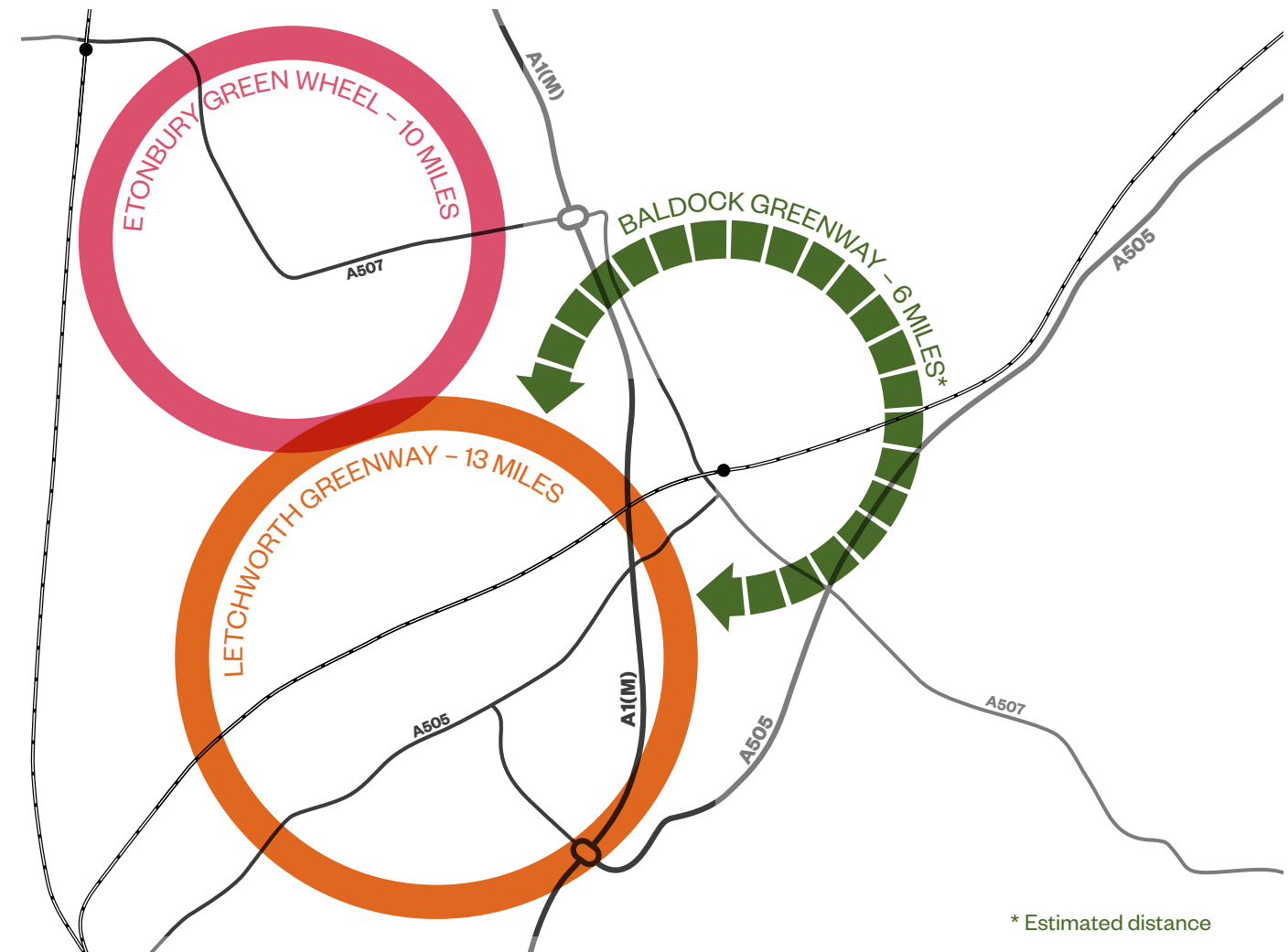
The green infrastructure network will comprise of a series of strategic scale green spaces as well as smaller scale green and open spaces, such as play areas and space for community food production, within and throughout development parcels.

Strategic Green Spaces

Baldock Greenway

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

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



* Estimated distance

▲ Figure 22: Strategic Recreational Routes

Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire ▶

Bygrave Common

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

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

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

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

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



▲ Figure 23: Bygrave Common Key Design Principles



▲ Landmark feature as part of Heritage Trail

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

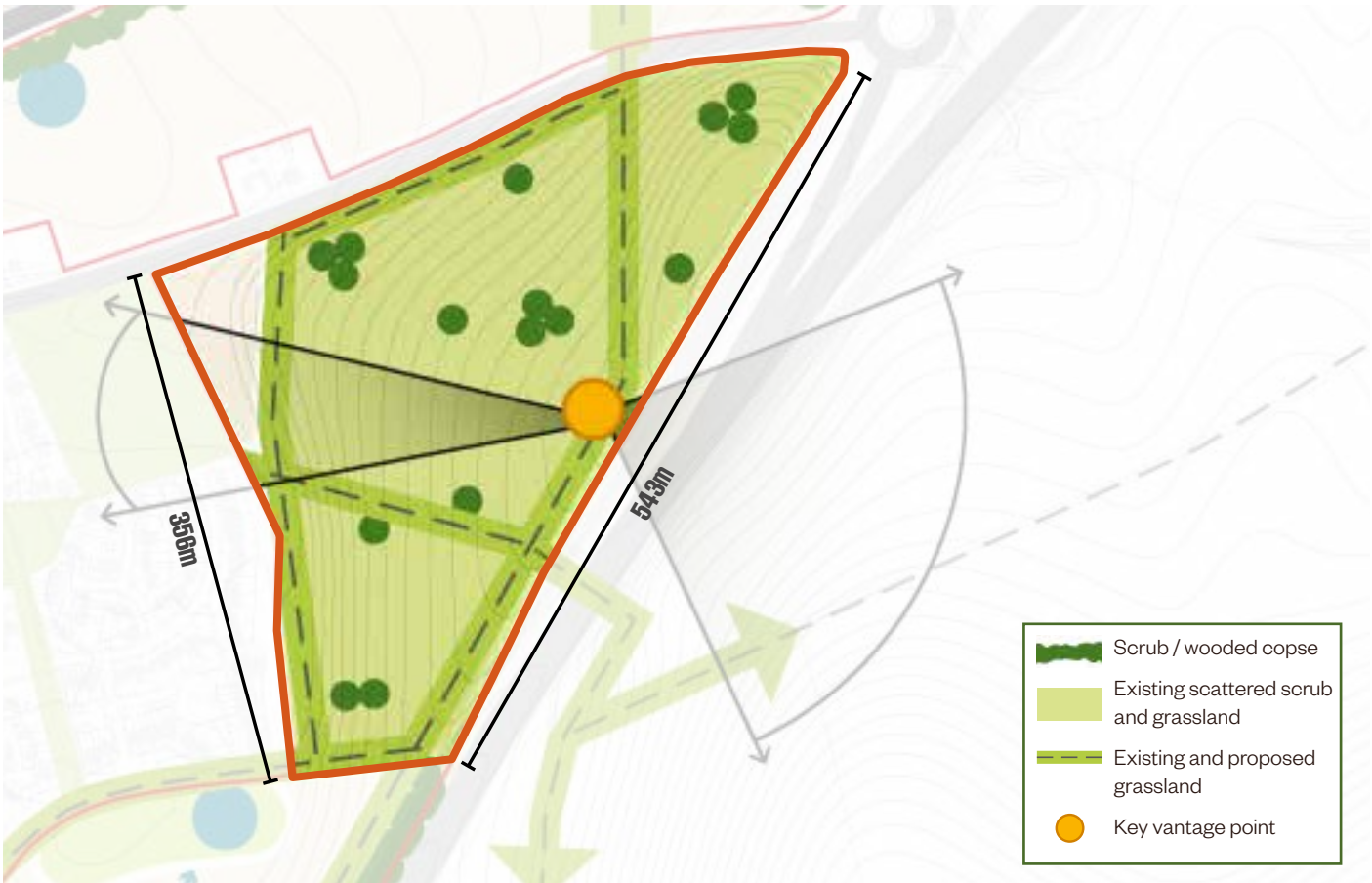


Green Space east of Clothall Common

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

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

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



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

Walls Field

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

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

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

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



Biodiversity benefits of meadow grassland



Meadow grassland

Sports provision



Heritage Park

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

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

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



Community garden



Figure 25: Walls Field Key Design Principles



Figure 26: Heritage Park Key Design Principles

Winterbourne Way

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

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



Integration of blue infrastructure into Winterbourne Way



Figure 27: Winterbourne Way Key Design Principles

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

Heritage Trail

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

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

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



Green connections, Houlton, Rugby

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

Play

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

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

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



Sports Provision

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

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

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

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

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

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



Productive Landscapes

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

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

Productive landscapes should:

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

▼ Allotments alongside a play area, Alconbury Weald



Strategic SUDS and water

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

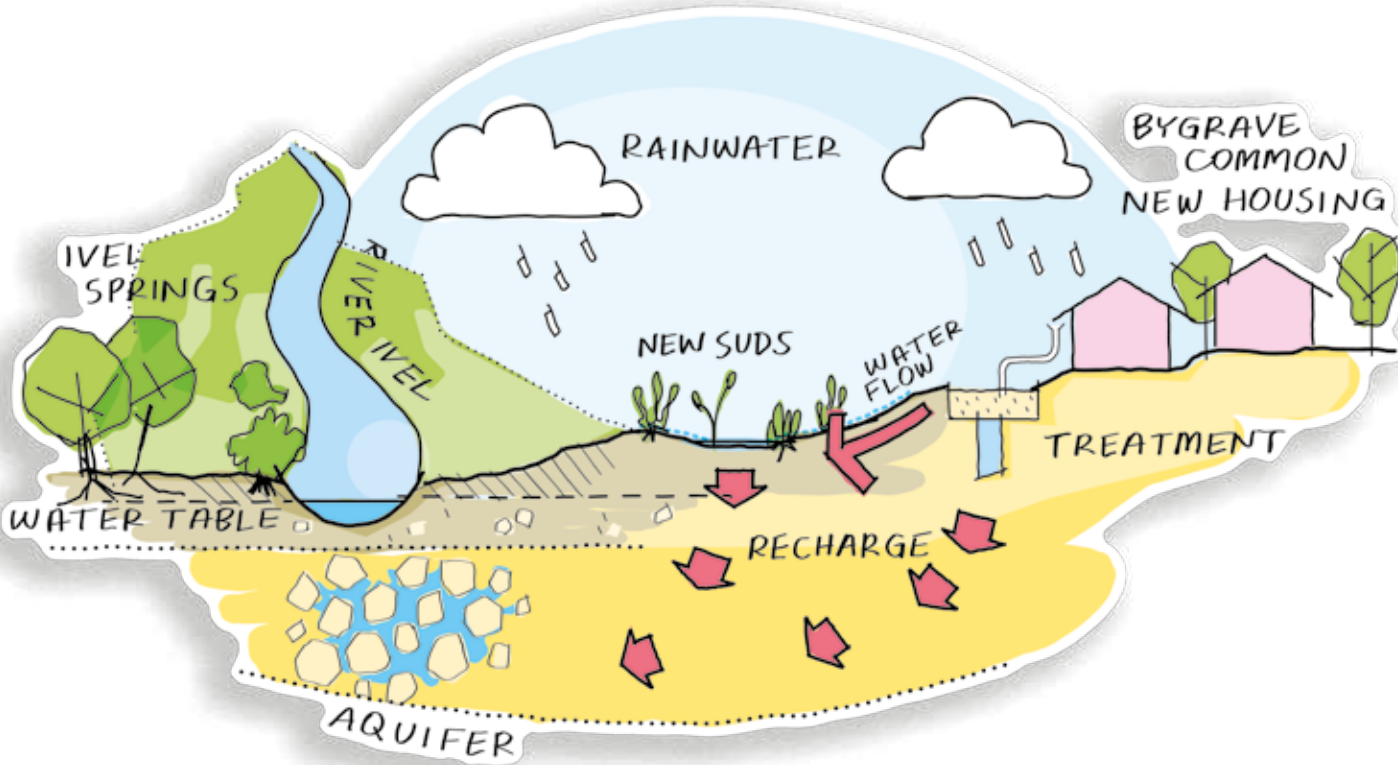
The development will contribute as far as possible to helping resolve the issues facing the River Ivel chalk stream. During the initial phases of development, sustainable drainage features will capture and convey surface water and allow it to infiltrate into the ground. This will help recharge the existing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

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

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

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

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



▲ Figure 28: River Ivel Recharge Strategy

Biodiversity Framework

Figure 29: Biodiversity Framework ▶

Biodiversity Key Principles:

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Enhancement of Bygrave Road Local Wildlife Site



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



Creation of network of connected wildlife corridors and green spaces



Connections to and buffering of Local Nature Reserves



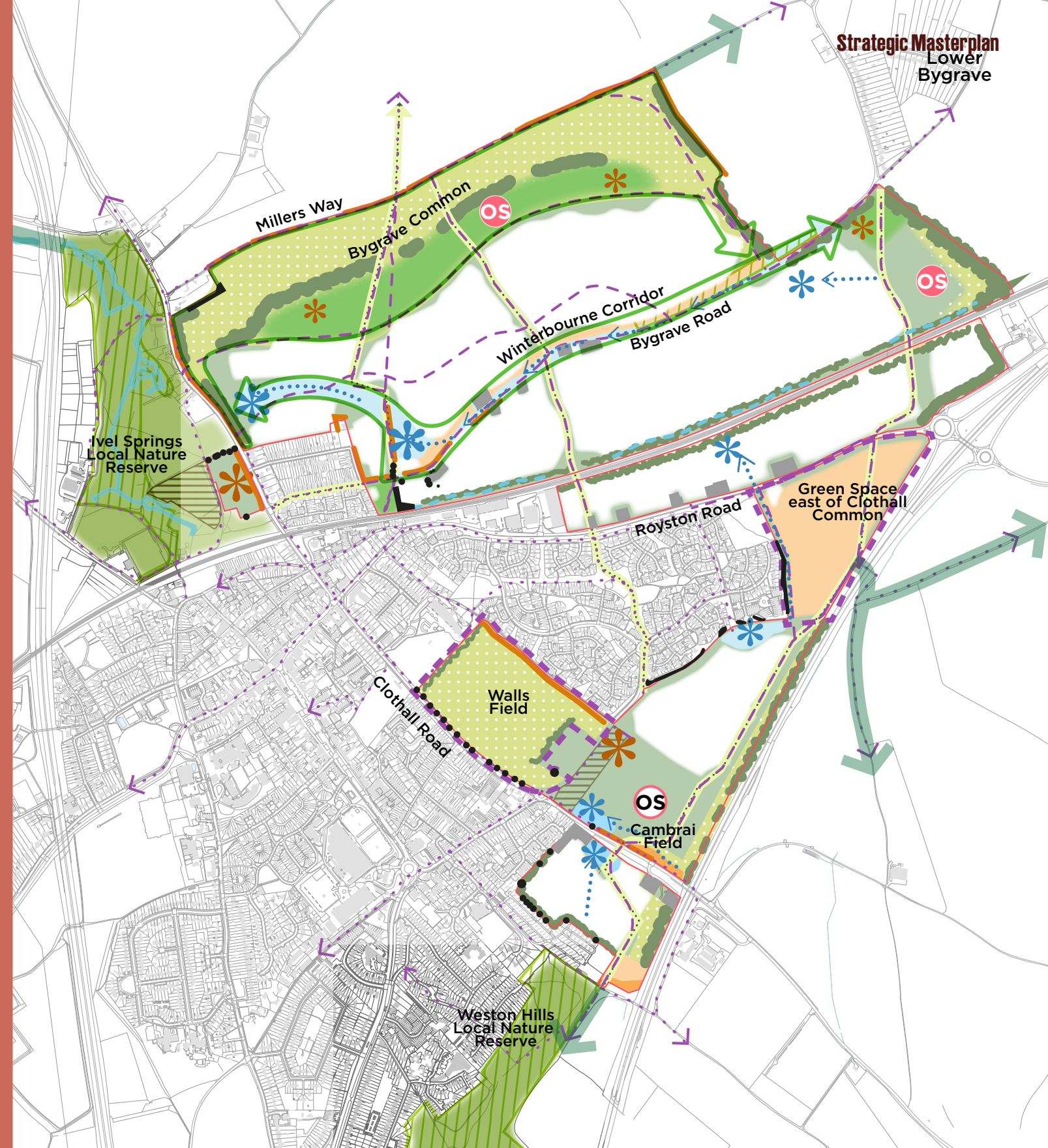
Mitigation of impacts on ecology through provision of new habitats



Native and climate resilient planting



Additional green spaces to reduce recreational pressure elsewhere



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



▲ Figure 30: Sowing the Seeds for a Wilder Future



Biodiversity Framework Components

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

Green Space east of Clothall Common

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

Wildlife Corridors & Green Links

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

Bygrave Road Local Wildlife Site and Winterbourne Wetland

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

Bygrave Common

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

Ivel Springs and Weston Hills Local Nature Reserves

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

Walls Field

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

Biodiversity Net Gain

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



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

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

Movement Framework

Movement Key Principles:



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

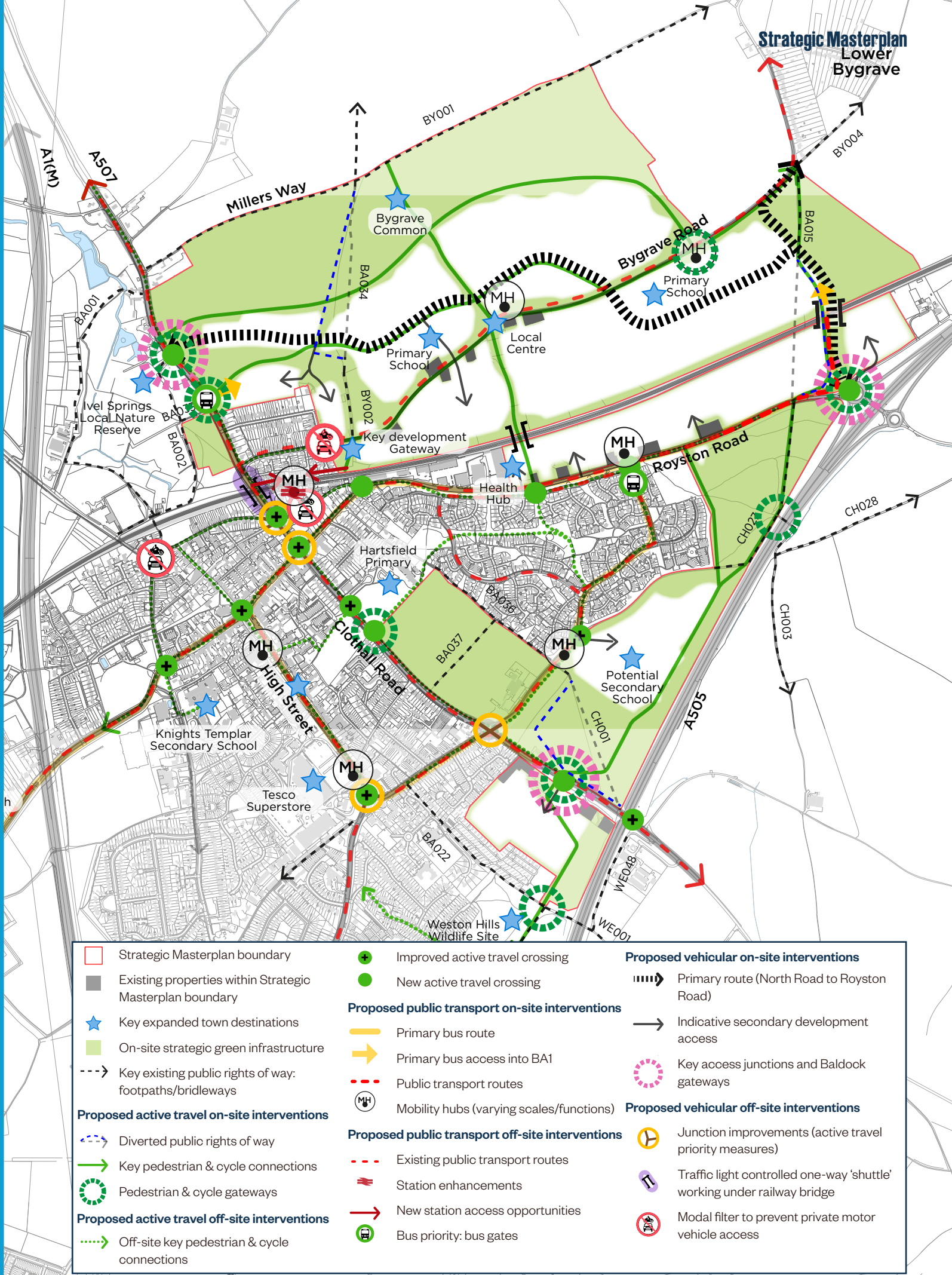


Town-wide improvements to encourage sustainable and active travel



Reclaiming space for walking, cycling and public transport

Figure 31: Movement Framework

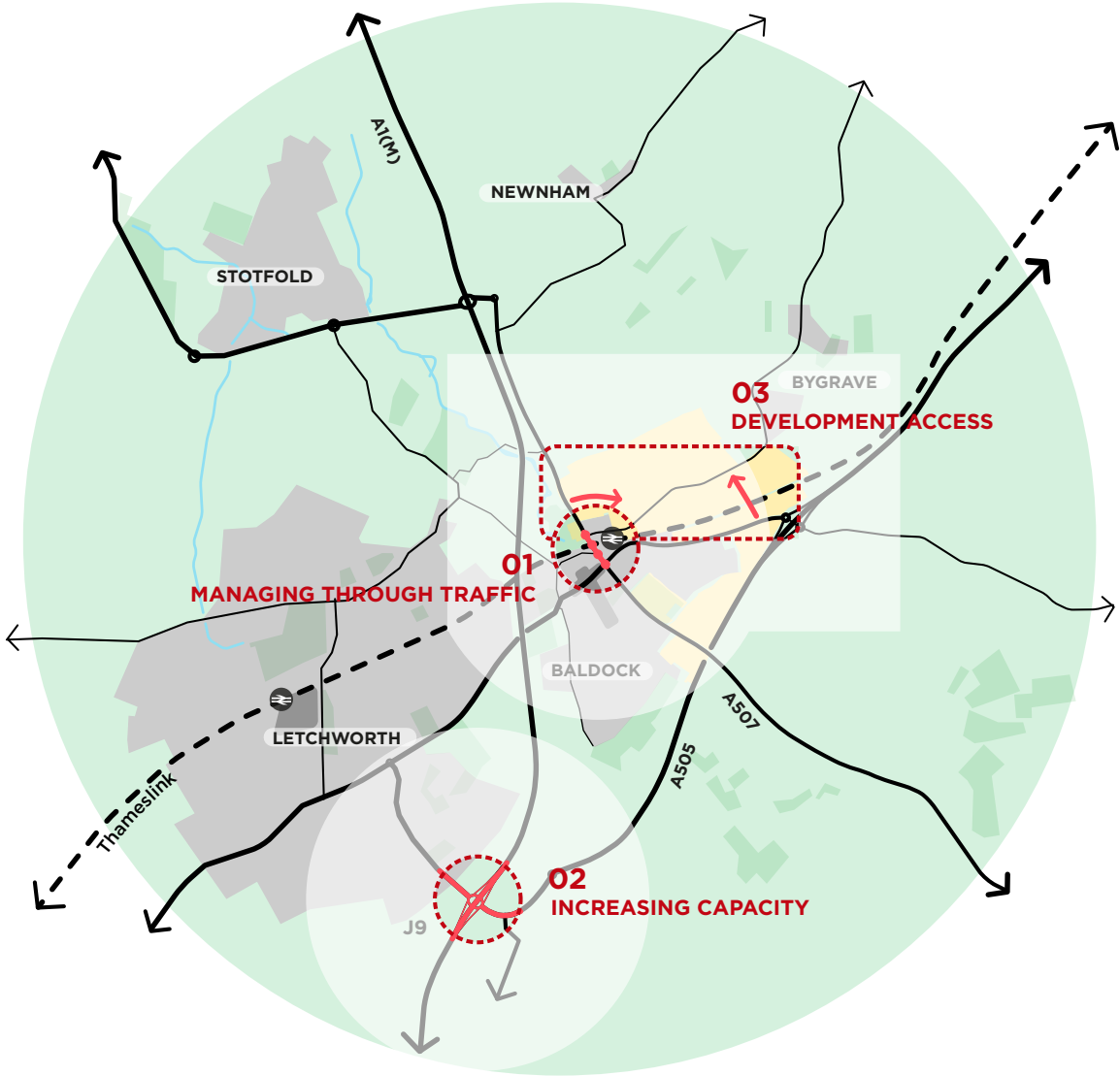


The Strategic Masterplan proposes a package of interventions across the town that will reduce through traffic, allowing conditions to be transformed for walking, cycling and public transport. These measures are being tested and assessed with the HCC Highways team and discussions regarding responsibility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

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

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

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



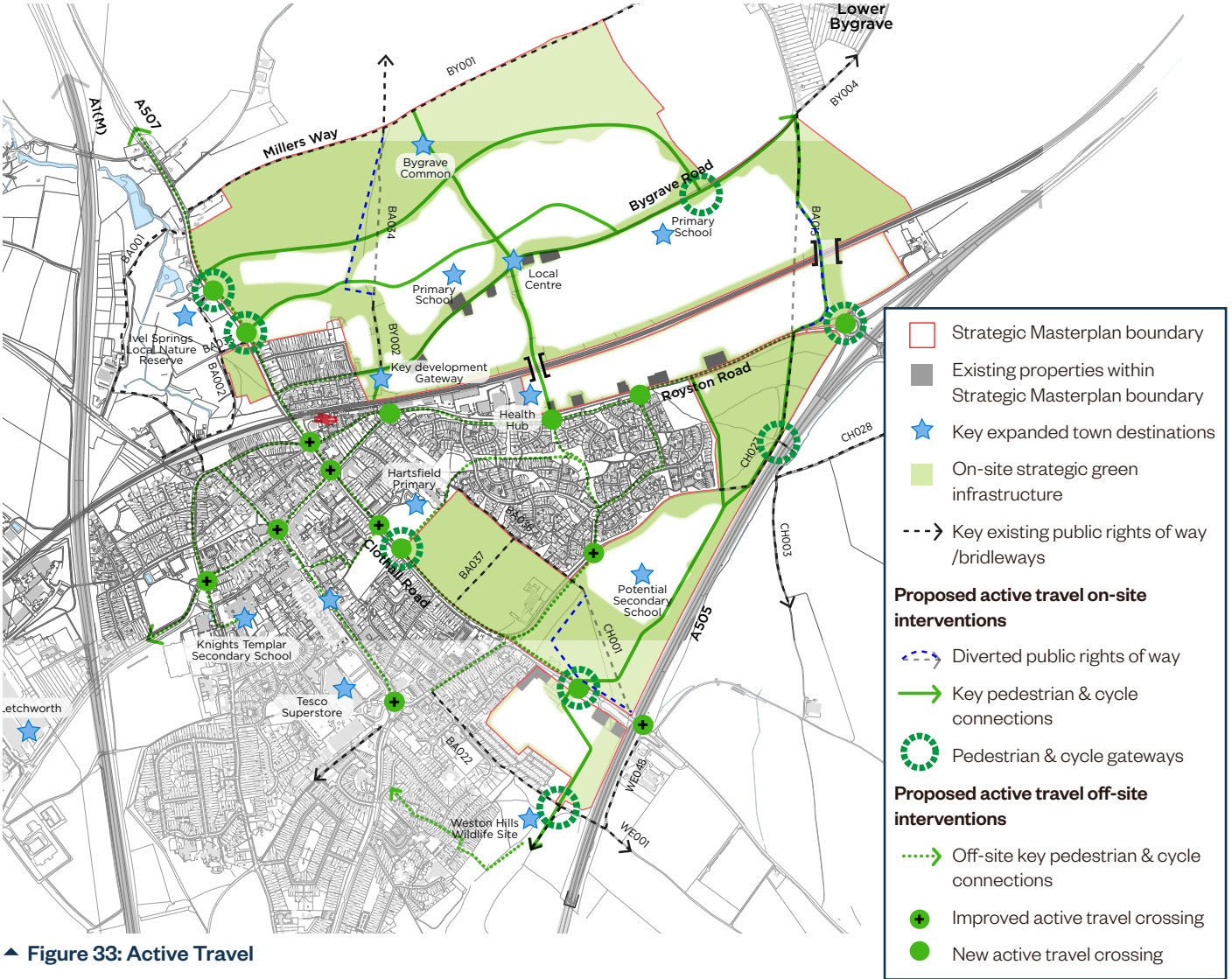
▲ Figure 32: Movement 'Big Moves'

Movement Framework Components

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

Active Travel (Walking and Cycling)

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



▲ Figure 33: Active Travel

Public Transport Components

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



Mobility hubs

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



Bus gate

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



Modal filter to prevent private car access

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



Shuttle working

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

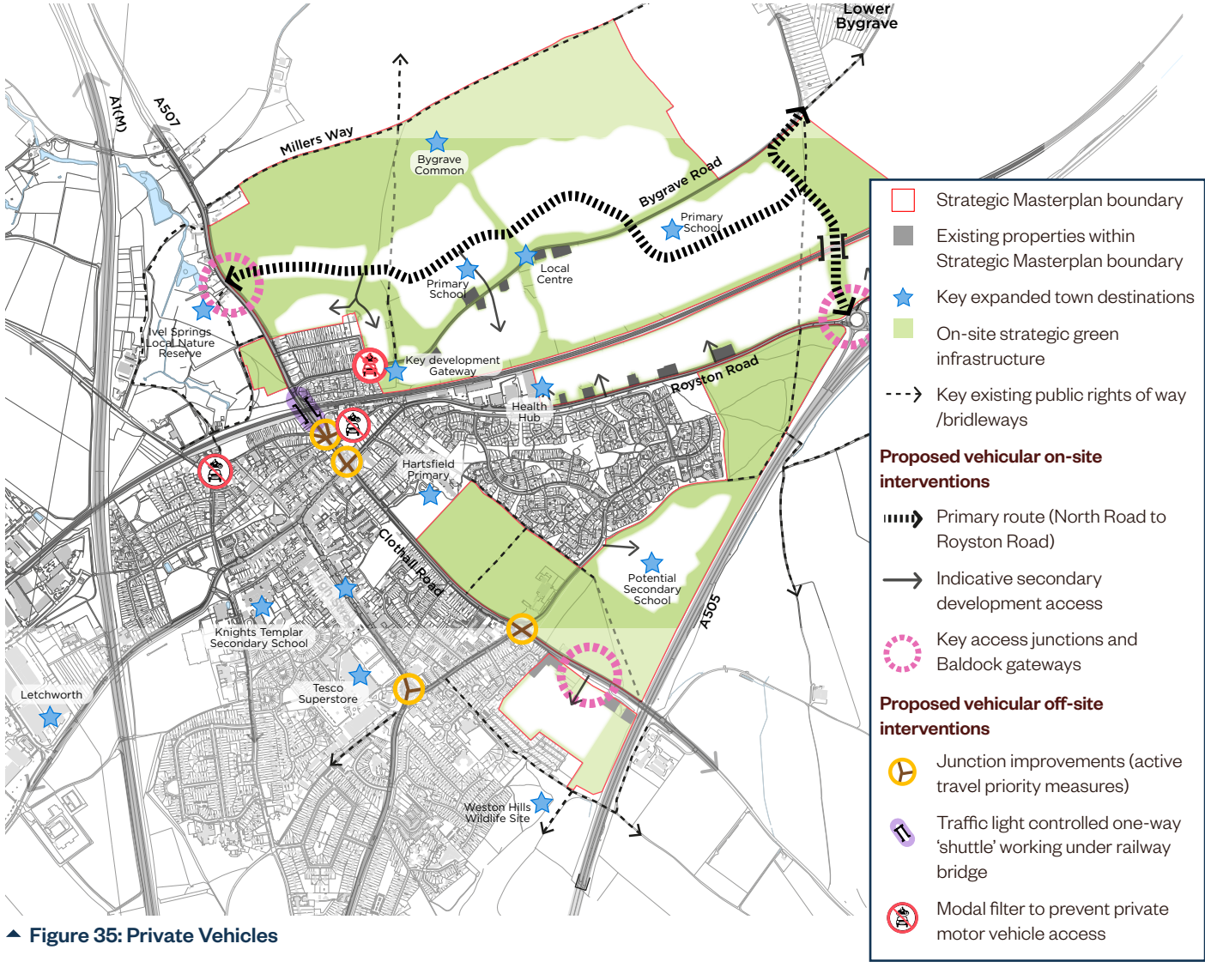
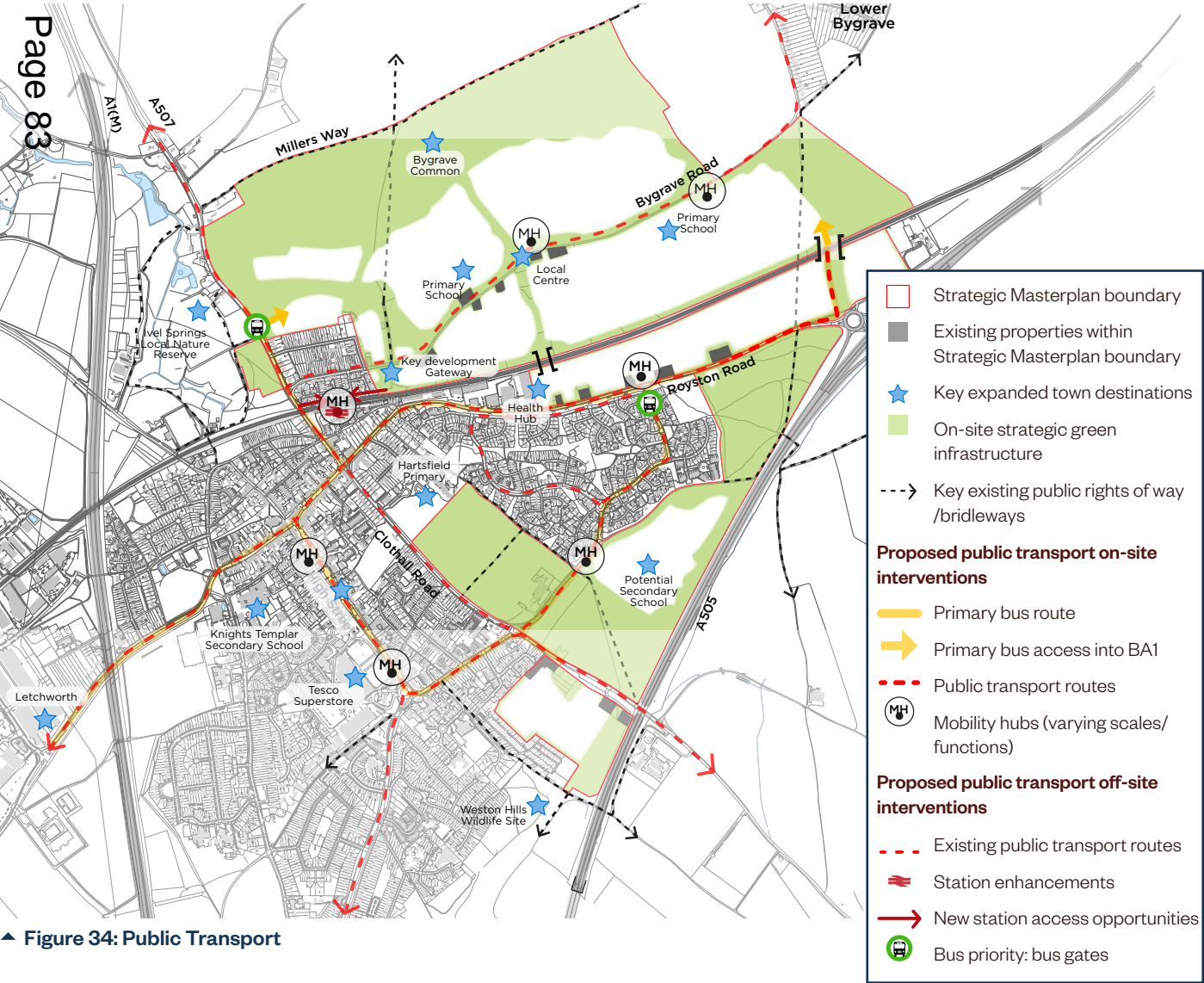


Car club

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

Vehicular Key Components

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



All-modes Access

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

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

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



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

Approach to Parking

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

- overall residential and commercial car parking levels will be guided by policy and reflect the best-practice approach to walking, cycling and public transport;
- residential and commercial car parking levels will be lower where accessibility by non-car modes is at its highest;
- destinations / facilities within the development being more conveniently accessible by sustainable modes, with low levels of parking provision focused on disabled parking;
- a variety of off-plot parking solutions will be explored as a way to encourage modes of transport other than private car use;
- convenient cycle parking at building/dwelling entrances;

- parking bays will be unallocated wherever possible;
- all vehicle parking spaces will be designed so that there is natural surveillance;
- car clubs will be provided to reduce the need for single, or multiple car ownership with the number of vehicles determined in relation to general parking provision;
- vehicle parking will be designed so that the land can be repurposed in the longer term, where possible, responding to changing needs in the future; and
- provide access to electric car charging points for all residential car parking spaces.

Construction Access

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



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

Off-site Interventions

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

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

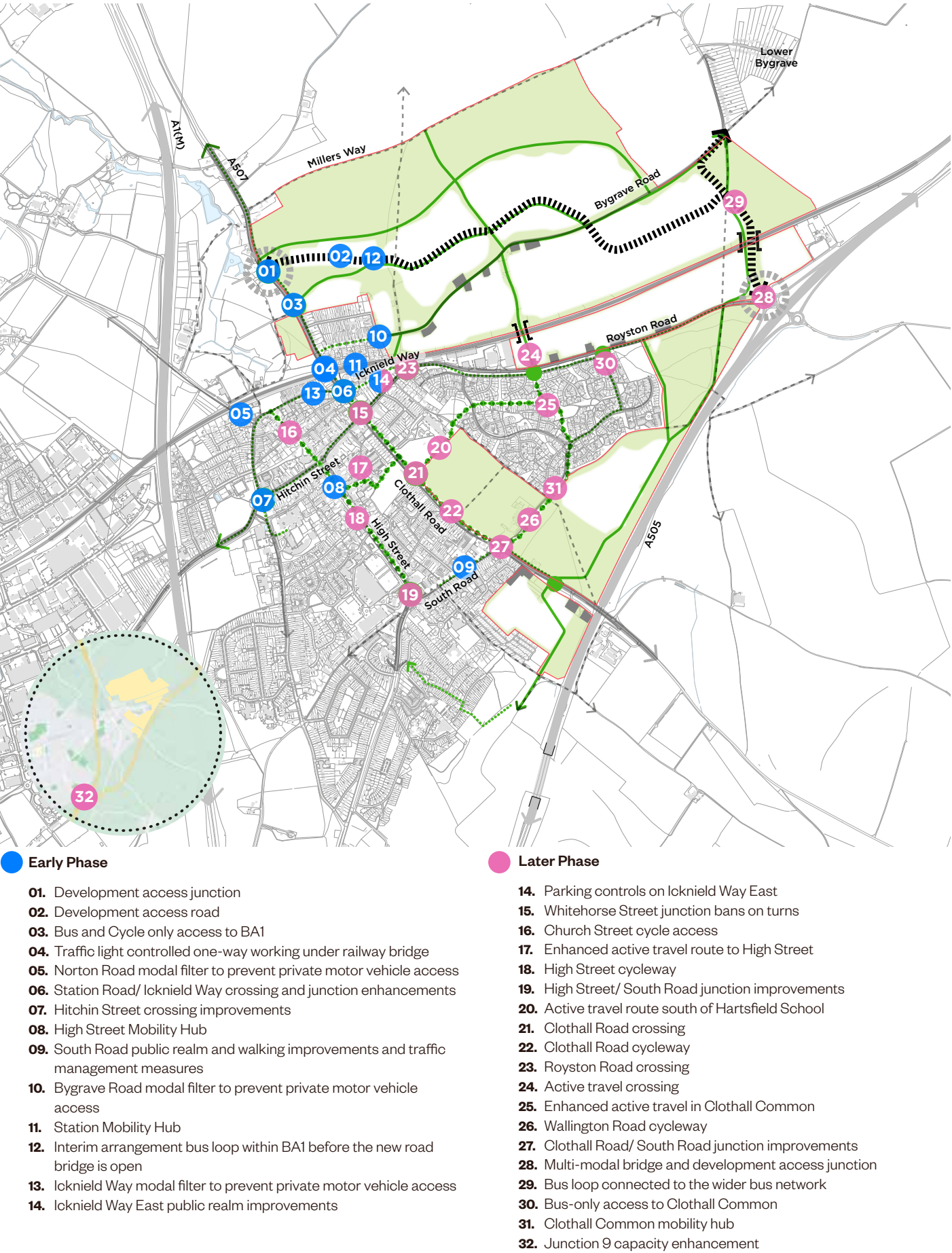
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- The following interventions are needed in order to allow the improvements above to be delivered:
- modal filters which allow pedestrians and cycles to pass only;
 - shuttle running is proposed on Station Road under the railway; and
 - restricted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

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

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

Figure 36: Indicative Access & Movement Interventions Phasing



Urban Design Framework

Figure 37: Urban Design Framework ▶

Urban Design Key Principles:

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



Retaining and enhancing key views towards Baldock and the wider landscape



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



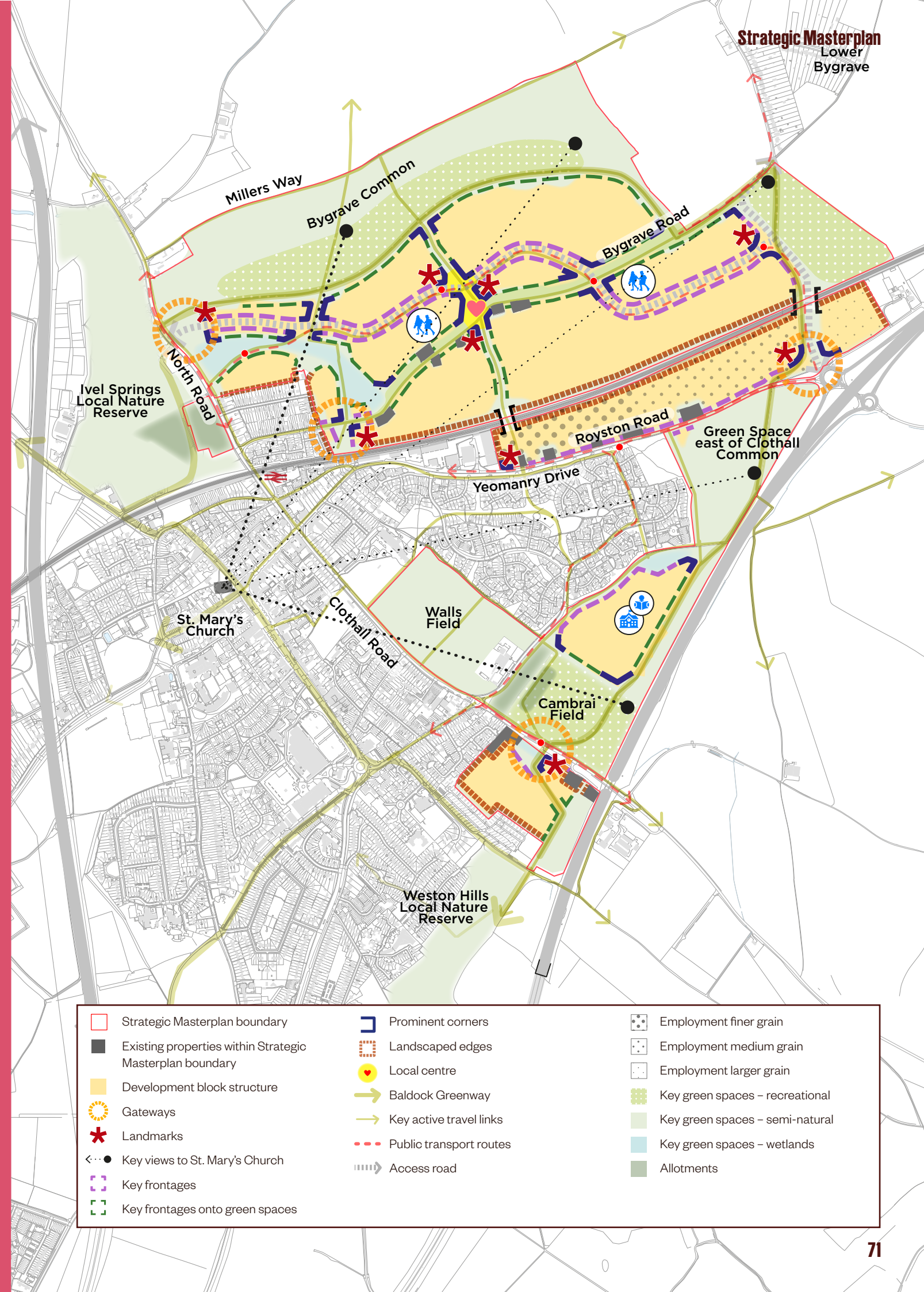
Putting place-making at the heart of the development.



Creating a new gateway into Baldock



A mix of buildings, spaces and character



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

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

Reinterpretation of Baldock’s Architectural Character

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

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

Typical Elements

1. Carriage arches, typical of Baldock, representing a distinctive feature of the town.
 2. Openings: bay windows, doorways, canopies over front doors.
 3. Ornaments: Visually strong window frames, dormers, ornate gables, flat recessed windows on upper storeys.

4. High-pitched roofs, half-hipped roofs (often long so as to be a prominent feature of the building).
 5. Large gables facing the street.
 6. Facade details variation: from plain to brick detailing.

Typical Materials / Colours

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



▲ Figure 38: Design Elements



▲ Figure 39: Materials and Colours

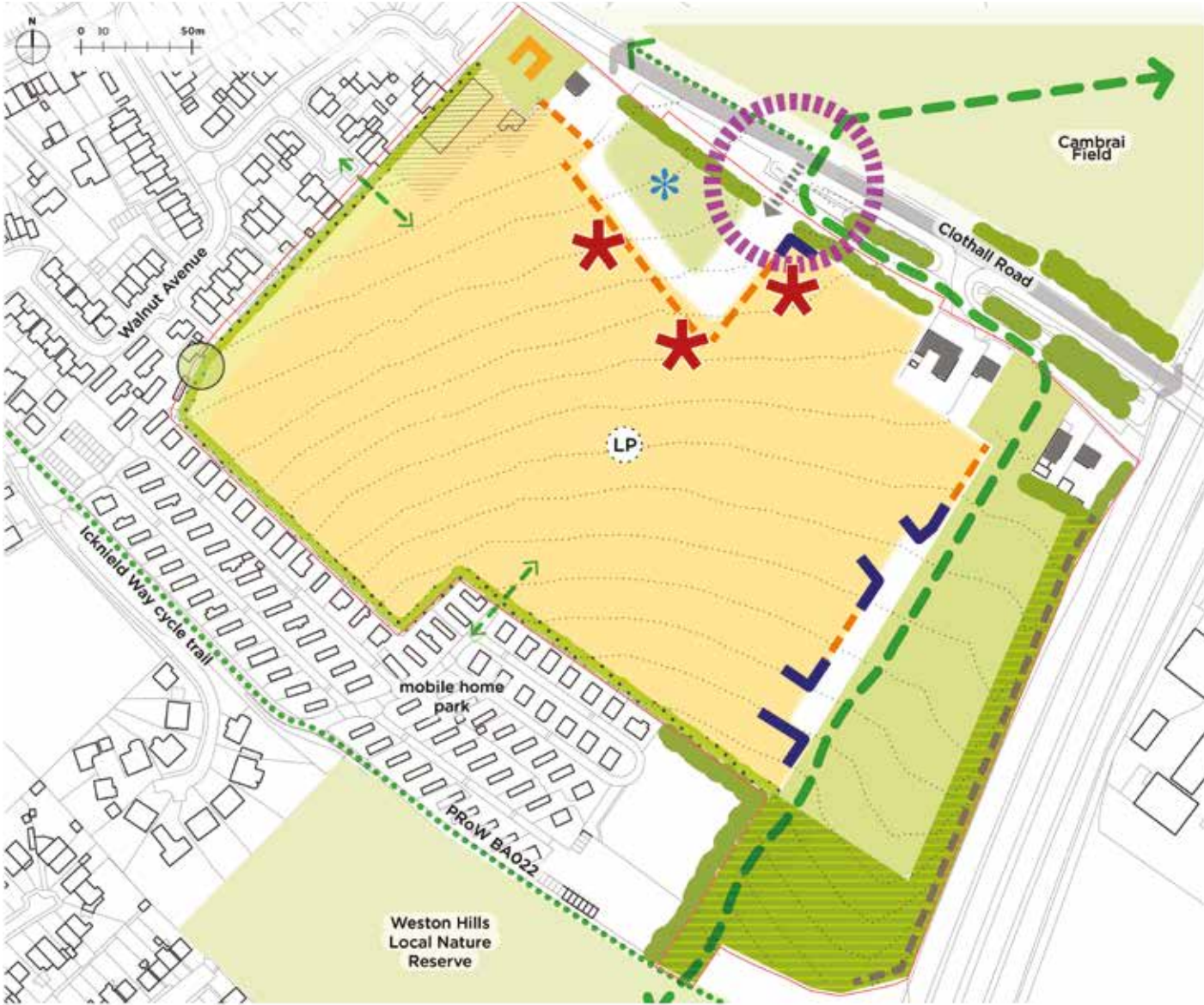
Phase 1 – BA2 Character and Design Principles

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

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

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

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



▲ Figure 40: BA2 Phase 1 Urban Design Framework

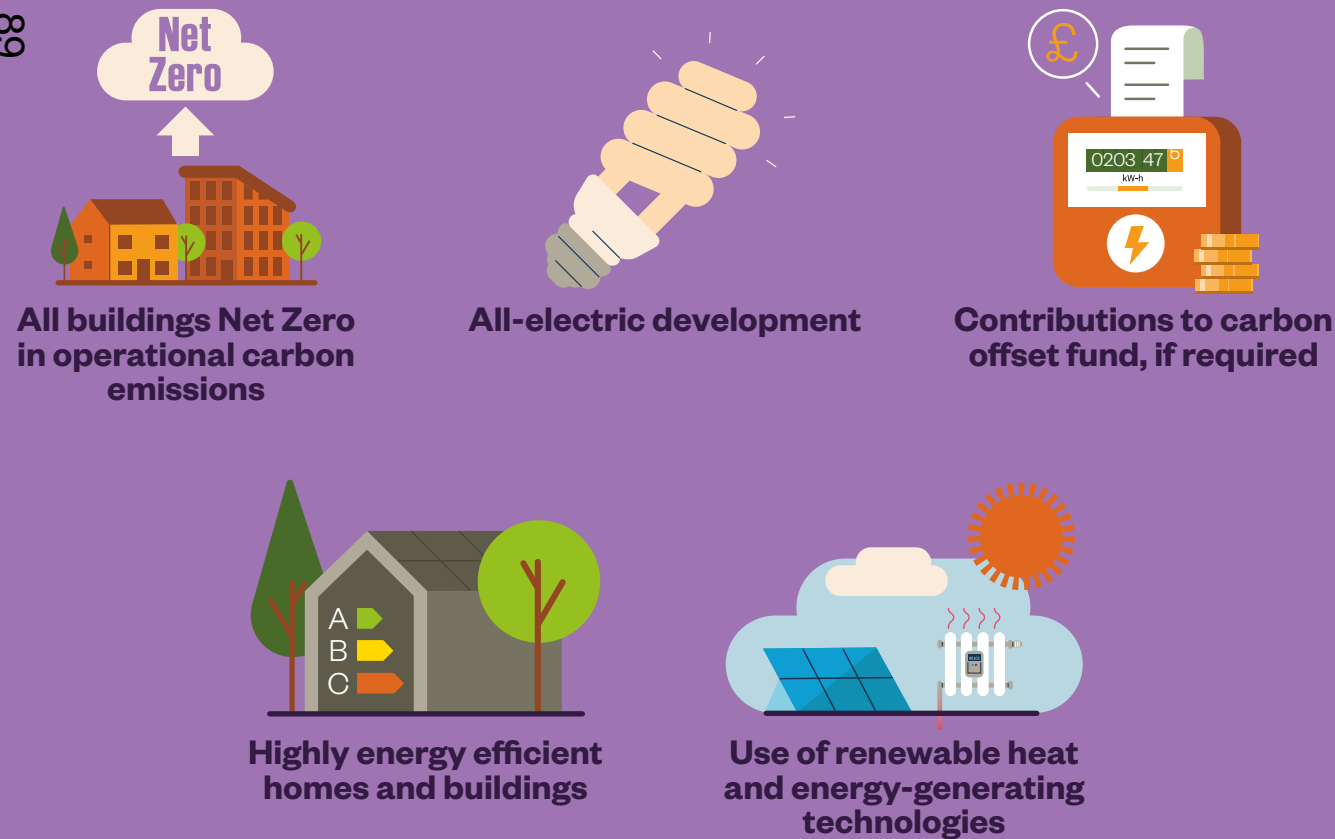


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Sustainability & Energy Framework

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Sustainability Key Principles:



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

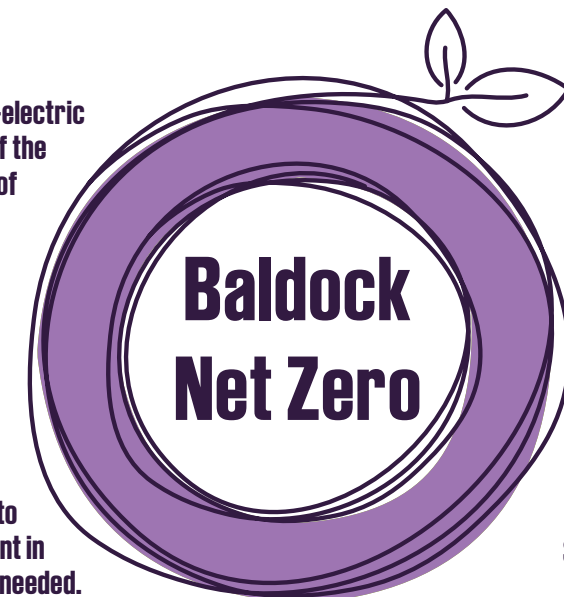
- **Embodied Carbon** – including the materials, components and energy that are required to make up a structure (capital and upfront carbon); and
- **Operational Carbon** – energy consumption in the day to day running of a building or structure.

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

The development will be all-electric allowing it to take advantage of the continued decarbonisation of the electricity grid.

All buildings delivered as part of the development will be Net Zero in operational carbon emissions.

Carbon offset fund will be created to ensure support for off site investment in energy efficient initiatives, where needed.



Carbon emissions will be reduced beyond the requirements of the government's 2025 Future Homes Standard.

Homes and buildings will be highly energy efficient and utilise renewable heat and electricity generating technologies such as Air Source Heat Pumps, and Solar PV.

▲ Figure 41: Baldock Net Zero

Building-scale Opportunities

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

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

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

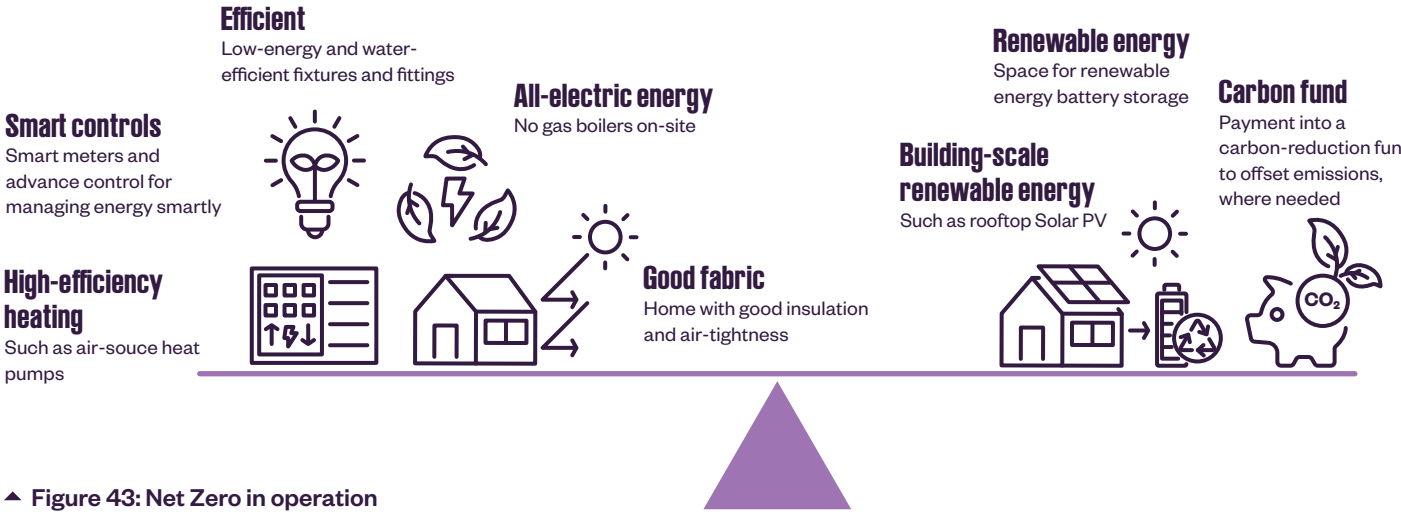
Homes and buildings will aim to go beyond the minimum requirements of the Government’s Future Homes and Building Standard. This approach is in line with the Hertfordshire Development Charter which recommends that developers commit to a sustainability standard that exceeds minimum current building regulations.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

Development-wide Opportunities

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

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

Net Zero in operation



▲ Figure 43: Net Zero in operation

11.0

Housing Need & Diversification

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

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Housing Mix

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

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

▼ Alconbury Weald, Cambridgeshire



Housing Type

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

Housing Tenure

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

▼ Houlton, Rugby



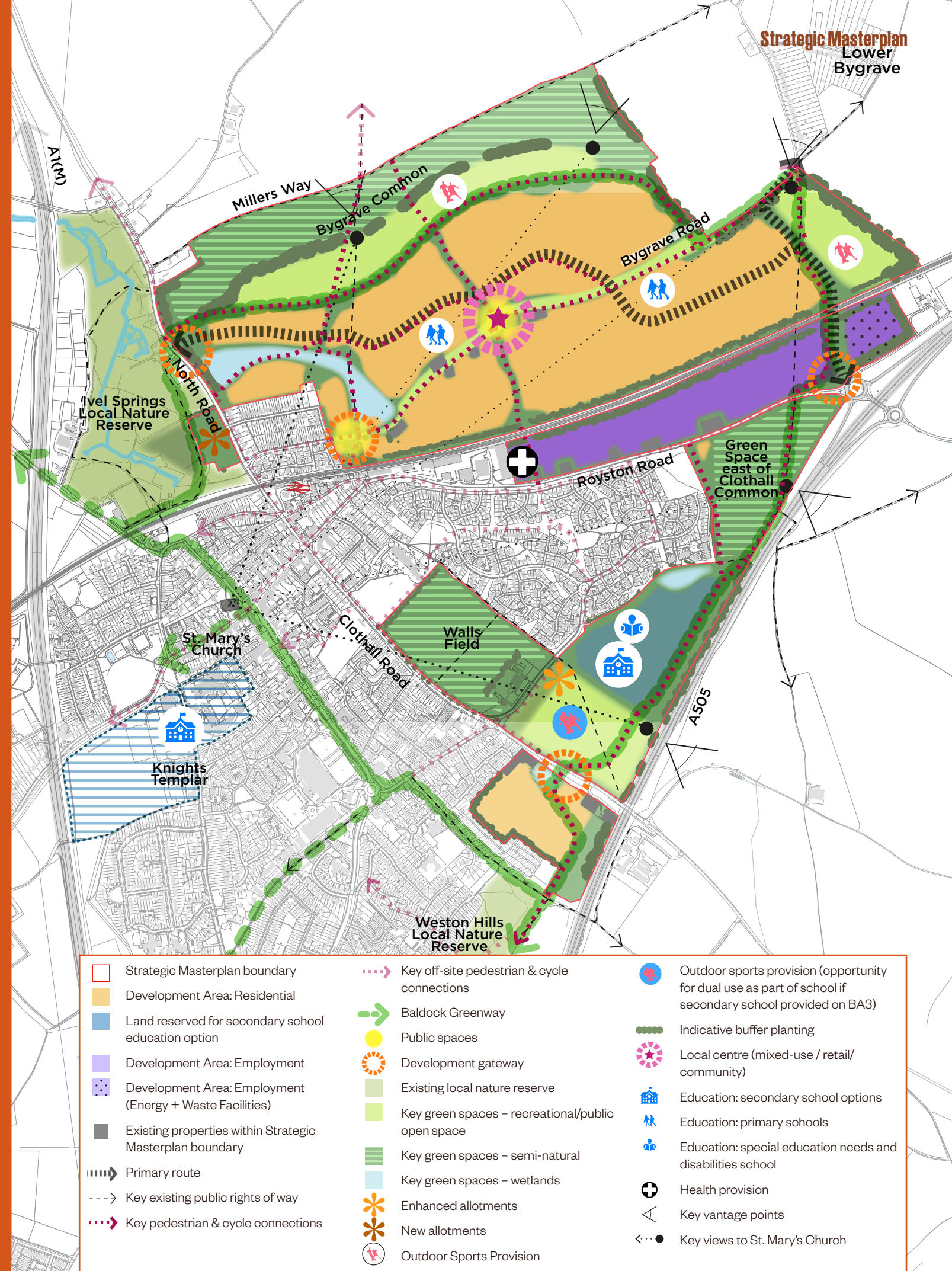
◀ Priors Hall, Corby



Composite Framework Plan

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

Figure 44: Composite Framework Plan



13.0 Infrastructure Delivery Plan

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

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Movement

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

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

Utilities

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

Early years

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

Primary Education

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

Secondary Education

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

SEND provision

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

Health facilities

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

Adult care

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

Waste

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

Public open space

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

Indoor/outdoor sports provision

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

Flood risk mitigation

| Off-site | On-site |
|----------|--|
| | Sustainable drainage network throughout site |

Biodiversity net gain

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

Sustainability and low carbon measures

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

Noise/air mitigation

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

Community facilities

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

Stewardship Planning

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key aims and objectives of the approach

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

This will be achieved by:

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

Process to agree the approach

The process to deliver this is as follows:

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

Defining the assets

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

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

Potential approaches for discussion

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

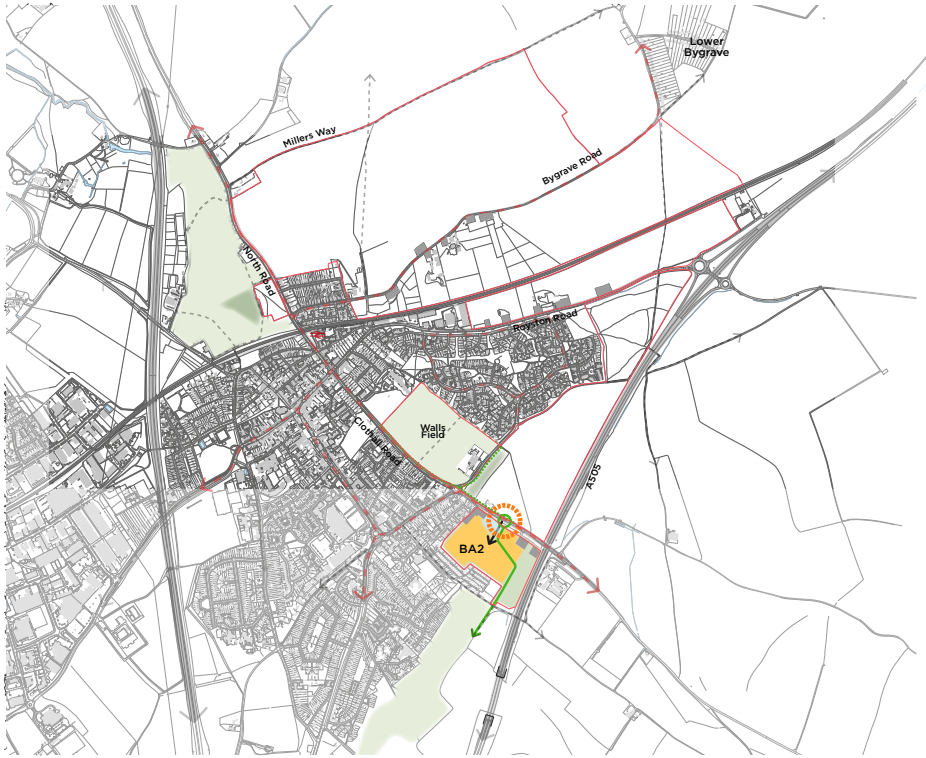
The ManCo/Charitable Trust approach U&C adopts reflects and embeds firstly U&C's company values and secondly, the U&C Sustainability Framework capitals which inform the design, delivery and management of spaces and places. There are huge opportunities to explore how the learning and experience can apply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

Indicative Phasing

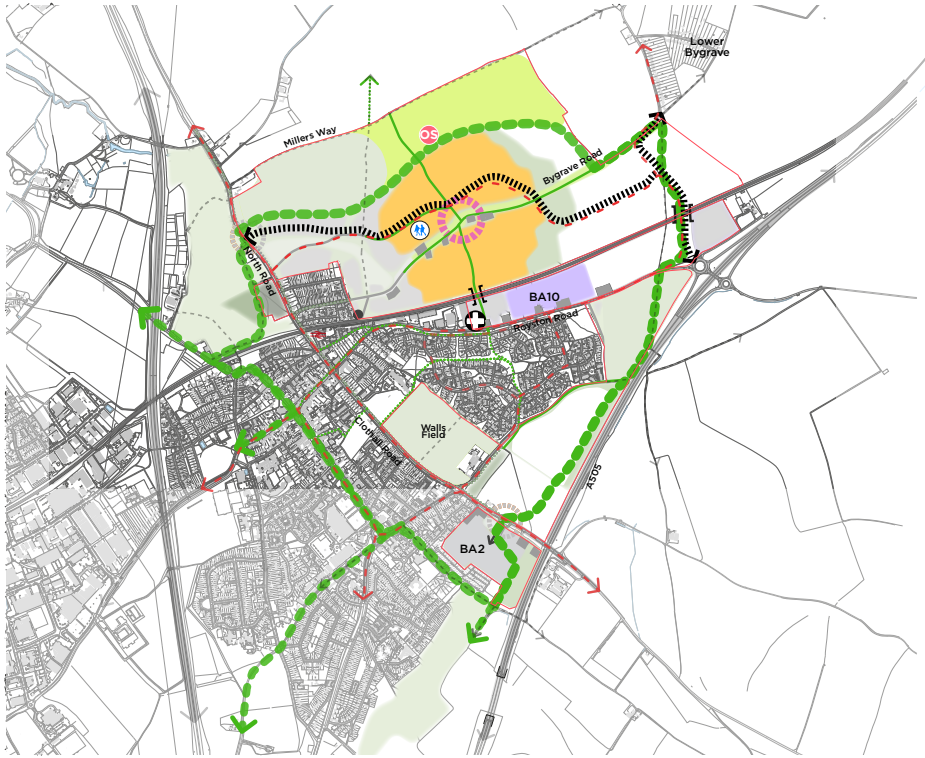
Figures 45 to 48 set out the potential indicative sequencing of development, starting with new homes in BA2, followed by the development of BA1 (new homes, primary schools, local centre and green infrastructure) from North Road, in an easterly direction. The employment parcel (BA10) will be largely market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

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

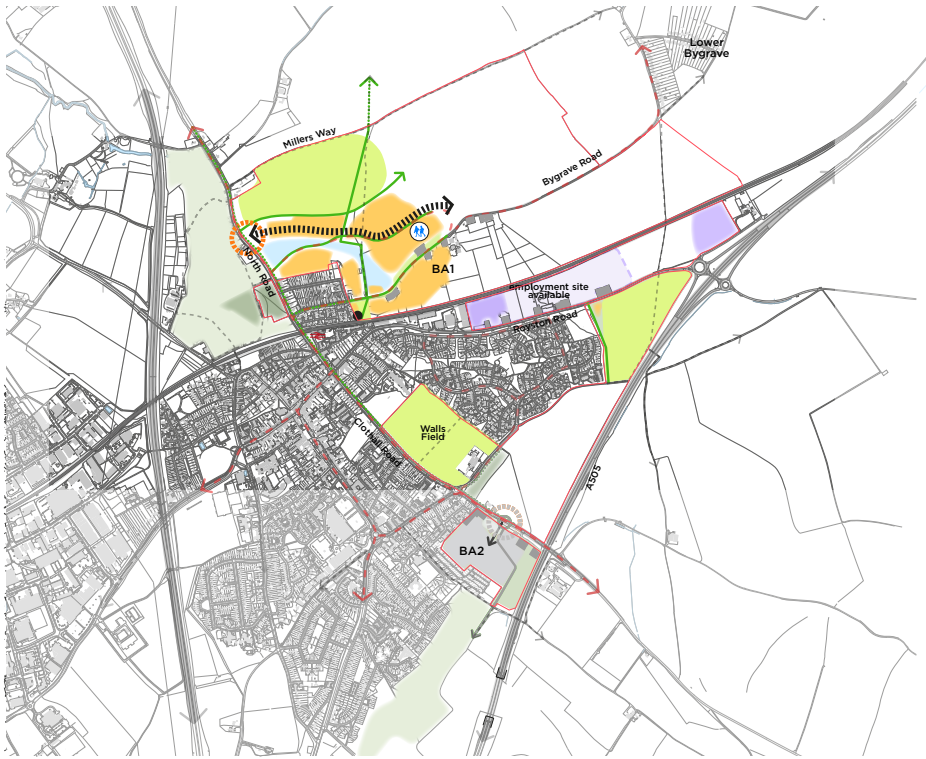
Phase A



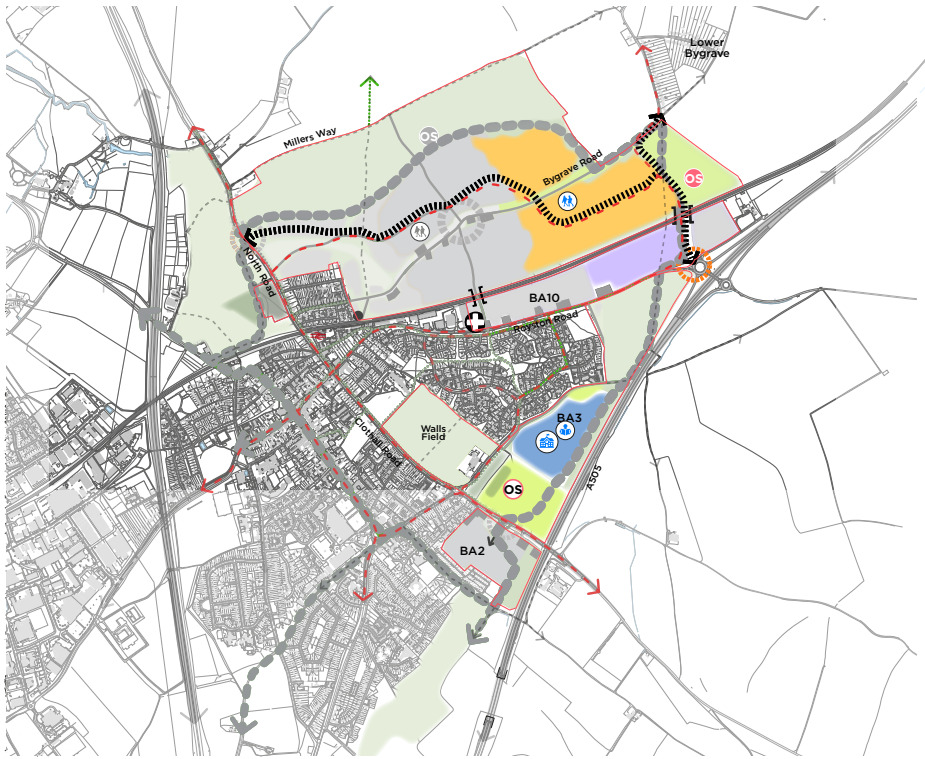
▲ Figure 45: Indicative Phase A



▲ Figure 47: Indicative Phase C



▲ Figure 46: Indicative Phase B



▲ Figure 48: Indicative Phase D

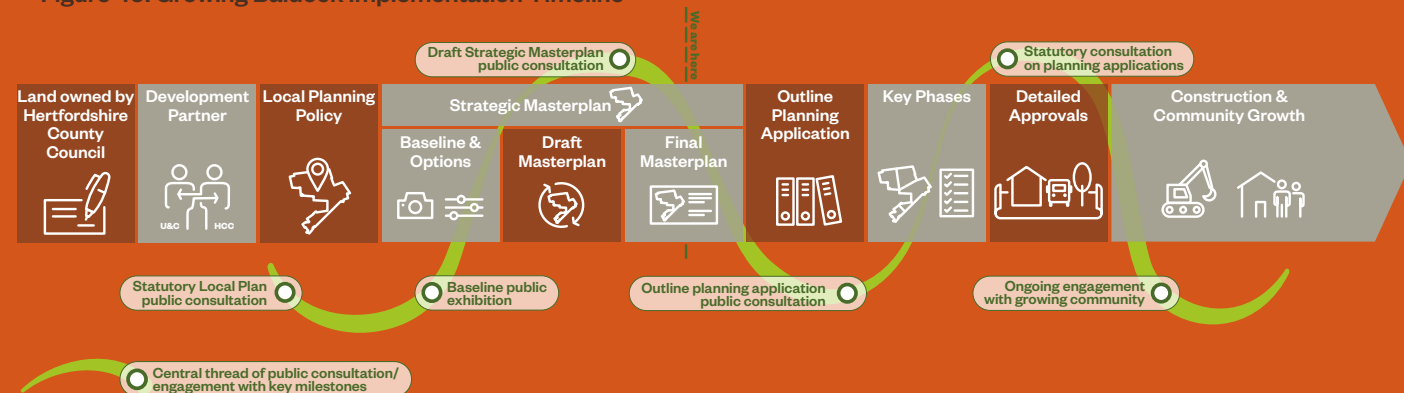
- Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Existing properties within Strategic Masterplan boundary
- Development Area: Residential
- Land reserved for secondary school education option
- Development Area: Employment
- Local centre: (mixed-use/retail/community)
- Education: secondary school options
- Education: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

Conclusions

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

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Figure 49: Growing Baldock Implementation Timeline



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

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

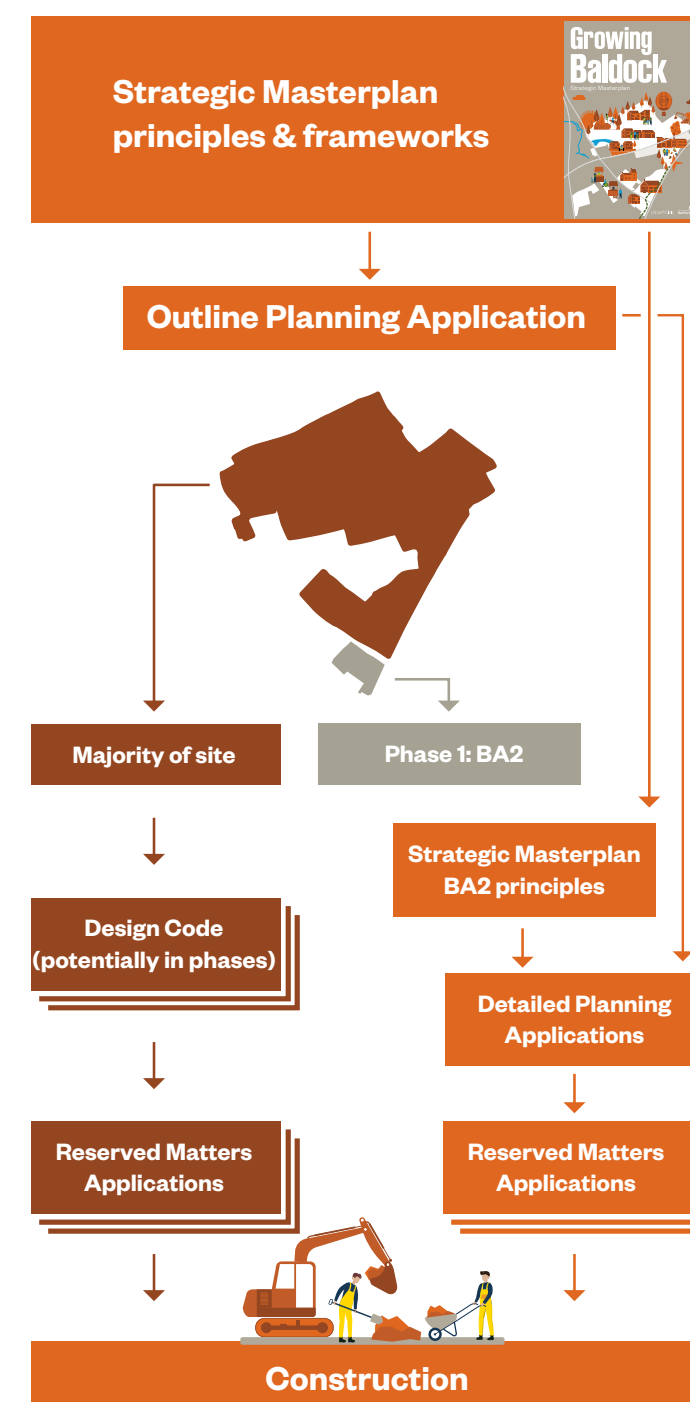


Figure 50: Planning Approval Scenarios

Outline Planning Application (OPA)

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

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

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

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

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

Phase Design Code

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

Reserved Matters Applications

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

davidlock.com



GROWING BALDOCK

Masterplan Summary Report

This report has been prepared by the Strategic Planning Urban Design Team as a summary of the Growing Baldock Strategic Masterplan Report. Circulation is intended for North Herts Councillors. The full report (prepared by the applicant Urban and Civic) is appended to the Cabinet Report.

Growing Baldock is the largest development project in the Local Plan by a significant margin. It is important to note that the size of the project, the nature of Urban & Civic's delivery model as master developer and the need to ensure flexibility on matters which cannot be resolved now have shaped the masterplan. The overall aim has been to establish key principles and objectives which can form a framework for the assessment of future, more detailed proposals. Therefore, the level of detail in the following plans and Masterplan Report differ from North Herts' other strategic masterplan sites.

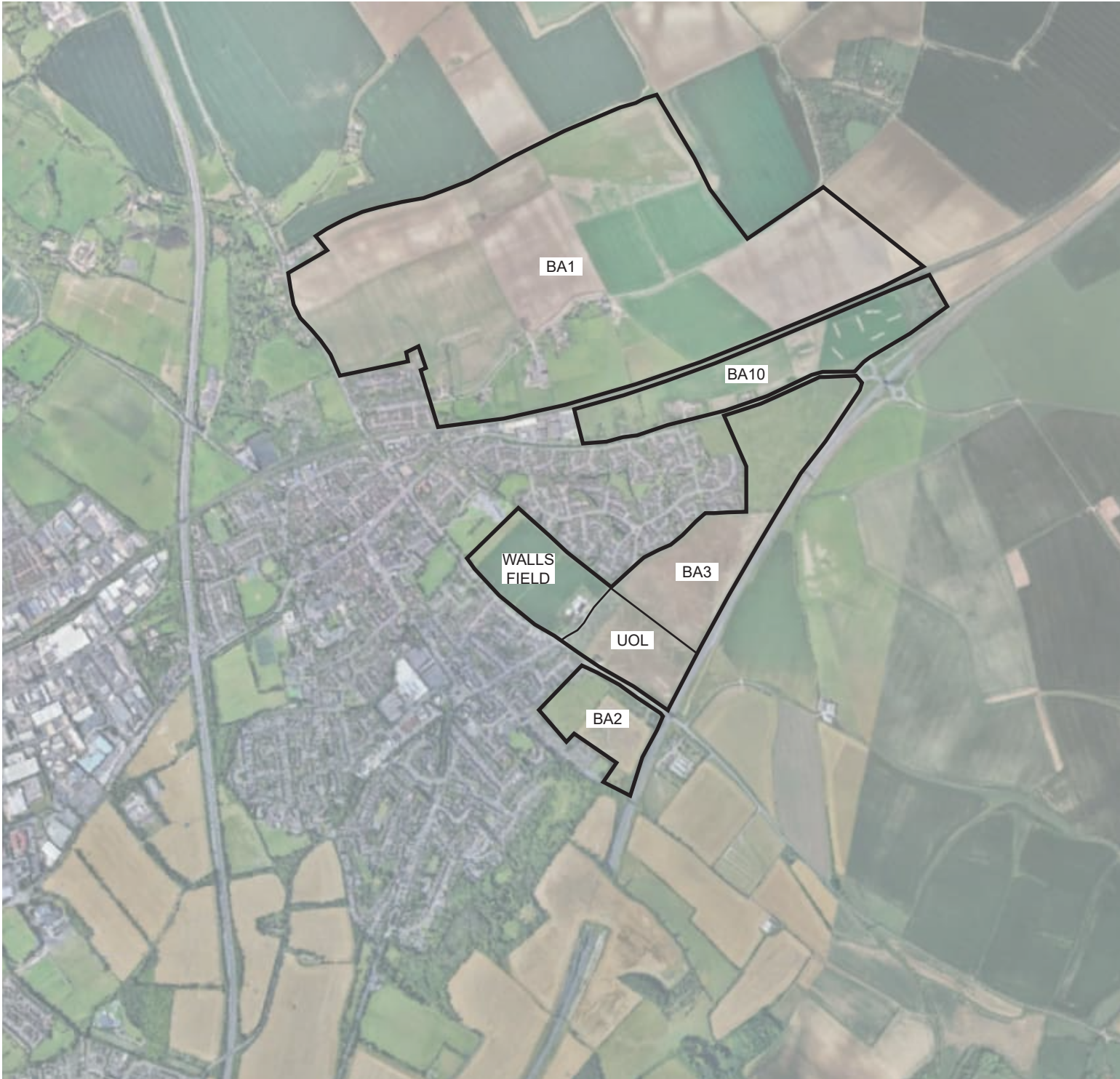
KEY INFORMATION

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| LP Allocation | BA1,BA2,BA3 and BA10 (collectively referred to as Growing Baldock) |
| Total Site Area | 220ha |
| Open Space | c. 52ha |
| No. of Homes | upto 3200 |
| Density (net) | average 37.5dph |
| Non-Resi Uses (approx) | Employment/Waste Infrastructure - 16ha Local Centre 2no. 2FE Primary Schools SEND school – 2ha Upto 12FE Secondary School (TBC) |

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| LP Allocation | Yes |
| Strategic MP Framework | Endorsed by Project Board and Cabinet |
| Outline Planning Application | PPA ongoing, target submission Dec 2025 |
| Legal Agreements and Conditions | Not Started |
| Design Coding | Not Started |
| Reserved Matters Applications | None |

The masterplan sets out how the development will seek to champion sustainability, organised around the themes in the Sustainability SPD. It is important to note that the following are targets and subject to more detailed design and viability.

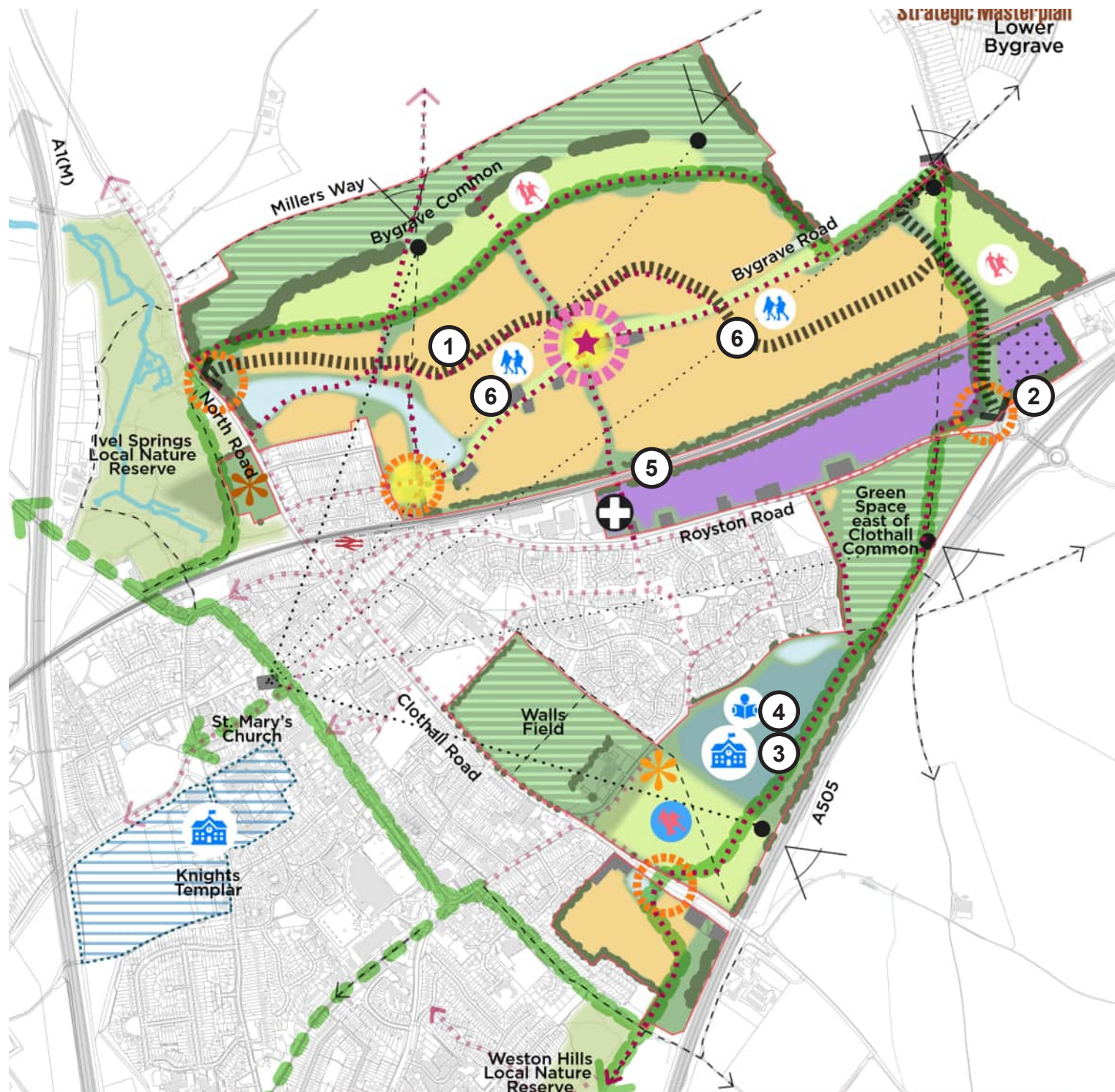
| | |
|--|--------|
| Optimising Passive Design and Fabric Performance | Silver |
| Achieving Low Carbon Energy | Bronze |
| Minimising Carbon Footprint | Bronze |
| Enhancing Open Space | Silver |
| Promoting Biodiversity | Gold |
| Sustainable Travel | Gold |
| Conserving Water | Silver |
| Incorporating SUDs | Gold |



DESIGN REVIEW PANEL

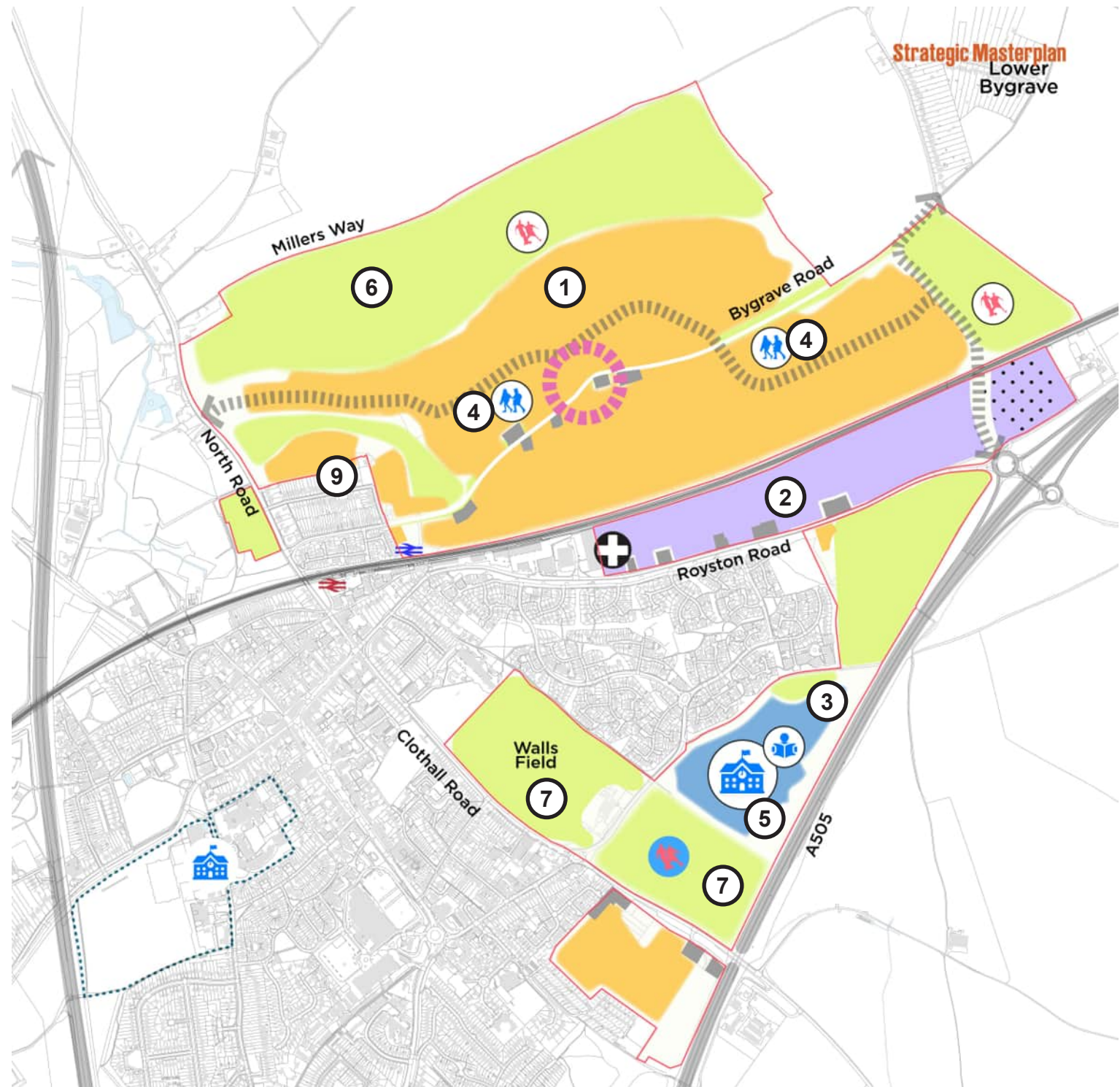
The masterplan has been through several stages of option testing, design review and public consultation. Formal Design Review took place in July 2023 using the Council's preferred partner Design South-East using their bespoke North Hertfordshire panel of experts. Key amendments to the design through the masterplan process include:

1. Realignment of the primary route through BA1 as a low-speed route through the site rather than a bypass.
2. Primary route to connect to the existing roundabout junction at the eastern end of the Baldock bypass following archaeological investigation.
3. Rationalising the spatial options for secondary school provision so that it is made either at the existing Knights Templar site or on BA3.
4. Co-locating SEND school provision on BA3.
5. Greater flexibility for second active travel crossing of the railway to allow further investigation of providing an underpass rather than an over-bridge.
6. Redistributing primary school provision within BA1 to provide one school to the west of the local centre and one to the east, both located close to the primary route and the Bygrave Road corridor.
7. Location and focus of the Local Centre to compliment rather than compete with the existing High Street.
8. Ensuring a comprehensively connected green infrastructure network to ensure successful movement of ecology and people.
9. Linking the structuring elements of the development parcels to important contextual aspects such as the Winterbourne Paleo Channel, views to St Mary's Church, topography and archaeology.



SETTLEMENT STRUCTURE AND LAYOUT

1. A significant new community north of the railway line with a centrally located Local Centre that will contain a range of facilities and community uses.
2. Strategic employment land (shown in purple) between the railway and Royston Road with a Health Hub serving both new and existing residents.
3. Flexible land use on BA3 (see point 5).
4. Two primary school sites within BA1 located to the east and west of the local centre to provide accessible education and opportunities for linked trips.
5. Reserved site for secondary education with a preferred solution of a relocated and expanded Knights Templar School on BA3.
6. Strategic areas of open space along the northern boundary to follow the natural site topography and provide a buffer to Lower Bygrave.
7. Walls Field and land between the garden centre and bypass brought into public and/or recreational use.
8. Smaller-scale residential blocks adjoining Salisbury Road and Bygrave Road allowing for sympathetic integration with the existing settlement.

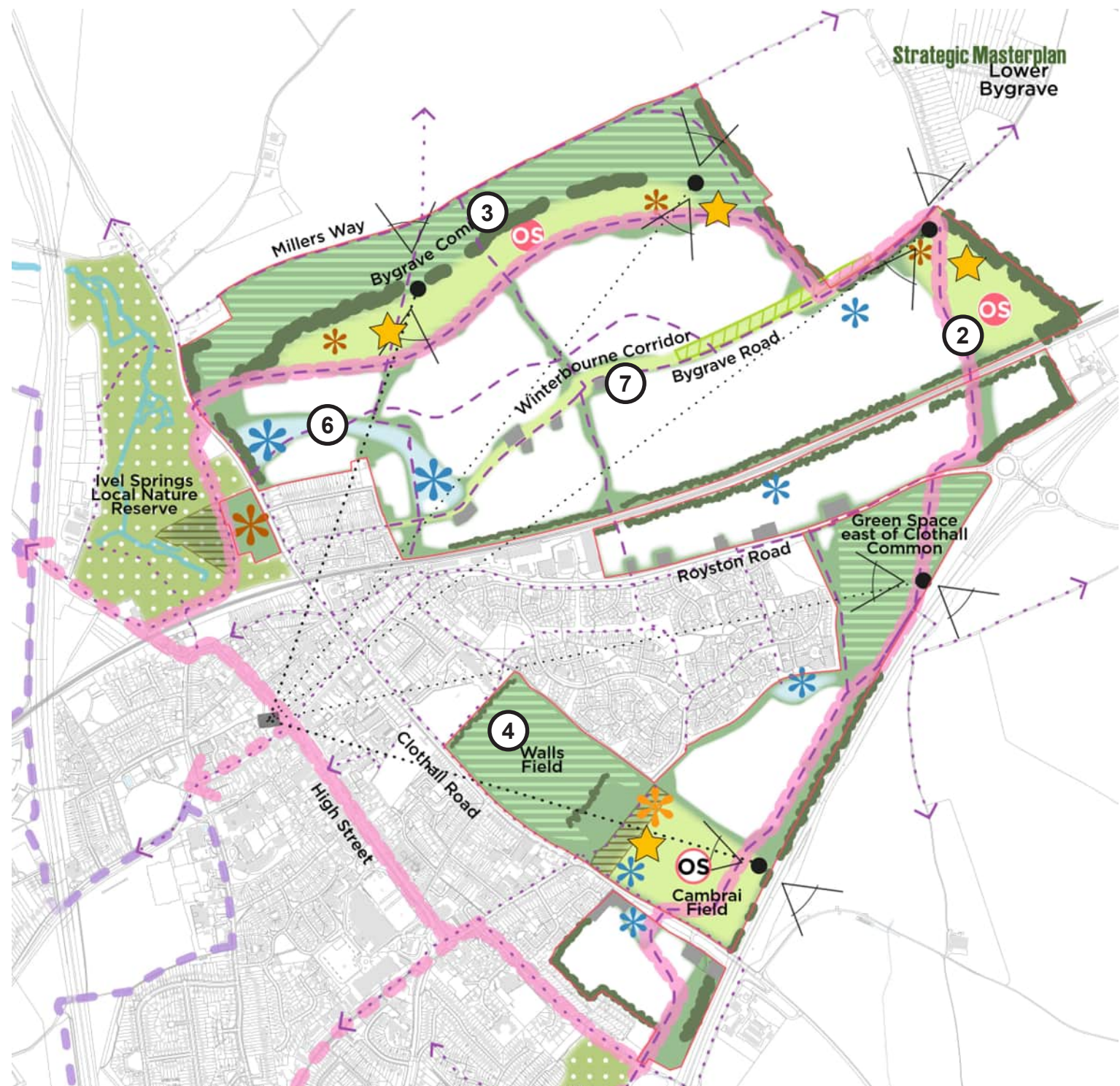


Land Use Key Principles:



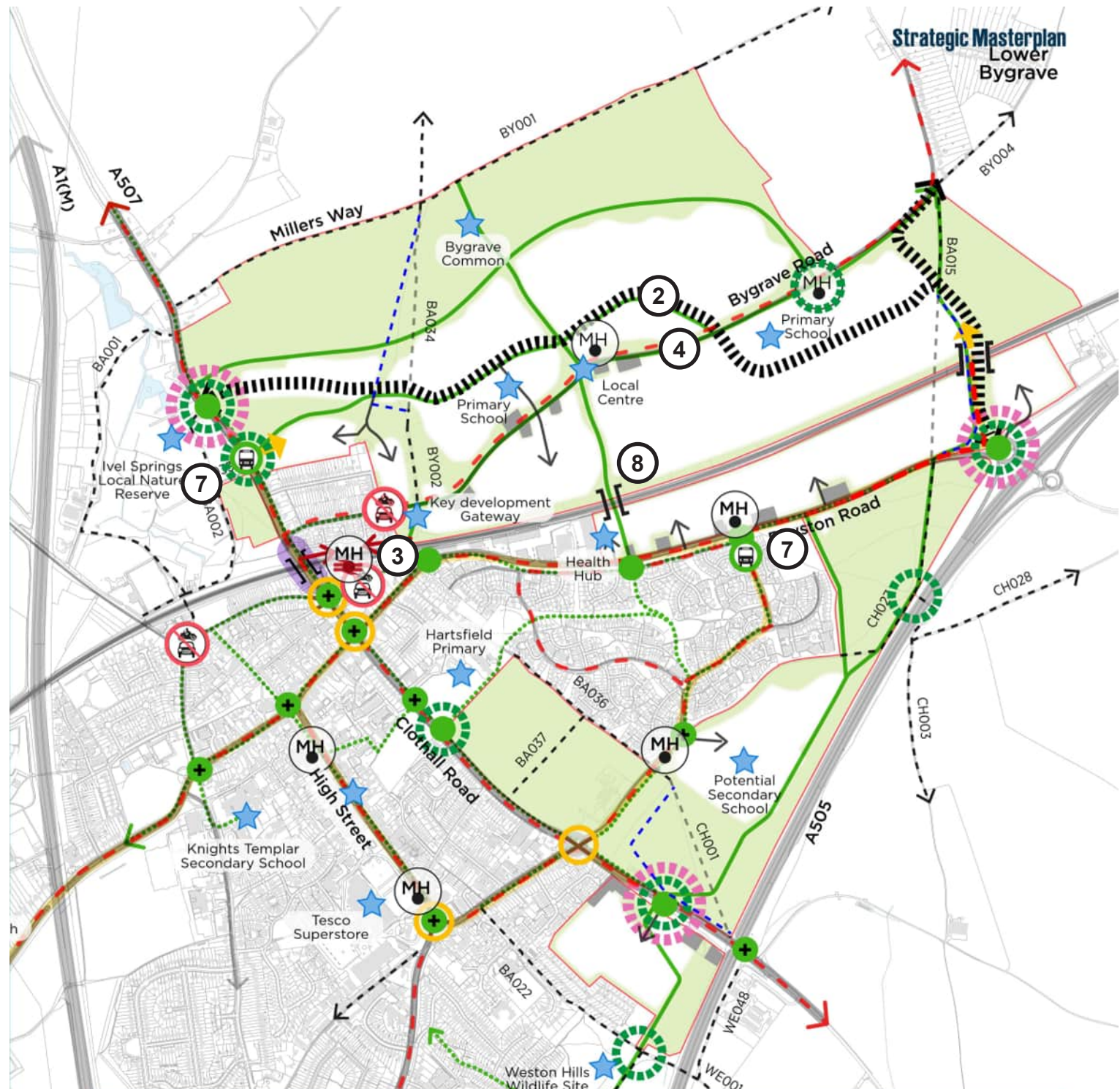
NATURE, OPEN SPACE AND ECOLOGY

1. A comprehensive network of wildlife corridors and green links will be integrated throughout the development, connecting habitats and supporting species movement.
2. The creation of the Baldock Greenway (shown in pink) - a 6-mile circular walking/cycling route connecting new and existing green areas such as Ivel Springs and Weston Hills LNR.
3. Bygrave Common will be a major new park combining areas for recreation, biodiversity and heritage interpretation.
4. Walls Field will be taken out of agricultural use and made open for public recreation as a biodiversity rich meadow grassland.
5. The development commits to delivering at least a 10% net gain in biodiversity, with an ambition to exceed this.
6. A strategic SuDS network will manage surface water, reduce flood risk and help recharge the aquifer that feeds the River Ivel, supporting the health of this chalk stream ecosystem.
7. To the north of the railway, this will broadly follow the course of the historic winterbourne paleo channel.



MOVEMENT, ACCESS AND PARKING

1. Target for at least 50% of all trips to be made by walking, cycling or public transport through a network of safe, direct and attractive routes to connect homes to key destinations like schools, parks and the town centre.
2. A new slow-speed access road connecting North Road and Royston Road, including a bridge over the railway. This road will prioritise sustainable travel and reduce through-traffic in the town centre.
3. A new northern entrance to Baldock Station will be created, improving access for pedestrians and cyclists.
4. Sections of Bygrave Road to be re-purposed to prioritise walkers, cyclists and bus routes.
5. Several hubs across the development offering facilities such as bus stops, cycle hire and parking, car clubs, EV charging and parcel lockers to support multi-modal travel (shown as MH).
6. Direct and efficient bus routes with stops within 400m of most homes.
7. Bus-only links will be created including access into Clothall Common and from North Road into BA1.
8. New and improved crossings, including a dedicated pedestrian/cycle crossing over the railway.



Movement Key Principles:



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

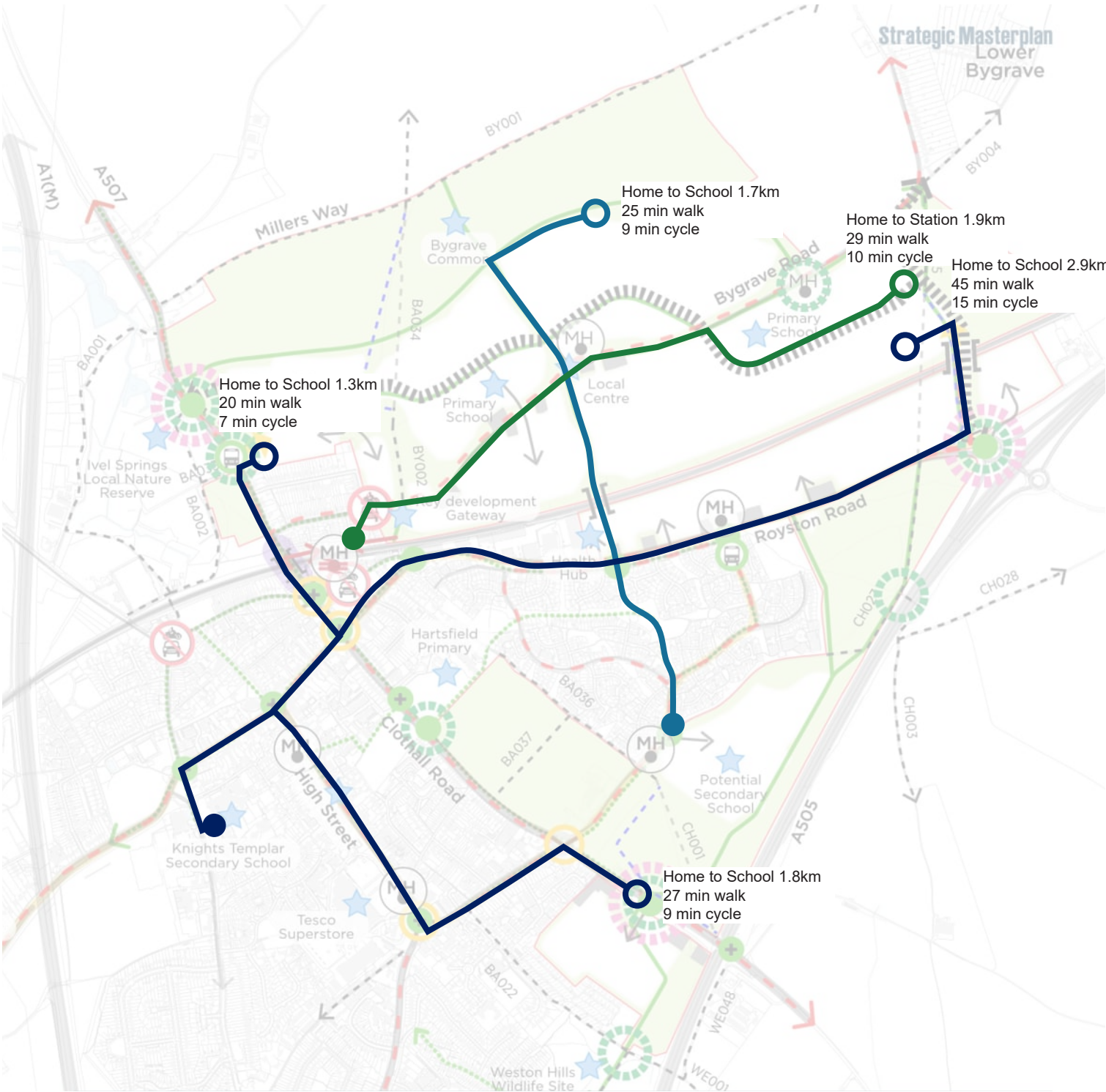


Town-wide improvements to encourage sustainable and active travel



Reclaiming space for walking, cycling and public transport

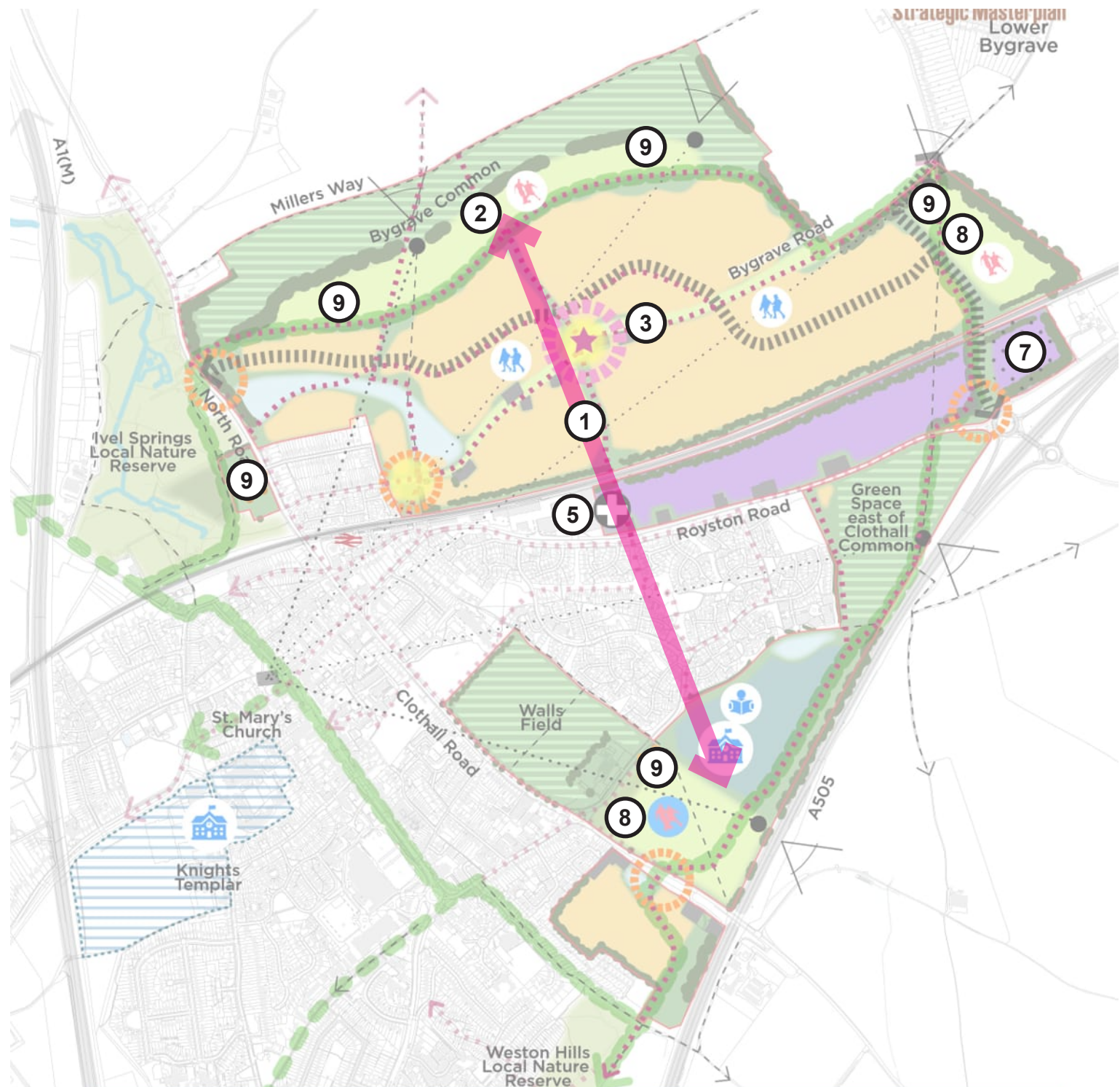
MOVEMENT, ACCESS AND
PARKING



Speeds used to calculate walking and cycling times are 4kph for walking and 12kph for cycling - these are typical speeds for young children, older and unfit people.
More active people would travel faster at 5kph for walking and 16kph for cycling.

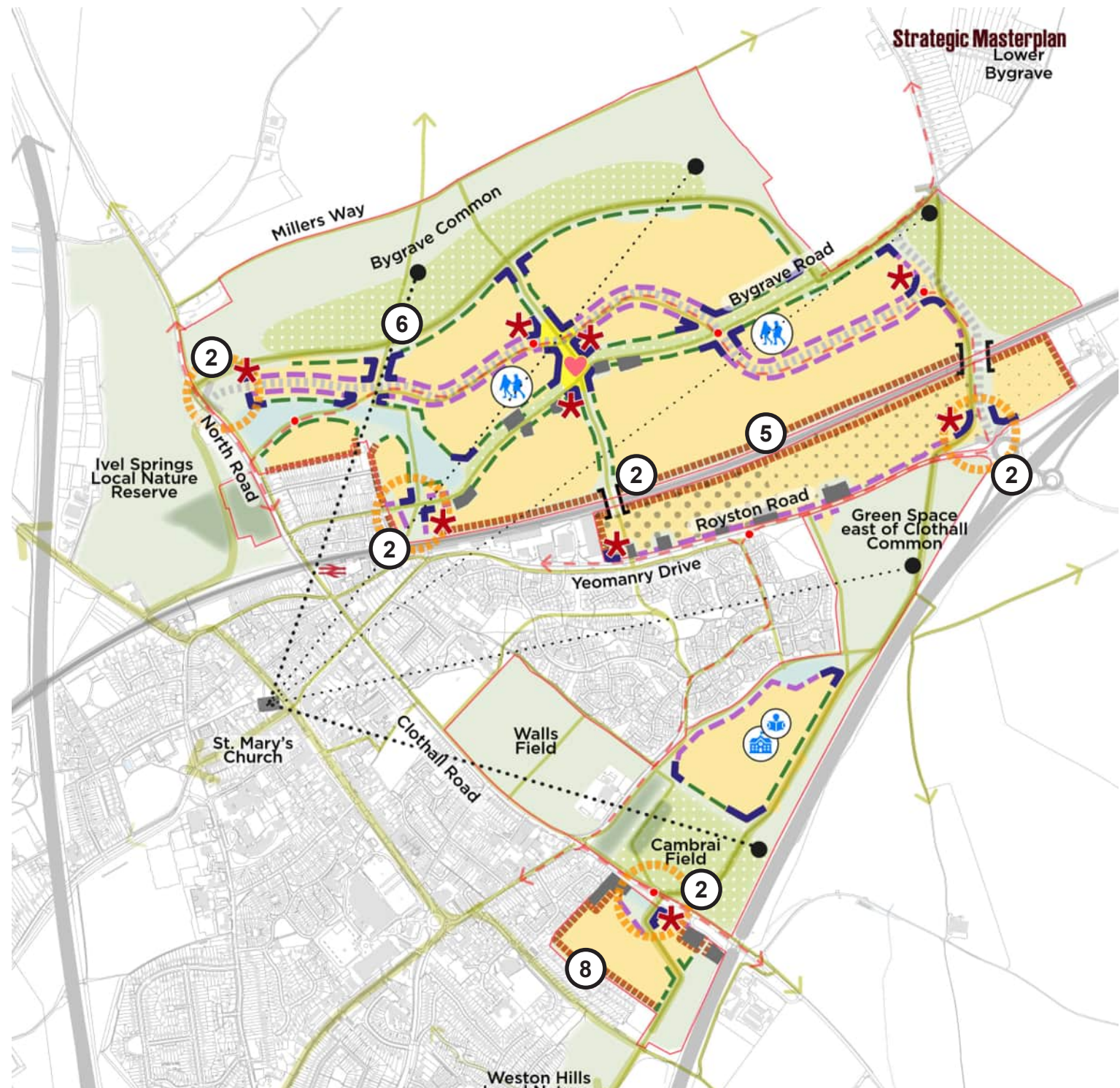
SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND COHESION

1. A key north-south axis (shown in pink) with the new school to the south and Bygrave Common to the north has been designed as a key social infrastructure corridor with the Health Hub and Local Centre along this route.
2. The route is terminated by Bygrave Common in the north where sports and recreation uses will be located to activate this important gateway.
3. A single, centrally located local centre in BA1 will provide day-to-day amenities such as retail, a pub, community facilities, workspace and/or nursery.
4. Community spaces will be integrated into the local centre and other key locations, including potential youth provision, childcare facilities and extra care/supported housing.
5. A new health hub is proposed at the western end of the employment area, near the railway station. Subject to discussion with the NHS and existing practice, it would include GP services and potentially other health and community uses.
6. BA10 employment land provision will support local jobs and reduce the need to commute. Further work is required to define the most appropriate uses and unit types to provide or target in this area.
7. Land is reserved at the eastern end of the employment parcel for waste uses, potentially including a waste transfer station, vehicle depot and a household waste recycling centre.
8. Three sports hubs are planned, in the Heritage Park, Bygrave Common and on the Urban Open Land (potentially shared with the secondary school). Facilities will include grass and 3G pitches. It is intended that any new secondary school would include a sports hall with community access.
9. The plan includes enhancement of the existing allotment provision and new sites along the proposed Baldock Greenway - bringing activity and community use to this important new leisure route.



CHARACTER, TYPOLOGY AND BUILT FORM

- 1.Details for built form and streets will follow in the subsequent Design Codes with the masterplan setting high-level principles.
- 2.Key gateways (orange circles) into the development have been identified on the plan - these will be developed to form strong and characterful entrances into the site.
- 3.Key landmarks (red stars) define important public spaces - these will be developed to support legibility and wayfinding.
- 4.A mix of housing types will be provided, including terraced, semi-detached, detached homes and apartments with higher densities near key amenities and transport nodes.
- 5.Landscaped edges have been included on the plan to highlight tricky edges such as the railway and existing properties to ensure they are resolved sensitively in the design code stage.
- 6.Building heights and plot layouts will respond to topography, key views (notably towards St Mary's Church) and the surrounding.
- 7.The design code will develop character areas to ensure the development is legible and characterful - respecting the existing context whilst being innovative about the future identity of Baldock.
- 8.The first phase (BA2) will set a high design benchmark, with strong frontages and sensitive edge treatments.

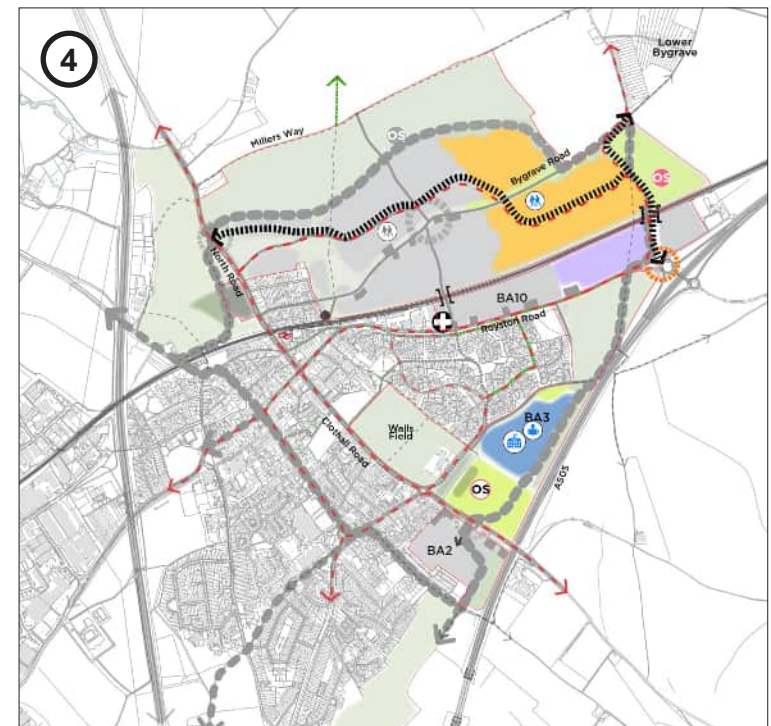
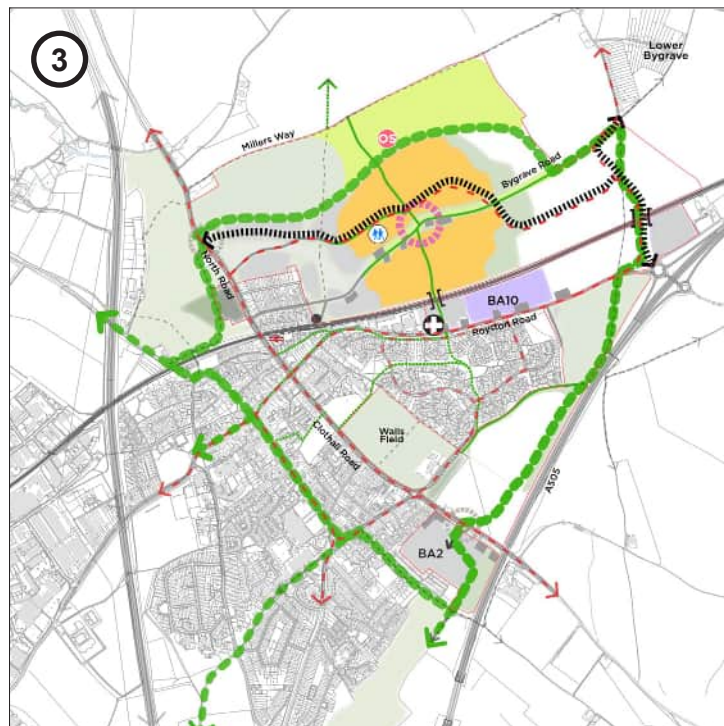
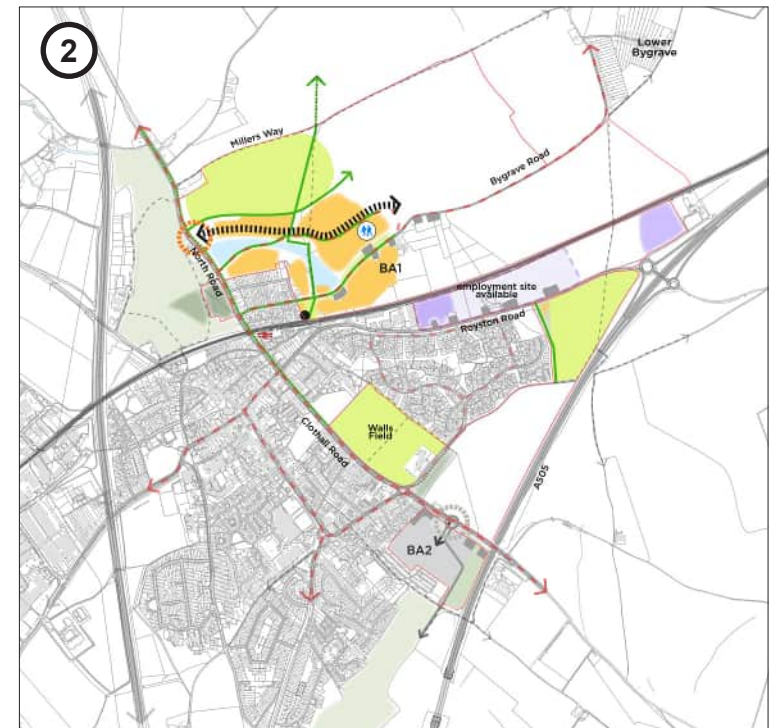
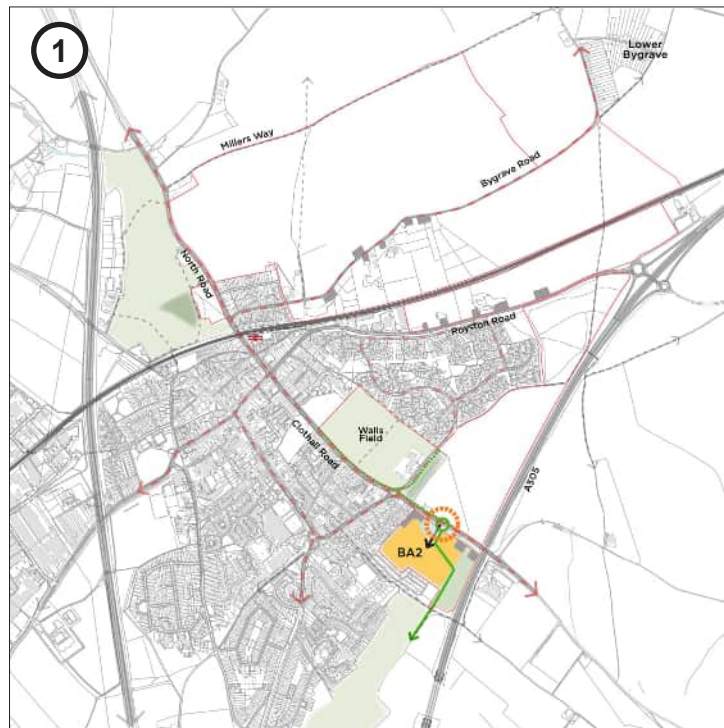


Urban Design Key Principles:



DELIVERY, MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE

1. The project will begin with Phase 1 (Site BA2), delivering around 200 homes, followed by sequential development of BA1, BA10, and potentially BA3, with phasing aligned to infrastructure capacity and strategic access delivery.
2. Key infrastructure such as roads, schools, and utilities will be delivered in tandem with housing, guided by a phasing plan and secured through planning conditions and legal agreements.
3. A Design Code will follow the outline planning application to ensure high-quality, characterful development, with reserved matters applications required to comply with the Strategic Masterplan and Design Code.
4. A tailored stewardship model will be developed to manage public spaces, green infrastructure, and community facilities, ensuring long-term quality and sustainability.
5. Management responsibilities may be shared between local authorities, a management company, charitable trusts, or community-led bodies, with flexibility to evolve over time.
6. Ongoing engagement with both the existing and new community will shape stewardship arrangements, ensuring integration with existing Baldock and fostering a sense of shared ownership and civic pride.



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| FULL COUNCIL 16 June 2025 |
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| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT | AGENDA ITEM No. |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|

TITLE OF REPORT: ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE 24-25
REPORT OF MONITORING OFFICER

THE CHAIR OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

COUNCIL PRIORITIES: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

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, at 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 ('CSPL') 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 Director in her role as 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.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Author

- 16.1 Jeanette Thompson Director: Governance (& Monitoring Officer):
Jeanette.thompson@north-herts.gov.uk

Consultee officers

16.2

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 17.1 None other than those referred to in Appendix A (and associated links) none.

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

FOREWORD

Councillor Alistair Willoughby, Chair the Standards Committee 2024 – 25



I am proud to have served as the Chair of the committee this year. We must all remember that, as elected members, none of us are 'above the law' and that it is incredibly important that we are held to the highest of standards and principles when representing our communities. Public trust is what legitimises our work to represent the interests of our residents, therefore, it is important that we are held to account and helped to do better when we fall short.

I am pleased that Councillor Standards have been given a national focus with the proposed changes to the regime under the English Devolution White Paper.

It is paramount for public confidence that the balance of a fair and impartial system is upheld. We trust that any national and legislative changes will try to and achieve that balance between those principles, whilst having safeguards against politically motivated or frivolous complaints.

I am delighted to present this Annual Report which provides a summary of activities in 2024/25 of the Standards work and reports on the significant progress and dedicated work undertaken by the Committee in this past year.

We have successfully reviewed and endorsed the Code of Corporate Governance for Statutory Officers, a crucial step in ensuring the highest standards of conduct and accountability within our organisation.

Furthermore, the Committee has played a vital role in the ongoing constitutional and governance review, providing considered recommendations aimed at strengthening our democratic processes and overall effectiveness. I am particularly pleased with the constructive and insightful contributions of all members in this important area, which was accepted by the Governance Group and later Full Council.

The expansion of the Committee's remit reflects the Council's commitment to embedding a strong ethical framework across all its activities. We have embraced this enhanced responsibility with diligence and a clear focus on promoting best practice.

The thorough consideration given to the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedures underscores our commitment to fostering a culture of transparency and providing a safe and confidential avenue for raising concerns. The recommendations made by the Committee will undoubtedly contribute to a more robust and trustworthy environment.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all members of the Standards Committee for their commitment, expertise, and diligent efforts throughout the year. Their thoughtful contributions and unwavering dedication are invaluable in upholding the highest standards of governance for our Council and the communities we serve.

I would also like to thank our Independent Persons Nicholas Moss OBE and the Reserve Independent Persons Patrick Hodson and Wai Bing Hui, the Parish Councillor co-optees, Rebecca Elliott and Martin Griffin, for their assistance to the Council during this period. I would also like to thank the Deputy Monitoring Officer, Isabelle Alajooz, for her work during this time.

My last note of thanks goes to our Monitoring Officer, Jeanette Thompson who has worked diligently to uphold the very best of standards and governance at North Herts for years. I know that every councillor across the chamber will join me in wishing her the very best in her retirement. Our next Monitoring Officer will have big shoes to fill.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report covers the civic year 2024/25. During that year, the Committee met twice, on 23 October 2024 and 5 March 2025. During the meetings, the Committee considered local and national standards issues, complaints, training in the Standards Matters reports, as well as specific reports on the CIPFA, SOLACE, and LLG Code for Statutory Officers, and Whistleblowing Policy.

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.
- 2.2. Following the constitutional and governance review in 2024/25, the Committee's terms were amended to include responsibility for ethical codes, protocols and procedures (new or existing – where they are non-executive in nature), and to consider the annual Constitutional review and make recommendations to Council.
- 2.3. Similarly to previous years, specific complaints are largely dealt with by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy in conjunction with the Independent Person (IP) and Reserve Independent Persons (ResIPs), unless the Complaints Handling Procedure required these to be determined externally. If a complaint had progressed 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 2024/25, the membership was:

Councillor Alistair Willoughby (Chair)
Councillor Ian Albert (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ruth Brown
Councillor Val Bryant
Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
Councillor Dominic Griffiths
Councillor Keith Hoskins MBE
Councillor Michael Muir
Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
Councillor Sean Prendergast
Councillor Emma Rowe
Councillor Tom Tyson

The Committee also has a number of reserves to call upon during the year in the event of necessity, and provides a wide range of views:

Councillor David Barnard (Reserve)
Councillor Clare Billing (Reserve)
Councillor Sam Collins (Reserve)
Councillor Emma Fernandes (Reserve)
Councillor Caroline McDonnell (Reserve)
Councillor Ralph Muncer (Reserve)
Councillor Paul Ward (Reserve)
Councillor Donna Wright (Reserve)

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 |
| Patrick Hodson | ResIP |
| Wai Bing Hui | ResIP |

4. **MONITORING OFFICER/SUPPORT TO THE COMMITTEE**

- 4.1 Jeanette Thompson was the Council's Monitoring Officer and Director (Legal & Community – changing title to Governance in April). 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 was one Deputy – Isabelle Alajooz (and an acting one from December 2024, Douglas Traill-Stevenson). The Director's PA, provided ongoing administrative support for complaints and other Monitoring Officer matters, supplemented by 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. **THE COMMITTEE'S WORK/ CODE OF CONDUCT/ COMPLAINT HANDLING/ COMPLAINTS**

The Committee:

- 5.1. Changes to the Standards regime were introduced in July 2012 following the Localism Act 2011 (the '2011 Act'). 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.
- 5.2. This matter was considered afresh, by the Committee and Council, as part of the 24/25 Constitutional review. This was *prior to central government's announcement on a re-examination of the National ethical standards regime*, and the Committee recommended its retention, for various sound and persuasive reasons. This, the Committee undertook on 23 October 2024, and the next day a consultation on proposed ethical standards changes was announced by the Deputy Prime minister. The proposed changes are covered in the report below under Other Areas of Work and Year Ahead; however, the key themes are around

strengthening the local government ethical framework – including the role of a local authority's Standards Committee.

The Code of Conduct:

- 5.3. As part of the current requirements under the 2011 Act, an authority is required adopted a Councillor Code of Conduct. There is no mandated form, and this Council has had various iterations since the 2011 Act came into force.
- 5.4. Most recently in 2021, this Council adopted the Local Government Association ('LGA') model (with minor local adjustments). Whilst the LGA had potentially been tasked with producing and reviewing this (by the Committee on Standards in Public Life), due to the proposed national changes and consultation, no further version have yet been produced. The Council's adopted Code can be found in section 17 of the Constitution [\[click here\]](#). This version has been adopted by most local Councils within the North Herts district, providing a degree of consistency across our area.

Complaints Handling:

- 5.5. 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).
- 5.6. The Procedure was reviewed in March 2024 by the Standards Committee [\[click here\]](#) and following their consideration/ representations it was considered/ reviewed by the Chair, Vice Chair, IP, and ResIPs, Monitoring Officer and Deputy, taking into account The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Code published in February 2024 (applicable from April 2024), the LGOs website guidance on complaint handling, and Local Government Association's Guidance on Member Model Code of Conduct Complaints Handling. An updated version was approved on 25 June [\[click here Delegated Decision\]](#) and can be found on the relevant Councillor Complaints page: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/complain-about-councillor>.
- 5.7. The Committee considered this once again on 23 October 2024. There had been a discussion around complaints being considered later than the general 3 month complaint cut off and whether this was reasonable and proportionate; and whether a secondary jurisdiction time limit based on constructive knowledge was reasonable and proportionate. A request was made for this to be considered by the Monitoring Officer and the conclusions / recommendations reported back to the Committee in March 2025. However, as an announcement was then made the next day that there would be a consultation on changes to the standards regime, followed by the publishing of the English Devolution White Paper on 16 December¹ and consultation on changing the regime commencing on 18 December, this was not progressed. This issue was however, reported back to the Committee in March that this should be shelved pending the new regime. This was because any new regime is likely to have prescribed arrangements and complaints handling procedures would have to correspond to any guidance provided centrally.

Complaints:

- 5.8. In terms of complaints received, these are recorded by calendar, as opposed to civic year. During 2024 the Council dealt with 19 complaints (as compared with 11 in 2023), and to date 7 (with one other on an elections matter that was submitted and dealt with by the Returning Officer). Summaries of these complaints up to March, can be found in the Standards Matters reports to the Committee from November and March [Click: [Agenda report pack 23 October 2024](#) & [5 March 2025](#)]. At the point of preparing this Annual report, three are ongoing. Whilst the numbers appear to be lower, so far this year, that does not necessarily reflect the time

¹ [english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/english-devolution-white-paper)

associated with the complaints, and whilst most are dealt with in-house, three were referred out for external consideration/ decision during 2024-to date.

- 5.9. In terms of trends in these complaints, the majority related to Members alleged conflicts of interest/ failures to declare interests. Whilst the majority were not upheld (for various reasons) they demonstrate the public's concerns over these sorts of issues and Members are advised that it is 'better to declare' and consider appropriate action / seek advice, than face complaints.

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 Patrick Hodson and Wai Bing Hui were appointed for the year in question. One other was appointed during the period in question, but resigned after a few months. The first two were appointed by Full Council on 19 September 2024, and the last on 15 January 2025, 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 18 September 2028 and 14 January 2029, albeit in the light of Local Government Reorganisation, the renewal process will have to be undertaken in the light of that.
- 6.2. Their role has been and continues to be, to provide independent input into the standards process, as required by the 2011 Act. An IP is consulted on complaints received and prior to a decision being reached.
- 6.3. Mr Moss OBE, as the primary IP, has provided the following comments, regarding the past Standards year:

I have been heartened by the Council's decision to maintain its Standards Committee as a single entity, rather than to merge it with another committee. When the option was being considered I said that I felt such a change could give the undesirable impression to the district's residents of diluting the importance of standards. That it has not done so puts it in step with likely legislation to make standards committees mandatory. [9.4 below refers]. More immediately - and importantly - the committee's re-confirmed existence reinforces to residents a commitment to the highest standards of conduct.

The Council's renewed endorsement of the Committee and Cllr Willoughby's unambiguous introduction to this report prompt me to return to an issue that I touched on last year. I commented then on instances of members complaining about other members' conduct at meetings. I suggested that they might have been driven almost entirely by political considerations and, implicitly, questioned their appropriateness. There have been further similar complaints in this reporting year. Again, none has warranted referral to the Standards Committee for determination as a potential breach of the code of conduct.

I appreciate that, at times, members can feel their patience is being tested during robust Council and committee discussion on contentious issues. I am not convinced, though, that, where such tensions arise, they are best resolved by alleging code breaches - generally on the slenderest of grounds.

That is my view as IP and it reflects also my standpoint as an elector in the district. In that capacity, I doubt that many voters see such complaints as beneficial to the advancement of their interests as residents. I should add that the required careful and fair initial assessment of complaints under the Council's procedures take significant officer time and, on occasion, additional cost: resources and cash that would otherwise be spent on the Council's services for those whom they represent.

Another issue that has occupied substantial time in this period relates to declarations of interest. In that context, I recognise that the role of councillor is not intended to be full-time; that the modest allowances payable to members are not regarded as a substitute for a salary;*

*and that the sums reflect a voluntary element to their council work. [*I'm sure that for some members it might seem as if it is!]*

Thus, it is completely appropriate for members to have jobs in addition to their Council positions. The statutory requirement to declare non-council activities recognises that reality. Nevertheless, I think it is important to recognise that the act of declaration should not be taken as legitimising activities that can reasonably give the impression to residents that they conflict with their council membership. Decisions on the appropriateness of undertaking outside positions can be matters of fine judgement and officers are happy to advise.

I have attended three national meetings about the proposed changes to the standards/conduct arrangements: with a Minister; at the Committee on Standards in Public Life; and with MHCLG officials. I responded also to the consultation earlier this year, as well as offering further suggestions to the Minister directly, which I have shared with the Monitoring Officer. The approach emerging from this engagement bolsters what I see as North Herts Council's resolve to do all it can to give confidence that members' activities are solely in the interests of its citizens.

Finally, I offer my thanks and appreciation to two imminently retiring officers of the Council. In their respective roles they have been loyal and highly professional servants of your authority. During her long tenure as Monitoring Officer, Jeanette Thompson has sought my views on countless complaints. She has considered them with care, attention and complete professionalism, ensuring that complainants and subject members - and I - have been treated totally fairly. My thanks, too, to Penny Copestake for her great efficiency and courtesy - and seemingly inexhaustible patience in responding to my countless inquiries. I shall miss them and wish them both all possible good fortune.

*Nicholas Moss
Independent Person
North Herts Council*

May 19th 2025

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 2024/25 referred to in the reports. This covers advice, where relevant, on standards and complaint matters. Other support such as training, is covered below.

8. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- 8.1. During 2024, post-election Code of Conduct training was provided via a new pre-recorded platform, prepared by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy. This was then (and remains) available on the Council's Growzone resource for District Councillors. All District Councillors undertook the training before the October 2024 meeting.
- 8.2. 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. There is no way of checking the uptake figures for this.
- 8.3. As indicated above, the training remains valid for the current Code. Training will need to be reviewed once a decision has been taken by government regard any new legislation / or mandatory code requirements.

- 8.4. Some of the Independent Persons attended an annual event for Independent Persons and all attended training provided by the Joint National Council on their role in any disciplinary proceedings relating to Statutory Officers.

9. OTHER AREAS OF WORK

Constitutional and Governance Review

- 9.1. Post all-out elections in May, the Monitoring Officer undertook a Constitutional and Governance Review, with the Group Leaders and other key officers in a Working Group. Various areas were considered at the time and as mentioned, this involved consideration of whether there should be a Standards Committee, remit of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, Planning Control Committee functionality, as well as the more general aspects of speaking times, motions and timings of Committee meetings. On 23 October 2024, the Committee made a recommendation to the Constitutional Working Group regarding the role of Standards Committee and its remit. The recommendation made by the Committee was (item 6) that:

“(3) That the Committee recommended that the working party be urged to retain and strengthen this Committee in consultation with the recommendations and comments from the Independent Person.”

- 9.2. This recommendation was accepted by the Working Group and became one of its recommendations to Full Council. At its meeting on 23 January 2025, the decision was to strengthen the Committees terms of reference, and for the Committee to take on the Annual role (with the Monitoring Officer) of considering and recommending changes to the Constitution, to Full Council (the earliest being at its meeting in October or subsequently in March 2026).

Member and officer indemnity

- 9.3. During 2024 the Deputy Monitoring Officer led on the review of the Member and Officer Indemnity Policy, with this being presented to Full Council on 19 September 2024². This was to ensure that it met current best practice. Its is worth pointing out that there are restrictions on cover, so that there is no indemnity in relation to any action or failure to act, which would constitute a breach of the Councillor’s Code of Conduct³.

English Devolution White paper⁴

- 9.4. As mentioned, in December 2024, the government published the White Paper, which among the main stem of Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution, also sets out proposals to cover changes to the Standards regime, including:

- **A mandatory code of conduct** – to establish a higher minimum standard of expected behaviours and ensure consistency, reflecting the government’s commitment to public service and to updating the 30-year code to cover discrimination, bullying, use of social media, and other issues not featuring in the current minimum requirements.
- **A requirement for principal Local Authorities to convene formal Standards Committees** – to ensure all Local Authorities have formal, transparent processes to uphold and promote standards.
- **A role for a national body to deal with the most serious cases and appeals**, as was the case under the former system with the Standards Board for England, subject to discussions with the sector.

² <https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s26107/Member%20and%20Officer%20Indemnity.pdf>

³ <https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s26108/App%201%20INDEMNITIES%20FOR%20MEMBERS%20AND%20OFFICERS%20showing%20tracked%20changes.pdf.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>

- **Powers to suspend, including imposing premises and facilities bans** – to allow Local Authorities to enforce their own standards. The government believes that councils need the ability to address serious misconduct with powers to suspend councillors for a maximum of six months, with the option to withhold allowances where deemed appropriate.
- **Disqualification if subject to suspension more than once** – to curb the risk of “repeat offending” and empower councils to signal that poor behaviour will not be tolerated. Subject to discussions with the sector we will explore immediate disqualification in certain instances of serious misconduct.
- **Interim suspension whilst under investigation** – to reassure the public that action is being taken. This could be used in serious cases that may involve protracted investigations or the police, for example alleged fraud or assault.
- **Publication of all code breach investigation outcomes** – to enhance transparency, giving the public the opportunity to check their council’s record on maintaining good conduct.

9.5. The consultation on the proposals closed on 26 February 2025. The Monitoring Officer and the IP attended various liaison meetings covering the consultation, including an invitation to participate in the Committee on Standards in Public Life discussion/ round table on 20 February⁵. The consultation feedback is currently being analysed.

9.6. During a Westminster Hall Debate in March 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon, stated that there were more than 2,000 submissions to the Government’s recent consultation:

“While the standards proposals that the Government have been consulting on are for whole system reform, at their foundation is the proposal for a mandatory code of conduct. We believe that a mandatory code is vital to achieving consistency across all the various types and tiers of local government..... This is about having a proportionate system that can hold up to scrutiny and be tested, but it has to be mandatory. It must have sanctions that matter, including the power of suspension, the power to withhold allowances, if that is correct, and the power for premises bans, if there is a safeguarding risk at play...”

Conflicts of Interest for employees and agency staff

9.7. This Policy was reviewed following discussions with Leadership and liaison with the Staff Consultation Group. The Policy was simplified, at the same time as introducing mandatory procedures for all new employees and agency staff/ with an annual review of any potential conflicts. This was approved in December 2024 and came into effect in January 2025.

Solace/ CIPFA/ LLG Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers

9.8. During 2023/ 24 the Council’s Statutory Officers (Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer) attended and participated in consultation with the above bodies on a proposed new Code. The Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers, was developed collaboratively by Solace, CIPFA, and LLG, in the wake of several national local government scandals. The Code provides a framework for the three most senior statutory officers to work effectively within the “Golden Triangle” to advise, implement, and achieve good outcomes for local authorities. It was presented and endorsed by the Committee

⁵ [CSPL - local government standards roundtable](#)

in October 2024⁶ which highlighted the seven key standards to enhance corporate governance and decision-making. The Seven Standards of the Code of Practice:

1. Understand Governance:

This standard focuses on the roles and responsibilities of each statutory officer within the Golden Triangle.

2. Act Wisely:

It emphasizes a duty of inquiry and the exercise of statutory functions.

3. Lead Ethically:

This standard underscores the importance of adhering to the Seven Principles of Public Life.

4. Act Effectively:

It highlights the need for robust working arrangements within the Golden Triangle.

5. Resource the Roles:

This standard emphasises providing the necessary tools and resources for statutory officers to effectively perform their duties.

6. Build Resilience:

It focuses on appointing deputies and supporting the ongoing development of statutory officers.

7. Deliver Sound Decision Making:

This standard emphasises the importance of effective decision-making processes and outcomes.

These standards are designed to ensure that local authorities are well-governed, with statutory officers working together to effectively serve the public and deliver on their mandates.

Whistleblowing Policy Review 2025:

- 9.9. Following the changes to the Committee's terms of reference, the Monitoring Officer undertook a review of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy, and presented this to the Committee in March 2025⁷. The Committee wished to promote knowledge and confidence in the arrangements (as well as anonymous Whistleblowing). Following the update of the Policy, a new Whistleblowing reporting form has been created/ made available on the Council's hub. Articles have been published in the staff magazine and in the Member's Information Service regarding the Policy and arrangements.

Liaison meetings:

- 9.10. 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 and Eastern region of Lawyers in Legal Government.

- 9.4 The Monitoring Officer has published several briefing/advice notes in the Members Information Service in 2024/25 including on the issues of Pre-Election Restricted Periods.

10. Lessons Learned

- 10.1 The learning from dealing with the complaints made since 2024/25, is the need for increased awareness for Members relating to their interests, and the public perception issues around this.

⁶ <https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s26506/CODE%20FOR%20STATUTORY%20OFFICERS%20HEAD%20OF%20PAID%20SERVICE%20SECTION%20151%20AND%20MONITORING%20OFFICERS.pdf>

⁷ <https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s27579/ANNUAL%20WHISTLEBLOWING%20POLICY%20REVIEW.pdf>

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 The English Devolution White Paper, is expected to be implemented through the English Devolution Bill, which is anticipated to begin its passage through Parliament in the middle of 2025. Therefore in all likelihood no finalised changes will be enacted during the year ahead, there is likely, at the very least, to be a new mandatory Code and sanctions for Councillors in the foreseeable future.

12. Recommendation

- 12.1 That Council receives this report on the work on standards matters and notes the issues being reviewed in 2024/25.

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