

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



11 September 2026

Our Ref Cabinet Tuesday, 22 September 2026
Contact. Committee Services
Direct Dial. 01462 474655
Email. committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk

To: Members of the Cabinet:

Executive Members Councillors: Val Bryant (Chair), Sean Nolan (Vice Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Daniel Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas, Laura Williams and Donna Wright.

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A
MEETING OF THE CABINET**

to be held in the

**COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON
ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF**

on

TUESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Isabelle Alajooz
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.	MINUTES - 16 JUNE 2026 To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 16 June 2026.	(Pages 7 - 28)
3.	NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.	
4.	CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS <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.	

Ecological Emergency

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

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

Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.

6. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

(Pages
29 - 36)

6A) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Allocation of MHCLG Homelessness Grant – **to be considered with Agenda Item 12.**

6B) Finance, Audit and Risk Committee – First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2026/27 – **to be considered with Agenda Item 14.**

6C) Finance, Audit and Risk Committee – First Quarter Capital Budget Monitoring 2026/27 – **to be considered with Agenda Item 15.**

6D) Finance, Audit and Risk Committee – First Quarter Treasury Management Review 2026/27 – **to be considered with Agenda Item 16.**

7. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN UPDATE REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

(Pages
37 - 48)

The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on progress against the agreed Action Plan that was developed following the November 2024 Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). The Action Plan was approved by Cabinet on 18 March 2025, with an update reported to Cabinet on 23 September 2025 and again on 17 February 2026 (alongside the CPC follow up report from the LGA).

- 8. LOCAL PLAN - CONTENT AND EVIDENCE BASE CONSULTATION** (Pages 49 - 702)
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – PLACE
- This report seeks approval for the Local Plan - Content and Evidence Base document for consultation. The Content and Evidence Base document is the second stage in the new plan-making system. Its purpose is to present the Council's emerging policy approach across a range of thematic areas and what evidence has been or will be collected to support the Local Plan. It will also explain which planning matters will be addressed through the new National Development Management Policies.
- 9. STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS REPORT** (Pages 703 - 724)
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – PLACE
- This report identifies the latest position on key planning and transport issues affecting the Council.
- 10. NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY** (Pages 725 - 854)
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – PLACE
- The draft Town Centres Strategy has been updated following public consultation. The report outlines the results of that public consultation, the proposed modifications to the Strategy and seeks approval to adopt the Town Centres Strategy.
- 11. CHARNWOOD HOUSE, HITCHIN** (Pages 855 - 874)
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – ENTERPRISE
- The Council has a policy for Charnwood House to be brought back into use to support community-based activities. A Record of Decision dated 3 August 2026 by the Executive Member for Enterprise approved the re-marketing of Charnwood House on a long lease to organisations with the vision and expertise to transform it into a thriving community asset. This Cabinet report seeks approval to the basis for assessing and scoring the applications, and delegating final approval of the successful organisation to the Executive Member for Enterprise in consultation with the Director of Enterprise.
- 12. ALLOCATION OF MHCLG HOMELESSNESS GRANT** (Pages 875 - 886)
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY
- The Council has received a multi-year funding settlement from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), ring-fenced for the purpose of supporting the Council in meeting its homelessness duties. This report details proposals for the allocation of some of this funding in line with grant conditions, national policy and local priorities.
- 13. 2026-27 Q1 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN UPDATE** (Pages 887 - 926)
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES
- This report presents progress on delivering the Council Delivery Plan for 2026-27. This is a Quarter 1 update, but generally reflects progress up to the point that the report was prepared (early August 2026).

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| 14. | FIRST QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2026/27
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES | (Pages
927 -
940) |
| | The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the summary position on revenue income and expenditure forecasts for the financial year 2026/27, as at the end of the first quarter. | |
| 15. | FIRST QUARTER CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REVIEW 2026/27
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES | (Pages
941 -
948) |
| | To update Cabinet on progress with delivering the Capital Budget Monitoring for 2026/27, as at the end of June 2026. | |
| 16. | FIRST QUARTER TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2026/27
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES | (Pages
949 -
968) |
| | To update Cabinet on progress with delivering the Treasury Strategy for 2026/27, as at the end of June 2026. | |
| 17. | GROUND'S MAINTENANCE CONTRACT REVIEW
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – ENVIRONMENT | (Pages
969 -
982) |
| | To review the grounds maintenance contract and seek approval for a five-year contract extension with John O'Conner (Grounds Maintenance) Ltd until 31 March 2032. | |
| 18. | EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC
To consider passing the following resolution: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following report will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended). | |
| 19. | PART 2 MINUTES - 25 JUNE & 9 JULY 2024 AND 16 JUNE 2026
To take as read and approve as a true record the Part 2 minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on the 25 June & 9 July 2024, and 16 June 2026. | 983 -
992 |
| 20. | KEYSTAGE AND THE TREATMENT OF HOUSING BENEFIT
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES AND DIRECTOR – REGULATORY | 993 -
1000 |
| | Previous reports have highlighted the viability issues faced by Keystage Housing in the provision of supported accommodation at the former Lord Lister hotel site in Hitchin. The Council needs to resolve how it will treat the Housing Benefit overpayment in relation to this. | |

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Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 16TH JUNE, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Val Bryant (Chair), Sean Nolan (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas, Laura Williams, Donna Wright and Daniel Allen.*

In Attendance: *Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Luca Benedito (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Rumi Bose (Churchgate Project Manager), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Philip Doggett (Principal Estates Surveyor), Robert Filby (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive), Rachael Rooney (Interim Strategic Planning Manager), Nigel Smith (Director - Place) and Sohanna Srinivasan (Principal Planning & Urban Design Officer).*

Also Present: *There were no members of the public present.*

Councillor Jon Clayden was present as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Vijaya Poopalasingham was present as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

Neil Parlett, as Director of Planning, Development and Regeneration and Ben Parker, as Senior Associate Director at Lambert Smith Hampton

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 52 seconds

There were no apologies for absence received.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas had advised the Chair of her late arrival to the meeting.

2 MINUTES - 14 APRIL 2026

Audio recording – 2 minutes 7 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 April 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 48 seconds

There was no other business notified.

4 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 56 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean that, as this was an emergency, all of us, Officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.
- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (4) The Chair advised for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.
- (5) The Chair advised of a change to the order of the Agenda and Agenda Items 11 and 18 to 21 would be taken following Agenda Item 24.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 26 seconds

There was no public participation at the meeting.

6 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 4 minutes 32 seconds

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

7 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS REPORT

Audio recording – 5 minutes 48 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Strategic Planning Matters Report' and advised that:

- Several national changes had been made to planning decision-making and delegation.
- From 11 May, Local Planning Authorities were required to consult the Secretary of State before refusing planning permission for housing schemes of 150 dwellings or more.
- A new National Scheme of Delegation due to be implemented in October would require more decisions by officers and limit Planning Control Committees to 13 Members, and an update on this would be provided at the Planning Control Committee meeting on 2 July.
- Consultation on planning fees had concluded on 18 May and they would await the outcome of this.

- The Council had published a notice of intention to review the Local Plan following national regulations coming into force, and scoping documents for the consultation that would close on 28 June had been published.
- Government funding of approximately £108K had been received to cover staff capacity costs for this if they met the Gateway 1 assessment by the end of October.
- A legal challenge for the Luton Airport expansion had been rejected, and Luton Rising would proceed with implementing the Development Consent Order (DCO).
- Officers were liaising with other authorities, and Luton Rising had been contacted about their next steps to ascertain the implications of the expansion for North Herts.
- £20K had been set aside for any extra work associated with the DCO.
- The six largest strategic sites were moving forward and other strategic sites were also making progress.
- Collaboration with 8 neighbouring authorities on their Local Plans had been maintained.
- The final version of the Draft Town Centres Strategy would be presented to Cabinet in September for adoption, and the delivery plan would be prepared following this.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, the Director – Place advised that:

- Traffic implications of Luton Airport expansion had been considered through the conditions imposed on the DCO and groups that would ensure those conditions were met would be set up in due course.
- Dacorum Borough Council and Hertsmere Borough Council had been placed under special measures by the Government for failure to meet decision-making targets on major applications.
- The Council was 1% under the threshold for special measures and given the small number of major applications considered by the Council, Members and officers were reminded to make robust decisions and work with Hertfordshire County Council to ensure this.

In response to questions, Councillor Donna Wright advised that:

- An additional, short period of consultation on the Draft Town Centres Strategy might take place in response to a request from Hitchin Community Forum.
- More consideration would be given on how to progress the recommendations from the S106 Task and Finish Group report as soon as possible.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Ian Albert.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

Points raised during the debate included:

- It would be useful to receive feedback on the expected traffic impacts of the Luton Airport expansion soon so that the Council could mitigate these.
- The letter sent to MPs on chalk streams was acceptable.

- It was important for them to be active and seek to influence decision-making on Luton Airport expansion by actively engaging with partners to ensure improvements and prevent impacts from affecting North Herts residents.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the report on strategic planning matters.
- (2) Noted the response in Appendix A.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters.

8 DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS SPD

Audio recording – 22 minutes 52 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Developer Contributions SPD' and advised that:

- The Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) had been adopted in February 2023 to provide additional details on developer contributions.
- General updates to the document were made after agreement to update it in 2024.
- Following approval of the Draft SPD by Cabinet last year, 55 responses were received from the public consultation, and more amendments were made from this as outlined in paragraph 8.3 of the report.
- In response to a letter received from a developer raising concerns on healthcare contributions at section 7.2 of the document, officers had reviewed this and were confident that the SPD had not set a fixed tariff for healthcare contributions, and that it made clear that all contributions should meet legal and policy tests to ensure they were proportionate and reasonable for each development.
- The letter should not prevent adoption of the SPD before the cut-off date of 30 June.

N.B. There was a break in proceedings at 19:59 and the meeting recommenced at 20:06.

The Director – Place provided a verbal update on the letter received and advised that:

- Bloor Homes claimed that section 7.2 of the SPD set out a formulaic healthcare contribution, which was contrary to planning practice guidance.
- After review by officers, they had concluded that this section stated how the Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) interacted with the local planning authority and calculated medical services costs based on their formula rather than how the Council acted.
- Section 7.2 was just one part of the SPD, and the approach to considering contributions was set out in the introductory sections, including the regulations that governed these.
- Officers were satisfied that the SPD set a rounded approach to considering contribution requests put forward by third parties on a case-by-case basis, and this was reinforced by policies in other documents such as Policy SP7 in the Local Plan and policies in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- They were happy to support the paper based on the response and assurances from the Director – Place.
- It was exciting to see this document progress and be used going forward as it was an exemplar document.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Adopted the Developer Contribution SPD, attached as Appendix 1.
- (2) Revoked the 2023 Developer Contributions SPD.
- (3) Delegated authority to the Director – Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Place, to make any minor non-material corrections (including but not limited to cosmetic additions or presentational alterations) to the adopted Developer Contributions SPD as considered necessary for publication and publicity in accordance with the relevant regulations.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To allow the updated Developer Contributions SPD to be adopted to support delivery of the policies in the adopted Local Plan and ensure that developer contributions for development schemes are secured appropriately where they are necessary.

9 NORTH HERTS DESIGN CODE SPD

Audio recording – 41 minutes 30 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'North Herts Design Code SPD' and advised that:

- The Draft Design Code had been presented to Cabinet in February following several Member Workshops held over the year before that.
- 68 responses had been received from the consultation and most of these had been addressed, with some raising procedural concerns on technical aspects, and these were set out at Appendix A to the report.
- A minor adjustment had been made to page 9 of the SPD in response to a second letter received from Bloor Homes to make it clear that existing plans should be consistent with the Design Code unless it would conflict with design principles established earlier.
- With the query addressed, they should accept the recommendations in the report.

The Director – Place provided a verbal update on the letter received and advised that:

- Four issues had been identified with the SPD on how it would be applied, its introduction of new policy, implications of viability, and the adequacy of consultation.
- Amendments had been made to the SPD to address its proposed application already and the letter acknowledged satisfaction with these.
- Officers did not agree that it introduced new policies as it expanded on existing policies in the Local Plan rather than creating new ones, which followed government guidance.

- It was also not agreed with that the SPD had negative viability implications as it would not reduce the quantity of development, overall value or prevent other targets being met in terms of density or space standards.
- It was also recognised that pre-existing work took precedent.
- The Design Code would be applied once applications progressed through certain stages such as Reserved Matters, but some elements would have already been fixed at earlier stages such as outline planning.
- A comply or justify approach allowed developers to put forward their case if they had not met requirements in the SPD.
- Consultation on the SPD had been condensed to meet deadlines but had not been compromised because of this and had met the relevant consultation regulations.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, the Director – Place advised that Natural England and the Environment Agency were two of the three statutory consultees for environmental appraisal screening, but there were more statutory consultees for planning consultations.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, the Principal Planning & Urban Design Officer advised that one request had been made by Historic England in response to the consultation to amend wording on listed buildings and character areas.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Sean Nolan.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Sean Nolan

Points raised during the debate included:

- Members had been fully involved in the process of developing this document, which had helped with their understanding.
- North Herts residents had also been involved, and it had been good to receive different perspectives to ensure the future of the district beyond the existence of the Council.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the outcomes of the consultation on the draft Design Code SPD, as contained in the Statement of Consultation at Appendix A.
- (2) Adopted the Design Code SPD, attached as Appendix B.
- (3) Revoked the 2011 Design Supplementary Planning Document.
- (4) Granted delegated authority to the Director: Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Place, to make any minor non-material corrections to the Design Code SPD as considered necessary for publication and publicity in accordance with the relevant regulations.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To allow the Design Code SPD to be adopted to support delivery of the policies in the adopted Local Plan and ensure that developer contributions for development schemes are secured appropriately where they are necessary.

- (2) To ensure the SPD is presented in advance of the Government's final cut-off of 30 June 2026 for any SPDs to be adopted under the outgoing legacy planning system.

10 WASTE VEHICLES FUEL ARRANGEMENTS

Audio recording – 54 minutes 32 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment, presented the report entitled 'Waste Vehicles Fuel Arrangements' and advised that:

- The Council had moved to using Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO) fuel as a low emission alternative to diesel to support carbon reduction commitments, but global events had increased the price of both.
- HVO was currently 40p more expensive than diesel and if 100% HVO use was continued, there would be an estimated overspend of roughly £15K a month.
- The proposal would cap the use of HVO in overall fuel mix, which would still achieve some emission reduction targets while limiting financial impacts.
- This was an interim measure that they would keep under review, with the aim to return to 100% HVO fuel mix once market conditions improved.

Councillor Amy Allen proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

As part of the debate, Councillor Ian Albert highlighted that this was a sensible and practical approach given international circumstances, and it was important for them to use HVO to some extent while recognising the financial implications as set out in the report.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved use of a HVO mix for the Council's large waste vehicles, that limits the additional cost to the Council (of using HVO over diesel) to approximately £5,000 per month from 1 July 2026 to 31 March 2027. This would be subject to a minimum HVO use of 20%, unless it became impossible to obtain HVO fuel.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) The Council set a budget in January 2025 to use Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil in the vehicles (above 3.5 tonnes) in the waste and street cleansing contract. The budget set aside at the time (£40k per year ongoing) was expected to be sufficient to use 100% HVO in those vehicles, although the budget decision did reference that it would be possible to use incremental levels of HVO depending on cost. Inflation added to the budget means that £40k budget is now £42k (for 2026/27).
- (2) Global events have increased the cost of fuel, with an even more substantial increase in the cost of HVO. This recommendation manages the cost impact on the Council during this period of uncertainty. Overall, the Council remains committed to its Sustainability Strategy and the carbon emission targets set within that strategy.

11 FUNDING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR)

Audio recording – 58 minutes 55 seconds

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

- Some discussion had taken place on staff training costs and the balance between training for new and existing staff.

- A query regarding how county-wide costs would be allocated had been answered by the Director – Resources.
- Discussion over transparency on decision-making and where projects needed to be scaled back as they moved to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) had also taken place.
- An amendment had been made to recommendation 2.2 in the report to include that any spend can be approved by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Overview of Scrutiny Committee and political Group Leaders in addition to the Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Resources.

N.B. Councillor Daniel Allen left the Council Chamber at 20:31.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Mick Debenham
- Councillor Daniel Allen

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that she, as the Leader of the Council, and the Executive Member for Resources were the only Members with a coherent view on staff training due to their attendance at ongoing meetings.

N.B. Councillors Daniel Allen and Tamsin Thomas entered the Council Chamber at 20:33.

In response to questions, Councillor Jon Clayden advised that neither he nor the political Group Leaders would have the decision-making power on spending, and that they would just be consultees along with the Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Resources.

In response to questions, Councillor Laura Williams advised that training plans across all 11 authorities in Hertfordshire had already been agreed by the Herts Leaders Group.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Funding for Local Government Reorganisation' and advised that:

- A delegated decision had allocated £450K for four HR and IT posts to address significant LGR workload pressures, and recruitment for those was ongoing, which meant that the full funding allocation might not be needed.
- £1M of total funding for the 2026/27 financial year and £1M for the 2027/28 financial year had been agreed.
- Spending related to staff backfill and county-wide costs would likely be made through delegated decision notices.
- Spending on learning and development would be allocated in tranches due to the low amounts and existing training budgets, and monitoring would take place on this through quarterly reports.
- Officer time spent on LGR was already significant and would only increase.
- A balance for spending on training for new and existing staff was recognised.
- Transparency on spending would be important to ensure scrutiny from the Overview & Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees.
- A huge number of important projects were taking place, and staff were being stretched in different directions, so there was a need to manage priorities.
- They were happy to accept the amendment suggested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the recognition that decisions would be made quickly and irregularly as £450K had already been allocated to staffing costs this year.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen

- Councillor Donna Wright

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- Given the importance of LGR, they were happy to include additional parties in the consultation process for spending on LGR related staffing costs.
- Decisions on staffing costs would not need to be made as quickly as those on county-wide costs, and no recruitment was planned in the near future.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that:

- They would be happy to listen to views from the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny and political Group Leaders, but there would be limited time for responses due to deadlines.
- An appropriate way of communicating with consultees on these matters would be considered.

In response to questions, Councillor Laura Williams advised that there was complexity on decision-making around LGR due to the number of authorities involved and the introduction of joint committees in the interim before the formation of shadow authorities.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that the Chief Executive would have the delegated authority to make the decisions on LGR related spending and other parties listed would be consultees only.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed the recommendations with the amendment to recommendation 2.2 to include that any spend can be approved by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and political Group Leaders in addition to the Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Resources, and this was seconded by Councillor Laura Williams.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Daniel Allen

Points raised during the debate included:

- It was pleasing to hear that they could continue to support staff with training.
- The next couple of years would be taxing for staff, and it would be important to support them through this.

Having been proposed and seconded, as amended and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Approved that up to £1 million of the available funding be allocated to county-wide costs. Any contribution will be based on a fair share from each Council and can be approved by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation and Executive Member for Resources.
- (2) Approved that up to £1 million of the available funding be allocated to additional staffing costs, noting that £450k has already been allocated. Any spend can be approved by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council, Executive Member for Resources, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and political Group Leaders, except where the Constitution already requires different approval processes.

(3) Approved that up to £200k of the available funding can be spent on additional training costs. Any spend can be approved by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Resources.

(4) Approved that any spend is subject to cap of £1 million in 2026/27 and £2 million overall.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: This is intended to provide a practical framework for agreeing LGR costs. It aims to allow timely reactions in what will need to be a fast-moving project.

12 2025-26 Q4 COUNCIL PLAN UPDATE

Audio recording – 1 hour 29 minutes 7 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled '2025-26 Q4 Council Delivery Plan Update' and advised that:

- Key Performance Indicator (KPIs) for 2026/27 were detailed within the report.
- The incomplete projects currently within the plan would be retained for 2026/27, with the addition of Royston Learner Pool.
- Three projects had been completed, two had a green delivery status, and three projects had an amber delivery status, which meant that a new milestone due date would be agreed for those.
- Three KPIs had a red status and five KPIs had an amber status, and planned actions for these were detailed at paragraphs 8.4 and 8.5 of the report.
- An agent had been appointed to lead the Expressions of Interest exercise for Charnwood House so that this could be progressed as early as July onwards.
- There was recognition that they needed to keep this plan under review as capacity and resourcing for big projects was an issue for all authorities with Local Government Reorganisation coming up.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted the progress against projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan and approved the changes to the milestones (Appendix 1).
- (2) Noted the performance against the Key Performance Indicators and confirms the actions for those with a red or amber status.
- (3) Approved the Key Performance Indicators and targets for 2026/27 (Appendix 2).
- (4) Approved that the existing incomplete projects on the Council Delivery Plan are carried forward into 2026/27, and that the Royston Learner Pool project is added.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) report provides Cabinet with the opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects and KPIs, including any overall trends. This end of year report also sets the scope (projects and KPIs) for 2026/27 monitoring. Overview and Scrutiny can use these reports to help with setting their work programme.

13 2025-26 YEAR END REPORT OF RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE

Audio recording – 1 hour 35 minutes 7 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- There had been no overall changes to the framework since last year.
- Paragraph 7 of the report showed the risk grid, which contained seven red corporate risks for the Council.
- The two highest scoring risks were related to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and resourcing.
- The Renters Right Act was a new addition to the risk register, although this was not yet a concern and they would continue to monitor this.
- Risk related to financial sustainability should reduce due to the financial position of the Council but there was a potential risk to this from global factors and inflation.
- There were a few risks to monitor but the Committee was broadly happy with the processes in place.

In response to a question from Councillor Sean Nolan, Councillor Poopalasingham advised that the Committee had a brief discussion on the Renters Right Act, but the Committee could not comment much on this at this stage and would continue to monitor it.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Ian Albert advised that the Council Delivery Plan (CDP) set out what actions would be taken on Oughtonhead Common Weir such as appointing a contractor to progress with the work on this.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Director – Resources advised that there was not a high level of risk in not delivering work on Oughtonhead Common Weir, but they would pick this up with the relevant service manager.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled '2025-26 Year End Report on Risk Management Governance' and advised that:

- All areas raised by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee would be kept under review, particularly cyber risks.
- Much of the detail in the report was contained within the Appendix to the report and showed that the Council had effective procedures in place to manage and monitor risks.
- Paragraph 7.1 of the report described corporate and overarching risks.
- The table at paragraph 7.2 detailed actions that would be taken to address red risks, including the actions already completed.
- Sections 9 and 12 of the report monitored performance and training.
- Service risks and activities were outlined at various sections in the report.
- The report concluded with progress against actions and set new actions for 2026/27.

In response to a question from Councillor Donna Wright, the Director – Resources advised that it was up to Cabinet Members to determine which risks should be corporate risks, and that planning would be considered at the next Risk and Performance Management Group.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the report.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it note the report.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To provide assurance that the Council is effectively managing risk. The Council's Risk Management Strategy details that this annual review should be presented to Council. Cabinet have responsibility for the management of risk.

N.B. There was a break at the end of this item and the meeting reconvened at 21:28.

14 REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2025/26 (FINAL)

Audio recording – 1 hour 56 minutes 24 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- The report had been updated for Cabinet to reflect a reduction in the underspend on waste vehicles and the mobilisation of the waste contract, and although this had been funded from waste reserves, this shortfall had impacted the outturn position.
- Appendix A to the report had been considered, which gave a breakdown of variance in the year and the report gave the final outturn position.
- Previous carry forward amounts at paragraph 8.5 demonstrated that delivery was constrained by capacity, and there had been concern over significant variances resulting in a big carry forward to this financial year, as this might constrain capacity further.
- There had been a focus on overspends such as the £169K in relation to Churchgate as indicated on page 489 of the Agenda Reports Pack.
- Loss of commercial waste revenue was noted and mitigations measures for this were considered.
- Apart from variances, the Committee were happy with the outturn.

N.B. Councillor Amy Allen entered the Chamber at 21:29.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Revenue Budget Outturn 2025-26 (Final)' and advised that:

- The number of car parking tickets sold went up by 4.6%, and penalty charge notices had also increased in this period.
- They were happy to take on board comments from the FAR Committee.
- Table 4 in the report looked at budgets, variances and carry forwards and these were carefully reviewed with Directors and Executive Members, but there was an acknowledgment for more transparency on this.
- External expertise would be important for the Churchgate project, but there was recognition that they could be more transparent about the nature of the spend on this.
- There had been further underspend against the budget, but half of this would be carried forward to next year as detailed in Table 4.
- £1.884M would be carried forward as shown at paragraph 8.3 of the report.
- Carry forwards from previous years were displayed in paragraph 8.5 to show that there were multiple planned areas of spend.
- The target level of efficiencies had been met as detailed at paragraph 8.4.
- Performance against corporate financial health income measures was shown at paragraphs 8.6-8.8.
- The General Fund was £17.9M by year end with £1.9M proposed carry forward, which was healthier than the £14.4M net position forecast back in February 2025
- Appendix 1 summarised all the variances across the year.

In response to a question by Councillor Daniel Allen, the Director – Resources advised that the costs incurred from the Public Inquiry for the appeal for the application on Barkway Road, Royston would likely be included if they were incurred before the end of March, but this would be checked.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

As part of the debate, Councillor Sean Nolan highlighted that:

- Combining outputs from risk management around capacity with staffing from Local Government Reorganisation would always be challenging.
- They would need to keep monitoring the above as this was not the first time there had been carry forwards, but they were fortunate to have good staffing levels.
- Everything needed to be done to support staff while the Council existed.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted this report.
- (2) Approved a decrease of £1.385million in the 2025/26 net General Fund expenditure, as identified in section 8, to a total of £21.400million.
- (3) Approved the changes to the 2026/27 General Fund budget, as identified in table 4 and paragraph 8.3, a total £651k increase in net expenditure

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it approves the net transfer from earmarked reserves, as identified in table 9, of £4.925million.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.
- (2) Changes to the Council's balances are monitored and approved.

15 TREASURY MANAGEMENT END OF YEAR REVIEW 2025/26

Audio recording – 2 hours 9 minutes 50 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- Balances were declining due to more capital spend, which meant less funding was available to invest. However, interest rates had stayed higher than expected.
- Interest returned from investments had been lower than the previous year but higher than expected at the beginning of the financial year.
- Inflation had not come down quickly, meaning that the higher than anticipated interest returns would be balanced out by higher spending in other areas.
- The current allocation of investments was shown on page 508 of the Agenda Reports Pack.
- Outstanding investments as of 31 March 2026 were shown at paragraph 8.9 of the report.
- There had been a good return on investments, but this could not always be guaranteed in the long-term.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Treasury Management End of Year Review 2025-26' and advised that:

- £2.08M had been returned from interest on investments, and while higher inflation benefitted their investments, it also impacted North Herts residents, and they sought to balance Council funding wisely.
- The position at the end of year was similar to the position at the end of Q3.
- They were required to note the breach of the strategy earlier in the year as described at paragraph 8.1 of the report, and actions would ensure this would not happen again.
- Investments continued to focus on security and liquidity first.
- Investments at the year end were shown at page 508 of the Agenda Reports Pack, and the one bank investment had now matured.

In response to a question by Councillor Mick Debenham, the Director – Resources advised that Surrey County Council had not gone through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) yet, but there was no risk associated with this as any outstanding investments in authorities that went through LGR would be transferred to one of the new authorities.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of March 2026.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

- (1) Approves the actual 2025/26 prudential and treasury indicators as detailed in Appendix B.
- (2) Notes the annual Treasury Management Review for 2025/26 (Appendix B).

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

16 CAPITAL END OF YEAR REVIEW 2025/26

Audio recording – 2 hours 16 minutes 26 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- Total expenditure against the capital budget over the year, including an underspend of £1.448M was detailed at Table 1 in the report, and areas within the capital schemes in which this had occurred were set out in Table 2.
- The Leisure Centre Decarbonisation project would need to be kept under review due to slippage of timelines and an increase in the project budget to cover additional costs.
- In-year variances on individual capital projects were shown at Table 3.
- Projects successfully completed in 2025/26 were highlighted at paragraph 8.6.
- There was a need to borrow to finance the capital programme as shown at paragraph 8.7 of the report.
- Borrowing had mostly been done internally, and they could continue with this approach as the most significant 2025/26 capital expenditure had already taken place.
- External borrowing needed to be kept under review due to high interest rates.
- Borrowing would impact the budget due to a minimum revenue provision charge.

- The Council were in an overall good position, but they would continue to monitor spending on budgets.
- Councillor Ian Albert was thanked for his attendance at the Committee.

The Director – Resources advised that £1.4M had been budgeted for a minimum revenue provision this year, which was a correction to the figure quoted at the most recent Finance, Audit and Risk Committee meeting.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Capital End of Year Review 2025-26' and advised that:

- Input and comments from Members of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee were welcomed.
- Completed capital projects such as King George V Skate Park and the leisure centre upgrades were fantastic achievements and of huge benefit to residents.
- Just over £1M of capital slippage and a net underspend of £300K was detailed at Table 2, which included the need to increase the budget for the Leisure Centre Decarbonisation project.
- The capacity to deliver would continue to be kept under review.
- £22M spend on capital projects during the year had been shown in Table 4, and this had been mostly funded by internal borrowing.
- The minimum revenue provision costs in 2026/27 would be less than anticipated due to capital slippage, and this would be monitored through quarterly review mechanisms.
- Projects would need to be kept under review moving forward due to Local Government Reorganisation.

In response to a question by Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Sean Nolan advised that they would speak to IT about the laptop refresh and the associated costs with this if Members were required to have a laptop.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Donna Wright seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted expenditure of £22.002million in 2025/26 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.
- (2) Approved the adjustments to the capital programme for 2026/27 as a result of the revised timetable of schemes and other adjustments detailed in table 2, increasing the estimated spend by £1.950million.
- (3) Noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.7 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.
- (4) Approved the application of £1.057million of capital receipts/set aside towards the 2025/26 capital programme, paragraph 8.7 refers.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.

17 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 2 hours 30 minutes 4 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

18 ALLOCATION OF MHCLG HOMELESSNESS GRANT - PART 2

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

Details of minutes taken on this item are restricted due to the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of Section 200A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

19 ALLOCATION OF MHCLG HOMELESSNESS GRANT - PART 1

Audio recording – 2 hours 35 minutes 54 seconds

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Regulatory, presented the report entitled 'Allocation of MHCLG Homelessness Grant – Part 1' and advised that:

- The proposed allocation of MHCLG funding equated to £2.8M of ringfenced funding for statutory homelessness duties over the next three years.
- This report set out proposals for part of the funding, and this would align with grant conditions, national policy and local priorities as detailed in Table 4.
- Most of the funding would support two homelessness schemes in the district operated by Keystage Housing and One YMCA.
- It was proposed to allocate £700K to Keystage Housing over the next three years, with the allocation for this financial year being lower to reflect a £58K interim payment made to them in May.
- It was proposed to allocate £81K to One YMCA to reconfigure existing accommodation to create additional units and increase capacity at their facilities.
- £8K was proposed for Herts Young Homelessness to deliver education programmes to secondary schools.
- £616K would be left over, which was different to the incorrect amount of £674K detailed in Table 4.
- Proposed allocations would support the Council in meeting its statutory homelessness duties, enhance local provision and increase accommodation capacity.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, Councillor Mick Debenham advised that:

- They had been paying Keystage since last March at a reduced rate of housing benefit, and the only risk was them not being able to continue providing their services.
- There was spare capacity as they were not inundated with homelessness.

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

- The district had fewer than 100 households in temporary accommodation.
- Single homeless people were the biggest challenge as they often had multiple needs and it was difficult to resource them, but organisations like One YMCA and Keystage Housing were critical in helping with this.
- Local Government Reorganisation may provide opportunities for extra capacity as they would be grouped with at least one other authority that had its own housing stock, which would increase their flexibility on providing homelessness accommodation.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the funding proposals for the allocation of Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant received from the MHCLG as outlined in Table 4 in paragraph 8.11.

REASON FOR DECISION: There is a need to secure housing services for homeless households in the district, including key existing services on the single homeless pathway. Adopting the recommendation at 2.1 secures the provision of high-quality local services to help those in need, which is also consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029).

20 GA2 ACCESS LAND

Audio recording – 2 hours 43 minutes 32 seconds

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'GA2 Access Land' and advised that:

- This follow-up report sought Cabinet approval to proceed with the option agreement for the potential sale of land that was approved by Cabinet last year.
- Terms for the option agreement were subject to notices being published regarding the appropriation of open space and disposal of the land.
- No objections or representations had been received in response and this stage had been completed.
- This land was required to facilitate access to the GA2 strategic housing site, which would deliver 600 dwellings and associated infrastructure near Great Ashby as seen in the Masterplan approved by Cabinet and ratified by Council in November 2024.
- Access would be required from Mendip Way, which would cross five parcels of land owned by separate parties, including the Council.
- Wider collaboration was required with the four other landowners, and the option agreement would give Picture Estates Ltd the option to acquire the land subject to planning permission being granted.
- The land owned by the Council was currently a playground and any loss from this would be mitigated through new provision in the GA2 development.
- Careful structuring of the agreement had ensured the Council would obtain best value.
- Upfront costs from this process had been covered by the developer and deducted from the proceeds of sale that would be split equally between the five landowners.
- If Cabinet approved this, it would ensure the unlocking of a strategic site and a capital receipt.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Daniel Allen

- Councillor Mick Debenham

In response to questions, the Principal Estates Surveyor advised that:

- If planning permission for this site was not granted, then the option agreement would not be exercised and they would retain ownership of the land in its current use as a playground, but this was unlikely given the agreed allocation.
- Access to the site must come from Mendip Way and the development could not proceed without passing through this land.
- One of the conditions of development would be the satisfactory re-provision and enhancement of the play area.
- There was a small risk that one of the other landowners might not accept a future deal and it could fall through, but this was unlikely as there had been years of discussions and negotiations to get to this point and all landowners would receive a capital receipt from the sale.

In response to questions, Councillor Tamsin Thomas advised that:

- The 600 proposed dwellings would be needed by the district, so it was critical that this happened to unlock the development.
- It was also critical that the enhancement of the playground and open space would take place through this.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

- (1) Noted that the proposals to appropriate open space for planning purposes and dispose of the open space land has been publicly advertised in compliance with the requirements of s122 and s123 of the Local Government Act 1972.
- (2) Appropriated for planning purposes, pursuant to s122 of the Local Government Act 1972, the land that is the subject of the transaction for the purposes of facilitating the development of the GA2 site including the provision of a new access road and associated works and infrastructure.
- (3) Delegated authority to the Director: Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member for Resources, to finalise, complete, sign and seal all necessary documentation associated with the transaction, subject to receipt of valuation advice confirming compliance with the Council's duty under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to obtain best consideration reasonably obtainable.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) Public notices as required by s122 & s123 of the LGA 1972 have been published and no objections or representations have been received by the deadline of 5pm on 15th May.
- (2) The recommendations are made to ensure that access is available to facilitate the development of GA2, a Strategic Housing site allocated in the Local Plan, which will Page 369 Agenda Item 11 assist in the delivery of circa 600 new homes and associated facilities including affordable homes.
- (3) Completion of the sale is also expected to generate a capital receipt.

21 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 2 hours 53 minutes 8 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

22 PART 2 MINUTES – 19 NOVEMBER 2025

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

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

RESOLVED: That the Part 2 Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 19 November 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

23 CHURCHGATE REGENERATION PROJECT UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS - PART 2

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

Details of the minutes taken on this item are restricted due to the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of Section 200A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

24 CHURCHGATE REGENERATION PROJECT UPDATE & NEXT STEPS - PART 1

Audio recording – 3 hours 23 minutes 10 seconds

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

- The Committee appreciated the opportunity to consider the report.
- They were keen to ensure that there was no softening of quality or affordable housing allocation resulting due to the updated process.
- There was concern over the sign off process for this project once the shadow authorities were formed.
- It had also been questioned why the work could not be completed inhouse, but that query had been answered.
- The balance of risk for the Council versus the risk for a developer as the project progressed was also considered.
- Recognition should be given to any increasing costs as these would be borne by the taxpayer.
- Some costs were distorting, but the Committee did not believe that the project had reached a point where there should be a cap on spending.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, Councillor Clayden advised that the point raised during the debate at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting that the project had reached a tipping point was not a formal position that the Committee had taken.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'Churchgate Regeneration Project Update and Next Steps – Part 1' and advised that:

- Since the Full Council meeting in July 2025, the project team had worked to test and progress issues associated with the site including viability, parking, the market and public realm.
- It was important to recognise that the Council was in a stronger position than it was in July last year as there was a clearer understanding of the site and the viability and delivery channels, a stronger technical and financial evidence base and a greater insight into market appetite and delivery expectations.
- Soft market engagement indicated that Hitchin was viewed as an attractive and credible regeneration opportunity with long-term potential whilst acknowledging that it was a complex scheme that would require careful feasibility work and detailed delivery planning.
- The Council was seeking to appoint regeneration specialists to work alongside the project team to refine a deliverable scheme and help to transition ambition into implementation.
- The phased approach would ensure that the investment, funding and risk would remain proportionate to certainty at each stage of the project while progressing the project in a controlled way with strategic oversight and decision-making control.
- Further testing of deliverability and viability would reduce uncertainty before any future long-term delivery decisions were made.
- A confirmation of viability would not compromise the delivery of affordable housing or value for money, and this stage would allow the precise testing of design, quality, viability and delivery considerations together rather than separately.
- The ambition to deliver a high-quality, viable regeneration scheme capable of supporting the long-term vitality and success of Hitchin Town Centre remained.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Sean Nolan

Points raised during the debate included:

- This was the right approach on a hugely important project.
- They would need to ensure clear communication with residents through the Churchgate website and other forms.
- The Project Board needed to urgently look at how they published the documents that were in the Agenda Reports Pack and communicated decisions on the project going forward.
- The documents were specialised and designed for the purpose of developers.
- Stakeholder communication had been considered by the project board, but there was also recognition that the public wanted to see progress, and they should communicate with an aim to demonstrate this.
- Communications Officers could attend project board meetings to ensure more communication.
- Additional layers of communication could be put in place to support the reading of more complex documents.
- The documents on this project were already in the public domain regardless of their appropriateness. Therefore, they should ensure that the information was shown in appropriate way.
- This project was one of the biggest projects the Council had undertaken, and it would be great for Hitchin.

In response to points raised during the debate, the Churchgate Project Manager advised that:

- The background documents were technical working documents on specialised topics prepared for internal decision-making purposes rather than public audiences, and it would be difficult for residents to interpret them without wider context.
- The project board would need to work on how to produce accessible updates for residents that would communicate progress going forward.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed an amendment to include that Cabinet instructs officers to undertake a review of the external communications approach of the Council, with a specific focus on improving transparency, accessibility, and the visibility of key decision-making information.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas accepted the amendment into the substantive motion, and this was also accepted by Councillor Daniel Allen as seconder.

Having been proposed and seconded, as amended and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

- (1) Approves the additional capital / revenue funding set out in the Part 2 report to support the next phase of the Churchgate Regeneration Project.
- (2) Instructs officers to undertake a review of the Council's external communications approach, with a specific focus on improving transparency, accessibility, and the visibility of key decision-making information.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) Since the last Full Council update in July 2025, and subsequent Overview & Scrutiny Committee discussions in February 2026, the Churchgate Regeneration Project has progressed significantly and moved into a substantially more mature and evidence-led phase.
- (2) Over the past year, the Council has undertaken an extensive programme of work to respond directly to key matters raised by Members and stakeholders, including viability, parking, public realm, market provision, delivery options, governance and long-term town centre sustainability. This has included financial analysis, specialist technical work, Project Board workshops and Member briefings.
- (3) This work has enabled the Council to move from high-level vision setting into a more informed, evidence-led and delivery-focused phase.
- (4) Alongside this, the Council has also undertaken early engagement with the development and investment sector to inform future procurement, delivery and partnership decisions. Feedback from this work has demonstrated strong market interest in Hitchin and increased confidence in both the credibility of the opportunity and the Council's commitment to delivering a high-quality regeneration programme for the town centre.
- (5) The recommendations within this report therefore represent a logical progression from the work completed to date and are intended to ensure that future decisions regarding the regeneration of the site are informed, evidence-led and commercially robust.

- (6) The proposed next stage of work is materially different from earlier strategic and visioning exercises. The Council is now seeking to appoint specialist regeneration and development expertise to work alongside the project team in refining a deliverable scheme, testing assumptions in greater detail, reducing uncertainty and supporting the transition from strategic visioning into delivery planning and implementation.
- (7) This phased approach enables the Council to retain control of the project as it develops, whilst ensuring that investment and risk remain proportionate to the level of certainty and information available at each stage.
- (8) The proposed next phase reflects the consistent feedback received through market engagement and specialist advice: that the appropriate next step is a structured feasibility and delivery-planning phase focused on shaping a viable, deliverable and investment ready regeneration scheme for Hitchin town centre.

The meeting closed at 11.20 pm

Chair

Item No	Referred from:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
6A	Date:	8 September 2026
	Title of item:	Allocation of MHCLG Homelessness Grant
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Agenda Item 12

The report considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting held on 8 September 2026 can be found here: [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 8th September, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet approves the funding proposals for the allocation of Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant received from MHCLG as outlined in Table 1 in paragraph 8.13 of the report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) There is a need to secure housing services for homeless households in the district, including key existing services on the single homeless pathway. Adopting the recommendation at 2.1 secures the provision of high-quality local services to help those in need and provides stability into the first year of the new unitary authority.
- (2) The recommendation at 2.1 is consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029) and the Council Plan.

Audio recording – 01 hours 16 minutes 10 seconds

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Regulatory, presented the report entitled 'Allocation of MHCLG Homelessness Grant' and advised that:

- The Council had received multi-year ringfenced funding of £2.88M from MHCLG to help it meet its homelessness duties.
- Cabinet had approved the first allocation of the grant funding on 16 June.
- A 3-year settlement for all but £426K of the remaining grant funding was proposed to ensure service continuity, regardless of the outcome of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- Significant amounts were proposed to be allocated to One YMCA and Lets4U, with smaller amounts proposed for other organisations as detailed in paragraph 8.13 of the report.
- A document detailing the achievements of the housing service over the last two years had been published in the Members Information Bulletin recently.
- The grant allocation would enable the Council to best meet its Housing Strategy.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor Claire Winchester

In response to questions, Councillor Mick Debenham advised that the Government decision to pause LGR in Hertfordshire would have no impact on the allocation of grant funding proposed.

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

- The Council inevitably had to compete with other authorities for properties to house residents both in and outside the district, but the £4-5K detailed in paragraph 8.8 of the report was one of the benchmark figures used for their spending, while also considering value for money against individual household circumstances.
- The unallocated funding for the 28/29 financial year was less as there was likely to be underspending in the first two years, and further funding such as the Rough Sleeper Grant announced by the Government after the report had been published may become available.
- Individuals from North Herts were prioritised over individuals from outside the district, except where the Council had legal responsibilities to look after specific individuals.

Councillor Claire Winchester proposed and Councillor Nigel Mason seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet approves the funding proposals for the allocation of Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant received from MHCLG as outlined in Table 1 in paragraph 8.13 of the report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) There is a need to secure housing services for homeless households in the district, including key existing services on the single homeless pathway. Adopting the recommendation at 2.1 secures the provision of high-quality local services to help those in need and provides stability into the first year of the new unitary authority.
- (2) The recommendation at 2.1 is consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029) and the Council Plan.

Item No	Referred from:	Finance, Audit and Risk Committee
6B	Date:	9 September 2026
	Title of item:	First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2026/27
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Agenda Item 14

The report considered by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee at the meeting held on 9 September 2026 can be found here: [Agenda for Finance, Audit and Risk Committee on Wednesday, 9th September, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That Cabinet note this report.
- (2) That Cabinet approves the changes to the 2026/27 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, an £826k decrease in net expenditure.
- (3) That Cabinet notes the changes to the 2027/28 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £387k increase in net expenditure. These will be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2027/28.
- (4) That Cabinet approve the debt write-off as detailed in paragraph 8.19.3.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.
- (2) To comply with the financial regulations in relation to debt write-offs.

Audio recording – 58 minutes 02 seconds

The Director – Resources presented the report entitled ‘First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2026/27’ and advised that:

- This report was in draft form, and an updated version would be presented to Cabinet.
- Recommendation 2.2 in the report should state an £826K decrease in net expenditure to match the figure in Table 3 of the report, rather than a £662K decrease.
- The highlighted figures for Garden Waste Collection Service Subscriptions detailed in Table 4 were correct, and the Garden Waste Collection Service performance figures in Table 5 were detailed as 29,612 in Q1 2026/27 compared with 27,467 in Q1 2025/26.
- A change relating to lease adjustments and their classification as an asset was detailed in paragraph 7.3 of the report, but this could be subject to change for the Cabinet report.
- Overall, the revenue contribution for the capitalisation of the lease would be off-set by future revenue savings, with the 2026/27 saving shown in Table 3.
- A 3.3% staff pay award increase had been accepted by the union and would be paid to staff this month.

- There were some carry forwards proposed in the report and there there would be a review of all carry-forwards to address the comments on the year-end report.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Paul Ward
- Independent Member John Cannon

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that:

- Bigger contracts such as the waste contract had several mechanisms that would need to be explored throughout the year to assess the impact against the budget for this year and previous projections for future years.
- Inflation assumptions would be reviewed as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy update in November.
- The approach of how the Council conducted equality analysis on savings and investment proposals had been in place for a while. However, the sentiment that a proposal could be adopted by Council without considering the equality implications was noted, and it would be considered how this could be done going forward.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis proposed the recommendations with an amendment to recommendation 2.2 to be an £826K decrease in net expenditure rather than a £662K decrease, and this was seconded by Councillor Brown and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That Cabinet note this report.
- (2) That Cabinet approves the changes to the 2026/27 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, an £826k decrease in net expenditure.
- (3) That Cabinet notes the changes to the 2027/28 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £387k increase in net expenditure. These will be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2027/28.
- (4) That Cabinet approve the debt write-off as detailed in paragraph 8.19.3.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.
- (2) To comply with the financial regulations in relation to debt write-offs.

Item No	Referred from:	Finance, Audit and Risk Committee
6C	Date:	9 September 2026
	Title of item:	First Quarter Capital Budget Monitoring 2026/27
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Agenda Item 15

The report considered by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee at the meeting held on 9 September 2026 can be found here: [Agenda for Finance, Audit and Risk Committee on Wednesday, 9th September, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That Cabinet notes the forecast expenditure of £13.570M in 2026/27 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.
- (2) That Cabinet approves the adjustments to the capital programme for 2027/28, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend by £0.67M.
- (3) That Cabinet notes the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.

Audio recording – 01 hours 10 minutes 27 seconds

The Director Resources presented the report entitled ‘First Quarter Capital Budget Monitoring 2026/27’ and advised that:

- Project timetable changes and the reason for these were outlined in Table 2 of the report.
- Changes to capital spending on S106 related projects were shown in Table 3.
- The forecast capital receipts totalling £3M would be delayed due to reasons as detailed in Table 4, such as ensuring best value for money when disposing of those assets.
- The delay would mean an increase in internal borrowing and the minimum revenue provision in future years until those capital receipts were realised and could be applied as capital funding.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Independent Member John Cannon

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that:

- Walsworth Common Pavilion was linked to S106 funding, and they were awaiting enough of this to cover the majority of its cost.
- There was a need to review the timescale and value of the Walsworth Common Pavilion as this had not been done for several years, but this could be done while setting the Capital Programme for next year.
- Other projects detailed in Table 2 would have been reviewed recently.
- The £140K of forecast spending on S106 projects was just for the first quarter.
- The increase in the capital asset figure at paragraph 8.1 since the last report in June may be due to indexation and re-evaluation since then, but this would be checked and an explanation for the increase would be provided.
- Asset values were not based on their sale value as many of them were specialised.
- The increase of £4.438M on the forecast capital expenditure was capital slippage from the previous financial year.

Councillor Paul Ward proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Clare Billing.

As part of the debate, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis highlighted that:

- Projects which had been on the capital programme for a long time such as the Walsworth Common Pavilion should be reprofiled, index linked, marked up for inflation and evaluated in terms of their risks and viability before coming up with plans for them.
- Executive Members and Directors were urged to undertake the above to determine a suitable course of action for each project.

In response to points raised by Councillor Elizabeth Dennis in the debate, Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, advised that:

- It was agreed that there was a need to review schemes on the capital programme as part of the budget.
- They were keen to proceed with projects that had been on the capital programme for several years, but this would be subject to a viable scheme to deliver them.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That Cabinet notes the forecast expenditure of £13.570M in 2026/27 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.
- (2) That Cabinet approves the adjustments to the capital programme for 2027/28, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend by £0.67M.
- (3) That Cabinet notes the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.

Item No	Referred from:	Finance, Audit and Risk Committee
6D	Date:	9 September 2026
	Title of item:	First Quarter Treasury Management Review 2026/27
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Agenda Item 16

The report considered by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee at the meeting held on 9 September 2026 can be found here: [Agenda for Finance, Audit and Risk Committee on Wednesday, 9th September, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet notes the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of June 2026 and as set out in Appendix 1.

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

Audio recording – 01 hours 23 minutes 52 seconds

N.B. Councillor Paul Ward declared an interest in this item due to his employment and left the Council Chamber for the duration of the item.

The Director – Resources presented the report entitled 'First Quarter Treasury Management Review 2026/27' and advised that:

- More interest on investments had been generated than forecast due to higher than forecast balances and interest rates.
- All investment had taken place in accordance with the Investment Strategy, which allowed the use of call account investments with the bank that the Council used.
- Most of the treasury was split between Government (DMO) and local authority investments, with the full range detailed in the table at paragraph 8.5 of the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Ruth Brown, the Director – Resources advised that there were several DMOs listed as there was one for each individual investment and the rates for those varied depending on when they were invested and the period they were invested for.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet notes the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of June 2026 and as set out in Appendix 1.

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

N.B. Following the conclusion of the item, Councillor Paul Ward returned to the Chamber at 20:59.

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**CABINET
TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan Update

REPORT OF: Chief Executive

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Leader of the Council

COUNCIL PRIORITY: All Priorities;

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet on progress against the agreed Action Plan that was developed following the November 2024 Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). The Action Plan was approved by Cabinet on 18 March 2025, with an update reported to Cabinet on 23 September 2025 and again on 17 February 2026 (alongside the CPC follow up report from the LGA).
2. RECOMMENDATIONS
2.1. That Cabinet note the progress against the agreed Action Plan.
2.2. That Cabinet agrees no further progress updates are required.
3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS
3.1. As the Action Plan is as complete as it is likely to be, plus the need to focus resource on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), it is recommended that no further updates are provided to the Action Plan. To be clear this does not mean that the Council will now ignore the recommendations, but rather reflects that changes have been embedded in how we work and that these have now become business as usual.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. The alternative would be to continue reporting updates from time to time, but that option was discounted for the reasons set out in the report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The current update was taken to the internal Political Liaison Board on 15 July 2026 for discussion and to consult on the proposed way forward. All documents relevant to the CPC process and follow up visit are available on the Council's internal Hub and the Council's external website. The link to the relevant webpage is <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/corporate-peer-challenge>

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 17 July 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. Members will recall the CPC process, which is set out in the previous Cabinet reports as referred to in paragraph 1 of this report. The Action Plan that was developed and agreed following receipt of the peer's recommendations has been regularly updated and reviewed, with approximately six monthly reporting to Cabinet (via Overview and Scrutiny Committee).
- 7.2. The remaining key response to the recommendations has been an updated People Strategy. This has been prepared following consultation with senior managers and Executive Members. The People Strategy, once finalised, will be presented to the Chief Executive (as Head of Paid Service) for approval under delegated authority.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The updated Action Plan is attached at Appendix A, with current RAG ratings against progress. Members will note 8/10 recommendations are Green, 1 is Amber (Prioritise) and 1 is Red (Place Narrative).
- 8.2 The Prioritise recommendation is, put simply, one that will remain ongoing whilst the Council exists. The Council Delivery Plan process has been refined, but the reality of the resource and capacity pressures created by the LGR programme will remain until 31 March 2028 and there will be an ongoing need to prioritise. Therefore it is not possible to complete this action and mark it Green.
- 8.3 Members have previously agreed not to pursue any significant work in relation to the current Place Narrative, due to LGR. Therefore this action will remain Red.
- 8.4 Whilst there is a requirement to produce an Action Plan following the CPC, which is reviewed during the follow up visit, there is no requirement to keep the Action Plan running indefinitely. For reference, following the January 2020 CPC there was no follow up visit (due to Covid) and it was agreed with the then Group Leaders to stop updating the Action Plan in October 2022. This does not appear to have been reported to a committee at the time.
- 8.5 The LGA sets an expectation that a Council will have a CPC every five years. Additionally the LGA can support targeted reviews on particular areas of concern (for example the targeted review of O+S and FAR that took place in January 2023). With the timescales for LGR and the amount of work required to deliver it safely, it is proposed that the Council should not intend to undertake further reviews unless there is a very clear need identified.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

- 9.2 The CPC is a voluntary process and therefore there is no legal obligation to either host a CPC or act upon the recommendations. However, it is best practice to undertake a CPC every five years and having done so, to act upon the issues identified. By doing so, this process is recognised by the LGA as a way to assist councils in meeting their Best Value Duty. The Best Value Duty is a statutory requirement contained within Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 for local authorities to “*make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.*”

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The original CPC report identified a need to better align the financial strategy with organisational priorities, ensuring that there was a real balance between income and expenditure and that there was no longer a reliance on the use of reserves to produce a balanced budget. The CPC follow up report identified there had clearly been progress in aligning service plans with the corporate plan, budget and transformation objectives.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. The CPC process helps to reduce risk by providing a different perspective on the Council. All the five themes of the CPC process can support specific and strategic risk management.
- 11.3. The CPC report identified areas where we can utilise our performance management framework more effectively, which could help with risk mitigation. The follow up report recognised the progress made, but that there was more to do.

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. Where relevant the Council has (and will) consider the equalities implications of actions set out in the Action Plan.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There were staffing resource implications within some of the recommendations in the original CPC feedback report, particularly organisational development and ways of working, which were considered in the development of the action plan. The CPC follow up report identified the good progress made in this respect and the ongoing work. The adoption of the new People Strategy is important for how the workforce is supported and developed over the next two years.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix 1 – CPC Action Plan September 2026

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Anthony Roche	Chief Executive,	anthony.roche@north-herts.gov.uk , Tel: 01462 474 588
Ian Couper	Director Resources	ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk
Isabelle Alajooz	Director Governance	Isabelle.alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk
Amber Smith-Howell	Policy and Strategy Officer	Amber.smith-howell@north-herts.gov.uk
Rachel Cooper	Controls Risk and Performance Manager	Rachel.cooper@north-herts.gov.uk
Jo Keshishian	HR Operations Manager	Jo.keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 [Agenda Cabinet, 18/03/2025 19:30](#) – Pages 281 – 294
- 18.2 [Agenda for Cabinet, 23/09/2025 19:30](#) – Pages 243 – 256
- 18.3 [Agenda for Cabinet, 17/02/2026 19:30](#) – Pages 19 – 52

North Herts Council Corporate Peer Challenge – November 2024
Action Plan adopted by Cabinet 18 March 2025

No.	Recommendation	Action	Led By	Timescale	Update (early July 2026)	
1	Develop the golden thread	We will use the Council Delivery Plan to continue to reflect the major projects that will support the delivery of our Council Plan. We will review our corporate KPIs (supported by an Internal Audit) to assess how they can be improved to reflect our priorities and also provide challenging targets that help to drive improvement	Exec Member & Director – Resources	Completed	Report to PLB (July and August 2025) on areas of Council Plan that could link to KPIs. Agreed added measures for 26/27 and set targets (as appropriate).	
		Alongside the Council Delivery Plan, we will continue to use internal Service Plans to reflect the other key tasks in each Directorate. These will have a focus on supporting the Council Plan, but will also incorporate other statutory requirements. Where appropriate, we will use Service KPIs to support Service Managers and Directors to assess performance.	Executive Members and Directors	Ongoing	Service plans have been adopted using these principles	
		Leadership Team will review all the projects on the Council Delivery Plan and Service Plans on a quarterly basis. This will help manage the delivery of projects and also ensure that they continue to align with the Council Plan and priorities. Executive Members will also be kept informed of progress against Service Plans. Cabinet (through quarterly updates on the Council Delivery Plan) will have regular opportunities to determine any projects that should be included at that level, as well as assess delivery of existing projects, KPIs and risks.	Executive Members and Directors	Ongoing	Circulated to Leadership Team when prepared for Risk and Performance Management Group. Service Plans to capture projects that are not on the Council Delivery Plan.	

		We will carry out a budget consultation exercise during summer 2025 to help inform our budget setting process for 2026/27 onwards. We will use this alongside the 3-year settlement for 2026-29 to assess our funding priorities. This will inform the areas where we will make savings to achieve a balanced budget.	Exec Member & Director – Resources	Completed	Budget consultation took place throughout June and July 2025. Feedback was reported as part of the budget papers.	
		The Digital Transformation oversight group will review what software and processes should be a transformation priority to maximise the organisational benefits. These could be direct financial benefits or through reducing effort that frees up Officer time.	Director – Customers	Ongoing	The programme pivoted in light of Local Government Reorganisation and continues to deliver improvements (see rec 9).	
		We have carried out a review of the capital programme to assess the likely timing of delivery and any projects no longer needed. The budget setting process for 2025/26 has also provided an opportunity to assess new and existing proposals. We will add new capital projects (e.g. Churchgate) when we have a defined plan and a reliable estimate of timing and costs.	Exec Member & Director – Resources	Ongoing	Council report July 2025 flags the capital implications of the Churchgate project, although it is still too early to attach figures to the project. This is again acknowledged in the July 2026 Council report.	
		As staff regular performance reviews are carried out, the priorities within them will be linked to the priorities in the Council Plan, Council Delivery Plan and Service Plans.	All managers	Ongoing	Leadership Team monitor completion of RPRs, as part of regular HR update	
2	Prioritise	We will use the Council Delivery Plan to track progress against our key corporate projects. As well as the formal discussion of this at Cabinet, we will also start to discuss it on a regular basis at Political	PLB	Ongoing	The Council Delivery Plan process has been refined. The demands of the LGR delivery programme mean that will be an	

		Liaison Board. We will agree which are the most important priorities for North Hertfordshire. This will allow earlier discussion of how the projects are helping to deliver our priorities and any blockages to delivery. Where blockages are caused by staffing resources we can assess where there may be opportunities to prioritise projects, based on the staff required (as usually requires specialist knowledge and skills) and relative importance of projects.			ongoing need to prioritise our work.	
3	Place Narrative	Subject to securing suitable funding, we will seek additional capacity to identify the opportunities available to promote our North Herts Place Narrative across the district. The most effective opportunities will then be included in a Marketing & Communications plan that the consultancy will be responsible for creating, executing, and measuring, with support from the North Herts Council communications and Economic Development teams.	Exec Members & Director - Customers, Director – Enterprise	Not pursuing	Due to local government reorganisation in Hertfordshire, it has been agreed not to actively pursue this work. We will continue to use the North Herts Place Narrative assets but will not commit resource to actively promoting it.	
4	Partnerships	We will continue to look for opportunities with partners, wherever interests can be aligned. We will continue to work closely with Herts Growth Board, HCCSP and others, taking leading roles where appropriate.	Cabinet and Leadership Team Cabinet and Leadership Team	Ongoing Ongoing	We are discussing with neighbouring councils potential opportunities through LGR eg housing, planning. CEx is on the Delivery Unit oversight group, overseeing whole programme. CEx and Director Customers are strategic leads for two of the workstreams, with all other Directors (and some senior managers) also involved in	

		The new leadership team structure includes a strategic health lead, which seeks to work more closely with the NHS through the work of the ICB.	Director Regulatory	Ongoing	working groups. The Leader is taking an active role at Herts Leaders Group. We continue to try to engage with health to explore opportunities for greater co-operation, however the ICB is currently focussed on their own restructure.	
5	Leadership	A leadership team restructure has been agreed and will be in place from 1 April 2025. There will also be further changes in the leadership team during the course of 2025, with two retirements. We will put in place a learning and development programme to integrate new members to the Leadership Team, build relationships and explore ways to re-energise the organisation, with visible officer leadership and more strategic impact. We will look to create opportunities for more in-person communications, for example an annual staff conference, attending different team meetings and visiting front line service areas.	Chief Executive and Directors Leadership Team	Completed Ongoing	The structure was implemented and all director roles are filled. The Cabinet portfolios have been aligned to the director responsibilities, to streamline and simplify arrangements. Learning and development for LT has been undertaken and will be kept under review in light of upcoming LGR. The first staff conference was delivered, with three sessions taking place during September 2025. The second annual staff conference is diarised for three dates in September 2026.	
6	Organisational Development	We will create a new HR strategy that reflects our priorities and how we develop existing staff and recruit new staff to deliver them. As we know that there will be some changes in the Leadership Team over the summer, we will do the majority of this work over the Autumn to ensure that it can capture the views of the new Directors. We will be clear on the importance of learning and development, even when	Exec Member & Director - Resources	[Completed] Ongoing	The People Strategy has been developed, for approval by the Chief Executive. This is emphasised in the People Strategy and is reflected in the	

		there is a need to reduce our spend. We will use our new Learning Management System to help with accessing training. We will review how we carry out our Regular Performance Reviews (appraisal) to make it simple, effective and aligned to the golden thread. We will use workforce data to inform how we address succession planning, recruitment and retention, with appropriate plans in place.		Ongoing	decision to allocate LGR funds to support training and development of staff. This has been reviewed, although need to strike a balance between simplicity and ensuring it covers all necessary areas. The People Strategy picks up these themes within its priorities.	
7	Ways of Working	We will relaunch our values with Officers and Councillors. This includes listening to and considering the views of each other, and work together and support each other to be the best organisation we can be. Executive members will present committee reports at meetings We will look at light touch staff surveys to check in with staff, which can also be used to reinforce expectations of behaviour. We will review our approach to whistleblowing training, in order to raise awareness across the organisation. We will consider adoption of any new model Code of conduct for Councillors	Member training champions and Leadership Team Cabinet Director - Resources Director - Governance Standards committee/ Director - Governance	Completed Ongoing Ongoing Completed When available	The values have been relaunched, using the phrase ALL In Together as a reminder (Adaptable, Learning, Listening, Inclusive, Together) This is the practice adopted This is the practice adopted Whistleblowing training has been delivered to Directors and representatives from each directorate. New code awaited. In the meantime, Council adopted the Code of Good Practice for Statutory Officers.	

8	Performance Management	We have updated the Council Delivery Plan to be clearer on any indicators that do not meet the green performance threshold. The report highlights the actions that will be taken to seek to improve performance, and we will continue to work on the explanations that Cabinet and O&S need.	Exec Member & Director – Resources	Completed		
		Internal Audit will benchmark our performance indicators to see how the measures and the target values compare to others. We will use that audit report to reflect on how we use the indicators to drive improvement We will also have an annual review of indicators that consistently achieve a green rating to assess how realistic it would be to set a more stretching target, and the benefits to residents that it would provide.		Completed	Agreed added measures for 26/27 and set targets (as appropriate).	
				Ongoing	Cabinet reviews the KPI targets annually.	
9	Modernisation	The digital transformation initiative is a key component of our corporate plan, guided by an Oversight group that provides strategic direction and prioritisation. This programme encompasses the upskilling of staff across the Council and the provision of appropriate tools to support their roles. Several workstreams are currently underway, including a partnership with an apprenticeship provider to develop skills in business transformation, AI, and data insights. A significant aspect of the digital programme involves the review and redesign of Council processes to enhance efficiency. We have recruited a	Exec Member & Director - Customers	Ongoing	The programme is ongoing and has helped support the launch of the new waste contract. The programme is reviewed and reprioritised in light of LGR, however appropriate transformation work continues.	
				Ongoing	Work is ongoing. First cohort of those undertaking digital qualifications completed. We are also supporting digital inclusion	

		dedicated Digital Business Analyst (BA) for this purpose, and through this work, we anticipate the transfer and upskilling of BA skills. Ongoing engagement with staff and Councillors is planned, alongside the development of our rolling communications plan. Additionally, a controlled pilot of using AI (Microsoft Copilot) is underway to identify use cases and assess the potential efficiency impact across various areas within the Council.		Ongoing	and upskilling across the district by partnering with North Herts & Stevenage CVS to deliver a range of digital inclusion initiatives This work is being delivered in phases as resource allows.	
10	Project Management	See response to recommendation 2, which covers resourcing of ongoing projects. For larger capital projects we will move towards incorporating project management into the capital cost, to reflect the required capacity and ensuring the total cost is considered as part of the overall project appraisal. We have a process for collecting lessons learnt from projects. By improving the project reporting to Leadership Team (included in the response to recommendation 1) we will have better understanding on when smaller projects have completed, so can work with those project managers to ensure that we collate lessons learnt. Having more lessons learnt, which may also be more relevant to a wider audience, will allow us to produce regular updates to share across the Council.	Exec Member & Director - Resources	Ongoing Ongoing	Churchgate report to July 2025 Council sought budget for the appointment of an experienced project manager, to help support the delivery of the project. This was approved and an individual recruited. July 2026 Council report seeks further specialist support. Reports will come to LT when completed, or on an exception basis as required. Lessons learned exercise imminent for the waste contract procurement and service change roll out.	

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**CABINET
TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2026**

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

REPORT OF: NIGEL SMITH, DIRECTOR OF PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR DONNA WRIGHT, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLACE

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

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report seeks approval for the Local Plan - Content and Evidence Base document for consultation. The Content and Evidence Base document is the second stage in the new plan-making system. Its purpose is to present the Council's emerging policy approach across a range of thematic areas and what evidence has been or will be collected to support the Local Plan. It will also explain which planning matters will be addressed through the new National Development Management Policies.

1.2 It is accompanied by the following supporting documentation:

Documents for Consultation:

- Content and Evidence Base document
- Site Submission Map referenced at section 8.21
- Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Health Impact Assessment

Documents Published for Information

- Gateway 1 Assessment
- Scoping Consultation Summary Report
- Community Engagement Strategy
- Evidence Base Reports published to date

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Cabinet notes the following documents:

- Consultation Summary Report – scoping consultation (Appendix A)
- Gateway 1 self-assessment (Appendix B)
- Consultation and Engagement Strategy (Appendix C)

2.2 That the Cabinet approves the Local Plan using a plan-period of 11 years from 2029 – 2040

2.3	That Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Director of Place, to amend and update the Statement of Community Involvement.
2.4	That Cabinet approves for consultation, the following documents: • Content and Evidence Base document (Appendix D) • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (Appendix E) • Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix F) • Health Impact Assessment (Appendix G) and delegates to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member of Place, to make any minor updates of a non-substantive nature to these documents, including in relation to any updates on Local Government Reorganisation.
3.	REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS
3.1.	To ensure the Council continues to meet the agreed milestones set out in the published timetable required under new Plan-making system.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Plan period

- 4.1. The draft NPPF set out a requirement for local plans to cover a minimum of 15 years. The final NPPF, published on 17 August 2026, reduced this requirement to a minimum of 10 years with Spatial Development Strategies covering a period of 25-30 years. Officers are proposing that the new Local Plan covers a period of 11 years starting from 2029 (expected data of adopted) to 2040. This is considered to be an appropriate timeframe in terms of allocating sufficient sites to meet the District's needs, based on the Government's housing standard method, and ensuring there is a buffer incase sites do not come forward in the way they are envisioned as well as allowing more complex sites with longer lead in times to be considered as part of the new Spatial Development Strategies. Further details are set out in section 8.21.

Spatial Development Options

- 4.2. Four spatial development options were considered in terms of how development could come forward as part of the new Local Plan's spatial strategy. These are considered to be the most realistic and deliverable options for accommodating the District's growth. It should be noted that the Sustainability Appraisal highlights that it is unlikely that any of the growth options would be able to accommodate the District's growth in full; and therefore, the spatial strategy is likely to need to include all 4 to various degrees either through the Local Plan period or beyond as part of the Spatial Development Strategy.

Timing of publication of Content and Evidence Document

- 4.3. Cabinet endorsed the overall timetable for the Local Plan at its April 2026 meeting. This followed a Key Decision at the January 2026 Cabinet meeting to support an expedited timetable for the new Local Plan once the relevant legislation and regulations had been laid and enacted.

- 4.4. The Council is required to publish its Gateway 1 self-assessment by 31 October 2026 as a condition of the funding received from MHCLG. While the Council could have delayed publication of the Content and Evidence document and supporting materials until further elements of the evidence base had been completed, publication of the Gateway 1 assessment triggers the requirement for the Local Plan to be prepared within 30 months. Publishing at the Content and Evidence document at this stage provides the Council with the maximum amount of time available to progress the subsequent, more formal stages of plan preparation.
- 4.5. There is also a requirement for a Gateway 2 assessment to take place between consultation on the Content and Evidence document and publication of the Draft Local Plan. Gateway 2 provides an opportunity for the Planning Inspectorate to advise the Council on the emerging direction of travel of the Plan, including its policies, scope and supporting evidence base. Although the timing of Gateway 2 is at the discretion of the local authority, it must take place sufficiently far into the process for meaningful advice to be provided, while also allowing sufficient time for the Council to consider and respond to that advice through policy amendments and/or the preparation of additional evidence. Publishing the Content and Evidence document at the earliest opportunity within the 30-month timeframe places the Council in the most flexible position to determine when Gateway 2 would be of greatest value.
- 4.6. Publishing the Content and Evidence document at the earliest opportunity within the 30-month timeframe also reduces the risk of the Draft Local Plan not being ready for consultation prior to the implementation of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The (potential) relationship with LGR is discussed further in Section 8, at 8.27 onwards.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 A series of member workshops have been held over the past year on a range of issues that have informed the proposals set out in the Content and Evidence Base document. All Members were invited to attend these workshops.
- 5.2 The proposals contained within the Content and Evidence document have also been informed by responses received during consultation on the Local Plan Scoping Document, which took place between 11 May and 28 June 2026.
- 5.3 Internal consultation has been undertaken with relevant officers across Council departments to inform the preparation of the Content and Evidence document.
- 5.4 The draft structure and content of the Content and Evidence document have been considered by the Council's informal Strategic Planning Project Board, which includes cross-party representation from all political groups. The Project Board is chaired by the Executive Member for Place.

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 17 July 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The new plan-making system came into effect on 25 March 2026. There are five main stages to the new system:
- Get Ready period – includes notice of intention, publishing timetable and scoping consultation, Gateway 1 Assessment
 - Preparing the Plan
 - a. Content and Evidence document consultation
 - b. Gateway 2 assessment
 - c. Draft Local Plan consultation
 - d. Gateway 3 Assessment
 - Examination
 - Adoption
 - Monitoring
- 7.2. Local Authorities are required to adopt their Local Plans within 30 months from the date they publish their Gateway 1 assessment. Further details of the new system were set out in the 20 January Cabinet papers.
- 7.3. As part of the Get Ready period, North Herts Council published a Notice of Intention to commence Plan making and a timetable on 24 April 2026. These can be found: [New Local Plan | North Herts Council](#)
- 7.4. The Council undertook a Scoping Consultation between 11 May – 28 June 2026 which sought views on what issues and priorities the Local Plan should include and asked communities how they would like to be involved throughout the process.
- 7.5. The consultation was published as follows:
- The outlook magazine, which was sent to every household
 - Emails were sent to everyone on the Local Plan database
 - Hard copies were available in the Council Offices and every library
 - Posters in libraries
 - Social media posts and webpage
- 7.6. Officers attended the five Community Forums to present the scoping document and answer questions.
- 7.7. There were 75 responses from a range of groups including residents, developers and government bodies/ statutory consultees. Issues raised through this consultation have informed the content and evidence document. The main issues raised included recognition of the housing challenges and that the targets set by Government should be seen as a minimum, ensuring sufficient infrastructure to support growth, support for a continued focus on environmental issues and climate change mitigation. In terms of engagement there was support for the range of mediums set out in the scoping document; with some suggestions for how to improve inclusivity of future engagements. These have been taken forward as part of the Community Engagement Strategy.
- 7.8. A consultation summary report setting out the Council's response to that consultation and how it has informed the Content and Evidence document is attached in **Appendix A**.

- 7.9. As part of the new plan-making system, the Council is required to publish a Gateway 1 assessment at the end of its Get Ready period. This is a self-assessment of how prepared the Council is to start the more formal stages of the plan-making process. There is a standardised template for use by local authorities. The Council's Gateway 1 assessment is attached in **Appendix B**.
- 7.10. A Community Engagement Strategy will also be published alongside the Content and Evidence document. As part of the scoping consultation on the Local Plan in May – June 2026, we asked our communities and other stakeholders how they wanted to be engaged as part of the scoping consultation. The strategy sets out a list of different stakeholders we will engage with and a commitment from the Council to engage in a variety of mediums at the different stages. The Community Engagement Strategy is set out in **Appendix D**.
- 7.11. The Community Engagement Strategy will replace the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which is now no longer a requirement of the new plan-making process. Upon any approval of the Community Engagement Strategy, the SCI 'falls away' as a statutory document. However, the SCI had a broader remit covering all aspects of planning, including Development Management. There is guidance within this document that will be retained pending consideration of how and where these expectations should be set out in future. Subject to approval by the Executive Member for Place in liaison with the Director of Place, a revised copy of the SCI will be prepared and published in due course as non-statutory guidance.
- 7.12. Cabinet members are requested to note the Consultation Summary Report; the Gateway 1 Assessment, and the Community Engagement Strategy.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 7.13. As set out in the Strategic Planning Matters paper for this Cabinet, the Government published the final NPPF on 17 August 2026. The draft NPPF was published for consultation in December 2025 and set out new requirements in relation to what Local Plans are required to plan for as well as introduce National Development Management Policies which should not be duplicated in Local Plans. The April Cabinet Strategic Planning Matters paper sets out North Herts officer response to that consultation. The Content and Evidence document has been updated to reflect the final NPPF requirements both in terms of plan making and in relation to NDMPs.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Content and Evidence document is set out in **Appendix D**. It is the second stage of consultation in the new plan-making system. Its purpose is to present the Council's emerging policy approach across a range of thematic areas, identifying where existing Local Plan policies are proposed to be carried forward and where new or revised policies are being developed. It will also explain which planning matters will be addressed through the new National Development Management Policies (NDMPs) and therefore do not need to be replicated within the new Local Plan.

- 8.2 The document summarises the key findings of the evidence base prepared to date and demonstrates how this evidence has informed the emerging policy direction. In addition, it identifies areas where further evidence is currently being commissioned or remains to be prepared.
- 8.3 Importantly, the new Local Plan is being prepared as an entirely new plan rather than a review or update of the existing Local Plan. This reflects the significant changes to national planning policy, legislation and plan-making requirements introduced under the new planning system.
- 8.4 The document is structured around the following chapters:
- Introduction
 - Vision and Measurable Outcomes
 - Our North Herts – Context
 - Spatial Strategy
 - Homes
 - Economy and Employment Opportunities
 - Town Centres
 - Natural Environment
 - Climate Change
 - Transport and Connectivity
 - Communities and Placemaking
 - Communications and Utilities
- 8.5 Whilst the Content and Evidence Document is substantial in length, it is performing an important role for the public in explaining the transition from the current Local Plan to the new Local Plan, particularly in relation to the relationship with the new NPPF changes.
- 8.6 Despite the length of the Content and Evidence Document, it is anticipated that the Local Plan itself will be significantly more concise. This is because it will focus primarily on locally specific policies and site allocations, with matters covered by NDMPs addressed at the national level rather than repeated within the Plan.

Local Plan period

- 8.7 The Local Plan will need to establish a clear plan period to define the timeframe it covers. The draft NPPF expected local plans to cover a period of around 15–20 years, while higher-level spatial development strategies (SDS) would cover a longer timeframe of 20–30 years. The final NPPF has changed this expectation and now states that local plans should cover a minimum of 10 years with SDS expected to cover at least 25 years.
- 8.8 It is therefore proposed that the Local Plan covers the period 2029–2040, representing a 11-year plan period. This approach aligns the start of the plan period with the

anticipated adoption date of the plan (2029). Although housing delivery rates in the District have increased since adoption of the current Local Plan (November 2022), they are still significantly beneath the Government's expectation of approximately 1,000 homes per year. Commencing the plan period in 2029 reduces the risk of North Herts being behind schedule before it has 'passed go'. It also recognises that housing delivery rates from existing strategic sites should improve over the coming years as these sites continue to progress through the development pipeline. A shorter timeframe also helps align North Herts with neighbouring authorities with whom we will be with as part of LGR.

Supporting documentation

Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

- 8.9 A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) scoping report, which incorporates the requirements of a Sustainable Environment Assessment, has been prepared. A SA assesses the likely social, economic and environmental impacts of the Local Plan, including reasonable alternatives; and identifies opportunities, minimise negative effects and improve the overall outcomes of our Plan. The SA involves five stages:
- Stage A – collecting the baseline information, identifying sustainability issues and challenges and developing SA framework
 - Stage B – testing the Local Plan objectives against SA framework and assessing reasonable alternatives
 - Stage C – prepare the SA report
 - Stage D – consult on SA report
 - Stage E – prepare and publish
- 8.10 The SA scoping report covers the first two stages in the SA process – Stage A and B. The SA scoping report, which initially included the baseline information and proposed SA framework, was consulted on between October and November 2025 with the statutory consultees – Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England – as per the requirements. Comments received during the consultation were carefully reviewed and considered, and where appropriate incorporated into the assessment framework. This informed the preparation of a post-consultation updated version of the SA Scoping Report, which is Part 1 of the report.
- 8.11 The updated Scoping Report establishes the Sustainability Appraisal Framework that will be used to assess the likely social, economic and environmental effects of the plan. The framework comprises 11 Sustainability Appraisal objectives, each supported by a set of appraisal questions. Together, these objectives and questions will guide the appraisal of plan policies, site allocations and reasonable alternatives, enabling sustainability considerations to be integrated throughout the plan-making process.
- 8.12 The appraisal of four spatial development options, as set out in the Content and Evidence document, comprises the second part of the report. These options are not mutually exclusive and many Local Plans (including our current one) ultimately adopt a 'hybrid'

approach. The appraisal indicates that all four growth options have the potential to contribute to sustainable development, but they perform differently across the environmental, social and economic objectives.

- Growth Option 1: Infill Development and Urban Intensification performs strongly in a number of areas such as making efficient use of previously developed land, supporting sustainable transport, reducing the need to travel and making best use of existing services and infrastructure. However, it is highly unlikely to meet the District's identified housing needs in full, which could have wider social and economic implications, including reduced delivery of affordable housing, increased housing affordability pressures, difficulties in meeting the needs of different groups within the community, and constraints on economic growth due to a limited supply of homes for the local workforce. There are also other potential impacts on biodiversity, heritage and local character, which are more limited in scale and more capable of mitigation. By not meeting the District's housing targets could lead to increased risk of speculative applications and appeals in the longer term.
- Growth Option 2: Urban Expansion also performs positively across most sustainability objectives, offering significant opportunities to deliver housing, infrastructure, employment and green infrastructure in accessible locations. Although it involves some environmental trade-offs, particularly relating to greenfield land and landscape impacts, these can be reduced through comprehensive planning and mitigation measures.
- Growth Option 3: Dispersed Village Growth generates a more mixed sustainability outcome. It can support rural communities, local services and village economies, but is generally less effective at promoting sustainable transport, reducing carbon emissions and delivering strategic infrastructure. The dispersed nature of development can also lead to greater environmental and accessibility challenges. As with Option 1, it is also highly unlikely to meet the District's identified housing needs in full with consequential implications for affordable housing and affordability pressures more generally; as well as potentially leading to more speculative applications in the longer term if housing targets are not met.
- Growth Option 4: New Settlement performs most strongly overall, providing significant opportunities to deliver housing, jobs, infrastructure, community facilities, sustainable transport and environmental enhancements as part of a comprehensively planned development. While it would result in some greenfield land loss and landscape change, these impacts are largely outweighed by the longer-term sustainability benefits.

8.13 The full findings are set out in the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report in **Appendix E**.

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- 8.14 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Content and Evidence document. It provides a baseline of data related to each protected characteristic group as identified by the Equality Act 2010 within North Hertfordshire, sets out key issues that the Local Plan should cover in relation to each protected characteristic, creates a framework to identify potential positive and negative impacts of the Local Plan and whether any mitigation is required. It also assesses the potential impacts of the spatial development options set out in the Content and Evidence document. We have also included an assessment of people who experience socio-economic disadvantage bearings on equality of life opportunities.
- 8.15 The assessment indicates that all growth options have the potential to deliver positive outcomes for residents, although the nature, scale and distribution of benefits and impacts vary.
- Growth Option 1: Infill Development and Urban Intensification is likely to have generally positive equality impacts due to good access to existing services, facilities, employment and public transport. Potential negative effects may arise where growth places pressure on infrastructure, green spaces or housing affordability.
 - Growth Option 2: Urban Expansion is expected to deliver predominantly positive equality outcomes, particularly where development is supported by timely delivery of infrastructure, services, employment opportunities and sustainable transport. Risks primarily relate to infrastructure delays, affordability and environmental impacts.
 - Growth Option 3: Dispersed Village Growth is likely to result in a mix of positive and negative impacts. While it can support rural communities and local services, it may reduce access to employment, healthcare, public transport and other facilities, particularly for more vulnerable groups.
 - Growth Option 4: New Settlement has the potential to deliver strong positive equality outcomes through the comprehensive planning of homes, jobs, transport and community infrastructure. However, benefits will depend on infrastructure and services being delivered alongside housing growth.

- 8.16 The full findings of the EQIA Scoping Report is set out in **Appendix F**.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

- 8.17 The Health Impact Assessment is set out in **Appendix G**. The HIA has been prepared to assess how our Local Plan could affect the health and wellbeing of people living, working and spending time in North Hertfordshire. Although a HIA is not a legal requirement, it is an important part of developing a Local Plan that supports healthy,

sustainable communities and aligns with the Council's commitment to improving quality of life for residents.

8.18 The report sets out a baseline of information and assesses the four strategic development growth options against the wider determinants of health¹ as set out in the Content and Evidence document.

- Growth Option 1: Infill Development and Urban Intensification This option is expected to have a generally positive impact on health and wellbeing by focusing development in locations with good access to services, jobs, public transport and existing infrastructure. It can encourage active travel, reduce car dependency and support urban regeneration which are important aspects of the wider determinants of health. However, positive outcomes will depend on good design, protection of green spaces and timely infrastructure provision.
- Growth Option 2: Urban expansion has the potential to deliver significant health benefits through new homes, community facilities, green infrastructure and sustainable transport connections. However, there is a risk of negative impacts if development results in the loss of greenfield land, increased car dependency or delays in infrastructure delivery. Overall, the health impacts are likely to be strongly positive where growth is comprehensively planned and supported by appropriate infrastructure.
- Growth Option 3: Dispersed Village Growth: This option could support the vitality of rural communities by helping to sustain local services, meet housing needs and maintain community cohesion, which is important for the health and well-being, particularly those more vulnerable or isolated. However, challenges relating to transport accessibility, car dependency and the capacity of local infrastructure may limit health benefits. Overall, the likely health impacts are mixed but generally positive if growth is carefully managed and supported by improvements to infrastructure and services.
- Growth Option 4: New Settlement
A new settlement has the greatest potential to deliver positive health outcomes because it allows healthy placemaking principles, green infrastructure, community facilities and sustainable transport networks to be planned and delivered in an integrated way from the outset. However, benefits depend on successful site selection, infrastructure delivery and transport connectivity, and are unlikely to be realised in the short to medium term. Overall, this option is expected to have significantly positive long-term health impacts.

Consultation Arrangements

¹ identified through the Hertfordshire Healthy and safe Framework [Herts Healthy and Safe Places Framework](#)

- 8.19 The consultation for the Content and Evidence document is scheduled to run from 13 October to 24 November 2026 for a period of six weeks, in accordance with Government requirements. The following documents will be published as part of the consultation:

Documents for Consultation:

- Content and Evidence document
- Site Submission Map*
- Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Health Impact Assessment

Documents Published for Information

- Gateway 1 Assessment
- Scoping Consultation Summary Report
- Community Engagement Strategy
- Evidence Base Reports published to date

- 8.20 The Content and Evidence document refers to various reports and studies that have currently been published or are expected to be published. These can be found on the Local Plan -evidence base page of the website. [Evidence base | North Herts Council](#)

- 8.21 *The Site Submission Map was published separately in September 2026 to allow communities, parish councils and other stakeholders sufficient time to understand the location and nature of submitted sites in advance of the formal consultation starting in on 13 October 2026. The information provided for each site includes:

- Site boundary (red line)
- Site identification number
- Site area (hectares)
- Proposed use, as submitted by the site promoter
- Site allocation reference, where applicable, for current Local Plan allocations

- 8.22 No assessment of the sites will be published at this stage. Internal consideration of the sites will continue. This will include informal engagement with Members prior to formal consultation on the draft Local Plan next year.

- 8.23 The Site Submission Map includes all sites submitted through the Call for Sites process, together with allocations contained within the current Local Plan that either do not have planning permission or have planning permission but development had not commenced as at 31 March 2026. This approach ensures that sites with extant permissions which have yet to be implemented remain within the assessment process and are not excluded should permissions subsequently lapse.

- 8.24 As part of allocating a range of size of sites in order to provide a more robust pipeline for delivery, the NPPF requires Local Plans to set 10% of allocations of sites of no larger

than 1ha and a further 10% of sites between 1ha and 2.5ha, unless there are strong reasons for not doing so. It should be noted that of the sites currently submitted, there is a lack of sites of no larger than 1ha and of between 1 and 2.5ha. In addition, there is a lack of brownfield/infill sites. Sites of this nature often have limited incentive to engage with a Local Plan process as they can be brought forward far more quickly through the development management system. However, we will continue to promote these requirements. Sites can continue to be submitted as part of the call for sites until the end of the consultation period on the Content and Evidence document.

- 8.25 Publishing the Site Submission Map in advance of the consultation will provide local communities, parish councils and town councils with an opportunity to review and discuss sites of relevance before submitting formal representations. At the same time, retaining a six-week consultation period will enable the Council to maintain progress against its Local Plan programme and the objective of adopting a new Local Plan within 30 months.
- 8.26 To support effective consultation management and analysis, each consultation document listed above will be presented as a separate consultation item on the Council's digital engagement platform, allowing respondents to provide comments on individual documents and topics. There will also be an Easy Read version of the Content and Evidence document on the website.

Relationship to LGR and future strategic planning

- 8.27 Arrangements for new unitary authorities in Hertfordshire were announced in July 2026. As Members will be aware, these authorities were to be vested in April 2028. Most of North Hertfordshire will be incorporated into a Central Hertfordshire authority with Stevenage and the significant majority of Welwyn Hatfield. Royston and surrounding areas will become part of the East Hertfordshire & Broxbourne unitary.
- 8.28 An overview of plan-making activities in these areas is provided in the Strategic Planning Matters report, with all authorities in regular and ongoing contact. At present, most of the authorities are working on the basis that one more round of District-level local plans can be achieved, and provide the best possible planning platform, for the new authorities. The general expectation in government guidance is that new, 'inheriting' authorities would complete the work of their predecessors. The post-examination stages of decision-making require plans which have been found sound to be adopted.
- 8.29 As it presently stands, the (constituent parts of) the new Unitary authorities cannot begin plan-making work on a new Unitary Plan for their areas until 1 April 2028 and would then need to work through the same stages outlined above. The announcements on 8 September of the pause to LGR provides further importance to progressing the new North Herts Local Plan. This means any new Unitary Plans would now be highly unlikely to be adopted prior to 2033 at the very earliest (if at all). This poses significant risks given the present picture of housing supply and delivery.

- 8.30 This approach has been considered, and is being considered, through relevant LGR work programmes on an ongoing basis. The current approach has been endorsed by Chief Executives on the basis that arrangements should be kept under continuous review. Officers are also working with MHCLG to obtain clarity on any transitional arrangements and / or any scope to undertake preparatory works on unitary footprints in advance of 2028.
- 8.31 In practical terms, officers anticipate an additional, informal 'gateway' with LGR partners in late 2026 / early 2027 to inform a collective and consistent decision on whether individual plans should proceed to draft stage or whether there is now scope to 'fold in' work to date to a different process.
- 8.32 Alongside this, the new plan-making system also reintroduces the concept of higher-level strategic plans in the form of a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). Responsibility for the SDS presently sits with Hertfordshire County Council but would pass to a future strategic authority or mayoral authority.
- 8.33 An SDS would set out the approach on strategic matters – such as the broad distribution of development, any requirements for Green Belt reviews and other 'larger than local' issues such as strategic infrastructure or regionally significant employment. Lower tier Local Plans should be in conformity with the SDS.
- 8.34 At present, preparatory work on any SDS is running significantly behind the Local Plan. In that regard, it is presently expected that any SDS will follow / reflect the shorter-term strategies set out in this generation of emerging plans and then set a longer-term vision and framework for the subsequent generation of unitary plans into the 2050s. As with local plans, this position is kept under review but it is presently anticipated this position is less likely to change significantly or in a way that fundamentally impacts upon the Local Plan.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The preparation of Local Plans is governed largely by Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (PCPA) (as presently amended).
- 9.2. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 paves the way for reforms to the plan-making process through amendments to the PCPA 2004. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 came into force on March 25, 2026. They set out the detailed process for the preparation of new-style plans
- 9.3. Cabinet holds a general power under Section 5.7.18 of the Constitution to exercise the Authority's functions as Local Planning Authority. Certain stages of plan-making, namely submission to the Secretary of State and adoption, are reserved to Full Council.

- 9.4. The detailed provisions of the Constitution are currently under review to assure alignment with the terminology and requirements of the new legislation and associated regulations. If necessary, these will be presented through the constitutional update to be presented to Full Council in October. However, the Director: Governance retains a general delegated authority to amend the constitution in response to legislative changes as set out in Section 2 of the constitution

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Local Plan Review and other planning documents are being produced from existing budgets including reserves that have been earmarked for this purpose. The current budget allocated for Local Plan is £691k. Although as set out below there is some risk as to whether the currently allocated resources will be sufficient.
- 10.2 The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in September 2024 set an expectation that the Local Plan Review will be delivered within existing resources. In broad terms, the costs of a Local Plan increase as it makes progress through the stages. The pre-submission plan (or equivalent replacement under the new regime) should be supported by a full evidence base. The examination phase can incur significant costs in legal representation and inspector fees, recognising the Government's proposal to significantly streamline this element.
- 10.3 The Council has secured additional funding from MHCLG in respect of £75,000 for the Green Belt review and £108,000 for additional staff capacity. The current budget allocated for Local Plan preparation is expected to cover the majority of the work required. However, a further budget bid may be necessary during the budget-setting process to fund additional evidence and assessment work arising from decisions by the County not to progress the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) at this stage. This could include work on strategic opportunities, such as renewable energy infrastructure, where assessment may be more appropriately considered at a regional scale.
- 10.4 The costs of the examination in public, including the inspector fees and legal costs, which will occur later in the process post Local Government Reorganisation will also need to be sought in this budget bid round. This allows these costs to be available for the new Unitary Authorities when considering their budgets and Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 10.5 Spend, and any impacts upon the Local Plan timetable, will be monitored on an on-going basis. This will include reporting to the Strategic Planning Project Board as part of their informal oversight role. There are likely to be requests for any year-on-year underspends to be carried forward into the next financial year. Dependent on progress, it may be necessary to reprofile the approved budget bids. Sensible steps have been taken to minimise external costs including the preparation of evidence studies in-house where this is achievable within the staffing capacity and professional competence of the team. Some specialist areas of evidence necessitate external advice from experts in their field and / or benefit from being independently assessed by third parties.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. In accordance with Section 15(3A) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, local authorities are required to prepare and publish a Local Plan programme and keep it up to date at least once a month.
- 11.3. The Local Plan Review is a key project in the Council Delivery Plan. These projects have specific risk entries as part of the Council's corporate risk monitoring approach. This is regularly updated and reported to Cabinet, with Overview and Scrutiny Committee also having opportunity for quarterly monitoring reports to help inform its work programme.
- 11.4. Key risks include:
 - a. Inadequate guidance leads to poor scheme outcomes that do not appropriately respond to, or contribute towards, corporate objectives and priorities of climate change, environment, economy, and place.
 - b. Poor design outcomes that do not appropriately respond to local character and context.
 - c. Failure to retain/recruit sufficiently experienced officers to implement required programme of work.
 - d. Failure to secure adequate funding to resource the process.
 - e. Failure to obtain political and / or Government approval at key stages or gateways.
 - f. Adverse appeal decisions on other/non-Local Plan sites if progress on the Local Plan Review is delayed or stalled.
 - g. Introduction of new Spatial Development Strategies, as preparation is likely to progress on a similar timeline to the Local Plan.
 - h. Government introduce different or new or substantive reforms to the planning system and / or national policy.
 - i. Government intervention if inadequate progress is made upon Local Plan Review.
 - j. Impact of Local Government Reorganisation – diversion of resources, changes to existing timetable/approach, introduction of new workstreams, conflicting policy approaches between authorities, split of North Herts into two administrative areas after April 2028.
- 11.5. In addition, the new regulations require a detailed risk register to be maintained.
- 11.6. Controls and mitigations include reporting to the internal Project Board and ongoing monitoring of workload and service-wide budgets to ensure sufficient resources.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment was carried out on the spatial development options contained in the Content and Evidence document. Section 8.14 sets out a summary of the main equality impacts for each spatial development option. To maximise positive equality outcomes and minimise potential adverse effects, the Local Plan should set policies that can enable the timely delivery of infrastructure, services and facilities alongside growth.
- 12.3. Key mitigation measures include providing a mix of housing types and tenures, including accessible and adaptable homes; promoting inclusive and age-friendly design; improving access to healthcare, education, childcare, public transport, green spaces and community facilities; and supporting community safety through high-quality place-making and design. The Plan should also promote affordable housing, access to employment opportunities, community cohesion and social inclusion, while protecting and enhancing community facilities and ensuring developments meet the needs of different groups and life stages.
- 12.4. The EqIA is an iterative process and will be updated as the Local Plan progresses through the next stage which will include an assessment of draft policies.
- 12.5. The EQIA Scoping Report is set out in **Appendix F**.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. A Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, which includes the requirements of Sustainable Environmental Assessment, has been undertaken on the Content and Evidence document. This is a requirement under the new plan-making system. A summary of the main impacts across of the four spatial development options is set out in section 8.11.
- 14.2. Overall, the appraisal suggests that the most positive sustainability outcomes are likely to be achieved through spatial development options that enable comprehensive planning, coordinated infrastructure delivery and sustainable transport provision, while more dispersed patterns of development present greater environmental and accessibility challenges.
- 14.3. The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report is set out in **Appendix E**.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 The Local Plan programme is subject to our Strategic Planning Team being fully resourced and staffed, which is currently is. However a number of posts are agency posts, including the interim Strategic Planning Manager and a Principal Planning project managing the site allocations work.
- 15.2 There are known recruitment issues and skills gaps within the planning sector as a whole. The consequence of not being fully staffed may ultimately have an impact on the delivery of the timeline of the Local Plan Update and the meeting of the key milestones set out in the document. The timetable will be kept under review in line with resource availability and updated as appropriate.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1. Appendix A - Consultation Summary Report – scoping consultation
- 16.2. Appendix B - Gateway 1 self-assessment
- 16.3. Appendix C - Consultation and Engagement Strategy
- 16.4. Appendix D - Content and Evidence Base document
- 16.5. Appendix E - Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report
- 16.6. Appendix F - Equality Impact Assessment
- 16.7. Appendix G - Health Impact Assessment
- 16.8. Appendix H – North Herts Statement of Community Involvement 2023

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Rachael Rooney	Interim Strategic Planning Manager	rachael.rooney@north-herts.gov.uk, Tel: 01462 474328
Nigel Smith	Director of Place	nigel.smith@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474847
Ian Couper	Director of Resources	ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243
Jo Keshishian	Human Resources Operations Manager	Jo.keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474314
Natasha Jindal	Governance Consultant	Natasha.Jindal@north-herts.gov.uk
Tim Everitt	Performance & Risk Officer	Tim.Everitt@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474646
Ellie Hollingsworth	Policy & Strategy Officer	Ellie.Hollingsworth@north-herts.gov.uk
Amber Smith-Howell	Policy & Strategy Officer	Amber.Smith-Howell@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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Summary of Scoping Consultation

Scoping Document (May 2026)

October 2026



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Translation

If you have difficulty understanding this publication or English is not your first language, please contact the Strategic Planning Team on 01462 474000 and we will do our best to help you.

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਆ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਜਾਂ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਰਣਨੀਤਕ ਯੋਜਨਾਬੰਦੀ ਟੀਮ ਨਾਲ 01462 474000 'ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ ਅਤੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਮਦਦ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਪੂਰੀ ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ।

(Panjabi)

Jeżeli masz trudności ze zrozumieniem tej publikacji lub angielski nie jest Twoim językiem ojczystym, skontaktuj się z Zespołem Planowania Strategicznego pod numerem 01462 474000, a dołożymy wszelkich starań, aby Ci pomóc.

(Polish)

Dacă întâmpinați dificultăți în înțelegerea acestei publicații sau dacă engleza nu este limba dumneavoastră maternă, vă rugăm să contactați Echipa de Planificare Strategică la numărul de telefon 01462 474000 și vom face tot posibilul să vă ajutăm.

(Romanian)

Se avete difficoltà a comprendere questa pubblicazione o se l'inglese non è la vostra lingua madre, contattate il team di pianificazione strategica al numero 01462 474000 e faremo del nostro meglio per aiutarvi.

(Italian)

Ha nehezen érti ezt a kiadványt, vagy az angol nem az anyanyelve, kérjük, vegye fel a kapcsolatot a Stratégiai Tervezési Csoporttal a 01462 474000 telefonszámon, és mi mindent megteszünk, hogy segítsünk Önnek.

(Hungarian)

இந்த வெளியீட்டைப் புரிந்துகொள்வதில் உங்களுக்குச் சிரமம் இருந்தாலோ அல்லது ஆங்கிலம் உங்கள் தாய்மொழி அல்ல என்றாலோ, தயவுசெய்து 01462 474000 என்ற எண்ணில் வியூகத் திட்டமிடல் குழுவைத் தொடர்புகொள்ளவும், நாங்கள்

உங்களுக்கு உதவ எங்களால் முடிந்த அனைத்தையும்
செய்வேலாம்.

(Tamil)

જો તમને આ પ્રકાશન સમજવામાં મુશ્કેલી પડતી હોય અથવા અંગ્રેજી તમારી માતૃભાષા
ન હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને 01462 474000 પર સ્ટ્રેટેજિક પ્લાનિંગ ટીમનો સંપર્ક કરો અને અમે
તમને મદદ કરવા માટે અમારા શ્રેષ્ઠ પ્રયાસો કરીશું.

(Gujarati)

Jei jums sunku suprasti šį leidinį arba anglų kalba nėra jūsų gimtoji kalba,
susisiekite su Strateginio planavimo komanda telefonu 01462 474000 ir mes
padarysime viską, kad jums padėtume.

(Lithuanian)

HOW DID WE CONSULT?

How did we consult?

Scoping Document Consultation

This consultation statement has been prepared in accordance with Regulation 22 of the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#).

The statement sets out who, how and when we consulted on our Scoping Document. The statement also summarises the representations received and how those representations will be taken forward into the Contents and Evidence Document and into the new Local Plan.

Consultation on the Scoping Document

At a meeting of Cabinet on [14 April 2026](#), we set out our timetable for the new Local Plan which included the consultation dates for the Scoping Document, 11 May to 28 June 2026.

We sent notification at the start of the consultation period by email or letter to:

- Statutory consultees;
- Town and Parish Councils;
- Landowners, developers and planning agents;
- Businesses;
- Community groups; and
- Individuals who had expressed an interest in the Local Plan.

We publicised the Scoping Document consultation in a number of ways. This included:

- Press releases
- Posters in community buildings
- The Council's quarterly Outlook Magazine
- Social media posts on Facebook, Instagram, X, Youtube and LinkedIn
- Officers also attended the Council's Community Forums in Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Southern and Rural during June.



In response to the consultation, we received representations from 73 different stakeholders, representing all of the groups listed above. Comments were received for all of the questions that we asked in the Scoping Document.

Summaries of those representations for each question are set out in a series of tables, together with our response setting out how those comments will be taken into account as we continue preparing the new Local Plan.

Methods of Communication: Summary of responses

The first section of our Scoping Document asked two questions about methods of communication and whether the communication methods are inclusive for different communities. The following tables set out a summary of the representations and our response to the issues raised.

Question 1: Are there any other methods of communication or engagement that you think we should be using that we haven't already included?

Summary of representations	Our response
Proposed consultation methods are not sufficient to ensure inclusive, accessible and meaningful engagement, especially for communities most affected by growth.	The Community Engagement Strategy will provide details of how we will consult all parts of the community
Representations set out a wide range of suggestions for additional consultation and engagement approaches, which included: • parish-level workshops and drop in sessions for all parish / community areas; • interactive mapping; • a standing liaison group; • accessible consultation materials; • pop-up engagement in everyday community locations; • recorded webinars; • paper response options; • topic-specific focus groups; • advance notice of 4 weeks for events; • early, informal engagement with landowners of large sites	What we are doing: In terms of how we consult the community, our Community Engagement Strategy will set out how we will consult all parts of the community. This will include: • Keeping our Local Plan website up to date; • Early notification of public consultation events; • Publishing short videos to help explain the Local Plan; • Holding public events in local communities during consultation periods; • Using venues across the District which are accessible, near to public transport and suitable for public participation; • Using the Community Forums and Councillor community surgeries which are already well established across the District; • Displaying posters in well used public locations;

Summary of representations	Our response
• focus groups for landowners; • use of councillor surgeries for in person information sessions; • interactive participative workshops at the early stages; • manned stalls in town centres on Saturdays to help feedback; • information to be held at NHC office / Love Letchworth & MP offices; • engage business community; • articles in the Royston Crow and the Listing; • write to people – to reach people without access to IT; • enable people to respond by post; • door to door visits; • website links – need to be made obvious; • easy access to the response forms; and • more leaflets and posters.	• Using our social media channels; • contacting everyone on our Local Plan database, whether by email or letter; • making our consultation materials available in alternative formats on request; • specifically written to seldom hard groups, which includes those with protected characteristics, to offer to meet these groups to explain the plan as well as provide other offers of help. What we are trying to improve: We have invested in new software which will help to make our consultations easier to use by: • providing easy to read consultation documents where it is possible to make comments directly, rather than having to send an email or letter; • improving our interactive map based information; and • enabling anyone or any organisation to register to receive updates on all Local Plan issues. What we are unable to do The consultation responses also included a number of suggestions for engagement methods which the Council cannot take forward. These engagement methods included door to door visits, writing to everyone, drop in sessions in all Parishes. The Council has limited financial and staffing resources and must ensure that these are used in the most effective and proportionate way.

Summary of representations	Our response
The evidence base page of the website is missing a range of documents which are needed for effective consultation.	We have a dedicated page on our website for our Local Plan evidence base documents. Not all of the evidence studies have been completed, but the web page includes the details and dates when that we expect to publish these.
Scoping consultation does not explain how the full range of stakeholders and socio-economic groups will be reached or the methods by which their views and concerns will be obtained.	The Community Engagement Strategy will include details of our core stakeholders and will set out the details about how all stakeholders will be engaged in consultation.

Question 2: Do you have any views on how the Council can ensure that the consultation is inclusive to our different communities?

Summary of representations	Our response
A number of suggestions have been put forward to enhance inclusive, proactive engagement with our communities. These included: • Rural inclusion events in the villages, not just in the town; • Ensuring that all materials are available in print and meet accessibility standards; • Freepost for returning consultation responses; • Provision of translated summaries and work with local community groups; • Offer translations of the documents through the website; • Ensure all venues are accessible;	In terms of how we can ensure that consultation for our new Local Plan is inclusive for our different communities, our Community Engagement Strategy includes the following measures: • keeping our Local Plan website up to date; • early notification of public consultation events; • making our consultation materials available in alternative formats, in languages other than English and which meet accessibility standards on request; • holding public events in local communities during consultation periods in venues across the District which are accessible, near to public transport and suitable for public participation;

Summary of representations	Our response
• Use high footfall locations to reach those people who do not attend formal events; • Ensuring that engagement is well publicised; • Ensuring that the relevant online portals are clear, accessible, easy to use and have the capability to allow uploading of large format documents formats; • Approach community organisations to offer presentations; • Approach schools to select young people to be ambassadors and offer to attend assemblies; • Visit local faith leaders; • Host interactive participative workshops at the early stages; • Make it easier to submit comments; and • Contact community leaders to discuss this with their groups.	• publicising our consultations in community locations; • work in conjunction with our Community Partnership Team to engage with seldom heard groups within the community; and • specifically written to seldom hard groups, which includes those with protected characteristics, to offer to meet these groups to explain the plan as well as provide other offers of help.
Making everything inclusive for all communities is expensive and impractical.	Our Community Engagement Strategy sets out how the Council will consult as widely as possible in the most cost-effective way possible.
How are the very vulnerable, immobile and perhaps digitally excluded people going to find out about the Local Plan?	Our Community Engagement Strategy recognises that there are groups within the community who may be underrepresented in consultations and sets out how we can work to include them.
There are very large amounts of information and people will give up after a few pages.	We recognise that the Local Plan and the supporting evidence documents are long and complex.

Summary of representations	Our response
	We will be preparing our consultation documents in accessible formats, downloadable PDFs and easy read versions of the key documents to make them as accessible as possible.
Council Officers should watch the “National Emergency Briefing” before working on the Local Plan.	We will be preparing the new Local Plan under current legislation and in consultation with a wide variety of organisations to ensure that we address climate change challenges which the planning system can influence.
Using scarce resources on the Local Plan appears pointless given the impending abolition of the Council. The resources could be better used for development management or enforcement.	A new, faster and streamlined approach to plan making was introduced earlier in 2026. At the heart of this reform is a new 30-month timeline for creating and adopting Local Plans, supporting the Government’s commitment to achieving universal Local Plan coverage across England. Despite Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire, North Hertfordshire still needs to plan for future growth during the transition to the new unitary arrangements. Our District must continue to guide where development should take place so that new homes, jobs, and infrastructure come forward in the right locations and in a way that benefits local communities. Maintaining an up-to-date Local Plan is an important part of this. Ahead of the new Unitary Council preparing its own Local Plan, North Hertfordshire intends to ensure that a clear and effective planning framework remains in place. This will help to secure sustainable development that meets our District’s needs, including housing, economic opportunities, and the delivery of essential infrastructure, while providing certainty for residents, businesses, and developers

OUR PRIORITIES

Our priorities

Our Scoping Document set out a series of issues, challenges and opportunities. These included:

Issues, challenges and opportunities

We identified a number of issues, challenges and opportunities for each of the following themes:

- Efficient use of land
- Housing
- Economy
- Environment and climate change
- Transport
- Communities

In the following pages, we have summarised the comments and the issues raised during the consultation period and set out how we might address those issues through the development of the new Local Plan.

Efficient use of land: Summary of responses

Question 3: Do you think there are any other challenges or opportunities we should be aware of in relation to efficient use of land?

Summary of representations	Our response
The representations raised the following issues: • Support that the consultation document recognised the District's valued rural character and the need for sustainable development; • Opportunities to utilise non-Green Belt land should be prioritised given significant Green Belt constraints in the district; • Effective use of land generally relates to accommodating as much development as possible on PDL and the application of minimum densities for development sites and / or specific locations; • Restrictive settlement boundaries result in over development and increasing density at the cost of supporting infrastructure; • The Local Plan should review the settlement boundaries and the green Belt boundaries because it is an opportunity to: ▪ expand the settlement boundaries to accommodate the housing required; ▪ deliver sustainable urban extensions to existing settlements as they represent the most sustainable, deliverable and logical approach to accommodating new housing growth; and	In developing a new spatial strategy for the District, we will need to consider balancing our requirements for housing and employment developments against protecting our environmental assets. This will include a review of development opportunities on previously developed land and on greenfield sites. We will also consider the needs of individual settlements, infrastructure requirements and where development will be best placed for the future. This will include making the best use of previously developed land (PDL), increasing densities for development in appropriate locations, infill development, extensions to villages and towns and new settlements. In response to the issue raised about the London Metropolitan Green Belt, it is highlighted in our Contents and Evidence Document and recognised as an asset for the District. When we consider the spatial strategy for the new Local Plan, we will have to consider the role of the Green Belt. However, in terms of policy, this is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Summary of representations	Our response
▪ direct development to well-served existing settlements and review sustainable locations adjacent to existing settlements, including land within the Green Belt. One representation stated that it was disappointing that the London Metropolitan Green Belt has not been identified as a crucial land use asset for the District and that it should be recognised as a critical element in balancing demands for development, infrastructure, agriculture, leisure and recreation activities with environmental activities. One further representation stated that there had been widespread community concern at the level of erosion of the Green Belt in the last local plan and that there should be a clear commitment that no Green Belt land will have its Green Belt designation removed in this local plan update, unless there is a compelling and evidenced based strategic case.	
One representation stated that it is difficult to ensure that the most efficient use of land is achieved if plans are advanced for only a part of the local authority area rather than planning comprehensively across the full extents of that authority. It is quite possible that there are opportunities and challenges in adjoining or nearby areas that will shortly form part of the same area as North Hertfordshire that would not be apparent if the Local Plan were to be prepared based on the current local authority boundaries.	The Local Plan is being prepared for North Hertfordshire as required by the legislation. The Government have made it clear that local plans should be progressed quickly. It would be unlikely that if we were to wait for the new unitary authority, new local plans would not be in place until the mid-2030s. This would risk many local plans being out of date and authorities being at risk of not having a five-year housing land supply and receiving speculative development. This in turn does not result in the best or most efficient use of land.

Commented [RR1]: Does the GB need to be a separate summary and answer? From memory, I think there were a couple of GB responses?
evidence base - GB study
C&E doc will highlight its importance but the GB policy will be addressed through NPPF

Housing: Summary of responses

Question 4 - Do you think there are any other challenges or opportunities we should be aware of in relation to housing?

The responses to this question did not necessarily focus on the key challenges and opportunities that were highlighted in the Scoping Document. The summaries below set out the responses to the challenges and opportunities which were raised in the Scoping Document and these are followed by a summary of the wider issues that were raised.

Key Issues: Exploring the opportunities to deliver sufficient levels of affordable housing, ensuring a range of housing options are available to meet the needs of all residents	Our response
Issues raised in response to the question about delivering a sufficient level of affordable housing included: • Councils should strictly enforce affordable housing commitments rather than allowing later reductions through viability arguments; • Need genuinely affordable housing; • Affordable housing provision should be set at a sustainable level to ensure deliverability of both affordable housing and other contributions required to facilitate development; • Developers have, and will continue to have, an aggressive approach to the provision of housing for affordable rent, with consultants advising them on how to avoid it; • There is a severe lack of affordable homes; and • Towns like Hitchin Letchworth Baldock & Royston need new affordable housing for the local population increases but not in the number that are planning.	Our new Strategic Housing Market Assessment indicates that there is a substantial need for: • affordable rented homes; • affordable home ownership options; and • a range of affordable housing tenures. Providing affordable housing will remain a key priority for the new Local Plan. We will be undertaking an updated Viability Assessment to understand what level of affordable housing can reasonably be delivered in the future. This will help inform any new affordable housing requirements and ensure that policies remain both ambitious and achievable.

Key Issues: Ensure that a range of suitable homes are provided for older people, residents with disabilities as well as those with other specialist needs	Our response
Ensure a range of suitable homes are provided for older people, residents with disabilities and other specialist needs.	Comments noted

Key Issues: Deliver housing designed to be accessible and adaptable to meet changing needs	Our response
Comments made in response to this key issue included: • The local plan should include accessibility design standards, Building Regulations M4(2) accessible and adaptable and M4(3) wheelchair user homes; • All new homes should be built to M4(2) standards and 10% should be built to M4(3) standards; • Accessible and adaptable housing standards are supported in principle, but should be justified by local evidence, viability and national standards; and • Units built to M4(3) standards requires significant modifications to a typical M4(2) unit and this must be considered in a viability assessment.	Evidence from our SHMA suggests that the need for accessible housing is likely to increase over the coming years and recommends that all new homes should be built to the M4(2) standard. There is also evidence of a continuing need for wheelchair-accessible housing. Our Contents and Evidence Document will seek to ask whether all new dwellings should meet the M4(2) standard. All our policies will be subjected to viability testing to ensure that they can be delivered.

Key Issues: Planning for the land and housing needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities	Our response
Sites for these communities should be allocated away from towns and villages so that communities can carry on with their preferred way of life.	We are reviewing our Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment. This will provide up-to-date evidence on the current and future accommodation needs of Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities; whether additional pitches or plots may be required during our Plan period, ensuring any future needs are planned for appropriately.

The summaries below set out the responses to the wider issues raised about housing issues which should be addressed in the new Local Plan.

Key Issues	Our response
A number of representations made wider comments about new residential development. These included: - the need to provide infrastructure as an integral part of new residential development; - that residential development should be mixed with light industry, shops to create little neighbourhoods and a community; - a view that developers are using community infrastructure proposals, such as special schools or care homes, to justify large-scale market housing on Green Belt land; - developers exploiting delays in existing housing delivery to support greenfield development; - Focus on homes for young people who cannot afford them;	Our new Local Plan will address the location of new development and the spatial strategy will help to focus new growth in the most sustainable locations. The importance of providing the necessary community infrastructure for new development is also recognised in our Contents and Evidence Base document and we will be inviting further comments about the types of policies we should be including in the new Local Plan. In response to issues raised about the delivery of sites allocated in the adopted Local Plan, we will be assessing those allocations to ensure that they remain deliverable. As our policies are developed for the new Local Plan, we will be undertaking a Viability Assessment to ensure that development is capable of being delivered. The Viability Assessment will be published alongside the draft Local Plan to show how the evidence has informed our policy approach.

Key Issues	Our response
• Need to ensure that existing allocations are genuinely deliverable and developable – recognising that some of the allocations have failed to deliver to date; • No mention of the need to build a minimum of c. 20,000 homes, which should be added as a priority; • No reference to a brownfield first approach – this should be embedded in the Local Plan; • Infrastructure and utilities are under strain and unable to meet modern day demands; • Rural villages should be protected from town expansion and changes to the countryside; • Views that increasing planning and regulatory pressures are slowing down housing development; • Councils should reduce planning obligations and supporting information requirements for applications as higher costs and burdens reduce the amount of housing delivered; and • Site viability must be considered to ensure that sites remain deliverable and are not overburdened with developer contributions.	
<u>Housing design</u> A number of representations were made in respect of the design of new housing developments: • Keep building heights below 4 floors; • Local Plan should prioritise urban densification, airspace development, and small infill sites; • New housing should be water neutral;	A large number of representations made comments about the design of new developments. Many of the issues raised about the design of new homes will be addressed through the Building Regulations and the Future Homes Standards, rather than through the Local Plan. The design of new residential development in North Hertfordshire will also be guided by the District Design Code. The Government's Design and

Key Issues	Our response
• New development should not result in sub standard living conditions for existing residents; • Although the Government has mandated solar panels on new build homes, they should also include a battery as well to store excess energy; • embedding inclusive design and adaptability, a mix of housing types, liveable space standards; • and daylight amenity, new homes will support health, dignity and wellbeing for all residents; • important to ensure that housing growth is aligned with sustainable water supply and supported by an appropriate evidence base, including a Water Cycle Strategy; • High density housing development which includes a mix of flats, terraced and semi-detached homes should be the focus in order to address the need for affordable housing and to enable more people to buy their own home. • Large developments (100+ homes) should include single storey homes; • New housing delivered through the re-purposing of existing buildings should achieve the highest EPC rating. Climate change requirements should override heritage aspirations; • New housing should be required to have a design which: ▪ Avoids overheating; ▪ No mains gas; ▪ Reduces energy demand; ▪ Capable of generating and storing energy;	Placemaking Planning Practice Guide also contains design principles that should be addressed through applications. We will be using our evidence base such as the watercycle strategy to inform our site allocations. We are proposing to set water efficiency standards lower than the Government benchmark in recognition of being in a water stressed area. We are proposing to require developments of a certain size to submit circular economy statements and whole life carbon statements to support objectives on climate change.

Key Issues	Our response
▪ Low carbon heating; ▪ Minimises use of mains water; ▪ Supports electric car charging • Climate change necessities should override heritage aspirations; • Authentic Traditional Architecture Design Codes will help address common challenges in large-scale housebuilding. They can support well-designed streets that fit with the existing area and help new residents and businesses feel part of the community; • HCC Public Health recommends the Council considers including a policy to explicitly prioritise healthy housing. This should address indoor air quality, thermal comfort, low-carbon and energy-efficient housing, pollution reduction and environmental protection; • Consider a policy which restricts biomass and solid fuel burning in new developments to improve indoor and outdoor air quality. New developments will then use alternative heating methods which reduce pollution and support wider sustainable environmental and climate targets; and • Design green and blue spaces in housing developments help with health benefits.	
<u>Housing Market Area</u> • The Local Plan should consider North Hertfordshire's role within the wider Housing Market Area, including Stevenage and part of Luton; • Unmet needs from Stevenage and Luton must be transparently assessed; and	We will be working with colleagues in our adjoining authorities to understand the housing needs across the wider housing market area.

Key Issues	Our response
Need to consider unmet needs from outside the Housing Market Area.	
<u>Housing Numbers</u> A number of representations were received in respect of housing numbers for the new Local Plan: - The Local Plan should plan positively for growth, using the standard method housing need figure as a minimum rather than a ceiling; - Necessary to meet the overall housing need target for the District; - The housing requirement may need to exceed local housing need where justified by affordable housing need, economic growth, infrastructure investment or unmet needs from neighbouring authorities; - Flexibility should be built into housing supply through appropriate buffers; - The discussion of housing concentrates on the provision of a theoretically derived number of units. This is inappropriate and damaging for North Herts. The Local Plan should reflect the complexity of housing provision, including unimplemented housing consents; the use of previously developed land; the use of empty units and the demographic context; and - In determining housing numbers and allocations, villages should be treated proportionately and there should be an individualised assessment of the settlement boundaries.	Our new Local Plan will be prepared in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework which requires us to plan for enough homes to meet the needs of our communities. The Government uses a standard method to calculate the minimum number of homes we should plan for. Based on that methodology, North Hertfordshire has a housing requirement of 1,036 homes per year.
<u>Representations about sites for residential development</u>	

Key Issues	Our response
These representations can be split between those representations which made generic comments about site allocations for residential development and those which were made about specific sites: <u>General comments included:</u> • Existing site allocations should be assessed to establish why they are not being delivered as expected; • Green Belt should be released to ensure housing takes place in the most sustainable locations; • The necessity to build on Green Belt should be referenced as a challenge and as an opportunity and there should be a Green Belt Review to understand the opportunities to deliver new homes; • A mix of housing sites should be considered, including brownfield, greenfield, small, medium and large sites, rather than relying on one source of supply; • Housing delivery in North Hertfordshire should prioritise locations which are demonstrably deliverable, well-connected, and capable of supporting both new and existing communities. Strategic urban extensions to sustainable settlements represent one of the most effective ways of achieving this; • Small and medium sites may be particularly important for short-to medium-term delivery; and • Opportunities to bring forward sites of a larger scale will enable the delivery of schools and other services rather than relying on the expansion of existing facilities.	All sites submitted through the Call for Sites will be assessed before allocations are made in the new Local Plan and we will follow Government guidance.
<u>Specific Sites:</u>	

Key Issues	Our response
A number of representations were made about specific sites which could be considered in the Local Plan for residential development: • Royston – development is restricted because of the A505, the county boundary and Therfield Heath. Every development around Royston leads to pressure on Therfield Heath; • Land west of the A1(M), Stevenage is safeguarded in the adopted development plan for future development and has already been removed from the Green Belt, with exceptional circumstances established; and • East of Luton & Icknield Downs promoted as suitable sites to help meet housing needs.	
<u>Housing Type & Tenure</u> The following issues were raised in the representations: • The type and tenure of housing should be robustly justified with an ability to adjust the mix should changes in demand happen; • The minimum 20,000 homes should be allocated through a mixture of small, medium and larger strategic sites; • The previous local plan did not address uneven social housing provision across North Herts towns. The updated plan should set housing mix targets at town level; • The Local Plan should stipulate a proportion of older persons housing, where newly developed, to be designed to fully wheelchair accessible standard; • policies which support a range of housing types and tenures such as affordable housing and specialist housing for vulnerable groups; and	Providing a range of house types, sizes, and tenures is essential to ensure that homes are available for families, young people, older people, and those with different incomes. We will use the updated SHMA to inform future housing types and tenure requirements. Our policies will be informed by the SHMA and by responses to our Contents and Evidence Document consultation.

Key Issues	Our response
• The type and tenure of housing should be robustly justified with an ability to adjust the mix should changes in demand happen.	

Economy and Town Centres: Summary of responses

The responses to Question 5 have been split between those which focussed on the economy and employment issues and those which focussed on our Town Centres.

Question 5 - Do you think there are any other challenges and opportunities we should be aware of in relation to economic issues?

Key Issues / Economy & Employment	Our response
<u>Location</u> In terms of the location of employment opportunities, a wide range of issues were raised in the representations. These included: • Jobs and amenities need to be located close to where people live; • Keep industry and commerce near good transport connections, brownfield sites, and existing industrial sites; • The loss of commercial sites results in reduced employment opportunities for local people which in turn results in people having to travel further for work; • Where sites are within active travel distance of key services, consider mixed-use development including residential and office space; • Sort out existing employment land, e.g in Baldock and empty units in Letchworth; • Consideration for the location, accessibility and flexibility of workplaces can help reduce long commutes and support work-life balance;	We recognise that employment land should be located close to where people live and that transport links to those employment areas are important. Our Contents and Evidence Document will seek to establish whether our existing employment areas should continue to be protected for employment uses. If our evidence shows that we need to allocate more employment land, we will consider the accessibility of those locations as part of the site assessment process.

Key Issues / Economy & Employment	Our response
• there is an opportunity to reduce net out-commuting by delivering homes in sustainable locations alongside existing employment centres; • Strategic growth at locations such as Royston provides an opportunity to reinforce its economic role; • The Local Plan should acknowledge Royston's strategic location close to Cambridge which the Government has identified as a focus for 'nationally significant growth'; • Use the Call for Sites to encourage submissions for undeveloped land within walking distance of train stations; and • Recognise Cambridge as a growing employment centre that is accessible from North Hertfordshire.	
<u>Employment uses and transport links</u> A number of representations mentioned the importance of transport links with the employment areas, both in the District and further afield, to ensure that it is easy for people to travel to those areas. Other comments included; • Focus on improving transport links to London for highly paid jobs as opposed to creating small local jobs needing more car journeys; • Keep industry and commerce near good transport connections, brownfield sites, and existing industrial sites; • Transport links are critical – many residents will not work in the County;	We recognise the importance of transport links to local employment areas and work opportunities further afield. Transport and active travel links will be one of the factors that we will consider when assessing sites which could be used for economic growth in the future.

Key Issues / Economy & Employment	Our response
• Locate new industrial sites next to major roads; • Include transport infrastructure to reduce potential traffic impacts on local residents; • Would be appropriate to improve cross District transport links; • Transport constraints affecting business growth; and • Policies should consider the accessibility of employment locations to reduce car dependency and supporting active travel and public transport use.	
<u>Economic growth</u> The Local Plan should clearly recognise that new development, including residential developments, supports economic growth. Embedding healthy economy policies within the Local Plan would help support the health of the local population because they create employment opportunities, support local businesses, increase access to local services and reduce social disparities linked to unemployment. Support the refurbishment of existing employment infrastructure. The ageing employment stock needs to be regenerated and modernised Digital connectivity in rural areas needs to be addressed.	Our Local Plan will recognise that new development will support economic growth and health in the District. If the Local Plan includes policies to designate employment areas, this will help to focus investment and provide employment opportunities for the future. The Health Impact Assessment will assess policy against a healthy economy as part of the wider determinants of health. Issues around digital connectivity are picked up through Building Regulations.
<u>Types of development</u>	We have commissioned an Employment Needs Review Study which will set out the current economic profile of the District. In turn, this

Key Issues / Economy & Employment	Our response
Several representations suggested particular types of development which could contribute towards the local economy: • AI data centres would bring investment and jobs; • A good mixture of small, medium and large industries would work; • Medical technology link up with Cambridge and Stevenage companies; and • Agri-tech and green economy growth – aligned to the District's strengths. Additional comments on AI Data Centres mentioned that these types of development need to consider water and energy supplies and efficiency.	will help to frame the strategy for future economic growth in the District. Our Contents and Evidence Document will include questions about whether the Local Plan should focus policies on developing an economic identity for North Hertfordshire or whether the District should position itself as a complementary economic centre for Stevenage, Cambridge and Luton.
<u>Economic growth and water resources</u> Economic growth, particularly where it includes water-intensive uses, has the potential to place additional pressure on water resources and infrastructure. This should be considered at an early stage in the plan-making process. Water scarcity is also an important issue when dealing with commercial development. This relates to both water supplies and water efficiency. This is becoming more important with the emergence of water heavy developments such as data centres.	As part of our evidence base for the new Local Plan, we will be undertaking a Water Cycle Study and a new Strategic Flood Risk Assessment to help us assess new sites for employment generating uses. The water companies will also be consulted as part of the preparation for the new Local Plan.
<u>Stevenage</u>	We recognise the significance of Stevenage as one of the major employment centres nearby. We will frame policies in the Local Plan to reflect the relationship between North Hertfordshire and these

Key Issues / Economy & Employment	Our response
Stevenage plays a significant sub regional economic role, particularly in life sciences, aerospace, and advanced manufacturing. Many North Hertfordshire residents work in Stevenage, and the two economies are closely interlinked. The Local Plan should: • Recognises Stevenage's role as a strategic employment centre; • Ensures employment land strategies and site allocations are complementary rather than competing; and • Includes joint labour market and commuting evidence.	nearby employment centres and have commissioned an Employment Needs Review Study which will help to inform these policies.
<u>Omissions</u> There were representations which stated that there was an omission in the Scoping Document: The Scoping Document did not recognise the protection of agricultural land and the farming community and the potential contribution of the countryside to the North Herts economy. The significance of the contributions of agriculture, leisure, recreation and retail activity linked to the rural economy are unspecified, and challenges and opportunities are seen only in terms of employment land, urban areas and town centres.	We do recognise that our rural areas make a valuable contribution to the local economy. In particular, our Contents and Evidence Document will consider whether the new Local Plan should include policies for rural tourism and visitor accommodation. The NPPF also includes policies which will help to support the rural economy.
<u>Other comments</u> Would recommend the inclusion of policies to increase education and training opportunities, especially in areas of deprivation.	Any policies in the Local Plan can only address the use and development of land, they cannot address education and training opportunities that maybe offered by educational establishments.

Key Issues / Economy & Employment	Our response
Need to provide more cycleways and better lighting for commuters who can't afford a car. Need low level lighting on Norton Common for commuters who walk from the Grange Estate area to the station.	We note these suggestions for improvements to travel routes to employment areas, although the Local Plan cannot address these directly.
The emphasis in the Scoping Document is on the economic characteristics of North Hertfordshire. However, the new authorities will need to consider planning for additional issues that may reflect types of locations different to those within the current boundaries of North Hertfordshire. The issues are likely to include the need for new warehousing, data centres and other forms of economic development, as well as other strategic economic development issues.	Whilst we cannot address wider issues in the new Local Plan for North Hertfordshire, we are working with our neighbouring local authorities and updating our evidence base to ensure that wider issues are considered.
LPAs should be conscious of the burden imposed on businesses through the planning process and the impact of policy requirements upon delivery.	The Local Plan seeks to set out policies which will encourage economic activity in the most suitable and sustainable locations. However, it is not possible for the Local Plan to influence business rates.
Reduce business rates to encourage business and employment	

Key Issues / Town Centres	Our response
Issues and observations raised in the consultation responses in respect of town centres included: • Recognising the importance of the town centres as part of the local economy and the challenges that are faced by them in light of changing shopping habits; • The Plan should consider the importance of maintaining and enhancing the vitality of town centres, recognising their role in supporting local economies and community life to become vibrant and adaptable places; • Support for the pedestrianisation of town centres; • Transport and accessibility to town centres should be improved to ensure that town centres thrive; • Our town centres are not going to ever be what they were, as shop retail battles with the internet; • Town centres cannot exist only as a cafe/restaurant culture, there needs to be more variety and more imaginative thinking; • Empty shops need to be repurposed more quickly, and not filled with the same old coffee shops, tattoo parlours, barbers and hairdressers; • Towns are being taken over by shops selling illegal goods; • Need to give people living here something to come into town for; • Consider more compact retail areas where appropriate;	We have commissioned an update to our Town Centre and Retail Study (December 2024) which will provide an updated assessment of our retail, leisure and town centre needs. We have also updated our Town Centre Strategy which sets out a broader view, setting out a long-term vision for how our town centres can evolve and thrive in the years ahead. Our Contents and Evidence Document sets out that we will consider: • Reviewing our Town Centre boundaries; • The diversification of our Town Centres to encourage a diverse mix of uses which would help the town centres stay active for longer periods of the day and attract a broad range of visitors and strengthen the local economy; and • The use of vacant premises and supporting meanwhile uses. There are issues which our new Local Plan cannot influence, including the type of shops, cafes and some services which are present in our in town centres as the Use Classes Order allows premises to change use without planning permission (E Class). Neither can our Local Plan include policies about car parking charges or business rates as these are set elsewhere by the Council.

Key Issues / Town Centres	Our response
• Update retail space requirements in the local plan to reflect these changes; • changes in how we shop and work provides an opportunity for mixed-use, low-carbon, re-development in town centres; • The Local Plan should recognise the role of population growth in supporting town centre vitality and enabling a more diverse and resilient local economy; • Some Town Centres and High Streets have experienced structural change from the rise in online retail and evolving consumer habits. Currently, Hitchin Town Centre is considered to be high performing, but its commercial viability remains vulnerable to changing market conditions; • Town centres should be sized to meet the needs of their own town populations and should not assume that town centre footfall will come from neighbouring towns; • Small businesses cannot afford the rent and rates that are charged to make high streets diverse and interesting; • Few people walk because of the weather and carrying shopping home – free parking is essential for a successful Town Centre; and • Insufficient affordable parking for commuters in town centres.	

Environment

Question 6 - Do you think there are any other challenges and opportunities we should be aware of in relation to environmental issues?

Key Issues – Reducing carbon emissions through sustainable construction methods and improving long term energy performance of buildings	Our response
The following comments were made in respect of reducing carbon emissions and improving the long-term energy performance of buildings: • Support the commitment to reducing carbon emissions, addressing water scarcity, managing flood risk, protecting and enhancing the natural environment by ensuring that developments work with nature, improving use of energy-efficient technology, and prioritising development in locations that support more sustainable travel choices. • Ensure builders are environmentally friendly; • Require whole life carbon assessments where there is a proposal to replace existing buildings, to encourage retrofit when this has the lowest carbon footprint; • Make use of sustainable construction methods, with the fitting of solar panels, heat pumps, EV charging points etc being a necessary condition to achieve planning permission; • Policies which include any standards related to these issues should be considered in the context of local evidence and viability;	We recognise that the retrofitting and refurbishing existing buildings can offer a number of benefits, including: • Reducing embodied carbon emissions associated with demolition and reconstruction; • Making better use of existing buildings and materials; • Preserving local character and heritage where appropriate; • Reducing construction waste; and • Supporting the transition to a more resource-efficient and circular economy. In our Contents and Evidence Document consultation, we will be consulting on the policy approach for the Local Plan which would encourage the retention, refurbishment and adaptation of existing buildings wherever practical and appropriate.

Key Issues – Reducing carbon emissions through sustainable construction methods and improving long term energy performance of buildings	Our response
• a policy requirement for sustainable and energy efficient dwellings should be relatively flexible and considerate of viability of development; • The Council's approach should recognise that standards for new homes are being addressed through the Future Homes Standard (2026) and policies should make reference to national standards and not duplicate them; and • Policies should proactively prevent the demolition of old buildings and historic buildings falling into decline.	

Key Issues / Water resources and managing flood risk	Our response
Responses suggested that the following water related issues should be addressed in the Local Plan: • Restricting development on flood plains; • Using a sequential approach and directing development to the lowest flood risk areas; • Reviewing and updating the SFRA; • Using an up to date Water Cycle Strategy to assess wastewater infrastructure, water quality impacts, cumulative catchment effects and wastewater treatment works capacity;	The NPPF requires that we minimise flood risk from all sources, including rivers, surface water and groundwater, taking into account the effects of climate change. Our Local Plan should ensure that new development is safe over its lifetime and does not increase flood risk elsewhere. As part of our evidence base work to inform and support policies and land allocations in the new Local Plan, we will be commissioning a Water Cycle Strategy and updating our Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. We are looking at introducing water consumption targets for new residential developments and our Contents and Evidence

Key Issues / Water resources and managing flood risk	Our response
- Existing wastewater and sewage infrastructure is already under pressure, and further housing could increase the risk of sewage overflows contaminating wildlife habitats and watercourses. - Treating water resources as a strategic constraint to growth; - Policies which require water efficiency and demand management measures; - Protection of the chalk aquifers, Source Protection Zones and sensitive receptors from pollution; - Design of Sustainable Drainage Systems to protect groundwater quality; - Recognising that transport infrastructure can have implications for flood risk and that new infrastructure should be designed to avoid flood risk, manage surface water and prevent of watercourses and groundwater; - Looking at opportunities to incorporate sustainable drainage, green infrastructure and nature based solutions within transport schemes to support climate resilience and environmental enhancement; - welcomes the scoping document's focus on carbon reduction, water scarcity, flood risk, nature protection, energy efficiency and sustainable travel; - The Local Plan needs to consider waterways and groundwater, air pollution, noise and light.	consultation document will seek to gather the levels of support or objection for this policy objective. The Local Plan will not duplicate policies already contained within the NPPF, which includes policies for sustainable drainage systems and watercourses.

Key Issues / Water resources and managing flood risk	Our response
the Local Plan should identify areas of water stress and control, protecting water courses and catchments.	

Key Issues / Natural environment / Biodiversity / LNRS / Air Quality	Our response
<u>Trees</u> The following issues should be considered in respect of trees: - Incorporating trees and open areas in new housing developments are essential to improve air quality and wellbeing; - Set a District wide % increase for canopy cover and site level minimum canopy standards for new development; - Treat trees as critical infrastructure; - Include a policy which states that development must align with LNRS priorities and opportunity areas; and - Use a woodland strategy to identify priority zones for woodland creation and buffers around existing woodland.	Trees are recognised as a valuable part of our rural and urban landscapes and the value of incorporating trees and open space in new development is recognised and the principles are established in our District Design Code. The NPPF also includes policies for trees in new developments. Our Contents and Evidence Document will ask whether the new Local Plan should set a higher BNG requirement for some site allocations and whether the existing Local Plan Policy, NE4 – Biodiversity and geological sites should continue to form part of the new Local Plan. We can consider whether setting canopy cover standards and preparing a woodland strategy as part of the work for the new Local Plan.
<u>National Nature Reserves</u> There is an intention to declare a super National Nature Reserve in the North Chilterns. This should be considered in preparing policies in the Local Plan and in assessing development proposals.	If this designation is confirmed, we can reflect this in our evidence base and in policies in the new Local Plan.

Key Issues / Natural environment / Biodiversity / LNRS / Air Quality	Our response
Several issues were raised in respect of biodiversity and Biodiversity Net Gain through the consultation. These can be divided between comments on biodiversity and protection of habitats and the location of new development: <u>Protection of habitats and biodiversity:</u> • Welcome the references to protected sites and the Chilterns National Landscape; • The Council should consider taking part in the Nature Towns and Cities Accreditation scheme as part of the local plan process; • Some development sites can contribute positively to environmental objectives, for example habitat creation, open spaces and climate change adaptation; • Potential for cross-boundary discussions relating to updated Habitat Regulations Assessment evidence; • Consideration of introducing policies to require the installation of universal swift bricks in all new residential and non-residential developments; • Would suggest a separate policy for green and blue infrastructure; • Introducing a BNG requirement above the legal requirement can adversely impact housing delivery, where the requirement becomes too high for a development to be viable; • Opportunity to assess local nature reserves and make mitigation measures a policy in the Local Plan;	Many of the issues raised in the representations will be addressed, either through policies in national legislation, the NPPF or our District Design Code. We will be preparing a Habitats Regulation Assessment as we assess the sites which will be allocated in the new Local Plan. Our Contents and Evidence Document will ask whether the new Local Plan should set a higher BNG requirement for some site allocations and whether the existing Local Plan Policy, NE4 – Biodiversity and geological sites should continue to form part of the new Local Plan. In terms of the location of new development, we will be assessing all of the submitted sites in terms of the impact that they might have on our environmental assets. The location of active sports facilities needs to be balanced between the need for those facilities to be accessible by different modes of transport and the effects that there might be on residential areas.

Key Issues / Natural environment / Biodiversity / LNRS / Air Quality	Our response
• The development of solar farms cutting off wildlife corridors and possibly having an impact on bird migration; • The loss of key farmland habitats, e.g skylarks and corn buntings as a result of edge of settlement developments which are not justified through biodiversity net gain; • Farmland buffers should be designated as permanent ecological corridors; • The Local Plan should acknowledge and take full advantage of the natural environment beyond the specified landscapes and habitats; • Consider opportunities to enhance ecological corridors; • Undertake evidence on the landscape and green infrastructure in a coordinated way with neighbouring authorities; • the role of protection of valued landscapes and countryside should be a priority objective for the Local Plan and should include landscape beyond the Chilterns National Landscape, including the chalk ridge that extends towards Royston and into East Anglia; and • The impact of development on nocturnal protected species, e.g owls and bats from light and noise pollution. Location of new development • The objectives in the LNRS should be incorporated into the considerations of locations for new development;	

Key Issues / Natural environment / Biodiversity / LNRS / Air Quality	Our response
• Larger sites will have a greater opportunity to improve sustainable links and as such should be considered on their own merits; • Habitats which support protected or Red List species should be excluded from development allocations; • The implementation of biodiversity net gain has resulted in additional costs and larger land use being required to bring sites forward – this should be carefully considered in allocating land for development; • Active sports areas should be located away from residential areas because of light and noise pollution; and • There is significant pressure on Therfield Heath, particularly from new developments in Royston.	
A number of representations recognised the importance of the District's vulnerable chalk streams and the effect that development can have on them, the aquifers and on the species supported by the sensitive habitats. It was suggested that there should be a report on the potential impact that housing growth might have on the aquifers and that there should be a preference to select sites which have the least impact on the chalk streams.	The importance of our chalk streams will be recognised in the new Local Plan.

Key Issues / Energy efficient technologies / Retrofitting	Our response
A number of representations were made in support of using energy efficient technologies in new developments, recognising that they are a way to safeguard the environment and that developers should create green dwellings. One representation stated that where solar panels are installed, a battery should also be installed to store excess energy. Environmental, sustainability and carbon standards should be aligned with national guidance. It is important that these requirements do not place an undue burden on development viability.	Comments noted The Government is introducing the Future Homes and Buildings Standard from March 2027 to help ensure that new homes and buildings are more energy efficient and produce significantly lower carbon emissions than those built today. The new standards are intended to support the transition to a low-carbon future by reducing energy use, lowering running costs and helping meet national climate change targets. The standards are expected to: • Require low-carbon heating systems in new homes, reducing reliance on fossil fuels. • Support the use of on-site renewable energy technologies, such as solar panels and air source heat pumps. • Improve energy efficiency, helping homes use less energy for heating, cooling and everyday living. • Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from new development. • Create homes that are "zero-carbon ready", meaning they will not need significant retrofit work in the future to meet net-zero objectives.

Key Issues – Prioritising development in locations well served by public transport to support more sustainable travel choices / ensure new development is designed to enable and encourage walking and cycling both within sites and to surrounding area	Our response
A number of comments suggested ways in which future developments could address sustainable travel choices, including: • Treating access by public transport as a core issue in future development decisions; • Existing walking and cycling routes being incorporated and extended as part of new development; • Making it easier for residents to use off road parking for EV charging and / or ensuring the installation of EV charging points in residential areas; • A need for more cycle lanes; • There is an opportunity to enhance existing access to the countryside through protection of existing footpaths, woodlands, and chalk streams; • considering developing a system of cycleways to connect villages, new developments and small towns in the area; • The suggestion that that larger development sites might provide a greater opportunity to improve sustainable links; • New development should support access to good-quality green infrastructure within 15 minutes of every household, in line with the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023;	The comments are noted. We will be considering how public and active travel can be incorporated into the design of new developments.

Key Issues – Prioritising development in locations well served by public transport to support more sustainable travel choices / ensure new development is designed to enable and encourage walking and cycling both within sites and to surrounding area	Our response
• Connected, nature-rich routes should link both new and existing communities to green infrastructure, while avoiding harm to sensitive sites such as SSSIs; • Our plan should improve air quality and reduce heat risks by protecting and enhancing green and blue infrastructure, including more tree planting, and should avoid supporting schemes that would significantly reduce access to local green space; and • Future plans should include plans to reduce queuing times where there are significant commuter delays, Hitchin and Letchworth Gate were mentioned specifically.	
A comment was also made that although private cars remain the preferred option for most people, vehicle pollution is likely to fall as electric and hybrid vehicles become more common and that policies aiming to reduce car journeys could be trimmed back.	Comments noted

Key issues: Heritage	Our response
The representations suggested that the following policy approaches could be considered for the Local Plan: • Historic environment policies tailored to North Hertfordshire's towns, villages, locations, themes, and heritage assets.	With the publication of the NPPF and the National Decision Making Policies, there is limited scope for heritage policies for North Hertfordshire. We will prepare, in consultation with Historic England, a Heritage Strategy for North Hertfordshire which will provide a local framework for understanding our heritage assets and identifying

Key issues: Heritage	Our response
• Protection of prominent or sensitive heritage asset settings. • A Local List and protection of important views. • Heritage-informed site allocation policies, especially for major growth areas. • Design policies, guides and codes based on local character evidence. • Reuse and retrofit of historic buildings. • Flood risk, climate change and renewable energy policies that consider heritage impacts.	opportunities to protect, conserve and enhance their significance and contribution to the character of our District.

A number of issues were raised in the consultation responses to the Environment Section which we cannot address through the Local Plan. These included the following representations:

Summary of responses / Issues outside the Local Plan	Our response
The planning process is not set up to deal with many of these questions. It is not a flexible process and policy in particular is slow in its gestation. There is a danger that by enshrining initiatives into a draft local plan, by the time of adoption, the background landscape has changed.	We acknowledge that the Local Plan is not a flexible process. We will not include policies in our Local Plan which refer to environmental standards which have not been finally approved.
Responses suggested that the Local Authority should lead by example in making its own properties more carbon neutral whilst also noting that improvements to residential and commercial properties is expensive and requires upfront investment, grants or match funding. It was also suggested that a register of approved tradespeople should be established.	Home improvement grants and registers of tradespeople is not something which the Local Plan can address. The Local Plan can only address the use and development of land.
A representation suggested that there should be a move to electric vehicles for council use?	The Council does have a fleet of electric vehicles, used by our Waste Management, Parking and Environmental Enforcement teams.
The need for additional reservoirs to address water shortages.	The need for additional reservoirs is determined at a strategic level by the water companies working alongside the UK Government (Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), Ofwat (Water Services Regulation Authority) and the Environment Agency, rather than through the Local Plan. Currently, there are no plans for a reservoir in North Hertfordshire.

Summary of responses / Issues outside the Local Plan	Our response
More areas should be covered in porous surfaces, rather than concrete.	Building Regulations require the use of porous surfaces and soakaways. Planning permission is required for impermeable surfaces in excess of 5 square metres.

Transport : Summary of responses

Question 7 - Do you think there are any other challenges and opportunities we should be aware of in relation to transport issues?

Key Issues	Our response
<u>Active Travel : Walking and Cycling</u> A number of representations supported the emphasis on sustainable transport, in terms of reducing car use, congestion and pollution and for increasing active travel and consequential health benefits. Several representations were made in respect of encouraging people to walk and cycle: - consider lighting for people to walk and cycle safely, particularly in the winter; - recording an integrated network of cycleways on the Definitive Map to ensure routes can be viewed on Ordnance Survey maps; - develop a system of cycleways and active travel routes to connect villages, new development and small towns in the area; - Local Plan policies should focus on enabling 2 wheeled connectivity between towns and villages on safe and maintained cycleways; - Sport and other facilities should be accessible by public transport or cycle networks; - Active travel routes should include provision for equestrians, particularly in rural areas;	We note and welcome the number of representations which support the emphasis on sustainable transport and active travel. Our new Local Plan will seek to: - ensure that our new developments are well connected and that amenities are provided on large sites; - introduce conditional planning obligations to address any unknown transport impacts from vision led transport planning; - alter car parking standards to help encourage a shift towards active and public transport and reducing the dependence on the private car; - require larger developments to incorporate one or more travel hubs; and - seek to safeguard / allocate land for travel hubs in the most suitable locations in town and village centres, with funding being secured from developments that would be served by them. Some of the issues raised in the representations are the responsibility of the Highways Authority, for example lighting, the PRoW network and cycle networks. We will forward these

Key Issues	Our response
• S106 payments should be used to improve cycling and walking provision on roads into town centres; • Increase cycle routes and cycle storage at railway stations; • New development should include safe footpaths and cycleways, separated from roads; and • Active travel routes should be designed to be safe, direct, be inclusive for all users and include supportive infrastructure, e.g signs, lighting, benches Other comments included: • There is a lack of safe walking & cycling routes between villages and towns; • Hitchin has a good active travel network but some routes are poor quality, unsafe or not well connected; • Ensure that roads, cycleways and footpaths are maintained to a high standard; • There is a challenge to integrate cycle and pedestrian options without damaging rural habitats and landscapes; • New housing developments should be supported where good walking, cycle and public transport links already exist or will be provided; • The Local Plan should list the LCWIP cycle schemes to be delivered in the plan period; and	representations to Hertfordshire County Council for their consideration.

Key Issues	Our response
The Local Plan should better join up health, active travel, green infrastructure and transport policy, including through green corridors and cycleways.	
<u>Railway Stations</u> Representations supported the intention to build near to railway stations but stated that the following issues or comments should also be considered: - The use of land around railway stations will have sustainable travel benefits; - There should be good pedestrian and cycle access routes linking to the station; - The Local Plan should recognise the potential for development sites to improve linkages when selecting development sites; - there needs to be an assessment of the impacts on existing communities and services of this type of development; - Existing infrastructure needs stabilising before adding more; - the rail system from Baldock will not cope with increased demand; - A north entrance to Letchworth station from Nevells Road should be included; and - There needs to recognition that decisions to locate development near to railway stations remains a balanced decision taking into account the environment, the Herts LNRS, local infrastructure.	We understand that our railway stations are important transport hubs need to be accessible for all users. We are assessing which sites will be allocated for development in the new Local Plan and access to railway stations will be one factor in those deliberations. A future update to the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan will include greater focus on improving walking and cycling links to railway stations.

Key Issues	Our response
<u>Public Transport</u> Comments on existing public transport services included: • Providing public transport for all small villages would be expensive so planning should continue to make provision for cars so that towns can continue to prosper; • Doubt whether new development bus routes would be profitable; • Lack of an efficient and sufficiently useful bus service which would allow people to be less reliant on their cars; and • It is unrealistic to attempt to limit car use unless there are viable and affordable alternatives, e.g the Herts Lynx service.	The Local Plan will require developments to contribute financially towards significant enhancements to bus services – scheduled and/or demand-responsive (HertsLynx).
<u>Roads</u> Comments on the existing road network included: • Congestion and limited capacity on the A1(M) and A602; • Consider the pinch points, e.g. A505 and A602 in Hitchin which should be upgraded and redesigned and make it an integral part of the east / west traffic solution; • Road network at Great Ashby is overstretched at peak times; • Speeding and dangerous driving is unacceptable and the impact on residents is ignored – further development will compound these issues; • Illegal battery-operated bikes and scooters; and	What we cannot address: The Local Plan cannot address drivers' behaviour and speeding on local roads or enforce against the use of battery-operated bikes and scooters. However, these matters are the responsibility of the police, and we will send the comments to Hertfordshire Constabulary.

Key Issues	Our response
Junction improvements are needed on roads serving the industrial areas where peak time delays are significant.	
<u>Transport Planning / Location of Development</u> In terms of the location of new development and transport, representations stated that: - Consideration should be given to sites which prioritise access to the strategic road network and allows for the integration of public transport at the outset; - There may be an opportunity to create a sustainable pattern of development that addresses transport challenges in the rural areas through planning across a wider geographical area; - New development should be located to reduce the use of private vehicles – this is particularly challenging for rural areas and should be a priority for the Local Plan; - Minimising the need to travel and maximising the use of public transport and active travel can be assisted by facilitating the growth of key settlements in the Green Belt; - Transport should be planned before growth – not after; - Integrated transport planning should be tied to spatial strategy choices; - If a proposed development site requires residents to use private vehicles on semi-rural roads, the site must be deemed structurally unsustainable and filtered out of the allocation process; and - The development of Universal Studios is a challenge unaccounted for in the Scoping Document. The development could saturate the	The new Local Plan will set criteria for sustainable development in transport terms that accord with the NPPF and Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan.

Key Issues	Our response
regional strategic network which in turn could affect local road networks in North Hertfordshire. A number of representations made comments about the design of new transport infrastructure: • Transport infrastructure can have implications for flood risk, water quality and the wider water environment; • There are opportunities for new infrastructure to incorporate sustainable drainage, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions within transport schemes to support climate resilience and environmental enhancement which should help to avoid flood risk, manage surface water and prevent pollution of watercourses and groundwater; • Transport infrastructure should also incorporate green infrastructure features, such as EV charging, green roofs on bus stations and cycle parking, permeable parking, and habitat features such as bee and bug hotels. • Policies on vehicle trips, air quality and carbon reduction should also consider impacts on the environment and protected sites, not just human health. Comments highlighted that development in North Hertfordshire has direct implications for transport networks serving Stevenage and that there was support for the inclusion of comprehensive transport modelling which should be jointly developed with Stevenage Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council and National Highways.	
<u>Car Parking</u>	In our new Local Plan, we will encourage a shift towards active travel, public and shared transport and reduce people's need to own

Key Issues	Our response
Several representations were made in respect of car parking, these included: • The Council should consider introducing maximum car parking standards to discourage unnecessary use of the car; • Car parking should be free to streamline connectivity across the area; • There should be a significant increase in town centre parking in all the towns to accommodate the increased numbers of people living outside a 10-minute walking distance; • The capacity of long stay and commuter parking should be increased at affordable rates; • There should be at least one park and ride facility to reduce congestion and parking pressure; and • The Local Plan's evidence base must actively identify and protect town-specific characteristics—such as historic street layouts and residential pinch points, otherwise this will be overlooked by a district-wide parking strategy will overlook;	and use a private car. We will do this by setting lower minimum and, in some circumstances, maximum parking standards that reflect the availability and attractiveness of alternatives to owning a car – walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport and car-sharing. We will require some residential parking to be provided off plot in shared parking squares or courts which will make better use of land and will provide greater scope for parking to be repurposed as and when private car ownership declines. There are no plans to build any park-and-rides in the District. They require a large amount of land, are expensive to build, require a car to access them, and undermine the viability of other bus services. The priority in the Local Transport Plan and new Local Plan will be to improve access to bus services from people's homes without the need to use a car.
<u>Using Private Cars</u> Some representations mentioned the use of private cars: • There are no safe alternatives to driving; • There is a need to address the reliance on private cars for everyday tasks; and	Our Local Plan can only influence the use of private cars through the design of new developments, setting car parking standards and ensuring that town centres and everyday amenities are located in locations which are served by reliable public transport and/or safe active travel routes.

Key Issues	Our response
Businesses and public services have no realistic option other than to use cars and commercial vehicles and adequate provision needs to be made for roads and car parking facilities. Failure to do this will result in reduced productivity.	

Community Issues: Summary of responses

Question 8 - Do you think there are any other challenges and opportunities we should be aware of in relation to community issues?

Summary of representations Shopping, services, community facilities	Our response
The challenges and opportunities are not specific to North Herts	Our Scoping Document set out the some of the key issues affecting the District. We asked for views on those issues and we will use the responses to reflect local issues in our new Local Plan.
Many representations highlighted the following issues in relation to existing and future community facilities: • Concern about the level of proposed development and the impact that development can have on existing community services and facilities, particularly in rural communities; • The Local Plan needs to include a cross-boundary assessment of infrastructure capacity and future needs, e.g the Lister Hospital, schools and leisure and community facilities; • The Local Plan should prohibit new development which add a significant population without a legally binding front loading for doctors, dentists and school places; • The new Local Plan is an opportunity to strengthen the protection for all community facilities, including public houses. In turn this will support the ambition to have enough community facilities,	We recognise that the provision of community facilities and service is important to both existing and future communities. As part of our work for the Local Plan, we will be updating our evidence base to give us an up-to-date picture of the levels of community facilities and services across the District. We will also be updating our Infrastructure Delivery Plan working with the statutory service providers and adjoining local authorities to ensure that these issues are considered through the Local Plan. We will consider whether any of these suggested additional policies can be incorporated into our new Local Plan, taking into account the National Development Management Policies and our existing policies.

Summary of representations	Our response
Shopping, services, community facilities	
improve employment opportunities and protecting our historic environment; • The Plan should support the delivery of well-connected, mixed and inclusive communities, with access to open space, community facilities and services; • Growth should be used as an opportunity to address existing infrastructure deficits and enhance provision for existing and new communities; • The location of community infrastructure should be based on meeting the needs of all residents of a town in a local plan not just located in a new development; • Strategic sites can provide the opportunity to deliver these elements in a coordinated manner; • Provision of community facilities should provide for day to day community needs where these are not already available locally; • Need more surgeries, dentists, school places, nursery places and cycle lanes. Investment needed in these if more houses are to be built; • Do not understand why developers are allowed to build houses without making provision for services, for example community centres with function space, shops, medical centre, schools, sports facilities, local council, police ambulance & fire services;	

Summary of representations	Our response
Shopping, services, community facilities	
• Facilities should be designed for multiple uses to maximise value, e.g BNG areas serving as open space, village halls including shops and school playing fields being available to the community outside school hours; • Increase the number of activities for under 25's, e.g community equestrian centres; • Facilities should be located in areas which are accessible without the need for a car; • Policies which seek to protect, enhance and create places that provide community, cultural, recreational, sport and leisure opportunities; and • Policies on healthy community infrastructure which should also specify that these facilities should be located within reasonable walking distances and be accessible by active travel routes and public transport.	
<u>Future community facilities</u> Some community facilities are strategic in nature and would be best planned for across the area of the new, larger authorities, including secondary schooling and major sports facilities. It would be more effective and sustainable if the Local Plan could address the new, wider authority area to take account of these issues and ensure a more joined-up approach to planning and minimise the risks of gaps in provision.	Whilst we cannot address wider issues in the new Local Plan for North Hertfordshire, we are working with our neighbouring local authorities and wider service providers to ensure that education, leisure and community facilities will be provided for in new developments.

Summary of representations Shopping, services, community facilities	Our response
Detailed representations were made in respect of strengthening health and wellbeing policies in the Local Plan. These included: • the Local Plan should positively promote health and wellbeing and address local health inequalities; • facilitate improvements to health infrastructure; • the Local Plan should seek to ensure infrastructure providers, including the NHS receive a commensurate share of developer contributions to mitigate the healthcare impacts arising from housing growth; • the Local Plan should recognise the impact on health services arising from planning applications made by specialist housing providers; • support the ability of the NHS as a landowner to continually review its healthcare estate, optimise land use, and deliver health services from modern facilities; • Refusing planning permission where proposals would cause unacceptable harm to public health; • Preparing a Health Impact Assessment to ensure health and wellbeing are properly considered; • Managing harmful land uses such as hot food takeaways, vape shops, betting shops, gambling venues and alcohol-selling premises, particularly near schools and other sensitive locations and limiting the clustering of these uses to reduce antisocial	We recognise that a Health Impact Assessment is an important part of developing a Local Plan that supports healthy, sustainable communities and aligns with the Council's commitment to improving quality of life for residents. We will be seeking views on our Health Impact Assessment which we have prepared to accompany the Contents and Evidence Consultation Document. Developer Contributions will be sought where appropriate and this may include contributions for additional healthcare needs arising from proposed developments. Our Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document sets out further details. The NPPF has introduced Policy HC5: Hot food takeaways which sets out that proposals for hot food takeaways should be refused in some circumstances. The Government has announced separate changes to planning laws for shops selling vapes and betting shops.

Summary of representations	Our response
Shopping, services, community facilities	
behaviour, financial harm, poor health outcomes and impacts on community wellbeing; • Supporting local food growing through policies for allotments and community gardens, including provision on larger residential sites; • Adopting the Healthy Streets approach, requiring Healthy Streets Assessments for major developments; and • Applying Age Friendly Principles to support accessible, inclusive places that promote physical activity, social interaction and wellbeing.	
New development needs to take into account the inability for trans people to use male, female or disabled toilets or changing rooms. Separate facilities for trans and disabled people need to be provided.	We will be considering equality, accessibility and health issues across all of the policy areas in the new Local Plan. This is not an issue which can be addressed directly through the Local Plan but could be addressed through detailed planning proposals.

Key Issues / sufficient open space for local communities	Our response
A number of representations recognised the importance of accessible open spaces both for existing residents and for future residents. The responses suggested that policies in the Local Plan should protect the existing open spaces and playing pitches and that they provision should be made in new developments.	It is evident that open spaces, playing pitches and other recreational facilities are important to the local community which will be reflected in our new Local Plan. In terms of the definitions used, we will ensure that are definitions in our Local Plan and evidence base documents are clear.

Key Issues / sufficient open space for local communities	Our response
It was also suggested that the Local Plan should be more specific about what open space means, would suggest sports facilities, parks and gardens, woodlands	
A wide range of issues were raised in the representations in terms of open space: • It should be recognised that development on the outskirts of a town can increase the distance for existing residents to access the countryside and green space; • Provision should be made for sport and play facilities within housing allocations to encourage and facilitate physical activity; • Guidance on sport and play facilities from Sport England could be embedded into policy; • Open spaces should not just include making parks in new developments but should also ensure that parks are connected with green links to the countryside and other green spaces; • Provide sufficient, high-quality open spaces that are usable and accessible for communities, in a range of sizes and types, to meet local needs. This should take account of existing provision and help support both physical and emotional wellbeing; • The open spaces mentioned are not enjoyable because of the volume of drivers; • In relation to providing sufficient, high-quality open spaces the Local Plan policy approach should be proportionate to the scale of development sites and should reflect the potential of development sites to improve and such provision e.g., new open spaces; • No mention of children's play areas; • There is an opportunity to create places which are designed to support wellbeing, inclusion and safety for all. By promoting	National planning policy requires us to take a proactive approach to planning for social infrastructure, including open and recreational spaces and facilities. We will be considering what types of new or enhanced open and recreational spaces are required as part of our site assessment work, taking into account our evidence studies and the types, sizes and location of sites available.

Key Issues / sufficient open space for local communities	Our response
inclusive environments, multifunctional public spaces and well-designed streets and neighbourhoods, planning policies can support social interaction, active lifestyles and a strong sense of community; • The Council's Playing Pitch and Indoor Sports Strategies identify current and future needs that the Local Plan can help address. Some can be met by improving existing facilities, while others will require new sites, such as football, rugby, hockey and tennis provision in the Royston area. The Local Plan can support this through site allocations, on-site provision where appropriate, and financial contributions to off-site improvements; and • Consideration should be given to the multi-use of facilities to ensure they are fully utilised. Examples given included: • BNG areas could also be used for open space provision if they are correctly designed and maintained; • Village halls could have a variety of uses and include small convenience stores or community shops alongside flexible office space and larger hall areas; and • School playing fields could be used by the community outside school hours.	
<u>Allotments</u> There is no reference to allotments which benefit wellbeing, the environment and sustainability	The importance of allotments is recognised in the NPPF, Policies HC1 (Planning for Healthy Communities) and Policy HC7 (Development affecting existing recreational land and facilities). The Local Plan should not duplicate policies which are included in the NPPF.
<u>Public Rights of Way</u> There is no explicit reference to the Public Right of Way (PRoW) network. The Local Plan should explicitly recognise the role of the	The importance of the Public Right of Way network (PRoW) is recognised in Policy TR8 (Public rights of way) in the NPPF. The Local Plan should not duplicate policies in the NPPF.

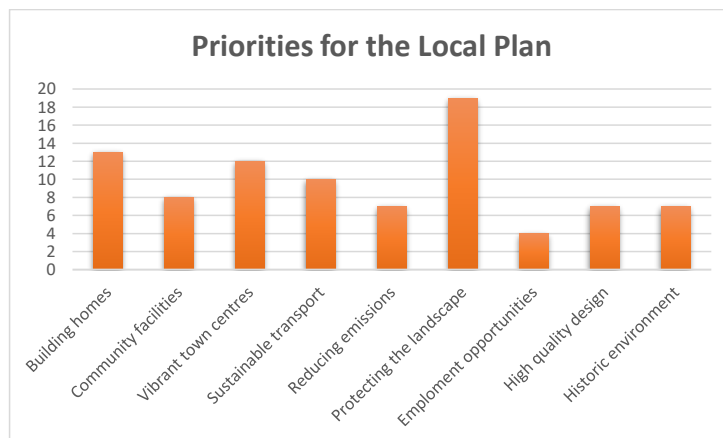
Key Issues / sufficient open space for local communities	Our response
PRoW network and the requirement for protection, creation and improvement of the network.	

Question 9: Please choose the three most important issues out of the topic areas below

Our Scoping Document outlined that we will have to carefully balance the demand for homes, jobs and infrastructure with the need to protect and enhance our important environmental and historic assets. We asked respondents to choose the three most important issues from the following list:

- Building enough homes, including affordable, accessible/ specialist in our District for our residents
- Having enough community facilities including sports facilities, and recreation/open spaces
- Having vibrant Town Centres that provide the facilities and services that our residents need
- Providing a range of sustainable transport opportunities and ensuring that active travel is prioritised
- Reducing carbon emissions of all types and improving the adaption of buildings to climate change by making use of efficiency technology e.g. rainwater harvesting etc
- Protecting our landscape and natural environment, improving biodiversity, improving air quality and reducing the risk of flooding.
- Improving employment opportunities in our District
- Ensuring high-quality design
- Protecting our historic environment

This question was only answered by those people responding online. However, the following graph shows the important priorities from those who did respond:



OUR VISION

Our Vision

In the Scoping Document we set out the factors which could be considered when developing a vision for the District and the new Local Plan.

We asked two questions, the first asking whether we were considering the right issues for the new vision and secondly for any additional suggestions which should be considered.

A summary of responses to these questions is set out in the tables on the following pages...

Our Vision: Summary of responses

Question 10: Do you think these are the right issues to be considered for our Vision?

The responses have been summarised in the table by theme:

Key Issues / Issues to be considered for our vision	Our response
<u>General comments</u> The vision should reflect why people value living in the area, use those priorities to guide the plan, and set clear, measurable objectives so the plan can be monitored and remain effective. Many of these issues are common to the new local authority areas, but some are different. It would be better if a comprehensive vision could be achieved, rather than a vision for just part of the area. This can only be achieved by considering specific places and locational challenges and opportunities across the area.	The comments made in respect of the vision and objectives are noted. We have reviewed all of the comments in developing a vision and objectives for the new Local Plan. As we set out in the Scoping Document, the Vision will need to be a clear, forward looking statement setting out the long term aspirations for North Hertfordshire and the objectives will set out clear and specific goals which will explain how that vision will be delivered over the life of the Local Plan. Our Contents and Evidence Document includes a proposed vision for the new Local Plan and we expect to receive further comments on this through public consultation.
<u>Climate change / Flood risk / Reducing carbon emissions</u> • The vision lacks an understanding of the National Emergency Briefing held in Parliament (November 2025); • Insulating homes should take priority over heritage considerations; • The vision would benefit from being more explicit about the need to plan for a world of high energy prices through energy conservation standards and building in sustainable locations to reduce car dependency; • Flooding is less of a risk than drought and water shortages in North Hertfordshire;	Our new Local Plan will place greater emphasis on issues, challenges and opportunities that are specific to the current geographic area of North Hertfordshire, many of which have been highlighted in the representations. The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2026) has introduced national decision-making policies (NDMPs). Many of the policies which were previously included in the Local Plan will be covered by the NDMPs and they will not be included in our new Local Plan.

Key Issues / Issues to be considered for our vision	Our response
• There should be stronger priority to water resilience as part of sustainable growth; and • Water should be treated as a central consideration within the Vision given the proposed scale of growth and the environmental sensitivities of the area, particularly in relation to groundwater and chalk streams.	
<u>Housing</u> • The vision should recognise the scale of housing growth required in North Hertfordshire; • Growth should be directed towards existing settlements to make the best use of established services and infrastructure; • Homes should be located on small, medium and large sites; • There should be some recognition of meeting housing needs in neighbouring authorities; • Greater emphasis should be placed on meeting and exceeding housing needs; and • The housing priority should include suitable, well located homes which support all parts of the community;	
<u>Thriving Communities / Health / Wellbeing</u> • Should recognise the role of new developments can play in supporting thriving communities by providing additional housing to meet local needs and sustaining local facilities;	

Key Issues / Issues to be considered for our vision	Our response
• Improve the health of the community by improving access to recreational facilities; • The Vision and Objectives should reflect local health challenges, embed health equity, inclusion and sustainability, and show how health connects to wider priorities such as the environment, economy, transport, communities, infrastructure and homes; and • Place making quality and long term stewardship should be considered throughout the Local Plan.	
<u>Environment</u> • Protection and enhancement of the natural environment is the most important and is being neglected by the council; • The Vision is too narrow as it focuses on “important habitats and landscapes”. It should consider both the natural and man-made environments; and • The Green Belt should be recognised as an important feature to protect	
<u>Heritage / Landscape</u> • As with heritage assets, important landscapes are already protected or covered by national policy – there is therefore no need of any local policies on these matters; and • The vision places too much emphasis on heritage and historic character, without enough reference to landscape or ecological value.	

Key Issues / Issues to be considered for our vision	Our response
In addition, several representations agreed that the right issues are considered in the Scoping Document which should then be reflected in a future Vision for North Hertfordshire and some respondents stated that there were no additional issues which should be considered.	The supporting representations are welcomed and noted.

Question 11 : Are there any other issues that you think we should be including?

A number of suggestions were made about issues that the Local Plan should consider, either as part of the Vision or in Local Plan policies. These suggestions included:

Key Issues	Our response
<u>Sustainability Appraisal</u> The Scoping Document does not include, summarise, or consult upon the required Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA) Scoping content. There is no baseline environmental information, no proposed SA/SEA objectives, and no invitation to comment on the scope of the assessment.	We are preparing a series of evidence base documents to support our Local Plan. This will include a Sustainability Appraisal, which includes the requirements of a Strategic Environmental Assessment. This will be published as part of the Contents and Evidence Consultation. Details of all our evidence base documents are available on our website .
<u>Design</u> The use of traditional architectural Design Codes	We have recently adopted a District Design Code and this will inform policies in our Local Plan and be used in determining planning applications.
<u>Landscape</u> Consideration of the Mimram Valley Parklands Landscape area	We have included a question in our Contents and Evidence Base document about whether we should consider designating Locally Valued Landscapes, which could include the Mimram Valley Parklands Landscape.
<u>Heritage</u> Consideration of working with Hertfordshire Gardens Trust to ensure a comprehensive list of Historic Parks and Gardens of Local Interest/Importance for the North Herts District	We are preparing a Heritage Strategy for the District which will include Historic Parks and Gardens. Information and advice from the Hertfordshire Gardens Trust will be welcomed.

Key Issues	Our response
<u>Transport</u> A southern bypass for Hitchin to divert east – west traffic and take traffic off Hitchin streets and would also be beneficial to the wellbeing of Hitchin residents	There are no proposals to build a southern by-pass for Hitchin. Any proposals for significant new or improved transport routes would be considered as part of the site allocations in the Local Plan.
<u>Public Engagement and Consultation</u> There may be opportunities to make public consultation more accessible, public meetings and simple feedback methods could help gather a wide range of views.	We have prepared a Community Engagement Strategy to set out how we will consult for the Local Plan.
It is unclear what is meant by strong communities – perhaps this could be made clearer and it should clearly state the need for local facilities such as parks, sports grounds etc that promote wellbeing and thriving communities	Comments noted. We will endeavour to explain this in future documents.
<u>Letchworth Garden City</u> - How will the local plan protect the original vision for Letchworth with the planned locations for housing, industrial and countryside? - What weight should be given to the Ebenezer Howards concept that there is a maximum size of a town? and - How much Green Belt is needed to uphold the vision of Town meets Country?	The importance of Letchworth Garden City is recognised in the proposed vision for the Local Plan. The draft vision will form part of our Contents and Evidence Document consultation in October 2026.
<u>Vision</u>	We recognise the importance of green infrastructure and this will be reflected in the Contents and Evidence Document.

Key Issues	Our response
The vision should include delivery of “green” infrastructure because this will be essential for biodiversity, shade, flood management and long-term liveability. Ongoing maintenance provision should be agreed for community infrastructure and spaces as part of the planning process for any site.	
<u>Sustainable development</u> Respecting the future need for development whilst respecting and protecting the green built so boundaries do not blur.	Comments noted.
<u>Green Belt</u> Suggest that the need to test and identify suitable land for development on Green Belt land/release Green Belt land for development is included in the vision.	We will be assessing sites submitted through the Call for Sites to identify which will be the most suitable for allocating in the new Local Plan.
<u>Joint working</u> Evidence of working with adjoining authorities on the strategic issues.	We are working collaboratively with other authorities on a number of evidence studies and on wider, strategic issues.
As stated above, clear objectives should be confirmed to ensure that the plan succeeds and is measurable. The Vision should then outline how the objectives are met. Place making quality and long-term stewardship should be carefully considered throughout the Local Plan.	The Contents and Evidence Document will set out a proposed vision and objectives for consultation in October 2026. Place making will be at the centre of the new Local Plan and how sites are allocated and delivered will be considered in its preparation.

Key Issues	Our response
Deliverability and speed of delivery are particularly important given the current housing shortfalls. It is also vital that the delivery of infrastructure is provided to support housing development.	
We recommend that the Local Plan explicitly recognises the importance of planning for water-resilient growth, ensuring that development is aligned with sustainable water supply, infrastructure capacity and environmental constraints. This should include: • integrating water resources and water quality considerations into the spatial strategy and site selection process; • requiring ambitious water efficiency standards and demand management measures; • ensuring that growth is supported by an up-to-date Water Cycle Strategy; and • protecting groundwater resources and water-dependent habitats, including chalk streams Embedding these considerations at an early stage will help ensure that the Local Plan delivers development that is both sustainable and resilient over the long term.	The importance of water is recognised in planning for the District's future. Our Contents and Evidence Document will consider a number of water related issues and consultation responses will help frame policies for the new Local Plan. We have also commissioned a Water Cycle Strategy and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment to accompany the new Local Plan.
Failure to Address Underground Archaeology and Non-Designated Heritage Assets: The Scoping Document places heavily simplified emphasis on "valued heritage assets" and their "reuse," but completely fails to mention the protection of non-designated heritage assets and highly sensitive underground archaeology.	There is very limited scope for us to introduce our own heritage policies specific to North Hertfordshire. For these reasons, our Local Plan will rely on national historic environment policy set out in the NPPF to conserve and enhance our heritage assets in our District which includes but is not limited to non-designated heritage assets and archaeological sites.

Key Issues	Our response
The Specific Challenge for Edge-of-Settlement Sites: Peripheral agricultural sites located along or adjacent to ancient corridors—such as the historic Icknield Way crossing at Ickleford—possess incredibly high potential for undisturbed Romano-British, Iron Age, and Anglo-Saxon archaeological remains. Allowing developers to clear and pave massive areas in these places risks obliterating unrecorded elements of our national story before they can even be identified. The Local Plan's Vision must mandate early, robust, front-loaded archaeological evaluations and declare that sites demonstrating a severe negative impact on the setting of ancient monuments or historic conservation areas will be strictly protected from allocation.	
People need a home/roof to live under - basis rule of security and health Kids need a school to attend GP used to keep up healthy - and trust Transport to get to shops, businesses, work, Green areas - wellbeing, community support Care homes for those who need them	Comments noted.
Monitoring and Implementation A clear and robust monitoring framework for local performance indicators should be included to understand if planning policies are delivering the objectives. These should include indicators from the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework to ensure the effective ongoing delivery of healthy place-making objectives.	Monitoring is an integral part of the local plan making process and a monitoring framework will be drafted alongside the Local Plan policies.

Key Issues	Our response
There were also a number of comments which stated that there were no additional issues to be considered but that the plan should be kept short and concise and remove anything which is duplicated in national policy.	Support noted

In addition to the comments summarised above, we also received a number of comments which raised issues which cannot be addressed through our Local Plan. These are summarised in the table below:

Key Issues	Our response
Transport bottle necks at Welwyn, both on the Welwyn rail viaduct and the A1M which have a significant impact on North Herts residents and causes unnecessary pollution.	Whilst we are aware of congestion and pinch points on the strategic road network, our Local Plan cannot address issues which arise out of the administrative boundary of North Hertfordshire.
There should be more demands and strict rules on developers to build what the community wants rather just accepting their plans.	We can use our Local Plan to set out criteria which help to guide the type of development that we expect to happen for our site allocations. These are used in considering applications for development, but at the point of determining planning applications there maybe a range of other factors which need to be considered by both planners and councillors.
The proper maintenance of trees and shrubs, some of which are Council's responsibility and other are homeowners. Preventing vehicles parking illegally on streets.	Although the Local Plan cannot influence the maintenance of trees and shrubs across the District, the Council does have a Greenspace Management Strategy 2022 – 2027 which sets out our approach to maintaining green spaces across the District. Our Local Plan cannot address illegal parking, but the Council does enforce parking restrictions across the District.
Reducing speed limits in urban areas and on major roads and dual carriageways	Hertfordshire County Council are proposing the introduction of new 20mph areas across the County as part of an initiative to improve road safety, create calmer streets and encourage more walking and cycling.

Key Issues	Our response
In Letchworth, consideration should be given to reducing the hard landscaping in the town centre and looking to deliver green squares with tree cover.	This is not a suggestion which we can consider in isolation through the Local Plan but we can encourage green spaces to be provided in all future development schemes.
As the Council starts to draft the Local Plan, it should include the following: • a Town Specific Parking Impact Assessments; and • a Transparent Transitional Framework - a formal mechanism ensuring that existing community petitions, localized grievances, and evidence gathered by current tiers of government are carried forward seamlessly into the post-2028 Unitary parking services design.	Whilst car parking in our towns will be considered as part of any development allocations, we will not be undertaking town specific parking impact assessments. Where responses are made in respect of the Local Plan, these will continue to be considered through the local planning process despite the changes that will take place through Local Government Reorganisation.

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The logo for the North Herts Local Plan is a circular emblem. At the center is a dark purple circle containing the text 'NORTH HERTS' in a smaller, white, sans-serif font, and 'LOCAL PLAN' in a larger, bold, white, sans-serif font below it. Surrounding this central circle is a vibrant, stylized illustration of a local landscape. This includes a blue river or canal winding through green grassy areas. Various landmarks are depicted around the perimeter: a large red-brick building with many windows at the top; a tall, orange-brown tower on the right; a grey stone building with a spire at the bottom right; a red brick building with a rainbow flag on the bottom left; and a small yellow bus on the left. The scene is populated with numerous green trees, bushes, and small figures of people engaged in activities like walking, cycling, and playing in a park. A large, light-colored rock sits on the left side of the river. The entire circular logo is set against a plain white background.

Although we started a lot of preparatory work on the evidence base for the Local Plan and during the Get Ready period, in terms of the 30 month requirements for preparing the Local Plan, we officially started preparing a new Local Plan for North Herts Council on 9 October 2026 (publication of the Gateway 1 assessment)

This page explains what we've done to get ready to meet the 30-month timeframe. It also has links to further information and where you can get updates.

The timetable shows when we expect to carry out the different stages and activities for preparing our Plan. It helps us check if and how we can adopt our Plan within the 30-month timeframe. We'll keep this updated as we make more progress.

- proposed Local Plan Content and Evidence (13 October and 24 November 2026), and
- Proposed Local Plan, (anticipated for 26 October 2027 and 4 January 2028)

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2026/186/contents/made>

To ensure we deliver our plan within 30 months, we:

- have proactively engaged with stakeholders and community groups as part of our Scoping Consultation
- will promote the use of a digital response form to help us analyse the responses more efficiently

Engaging in this way has helped generate initial ideas and key criteria within our Plan. It also ensured that stakeholders and residents had sight of the plan-making process and the requirements for the new plan-making system early on. We will continue to work with these groups through our consultation periods.

We're confident we will be able to adopt our plan within 30 months.

You can view our [Local Plan timetable](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/local-plan-timetable)² on our webpage.

We have established project management and governance arrangements

Preparing a Local Plan involves many people across the Council and from other organisations. Thinking early about how the work is planned, managed and signed off helps us:

- check our progress and keep the work on track
- anticipate and manage any risks to us adopting the plan within 30 months

We have developed a project plan to help us prepare our Plan in line with our Local Plan timetable and will meet regularly with our key decision makers to monitor how this is going. When we developed the project plan, we identified some risks to its delivery. We have reflected on these risks and identified things we can do to reduce these risks.

Guidance advises us:

- to consider our governance procedures
- to ensure we have efficient sign off processes in place with key decisions makers

We report to a Strategic Planning Project Board, which is chaired by the Executive Member for Place and includes cross-party representation from all political groups. The Board provides informal guidance on key issues and receives regular updates on the progress of the programme.

We have undertaken a series of informal Member workshops prior to the Scoping Consultation, as part of the "Get Ready" stage, to scope out issues to be included in our Plan and to start developing a vision to further develop with our communities

² <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/local-plan-timetable>

through the public engagement.

We are currently undertaking a review of our governance processes in consultation with Councillors to ensure our constitution aligns with the new plan-making system regulations so that decisions can be taken in a timely way.

We planned how we will consult on our Plan

Public consultation is essential for our Local Plan to represent the needs of our communities. It must be easy for people to have their say in a way that works for them, so they can influence the way the area develops. By planning this early, we can ensure people are aware in advance and can get involved from the start.

We have already undertaken a Scoping Consultation to get people's views on what our Plan could contain and how we propose to consult on our Plan at key stages.

We used this consultation to help us prepare a Community Engagement Strategy. This sets out how we'll consult and communicate with our communities as we continue to prepare our Plan.

We have already undertaken some informal engagement activities and planned to increase our resource and use of digital software to analyse the responses in a timely manner.

We have planned a mix of consultation and communication approaches to get more people involved. This includes:

- Community drop-in sessions in different parts of North Hertfordshire
- Area Forums and Councillor Surgeries
- Briefing sessions with Parish and Town Councils
- Attendance at meetings with seldom-heard groups
- Targeted meetings with other stakeholders

We are using [PlaceMaker](https://placemaker.north-hertfordshire.urbanintelligence.co.uk/p/document/2/)³, provided by Urban Intelligence, as our digital platform.

You can find more information about upcoming consultation activities on our [website](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/new-local-plan)⁴, in our [Community Engagement Strategy](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/community-engagement-strategy)⁵, and on our social media channels.



³ <https://placemaker.north-hertfordshire.urbanintelligence.co.uk/p/document/2/>

⁴ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/new-local-plan>

⁵ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/community-engagement-strategy>

We began scoping out the content of our Plan

Scoping includes considering how well our existing Plan is working and gathering updated baseline information about our District. This helps to identify our future needs and ambitions. Starting this work early means we can begin preparing our new Plan with a clear vision, which makes it quicker and easier to consult on our Plan and make decisions about it.

To gain an understanding of the development needs for North Hertfordshire, we have looked at the existing evidence about our District and the people our Plan needs to provide for.

Using the information we have gathered along with the input from our Members, we have:

- begun to draft a vision for our District
- started to understand our development requirements for North Hertfordshire
- started to assess sites that have been submitted to us for where new developments could be located
- started to procure evidence base to inform proposed policy approaches and identify where we need to commission and/or prepare further evidence where there are gaps. We've shared some of this [evidence](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base)⁶ through early engagement activities and published summaries of consultation responses on our website.

We began a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) (which incorporates the requirements of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA))

We're legally required to identify, describe and evaluate any likely significant effects on the environment of:

- implementing our Local Plan
- reasonable alternatives taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of our Plan

This process will consider how we take account of community, national and international environmental, social and economic objectives in our Plan. It will help us to predict significant effects and develop ways of preventing, reducing and offsetting these.

It is important we start this work early and are transparent about how we are doing the assessment when engaging stakeholders and communities.

⁶ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

We have identified other relevant plans and programmes and collected baseline information, looking at our District's environment and relevant designations to identify potential issues or problems.

We started the initial work on the SA scoping report, the baseline and SA framework, prior to the new plan-making system coming into force. We consulted with the statutory consultees

- Natural England,
- Environment Agency and
- Historic England

as per the requirements of the SEA framework(which have been incorporated into the SA), between October and November 2025.

Comments received during the consultation were carefully reviewed, and where appropriate incorporated into the assessment framework. We will be consulting on the revised Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report which includes assessment of reasonable alternatives alongside the Content and Evidence document.

Equality Impact Assessment

We have also prepared an Equality Impact Assessment Scoping Report which provides a baseline of data related to each protected characteristic group as identified by the Equality Act 2010 within North Hertfordshire, sets out key issues that the Local Plan should cover in relation to each protected characteristic, and creates a framework to identify potential positive and negative impacts of the Local Plan and whether any mitigation is required.

Health Impact Assessment

In addition, we have prepared a Health Impact Assessment Scoping Report which sets out a baseline of information and assesses the four strategic development growth options against the wider determinants of health. Although a HIA is not a legal requirement, it is an important part of developing a Local Plan that supports healthy, sustainable communities and aligns with the Council's commitment to improving quality of life for residents.

How to stay up to date

For updates about upcoming consultation activities, sign up to our [Local Plan Updates](#)⁷

⁷ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/subscribe-email-updates-and-text-alerts>

Follow us on social media to see our progress in preparing our Local Plan.



[Find us on Facebook](#)



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[Find us on X](#)



[Find us on YouTube](#)



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[Find us on Nextdoor](#)



Community Engagement Strategy

October 2026

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**North
Herts**
Council

Translation

If you have difficulty understanding this publication or English is not your first language, please contact the Strategic Planning Team on 01462 474000 and we will do our best to help you.

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਆ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਜਾਂ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਰਣਨੀਤਕ ਯੋਜਨਾਬੰਦੀ ਟੀਮ ਨਾਲ 01462 474000 'ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ ਅਤੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਮਦਦ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਪੂਰੀ ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ।

(Punjabi)

Jeżeli masz trudności ze zrozumieniem tej publikacji lub angielski nie jest Twoim językiem ojczystym, skontaktuj się z Zespołem Planowania Strategicznego pod numerem 01462 474000, a dołożymy wszelkich starań, aby Ci pomóc.

(Polish)

Dacă întâmpinați dificultăți în înțelegerea acestei publicații sau dacă engleza nu este limba dumneavoastră maternă, vă rugăm să contactați Echipa de Planificare Strategică la numărul de telefon 01462 474000 și vom face tot posibilul să vă ajutăm.

(Romanian)

Se avete difficoltà a comprendere questa pubblicazione o se l'inglese non è la vostra lingua madre, contattate il team di pianificazione strategica al numero 01462 474000 e faremo del nostro meglio per aiutarvi.

(Italian)

Ha nehezen érti ezt a kiadványt, vagy az angol nem az anyanyelve, kérjük, vegye fel a kapcsolatot a Stratégiai Tervezési Csoporttal a 01462 474000 telefonszámon, és mi mindent megteszünk, hogy segítsünk Önnek.

(Hungarian)

இந்த வெளியீட்டைப் புரிந்துகொள்வதில் உங்களுக்குச் சிரமம் இருந்தாலோ அல்லது ஆங்கிலம் உங்கள் தாய்மொழி அல்ல என்றாலோ, தயவுசெய்து 01462 474000 என்ற எண்ணில் வியூகத் திட்டமிடல் குழுவைத் தொடர்புகொள்ளவும், நாங்கள்

உங்களுக்கு உதவ எங்களால் முடிந்த அனைத்தையும்
செய்வோம்.

(Tamil)

જો તમને આ પ્રકાશન સમજવામાં મુશ્કેલી પડતી હોય અથવા અંગ્રેજી તમારી માતૃભાષા
ન હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને 01462 474000 પર સ્ટ્રેટેજિક પ્લાનિંગ ટીમનો સંપર્ક કરો અને
અમે તમને મદદ કરવા માટે અમારા શ્રેષ્ઠ પ્રયાસો કરીશું.

(Gujarati)

Jei jums sunku suprasti šį leidinį arba anglų kalba nėra jūsų gimtoji kalba,
susisiekite su Strateginio planavimo komanda telefonu 01462 474000 ir
mes padarysime viską, kad jums padėtų.

(Lithuanian)

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Purpose of the Local Plan

North Hertfordshire is beginning the important and exciting process of preparing a new Local Plan that will help shape the future of our district. Our Local Plan is more than a collection of planning policies and documents; it will influence where homes, jobs, services and infrastructure are located, how our communities grow, and how we protect and enhance the places that make North Hertfordshire a great place to live, work and visit.

Purpose of the Engagement Strategy

The success of our Local Plan depends on the meaningful involvement of the people and organisations who know North Hertfordshire best. Residents, businesses, community groups, landowners, developers, service providers and other stakeholders all bring valuable knowledge and perspectives that can help shape our Plan. We are committed to working collaboratively throughout the plan-making process.

This Community Engagement Strategy supports the delivery of the North Hertfordshire [Council Plan](#)¹ priorities by ensuring that stakeholders have genuine opportunities to contribute to decisions about the future of our District. Through this approach, we will help deliver the Council's ambitions to:

- Support thriving, healthy and inclusive communities.
- Deliver sustainable and well-connected growth.
- Protect and enhance our environment and natural resources.

Why engagement matters

We want to involve people from the earliest stages of preparing our Local Plan, when ideas, evidence and local knowledge can have the greatest influence on its development. Through consultations, events, meetings and communications activities, we will provide a range of opportunities for people to share their views and help shape the future of North Hertfordshire.

This Strategy builds on feedback received during the initial [Scoping Document](#)² consultation undertaken between May and June 2026. It explains:

- The key stages in preparing our Local Plan.
- How consultation opportunities will be publicised.
- The different ways people can get involved.
- When engagement activities are expected to take place.

¹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/2024%20-%202028%20Council%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf>

² https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-05/Scoping%20Document%20-%20May%202026_0.pdf

- How stakeholders can stay informed throughout the process.

We welcome feedback on both our Local Plan and our approach to engagement. By working together, we can prepare a Plan that reflects the aspirations, priorities and needs of North Hertfordshire and provides a shared vision for our District's future.

Effective communication is essential to successful engagement. It helps us explain complex planning issues in an accessible way, encourages participation, and builds trust throughout the plan-making process.

We recognise that the ways people access information and communicate continue to evolve. While embracing new technologies and digital channels, we will also maintain traditional methods for those who prefer non-digital or more personal forms of communication.

Our programme will therefore use a range of channels, including digital platforms, social media, face-to-face events, community meetings, councillor surgeries, printed materials and direct stakeholder communications. This will help ensure information reaches a wide audience and that people can engage in ways that best suit their needs.

Our communications and engagement activities will be guided by the aims and principles set out in the Council's [Marketing and Communications Strategy 2024–2028](#)³.

Local Government Reorganisation

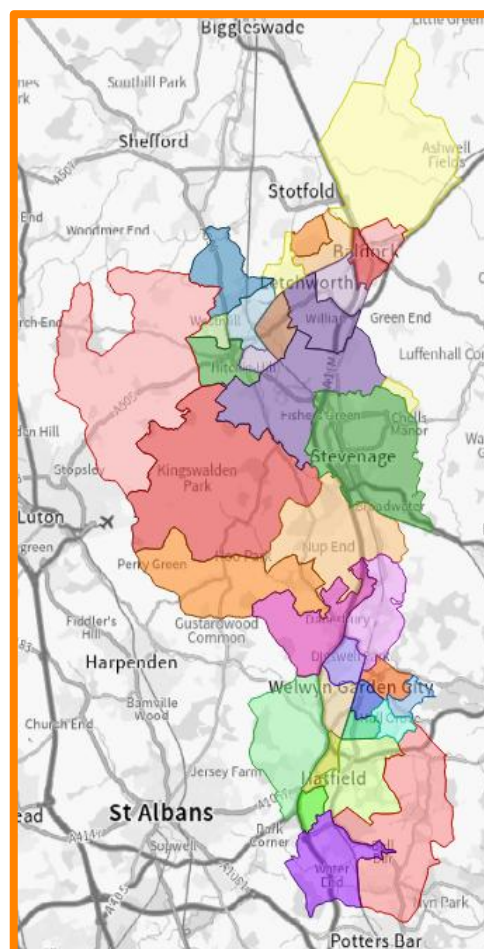
Local Government in England is undergoing significant change. In July 2026, Government confirmed that North Hertfordshire (minus five wards) will join with Stevenage Borough Council and Welwyn Hatfield District Council (minus one ward) to form Central Hertfordshire.

In May 2027 elections will take place to establish the Shadow Central Hertfordshire Authority, which will act as the interim governing body responsible for preparing Central Hertfordshire for operation.

The new Central Hertfordshire Unitary Authority is planned to come into full effect on 1 April 2028, known as Vesting Day. From this point, Central Hertfordshire will take on all responsibilities currently delivered by both Hertfordshire County Council, North Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield District Councils and Stevenage Borough Council.

What this means for North Hertfordshire

North Hertfordshire still needs to plan for future growth during the transition to the new unitary arrangements. Our District must continue to guide where development should take place so that new



³ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-11/North%20Herts%20Council%20Marketing%20%26%20Communications%20strategy%202024%20-%202028.pdf>

homes, jobs, and infrastructure come forward in the right locations and in a way that benefits local communities. Maintaining an up-to-date Local Plan is an important part of this.

Ahead of Central Hertfordshire preparing its own Local Plan, North Hertfordshire intends to ensure that a clear and effective planning framework remains in place. This will help to secure sustainable development that meets our District's needs, including housing, economic opportunities, and the delivery of essential infrastructure, while providing certainty for residents, businesses, and developers.

OUR ENGAGEMENT VISION

Our Engagement Vision

We want our engagement to be

- **Inclusive** - encouraging participation and partnership working throughout the plan-making process by highlighting opportunities to influence the future of North Hertfordshire and sharing examples of successful community participation.
- **Accessible** - providing information in formats and locations that are accessible to all members of the community and helping people understand what the Plan is, why it matters, and how it may affect them and their communities.
- **Transparent** - explaining how decisions are made and how feedback has informed the process. Promoting two-way communication through discussion, collaboration and ongoing dialogue, helping us and local communities work together to shape the future of our District.
- **Meaningful** - ensuring information is delivered to the right audiences at appropriate times and providing meaningful opportunities for stakeholders to contribute to decision-making, ensuring that views are listened to and considered throughout the preparation of our Plan.
- **Proportionate** - making efficient use of available resources.

Our Communication Principles

All communication and engagement activities undertaken as part of our Local Plan process will aim to be underpinned by three strategic priorities:

- **People First** - People are at the heart of the plan-making process. We will focus on providing information that is relevant, understandable and useful to local communities. Communications will be designed around the needs of residents and stakeholders, ensuring people can easily access the information they require and understand how they can become involved.
- **Digital First** - Digital engagement provides opportunities to communicate quickly, reach wider audiences and make participation easier and more convenient. We will make full use of our website, PlaceMaker platform, social media channels, online consultations and email communications to enable stakeholders to engage at a time and place that suits them.
- **Cross-Channel Engagement** - While digital engagement offers significant benefits, we recognise that it is not suitable for everyone. We will therefore adopt a cross-channel approach, using a combination of online and face-to-face engagement methods. This will help ensure that those who prefer traditional forms of communication are not excluded and that engagement remains as inclusive and accessible as possible.

Who We Will Engage With

Our Local Plan affects everyone living, working and investing in North Hertfordshire. We therefore aim to engage with a broad range of stakeholders, including:

- **General Audiences**
 - Residents
 - Businesses
 - Developers
 - Landowners
 - Community organisations
 - Infrastructure providers
- **Specific Stakeholders**
 - Parish and Town Councils
 - Community Forums
 - Statutory Consultees
 - Neighbouring Authorities
- Members of Parliament
- Councillors
- **Seldom-Heard Groups**
 - Young People
 - Faith Groups
 - Ethnic Minority Communities
 - LGBTQ+ Communities
 - Disabled People
 - Gypsy and Traveller Communities
 - Rural Communities
 - Small Businesses

By ensuring that information reaches the right people at the right time and through the most appropriate channels, we aim to maximise participation and ensure that a diverse range of views informs the preparation of our Local Plan.

LOCAL PLAN TIMETABLE AND CONSULTATION STAGES

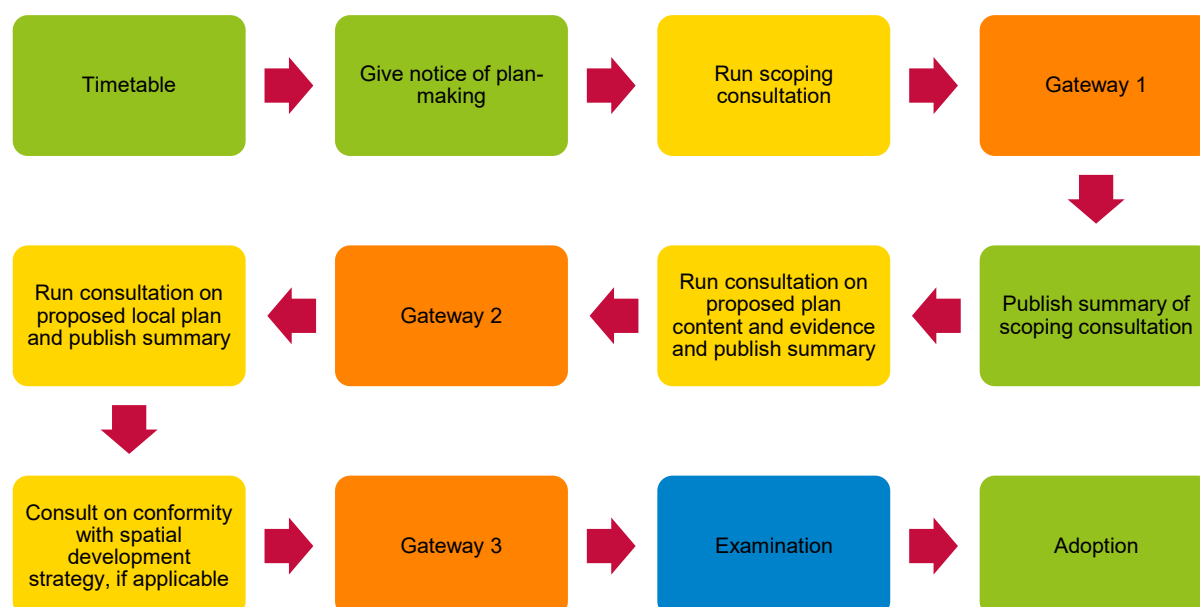
Local Plan timetable and consultation stages

Stages in the Preparation of the Local Plan

Preparing a Local Plan is a structured process that builds on evidence gathering, option development and consultation. As our Plan progresses, proposals will be refined in response to feedback and ongoing engagement.

Throughout the process, residents, businesses and other stakeholders will have opportunities to review information, share their views and contribute local knowledge. This helps ensure our Local Plan reflects the needs and priorities of North Hertfordshire.

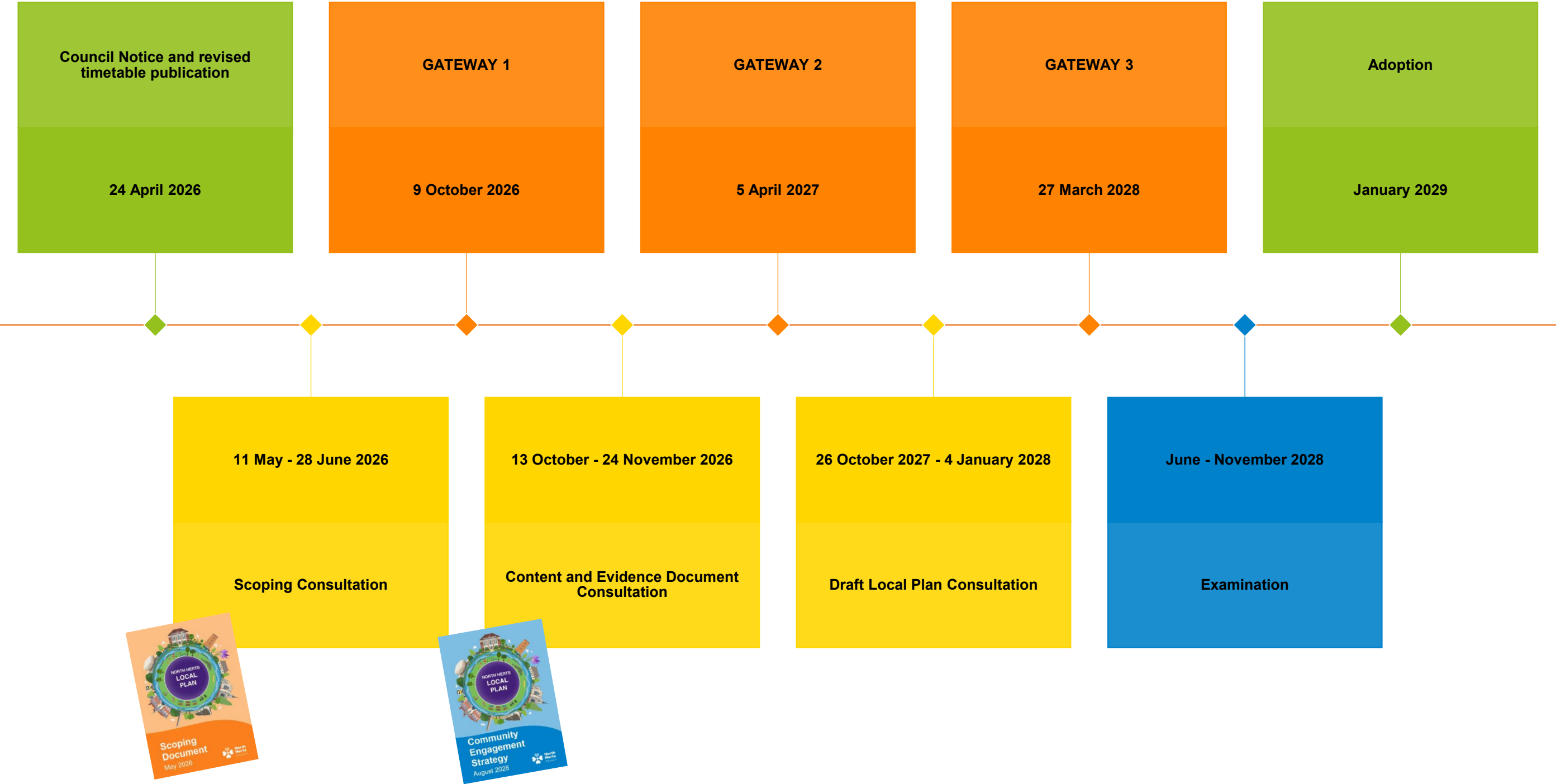
The diagram below illustrates the key stages of Local Plan preparation and the opportunities for involvement at each stage.



The preparation of our Local Plan is guided by a published [timetable](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/local-plan-timetable)⁴, which sets out the key stages and expected timescales for delivery.

The timetable provides transparency, helping communities, stakeholders and partner organisations understand when consultation activities will take place and how our Plan is progressing. A summary of the current timetable is provided in the diagram on the following page and will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

⁴ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/local-plan-timetable>



HOW WE WILL ENGAGE

How we will engage

We recognise that different people prefer to engage in different ways. Some may choose to participate online, while others may prefer face-to-face discussions, local meetings or written correspondence. We also recognise that certain groups can sometimes be underrepresented in planning consultations.

To address this, we will use a variety of communication and engagement methods to maximise participation and make it as easy as possible for people to get involved. We will make particular efforts to engage with groups whose voices may otherwise be underrepresented, ensuring that our Local Plan is informed by a broad range of views and experiences.

Digital Engagement

Digital engagement allows us to reach a wide audience quickly and efficiently, giving residents, businesses, community groups, developers and other interested parties convenient access to information and opportunities to contribute to our Local Plan process.

We will use a range of digital tools and platforms, including:

- Our website and dedicated Local Plan webpages.
- Our PlaceMaker engagement platform, provided by Urban Intelligence.
- Online consultations and surveys.
- Interactive maps and consultation tools.
- Email newsletters and stakeholder updates.
- Social media channels.
- Virtual meetings and webinars, where appropriate.

These platforms will provide access to consultation materials, evidence documents and supporting information, while enabling participants to submit comments electronically. Digital engagement will complement, rather than replace, traditional methods to ensure the process remains inclusive and accessible.

Social Media

Social media is an important tool for raising awareness of our Local Plan and promoting opportunities to get involved.

We will use social media to:

- Announce consultations and engagement events.
- Encourage participation in consultations, surveys and public events.
- Direct people to our Local Plan webpages and PlaceMaker platform for further information.

Platforms may include



Facebook



YouTube



Instagram



LinkedIn



X (formerly Twitter)

Social media will form part of a wider communications programme to ensure information remains accessible to those who do not use these channels.

Email Updates

We maintain a consultation database of residents, businesses, community groups, landowners, statutory consultees and other organisations interested in our Local Plan.

Subscribers will receive updates on:

- Key milestones and upcoming stages of plan preparation.
- Publication of evidence-base documents.
- Consultation opportunities and engagement events.
- Examination hearings, where relevant.
- Consultation outcomes and next steps.

Anyone interested in the future development of our District can sign up via the [Local Plan](#)⁵ webpages and PlaceMaker platform to receive updates and notifications of consultation opportunities.

Online Publication of Documents

Local Plan consultation documents, supporting evidence and related information will be published online through our website and PlaceMaker platform.

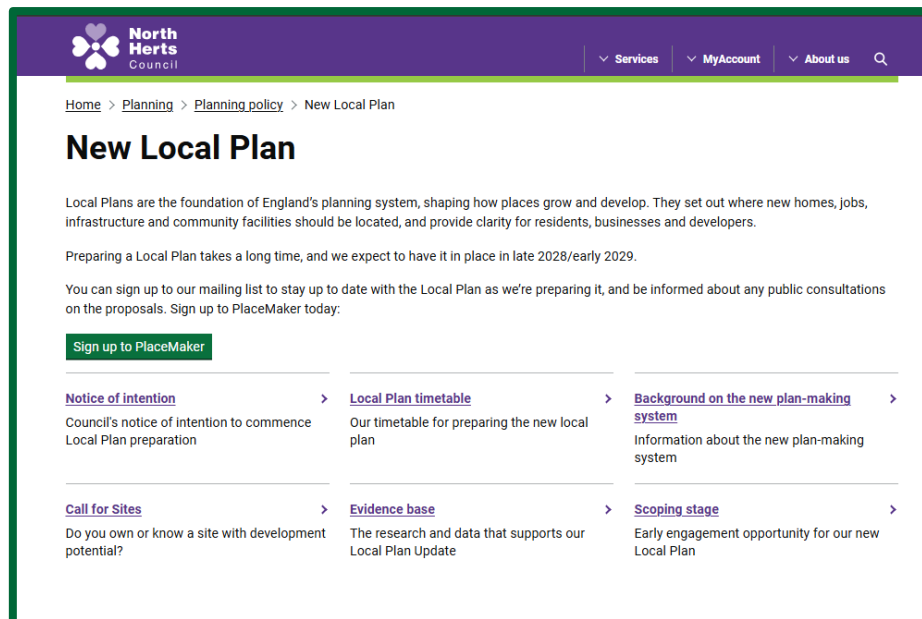
Consultation materials will be provided in accessible formats, including downloadable PDFs and Easy Read versions of key documents where appropriate. We will seek to ensure documents meet recognised accessibility standards and we will continue to review and improve the accessibility of consultation materials to ensure everyone has a fair opportunity to access information and provide feedback.

Our dedicated Local Plan webpages will provide a central source of information throughout the plan-making process. They will be regularly updated to help residents, businesses, community groups and other stakeholders stay informed and access opportunities to participate.

Key features of the webpages will include:

- Join Our Mailing List

⁵ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/new-local-plan>



- Call for Sites
- Evidence Library
- Local Plan Programme and Timetable
- Engagement Activities

Animations and Video Content

Planning can involve complex and technical information. To help explain key concepts clearly, we have produced a range of short animations and videos available through our Local Plan webpages and YouTube channel.



These resources provide an accessible and engaging way to understand the plan-making process and complement our written consultation materials. We will continue to explore opportunities to develop additional digital content to support understanding and participation throughout the preparation of our Local Plan.

Place-Based Engagement

We will hold a series of public engagement events across our District, providing residents, businesses, community groups and other stakeholders with opportunities to discuss our emerging Local Plan directly with us.

These events will coincide with the main consultation stages of our Local Plan process, currently proposed for:

- October to November 2026 – consultation on the emerging Local Plan, including the draft vision, spatial strategy and supporting evidence.
- October 2027 to January 2028 – consultation on the proposed draft Local Plan.

The events will provide information about our Local Plan, enable attendees to ask questions and discuss issues affecting their area.

To ensure accessibility, events will be held at a range of locations across our District. Details, including dates, times and venues, will be published on our Local Plan webpages at least four weeks in advance.

These events will complement online consultation activities by providing opportunities for face-to-face discussion.

Community Forums

Community Forums are established local engagement groups that bring together residents, local organisations, parish and town councils, community representatives and elected Members.

A member of our Strategic Planning team will attend Community Forum meetings wherever possible to:

- Share progress on our Local Plan.
- Explain upcoming stages and consultation activities.
- Respond to questions and requests for clarification.
- Gather local views and concerns relevant to plan preparation.

Using the existing Community Forum structure provides a valuable mechanism for ongoing engagement outside formal consultation periods.

Future meeting dates will be published through the Council's [Civic Calendar](#), with the anticipated dates for 2026/27 set out below.

Community Forum	Meeting Dates		
Baldock and Villages	14 September	7 December	22 March
Hitchin	15 September	8 December	23 March
Letchworth Garden City	30 September	16 December	3 March
Royston and Villages	23 September	9 December	24 February
Southern Rural	10 September	26 November	11 March

Councillor community surgeries

In addition to formal consultation events and Community Forums, Councillor Community Surgeries provide another opportunity to engage with residents.



A member of our Strategic Planning team will attend the sessions highlighted below to:

- Provide information about our Local Plan.
- Answer questions.
- Signpost consultation materials and opportunities to comment.
- Encourage residents to register for updates through PlaceMaker.

These informal sessions help reach people who may not otherwise engage through formal consultations or online channels and support a more inclusive consultation process.

The anticipated surgery dates for the remainder of 2026 are set out below.

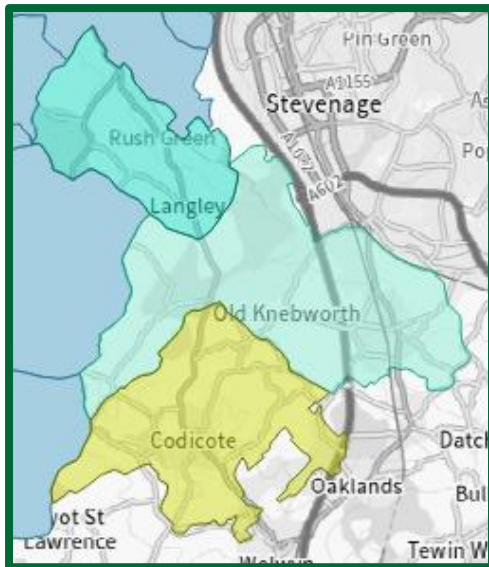
Councillor community surgery	Baldock	Hitchin	Letchworth Garden City	Royston
Location	Outside Tesco	Market Place	Garden Square Shopping Centre	Market Hill Car Park
Time	10.30am - 12noon	10.30am - 12noon	10.30am - 12noon	10am - 11.30am
Dates	26 September	5 September	19 September	12 September
	31 October	3 October	17 October	14 November
	28 November	7 November	21 November	
		5 December	19 December	

Parish Council Meetings

Parish and Town Councils play an important role in representing local communities and providing insight into local issues, opportunities and priorities.

To support Local Plan preparation, we will engage with Parish and Town Councils through dedicated briefing sessions and targeted engagement activities. These will provide opportunities to:

- Share progress on our Local Plan.
- Discuss forthcoming consultation stages.
- Explore issues affecting different parts of our District.
- Gather local knowledge and evidence.
- Respond to questions and requests for clarification.

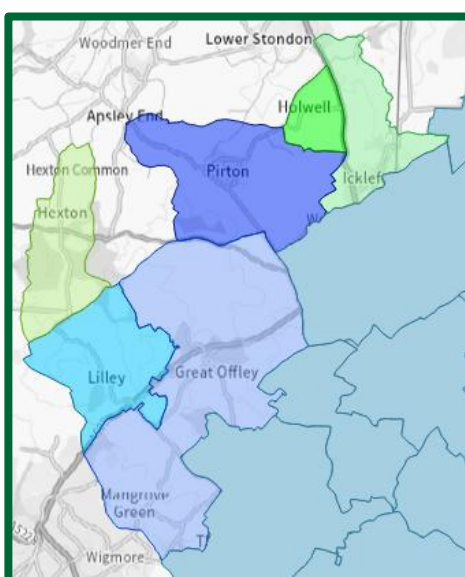
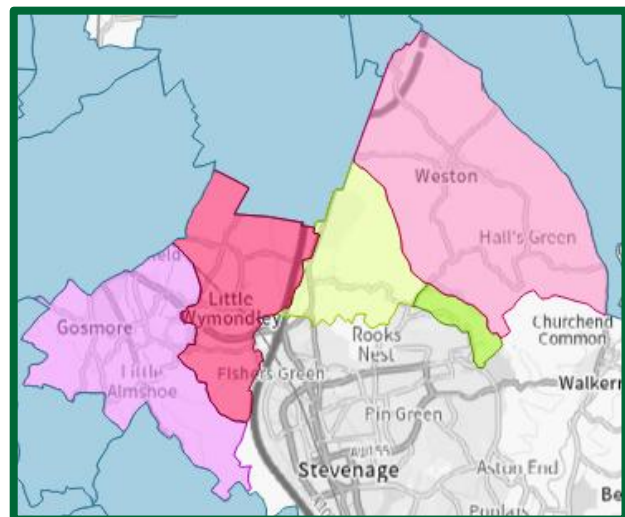


Southern

- Codicote Parish Council
- Knebworth Parish Council
- Langley Parish Meeting

Central

- Graveley
- Great Ashby Community Council
- St Ippolyts Parish Council
- Weston Parish Council
- Wymondley Parish Council



North Western

- Hexton Parish Meeting
- Holwell Parish Council
- Ickleford Parish Council
- Lilley Parish Council
- Offley (with Cockernhoe) Parish Council
- Pirton Parish Council

South Western

- Kimpton Parish Council
- Kings Walden Parish Council
- Preston Parish Council
- St Paul's Walden Parish Council



Details of, and invites to, meetings and briefing sessions, to be held at the Council offices, will be circulated directly to Parish and Town Councils, with supporting information provided in advance where necessary.

This approach will help ensure that local knowledge and community priorities continue to inform the preparation of our Local Plan.

Traditional communication methods

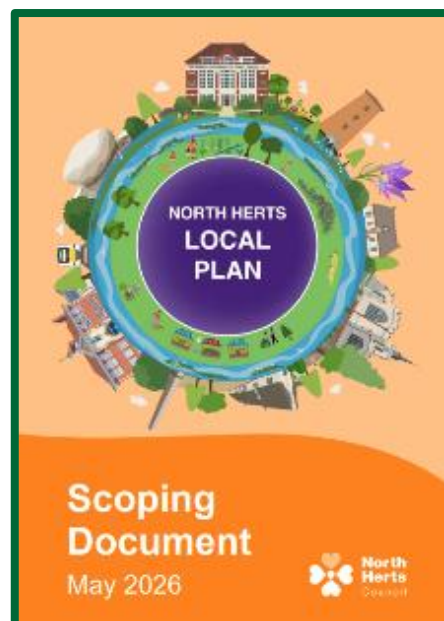
Hard copy documents

We recognise that some people prefer to access information in printed rather than digital formats. To support inclusive participation, hard copy, reference versions of key Local Plan consultation documents will be available for public inspection during consultation periods.

Printed reference copies will be available at:

- North Hertfordshire District Council Offices, Letchworth Garden City.
- Public libraries across North Hertfordshire.
- Consultation event venues, where appropriate.

These documents will not be available to take away from venues and are for reference use only. This is to ensure that other members of the public can access the documents also.



Individuals may also request printed copies of consultation documents from the Strategic Planning team. Charges may apply to cover printing and postage. Details of any charges will be published on our website and provided on request.

Where possible, documents will also be made available in alternative formats, including large print and other accessible versions.

Postal Letters

We maintain a database of stakeholders who have asked to receive information about our Local Plan by post. These contacts will receive the same key information provided through our email updates, including:

- Progress updates and key milestones.
- Publication of evidence documents.
- Consultation opportunities.
- Public meetings, engagement events and examination hearings, where relevant.
- Consultation outcomes and next steps.

While we encourage electronic communication where possible, we will continue to provide postal correspondence for those who prefer this method.

Posters and Advertising Materials

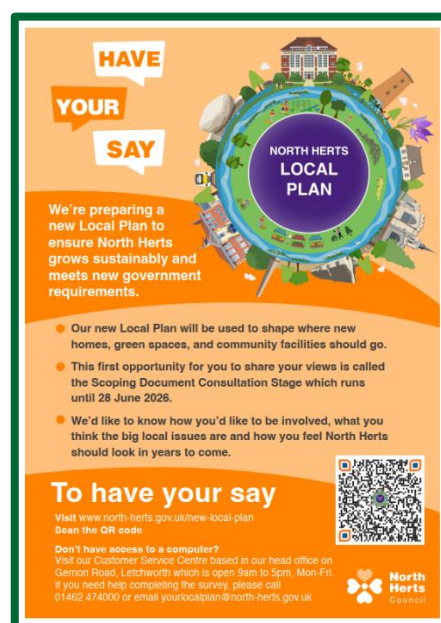
Printed publicity materials will complement our digital communications and help promote consultation opportunities to a wider audience.

Posters, leaflets and display materials may be distributed through a range of community locations, including:

- Public libraries.
- Community centres and village halls.
- Places of worship.
- GP surgeries and healthcare facilities.
- Schools and educational establishments.
- Leisure centres and sports facilities.
- Parish and Town Council offices.

These materials will be used to:

- Raise awareness of our Local Plan.
- Publicise consultations and engagement events.



- Community noticeboards.
- Council buildings and facilities.
- Local shops and businesses, where appropriate

- Signpost people to further information and consultation platforms.
- Explain how feedback can be submitted.

All publicity materials will be produced in accordance with the Council's corporate identity and accessibility standards and will provide details of alternative formats and support where appropriate.

Outlook Magazine

The Council's *Outlook* magazine will be used to communicate information about our Local Plan throughout its preparation. As it is delivered to households across North Hertfordshire, it provides an effective way of reaching residents who may not engage through digital channels.

Articles and updates will:

- Explain key stages of Local Plan preparation.
- Promote consultation opportunities and engagement events.
- Signpost readers to the Local Plan webpages and PlaceMaker platform.
- Provide information on alternative ways to access documents and submit comments.



Where appropriate, QR codes will be included to provide quick access to additional information online.

Table 1 - Overview of consultation communication methods for each stage of the plan-making process

Engagement/Consultation Stage	When?	With whom?	Method
Call for Sites	June – September 2025	District-wide	Local Plan webpages Mail out (Email and post)
Scoping Consultation	May – June 2026	District-wide	Community Forums Local Plan webpages Mail out (Email and post) Posters in Community areas (Community and Parish Halls, Libraries, Museums, GP Surgeries) Press Releases Outlook – magazine for residents Social Media 
Gateway 1	October 2026	District-wide	Local Plan webpages Monthly ENewsletter
Call for Sites submissions Map	September 2026	District-wide	Community Forums - Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston, Southern and Rural Councillor Surgery – Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston Mail out (Email and post) Local Plan webpages Monthly ENewsletter Press Releases Social Media 

Engagement/Consultation Stage	When?	With whom?	Method
Content and Evidence Consultation	October – November 2026	District-wide	Community Forums - Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston, Southern and Rural Councillor Surgery – Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston In person consultation events at different venues throughout our District Local Plan webpages Mail out (Email and post) Monthly ENewsletter Parish Council Meetings Posters in Community areas (Community and Parish Halls, Libraries, Museums, GP Surgeries) Press Releases Social Media 
Gateway 2	April 2027	District-wide	Local Plan webpages
Draft Local Plan	November 2027 – January 2028	District Wide	Community Forums- Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston, Southern and Rural Councillor Surgery – Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston In person consultation events at different venues throughout our District Local Plan webpages Mail out (Email and post) Monthly ENewsletter Outlook – magazine for residents Parish Council Meetings Posters in Community areas (Community and Parish Halls, Libraries, Museums, GP Surgeries) Social Media  Press Releases

Engagement/Consultation Stage	When?	With whom?	Method
Gateway 3	March 2028	District-wide	Local Plan webpages Monthly ENewsletter
Examination	June – November 2028	District-wide	Local Plan webpages Mail out (Email and post) Monthly ENewsletter Press Releases Social Media 

ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

Accessibility and inclusion

We are committed to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access information about our Local Plan and participate in the consultation process. We recognise that people have different communication needs, preferences and circumstances, and we will seek to remove barriers to participation wherever possible.

Our aim is to ensure that all residents, businesses, community groups and stakeholders can access information, understand proposals and provide feedback in a way that works for them.

Easy Read documents

Consultation materials will be provided in accessible formats, including downloadable PDFs and Easy Read versions of key documents where appropriate. We will seek to ensure documents meet recognised accessibility standards through:

- Clear, readable fonts.
- Appropriate font sizes.
- High-contrast layouts.
- Accessible document structures.
- Compatibility with screen readers and assistive technology.
- Alternative formats on request.

Translation support

We recognise that language can sometimes be a barrier to participation and are committed to making information as accessible as possible.

Where there is an identified need, consultation documents and supporting information can be made available in alternative languages upon request. Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the nature of the document, the level of demand and the resources available.

Residents and stakeholders who require information in an alternative language will be encouraged to contact the Strategic Planning team, who will work with them to identify the most appropriate support.

Accessible Venues

We will ensure that venues for consultation events will be easily accessible for all people.

When selecting venues for consultation events, workshops, exhibitions and public meetings, we will seek to ensure that locations are accessible to as many people as possible. This will include consideration of:

- Step-free access and appropriate facilities for people with mobility impairments.

- Accessible toilets and other essential amenities.
- Suitable public transport connections where available.
- Adequate parking, including accessible parking spaces.
- Safe and convenient pedestrian access.
- Appropriate seating and room layouts.
- Good lighting and clear signage.
- Hearing assistance facilities where available.

We will also consider the geographical distribution of venues across our District to ensure that residents living in both urban and rural areas have reasonable opportunities to attend events. Wherever possible, events will be held in well-known community venues that are familiar and easy to access.

If individuals have specific accessibility requirements, we encourage them to contact the Strategic Planning team in advance of an event. We will seek to make reasonable adjustments wherever possible to support participation.

Engaging with Seldom Heard Groups

Our Local Plan will be most effective if it reflects the needs, experiences and aspirations of the diverse communities across North Hertfordshire. To support this, we will use targeted approaches to engage with groups that may otherwise be under-represented by working closely with our Communities Team to raise awareness of the Local Plan and encourage participation from all seldom heard communities across our District. Through established community networks and contacts, we will share information about consultation opportunities and invite individuals and groups to become involved in the plan-making process.

We will contact each of our identified Seldom Heard Groups in our District (some of which are listed below), to offer to attend meetings and groups, and provide pop-up events where individuals and representatives can ask questions about the plan-making process and get involved in the different stages of consultation of our Local Plan. Where there is provision to include information about our Local Plan in electronic communication sent out by the community groups, we will endeavour to use this channel of communication also.

Young People

- Fearnhill School Maths and Computing College, Letchworth
- Hitchin Boys' School, Hitchin
- Hitchin Girls' School, Hitchin
- The Highfield School, Letchworth Garden City
- The Knights Templar School, Baldock
- The Priory School, Hitchin
- North Hertfordshire College, Hitchin
- Youth Action

Ethnic Minority Communities

- North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum, Hitchin
- Jaswant Lunch Clubs, Hitchin & Letchworth
- Khalsa Youth Football Academy, Letchworth

Faith Communities

- North Hertfordshire Inter Faith Forum, Hitchin
- Churches Together, Hitchin
- Hitchin Mosque
- Letchworth Dhamma Nikethanaya Buddhist Meditation Centre
- Tanki Buddhist Therapists Forum
- Ramgarhia Gurdwara, Hitchin
- Ravidassia Community Centre, Hitchin & Letchworth
- Society of Friends (Hitchin Quakers)

Disabled People

- North Herts Day Service (OPPD), Hitchin
- Always Bee You

LGBTQ+ Communities

- Queers and Peers, Hitchin
- North Herts Pride
- Impactful Lives

Gypsy and Traveller Communities

- GATE Herts (Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment)

Rural Communities

- CDA Herts
- Farming Community Network
- North Hertfordshire Ramblers
- Triangle Community Garden

Small Business Owners

- Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce
- Business Buzz Hertfordshire

- Hertfordshire Growth Hub
- Federation of Small Businesses

Residents

- North Herts 50 Plus
- Green & Growing

We will publicise consultation opportunities through a range of communication channels, including:

- Local Plan webpages.
- Social media.
- Email and postal updates.
- Outlook magazine.
- Community Forums.
- Public events and local publicity materials.

HOW WE WILL USE YOUR FEEDBACK

How we will use your feedback section

Recording responses

When you submit comments on any of our Local Plan consultations, regardless of the stage of plan preparation, your details and representations will be recorded on our consultation platform, PlaceMaker. This allows us manage the consultation process, maintain an accurate record of representations received, and meet the legal requirements associated with preparing a Local Plan.

The information we will record includes:

- Your name.
- Your email address and/or postal address.
- The comments and representations you submit.

We are required to retain this information as part of the statutory process for preparing our Local Plan.

Publishing responses

In line with statutory requirements, comments and representations submitted during Local Plan consultations will be made publicly available; ensuring that the plan-making process remains open and accountable.

However, personal information will not be published. To protect privacy, representations will be anonymised before they are made publicly available. Each responder will be assigned a unique reference number, and any published comments will be identified using this reference rather than personal contact details.

We are committed to handling personal information responsibly and in accordance with data protection legislation. Further information on how we collect, use and protect personal data is available in our [Privacy Notice](#).

We will also use your preferred method of communication to keep you informed about the progress of our Local Plan. This may include:

- Updates on key stages of plan preparation.
- Notifications of future consultation opportunities.
- Information on the publication of evidence and supporting documents.
- Details of our Local Plan Examination in Public.
- Updates on significant milestones and decisions relating to the Plan.

Reporting

We must publish summaries of each of our consultations stages before we can move onto the next stage of the plan-making process, setting out matters including:

- a summary of the feedback we received in response to the consultation
- an explanation of how we have considered the feedback from the consultation

DUTY TO CO-OPERATE

Duty to Co-Operate

Many of the challenges and opportunities facing North Hertfordshire extend beyond administrative boundaries. Issues such as housing, transport, flooding, climate resilience and environmental protection require cooperation between councils, public bodies and other organisations.

Although the formal Duty to Co-operate requirement has been removed under the new plan-making system, local planning authorities are still expected to work closely together on issues that cross administrative boundaries. Effective cooperation remains important to ensure that matters such as housing, employment, infrastructure, transport and environmental issues are considered and planned for in a coordinated way.

What This Means

- Homes for the future: Planning together ensures we meet housing needs across the wider region.
- Transport and travel: Strategic highways and rail connections affect everyone, so we coordinate to keep people moving safely and efficiently.
- Flooding and climate resilience: Rivers and weather systems cross boundaries, so our response must too.
- Heritage and environment: Protecting our historic sites and natural landscapes requires collaboration with national bodies.

How We Work

As we prepare our Local Plan, we will:

- Identify strategic cross-boundary issues.
- Work jointly to find solutions.
- Publish a Statement of Common Ground setting out areas of cooperation and progress on shared matters.

Who We Collaborate With

Our main partners include:

- Central Bedfordshire, East Herts, Luton, South Cambridgeshire, St. Albans, Stevenage, Uttlesford and Welwyn Hatfield
- Hertfordshire County Council
- The Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England
- Civil Aviation Authority, Homes England
- NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board
- Anglian and Thames Water

- Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

This collaborative approach helps ensure that our Local Plan is informed by wider strategic considerations and supports sustainable growth across the area.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Parish and Town Councils

Ashwell Parish Council	Preston Parish Council
Barkway Parish Council	Reed Parish Council
Barley Parish Council	Royston Twon Council
Bygrave Parish Council	Rushden and Wallington Parish Council
Caldecote and Newnham Parish Council	Sandon Parish Council
Codicote Parish Council	St Ippolyts Parish Council
Graveley Parish Council	St Paul's Walden Parish Council
Great Ashby Community Council	Therfield Parish Council
Hinxworth Parish Council	Weston Parish Council
Holwell Parish Council	Wymondley Parish Council
Ickleford Parish Council	Clothall and Luffenhall Parish Meeting
Kimpton Parish Council	Hexton Parish Meeting
Kings Walden Parish Council	Kelshall Parish Meeting
Knebworth Parish Council	Langley Meeting
Lilley Parish Council	Nuthampstead Meeting
Offley (with Cockernhoe) Parish Council	Radwell Meeting
Pirton Parish Council	

Appendix B – Community Forums

Baldock

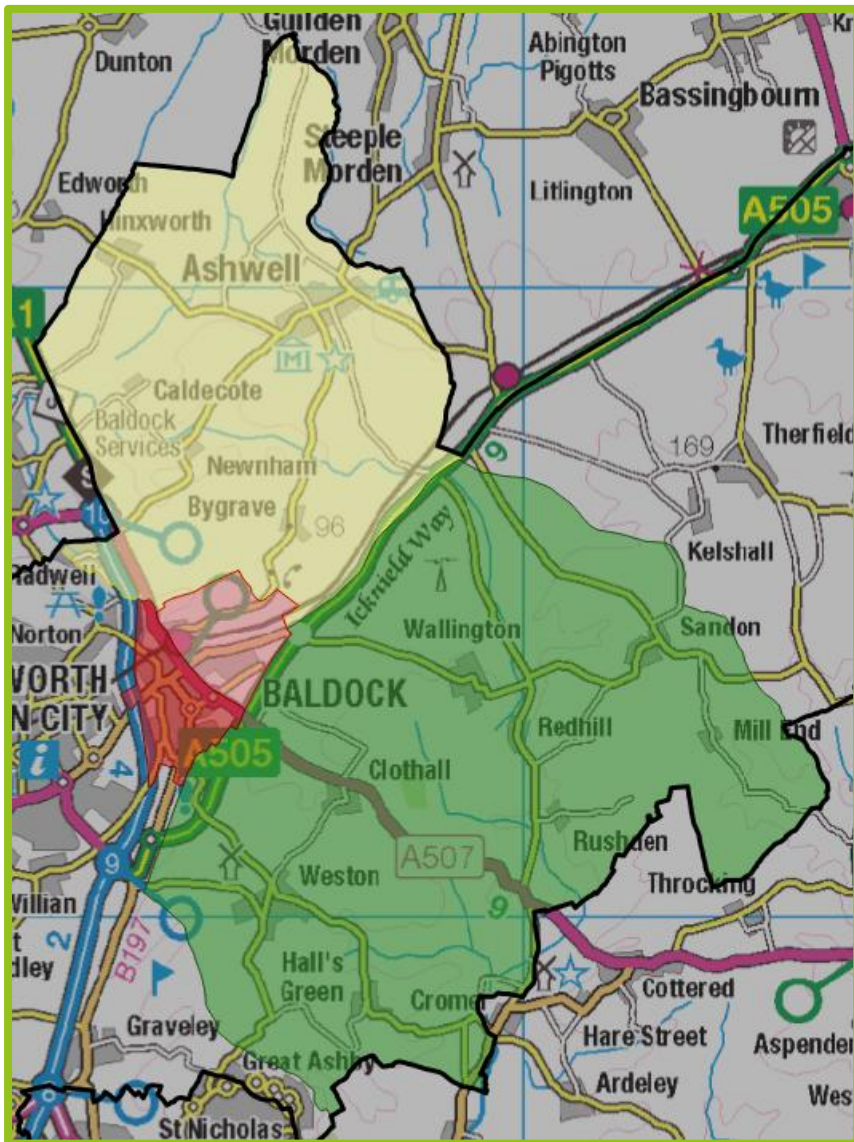
Hitchin

Letchworth Garden City

Royston and Villages

Southern Rural

Baldock Community Forum Area



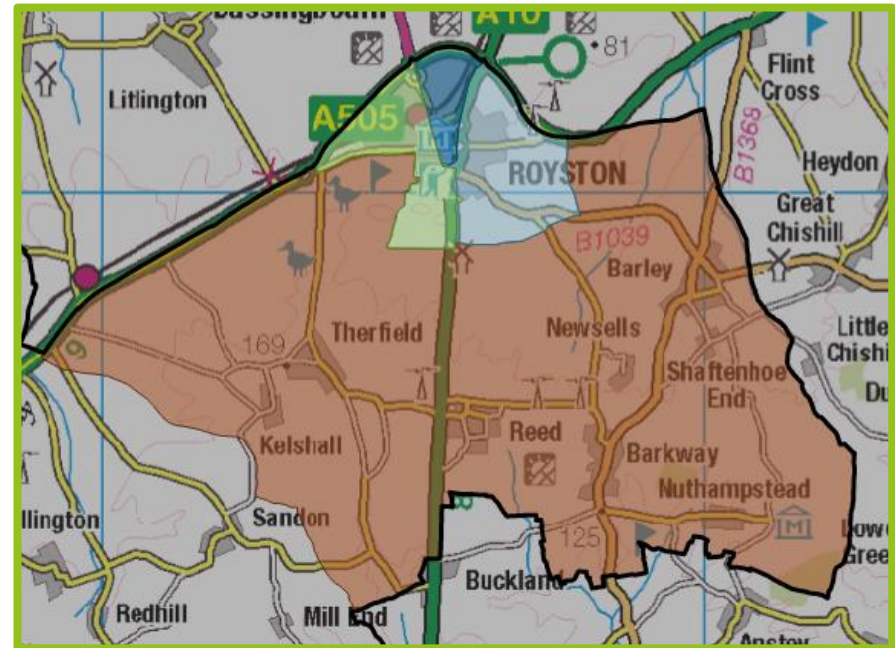
Hitchin Community Forum Area



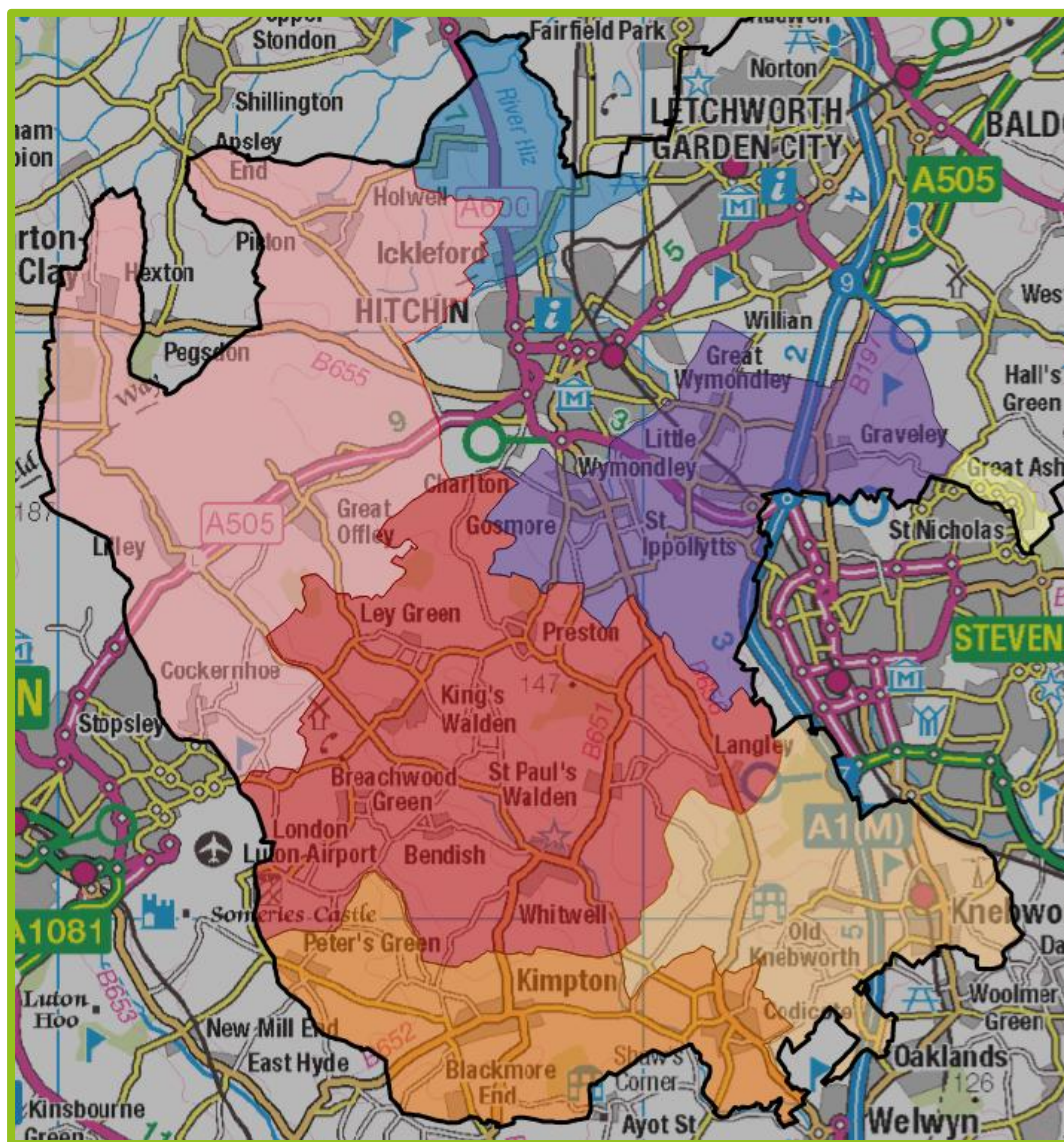
Letchworth Community Forum Area



Royston and Villages Community Forum Area



Southern Rural Community Forum Area



Appendix C – Statutory Consultees

Coal Authority

Environment Agency

Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as Historic England)

Marine Management Organisation

Natural England

Network Rail Infrastructure Limited

National Highways

All neighbouring authorities

- East Herts

- St. Albans

- Stevenage

- Welwyn Hatfield

- Central Bedfordshire

- Luton

- South Cambridgeshire

- Uttlesford

NHS Central East Integrated Care Board

UK Power Networks

Cadent Gas Ltd

Thames Water

Anglian Water

Affinity Water

Homes England

Active Travel England

Appendix D – Duty to Co-Operate Bodies

Environment Agency

Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as Historic England)

Natural England

Civil Aviation Authority

Homes England

NHS Central East Integrated Care Board

Office of Rail Regulation

Transport for London

Integrated Transport Authority

National Highways

All neighbouring authorities

- East Herts

- St. Albans

- Stevenage

- Welwyn Hatfield

- Central Bedfordshire

- Luton

- South Cambridgeshire

- Uttlesford

Marine Management Organisation

Hertfordshire Futures (previously Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership)

Appendix E – Neighbouring Authorities

Central Bedfordshire

East Herts

Luton

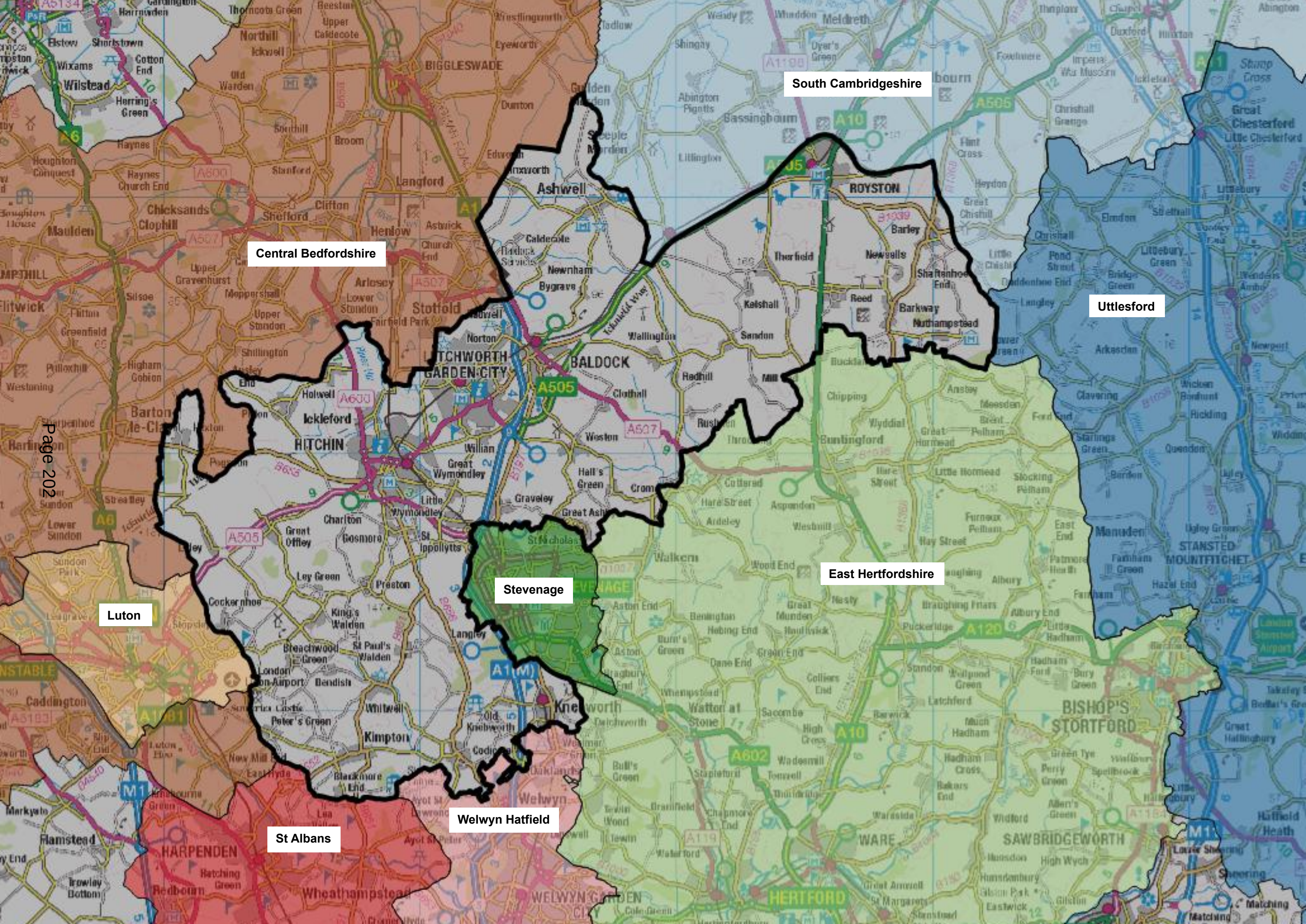
South Cambridgeshire

St. Albans

Stevenage* part of new unitary authority with North Herts

Uttlesford

Welwyn Hatfield* part of new unitary authority with North Herts



South Cambridgeshire

Central Bedfordshire

Uttlesford

Stevenage

East Hertfordshire

Luton

Welwyn Hatfield

St Albans



Content and Evidence Document

October 2026

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**North
Herts**
Council

Translation

If you have difficulty understanding this publication or English is not your first language, please contact the Strategic Planning Team on 01462 474000 and we will do our best to help you.

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਆ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਜਾਂ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਰਣਨੀਤਕ ਯੋਜਨਾਬੰਦੀ ਟੀਮ ਨਾਲ 01462 474000 'ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ ਅਤੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਮਦਦ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਪੂਰੀ ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ।

(Panjabi)

Jeżeli masz trudności ze zrozumieniem tej publikacji lub angielski nie jest Twoim językiem ojczystym, skontaktuj się z Zespołem Planowania Strategicznego pod numerem 01462 474000, a dołożymy wszelkich starań, aby Ci pomóc.

(Polish)

Dacă întâmpinați dificultăți în înțelegerea acestei publicații sau dacă engleza nu este limba dumneavoastră maternă, vă rugăm să contactați Echipa de Planificare Strategică la numărul de telefon 01462 474000 și vom face tot posibilul să vă ajutăm.

(Romanian)

Se avete difficoltà a comprendere questa pubblicazione o se l'inglese non è la vostra lingua madre, contattate il team di pianificazione strategica al numero 01462 474000 e faremo del nostro meglio per aiutarvi.

(Italian)

Ha nehezen érti ezt a kiadványt, vagy az angol nem az anyanyelve, kérjük, vegye fel a kapcsolatot a Stratégiai Tervezési Csoporttal a 01462 474000 telefonszámon, és mi mindent megteszünk, hogy segítsünk Önnek.

(Hungarian)

இந்த வெளியீட்டைப் புரிந்துகொள்வதில் உங்களுக்குச் சிரமம் இருந்தாலோ அல்லது ஆங்கிலம் உங்கள் தாய்மொழி அல்ல என்றாலோ, தயவுசெய்து 01462 474000 என்ற எண்ணில் வியூகத் திட்டமிடல் குழுவைத் தொடர்புகொள்ளவும், நாங்கள் உங்களுக்கு உதவ எங்களால் முடிந்த அனைத்தையும் செய்வோம்.

(Tamil)

જો તમને આ પ્રકાશન સમજવામાં મુશ્કેલી પડતી હોય અથવા અંગ્રેજી તમારી માતૃભાષા ન હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને 01462 474000 પર સ્ટ્રેટેજિક પ્લાનિંગ ટીમનો સંપર્ક કરો અને અમે તમને મદદ કરવા માટે અમારા શ્રેષ્ઠ પ્રયાસો કરીશું.

(Gujarati)

Jei jums sunku suprasti šį leidinį arba anglų kalba nėra jūsų gimtoji kalba, susisiekite su Strateginio planavimo komanda telefonu 01462 474000 ir mes padarysime viską, kad jums padėtume.

(Lithuanian)

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Why are we preparing a new Local Plan?

Every local planning authority in England is required to have an up-to-date Local Plan.

Our current Local Plan was adopted in 2022 following many years of preparation and consultation and included a commitment to review the policies and assess whether a new Plan was needed. Following that review, we concluded that preparing a new Local Plan was the best way to ensure we can continue to plan positively for the future of our District.

Since then, a lot has changed. A new planning system has been introduced, national planning policies have evolved, local priorities have shifted, and new challenges and opportunities have emerged.

Our new Local Plan will cover the current geographical area of North Hertfordshire and will guide decisions about development, growth and investment across our District up to 2040.

However changes to local government arrangements mean that, from 2028, North Hertfordshire will become part of a new Central Hertfordshire Authority. Responsibility for preparing any future Local Plan covering that wider area will rest with the new authority.

By updating our Local Plan now, we can make sure it reflects the needs of our communities today while planning for the future. It will help us provide the homes, jobs, services and infrastructure people need, while protecting the character, environment and heritage that make North Hertfordshire special.

Without an up-to-date Plan, we have less influence over where new development takes place, what it looks like, and how it supports local communities.

Local Government Reorganisation

Local Government in England is undergoing significant change. In July 2026, Government confirmed that North Hertfordshire (minus Royston Heath, Royston Palace, Royston Meridian, Ermine, and Weston and Sandon wards) will join with Stevenage Borough Council and Welwyn Hatfield District Council (minus Northaw and Cuffley ward) to form Central Hertfordshire.

This programme is intended to create single-tier unitary councils that are responsible for delivering all local government services within their area. The aim is to simplify decision-making, improve the coordination of public services, reduce duplication, and provide greater clarity about responsibility and accountability.

In May 2027, elections will take place to establish the Shadow Central Hertfordshire Authority, which will act as the interim governing body responsible for preparing Central Hertfordshire for operation.

The new Central Hertfordshire Unitary Authority is planned to come into full effect on 1 April 2028, known as Vesting Day. From this point, Central Hertfordshire will take on all responsibilities currently delivered by both Hertfordshire County Council, North Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield District Councils and Stevenage Borough Council.

Royston Heath, Royston Palace, Royston Meridian, Ermine, and Weston and Sandon wards will become part of the new East Hertfordshire and Broxbourne unitary authority, along with East Herts and the majority of wards in Broxbourne.

Figure 1 – Hertfordshire Four Unitary Authorities



Source: [One Welwyn Hatfield](https://one.welhat.gov.uk/news/article/509/government-announces-four-unitary-authorities-in-hertfordshire)¹

As we prepare our new Local Plan for North Hertfordshire – including Royston Heath, Royston Palace, Royston Meridian, Ermine, and Weston and Sandon wards, it is important that we consider not only the needs of our District, but also the wider area that we will ultimately form part of. Future planning decisions will need to take account of how growth and investment can be delivered across this broader geography and how different areas can work together to meet shared challenges and opportunities.

¹ <https://one.welhat.gov.uk/news/article/509/government-announces-four-unitary-authorities-in-hertfordshire>

This includes considering wider requirements for:

- Housing growth
- Employment growth
- Infrastructure provision
- Nature recovery and biodiversity enhancement
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Taking this wider perspective will help ensure that future growth is planned in a coordinated way, making the best use of available land, infrastructure and environmental resources, while supporting the long-term prosperity and sustainability of both North Hertfordshire and the new unitary authority areas.

While LGR will create new unitary authorities covering a wider area, we must continue to prepare and maintain our own Local Plan for our existing District until a replacement plan is adopted for the new authority area, which may not be until the mid-2030's.

Once the new unitary authorities are established, they will be able to prepare a Local Plan covering their wider geography. Until then, our new Local Plan will provide the planning framework needed to manage development effectively and ensure growth takes place in the right locations for the existing geography of North Hertfordshire.

What is a Local Plan?

Our Local Plan sets out our vision for the future of North Hertfordshire up to 2040, helping to guide the District through a period of change before a new Local Plan is produced for the new Central Hertfordshire Authority and the East Hertfordshire and Broxbourne Authority.

It is a long-term plan for how our towns, villages and countryside will grow and develop. It helps determine where new homes, jobs, green spaces and community facilities should be provided, and how development can support thriving and sustainable communities.

What a Local Plan can do

Our Local Plan will:

- Set a clear vision for how North Hertfordshire will grow and change over the next 15 years or so.
- Guide planning decisions by providing the framework for deciding where development should take place and what it should look like.
- Support high-quality development by setting standards for design, sustainability and infrastructure.
- Balance competing needs by protecting our environment and heritage while planning for new homes, employment opportunities and local services.
- Create better places by helping to build healthy, well-connected and inclusive communities for everyone.

What a Local Plan cannot do

Our Local Plan cannot:

- Control every change to a building or piece of land, as some works do not require planning permission.
- Decide who lives in, owns or occupies a particular property.
- Replace other regulations and responsibilities, such as licensing, environmental health or building regulations.

Our Current Local Plan

Our current Local Plan was adopted in 2022 and sets out the vision and framework for development across North Hertfordshire up to 2031. It identifies where new homes, employment opportunities and supporting infrastructure should be delivered, while helping to protect the character of our District and its valued landscapes.

Our current Plan includes strategic development sites in and around:

- Baldock
- Hitchin
- Letchworth Garden City
- East of Luton
- Stevenage

These sites are helping to meet local housing and employment needs. Some have already delivered new homes, community facilities and infrastructure, while others are still progressing through the planning and development process.

Our current Local Plan will continue to guide planning decisions until our new Local Plan is adopted. As part of the plan-making process, we will consider which existing policies remain effective and should be carried forward, and where new or updated policies may be needed to respond to changing circumstances and national requirements.

Housing Delivery and Five-Year Housing Land Supply

Our current Local Plan allocated enough land to meet our District's identified housing needs at the time it was prepared. However, a number of allocated sites have been slower to come forward than anticipated. This has been influenced by a range of factors, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, construction market challenges and wider economic uncertainty affecting the development industry.

As a result, housing delivery has not progressed at the rate originally expected and the Council has been unable to consistently demonstrate a five-year housing land supply.

A five-year housing land supply is a national planning requirement. It measures whether there are enough deliverable housing sites available to meet a district's housing needs over the next five years. Maintaining an adequate supply is important because it helps ensure that housing needs can be met in a planned and coordinated way.

Where a local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, the weight that can be given to some Local Plan policies may be reduced when determining planning applications. In these circumstances, there is a greater likelihood that proposals for housing development on sites not allocated in the Local Plan may be approved, provided they comply with national planning policy and other relevant planning considerations.

We monitor housing delivery and housing land supply twice a year, with updates published through our [monitoring reports](#)² on our website.

Supplementary Planning Documents

To support our Plan, we have also adopted a number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's), including:

- Sustainability SPD (2024) - providing guidance on designing and delivering low-carbon, climate-resilient development.
- Developer Contributions SPD (2026) - explaining how new development should contribute towards infrastructure, services and community facilities.
- District Design Codes SPD (2026) - providing guidance on the design requirements of developments.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) will no longer form part of the new plan-making process. Instead, they will be replaced by Supplementary Plans (SPs).

Unlike SPDs, Supplementary Plans will be prepared through a more formal process and will be examined independently, similar to the way Local Plans are examined. This will give them greater weight in planning decisions and help ensure consistency between planning policies and supporting guidance.

We will review the content of our existing SPDs to determine the most appropriate place for their policies and guidance. Where necessary, some matters may be incorporated directly into our new Local Plan, while more detailed guidance may be included within future SPs.

We are currently awaiting further Government guidance on the preparation and content of Supplementary Plans.

Policy Map

Our Local Plan Policies Map shows the main planning designations and development areas across North Hertfordshire. It provides an overview of the policies that currently apply across the district and will help inform the preparation of our new Local Plan.

For more detailed information, including interactive mapping and the full Policies Map, please visit our [Local Plan webpages](#)³.

Neighbourhood Plans

A Neighbourhood Plan is prepared by a Parish or Town Council, with input from their local community. It allows local people to help shape development in their area by setting planning policies that reflect local priorities and issues.

Once made, a Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the Development Plan for North Hertfordshire and is used alongside our Local Plan when planning applications are considered.

Ten of our parishes have prepared [Neighbourhood Plans](#)

² <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/monitoring-reports>

³ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/local-plan-2011-2031>

- Ashwell
- Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall
- Barkway and Nuthampstead
- Codicote
- Ickleford
- Knebworth
- Pirton
- Preston
- Wallington
- Wymondley

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 introduced Neighbourhood Priority Statements (NPSs) as a simpler and more flexible alternative to a Neighbourhood Plan.

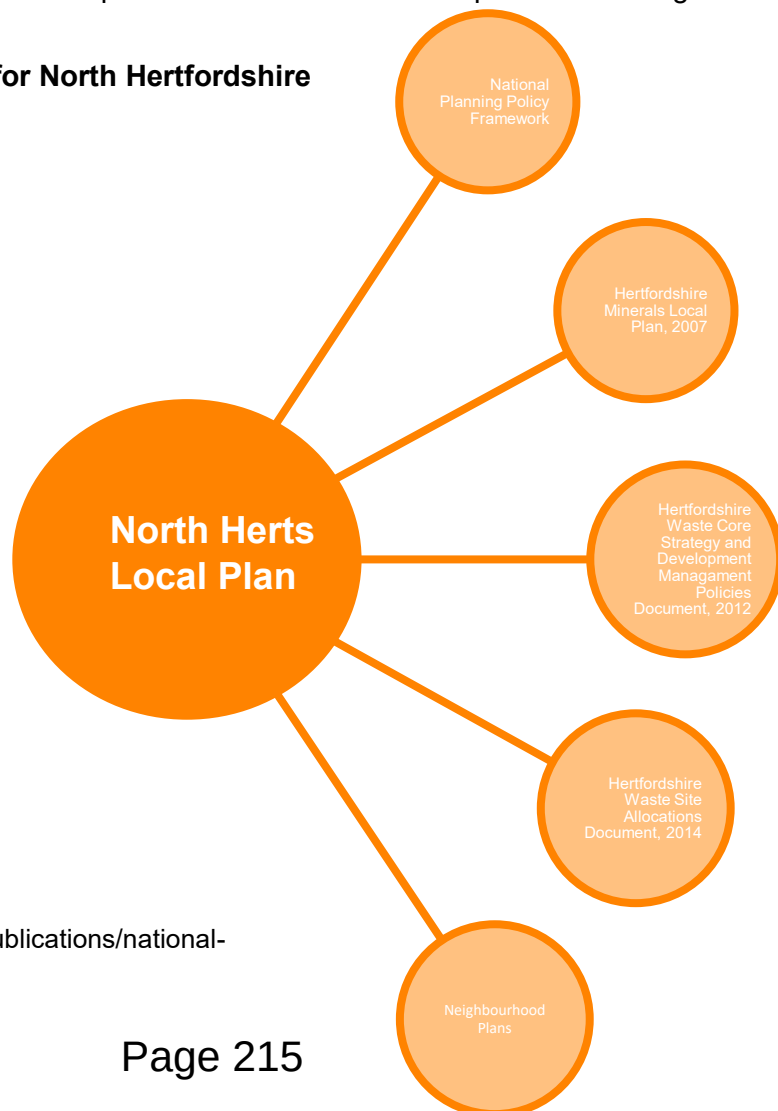
NPSs allow communities to identify the issues, priorities and aspirations that are most important to them, without the need to prepare a full neighbourhood plan. They can help inform both Local Plan preparation and wider planning decisions such as S106 contributions by providing a clear statement of local priorities.

What is our Local Plan's relationship to other plans?

Our Local Plan is shaped by local needs and priorities, but it must also follow national planning policy.

The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2)⁴ sets out the issues every local planning authority must consider when planning for the future. The Government has consulted on a revised NPPF and published the final version on 17 August 2026. This document has been drafted and updated to align with the requirements of the final NPPF published in August 2026.

Figure 2 – Development Plan for North Hertfordshire



⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

Our priorities

Our new Local Plan will be guided by the Council's priorities:



Thriving communities



Accessible services



Responsible growth



Sustainability

These priorities, set out in the [North Herts Council Plan](#)⁵, will help shape decisions about where development takes place and how it contributes to the long-term wellbeing of our communities.

Working together across Hertfordshire

Our Local Plan also works alongside county-wide plans, including the [Hertfordshire Waste Plan](#)⁶ and the [Hertfordshire Minerals Plan](#)⁷. By taking these plans into account, we can ensure that North Hertfordshire's growth is supported by a coordinated and long-term approach to planning for the future.

What new objectives and trends do we need to plan for?

As part of our new Local Plan, we are looking at the latest evidence, local needs and future challenges to help shape how North Hertfordshire grows over the coming years.

We want to create communities where people have easy access to the services and facilities they use every day. This means planning neighbourhoods where shops, schools, healthcare, green spaces and leisure opportunities are easier to reach, reducing the need to make every journey by car and making it simpler for people to walk, cycle or use public transport.

The way we live, work and travel has changed significantly in recent years. Many people now spend more time in their local area and place greater value on nearby services, open spaces and community facilities. This presents a great opportunity to think differently about how we plan future development and improve existing places.

In 2019, North Hertfordshire District Council declared a climate emergency and committed to reducing carbon emissions across our District. The Council's ambition is for North Hertfordshire to become carbon neutral by 2030, and our Local Plan has an important role to play in supporting that goal.

⁵ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/2024%20-%202028%20Council%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/planning-in-hertfordshire/minerals-and-waste-planning/waste-planning/waste-planning.aspx>

⁷ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/planning-in-hertfordshire/minerals-and-waste-planning/minerals-planning/minerals-planning.aspx>

To help achieve this, we are exploring ways to:

- Focus new development in locations that are well connected by public transport and have good walking and cycling links.
- Improve access to parks, nature and green spaces for all residents.
- Support healthy, inclusive and resilient communities that meet the needs of people at all stages of life.
- Encourage development that helps reduce carbon emissions and supports more sustainable ways of living.

In July 2023 the Council also declared an Ecological Emergency to recognise that the crisis facing nature requires urgent action and is interlinked with the climate crisis.

These declarations asserted the Council's commitment toward climate action and nature recovery beyond current government targets and international agreements. This is being pursued through our [Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030](#)⁸ which aligns to the Council priority of Sustainability. This strategy replaced the Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027.

What other information makes up the Local Plan?

Engagement

We want as many people as possible to get involved in shaping our new Local Plan.

We consulted on a new Local Plan Scoping Document between 11 May and 28 June 2026 to understand:

- key challenges, opportunities and priorities for North Hertfordshire
- key issues to inform a vision for our plan
- how communities wanted to be involved as our Local Plan evolves

The feedback from the Scoping Consultation has been used to inform the proposed approaches set out in this document. This consultation is, therefore, your next opportunity, as residents, businesses, community groups and other interested organisations, to have your say in the preparation of our Local Plan for North Hertfordshire.

There are questions set out throughout this document where we would like you to set out your thoughts and views.

Every response will be carefully reviewed and considered as we develop the next stage of our Plan. Following the consultation, we will also publish a report summarising the feedback we receive and explaining how it has informed each stage of the preparation of Local Plan.

Building the evidence base

Good planning needs to be based on reliable evidence. As part of preparing our new Local Plan, we are gathering information to help us understand our District today and plan effectively for the future.

Our evidence base will help us identify:

⁸ https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-08/NHDC-1506%20NHDC%20Sustainability%20Strategy%202025-30_V4.pdf

- What is working well and should be protected or enhanced.
- Where there are challenges that need to be addressed.
- What homes, jobs, services and infrastructure may be needed in the future.
- How North Hertfordshire is changing over time.

We will draw on a range of information, including:

- Research, data and analysis.
- Site visits and technical assessments.
- Specialist advice from experts and partner organisations.
- Future trends and forecasts.

Local knowledge is also an important part of the evidence base. Residents, businesses and community organisations have valuable insights into their areas.

As evidence base documents are completed, they will be published to support future consultations and help everyone to understand the information that underpins our Local Plan.

These documents provide the evidence and justification for the policy approaches and options presented throughout this document, and references to relevant evidence are included where appropriate.

A full list of the [evidence base](#)⁹ can be found in the Appendix at the back of this document as well as on our website.

Appraisals and assessments

As we develop our Local Plan, we need to understand how different options could affect people, places and the environment. A range of assessments will help us do this and ensure that our Plan delivers positive outcomes wherever possible.

Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA)

We are undertaking a Sustainability Appraisal, which incorporates the requirements of [Sustainable Environmental Assessment](#)¹⁰, to assess the likely social, economic and environmental impacts of our Plan and reasonable alternative approaches. This helps us identify opportunities, minimise negative effects and improve the overall outcomes of our Plan.

The SA scoping report is published alongside this consultation for comment.

⁹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/1633/contents/made>

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

We are carrying out an [Equality Impact Assessment](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/equality-impact-assessment)¹¹ as part of preparing our new Local Plan. This helps ensure that we meet our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and gives proper consideration to the needs of people with protected characteristics throughout the plan-making process.

The EqIA looks at how the policies in our Local Plan could affect different groups within our communities. It is an ongoing assessment process and will continue to inform the development of our Local Plan as policies evolve and new evidence becomes available.

We are publishing the EqIA Scoping Report alongside this consultation and welcome your views on the issues identified and the proposed approach.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

A [Health Impact Assessment](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/health-impact-assessment)¹² helps us understand how our Local Plan could affect the health and wellbeing of people living, working and spending time in North Hertfordshire.

The assessment looks at how proposed policies and potential development sites may influence the wider factors that affect health, such as access to housing, green spaces, healthcare, jobs, transport, education and community facilities. It also considers whether different groups may experience impacts in different ways and how the Local Plan can help reduce health inequalities.

Although a HIA is not a legal requirement, it is an important part of developing a Local Plan that supports healthy, sustainable communities and aligns with the Council's commitment to improving quality of life for residents.

The HIA is published alongside this consultation, and we welcome your views on its findings and recommendations.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

A Habitats Regulations Assessment is required by law under the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 \(as amended\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents)¹³. It assesses whether a plan or project could have a significant effect on internationally important wildlife sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

For our Local Plan, the HRA will consider whether proposed policies, site allocations and future development could affect protected habitats and species. It helps ensure that internationally designated nature conservation sites are properly safeguarded and that any potential impacts are identified and addressed at an early stage.

The assessment forms an important part of the evidence base for our Plan and will help inform decisions about where and how growth should take place. Where necessary, it will identify measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate any potential impacts on protected habitats and species.

The HRA will be published alongside our draft Local Plan for consultation next year.

¹¹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/equality-impact-assessment>

¹² <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/health-impact-assessment>

¹³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents>

Viability

Our Local Plan needs to be both ambitious and deliverable. As we develop policies for new homes, infrastructure, green spaces and community facilities, we must ensure that these requirements can realistically be achieved. National planning policy requires us to consider viability so that development remains capable of being delivered while still contributing to local priorities.

To help with this, we will carry out a viability assessment as part of the next stage of our Local Plan process. This will assess whether the cumulative costs of Local Plan policies can be accommodated without compromising the delivery of development.

The findings will be published and made available alongside our draft Local Plan consultation, allowing residents and stakeholders to see how the evidence has informed our approach.

About this document

Recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including the introduction of National Decision-Making Policies (NDMPs), means that our new Local Plan will be structured differently from our current Plan. This document explains how these changes will influence the preparation of our new Local Plan and the way planning policies are presented.

In particular, it identifies planning issues that will be addressed through NDMPs. National policy is clear that matters covered by NDMPs should not be repeated in Local Plans. As a result, our new Local Plan will focus on locally specific policies and priorities, avoiding duplication of national policy. The final NPPF was published on 17 August 2026; and made clear that NDMPs are material considerations in planning decisions and should be given 'critical' weight. In effect, this means they should be considered as though they are part of the Development Plan.

This document also sets out our emerging approach to a range of planning issues. It explains where existing policies are expected to remain broadly unchanged and where new or revised policies may be needed to respond to local evidence, national policy requirements and future challenges.

Alongside this, this document summarises the evidence gathered to date and explains how it is shaping our new Local Plan. It also identifies areas where further evidence, studies and assessments are still being prepared to inform future policy choices.

Have your say on the future of North Hertfordshire

This document is an important step in preparing our new Local Plan for North Hertfordshire, and we want to hear your views.

It sets out the key issues we believe our new Local Plan should address, along with some of the options we are considering. These have been informed by:

- Feedback from our previous scoping consultation and engagement with residents and stakeholders.
- Information gathered through monitoring our current Local Plan.

- Changes in housing, employment and development trends.
- New Council priorities, strategies and commitments.
- Changes to national planning policy.

This is an early stage in the process, and we recognise that new challenges and opportunities may emerge as work on our Plan continues. That is why we are seeking your views now.

We would like to know:

- Do you support the approaches and options being considered?
- Are there alternative ideas we should explore?
- Is there anything important that we have missed?

Questions are set out through-out the document where we would like your specific views.

Your comments will help shape the draft policies in our Local Plan and ensure that it reflects the needs, aspirations and priorities of our local communities.

Table 1 – North Hertfordshire Local Plan Timetable

Plan-making stage	Key dates
Council Notice and revised timetable publication	24 April 2026
Scoping Consultation	11 May - 28 June 2026
GATEWAY 1	9 October 2026
Content and Evidence Document Consultation	13 October - 24 November 2026 We are here
GATEWAY 2	5 April 2027
Draft Local Plan Consultation	26 October 2027 - 4 January 2028
GATEWAY 3	27 March 2028
Submission	31 May 2028
Examination	June - November 2028
Adoption	January 2029

Find out more

For more information about our new Local Plan, including supporting documents, consultation materials and future updates, visit our [Local Plan webpages](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/new-local-plan)¹⁴ by scanning the QR code below.



¹⁴ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/new-local-plan>

OUR VISION

Our vision

What is a vision?

At the heart of every Local Plan is a vision - a clear picture of what we want our District to become over the coming years.

The vision sets out our ambitions and provides the foundation for everything in our Local Plan.

A strong vision should be:

- Ambitious - setting out our aspirations for thriving communities, a healthy environment and a strong local economy.
- Realistic - reflecting the challenges we face and building on the opportunities available to us.
- Locally distinctive - recognising the unique character of North Hertfordshire and the qualities that make it a special place to live, work and visit.

We want a vision that reflects the views and priorities of everyone in North Hertfordshire, that reflects the character of our towns and villages, the values we hold, and the future we want to create together.

What do we need to consider and plan for?

The NPPF places sustainable development at the heart of the planning system, and it is a key principle that will guide the preparation of our new Local Plan.

Sustainable development means meeting the needs of people today while ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the same opportunities and quality of life. It is about planning for the homes, jobs, services and infrastructure our communities need, while protecting the environment and making the best use of available resources.

To achieve this, our Local Plan must balance three important and interconnected objectives:

- Environmental
- Social
- Economic

These objectives are most effective when considered together. The challenge for our Local Plan is to achieve the right balance, ensuring that growth benefits our communities, supports the local economy and protects the environment.

We identified a number of challenges and opportunities that our Local Plan needs to address. These were included in our [Scoping Document](#) and the feedback we received has been taken into account in developing this document and our vision for our new Local Plan.



Our proposed vision

We have developed a draft Vision for our new Local Plan.

‘Inspired by Our Past, Planning for a Sustainable Future’

‘By 2040, North Hertfordshire will strengthen its identity as the District shaped by the world’s first Garden City, Letchworth, whose pioneering principles of planned growth, green space, and community wellbeing will continue to influence high-quality design and placemaking across the area. Our District’s historic market towns, Hitchin, Baldock and Royston, each with distinctive medieval and Georgian cores, will thrive as vibrant centres of culture, employment and local services, supported by sensitive development that respects their well-preserved built heritage.

North Hertfordshire’s villages and rural surroundings, set against the backdrop of the Chilterns National Landscape, chalk downland and varied historic environments, will continue to benefit from small-scale, locally appropriate growth that sustains community facilities while protecting the rural character that distinguishes each settlement. Development will preserve the district’s pattern of distinct towns and villages.

Our District will deliver high-quality growth, making use of previously developed land wherever possible and prioritising active travel networks, sustainable transport connections and climate-resilient design. A diverse range of high-quality homes, including affordable and social housing, will help meet the needs of current and future residents, supporting mixed and balanced communities in keeping with Garden City principles. Improvements to walking, cycling and public transport will reduce car dependency and strengthen links between our District’s towns, villages and wider sub-regional destinations.

Economically, North Hertfordshire will build on our strong enterprise base and strategic location along the A1(M) knowledge and growth corridor, supporting the shift toward a more diverse, innovative and resilient local economy. Local businesses will benefit from targeted support aligned with our district’s commitment to responsible, greener growth.

Our District will collaborate on long-term planning for strategic transport, green infrastructure, and climate action, ensuring that our growth needs are met in a coordinated and sustainable way across the area. Community-led renewable energy generation, smart energy networks and low-carbon infrastructure will contribute to greater energy resilience, helping residents and businesses benefit from cleaner and more affordable energy while supporting the transition to net zero.

North Hertfordshire will be a distinctive, heritage-rich and environmentally led district, delivering high-quality homes, strong local economies, and thriving communities while safeguarding the unique character of our garden city, market towns and rural villages.’

Q1. Do you agree with our proposed Vision for North Hertfordshire?

Q2. Is there anything else that we should consider for the Vision?

Measurable Local Plan Outcomes

Table 2 – Ten measurable outcomes to monitor the progress towards meeting our vision

Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
Efficient use of land Balancing housing, jobs, infrastructure, and the environment to build sustainable communities.	Previously Developed Land	At least 20% of new homes completed in the Plan period are built on previously developed (brownfield) land.	% development on previously developed land	Planning permissions/completions database
	Design Quality	100% of major developments achieve compliance with our design code, including Garden City-inspired placemaking principles.	% of major developments compliant with design code	Planning decisions
Housing Meeting the diverse housing needs of all our residents	Affordable and Social Housing Delivery	At least 40%* of all new homes delivered are affordable housing, including an agreed proportion of social rented homes. *This will be updated from findings of viability study complete	% affordable housing delivered categorised by tenure type	Planning permissions/completions database
Economy	Economic Resilience	Growth in the number of businesses operating in knowledge-intensive,	Number of businesses in the defined sectors	ONS UK Business Counts (Nomis)

Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
Supporting a resilient and prosperous local economy		green and innovative sectors by 50% compared with the 2025 baseline.		
	Town Centre Vitality	Maintain or increase town centre occupancy rates to at least 90% in Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Letchworth.	Vacancy rates	Experian GOAD Footfall monitoring Retail/centre health checks
Environment and climate change Addressing the climate and environmental impacts of growth	Low-Carbon Energy and Resilience	At least x%* of the district's electricity demand is met through local renewable or community energy generation by 2040. *TBC once evidence base is collected	% incorporating low-carbon technologies	Energy statements submitted with applications Building regulations compliance data
Transport Managing growth in a way that promotes sustainable and accessible travel	Active and Sustainable Travel	Increase the proportion of short journey stages in towns that are walked, wheeled or cycled to at least 55% by 2035 ¹⁵	Mode share (% short journey stages in towns by sustainable modes)	Census data Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan monitoring

15

Objective of the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 3: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-third-cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy/active-travel-active-england-the-third-cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy-cwis3>

Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
Communities Creating healthy, sustainable and well-connected communities	Access to Services and Facilities	Increase the number of new homes located within a 20-minute walk (approximately 1,300m) of a range of day-to-day services and community facilities, including shops, schools, healthcare and open space	Average number of key services accessible within a 20-minute walk of new housing developments	Planning permissions
	Access to High-Quality Open Space	100% of residents live within a 100m of an accessible, high-quality public open space, as defined by local open space standards.	Percentage of residents living within 100m walking distance of an accessible public open space	Planning permissions

Q3. Do you agree with our proposed measurable outcomes and indicators that support and deliver our vision for North Hertfordshire set out in Table 2?

A PICTURE OF NORTH HERTS

A picture of North Herts

About North Hertfordshire

North Hertfordshire covers around 375 square kilometres, making it the largest District in Hertfordshire by area. Located in the north of the county, it is home to a diverse mix of market towns, villages and countryside, each with its own distinct character and identity.

Our District includes the towns of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston, alongside many smaller villages and rural communities. Together, these places create a unique and varied area with a strong sense of history, community and place.

Much of North Hertfordshire is rural in nature, with open countryside, valued landscapes, green spaces and historic settlements that contribute greatly to its character and appeal. These natural and historic assets are important to our residents, businesses and visitors and play a key role in shaping how our District develops.

We need to balance the need for new homes, jobs and services with the protection of the countryside and the qualities that make North Hertfordshire special.

Figure 3 – North Hertfordshire Map



Source: North Herts Council

Working with our neighbours

North Hertfordshire is part of a wider region, and many of the issues we plan for do not stop at District and Borough boundaries. Residents travel to neighbouring areas, and beyond, for work, education, shopping, healthcare and leisure, which means many planning decisions are interconnected.

We share boundaries with eight neighbouring local authorities:

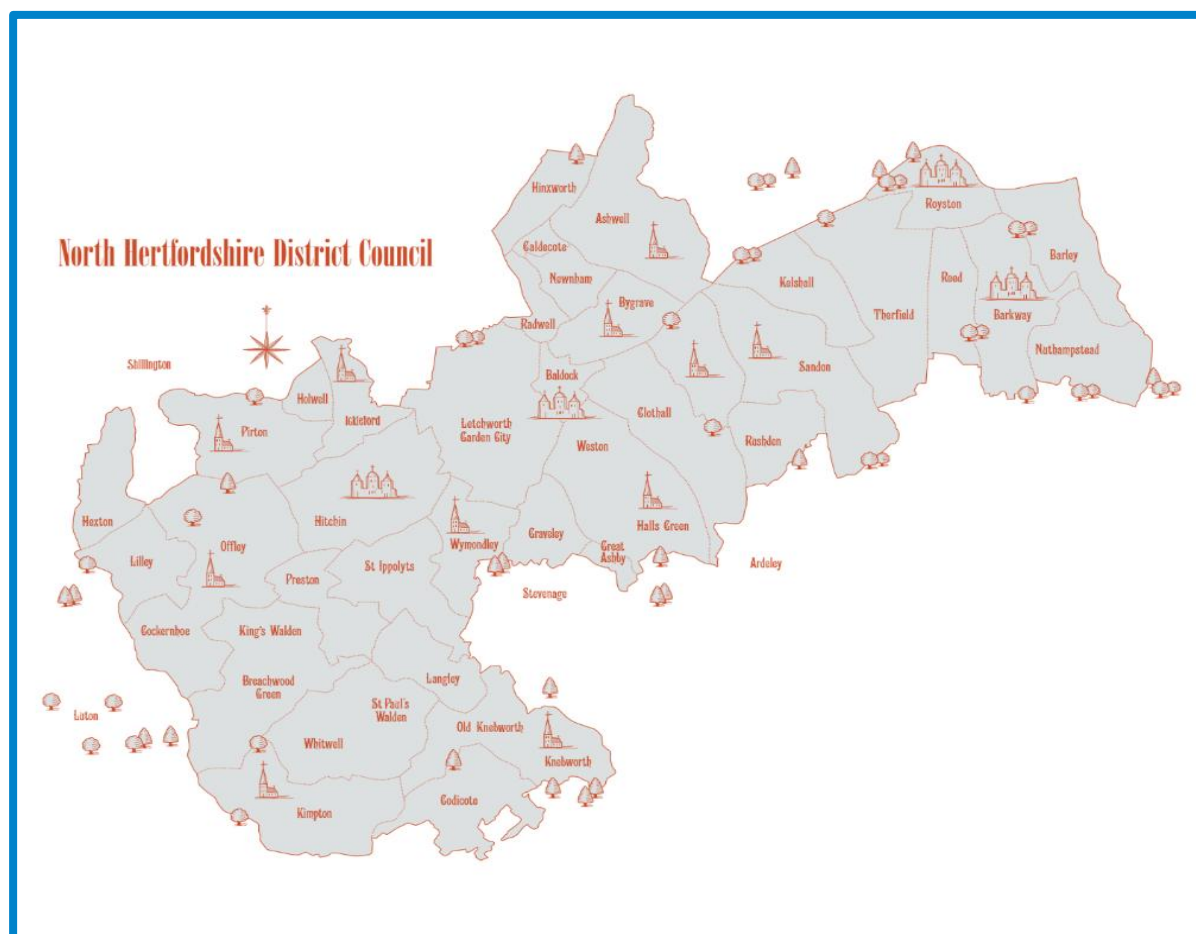
- Central Bedfordshire
- East Hertfordshire
- Luton
- South Cambridgeshire
- St Albans
- Stevenage
- Uttlesford
- Welwyn Hatfield

As we prepare our new Local Plan, it is important that we work closely with our neighbours and other organisations. By understanding the opportunities and challenges that we share, we can help ensure that planning decisions are coordinated and that growth is supported by the right infrastructure, services and connections.

Our towns and villages

North Hertfordshire is home to a diverse network of towns, villages and rural communities, each with its own character and identity.

Figure 4 – Map showing the parishes of North Hertfordshire



Source: North Herts Council

Our four main towns act as the principal centres for housing, employment, services, shopping, leisure and community life:

- **Baldock** - A historic market town with good rail and road connections, a thriving town centre and a growing residential community.
- **Hitchin** - A vibrant and attractive market town, known for its lively town centre, independent businesses, cultural offer and strong sense of community.
- **Letchworth Garden City** - The world's first Garden City, recognised for its unique combination of green spaces, heritage, innovation and carefully planned neighbourhoods.
- **Royston** - A thriving market town with strong transport links, a diverse local economy and easy access to the surrounding countryside.

Alongside these towns, we are home to many villages and smaller rural settlements. These communities play an important role in the life of our District, contributing to its character, heritage and rural economy. Each has its own strengths, challenges and local identity.

In addition, Great Ashby, on the edge of Stevenage, is largely within North Hertfordshire and forms an important part of our community. Its close relationship with Stevenage means residents benefit from access to a wide range of services, facilities and employment opportunities.

Our Countryside and Green Belt

Much of our countryside is protected by Green Belt designation, which plays an important role in preventing urban sprawl, safeguarding the character of towns and villages, and maintaining open areas between settlements.

Our District contains two Green Belt areas:

- The Metropolitan Green Belt, which covers Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock, Stevenage and a number of surrounding settlements.
- The Luton Green Belt, which protects areas in the western part of the district.

Areas outside the Green Belt are designated in our current Local Plan as the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. These landscapes remain an important part of North Hertfordshire's identity, supporting farming, wildlife, recreation and the wider rural economy.

Our countryside, open spaces and natural environment are highly valued by our residents and visitors alike. As we plan for future growth, we will seek to balance the need for homes, jobs and infrastructure with the protection and enhancement of the landscapes and green spaces that make North Hertfordshire distinctive.

Transport and Connectivity

We benefit from a strategic location and strong transport connections, helping our residents, businesses and visitors access opportunities both within our District and beyond.

Our area is served by five railway stations, providing direct links to destinations including:

- London and Hertford to the south.
- Cambridge and King's Lynn to the north-east.
- Peterborough to the north.
- Stevenage, which provides onward rail connections to destinations across the Midlands, the North East and Scotland.



While rail connections to London and the east of England are strong, there are currently no direct rail services westwards, making journeys to places such as Luton and Milton Keynes more challenging by public transport.

We are also served by several key road routes, including:



- The A1(M), providing north-south connections between London and the north of England.
- The A505, which links communities across the District from east to west.
- Other important routes include the A507, A600 and A602.

For international travel, both London Luton Airport and London Stansted Airport are within easy reach of our District.

As we plan for North Hertfordshire, we want people to be able to travel safely, efficiently and sustainably. We therefore need to consider how best to:



- Improve opportunities for walking, cycling and public transport.
- Support better connectivity between communities.
- Improve access to key destinations and services.
- Reduce reliance on private cars where practical.
- Ensure that transport infrastructure keeps pace with growth.
- Support our wider environmental and climate objectives.

Key Characteristics of North Hertfordshire



Second largest district in Herts at **375 square kilometres**



Total population **133,583**



59,000 dwellings



Life expectancy

80.9 years Male

83.2 years Female



Working age population of **82,133** people, **85.2%** economically active



9 chalk stream Main Rivers, 3% of the UK total



4 main towns (Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston)



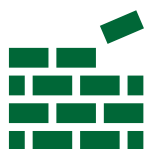
Located between **two** international airports, London Luton Airport and London Stansted Airport



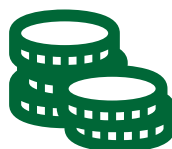
Circa **66,000** jobs



Five railway stations provide direct services to Peterborough, Cambridge, King's Lynn, London and Hertford



6,830 active businesses



Ranked **269 out of 317**
of English Local Authorities
for deprivation (317 = least
deprived)

A PLACE-BASED SPATIAL STRATEGY FOR NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE

A place-based spatial strategy for North Hertfordshire

What is a spatial strategy?

A spatial strategy is a long-term approach for how an area should evolve over time.

The [National Planning Policy Framework, 2026 \(NPPF\)](#)¹⁶ makes clear that we must prepare a spatial strategy that is genuinely plan-led, based on clear and up-to-date evidence. Our strategy should be based on long-term understanding of how much development is needed in North Hertfordshire and should fit with the wider, sub-regional plan, known as the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS), that is being produced by Hertfordshire County Council.

We must set out a positive vision for how our area will change over time. This includes making clear decisions about where growth should happen, how much development is needed, and which places are most suitable for it.

Our Local Plan must identify minimum levels of development, allocate land for growth, set out broad locations for development, and establish a clear hierarchy of settlements so growth is directed to the most sustainable locations.

This means carrying out detailed assessments of housing and economic needs in North Hertfordshire, including understanding land that is available to develop, population changes, market demands, employment trends, and infrastructure capacity. We have already published some evidence on our [webpage](#) and this will be updated when new assessments have been finalised.

The NPPF also promotes the establishment of a settlement hierarchy. This includes looking at:

- access to services;
- transport links;
- infrastructure capacity; and
- environmental constraints.

This helps ensure homes, jobs and town-centre uses are directed to the most suitable and well-connected places in our District, while protecting less suitable settlements from inappropriate development.

Once agreed, the Spatial Strategy will

- Guide future decisions on the location of specific housing sites;

¹⁶

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a8334c03bd75b81e2329ac4/National_Planning_Policy_Framework.pdf

- Provides the framework against which planning applications are considered; and
- Enables infrastructure providers (schools, roads, NHS, and utilities) to plan and deliver services effectively.

Local Plan Call for Sites: Submitted Sites

Between June and September 2025, we carried out a [Call for Sites](#), inviting landowners, developers, organisations and members of the public to suggest land that they believed might be suitable for development through our new Local Plan. The sites submitted to us may have the potential to accommodate different types of development or land use. This could include housing, employment uses, mixed-use development, new open space, or land that could be used to support biodiversity and nature recovery.

We have published a [map](#)¹⁷ showing all the sites submitted through this process.

It is important to understand that this map includes all sites that have been submitted to us. Inclusion on the map does not mean that a site is suitable for development or that it will be allocated in our Local Plan.

We have begun a detailed assessment of all submitted sites and will continue this work over the coming months. This involves a comprehensive review of each site against a wide range of planning, environmental, infrastructure and sustainability criteria. Through this process, sites will be assessed and, where appropriate, discounted if they are not considered suitable, available, achievable or sustainable.

The outcome of this assessment work will help inform the selection of sites to be allocated in our Local Plan. A proposed list of allocations will be published as part of the Draft Local Plan, which is currently expected to be consulted on in Autumn 2027.

Alongside this Content and Evidence consultation, we are also seeking views on the sites that were submitted through the Call for Sites process. We welcome comments on any site that is of particular interest to you, whether you support or do not support its potential development.

However, it is important to reiterate that these sites are only suggestions submitted to us at this stage. They have not yet been fully assessed and should not be regarded as proposed allocations. Any sites that are ultimately recommended for allocation will only be identified following detailed technical assessment and public consultation through later stages of the plan-making process.

Small sites and brownfield sites

As part of allocating a range of size of sites, in order to provide a more robust pipeline for delivery, the NPPF requires local plans to set 10% of allocations of sites under 1ha and a further 10% of sites between 1ha and 2.5ha, unless there are strong reasons for not doing so. It should be noted that of the sites currently submitted, there is a lack of those sizes of sites. In addition, there are a significant number of greenfield sites compared to brownfield sites. We are therefore keeping the Call for Sites open until the end of the consultation

¹⁷ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/call-sites>

period on the Content and Evidence document and would encourage people to consider submission of those types of sites where they are considered deliverable.

Planning for housing growth

Meeting our future housing needs is one of the biggest challenges facing our Local Plan. Delivering enough new homes will require significant change across our District. Our Local Plan must ensure that the right number of homes are built, that they are the right types, and that they are in the most suitable places. This includes making sure the needs of different groups are met, such as families, older people, those who need affordable housing, and people with specialist housing needs.

We recognise the need for a major increase in housing delivery nationwide and the benefits this brings to the wider economy and people's life chances. Increasing the supply of homes is a key priority for the current Government, which has set an ambition to deliver 1.5 million new homes between 2024 and 2029.

Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople are an established part of our District's communities. National planning policy requires Local Plans to identify enough suitable sites to meet their accommodation needs. A strong spatial strategy should ensure these sites are in appropriate places, with good access to services, respect for the local environment, and consideration of travelling lifestyles. Providing well-designed, authorised sites will help meet needs properly and reduce the risk of unauthorised encampments.

Housing need

Using the Government's [standard method](#), we are expected to plan for around 1,036 additional new homes each year. So, for example, over the next 11 years, we would have to plan for around 11,396 new homes.

We currently have over 12,100 homes already planned or have permission in our District – see Table 3. This is based on the existing Local Plan allocations and current planning approvals.

Of our current site allocations without planning permission or with permission but yet to be built out, we have 9,844 homes that could potentially be taken forward as new allocations in the new Local Plan. The NPPF is clear that housing targets should be seen as a minimum and therefore we will still need to consider the appropriateness of other potential sites put forward through our recent [Call for Sites](#) process. If during the next Plan period, some sites are delayed and we are unable to meet our 5 year housing land supply, as is the case now, we would also be required to provide a 20% buffer. This means allocating a further 2,279 homes in that circumstance.

Table 3 – Current residential commitments in North Hertfordshire, 31 March 2026

Source of sites	Number of homes	Less than 1ha	1ha – 2.5ha
Sites under construction	812	-	-
Minor development with permission	262	-	-
Major development with full permission	302	LP allocations 108	LP allocations 125
Other permissions	1,115	0	42
Local Plan allocations without permission	9,611	292	304
Total	12,102	400	471

Important choices still need to be made about where and how our remaining homes should be delivered. These decisions must strike a balance between meeting housing needs, protecting the character of our District, and creating places where people can live, work and thrive.

To help inform these decisions, we are preparing a [Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment](#)¹⁸, in line with Government guidance. This work will help identify suitable land and will inform proposed site allocations in our new Local Plan.

We have prepared a [Strategic Housing Market Assessment](#)¹⁹ to understand what types and sizes of homes will be required over the next 11 years. More detail is provided in the Housing chapter of this document.

Any new planning policy will decide where new homes can be built in our District. The aim is to use land efficiently by choosing locations that suit their surroundings and can be supported by the right schools, public transport options and local services, both now and in the future.

As we prepare our new Local Plan, we need to be mindful of not only the needs of our District, but also the new wider unitary areas, as part of LGR. Future planning decisions will need to take account of how growth and investment may be delivered across this broader geography and how different areas can work together to meet shared challenges and opportunities.

This includes considering wider requirements for:

- Housing growth
- Employment growth
- Infrastructure provision

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>

¹⁹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

- Nature recovery and biodiversity enhancement
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Settlement hierarchy

The settlement hierarchy helps shape our Local Plan's spatial strategy by determining where development should be focused. When developing different options for our Local Plan, it is helpful to group settlements into a hierarchy that reflects the role each place plays within North Hertfordshire and their capacity for accommodating growth.

This hierarchy should be based on a range of factors, such as how many people live there, the size of the settlement, the services and facilities available, and how well it is connected by transport.

We have asked our parishes to identify all the services in each of the settlements within their parish boundaries. We will use this alongside information on proximity to sustainable modes of transport to help us categorise settlements according to a range of criteria.

We have identified some key services that are important for each of the settlement as well as other facilities and services that provide a more supporting role.

Key Services

Primary/lower school

Food shop/corner shop

Village/Parish hall

Public House

Place of worship

Bus service

Support Services

Education

- Primary school
- Secondary school
- Further education
- Creche/nursery



Shops

- Food shop
- Retail shop



Hospitality

- Restaurant/pubs/cafes
- Takeaways

Healthcare

- Hospital
- GP surgery

Professional Services

- Post office



- Health clinic
- Dementia day care



- Bank/building society
- Estate agent etc

- Dentist
- Optician
- Pharmacy

Community Services

- Village/community hall
- Place of worship
- Permanent library
- Leisure centre
- Sports club
- Entertainment facilities



Outside facilities/ Open space

- Public park/garden
- Sports pitch
- MUGA
- Playground
- Allotment
- Public open space



Access to public transport

Railway stations (in or serving North Hertfordshire)

- Ashwell and Morden
- Arlesey
- Baldock
- Hitchin
- Knebworth
- Letchworth
- Luton
- Meldreth
- Royston
- Stevenage



Bus services

- Availability of bus stops
- Frequency of bus services to key destinations such as Town Centres



Connectivity

The presence and reliability of quality Broadband coverage

- Gigabit-Capable / Full Fibre (FTTP)
- Superfast (Fibre to the Cabinet - FTTC)
- Standard Broadband
- 5G Broadband



Once all the information has been collected, we will use it to understand what services and facilities each settlement has, including broadband coverage, as well as proximity to sustainable modes of transport and key employment centres and apply the same approach to all of them to create a clear settlement hierarchy.

Q3. Do you agree with the criteria we are using to categorise settlements? Yes/ No

Please explain your reasons

Q4. Are there any other criteria you think we should be using to help categorise settlements?

Spatial Development Options

Our new Local Plan needs a clear strategy that brings all our policies together and helps deliver our overall vision for our District, towns and villages.

We have also been working with neighbouring authorities to look at larger-scale growth across a wider area. A [North East Central Hertfordshire Vision 2050](#) document sets out some of our shared aspirations, including the potential for a new settlement.

There are a number of growth options that could influence how development is planned across North Hertfordshire in the future. In practice, however, it is unlikely that any single option would be capable of delivering the scale and type of development required on its own.

The most sustainable and deliverable approach is likely to involve a combination of the first three options, allowing growth to be distributed across a range of locations while making best use of existing settlements, infrastructure and development opportunities.

Assessing the impacts of growth

As part of the plan-making process, we are undertaking a Sustainability Appraisal, that includes the requirements of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This assessment helps us understand the likely effects of different options for future growth and development across North Hertfordshire by considering the potential impacts of different housing growth

options and development approaches, identifying their strengths, weaknesses and likely consequences. Further details of these impacts across the strategic development growth options are set out in the Sustainability Appraisal scoping report.

Different growth options

The following sections set out the different growth options, presented in our current order of preference for the Local Plan. This ordering reflects our initial assessment of how each option could contribute to meeting housing, employment and infrastructure needs, while protecting the environment and supporting sustainable communities.

1. Infill Development/Urban intensification

This option would focus on building more homes within existing towns and villages. It would make use of available sites within existing settlement boundaries and maximise the use of land, particularly in central locations such as town centres and near transport hubs like railway stations and bus interchanges in urban areas. The focus would be on redeveloping previously used (brownfield) land within urban areas.

Building more homes and welcoming more people into existing urban areas could help bring new life to town centres in North Hertfordshire. This could have a positive knock-on effect on local economies and may also help support jobs and productivity in nearby employment areas.

This approach can make more efficient use of land, but it can also create challenges for infrastructure, character and local services. It is also highly unlikely to meet the District's identified housing needs in full, which could have wider social and economic implications, including reduced delivery of affordable housing, increased housing affordability pressures, difficulties in meeting the needs of different groups within the community, and constraints on economic growth due to a limited supply of homes for the local workforce. The advantages and disadvantages of this approach are shown in the table below.

Table 4 – Advantages and disadvantages of infill development/urban intensification

Advantages	Disadvantages
New housing is directed to locations with existing transport links, schools and town-centre services, making walking or cycling more practical and reducing reliance on private cars	Excessive development may affect the character and setting of historic areas, potentially making
Focusing development on brownfield land and within existing urban areas can reduce the need to build on Green Belt land	Higher concentrations of housing can increase traffic congestion and place pressure on the local environment
More people living in and around town centres can help support shops, cafés, services and local businesses as high streets change	Greater housing density can create additional demand for schools, utilities, healthcare and other community infrastructure

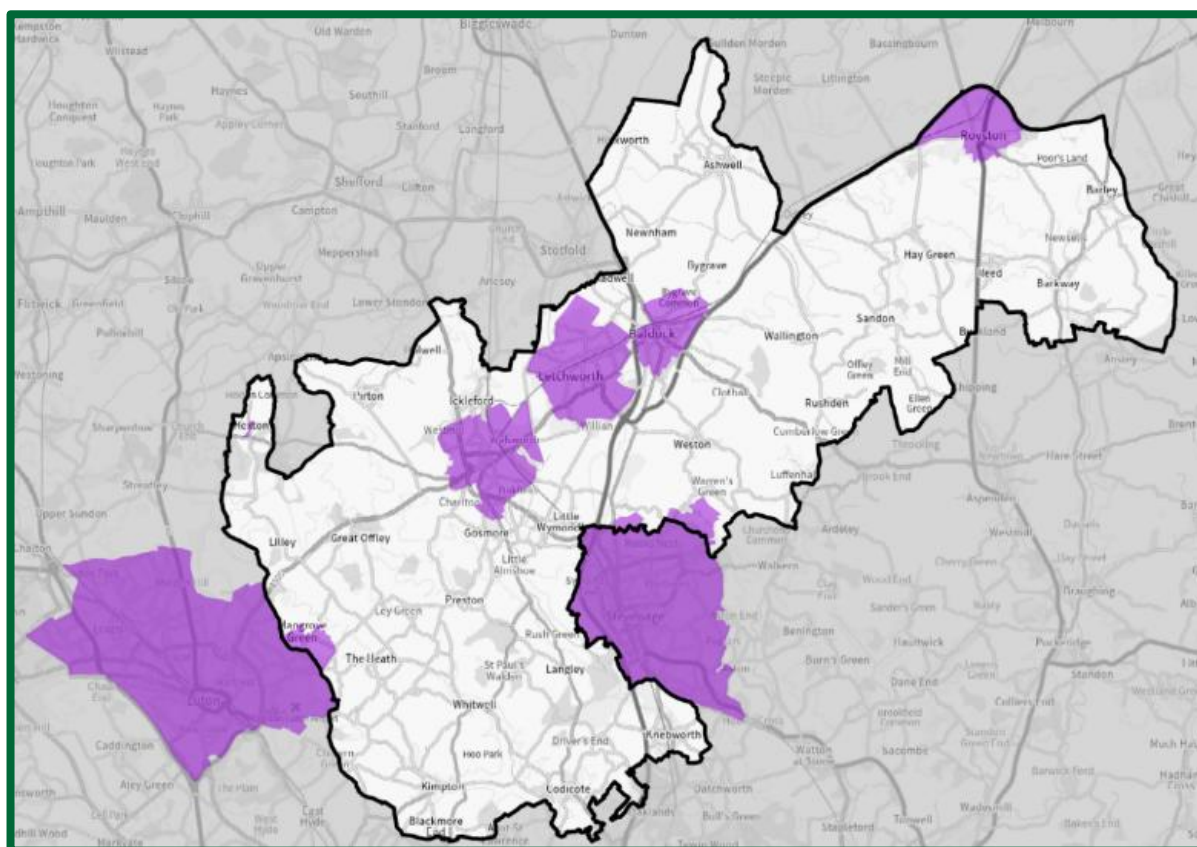
Advantages	Disadvantages
Urban areas provide important opportunities to deliver affordable housing, self-build plots and a wider range of housing types	Increased traffic, hard surfaces and taller buildings can contribute to poorer air quality and intensify to the “urban heat island” effect
Makes efficient use of previously developed vacant, derelict or underutilised land	Some developments may result in the loss of urban green spaces, potentially affecting biodiversity and local amenity unless suitable mitigation or compensation is provided
	Reliance on infill / urban intensification is likely to result in significant under-delivery against the District’s housing targets and may increase the likelihood of planning permissions being granted on appeal for sites such as greenfield sites. This would potentially result in development that is less sustainable and more environmentally damaging.

2. Urban expansion

This option would deliver new housing through strategically planned edge of town extensions. Development would take place around the edges of the main towns, such as Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston, as well as considering one or more larger sites in other possible locations, such as the currently safeguarded site west of Stevenage or potentially further development around Luton.

New homes would be planned as well-designed strategic extensions to existing communities, with careful masterplanning to make sure they connect well to existing towns, services and transport networks. Growth would be phased and supported by new infrastructure, such as schools, transport and community facilities, delivered alongside development. This approach balances spreading growth across several locations focusing development where it can be planned and delivered most effectively.

Expanding towns through development on land at their edges can help meet housing and other development needs, but it can also have impacts on the environment, infrastructure and local character. The advantages and disadvantages of this approach are summarised in the table below.

Figure 5 – Urban areas in and around North Hertfordshire

Source: North Herts Council

Table 5 – Advantages and disadvantages of urban expansion

Advantages	Disadvantages
Building in larger, planned locations can reduce more dispersed development in the countryside.	Can make neighbouring towns appear to expand towards one another, reducing the distinction between settlements and weakening their individual identity.
Makes efficient use of existing schools, healthcare facilities, public transport, roads and utilities, reducing the need for significant new infrastructure.	Development on open land can alter the appearance of settlement edges and the relationship between towns and the surrounding countryside.
Development on the edge of towns can support the vitality and viability of local shops, services, employment opportunities and community facilities.	Large-scale growth can place pressure on schools, healthcare services and transport networks unless infrastructure investment keeps pace.

Can make walking, cycling and public transport more viable, helping to reduce reliance on private cars and lower emissions.	May increase traffic congestion, reduce open space and change the character of an area.
Allows development to be coordinated and planned comprehensively from the outset, ensuring housing, employment, infrastructure, green space and transport are delivered together.	Large strategic sites often require more extensive planning, infrastructure and site preparation, meaning it can take many years before homes are delivered.
Larger developments can support the timely delivery of essential infrastructure, such as schools, healthcare facilities, roads and community amenities.	Housing delivery may depend heavily on a small number of large developers, reducing flexibility if circumstances change.
Fewer, larger sites can enable more integrated development and reduce the risk of piecemeal growth.	Delays to infrastructure funding, legal agreements or site-specific issues can slow down housing delivery.
Can support wider economic growth and facilitate strategic planning with neighbouring areas.	Concentrating growth in a limited number of places can intensify impacts on local communities, transport networks and the environment.
Provides greater opportunity to incorporate low-carbon energy, sustainable drainage and active travel infrastructure that maybe harder to deliver on small sites.	If delivery on major sites stalls, there may be fewer alternative sites available to maintain housing supply.
	May involve development on Green Belt land, raising concerns about the loss of openness and the long-term purposes of the Green Belt.

3. Dispersed village growth

This option would provide new homes through a number of smaller developments spread across villages in North Hertfordshire. Building would usually happen within villages or on land next to them. The focus would be on meeting local housing needs while helping villages remain active, supported and sustainable.

We will use the settlement hierarchy to identify which villages are best placed to accommodate development. This will help ensure that growth is directed to villages with the right level of services, facilities and infrastructure. In some cases, allowing development in some of the smaller villages can help support local services, such as schools, shops and community facilities, and keep them viable where they might otherwise be at risk from declining use.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to dispersed village growth that need to be carefully considered. While this approach can help meet local housing needs and support the vitality of rural communities, it can also create challenges relating to infrastructure,

services, transport and impacts on the countryside. The advantages and disadvantages of this approach are shown in the table below.

Table 6 – Advantages and disadvantages of dispersed village growth

Advantages	Disadvantages
Small-scale housing growth can help sustain villages communities by supporting services, facilities and community life.	Many villages have limited public transport, school places, GP capacity and utilities, making additional development more challenging to accommodate.
Can help deliver homes that meet identified local needs, including affordable housing, smaller homes or housing for older residents.	New housing may increase car dependency, especially in locations where jobs, services and public transport options are limited.
More residents help maintain the viability of village shops, schools, pubs and community facilities.	If not carefully managed, growth can affect the scale, character and rural identity of villages, particularly those with historic significance.
Distributing development across a number of villages can help spread growth more evenly and avoid putting too much pressure onto one single settlement.	The cumulative impact of numerous small developments can have significant effects on countryside character, biodiversity and tranquillity.
Smaller village sites are often easier and quicker to deliver and can attract a wider range of developers, including small and medium sized builders.	Small village sites on their own are unlikely to deliver enough homes to meet overall District needs and would need to be complemented with larger growth locations to meet district-wide requirements.
Can support a more consistent supply of housing, reducing reliance on a small number of large sites.	Providing infrastructure and services across multiple villages can be less efficient and more costly than concentrating development in larger settlements.
Growth across a network of villages may help support improved rural public transport, with increased demand contributing to the viability of local bus services and connections.	

4. New settlement growth

This option would accommodate a significant proportion of future housing needs through the delivery of one or more new, freestanding settlements. These would be comprehensively

planned developments designed to operate as sustainable communities, with their own infrastructure, services and employment opportunities. Rather than relying primarily on existing towns and villages, the new settlements would be largely self-contained. They would be comparable in scale and ambition to developments such as Cambourne (approximately 23,000 residents) and the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (around 45,000 residents).

This option should more appropriately be considered through the Spatial Development Strategy, which should assess growth needs across Hertfordshire as a whole. Any new settlement proposal would likely require close working with neighbouring authorities, such as Central Bedfordshire and South Cambridgeshire, given the potential for cross boundary impacts and opportunities.

It is also unlikely that a new settlement could be delivered within the timeframe of this Local Plan. New settlements typically require significant preparation, including land assembly, masterplanning, infrastructure planning and funding, meaning they often take many years before development can begin. The advantages and disadvantages of this approach are shown in the table below.

Table 7 – Advantages and disadvantages of new settlement growth

Advantages	Disadvantages
Government support can make it easier to deliver large-scale, planned developments, through dedicated programmes, funding and long-term strategic backing.	Requires substantial upfront investment in land, infrastructure and services, often involving significant financial risk and potentially requiring public funding or complex delivery arrangements.
New settlements can enable the early provision of major infrastructure, such as schools, roads, healthcare facilities, utilities and green spaces, rather than relying on existing services with limited capacity.	Requires large areas of land, which can have significant impacts on the landscape and may affect agricultural land, biodiversity, heritage assets and the countryside.
Can help reduce pressure on existing towns and villages by accommodating growth in a planned new location rather than through incremental expansion.	New settlements can take many years to plan, approve and build out, limiting their ability to meet housing needs in the Plan period.
Provides an opportunity to create well-designed communities from the outset, with integrated neighbourhoods, a mix of homes and jobs, attractive green infrastructure and sustainable, low-carbon development.	Delivery often relies on a small number of major developers and partners and can increase vulnerability to changes in the markets or investment priorities.
Offers a clear, long term strategy for accommodating growth, providing greater	Delays to infrastructure funding, governance arrangements or site delivery can have serious

Advantages

certainty for communities, infrastructure providers and developers.

Disadvantages

consequences for housing supply and the achievement of growth targets.

Q5. We intend to use a combination of growth options 1 - 3 as set out above. Do you agree?

If not, why?

Q6. Are there other spatial options that should be considered?

Q7. Are there broad locations that we could consider for a new settlement(s)?

Efficient use of land

The NPPF encourages making the best use of land so that we can provide homes and other development while protecting the environment and creating safe, healthy places to live.

This is a fundamental part of our Local Plan. It means prioritising the reuse of previously developed (brownfield) land, increasing density where appropriate, and bringing sites forward in an efficient and sustainable way to make the best use of the land that we have.

We should make the most of land within existing built-up areas, such as:

- car parks
- service yards
- underused retail sites
- older estates that could be regenerated

This helps reduce the need to build on undeveloped (greenfield) land.

Our Local Plan will use design codes to show how land can be used more efficiently; this could include filling gaps between buildings, making better use of low-density sites, allowing taller buildings in suitable locations, and small infill developments within settlement boundaries. The aim is to deliver more homes without reducing the quality of development.

Minimum density standards will also be set, particularly in town centres and other well-connected locations across our District.

Where sites are allocated in our Local Plan, some will be expected to provide a mix of uses because this helps reduce the need to travel and can improve the local environment. We will also review sites that have been previously allocated in our current Local Plan that are unlikely to come forward and consider whether they are better suited to alternative uses.

National policy requires us to set minimum residential density standards for residential development outside town centres and locations that have a high level of connectivity. NDMPs currently set a minimum density of at least 35 dwellings per hectare (dph) within a reasonable walking distance (800m) of a well-connected railway station (within the top 80 travel to work areas (TTWA)). All North Hertfordshire's rail stations are within the top 80 TTWAs. A density of at least 35 dwellings per hectare should be achieved within the net developable area of the site. Higher densities – of at least 45 dwellings per hectare – should be achieved where the service frequency is at least twice that of the minimum required for a well-connected station.

Figure 6 – Example of 50dph



Source: Levitt Bernstein

We propose the introduction of additional minimum housing density requirements, based on the net developable area, in locations that are well served by services, facilities and public transport:

- 45dph within the town centre boundaries of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston.
- 40dph within the wider town boundaries and urban extension areas.
- 30dph within larger villages, subject to the outcome of the proposed settlement hierarchy review.

These thresholds would only apply to residential sites over 10 units and represent minimum expectations rather than fixed targets. Higher or lower densities may be appropriate in some locations, depending on factors such as local character and prevailing densities.

Figure 7 – Example of 40dph

Source: Levitt Bernstein

Figure 8 – Example of 30dph

Source: Levitt Bernstein

Q8. Do you agree with these minimum housing density requirements? Yes/No

Please provide your reasons

Green Belt

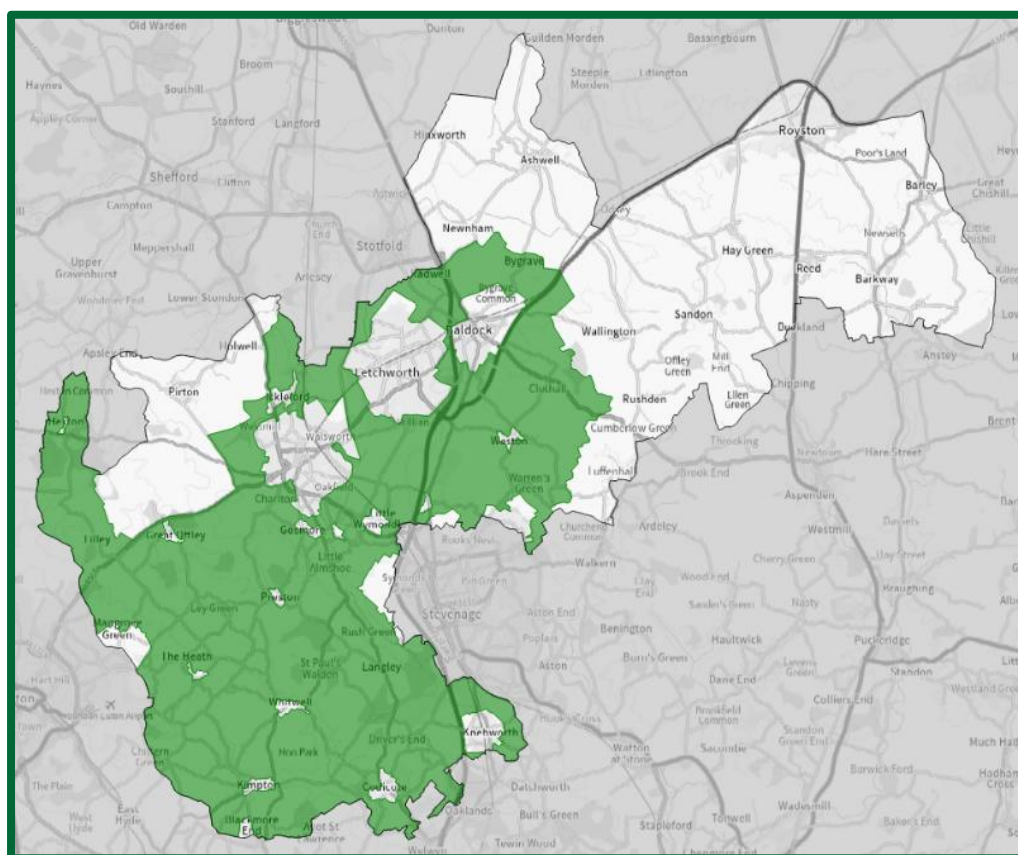
Green Belt is a national planning policy that protects open land around towns and cities to stop them from sprawling into the countryside. Its main purpose is to keep countryside permanently open, prevent nearby towns from merging into one another, and encourage development to take place within existing urban areas instead.

Green Belt land serves five key purposes:

- Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- Prevent the merging of neighbouring towns;
- Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- Assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

These purposes help guide decisions about whether development on Green Belt land should be supported or resisted.

Figure 9 - Green Belt in North Hertfordshire



Source: North Herts Council

In North Hertfordshire, we were one of only a small number of councils that added land to the Green Belt when adopting our current Local Plan. Around 4,000 hectares of land were

designated as Green Belt, resulting in a net increase of nearly 25% to 17,590 hectares of Green Belt land in North Hertfordshire in our current Local Plan.

In 2024, the NPPF introduced the concept of “Grey Belt” into policy. It recognised that not all Green Belt land serves the same purpose. Some areas do little to check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas (a), prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another (b), or preserve the setting and special character of historic towns (d).

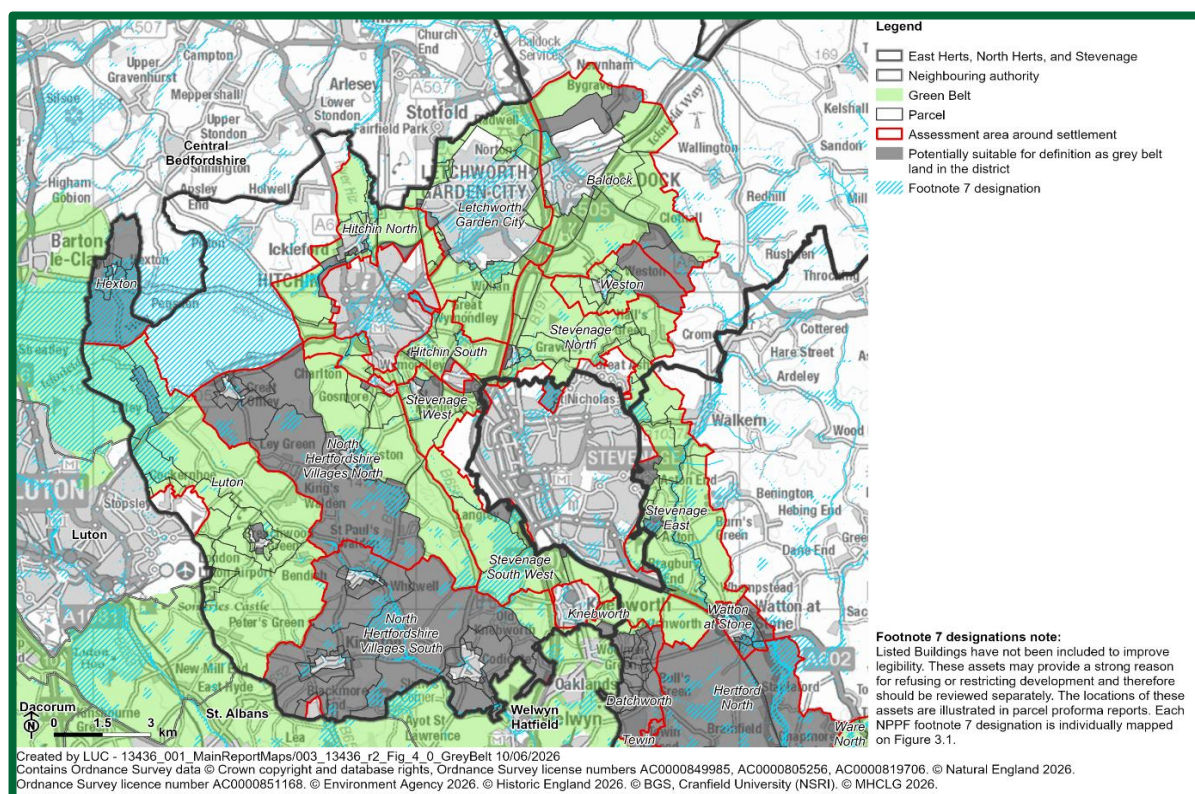
Where land does not perform strongly against these 3 purposes, it may now be considered for development, if other conditions are met. Sites would also need to be in a sustainable location as well as meet what are known as the “Golden Rules”, requiring development to deliver clear public benefits, such as affordable housing, good design, green space and supporting infrastructure.

If land is identified as Grey Belt, is in a sustainable location and the Golden Rules are met, instead of having to prove “very special circumstances,” decisions focus on whether proposals meet planning policies, manage impacts properly, and deliver clear benefits for communities.

The NDMPs also introduce a separate route for development near public transport, particularly around railway stations in the Green Belt. This supports the idea of locating homes where people can travel easily by train, helping to reduce reliance on cars. This approach does not depend on land being classed as Grey Belt.

Overall, these changes move Green Belt policy away from a one-size-fits-all approach. They allow carefully planned development in limited locations where land does not perform strongly against certain Green Belt purposes, while ensuring meaningful public benefits and continued protection for the most important areas.

Figure 10 – Areas potentially suitable for definition as grey-belt



Source: North Herts Green Belt Study 2026

We have reviewed all Green Belt land in North Hertfordshire, in line with the Government's requirements, and identified areas that now meet the definition of Grey Belt. This assessment has been published as part of the [evidence](#) supporting our new Local Plan.

Because the NPPF 2026 now sets out detailed policies for Green Belt land, there is very limited scope for us to introduce our own Green Belt policies specific to North Hertfordshire. For these reasons, we are proposing that our Local Plan relies on national Green Belt policy set out in the NPPF. For decision making purposes, the NPPF provides the policy framework for:

- How development is controlled in the Green Belt (Policy GB6)
- What types of development are acceptable in the Green Belt (Policy GB7)
- The 'Golden Rules' that must be met where development is proposed (Policy GB8)

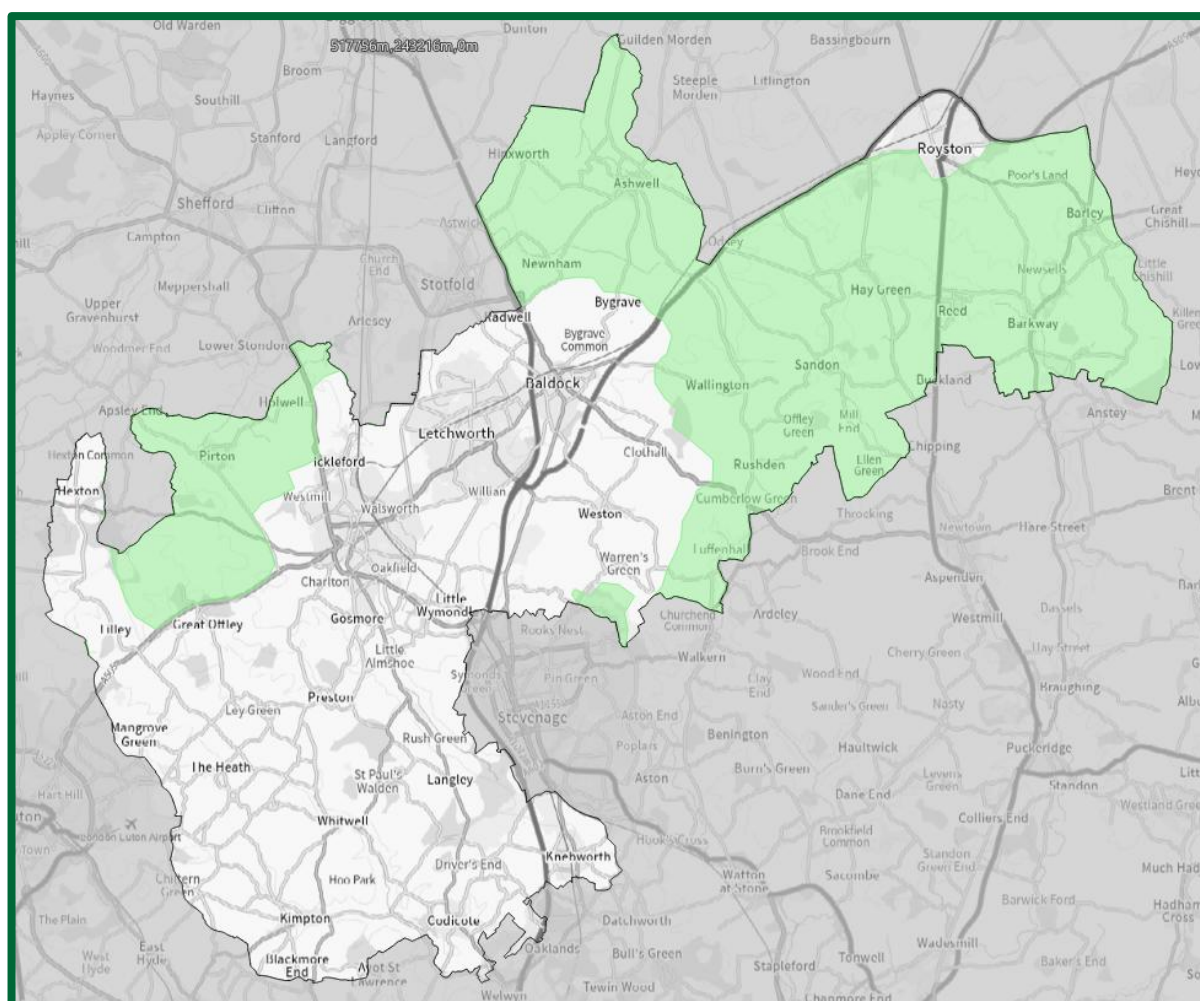
Q9. Are there any issues in relation to Green Belt that our Local Plan needs to cover that are not already addressed? Yes/No

Please explain your reasons

Rural Area beyond the Green Belt

Our current Local Plan designates a large area as 'Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt'. This covers much of the eastern part of our District, including most of the land between Baldock and Royston, the villages and countryside to the south of Royston, and land to the north and west of Hitchin outside the Green Belt.

These rural areas include some of our District's highest-quality countryside. Our use of the term 'Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt' is a local planning designation and is not the same as the NPPF definition of 'rural areas'.

Figure 11 – Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt in North Hertfordshire

Source: North Herts Council

The intention of our current Local Plan policies is to protect the countryside from unnecessary or inappropriate development, while still allowing essential, small-scale, or locally beneficial development that supports villages, the rural economy, and community needs without urbanising the area.

Q10. Should we keep a designation of a “Rural Area beyond the Green Belt”? Yes/No

Please explain your reasons

Heritage

Our District has a rich history, with archaeological evidence of settlements stretching back to the Palaeolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Ages. Our heritage continues through the character of the medieval market towns of Hitchin, Baldock and Royston, each preserving notable historic buildings and distinctive townscapes.

Letchworth Garden City stands as a pioneering example of urban design, celebrated as the world's first Garden City. The town features exceptional architecture by renowned designers including Barry Parker & Raymond Unwin, Bennett and Bidwell, Cecil Hignett, and Mackay Hugh Baillie-Scott.

North Hertfordshire is home to:

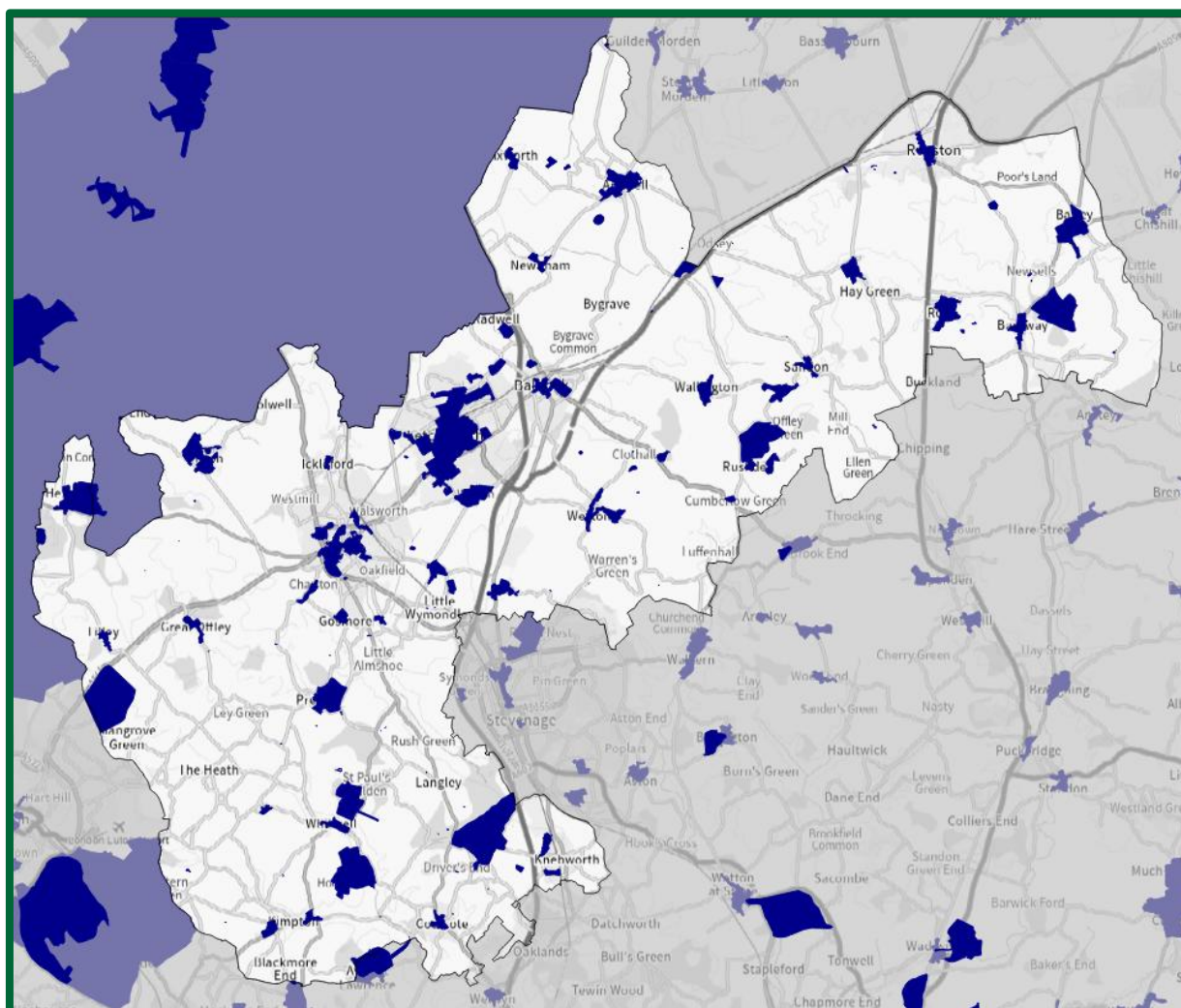
- Around 2,500 listed buildings
- 63 scheduled monuments
- 13 registered parks and gardens
- 44 Conservation Areas

The NPPF requires our Local Plan to support the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the historic environment whilst also setting out detailed policies relating to the heritage assets as an irreplaceable resource.

There is very limited scope for us to introduce our own heritage policies specific to North Hertfordshire. For these reasons, our Local Plan will rely on national historic environment policy set out in the NPPF to conserve and enhance our heritage assets in our District which includes but is not limited to non-designated heritage assets and archaeological sites.

While our Local Plan will rely on the NDMPs for decision-making on heritage matters, we will prepare a North Hertfordshire Heritage Strategy. The strategy will provide a local framework for understanding our heritage assets and identifying opportunities to protect, conserve and enhance their significance and contribution to the character of our District.

Figure 12 – Heritage assets across North Hertfordshire



Source: North Herts Council

Q11. Are there any issues in relation to heritage that our Local Plan needs to cover that are not already addressed?

If so, what?

HOMES

Homes

Good-quality housing can improve health and wellbeing, support stronger communities and help people feel connected to the places where they live. At the same time, new homes have an important role to play in tackling climate change through better energy efficiency, lower carbon emissions and more sustainable construction methods. Our [Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029](#)²⁰ sets out how we'll make sure the right mix of homes is available to meet local needs.

Our current Local Plan includes a target to deliver 13,000 homes between 2011 and 2031. Since the beginning of the Plan period, thousands of new homes have been completed across our District, with further homes already under construction or in the planning process; but it's not enough to meet our current housing requirement.

A significant proportion of future housing delivery is expected to come from strategic development sites around Baldock, Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, alongside smaller sites that come forward over time. These smaller developments, often referred to as windfall sites, continue to make an important contribution to housing supply across our District.

The challenge is not simply to deliver more homes, but to deliver the right homes in the right places. This includes homes that are affordable, accessible, energy-efficient and designed to meet the changing needs of our communities.

Figure 13 - Meridan Gate, Royston



Source: North Herts Council

Planning legislation allows some commercial buildings to be converted into homes without the need for a full planning application. While these conversions can help increase housing supply, they can also result in the loss of employment space and town centre businesses.

To help maintain this balance, we have introduced [Article 4 Directions](#)²¹ in key locations. These directions remove certain permitted development rights, ensuring that proposals for such changes can be properly assessed through the planning process. This approach helps

²⁰ https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-04/NHC%20Housing%20Strategy%202024-2029_0.pdf

²¹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/article-4-directions-0>

protect important employment areas, support vibrant town centres and ensure that housing growth does not come at the expense of local jobs and services.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026)

National planning policy requires us to plan for enough homes to meet the needs of our communities, ensuring that people can access homes that are suitable, affordable and meet a range of needs throughout their lives.

The Government uses a [standard method](#)²² to calculate the minimum number of homes we should plan for. Based on that methodology, North Hertfordshire has a housing requirement of 1,036 homes per year, equating to approximately 11,396 homes between 2029 and 2040.

National planning policy requires us to identify and maintain a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. This is an important part of ensuring that enough homes are available to meet current and future needs. Currently we are facing a challenge in maintaining a sufficient supply of homes in the short term.

Although major housing sites have been allocated through the current Local Plan around North of Baldock (BA1), North of Stevenage (NS1), and North of Letchworth Garden City (LG1), they take time to progress through planning, infrastructure provision and construction before large numbers of homes can be delivered.

National policy recognises that a substantial proportion of new homes may need to come from larger developments, such as urban extensions or new settlements. These developments can provide opportunities to deliver not only housing, but also schools, healthcare facilities, open spaces, community facilities and transport improvements. However, they must be planned and designed carefully to create sustainable and attractive places to live.

At the same time, future housing delivery should not rely solely on large sites. Smaller and medium-sized developments also have an important role to play. The NPPF requires Local Plans to allocate a range of size of sites in order to provide a more robust pipeline for delivery, setting a requirement for 10% of allocations of sites of under 1ha and a further 10% of sites between 1ha and 2.5ha, unless there are strong reasons for not doing so. This is to help create opportunities for different types of developers and can increase the overall supply of new homes.

The NPPF also places a strong emphasis on making more efficient use of land in locations that have good access to public transport, jobs, shops and other services, helping to reduce the need to travel and making the best use of existing infrastructure.

Providing affordable housing remains a key priority. Our current Local Plan requires major residential developments to deliver between 25% and 40% affordable housing, depending on the size and location of the scheme. National policy also places increasing emphasis on meeting the needs of households who require social rented housing, ensuring that homes are available to those most in need.

²² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

The NPPF contains NDMPs that relate to the locating of specialist forms of accommodation, rural exception sites, isolated homes in the countryside, and the locating of traveller sites. Our Local Plan will not duplicate policies for matters that are already covered by these.

What does the data tell us?

Demographics

North Hertfordshire has an ageing population; The median age here is now 42 years old, up from 40 in 2011, and slightly higher than the national median age of 40 across England.

As people's ages change, so too do their housing needs. Older residents may prefer smaller, more accessible homes, while younger families often look for larger spaces.

Our housing provision has to reflect the needs of all our residents, from first-time buyers to retirees, so that our communities remain inclusive, balanced, and supportive for every generation.

Housing completions

Housing completions in North Hertfordshire have fallen below the levels needed to meet our housing targets. This has contributed to a growing gap between the number of homes required and the number being delivered, making it harder to meet the needs of local people and maintain a 5-year housing land supply, which then puts us at risk of more speculative development.

Figure 14 – Net housing completions compared to target completions in North Hertfordshire, 2011 - 2031



Source: North Herts Monitoring 2025/26

We continue to work with developers, infrastructure providers, local communities and other partners to help ensure that planned developments are delivered in a timely way and that

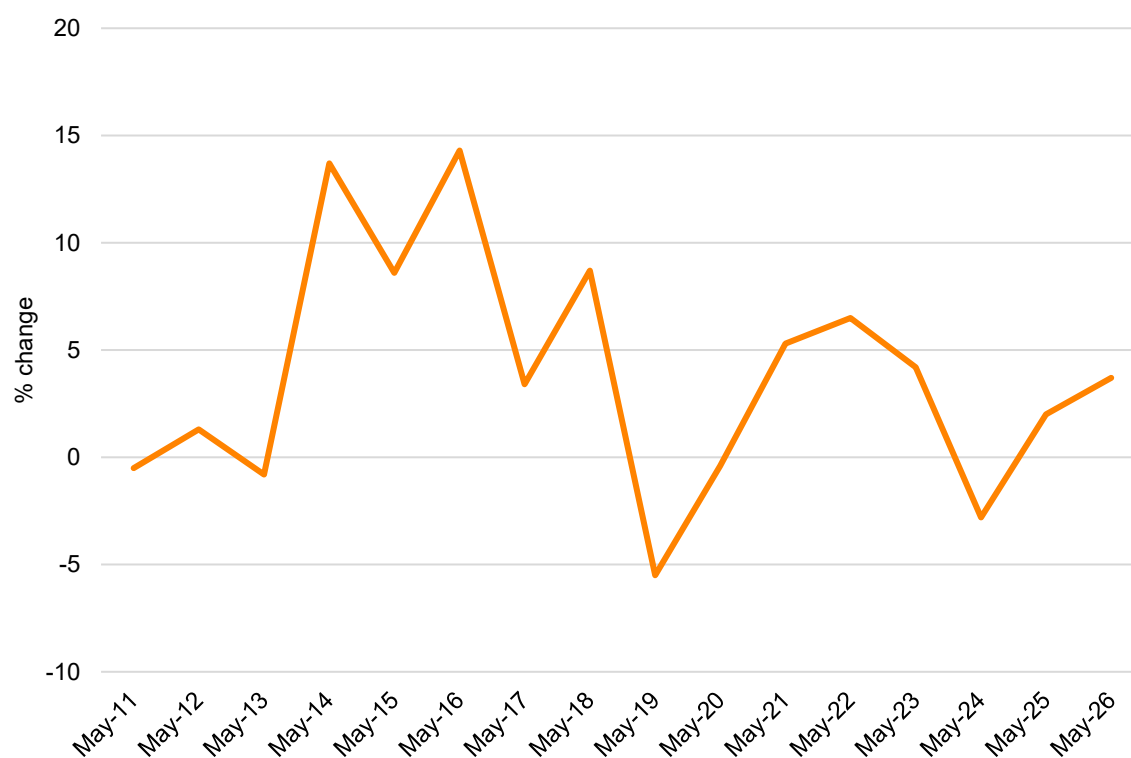
new homes are supported by the services, facilities and infrastructure that communities need.

House prices

House prices in our District have continued to rise in recent years. As of May 2026 (provisional), the [average house price in North Hertfordshire](#) stood at £417,000, up 3.7% from May 2025²³

The rising cost of housing highlights the importance of planning for a greater supply of homes, including affordable housing, across our District to meet local needs, support mixed and balanced communities, and give more people the opportunity to live in a suitable home.

Figure 15 - [Annual change in house prices in North Hertfordshire](#), May 2011 - May 2026²⁴



Source: UK House Price Index from Office for National Statistics and HM Land Registry

Understanding our future housing needs

To help plan for future housing growth, we are preparing a range of evidence studies that will inform our new Local Plan and ensure decisions are based on a clear understanding of local needs.

²³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E07000099/>

²⁴ UK House Price Index from Office for National Statistics and HM Land Registry (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E07000099/>)

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

We have prepared a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) to better understand the housing needs of North Hertfordshire including helping identify the types of homes needed, and consider the requirements of different groups within our communities, including:

- Families with children
- Young people and care leavers
- Older people
- Students
- People with disabilities or additional support needs
- Serving and former members of the armed forces
- People who rent their homes
- People wishing to build or commission their own homes
- Households in need of affordable housing

The findings of the SHMA will help shape future housing policies ensuring our Plan provides the right range of homes for our diverse communities.

Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)

We are preparing a Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) to identify land that may be suitable, available and achievable for future development. We undertook a call for sites in 2025 and are currently assessing their potential.

It is important to note that inclusion in the HELAA does not mean that a site will be allocated for development. The assessment is simply one of several pieces of evidence that will be considered as our Local Plan progresses.

Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation

We are reviewing the findings of the [Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment](#)²⁵ (GTAA) completed in 2024.

A revised assessment will provide up-to-date evidence on the current and future accommodation needs of Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities; whether additional pitches or plots may be required during our Plan period, ensuring any future needs are planned for appropriately.

The evidence will support the development of Plan policies to ensure suitable accommodation needs are considered alongside wider housing requirements across the District.

Monitoring housing delivery

Each year, we publish a [housing trajectory](#)²⁶ showing how housing is expected to be delivered across North Hertfordshire and whether we are on track to meet our identified housing requirement of 1,036 homes per year.

²⁵ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/North%20Herts%20Final%20Report%20Merged%2005082024.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/monitoring-reports>

Affordable housing

Affordable housing plays an important role in ensuring that people on low and moderate incomes can access homes that are safe, secure and suitable for their needs. A lack of available and appropriate homes can have wider impacts on individuals, families and communities; leading to increased housing insecurity, overcrowding, pressure on local services, poorer health and wellbeing, and difficulties for local employers in attracting and retaining workers.

In planning terms, affordable housing is housing provided for people whose needs are not met by the open market. This can include:

- Social rent
- Affordable rent
- Shared ownership
- Discounted market sale housing
- Other affordable routes to home ownership

Providing affordable housing is an important part of creating balanced and inclusive communities.

Our current Local Plan includes policies that require affordable housing to be delivered as part of larger residential developments using a stepped approach, with different affordable housing requirements depending on the size of the development.

Table 8 – Affordable Housing (Stepped Approach)

Development size	Affordable housing requirement
11-14 dwellings	25%
15-24 dwellings	35%
25 or more dwellings	40%

Source: North Herts Local Plan 2022

This approach reflected the evidence at the time our current Local Plan was prepared and showed larger developments can often support higher levels of affordable housing than smaller schemes.

We will be undertaking an updated Viability Assessment to understand what level of affordable housing can reasonably be delivered in the future. This will help inform any new affordable housing requirements and ensure that policies remain both ambitious and achievable.

Meeting different affordable housing needs

Providing affordable housing is not just about the number of homes delivered. It is also important to provide the right mix of affordable housing options to meet the needs of different households. Our new Plan will consider how best to provide a range of affordable housing options, helping to ensure that local people have access to homes that meet their needs and circumstances.

The findings of our Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) indicate a substantial need for affordable housing, including:

- affordable rented homes, including social rented housing
- affordable home ownership options
- a range of affordable housing tenures

Our SHMA also highlights that affordable housing need is not limited to households in the most urgent housing circumstances. While some households are in acute need of affordable rented accommodation, there are many others who are renting but cannot afford to buy a home in the open market.

Our SHMA identifies an annual shortfall of 277 social/affordable rented homes per year over the plan period (27% of the standard method figure), and a potential demand for up to 526 affordable home ownership homes per year, resulting in a total annual affordable housing need of 803 homes per year.

Our SHMA shows that it would be possible to meet acute needs for affordable housing if delivery of new affordable housing is maximised and priority is given to building social/affordable rented homes. It also shows that some households, particularly families who rely on benefits, are better off in social rented housing. What we prioritise is likely to impact on development viability and this leads to trade-offs which need to be considered, including whether we prioritise delivering more affordable housing overall, or focus on meeting acute needs which may mean delivering less overall.

Q12. Should we require fewer affordable homes overall if it meant a higher proportion of them were social rent?

For example, 30% affordable housing in total, but with 50% of that being social rent.

Housing mix

Providing a range of house types, sizes, and tenures ensures homes are available for families, young people, older people, and those with different incomes.

A varied mix of homes gives residents more options to find homes that suit their lifestyle and circumstances and supports local services (schools, shops, transport) by attracting a stable and diverse population.

The mix of homes provided within a development can also influence how efficiently the land is used. For example, a greater proportion of smaller homes may be able to achieve higher densities than those made up primarily of larger family housing.

We are going to use the findings of the SHMA to inform future housing mix requirements. This will help us understand the types, sizes and tenures of homes needed across our District and ensure that new development responds to the needs of current our residents.

Q13. What types, sizes and tenures of homes do you think are required in the District?

Are you aware of any specific gaps in specific locations?

Specialist forms of housing

It is important that our Local Plan supports a range of specialist housing, including

- specialist housing for older people who want to live independently in smaller, more manageable homes such as sheltered accommodation, retirement living, etc (Use Class C3, dwelling-houses)
- supported housing and care accommodation where care and support is provided as an integral part of residents' living arrangements. This can include accommodation for older people, people with physical or learning disabilities, people with mental health needs, and other groups who require additional support (often Use Class C2, residential institutions)

With an ageing population and our communities becoming increasingly diverse, we must ensure that a range of appropriate housing and care options are available in the right locations to support the needs of all residents.

According to our SHMA, we need around 100 specialist homes for older people each year and this is largely due to the ageing population. There is an additional need for . care accommodation, including with nursing support, particularly for people living with dementia or complex care needs.

Our assessment also highlights a requirement for a mix of specialist supported accommodation, adaptable mainstream housing, and care-linked housing options for vulnerable groups, including people with learning disabilities, and a wider need for age-exclusive, sheltered, and extra care homes to meet the diverse needs of residents.

Q14. We currently require residential developments of over 100 units to provide an element of older persons housing (Use Class C3). Do you agree with this threshold?

Yes/No

If not, what would be an appropriate size of site?

Please explain your reasons

Accessible and adaptable housing

The [2021 Census](#) identified 15.9% of North Hertfordshire's population as being disabled under the Equality Act²⁷.

Providing accessible and adaptable housing that meets needs of our residents throughout their lives can support independence, enable people to remain in their communities, provide greater flexibility when circumstances change and reduce pressure on health and social care services.

[Building Regulations](#)²⁸ set minimum standards for access in all new homes. There are also higher optional standards that local planning authorities can require where evidence shows a need. The relevant categories are:

- M4(2) Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings: Homes designed so they can be more easily adapted to meet the changing needs of older people, disabled people and those with reduced mobility.
- M4(3) Wheelchair User Dwellings: Homes designed to meet the needs of wheelchair users, either from the outset or capable of being easily adapted for wheelchair use.

Our current Plan requires:

- 50% of new homes on major residential developments to meet the M4(2) standard.
- Where 10 or more affordable units are being delivered on a site, 10% of these affordable units should be built to M4(3) standard.

Evidence from our SHMA suggests that the need for accessible housing is likely to increase over the coming years and recommends that all new homes should be built to the M4(2) standard subject to viability testing.

There is also evidence of a continuing need for wheelchair-accessible housing. Our SHMA estimates that around 3.6% of households overall require accommodation suitable for wheelchair users (based on national rates), which would equate to approximately 37 new wheelchair-accessible homes each year based on our identified overall housing need of 1,036 dwellings per year.

Our Housing Register supports this evidence, including 39 applicants who use a wheelchair, as well as 173 with restricted mobility and 277 applicants with health conditions requiring level-access accommodation.

The NPPF allows accessibility standards to be set that exceed local needs. Notwithstanding that, this will need to be tested as part of the viability assessment, we are considering whether M4(3) standards should be increased to 10% to ensure that future housing is inclusive, adaptable and capable of meeting the needs of residents both now and in the future.

By planning for accessible homes today, we can help create communities where people of all ages and abilities can live independently, remain connected to their local area and enjoy a better quality of life.

²⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000099/>

²⁸

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f8a82ed915d74e622b17b/BR_PDF_AD_M1_2015_with_2016_amendments_V3.pdf

Q15. We propose that 100% of new dwellings in North Hertfordshire should meet the M4(2) (accessible and adaptable dwellings) standards.

Do you agree? Yes/No

Please explain your reasons

Q16. We propose that 10% of all units should meet M4(3) (wheelchair user dwellings) standards on all sites.

Do you agree? Yes/No

Please explain your reasons

Relatives and dependent accommodation

A residential annexe is a self-contained living space that remains part of, and subordinate to, a main home. Annexes are often used to accommodate family members, such as older relatives, adult children or people who need additional support, while allowing them to maintain a degree of independence. They may include:

- Sleeping accommodation
- Living space
- Bathroom facilities
- A small kitchenette

Policy HS6: Relatives' and dependents' accommodation of our current Plan supports proposals for accommodation for relatives and dependants where:

- There is a clear and genuine need for the accommodation.
- The annexe remains closely linked to the main dwelling.
- It is of a scale that would normally be acceptable as an extension to the main property.
- It can be readily incorporated back into the main dwelling if no longer needed.
- Occupation can be controlled through planning conditions where appropriate.

It is important that residential annexes remain ancillary to the main dwelling. In some cases, permitted annexes are converted into separate dwellings without being assessed as such through the planning process, resulting in potentially harmful impacts on the area and its residents. These types of dwellings need to be managed properly. We are considering

strengthening the existing policy by introducing a criterion that requires applicants to set out and evidence how the annex will remain ancillary to the main dwelling. In assessing this, the Council may consider the physical relationship between the annex and the host dwelling, the degree of shared facilities (e.g. bathrooms, kitchens), the intended occupiers, and whether the annex could reasonably function as a separate planning unit.

Q17. Should the policy on residential annexes be strengthened? If yes, do you agree with our proposed approach?

If no, please explain why.

Are there any additional criteria for considering planning applications for residential annexes?

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

HMOs are properties where three or more people who are not part of the same household live together and share facilities such as a kitchen, bathroom or living area.

HMOs can help meet the needs of a wide range of residents, including young professionals, key workers, people on lower incomes and those who may not be ready or able to rent or buy a home of their own, whilst also making effective use of existing housing stock. Larger HMOs, occupied by five or more unrelated people, must be licensed by the Council. As of August 2026, there were [48 licensed HMOs](#)²⁹ in North Hertfordshire.

However, HMOs can also create challenges if they are not well managed or are concentrated in particular areas. Concerns often include:

- Increased pressure on on-street parking.
- Greater demand for waste and recycling services.
- Impacts on the character of residential areas.
- Risks associated with overcrowding and poor living conditions.
- Fire safety and other property management issues.

Planning and licensing controls seek to ensure that HMOs provide good-quality accommodation while minimising potential impacts on neighbouring properties and local communities.

The Government has introduced significant changes to the private rented sector through the [Renters' Rights Act 2025](#)³⁰, aimed at improving standards and providing greater security for tenants.

²⁹ https://onlinepp.north-herts.gov.uk/register/index.html?fa=licence_register§ion=licence_register

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-the-renters-rights-act/guide-to-the-renters-rights-act>

These reforms include measures to improve the quality of rented accommodation and strengthen tenants' rights. The introduction of a national landlord database will help create greater transparency, giving renters access to information about landlords and rented properties. The reforms will also help raise housing standards across the private rented sector, building on existing expectations for safe and decent homes.

Q18. Should we control the number of HMOs across North Herts? If so, what should the criteria be?

Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

We have a responsibility to understand and plan for the accommodation needs of Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities as part of our wider housing responsibilities, ensuring their needs are properly met to enable their continued traditional and nomadic way of life.

Our most recent Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment ([GTAA](#))³¹, published in 2024, identified an additional need of:

- 6 gypsy and traveller pitches for households that met the [planning definition](#)³²
- Up to 3 gypsy and traveller pitches for undetermined households
- 0 plots for travelling showpeople
- 0 pitches for formal public transit sites.

We are currently commissioning a new GTAA which will review the latest evidence and consider whether further provision is needed over the period to 2040.

Our current Policy HS7 allocated land at Danesbury Park Road to help meet identified need, setting out the circumstances in which additional pitches or plots may be permitted.

When considering future provision, it is important to balance a range of factors, including:

- The identified accommodation needs.
- Access to local services and facilities.
- Highway safety and accessibility.
- Impacts on neighbouring communities and the wider environment.
- The availability of suitable and deliverable sites.

³¹ [https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/North Herts Final Report Merged 05082024.pdf](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/North%20Herts%20Final%20Report%20Merged%2005082024.pdf)

³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-policy-for-traveller-sites/planning-policy-for-traveller-sites>

Q19. If we identify a need for additional Gypsy and Traveller provision, should we prioritise allocating new pitches on new land or expand already existing sites?

Self-build and custom housebuilding

Self-build and custom build homes are a form of housing where the future homeowner plays a direct role in creating or commissioning their home, rather than buying a standard property.

The [Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/33/contents)³³ (as amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016) requires us to maintain and update a register of people who are interested in building their own home. We currently have a total of 122 individuals and 0 associations on our self-build and custom housebuilding register (August 2026).

Our current Local Plan does not contain a specific development management policy on self-build and custom housebuilding, but it does contain allocations for 56 plots spread over five Strategic Housing Sites at:

- North of Baldock
- North of Letchworth Garden City
- North of Stevenage
- Highover Farm, Hitchin
- Land off Mendip Way, Great Ashby

56 plots equate to 1% of the number of dwellings on these sites, and they help address the demand for self-build and custom housebuilding plots.

A specific policy for self-build and custom housebuilding in our new Plan could help support the delivery of plots for people on our self-build and custom-build register; providing greater clarity for developers, landowners and local communities about how this type of housing should be considered through the planning process.

Q20. How should we plan for self-build and custom housebuilding need in the district?

Should we identify specific sites to accommodate need, should larger housing sites provide a specified percentage of self-build and custom housebuilding plots, or should there be a combination of the two approaches?

Please explain your reasons.

³³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/17/contents>

Q21. If self-build and custom housebuilding plots are required to be provided by policy, we will require these to be marketed exclusively for this purpose for at least 12 months before the plots can be reverted to open market housing. Do you agree with this approach?

Plot passports

A plot passport is a simple design guide for an individual building plot, setting out the key requirements and opportunities for development.

A plot passport would typically include information such as:

- The size and boundaries of the plot.
- The location and position of any building.
- Permitted building heights and scale.
- Design principles and materials.
- Access, parking and servicing arrangements.
- Utility connections and infrastructure requirements.
- Any planning constraints, restrictions or site-specific requirements.

Providing clear guidance from the outset can make the self-build process more straightforward and give greater certainty to both landowners and potential builders.

Q22. Should we require plot passports for self-build and custom-housebuilding development?

Other housing issues

Q23. Are there any other housing issues that you think we should think about?

ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Economy and employment opportunities

North Hertfordshire has a strong and diverse economy that supports communities across our District. Our four main towns provide key centres for employment, services, shopping and business activity, while our villages play an important role in supporting local businesses, jobs and the rural economy.

Our District currently accommodates around 6,225 businesses and approximately 66,000 jobs, generating an estimated £4.3 billion in Gross Value Added in 2022³⁴. We benefit from our location between London and Cambridge, with strong transport links making our District an attractive place for businesses to invest and grow. Connections via the A1(M), A505, the East Coast Main Line and rail services to Cambridge provide access to major markets, skilled labour and economic opportunities. Strong links with neighbouring areas, including Central Bedfordshire, also support local employment and commuting patterns.

We need to consider how best to support economic growth while responding to changing business needs and ways of working as we prepare our new Plan. Key issues and opportunities include:

- Ensuring there is enough land and premises available for businesses to grow and invest.
- Improving and modernising existing employment areas where appropriate.
- Strengthening links with neighbouring economic centres and labour markets.
- Encouraging innovation and investment in key sectors.
- Supporting tourism, culture and the visitor economy.
- Helping rural businesses diversify and grow, including through the sensitive reuse of existing rural buildings.
- Ensuring that employment opportunities are accessible to people across our area.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

National Policy requires us to support sustainable economic growth and provide a positive vision for the future of local economies.

This means that our Local Plan must set out a clear strategy for supporting businesses, attracting investment and creating employment opportunities. It should identify the land and premises needed for existing and future businesses, while ensuring there is enough flexibility to respond to changing economic circumstances and emerging industries.

National policy also recognises that business needs can change over time. Our Local Plan should therefore avoid being unnecessarily restrictive and allow employment areas and

³⁴ https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/North%20Hertfordshire%20Economic%20Evidence%20Base%202025_0.pdf

commercial sites to adapt when and where appropriate. This will help ensure that North Hertfordshire can respond to new technologies, changing ways of working and future economic opportunities.

NDMPs focus on supporting business growth, meeting the need for business land and premises, supporting freight and logistics and rural business development. As a result, our new Local Plan will focus on issues that require a local approach rather than repeating policies that are already set at a national level.

Regional and Local Strategies

[Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2026–2036](#)³⁵ sets out five strategic priorities to position the county globally as the UK's innovation heartland.

- Digital adoption and AI: Integrating advanced digital capabilities and artificial intelligence across local industries to boost efficiency and modernization.
- Skills and participation: Improving careers education, expanding training opportunities, and helping residents overcome barriers to employment.
- Innovation and clean growth: Driving sustainable business practices, clean tech development, and leveraging research partnerships in key sectors.
- Thriving places: Developing sustainable infrastructure, boosting the visitor economy, and supporting local communities and vibrant commercial spaces.
- Hertfordshire's national and international role: Strengthening globally significant sectors like space, defence, and life sciences while scaling local businesses international

The North Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2025–2030 also sets out a vision for strong, resilient and sustainable local economic growth, supporting businesses, skills development and investment across the District. The strategy is based on a looking in and looking out approach - recognising the identity and strengths of our towns, while also looking at opportunities from links with neighbouring authorities.

We are also preparing an Employment Land Review, which will provide an up-to-date picture of future employment land needs, market trends and the types of workspaces required by businesses.

What does the data tell us?

Gross Value Added (GVA) measures the contribution of economic activity to the economy through the production of goods and services. Analysis of GVA data indicates that the local economy is primarily driven by manufacturing, real estate, insurance and pensions, wholesale and retail trade, construction, and financial services.

The composition of businesses across these sectors is broadly consistent with the national economic profile, as illustrated in the table below.

³⁵ <https://www.hertfordshirefutures.co.uk/economic-strategy>

Table 9 - Business Count by Size, 2025

	North Hertfordshire	UK
Micro (0 To 9)	5,525 (89%)	2,437,850 (89%)
Small (10 To 49)	560 (9%)	241,185 (9%)
Medium (50 To 249)	105 (2%)	44,170 (2%)
Large (250+)	15 (0.2%)	11,415 (0.4%)
Total	6,205	2,734,615

Source: ONS, 2025

Occupational data for North Hertfordshire shows a higher proportion of residents employed in professional occupations, as well as managerial, director and senior official roles, compared with both the East of England and England as a whole. Conversely, the District has a lower proportion of workers employed in sales and customer service occupations, process plant and machine operative roles, and elementary occupations.

Evidence indicates that, while office vacancy rates remain relatively low, demand is increasingly focused on modern, high-quality, flexible and well-specified office space in accessible locations, particularly within Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City.

Market signals also point to strong demand for industrial and warehousing floorspace across the District. Much of the existing employment stock is ageing and no longer fully meets the requirements of modern occupiers. Evidence gathered through the Economic Needs Review suggests there is a shortage of high-quality industrial premises and "grow-on" space for expanding businesses. The Review highlights the need for both the development of new employment floorspace and the renewal and modernisation of existing employment areas to ensure they remain fit for purpose and capable of supporting future economic growth.

Our economic role and strategic connections

North Hertfordshire benefits from its strategic location between London and Cambridge, a highly skilled resident workforce, and a network of vibrant towns, villages and employment areas.

Our District has a greater proportion of residents employed in higher-skilled occupations than the number of higher-skilled jobs available locally. As a result, many residents currently commute to employment centres outside our area, particularly London, Cambridge, Stevenage and Luton³⁶.

Because our economy is closely linked to a number of major economic centres and growth corridors, significant opportunities for future investment and job creation present themselves.

These include:

³⁶ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-02/AMR%202024-25.pdf>

- Cambridge-London Corridor

sitting within the nationally important Cambridge-London corridor, we benefit from excellent rail and road connections to two of the UK's most significant centres for research, technology, innovation and business growth. This provides us with opportunities to attract investment, support knowledge-based industries and strengthen links between homes, jobs and skills.

- Stevenage and Local Government Reorganisation

We have particularly strong functional relationships with Stevenage. Many residents travel between the two areas for work, shopping, education and services. Looking ahead, proposed Local Government Reorganisation and the formation of a new Central Hertfordshire authority may provide opportunities for closer economic integration, stronger labour markets, improved connectivity and a more coordinated approach to economic growth and infrastructure planning.

- London Luton Airport

London Luton Airport is an important economic asset for the wider region, supporting employment, business activity, logistics, tourism and international connectivity. Its continued growth presents opportunities for North Hertfordshire businesses and residents through improved access to markets and employment opportunities.

- Universal Studios Bedford

The Universal Studios development in Bedfordshire has the potential to be a major economic driver for the wider region. Alongside direct employment opportunities, it could generate wider benefits for tourism, hospitality, supply chains and related businesses across North Hertfordshire and neighbouring areas.

Q24. Should we focus on developing our own distinct economic identity, or position ourselves as a complementary partner to Stevenage and Cambridge by supporting their employment sectors? Yes / No

Please give your reasons

Planning for jobs and economic growth

By the time our Local Plan is adopted, North Hertfordshire is expected to form part of two new unitary authorities. At the same time, work will be progressing on a Strategic Development Strategy (SDS) for Hertfordshire, which will consider the future distribution of homes, jobs and infrastructure across a wider geographic area.

As part of the Call for Sites process, a number of potential employment sites have been promoted, including land around Letchworth Gate. If progressed, some of these sites could help meet North Hertfordshire's own employment needs, while others may play a wider strategic role by supporting growth across the region.

Q25. Do you think North Hertfordshire should identify land for strategic employment uses, such as logistics, advanced manufacturing or distribution, where there is evidence of wider regional need? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons.

Meeting employment needs

The [Employment Needs Review](#)³⁷ indicates that, while North Hertfordshire has a range of employment areas and businesses, there is a shortage of suitable "move-on" space for growing companies; this refers to premises that allow businesses to expand when they outgrow small start-up units or home-working arrangements but are not yet ready for large-scale commercial premises.

Without suitable premises, businesses may struggle to expand or may relocate elsewhere, resulting in the loss of investment, jobs and economic activity from our District.

Q26. Do you agree that designated employment sites and employment areas should continue to be protected for employment uses?

Q27. Do you agree that some flexibility should be allowed for appropriate sui generis uses that are not suitable for town centre locations?

Rural and low-impact tourism

Low-impact tourism focuses on sustainable visitor experiences that respect the environment, local communities and cultural heritage. This can include activities that encourage people to enjoy and explore our District while minimising environmental impacts and supporting local businesses.

National planning policy supports appropriate tourism development in rural areas but leaves it to us to determine how this should be managed in line with local circumstances.

North Hertfordshire has many assets that can support sustainable tourism, including:

³⁷ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

- Attractive countryside, including National Landscape and walking routes.
- Historic towns and villages.
- Heritage attractions and cultural assets.
- Nature and wildlife sites.
- Cycling and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Local food and rural businesses.

Supporting these attractions can help diversify the local economy and encourage investment, while providing benefits for residents and visitors alike.

While tourism can bring economic benefits, it is important that development does not harm the very qualities that attract visitors in the first place. Any future policy should seek to balance economic growth with the protection of the environment, local communities and the character of North Hertfordshire.

Q28. Do you agree that specific local planning criteria should be developed for heritage and nature-based tourism proposals, including eco-accommodation and cycling hubs?

Visitor Accommodation

The [North Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2025-2030](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/North%20Hertfordshire%20Economic%20Strategy%202025%20-%202030.pdf)³⁸ recognises the importance of the visitor economy as a driver of economic growth, investment and local prosperity.

North Hertfordshire benefits from a range of established attractions, including Knebworth House, Hitchin Lavender, its historic market towns, attractive countryside, cultural venues and events. Our urban and rural landscapes are also valued as locations for film and television production, further contributing to the area's appeal and profile.

The Economic Strategy highlights the need to strengthen and support the visitor economy by attracting more visitors, encouraging them to stay longer, and increasing participation by residents in cultural, sporting, leisure and recreational activities. Increasing dwell time is particularly important, as visitors who spend longer in the district are more likely to support local businesses and services.

Visitor accommodation can play an important role in achieving these objectives. Hotels, guesthouses and other forms of visitor accommodation can encourage people to stay longer, enabling them to explore more of the district and make greater use of local businesses, attractions and services.

We will consider how appropriate visitor accommodation and tourism-related development can support the wider ambitions of the Economic Strategy while respecting the character of our towns, villages and countryside.

³⁸ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/North%20Hertfordshire%20Economic%20Strategy%202025%20-%202030.pdf>

Q29. Do you agree that hotels and other forms of visitor accommodation should be permitted in suitable locations where they support major visitor attractions and transport hubs, such as Knebworth House, Hitchin Lavender, London, Luton Airport and Universal Studios?

Please explain your reasons

Other economy and employment issues

Q30. Are there any other economy and/or employment issues that you think we should think about?

TOWN CENTRES

Town centres

North Hertfordshire's four main town centres, Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston, play an important role in supporting our District's and communities. Together they provide a range of shopping, leisure, employment, service and community functions that meet the day-to-day and longer-term needs of residents, businesses and visitors.

Our town centres generally occupy a middle-market position within the wider region and are located within a highly connected area where our town centres compete with and complement nearby destinations, including Stevenage, Luton, Welwyn Garden City and Cambridge.

Our town centres perform different but complementary roles within our settlement hierarchy. Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City function as the principal centres, offering the broadest range of retail, leisure and service provision and attracting visitors from a wider catchment area. Baldock and Royston perform important local and sub-regional roles, providing shops, services, employment opportunities and community facilities that support their residents and surrounding rural areas.

Each town centre has a distinct character and identity:

- Hitchin is North Hertfordshire's principal town centre and strongest-performing retail destination. While larger regional centres offer a wider range of national retailers, Hitchin's appeal lies in its unique character and experience with a strong independent retail sector, and attractive historic environment. As well as being an important shopping destination, Hitchin is a focal point for leisure, culture and community activity. The town centre is also the focus of the Churchgate regeneration project, which represents a significant opportunity to enhance the centre's retail, leisure and public realm offer.
- Letchworth Garden City benefits from its unique Garden City heritage and diverse mix of shops and services. It serves not only the town itself but also surrounding communities, making it an important destination within North Hertfordshire. Alongside its shopping offer, Letchworth benefits from a variety of community, cultural and recreational facilities that support a vibrant and active town centre.
- Baldock is an important local centre serving both the town and surrounding communities. While smaller than Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, it provides a valuable range of shops, services, cafés and community facilities that support everyday needs. The town's historic character, attractive environment and strong mix of independent businesses give it a distinctive identity and appeal.
- Royston provides an important service centre for the north-eastern part of the District and its surrounding villages. While smaller than Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, Royston offers a mix of independent businesses, local services and national retailers that support a vibrant local economy and create an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Figure 15 - Sun Street, Hitchin

Source: North Herts Council

Like many town centres nationally, our town centres continue to adapt to changing economic conditions, consumer behaviour and growth in online retailing; their role increasingly focused on providing a diverse mix of retail, leisure, cultural, community and employment uses, supporting vibrant and resilient centres that remain attractive destinations for residents, businesses and visitors.

As a result of changing consumer behaviour and concerns over the vitality of town centres, the Government changed the Use Class Order to provide flexibility to help businesses respond to changing circumstances. The Use Classes Order groups different types of buildings and land uses into categories for planning purposes. One of the main categories is Use Class E, which covers a range of commercial, business and service uses, including shops, offices, cafés and restaurants, health services, nurseries, and some leisure facilities. The class was introduced to give businesses greater flexibility to change between these uses without needing planning permission in many cases, helping town centres and employment areas adapt to changing needs and market conditions.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

National planning policy requires us to support the long-term success of our town centres by setting out a clear strategy for North Hertfordshire's town centres, helping them remain vibrant, attractive and adaptable as shopping habits and business needs continue to evolve.

Our Local Plan will:

- Establish a hierarchy of centres across our District and define their boundaries.
- Support our town centres as the preferred location for shops, leisure, cultural, community and other main town centre uses.

- Encourage a mix of uses that helps increase activity throughout the day and evening.
- Identify opportunities for regeneration, diversification and the better use of underused sites.
- Support public realm, accessibility and infrastructure improvements that enhance the town centre experience.
- Allocate sites to accommodate retail, leisure, employment, community and other town centre uses, where needed.
- Set a locally defined threshold above which proposals outside town centres will need to demonstrate their impact on existing centres.

Our aim is to ensure that Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston continue to thrive and adapt to changing economic conditions while remaining at the heart of their communities.

The NPPF sets out NDMPs relating to how development proposals in town centres should be assessed, how a sequential test should be applied to main town centre uses outside town centres, and the need for impact assessments for major development that may have negative impacts on existing town centres. To avoid unnecessary duplication these matters will not be covered in the Local Plan.

What does the data tell us?

North Hertfordshire's town centres each play a distinct role in supporting local communities, businesses and visitors.

Our [North Hertfordshire Town Centres and Retail Study \(December 2024\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/19%20Dec%20Final%20Report_Lichfields%20Town%20Centres%20and%20Retail%201.pdf)³⁹ provides an up-to-date assessment of our retail, leisure and town centre needs.

The study examines a range of issues, including:

- shopping habits;
- retail expenditure;
- vacancy rates;
- demand for new retail and leisure floorspace; and
- the impact of changing consumer behaviour and national planning policy.

It shows that North Hertfordshire benefits from a strong and established network of centres, each serving its own community and wider catchment area. However, there is also significant overlap between the catchment areas of Baldock, Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, meaning these centres often compete for the same customers.

Overall, vacancy rates across our District remain relatively low compared with national averages, indicating that our town centres continue to perform relatively well. The study identifies Letchworth Garden City as having the greatest opportunity to accommodate future retail and town centre growth.

³⁹ https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/19%20Dec%20Final%20Report_Lichfields%20Town%20Centres%20and%20Retail%201.pdf

We have commissioned an update to the Retail Needs Study to ensure that we have a more robust understanding of retail, leisure and town centre needs as we progress the Local Plan.

The [Draft North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy \(2025\)](#)⁴⁰ takes a broader view, setting out a long-term vision for how our town centres can evolve and thrive in the years ahead.

The Strategy recognises that successful town centres are about much more than shopping. They are places where people live, work, meet, access services and spend their leisure time; and sets out a planning-led approach to creating vibrant, attractive and resilient town centres across North Hertfordshire.

The Strategy is built around four key themes:

- Land Use and Economic Activity - promotes a balanced approach that supports shops, businesses, leisure, culture, community facilities and town centre living, helping to create centres that remain active throughout the day and evening.
- Built Environment - promotes high-quality design that respects local character, strengthens biodiversity, supports climate resilience and enhances the appearance and functionality of town centres.
- Transport, Access and Movement - supports improvements that make it easier for people to reach and move around town centres using a range of transport options. This includes better opportunities for walking, cycling and public transport, alongside maintaining appropriate access for vehicles where needed.
- Community and Wellbeing - seeks to create welcoming places that encourage social interaction, support health and wellbeing, and provide opportunities for cultural, community and civic activities. By creating lively and inclusive centres, we can help strengthen community connections and support local pride.

Reviewing the hierarchy of centres

Our current Local Plan identifies a retail hierarchy:

- Four Town Centres
 - Baldock
 - Hitchin
 - Letchworth Garden City
 - Royston
- 13 Local Centres
 - Ashwell
 - Codicote
 - Great Ashby
 - Grove Road, Hitchin
 - Jackmans, Letchworth Garden City
 - Knebworth
 - Nightingale Road, Hitchin
 - Ninesprings, Hitchin
 - Redhill Road, Hitchin
 - The Grange, Letchworth Garden City

⁴⁰ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-12/Draft%20North%20Hertfordshire%20Town%20Centres%20Strategy%20for%20Public%20Consultation.pdf>

- Walsworth (Cambridge Road), Hitchin
- Walsworth Road, Hitchin
- Two new Local Centres
 - North of Baldock
 - East of Luton
- Westmill (John Barker Place), Hitchin

As part of preparing our new Local Plan, we will review the hierarchy using the latest available evidence. This will include findings from our Town Centres and Retail Study, Town Centres Strategy and our updated Retail Needs Assessment that is currently underway, to ensure that the hierarchy continues to reflect how people use our centres today and provides an appropriate framework for managing future development, investment and regeneration across our District.

Town centre boundaries

Our current Local Plan defines primary and secondary shopping frontages within a defined Town Centre boundary in each of our four towns. However, in 2018, National Planning Policy changed and we no longer have to define primary and secondary shopping frontages. This is so that town centres can respond faster to changes in the retail and leisure industries that are considered 'main town centre uses'⁴¹.

Evidence from the Town Centre Strategy suggests there is no need for a significant reduction in the overall size of our town centres. However, it also notes that some town centre boundaries are drawn quite widely and, in certain locations, include areas that are predominantly residential and no longer function as part of the active town centre.

The maps below show a revised town centre boundary for each of the Town Centres. These revised boundaries focus on the core retail area, and other active town centre uses, while excluding areas that are predominantly residential in character.

⁴¹ Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); banks; professional services; offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities) – NPPF, 2025

Figure 16 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Baldock

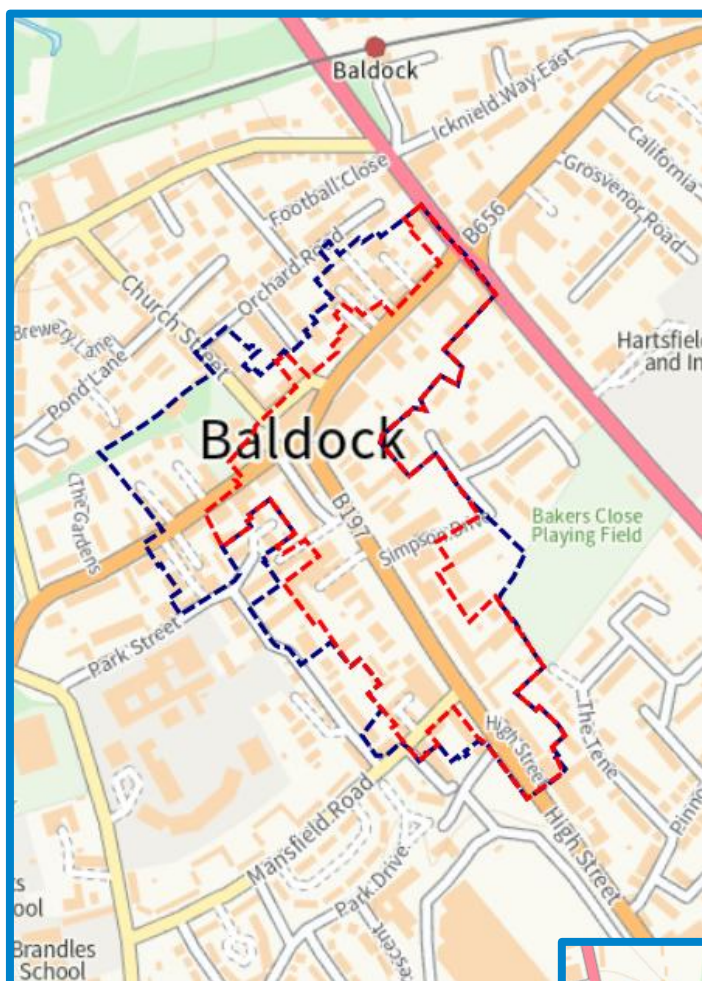


Figure 17 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Hitchin



Figure 18 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Letchworth Garden City

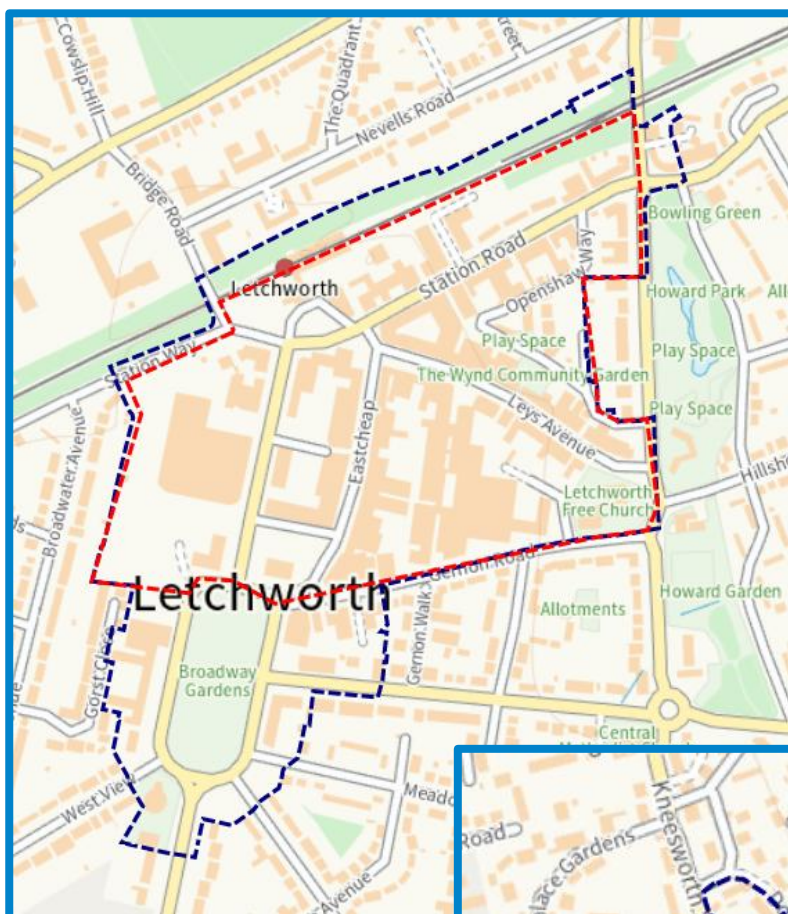
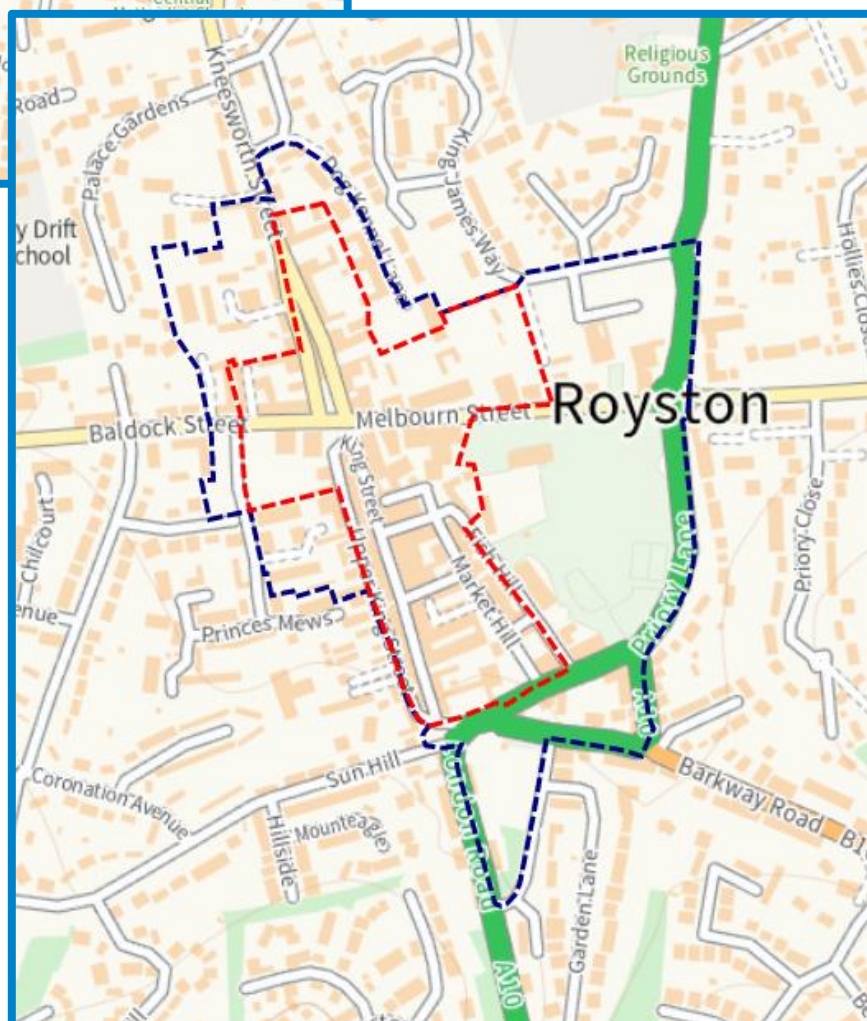


Figure 19 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Royston



Q31. We propose reducing the town centre boundaries to focus retail activity within the core areas, while allowing a broader mix of uses, such as leisure and hospitality, in the immediate surrounding areas?

Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Town centre uses

Diversification

Town centres across the country are changing. More people are shopping online, and many traditional retailers are using less space than they did in the past. As a result, town centres are increasingly becoming places where people meet, work, spend leisure time, access services and take part in community activities, rather than places focused solely on shopping.

To remain vibrant and successful, our town centres need to evolve and offer a wider range of attractions and experiences. Encouraging a greater mix of leisure, cultural, community and business uses can help attract more visitors, increase footfall throughout the day and evening, and support local businesses.

This could include:

- Cultural and arts venues.
- Community facilities and services.
- Restaurants, cafés and entertainment venues.
- Health and wellbeing uses.
- Co-working and flexible workspace.
- Markets and event spaces.
- Educational and learning facilities.

A more diverse mix of uses can help create town centres that are active for longer periods, attract a broader range of visitors and strengthen the local economy.

Q32. Should our Local Plan prioritise expanding leisure, cultural and community uses to strengthen the town centre economy and increase activity throughout the day and evening? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Supporting flexible and meanwhile uses

As shopping habits continue to change, some town centre buildings may become vacant for periods of time. Empty premises can reduce footfall, affect the appearance of town centres and make it more difficult for existing businesses to thrive.

One way of addressing this is through meanwhile uses. These are temporary uses of vacant land or buildings that bring activity back into underused spaces while longer-term plans are developed.

Meanwhile uses can:

- Bring vacant premises back into active use.
- Attract visitors and increase footfall.
- Improve the appearance of town centres.
- Support local businesses, community groups and start-up enterprises.
- Encourage innovation and new ideas.
- Offer opportunities for events, exhibitions, markets and cultural activities.
- Make productive use of buildings that might otherwise remain empty.

Examples could include pop-up shops, community spaces, artists' studios, start-up workspaces, temporary cafés, cultural events or local markets.

Q33. We are proposing to support meanwhile uses in town centres where they activate vacant premises, support town centre vitality and protect local amenity. Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Public Realm

Evidence from the draft Town Centres Strategy 2025⁴² highlighted the importance of creating town centres that are attractive, welcoming and easy to move around. In feedback from the Strategy consultation, residents told us that improvements to public spaces, walking and cycling routes, signage and wayfinding could help make our town centres more appealing places to visit and spend time.

We will explore opportunities to reduce the impact of traffic passing through town centres where this would improve safety, accessibility and the overall experience for residents and visitors. This could help make town centres more pleasant places to walk, cycle and spend time, while also supporting more reliable public transport services.

⁴² www.north-herts.gov.uk/town-centres-strategy

Q34. Do you support improving the public realm to create safer, more attractive and better-connected places? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Q35. Would you support the removal of through-traffic from town centres to improve people's experience of walking, cycling and taking the bus? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Night-time economy

Our town centres play an important economic role beyond the traditional working day by providing restaurants, cafés, pubs, entertainment venues, cultural attractions and evening events to help create vibrant places where people can socialise, relax and enjoy their local area.

Our [Economic Strategy, 2025 – 2030](#)⁴³, recognises the potential of a strong and well-managed night-time economy to support local businesses, create jobs and attract more people into our town centres during the evening.

As part of the new Local Plan, we are considering an approach that would:

- Encourage a safe, welcoming and vibrant evening economy.
- Support leisure, food, drink, entertainment and cultural activities that contribute positively to town centre vitality.
- Promote the reuse of vacant premises for cultural, creative, flexible workspace and community uses.
- Focus evening and late-night activities within defined town centre areas, where they can benefit from existing facilities and transport connections.
- Balance economic activity with the need to protect the amenity of local residents.
- Ensure new development is designed and managed to minimise issues such as noise, disturbance and anti-social behaviour.
- Support office and workspace development in appropriate locations that complement rather than displace core town centre uses.

A successful night-time economy can help increase footfall, support independent businesses, improve perceptions of safety through increased activity, and create lively town centres that remain attractive destinations throughout the day and evening.

⁴³ Ww.north-herts.gov.uk/economic-development-strategy

Q36. Do you agree that our Local Plan should support a safe and vibrant night-time economy by encouraging leisure, food, drink and cultural uses, while focusing evening and night-time activities within town centres to help manage impacts and protect the amenity of nearby residents? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Neighbourhood Health Hubs

Neighbourhood Health Hubs are becoming an increasingly important part of modern healthcare; designed to bring a range of health and wellbeing services together in one convenient location, making it easier for people to access the support they need closer to home.

The NHS is increasingly moving towards a more joined-up and preventative approach to healthcare, helping people access services earlier and reducing the need for hospital treatment where possible.

The [Central East Integrated Care Board \(ICB\)](https://www.centraleast.icb.nhs.uk/)⁴⁴ is exploring opportunities for Neighbourhood Health Hubs in Baldock, Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City as part of a wider national approach to improving access to healthcare services. Potential locations and site requirements are currently being considered.

Q37. Do you support the inclusion of policies that promote Neighbourhood Health Hubs within our Local Plan? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Other town centre issues

Q38. Are there any other town centre issues that you think we should think about?

⁴⁴ <https://www.centraleast.icb.nhs.uk/>

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Natural environment

What is the natural environment?

In planning, the natural environment means the parts of our surroundings that are not man-made. This includes wildlife, landscapes, rivers and other water sources, soil and air. These natural systems work together to support nature, people's health and the local economy, and we have a duty to protect and improve them.

The key components are:

- Biodiversity and geology - protecting habitats, species and important geological features, including internationally, nationally and locally designated sites.
- Landscape and countryside - protecting valued landscapes and areas with distinctive character, from inappropriate development.
- Green and blue infrastructure - a connected network of green and blue spaces such as parks, woodlands, rivers, allotments and green roofs that support nature, help manage climate change, and improve wellbeing.

Figure 20 – The Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*), native to North Hertfordshire and the official county flower of Hertfordshire



Source: North Herts Council

Biodiversity and geology

North Hertfordshire's natural resources play an important role in supporting the local economy, wildlife, and residents' health and wellbeing. In July 2023 North Herts Council formally declared an Ecological Emergency, recognising that the rapid decline of nature and biodiversity requires urgent and coordinated action.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

The NPPF requires our Local Plan to actively protect, improve and restore nature, guide development to the least damaging locations, and ensure environmental gains are realistic, justified and deliverable.

NDPMs address a wide range of natural environment matters, including:

- the setting out of a hierarchy of designated sites
- requiring opportunities to be taken for the enhancement and recovery of landscapes, protected sites, habitats and species,
- sets out requirements for development within protected landscapes,
- requiring the avoidance of the use of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land for development where lower quality land is available,
- strengthening of ecological networks and protecting important nature sites identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy,
- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), and
- water management.

The Local Plan will not duplicate policies already covered within the NDMPs of the NPPF.

Legislation

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 / Environment Act 2021 places a duty on all public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. A key purpose of this duty is to embed consideration of biodiversity as an integral part of policy and decision making.

The Environment Act 2021 introduced the need for Local Planning Authorities to have regard to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) in local planning policy and decision-making. The Hertfordshire LNRS⁴⁵ identifies specific areas that are, or could become, of particular importance for biodiversity. This will help inform planning decisions in our district.

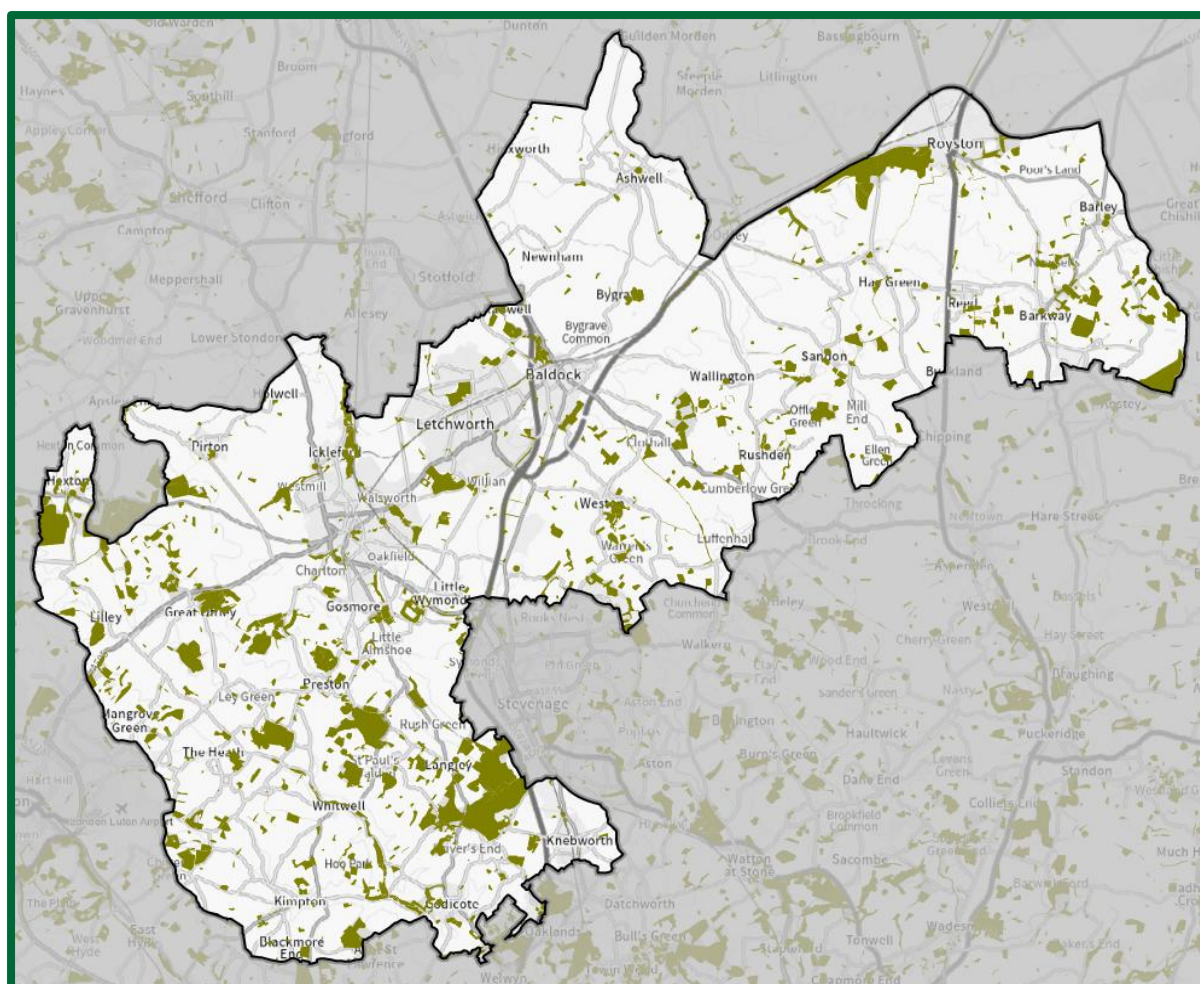
⁴⁵ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/how-the-council-works/partnerships/herts-nature-recovery-partnership/local-nature-recovery-strategy.aspx>

What does the data tell us?

North Hertfordshire contains a variety of habitats for wildlife and plants, including areas of high biodiversity and has many nationally and locally designated sites for nature conservation.

The Hertfordshire LNRS identifies Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIBs) across the County. These are locations which already provide valuable space for nature or present a very high opportunity for nature recovery action. APIBs are 'hubs' for nature from which the nature recovery network will be built through growing, enhancing, and better connecting APIBs to each other and new habitat. The LNRS also identifies Areas that Could become of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (ACIBs). These are areas that are targeted for specific actions set out in the LNRS, such as making new and existing buildings and green spaces more nature friendly.

Figure 21 - Map of Areas that Could become of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (ACIBs) in North Hertfordshire



Source: Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Hertfordshire County Council

[Oughtonhead Common Local Nature Reserve](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/oughtonhead-common)⁴⁶ is one of our important local wildlife habitats and forms part of the wider network of habitats associated with the River Oughton and surrounding green infrastructure. Natural England are looking into the opportunity to

⁴⁶ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/oughtonhead-common>

designate a 'super' National Nature Reserve in the wider area which would include Oughtonhead Common.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development that seeks to ensure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before development took place. This requires developers to improve the natural habitat by a net increase of at least 10% using the national biodiversity metric⁴⁷.

The NPPF allows us to set local standards for biodiversity net gain above the statutory requirement of 10% for specific site allocations where it is fully justified and deliverable. Potential criteria for higher BNG requirements could include:

- Ecological opportunities such as habitat creation, restoration, or the delivery of parts of strategic networks;
- Proximity to designated ecological sites;
- The site's contribution to strategic green infrastructure;
- Existing ecological deficit or impact; and
- The deliverability and viability of providing BNG above 10%.

Q39. We are proposing that some site allocations should be required to deliver more than the statutory minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain where this can be demonstrated to be justified, viable and deliverable. Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Habitats

Policy NE4: Biodiversity and geological sites of our current Local Plan require proposals to consider appropriate buffers of complimentary habitat for designated sites and other connective features, wildlife habitats, priority habitats and species. The appropriateness of any buffers should be considered having regard to the status of the relevant habitat. The policy also requires a 12-metre buffer of complimentary habitat around wildlife sites (locally designated sites and above), trees and hedgerows; and states that this may need to be exceeded for fragile habitats such as ancient woodland or to provide appropriate root protection for mature trees.

⁴⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/calculate-biodiversity-value-with-the-statutory-biodiversity-metric>

Q40. We are proposing to keep the requirement of a buffer between development and habitats. Do you think the 12m buffer is appropriate?

If not, what should it be? Please explain your answer.

Q41. Are there any other specific biodiversity or ecological requirements that you think should be included in the new Local Plan?

Please provide your comments.

Chalk Streams

Our District is largely underlain by chalk, evident from the areas of chalk hills and escarpments across the area. The geology affects soil type, drainage, and nutrient levels. The Chiltern Hills is a chalk escarpment which passes through our District, this area is rich in botanical interest and also the basis of internationally rare chalk streams.

Clear water rivers rise from underground chalk aquifers and support a wide variety of plant and animal life. Chalk streams are globally scarce, there are around 200 in the world, and about 170 of these are found in the UK. Ten of these are in North Hertfordshire.

In April 2026, North Herts Council passed a [motion](#) to recognise the importance of, and provide protection for, the ten chalk streams within North Hertfordshire. We have also expressed our support for a local [MP's Private Member's Bill](#)⁴⁸ to seek UNESCO World Heritage Status for the UK's chalk streams, recognising their national and international importance.

Chalk streams are identified in the [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)⁴⁹ as being of high ecological importance. One key action is to create and manage natural buffer zones alongside rivers. These buffer strips help connect habitats, reduce pollution entering the water, and allow the right amount of light to reach the river.

Table 10 Rivers in North Hertfordshire

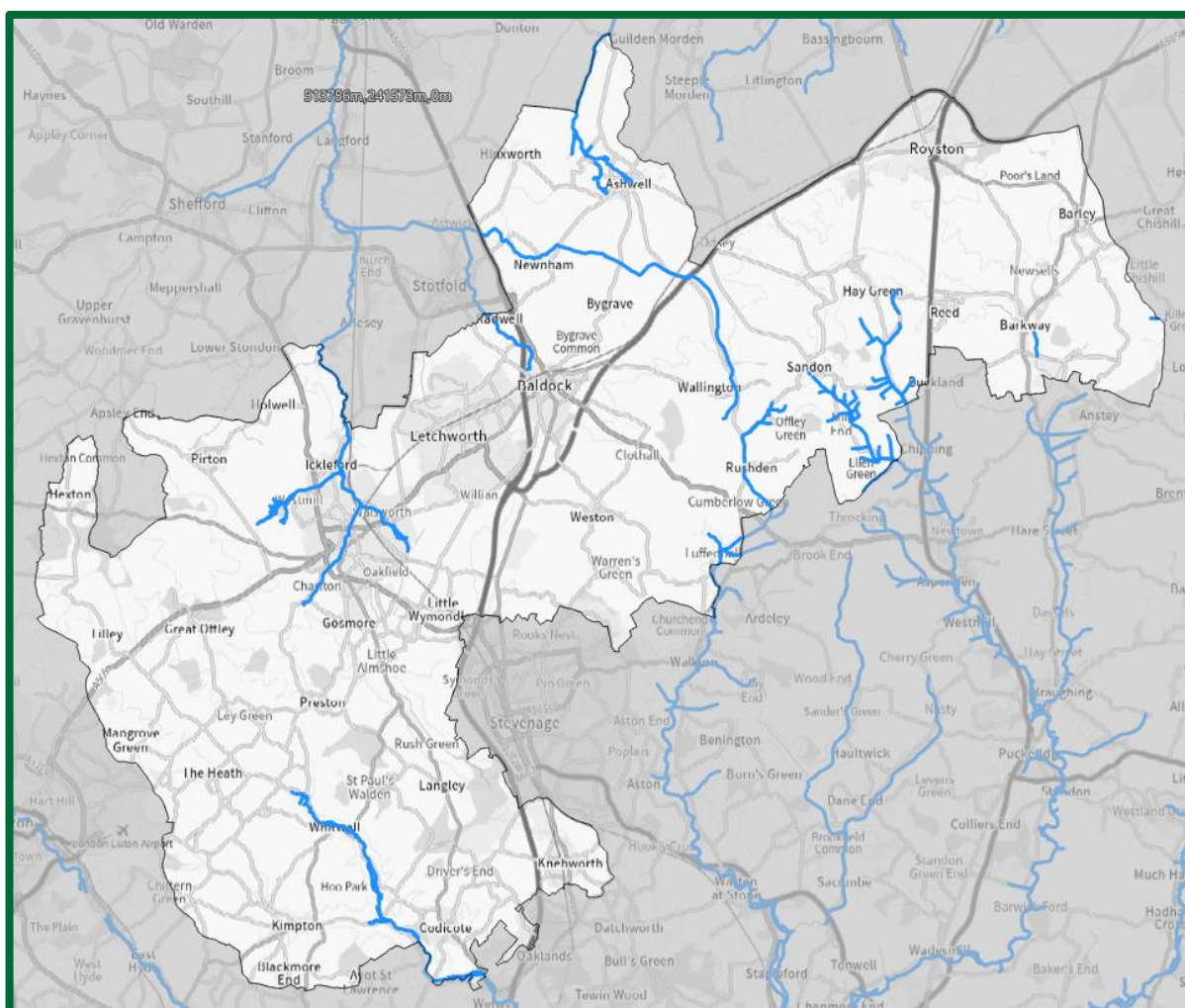
River Catchment	Main River	Tributary
East Anglia – all the chalk streams that flow into the River Ouse	River Cam	River Rhee
	River Ivel	River Hiz / Purwell

⁴⁸ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4084>

⁴⁹ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/how-the-council-works/partnerships/herts-nature-recovery-partnership/local-nature-recovery-strategy.aspx>

Thames – all the chalk streams that flow into the Thames and Thames Estuary	River Lea	River Oughton
		River Ivel
		Cat Ditch
		River Beane
		River Rib
		River Quin
		River Mimram
		River Stort

[The River Restoration Centre](#) and the [Chilterns Chalk Streams Planning Guidance](#) both recommend the introduction of a 10m buffer zone adjacent to chalk streams for the benefit of water environment and the conservation of riverside wildlife. The Council also recently passed a motion supporting this intention.

Figure 22 Chalk Streams in North Hertfordshire

Source: North Herts Council

Q42. We are proposing that new development adjacent to chalk streams and all other rivers should provide and maintain a minimum 10-metre riparian buffer zone, measured from the top of the riverbank, that remains free from built development.

Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Landscape and countryside

High-quality agricultural land is an important natural resource in North Hertfordshire. It supports local food production, helps maintain the rural economy, and forms a key part of the District's wider landscape character. Protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land is therefore important when considering future growth options, particularly where development could lead to the permanent loss of productive soils.

Our countryside also provides environmental, recreational and cultural benefits. Valued landscapes, including areas associated with the Chilterns National Landscape, contribute to local identity, visual amenity, biodiversity and climate resilience. They can help absorb carbon, support water management, provide space for recreation and wellbeing and create ecological connections between habitats.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

Plan-making policies in the NPPF set out that the local plan must identify opportunities for conserving, enhancing, and recovering landscapes, and avoid using higher quality agricultural land and limit development in Protected Landscapes. The local plan should direct development towards locations where environmental harm can be avoided or minimised.

NDMPs in the NPPF make clear that development in protected landscapes (including National Parks and National Landscapes such as the Chilterns) should be very limited and carefully designed, with large-scale proposals only allowed in exceptional, clearly justified public interest cases, and even then, their harm must be minimised.

We are currently preparing a landscape sensitivity study which will provide evidence to help identify areas where potential development could have significant effects on landscape character, visual amenity and the setting of the Chilterns National Landscape. This evidence will inform both site assessment and any locally valued landscape designations.

What does the data tell us?

Landscape

The Chilterns National Landscape lies in the western part of our District and extends westwards towards Oxford. Recent work by Natural England identified potential areas where this designation could be extended eastwards into North Hertfordshire.

Although this work has been [paused](#)⁵⁰ due to funding constraints, we recognise the value of the evidence produced so far. There is an opportunity to use this work to help identify and protect important landscapes outside the existing National Landscape boundary.

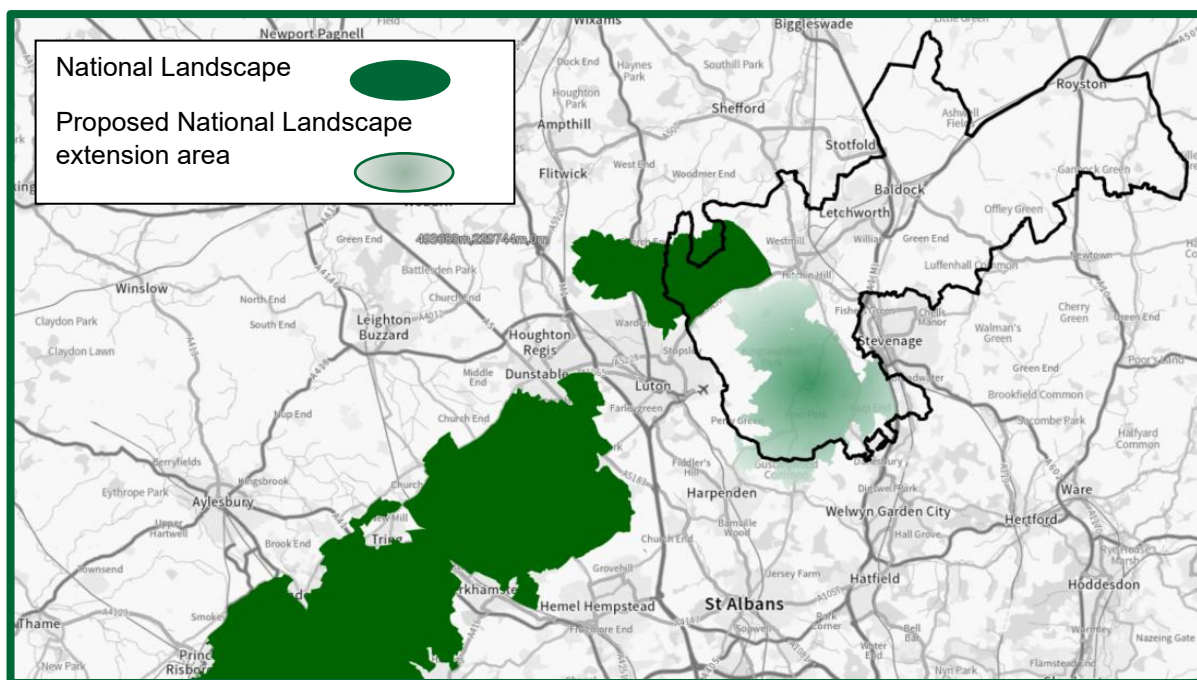
⁵⁰ https://www.chilterns.org.uk/news/deep-disappointment-at-cancellation-of-the-chilterns-boundary-review/?utm_source=ChilternsNL+VIPs+%28MPs%2C+LAs%2C+stakeholders%2C+key+partners%29&utm_campaign=7ff83b4db0-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_12_09_12_43_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-20544265d4-1432794625

Our Local Plan could therefore consider designating areas of locally valued landscape in the west of the District. This would help protect distinctive landscapes of local importance and provide a more consistent and coordinated approach to landscape protection across the wider area.

The map below shows the broad area being considered for possible local landscape designation, including its relationship with the existing Chilterns National Landscape and areas identified through Natural England's preliminary boundary review work.

This area could include the Mimram Valley Parklands, where there is overlap with land previously identified by Natural England as part of its assessment of a potential extension to the Chilterns National Landscape.

Figure 23 Map of proposed extension of Chiltern National Landscape



Source: North Herts Council

Q43. We are proposing that areas of distinctive landscape character and local importance outside the Chilterns National Landscape should be designated as Locally Valued Landscapes in our Local Plan to help recognise and protect them. Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your answer

Agricultural land

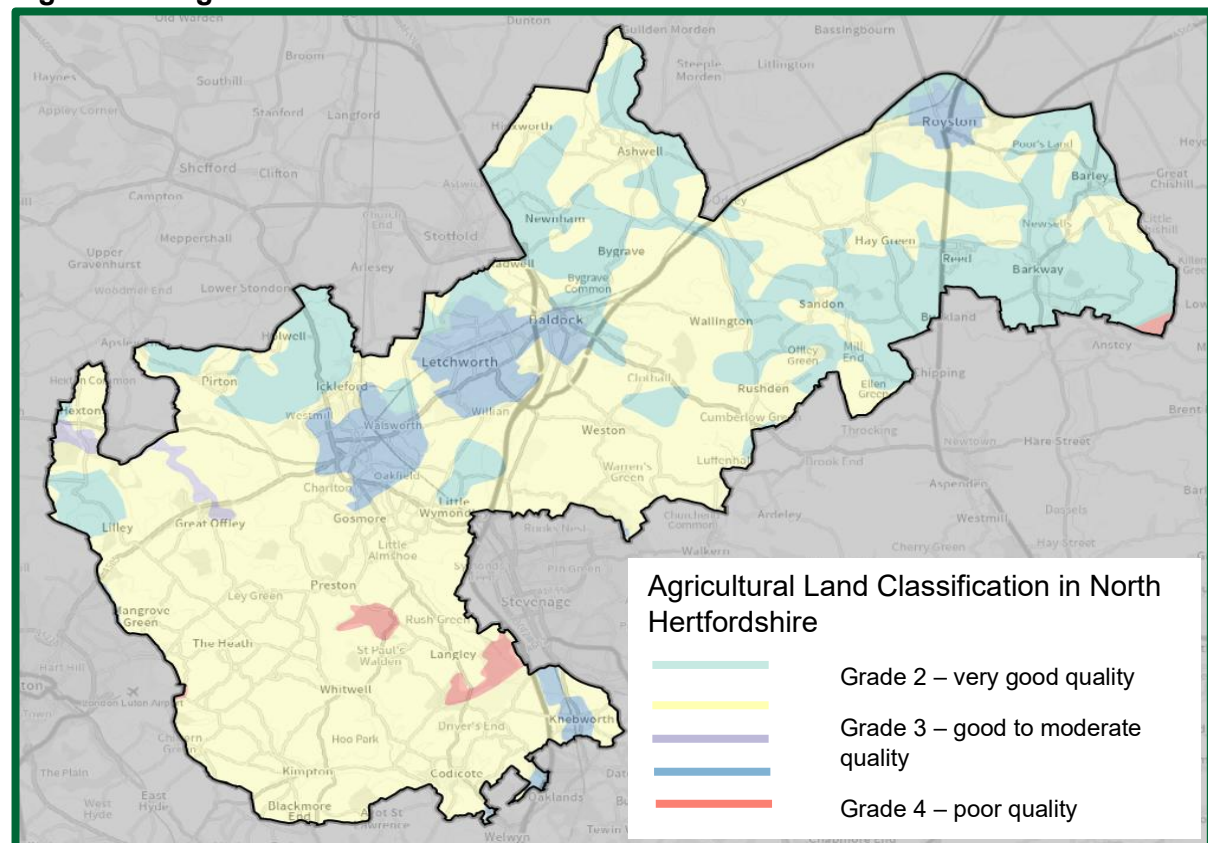
Provisional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) is categorised into five grades; grade one is best quality and grade five is poorest quality.

Table 11 – Provisional Agricultural Land Classification

Grade 1 – excellent quality agricultural land		Best and Most Versatile
Grade 2 – very good quality agricultural land		
Grade 3 – good to moderate quality agricultural land		
	Subgrade 3a – good quality agricultural land	
	Subgrade 3b – moderate quality agricultural land	
Grade 4 – poor quality agricultural land		
Grade 5 – very poor-quality agricultural land		

Source: Defra

NDMPs steer us in how to account for ALC when making decisions about applications and so there is no need for our Local Plan to repeat these policies. However, we will use ALC survey data to assess the loss of land or quality of land for sites submitted through the Call for Sites process and take this into account when deciding which sites are suitable for allocation.

Figure 24 – Agricultural Classifications in North Hertfordshire

Source: Defra

Green and blue infrastructure

Green and blue infrastructure refers to a network of multi-functional green spaces, river corridors and other natural features, urban and rural, which can deliver a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

Plan-making policies in the NPPF requires local plans to set clear standards for green infrastructure provision. These standards should draw upon Natural England's Green Infrastructure Standards for England.⁵¹

NDMPs in the NPPF seek to ensure trees are integrated into new development. These policies require Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) for any development that have implications on drainage and seek to avoid the culverting of watercourses and supports the de-culverting and re-naturalising of river channels. As these matters are covered by national policies, we will not be including these issues in the new Local Plan.

What does the data tell us?

North Hertfordshire has a strong network of green and blue spaces. We want to protect and improve these networks and create new links between them through future development.

We also want to ensure that our green and blue infrastructure connects with networks in neighbouring areas, so that these benefits continue across administrative boundaries.

We have discussed the rarity and importance of our Chalk Streams specifically in our Biodiversity and Geology section, but we need to ensure that we protect all of our rivers and streams. Our main watercourses, their catchments and the areas where development may need to take particular account of water quality, habitat connectivity and riparian buffer requirements will be mapped.

Urban Greening Factor

The Urban Greening Factor (UGF) is a planning tool developed by Natural England that seeks to help developers and local authorities quantify the required provision of greenspace for a proposal. The UGF is used to calculate a score for each proposal by taking the area of proposed green infrastructure surface cover and multiplying it by a factor that Natural England has set for each typology. By then dividing this figure by the total area of the proposal, the UGF score of the proposal is calculated. Natural England sets a national

⁵¹ [GI Standards](#)

standard of UGF of at least 0.3 for commercial development, 0.4 for residential development, and, where appropriate, 0.5 for residential greenfield development.

As an example, a proposal for residential development covering an area of 100 square metres will provide 2.5 square metres of allotment area, 37 square metres of semi-natural vegetation, and 8 square metres of amenity grassland. Natural England has provided allotments a factor of 0.7, semi-natural vegetation a factor of 1.0, and amenity grassland a factor of 0.4. This proposal would score 0.42, which achieves the proposed national standard of 0.4.

Table 12 – Urban Greening Factor

Surface Cover Type	Proposed area	Natural England factor	Total
Allotment	2.5 sqm	x 0.7	1.75
Semi-natural vegetation	37 sqm	x 1.0	37
Amenity grassland	8 sqm	x 0.4	3.2
	Total		42
	Total site area		100 sqm
	UGF (42/100)		0.42

Source: North Herts Council

Q44. Our Sustainability SPD currently requires an Urban Greening Factor of 0.3 for commercial development and 0.4 for residential development, in line with recommended standards for England. We are proposing to incorporate these requirements into our new Local Plan.

Do you support the inclusion of these Urban Greening Factor standards in Local Plan policy? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard

Natural England has developed the Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard in collaboration with the Forestry Commission. It is a tool used to increase the tree canopy cover in urban areas. Tree canopy cover provides areas with a multitude of benefits; helping mitigate the Urban Heat Island effect and keeping our towns cool and shaded, increasing the character and

quality of the built environment, and encouraging biodiversity. The Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard is a percentage of a development's area that should be covered by tree canopies. This percentage will be based on a locally defined baseline, and will take into account local needs, opportunities and constraints. We are proposing to introduce canopy cover standards in our new Local Plan. This will be produced in line with what will be set out in the Natural England Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard User Guide, which is currently in production.

The NPPF now requires streets in new development to be tree-lined, and by setting canopy cover standards we can ensure that the benefits from this new requirement are maximised. These standards will also help achieve the Environment Act 2021 binding targets of achieving 16.5% tree canopy cover nationally, and the LNRS ambition of achieving 19% canopy cover in Hertfordshire.

Q45. Should we set Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standards in our Local Plan?

If yes, what should they be? If no, why not?

Other natural environment issues

Q46. Are there any additional issues relating to the natural environment, biodiversity, landscapes, watercourses or green infrastructure that the Local Plan should consider?

Please provide your comments.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change

The Council has strengthened its response to climate change by declaring a Climate Emergency in May 2019 and an Ecological Emergency in July 2023. Since then, it has adopted a [Climate Change Strategy](#)⁵² and a [Sustainability Strategy](#)⁵³ and produced a [Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document](#)⁵⁴ (SPD). The SPD encourages higher standards of sustainability in new development.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, often referred to as climate change mitigation, involves finding ways to lower the carbon footprint of new development and everyday activities. But even as we work to reduce emissions, we must also prepare for the effects of a changing climate. This is known as climate change adaptation.

Addressing climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing society and will be an important theme running throughout our new Local Plan. By planning for low-carbon development and increasing resilience to future climate impacts, we can help reduce our impact on climate change.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

The NPPF requires our new Local Plan to take a proactive approach to mitigating climate change, and to support the transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The Local Plan will do this by shaping how and where development takes place, setting local water efficiency standards where justified and identifying opportunities for Green Infrastructure provision to safeguard and improve carbon storage and support nature recovery.

The Local Plan needs to take into account available and needed energy supply, network capacity, water supply, drainage and wastewater capacity in planning new development. Our Local Plan needs to support the delivery of new and enhanced renewable and low-carbon energy. This includes identifying suitable locations for such development and promoting opportunities for buildings to use energy from decentralised networks and low-carbon sources. Our Local Plan should also encourage the co-location of energy producers and users, so that surplus heat or energy can be shared efficiently, helping reduce waste and support the transition to net zero.

The NPPF sets out NDMPs that cover issues relating to mitigation and adaptation of climate change, including the creation and restoration of habitats which can act as carbon stores, supporting good access to facilities to limit the need to travel, minimise the risk of flooding of a development and elsewhere, the incorporation of sustainable drainage systems, and compliance with national objectives and targets for air pollutants. The Local Plan will not reiterate national policy and will not cover issues that are already in NDMPs.

⁵² https://climate-hive.hub.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts_community_hub/files/2024-09/NHDC-294%20NHDC%20Climate%20change%20Strategy%202021-26%20web.pdf

⁵³ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sustainability-strategy>

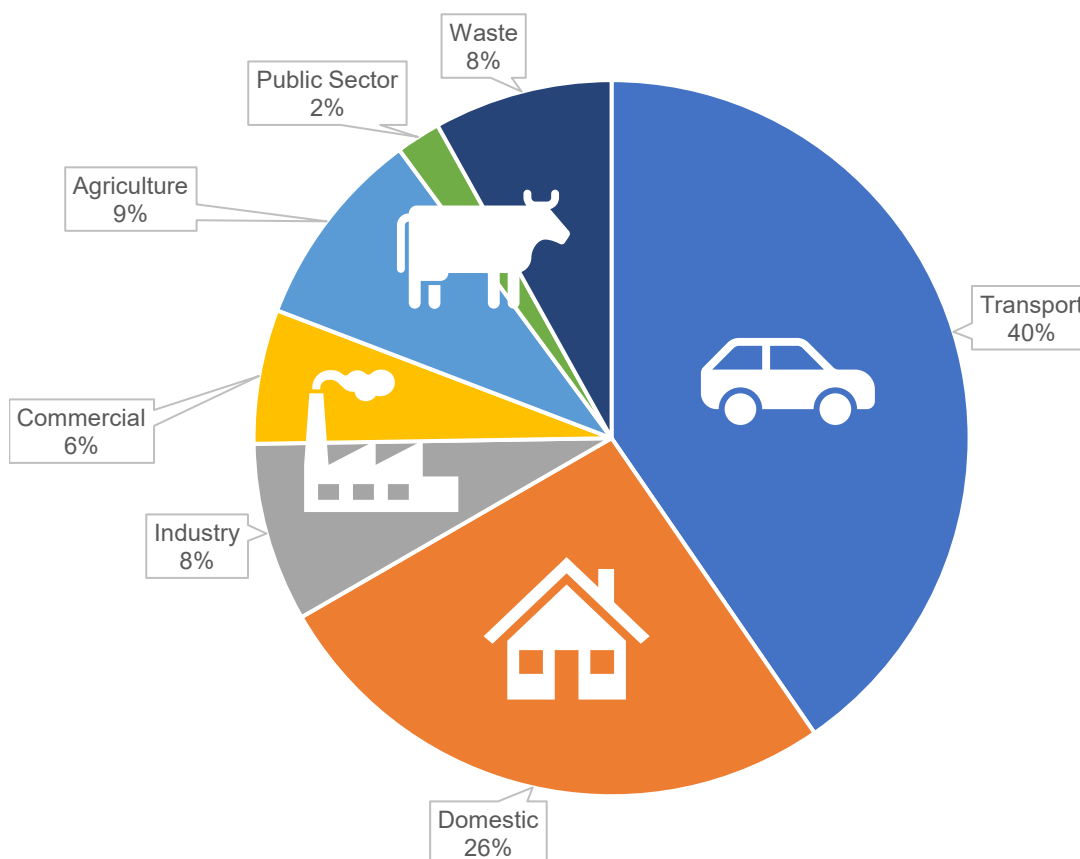
⁵⁴ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sustainability-supplementary-planning-document>

What does the data tell us?

In North Hertfordshire, as across the UK, carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the main cause of climate change and is expected to be responsible for around two-thirds of future global warming.

In 2024, total greenhouse gas emissions in North Hertfordshire were around [613 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent](#)⁵⁵. The below diagram presents the largest sources of emissions.

Figure 25 Greenhouse gas emissions in North Hertfordshire, 2024



Source: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions statistics, 2005 to 2024

Over the last two decades, emissions per person have nearly halved, mainly from cleaner electricity, lower gas use, and improvements in transport.

Air Quality

National and local approaches to air quality have evolved in recent years. Monitoring has traditionally focused on nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), which is primarily associated with road traffic emissions. However, there is now increasing recognition of the health impacts of fine

⁵⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-greenhouse-gas-emissions-statistics-2005-to-2024>

particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), leading to a greater emphasis on monitoring and reducing exposure to these pollutants.

In North Hertfordshire, we previously designated two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in Hitchin:

- Stevenage Road
- Payne's Park Roundabout

Following sustained improvements in air quality and monitoring results that demonstrated national objectives had been achieved, both AQMAs were [revoked](#)⁵⁶ in March 2026.

While this is positive progress, it does not mean that air quality is no longer an issue. We remain committed to maintaining and improving air quality across our District as required by the [National Air Quality Strategy](#)⁵⁷.

Our Local Plan can contribute to improved air quality by:

- Encouraging development in locations where people can walk, cycle, wheel and use public transport more easily.
- Reducing reliance on private car travel.
- Supporting the transition to low-emission and zero-emission vehicles.
- Promoting active travel and healthy lifestyles.
- Protecting and enhancing green infrastructure, which can help improve local environmental quality.
- Ensuring new development is designed to minimise adverse air quality impacts.

Q47. We are proposing requiring an Air Quality Assessment for certain types of development where there is potential for significant air quality impacts, including larger developments and those located close to sensitive uses such as schools, care homes, hospitals and nurseries.

Do you support this approach? Yes / No

Please explain your answer

Q48. What thresholds, distances from sensitive receptors, or other criteria should be used to determine when an Air Quality Assessment is required?

Please provide your reasons for any suggestions

⁵⁶ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/air-quality-monitoring>

⁵⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-air-quality-strategy-for-england>

Renewable energy

North Hertfordshire is continuing to expand its local clean energy generation capacity. There are already more than 3,700 solar panel installations across the District, and as this capacity continues to grow, North Hertfordshire has the potential to be one of the leading areas in the country for solar energy generation, making a significant contribution towards achieving net zero carbon emissions.

National policy requires us to positively plan for clean energy infrastructure. Strategic Development Strategies are expected to identify the type, scale and broad location of strategic infrastructure needed to support development, including utilities infrastructure. We are also expected to support the delivery of renewable and low-carbon energy through plan-making and decision-taking.

To help inform our approach, we will be commissioning evidence to better understand electricity network capacity across North Hertfordshire and identify any opportunities or constraints for future energy infrastructure.

Battery Storage

Renewable energy sources such as solar and wind do not always generate electricity when demand is highest. Battery storage can help address this by storing energy when it is available and releasing it when it is needed. This can improve the resilience and reliability of the electricity network, support the integration of renewable energy and help meet future demands arising from new homes, businesses and electric vehicles.

To help inform our approach, we will be commissioning evidence to better understand electricity network capacity across North Hertfordshire and identify any opportunities or constraints for future energy infrastructure.

We are considering introducing a policy to support battery energy storage development, subject to appropriate safeguards and site-specific considerations. This could include consideration of:

- Location and siting
- Landscape and visual impacts
- Noise impacts
- Biodiversity and environmental impacts
- Transport and construction impacts
- Decommissioning and restoration

Q49. We propose introducing a policy that supports battery energy storage development, subject to appropriate safeguards. Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons.

Are there any additional criteria that you think should be included in the policy?

Community energy schemes

Community energy schemes (CES) are locally owned, managed or led by local communities to generate energy from renewable sources such as solar, wind, hydro or biomass. They provide an opportunity for communities to play a direct role in the transition to a low-carbon future while helping to meet local energy needs.

Unlike commercial energy schemes, community energy projects are designed to deliver benefits locally. Any income generated can be reinvested into community initiatives, energy-efficiency improvements, fuel poverty programmes or other local projects identified by residents.

As interest in local energy generation grows, community energy schemes may play an increasingly important role in helping North Hertfordshire meet its climate change objectives while delivering wider social, economic and environmental benefits.

Q50. Do you support the inclusion of a Local Plan policy that encourages Community Energy Schemes, where residents and local organisations collectively develop, own or benefit from renewable energy projects, such as solar photovoltaic installations? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Heat Networks

Heat networks, sometimes known as district heating networks, provide heating and hot water from a central source to multiple homes, businesses or public buildings through a network of insulated underground pipes.

Heat networks can operate at a variety of scales, from a single block of flats or a new housing development to larger networks serving town centres, employment areas, hospitals, schools and other groups of buildings.

They can use a range of low-carbon and renewable heat sources, including:

- Ground source and water source heat pumps.
- Solar energy.
- Biomass.
- Energy from waste facilities.
- Surplus or waste heat from industrial processes and data centres.

Heat networks can provide an efficient and lower-carbon way of heating buildings, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support the transition to net zero. They can also improve energy resilience by reducing reliance on individual gas boilers and making use of heat that might otherwise be wasted.

Heat networks are most effective in locations where there is a high concentration of buildings with a consistent demand for heat, such as town centres, larger mixed-use developments, hospitals, schools, employment areas and major regeneration sites.

Q51. Do you support a policy that prioritises heat networks in suitable developments where they can provide efficient, low-carbon heating, rather than relying solely on individual building heating systems? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Q52. Should developments of 100 dwellings or more be required to assess opportunities to use waste heat from nearby energy-intensive infrastructure, such as data centres and wastewater treatment works, as part of their heating strategy? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Energy efficiency

The Government is introducing the [Future Homes and Buildings Standard](#)⁵⁸ from March 2027 to help ensure that new homes and buildings are more energy efficient and produce significantly lower carbon emissions than those built today. These new standards are intended to support the transition to a low-carbon future by reducing energy use, lowering running costs and helping meet national climate change targets.

The standards are expected to:

- Require low-carbon heating systems in new homes, reducing reliance on fossil fuels.
- Support the use of on-site renewable energy technologies, such as solar panels and air source heat pumps.
- Improve energy efficiency, helping homes use less energy for heating, cooling and everyday living.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from new development.
- Create homes that are "zero-carbon ready", meaning they will not need significant retrofit work in the future to meet net-zero objectives.

Whilst these requirements will be set through national building regulations, the NPPF 2026 says that our Local Plan can set standards beyond them, provided we have a clear and robustly costed rationale showing there will not be an adverse impact on the viability and deliverability of the development scheme.

⁵⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-homes-and-buildings-standards-building-circular-012026/the-future-homes-and-buildings-standards-building-circular-012026-letter>

Q53. Should our Local Plan set energy efficiency standards above those set out in current or proposed Building Regulations?

Yes / No

Please explain your answer

Circular Economy

As buildings become more energy efficient and the energy we use becomes less carbon-intensive, the carbon emissions generated during construction, known as embodied carbon, account for an increasingly large share of a building's overall environmental impact.

A [study](#)⁵⁹ published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in 2026 found that demolition and redevelopment are often favoured over refurbishment or retrofit for financial and commercial reasons. The research also highlighted that uncertainty around planning policy can influence decisions, with developers and landowners not always having clear guidance on whether the planning system supports the retention and improvement of existing buildings.

Retrofitting and refurbishing existing buildings can offer a number of benefits, including:

- Reducing embodied carbon emissions associated with demolition and reconstruction.
- Making better use of existing buildings and materials.
- Preserving local character and heritage where appropriate.
- Reducing construction waste.
- Supporting the transition to a more resource-efficient and circular economy.

For these reasons, we are considering a policy approach that would encourage the retention, refurbishment and adaptation of existing buildings wherever practical and appropriate.

Where demolition is proposed, we may require applicants to demonstrate that alternative retrofit-led approaches have been properly considered, and that retention or refurbishment is not a feasible option. This would help ensure that the environmental impacts of demolition are fully understood and that opportunities to reduce carbon emissions are not overlooked.

Q54. Do you agree that the Local Plan should prioritise the retention, retrofitting and sensitive extension of existing buildings, with demolition only permitted where it is supported by robust evidence? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

⁵⁹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69b3f237ba47c264e6c8cf24/Demolition__redevelopment_and_retrofitting_of_buildings.pdf

Q55. Where demolition is proposed, should developers be required to submit:

- A pre-demolition audit?
- A whole-life carbon assessment?
- A circular economy statement?

Yes / /No

Please explain your answer.

For major development we may require both the construction phase embodied carbon and the whole life-cycle embodied carbon to be below a specified level (usually measured in carbon dioxide equivalent per square metre of floor area, or CO₂e/m²). To evidence this we may require major development proposals to be supported by an embodied carbon assessment.

Q56. We are considering setting maximum amounts of CO₂ equivalent emissions per square metre of floor area for the construction of and/or the whole life cycle of buildings that form part of major development proposals. Do you think this would be an appropriate approach?

Water resources and flood risk

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

The NPPF sets out that in preparing our Local Plan we need to work closely with water companies and drainage authorities and regulators to ensure we have a good understanding of available infrastructure capacities, requirements and limits, and to make provision for required new or enhanced water supply, drainage and wastewater infrastructure development.

Our Local Plan should also minimise flood risk from all sources, including rivers, surface water and groundwater, taking into account the effects of climate change. Our Local Plan should ensure that new development is safe over its lifetime and does not increase flood risk elsewhere.

When choosing locations for development, our Plan must take a risk-based approach and assume that flood risk will increase over time due to climate change with a requirement to reduce flood risk overall, not just manage it site-by-site, and plan for worsening conditions.

NDMPs contained within the NPPF sets out how individual proposals should be assessed for flood risk, how the sequential test should be applied, and the need for the incorporation of Sustainable Drainage Systems for development which could affect drainage. The Local Plan will not duplicate national policy and therefore will not cover issues that are already in NDMPs.

What does the data tell us?

Availability of water

As the population grows and climate change increases the risk of drought and extreme weather, the pressure on water availability will increase. The challenge is to allow necessary development while making sure water is used much more efficiently and sustainably.

Much of North Hertfordshire lies above underground water sources that supply most of our drinking water. The Environment Agency has identified that both rivers and groundwater across most of Hertfordshire are under serious pressure, with too much water already being taken out. This means our District is classed as an area of 'serious water stress', meaning demand for water is already high compared to what is available.

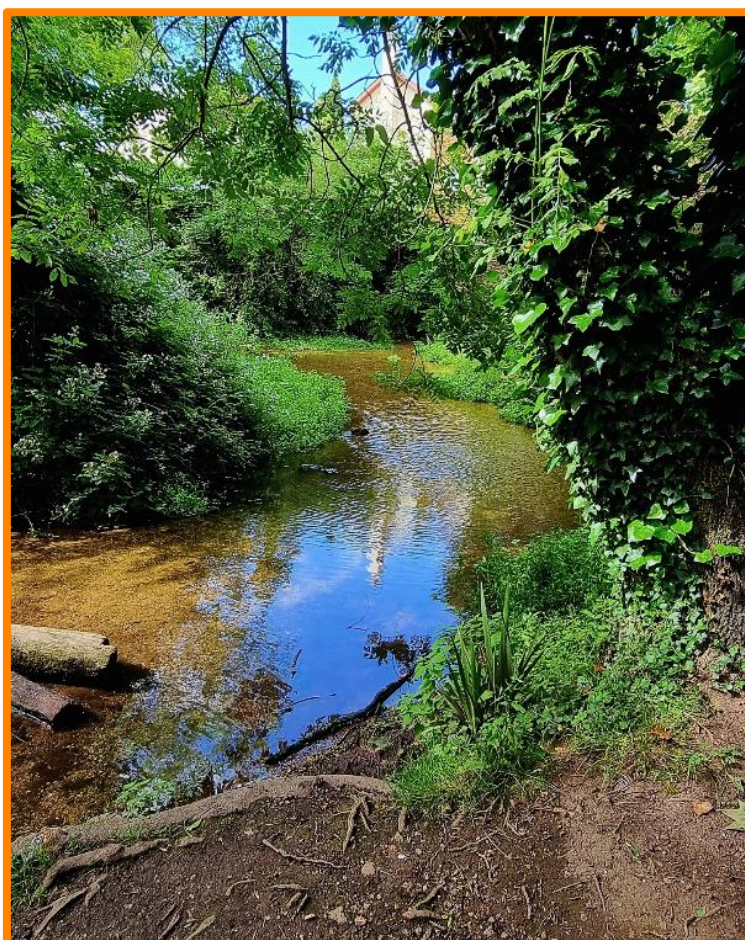
This issue has been brought into even sharper focus by the exceptionally hot and dry conditions experienced during the summer of 2026. Large parts of England have experienced prolonged periods of drought, with below-average rainfall placing increasing pressure on water supplies, rivers, agriculture and the natural environment. These conditions demonstrate how climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of drought events in the future, highlighting the importance of ensuring that new development is designed to use water efficiently and does not place additional strain on already stressed water resources.

Our chalk rivers have reduced water levels, with some sections drying up for long periods. Around half of the River Beane and River Mimram are affected by these dry stretches. Low or no water flow damages wildlife, allows sediment to build up, and reduces plant life in rivers, putting already fragile ecosystems at risk.

We are preparing a new Water Cycle Strategy for North Hertfordshire and this will help us make sure new development does not put too much pressure on water resources. It looks at water supply, wastewater treatment and flood risk to ensure environmental limits are not exceeded. The strategy will assess existing infrastructure and will be informed by [Affinity Water's Water Resources Management Plan](https://affinitywater.uk/engagement/hq.com/wrmp)⁶⁰ (WRMP), which identifies significant pressures on the local environment and water resources due to population growth and climate change.

⁶⁰ <https://affinitywater.uk/engagement/hq.com/wrmp>

Figure 26 – Ashwell Springs



Source: North Herts Council

Q57. We are proposing to require all new residential development to achieve a maximum water consumption target of 85 litres per person per day, reflecting emerging water-efficiency standards for areas of serious water stress.

Do you support this requirement? Yes / No

Please explain your answer

Greywater recycling

Greywater recycling involves collecting and reusing relatively clean wastewater from sources such as showers, baths and hand basins for non-drinking purposes, including toilet flushing and garden irrigation. These systems can help reduce the amount of mains water used in homes and other buildings.

Greywater recycling is referenced within [Building Regulations Approved Documents G \(Sanitation, Hot Water Safety and Water Efficiency\)](#)⁶¹ and [H \(Drainage and Waste Disposal\)](#)⁶². However, unlike some other water efficiency measures, the installation of greywater recycling systems is not currently a mandatory national requirement.

Q58. Should the Local Plan encourage the use of greywater recycling systems and other water-saving technologies in new development? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons.

Water quality in rivers and groundwater

North Hertfordshire has many rivers and streams, mainly associated to the Rivers Ivel, Hiz, and Beane. At present all rivers in England, including those in our District, fail to meet good chemical water quality standards. In 2025, a total number of 188 sewage spills were recorded at pumping stations and wastewater treatment works in North Hertfordshire lasting for a total duration of 1,142 hours⁶³.

Most of our rivers have moderate or good ecological health, although the River Beane is in poor condition. Pollution comes from a range of sources, including urban development, road run-off, industry, farming and livestock, land management practices, water abstraction, and wastewater discharges.

Changes to rivers themselves, such as barriers, culverts and modifications made for flood management, also harm river health and contribute to their decline.

We want to ensure that development in our District helps to improve the chemical and biological quality of the rivers in North Hertfordshire.

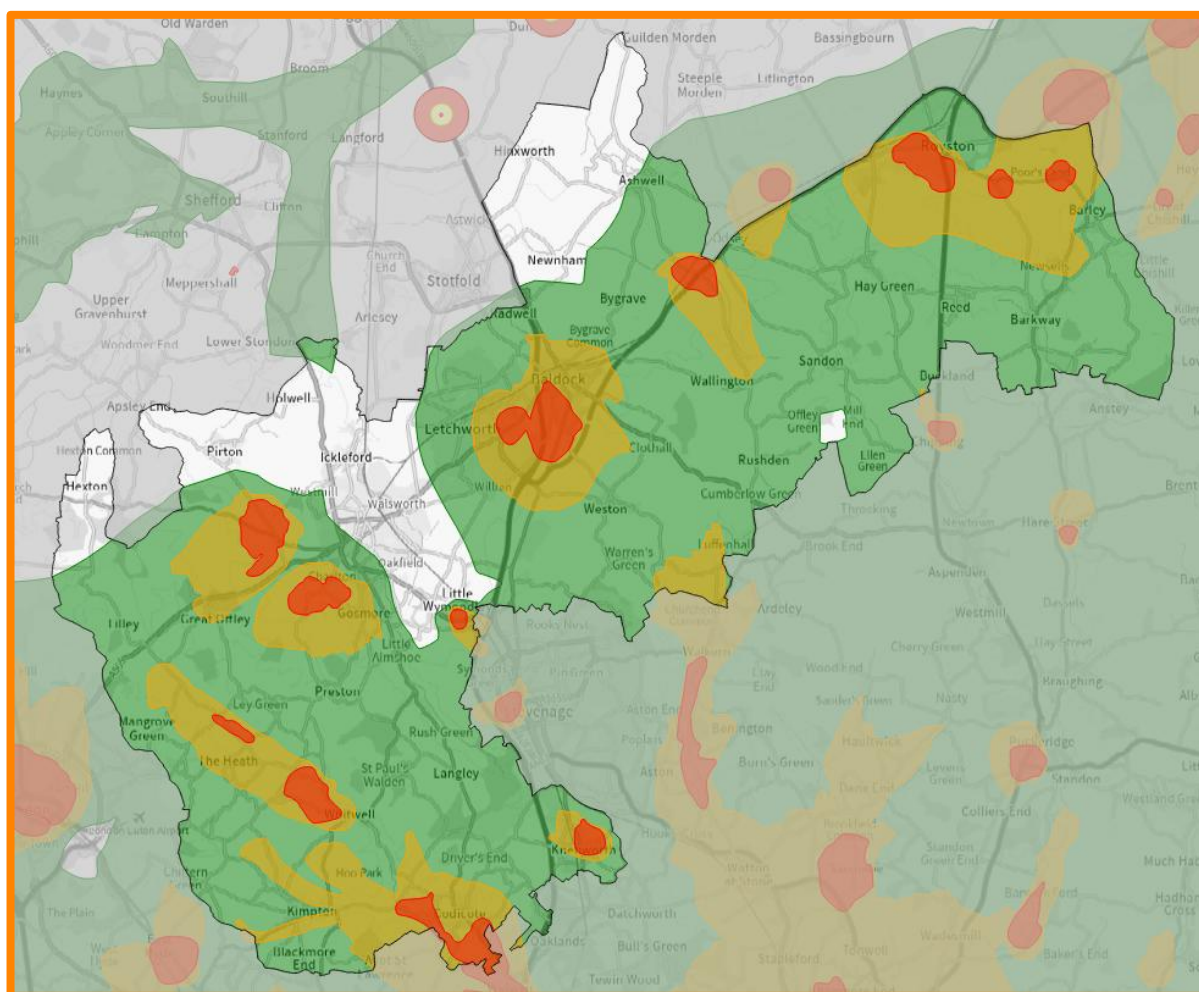
⁶¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66f6c6ce3b919067bb4828cc/ADG_with_2024_amendments.pdf

⁶² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drainage-and-waste-disposal-approved-document-h>

⁶³ [https://theriverstrust.org/sewage-](https://theriverstrust.org/sewage-map?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=23308961225&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIqY3Hys-mlAMV65RQBh1caxz9EAAAYASAAEgJMHfd_BWE)

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Figure 27 - Source Protection Zones – North Hertfordshire

Source: North Herts Council

In addition to rivers and streams, much of North Hertfordshire sits above underground water sources (aquifers). Some of these aquifers are 'principal aquifers', which can store and supply large amounts of water and help feed rivers over a wide area. Others are 'secondary aquifers', which usually support water supplies at a more local level and provide important flows to nearby rivers.

Water is abstracted from these underground water sources for drinking water and so these areas need extra protection as they are particularly vulnerable to pollution. These areas of protection are called Source Protection Zones, and are mainly around Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock, Royston, Ashwell and Stevenage.

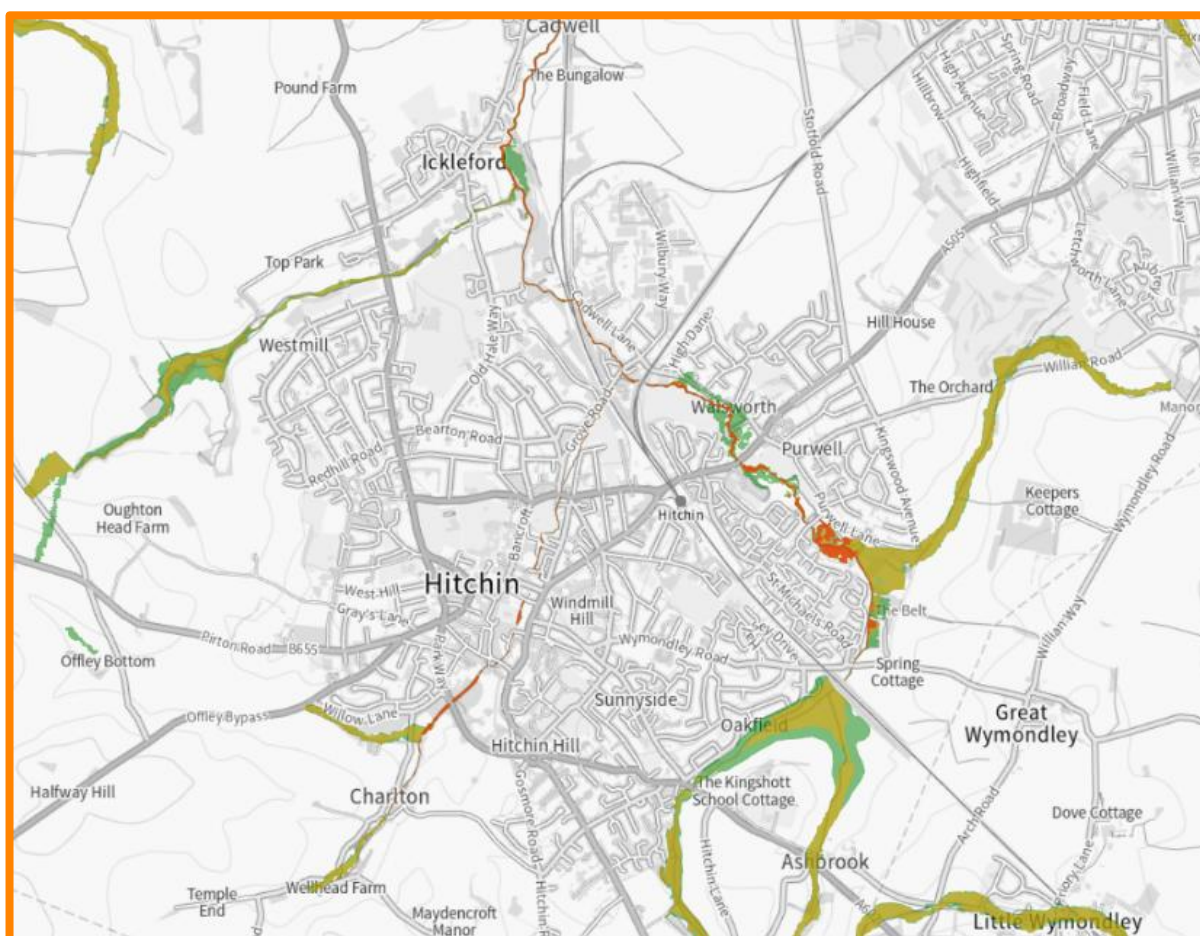
Flood risk

North Hertfordshire faces a number of flood risk challenges, particularly from surface water flooding, which means some areas are more vulnerable than others. Around 4,000 properties in our District are at high risk of surface water flooding (a 1 in 30-year chance), with a further 8,000 properties at medium risk (a 1 in 100-year chance).

The [Hertfordshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2](https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/environment-and-planning/water/flood-risk-management/lfrms-for-hertfordshire-full-report.pdf)⁶⁴ (LFRMS2) explains that climate change is expected to make flooding more frequent and more severe across Hertfordshire. It identifies three main sources of local flood risk:

- Surface water flooding, which is the most common and widespread
- River flooding, from rivers and watercourses
- Groundwater flooding, which is less frequent but can be significant in certain locations

Figure 28 – Areas of flood risk in Hitchin



Source: Hertfordshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

In places where there is already a high risk of river flooding, such as Hitchin, it is important that new development allows space for water and does not increase flood risk on site or elsewhere.

We are currently preparing a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). This will map flood risk across our District and identify where flooding may limit development. The results will help us decide where growth can take place safely and where development should be avoided or would need further testing through the Sequential or Exception Tests.

⁶⁴ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/environment-and-planning/water/flood-risk-management/lfrms-for-hertfordshire-full-report.pdf>

Together, the SFRA and Water Cycle Strategy will provide the technical evidence needed to plan growth responsibly. They will help ensure that new development is environmentally sustainable, supported by the right infrastructure, and follows best practice in managing water-related risks.

Other climate change related issues

Q59. Are there any other climate change issues relating to reducing carbon emissions, renewable energy, energy efficiency, flooding, water resources or climate resilience that our Local Plan should consider?

Please provide your comments.

TRANSPORT AND CONNECTIVITY

Transport and connectivity

The way we plan new development has a major influence on how people travel. Locating homes, jobs and services in accessible locations gives people more choice about how they get around and can reduce the need to make every journey by car.

This is particularly important for those who do not have regular access to a car, including children and young people, older residents, disabled people and lower-income households. Well-connected communities can improve access to opportunities, support independent living and help reduce social isolation. It also leads to lower car usage, which improves air quality, reduces congestion and improves people's health and wellbeing.

Our Local Plan will direct large-scale development to locations that are already well connected, or where there is a policy commitment to provide the infrastructure and transport investment needed to integrate the site with existing networks, enabling residents to have a genuine choice of travel modes.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

National planning policy places a strong emphasis on creating places that are easy to get around and give people genuine choices about how they travel.

Local Plans are required to plan for new homes, jobs and services in locations where people can easily walk, cycle, wheel or use public transport to reach the places they need to go, including schools, healthcare facilities, shops, town centres and transport hubs.

For larger developments, a range of local facilities and services are expected to be provided nearby, helping to reduce the need for people to travel longer distances for everyday needs.

A key principle of NPPF Policy TR3 is designing places around people rather than traffic. This means creating communities where walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport are safe, attractive and convenient options that people have a genuine choice to use. This approach can bring wider benefits, including:

- Healthier and more active lifestyles.
- Improved air quality.
- Reduced congestion.
- Lower carbon emissions.
- Better connected communities

National policy also requires us to set appropriate parking standards for new development, taking account of local circumstances.

NDMPs cover policies on locating development in sustainable locations; street design, access and parking; roadside facilities (EV chargepoints and lorry parks); assessing transport impacts; marine ports, airports and other aviation facilities; and public rights of way.

Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan, 2018 - 2031

The [Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan 2018-2031](#) (LTP4)⁶⁵ provides the strategic framework for how transport infrastructure and services should support population growth, economic development and improved quality of life across the County.

It recognises that future growth in homes and jobs will increase demand for travel; and that without intervention, there will be a continued reliance on private cars. To address this, LTP4 Policy 1 sets out a Transport User Hierarchy by which the County Council will assess development proposals in order of priority:

1. Opportunities to reduce travel demand and the need to travel
2. Vulnerable road user needs (such as pedestrians and cyclists)
3. Passenger transport user needs
4. Powered two-wheeler (mopeds and motorbikes) user needs
5. Other motor vehicle user needs

This is supplemented in Policy 5 by requirements for new development to meet design and safety standards and to mitigate adverse impacts in order to create safe, sustainable and viable places from a transport perspective.

LTP4 Policy 12 seeks to make the most efficient use of the road network by reducing single occupancy car use and encouraging travel by walking, cycling and passenger transport.

What does the data tell us?

Bus travel⁶⁶ has declined markedly across Hertfordshire since a peak in around 2014. Although bus use has stopped falling since the pandemic, it has not recovered to previous levels. People are making fewer bus journeys than before, and bus services are less frequent and cover fewer routes, particularly those that operate without public subsidy.

Most rail stations⁶⁷ in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage have seen passenger numbers return to around pre-COVID levels. However, recovery has been slower at Knebworth, Baldock and Hitchin, where passenger numbers remain below their pre-pandemic highs.

National Travel Survey

Travel levels have fallen over the last two decades. People are making fewer journeys, travelling shorter distances, and spending less time travelling than in 2002. Shopping is now the most common reason for travel, followed by commuting⁶⁸.

⁶⁵ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/planning-in-hertfordshire/transport-planning/local-transport-plan.aspx>

⁶⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/bus-statistics-data-tables>

⁶⁷ <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/estimates-of-station-usage>

⁶⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-travel-survey-statistics>

Hertfordshire Travel Survey 2025

In 2024, traffic across the county was around 4% lower than in 2019, although it is expected to have recovered fully by 2025/26. In North Hertfordshire, traffic levels in 2024 were already nearly 5% higher than before the pandemic.⁶⁹

Travel patterns have changed since COVID-19. Traffic is still lower during the traditional morning and evening rush hours, particularly in the morning; suggesting that more people are travelling at different times of the day, possibly due to flexible and hybrid working. This trend is especially noticeable on Fridays, which are now the busiest day of the week overall.

Congestion remains a problem at a number of locations across and around North Hertfordshire, including junctions on the A1, parts of the A505, A10 and A602, and key routes through Royston, Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Knebworth. Delays can be unpredictable in some areas, leading drivers to use alternative routes that may be less suitable for higher levels of traffic.

Most journeys are still made by car. In 2024, around 21% of monitored trips in Hertfordshire were made by other means, including walking (9%), bus travel (11.5%) and cycling (less than 1%).

Cycling increased during the pandemic but has since fallen back to around pre-pandemic levels. The proportion of children cycling to school has also declined in recent years.

Physical activity levels remain a concern. In 2025, just over half of Hertfordshire residents achieved the recommended level of weekly physical activity, while around one in nine people were active for less than 30 minutes a week.

Many short journeys are still made by car. One in five trips of less than a mile are made by car, rising to almost two-thirds of trips between one and three miles. These distances are often suitable for walking or cycling where safe and convenient routes are available. This suggests there is significant potential to increase active travel through better infrastructure and connectivity.

Car ownership

Car ownership in North Hertfordshire increased between 2011 and 2021. The proportion of households without access to a car fell slightly (from 16.5% to 15.5%), while the number of households owning three or more vehicles increased. On average, households owned 1.42 cars or vans in 2021, compared with 1.37 in 2011.

As the number of households also grew during this period, the total number of cars and vans owned by residents increased by around 10%.

Car ownership varies significantly depending on the type of housing and whether a property is owned, rented privately or rented from a social landlord; suggesting parking provision should reflect the characteristics of the homes being built rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

⁶⁹ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/Highways-roads-and-pavements/Speed-awareness-and-driver-training/Transport-and-Accident-Data/Transport-and-accident-data.aspx#traffic>

The evidence from the 2021 Census of car ownership in North Hertfordshire supports limiting on-plot parking to no more than two spaces per dwelling. This helps ensure land is used efficiently while still providing an appropriate level of parking for most households.

Table 23 - Average number of cars/vans per household in North Hertfordshire for different tenures and dwelling sizes

Tenure	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5+ bed
Social rented	0.5	0.9	1.2	1.5	1.1
Shared ownership	1.1	1.3	1.7	2.0	1.5
Private owned or rented	0.8	1.0	1.3	1.4	1.7

Source: Census 2021

Blue Badges

In Hertfordshire, around 6.3% of residents currently hold a Blue Badge, which is higher than the national and regional averages.⁷⁰

The proportion of older people in North, East and Central Hertfordshire is expected to grow from 18.5% of the population in 2026 to 21.3% by 2040.⁷¹ As people are more likely to need a Blue Badge as they get older, this is expected to increase demand for accessible parking and other age-friendly transport measures.

Based on current trends, the proportion of residents holding a Blue Badge could rise from around 6.3% today to approximately 7% by 2040. This highlights the importance of ensuring that new developments provide suitable levels of accessible parking and are designed to meet the needs of an ageing population.

Connectivity

To support the delivery of sustainable and well-connected communities, we propose some new concepts relating to connectivity, as set out below

Sustainably connected

- A **sustainably connected** site has safe walking routes to
 - Primary school within 800m
 - General shop within 600m
 and

⁷⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/blue-badge-scheme-statistics-data-tables-dis>

⁷¹ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/herts-insight/topics/population.aspx>

- Bus stop within 400m with a **medium quality** of service
or
- Bus stop within 400m with a **low quality** of service
- Secondary school within 5km by a safe cycle route
- Railway station or town centre within 5km by a safe cycle route

Well-connected

- A **well-connected** site⁷² has safe walking routes to:
 - Primary school within 800m
 - Secondary school within 5km by a safe cycle route
 - General shop within 600m
 and
- Bus stop within 800m with a **high quality** of service
or
- Railway station or town centre within 800m

Quality of bus services

- **High quality** – buses run to and from a town centre and railway station at least every 20 minutes during weekday peak periods (6am to 9am and 4pm to 7pm), and at least every 30 minutes at all other times between 6am and 11pm, seven days a week
- **Medium quality** – buses run to and from a town centre and railway station at least every 30 minutes during weekday peak periods (6am to 9am and 4pm to 7pm), and at least hourly at all other times between 6am and 11pm, seven days a week.
- **Low quality** - buses run to either a town centre or railway station at least once an hour between 7am and 10pm, Monday to Saturday

All proposed development sites should be **sustainably connected**, unless there are significant benefits arising from other policy objectives that outweigh this requirement.

Strategic sites of 150 or more dwellings should be **well connected**, and, in line with the NPPF, should generally be developed at higher densities to make the most efficient use of accessible locations.

Larger developments should provide on-site amenities, such as education, community, retail, leisure, cultural and healthcare facilities that complement existing provision elsewhere and minimise the need for residents to travel further afield for their daily needs.

Sites that are not **sustainably connected** should either include measures to improve connectivity or demonstrate that other planning considerations outweigh this deficiency. Bus services below the threshold of a **low-quality service** should not be regarded as

⁷² This should not be confused with the definition of “well-connected station” in the NPPF.

contributing to sustainable transport provision, as they are unlikely to provide the NPPF's required "genuine choice" of travel modes, even where they fulfil an important social function.

Q60. Do you agree with the definition of “sustainably connected” as defined above as a default requirement for new developments?

If not, what changes do you suggest for the definition of “sustainably connected” and/or qualities of bus services?

Q61. Do you agree that housing developments of 150 or more dwellings should meet the requirement of being well connected (as defined above)?

If not, what changes do you suggest for the definition of “well connected” and/or qualities of bus services?

Q62. Do you agree that bus services below the criteria for a low-quality service, as defined above, should not be counted when assessing a site’s connectivity? If not, what threshold do you think we should set?

Q63. Do you have comments on other aspects of these proposals

Travel plans and mitigation

The NPPF promotes a vision-led approach to transport planning, meaning developments should be planned around the travel choices people will want to make in the future, rather than assuming a continuation of historic traffic patterns and trends.

NDMPs require development proposals to assess the likely impacts for transport. Sites that will generate significant amounts of movement are also required to prepare a Travel Plan and to manage adverse impacts with appropriate mitigations.

Our Local Plan will require developments that are likely to generate significant numbers of trips to commit to ambitious but realistic targets for sustainable travel (walking, wheeling, cycling, bus rail and car-sharing) in their Travel Plans.

In accordance with NPPF Policy TR3 and LTP4 Policy 5, developments will be expected to propose a package of measures that is sufficient to mitigate the adverse impacts of the development on existing transport infrastructure, including:

- New or improved walking and cycling routes
- Safer road crossings and junction improvements
- Bus priority measures and improved bus facilities
- Lower speed limits and traffic-calming measures
- Parking management measures
- Car clubs and shared mobility schemes
- Cycle, e-bike and cargo bike hire schemes
- Travel incentives and sustainable travel initiatives

Mitigations should seek to both maximise the share of trips generated by the development by sustainable modes and shift existing trips on the road network to more sustainable modes. Put the other way around, mitigations should seek to minimise vehicular trips generated by the development and release capacity in the existing road network to accommodate unavoidable new vehicular trips generated by the development.

Any proposal to add new road capacity will be accepted only as a last resort and to satisfy NNPF Policy TR6 paragraphs 3 and 4.

A Monitor and Manage Approach

Predicting future travel behaviour is not an exact science and it is not possible to know with certainty whether Travel Plan targets will be achieved.

We are therefore proposing a Monitor and Manage approach to complement the NDMPs for sites that require a Travel Plan: developers would be required to provide a proportionate financial contribution in the form of a bond that may be used to implement additional mitigations if monitoring shows that agreed Travel Plan targets are not being met or if significant adverse impacts of the development are observed that were not anticipated.

Monitor and Manage mitigations may supplement and/or extend mitigations agreed to make the development acceptable in planning terms in the first place, and must be prioritised in the same way.

The bond would be used only if further intervention is required. Unspent funds would be returned to the developer in accordance with the terms of a legal agreement once monitoring after completion of the development shows that Travel Plan targets have been achieved, are likely to be sustained, and no other significant adverse impacts persist.

Q64. Do you agree that developments that require a Travel Plan should contribute to a Monitor and Manage Fund to mitigate unanticipated adverse impacts of the development? Yes / No

If no, how else do you think we can best address uncertain outcomes of a vision-led approach to transport planning?

Cycle parking

Providing safe, convenient and secure cycle parking is an important part of encouraging more people to travel by bicycle. If people are confident that they can store their cycle safely at home and at their destination, they are more likely to choose cycling for everyday journeys.

We are proposing to make a clearer distinction between types of provision:

- Secure cycle parking - Covered parking with controlled access or other measures to help prevent theft, typically for residents, employees and long-stay users.
- Public-access cycle parking - Parking located within publicly accessible areas, primarily for visitors and short-stay users. This may be covered where appropriate.

Residential Development

All new homes should provide sufficient cycle parking to ensure residents have safe, secure and convenient places to store their bicycles.

As people generally do not share bicycles in the same way as cars, our starting assumption is that cycle parking provision should broadly reflect the number of people likely to live in a home. A combination of on-plot and shared provision will often provide the most efficient use of space.

For developments of five or more dwellings, additional cycle parking should be provided for visitors in locations that are easy to find, conveniently located and accessible without entering secure residential areas.

Q65. Are there any specific considerations you think we should take into account when setting cycle parking standards?

Cycle hire schemes

We are hoping to build on initiatives in Stevenage where the Council and Beryl Bikes launched a town-wide e-bike hire scheme in 2024, providing an alternative (alone or in combination with public transport) to private car use for shorter journeys.

To support the growth of shared mobility, we are proposing that residential developments of more than 100 dwellings should:

- Provide suitable space for shared mobility stations that are integrated into the layout of the development from the outset, ensuring they are visible, safe, accessible and convenient to use.

- Work with an appropriate operator to provide shared cycles, e-bikes, cargo bikes and/or e-scooters (where legally permitted).
- Provide residents with access to a booking and management system.

Where an established local shared mobility operator already serves the area, developers would normally be expected to work with that operator to help expand the existing network.

Q66. Do you agree that larger residential developments of 100 dwellings or more should provide space for shared mobility hubs and work with operators to provide cycle, e-bike, cargo bike and other shared transport services? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons.

Car parking

The amount, location and cost of parking can have a significant influence on how people travel. Parking provision affects car ownership levels, travel choices and the overall design of new development. It is therefore an important consideration in creating sustainable, attractive and well-functioning places.

As required by the NPPF, our new Local Plan will set parking standards for both residential and non-residential development.

Residential parking

To support more efficient use of land, we are proposing that a proportion of residential parking is provided off-plot within shared parking courts, parking squares or parking barns. This approach helps to reduce the amount of underused parking space within developments.

For **well-connected** sites, parking standards will generally be treated as maximum standards, with homes in the most accessible parts of a development having lower levels of parking.

For other sites, the parking standards will generally be treated as target levels of provision that should not normally be exceeded.

As illustrated in the evidence above, vehicle ownership can vary significantly between different housing tenures and household types. So, our proposed parking standards will take account of these differences.

Q67. Do you agree with the principle of having less on-plot and more shared parking provision to make more efficient use of land? Yes/No. If not, please explain why

Visitor parking

Visitor parking is an important part of successful residential development to avoid unsafe or obstructive parking (e.g. close to junctions or on pavements). We anticipate that the new standards will be lower than our current Local Plan requirements, which generally require 0.25 to 0.75 visitor parking spaces per dwelling depending on the type and location of development.

Q68. Are there any specific considerations you think we should take into account when setting standards for visitor parking in residential areas?

Car clubs

Car clubs can provide residents with access to a vehicle when needed without the costs and responsibilities of owning a private car. Having conveniently located club cars in new developments is expected to play an important role in supporting sustainable travel and reducing parking demand.

Our new Local Plan will therefore require residential developments over 50 dwellings to provide up to one dedicated car club parking bay per 50 dwellings. Sites larger than 100 dwellings will generally be required to provide, in partnership with a car club operator, one or more club cars so that every dwelling is within around 400m on foot from a club car in a designated parking bay.

Q69. Do you think these are reasonable expectations of residential developments to support access to club cars? Yes / No

If not, please propose alternative thresholds with justifications.

Loading bays

Online shopping and home delivery services are now a routine part of everyday life. New residential developments therefore need to be designed to enable deliveries, carers, tradespeople and other short-stay users to park close to dwellings safely and without causing an obstruction.

Our new Local Plan will require developments to provide convenient loading and short-stay parking facilities close to homes:

- A loading or short-stay parking bay should be provided within 50 metres of every dwelling entrance.
- Bays should be designed to accommodate a large van (up to 3.5 tonnes).

Q70. What do you think is the maximum convenient distance from a loading bay to your front door for home deliveries or loading/unloading your car if it is not parked on a driveway? 50m / 40m / 25m / other (please provide justification)

Non-residential parking

We will review existing non-residential parking standards to ensure they remain appropriate and reflect current evidence, travel patterns and levels of accessibility. Any changes will seek to ensure that parking provision is sufficient to meet operational needs while avoiding excessive provision that can encourage unnecessary car use or result in inefficient use of land.

Public and private car parks should generally provide 7% of parking spaces as accessible bays for disabled staff and visitors.

Parking at retail and leisure destinations will also require a proportion of parking bays close to the building entrance to be wider and prioritised for disabled and family users.

Q71. Are there any specific considerations you think we should take into account when setting car parking standard for non-standard residential and non-residential developments?

Parking Restrictions

Where a residential development proposal has lower parking provision than the target standards, the developer may be required to fund the consultation and, where supported, introduction of parking restrictions, potentially including a Controlled Parking Zone, in areas that would be affected by spillover parking.

For residential and non-residential developments that may attract commuter parking (e.g. that are close to a railway station), our new Local Plan will allow for the introduction of parking restrictions, potentially including a Controlled Parking Zone, within the development site as part of the planning application to be implemented in advance of people taking residence.

Residents of new developments will generally not be eligible for permits to park within current or future Controlled Parking Zones outside of the development.

Q72. Do you agree that developments should be able to include Controlled Parking Zones within their site boundary without a resident consultation? If not, please explain why.

Electric vehicle charge points

Residential development is required to provide EV charging points in accordance with [Building Regulations Part S \(infrastructure for charging electric vehicles\)](#)⁷³.

Non-residential sites will provide charge points in response to market demand. Installing charging points is, in most cases, permitted development.

Disabled parking bays with EV charging points should comply with [Electric Vehicles Accessible Charging Specification PAS1899](#)⁷⁴ standards.

The Local Plan will therefore not include policies on EV charging points.

Travel hubs

Travel Hubs (transport interchanges) can help support sustainable travel by making multimodal journeys easier and more convenient by creating a more connected and sustainable transport network, bringing different travel options together in one convenient location. By making it easier to switch between walking, cycling, public transport and shared mobility services, they can help reduce reliance on private car ownership and provide people with a wider range of travel choices.

Railway stations and bus stations already function as primary Travel Hubs because they already act as transport interchanges. However, there is also a role for secondary Travel Hubs in:

- Town centres
- Village centres
- Neighbourhood and community centres

These need to be highly visible and connected by safe walking and cycling routes from the surrounding area.

Our Local Plan will seek to safeguard land in towns for Travel Hubs and will make it a requirement of Neighbourhood Plans that they also safeguard land in appropriate villages (e.g. on scheduled bus routes) for Travel Hubs.

Q73. Do you agree that our Local Plan should safeguard land for travel hubs in towns? Yes / No. If no, please explain why.

⁷³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infrastructure-for-charging-electric-vehicles-approved-document-s>

⁷⁴ <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/insights-and-media/insights/brochures/pas-1899-electric-vehicles-accessible-charging-specification/>

Q74. Do you agree that Neighbourhood Plans should safeguard land for travel hubs in villages? Yes/No If no, please explain why.

Q75. Do you agree that our Local Plan should require developments of more than 150 dwellings to include a travel hub? Yes / No

If no, please explain why or propose a different threshold

Last-mile delivery

Last-mile delivery is the final stage of the delivery process, where goods are transported from a depot to their final destination, such as a home or business.

The growth of online shopping and home deliveries has increased the number of delivery vehicles on our roads. Last-mile deliveries are mostly undertaken by lorries, vans and cars, generating a large number of relatively short trips in towns that contribute to:

- Traffic congestion.
- Increased air pollution and carbon emissions.
- Road safety concerns where vehicles park unsafely.
- Obstruction of pavements, cycle lanes and bus routes.

One way to reduce these impacts is to create a network of distribution and consolidation depots on the edges of towns where goods to be transferred between large vehicles and electric vans, cargo bikes or other low-emission vehicles for the 'last mile'.

Our new Local Plan will propose safeguarding suitable land for future distribution and consolidation depots where there is evidence that they can support sustainable freight movements and help reduce the impacts of last-mile delivery.

Q76. Do you agree with our proposals to safeguard land for distribution and consolidation depots to reduce the impact of 'last-mile' deliveries and collections? Yes / No

If no, please explain your reasons.

Lorry parking

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) play a vital role in supporting the economy. But to operate safely, drivers are required to take regular rest breaks as part of national road safety regulations.

North Hertfordshire already contains some provision for HGV parking, including:

- The lorry park at Baldock Services on the A1(M) at Junction 10.
- Overnight lorry parking facilities at Woodside Car Park, Hitchin.

As freight activity continues to grow, it is important to ensure that adequate facilities are available for drivers travelling through and working within our District.

We are proposing that our new Local Plan safeguards land in suitable locations for HGV parking and driver welfare facilities, particularly in locations with good access to the strategic road network, including the A1 and A505.

Q77. Are there any locations you believe would be suitable for lorry parking?

Are there any locations you believe would be suitable for driver welfare facilities?

COMMUNITIES AND PLACEMAKING

Communities and placemaking

North Hertfordshire is home to a diverse population, with people of all ages and backgrounds living in our towns, villages and rural communities. It is important that new development creates places that are inclusive, accessible and supportive of people's health and wellbeing.

We want healthy communities to be at the heart of our new Local Plan, and this means ensuring that the homes, neighbourhoods and public spaces we create help people lead active, healthy and connected lives, while providing opportunities for everyone to participate fully in community life.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

National planning policy requires Local Plans to have a clear understanding of the facilities, services and infrastructure needed to support existing and future communities and promote healthy and inclusive places. Our Plan can also designate Local Green Space where national criteria are met. Local Green Space is a designation used to protect green spaces that are important to the local community. This designation protects land from development in almost the same way as Green Belt land, meaning only very limited and exceptional development will normally be allowed.

NDMPs deal with the provision, improvement and retention of community facilities and public service infrastructure in new developments, the restriction of hot food takeaways in areas where children and young people congregate, and also any development that affects existing recreational land facilities or Local Green Spaces. Any green space that is close to the community it serves, holds a particular local significance, and is local in character and not an extensive tract of land can be designated.

What does the data tell us?

Life Expectancy

Life expectancy in North Hertfordshire is reasonably high compared to the national average

Table 14 – Life expectancy in North Hertfordshire, 2023 - 2025

	North Hertfordshire	England
Men	81.2 years	79.7 years
Women	84,1 years	83.5 years

Source - [Health and Wellbeing Profile - County | Hertfordshire | Report Builder for ArcGIS](#)⁷⁵

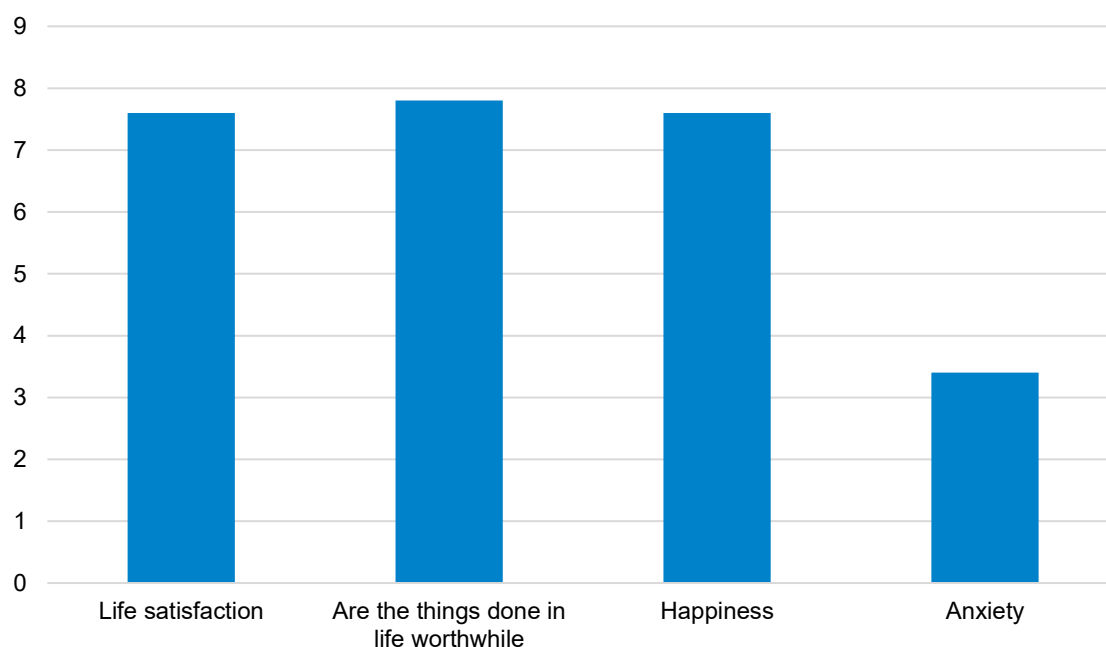
Mental health

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) carry out an Annual Population Survey that asks people in the UK to rate their well-being through four measures:

- Life satisfaction,
- Feeling the things done in life are worthwhile,
- Happiness, and
- Anxiety.

Responses are on an 11-point scale, where 0 is "Not at all" and 10 is "Completely".

Figure 29 – Well-being in North Hertfordshire, 2022 - 2023



Source – [ONS Annual Population Survey](#)⁷⁶

Disability

The 2021 Census shows that 21,236 residents of North Hertfordshire are disabled under the Equality Act, whilst a further 10,814 residents had conditions or illnesses that did not qualify them as disabled under the Equality Act⁷⁷.

Additional data on the wider demographics of our communities is set out in both the baseline for the [Sustainability Appraisal](#) and the [Equality Impact Assessment](#).

⁷⁵ <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/eb7013b48b5c416e814a386cde0b8c81/E10000015?clear=true>

⁷⁶ <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c46f72e1fade4249aad53656d4773ce4/E07000099>

⁷⁷ <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c46f72e1fade4249aad53656d4773ce4/E07000099>

Healthy and wellbeing in our communities

Creating healthy communities is a key part of planning for the future. The [Hertfordshire Safe and Healthy Places Framework](#)⁷⁸ promotes a 'Health in All Policies' approach, recognising that the places where we live, work and spend our time can have a significant impact on our physical and mental wellbeing.

This approach encourages health considerations to be embedded throughout the plan-making process, rather than treated as a separate issue. It recognises that access to good housing, green spaces, community facilities, employment, education and sustainable transport all contribute to healthier lives and reduced health inequalities.

The Framework supports the creation of places that:

- Encourage walking, cycling and other forms of active travel.
- Provide access to parks, open spaces and nature.
- Promote social interaction and community connections.
- Support good mental and physical health.
- Improve access to healthcare and local services.
- Create safe, inclusive and accessible environments for people of all ages and abilities.
- Help reduce health inequalities between different communities.

As we prepare our new Local Plan, we will consider how planning policies can contribute to healthier communities and support the principles of the Hertfordshire Safe and Healthy Places Framework. This will help ensure that health and wellbeing are considered alongside housing, transport, the environment, town centres and other aspects of growth and development.

Q78. Do you support our Local Plan taking a "Health in All Policies" approach to help improve health and wellbeing outcomes across North Hertfordshire? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Q79. Are there any specific health and wellbeing issues that the Local Plan should address or place greater emphasis on?

Please provide your comments

⁷⁸ <https://hertshealthyplacemaking-hertscc.hub.arcgis.com/>

Open space

Open spaces can provide a wide range of environmental, social and health benefits. Socially, they provide places for recreation, informal play, community activity and helping to improve the quality of life of the people who use them. They also support health and wellbeing of people by encouraging physical activity and providing space for leisure.

The NPPF defines 'open space' as all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.

We are currently undertaking an open space study, identifying the overall provision of open space in our District, the main deficiencies in terms of quantity and quality of open spaces, and areas for improvement.

Our current Local Plan does not designate any Open Spaces, nor does it designate any Local Green Spaces. To identify land suitable for Local Green Space designation in the new Local Plan, we are considering a call for Local Green Space sites where anyone can submit sites for our consideration. These will then be assessed against national policy criteria and be designated where suitable.

Q80. Do you support the designation of open spaces in the Local Plan? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Q81. Do you support the designation of Local Green Spaces in our new Local Plan to help protect areas that are demonstrably special to local communities? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Social Infrastructure

As North Hertfordshire grows, new homes and jobs need to be supported by the right infrastructure, helping communities remain healthy, connected and resilient.

To help shape our approach, we are preparing and reviewing a range of evidence, including:

- An Infrastructure Delivery Plan, identifying the infrastructure needed to support future growth.
- An [Outdoor Playing Pitch Strategy](#)⁷⁹, assessing current and future needs for sports pitches and outdoor recreation.

⁷⁹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

- An Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy, reviewing demand for indoor leisure and sports facilities.
- A Burials Study, considering future cemetery and burial provision.

We will work closely with infrastructure providers and partner organisations to understand how growth will affect demand for services and facilities. This includes organisations responsible for:

- Education and schools.
- Healthcare services.
- Emergency services.
- Community facilities.
- Sports and leisure provision.
- Utilities and other essential infrastructure

This collaboration will help ensure that sufficient land is identified, where needed, for new facilities and that future development supports the delivery plans of key service providers.

For larger development sites, we will also consider whether new facilities should be provided as part of the development itself, helping to create well-served and sustainable neighbourhoods from the outset.

We will also work with town and parish councils, and neighbourhood planning groups to better understand local needs and priorities. This will help inform future infrastructure planning, neighbourhood priorities and the use of developer contributions to support community projects and improvements.

Q82. Do you agree with the proposed approach to planning for social infrastructure? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Public toilets

Public toilets are an important part of community infrastructure and can play a significant role in supporting health, wellbeing, inclusion and accessibility. Access to safe, clean and conveniently located toilet facilities enables people to spend longer in town centres, parks, open spaces and other public locations, supporting both local communities and the local economy.

The availability of public toilets can be particularly important for older people, young children and families, pregnant women, people with disabilities or long-term health conditions, and those whose employment requires them to spend extended periods away from home, such as delivery drivers, bus drivers, taxi drivers and other mobile workers. A lack of accessible facilities can discourage people from visiting local centres, participating in community activities, or travelling independently.

Publicly accessible toilets can be provided in a variety of ways, including:

- Dedicated public toilet buildings.
- Toilets within community facilities, libraries and public buildings.

- Toilets within transport hubs and public transport interchanges.
- Customer and publicly accessible toilets within larger retail, leisure, commercial and mixed-use developments.
- Facilities designed to meet a range of needs, including wheelchair-accessible toilets, Changing Places toilets, family rooms and gender-neutral provision where appropriate.

Changing Places toilets provide larger, fully accessible facilities for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, serious mobility impairments and other complex needs, together with their carers. The provision of Changing Places facilities in key destinations can help ensure that all members of the community are able to access services, facilities, employment opportunities, open spaces and leisure activities with dignity and independence.

Q83. Should the Local Plan seek to protect existing public toilets from unnecessary loss and require larger commercial, retail, leisure, transport or mixed-use developments to provide publicly accessible toilet facilities, including accessible and Changing Places toilets where appropriate? Yes/ No

Please explain your reasons

Design codes

Design codes can help provide clear expectations for developers, communities and decision-makers, ensuring that new development reflects local character while meeting the needs of current and future residents.

Our current [District Design Code](#)⁸⁰ includes principles covering:

- High-quality open spaces.
- Streets that prioritise walking, wheeling and cycling.
- Well-integrated development.
- Communities that include everyone.
- Efficient use of land.
- Neighbourhoods that offer opportunities for everyone.
- Buildings that relate to and define a place.

Q84. Are there any additional design principles that should be included in the District Design Code?

Please provide your comments

⁸⁰ [north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/North Herts Design Code_SPD.pdf](http://north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/North%20Herts%20Design%20Code_SPD.pdf)

Whilst a district-wide design code sets broad expectations, there may be benefits in preparing more detailed guidance for specific types of development.

For example, a Householder Design Code could provide guidance on:

- Building relationships, spacing and privacy.
- Building height, scale and massing.
- Materials and local character.
- Parking, access and landscaping.

A Retail and Town Centre Design Code could address:

- Shopfront design.
- Signage and fascias.
- Awnings and canopies.
- Accessibility and frontage treatments.

More detailed design codes could help improve design quality, provide greater certainty for applicants and communities, and ensure consistency across North Hertfordshire.

Q85. Should we prepare more detailed design codes for specific types of development, such as householder extensions, retail premises or town centre development? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Masterplanning

Masterplans provide a clear framework for larger developments, helping to ensure that homes, infrastructure, open spaces, facilities and transport connections are planned in a coordinated way.

They can help achieve better outcomes by:

- Creating well-designed and connected neighbourhoods.
- Ensuring infrastructure is planned alongside development.
- Providing certainty for residents, developers and service providers.
- Supporting high-quality placemaking.
- Helping communities understand how sites will be developed over time.

Q86. The current Local Plan requires masterplans for developments of 100 or more dwellings. Do you agree with this threshold? Yes / No

**If not, what threshold do you think would be more appropriate?
Please explain your reasons**

**Q87. Are there any other placemaking, design or community
issues that you think the Local Plan should address?**

COMMUNICATIONS AND UTILITIES

Communications and utilities

Supporting growth in North Hertfordshire relies on a wide range of essential infrastructure and services.

Many of these services are planned, funded and delivered across areas that extend beyond North Hertfordshire's boundaries. Decisions on investment, capacity and future provision are often made at a larger scale by infrastructure providers, utility companies, regulators and public bodies.

To ensure that growth is supported by the infrastructure communities need, we will continue to work closely with infrastructure providers, neighbouring authorities and other partners throughout the preparation of our Local Plan.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

We are required to plan positively for, and support high-quality communications infrastructure as well as the expansion and maintenance of utility infrastructure.

However, our Local Plan will not cover issues of waste and minerals as these are part of the Development Plan that currently sits with [Hertfordshire County Council](#) and will eventually be subsumed as part of the Spatial Development Strategy for Hertfordshire. Nor will it include additional policies on issues such as proposals for the expansion or upgrading of electronic telecommunications networks and infrastructure as these are already addressed through the NDMPsnational development management policy.

What does the data tell us?

Wastewater and Sewerage

Anglian Water

Evidence from Anglian Water's [Drainage and Water Recycling Management Plan 2023](#)⁸¹ (DWMP) identifies significant growth across the Upper and Bedford Ouse catchment, including:

- An estimated population increase of 136,350 people between 2025 and 2050.
- Potential infrastructure investment of up to £476 million between 2025 and 2050.

The DWMP also identifies specific improvements within North Hertfordshire, including:

- Increased wastewater network capacity in Letchworth Garden City by 2035.

⁸¹ <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/about-us/dwmp/dwmp-1.pdf>

- Programmes to remove 25% of surface water from the wastewater network in Letchworth Garden City and Hitchin by 2050, helping to improve network resilience and reduce the risk of flooding and sewer overflows.

As part of the plan-making process, we will work closely with Anglian Water's Strategic Growth Team to ensure that:

- Infrastructure requirements are identified early in the plan-making process.
- Opportunities to reduce pressure on the sewerage network are explored through sustainable drainage and water management measures.
- New development is supported by the infrastructure needed to operate effectively and sustainably.

Thames Water

Parts of southern North Hertfordshire are served by Thames Water, whose [Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan 2023](#)⁸² (DWMP) and [Hertfordshire Catchment Strategic Plan](#)⁸³ set out the long-term investment and infrastructure improvements required to support future growth and improve network resilience.

The evidence identifies a range of challenges across the catchment of Rye Meads Sewerage Treatment Works, including increased pressure on the wastewater network, the risk of hydraulic sewer flooding and the need to manage surface water more effectively.

As we prepare our new Local Plan, we will continue to engage with Thames Water to ensure that:

- Capacity constraints are identified and understood at an early stage.
- Opportunities for sustainable drainage and surface water management are incorporated into new development.
- Future residents and businesses are supported by resilient and reliable infrastructure.

Water (Mains supply)

Evidence from Affinity Water's [Water Resources Management Plan \(WRMP\) 2024](#)⁸⁴ highlights the importance of using water more efficiently and reducing pressure on water resources.

Many of the measures proposed through our new Local Plan will support the objectives of Affinity Water's Water Resources Management Plan.

As part of preparing the new Local Plan, we will continue to engage with Affinity Water and other infrastructure providers to understand future water supply requirements and ensure that planned growth can be supported sustainably.

By planning positively for water efficiency and environmental protection, we can help ensure that North Hertfordshire has resilient water supplies while safeguarding the district's important water environments for future generations.

⁸² <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/regulation/drainage-and-wastewater-management/dwmp23>

⁸³ <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/media-library/lb2jnaoq/hertfordshire-catchment-strategic-plan.pdf>

⁸⁴ <https://affinitywater.uk.engagementhq.com/wrmp>

Water Cycle Strategy

We will be producing a Water Cycle Strategy that considers water supply, wastewater infrastructure, flood risk and environmental protection to ensure our Local Plan can deliver sustainable growth. It will show:

- whether there is enough wastewater capacity for new development
- whether there is adequate water supply for new developments
- whether there is good water quality within the local catchment
- the risk of flooding, particularly from surface water

Electricity

UKPN's long-term plans focus on enabling the electrification of transport, heating and energy generation while maintaining a reliable and resilient electricity network.

As we move towards net zero carbon emissions, demand for electricity is expected to increase significantly. For North Hertfordshire, this transition is likely to require substantial investment in electricity infrastructure and network capacity over the coming decades. UKPN identifies:

- Reinforcement and upgrading of the local electricity network.
- New grid connections to support housing and employment growth.
- Connections for renewable energy projects, including solar farms.
- Infrastructure to support battery energy storage facilities.
- Increased provision of electric vehicle charging hubs.
- Network improvements to support the decarbonisation of heating and transport.

The transition to a more electrified energy system also places greater emphasis on [Local Area Energy Planning](#)⁸⁵, helping to identify where future energy demand is likely to arise and how infrastructure investment can be coordinated alongside planned growth.

Gas

Cadent Gas has published a [Long Term Development Plan](#)⁸⁶ that recognises the changing role of gas as the UK transitions towards a low-carbon energy system.

Cadent's Long Term Plan acknowledges that future development is likely to rely less on natural gas as buildings become more energy efficient and alternative low-carbon heating technologies, such as heat pumps and heat networks, become more widely used. This shift is also reflected in national policy and building standards, including the Future Homes and Buildings Standards.

At the same time, Cadent identifies opportunities for the gas network to contribute to decarbonisation. In particular, the company highlights the potential role of biomethane, a renewable gas produced from organic materials, as a lower-carbon alternative to natural

⁸⁵ <https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pn-0703/>

⁸⁶ <https://cadentgas.com/getcontentasset/fe78fbee-7896-4c69-8f6b-a4b55772f072/1edc10b3-193a-4a87-9cfc-cbb68531e06b/cadent-long-term-development-plan-2025-final.pdf?language=en>

gas. Cadent's long-term vision includes increasing the use of low-carbon gases within the energy system where this is practical and sustainable to do so.

The transition to a low-carbon energy future will require coordination between electricity, gas and heat infrastructure providers. As heating systems evolve and energy demands change, it will be important to ensure that new development is planned alongside appropriate investment in supporting infrastructure.

Waste and recycling

Whilst the responsibility for waste planning rests with HCC through the [Hertfordshire Waste Local Plan](#) (HWP)⁸⁷, it is important that our Local Plan recognises the facilities that already exist within North Hertfordshire and their role in supporting future growth.

The HWP identifies three allocated waste management sites within North Hertfordshire:

- Cumberlow Green Farm
- Bury Mead Road, Hitchin
- The New Barn, A1(M) J10

These facilities form part of the county-wide network of waste management infrastructure and help provide capacity for the treatment, recycling and management of waste.

In addition, HCC has identified a number of sites within designated employment areas that are considered potentially compatible with waste management uses, although many currently have limited immediate redevelopment potential. These include sites within:

- Wilbury Way, Hitchin (four sites)
- Cadwell Lane / Wallace Way, Hitchin
- Icknield Way East, Letchworth Garden City
- Works Road / Blackhorse Road, Letchworth Garden City
- Orchard Road West, Royston
- Station Approach, Hitchin
- Royston Road, Baldock

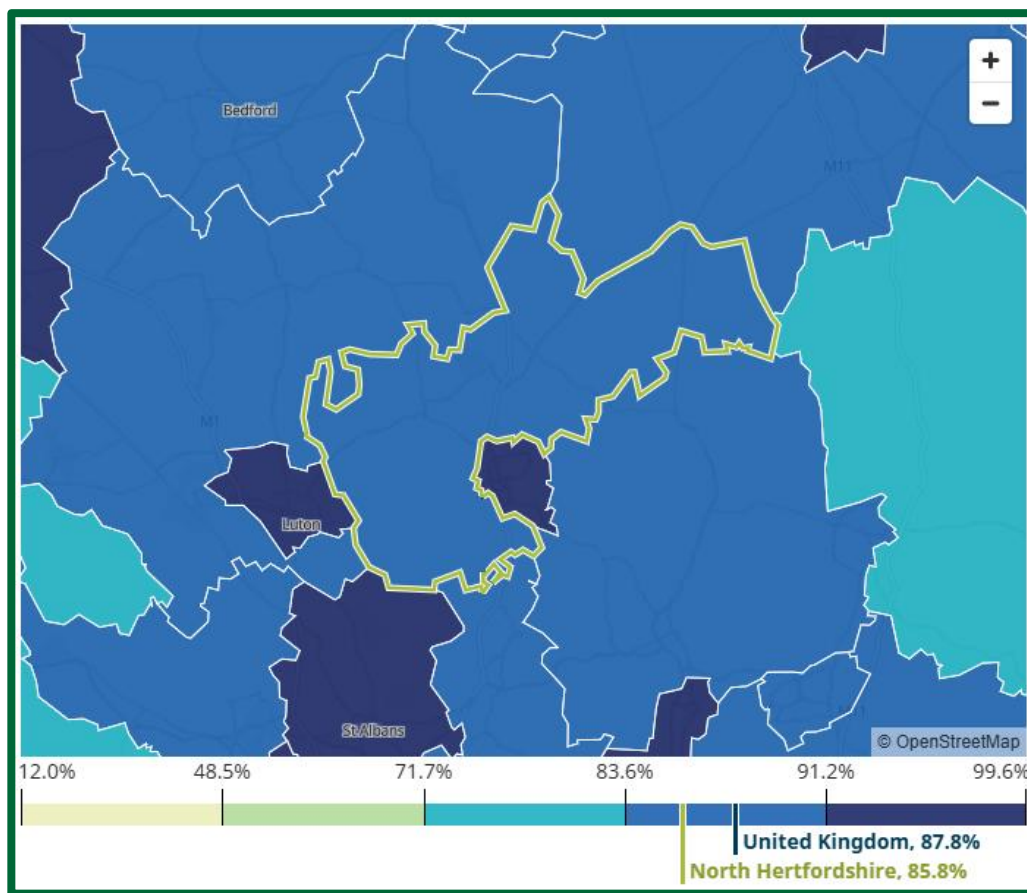
The identification of these locations does not imply that waste development will occur on these sites. Rather, it recognises that they are situated within employment areas where waste-related activities could potentially be compatible with surrounding land uses.

As North Hertfordshire grows, it will be important to ensure that sufficient waste management capacity is available to support households and businesses while helping to increase recycling rates, reduce waste and support a more resource-efficient economy.

Digital Infrastructure

Evidence from the Office for National Statistics shows that 85.8% of premises in North Hertfordshire have gigabit-capable service (download speeds of 1,000Mbps or more) coverage.

⁸⁷ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/planning-in-hertfordshire/minerals-and-waste-planning/waste-planning/waste-planning.aspx>

Figure 30 - Percentage of premises with gigabit-capable service, Jan 2026

Source - [Ofcom](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-and-broadband/coverage-and-speeds/infrastructure-research)⁸⁸

Reliable access to high-quality digital infrastructure, including fixed broadband and mobile networks, enables people to work, learn, access healthcare, communicate and participate fully in society.

Strong digital connectivity supports:

- Economic growth and business competitiveness.
- Home working and flexible employment opportunities.
- Access to public services and healthcare.
- Education and lifelong learning.
- Social inclusion and community wellbeing.
- Innovation and technological advancement.
- More efficient use of infrastructure and public services.
- Reduced need to travel, helping to lower congestion and carbon emissions.

⁸⁸ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-and-broadband/coverage-and-speeds/infrastructure-research>

As technology continues to evolve, access to fast and reliable digital connectivity will become increasingly important for residents, businesses and service providers across North Hertfordshire.

Our new Local Plan will therefore consider digital connectivity as a key component of sustainable development, helping to ensure that decisions about land use, infrastructure, public services and investment support improved digital outcomes across our District.

Building Regulations ([Approved Document R⁸⁹](#)) requires developers to install gigabit-ready physical infrastructure and a functional gigabit-capable connection for nearly all new homes, subject to a £2,000 per-dwelling cost cap.

Data Centres

Data centres are becoming increasingly important as demand for digital services, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and data storage continues to grow. They provide the infrastructure that supports many of the online services used by residents, businesses and public organisations every day.

Hertfordshire is considered an attractive location for data centre investment due to a number of strategic advantages, including:

- Proximity to London and major digital markets.
- Strong road and rail connections.
- Existing electricity and fibre-optic infrastructure.
- Its location within the wider Cambridge-London growth corridor.

Several data centres have already been developed elsewhere in Hertfordshire. While there are currently no major data centres within North Hertfordshire, there has been some interest in potential locations within our District.

However, data centres can present significant planning challenges. These may include:

- Very high electricity demand.
- Potential impacts on the capacity of local power networks.
- Water consumption and cooling requirements.
- The need for substantial digital and utility infrastructure.
- Effects on the landscape and local character.
- Potential impacts on the Green Belt.
- Relatively low levels of long-term employment compared with the amount of land and infrastructure required.

At present, we have not commissioned specific evidence to assess the need for, or suitability of, data centre development in North Hertfordshire. Further work is needed to understand potential opportunities, constraints and infrastructure requirements.

There may also be benefits to considering data centres at a wider-than-local scale. The SDS for Hertfordshire could provide an opportunity to take a coordinated regional approach, identifying suitable locations and considering infrastructure requirements across the county

⁸⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infrastructure-for-electronic-communications-approved-document-r>

and neighbouring areas. However, the SDS preparation may not align with the timetable for our new Local Plan.

Q88. What is the most appropriate approach for planning future data centre development in North Hertfordshire?

- 1. Proactively identify and allocate sites in the Local Plan**
- 2. Consider data centre requirements as part of a future SDS covering a wider area**
- 3. Other (please specify)**

Please explain your answer

Q90. Are there any other utilities and communication issues that you think we should think about?

EVIDENCE BASE

Evidence Base

Below is a list of evidence base that has been published, is in preparation or is intended to be published.

Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment

Strategic Housing Market Availability Assessment

5 year housing land supply

Settlement Hierarchy

Area Strategies

Green Belt Study

Conservation Areas Appraisals and local listed buildings

Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment

Employment Needs Review

Town Centres Strategies

Retail Needs Review - update

Landscape Review

Locally Valued Landscape Review

Open Space Study

Water Cycle Study

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

Infrastructure Delivery Plan

Outdoor playing pitch strategy

Indoor sports strategy

Burials Study

To commission

Survey and analysis of car and cycle parking provision and utilisation in non-standard residential and non-residential developments

Grid capacity and renewable energy opportunities

All [evidence base](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base)⁹⁰ documents will be published on our website. Expected dates for those yet to be published are also set out.

⁹⁰ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

GLOSSARY

Glossary

The Glossary below aligns with the NPPF glossary.

Affordable housing: Housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers or national military housing needs); and which complies with one or more of the following definitions:

- a. Social Rent: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the government's rent policy for Social Rent; (b) the landlord is a registered provider; and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.
- b. Other affordable housing for rent: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the government's rent policy for Affordable Rent, or is at least 20% below local market rents (including service charges where applicable); (b) the landlord is a registered provider, except where it is included as part of a Build to Rent scheme (in which case the landlord need not be a registered provider); and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. For Build to Rent schemes affordable housing for rent is expected to be the normal form of affordable housing provision (and, in this context, is known as Affordable Private Rent).
- c. Discounted market sales housing: is that sold at a discount of at least 20% below local market value. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Provisions should be in place to ensure housing remains at a discount for future eligible households.
- d. Other affordable routes to home ownership: is housing provided for sale that provides a route to ownership for those who could not achieve home ownership through the market. It includes shared ownership, relevant equity loans, other low cost homes for sale (at a price equivalent to at least 20% below local market value) and rent to buy (which includes a period of intermediate rent). Where public grant funding is provided, there should be provisions for the homes to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for any receipts to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision, or refunded to government or the relevant authority specified in the funding agreement.
- e. Military affordable housing: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is sub-market military rent as determined by the Ministry of Defence; and (b) it includes provisions to remain as affordable housing for future eligible households, service personnel and veteran households (including widowed partners and spouses of service personnel), or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.

Air Quality Management Areas: Areas designated by local authorities because they are not likely to achieve national air quality objectives by the relevant deadlines.

Article 4 direction: A direction made under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 which withdraws permitted development rights granted by that Order.

Best and most versatile agricultural land: Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC). ALC is graded from 1 to 5 and based on yield, range and versatility of use, and need for input.

Brownfield land: See Previously developed land.

Climate change adaptation: Adjustments made to natural or human systems in response to the actual or anticipated impacts of climate change, to mitigate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.

Climate change mitigation: Action to reduce the impact of human activity on the climate system, primarily through reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Community facilities: Meeting places, public houses, places of worship, cultural venues, youth centres, allotments, cemeteries and burial grounds, and facilities for play, sport and informal recreation.

Community-led development: A development taken forward by, or with, a not-for-profit organisation, that is primarily for the purpose of meeting the needs of its members or the wider local community, rather than being a primarily commercial enterprise. The organisation should be created, managed and democratically controlled by its members, and membership of the organisation should be open to all beneficiaries and prospective beneficiaries of that organisation. It may take any one of various legal forms including a co-operative society, community benefit society and company limited by guarantee. The organisation should own, manage or steward the development in a manner consistent with its purpose, potentially through a mutually supported arrangement with a registered provider of social housing. The benefits of the development to the community should be clearly defined and consideration given to how those benefits can be protected over time, including in the event of the organisation being wound up.

Connectivity: As defined in the NPPF, this refers to the degree to which a location provides access to jobs, services, and facilities by sustainable transport modes. The Connectivity Tool (Connectivity Tool - GOV.UK) provides a means of assessing this.

Conservation/conserve (for heritage policy): The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains, preserves and, where appropriate, enhances its significance.

Design code: A set of illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site, or area. The graphic and written components of the code should build upon a design vision, such as a masterplan or other design and development framework for a site or area.

Design guide: A document providing guidance on how development can be carried out in accordance with good design practice, often produced by a local authority.

Designated heritage asset: A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated under the relevant legislation or the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

Development plan: Is defined in section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, and includes adopted spatial development strategies, adopted local plans, adopted minerals and waste plans, adopted supplementary plans, neighbourhood plans that have

been made and published and the policies maps for the area. Neighbourhood plans that have been approved at referendum are also part of the development plan, unless the local planning authority decides that the neighbourhood plan should not be made.

Disabled people: People have a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment, and that impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. These persons include, but are not limited to, people with ambulatory difficulties, blindness, learning difficulties, autism and mental health needs.

Edge of centre: For retail purposes, a location that is well-connected to, and up to 300 metres from, a primary shopping area (if no primary shopping area has been defined in the development plan, it should be regarded as a location that is well-connected to, and up to 300 metres from, that part of the town centre within which retail uses predominate – measured from its outer edge). For all other main town centre uses, a location within 300 metres of a town centre boundary. For office development, this includes locations outside the town centre but within 500 metres of a public transport interchange. In determining whether a site falls within the definition of edge of centre, account should be taken of local circumstances.

Electricity network infrastructure: Infrastructure that facilitates the transmission of electricity from generation sources to end users, including transmission, distribution, and interconnection. This infrastructure is essential for the operation and expansion of the electricity network and includes components such as substations, converter stations, interconnectors, and cables.

Freight and logistics: Uses directly associated with the processing, storage, distribution and transportation of goods, alongside supporting infrastructure. This includes (but is not limited to) storage and distribution operations, rail freight terminals, intermodal facilities, HGV operating centres, lorry parking facilities, ports and inland border facilities.

Geodiversity: The range of rocks, minerals, fossils, soils and landforms, together with the natural processes which form and alter them.

Green infrastructure: A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity. It includes parks and gardens, green spaces, green corridors such as rivers and canals, sustainable drainage systems, features for species, street trees and community orchards.

Grey belt: For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in policy GB2.

Gypsies and travellers: Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependants' educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a caravan, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or circus people travelling together as such.

Habitats site: Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and also including candidate Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas, listed or proposed Ramsar sites, relevant Marine Sites, and compensatory habitats which relate to these sites.

Heritage asset: A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes but is not limited to designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing). Potential Special Protection Areas, possible Special Areas of Conservation and proposed Ramsar sites are sites on which the Government has initiated public consultation on the scientific case for designation as a Special Protection Area, candidate Special Area of Conservation or Ramsar Site.

Historic environment: All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora.

Historic Environment Record: Information services that seek to provide access to comprehensive and dynamic resources relating to the historic environment of a defined geographic area for public benefit and use.

Housing Delivery Test: Measures net homes delivered in a local authority area against the homes required, using national statistics and local authority data. The Secretary of State will publish the Housing Delivery Test results for each local authority in England annually.

International, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity: All international sites (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, and Ramsar sites), national sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and locally designated sites including Local Wildlife Sites.

Large-scale shared living accommodation: Accommodation which provides private rooms alongside shared communal spaces and facilities. This type of accommodation does not constitute self-contained dwellings (use class C3), HMOs, student accommodation, hotels, or other residential institutions.

Local Development Order: An Order made by a local planning authority (under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) that grants planning permission for a specific development proposal or classes of development.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies: A system of spatial strategies for nature and environmental improvement required by law under s.104 of the Environment Act 2021.

Local Nature Reserves: A site managed as a nature reserve under s.21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by principal local authorities.

Local plan: A plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community.

Local Wildlife Sites: A term used to describe non-statutory areas identified by local authorities in the development plan for their biodiversity value. There are a number of different terms in use locally to describe these sites, including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) and County Wildlife Sites (CWS).

Main town centre uses: Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); banks; professional services; offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).

Major development: For housing, development where 10 or more homes will be provided, or the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more. For non-residential development it means additional floorspace of 1,000m² or more, or a site of 1 hectare or more, or as otherwise provided in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

Masterplan: A masterplan is a flexible, placemaking tool, providing a three-dimensional spatial framework and long-term vision for the development or regeneration of area-specific or site-specific locations.

Medium development: A sub-set of major development, comprising housing development where 10-49 homes (inclusive) will be provided, and the site has an area of up to 2.5 hectares. Policies in this Framework which relate to major development involving the provision of housing also apply to medium development, whereas policies which apply exclusively to medium development do not apply to larger scales of development.

Mineral Consultation Area: A geographical area based on a Mineral Safeguarding Area, where the district or borough council should consult the mineral planning authority for any proposals for non-minerals development.

Minerals and waste plans: A plan containing policies on mineral and waste development, drawn up by the minerals and waste planning authority in consultation with the community. Minerals and waste matters can be dealt with in separate plans or combined with local plans where an authority is responsible for all these matters.

Mineral Safeguarding Area: An area designated by minerals planning authorities which covers known deposits of minerals which are desired to be kept safeguarded from unnecessary sterilisation by non-mineral development.

Model Design Codes: Standard design requirements published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for common development types that can be used and adopted locally.

National Landscapes: Areas legally designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Neighbourhood plan: A plan prepared by a parish council or neighbourhood forum for a designated neighbourhood area. In law this is described as a neighbourhood development plan in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Net developable area: For the purposes of references to density, net developable area is the part of a site that can be developed for housing and directly associated uses, including access roads, hard landscaping (including footways, paved areas and servicing areas), private gardens, ground floor private and communal amenity space, ground level parking and incidental open spaces (including verges and threshold planting). It excludes land that is not suitable for built development, such as land required for strategic infrastructure, parks and public squares, and open spaces that deliver benefits as part of the wider green infrastructure network (including significant onsite biodiversity net gain enhancements and significant sustainable drainage features).

Older people: People over or approaching retirement age, including the active, newly-retired through to the very frail elderly; and whose housing needs can encompass accessible, adaptable general needs housing through to the full range of retirement and specialised housing for those with support or care needs.

Open space: All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.

Out of centre: A location which is not in or on the edge of a centre but not necessarily outside the settlement.

Pitches and Plots: 'Pitch' means a pitch on a gypsy and traveller site and 'plot' means a pitch on a travelling showpeople site (often called a 'yard'). This terminology differentiates between residential pitches for gypsies and travellers and mixed-use plots for travelling showpeople, which may / will need to incorporate space or to be split to allow for the storage of equipment.

Planning condition: A condition imposed on a grant of planning permission (in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) or a condition included in a Local Development Order, Mayoral Development Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

Planning obligation: A legal agreement entered into under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to mitigate the impacts of a development proposal.

Policies Map: A map prepared and maintained by a local planning authority, illustrating policies across all parts of the development plan.

Previously developed land: Land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed). It also includes land comprising large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed. Previously developed land excludes: land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed but where provision for restoration has been made through development management procedures (including development related to minerals extraction, waste disposal by landfill and renewable and low carbon energy development, where provision for restoration exists); land in built-up areas such as residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape.

Primary shopping area: Defined area where retail development is concentrated.

Priority or threatened species: Species which are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of development, including but not limited to species contained in the list of species and habitats of principal importance in England published by the Secretary of State pursuant to section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, protected species listed in Schedule 2 and Schedule 5 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, and species protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Protected Landscapes: Refers to National Parks, the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads and National Landscapes in England.

Public service infrastructure: Education and healthcare facilities of all types, and facilities for blue light, social care, library and criminal justice uses.

Ramsar sites: Wetlands of international importance, designated under the 1971 Ramsar Convention.

Reasonable walking distance: For the purpose of NPPF policies S5, L3, GB7 (relating to land around well-connected stations), this should be considered to be around 800 metres, or

around 10 minutes' walk time if topography, route availability and quality or physical barriers would prevent or discourage walking from up to 800 metres away. For the purpose of NPPF policy HC5 (hot food takeaways) it should be considered to be around 400 metres, or around five minutes' walk time if topography, route availability and quality or physical barriers would prevent or discourage walking up to 400 metres. Where a reasonable walking distance is required to be calculated when applying NPPF policies S5(1)(h), L3(2)(c) and GB7(1)(h), and only part of the site falls within the reasonable walking distance, those sub-paragraphs of NPPF policies S5, L3 and GB7 only apply to the area of the site within that reasonable walking distance.

Renewable and low carbon energy: Includes energy for heating and cooling as well as generating electricity. Renewable energy covers those energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment – including from the wind, the fall of water, the movement of the oceans, from the sun and also from biomass and deep geothermal heat. Low carbon technologies are those that can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions (compared to conventional use of fossil fuels). These technologies include, but are not limited to, nuclear power and supporting infrastructure, low carbon fuels such as biomethane and hydrogen, heat from recoverable sources (such as heat recovered from data centres), and the storage of renewable and low carbon energy, including long-duration and short-duration energy storage such as Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).

Self-build and custom-build housing: Housing built by an individual, a group of individuals, or persons working with or for them, to be occupied by that individual. Such housing can be either market or affordable housing. A legal definition, for the purpose of applying the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (as amended), is contained in section 1(A1) and (A2) of that Act.

Setting of a heritage asset: The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.

Settlement: Includes cities, towns, villages and other predominantly built-up areas, including land which is allocated or has permission for development which will form part of the built-up area once the development is complete. This includes areas defined as a settlement in the development plan (whether using defined settlement boundaries or equivalent terms, or criteria for identifying settlement extents where boundaries have yet to be defined). Settlements do not include hamlets and scattered groups of houses located outside predominantly built-up areas, unless specifically defined as a settlement in the development plan. For the purpose of the NPPF 2026 they also exclude villages which lie within and are defined as part of the Green Belt in the development plan.

Significance (for heritage policy): The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting. For World Heritage Sites, the cultural value described within each site's Statement of Outstanding Universal Value forms part of its significance.

Site of Special Scientific Interest: Sites notified for their flora, fauna or geological, physiographical or geomorphological features (in England, these sites are notified under s. 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981).

Spatial development strategy: A plan containing policies on the development and use of land on matters of strategic importance to the area prepared by strategic planning authorities.

Special Areas of Conservation: Designated areas which have been given special protection as important conservation sites (in England, these sites are designated under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017).

Special Protection Areas: Areas classified for being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds (in England, these sites are classified under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017).

Strategic environmental assessment: A procedure (set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) which requires the formal environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Supplementary plans: A type of plan that relevant plan-making authorities can choose to prepare to set locally-specific design standards or shape and direct site-specific development. They must undergo consultation and independent examination.

Sustainable drainage system: A sustainable drainage system controls surface water run off close to where it falls, combining a mixture of built and nature-based techniques to mimic natural drainage as closely as possible, and accounting for the predicted impacts of climate change. The type of system that would be appropriate will vary from small scale interventions such as permeable paving and soakaways that can be used in very small developments to larger integrated schemes in major developments.

Sustainable transport modes: Any efficient, safe and accessible means of transport with overall low impact on the environment, including walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport.

Town centre: Area defined in the local authority's policies map in the development plan including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area.

Transport assessment: A comprehensive and systematic process that considers and sets out transport issues relating to a proposed development, in the context of the vision for the scheme. It identifies measures required to support alternatives to the car such as walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport, and to promote accessibility and safety, together with measures that will be needed to deal with the anticipated transport impacts of the development.

Travel plan: A long-term management strategy for an organisation or site that details how agreed sustainable transport objectives are to be delivered, and which is monitored and regularly reviewed.

Travellers: Gypsies and travellers, and travelling showpeople.

Travelling showpeople: Members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows (whether or not travelling together as such). This includes such persons who on the grounds of their own or their family's or dependants' more localised pattern of trading, educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excludes gypsies and travellers as defined separately in this glossary.

Vision-led approach: An approach to transport planning which sets outcomes for a development based on achieving well-designed, sustainable, inclusive and popular places, and provides the transport solutions to deliver those outcomes as opposed to predicting future demand to provide capacity (often referred to as 'predict and provide').

Well-connected station: Railway stations and underground, tram and light rail stops located within a top 80 Travel to Work Area located partially or fully within England by Gross Value Added (GVA)⁷² and which, in the normal weekday timetable, are served (or have a reasonable prospect of being served due to planned upgrades or through agreement with the rail operator) throughout the daytime by at least four trains or trams per hour overall, or at least two trains or trams per hour in any one direction.

Wheeling: The use of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and similar mobility aids as a means of travel.



Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

September 2026



**North
Herts**
Council

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Appendix A – Detailed assessments of spatial development options

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Our Local Plan

Our new Local Plan will set out the long-term vision for our District from 2029 - 2040; identifying how and where new homes, jobs and infrastructure will be delivered. It will seek to address climate change mitigation and adaptation and encourage high-quality sustainable design and protection of the natural environment.

The duration of the Local Plan is 11 years from 1 April 2029 to 31 March 2040. This reflects the new 2026 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (PM2: Local Plans), which states that spatial strategy and policies should look ahead over a minimum 10 year period from adoption.

A key objective of the proposed plan period is to identify enough land to deliver the district's full objectively assessed housing need of 1,036 dwellings per annum, in line with the Government's standard method. The Plan will also need to remain sufficiently flexible to consider any future requests to accommodate unmet housing needs from neighbouring areas, where these are supported by evidence and the Duty to Cooperate requirements.

Our Priorities

We declared a climate emergency in 2019 and committed to take action to address the causes of climate change across our District. Subsequently we declared an ecological emergency in 2023

identifying biodiversity and nature recovery as a strategic priority for planning. Therefore, our new Local Plan will seek to promote sustainable development, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and enhance resilience through adaptation measures.

What is Sustainability Appraisal?

Sustainable Development¹ can be defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

A [Sustainability Appraisal \(SA\)](#) is a methodical and iterative process that must be carried out during the preparation of local plans and spatial development strategies; it is used to evaluate emerging options identified in our Local Plan development against the three elements of sustainability;

- social;
- environmental; and
- economical

SA helps us to select the most sustainable options for our District and helps us fine-tune the policies in our Local Plan.

The [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#) requires us to carry out SA for all proposals in our Plan to ensure we deliver sustainable development. These appraisals integrate the requirements of [the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004](#).

¹ [The Sustainable Development Agenda - United Nations Sustainable Development](#)

Progress to date

A SA Scoping Report was prepared and consulted upon between October and November 2025 as part of the statutory consultation process. The report was shared with the statutory consultees; Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England to seek their views on the scope and methodology of the appraisal. Comments received during the consultation were carefully reviewed and considered, and where appropriate incorporated into the assessment framework. This informed the preparation of a post-consultation updated version of the SA Scoping Report, which is **Part 1** of this report.

The updated Scoping Report established the Sustainability Appraisal Framework that will be used to assess the likely social, economic and environmental effects of the plan. The framework comprises 11 Sustainability Appraisal objectives, each supported by a set of appraisal questions to provide a consistent and transparent basis for assessment. Together, these objectives and questions guide the appraisal of plan policies, site allocations and reasonable alternatives, enabling sustainability considerations to be integrated throughout the plan-making process. The appraisal of spatial development options is **Part 2** of this report.

PART 1 – SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SCOPING REPORT

Part 1 - Introduction

The Scoping process

As shown in the diagram below, scoping involves identifying a set of sustainability issues and objectives that provide a ‘framework’ for the appraisal of our emerging Plan (including reasonable alternatives).

The SA Topics

The topics included in the SA are listed below:

The Natural Environment	The Historic Environment
Climate Change & Flooding	Social & Cultural Infrastructure
Population, Health & Wellbeing	Local Economy & Employment
Transport, Air Quality & Noise	Land, Soils & Waste
Housing	Water Resources & Quality

The SA process

Stage A – setting the content & objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope

- Identify other relevant policies, plans and programmes, and sustainability objectives
- Collect baseline information
- Identify sustainability issues and challenges
- Develop the SA framework
- Consult the statutory consultees on the SA scoping report

Stage B – developing and refining alternatives and assessing effects

- Test the Local Plan objectives against the SA framework
- Develop the Local Plan options including reasonable alternatives
- Evaluate the likely effects of the Local Plan and alternatives
- Consider ways of mitigating adverse effects and maximising beneficial effects
- Propose measures to monitor the significant effects of implementing the Local Plan

Stage C – prepare the SA report

Stage D – seek representations on the SA report from consultation bodies and the public

Stage E – post adoption reporting and monitoring

- Prepare and publish a post-adoption statement
- Monitor significant effects of implementing the Local Plan
- Respond to adverse effects

Consultation responses

The SEA regulations require that we consult the statutory consultees; Environment Agency (EA), Natural England (NE) and Historic England (HE) on the SA scoping report. This consultation was carried out between the 17 October to 24 November 2025 and the statutory consultee responses are summarised in the table below:

Environment Agency (EA)	
Introduction & policy review: Agreed with the principles and objectives outlined and welcomed the consultation on the report. River Basin Management: Pleased to see the inclusion of Plans and the Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.	Noted.
Water (Cycle) Studies: Strongly recommended an updated water cycle study, to include strong engagement with the relevant water companies and the EA.	Noted. NHDC will be conducting a new Water Cycle Study to inform the new Local Plan. This will include engagement with the EA, utilities and other stakeholders.
Additional comments – Recommend the Council takes into account the National Framework for Water Resources 2025	This has been added to the policy review and will be considered in the LP process.

NHDC Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is out of date and will need to be updated	A new SFRA is currently being carried out.
The Natural Environment Chalk streams - Recommended incorporating robust planning policies aimed at deculverting, promoting natural river morphology, promoting nature-based solutions and ensuring the security of buffer zones along chalk rivers. These considerations to be explored in the evidence base and LP policies including 10-metre buffer zone requirements where appropriate.	Noted. We will consider these issues in the water cycle study, the SFRA and the new LP.
Recommended the inclusion of blue infrastructure (in addition to green infrastructure on page 27) and the associated benefits and considerations.	Reference to green infrastructure now changed to green and blue infrastructure, including in the objectives.
Climate change and flooding Recommended the use of the latest data including NaFRA & new national flood and coastal erosion risk information.	The new local plan will be informed by a new SFRA which will be based on the latest available flood risk data including those noted. The EA will be consulted during the SFRA process.
Water resources, additional comments:	Amended this section to emphasise need to

Key sustainability issues should be extended to all forms of flooding as later outlined in the appraisal guide questions on page 35.	consider all sources of flood risk. New appraisal guide question added to reflect.
Population, health and wellbeing: No specific comments but noted the benefits of blue infrastructure on health and wellbeing.	Noted, an additional paragraph has been added to this section highlighting the importance of blue infrastructure to health and wellbeing.
Land, soils and Waste: requested added emphasis on contaminated land	A contaminated land section and appraisal guide questions added to this chapter.
Water resources and quality: agreed with the information included and welcome inclusion of SPZs and SuDS.	Noted.
Main rivers and chalk streams: Welcomed the inclusion of chalk streams and recommended the inclusion of all watercourses (including main rivers). This is to be followed by robust policies that call for the protection of all main rivers, inc. 8-metre buffer zone requirements and a 10-metre buffer zone requirement for chalk streams where appropriate.	Noted. There is a substantial section on river/ water bodies in this chapter in addition to Chalk streams. The buffers required will continue to be implemented through LP and DM policies.
Catchment Data Explorer: LPA must integrate WFD consideration into LPs	Noted. We confirm these points will continue to be

promoting SuDS, avoiding development likely to cause deterioration / cause alteration of river, morphology and supporting catchment-based approach.	considered in planning policies and decision making.
Historic England	
General comments: Strongly advised that the North Herts conservation team be closely involved in the SA preparation and identified Historic England advise on undertaking SA.	Noted. We confirm that the conservation team are involved in the SA process and that we are following the HE guidance on SAs.
Policy review: considered that the Report identified the main plans and programs of relevance to the LP.	Noted.
The Historic Environment: Welcomed the inclusions of baseline information and the recognition of locally significant non-designated heritage assets, the HER, Heritage at Risk and importance of the setting of heritage assets.	Noted.
Key sustainability issues, SA objectives and appraisal guide questions: considered that the Report correctly identifies the key issues and supported the objectives.	Noted.
The SA Framework & Next Steps: Strongly recommended that Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) be prepared for all sites where	Noted. We confirm that HIA's will be required where a site has the potential to impact

development could affect the significance of nearby heritage assets. Ideally, conducted prior to site selection so that they can meaningfully inform this process as well as to identify any site-specific criteria considered necessary for inclusion in the corresponding site-specific policies.	heritage assets. The initial site assessment/selection process is also informed by the local historic environment context.
Allocations (e.g. within a Conservation Area) may provide opportunities for enhancement and addressing heritage at risk. Allocations at considerable distance from a heritage asset could still harm its significance. The cumulative effects of site options on the historic environment should also be taken into account.	Noted. This point will be considered in LP /SA process – We have also tried to reflect these in the objectives/ appraisal guide questions.
Natural England	
Natural England had no comments to make but added that this should not be interpreted as a statement that there are no impacts on the natural environment.	Noted.

Policy Review

A vital first step in any SA is a thorough review of relevant plans, policies, policies and programmes. This helps to set the strategic context, ensuring the appraisal aligns with existing frameworks and supports broader sustainability aims. By identifying synergies, and any potential conflicts, this review sharpens the focus of the SA and strengthens its ability to guide truly sustainable decision-making.

The policies, strategies and plans reviewed are briefly discussed below under the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. Within each pillar, documents will be considered in order of their geographic scale—starting with international, followed by national, regional, and finally local.

Environmental

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2015

World leaders came together in 2015 and made a promise to secure the rights and well-being of everyone on a healthy, thriving planet, this sets out 17 sustainable development goals. These range from access to clean and affordable energy to improved health outcomes.



Kyoto Protocol and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1997

The Local Plan must also align with the ambitions for climate change. Both protocols underline the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The SA should play a key role in steering the plan toward low-carbon, climate-resilient development, assessing how policies and proposals can support emissions reductions and contribute to long-term environmental targets.

The Paris Agreement, 2015

The Agreements central aim is to keep global temperature rise well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, while striving to limit it to 1.5°C. To achieve this, participating countries have pledged to cut GHG emissions through their own nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and strengthen their resilience to climate-related impacts. The agreement represents a united global commitment to long-term environmental stewardship and sustainable development.

European Directive 2001/42/EC

Commonly known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive, it was transposed into UK law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans or Programmes Regulations 2004. This legal framework outlines how the SA process must comply with the Directive, ensuring that environmental considerations are integrated into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes from the outset.

The European Landscape Convention, 2000

The Convention champions the protection, planning, and sustainable management of landscapes across Europe, while fostering international cooperation on landscape-related issues. Open to all member states of the Council of Europe, as well as European non-members, the ELC underscores the value of landscape in shaping cultural identity, environmental health, and community wellbeing. Crucially, it calls for landscape considerations to be fully embedded in regional and local planning, as well as in policies spanning culture, agriculture, the environment, the economy, and social development, recognising its far-reaching impact on people and place.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations, 2019

Updated the 2017 Regulations following the UK's departure from the EU, transferring key responsibilities for habitat and species protection to domestic authorities in England and Wales. This legislation ensures continuity in safeguarding the UK's most valuable natural environments by requiring authorities to maintain and restore protected habitats and wildlife. Where a plan or project could significantly affect a designated site, it must undergo a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to evaluate potential impacts. In addition, authorities are responsible for regular monitoring and reporting on the condition of these protected areas, reinforcing long-term environmental stewardship.

The Environmental Protection Act, 1990

This legislation aims to safeguard the environment by establishing clear rules around waste management and pollution control. It sets out legal duties for businesses, local authorities, and individuals to prevent environmental harm and ensure that waste is handled, stored, and disposed of responsibly. The Act provides a broad

framework for environmental protection, covering key areas such as air and water quality, noise pollution, and the sustainable management of waste.

The Environment Act, 1995

One of its key provisions requires local authorities to regularly assess air quality in their areas and, where standards are not being met, to designate Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). In such cases, local authorities must prepare and implement Air Quality Action Plans (AQAPs) to address the issues identified. Reflecting this responsibility, the Council published its most recent Annual Status Report (ASR) in June 2023, outlining current air quality conditions and actions underway to support improvement.

The Climate Change Act, 2008

Legally commits the UK to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, initially by 80% compared to 1990 levels, later strengthened to a net zero target by 2050. This means that by mid-century, the UK must balance the amount of emissions produced with those removed from the atmosphere. The Act also introduced a pioneering carbon budgeting system, setting binding five-year emission caps to ensure steady progress.

Safeguarding Our Soils – A Strategy for England, 2009

Sets out a long-term vision to ensure all soils are sustainably managed and degradation threats are successfully addressed by 2030. It emphasises the need to better protect agricultural soils, conserve vital stores of soil carbon, enhance resilience to climate change, and prevent pollution. Recognising that development pressures are likely to intensify, the strategy calls on the planning system to play a proactive role in mitigating impacts on soil health. By valuing soil as a critical natural resource, the strategy aims to secure its essential functions for future generations.

The Air Quality Standards Regulations, 2010

Established legally binding limits and targets for key air pollutants, aimed at protecting both public health and the environment. They implement the EU Ambient Air Quality Directive (2008/50/EC) and the Fourth Daughter Directive (2004/107/EC). These regulations set concentration limits for pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), ozone (O₃), and heavy metals. Following Brexit, these standards remain in force, with domestic legislation and regulatory bodies now responsible for monitoring compliance and enforcement.

Flood and Water Management Act, 2010

Outlines a comprehensive approach to managing flood risk from all sources, rivers, surface water, groundwater, and coastal flooding. It promotes the integration of resilience measures into the design of new buildings, ensuring developments are better prepared for future flood events. It also encourages the use of natural processes to reduce flood risk, such as restoring wetlands and creating areas for temporary water storage. A key component is the implementation of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), which help manage surface water runoff in a way that mimics natural drainage, reducing pressure on traditional infrastructure and enhancing local biodiversity.

UK Biodiversity Framework, 2024

This Framework supersedes the previous Framework (the UK post-2010 UK Biodiversity Framework). This Framework sets out shared objectives, governance arrangements and priorities for collaborative action on nature recovery, biodiversity monitoring, reporting and evidence gathering, while allowing each UK nation to pursue its own biodiversity policies and delivery plans. This Framework supports coordinated action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and contribute to wider environmental and climate objectives.

National Planning Policy for Waste, 2014

Sets out national waste planning policies aimed at advancing a more sustainable and resource-efficient approach to waste management. It promotes the integration of waste considerations into the design and layout of new developments, ensuring that infrastructure supports waste minimisation, reuse, and recycling from the outset. By aligning spatial planning with the waste hierarchy, the policy encourages modern, well-located waste facilities and supports the transition to a circular economy.

UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide Concentrations, 2017

Aims to improve air quality by meeting statutory nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) limits, cutting carbon emissions, and accelerating the shift to cleaner vehicles. As part of the UK's 25 Year Environment Plan, it also promotes broader environmental benefits, such as mandatory BNG, urban tree planting, and cleaner fuel supplies. Together, these measures support healthier communities, greener transport, and a more resilient natural environment.

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations, 2017

These regulations apply to both surface water and groundwater, emphasising the need to prevent further deterioration of aquatic ecosystems and to prioritise the protection, enhancement, and restoration of water bodies. They require development proposals to assess impacts on water sources and set out tangible improvements in water quality and ecological health. This includes ensuring that there is adequate wastewater treatment capacity to cope with new development and incorporating water efficiency measures and sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS). The overarching goal

is to return water bodies to a condition that is as close as possible to their natural state, ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience.

The National Framework for Water Resources 2025

Sets out England's long-term water needs to 2055, highlighting severe pressures from climate change, population growth and environmental requirements, and projecting a potential 5 billion litres per day public water supply deficit without urgent action. It emphasises a coordinated national, regional and local approach focused on demand reduction, leakage control, new supply infrastructure, sustainable abstraction, and multi-sector planning, recognising that more than 60% of the deficit must be met through demand management before major infrastructure comes online. The Framework calls for accelerated collaboration across government, water companies, abstractors, industry and regulators to secure resilient water supplies, support economic growth, and protect the water environment.

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, 2018

The strategy sets out a long-term vision to improve the natural environment within a generation. Its core ambition is to leave the environment in a better state than it was found. The plan outlines how government, businesses, and communities will work together to achieve this through cleaner air and water, thriving wildlife, reduced waste, and more sustainable use of resources. It also promotes stronger connections between people and nature and commits to measurable progress through regular reporting and updates.

The Clean Air Strategy, 2019

Sets out measures to reduce public exposure to air pollution through strengthened legislation and enhanced local authority powers. Under the Environment Act 2021, the UK Government is legally required to

set and achieve air quality targets, including for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), one of the most harmful pollutants to human health. The Environmental Targets (Fine Particulate Matter) (England) Regulations 2023 establish two key targets: an annual mean concentration limit of 10µg/m³ and a 35% reduction in population exposure compared to 2018 levels, both to be achieved by 2040. While these are national targets, local authorities play a vital role in delivering the actions needed to meet them.

Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener, 2021

Provided the government's plan to achieve its legally binding 2050 net zero emissions target, outlining policies for decarbonizing all sectors of the economy and framing the transition as an economic opportunity for jobs. The 10-point plan promotes renewable energy, low emissions vehicles, green public transport, sustainable aviation, greener buildings, carbon capture and storage, protecting the environment and green finance.

The Environment Act, 2021

This sets out legally binding targets covering air and water quality, biodiversity, and waste reduction, marking a shift toward long-term environmental improvement. The Act makes a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) mandatory for most new developments, ensuring that nature is left in a measurably better state. It also introduces Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), providing a coordinated, place-based framework for boosting biodiversity and restoring natural habitats across the country. The requires a review of the strategy every 5 years, a review took place leading to the [2023 Air Quality Strategy](#), and links to the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 (EIP23) (discussed see below).

UK National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP), 2023

The National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP) sets out how the UK can meet the legally binding 2020 and 2030 emission reduction commitments (ERCs). These commitments apply for 5 pollutants: nitrogen oxides, ammonia, volatile organic compounds, particulate matter and sulphur dioxide.

Air Quality: Revised UK National Air Pollution Control Programme, 2023

Provides a framework for local authorities in England to meet the government's long-term goals, seeking to reduce public exposure to fine particulate, establishing new binding targets for PM_{2.5} by 2040. This is to be achieved by managing domestic burning, reducing transport emissions, and improving regulatory frameworks for industrial sources.

Environmental Improvement Plan, 2023

Building on the long-term vision of the 25 Year Environment Plan, it sets out clear actions and interim targets to improve air and water quality, protect and expand habitats, reduce waste, and promote sustainable land use. It also reinforces legally binding commitments under the Environment Act 2021 and introduces tools like LNRS and mandatory BNG to ensure measurable progress. At its core, EIP23 aims to leave the environment in a better state for future generations, through collaboration with communities, landowners, and businesses.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2026

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), together with the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), sets out national planning policy in England. It promotes sustainable development, supporting the

creation of resilient, well-designed communities while balancing economic, social and environmental objectives.

The NPPF seeks to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment through biodiversity improvement, nature recovery, and the conservation of landscapes and heritage assets. It also supports action on climate change by encouraging climate-resilient development, sustainable water management, and the transition to clean energy.

To promote sustainable and healthy communities, the framework encourages development in accessible locations and prioritises public transport, walking, wheeling and cycling as alternatives to private car use.

[National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for 2030](#)

Outlines how the UK will meet all 23 global targets aimed at halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. The plan focuses on protecting and restoring nature, promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, and embedding biodiversity considerations across all sectors of society. It reflects a coordinated effort across the four nations of the UK, as well as its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, to deliver measurable progress toward a nature-positive future.

[River Basin Management Plans](#)

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is primarily delivered through River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs), which identify the key pressures on the water environment and outline the actions needed to meet WFD objectives. In North Herts, this includes both the [Thames Water](#) (2022) and [Anglian Water's RBMPs](#) (2022). These plans play a vital role in guiding local and strategic interventions to protect and enhance water quality. Under the WFD, all public bodies are legally required to 'have regard to' these plans when exercising

their functions, ensuring that water environment considerations are embedded in decision-making across sectors.

[Affinity Water Resources Management Plan, 2024](#)

Outlines how Affinity Water will maintain a sustainable and secure supply of drinking water from 2025 to 2075. It focuses on reducing leakage, improving water-use efficiency, and transferring water from surplus to deficit regions. The strategy also includes developing new long-term supply options, such as reservoirs, water recycling, and desalination, to meet growing demand, adapt to climate change, and protect the environment. The plan reflects a collaborative effort between government, regulators, and water companies to ensure resilient water infrastructure for future generations.

[Green Infrastructure Framework, Natural England, 2023](#)

The Framework is a national planning and design framework that provides guidance, standards and mapping tools to help local authorities, developers and other stakeholders deliver high-quality green infrastructure. The Framework promotes the creation of connected networks of green and blue spaces that support biodiversity, climate resilience, health and wellbeing, sustainable development and access to nature. It is intended to inform plan-making and development decisions, helping to ensure that growth is accompanied by accessible, multifunctional and nature-rich green spaces.

[UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, 2022](#)

This is the UK Government's statutory assessment of the key risks and opportunities arising from climate change across the UK. Published under the Climate Change Act 2008, it evaluates the potential impacts of climate change on communities, infrastructure, the economy, health and the natural environment, and identifies

priority areas where adaptation action is needed. The assessment provides the evidence base for national adaptation policies and programmes, helping to ensure that decision-making and future development are resilient to the effects of a changing climate.

[North East Central Hertfordshire: Vision 2050, 2024](#)

A collaborative strategy developed by five local authorities, East Herts, North Herts, Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield, and Broxbourne, together with Hertfordshire County Council. It sets out a shared vision to guide sustainable growth and development across the sub-region up to 2050.

The vision is structured around six key themes: *Place, Environment, Infrastructure, Movement, People, and Economy*. It aims to ensure that future planning meets the evolving needs of residents, businesses, and the natural environment. By identifying strategic sites for investment, the plan supports modern economic activity, job creation, and skills development, while also prioritising infrastructure improvements in transport, digital connectivity, and utilities to unlock growth potential.

Serving as an outline for Local Plans, the Vision 2050 promotes cross-boundary collaboration and long-term resilience, seeking to achieve a thriving, inclusive, and well-connected region.

[Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, 2025](#)

The Strategy is prepared by Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership to provide a strategic framework for protecting, enhancing and connecting the county's network of green infrastructure. The Strategy assesses existing green infrastructure assets, identifies priorities for improvement and sets out actions to deliver a more resilient, accessible and healthy environment. It supports sustainable growth by promoting the integration of green spaces, biodiversity, landscape

character, recreation and ecosystem services into planning and development decisions.

[Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework, 2026](#)

The Framework aims to ensure health is considered in planning policy to ensure inequalities in health across the county are address. This document focuses on the environmental and social determinants that influence health outcomes and how they can be improved through strategic planning.

[The Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape, 2025](#)

North Herts District partially overlaps the Chilterns National Landscape (also known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or AONB), which is nationally protected as one of the finest areas of countryside in the UK. The AONB's management plan requires that planning decisions put the conservation and enhancement of the AONB first, ensuring that development leaves it better than it was before – richer in wildlife, quieter, darker at night, designed to have a low impact on the environment, and beautiful to look at and enjoy. The plan expects opportunities to be pursued to restore sites currently degraded by unsympathetic development, infrastructure or dereliction.

The Council is part of the [North Chilterns Landscape Partnership](#); a group of organisations working together to shape nature's recovery across the North Chilterns landscape, connect people with nature, support delivery of the Chilterns Management Plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and other relevant work through joint projects delivered across the North Chilterns landscape.

[The Hertfordshire Water Study, 2017](#)

Identifies how future growth is likely to affect water infrastructure, what changes are potentially needed to facilitate this growth and how could new systems impact the environment. It also identifies a range of options to meet local and strategic infrastructure needs.

[Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan, 2018](#)

Sets out a strategic vision to improve air quality and public health by transforming how people move around the county. It prioritises reducing emissions from transport, one of the largest contributors to local air pollution, by shifting away from private car use and investing in sustainable alternatives.

Key measures include expanding infrastructure for walking and cycling, enhancing public transport, and supporting the rollout of low-emission zones and cleaner fuel technologies.

[Hertfordshire's State of Nature 2020](#)

Provides an overview of the county's wildlife over the past 50 years, highlighting changes in species and habitats. The report produced a new dataset of Hertfordshire Species of Conservation Concern.

[Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy, 2020](#)

Sets out a county-wide commitment to embed sustainability across all operations and services delivered by Hertfordshire County Council. In response to the 2019 Climate Emergency Declaration, the strategy outlines a bold vision for a cleaner, greener future, anchored by key targets such as achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions across the county before 2050 and enhancing nature by 20% within the same timeframe. The strategy comprises three pillars: *leading by example* in council operations, *enabling sustainability* through policies and programmes, and *inspiring action* among residents and businesses. It promotes a whole-systems approach to tackling climate change, improving biodiversity, and building resilience across communities.

[Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) identify priorities, map areas for nature restoration, and propose actions to expand and connect habitats for the Nature Recovery Network. Introduced in the Environment Act 2021, LNRS will map out the action needed to restore nature and meet the Government's England-wide nature targets. The Hertfordshire LNRS will:

- Map areas of habitat across Hertfordshire.
- Agree on local biodiversity priorities.
- Identify where practical action would be most beneficial to create, enhance or recover habitat.

[Hertfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2040 Draft Plan, 2022](#)

The emerging plan will eventually replace Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan (2007). Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), as Minerals and Waste Planning Authority (MWPA) for the area, is required to prepare Minerals and Waste Local Plans, to guide minerals and waste management development. The Minerals Local Plan (adopted 2007) is a strategic document setting out the spatial strategy for minerals planning in Hertfordshire. It includes strategic policies that aim to meet the need for mineral extraction alongside more detailed development management policies to be used when determining planning applications for minerals related development. The document also identifies preferred areas for sand and gravel extraction along with other safeguarded mineral extraction sites and rail aggregate depots.

[Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership - Strategic Action Plan for Biodiversity, 2023](#)

Outlines the Hertfordshire Climate Change & Sustainability Partnership's (HCCSP) intention to take actions to restore and enhance biodiversity across Hertfordshire. It aims to harness opportunities from new development, improved agricultural practices, and management of local authority greenspaces to help restore and enhance biodiversity.

[North Hertfordshire Landscape Study, 2011](#)

Provides a description of the distinctive characteristics of each landscape character area based on factors such as the geology, landform, soil types and historical activities for each area. It also identifies the inherent sensitivities of each character area in landscape and visual terms together with its capacity to accommodate a range of different types of development.

A new landscape study is being prepared as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.

[North Hertfordshire Contaminated Land Strategy, 2012](#)

Strategy produced in line with statutory requirements to ensure that contaminated land is identified and remediated to a state such that the land becomes suitable for use and does not pose a significant risk to health or the environment.

[North Hertfordshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, 2016 Update](#)

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) provide the basis for applying the sequential and exception tests for development sites. Areas at risk of flooding are identified in the SFRA so that appropriate mitigation measures can be incorporated when designing development in order to reduce the risk of flooding from surface water. The Council will produce an updated SFRA as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.

[North Hertfordshire Air Quality Action Plan, 2018](#)

Local Planning Authorities are required to publish annual Air Quality Annual Status Reports (ASRs) to discharge their monitoring obligations under the Environment Act (1995). This requires local authorities to review air quality in their area and designate Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) if improvements are necessary. Where an AQMA is designated an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) must then be put in place. The Council's most recent ASR is published on its website ([ASR](#)).

[North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 \(adopted 2022\)](#)

The current North Herts Local Plan was adopted in November 2022. It sets out the growth strategy and the long-term vision for the District by identifying how and where new homes, jobs and infrastructure will be delivered. Plan policies seek to achieve high-quality sustainable design and consideration for the natural environment.

[North Hertfordshire Climate Change Strategy \(2022-2027\)](#)

Seeks to reduce carbon emissions by working along other initiatives at district and county levels addressing issues relating to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The strategy's objectives are to:

- Achieve carbon neutrality across the Council's own operations by 2030
- Ensure that operations and services are resilient to impacts of climate change
- Achieve a Net Zero district by 2040
- Become a district that is resilient to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

[North Hertfordshire Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document, 2024](#)

Sets out sustainable construction requirements for climate change mitigation and adaptation including energy efficiency, renewables/ low-carbon energy and water conservation. The SPD sets three standards of sustainability: bronze, silver and gold where bronze aiming to encourage developers to target higher sustainability standards (silver/ gold) beyond current building regulations requirements (bronze level).

Social

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2015

World leaders came together in 2015 and made a promise to secure the rights and well-being of everyone on a healthy, thriving planet, this sets out 17 sustainable development goals. These range from access to clean and affordable energy to improved health outcomes.

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990

Governs the granting of planning permission for building works, with a particular emphasis on protecting listed buildings and conservation areas. It introduces special controls over the demolition, alteration, or extension of buildings, structures, or objects that hold architectural or historic significance. These protections ensure that any proposed changes preserve the character and heritage value of these designated sites, maintaining their contribution to the cultural and visual identity of local areas.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000

Upholds the public's right to access open land for open-air recreation, granting greater freedom to explore the countryside while safeguarding the natural features that make these landscapes special. It also strengthens the protection and management of National Landscapes (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or AONBs), requiring the preparation and publication of management plans every five years. These plans set out a shared vision for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of these designated areas, ensuring they remain vibrant and accessible for future generations.

Planning for healthy places, 2024

Guidance produced by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol to help local authorities integrate health and wellbeing considerations into plan-making and development management. The document provides an evidence-based framework for preparing Local Plans and planning policies that promote healthier places, reduce health inequalities and address the wider determinants of health. It covers topics including healthy neighbourhood design, healthy homes, active travel, access to green infrastructure, food environments, climate change and Health Impact Assessments, supporting planners and public health professionals to embed health objectives across all stages of the planning process.

[Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review, 10 Years On, 2020](#)

Assesses progress since the 2010 Marmot.: Key findings include life expectancy in England stalled, and even declined for some groups, while health inequalities have deepened, especially among the most deprived communities. The findings highlight a steepening social gradient, with poorer populations experiencing shorter lives and worse outcomes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Crucially, the report underlines that improving health outcomes requires action beyond the healthcare system, by tackling the root causes of inequality, including housing, income, education, and employment.

[Building for a Healthy Life, 2026](#)

A nationally recognised design toolkit that supports the planning, design and assessment of new neighbourhoods, streets, homes and public spaces. Published by Homes England and partners, it provides a practical framework for creating healthy, inclusive and sustainable places, helping planners, developers and communities to evaluate the quality of development proposals. The 2026 edition places increased emphasis on active travel, nature-based solutions,

green and blue infrastructure, climate resilience, biodiversity net gain and healthy placemaking, and is intended to support the implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and wider design guidance. Its 12 design considerations are organised around the themes of Integrated Neighbourhoods, Distinctive Places and Streets for All, promoting development that supports health, wellbeing, social interaction and environmental sustainability.

[The National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\), 2026](#)

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and places sustainable development at the heart of plan-making and decision-making. It promotes the creation of strong, vibrant and healthy communities through the delivery of sufficient and diverse housing, accessible community facilities, public service infrastructure, open space and opportunities for social interaction. The 2026 Framework places greater emphasis on promoting healthy communities, reducing health inequalities, supporting active travel, securing high-quality green infrastructure, and ensuring development contributes positively to wellbeing and social inclusion. It also strengthens requirements for planning authorities to consider education, healthcare, recreation, community facilities and wider social infrastructure needs alongside housing growth, ensuring that new development supports inclusive, healthy and sustainable places. The Framework recognises the importance of safeguarding existing community facilities and delivering new infrastructure to meet the needs of growing populations.

[Hertfordshire & West Essex Integrated Care System \(ICS\) “Our strategy for a healthier Hertfordshire and west Essex”, 2023](#)

Sets out how the ICS will work to ensure healthy and safe communities. It focuses on the following priorities:

- *Give every child the best start in life*
- *Support communities and places to be healthy and sustainable*
- *Support residents to maintain healthy lifestyles*
- *Enable residents to age well and support people living with dementia*
- *Improve support to people living with life-long conditions/ long term health conditions, and their families*
- *Improve residents' mental health and outcomes for those with learning disabilities and autism.*

[Hertfordshire's Plan for Children and Young People \(2026-2031\)](#)

Hertfordshire's overarching strategic plan for improving outcomes for children, young people and families over the period 2026 to 2031. It sets out a vision for ensuring that children and young people are safe, healthy, included, resilient, ambitious and independent, alongside four delivery ambitions focused on education, early help, safeguarding, family support, stable homes and successful transitions to adulthood. The Plan is underpinned by three organisational enablers relating to partnership working, leadership and workforce development, and provides the strategic framework for the commissioning, delivery and evaluation of children's services and related programmes across Hertfordshire.

[Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework, 2026](#)

The Framework aims to ensure health is considered in planning policy to ensure inequalities in health across the county are address.

This document focuses on the environmental and social determinants that influence health outcomes and how they can be improved through strategic planning.

[Hertfordshire Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2028](#)

Sets out to inform health and care services and influence service delivery in the county. The strategy sets out to prevent poor health through supporting residents to make the right choices for themselves to improve their health and wellbeing.

[North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Borough Councils Strategic Housing Market Assessment \(SHMA\) Part II Update \(2023\)](#)

The North Herts District and Stevenage Borough Councils Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) Part II Update (2023) provides the evidence required to support the Local Plan process updating the previous (2016) version of the assessment. It provides an estimate of housing need (market and affordable) for the period 2022-2031 after considering housing delivery since 2011 and updated guidance.

[North Hertfordshire Housing Strategy 2024-2029](#)

Sets out how the Council intends to maximise the supply of affordable housing by working with developers to achieve up to 40 percent affordable housing on new sites.

Economic

[United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2015](#)

World leaders came together in 2015 and made a promise to secure the rights and well-being of everyone on a healthy, thriving planet, this sets out 17 sustainable development goals. These

range from access to clean and affordable energy to improved health outcomes.

The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, 2025

The Government's long-term, 10-year economic strategy for increasing business investment, boosting productivity and supporting sustainable economic growth across the UK. The Strategy focuses on creating the conditions for investment and innovation within eight priority growth sectors, including advanced manufacturing, clean energy industries, life sciences, digital technologies and the creative industries. It aims to strengthen regional economies, develop skills, improve infrastructure, accelerate the transition to net zero, and support high-quality employment opportunities. The Strategy is particularly relevant to planning and sustainability as it promotes coordinated investment, clean growth, infrastructure delivery and place-based economic development to support prosperous, resilient and sustainable communities.

Planning and Infrastructure Act, 2025

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 became law in December 2025 to accelerate the delivery of 1.5 million homes and fast-track major economic infrastructure. It overhauls the planning system by streamlining approvals for major projects, reforming local planning committees, and introducing strategic environmental frameworks.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2026

The NPPF supports sustainable economic growth by promoting a strong, competitive and productive economy and ensuring that sufficient land is available in the right locations to meet business, employment and infrastructure needs. The 2026 NPPF places greater emphasis on supporting the delivery of the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, enabling investment in key growth sectors such

as advanced manufacturing, digital technologies, life sciences, clean energy industries and logistics. It encourages planning authorities to identify suitable sites for business growth, safeguard strategic infrastructure, support innovation clusters, facilitate freight and logistics development, and address barriers to investment such as housing and infrastructure constraints. The Framework also promotes sustainable transport, digital connectivity and the efficient use of land to support long-term economic prosperity, productivity and resilient local economies.

Functional Economic Market Area Study, 2015

Defines the geographical extent of 'Functional Economic Market Area(s)' (FEMAs) that fall within and across the three local authorities of Stevenage, North Herts and Central Bedfordshire. A new FEMA study is being undertaken as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.

Perfectly Placed for Business: The Refreshed Strategic Economic Plan: 2017 – 2030, 2017

Is the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Strategic Economic Plan. It outlines a vision for the county's economic development up to 2030. It proposes that Hertfordshire could become a central part of the *Golden Triangle* (Oxford–London–Cambridge); an important hub for scientific research and development. The plan focuses on enhancing productivity, supporting the creation of high-quality employment, and unlocking the county's economic potential. The strategy addresses several challenges, including relatively slow productivity growth, transport infrastructure pressures, limited availability of housing and employment land, and the need to improve workforce skills. It sets out a framework for promoting sustainable and inclusive growth, both within Hertfordshire and in contribution to the wider UK economy.

North Hertfordshire Economic Development Strategy 2025-2030, 2025

Sets out the Council's vision and priorities for supporting a strong, resilient and sustainable local economy over the period to 2030. The Strategy identifies the district's key economic strengths, opportunities and challenges, and seeks to promote responsible growth by supporting existing businesses, encouraging investment, improving town centres, fostering innovation, and strengthening links with major economic hubs including Cambridge, London, Stevenage and Luton. It recognises the importance of the district's diverse business base, skilled workforce, visitor economy and strategic transport connections, while also addressing challenges such as commercial property provision, economic productivity, town centre vitality and the transition to a low-carbon economy. The Strategy provides a framework for partnership working and investment to enhance economic prosperity, business competitiveness and sustainable growth across North Hertfordshire.

North Hertfordshire Retail Needs Study, 2024

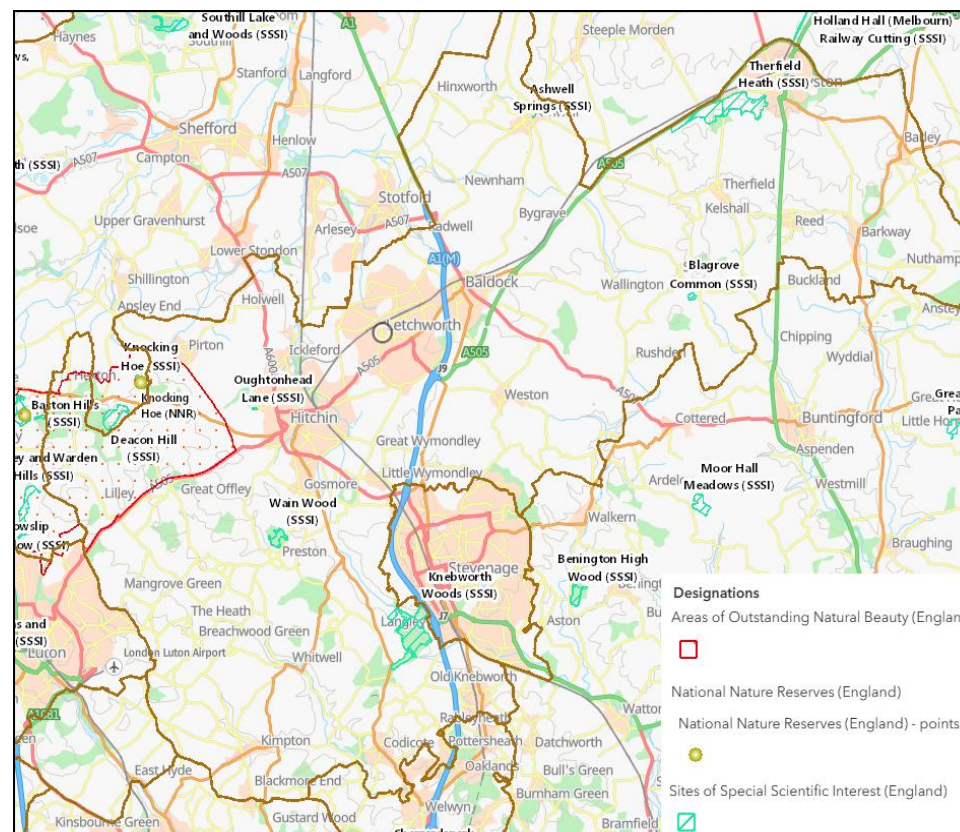
Provides the evidence base to support planning policy and future decision-making relating to North Hertfordshire's town centres, retail provision and leisure uses. Prepared by Lichfields on behalf of North Hertfordshire Council, the study assesses the health, performance and function of the district's main centres, including Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston, and evaluates current and future needs for retail, leisure and town centre development. The study reviews existing planning policies, forecasts future retail and commercial requirements, and identifies opportunities to enhance the vitality, viability and resilience of town centres, helping to inform the Council's emerging Local Plan and wider economic growth objectives.

North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy, Draft 2025

Provides a strategic framework for supporting the vitality, viability and long-term sustainability of North Hertfordshire's four principal town centres: Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Baldock. Building on the Council's evidence base, including the Town Centres and Retail Study, the Strategy sets out a vision, planning guidance and town-specific priorities focused on land use and retail, the built environment, transport and movement, and community wellbeing. It aims to support investment, regeneration and high-quality development, strengthen local distinctiveness, improve accessibility and active travel opportunities, enhance town centre resilience, and promote thriving, inclusive and sustainable centres that continue to serve residents, businesses and visitors. The Strategy is intended to inform planning decisions, future policy development and the ongoing Local Plan review.

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

North Herts is home to a rich variety of SSSIs - nationally recognised areas that protect important habitats and geological features. These include a variety of habitats such as wetlands, rivers, meadows, moorland, and ancient peat bogs. Each SSSI plays a crucial role in supporting biodiversity and conserving rare species. Set out below



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¹are descriptions of each SSSI, the key features that support their designation and the potential threats for each site².

Therfield Heath SSSI 143ha

Natural England describes Therfield Heath as one of the finest examples of East Anglian chalk grassland in England. According to Natural England this rare habitat has declined dramatically since the post-war period mainly due to intensive farming and the loss of traditional sheep grazing, making surviving areas like this one critically important for conservation.

In addition to its species-rich grasslands, the site includes areas of mixed scrub and two mature beech woodlands, adding to its ecological diversity.

Therfield Heath is especially notable for:

- The Pasque flower, a nationally rare and *priority species*
- The Chalk hill Blue butterfly, a *species of conservation concern*

It holds multiple designations as a Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site reflecting its environmental value.

However, the site is sensitive to disturbance. Threats include:

- Recreational pressures (e.g. dog fouling, nutrient enrichment)
- Inappropriate management (such as overcutting, undergrazing, or invasive species)
- Chemical impacts from fertilisers and pesticides

Protecting Therfield Heath means careful stewardship—balancing access with long-term habitat health.

Wain Wood SSSI 19ha

The site is located just north of Preston and protects valuable areas of ancient broadleaved and mixed lowland woodland, including mature oak, hornbeam, and yew.

This habitat supports a variety of wildflowers such as field scabious, hairy St John's wort, lady's mantle, and eyebright, creating a vibrant woodland floor. The wood is also home to an interesting mix of butterflies, with the purple hairstreak standing out as a particularly notable species.

Threats include Inappropriate woodland management, invasive species, and damage from rabbits, deer, and livestock

Oughtonhead Lane SSSI 0.9ha

This nationally important geological site was once a marsh nourished by natural springs and is renowned for its layers of **tufa** - a rare type of limestone formed by freshwater springs.

Its rich collection of fossilised land snails and ancient mammal bones offer unique insights into environmental conditions during past interglacial periods. It is one of only two such sites in the UK known for their exceptional fossil snail records, critical for understanding the glaciation history of East Anglia.

Natural England's [Views about Management Statement](#) (VAM) recommends avoiding any deep soil disturbance like ploughing,

¹

² The information in this section is from: [Natural England Designated Sites View](#)

trenching, or construction, and managing vegetation to preserve the delicate sediment layers that hold the information on the past.

Knebworth Woods SSSI 121ha

One of the finest ancient woodlands in the region, lying on rare acidic clay-with-flints soils. This nationally important SSSI is celebrated for its rich mix of habitats - from broadleaf woodland and grassy rides to seasonal ponds and diverse grasslands.

The site supports:

- Two rare aquatic plants in Hertfordshire: *Water violet* and *Fine-leaved Water Dropwort*
- A thriving fungal and bryophyte community
- Breeding nightingales, a sign of high biodiversity
- The county's best neutral grassland meadow for Green-winged Orchids

The [VAM](#) identifies the following threats: undergrazing, inappropriate woodland and parkland management (felling, thinning, coppicing), and damage from deer threaten the balance of its delicate ecosystems.

Blagrove Common SSSI 5ha

This site supports one of the last surviving patches of unimproved marshy grassland in Hertfordshire, making it a site of high conservation value.

Bisected by a meandering stream, the Common hosts a mix of habitats:

- Marshy areas dominated by rushes and *Tufted Hair-grass*, with abundant wild orchids such as Early Marsh, Southern Marsh, and Common Spotted Orchid

- Drier grassland zones that support species like *Meadow Foxtail*, *Common Cat's-ear*, and *Common Sorrel*

This diversity supports a rich collection of plants and associated wildlife. According to Natural England's VAM the site is sensitive to pressures such as scrub encroachment and fluctuating water levels threaten the delicate balance of its ecosystems.

Conserving Blagrove Common means protecting not just its plants, but the character of a landscape that's becoming increasingly rare.

Ashwell Springs SSSI 0.23ha

Is one of the primary sources of the River Cam. These freshwater springs maintain a steady, cool temperature year-round, flowing into shallow pools lined with chalk and flint gravel.

This site is home to a specialised cold-water invertebrate community, with several species that are rare in Hertfordshire and uncommon across southern England, making this a vital haven for biodiversity.

However, Ashwell Springs faces ongoing threats including pollution from urban runoff, agricultural land, and roads that puts the delicate ecosystem at risk.

There are two further SSSI located just outside the Plan area.

Barton Hills SSSI (48 ha) and National Nature Reserve (NNR), The site comprises lowland chalk grassland, a habitat with numerous wildflowers in summer, and rich beech woodland, offering an important home for wildlife.

The woodland supports a rare population of large-leaved lime trees, while the grasslands provide a stronghold for the uncommon plant Herb-paris.

However, like many sensitive sites, Barton Hills faces pressures from:

- Recreational impacts
- Undergrazing or overgrazing
- Scrub encroachment
- Invasive species and tree disease

Knocking Hoe SSSI and NNR (8.1 ha) is just southwest of Pirton and is one of the best-preserved examples of lowland calcareous (chalk) grassland, famed for supporting large populations of rare and specialist plant species, some found in very few places across the country.

Scrub encroachment and overgrazing by wild animals pose serious threats, making sensitive and well-informed management essential to maintain its biodiversity.

Priority Habitat Sites

Some semi-natural habitats in England are especially rare or under threat. These are known as **Priority Habitats**, identified under Section 41 of the [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act \(2006\)](#) as being most in need of conservation.

To help safeguard these and other important ecological features, areas can be formally protected as **Designated Sites**, such as:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- National Nature Reserves (NNRs)
- Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)

Often, priority habitats lie within designated sites, enhancing their biodiversity value. For example, a SSSI might be chosen for its mix of priority grassland, heathland, or woodland.

Both receive legal and policy protections, with a shared goal: to conserve vital habitats, safeguard rare species, and support long-term nature recovery.

Throughout the District, a diverse variety of priority habitats contribute to the area's rich natural heritage. These include:

- **Ancient Woodland** - unchanged since at least AD 1600, these are some of the most ecologically valuable landscapes in the District. North Herts' Brooches Wood and Pryor's Wood are prime examples, hosting rare birds, plants, fungi, and invertebrates. These long-established woodlands are not only rich in biodiversity but also serve as spaces for recreation, education, and a connection to our shared natural and cultural heritage. Preserving them safeguards both the past and the future.
- **Deciduous Woodland** - seasonal and scenic, these woodlands are scattered throughout the district. Notable sites include Wintergreen Wood near Knebworth, Furzen Wood south of Hexton, Weston Park, and Therfield. These habitats support a broad range of wildlife and provide year-round visual and ecological variety, from springtime blossoms to autumn foliage.
- **Lowland Calcareous Grassland** - located mainly southwest of Royston and south of Hexton, these vibrant chalk grasslands are among the most species-rich in the UK. They support a stunning diversity of wildflowers and insects, making them a crucial resource for pollinators and a highlight of the local landscape.
- **Chalk Rivers** - rare and ecologically significant, chalk rivers such as the Rib, Mimram, Oughton, Hiz, Ivel, Beane, and Cat Ditch flow across the district. These waterways provide

habitat for a range of specialist freshwater species and are internationally recognised for their environmental importance.

- Wood-Pasture and Parkland - are historically managed landscapes, where open grassland meets ancient trees, are found at Hexton, Old Knebworth, Letchworth, Ayot St. Lawrence, and other sites. Shaped by centuries of grazing, wood-pastures support diverse species including bats, birds, and fungi, while also carrying cultural and historical value.
- Traditional Orchards – are scattered throughout villages such as Great Offley, Wandon End, Kimpton, and Barkway, traditional orchards are biodiversity hotspots. They're home to heritage fruit varieties, bees, lichens, and other species linked to long-standing rural practices. These orchards form an essential part of the district's ecological and cultural landscape.

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

There are no SACs designated within North Herts. However, the nearest SAC is located approximately 10km north of Royston at Eversden and Wimpole Woods in South Cambridgeshire. This proximity provides important regional context and contributes to the broader ecological network influencing conservation priorities in and around the District.

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

There are no designated SPAs within North Herts. However, the nearest SPA is the Lee Valley SPA, located approximately 17km southeast of the District in East Hertfordshire. This site forms part of a wider network of internationally important habitats for bird conservation and adds valuable ecological context to the region

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are special sites managed by local authorities to safeguard biodiversity and connect people with nature. Designated for their ecological value, these sites support local wildlife, offer opportunities for learning and discovery, and provide peaceful green spaces for recreation.

The designation process includes:

- Identifying ecologically important sites
- Formally declaring them as reserves
- Creating tailored management plans to enhance habitats and ensure community access

There are several LNRs across the District, each contributing to local natural heritage and helping deliver biodiversity close to where people live.

- Burymead Springs
- Ivel Springs
- Norton Common
- Oughtonhead Common
- Purwell Meadows
- Therfield Heath
- Weston Hills

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), sometimes known as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), highlight areas of locally significant ecological value. North Herts is home to over 100 of these sites, which support rare habitats, protected species, and rich biodiversity. LWS play a key role in:

- **Connecting landscapes** – acting as corridors and stepping stones that help wildlife move and adapt
- **Safeguarding local character** – preserving unique habitats found nowhere else in the country
- **Boosting resilience** – supporting nature’s ability to respond to climate and environmental changes

Ramsar Sites

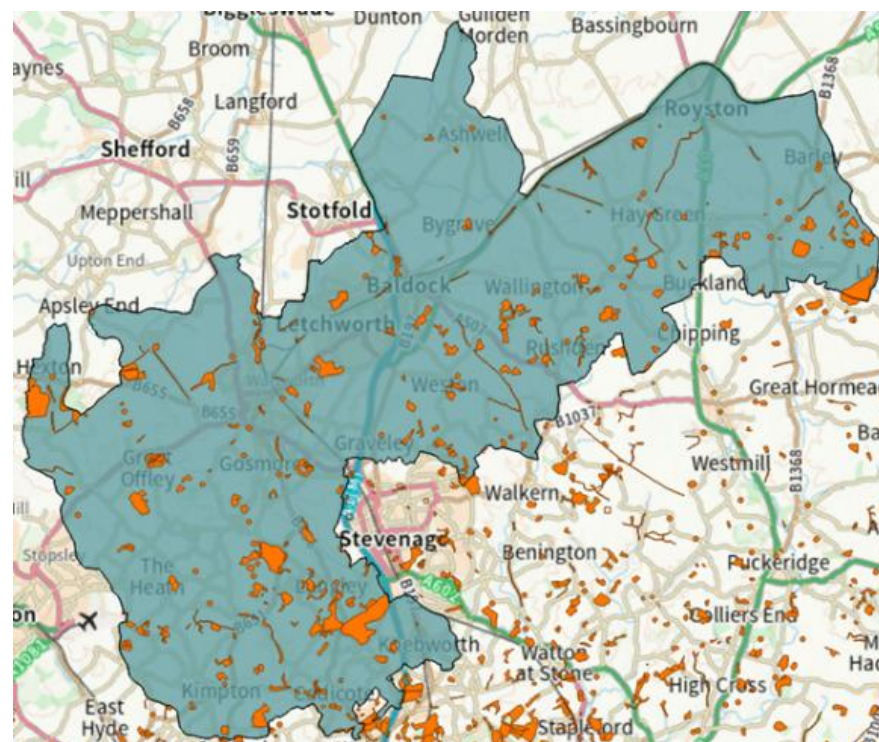
Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, also known as the [Ramsar Convention](#). These sites are selected for their significance in conserving biological diversity, supporting ecosystems, and for their representative, rare, or unique wetland characteristics. North Herts doesn’t have any Ramsar sites. The nearest Ramsar site is the Lee Valley Ramsar 15km southeast of Knebworth near Ware and extending along the Lee River into London.

Landscape

National Character Areas (NCAs) are distinct zones in England defined by their shared natural and cultural landscape features such as geology, landform, soils, habitats, and settlement patterns. They are defined by [Natural England](#). NCAs follow the natural contours of the land and helps define the character of different landscapes.

In North Herts, three major NCAs shape the environment and identity of the District:

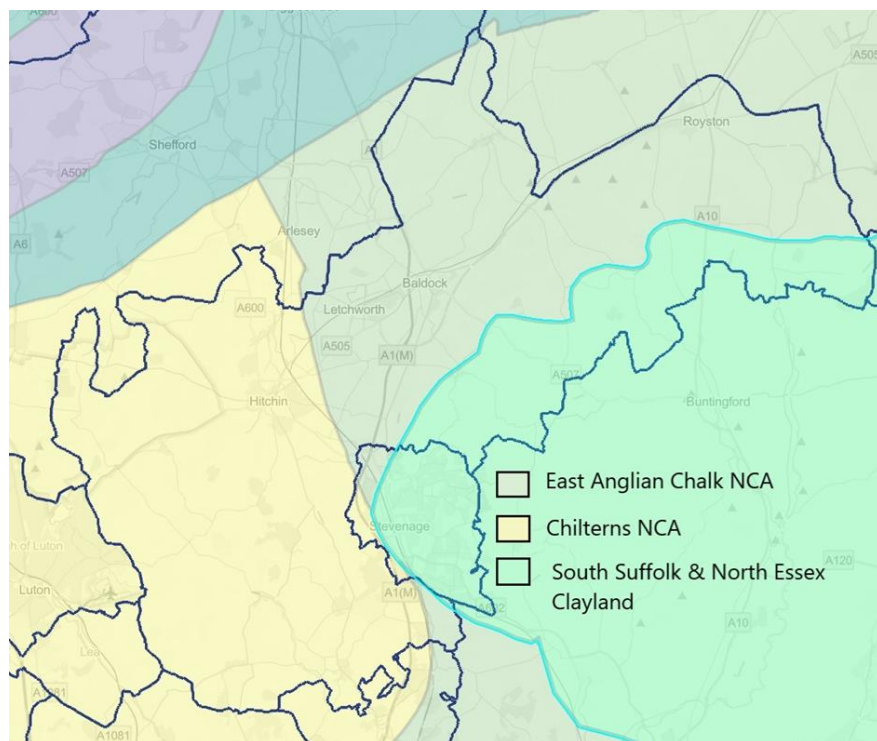
North Herts Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)



Source: North Herts [Authority Monitoring Report 2023/24](#)

- **NCA 86: South Suffolk & North Essex Clayland** – Featuring gently undulating farmland, hedgerows, and traditional orchards
- **NCA 87: East Anglian Chalk** – A landscape of dry valleys, open arable fields, and chalk grassland
- **NCA 110: Chilterns** – Characterised by rolling chalk hills, beech woodlands, and historic villages

North Herts National Character Areas



Source: Natural England. © Natural England copyright.
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These NCAs provide a vital framework for planning, conservation, and understanding how landscape and heritage influence place-making.

NCA 86: South Suffolk & North Essex Clayland stretches across parts of Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, and Cambridgeshire, covering gently rolling farmland, from Bury St Edmunds to Ipswich, and across

to Bishop's Stortford and Stevenage. It encompasses quiet villages, fertile fields, ancient woodlands, and tranquil river valleys—a landscape rich in heritage and natural beauty.

Natural England NCA Profile notes that this NCA offers the following key environmental opportunities:

- Maintain and enhance the rural landscape by promoting sustainable agriculture and land use—helping to protect soils, water quality, biodiversity, geodiversity, and the district's character.
- Protect ancient woodlands, parkland trees, river valley plantations, and hedgerows through thoughtful woodland management and new planting—strengthening habitat connectivity, cultural identity, and ecosystem services.
- Enhance slow-flowing rivers and floodplains, including disused extraction sites—boosting biodiversity, supporting water flow regulation, and enriching recreational and heritage value.
- Enhance public enjoyment and understanding of historic landscapes by improving access, interpretation, and opportunities for quiet recreation. This should be balanced with protecting the tranquillity and special qualities of protected areas, while also supporting wider goals for health, learning, and community well-being.
- Promote sensitive enhancement of historic settlements and heritage assets, including archaeological sites, through thoughtful design of new development and infrastructure. Investment in high-quality green infrastructure can deliver social, cultural, and environmental benefits—strengthening connections between people and place.

NCA 87: East Anglian Chalk forms a narrow sweep of rolling chalk hills stretching from southwest to northeast across southern England. Its landscape is defined by smooth open ridges, large rectilinear fields, and low hawthorn hedgerows, offering far-reaching views and a strong sense of place.

Key environmental opportunities within this NCA include:

- Supporting sustainable agriculture while reconnecting fragmented chalk grasslands through sensitive verge management and wider field margins that improve soil health, water quality, and pollinator habitats.
- Safeguarding chalk groundwater and chalk streams via catchment-scale water management, benefiting biodiversity, the landscape, and community enjoyment
- Celebrating the chalkland's unique character, its sweeping landforms, linear ditches, and archaeological legacy such as the Icknield Way, while protecting its geodiversity and strong equine traditions.
- Enhancing sustainable drainage and green infrastructure within and around settlements, strengthening the resilience and liveability of both new and existing communities.

NCA 110: Chilterns is a distinctive landscape marking the northwestern edge of the chalk aquifer beneath the London Basin. It features a mosaic of wooded hills, hedgerow-lined fields, and mixed farmland, shaped by small streams and the River Thames. Major towns such as Luton, Hitchin, Stevenage, Hemel Hempstead, and High Wycombe sit within or near this landscape, offering access to open commons, chalk downland, ancient woodlands, and an extensive network of public rights of way.

The NCA's key priorities include:

- Managing the landscape (including woodlands, hedgerows, commons and parklands) with the aims Conserving and enhancing biodiversity and the historic landscape and its significant features; maximising the potential for recreation; and securing sustainable production of biomass and timber.
- Restore historic landscape patterns, improve ecological networks, and conserve soil through careful land management.
- Safeguard chalk streams, groundwater, and the River Thames, adopting a catchment-scale approach to protect water quality and maintain vibrant floodplains.
- Enhance green infrastructure and local character, especially in areas of growth, ensuring people have access to nature-rich spaces close to where they live.

National Landscape

National Landscapes (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) are designated areas in the UK recognised for their exceptional natural beauty and national importance. The area between Hitchin, Lilley, and Hexton, following the escarpment of the Chiltern Hills, lies within the Chilterns National Landscape. Designated in 1965 and extended in 1990, the Chilterns National Landscape supports:

- Climate resilience through carbon storage and water management
- Thriving communities via support for local food production, heritage, and recreation
- Wildlife restoration and enhancement of ecological networks

In planning terms, National Landscapes are afforded the same status as National Parks. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

places a legal duty on local authorities to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of these protected landscapes when making decisions that affect them.

The Chilterns National Landscape extends into only a portion of North Herts. Recognising the significance of this landscape, Natural England initiated a programme to explore the opportunity to expand the designated area to include more of the district's unique natural and cultural features.

In June 2021, Natural England sought to consider both boundary extension and enhanced approaches to landscape management and governance. However, in May 2025, they announced the cancellation of the Chilterns Boundary Review project due to national budget reductions, resulting in the early closure of the initiative.

Despite this outcome, the Council, which is part of the North Chilterns Landscape Partnership, remains committed to safeguarding the district's valued landscapes and will continue to assess the potential for further designation to ensure long-term protection and recognition of North Herts' distinctive environmental and cultural assets as part of the Local Plan evidence base.

Local Landscape Character

The [North Herts Landscape Study](#) provides a detailed assessment of the different characters across the district, identifying 37 unique landscape character areas. Each has its own visual qualities, sensitivities, and ability to accommodate different types of development. Carefully tailored guidance is provided to help manage change, ensuring that new development aligns with the local character and strengthens rather than weakens it.

Views and vistas also play a vital role. They frame our experience of a place, connecting us visually to natural landmarks, heritage features, and memorable skylines. Whether it's a glimpse of open

countryside through a village green or the silhouette of a historic church tower, these views contribute to identity, continuity, and a powerful sense of belonging.

The Council has commissioned a new Landscape Sensitivity study which will form part of the evidence base of the new Local Plan.

Key sustainability issues

Informed by current data and policy context, several important considerations emerge for the natural environment in the District:

- **Protecting Designated Sites** North Herts contains numerous sites of national and local biodiversity importance. It is essential that new development respects and supports the integrity of these designated areas. Key pressures include direct encroachment as well as indirect impacts such as increased recreational use, and pollution from water runoff, light, and noise.
- **Conserving landscape character** With much of the District being rural, its distinctive landscapes, including the Chilterns National Landscape, contribute significantly to local identity and ecological richness. These special areas must be safeguarded and, where possible, enhanced through careful planning and design.
- **Strengthening habitat networks and green infrastructure** The diversity of habitats across North Herts underpins the presence of many protected and priority species. Planning should aim to expand and improve green infrastructure and recreational opportunities, maximising the environmental and social benefits of these landscapes while avoiding harm to their most sensitive features.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Considering the key sustainability challenges identified, ranging from the protection of designated biodiversity sites to the enhancement of landscape character and green and blue infrastructure, it is recommended that the Sustainability Appraisal includes the following objective and supporting questions. These will help assess whether a given option or policy positively contributes to environmental resilience, ecological value, and the distinctiveness of place.

SA Topic	Objective
The natural environment	<i>Protect, conserve, and enhance biodiversity, priority habitats, designated sites, and landscape character, while promoting the multifunctional benefits of green and blue infrastructure and avoiding harm to sensitive environments</i>

- Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?

Landscape

- Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscapes and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?

Recreation & access

- Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

Biodiversity & GI

- Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?
- Protect and enhance priority habitats, semi-natural habitats, species, and the ecological network connecting them?

CLIMATE CHANGE & FLOODING

Climate Change and Flooding

Current Data and Context

Decarbonisation targets

The UK has set a series of ambitious national carbon reduction targets to meet its climate commitments and drive the transition to a low-carbon future. These milestones are (relative to 1990 levels):

- **By 2030: A 68% reduction** in greenhouse gas emissions, as part of the UK's [Nationally Determined Contribution](#) (NDC) under the Paris Agreement. This excludes international aviation and shipping and was formally submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- **By 2035: An 81% reduction**, confirmed at COP29 in November 2024, aligning with the UK Climate Change Committee's advice. This also excludes international aviation and shipping.
- **By 2050: A 100% reduction (net zero)** in emissions, legally binding under the [Climate Change Act 2008](#) (as amended in 2019)

In May 2019 the North Herts Council declared a climate emergency asserting the Council's commitment toward climate action beyond current government targets and international agreements. This is currently pursued through our Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030¹ which seeks to:

- achieve Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions for the Council's own operations by 2030
- ensure that all operations and services are resilient to the impacts of climate change
- achieve a Net Zero Carbon North Herts district by 2040
- become a district that is resilient to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Tackling greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is central to addressing climate change, and in North Herts, like the rest of the UK, carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the dominant contributor and expected to drive around two-thirds of future global warming. The other main greenhouse gases are methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O) and fluorinated gases (F-gases), each of which has a different capacity to trap heat.

In 2023, GHG emissions in the District totaled approximately 612 kilotonnes CO₂ equivalent (ktCO₂e)². The largest share came from:

¹ North Herts Council Sustainability Strategy is available at: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sustainability-strategy>

²According to the latest available set of data (as of September 2026) from [UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions statistics](#)

- **Transport (40%)** - mainly from road vehicles with transport related to minor roads, likely to be local traffic, making up just under half of those emissions
- **Domestic energy use (26%)** - heating, cooking, and electricity
- **Industry and commercial sectors (15%)**

Per capita emissions stood at 4.5 tonnes, below the England average (4.7 t), but slightly higher than Hertfordshire's overall average (4.4 t). Since 2006, emissions per person have fallen 46%, broadly mirroring national trends, though at a slightly slower pace than Hertfordshire as a whole.

Emissions trends in North Herts by sector since 2005³:

- A 74% reduction in domestic electricity emissions
- A 28% fall in domestic gas-related emissions
- Transport emissions have reduced 19% over that period

These figures reflect significant progress, but also highlight areas where further action is needed to accelerate the district's transition to net zero, particularly related to transport and use of gas in buildings.

Renewable Energy

North Herts has made a steady start to clean energy generation, with over 3700 PV installations⁴ generating around 32,000 MWh. The combined renewable energy capacity is 45.1 megawatts (MW) which includes anaerobic digestion and landfill gas installations. However, solar PV alone accounts for 87% of installed capacity, highlighting its central role in the local energy mix. In national rankings, this puts

North Herts at 136th out of 354 English local authorities in terms of installed PV capacity, and 24th in the East of England region. While currently modest, this standing is in a position to shift dramatically once proposed Tophams, Bygrave, and Priory Farm solar farms (each with 50 MW capacity) are completed. These projects would place the District among the UK's largest contributors to solar energy, marking a step change in its role in the national transition to net zero.

North Herts renewable energy capacity – as at end of 2024 ([Regional renewable statistics](#))

Type	Number of installations	Capacity (MW)	Generation (MWh)
Photovoltaics	3,740	39.4	30,839
Anaerobic Digestion	1	2.7	Not disclosed
Landfill Gas	2	3.1	Not disclosed
Total:		45.2	30,839

³ Source: Dept. for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ), [UK Local Authority and Regional Greenhouse Gas Emissions](#)

⁴ [Renewable electricity by local authority, 2014 to 2024](#) ([Regional Renewable Statistics - GOV.UK](#))

Climate Change Adaptation

North Herts district falls within the East of England – the UK’s most vulnerable region to the impacts of climate change, making adaptation and resilience-building urgent priorities⁵.

Climate Change Projections

Updated projections from the [UK Climate Projections \(UKCP18\)](#) suggest that by the 2050s, under a medium emissions scenario, the South East of England could face a combination of significant climate-related challenges. These projections are modelled to show both the range and likelihood of change, down to regional scales.

Key projected impacts include:

- **Water stress and quality issues** due to lower summer stream levels followed by more turbulent flows after intense rainfall
- **Increased flood risk**, including greater susceptibility to what were once considered 1-in-100-year floods
- **Strain on wastewater infrastructure** as treatment plants and sewer systems struggle with extremes in flow
- **Soil degradation and erosion** caused by flash flooding events
- **Shifts in species distribution** with some southern species declining and northern ones expanding
- **Higher demand for cooling**, especially in buildings not designed for elevated summer temperatures

- **Greater drought- and flood-related impacts**, such as **subsidence** and **soil shrinkage**, threatening buildings and infrastructure
- **Road surface damage and flooding**, disrupting transport networks more often
- **Human health impacts**, including both physical and emotional trauma, ill-health, and personal loss

Flood Risk

The [Hertfordshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2](#) (LFRMS2), published in 2017, builds on earlier work to highlight how climate change is expected to increase both the frequency and severity of flooding across the county. The strategy identifies three main sources of local flood risk:

- **Surface water** – the most common and widespread source in Hertfordshire
- **Fluvial flooding** – from rivers and watercourses
- **Groundwater flooding** – less frequent but locally significant in some areas

Crucially, the strategy confirms that flood risk is not isolated to a few locations, but rather scattered across the county, with many urban and rural communities affected.

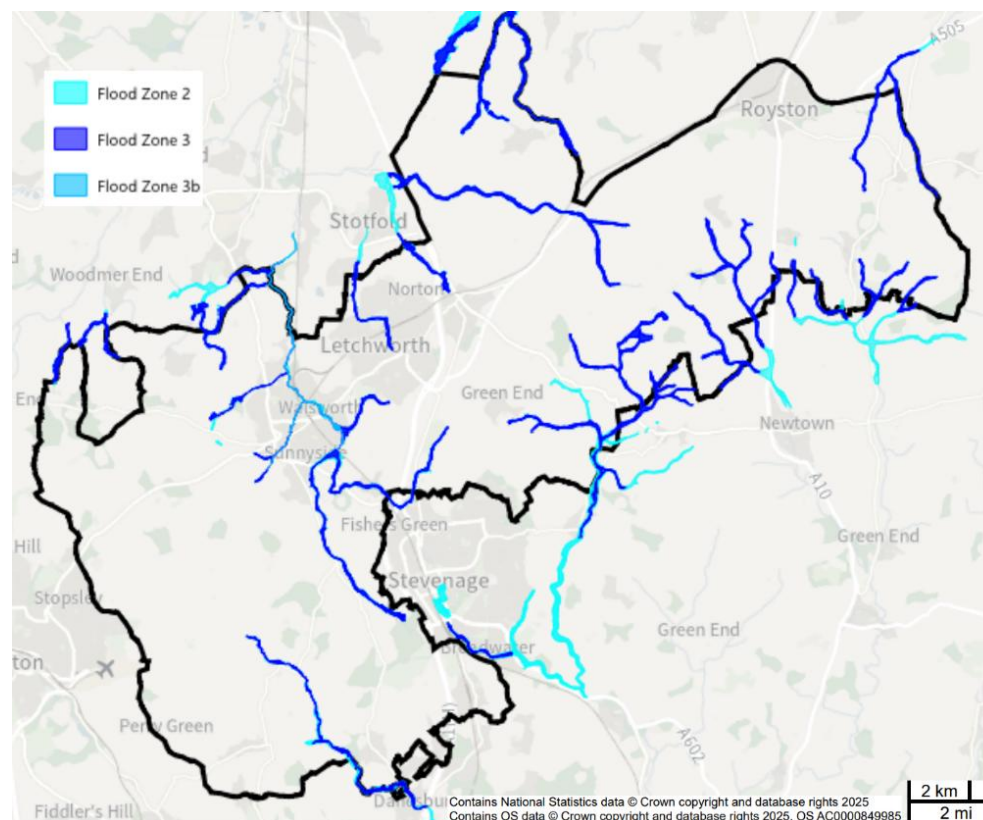
Within the District, around 4,000 properties are considered to be at high risk of surface water flooding (a 1 in 30 year chance), with a further 8,000 properties at medium risk (1 in 100 year chance).

⁵ [The University of East Anglia Tyndall Centre for Climate Research Briefing for the East of England All Party Parliamentary Group Meeting \(6-Dec.-2023\)](#)

As the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) plays a central role in managing and communicating flood risk. This includes:

- Keeping up-to-date risk information available for the public and stakeholders
- Supporting communities, especially vulnerable groups, who are most likely to experience the impacts of flooding
- Integrating flood awareness into planning and infrastructure decisions.

North Herts Flood Zones Map



Surface Water Flood Risk – Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock & Royston ([Long term flood risk - GOV.UK](#))



Water Resources

North Herts lies within an area officially classified as being in “serious water stress”, meaning that demand for water already rivals available supply, a situation likely to worsen with climate change. Rising temperatures, more frequent droughts, and increasingly extreme weather events are expected to strain water systems further, especially in tandem with continued population growth.

This challenge is underlined in Affinity Water’s Water Resources Management Plan ([WRMP](#)), which identifies significant environmental and water resource pressures now and in the years ahead. The WRMP also recognises the need for both infrastructure upgrades and public demand reduction, as well as a shift in how water is valued and managed at the local level.

This issue is explored further in the Water Resources and Quality area of this report.

Wastewater

The Hertfordshire Water [Study](#) (published in 2017) modelled a range of future population growth scenarios (2021 to 2051) and the likely impacts on wastewater treatment infrastructure. It concluded that:

- Development proposals around the northeast of Letchworth Garden City are likely require significant new infrastructure and / or upgrades to the existing sewerage system near Ashbrook Sewage Treatment Works (STW)
- The majority of STWs in North Herts are predicted to require focused planning from 2021 onwards to ensure they can accommodate the quantum of growth projected

- Under the high growth scenario, strategic interventions could be required at Ashbrook, Whitwell and Weston STWs to ensure it has sufficient capacity in 2051.

Key sustainability issues

Having reviewed the current data and policy context, several priority issues emerge where the Local Plan can help drive climate action:

- **Managing emissions amid growth:** While per capita CO₂e emissions are on a downward trend, due to cleaner energy, better efficiency, and the rise of electric vehicles (EVs), population growth could undermine that continued trend, particularly in the context of the council’s goal for a Net Zero district by 2040. The Local Plan can shape development that reduces demand, boosts energy performance, and embeds low-carbon living, to support delivery of both the council’s and national climate goals.
- **Tackling transport emissions:** With transport the largest contributor to district wide emissions, the plan should steer growth to well-connected, sustainable locations, support active travel infrastructure, and promote low-carbon transport technology, from EV charging to shared mobility hubs.
- **Decarbonising the built environment:** The plan can seek more energy-efficient building design, subject to viability, through policies and a strengthened sustainability criterion, while directing growth to areas where emissions can be most effectively managed. There are also opportunities to measure and address embodied carbon from development in the district.
- **Scaling up renewable energy** Support is needed for onsite renewables and district heating, but also for strategic-scale

schemes (e.g. solar farms). The plan can help identify sites and include policy support to unlock these opportunities while maintaining community support through support for community energy schemes.

- **Adapting to water stress** With the District in an area of serious water stress, the plan should promote water efficiency, reuse, and sustainable supply, ensuring that growth doesn't place unsustainable pressure on water resources.
- **Managing flood risk naturally** Surface water flooding is a key concern, and climate change will increase flood frequency. Site allocations and policies will be informed by flood risk (from all sources) data to guide growth to lower-risk areas and promote natural flood management, SuDS, and river restoration to boost resilience.
- **Future-proofing wastewater infrastructure** Climate change and housing growth could potentially lead to exceedance of wastewater treatment infrastructure capacity. Early alignment between planning and utilities will be vital to ensure timely infrastructure upgrades.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Considering the key sustainability challenges identified, it is recommended that the Sustainability Appraisal includes the following objective and supporting questions. These will help assess whether a given option or policy positively contributes to climate change resilience.

SA Topic	Objective
Climate Change & Flooding	<i>Support the transition to net zero by minimising greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy efficiency, enabling renewable energy, and building resilience to climate-related risks such as flooding, water scarcity, and infrastructure stress</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

Greenhouse gas emissions

- Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings and land use?
- Focus development in sustainable locations?
- Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?

Low-Carbon, energy efficient places

- Improve the energy performance of new buildings beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?
- Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support the wider transition in North Herts.

Climate change adaptation/ resilience

- Steer development to areas of low flood risk following the sequential approach outlined in the NPPF and guidance.
- Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources to people, property, infrastructure?
- Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood management, river restoration, and tree planting?
- Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?

Water resources

- Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?
- Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?

POPULATION, HEALTH & WELLBEING

Current Data and Context

Population

The 2021 Census showed North Herts' population was [133,210](#)¹ living in [56,731](#)² households. This represents a population growth of 4.8% from the 2011 Census figure of [127,114](#)³.

This is lower than the population growth at national levels (6.6% for England – [56,490,048](#)¹ (2021) and [53,012,456](#)³ (2011)) levels.

Just over half the population, 68,472¹ (51.4%), were female with males forming 48.6% (64,738¹) of the total.

Age structure

At the 2021 Census, North Herts' [age profile](#)⁴ broadly mirrors the national picture, though 15–34-year-olds are underrepresented and the 75+ age group slightly overrepresented. The District's median age⁵ was 42, compared to 40 for England ([2021 Census](#)⁶)

The [latest available population data](#)⁷ (for mid-2025) estimates the District's population to be [137,365](#)⁸. This is comprised of 70,855 (51.6%) females and 66,510 (48.4%) males. In terms of broad age groups, the resident population is comprised of:

- 18.5% people aged 0-15 years (25,447)
- 61.0% people aged 16-64 (83,795)
- 20.5% people aged 65 years and over (28,123)

Age structure of North Herts residents at mid-2025



Source – [ONS – Mid-year population estimates 2025](#)⁹

¹ ONS - 2021 Census (TS008) - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E07000099>

² ONS - 2021 Census (TS003) - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E07000099>

³ ONS - 2011 Census (KS101EW) - https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2011_ks/report?compare=E07000099

⁴ ONS - 2021 Census (TS007B) - https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/report?compare=E07000099,E12000006,E92000001

⁵ The age of the person in the middle of the group, meaning that one half of the group is younger than that person and the other half is older.

⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000099/>

⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025>

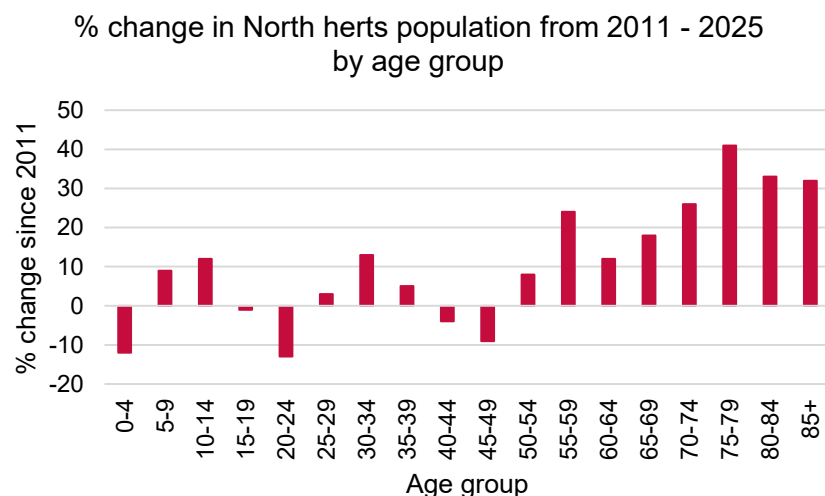
⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities>

⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities>

Demographic Trends (2011-2021)

The chart below shows how North Herts' population changed between 2011 and 2025 (based on ONS data). It shows that older age groups grew at the fastest rates (except the 60-64 cohort) with younger age groups either growing at slower rates or declining.

The number of people aged 50 to 64 years rose by around 3,400 (an increase of 14.5%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by around 820 (2.8% decrease).



Source – [ONS – Mid-year population estimates 2025](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities)¹⁰

Future population projections

According to the latest [ONIS population projections](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2022based#projected-change-by-local-authority)¹¹, North Herts' population is forecast to grow to 147,761 by 2047. That is a 7.6% increase from current 2025 population numbers. This compares with projected population growth of 9.8% for England as a whole.

The 65 plus age group, currently a fifth of our population (28,123), is projected to form almost a quarter (35,090 - 24%) of the resident population by 2047.

The data for 2047 also shows males forming a smaller proportion (10%) of the 65+ age group compared to females (13%), due to higher female life expectancy.

The 2025 ONS '[Old Age Dependency Ratio](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/comparisonofoldagedependencyratioestimatesandprojectionsukandconstituentcountries)' (OADR)¹² data estimates the number of people of State Pension Age (SPA) per 1,000 people of working age. Note that being over SPA does not necessarily mean someone is retired, nor are all working age people in employment. The ratio for OADR for North Herts from 2022 to 2047 begins at around 300 in 2022, remains relatively stable until 2028, then begins a steady rise, peaking around 340 between 2039 and 2043.

This indicates a growing proportion of older people relative to the working-age population. After 2043, the ratio gradually declines (but remains higher than current levels), reaching about 325 by 2047. Again, this suggests an ageing population with increasing pressure

¹⁰

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities>

¹¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2022based#projected-change-by-local-authority>

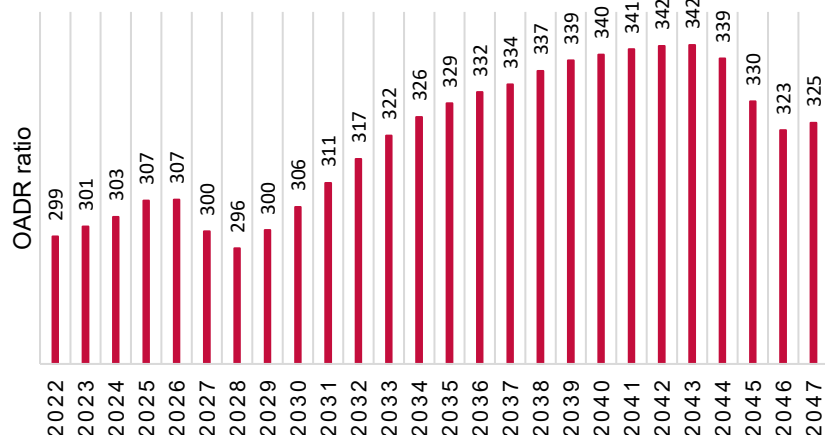
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2022based#projected-change-by-local-authority>

¹²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/comparisonofoldagedependencyratioestimatesandprojectionsukandconstituentcountries>

on services and support systems, particularly during the 2030s and early 2040s.

OADR for North Herts 2022-2047



Source – [ONS – Comparison of old age dependency ratio estimates and projections 2025](#)¹³

Overall, the data shows a trend of an ageing population with a reducing percentage of children and working age people (traditionally defined as those aged 16 to 64)¹⁴ as more people move into the 65+ age group and the younger age groups grow at slower rates or decline. This potentially presents challenges, such

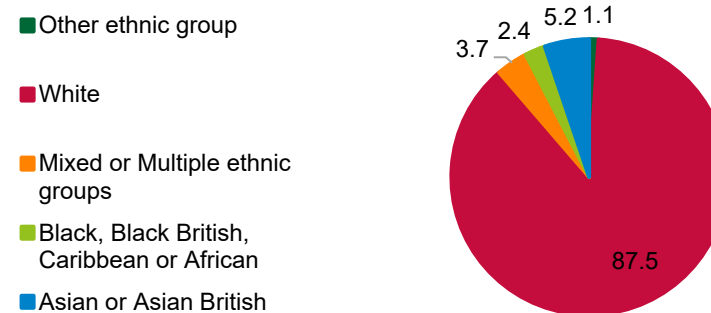
as increased demand for health and social care, and a shrinking labour force.

Ethnicity profile

Data from the 2021 Census showed that [18.7%](#)¹⁵ of North Herts' residents were from an ethnic minority (not white-British). This is lower than the national average (26.5% for England) and the wider county (28.2% for Hertfordshire).

In terms of broad ethnic makeup of the District, the Asian/ Asian British group was the largest ethnic minority in 2021, forming 5.2% of the District's population followed by 'mixed/ multiple ethnic' group (3.7%) and 'black/ black British, Caribbean or African' (2.4%).

North Herts ethnic make up by broad groupings in 2021



Source – [ONS Census 2021, Table TS021](#)¹⁶

¹³

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/comparisonofoldagedependencyratioestimatesandprojectionsukandconstituentcountries>

¹⁴ This is only an approximation as education is now required until 18, the state pension age is rising to 66–67 and people can work beyond pension age

¹⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS021/editions/2021/versions/1>

¹⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS021/editions/2021/versions/1>

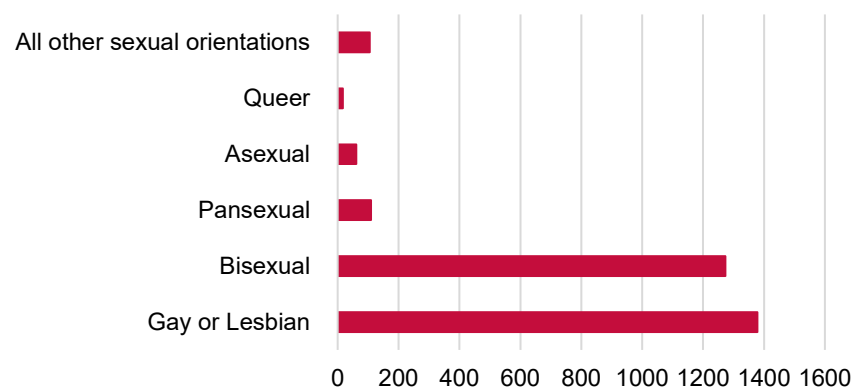
Between the 2011 and 2021 censuses, the proportion of residents identifying as 'White' in North Herts fell by 2% from [89.5% in 2011](#)¹⁷ to [87.6% in 2021](#)¹⁸, making up 87.5% of the population.

Meanwhile, the 'Black/Black British' group rose from [1.9% in 2011](#)¹⁷ to [2.4% in 2021](#)¹⁸, and the 'Mixed' group increased to [3.7% in 2021](#)¹⁸ from [2.6% in 2011](#)¹⁷. Although the district remains less diverse than Hertfordshire and England overall, it is gradually becoming more diverse.

Sexual orientation

In the [2021 Census](#), 90.8% of residents aged 16 plus, identified as straight, 1.3% as gay or lesbian and 1.2% as bisexual¹⁹.

Number of usual residents aged 16 years and over in North Herts by sexual orientation



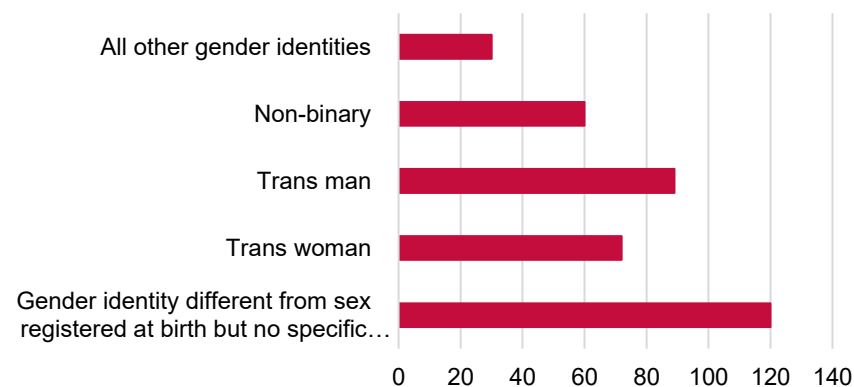
Source – [ONS – Census 2021, Table TS079](#)¹⁹

Gender Reassignment

According to the 2021 Census, the proportion of residents aged 16 years or over across our District who indicated that they have a gender identity different from their sex registered at birth is broadly in line with the average across the country.

94.9% (102,208) of usual residents aged 16 years and over in our District, in March 2021, said their gender identity was the same as sex registered at birth¹⁹.

Number of usual residents aged 16 years and over in North Herts by gender identity



Source – [ONS – Census 2021, Table TS079](#)¹⁹

¹⁷ ONS, Census 2011, Table KS201EW - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks201ew>

¹⁸ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS021 - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts021>

¹⁹ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS079 - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts079>

Health and Wellbeing

Life expectancy at birth in North Herts stands at 81.2 years for men and 84.0 years for women²⁰. These figures are slightly higher than the national and regional figures.

Life expectancy at birth

Geography	Females	Males
North Herts	84.0	81.2
East of England	83.8	80.1
England	83.2	79.3

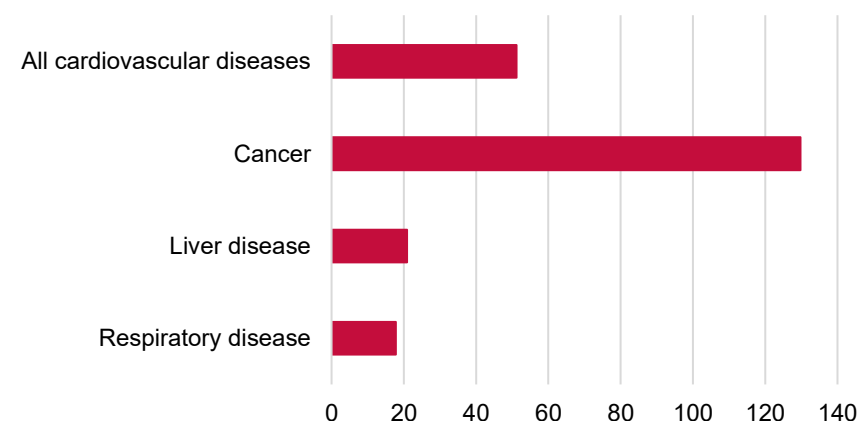
Source – [ONS – Life expectancies](#)²³

In the 2021 Census, [50.6%](#)²¹ of North Herts' residents reported their general health as "very good". This is slightly below the average for Hertfordshire (52.6%) but above the national average for England (48.5%). 0.8% of residents reported having 'very bad health' in the District which is similar to Hertfordshire (1%) and England (1%).

Mortality rates

The age standardised mortality rate (ASMR) (deaths per 100,000 population) in North Herts is [881.4](#)²² which is lower than the regional (910.0 for the East of England) and national (964.5 for England) averages.

Under 75 mortality rates in North Herts, 2025



Source – [Health and Wellbeing Profile - Districts | North Hertfordshire | Report Builder for ArcGIS – PHOF \(Indicators E04a, E05a, E06a and E07a\)](#)²³

Disability

In the 2021 Census, [101,159](#)²⁵ (76%) of residents reported that their day-to-day activities were not limited due to health or disability,

²⁰ ONS, Health state life expectancies - <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c46f72e1fade4249aad53656d4773ce4/E07000099>

²¹ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS037 - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts037>

²²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregistrationsummarytables/2023#age-standardised-mortality-rates-by-area>

²³ <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c46f72e1fade4249aad53656d4773ce4/E07000099>

which is broadly inline with regional and national levels. Conversely, [16%](#)²⁵ of the population stated that their day-to-day activities were limited.

In 2021, [21,236](#)²⁴ (15.9%) of North Herts residents were disabled (under the Equality Act). This is broadly inline with regional and national levels.

In the 2011 census, [15.1%](#)²⁵ of the District's population reported that their day-to-day activities were limited (either 'a lot' or 'a little') due to a long-term health problem or disability.

Health indicators

The data shows that North Herts performs better than average for instances of preventable cardiovascular mortality and obesity rates (child and adult). However, smoking is slightly more prevalent in the District compared to the national average.

Local Health Indicators for North Herts

Indicator	North Herts	England
Cigarette smokers ²⁶	10.1% (2024)	11.5%

²⁴ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS038 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS038/editions/2021/versions/3>

²⁵ ONS, Census 2011, Table KS301EW -

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/2011censuskeystatisticsforenglandandwales/2012-12-11>

²⁶

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain/2024#local-authority-smoking-prevalence>

²⁷ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/obesity-physical-activity-nutrition/data#page/1/gid/8000011/ati/501/iid/90316/age/200/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

Child obesity - reception age ²⁷	7.7% (2023)	105%
Child obesity - Year 6 age	16.3% (2023)	22.2%
Adult obesity ²⁸	26.4% (2023)	26.6%
Preventable cardiovascular mortality (per 100,000) ²⁹	21 (2023)	26

Source – [ONS – Local Indicators](#)³⁰

In terms of wellbeing, the data for North Herts is similar to the national average (across all LPAs).

Self-reported wellbeing (score out of 10) for North Herts (2022 – 23)

Indicator	North Herts	England
Anxiety	3.4 (22-23)	3.2

²⁸ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/obesity-physical-activity-nutrition/data#page/1/gid/1938133368/ati/501/iid/93088/age/168/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

²⁹ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/public-health-outcomes-framework/data#page/4/gid/1000044/ati/501/iid/93722/age/163/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/3/cid/4/tbm/1/page-options/car-do-0>

³⁰ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/indicators#health%20and%20wellbeing>

Feeling life is worthwhile	7.8	7.7
Happiness	7.6	7.4
Life satisfaction	7.6	7.4

Source – [ONS – Local Indicators](#)³¹

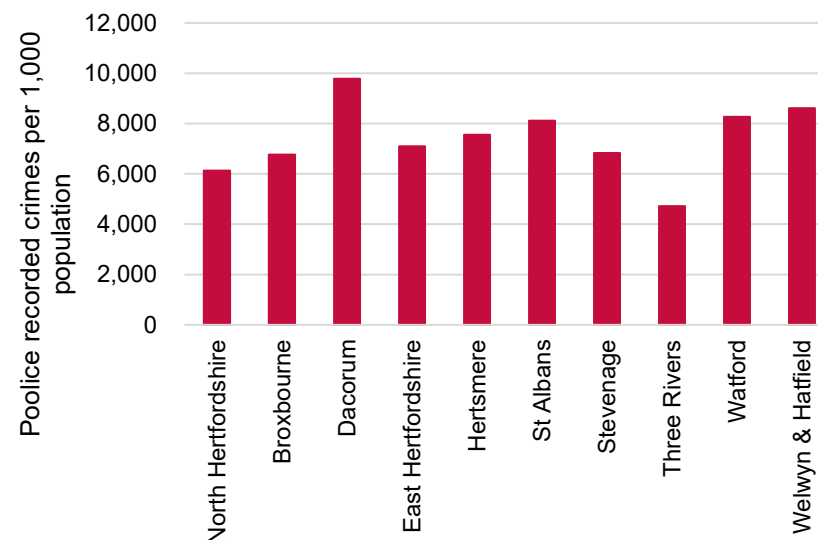
Crime

The chart below compares the crime rate in North Herts to the crime rate across the rest of Hertfordshire. It shows the total number of crimes over a twelve-month period per thousand residents.

In the year ending March 2024, the crime rate in North Herts was lower than the average crime rate across Hertfordshire.

All types of crime were lower in North Herts than across Hertfordshire except for criminal damage and arson, and sexual offences.

Crime in North Herts compared with other areas in the Hertfordshire force area



Source – ONS – [Recorded crime data by Community Safety Partnership area](#)³²

³¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/indicators#health%20and%20wellbeing>

³²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/recordedcrimedatabycommunitysafetypartnershiparea>

Deprivation

The [Index of Multiple Deprivation](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation)³³ (IMD) provides a comprehensive picture of relative disadvantage by combining data across seven key areas.

For the IMD and each of the key areas, every small area (LSOA) in England is given a score which is then used to rank the LSOAs from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area). There is no definitive cut-off at which an area is described as deprived, LSOAs are said to be more or less deprived than others. The ranked areas are split into 10 equal groups (or deciles), from the 10% most deprived to the 10% least deprived. North Herts ranks 269th out of 317 lower-tier local authorities in England with rank 1 being the most deprived.

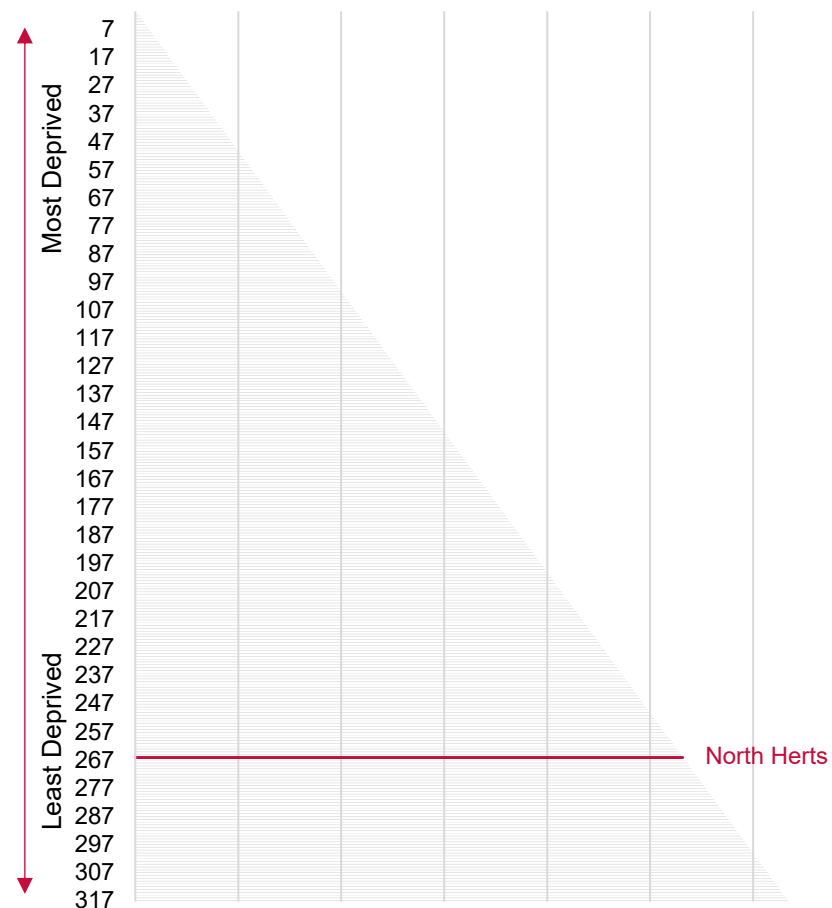
The IMD breakdown reveals that the District has no areas within the most deprived 10%. However, there are a few neighbourhoods that fall within the 20% most deprived areas in England (Letchworth-South East) and some that are within the 30% most deprived (Hitchin-Oughton and Baldock- Town).

There are no LSOA's within the 10% most deprived when looking at overall IMD. However, examining the individual domains (and sub-domains) reveals areas in the District that fall within the 10% most deprived with respect to the following domains:

Education, skills and training

- Education, skills and training – measures lack of attainment and skills. No LSOAs in the District are within the 10% most deprived with this respect to this domain.

North Herts IMD ranking, 2025



³³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation>

- Children and young people (sub domain) - measures the attainment of qualifications and associated measures. Around 4 LSOAs within the District are in the 10% most deprived.

Barriers to housing and services

- Barriers to housing and services domain – measures the physical and financial accessibility of housing and local services. The indicators fall into two sub-domains: the Geographical Barriers sub-domain relates to the physical proximity of local services. The Wider Barriers sub-domain includes issues relating to access to housing, such as affordability. 5 LSOAs in North Herts are within the 10% most deprived areas. The geographical barriers sub-domain shows that 11 LSOAs are in the 10% most deprived.

Living environment

- Living environment domain – measures the quality of both the 'indoor' and 'outdoor' local environment. 2 LSOAs in North Herts are in the 10% most deprived areas.

The above highlights how multiple factors combine to influence levels of deprivation and health outcomes. Areas with higher deprivation often experience poorer physical and mental health, reduced life expectancy, and greater vulnerability to chronic conditions. These interconnected challenges can limit opportunities and access to healthcare, reinforcing cycles of inequality.

Open Space

North Herts has an assortment of green and blue infrastructure, offering both ecological value and recreational opportunities. The District is home to several minor river valleys, including the Oughton, Purwell, Mimram, Hiz, Pix, and Ivel, which meander through the landscape alongside a broad network of waymarked routes and scenic trails. Residents and visitors can access ancient woodlands (some designated as SSSI's), heathlands, commons, chalk grasslands, and a number of registered parks and gardens. The local landscape is also dotted with historic deer parks, particularly across the southern areas. A portion of the Chilterns National Landscape extends into the District near Hitchin.

The North Herts [Open Space Review & Standards](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/OSC4%20North%20Hertfordshire%20Open%20Space%20Review%20%26%20Standards%202016.pdf)³⁴ (2016) identifies around 2,343 hectares of public open space in the District which can be classified as follows:

Open Space Provision in North Herts

Types of open space	Primary purpose
Parks and gardens	Accessible, high-quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events
Amenity Greenspace (including recreation space)	Opportunities for informal activities close to home/work or enhancement of the appearance of residential areas

³⁴ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/OSC4%20North%20Hertfordshire%20Open%20Space%20Review%20%26%20Standards%202016.pdf>

Provision for children and young people	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people
Outdoor sports facilities	Opportunities for the participation in outdoor sports such as pitch sports, tennis, bowls etc
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	Areas for wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education/awareness
Green Corridors	Connecting areas for walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel and opportunities for wildlife migration
Cemeteries and churchyards	Providing areas of quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity

According to the 2016 evidence our open space provision equates to 18.4 hectares per 1,000 residents, a figure considered indicative of strong provision. It should be noted that we are in the process of updating this evidence and this will be published in due course.

While rural areas benefit from extensive Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces, the four main towns (excluding Baldock) tend to offer more formal recreational spaces, such as outdoor sports facilities.

The OSRS estimates that by 2031 the open space ratio will reduce to around 14.83 hectares per 1,000 people due to population growth. The study concludes that:

- The District has a high level of open space provision
- Fields in Trust benchmarks tend to exceed local adjusted provision once very large sites are excluded.
- Consistent open space standards are crucial for shaping high-quality, accessible spaces in new developments.
- Provision varies widely across neighbouring authorities, underscoring the value of a locally tailored approach.
- Long-term management must be built into standards, considering both funding limitations and future opportunities.

Blue Infrastructure

North Hertfordshire's blue infrastructure comprises a network of water-related natural and semi-natural features within the District, including rivers, ponds, lakes, and other water bodies. Proximity to high-quality blue spaces, such as canals and rivers, is associated with lower psychological distress, reduced anxiety, and improved mental well-being through restorative properties and stress reduction. These environments promote healthy lifestyles by encouraging active travel, walking, and cycling, while also offering unique opportunities for recreational physical activity.

Key sustainability issues

Based on current data and the policy context, several key challenges and opportunities have been identified in relation to population, health and wellbeing in North Herts:

- **An ageing population:** With a growing proportion of older residents, pressure on health and social care services is

expected to rise over the plan period. This underlines the need to maximise the benefits of new development to enhance local health infrastructure and community facilities. As age-related health issues, such as reduced mobility, sensory impairments, and dementia, become more common, it will be essential to design housing, public spaces, and services that are more accessible, inclusive, and adaptable.

- **Pockets of deprivation:** While the District performs well overall, some neighbourhoods face notable levels of deprivation. Regeneration and improved accessibility to health, education and employment services offer opportunities to tackle inequality and improve outcomes in these more vulnerable areas.
- **Strong green and blue infrastructure network:** North Herts enjoys a diverse and valuable range of open spaces and green and blue infrastructure. Future development can strengthen these health benefits by enhancing connectivity and delivering new green and blue infrastructure, such as SuDS, river corridors enhancements, and water features. These features provide high-quality environments that encourage active travel and outdoor recreation with positive impacts on health and wellbeing.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

In light of the key sustainability issues identified, it is proposed that the Sustainability Appraisal framework should include a clear set of objectives alongside appraisal questions to assess how well each plan option or proposal supports these objectives.

SA Topic

Objective

Population, health and wellbeing

Promote inclusive, healthy, and sustainable communities by improving access to health and social care, reducing inequalities, supporting active lifestyles, and enhancing the quality of local environments

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

- Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?
- Encourage healthy/ active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?
- Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?

TRANSPORT & CONNECTIVITY

Current Data and Context

North Herts and the wider county are defined by a dispersed pattern of small to medium-sized urban centres, with no single dominant hub. This spatial arrangement has shaped a transport network built around interurban corridors and strategic routes, rather than a centralised system.

Roads Network

Key connections include:

- **North–South:** A1 (passing between Letchworth and Baldock); A600 (Hitchin to Bedford); A602 (Hitchin to Stevenage); A10 (through Royston).
- **West–East:** A505 (Luton to Royston) and A507 (Baldock to Buntingford).

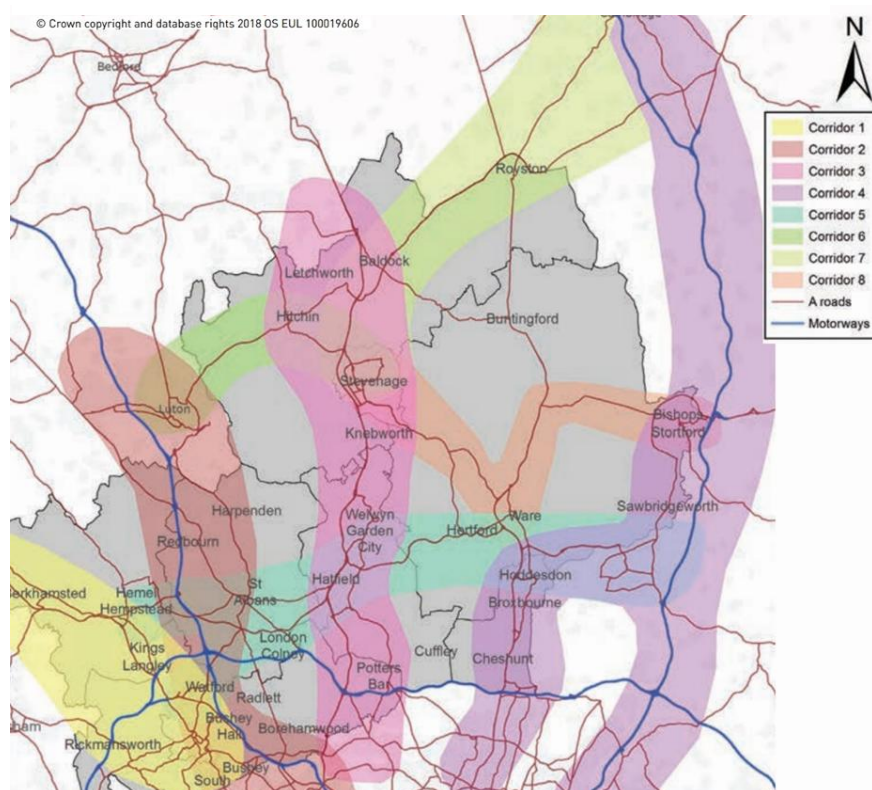
Lower order roads support cross-district movement and underpin the District's economic and social connections to its market towns and nearest large conurbations, including Stevenage, Luton and Cambridge.

[Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan 4 \(LTP4\)](#) identifies key multimodal movement corridors that are critical to the county's future transport strategy, which aims to support sustainable growth, aligned with local and regional housing and economic development plans, improve air quality and reduce car dependency.

Three of these strategic corridors pass through the District:

- Corridor 3: London↔Stevenage↔Peterborough
- Corridor 6: Luton↔Stevenage
- Corridor 7: Stevenage↔Cambridge

Key multimodal movement corridors (LTP4)



Source: HCC [LTP4](#), pg. 38

London↔Stevenage↔Peterborough Corridor (Corridor 3)

Primary infrastructure includes:

- A1(M) and M25, which are intended to facilitate long-distance travel but also carry substantial local traffic.
- East Coast Main Line, a major rail artery linking London and Scotland via Stevenage.

The corridor experiences significant commuter flows, particularly:

- Hitchin ↔ Stevenage
- Hitchin ↔ London
- Hitchin ↔ Arlesey

Strategic priorities for this corridor include:

- Ensuring that any future plans for the A1 consider the role of all transport modes and focus on maximising existing capacity rather than defaulting to road expansion.

This corridor plays a vital role in supporting sustainable growth, reducing car dependency, and improving access to jobs, services, and housing across the region.

Luton↔Stevenage Corridor (Corridor 6)

The A505 and A602 carry local traffic between Luton, Hitchin and Stevenage, but also serve as a key connection for longer-distance movements between the A6 in the west and the A1 in the east, and between Luton Airport and its wide catchment area. Some traffic is known to divert through villages to the south of the A505 to avoid congestion hotspots in Luton and Hitchin.

Notable travel flows include:

- Luton/Dunstable ↔ Hitchin and Stevenage

Strategic priorities for this corridor include:

- Improving bus connectivity between Luton and Hitchin station and wider, more frequent bus/coach connectivity to Luton Airport.

Stevenage↔Cambridge Corridor (Corridor 7)

Primary infrastructure includes:

- A505, which supports both local journeys and longer-distance traffic between the A1 (Letchworth) and M11 (Cambridge).
- Rail line between Hitchin and Cambridge

Key travel flows include:

- Stevenage ↔ Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, and Baldock
- Royston ↔ London
- Royston ↔ Cambridge

Strategic priorities for this corridor include:

- Enhancing station access and rail service levels.
- Enhancing walking and cycling links between Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Stevenage.
- Improving bus connectivity into and between the towns.
- Collaborating with Cambridgeshire authorities to improve sustainable travel options between Royston and South Cambridgeshire.

This corridor connects Hertfordshire's innovation clusters with Cambridge's knowledge economy, and improving sustainable transport links will be key to unlocking its full potential.

The [North Central Hertfordshire Growth and Transport Plan](#) (GTP) (2022) highlights a range of transport challenges that affect the District's connectivity, sustainability, and inclusivity.

Key issues identified include:

- **Congestion:** Persistent delays on major routes such as the A1 (especially junctions 8 and 9), A505, and A602, particularly during peak hours, undermine journey reliability and economic efficiency.
- **Public Transport:** Limited bus services, especially in rural areas like the northeast of the District which suffer from low frequency and reliability. A lack of bus priority measures further reduces the appeal of public transport.
- **Active Travel:** Walking and cycling infrastructure is often fragmented and of poor quality. Major roads and rail lines create severance, making it difficult to establish safe, direct routes for non-motorised users.
- **Accessibility:** Many residents, particularly those without access to a car, including vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled, face barriers in reaching key services and employment areas.
- **Environmental Impact:** High car dependency contributes to air pollution, carbon emissions, and noise and light pollution, affecting both environmental quality and public health.

Car ownership data reinforces these trends: only 15.5% of households in North Herts don't have access to a car or van, compared to 23.5% nationally (Census 2021). A higher proportion of households own multiple vehicles, indicating a strong reliance on private transport.

These findings underline the need for integrated, multimodal solutions that reduce car dependency, enhance sustainable travel options, and improve access for all residents.

Rail services

The District has good rail and road connections. The rail network provides a transport backbone through the district, connecting all four towns and Knebworth with Stevenage, London, Cambridge, Peterborough and other destinations on the rail network. There is a notable gap between the East Coast Main Line and the Midland Main Line (through Luton), which will be bridged by East West Rail between Bedford and a new station at Tempsford.

The rail services in North Herts are operated by GTR (Great Northern and Thameslink). Interchanging at Stevenage, Peterborough or Cambridge gives passengers access to other services, including to Hertford, North East England, Scotland, Stansted Airport, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Great Northern services to King's Cross can be overcrowded at peak times. Thameslink services (via St Pancras) have spare seating capacity in North Herts at all times of day. The frequency with which services can run is constrained in part by the two-tracked section through the Welwyn valley. The East Coast Digital Programme will increase line capacity with cab-based (rather than track-side) signalling and is due to be fully rolled out by 2030.

The [North East Central Hertfordshire Vision 2050](#) (NEC 2050) notes that stations at Hitchin and Royston are not located in town centres impacting on accessibility and transport connectivity particularly for the less mobile and increasing need to drive to get to a train station.

Hertfordshire County Council's Rail Strategy includes a long-term aspiration for a new Stevenage–Luton Airport rail link.

Bus services

Bus services are generally poor in North Herts, in part because they compete with the railway for inter-urban travel, which would normally support commercially viable (profitable) services. Furthermore, the limited number of rail–road bridges and historic road layouts make it difficult to design efficient bus routes in many parts of the district.

It is not viable for operators to serve widely dispersed villages on a commercial basis, so these rely on subsidised services, including the demand-responsive HertsLynx. However, for the vast majority of residents, these do not provide a level of service (availability, reach, hours of service) that can replace owning a car.

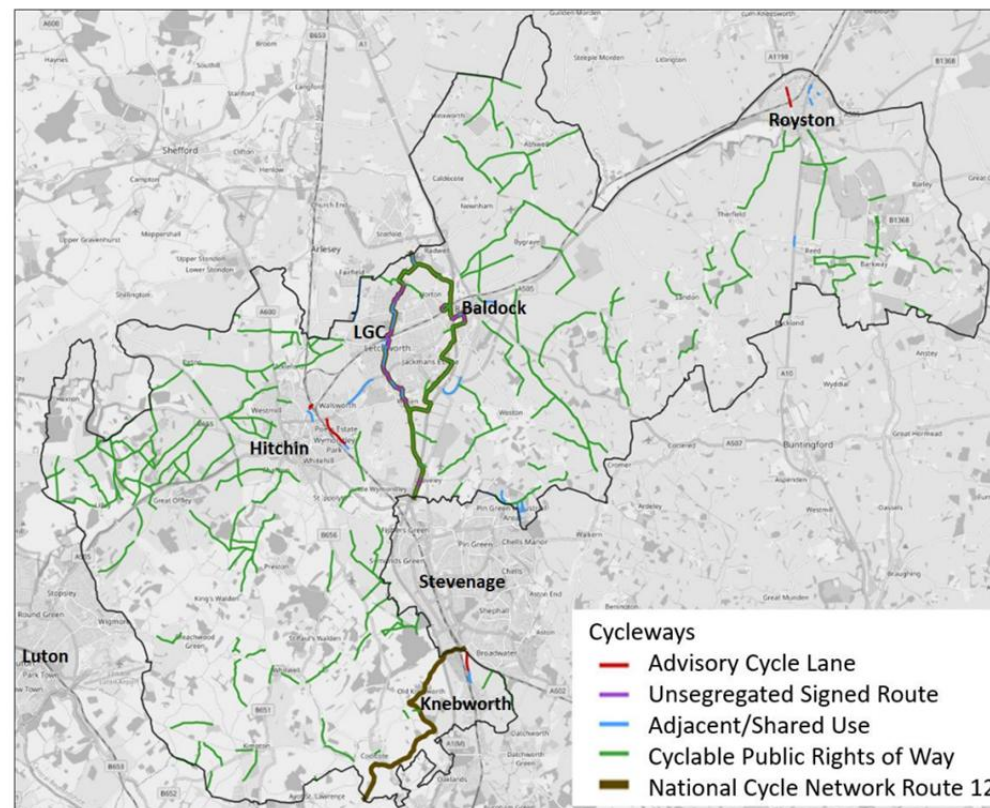
Fares are often not commensurate with the quality of service provided, especially when a trip involves more than one bus or operator or mode of transport (e.g. rail or taxi).

Cycle Network

National Cycle Network Route 12 (NCN12) runs north–south through the District, linking Welwyn Garden City, Stevenage, Letchworth, Baldock and Stotfold. The route contains some traffic-free sections, but the general quality, capacity and legibility of the route is poor.

The North Hertfordshire Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), adopted in 2023, sets out improvements to be prioritised in the four towns and Knebworth, and between Hitchin and Stevenage. An update is being prepared that will include more inter-urban and rural routes.

North Herts Cycle Routes [North Hertfordshire District Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan](#), p. 32



Travel to Work

Travel patterns across North Hertfordshire have changed considerably since the COVID-19 pandemic, with traditional commuting patterns becoming less pronounced. Traffic levels remain lower during the conventional morning and evening peak periods,

particularly in the morning, suggesting that flexible and hybrid working continue to influence when people travel. Fridays are now reported to be the busiest day of the week overall ([Hertfordshire Traffic and Transport Data Report, 2025](#)).

Despite these changes, travel in North Hertfordshire and the wider county remains predominantly car-based. In 2024, around 21% of monitored trips in Hertfordshire were made by other modes, including walking (9%), bus (11.5%) and cycling (less than 1%). Many short journeys also continue to be undertaken by car; around one in five journeys of less than one mile are made by car, increasing to almost two-thirds of journeys between one and three miles.

Congestion remains an issue at a number of locations across and around North Hertfordshire, including junctions on the A1 and sections of the A505, A19 and A602, as well as key routes through Royston, Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth and Knebworth. Unpredictable delays can encourage drivers to use alternative routes which may be less suitable for higher volumes of traffic.

These patterns indicate continued reliance on private vehicles, while also demonstrating significant potential to increase the proportion of shorter journeys undertaken by walking and cycling where safe and convenient routes are available. Improving active travel infrastructure, public transport provision and connectivity will therefore remain important in supporting more sustainable travel patterns across the District.

Airports

The primary international airports serving North Herts are London Luton Airport (LTN) and London Stansted Airport (STN). Luton is the closest, just west of the District.

Strategic Infrastructure Projects

Expansion of London Luton Airport

An application to expand capacity from 18 to 19 million passengers per annum (mppa) – was granted permission in October 2023. A DCO application to expand capacity to 32 mppa was granted consent in April 2025 (GOV.UK, 2026). As of October 2025, it is still subject to a judicial review.

While this growth will increase travel to the airport through the District, leading to higher traffic volumes and congestion on some roads, it also offers an opportunity to improve public transport links to the airport, which could enhance regional connectivity and reduce reliance on car travel.

Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor

Championed by Lord Vallance, this government project to “supercharge growth” (GOV.UK, 2026) in the region between Oxford and Cambridge encompasses various projects:

- Dualling of the A428 east of the A1, reducing journey times to Cambridge and Felixstowe (via the A14)
- East West Rail, a new and upgraded railway line between Oxford and Cambridge via Milton Keynes and Bedford. Trains are expected to start running between Oxford and Milton Keynes in 2025. An application for a Development Consent Order to construct the section between Milton Keynes and Cambridge is expected to be made in 2025/26 (East West Rail, 2026).
- Cambridge Growth Company, headed by Peter Freeman, is a subsidiary of Homes England and is tasked with enabling and supporting housing (in the region of 150,000 new homes)

and economic growth in the Cambridge area beyond the current and emerging Local Plans (GOV.UK, 2024).

- New settlement at Tempsford, between St Neots and Sandy, which was announced by the New Towns Taskforce in September 2025 (Central Bedfordshire, 2026). “The new town proposal near Tempsford in Bedfordshire is a unique opportunity with potential to provide over 40,000 homes in a standalone greenfield settlement at the intersection of the East Coast Main Line (ECML) and East West Rail (EWR), in the heart of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor.”

These projects will all have an impact on North Hertfordshire, in terms of creating new employment opportunities for residents, more travel options, but also potentially more traffic on strategic roads, such as the A1 and A505.

Digital connectivity

High quality digital connectivity including home broadband, mobile coverage, and Wi-Fi in public areas (trains, stations, public libraries, community rooms, cafés, etc) supports remote and hybrid working, learning and meeting, which became more prevalent following the Covid-19 pandemic. This reduces commuting, in particular at peak times, easing congestion and lowering transport emissions. Continued investment in fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC), fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP), 5G and other communications infrastructure, in particular in rural areas, will help sustain flexible working patterns, contributing to more sustainable travel patterns, greater social equality, and improved quality of life.

As of 2023 81.4% of premises in the District were able to receive gigabit broadband and 98.6%, 30Mbps or faster. This compares with 76.9% and 97.4%, respectively, for England.¹

Overall, there is a good level of high-speed internet provision in the District. However, there are other factors that could potentially lead to digital exclusion such as ability/ confidence in accessing the Internet, and the affordability of broadband and mobile data contracts ([Herts Insight](#))

Key sustainability issues

Informed by current data policy context, the following key issues are identified in relation to the transport, air quality and noise SA theme:

- **Strategic Connectivity and Congestion:** In the absence of effective plans to enable and promote sustainable travel, housing growth will increase transport carbon emissions and exacerbate congestion in town centres and on the A1, A505, A602 and other roads in the District. It would not be compliant with policy, affordable or, in most cases, practical, to increase road capacity to accommodate more vehicles. Therefore, the District must pursue policies, strategies and plans that minimise travel demand, enable and promote modal shift to active travel and to public and shared transport, and support emerging mobility solutions. It should support the shift from petrol/diesel to electric vehicles, but recognise that, though this will reduce carbon emissions and some forms of air pollution, it will not reduce traffic volumes or congestion. In

¹ Source: Ofcom, Connected Nations Report, 2023

fact, access to cheap electricity can encourage EV owners to drive *more* than they would in a petrol/diesel vehicle.

- **Public Transport and Active Travel Gaps:** Rail and bus usage is relatively low in most of the District. Existing active travel routes are often fragmented or severed by major roads and rail lines, reducing safety and discouraging use. New development presents opportunities to invest in public transport and active travel infrastructure. Priorities include improving access to railway stations by active travel and bus; creating and improving bus stations in the towns to create attractive and safe waiting environments; integrating public transport services better to reduce travel times and costs; improving the quality and availability of information about sustainable travel options, including reliable bus time data; rationalising car parking so that it does not undermine sustainable travel alternatives or exacerbate congestion in town centres.
- **Digital Connectivity and Home Working:** A significant proportion of residents work mainly from home, above regional and national averages. Enhancing broadband and mobile data and WiFi coverage could help sustain and extend this trend, reducing pressure on transport networks and lowering emissions.
- **Cumulative Impacts of growth:** The Luton Airport expansion, Oxford–Cambridge growth corridor, and East West Rail are likely to have both positive and negative impacts on the District. Cumulative impacts of growth and new infrastructure needs to be assessed as part of planned development in the District, particularly in relation to carbon emissions and road congestion.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the following objectives

SA Topic	SA Objective
Transport & Connectivity	<i>Maximise sustainable transport and active travel opportunities while minimising the need to travel.</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/proposal help to ...

Facilitating modal shift

- Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?
- Help improve public transport, including the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without compromising existing provision)?
- Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared with driving and parking?
- Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?

Reducing transport emissions

- Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?

Digital connectivity

- Enhance communications core infrastructure?

HOUSING

Housing

Current Data and Context

Housing stock

North Herts has approximately 60,020 homes.¹ Most are in good condition with no significant concentrations of substandard stock².

According to the ONS Census 2021, semi-detached dwellings are the most common type of dwelling (30.5%), followed by terraced dwellings (24.6%), detached dwelling or bungalows (24.3%), and purpose-built flats (17.1%). There are also a small number of park homes (0.6%) which offer an alternative to the main housing stock.³

House Prices and Affordability

Housing affordability in North Herts continues to be a significant challenge. The average house price in the District has risen to £423,000 as of June 2026, marking a 7.8% increase since June 2025⁴. Entry-level homes (the bottom 25% of properties by value), now average £318,00 as of September 2025,, a 34% increase over since September 2015. For comparison, the average house price in England was £291,000 in 2025.⁵

Affordability ratios (house price divided by earnings), compare house prices to household incomes, with higher ratios indicating decreasing affordability. The average affordability ratio in North Herts stands at 10.1 (i.e. average house price is 10.1 times average earnings), up from 7.85 a decade ago. For entry-level homes the ratio was 9.92 in 2025,, compared to 9.51 in 2025. These figures exceed both the East of England average (8.76) and the national average (6.98), highlighting the District's relative unaffordability ([ONS](#)).

Looking ahead, our Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2026 projects a shortfall of 2,834 affordable rented homes to 2045.⁶

This trend underlines the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve affordability, expand affordable housing supply, and support lower-income households in accessing secure, suitable homes.

Housing Tenure

In North Herts, the housing tenure profile is dominated by owner-occupation, which accounts for approximately 65% of all homes. The private rented sector makes up around 15%, while affordable housing tenures represent the remaining 20%.⁷

Within the affordable housing category, the vast majority (19%) are provided as affordable rent, typically managed by registered providers, who face increasing challenges in maintaining and upgrading an ageing housing stock amid rising regulatory and financial pressures. A small proportion, around 1%, comprises affordable home ownership options, such as shared ownership

¹ Source: [VOA Council Tax statistics](#) for 2025

² [North Herts' Housing Strategy 2024-2029](#)

³ [Housing, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

⁴ [ONS Housing affordability in England and Wales 2025](#)

⁵ [Lower quartile price paid for administrative geographies September 2025](#)

⁶ [SHMA Update 2023 \(F&S\)](#) SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SCOPING REPORT | SEPT 2026

⁷ [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

schemes. This tenure mix reflects a relatively stable housing market, though the limited supply of affordable ownership options may present challenges for lower-income households seeking a first step onto the property ladder. There are around 200 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the District, with the Council holding licensing responsibilities for just under 40 of these.

Housing Need

The North Herts Local Plan (NHLP) 2011–2031 sets a housing requirement of 11,600 new homes, excluding an additional 1,400 homes accepted to meet unmet need from Luton. The Plan adopts a stepped trajectory for delivery:

- 2011–2020: 350 homes per year
- 2020–2024: 500 homes per year
- 2024–2031: 1,120 homes per year

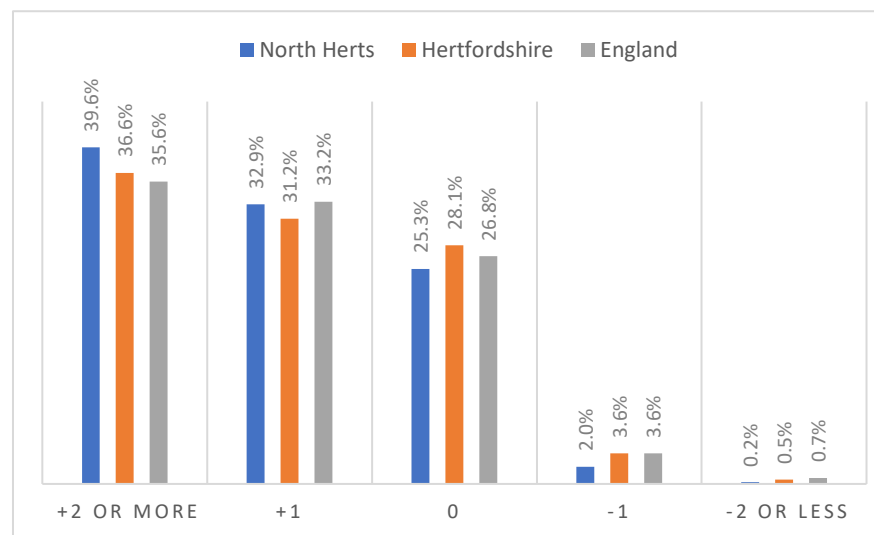
Since the start of the current plan's period (2011) a total of 5,456 new dwellings have been delivered in North Herts. This leaves a total of 7,544 remaining for the period 2025-2031.

The government's standard method for calculating housing need was revised in Dec. 2024. Under the [new method](#) North Herts' housing need is 1,018 dwellings per year⁸ or 20,360 homes over a twenty year period.

Occupancy rates

Occupancy rating provides a measure of whether a household's accommodation is overcrowded or under-occupied. An occupancy rating of negative 1 or less implies that a household has fewer bedrooms than required, so is overcrowded (for example, negative 1 means one bedroom fewer than required, negative 2 has two fewer than required). An occupancy rating of positive 1 or more implies that a household has more bedrooms than required, so is under-occupied (for example, positive 1 means one bedroom more than required, positive 2 has two bedrooms more than required), and 0 implies that they are occupied-to-standard. The data shows that around 2% of households live in overcrowded homes which is lower than in the

Occupancy rating for bedrooms (Census 2021 TS052)



⁸ [Local Housing Need outcome-of-the-new-method](#)

wider geographies. However, there is a significant proportion of households (over 70%) living in underoccupied homes with 1 or more surplus bedrooms. This suggests that larger housing in the District isn't being occupied by households with the most family members. It is likely that larger homes are occupied by wealthier and potentially older people who have chosen not to (or are unable to) downsize into smaller properties.

Affordable Housing

The current Local Plan commits to delivering at least 11,600 net new homes to meet both market and affordable housing needs. It sets a strategic target for 33% of all homes to be delivered as affordable housing across the plan period, with a higher target of 40% on the largest allocated sites.

In total, North Herts will need 2,834 affordable homes by 2045.

This evidence underscores the importance of delivering a balanced mix of affordable tenures to meet both current and future needs. The Council's [Housing Strategy](#) (2024-2029) and [Tenancy Strategy](#) (2024-2029) highlight the need for genuinely affordable homes, noting that the affordable rent product is becoming increasingly unaffordable as it is tied to market rents.

There have been 1,167 affordable dwelling completions since 2011.

Demand is consistently high for affordable housing, with generally over 2000 households on the Council's register for affordable housing at any one time ([NHDC Summary statistics: Common Housing Register 2024/25](#)). This includes households and individuals who are either homeless, living in overcrowded conditions, or whose health is negatively affected by their current accommodation.

This sustained demand highlights the ongoing pressure on affordable housing in the District and the critical need to accelerate

delivery of suitable, genuinely affordable, secure homes for those in greatest need.

Temporary Accommodation

North Herts reported 97 households (in fourth quarter of 2024/25) being in temporary accommodation. Whilst the rate of households in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households is significantly lower than at county, regional, and national levels, purpose built temporary accommodation consistently operates at near to full capacity and the Council continues to rely on hotel placements in times of particularly high demand.

This further highlights the need for continued investment in affordable housing, homelessness prevention, and support services, especially as national trends show no sign of easing.

Older Persons' Housing

The [2013 'Ready for Ageing'](#) report by the Select Committee on Public Service and Demographic Change warned that the housing market is failing to deliver enough specialist homes for older people, a concern that remains highly relevant today.

According to the 2026 SHMA, North Herts currently has 1,924 specialist housing units for older people (including housing with support or care). However, based on projected population growth, unmet demand, and existing stock, the SHMA estimates a need for 82-105 specialist dwellings per year, and an additional 425-791 care home beds per year until 2045.

While this figure represents nearly half of the District's total housing need over the period, and may be difficult to fully achieve, it underlines the critical role that dedicated older persons' housing must play in shaping a balanced and inclusive housing mix. Delivering even a portion of this requirement will be vital to supporting healthy

ageing, freeing up under-occupied family homes, and reducing pressure on health and care services.

Gypsy and Traveller Provision

The [Gypsy, Traveller and Showperson Accommodation Assessment, 2024 \(GTAA\)](#) for North Herts identifies a need for 6 additional pitches to be delivered by 2038. This reflects the projected accommodation requirements of Gypsy and Traveller households who meet the planning definition. There is also a need for up to 3 additional pitches for undetermined Gypsy and Traveller households that may meet the planning definition. Meeting this need will help support the rights and wellbeing of the travelling community, while also ensuring that future provision is planned, sustainable, and appropriately located. An updated GTAA will be produced to support the emerging local plan.

Key sustainability issues

Having considered the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues are identified in relation to the housing SA theme:

- **Meeting Identified housing need;** the District faces a significant housing challenge, with the government's revised standard method setting out a need for 1,018 homes per year. Addressing this will require not only local delivery but also cross-boundary collaboration, recognising that the Housing Market Area (HMA) spans multiple authorities with varying land constraints and growth pressures.
- **Affordability and market pressures;** house prices have outpaced earnings, with the average home now costing over 10 times the average household income. This declining affordability highlights the need for robust affordable housing policies, while also considering accessibility, space standards, and development viability.

- **Diverse and specialist housing needs;** a balanced housing strategy must cater to a range of tenures and types, including lower-cost market housing, sociate rents, affordable rents, ownership options, and specialist accommodation, particularly for older people. With an ageing population, the need for age-appropriate housing will become increasingly urgent and should be embedded in future housing delivery plans.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the objectives

SA Topic	Objective
Housing	<i>Ensure that everyone has access to a decent, affordable home that meets their needs, while supporting a mix of housing types, tenures, and specialist provision across the district</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

- Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of housing sizes, types and tenures?
- Deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of all residents?

THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

The Historic Environment

Current Data and Context

Heritage and Historic Environment in North Herts

The District has a rich history, with archaeological evidence of settlements stretching back to the Palaeolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Ages. The District's heritage continues through the character of the medieval market towns of Hitchin, Baldock, and Royston, each preserving notable historic buildings and distinctive townscapes.

Letchworth Garden City stands as a pioneering example of urban design, celebrated as the world's first Garden City. The town features exceptional architecture by renowned designers including Barry Parker & Raymond Unwin, Bennett and Bidwell, Cecil Hignett, and Mackay Hugh Baillie-Scott.

North Herts is home to:

- Around 2,500 listed buildings (North Herts Council, 2025)
- 63 scheduled monuments (North Herts Council, 2026)
- 13 registered parks and gardens (North Herts Council, 2026)
- 44 conservation areas (North Herts Council, 2026)

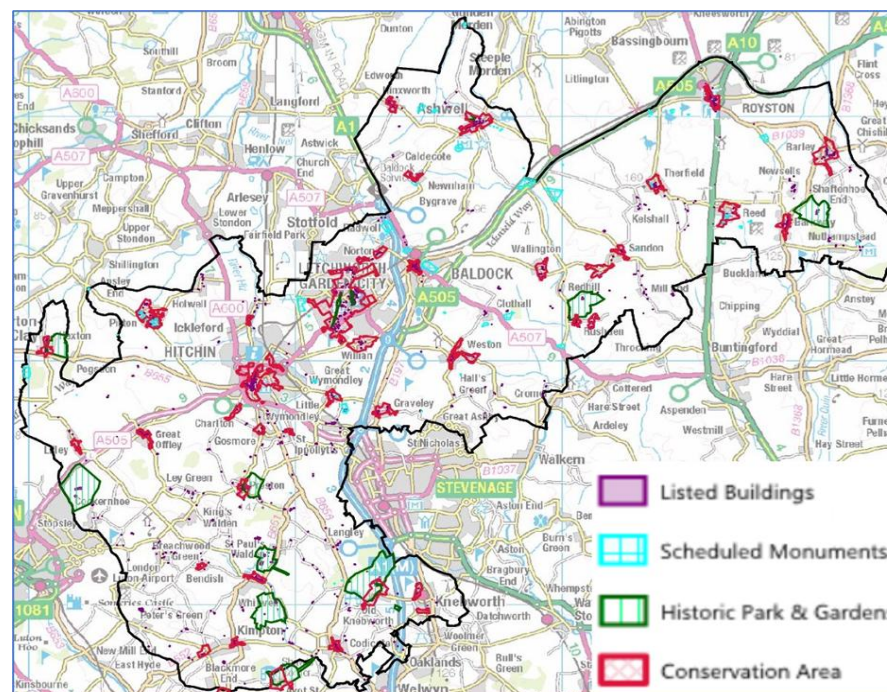
The District also contains ancient monuments and historic parks such as Howard Park and Gardens and Rushby Mead, in Letchworth Garden City. These spaces are preserved under the Ancient

Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act and recorded in Historic England's national register, established in 1983 (Historic England, 2026).

Conservation areas are designated for their special architectural or historic interest, often centred around clusters of listed buildings. They may also encompass features like open spaces, trees, historic street patterns, and locally important archaeological sites.

Each conservation area is supported by a character statement, and many are guided by appraisal and management plans.

North Herts Heritage Assets ([MAGIC](#))



The Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) includes locally important non-designated heritage assets which shape local identity. These include historic buildings, archaeological remains, and locally cherished landmarks. The HER plays an important role in cataloguing features that contribute to the county's character and identity. A search via the Heritage Gateway reveals over 4,000 records within North Herts alone, encompassing a wide array of built and archaeological assets across various historic periods.

To safeguard vulnerable heritage sites, Historic England maintains the Heritage at Risk Register, which identifies assets considered at risk of decline or loss. In North Herts, the register currently lists 10 heritage assets as at risk, listed in the table.

However, it's important to note that this national register excludes information about Grade II listed buildings outside of London. As such, the status of Grade II sites within the District remains unclear at this stage.

As the SA process progresses, the local 'At Risk' Register will be closely examined to assess whether any of the District's vulnerable heritage assets may be affected by the proposals in the emerging Local Plan.

North Herts Heritage at Risk¹

Entry name	Location	Grade
Church of St Mary	Mill Lane, Ashwell	I
Church of St John the Baptist	Melbourn Street, Royston	I
Royston Cave	Royston	Scheduled monument
Romano-British small town and late Iron Age settlement at Baldock	Baldock	Scheduled monument
West Barn at Rectory Farm	Shillington Rd., Pirton	II*
Knebworth House	Knebworth	II*
Church of St Vincent	Codicote Rd., Newham	II*
North Hertfordshire Masonic Lodge (the Cloisters)	Barrington Rd., Letchworth	II*
Ruins of Church of St Etheldreda	Chesfield, Gravely	Scheduled monument & II*
Church of St Mary	Church St., Baldock	I

¹ Source: [Historic England Heritage at Risk Register](#)

An important consideration is the relationship between heritage assets and their wider surroundings or their setting. The setting of a heritage asset encompasses not only its immediate environment but also its visual, spatial, and historical context—how it relates to other assets and the broader landscape. Understanding why assets are located where they are, and recognising patterns across an area, can reveal valuable insights into the historic development of a place.

Key sustainability issues

Drawing on the current data and policy context, several important themes have emerged in relation to safeguarding and enhancing the historic environment during development of the new Local Plan:

- Preserving Heritage**
 With an abundance of designated and non-designated heritage assets across the District, there is a significant opportunity to shape the spatial strategy and policy that actively protects historic assets. It is essential that new development respects the fabric and setting of these assets to preserve their integrity and character.
- Raising Awareness and Understanding**
 A more robust evidence base will support greater public appreciation of North Herts's historic assets, fostering a deeper sense of place among residents and enriching the experience for visitors.
- Protecting At Risk Heritage Assets**
 Opportunities to restore, re-purpose, or support management plans for assets identified as at risk particularly those listed on the Heritage at Risk Register, should be actively pursued.
- Enhancing the Public Realm and Green Infrastructure**
 Improvements in green infrastructure and the quality of public spaces can deliver indirect benefits to heritage settings,

enhancing their visibility, accessibility, and long-term stewardship.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the objectives below.

SA Topic	SA Objective
The Historic Environment	<i>Protect and enhance the historic environment of North Herts by ensuring that development respects and conserves the character, fabric, and setting of heritage assets while supporting their long-term viability and public appreciation</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

- Conserve and enhance the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets and their setting?

SOCIAL & CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Social and Cultural Infrastructure

Current Data and Context

North Herts is home to a diverse and structured hierarchy of retail and service centres, which play a vital role in supporting local communities and reducing reliance on travel to alternative destinations. To maintain and enhance this network, the current Local Plan aims to improve and protect these centres, ensuring that local expenditure stays within the District and our communities remain well-served.

Hierarchy of centres

Town centres

The four main town centres, Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Letchworth Garden City offer a range of shopping, employment opportunities, and community services. Each centre not only caters to its urban population but also serves the surrounding rural hinterlands. [The North Herts Town Centres & Retail Study \(2024\)](#) (TCRS) concluded that the mix of use in the District is broadly in line with the UK average in terms of comparison goods retail and financial professional services. There is a higher provision of restaurants/cafés and other non-retail services. However, the provision of convenience goods shops, hot foods takeaways and pubs/bars is

below the UK average. All four centres have a reasonable mix of retail and service uses, but Baldock has a lower proportion of comparison goods retail than the District and UK averages. Baldock has a strong provision of non-retail services and food/ beverage outlets. The food/ beverage sector is proportionately lowest in Letchworth Garden City, particularly in terms of pubs/bars. There are relatively low vacancy rates through the District, significantly below UK average, aside from at Letchworth Garden City.

Village Centres

Located in Ashwell, Codicote and Knebworth, the District's village centres provide essential local services and shopping, acting as key focal points for their communities.

Neighbourhood Centres

Found predominantly around Hitchin, Letchworth and Great Ashby, the designated village neighbourhood centres vary significantly in size from only 2 units (Grove Road) to over 40 units (Knebworth). Most village/neighbourhood centres have 10 or more retail/service units¹. The designated neighbourhood centres are:

- Great Ashby
- Grove Road
- Jackmans
- Nightingale Road
- Ninesprings
- The Grange
- Redhill Road

¹ [North Hertfordshire Town Centres and Retail Study \(Dec.2024\)](#)

- Walsworth (Cambridge Road)
- Walsworth Road
- Westmill (John Barker Place)

Two new centres within strategic housing sites in north of Baldock and east of Luton are proposed in the adopted Local Plan. These centres will introduce a range of facilities, from medium-sized town hubs to small village and neighbourhood clusters.

North Herts Designated Centres: Current Services (TCRS), pg. 25

	Letchworth	Hitchin	Royston	Baldock	Knebworth	Codicote	The Grange	Great Ashby	Redhill Road	Ashwell	Walsworth Rd.	Jackmans	Walsworth (Cambridge Rd.)	Nightingale Road	Ninesprings	Westmill	Grove Road
Food/ convenience																	
Banks																	
Post office																	
Newsagent																	
Off licence																	
Chemist																	
Takeaway, café or restaurant																	
Public house																	
Bookmakers																	
Launderette, dry cleaner																	
Hairdresser, beauty salon																	
Florist																	
Estate agents																	
Community hall																	
Doctor's surgery																	
Library																	

Leisure, entertainment & cultural facilities

Residents in the District have a reasonable range of commercial leisure and entertainment uses within the authority area and within neighbouring authorities. Public transport access to facilities within Stevenage, Cambridge and Central London provides additional opportunities for leisure, entertainment and cultural trips (TCRS).

Cultural & entertainment venues

Key cultural and entertainment venues are:

- North Herts Museum (Hitchin) showcases the District's history and traditions.
- Baldock Arts and Heritage Centre which a space for exhibitions, performances and heritage appreciation.
- Broadway Cinema and Theatre is the District's only cinema with 4 screens with a capacity of 809 seats.
- There are five main theatre venues with up to 969 seats:
 - Broadway Cinema and Theatre (Letchworth Garden City)
 - Market Theatre (Hitchin)
 - Queen Mother Theatre (Hitchin)
 - The Factory Playhouse (Hitchin)
 - Hitchin Thespians at Woodside Hall

Future Provision & Development

The Town Centres and Retail Study finds no immediate need for new major leisure developments over the next ten years. Instead, the focus will be on:

- Reoccupying vacant units

- Advancing mixed-use developments already allocated in the Local Plan – site allocations (HT11, HT12, LG19, LG21, RY12)
- Supporting new leisure hubs within strategic housing growth sites

Health and fitness clubs

The Sport England/ [Active Places data](#) indicates that there are 21 registered health and fitness facilities in the District, with 1,336 fitness stations North Herts which exceeds regional benchmarks in fitness infrastructure.

Outdoor sports pitches

The Council's [Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy \(2025\)](#) (PPOSS) assesses provision of playing pitch and outdoor sports facilities in accordance with Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) [Guidance](#) and Sport England's Assessing Needs and Opportunities [Guide](#) (ANOG) for "non-pitch" sports. The assessment considered current supply and estimated future demand up to 2043. Its conclusions are summarised in the table below.

Type of provision	Current provision	Summary
Football	155	155 pitches across 61 sites, shortfall for youth 11v11, 9v9 and mini pitches.
3G	6+2 small pitches	shortfall of 3.5 11v11 pitches.
Rugby union	14 across six sites	Shortfall of 28.25 match equivalent sessions identified when accounting for future demand.
Tennis	110 courts	insufficient provision, under-provision equivalent to 261 members
Hockey	3 pitches	Insufficient - new full-sized sports lit hockey pitch is required to meet current demand.
Netball	66 across 33 sites	adequate netball provision
Athletics	No purpose-built tracks within the District – Ridlins Wood Athletic Track (in Stevenage) serves North Herts.	
Lawn Bowls	13 bowling greens across 13 sites	There is sufficient provision – but demand likely to increase due to growth in 65+ age group
Cricket	28 across 26 sites	insufficient capacity to meet demand
Water sports	2 outdoor pools	Sufficient provision

Golf	5 facilities	sufficient supply.
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Education

Most of the District operates a two-tier education system, with children attending primary schools from ages 4-11 and secondary schools from ages 11-16 (and up to 18 where sixth-form provision is made). The east of the District operates a three-tier system of lower (ages 5-9), middle (9-13) and upper (13-16/18) schools. Below is a summary of current provision in the District.

Schools provision in North Herts (Source: [HCC Schools directory](#))

School Type	Number of Schools
Nursery	32
Infant/ Nursery	6
First (ages 5 to 9)	8
Junior	6
Primary	33
All through	1
Secondary	6
Special	2

Further Education

North Hertfordshire College (NHC) plays a key role in vocational and occupational learning. With campuses in both Hitchin and Stevenage, the college offers:

- Full and part-time programmes across multiple sectors
- Specialist support for students with additional learning needs
- Close alignment with local employment and skills development priorities

Planned provision

The current [Local Plan](#), Policy SP14, identifies a need for new school provision North of Baldock to include:

- A new primary school
- A new secondary school

Health Care

North Herts benefits from a network of healthcare services that support residents' everyday medical needs while providing access to specialised treatment through nearby regional hospitals.

- **Emergency Care:**
The nearest Accident & Emergency (A&E) facility is Lister Hospital in Stevenage, serving as a vital resource for urgent care needs across the District.
- **Local and Regional Hospitals:**
Residents also have access to the following healthcare facilities within and around the District:
 - Royston Hospital
 - Hertford County Hospital (Hertford)

- New Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (Welwyn Garden City)
- Renal Medicine Departments: Bedford, Harlow, St Albans, and Dunstable
- For advanced and specialist services, Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, serves the wider East of England region, including parts of North Herts.

Local Primary Care Services

Healthcare at the community level is provided by GP surgeries across the District (www.nhs.uk):

- Hitchin, Whitwell, Ashwell, Letchworth & Baldock are served by the Herts & West Essex Integrated Care Board, with 10 GP practices.
- Royston is covered by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care Board, with a further 6 GP surgeries.

Residents can also access approximately:

- 22 dental clinics
 - 28 pharmacies
- (Source www.nhs.uk)

Community Centres and Village Halls

North Herts has a selection of village and community halls that serve as vital hubs for social, cultural, and recreational activities. These venues provide spaces for events, clubs, celebrations, and local initiatives, helping strengthen the fabric of community life across the District (www.north-herts.gov.uk).

Larger venues in more urban settings provide extended capacity for community-led programming and larger gatherings:

- Hitchin Town Hall – A central and historic location for events, exhibitions, and civic functions
- St. John’s Community Centre
- Westmill Community Centre
- Walsworth Community Centre

Key Sustainability Issues

Informed by current data and policy context, several important considerations emerge for the natural environment in the District:

- **Revitalise Retail Spaces** by prioritising the reoccupation of vacant shop units, especially in underused centres and supporting small-scale shops and services in both designated and underserved areas where need is evident.
- **Ensuring Educational Capacity** through collaboration with Hertfordshire County Council to secure sufficient school places across all age groups and expanding existing capacity and plan new facilities to meet growth-driven demand.
- **Strengthening Health Infrastructure** by working with Integrated Care Boards to ensure that the provision of primary healthcare services, GPs, dentists, and pharmacies, can meet current and future needs.

SA Objectives and Appraisal Questions

Considering the key sustainability challenges identified, several strategic considerations have been identified that relate to wider development challenges

SA Topic	Objectives
Social and Cultural Infrastructure	<i>Promote environmentally responsible and socially inclusive development that supports local communities, protects natural resources, and enhances long-term wellbeing across our District</i>

Appraisal supporting questions:

Will the proposal or policy…?

- help create resilient communities by improving access to social and cultural facilities while ensuring equitable distribution of services?

LOCAL ECONOMY & EMPLOYMENT

Local Economy and Employment

Current Data and Context

North Herts is well-positioned with a strong transport network that connects it regionally and nationally and supports our local economy. Situated in a dynamic sub-region, the District benefits from access to major roadways, including the M1, A1, A1(M) and A505. and the East Coast, West Coast, and East Midlands routes. The District benefits from 5 railway stations offering direct services to London, Cambridge and further afield. Luton and Stansted airports are within close proximity to the District.

Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA)

Economic activity in North Herts extends beyond its administrative boundaries, operating within a broader Functional Economic Market Area ([FEMA](#)) that encompasses the eastern half of Central Bedfordshire, forming an interconnected economic zone along the vital A1 corridor. Notably, 70% of people who work in this FEMA also live within it, underscoring strong residential and employment integration.

The A1(M) corridor stands out as the most commercially significant area within the wider study zone. It supports:

- A high concentration of employment space
- Excellent strategic access to Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, London, and the M25 orbital route
- A thriving ecosystem for property occupiers seeking connectivity and market reach

There is a significant amount of commuting between the settlements of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Baldock.

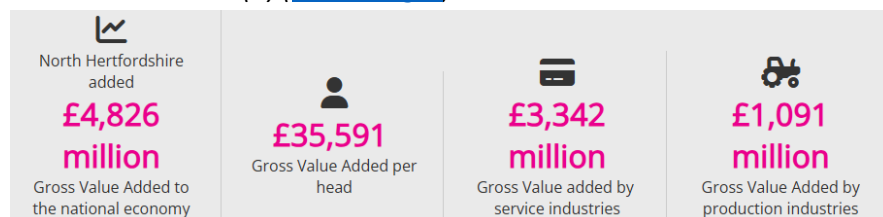
The proximity of Stevenage and Luton means that many of those with the highest level of skills commute out of the District to work. The 2021 Census took place mid-pandemic, and the recorded volume of commuting was substantially affected by lock down. Post-pandemic there is little to suggest that the patterns observed a decade earlier have materially changed. At the time, North Herts was characterised as a net exporter of labour, with an overall net outflow of 12,385 persons and approximately 22.9% of working residents commuting to Greater London¹. Today, hybrid working is likely to feature much more strongly, but the links to Greater London – through both the labour market and the housing market – continue to be strong (NHDC Economic Strategy 2025) .

The Local Economy

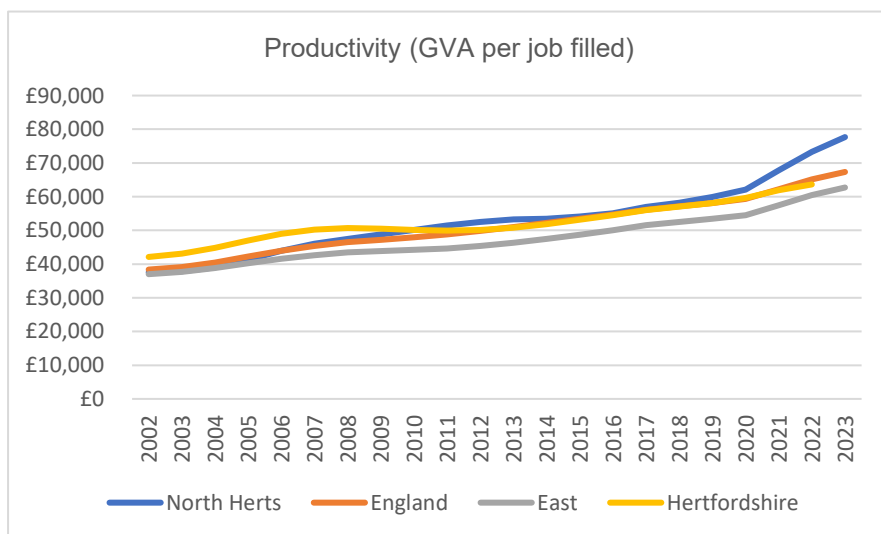
There are 6,225 businesses employing around 69,400 people in the District. The economic output of an area can be evaluated using the Gross Value Added which is a measure of the economic output of an area; representing the value of goods and services produced minus the cost of inputs and raw materials ([Herts Insight](#)).

¹ [Functional Economic Market Area Study, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, 2015](#)

North Herts's GVA(B) ([Herts Insight](#))



In 2023 the GVA was estimated to be £4.8Bn equating to £35,591 per head. Almost 70% of this was attributable to service industries and 30% to production industries.



Source: [ONS](#)

Productivity, as measured by the overall value of output (GVA) per filled job,² was £77.7k – higher than both the regional (£62.3k) and national (£67.3k) averages.

Workforce and Skills

The employment rate is around 82.1% of the working age population (for year ending Mar. 2025) which is higher than the national average of 75% ([ONS](#)) and slightly higher than the rate for Hertfordshire (80.1%). The unemployment rate was 3% in 2023 which is slightly below the national average of 3.4% ([ONS](#)).

The economic inactivity rate refers to working age (16-64) people who are not working and not actively looking for work (includes students, early retirees, long-term sick, disabled or those looking after family etc.). The economic inactivity rate for North Herts was 14.8% in 2023, below the national average of 20.8% ([ONS](#)).

In terms of adult qualification levels, 51.5% of residents hold Level 4 qualifications³ or higher, which is a little below the level for Hertfordshire (56.6%) but higher than regional (43.8% for the East region) and national (47.1%) averages. Only 3.8% of residents have no formal qualifications, compared to 5.2% regionally and 6.4% nationally.

² ONS [Subregional Productivity June 2025 release](#).

³ Certificate of higher education, higher apprenticeship, Level 4 diploma or NVQ

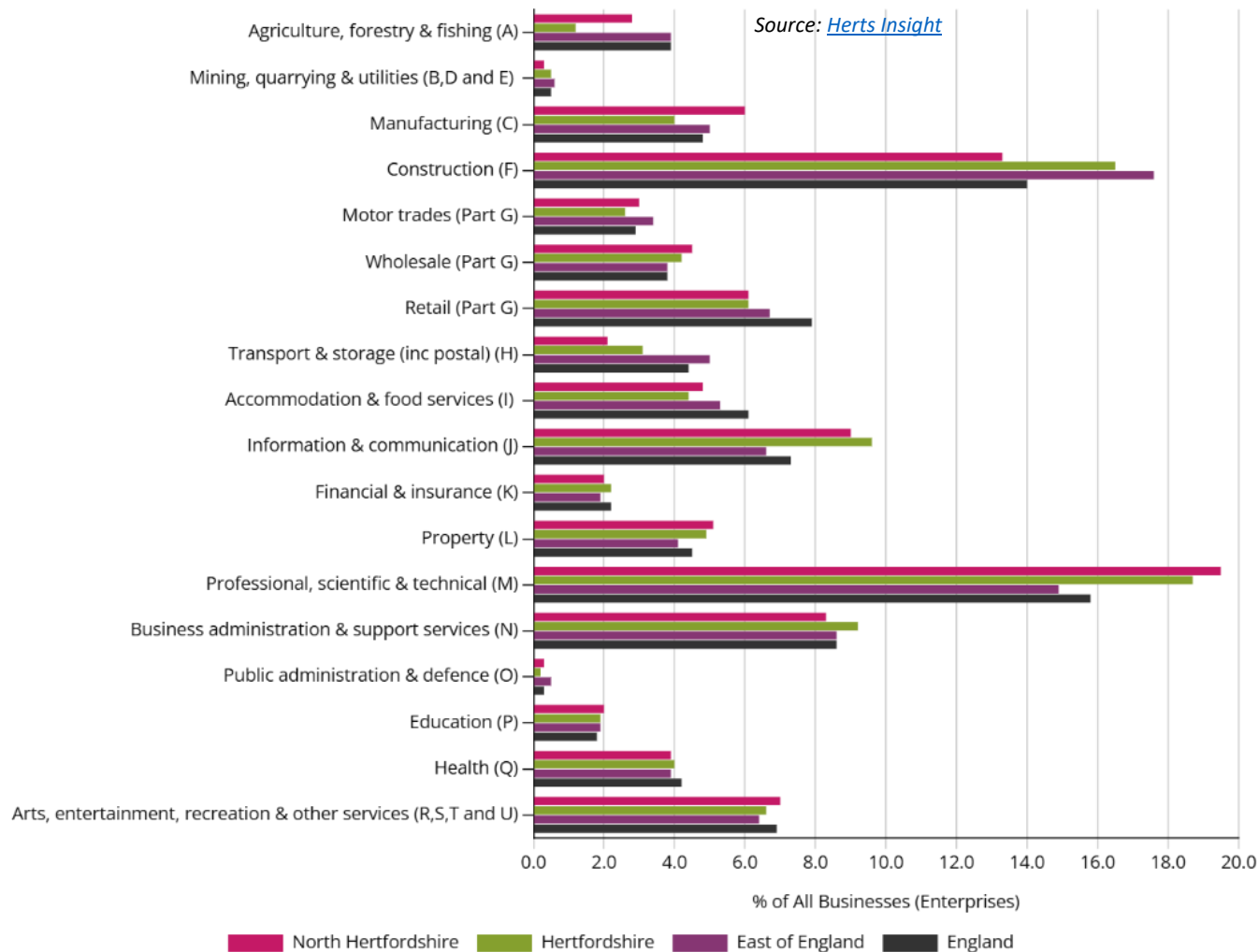
Businesses by Industry

The largest proportion of businesses in North Herts (19.3% of total) specialise in the Professional, Scientific & Technical sector. This compares to 18.7% in Hertfordshire and 15.8% nationally. The second largest sector in North Herts is construction, which makes up 13% of the total.

There are around 5,525 micro-businesses (up to 9 employees) in the District making up 89% of total businesses followed by small businesses (10-49 employees) represented by 560 businesses. There are 100 medium-sized (50-249 employees) businesses and only 15 large businesses (250+ employees) in the District (source: [ONS](#)).

The Council's Economic Strategy 2025-30, notes that the District has a mix of high and low productivity businesses and sectors. It is home to some major research-intensive advanced manufacturing businesses; with manufacturing accounting for about 13% of employment in North Herts. This is double the proportion at national level and almost three times the County average. Among the advanced manufacturing businesses, Johnson Matthey and Sartorius, both in Royston, are two important examples. Letchworth Garden City also has a concentration of manufacturing businesses and employment. For some of these

Percentage of Businesses (Enterprises) in each Industry Group as at March 2024



businesses, links to the Cambridge sub-region, particularly to the major technology consultancies, is very important (DEC25).

Key Employment Areas

Within the four main towns there are a number of established Employment Areas, where the majority of employment premises are located. They include certain E class uses (office, research and development, industrial processes), B2 (industrial) and B8 (storage and distribution) class uses. These include:

- Works Road and Avenue One Employment Area, Letchworth
- Hitchin Industrial Estate
- York Road and Orchard Way Employment Area, Royston

Commercial Floorspace

Total commercial floorspace in the District equates to around 1,346,000 sq.m with the majority of this is made up by the industrial sector followed by the retail and office sectors ([Valuation Office Agency data Mar. 2023](#)). There is a need to modernise and to improve the environmental performance of business premises, especially in Letchworth. Currently there is more demand for industrial sites/premises than office buildings, but both need to be better aligned with the district's economic ambitions and potential.

Retail Floorspace

Most of the District's comparison and convenience goods retail outlets are focused in Hitchin and to a lesser extent Letchworth Garden City. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 9.

The North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy [TCRS](#) projected the following retail floorspace requirements up to 2036:

Location	Requirements by 2036 (sq.m)
Hitchin	2,150
Letchworth GC	1,350
Baldock	1,020
Royston	100
Other	550

The combined total floorspace capacity projections above total 5,170 sq.m gross by 2036. The study concludes that based on a reasonable reduction in shop vacancy rates, reoccupied space could in theory accommodate about three quarters of the projected capacity need up to 2036. Any residual floorspace capacity up to 2036 could be met by the development of the existing mixed-use allocations in the town centre.

The adopted Local Plan includes mixed use allocations in Churchgate and surrounding areas (Policy HT11), where redevelopment could provide about 4,000 sq.m gross of additional retail and food/beverage uses and Raynes Park (Policy HT12) where mixed use development could provide about 3,000 sq.m gross of additional retail and food/beverage uses. One or other of these two mixed use allocations is more than sufficient to meet projected need over the plan period (TCRS).

Office stock

Offices are generally focused in town centre units, a mix of purpose-built spaces and conversions of older buildings, concentrated in Letchworth, Hitchin, and Royston. There is further provision within key employment zones at:

- Hitchin Industrial Estate (Wilbury Way)
- Works Road Employment Area in Letchworth

- York Road/Orchard Way Employment Area in Royston

Additionally, there are standalone office blocks, notably the landmark Spirella Building in Letchworth and premises on Walsworth Road near Hitchin Station, with further smaller rural schemes adding variety.

The NHDC Economic Development Strategy (2025) concludes that there is a need to modernise and to improve the environmental performance of business premises, especially in Letchworth. Adding that there is currently more demand for industrial sites/ premises than office buildings, but both need to be better aligned with the district's economic ambitions and potential.

Given its proximity to both Cambridge and London, the district's asset base should be valuable. The York Way industrial area in Royston is already home to some major advanced manufacturing and life sciences businesses and this could be further strengthened by forging deeper links to the Cambridge region.

Key sustainability issues

Having considered the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues are identified in relation to the economy and employment SA theme:

- Supporting the resident population with good access to a variety of job and training opportunities will help maintain the high economic activity rate in the District.
- Maintaining and improving the vitality and viability of town, local and retail centres in the District will help ensure their continued strong economic performance.
- The Local Plan should seek to protect and support the modernisation of commercial floor space particularly in strategic employment sites.

- It will be important to continue to support small business which form the bulk of the employment opportunities in the District. At the same time the Plan should seek to attract larger businesses and foster greater connections to the high tech and research centres in the Cambridge sub-region.

SA Objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the below objective

SA Topic	SA Objective
Local Economy & Employment	Support a strong, diverse and resilient economy that provides opportunities for all, enhances the vitality of the District's town and local centres, and employment areas.

Appraisal supporting questions:

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

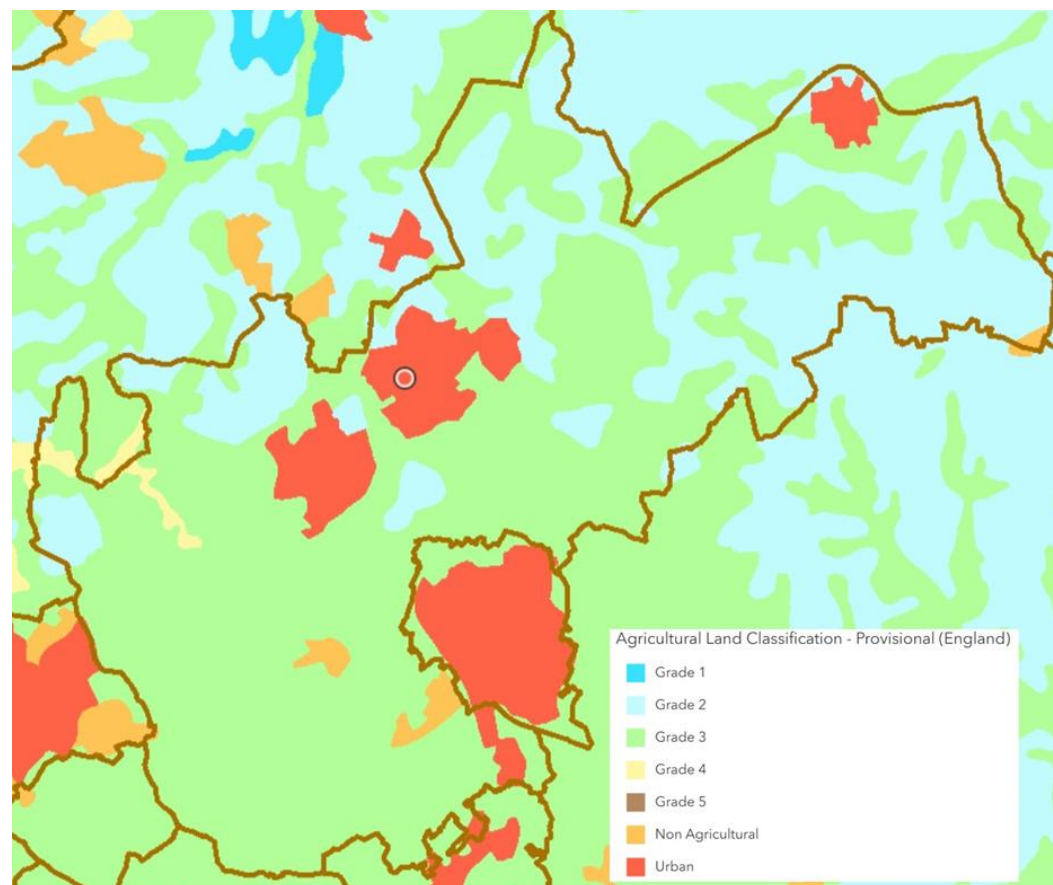
- Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?
- Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?
- Encourage the growth of existing businesses?
- Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres

LAND, SOILS & WASTE

Current data and Context

Soil resources

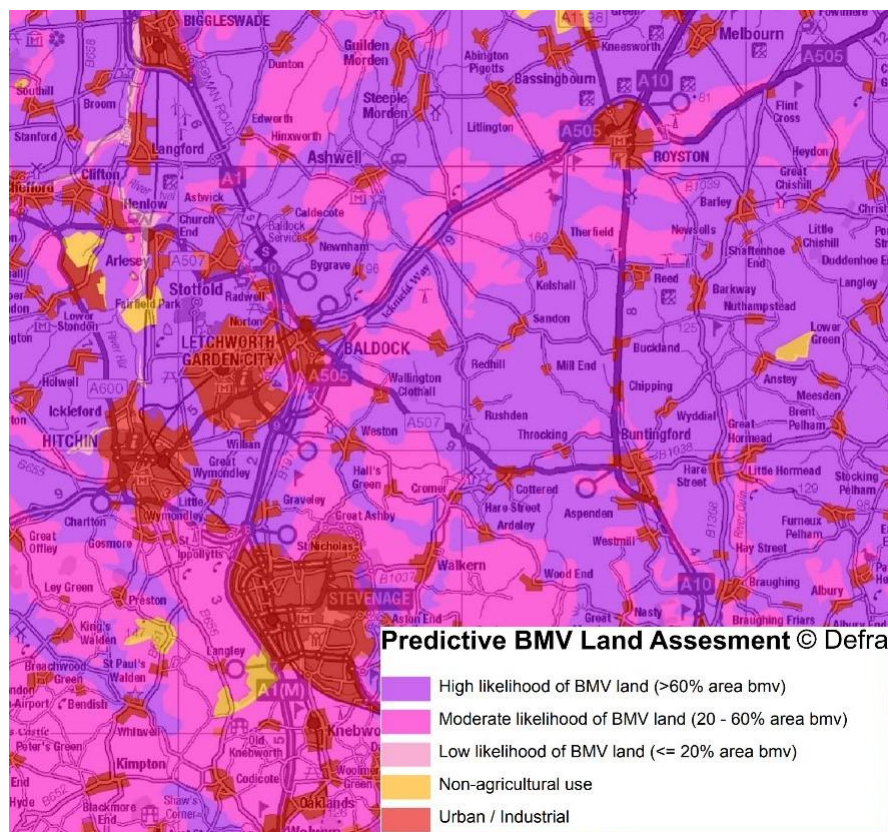
The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) classifies land into six grades (plus 'non-agricultural' and 'urban'), where Grades 1 to 3a are recognised as being the 'best and most versatile' (BMV) land and Grades 3b to 5 are of poorer quality. The provisional ALC dataset provided by Natural England¹ demonstrates that the majority of North Herts District area is underlain with Grade 3 'Good to Moderate' agricultural land with some Grade 2 'Very Good' agricultural land and a small pocket of Grade 4 'Poor' land and areas of urban land and land in non-agricultural use around major settlements. Nevertheless, in the absence of a detailed ALC assessment for the whole of North Herts, it currently cannot be determined whether this Grade 3 land is Grade 3a (i.e., BMV land) or Grade 3b (not BMV land).



Agricultural Land Classification (Source: [MAGIC](#))

¹ [Agricultural Land Classification map Eastern Region - ALC008](#)

Predictive BMV Land Assessment



Source: [Natural England](#)

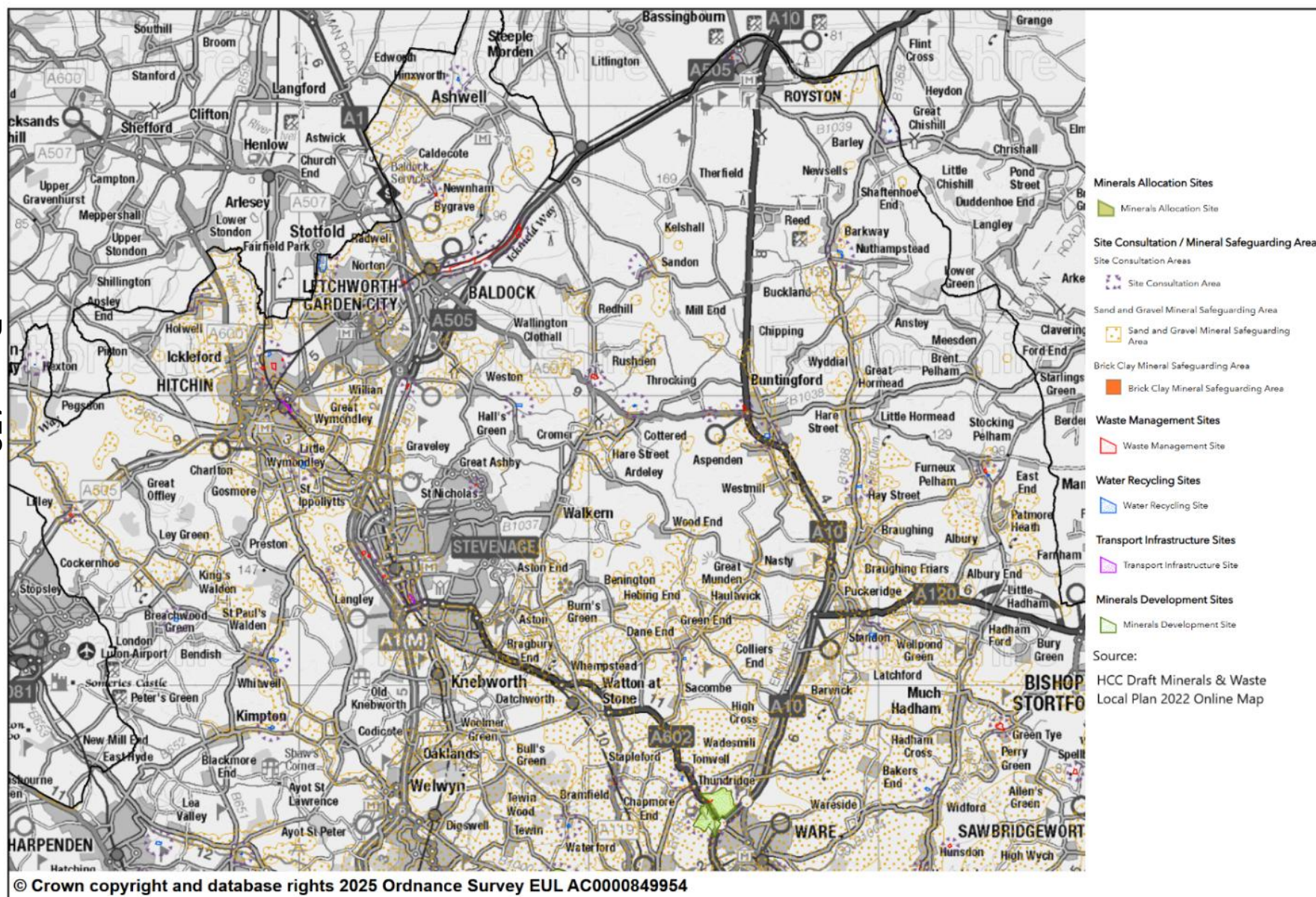
The 'Predictive Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land Assessment' for the Eastern Region provided by Natural England shows the District as having significant areas of high (>60%) and moderate (20-60%) likelihood of BVM areas outside urban areas in the main settlements.

Mineral resources

Mineral resources are defined as natural concentrations of minerals or bodies of rock that have the potential to be of economic interest. As minerals are a non-renewable resource, minerals safeguarding is used to ensure that non-minerals development does not needlessly prevent (or sterilise) the future extraction of mineral resources. A minerals safeguarding area (MSA) is an area designated by a Mineral Planning Authority (HCC) which covers known deposits of minerals which are desired to be kept safeguarded from unnecessary sterilisation by non-mineral development. A minerals consultation area (MCA), is an area, based on a MSA, where the Council should consult the Mineral Planning Authority (HCC) for any proposals for non-minerals development. North Herts has numerous areas of sand and gravel mineral safeguarding areas as shown on the map below.

Waste

North Herts collected 48,696 tonnes of waste in 2024-2025, achieving a recycling rate of around 56.5% for household waste ([DEFRA](#)); including waste sent for recycling, composting, anaerobic digestion or reuse. This rate compares favourably with the Eastern region (44.9%) and England (43.8%). The Hertfordshire Waste Development Framework [Waste Site Allocations](#) (WSA) (adopted 2014, identifies sites for waste management facilities across the County, including three sites in North Herts at Bury Mead Rd. (Hitchin), Cumberlow Green (Buntingford) and at Stotfold.

Minerals & Waste Sites ([HCC](#))Source: [HCC](#)

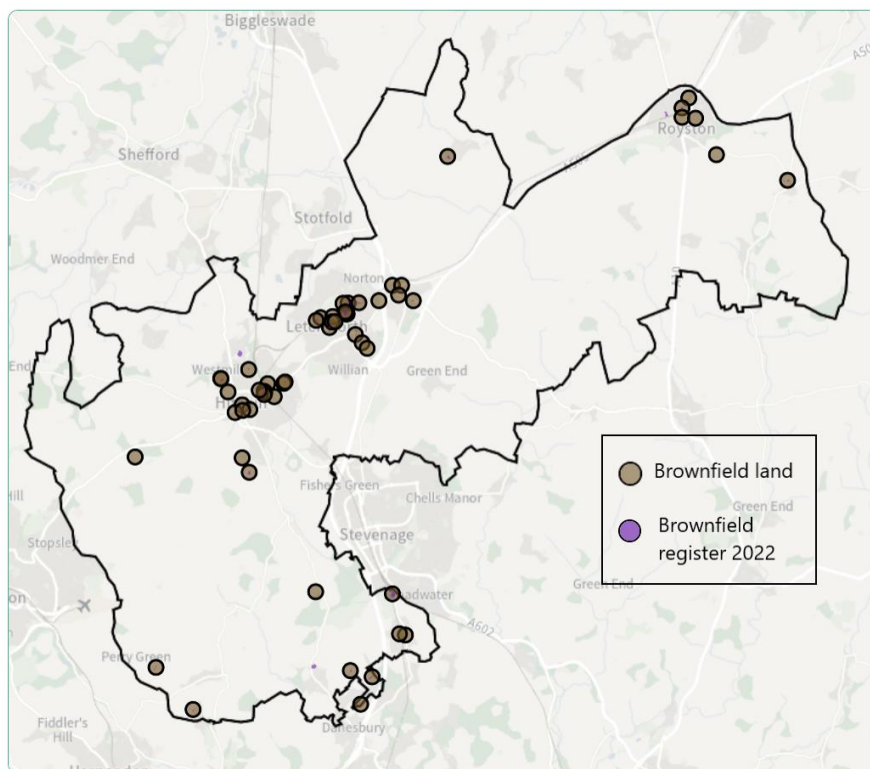
Brownfield land

Brownfield or of previously developed land (pdl) is defined as *land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land and any associated fixed surface infrastructure* (NPPF). The adopted Local Plan promotes the re-use of brownfield (or previously developed land) setting a target of 20% of new homes to be built on previously developed land (Policy SP8). For example, within Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, employment area designations released some modest brownfield sites for residential development. Within Letchworth, the former power station site at Works Road has been brought back into use for employment purposes. The North Herts Brownfield Land Register identifies capacity for up to 618 new dwellings on brownfield sites. However, it is important to note that there are often obstacles associated with pdl sites such as abnormal costs associated with removing contamination, underground obstructions, the demolition of existing buildings, poor quality /nature of used topsoil and lack of suitable amenities and infrastructure.

Contaminated Land

Contaminated land refers to sites where substances such as chemicals, gases, or waste materials are present at levels that could pose risks to human health, property, water resources or the wider environment. For example, in North Herts there are some historic landfill sites. Other examples include former factories, chemical works, historic landfill sites but other examples include petrol stations, farmland (with pesticide build up) etc. In the context of Local Plans, LPAs are required to consider the implications of land contamination when allocating or assessing land for development, ensuring that sites are suitable for their intended use and that any unacceptable risks are appropriately identified, assessed, and mitigated through the planning process. This includes ensuring that developers undertake adequate site investigations and risk assessments so that contaminated land is remediated to a standard that prevents significant harm and enables safe, sustainable development. Therefore, it will; be important for the local plan to identify and consider the risk posed by contaminated sites when allocating sites for development. This can include remediation of contaminated brownfield sites and the reuse of land where it can be made safe and it is viable to do so.

North Herts Brownfield Sites (NHDC)



Source NHDC

Key sustainability issues

Having considered the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues are identified in relation to the land, soils and waste SA theme:

- The District contains large swathes of high-quality and 'best and most versatile' agricultural land which is likely to face increasing pressures from new development.
- There are opportunities to deliver some new development on brownfield sites within the District, though there is a limited supply of suitable sites and it can be challenging to fully unlock such sites.
- There are mineral-related facilities and activities, and waste sites safeguarded in the District. Many settlement areas also lie within a Minerals Consultation Area. The impacts of new development on natural resources and sustainable waste management will need to be taken into consideration.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the objectives outlined below

SA Topic	SA Objective
Land, soils & waste	<i>Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect soil and mineral resources</i>

Appraisal supporting questions:

Will the proposal/ policy help to ...

- Promote the use of previously developed land & support the remediation of contaminated land?
- Prevent development on land where contamination poses unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?
- Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?
- Protect the integrity of mineral resources?

WATER RESOURCES & QUALITY

Current Data and Context

Water resources

North Hertfordshire District is within an area of 'serious water stress'¹. This implies that water demand is high compared to available water resources. Population growth coupled with droughts and extreme weather events associated with climate change are expected to exacerbate this issue. Affinity Water's Water Resources Management Plan 2024 ([WRMP](#)) identifies significant pressures on the local environment and water resources due to population growth and climate change.

Water stored in geological strata (for example, in rocks) below the water table is called groundwater. The geological strata that hold water are called aquifers; these are the subsurface layer or layers of rock or other geological strata of sufficient porosity and permeability to allow either a significant flow of groundwater or the abstraction of significant quantities of groundwater.

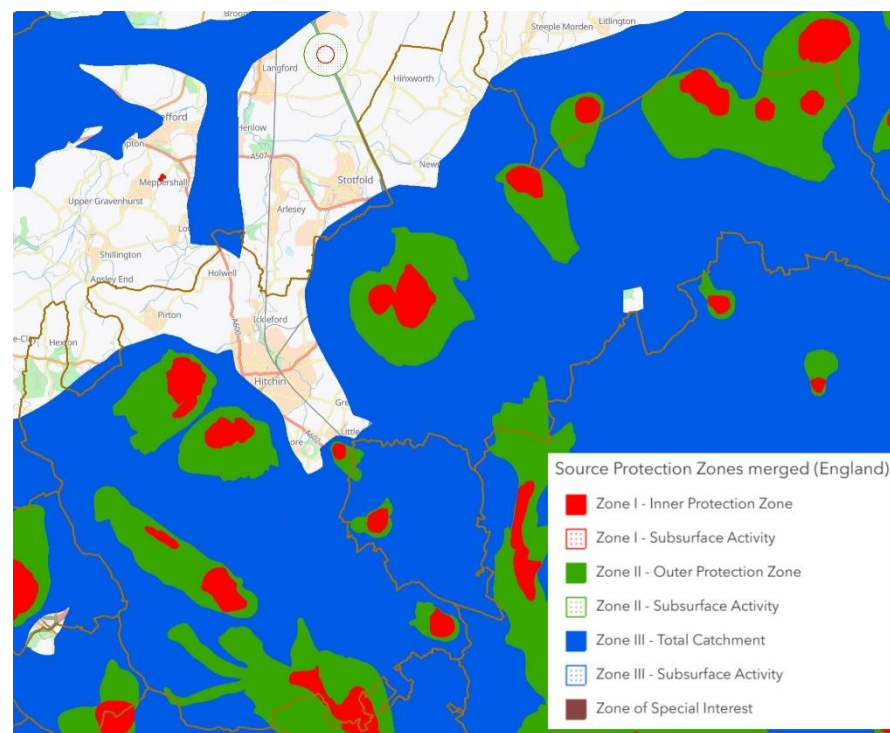
Much of North Herts is underlain by principal and secondary aquifers from which the area's drinking water is sourced. The Environment Agency (EA) classifies both surface water and groundwater resources within the majority of Hertfordshire as over-licensed or over-abstacted.

Source Protection Zones (SPZ)

SPZ are areas designated by the EA around large and public potable groundwater abstraction sites. These provide additional protection to safeguard drinking water quality through constraining the proximity of an activity that may impact upon a drinking water abstraction. Zone

1 (Inner Protection) is closest to the source, with a 50-day pollutant travel time, aimed at preventing microbial contamination. Zone 2 (Outer Protection) extends further out (400-day travel time), and Zone 3 (Source Catchment) encompasses the full recharge area needed to sustain abstraction. There are 12 SPZ1's across the District.

North Herts Source Protection Zones



Source Protection Zones ([MAGIC](#))

¹ [Environment Agency: Water stressed areas – final classification 2021](#)

The EA uses SPZ as generic indicators of risk. Developers or operators may need to supply site specific information to demonstrate that the risks are acceptable and can be mitigated².

Chalk Streams

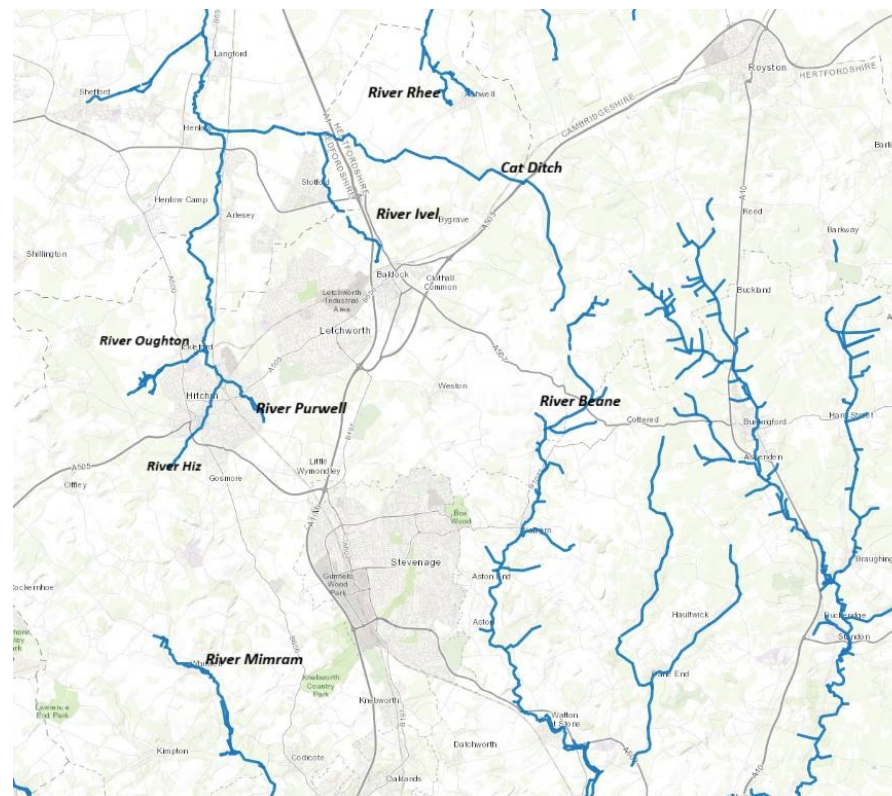
Groundwater abstractions have contributed to reduced flows along several chalk rivers in Hertfordshire³, leading to increased periods of dry bed conditions along winterbourne sections (stretches of chalk rivers that are normally dry in summer and flow after winter rains) that are routinely affected by seasonal drying out account for roughly half the course of the river Beane and river Mimram. Any extension of such periods impacts local wildlife and biodiversity. The secondary effects of prolonged periods of low flow / no-flow conditions can include amongst other detrimental impacts the accumulation of fine sediment (silt) on the riverbed which can adversely affect the diversity of aquatic vegetation thus impacting the balance of fragile natural ecosystems.

North Herts is located at the head of both Great Ouse and Thames river catchments. The Thames River Basin Management Plan ([RBMP](#), 2022) and the [Anglian RBMP](#), 2022) identify a range of significant water management issues that can adversely impact the water environment including:

- Physical modifications - e.g. flood defences and weirs that alter natural flow characteristics, cause excessive accumulation of fine sediment in surface water bodies and the degradation and loss of wildlife habitats and recreational uses.

- Pollution from wastewater – sewer discharges (from combined sewer overflows, treatment works, and due to foul flooding) can contain large quantities of contaminants, with population growth and changes in rainfall patterns increasing the pressure on the sewer networks.

North Herts Chalk Rivers ([Natural England](#))



² [The Environment Agency's approach to groundwater protection](#)

³ [Hertfordshire Water Study \(Arcadis 2017\)](#)

- Pollution from towns, cities and transport - rainwater draining from roofs, roads and pavements into watercourses.
- Changes to the natural flow and depth of water - caused by human activity (such as abstraction) or during drought conditions, which adversely affects the health of aquatic ecosystems.

Status of Water Bodies

The following table shows a summary of the ecological and chemical status of water bodies within the District associated with the rivers Ivel, Hiz, Beane and Rhee. It shows all water bodies failing chemical status. The majority have good/ moderate ecological status except the Beane which has poor ecological status. The main sources of pollution are associated with urbanisation, road transport run-off, industry, agriculture and livestock, land management, water abstraction and wastewater discharge. Physical (ecological) barriers and water course modification (including for flood management) are also major causes of deterioration.

Wastewater

The [Hertfordshire Water Study \(2017\)](#) modelled a range of future population growth scenarios (up to 2051) and the likely impacts on wastewater treatment infrastructure serving the district. It concluded that:

- Development proposals around the northeast of Letchworth Garden City are likely to require significant new infrastructure and / or upgrades to the existing sewerage system near Ashbrook Sewage Treatment Works (STW).
- The majority of STWs in North Hertfordshire are predicted to require capacity planning from 2021 onwards to ensure they can accommodate the quantum of growth projected.

Status of North Hertfordshire water bodies ([Catchment Data Explorer](#))

Water body	Ecological status	Chemical status	Issues (contaminants, sources/ causes)
Hiz (DS Hitchin)	Moderate	Fail	Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDE), physical modification/ barriers/ ecological discontinuity, transport drainage, invasive species, urbanisation
Ivel (US Henlow)	Good	Fail	PBDE, Perfluorooctane sulphonate (PFOS) & groundwater abstraction
Purwell	Moderate	Fail	PBDE, physical modification / water level (flood protection management) barriers, Phosphate (sewage discharge)
Pix Brook	Moderate	Fail	PFOS, PBDE, Phosphate (sewage discharge), Nickel, urban transport
Rhee (DS Wendy)	Moderate	Fail	PFOS, PBDE, Phosphate (sewage), physical modification
Beane (source to Stevenage Brook)	Poor	Fail	Macrophytes and Phytobenthos and Phosphate (agriculture/ rural land management, livestock & abstraction), PFOS, PBDE,

- Under the government's revised housing targets the new local plan would need to plan for 1,018 homes per year. This may require strategic interventions to ensure that the current wastewater treatment infrastructure can meet the planned growth.

Blue infrastructure

North Hertfordshire's blue infrastructure comprises a network of water-related natural and semi-natural features within the District, including rivers, ponds, lakes, and other water bodies. Blue infrastructure is a key component of the broader green and blue infrastructure, which can create a network of natural spaces that provide various benefits for nature, communities, and the local environment. These benefits include flood risk management, biodiversity enhancement, improved water quality, and enhanced recreation opportunities. Whilst most local plans have strong policies on green infrastructure (GI), blue infrastructure is generally poorly referenced or recognised as part of GI/GBI. Examples of blue infrastructure in North Herts include the River Lee, various ponds and lakes, and the floodplains along the River Mimms.

Combining green and blue infrastructure within a development can be an effective way of providing ecological connectivity whilst also delivering sustainable, natural solutions to the changing climate as well as creating pleasant places to live and work.

Key sustainability issues

Having considered the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues are identified in relation to the water SA theme:

- The District is in an area of 'serious water stress'. This is likely to be exacerbated by future population growth and the effects of climate change (e.g. more frequent droughts).
- Future growth is likely to increase pressure on wastewater infrastructure due to increased demand from development and an increasing population alongside the impacts of climate change (e.g. more frequent flooding/ storm events).
- The District is underlain by important groundwater source protection zones where development and increasing abstraction can harm the aquifers and damage chalk stream habitats.
- Water bodies in the District are under increasing pressures due to manmade physical barriers and pollution associated with agriculture, industry, road transport, urbanisations, abstraction and sewage effluent.

SA objectives

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the objectives

SA Topic	SA Objective
Water	<i>Promote sustainable development which minimise pressure on water resources, whilst maintaining and enhancing the quality of the District's rivers, lakes and aquifers.</i>

Appraisal supporting questions

Will the policy / proposal help to ..?

- Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support improvements to water bodies and blue infrastructure?
- Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development?
- Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water recycling?

AIR QUALITY & NOISE

Current Data and Context

Air Quality

Breathing in polluted air affects our health and costs the NHS and our society billions of pounds each year. Air pollution is recognised as a contributing factor in the onset of heart disease and cancer and can cause a range of health impacts, including effects on lung function, exacerbation of asthma, increases in hospital admissions and mortality.

The [North Herts 2025 Air Quality Annual Status Report](#) (ASR) identifies road traffic as the primary source of air pollution.

Key Pollutants

- Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) is a gas which is generally emitted from high-temperature combustion processes such as road transport or energy generation. The regulations set an annual mean limit or 'air quality objective' of 40 µg/m³ for NO₂.
- Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) is a corrosive gas which is predominantly produced from the combustion of coal or crude oil. The air quality objective for SO₂ is not to exceed 350 µg/m³ for a 1-hour mean, a value that should not be exceeded more than 24 times per year.
- Particulate Matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) is everything in the air that is not a gas. Particles can come from natural sources such as pollen, as well as human made sources such as smoke from fires, emissions from industry and dust from tyres and brakes. PM₁₀ refers to particles under 10 micrometres and fine particulate matter or PM_{2.5} are particles under 2.5 micrometres. The annual air quality objective for PM₁₀ is 40 µg/m³. The Environment Act 2021 introduced 2 new targets for PM_{2.5}: a 10 µg/m³ annual mean concentration by 2040, with an interim target of 12 µg/m³ by January 2028.

Air quality monitoring

The Council air quality monitoring takes place at traffic hotspots within Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Letchworth. This is carried out via diffusion tubes placed at 42 monitoring sites and then collected for analysis in a laboratory (referred to as non-automatic or manual monitoring). Automatic monitoring (uses electronic real-time monitoring equipment) also took place for 8 years (ended in late 2023) at Stevenage Rd., in Hitchin.

However, public health data shows that there is no safe lower threshold for human exposure to ambient air pollution, particularly Fine Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}). The Council is therefore changing the way it undertakes monitoring from reactive hotspot remediation to proactive, district-wide exposure reduction.

Air Quality Management Areas

Until recently North Herts had two historic sites declared as Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA). These were established where national air quality objectives were not being met, and they serve as focal points for targeted interventions to protect public health and the environment. The AQMAs were both in Hitchin, at:

- Stevenage Road (AQMA 2012)
- Payne's Park Roundabout (AQMA 2017) along the A602

The [ASR](#) (2025) concluded that the AQMAs should be revoked as the Council's long-term monitoring shows that nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels along both streets have remained consistently below national air-quality objectives for more than five years. With no recent

exceedances, the evidence met the statutory criteria for ending the enhanced monitoring status previously required under an AQMA. The Council subsequently confirmed the revocation of the two AQMAs following a Cabinet decision on 20 January 2026.

Interventions to improve air quality

The adopted Local Plan promotes the integration of active travel routes within strategic development sites and supports sustainable transport provision and EV charging. It also seeks to enhance green infrastructure provision which helps reduce pollution and act as a buffer between roads and residential areas, reducing exposure to harmful emissions. Other interventions that the Council is pursuing to reduce air pollution include:

- Promoting low-emission freight and working with businesses to reduce traffic through congestion hotspots.
- Transitioning the Council's fleet to low-emission vehicles and expanding EV infrastructure.
- Encouraging active travel, school travel plans, and car-sharing schemes.

In conclusion, traffic levels have increased to almost pre-pandemic levels, whilst long term average pollution levels (as measured at roadside sites) fell by 37% between 2016 to 2024 (ASR). However, it will be challenging to maintain reduced levels of air pollution within the District due to the increased traffic related to housing and infrastructure growth, and the potential growth in traffic that would be stimulated by the consented expansion to Luton Airport to the south-west of the district (currently subject to a judicial review).

Noise

Ensuring that new development is appropriate for its location requires careful consideration of noise pollution and its cumulative effects on health, quality of life, and the natural environment. The sensitivity of both the site and surrounding area must be factored into planning decisions.

In North Herts, noise impacts from residential development are managed through national regulations and adopted Council policies. Common mitigation measures include insulation, landscaping and appropriate orientation of living spaces.

Transport infrastructure projects, such as new roads or public transport systems, can generate significant noise during both construction and operation. These schemes are expected to incorporate noise reduction strategies, including quieter road surfacing, speed management, and route design that avoids sensitive receptors.

Aviation noise is another source of noise pollution, this could be exacerbated by the planned expansion and operational changes at London Luton Airport. Flight paths associated with Luton Airport cross into North Herts and the Airport's monitoring [reports](#) show that it has received complaints from residents in the District (including Hitchin, Codicote, Wheathampstead and Blackmore End). The airport's proposed expansion, from 19 million to 32 million passengers annually, could potentially lead to increased noise exposure (from aviation and road traffic) for local communities. Luton Airport has that *"Under all the noise assessment scenarios [...] no properties are expected to be at risk of being unacceptably affected"* citing its environment impact assessment for [project \(Luton Rising, 2024\)](#). The Airport also offers compensation measures such as voluntary acquisition policy (for properties experiencing noise above certain thresholds, financial compensation for directly impacts properties and noise insulation schemes).

Key sustainability issues

Informed by current data policy context, the following key issues are identified in relation to the air quality and noise SA theme:

- **The AQMAs** have been revoked due to sustained improvements, with no exceedances of national air quality objectives in recent years.
- **Large scale infrastructure projects** such as Luton Airport expansion have the potential to adversely impact air quality and noise. It will be important to consider cumulative effects of locally planned growth and major infrastructure projects on air quality and noise.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the following objectives

SA Topic	SA Objective
Air Quality & Noise	<i>Reduce sources of air and noise pollution and seek appropriate mitigation measures in new developments.</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...

- Consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?

THE SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The SA Framework

The SA framework below takes the form of a list of topic headings; each associated with sustainability objective(s). The framework comprises the 11 themes discussed in the previous chapters of this report.

SA Topic	Objective	Appraisal supporting questions (<i>will the proposal/ policy help to...?</i>)
The Natural Environment	<i>Protect, conserve, and enhance biodiversity, priority habitats, designated sites, and landscape character, while promoting the multifunctional benefits of green infrastructure and avoiding harm to sensitive environments</i>	Biodiversity & GI <i>Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?</i> <i>Protect and enhance priority habitats, species, and the ecological networks connecting them?</i> <i>Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?</i> Landscape <i>Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscape and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?</i> Recreation & access <i>Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?</i>
Climate Change & Flooding	<i>Support the transition to net zero by minimising greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy efficiency, enabling renewable energy, and building resilience to climate-related risks such as flooding, water scarcity, and infrastructure stress</i>	Greenhouse Gas Emissions <i>Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings, and land use</i> <i>Focus development in sustainable locations?</i> <i>Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?</i>

SA Topic	Objective	Appraisal supporting questions (<i>will the proposal/ policy help to...?</i>)
		Low-Carbon, energy-efficient places <i>Improve the energy performance of new buildings, beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?</i> <i>Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support the wider transition in North Herts?</i> Climate change resilience / adaptation <i>Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources of flooding to people, property, infrastructure?</i> <i>Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood management, river restoration, and tree planting?</i> <i>Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?</i> Water resources <i>Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?</i> <i>Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?</i>
Population, Health & Wellbeing	Promote inclusive, healthy, and sustainable communities by improving access to health and social care, reducing inequalities, supporting active lifestyles, and enhancing the quality of local environments	<i>Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?</i> <i>Encourages healthy/ active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?</i>

SA Topic	Objective	Appraisal supporting questions (<i>will the proposal/ policy help to...?</i>)
		<i>Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?</i>
Transport & Connectivity	<i>Maximise sustainable transport and active travel opportunities while minimising the need to travel.</i>	Facilitating modal shift <i>Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?</i> <i>Help improve public transport including, the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without compromising existing provision)?</i> <i>Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared with driving and parking?</i> <i>Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?</i> Reducing transport emissions <i>Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?</i> Digital connectivity <i>Enhance communications core infrastructure?</i>
Housing	<i>Ensure that everyone has access to a decent, affordable home that meets their needs, while supporting a mix of housing types, tenures, and specialist provision across the district</i>	<i>Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of housing sizes, types and tenures?</i> <i>Deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of all residents?</i>

SA Topic	Objective	Appraisal supporting questions (<i>will the proposal/ policy help to...?</i>)
The Historic Environment	<i>Protect and enhance the historic environment of North Herts by ensuring that development respects and conserves the character, fabric, and setting of heritage assets while supporting their long-term viability and public appreciation.</i>	<i>Conserve and enhance the significance of, designated and non-designated, heritage assets and their setting?</i>
Social & Cultural Infrastructure	<i>Promote environmentally responsible and socially inclusive development that supports local communities, protects natural resources, and enhances long-term wellbeing across our District</i>	<i>Help create resilient communities by improving access to social and cultural facilities while ensuring equitable distribution of services?</i>
Local Economy & Employment	<i>Support a strong, diverse and resilient economy that provides opportunities for all, enhances the vitality of the District's town and local centres, and employment areas.</i>	<i>Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?</i> <i>Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?</i> <i>Encourage the growth of existing businesses?</i> <i>Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres</i>
Land, Soils & Waste	<i>Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance soil and mineral resources</i>	<i>Promote the use of previously developed land & support remediation of contaminated land?</i> <i>Prevent development on land where contamination poses unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?</i> <i>Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?</i> <i>Protect the integrity of mineral resources?</i>

SA Topic	Objective	Appraisal supporting questions (<i>will the proposal/ policy help to...?</i>)
Water Resources & Quality	<i>Promote sustainable development which minimise pressure on water resources, whilst maintaining and enhancing the quality of the District's rivers, lakes and aquifers.</i>	<i>Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support improvements to water bodies and blue infrastructure?</i> <i>Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development?</i> <i>Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water recycling?</i>
Air Quality & Noise	<i>Reduce sources of air and noise pollution and seek appropriate mitigation measures in new developments.</i>	<i>consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?</i>

PART 2 – ASSESSMENT OF SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

This Interim SA Report has been prepared to support the Local Plan Content and Evidence consultation. This report assesses the likely environmental, social and economic effects of the draft spatial development options, ensuring that sustainability considerations are integrated into plan-making from an early stage. This provides a transparent evidence base for evaluating alternative development options, development sites and planning policies, identifying potential benefit and harm effects, and helping to inform the selection of our preferred approach. In doing so, it fulfils the requirements of Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment legislation and supports the preparation of a Local Plan that promotes sustainable development across the district.

This part of the report presents an appraisal of the draft spatial development options based on the identified SA themes, objectives and guiding questions. For each of the spatial development option, there will be a summary of the appraisal followed by strengths, weaknesses, effect characteristics and conclusion.

Housing need

The Local Housing Need (LHN) is a minimum starting point. The Government's standard method identifies the minimum annual housing need figure that authorities are expected to use when preparing plans. It is described as an unconstrained assessment of need and does not itself set the housing requirement.

The LHN for North Hertfordshire is 1,036 dwellings per annum on the basis of the Government's standard method, which accounts for: a) existing dwelling stock; and b) affordability. This equates to 11,396 homes over the 11 year plan period of 2029-2040.

If during the next Plan period, some sites are delayed and a five year housing land supply cannot be demonstrated, as this is the case now,

there is a requirement to provide a 20% buffer. This means allocating a further 2,279 homes in that circumstance. This would increase the overall need to 13,675 homes for the plan period.

Government guidance states that the housing requirement in a Local Plan may be higher than the identified housing need, and authorities should consider planning for higher growth where, for example, this supports economic growth aspirations.

However, the NPPF expects plans to meet identified housing needs. The standard method figure is intended to be the basis for plan-making, and authorities must provide a robust justification where constraints affect delivery if planning less than the LHN.

It is important to note that constraints that may affect the housing requirement, it does not automatically reduce the housing need. Government guidance distinguishes between housing need (the minimum unconstrained need); and housing requirement (what the Local Plan seeks to deliver after considering land availability, constraints and other evidence).

The NPPF also requires local planning authorities to allocate land to accommodate at least 10% of the housing requirement on sites no larger than one hectare and a further 10% on sites of between one and two and a half hectares. Any departure from these requirements would need to be supported by strong planning reasons demonstrating why it is not possible or appropriate to allocate sufficient sites within these size categories, taking account of local circumstances, site availability and deliverability constraints.

If the plan period increases to 15 years, applying the annual local housing need figure of 1,036 dwellings results in a total housing need of 15,540 homes across the plan period, or 18,648 homes with a 20% buffer. This will mean further sites are needed overall as well as smaller sites to meet the NPPF requirements.

Housing capacity

We currently have 12,102 homes already planned or have permission in our District (at 31 March 2026). This is based on existing Local Plan allocations and current planning approvals. Existing Local Plan allocations that have not started at 31 March 2026 will also be considered as possible allocations in the new Plan. From the existing commitments, there is a total of 9,844 homes on existing allocations, not started.

A review of the existing allocations without planning permission that are proposed to be carried forward indicates there is insufficient provision to meet the NPPF requirements on smaller sites. As a result, additional sites will need to be identified through the new Local Plan to ensure compliance with the NPPF's requirements for a diverse supply of housing sites.

Based on existing Local Plan allocations, not started, there is a need to identify a further 3,831 homes to meet the full local housing need plus 20% buffer.

Existing commitments at 31 March 2026

Source of sites	Number of homes
Sites under construction	812
Minor development with permission	262
Major development with full permission (includes LP allocations)	302
Other permissions (includes LP allocations)	1,115
Local Plan allocations without permission	9,611
Total	12,102

A call for sites exercise was carried out between June and September 2025 which resulted in approximately 150 sites. Detailed site assessments are being undertaken as part of the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), and until the assessments are complete and tested through transport modelling and other evidence studies, the housing capacity arising from these site submissions is unknown at this stage.

At present, it is not possible to place housing numbers against the draft spatial development options as the site assessments are unfinished.

Draft spatial development options

Our new Local Plan needs a clear strategy that brings all our policies together and helps deliver our overall vision for our district, towns and villages.

There are a number of development options that could influence how development is planned across North Hertfordshire in the future. In practice, however, it is unlikely that any single option would be capable of delivering the scale and type of development required on its own.

We have identified four spatial development options which are presented below.

Spatial development option 1 – Infill development / urban intensification

This option focuses growth within existing towns and villages by redeveloping brownfield land, underused sites and vacant urban land. Development would generally occur within existing settlement boundaries, making better use of existing infrastructure, services and public transport connections. It seeks to accommodate growth without significant outward expansion into the countryside.

Spatial development option 2 – Urban expansion

This option directs growth to planned extensions on the edges of existing towns, such as Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston, as well as considering one or more larger sites in other possible locations, such as the currently safeguarded site west of Stevenage or potentially further development around Luton New development would be delivered through larger strategic sites,

supported by new infrastructure, schools, healthcare facilities, transport improvements and green spaces. The aim is to create well-connected extensions that integrate with existing communities.

Spatial development option 3 – Dispersed village growth

This option spreads development across a number of villages through smaller-scale housing schemes. The focus is on meeting local housing needs, supporting rural communities and helping maintain village services such as shops, schools and community facilities. It does not rely on major growth in a small number of locations but distributes development more widely across the district.

Spatial development option 4 – New settlement

This option accommodates a significant proportion of future growth in one or more new freestanding settlements. These would be comprehensively planned communities with their own housing, employment opportunities, schools, healthcare facilities, green spaces and supporting infrastructure. Rather than expanding existing towns and villages, growth would be focused in entirely new settlements designed to be largely self-sufficient.

Emerging Local Plan objectives

Emerging Local Plan objectives

The Content and Evidence document sets out the Local Plan objectives covering environmental, social and economic.

Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
Efficient use of land Balancing housing, jobs, infrastructure, and the environment to build sustainable communities.	Previously Developed Land	At least 20% of new homes completed in the Plan period are built on previously developed (brownfield) land.	% development on previously developed land	Planning permissions/completions database
	Design Quality	100% of major developments achieve compliance with our design code, including Garden City-inspired placemaking principles.	% of major developments compliant with design code	Planning decisions
Housing Meeting the diverse housing needs of all our residents	Affordable and Social Housing Delivery	At least 40%* of all new homes delivered are affordable housing, including an agreed proportion of social rented homes. *This will be updated from findings of viability study complete	% affordable housing delivered categorised by tenure type	Planning permissions/completions database

Commented [RR1]: Need to check with design team - remember they amended the requirements of the design code - so that its comply or justify. Therefore it should be 100% - but that also then makes the figure meaningless??

as they said justify rather than comply - we can't have a target of 90%

Commented [DC2R1]: We can change it to 100%

Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
Economy Supporting a resilient and prosperous local economy	Economic Resilience	Growth in the number of businesses operating in knowledge-intensive, green and innovative sectors by 50% compared with the 2025 baseline.	FILL THIS IN	
	Town Centre Vitality	Maintain or increase town centre occupancy rates to at least 90% in Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Letchworth.	Vacancy rates	Experian GOAD Footfall monitoring Retail/centre health checks
Environment and climate change Addressing the climate and environmental impacts of growth	Low-Carbon Energy and Resilience	At least x%* of the district's electricity demand is met through local renewable or community energy generation by 2040. *TBC once evidence base is collected	% incorporating low-carbon technologies	Energy statements submitted with applications Building regulations compliance data
Transport Managing growth in a way that promotes	Active and Sustainable Travel	Increase the proportion of short journey stages in towns that are walked, wheeled or cycled to at least 55% by 2035 ¹	'Mode share (% short journey stages in towns by sustainable modes)	Census data Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan monitoring

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Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
sustainable and accessible travel				
Communities Creating healthy, sustainable and well-connected communities	Access to Services and Facilities	Increase the number of new homes located within a 20-minute walk (approximately 1,300m) of a range of day-to-day services and community facilities, including shops, schools, healthcare and open space	Average number of key services accessible within a 20-minute walk of new housing developments	Planning permissions
	Access to High-Quality Open Space	100% of residents live within a 100m of an accessible, high-quality public open space, as defined by local open space standards.	Percentage of residents living within 100m walking distance of an accessible public open space	Planning permissions

Objective of the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 3: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-third-cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy/active-travel-active-england-the-third-cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy-cwis3>

Compatibility of Local Plan objectives with SA objectives

The Local Plan objectives are tested against the Sustainability Framework to ascertain how compatible the aims for the district are with the principles of sustainable development. The results are shown in the table below.

The following compatible symbols have been used in the analysis:

+	Objectives are compatible and/or enhance one another
–	Objectives incompatible and/or in conflict with one another
○	Objectives have no clear relationship
?	Relationship between objectives is mixed or uncertain

Table X: Compatibility of Local Plan objectives with SA objectives

	Local Plan objective					
SA topic	Efficient use of land	Housing	Economy	Environment & climate change	Transport	Communities
The natural environment	?	?	?	+	○	+
Climate change & flooding	+	?	?	+	+	+
Population, health & wellbeing	+	+	+	+	+	+
Transport & connectivity	+	+	+	+	+	+
Housing	+	+	+	?	+	+
The historic environment	?	?	+	?	○	+
Social & cultural infrastructure	+	+	+	+	+	+
Local economy & employment	+	+	+	?	+	+
Land, soils & waste	+	?	?	+	○	○
Water resources & quality	?	?	?	+	○	+
Air quality & noise	+	+	?	+	+	+

ASSESSMENT OF SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

Appraisal matrix

The appraisal matrix has been developed to assess the relative sustainability performance of the four spatial development options. Each option has been assessed against the eleven Sustainability Appraisal objectives contained within the SA Framework, covering environmental, social and economic considerations.

The appraisal draws on the characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of each development option and applies the significance criteria as set out below. Effects have been judged using professional planning judgement, taking account of factors such as the likely impact, scale, duration and probability of effects, together with the sensitivity of the environmental, social and economic assets that may be affected. The matrix uses the following scoring system ranging from major benefit effects to major harm effects, allowing a consistent comparison of the sustainability implications of each growth option and helping to identify the most sustainable strategy, or combinations of strategies for the area.

The summary of assessments is set out in this section, with the detailed assessments included in Appendix A.

Assessment criteria

- **Impact** – The nature of the effect on sustainability objectives; whether the effect is benefit, harm or neutral, and what aspect of the environment, economy, or community is affected.
- **Scale** – The geographical extent or magnitude of the effect; for example, whether the impact is experienced across parts of the district or across most or all of the district, and how

many people, properties, or environmental assets are affected.

- **Duration** – How long the effect is expected to last; typically classified as no harm/benefit, short term (months or 1-5 years), medium term (6-10 years) or long term (10+ years/permanent)
- **Probability** – The likelihood that the effect will occur; often described as certain, likely, potential or unlikely.

The level of significance is determined when considering the impact, scale, duration and probability.

Explanation of the assessment scoring

Each assessment parameter is associated with a numerical score:

- **Impact:** -3 to +3
- **Scale:** 1 or 2
- **Duration:** 1 or 3
- **Probability:** 0 to 1

The initial score is calculated by multiplying all the scores for each assessment criterion. These scores range from -18 to +18.

To map the scores onto a five-point scale of indicators (double-minus to double-plus), the score range is compressed to -2.5 to 2.5 (spanning five whole points) by dividing the initial scores by 18 and multiplying by 2.5 – which is the same as multiplying by 0.1389. Each indicator corresponds to a single point with the adjusted score range as follows:

- — Major negative ($-2.5 \leq \text{adjusted score} < -1.5$)
- Minor negative ($-1.5 \leq \text{adjusted score} < -0.5$)

- Neutral or no effects ($-0.5 \leq \text{adjusted score} < +0.5$)
- +
- ++ Minor positive ($-0.5 \leq \text{adjusted score} < 1.5$)
- ++ Major positive ($1.5 \leq \text{adjusted score} \leq 2.5$)

To arrive at a score for each assessment theme (e.g. Climate Change & Flooding), the adjusted scores for each criterion within that theme are averaged. The averaged score is then also mapped to the five-point indicator scale. The numerical scores that are averaged, not the indicators, so as to avoid rounding errors.

Finally, the averaged themes scores for each spatial strategy and also averaged to yield an averaged spatial strategy score. This too is mapped onto the five-point indicator scale.

Level of significance

Symbol	Significance of effects
++	Major benefit
+	Minor benefit
○	Neutral or no effects
-	Minor harm
--	Major harm

Summary of assessment

		Infill		Urban expansion		Dispersed village		New settlement	
SA objective	Description	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator
The natural environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance biodiversity, priority habitats, designated sites, and landscape character, while promoting the multifunctional benefits of green infrastructure and avoiding harm to sensitive environments.	-0.21	○	0.38	○	0.06	○	0.50	+
Climate change & flooding	Support the transition to net zero by minimising greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy efficiency, enabling renewable energy, and building resilience to climate-related risks such as flooding, water scarcity, and infrastructure stress.	0.83	+	0.43	○	-0.08	○	1.34	+
Population, health & wellbeing	Promote inclusive, healthy, and sustainable communities by improving access to health and social care, reducing inequalities, supporting active lifestyles, and enhancing the quality of local environments.	1.25	+	0.94	+	0.80	+	2.29	++
Transport & connectivity	Maximise sustainable transport and active travel opportunities while minimising the need to travel.	0.97	+	0.43	○	-0.85	-	0.24	○
Housing	Ensure that everyone has access to a decent, affordable home that meets their needs, while supporting a mix of housing types, tenures, and specialist provision across the district.	0.73	+	2.50	++	0.63	+	0.00	○

		Infill		Urban expansion		Dispersed village		New settlement	
SA objective	Description	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator
The historic environment	Protect and enhance the historic environment of North Herts by ensuring that development respects and conserves the character, fabric, and setting of heritage assets while supporting their long-term viability and public appreciation.	-0.63	—	-0.21	○	-0.42	○	-0.42	○
Social & cultural infrastructure	Promote environmentally responsible and socially inclusive development that supports local communities, protects natural resources, and enhances long-term wellbeing across our District.	0.63	+	0.94	+	1.88	++	2.50	++
Local economy & employment	Support a strong, diverse and resilient economy that provides opportunities for all, enhances the vitality of the District's town and local centres, and employment areas.	1.04	+	0.55	+	0.63	+	1.51	++
Land, soils & waste	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance soil and mineral resources.	0.99	+	-0.13	○	-0.05	○	-0.03	○
Water resources & quality	Promote sustainable development which minimise pressure on water resources, whilst maintaining and enhancing the quality of the District's rivers, lakes and aquifers.	0.42	○	0.31	○	0.10	○	1.67	++
Air quality & noise	Reduce sources of air and noise pollution and seek appropriate mitigation measures in new developments.	-0.63	—	-0.31	○	-0.63	—	0.63	+

		Infill		Urban expansion		Dispersed village		New settlement	
SA objective	Description	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator
Overall average (unweighted)		0.49	○	0.53	+	0.19	○	0.93	+

Spatial development option 1 – Infill development / urban intensification

Strengths	The infill and urban intensification option performs particularly strongly against objectives relating to climate change mitigation, sustainable transport, healthy lifestyles, regeneration and efficient land use. Major positive effects are identified for focusing development in sustainable locations, reducing carbon emissions, encouraging active travel, supporting healthy and active lifestyles, enhancing local centre vitality, and promoting the reuse of previously developed land. Development within existing settlements enables residents to access services, employment, education and community facilities more easily, reducing reliance on private vehicles and supporting more sustainable patterns of movement. The option also generates a range of additional minor benefits through improved access to health and community infrastructure, increased support for public transport, opportunities for sustainable drainage and water efficiency measures, and the delivery of new housing within established communities. Overall, the option demonstrates a consistently positive sustainability performance across social, economic and environmental objectives.
Weaknesses	The principal weaknesses relate to the environmental effects associated with redevelopment and intensification within existing settlements. Minor adverse effects are identified for biodiversity, ecological connectivity, landscape and townscape character, heritage assets and local environmental quality. Redevelopment may result in the loss of urban habitats, fragmentation of ecological networks and changes to the character of established areas. Increased development activity may also contribute to localised air quality and noise pressures. While opportunities exist to incorporate biodiversity enhancements, green infrastructure and sustainable design measures, delivery can vary between sites and may not

	fully offset cumulative impacts. Housing delivery is supported by the option but is unlikely to make a substantial contribution towards meeting overall housing needs when compared with more spatial options.
Effect characteristics	The effects of the option are predominantly long term and permanent, reflecting the enduring influence of redevelopment on settlement patterns, infrastructure use and environmental conditions. Positive effects are generally widespread across the District and are frequently assessed as certain or likely because they arise directly from concentrating development within sustainable urban locations. The strongest positive effects relate to climate change, transport, health and regeneration objectives. Negative effects are fewer in number and are mostly assessed as minor harms, occurring as cumulative consequences of urban intensification. Several objectives relating to green infrastructure, renewable energy, flood risk management, water resources and economic growth are assessed as minor benefits but remain dependent on site-specific opportunities and implementation, creating a degree of uncertainty. The majority of adverse effects are capable of mitigation through effective planning, design, environmental enhancement and heritage-sensitive development.
Conclusion	Overall, the infill and urban intensification option represents a strongly positive and sustainable growth strategy. The assessment identifies numerous beneficial effects, including several major positive outcomes relating to sustainable locations, carbon reduction, active travel, healthy lifestyles, town centre vitality and the reuse of brownfield land. Although some minor adverse effects are identified for biodiversity, heritage, townscape character and environmental quality, these are relatively limited in scale and are generally capable of mitigation through appropriate planning and design measures. Opportunities for delivering new homes could be challenging due to limited available land suitable for development. By not meeting the District's housing targets could lead to increased risk of speculative applications and appeals in the longer term. On balance, the option is expected to deliver significant sustainability benefits and performs particularly well in supporting climate objectives, reducing the need to travel, making efficient use of land and infrastructure, and reinforcing the vitality of existing settlements and centres but unlikely to contribute substantially towards meeting the District's housing needs. This could have wider social and economic implications, including reduced delivery of affordable housing, increased housing affordability pressures, difficulties in meeting the needs of different groups within the community, and constraints on economic growth due to a limited supply of homes for the local workforce.

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Spatial development option 2 – Urban expansion

Strengths	The urban expansion option performs strongly across a wide range of sustainability objectives and records several major positive effects. The option performs particularly well in relation to housing delivery, affordable and specialist housing provision, sustainable locations, health and wellbeing, community cohesion, active travel and social infrastructure. Strategic urban extensions provide opportunities to deliver substantial numbers of homes alongside new community facilities, healthcare provision, public open space and supporting infrastructure. Significant benefits are also identified for multifunctional green infrastructure, access to nature, sustainable drainage, flood risk management and employment generation. The scale of development allows comprehensive masterplanning, enabling development to integrate green corridors, recreational spaces, active travel networks and infrastructure improvements from the outset. Overall, the option offers a strong balance between housing growth, service provision, community development and environmental enhancement opportunities.
Weaknesses	The principal weaknesses relate to the environmental effects of expanding settlements onto greenfield land. Minor adverse effects are identified for landscape character, climate change, wastewater infrastructure, heritage, previously developed land objectives, mineral resources, water quality and local air quality and noise. Development beyond existing settlement boundaries may result in permanent changes to the character of the countryside and the loss of undeveloped land. Although biodiversity net gains and ecological enhancements can be incorporated through masterplanning, there remains potential for habitat loss and ecological disruption where development affects greenfield sites. Additional pressure on wastewater infrastructure and water environments may also occur unless supporting infrastructure is delivered in a timely manner. Furthermore, some reliance on private vehicle travel is likely to remain despite improvements to active travel and public transport connections.
Effect characteristics	The effects of the urban expansion option are predominantly long term and permanent because they are associated with strategic changes to settlement form, land use patterns and infrastructure provision. Positive effects are generally assessed as likely or certain and arise directly from the scale and planned nature of urban extensions. Benefits are particularly strong in relation to housing provision, affordable housing, health and wellbeing, social

	infrastructure, green infrastructure, active travel, flood risk management and employment opportunities. These benefits are often experienced both within growth areas and more widely across the District. Negative effects are generally minor in nature and primarily relate to environmental objectives, including landscape change, greenfield land loss, water resources, heritage and environmental quality. While many adverse effects can be reduced through mitigation, masterplanning and infrastructure investment, some residual environmental impacts are likely to remain due to the permanent conversion of undeveloped land to urban uses.
Conclusion	Overall, the urban expansion option performs strongly against the majority of sustainability objectives and generates a substantial number of positive effects, including several major benefits. The option is particularly effective at delivering housing growth, affordable housing, community infrastructure, health benefits, active travel opportunities, green infrastructure and economic growth. It also provides significant opportunities for comprehensive masterplanning, enabling the coordinated delivery of services, open space, sustainable drainage and supporting infrastructure. Although there are environmental trade-offs associated with greenfield land release, landscape change, infrastructure pressures and some environmental quality objectives, these adverse effects are generally minor in significance and can be reduced through careful planning, mitigation and design. On balance, the urban expansion option is expected to generate a strong positive sustainability outcome and represents a robust and deliverable spatial option capable of meeting a wide range of economic, social and environmental objectives.

Spatial development option 3 – Dispersed village growth

Strengths	The dispersed village growth option performs particularly strongly in supporting rural communities, social cohesion and the vitality of local economies. Minor positive effects are identified for community inclusion and cohesion, resilient communities, housing delivery although limited, support for existing businesses and enhancement of communications infrastructure. Growth distributed across a range of villages can help sustain schools, shops, community facilities and local services, strengthening the long-term viability of rural settlements. The option also supports local housing needs and can contribute to maintaining balanced communities across the district. Additional benefits are identified through
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	opportunities for biodiversity enhancement, green infrastructure provision, improved recreational access, water efficiency measures and support for local employment. Improvements to broadband and mobile connectivity could also generate wider economic and social benefits for rural areas. Overall, the option performs particularly well against objectives relating to community resilience, social wellbeing and the rural economy.
Weaknesses	The principal weaknesses relate to climate change, transport sustainability and the cumulative environmental effects of dispersed development patterns. Major adverse effects are identified for transport-related carbon emissions and traffic volumes, reflecting the increased reliance on private vehicles and longer travel distances associated with growth in smaller villages. The option also records a major negative effect for minimising carbon emissions overall and minor adverse effects relating to sustainable locations, wastewater capacity, landscape character, heritage assets, water quality, air quality, brownfield land use and mineral resources. While some public transport improvements may be delivered, dispersed growth makes it more difficult to achieve efficient and sustainable travel patterns compared with more concentrated development strategies. The widespread use of greenfield sites also limits opportunities for regeneration and the efficient use of existing urban infrastructure. Delivery of new homes will be of smaller scale across smaller sites in rural areas and highly unlikely to meet the District's identified housing needs in full.
Effect characteristics	The effects of dispersed village growth are predominantly long term and permanent because they result in enduring changes to settlement patterns, travel behaviour and land use across numerous locations. Positive effects are concentrated around social, community and economic objectives and are generally assessed as likely, reflecting the ability of growth to support local services, businesses and community infrastructure. Benefits are distributed across a large number of settlements and therefore contribute to district-wide rural resilience. However, adverse effects are also cumulative in nature and occur across a wide geographic area. The most significant negative effects relate to transport behaviour and carbon emissions, where dispersed development patterns make sustainable travel more challenging to achieve. Environmental effects are generally assessed as minor adverse effects, but their cumulative nature means they may become more pronounced over time unless effectively managed through planning, infrastructure provision and mitigation measures.
Conclusion	Overall, the dispersed village growth option generates a more mixed sustainability outcome. The option performs strongly against several social and economic objectives, delivering

	significant benefits for community cohesion, rural service provision, housing delivery, local businesses and the resilience of village communities. However, these benefits are offset by substantial disadvantages in relation to climate change and transport sustainability, with major adverse effects identified for carbon emissions and traffic generation. The option also generates a range of minor environmental harms associated with cumulative development across multiple rural locations and continued reliance on greenfield land. While mitigation measures could reduce some of these impacts and public transport investment could improve accessibility, the dispersed nature of the strategy inherently limits opportunities to achieve the same level of sustainability benefits associated with more concentrated growth patterns. On balance, the option offers clear social and rural economic advantages but performs less favourably against climate change, transport and resource-efficiency objectives, resulting in an overall mixed sustainability performance. Delivery of new homes is highly unlikely to meet the District's identified housing needs in full with consequential implications for affordable housing and affordability pressures more generally, as well as potentially leading to more speculative applications in the longer term if housing targets are not met.
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Spatial development option 4 – New settlement

Strengths	The new settlement option performs strongly across the sustainability framework and records the greatest concentration of major positive effects of all the growth options. Significant benefits are identified for housing delivery, affordable and specialist housing, health infrastructure, community facilities, social inclusion, economic growth and employment creation. The comprehensive masterplanning of a new settlement provides unique opportunities to integrate extensive green infrastructure, active travel networks, renewable energy systems, low-carbon technologies, sustainable drainage, water recycling and climate-resilient design from the outset. Major positive effects are also identified for flood risk management, wastewater infrastructure, water efficiency, green infrastructure provision and access to nature. The scale of development enables the coordinated delivery of schools, healthcare facilities, employment land, community infrastructure and environmental enhancements alongside housing growth, creating the potential for a highly sustainable and resilient new community. The option also performs particularly well in supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy and delivering high standards of resource efficiency and environmental management.
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Weaknesses	The principal weaknesses arise from the substantial land-use change required to create a new settlement. Major adverse effects are identified for landscape character and the use of previously developed land, reflecting the likelihood that development would occur on a large greenfield site and result in permanent changes to the rural landscape. Additional minor adverse effects are identified for ecological networks, sustainable location objectives, heritage assets, mineral resources and local centre vitality. Although extensive mitigation and environmental enhancement can be incorporated through masterplanning, the scale of development means some residual effects on landscape character and undeveloped land are likely to remain significant. There are also potential sustainability challenges during the early stages of development, when services, employment opportunities and transport connections may take time to become fully established, potentially affecting self-containment and travel patterns. Furthermore, while the option scores highly for housing provision overall, the significant lead-in times associated with major infrastructure delivery mean that housing benefits are unlikely to be realised in the short to medium term and therefore unlikely to contribute towards five year housing land supply and/or to delivery much within the Plan period.
Effect characteristics	The effects of the new settlement option are predominantly strategic, long term and permanent in nature, reflecting the transformational changes associated with creating an entirely new community. Positive effects are generally district-wide and are frequently assessed as likely or certain because they arise directly from the ability to comprehensively plan and deliver infrastructure, services and environmental measures as part of an integrated masterplan. The strongest benefits relate to housing, health and wellbeing, social infrastructure, water management, flood resilience, low-carbon development, renewable energy, economic growth and community creation. Many of these benefits have the potential to operate at both settlement and district scales. Negative effects are fewer in number but include some significant environmental impacts, particularly those associated with greenfield land take and landscape change. Whilst many adverse effects can be reduced through careful site selection, masterplanning, design and mitigation measures, some permanent changes to landscape character and land use are likely to remain unavoidable consequences of the option.
Conclusion	Overall, the new settlement option performs strongly against the majority of sustainability objectives and offers significant long-term benefits through the coordinated delivery of

	housing, infrastructure, employment, community facilities and environmental enhancements. However, the substantial infrastructure requirements and long lead-in times associated with a new settlement mean that housing delivery is likely to be delayed, with little or no housing completions expected within the 11-year plan period. Consequently, despite its strong sustainability performance and long-term potential, the option is unlikely to make a meaningful contribution towards meeting the District's identified housing needs during the plan period, raising significant concerns regarding its effectiveness as a strategy for addressing immediate housing requirements.
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CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Conclusion

The Sustainability Appraisal identifies clear differences in the performance of the four growth options, although all options generate a combination of benefit and harm effects across the appraisal framework.

The appraisal suggests that more concentrated forms of growth generally perform better than dispersed patterns of development. The New Settlement option emerges as the strongest-performing strategic option overall, followed by Urban Expansion and Infill/Urban Intensification, both of which deliver positive sustainability outcomes but with different strengths and constraints. Dispersed Village Growth offers important local and community benefits but performs less favourably when assessed against the wider sustainability objectives of reducing carbon emissions, supporting sustainable transport and maximising infrastructure efficiency.

The assessment indicates that a growth strategy focused on new settlements, urban expansion and/or urban intensification is likely to provide the strongest overall sustainability outcomes for North Hertfordshire, provided that environmental impacts are appropriately mitigated and infrastructure is delivered in step with growth. However, the substantial infrastructure requirements and long lead-in times associated with a new settlement mean that housing delivery is likely to be delayed, with little or no housing completions expected within the 11-year plan period.

Consequently, despite its strong sustainability performance and long-term potential, the option is unlikely to make a meaningful contribution towards meeting the District's identified housing needs during the plan period, raising significant concerns regarding its effectiveness as a strategy for addressing immediate housing requirements. It is therefore considered that this option is more

appropriately taken forward as part of the work on the Spatial Development Strategy.

Next steps

Subsequent to the Content & Evidence consultation, the Council will undertake further work in respect of spatial strategy and site selection process. There will also be a need for further work in respect of Development Management policies and area/site specific policies.

The assessment criteria used for the draft strategic development growth options will also be used to consider policies and sites as part of this Local Plan process.

A full Sustainability Appraisal Report will be prepared to support the proposed Local Plan. This will involve updating the interim SA Report as necessary, as well as establishing potential monitoring measures. Further mitigation or enhancement measures will also need to be considered, as well as revisiting the consideration of alternatives in light of any new evidence.

The timetable moving towards adoption of the Local Plan is set out in the table below. At each of these stages, it may be necessary to undertake additional iterations of the SA to account for changes/modifications to the Plan.

Plan event	Date
Publish Notice of Intention to Commence	24 April 2026
Scoping Consultation start - end	11 May - 28 June 2026
Gateway 1 Self Assessment	9 October 2026
Plan Content & Evidence Consultation start-end	13 October - 24 November 2026
Gateway 2 Advice sought	5 April 2027

Proposed Plan Consultation start - end	26 October 2027 - 4 January 2028
Gateway 3 Advice sought	27 March 2028
Submission of the proposed Local Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination	31 May 2028
Examination Recommendations published	30 November 2028
Adopted	5 January 2029

Spatial development option 1 - Infill development / urban intensification

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
The natural environment							
Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect is identified as infill development may result in the loss of urban habitats and biodiversity features despite opportunities for mitigation and biodiversity net gain. Effects could occur across the District through cumulative redevelopment activity and would be permanent where habitats are lost. The effect is considered likely due to the widespread nature of urban redevelopment.
Protect and enhance priority habitats, species, and the ecological networks connecting them?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect is anticipated because redevelopment may fragment ecological corridors and reduce habitat connectivity within urban areas. Effects would occur across multiple settlements, remain long term and permanent, and are considered likely due to cumulative impacts from intensification.
Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified as redevelopment can incorporate urban greening, SuDS and public realm improvements. Benefits could be experienced district-wide and remain permanent where delivered. However, implementation opportunities vary between sites, making the effect potential.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscape and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?	Minor harm	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is identified because higher densities and redevelopment may alter local character and visual appearance. Effects would occur across existing settlements, be permanent, and are considered likely given the nature of urban intensification.
Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated through potential improvements to parks, green spaces and access routes. Benefits may be experienced throughout the District and would be long term, although delivery opportunities vary, making the effect potential.
Climate change & flooding							
Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings, and land use	Major benefit	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because development is focused in accessible locations with existing services and public transport. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, continue permanently, and are considered certain as they arise directly from the growth strategy.
Focus development in sustainable locations?	Major benefit	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified as growth is directed to settlements with existing infrastructure, services and employment opportunities. Benefits would occur across the district, be permanent, and are considered certain because this is a defining characteristic of the option.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is expected through sustainable redevelopment and support for energy-efficient development. Benefits would be district-wide, long term, and are considered likely to occur.
Improve the energy performance of new buildings, beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because new buildings are likely to outperform existing stock in energy efficiency. Benefits would apply across the District, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support the wider transition in North Herts?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified as some redevelopment schemes may incorporate renewable technologies. Benefits could occur district-wide and be long term, although delivery depends on site viability and is therefore potential.
Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources of flooding to people, property, infrastructure?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because redevelopment can avoid high-risk areas but may also increase pressure on drainage systems. Effects would occur across the district, be long term, and remain uncertain, resulting in a potential rating.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood management, river restoration, and tree planting?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because redevelopment provides opportunities to introduce SuDS and improved drainage infrastructure. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.
Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because impacts depend on existing capacity and future infrastructure upgrades. Effects would be district-wide, long term, and only potential at this stage.
Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated through the use of modern water-efficient technologies. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because redevelopment can incorporate water-sensitive design measures. Benefits would occur across the district, be long term, but remain potential depending on individual schemes.
Population, health & wellbeing							
Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because development is concentrated in locations with existing health and community facilities. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Encourages healthy / active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated due to excellent access to services, walking and cycling routes, parks and recreation facilities. Benefits are district-wide, permanent, and certain.
Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because infill development can support diverse and accessible communities. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Transport & connectivity							
Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because development occurs in locations already well served by walking and cycling infrastructure. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and certain.
Help improve public transport including, the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated as increased population can support the viability of existing services. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
compromising existing provision)?							
Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared with driving and parking?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Unlikely	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because the option has limited influence over fares and parking charges. Effects would be district-wide, long term, but unlikely to materially alter costs.
Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because compact growth can reduce travel demand and support sustainable transport. Benefits would be district-wide, long term, and potential.
Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified due to shorter journeys and increased use of sustainable transport modes. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.
Enhance communications core infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated as redevelopment can facilitate infrastructure upgrades. Benefits would be localised, permanent and potential.
Housing							
Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.83	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because infill development contributes to housing supply while making efficient use of land but unlikely to contribute considerably towards meeting the full local housing need given the small scale of

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Unlikely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because links between infill development and higher-skilled employment growth are indirect. Effects would be district-wide, long term, but are considered unlikely to be significant.
Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Under 10 years	Potential	0.14	○	A minor positive effect is anticipated through construction activity and increased economic activity. Benefits would occur across the district, persist for 6-10 years or longer, and are considered potential.
Encourage the growth of existing businesses?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified through increased local spending and population growth. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.
Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because development directly supports existing centres through increased footfall and expenditure. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and certain.
Land, soils & waste							
Promote the use of previously developed land & support remediation of contaminated land?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because redevelopment of brownfield land is a key feature of the option. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and certain.
Prevent development on land where contamination poses	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated through remediation and risk-management processes.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is identified because increased density and activity may generate localised increases in traffic, noise and air quality pressures. Effects could occur across multiple settlements, remain long term, and are considered likely despite mitigation measures.

Spatial development option 2 - Urban expansion

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
The natural environment							
Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because strategic urban expansions can deliver biodiversity net gain, habitat creation and ecological buffers through comprehensive masterplanning. Benefits would be experienced across multiple expansion locations throughout the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely because biodiversity enhancement is a standard requirement of strategic development.
Protect and enhance priority habitats, species, and the ecological networks connecting them?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is anticipated because expansion onto greenfield land may result in habitat loss, fragmentation and disruption to ecological networks. Effects would occur across several urban-edge locations, remain permanent, and are considered likely despite mitigation measures due to the scale of land-use change.
Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is identified because strategic urban expansions can deliver coordinated networks of parks, green corridors, SuDS and recreational open space. Benefits would be realised across growth areas and surrounding communities, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to the comprehensive design of strategic sites.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscape and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is identified because urban expansion would extend development beyond existing settlement boundaries and alter the character of the surrounding countryside. Effects would occur across multiple settlement edges, remain permanent, and are considered likely as landscape change is an inherent consequence of this option.
Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is anticipated because urban expansions can provide extensive public open space, green corridors and enhanced rights of way. Benefits would be experienced within and around strategic growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to policy requirements for accessible green infrastructure.
Climate change & flooding							
Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings, and land use	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is identified because edge-of-settlement locations may increase travel demand and maintain some dependence on private vehicles despite sustainable design measures. Effects would be experienced across the district, continue throughout the plan period, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Focus development in sustainable locations?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because growth is located adjacent to existing towns with established services, jobs and infrastructure. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered certain because proximity to existing settlements is fundamental to the option.
Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because strategic development can support investment in low-carbon technology, sustainable construction and supporting infrastructure. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Improve the energy performance of new buildings, beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because new development is likely to achieve significantly higher energy standards than existing building stock. Benefits would occur across all strategic sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because the scale of development may support renewable energy generation and low-carbon heat networks. Benefits would occur within growth areas, remain long term, but are considered only potential because delivery depends on viability and detailed design.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
the wider transition in North Herts?							
Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources of flooding to people, property, infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because strategic planning enables flood risk to be addressed through site selection and design. Benefits would occur within development areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood management, river restoration, and tree planting?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is anticipated because urban expansions provide significant opportunities for SuDS, natural flood management, tree planting and flood storage measures. Benefits would be experienced across development areas and surrounding catchments, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is identified because substantial growth may place pressure on existing wastewater infrastructure if upgrades are not delivered in a timely manner. Effects would occur within affected catchments, persist throughout the plan period, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because modern development can incorporate water-efficient fixtures and landscaping. Benefits would occur across strategic developments, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because strategic masterplanning provides opportunities for water-sensitive design and integrated drainage systems. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Population, health & wellbeing							
Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is identified because urban expansions can deliver new healthcare facilities and improve access to services for existing and future communities. Benefits would occur across strategic growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Encourages healthy / active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is anticipated because strategic sites can provide active travel networks, sports facilities and extensive green infrastructure. Benefits would be experienced across development areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is identified because comprehensive masterplanning can provide community facilities, public spaces and a mix of housing types. Benefits would be experienced across new neighbourhoods, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Transport & connectivity							
Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	1.25	+	A major benefit effect is identified because strategic developments can deliver new walking and cycling routes linking homes to services and public transport. Benefits would be experienced across growth corridors, remain permanent, and are considered certain given the requirement of the NPPF, Local Plan and Local Transport Plan policies to fund enhanced connections and services through S106.
Help improve public transport including, the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without compromising existing provision)?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because additional population can support new and enhanced bus services. Benefits would occur within growth areas and nearby settlements, remain long term, and are considered certain.
Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because the option has limited influence over fare structures and parking costs. Effects would be

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
with driving and parking?							experienced locally, remain long term, and are considered only potential.
Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?	Neutral	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is anticipated because new travel options may mode-shift some background trips, but these are likely to be offset by new car trips from the suburban development. Benefits would occur within nearby towns, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because development adjacent to towns can support shorter journeys and greater use of sustainable transport. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered potential.
Enhance communications core infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because the spillover (e.g. from new mobile phone masts) is likely to be small, especially as 5G masts serve a relatively small geographical area. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Housing							
Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of housing	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because strategic urban expansions can deliver substantial numbers of homes and a wide range of housing types. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, remain permanent,

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
sizes, types and tenures?							and are considered certain as housing delivery is a primary purpose of the option.
Deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of all residents?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because larger strategic sites provide strong opportunities to deliver affordable housing and specialist accommodation. Benefits would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
The historic environment							
Conserve and enhance the significance of, designated and non-designated, heritage assets and their setting?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.21	○	A minor harm effect is identified because urban expansion may affect the setting of heritage assets located on settlement edges and within surrounding landscapes. Effects could occur across strategic growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered potential because impacts depend on site location and design.
Social & cultural infrastructure							
Help create resilient communities by improving access to social and cultural facilities while ensuring equitable	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is identified because urban extensions can provide schools, community facilities and social infrastructure alongside growth. Benefits would occur within strategic growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
distribution of services?							
Local economy & employment							
Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because strategic sites can support modern employment space and improved infrastructure. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	1.25	+	A major benefit effect is identified because construction activity and associated economic growth will create employment opportunities. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, remain long term, and are considered certain.
Encourage the growth of existing businesses?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because population growth can increase local expenditure and market demand. Benefits would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because additional residents can increase footfall and spending within nearby centres. Benefits would occur across existing towns, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Land, soils & waste							

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Promote the use of previously developed land & support remediation of contaminated land?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	-0.83	—	A minor harm effect is identified because urban expansion predominantly requires greenfield land and offers limited opportunities for brownfield regeneration. Effects would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
Prevent development on land where contamination poses unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because site assessment and remediation processes can manage contamination risks. Benefits would occur at individual sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because strategic developments can incorporate modern waste management and recycling practices. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Protect the integrity of mineral resources?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is anticipated because expansion onto undeveloped land could sterilise safeguarded mineral resources. Effects would occur within growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Waste resources & quality							
Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is identified because growth may increase runoff and place additional pressure on water environments.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
improvements to water bodies and blue infrastructure?							Effects would occur within affected catchments, remain permanent, and are considered likely despite mitigation measures.
Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is anticipated because strategic sites can incorporate comprehensive drainage strategies and SuDS from the outset. Benefits would occur across development areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water recycling?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because modern development can incorporate water-saving technologies and recycling systems. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Air quality & noise							
Consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is identified because additional development and associated traffic may increase localised air quality and noise pressures. Effects would occur across strategic growth areas, remain long term, and are considered likely, although mitigation measures would help reduce the overall impact.

Spatial development option 3 - Dispersed village growth

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
The natural environment							
Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because small-scale village growth can provide opportunities for biodiversity enhancement, habitat creation and biodiversity net gain alongside development. Benefits would occur across multiple villages at a district level, remain permanent, and are considered likely as biodiversity enhancement is increasingly required through development proposals.
Protect and enhance priority habitats, species, and the ecological networks connecting them?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is anticipated because dispersed development may fragment habitats and ecological corridors across several rural locations. Effects would occur across a wide geographic area, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to cumulative impacts arising from multiple development sites.
Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because development can provide local open spaces, green infrastructure and sustainable drainage features that benefit residents and biodiversity. Benefits would occur at a district level across multiple villages, remain permanent, and are considered likely through normal planning requirements.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscape and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect is identified because incremental village expansion may alter rural character, settlement form and important local views. Effects would occur across numerous settlements, be permanent, and are considered likely due to the cumulative nature of dispersed growth.
Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because some developments could improve access to green spaces, public rights of way and surrounding countryside. Benefits would be experienced across multiple villages, remain long term, and are considered likely where access improvements are secured through development.
Climate change & flooding							
Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings, and land use	Major harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-1.88	— —	A major harm effect is identified because dispersed development is likely to increase reliance on private vehicles and generate longer travel distances for employment, education and services. Effects would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to the rural nature of many growth locations.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Focus development in sustainable locations?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect is identified because many villages have fewer services, employment opportunities and public transport connections than the main towns. Effects would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to the spatial distribution of growth.
Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because new development can support energy-efficient construction and investment in low-carbon technologies. Benefits would be largely localised to individual developments, remain permanent, but are considered potential because delivery will vary between sites.
Improve the energy performance of new buildings, beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because new housing is expected to perform better than much of the existing housing stock in terms of energy efficiency. Benefits would be experienced across multiple villages, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because some sites may accommodate renewable energy technologies such as solar panels and heat pumps. Benefits would generally occur at individual site level, remain permanent, but are considered potential as implementation depends on viability and design.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
the wider transition in North Herts?							
Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources of flooding to people, property, infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because development can be guided away from areas of highest flood risk and designed to incorporate resilient drainage measures. Benefits would occur across development locations, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood management, river restoration, and tree planting?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because village developments can incorporate sustainable drainage, tree planting and natural flood management measures. Benefits would occur at a district level through multiple sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is identified because growth in numerous villages may increase pressure on wastewater networks and treatment facilities. Effects would occur across multiple catchments, persist throughout the plan period, and are considered likely unless infrastructure upgrades are delivered.
Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because new developments can incorporate modern water-efficient technologies and landscaping. Benefits would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because development can include water-sensitive design and sustainable drainage measures. Benefits would be experienced across development locations, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Population, health & wellbeing							
Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because growth may help sustain local services and support investment in community facilities. Benefits would be experienced across multiple villages, remain permanent, but are considered potential because service improvements are not guaranteed.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Encourages healthy / active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because development can improve access to green spaces, recreation facilities and local walking opportunities. Benefits would occur across participating villages, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because growth can help sustain village communities, schools, shops and shared facilities, supporting social cohesion. Benefits would be experienced across numerous settlements, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Transport & connectivity							
Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because some developments may improve local footpaths, cycle routes and village connectivity. Benefits would occur within individual settlements, remain permanent, but are considered certain given the requirement of the NPPF, Local Plan and Local Transport Plan policies to fund enhanced connections and services through S106.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Help improve public transport including, the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without compromising existing provision)?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Under 10 years	Certain	0.42	○	A major benefit effect is identified because it would lead to a large expansion of rural bus services. Effects would be localised, short-lived because rural services require long-term subsidy and considered certain give it is a policy requirement.
Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared with driving and parking?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect covering a wide area which is considered likely because the cost of operating rural bus services exceeds revenue, so the pressure will be to increase fares across the region.
Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?	Major harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	-2.50	— —	A major harm effect is identified because even with a good bus service, most trips to destinations across the district (and beyond) will be by car. Few existing trips would be mode-shifted from car. Effects would occur across the district, remain long term and are considered certain.
Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?	Major harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	-2.50	— —	A major harm effect is identified as car dependency will increase both embodied and carbon from the purchase and use of more cars. Effects would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered certain.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Enhance communications core infrastructure?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is anticipated because it would bring significant boosts in broadband speeds and mobile phone coverage in rural areas. Benefits would occur across multiple settlements, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Housing							
Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of housing sizes, types and tenures?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because dispersing development across numerous settlements can provide a flexible and deliverable supply of housing however of smaller scale. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of all residents?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because village growth can contribute to local housing needs and affordable housing provision, although opportunities for specialist housing may be more limited. Benefits would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
The historic environment							

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Conserve and enhance the significance of, designated and non-designated, heritage assets and their setting?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.42	○	A minor harm effect is identified because development on village edges may affect the setting of listed buildings, conservation areas and other heritage assets. Effects would occur across numerous settlements, remain permanent, but are considered potential because impacts depend on site selection and design.
Social & cultural infrastructure							
Help create resilient communities by improving access to social and cultural facilities while ensuring equitable distribution of services?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because additional population can help sustain schools, community halls, local shops and cultural facilities. Benefits would occur across many villages, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Local economy & employment							
Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because improved digital connectivity and home-working opportunities may support knowledge-based employment. Benefits would be localised, remain permanent, and are considered potential due to their indirect nature.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because development would generate construction employment and support local service-sector jobs. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Encourage the growth of existing businesses?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because increased population can support village shops, services and small businesses through additional expenditure. Benefits would occur across numerous settlements, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.21	○	A minor harm effect is identified because some spending may be retained within villages rather than directed towards larger town centres. Effects would be localised, remain long term, and are considered potential.
Land, soils & waste							
Promote the use of previously developed land & support remediation of contaminated land?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is identified because dispersed village growth would largely rely on greenfield land and provide limited opportunities for brownfield regeneration. Effects would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Prevent development on land where contamination poses unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because development proposals would be subject to site investigations and remediation where required. Benefits would occur at individual sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because modern development can incorporate improved waste-management and recycling practices. Benefits would occur across development sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Protect the integrity of mineral resources?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.21	○	A minor harm effect is anticipated because some sites may sterilise safeguarded mineral resources. Effects would be localised, remain permanent, and are considered potential because impacts depend on site location.
Waste resources & quality							
Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support improvements to water bodies and blue infrastructure?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is identified because development across multiple catchments could create cumulative pressure on water quality and aquatic environments. Effects would occur across development locations, remain permanent, and are considered likely despite mitigation measures.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because development can incorporate sustainable drainage and water-management measures. Benefits would occur across multiple sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water recycling?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because new development can incorporate water-efficient technologies and water-saving measures. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Air quality & noise							
Consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect is identified because dispersed development may increase vehicle movements across the district, creating cumulative pressures on air quality and noise levels. Effects would occur across multiple settlements, remain long term, and are considered likely despite mitigation.

Spatial development option 4 - New settlement

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
The natural environment							
Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can be comprehensively planned to deliver strategic biodiversity net gain, habitat creation, ecological buffers and landscape-scale green infrastructure. Benefits would extend across the settlement and wider ecological network, remain permanent, and are considered likely as biodiversity enhancement can be embedded from the outset.
Protect and enhance priority habitats, species, and the ecological networks connecting them?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is anticipated because development on a large greenfield site may result in habitat loss and disruption to existing ecological networks despite opportunities for mitigation and enhancement. Effects would occur across a strategic area, remain permanent, and are considered likely given the scale of land-use change required.
Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can provide extensive green corridors, parks, recreational space, SuDS and climate-resilience infrastructure as part of a single masterplan. Benefits would be experienced across the settlement and surrounding area, remain permanent, and are considered certain as green infrastructure is

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
							fundamental to successful new settlement design.
Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscapes and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?	Major harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-1.88	--	A major harm effect is identified because constructing a new settlement would introduce substantial built development into a largely undeveloped landscape and permanently alter local character and views. Effects would occur across a strategic geographic area, remain permanent, and are considered likely because landscape change is inherent to the option.
Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because a new settlement can provide extensive publicly accessible open space, green corridors and enhanced rights of way from the outset. Benefits would be experienced across the settlement and surrounding communities, remain permanent, and are considered likely through masterplanned delivery.
Climate change & flooding							

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings, and land use	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because a well-designed new settlement can reduce travel demand through mixed uses, active travel and highly energy-efficient buildings. Benefits would occur at a strategic scale, remain permanent, but are considered potential as outcomes depend on location, self-containment and delivery standards.
Focus development in sustainable locations?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.42	○	A minor harm effect is identified because a new settlement may initially be isolated from existing employment, services and transport networks and could take time to become self-sustaining. Effects would occur across the strategic growth area, remain long term, and are considered potential because sustainability performance will depend on site selection and infrastructure delivery.
Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because a new settlement creates opportunities to incorporate low-carbon infrastructure, modern construction techniques and green technologies at scale. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to the comprehensive nature of development.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Improve the energy performance of new buildings, beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because all homes and buildings could be constructed to high energy-efficiency standards, significantly outperforming existing stock. Benefits would occur across the entire settlement, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support the wider transition in North Herts?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because the scale of development can support district heating, heat networks and large-scale renewable energy generation. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to economies of scale and integrated infrastructure planning.
Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources of flooding to people, property, infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because site selection and masterplanning provide opportunities to avoid higher-risk areas and integrate resilience measures into development design. Benefits would occur within the development area, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because a new settlement can incorporate strategic SuDS networks, natural flood management, river restoration and extensive tree planting from the outset. Benefits would occur across the settlement and surrounding catchment, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
management, river restoration, and tree planting?							
Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because wastewater infrastructure can be planned and delivered alongside the settlement as part of a coordinated strategy. Benefits would occur across the whole development area, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because water-efficient design standards, landscaping and technologies can be incorporated consistently across the settlement. Benefits would occur at a strategic scale, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because integrated water management systems, water recycling and sustainable drainage can be incorporated from the outset. Benefits would occur across the development and receiving catchments, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Population, health & wellbeing							

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can provide purpose-built healthcare, education and community facilities alongside housing delivery. Benefits would occur across the settlement population, remain permanent, and are considered certain because infrastructure provision is fundamental to the concept.
Encourages healthy / active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because active travel routes, parks, recreation facilities and green spaces can be integrated throughout the settlement. Benefits would occur across the whole community, remain permanent, and are considered certain through planned design.
Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can provide a mix of housing, community facilities and public spaces that support social cohesion. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Transport & connectivity							

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because walking and cycling networks can be planned as the primary means of movement throughout the settlement. Benefits would occur across the development area, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
Help improve public transport including, the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without compromising existing provision)?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because a critical population mass can support new bus services and other sustainable transport infrastructure. Benefits would occur across the settlement and surrounding area, remain permanent, and are considered certain given a policy requirement.
Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared with driving and parking?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because increased patronage may improve commercial viability and service provision. Benefits would be localised, remain long term, and are considered potential because outcomes depend on future service arrangements.
Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?	Neutral	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is anticipated because only a relatively small proportion of existing trips will be shifted to sustainable modes and this is likely to be offset by new car trips from the development. Benefits would be localised, remain long term, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because only a relatively small proportion of existing trips will be shifted to sustainable modes and this is likely to be offset by new car trips from the development. Benefits would occur at a strategic scale, remain permanent, and are considered likely where sustainable transport is embedded within the masterplan.
Enhance communications core infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated as there will be little if any spillover benefit. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
Housing							
Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of housing sizes, types and tenures?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because, although a new settlement has the potential to deliver substantial housing numbers and a wide mix of housing types over the longer term, the significant infrastructure requirements and long lead-in times mean that housing delivery is unlikely to occur within the plan period. Consequently, the option is unlikely to make a meaningful contribution towards meeting identified housing needs during the period covered by the Local Plan.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of all residents?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because, although a new settlement could deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing and provide a broad mix of homes over the longer term, the substantial infrastructure requirements and lengthy lead-in times mean that housing delivery is unlikely to occur within the short to medium term or within the Local Plan period. Consequently, the option is not expected to make a meaningful contribution towards meeting identified housing needs during the plan period.
The historic environment							
Conserve and enhance the significance of, designated and non-designated, heritage assets and their setting?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.42	○	A minor harm effect is identified because a new settlement could affect the setting of heritage assets depending on its location and design. Effects would occur across the strategic development area, remain permanent, and are considered potential because impacts will vary between sites.
Social & cultural infrastructure							
Help create resilient communities by improving access to social and cultural facilities while ensuring equitable	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can deliver schools, community centres, sports facilities and cultural infrastructure as part of an integrated community. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered certain.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
distribution of services?							
Local economy & employment							
Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because modern employment space, digital connectivity and new infrastructure can attract knowledge-based industries. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because construction, service provision and employment land development would create substantial job opportunities. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
Encourage the growth of existing businesses?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because increased population and economic activity would generate additional demand for local goods and services. Benefits would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.21	○	A minor harm effect is identified because a self-contained settlement may retain some expenditure that might otherwise support existing town centres. Effects would be localised, remain long term, and are considered potential.
Land, soils & waste							
Promote the use of previously developed land & support remediation of contaminated land?	Major harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-1.88	--	A major harm effect is identified because new settlements generally require extensive greenfield land. Effects would occur at a strategic scale, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Prevent development on land where contamination poses unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because new settlement proposals would require comprehensive site investigation and remediation where necessary. Benefits would occur at site level, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can incorporate integrated waste-management infrastructure and circular economy principles from the outset. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Protect the integrity of mineral resources?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.42	○	A minor negative effect is anticipated because development could sterilise safeguarded mineral resources depending on site location. Effects would occur across the development area, remain permanent, and are considered potential.
Waste resources & quality							
Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support improvements to water bodies and blue infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because comprehensive water management and blue infrastructure can be incorporated as part of the settlement design. Benefits would occur across the settlement and wider catchment, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because drainage infrastructure can be planned and delivered comprehensively alongside development. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water recycling?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because water recycling, rainwater harvesting and efficient design standards can be incorporated across the entire settlement. Benefits would occur at a strategic scale, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Air quality & noise							

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because a single comprehensively planned settlement allows environmental impacts to be managed through coordinated design, green infrastructure and mitigation measures. Benefits would occur across the strategic development area, remain permanent, and are considered likely, although some residual impacts would remain inevitable.

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Translation

If you have difficulty understanding this publication or English is not your first language, please contact the Strategic Planning Team on 01462 474000 and we will do our best to help you.

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਆ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਜਾਂ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਰਣਨੀਤਕ ਯੋਜਨਾਬੰਦੀ ਟੀਮ ਨਾਲ 01462 474000 'ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ ਅਤੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਮਦਦ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਪੂਰੀ ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ।

(Punjabi)

Jeżeli masz trudności ze zrozumieniem tej publikacji lub angielski nie jest Twoim językiem ojczystym, skontaktuj się z Zespołem Planowania Strategicznego pod numerem 01462 474000, a dołożymy wszelkich starań, aby Ci pomóc.

(Polish)

Dacă întâmpinați dificultăți în înțelegerea acestei publicații sau dacă engleza nu este limba dumneavoastră maternă, vă rugăm să contactați Echipa de Planificare Strategică la numărul de telefon 01462 474000 și vom face tot posibilul să vă ajutăm.

(Romanian)

Se avete difficoltà a comprendere questa pubblicazione o se l'inglese non è la vostra lingua madre, contattate il team di pianificazione strategica al numero 01462 474000 e faremo del nostro meglio per aiutarvi.

(Italian)

Ha nehezen érte ezt a kiadványt, vagy az angol nem az anyanyelve, kérjük, vegye fel a kapcsolatot a Stratégiai Tervezési Csoporttal a 01462 474000 telefonszámon, és mi mindent megteszünk, hogy segítsünk Önnek.

(Hungarian)

இந்த வெளியீட்டைப் புரிந்துகொள்வதில் உங்களுக்குச் சிரமம் இருந்தாலோ அல்லது ஆங்கிலம் உங்கள் தாய்மொழி அல்ல என்றாலோ, தயவுசெய்து 01462 474000 என்ற எண்ணில் வியூகத் திட்டமிடல் குழுவைத் தொடர்புகொள்ளவும், நாங்கள்

உங்களுக்கு உதவ எங்களால் முடிந்த அனைத்தையும்
செய்வோம்.

(Tamil)

જો તમને આ પ્રકાશન સમજવામાં મુશ્કેલી પડતી હોય અથવા અંગ્રેજી તમારી માતૃભાષા
ન હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને 01462 474000 પર સ્ટ્રેટેજિક પ્લાનિંગ ટીમનો સંપર્ક કરો અને
અમે તમને મદદ કરવા માટે અમારા શ્રેષ્ઠ પ્રયાસો કરીશું.

(Gujarati)

Jei jums sunku suprasti šį leidinį arba anglų kalba nėra jūsų gimtoji kalba,
susisiekite su Strateginio planavimo komanda telefonu 01462 474000 ir
mes padarysime viską, kad jums padėtų.

(Lithuanian)

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

What is an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)?

This EqIA looks at the potential positive and negative effects of the objectives of our North Herts Local Plan update.

The main aim of this EqIA is to provide us with information about the impact on the [protected characteristics](#)¹ identified in the [2010 Equality Act](#)² and support our decision making in developing our Local Plan.

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, of the Act, we are required to have ‘due regard’ to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. This means having regard particularly to the need to
 - Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - Take steps to meet the needs of people who share a relevant protected characteristic; and
 - Encourage people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life equally
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. This means having regard in particular to the need to
 - Tackle prejudice; and
 - Promote understanding.

What are the protected characteristics?

The protected characteristics defined in the 2010 Equality Act include

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/2/chapter/1>

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Because income and deprivation are not included as a protected characteristic within the Act, we are including socio-economic as an additional characteristic due to its bearings on equality of life opportunities.

What is the purpose of this EqlA Scoping Report?

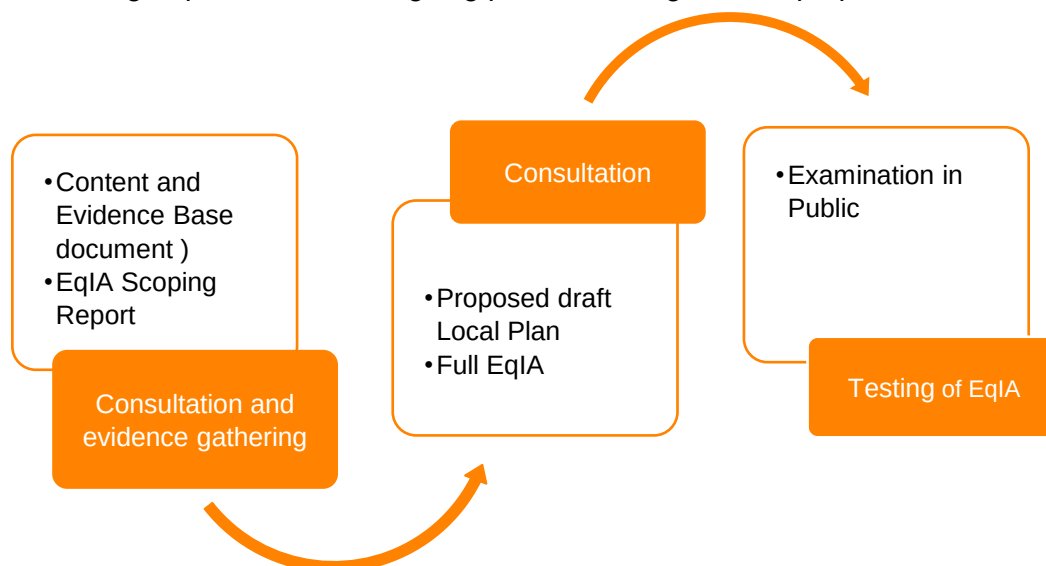
Planning has a key role in achieving greater social and economic inclusion, promoting equality and reducing poverty.

Planning policies and decisions impact people differently and there is a risk that some groups of people are disproportionately negatively impacted by planning decisions, particularly unintended consequences.

This EqlA helps inform the development of our planning policies by assessing how policies can be strengthened so they maximise the positive impacts of promoting equality and inclusion, and, where required, remove or mitigate any negative or discriminatory impacts of policies on specific groups.

The EqlA is an ongoing process to genuinely inform the development of planning policies.

The EqlA Scoping Report is the first stage of the EqlA for our North Herts Local Plan. It builds an evidence base to identify potential equalities issues for the different protected characteristics. Building our evidence base to effectively evaluate the policy impacts involves ongoing and meaningful consultation to gather information on how our policies and issues affect different groups. This is an on-going process throughout the preparation of the EqlA.



This scoping report will

1. Provide a baseline of data related to each protected characteristic group within North Hertfordshire.
2. Set out key issues that our Local Plan should cover in relation to each protected characteristic.
3. Create a framework to identify potential positive and negative impacts of our Local Plan and whether any mitigation is required.

4. Assess potential impacts of the spatial development options sets out in the Content and Evidence Base document.

Local Plan Context

What is the proposal or policy?

Every local planning authority in England is required to have an up-to-date Local Plan.

Our Local Plan sets out our vision for the future of North Hertfordshire up to 2040, helping to guide the District through a period of change before a new Local Plan is produced for the new Central Hertfordshire Authority.

It is a long-term plan for how our towns, villages and countryside will grow and develop. It helps determine where new homes, jobs, green spaces and community facilities should be provided, and how development can support thriving and sustainable communities.

The Government has introduced a new plan-making system in March 2026 that set out new regulations as to how Local Plans should be prepared. Understanding the potential equality impacts of

What are the main objectives and purpose of the proposal or policy

Our Local Plan will:

- Set a clear vision for how North Hertfordshire will grow and change over the next 15 years or so.
- Guide planning decisions by providing the framework for deciding where development should take place and what it should look like.
- Support high-quality development by setting standards for design, sustainability and infrastructure.
- Balance competing needs by protecting our environment and heritage while planning for new homes, employment opportunities and local services.
- Create better places by helping to build healthy, well-connected and inclusive communities for everyone.

We undertook an initial scoping consultation with our communities and stakeholders between 11 May and 28 June 2026 to scope key issues for the Local Plan to cover and asked how they wanted to be involved in the preparation of the Plan as it develops.

We have prepared a Content and Evidence Base document, which is the second stage in the new plan-making process. It sets out the Council's proposed approach across a number of thematic issues:

- Introduction
- Vision and Measurable Outcomes
- Our North Herts – Context
- Spatial Strategy
- Homes

- Economy and Employment Opportunities
- Town Centres
- Natural Environment
- Climate Change
- Transport and Connectivity
- Communities and Placemaking
- Communications and Utilities

The Content and Evidence Base document is currently being consulted on alongside this EqlA scoping report.

The next stage of the Local Plan is the proposed draft Local Plan, which is anticipated to be consulted on in October 2027.

Is this a new policy or proposal or a change to an existing?

Our current Local Plan was adopted in 2022 and sets a vision and framework for development across North Hertfordshire up to 2031.

Local Plans need to be reviewed every 5 years to ensure they provide an up-to-date planning framework for the area. Without an up-to-date Local Plan, we lose some local discretion on deciding planning applications.

We also need to ensure that our planning policies remain fit for purpose and reflect our current needs, addresses emerging challenges and help us make the most of new opportunities.

Who is affected by the policy or proposal?

The preparation of the new Local Plan includes a wide range of stakeholders and involves cross-council working. It affects residents, businesses and local organisations and involves the input of statutory consultees, public bodies and council partners.

Our new Local Plan will cover the current geographical area of North Hertfordshire and will guide decisions about development, growth and investment across our District up to 2040.

Changes to local government arrangements mean that, from 2028, North Hertfordshire will become part of a new Central Hertfordshire Authority. Responsibility for preparing any future Local Plan, beyond LGR, covering that wider area will rest with the new authority.

Will the policy or decision influence how the Council operates or have substantial changes in resources?

Our Local Plan (alongside any Neighbourhood Plans and the County Councils' Waste and Minerals Plans) forms part of the Development Plan for North Herts and is used in planning decisions for new development and to shape growth in the District.

Is the policy associated with other Council policies, if so identify the policy/policies?

At the heart of the Local Plan will be the delivery of the Council's core strategies. These include

- [Council Plan 2024-2028](#)³
- [North Herts Climate Change Strategy 2022 – 2027](#)⁴
- [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022 - 2027](#)⁵

As part of the preparation of the new Local Plan, we have also prepared a **Community and Engagement Strategy** which aims to ensure consultation and engagement are as accessible as possible, and any method addresses equalities considerations.

³ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/2024%20-%202028%20Council%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf>

⁴ https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-02/NHDC-811%20NHDC%20Climate%20change%20Strategy%202022-27_V3.pdf

⁵ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-03/Equality%2C%20Diversity%2C%20and%20Inclusion%20Strategy%202022-2027.pdf>

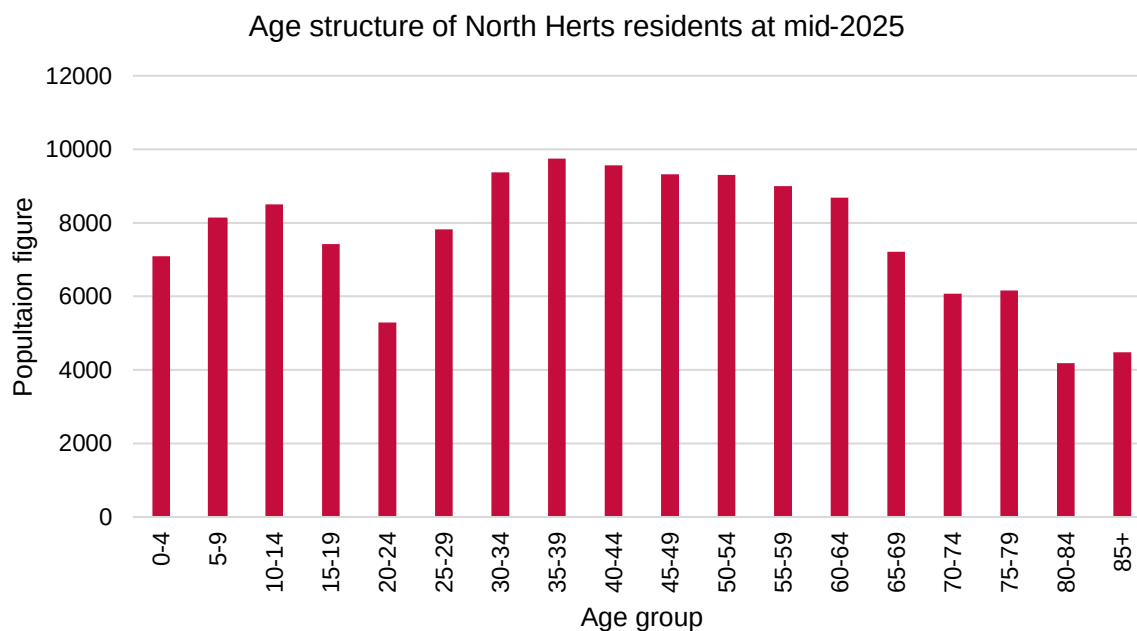
AGE

Age

Age Structure of Residents of North Herts

Of the estimated total population of North Herts at mid-2025, **137,365**, this is the age structure of residents.

It is clear the largest proportion of residents are between the ages of 30 – 59 years of age.



Source – [ONS – Mid-year population estimates 2025](#)⁶

The data does not indicate that there is a particularly sensitive age profile in our District among our residents.

Estimates and Projections of 0–15-year-olds

Of the estimated total population of North Herts at mid-2025

25,447 (18.5%) were **aged under 16** and

23,781 (16%) are projected in 2047⁷

Of these 25,447 residents under 16 years, 51% (13,010) are male and 49% (12,437) are female.



⁶

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities>

⁷

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2022based#projected-change-by-local-authority>

Estimates and Projections of 16–64-year-olds

Of the estimated total population of North Herts at mid-2025

83,795 (61.0%) were **aged 16 to 64** and

88,890 (60.2%) are projected in 2047⁸

Of these 83,795 residents of working age, 49% (40,736) are male and 51% (43,059) are female.



Estimates and Projections of 65+ year olds

Of the estimated total population of North Herts at mid-2025

28,123 (20.5%) were **aged 65+** and

35,090 (23.9%) are projected in 2047⁸

Of these 28,123 older residents, 45% (12,764) are male and 55% (15,359) are female.



Key issues the Local Plan should consider

The location and nature of new development can affect age groups in different ways. Accessibility plays a crucial role, with some individuals and age groups experiencing greater impacts than others. For example, older adults may place particular importance on proximity to essential services such as healthcare, social care, convenience shopping, and community facilities. Safe and easy access to these services, especially via public transport, is often a key consideration.

In contrast, younger people are more likely to prioritise access to quality employment, education, and training opportunities, as well as the ability to enter the housing market. For households with young children, access to pre-school facilities, play areas, and healthcare services is likely to be especially important.

The availability of suitable and flexible housing in the right locations is vital for the entire community and can be shaped by local planning policies. However, this need is often more pronounced at either end of the age spectrum.

For older individuals, the provision and location of adaptable homes, retirement housing, sheltered accommodation, and extra care housing are particularly significant. Meanwhile, younger people may face challenges in accessing affordable housing, which is essential for enabling independent living and establishing a foothold in the local property market.

The effects of climate change and poor air quality vary across different age groups. Older adults are especially vulnerable to rising temperatures, which can worsen existing health conditions and increase the risk of heat-related illness. Children, meanwhile, are particularly sensitive to air pollution due to their developing lungs and higher exposure levels, which can lead to respiratory issues and long-term health impacts.

Particular consideration should be given to creating age-friendly environments through high-quality design, accessible public spaces, safe walking and cycling routes, and good public

⁸

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2022based#projected-change-by-local-authority>

transport connections. The Plan should also support healthy lifestyles, social interaction and community cohesion, helping to reduce loneliness and social isolation, particularly amongst older people and more vulnerable residents.

Well-designed places can reduce fear of crime, improve safety and accessibility of public spaces, and help ensure that people of all ages are able to move around and use their local environment confidently and independently. For older people, this may include features such as good street lighting, clear signage, seating, accessible walking routes, safe crossing points and step-free access, which can encourage active lifestyles and reduce social isolation. For children and young people, safe and well-overlooked streets, public spaces and recreational areas can support independent mobility, play and social interaction

Recommendations

Our new Local Plan should gather more evidence on the experience of people of different age groups to assess the impact of the Local Plan policies on different age groups. This includes ensuring that the voices of young people are heard through consultation and engagement activities.

Demographic analysis, housing needs evidence, health and wellbeing data, and engagement with relevant organisations should be used to identify any barriers that may prevent particular age groups from fully benefiting from growth and development.

DISABILITY

Disability

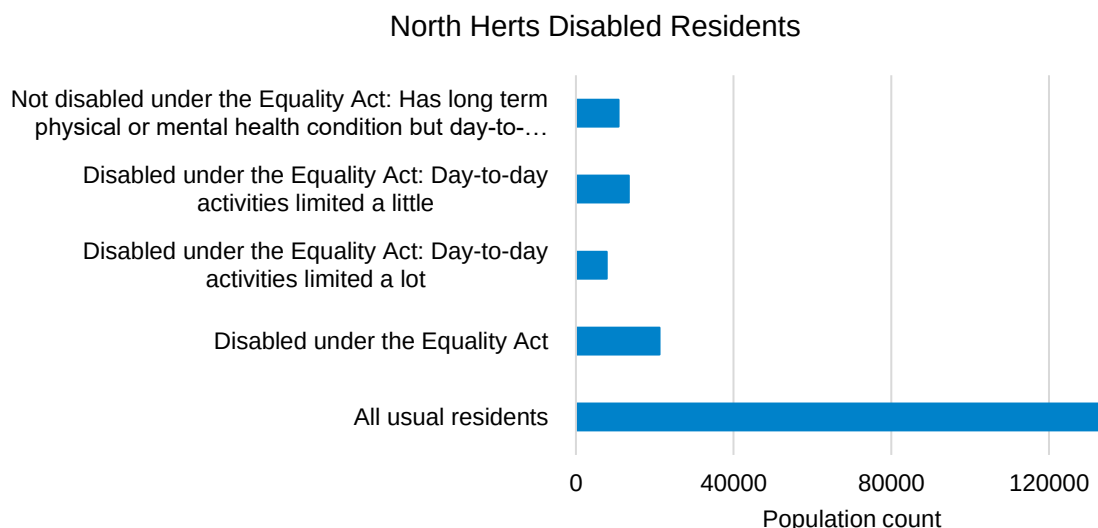
A person has a disability if they

- Have a physical or mental impairment, and
- The impairment has a substantial long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities ([Equality Act 2010, Section 6](#)⁹).

Disabled Residents

Of the estimated total population of North Herts from the 2021 Census ([133,210](#)¹⁰)

21,236 (15.9%) assess themselves as disabled under the Equalities Act 2010¹¹



Source – [ONS, Table TS038](#)

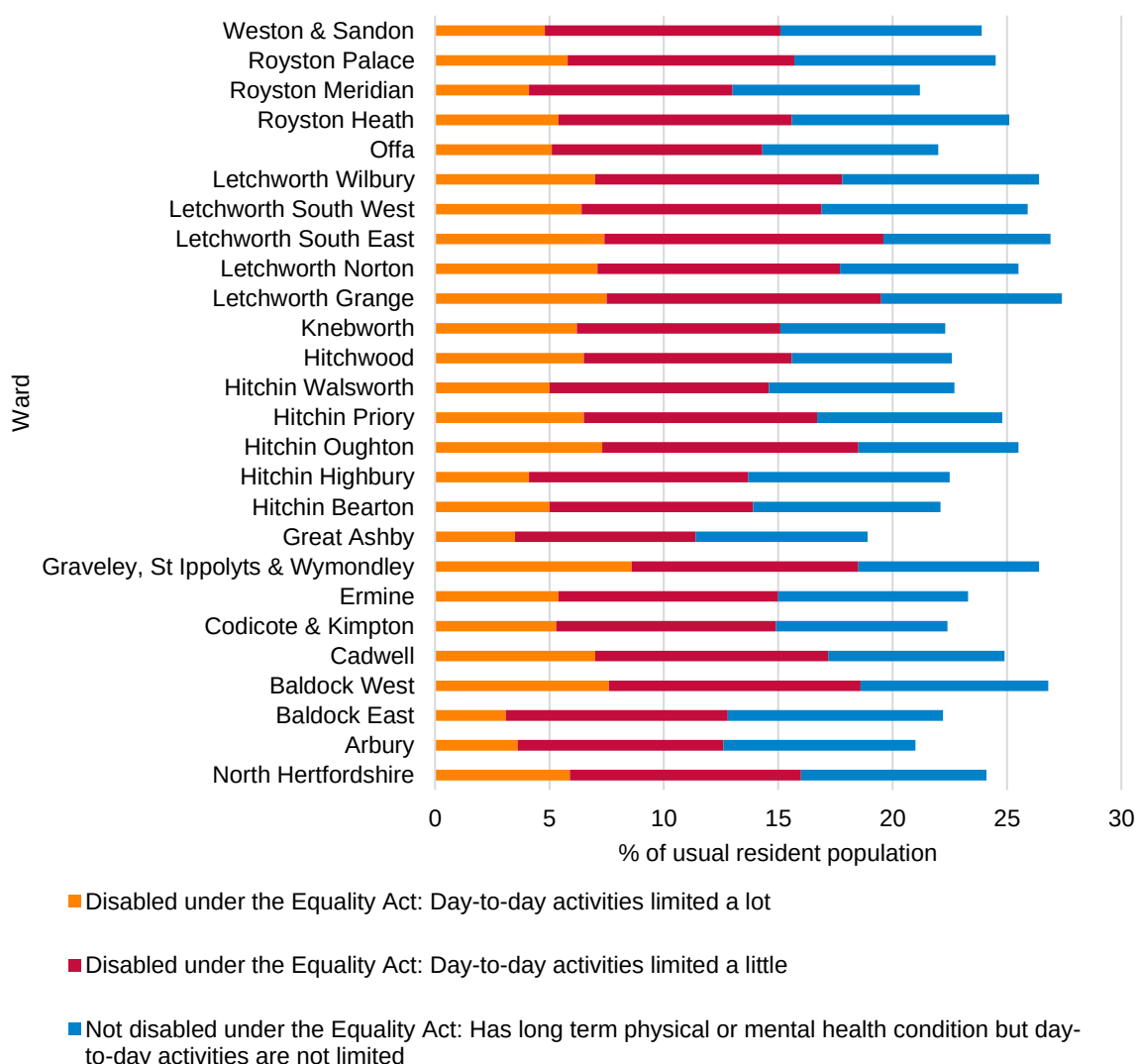
Of these 21,236 residents who assessed themselves as disabled under the Equalities Act 2010, 6% (7,846) considered that their day-to-day activities were limited a lot, whilst 10% (13,390) considered that their day-to-day activities were limited a little.

⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/6>

¹⁰ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E07000099>

¹¹ ONS Census 2021, Table TS038 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS038/editions/2021/versions/3#get-data>

% of Residents Whose Day-to-Day Activities are Limited by a Long-Term Illness or Disability in 2021



Source – [ONS, Table TS038](#)

Key issues that the Local Plan should consider

The location, design and delivery of future development can have a significant impact on disabled people. Barriers such as poor access to essential services, limited transport choices, and a lack of specialist or adaptable housing can affect independence, wellbeing and quality of life. These challenges may be exacerbated where the built environment is not designed to be accessible and inclusive.

The way development is planned can also influence access to employment, education and training opportunities. Ensuring that homes, workplaces, services and community facilities are well connected, easy to access and designed to meet a range of needs can help disabled people participate more fully in economic and social life.

Disabled people may have a wide range of mobility, sensory, cognitive and mental health needs. Providing a greater choice of accessible and specialist housing, delivering inclusive

environments, and creating healthy and welcoming communities can help remove barriers and support independent living.

Access to open spaces, community facilities and the public realm is also important. Safe, attractive and accessible places can improve health and wellbeing, reduce social isolation, and enable greater participation in community life. Embedding inclusive design principles throughout future development can help create places that are usable by everyone and provide equal access to opportunities and services.

Disabled people may also be disproportionately affected by climate change and poor air quality, particularly those with respiratory, cardiovascular or other long-term health conditions. Extreme weather events, including heatwaves and flooding, can create additional challenges and increase vulnerability.

Recommendations

The Local Plan can help address these issues by promoting healthy, climate-resilient and inclusive development. Measures such as improving air quality, enhancing green infrastructure, reducing environmental risks, and ensuring that transport networks, public spaces and community facilities remain accessible and functional during extreme weather events can help create more resilient and inclusive communities for disabled people.

The new Local Plan should gather further evidence on the experience of residents with disabilities to more fully understand lived experiences of these groups.

Engagement and consultation activities should be designed to be accessible and inclusive, enabling people with a range of physical, sensory, cognitive and mental health disabilities to participate meaningfully in the plan-making process. The Council should also seek input from disability organisations, service providers and individuals with lived experience to ensure that policies and site allocations reflect the needs of disabled residents.

GENDER REASSIGNMENT

Gender reassignment

A person has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if the person is proposing to undergo, is undergoing, or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex ([Equality Act 2010, Section 7](#)¹²).

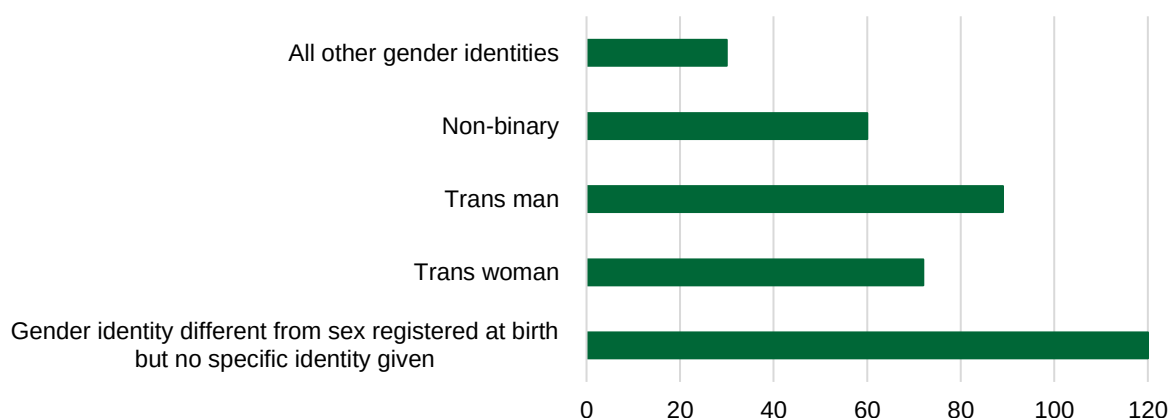
Residents who are considered under Gender Reassignment

According to the [2021 Census](#)¹³, the proportion of residents aged 16 years or over across our District who indicated that they have a gender identity different from their sex registered at birth is broadly in line with the average across the country.

94.9% (102,208) of usual residents aged 16 years and over in our District, in March 2021, said their gender identity was the same as sex registered at birth.

4.8% (5,163) of usual residents aged 16 years and over in our District, in March 2021, did not answer the voluntary gender identity question.

Count of usual residents aged 16 years and over in North Hertfordshire in 2021 by gender identity (excluding the same as sex at birth or not answered)



Key issues that the Local Plan should consider

Inclusive housing design is essential for trans and non-binary individuals, especially those who may face discrimination or feel unsafe in traditional housing settings. Those people currently undergoing or straight after transition, especially younger people, may be more vulnerable to finding themselves homelessness. Policies that support safe, affordable, and flexible housing options can help trans people live independently and securely, particularly during or after transition.

¹² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/7>

¹³ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS070, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS070/editions/2021/versions/1>

Proximity to healthcare services, mental health support, and community resources is critical. Local plans that consider transport links and service distribution can reduce barriers to accessing essential care.

The design of public spaces should promote safety, dignity, and inclusion for all gender identities. Features like gender-neutral toilets, inclusive signage, and safe lighting contribute to a more welcoming environment.

Recommendation

Our new Local Plan should gather further evidence on the experience of transgender residents to better assess the impact of the Local Plan policies on the gender reassignment protected character.

Consultation and engagement activities should be inclusive and accessible, ensuring that transgender residents feel they are able to participate. Policies relating to design, community facilities, health and wellbeing, transport and place-making are important in promoting equality, foster inclusive communities and do not inadvertently disadvantage people with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment.

MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP

Marriage and civil partnership

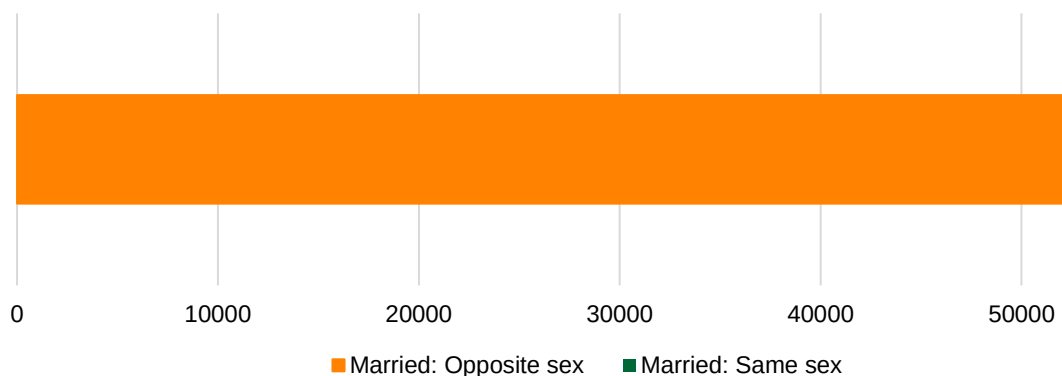
Following the implementation of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, the first marriages of same-sex couples took place on 29 March 2014. Civil partners have been able to convert their civil partnership into a marriage, if they so desired, from 10 December 2014.

Married Residents

In 2021¹⁴, 48% (52,088) of usual residents in our District were in a married relationship with a person of the opposite sex. Whilst 0.26% (280) of usual residents in our District were in a married relationship with a person of the same sex.



Count of Married relationships of usual residents aged 16 and over in North Herts in 2021



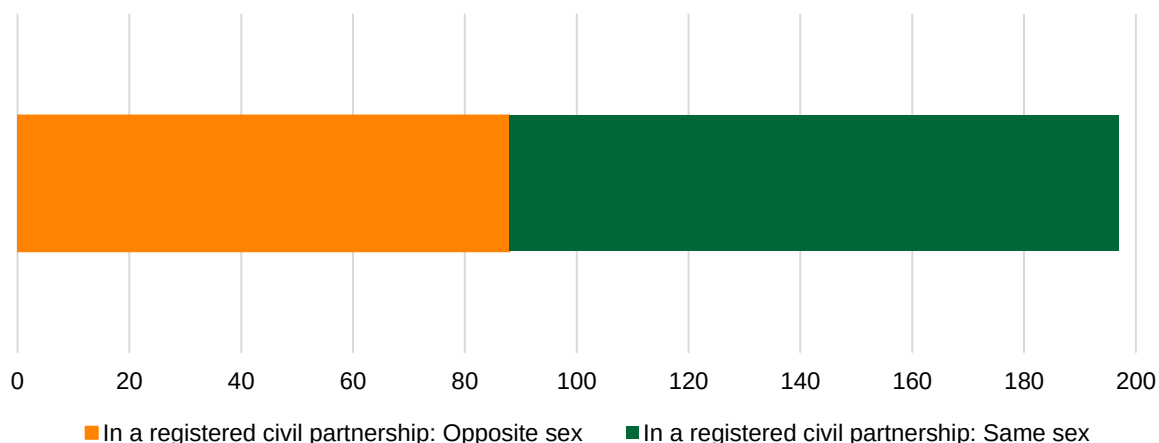
Civil Partnership Residents

In 2021¹⁴, 0.1% (88) of usual residents in our District were in a civil partnership with a person of the opposite sex. Another 0.1% (109) of usual residents in our District were in a civil partnership with a person of the same sex.



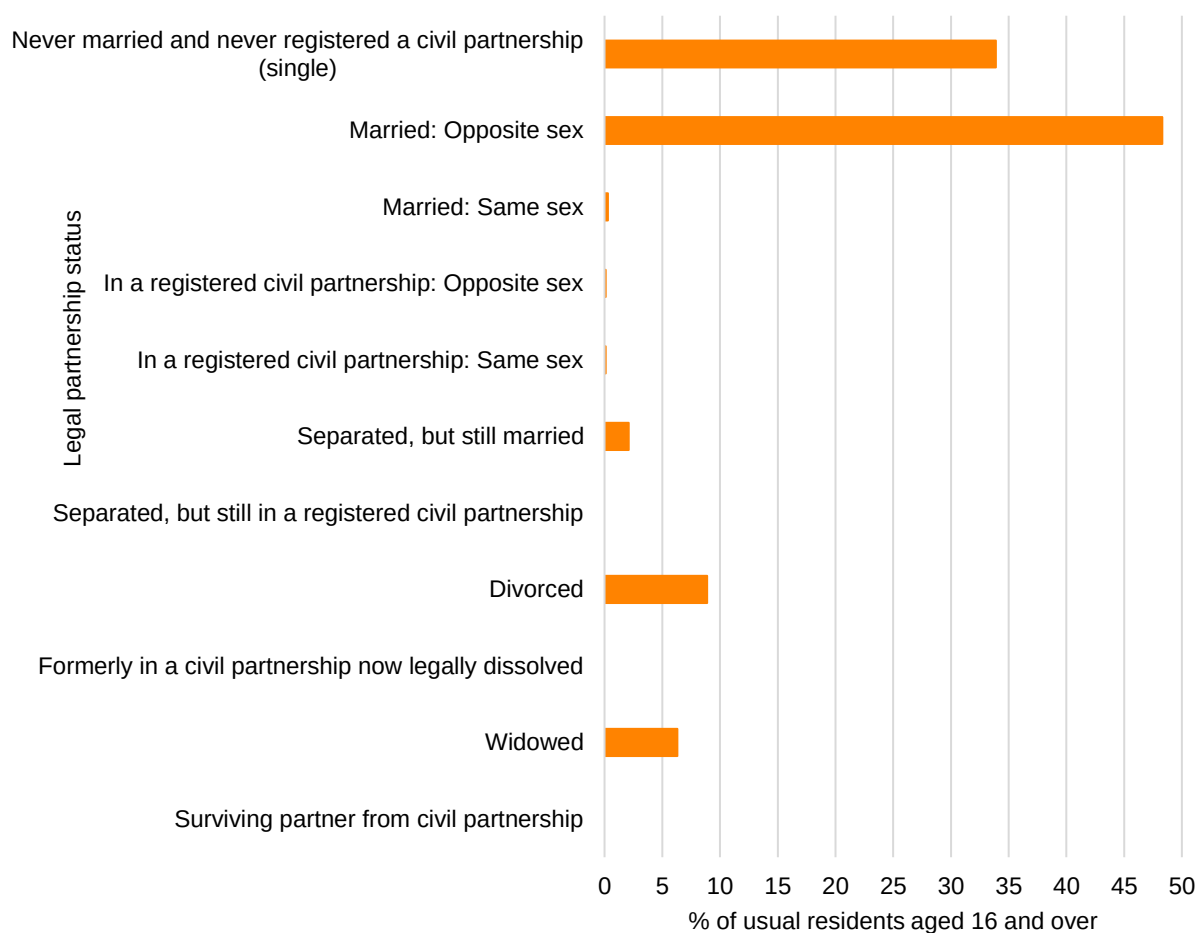
¹⁴ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS002, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS002/editions/2021/versions/1>

Count of Civil Partnerships of usual residents aged 16 and over in North Herts in 2021



The trends of relationships in our District are not dissimilar to the trends seen across Hertfordshire and the rest of the country¹⁵.

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 and over by legal partnership status in North Hertfordshire at March 2021



¹⁵ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS002 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS002/editions/2021/versions/1>

Key issues that the Local Plan should consider

Whilst Local Plan policies are unlikely to have significant direct impacts on people because they are married or in a civil partnership, planning decisions can influence the availability of housing, access to services, employment opportunities and the quality of the places in which people live. Policies that support a diverse housing stock, sustainable communities, access to healthcare, community facilities and employment opportunities can contribute positively to the wellbeing of married couples and civil partners.

Recommendation

The new Local Plan should continue to consider the needs of different household types and family structures.

The Local Plan should seek to ensure that all households can access suitable housing, infrastructure and other services so that no groups are disproportionately disadvantaged by policy requirements or the location of development.

PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY

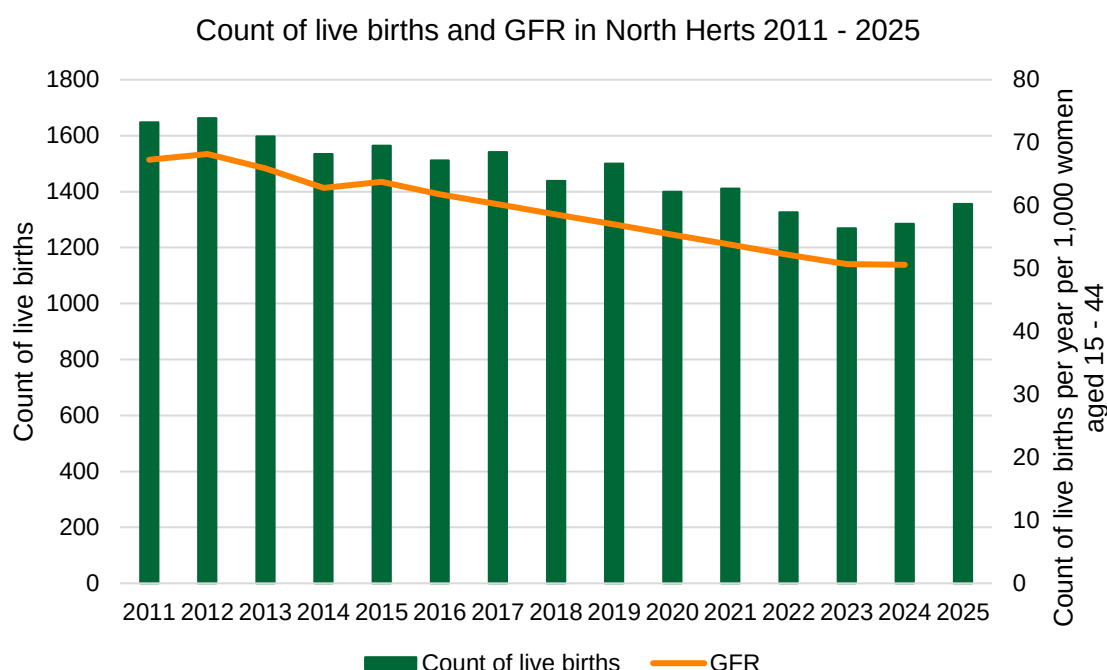
The ONS does not provide statistics on the number of people who are pregnant. Therefore, this baseline analysis considered live birth data as a proxy. The general fertility rate (GFR), measured as number of live births in a year per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 years,



Pregnancy and Maternity Rates amongst our Residents

In 2025, 1,356 live births were recorded for our District. The resulting GFR was 50.7

Live birth rates and GFR have been gradually reducing over the last 12 years



Source – [ONS, Births in England and Wales: birth registrations](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/datasets/birthsinenglandandwalesbirthregistrations)¹⁶

Key issues that the Local Plan should consider

Proximity to maternity care (e.g. clinics, hospitals, midwifery services) is essential for pregnant women. The promotion of integrated health hubs and ensuring new developments are well-connected to healthcare facilities can improve maternal health outcomes.

Pregnant people and new parents benefit from safe, stable, and affordable housing, especially during periods of reduced income. Planning policies that support family-friendly housing, with access to green spaces, play areas, and community services, can enhance wellbeing during and after pregnancy.

Reliable and accessible public transport is crucial for attending medical appointments, accessing childcare, and returning to work

¹⁶

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/datasets/birthsinenglandandwalesbirthregistrations>

The location and accessibility of employment centres can influence return-to-work options after maternity leave. The creation of a diverse economy can increase employment opportunities with flexible workspaces, childcare facilities, and inclusive transport links can help reduce barriers to re-entering the workforce.

Access to nurseries, pre-schools, and parenting support services is also vital for new parents.

Pregnant women and young children can be more vulnerable to the effects of poor air quality, excessive heat and environmental pollution.

Recommendations

Our new Local Plan should gather further evidence on the experiences and needs of pregnant women, new mothers and families with young children to better understand the potential impacts of planning policies on the pregnancy and maternity protected characteristic. Consultation and engagement activities should be designed to capture these views, recognising that these groups may face practical barriers to participation. Engagement with healthcare providers, family support organisations and early years services could also help identify local needs and opportunities to improve outcomes through planning policy.

The Local Plan should promote healthy, inclusive and sustainable environments for families. This could include supporting walkable neighbourhoods, safe and attractive walking and cycling routes, and inclusive transport networks that are accessible for people with prams or temporary mobility limitations associated with pregnancy and childbirth. The Plan should also seek to improve air quality, increase access to green infrastructure and open spaces, and support climate-resilient development to help create healthier and more resilient places for families. Consideration of access to suitable housing, healthcare, childcare, employment opportunities, transport, community facilities, open spaces and other services that support family life is also important.

RACE

Race

A person's race includes several personal characteristics. The [Equalities Act 2010, Section 9](#)¹⁷ defines race to include

- colour,
- nationality; and
- ethnic or national origins.

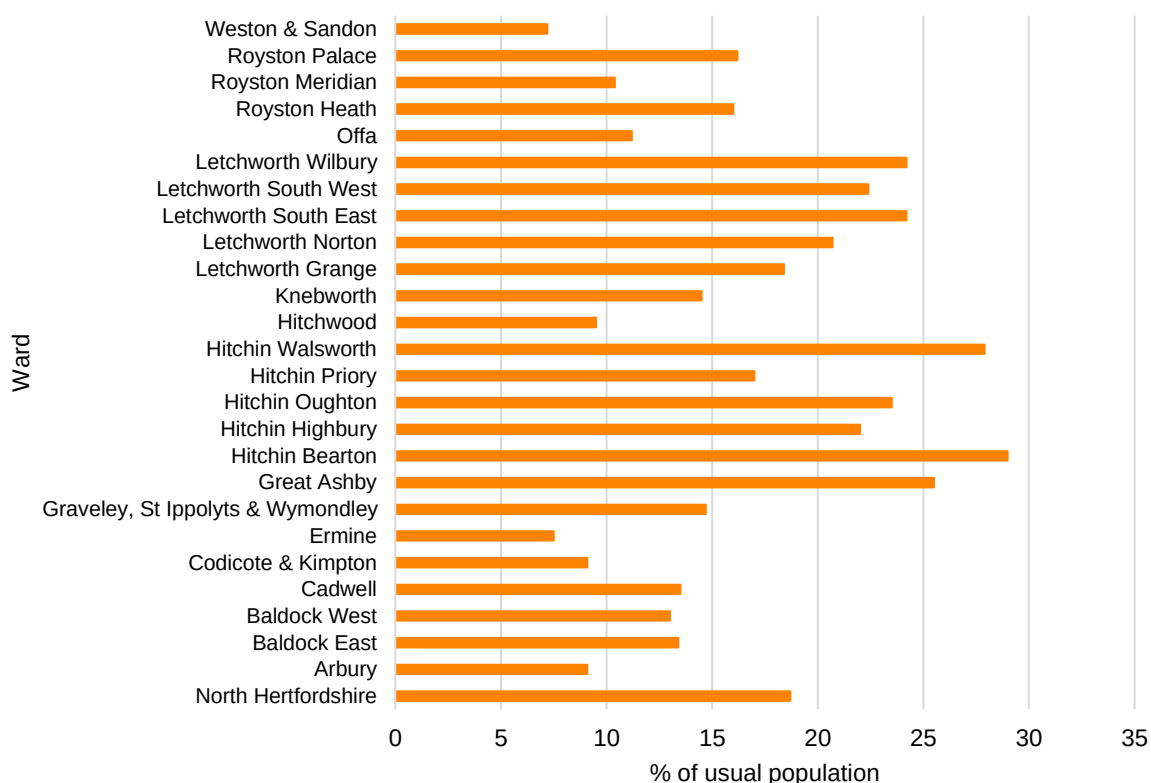
As such, our baseline assessment considers a range of data sources including ethnicity, place of birth and language spoken to provide a baseline analysis of our District relating to race.

Ethnicity

Ethnic group was categorised in the 2021 Census by broad groupings, e.g. "Asian / Asian British" as well as more specific categories such as "Pakistani".

Data from the [2021 Census](#)¹⁸ shows 18.7% (24,912) of residents were from an ethnic minority (not white-British).

% of Minority Ethnic Groups in North Herts and its Wards in 2021

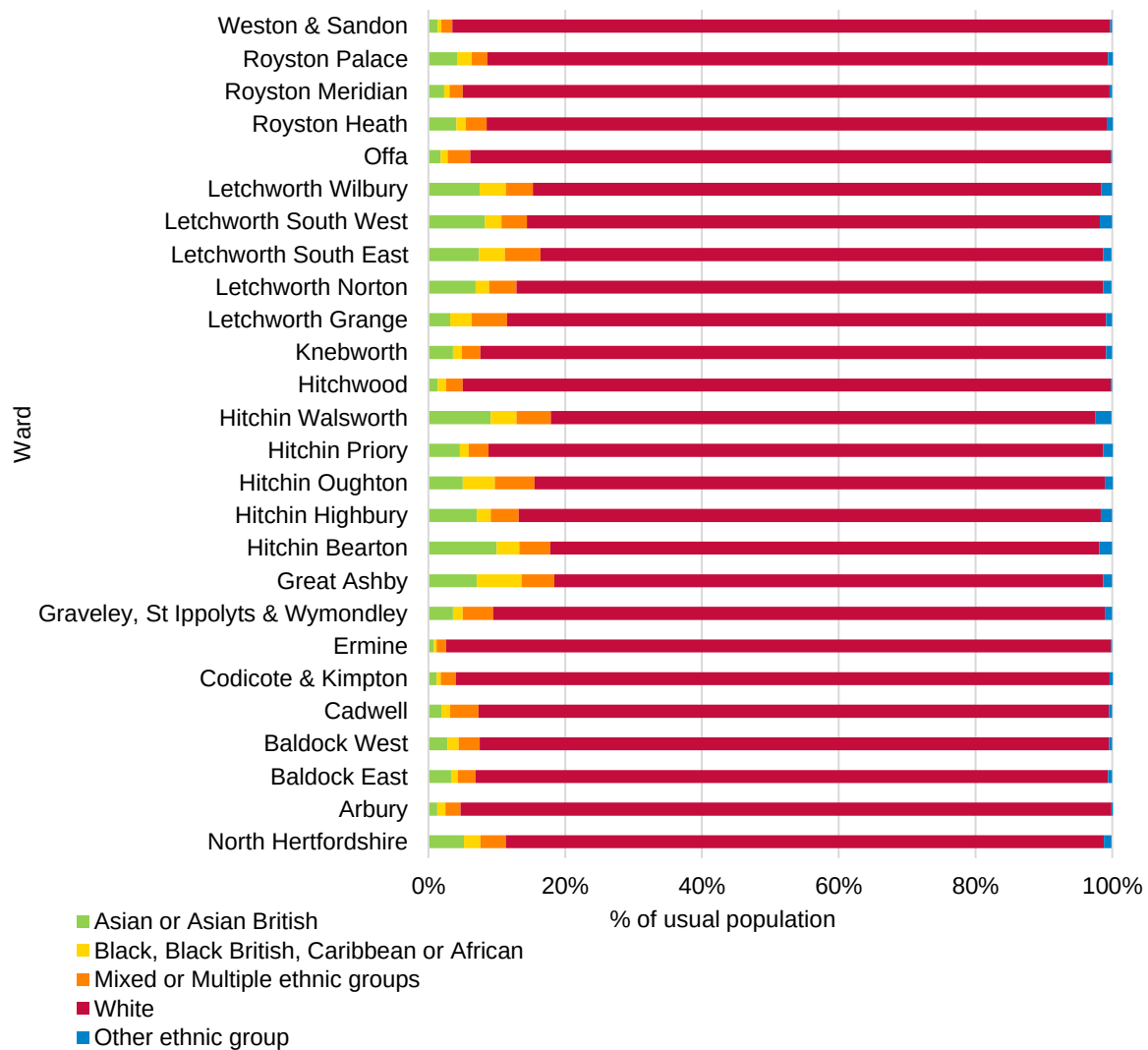


Source – [ONS, Table TS021](#)

¹⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/9>

¹⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS021/editions/2021/versions/1>

% of usual residents in North Herts and its Wards in 2021 by broad ethnic group



Source - [ONS, Table TS021](#)

Broad Ethnic Groups

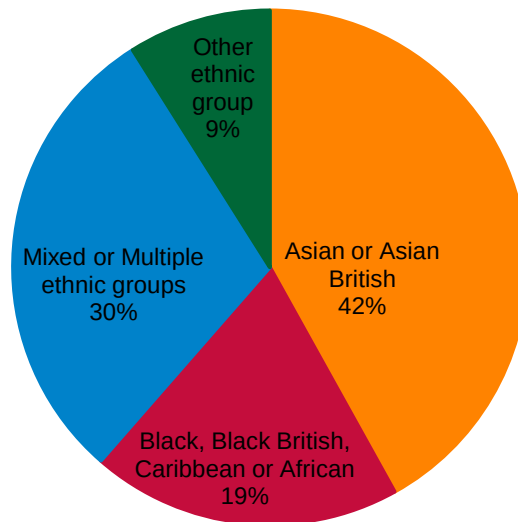
Our ethnic minority groups¹⁹ can be broken down further into broad ethnic groups which include

- Asian or Asian British
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
- Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
- Other ethnic groups

¹⁹ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS021/editions/2021/versions/1>

We have excluded 'White British' as an Ethnic Group so that the other categories can be clearly seen.

Ethnic Makeup by Broad Groupings, North Herts, in 2021

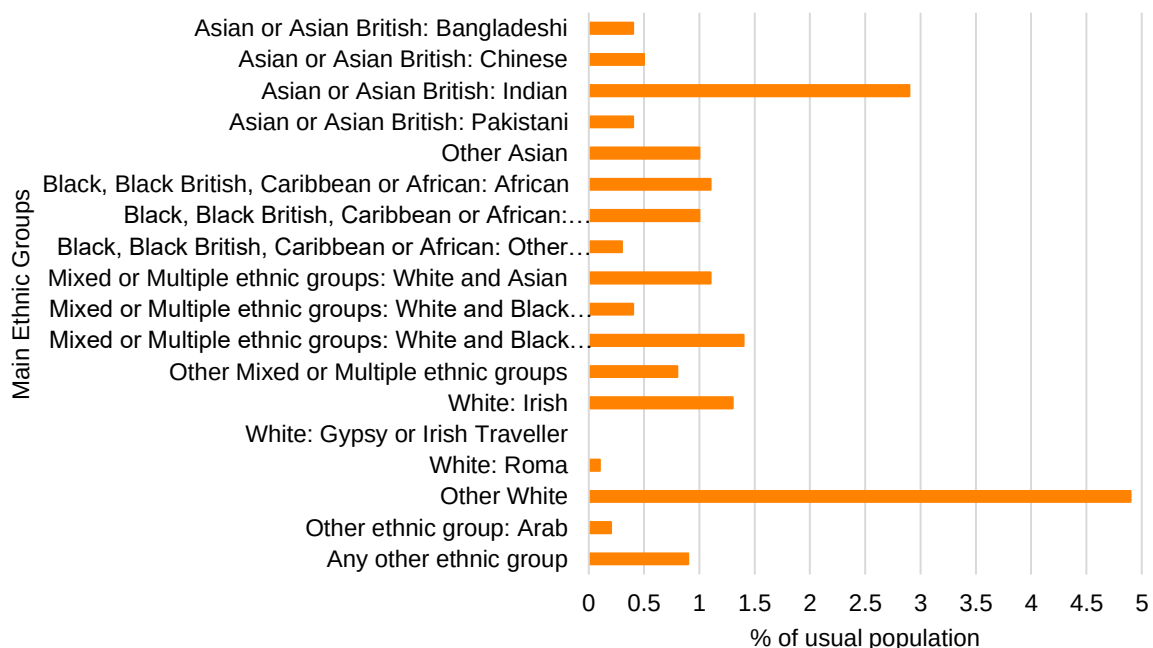


Source – [ONS, Table TS021](#)

Main Ethnic Groups

The Broad Ethnic Groups can be broken down further into Main Ethnic Groups. We have excluded 'White British' as an Ethnic Group so that the other categories can be clearly seen.

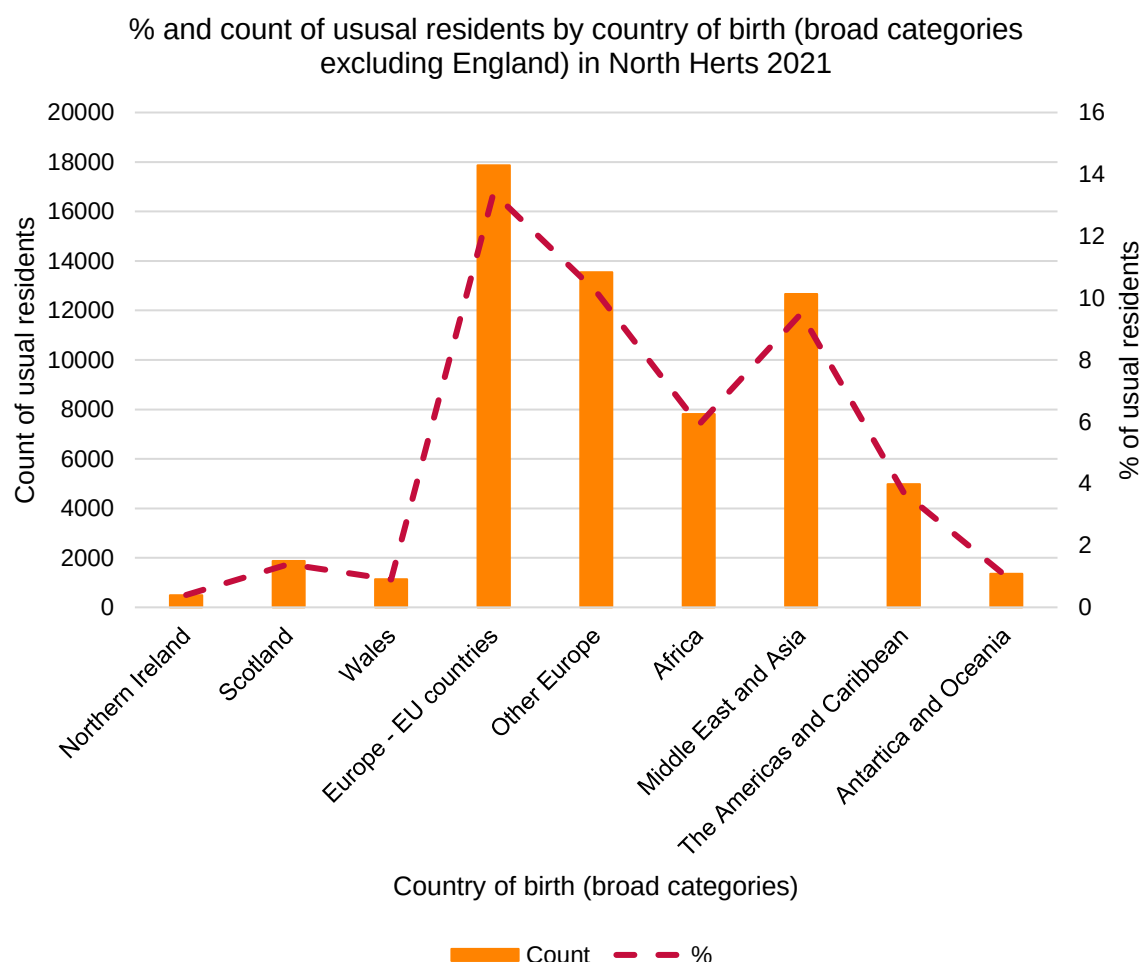
% of usual residents in Non-White British Ethnic Groups in North Herts in 2021



Source – [ONS, Table TS021](#)

Nationality

The [2021 Census](#)²⁰ provides data on place of birth. In North Herts, 88% of residents were born in the UK; 4.5% were born in EU Countries; 3.2% were born in the Middle East and Asia; 1.8% were born in Africa; 1.2% were born in the Americas and Caribbean, and 0.3% were born in Australasia.



Source – [ONS, Table TS012](#)

Language

Household Language

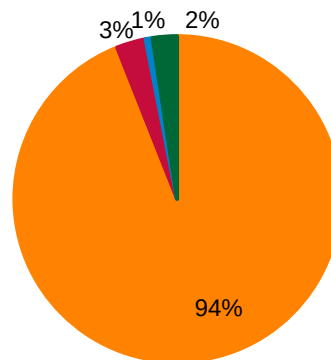
The [Census 2021](#)²¹ shows that 94% of all households in our District have English as their main language amongst the adults.

²⁰ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS012, <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts012>

²¹ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS024, <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts024>

English as a main language in households in North Herts in 2021

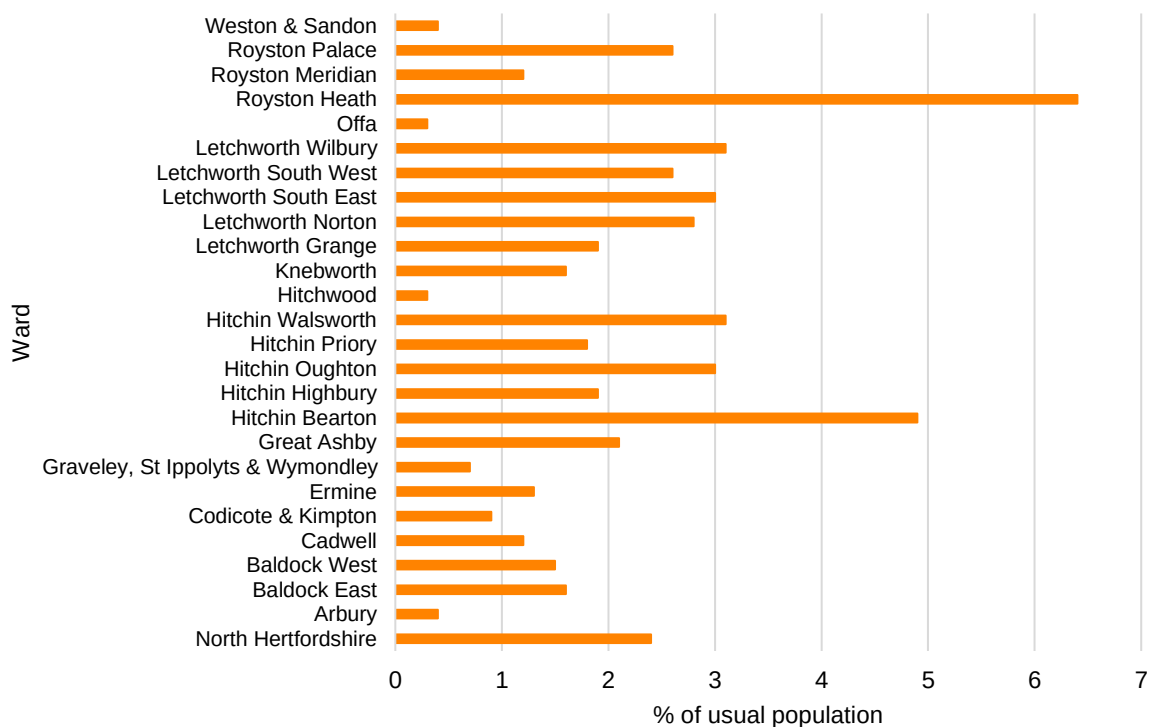
- All adults in household have English as a main language
- At least one but not all adults in household have English as a main language
- No adults in household, but at least one person aged 3 to 15 years, has English as a main language
- No people in household have English as a main language



Source – [ONS, Table TS024](#)

In 2021, 2.4% of households in our District had nobody who had English as a main language²².

% of households where nobody has English as a first language in North Herts and its Wards in 2021



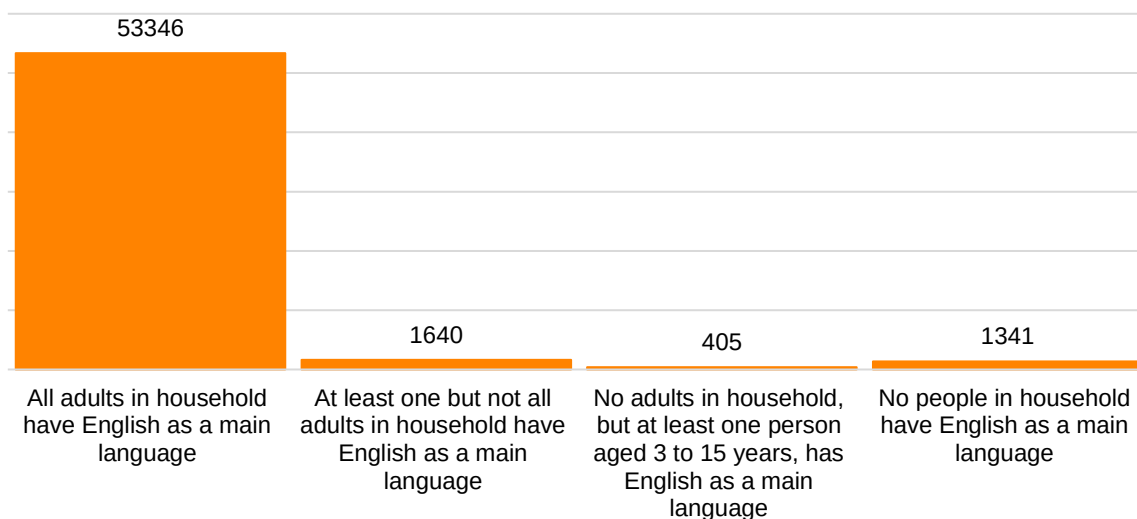
Source – [ONS, Table TS025](#)

²² ONS, Census 2021, Table TS025, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS025/editions/2021/versions/3>

Residents with English as a Main Language

The [2021 Census](#)²³ shows 0.7% (405) of households in North Herts had a child or children (3 to 15 years old) who had English as a main language amongst others who do not have English as their main language.

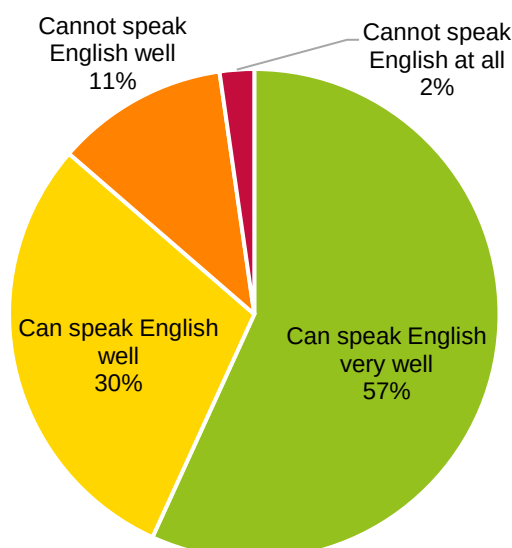
Number of households in North Herts in 2021 by household language



Source – [ONS, Table TS025](#)

0.1% of our residents in North Herts, aged 3 years and over, who do not have English as their main language, cannot speak English at all²⁴. These values are lower than the average across the Country.

Proficiency in English in North Herts when English is not the main language, 2021



Source – [ONS, Table TS024](#)

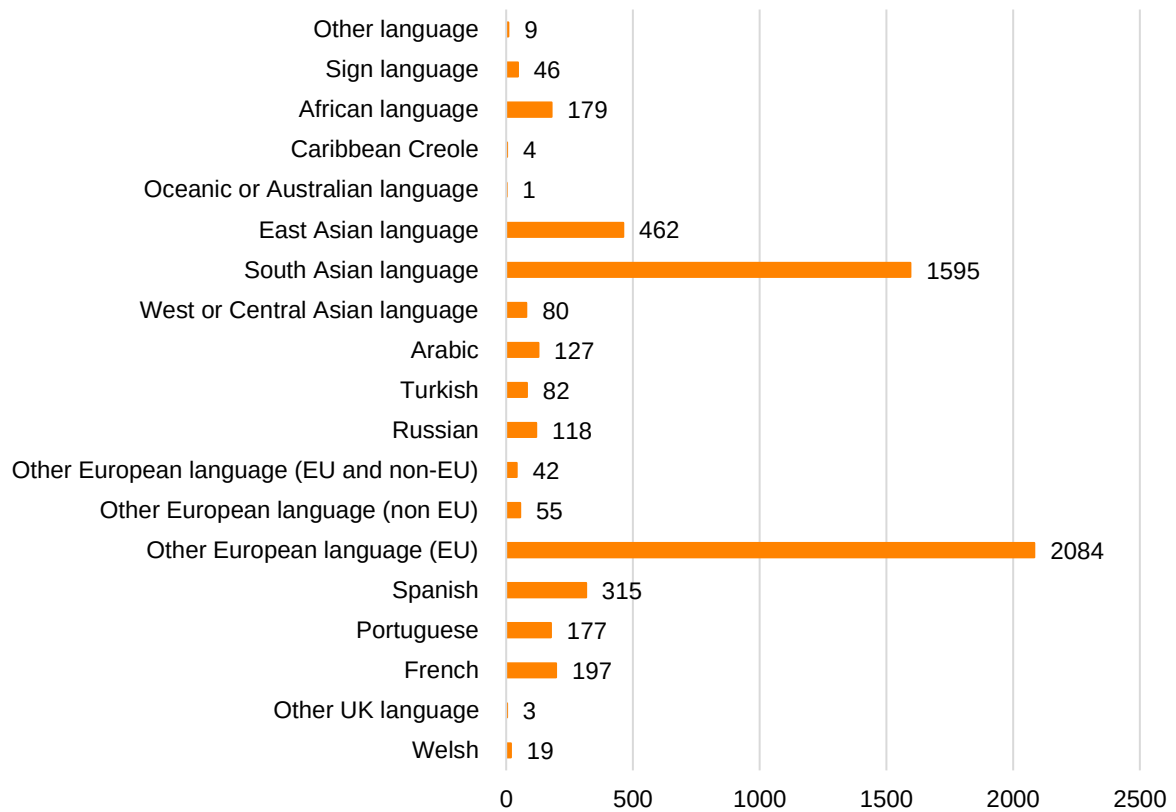
²³ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS025, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS025/editions/2021/versions/3>

²⁴ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS024, <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts024>

Main Languages other than English

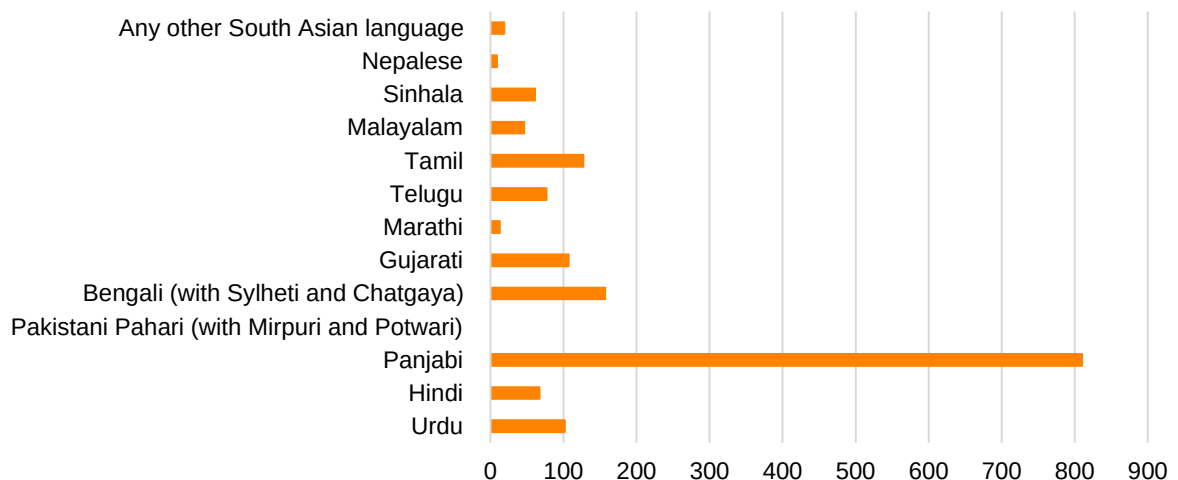
Punjabi²⁵ was the most spoken non-English language in our District in 2021 with 810 (0.6% of people speaking it. Followed by Polish with 679 (0.5%) speakers in North Herts.

Count of Main Spoken Language (other than English) by North Herts Residents in 2021



Source – [ONS, Table TS025](#)²⁶

South Asian Languages - Count

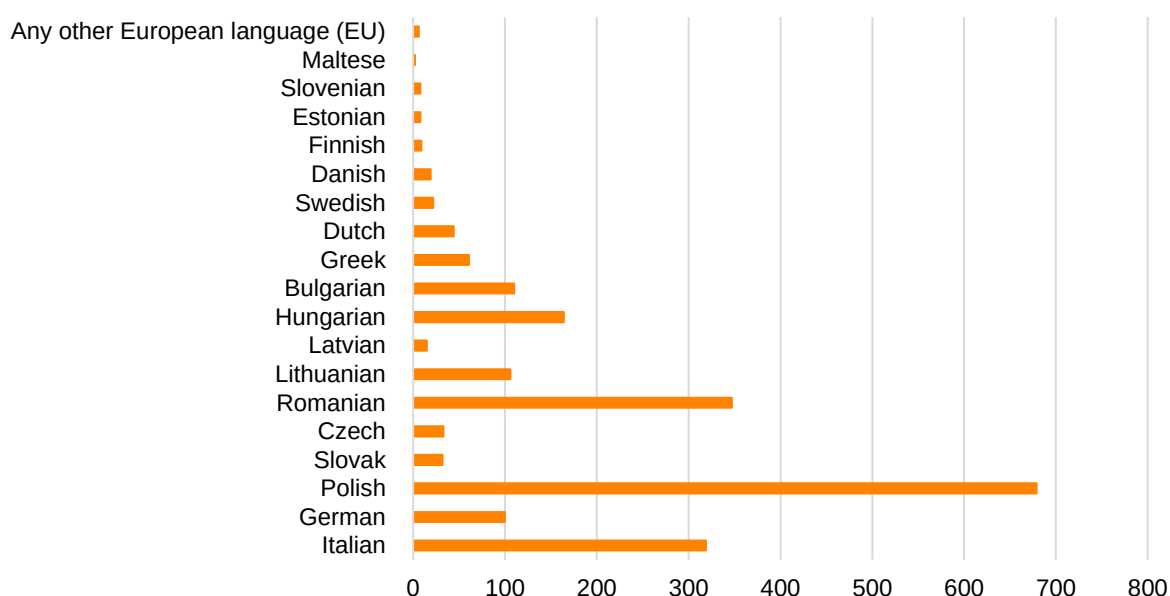


Source - [ONS, Table TS025](#)

²⁵ The correct transliteration replacing the use of 'Punjabi'

²⁶ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS025 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS025/editions/2021/versions/3>

Other European Languages (EU) - Count North Hertfordshire



Source - [ONS, Table TS025](#)

Key issues that the Local Plan should consider

People from different racial and ethnic backgrounds can experience a range of inequalities that may be influenced by the location, design and delivery of development. Some ethnic minority communities may face particular housing challenges, including affordability pressures, overcrowding and a greater reliance on the private rented sector, which can affect housing quality, stability and wellbeing.

Access to healthcare, education, employment opportunities, community facilities and transport infrastructure can also influence equality of opportunity. Barriers to accessing services, jobs and training may disproportionately affect some communities, particularly where affordable and sustainable transport options are limited.

The quality and design of places can affect how safe, welcome and included people feel within their communities. Some ethnic minority groups may be more likely to experience discrimination, harassment or social exclusion, which can influence their use of public spaces and local facilities. Environmental inequalities, including exposure to poor air quality and other environmental hazards, may also have a disproportionate impact on health and wellbeing.

Community facilities, public spaces and local centres can play an important role in supporting social interaction, cultural expression, community participation and a sense of belonging for people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Recommendation

Our new Local Plan should gather further evidence on the experiences and needs of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds to better understand the potential impacts of Local Plan policies on this protected characteristic. This should include consideration of

housing needs, access to services and facilities, transport, employment opportunities, health outcomes and the quality of the local environment.

Consultation and engagement activities should be designed to be inclusive and accessible, ensuring that people from all communities have opportunities to participate in the plan-making process. Consideration should be given to potential barriers to engagement, including language, cultural factors and awareness of consultation activities.

The Local Plan should seek to support the delivery of a range of housing types, sizes and tenures to meet the needs of diverse households, while helping to reduce inequalities in housing outcomes.

Policies should promote well-connected development with good access to employment, education, healthcare, community facilities and sustainable transport options. They should also support safe, inclusive and high-quality places, equitable access to green infrastructure and open spaces, and measures that help address environmental inequalities and improve health and wellbeing.

RELIGION OR BELIEF

Religion or Belief

In the [Equality Act 2010 Section 10](#)²⁷, religion relates to any religion and includes a reference to a lack of religion.

Belief relates to any religious or philosophical belief including not having a belief.

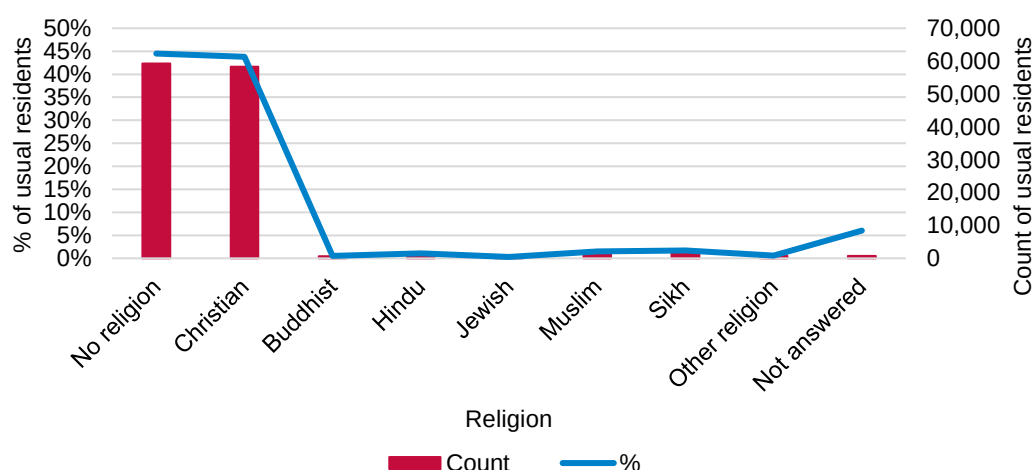
Non-Religious Residents

44.5% ([59,315](#))²⁸ of our residents choose not to follow a religion in 2021.

Religious Residents

At the same point in time, 43.8% (58,320) of our residents identify as Christian. Sikhism is the next most prevalent religion among our residents at 1.7% (2,280).

Percentage and Count of usual residents in North Herts in 2021 by religion



Key issues that the Local Plan should consider

People from different faith and belief groups may have particular needs relating to places of worship, community facilities and burial provision. Access to these facilities, alongside housing, employment, education, healthcare and open spaces, can influence how individuals participate in community life and practise their faith.

Some faith communities may experience discrimination, harassment or exclusion, which can affect their sense of safety and belonging. The availability of welcoming, inclusive and accessible spaces can therefore play an important role in supporting community cohesion, social interaction and cultural expression.

²⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/10>

²⁸ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS030, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS030/editions/2021/versions/3>

Recommendation

Our new Local Plan should engage with a range of faith and belief groups to better understand their needs, experiences and priorities, helping to inform future policies and site allocations.

The Plan should consider whether existing and future infrastructure is sufficient to meet the needs of North Hertfordshire's communities, including places of worship, community facilities and burial provision, where appropriate. It should also promote safe, accessible and inclusive environments, support equitable access to services and facilities, and encourage opportunities for interaction to help foster community cohesion and a sense of belonging.

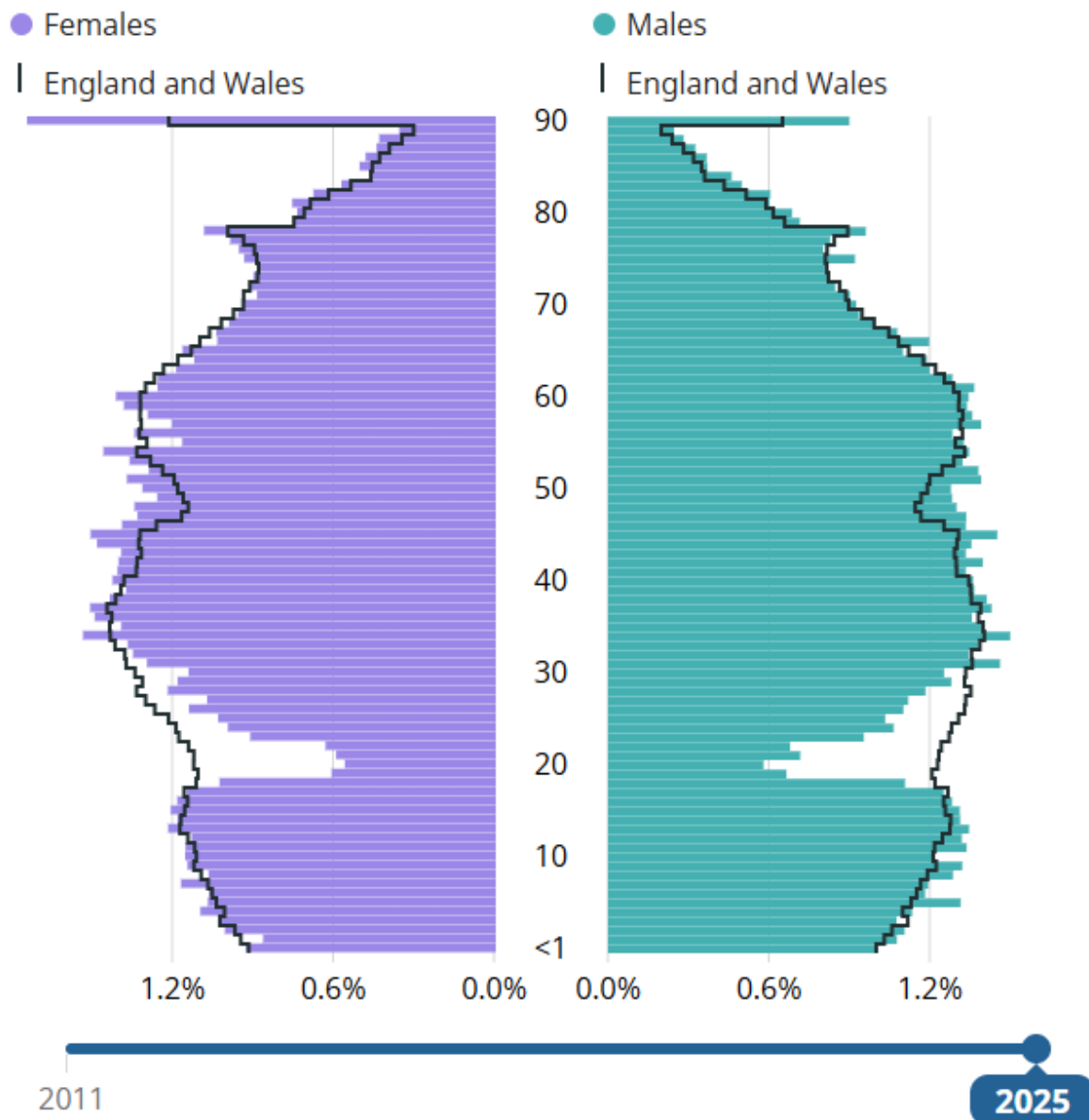
SEX

Sex

Sex relates to a person being a man or a woman in the [Equality Act 2020, Section 11](#)²⁹.

Sex of Residents

Of the population of our District, 137,365, 48.4% (66,510) were male and 51.6% (70,855) were female at mid-2025.



Source – [ONS, Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2025](#)

²⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/11>

Key issues that the Local Plan should consider

Women and men can experience housing needs differently due to factors such as income inequality, caring responsibilities, household composition and vulnerability to homelessness. Women are more likely to be lone parents and may therefore face greater affordability pressures and challenges in accessing suitable housing.

Access to employment opportunities, services and community facilities can also vary between women and men. Women are more likely to combine employment with childcare and other caring responsibilities, often resulting in more complex travel patterns and a greater reliance on local services and public transport. These factors can influence access to jobs, education, healthcare, shops and recreational opportunities.

The design of places can affect how people experience and use their local environment. Women are more likely to report concerns about personal safety in public spaces, particularly after dark, which may influence travel choices and participation in community life. Differences in access to healthcare, open spaces, recreation and healthy environments can also contribute to varying physical and mental health outcomes for women and men.

Recommendations

Our new Local Plan should engage with a wide range of residents and organisations to better understand the differing experiences, and needs and priorities of women and men.

The Plan should support the delivery of a range of housing types and tenures that meet the needs of different households and help address barriers to accessing suitable and affordable housing.

Policies should promote accessible employment opportunities and ensure that development is well connected to services, community facilities and sustainable transport networks. Particular consideration should be given to the needs of people with caring responsibilities by supporting walkable neighbourhoods, reliable public transport and convenient access to everyday services.

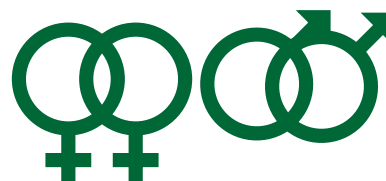
Planning policies should also promote safe, inclusive and accessible environments through high-quality design, which includes measures that help improve perceptions of safety, while supporting equal access to employment, services, open spaces, and other opportunities.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexual Orientation

A person's sexual orientation includes their sexual behaviour, sexual attraction and sexual identity.

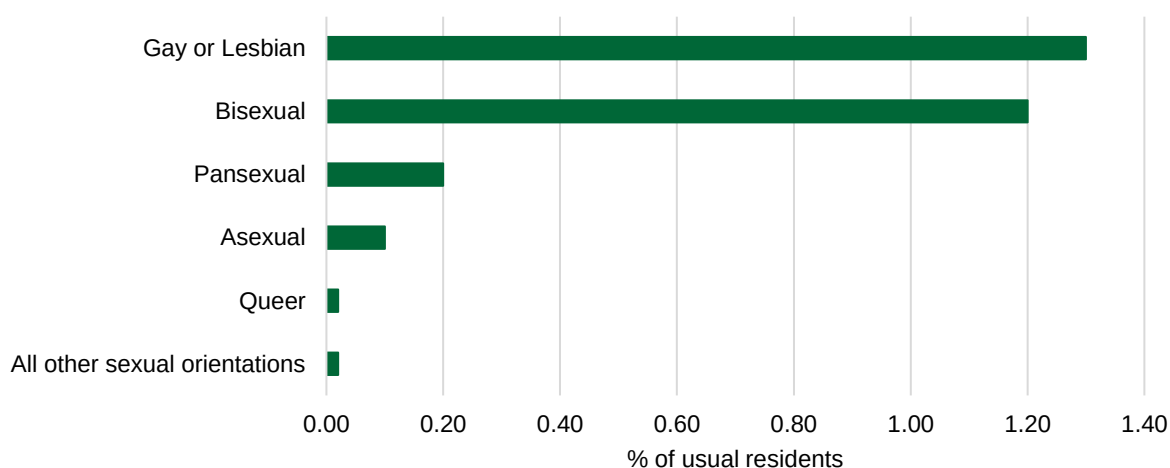
Sexual orientation is a protected characteristic to allow individuals to choose how they wish to express their sexual orientation without discrimination. This includes discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services on grounds of sexual orientation.



Discrimination towards sexual orientation is possible in various forms including

- discrimination arising from a person's self-perceived sexual identity;
- a person's perceived sexual orientation (discrimination by perception); or
- a person's links to other individuals and their sexual orientation (discrimination by association).

% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in North Herts in 2021 by sexual orientation



Source, [ONS - Census 2021](#)³⁰

Straight

Of our usual residents, aged 16 years and over, 90.8% (97,811) identified as straight, that is they are attracted to the opposite sex.

Gay or Lesbian

1.3% (1,378) of our usual residents, aged 16 years and over, identified as gay or lesbian, that is they are attracted to the same sex.

Bisexual

Of our usual residents, aged 16 years and over, 1.2% (1,273) identified as bisexual, that is they are attracted to more than one sex.

³⁰ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts079>

Pansexual

0.2% (191) of our usual residents, aged 16 years and over, identified as pansexual, that is they are attracted to people regardless of their sex.

Asexual

Of our usual residents, aged 16 years and over, 0.1% (61) identified as asexual, that is they do not experience sexual attraction.

Queer

0.02% (17) of our usual residents, aged 16 years and over, identified as queer, that is that they reject specific labels of sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Key issues that the Local Plan should consider

People who are lesbian, gay or bisexual may experience discrimination, harassment or hate crime, which can affect their sense of safety and belonging within their communities. As a result, some individuals may feel less comfortable using public spaces, community facilities or public transport.

LGBTQ+ people can also experience poorer physical and mental health outcomes linked to discrimination, exclusion, social isolation and unequal access to support networks. Access to healthcare, social infrastructure, open spaces and opportunities for community participation can therefore be important factors in supporting wellbeing.

The availability of welcoming and inclusive places can influence social connections, community participation and quality of life. Ensuring that everyone feels able to participate fully in local communities, regardless of sexual orientation, is an important consideration for the Local Plan.

Recommendation

Our new Local Plan should seek to engage with a broad range of people and community organisations to better understand the experiences and needs of people with different sexual orientations. This can help identify barriers to inclusion and ensure that policies respond appropriately to the needs of LGBTQ+ communities.

The Plan should promote safe, inclusive and accessible environments through high-quality design and well-connected communities. Particular consideration should be given to creating places where all residents feel safe and welcome, and where opportunities for discrimination and antisocial behaviour are reduced.

The Local Plan should support equitable access to housing, employment opportunities, healthcare, transport networks, community facilities and open spaces; encouraging the provision of flexible and inclusive community spaces that support social interaction and community cohesion.

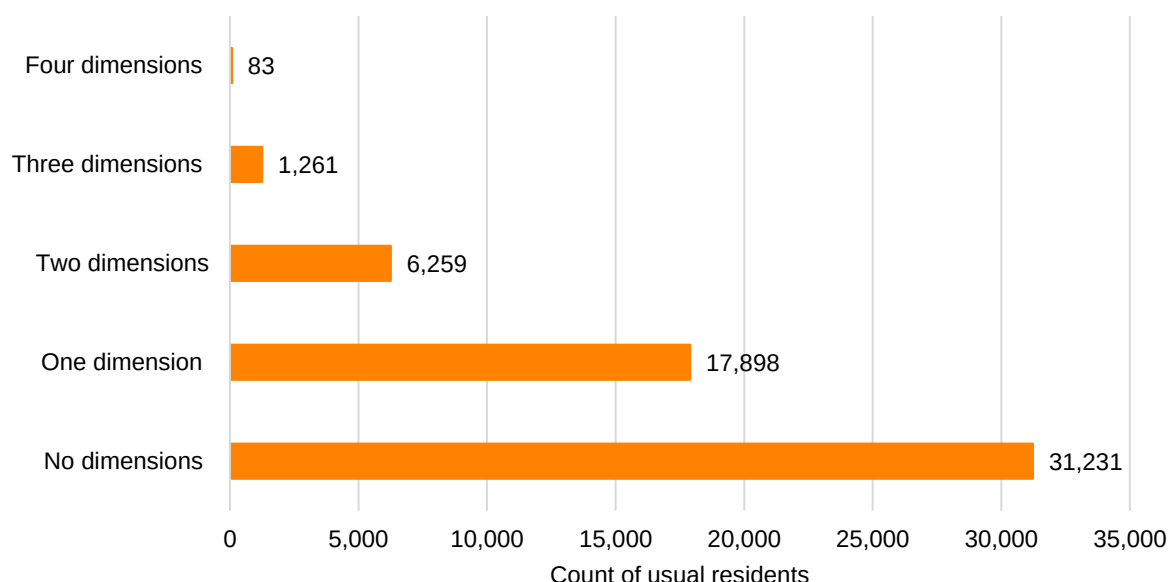
SOCIO-ECONOMIC

Household Deprivation

Census 2021 data was used to define four dimensions of deprivation in households, the dimensions are based on following household characteristics

- Employment - where any person in a household, who is not a full-time student, is either unemployed or economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability.
- Education - where no person in the household has at least five or more GCSE passes (grade A* to C or grade 4 and above) or equivalent qualifications, and no person aged 16 to 18 years is a full-time student.
- Health and disability - where any person in the household has general health that is “bad” or “very bad” or is identified as disabled.
- Housing - the household’s accommodation is either overcrowded, with an occupancy rating of negative 1 or less (implying that it has one fewer room or bedroom required for the number of occupants), or is in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating.

Households by number of deprivation dimensions in North Herts at March 2021



Source – [ONS, Census 2021, Table TS011](#)³¹

Employment

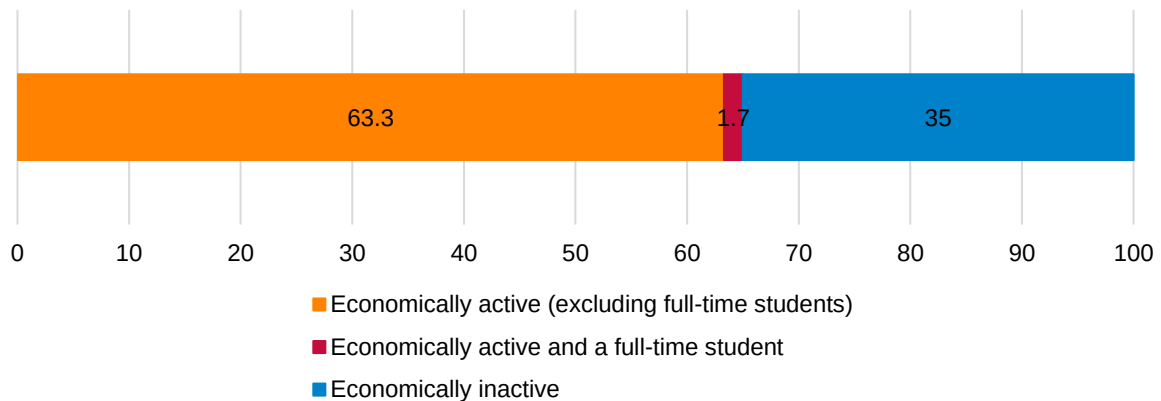
Economic activity status is a measure of whether or not a person is an active participant in the labour market, either working or unemployed but looking for or about to start a job.

It applies only to people aged 16 years and over and is split into those who are ‘economically active’ and those who are ‘economically inactive’. The economically active are also broken down by whether they were full-time students or not.

³¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS011/editions/2021/versions/6>

Census 2021 took place during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, a period of unparalleled and rapid change; the national lockdown, associated guidance and furlough measures will have affected data on labour market topic.

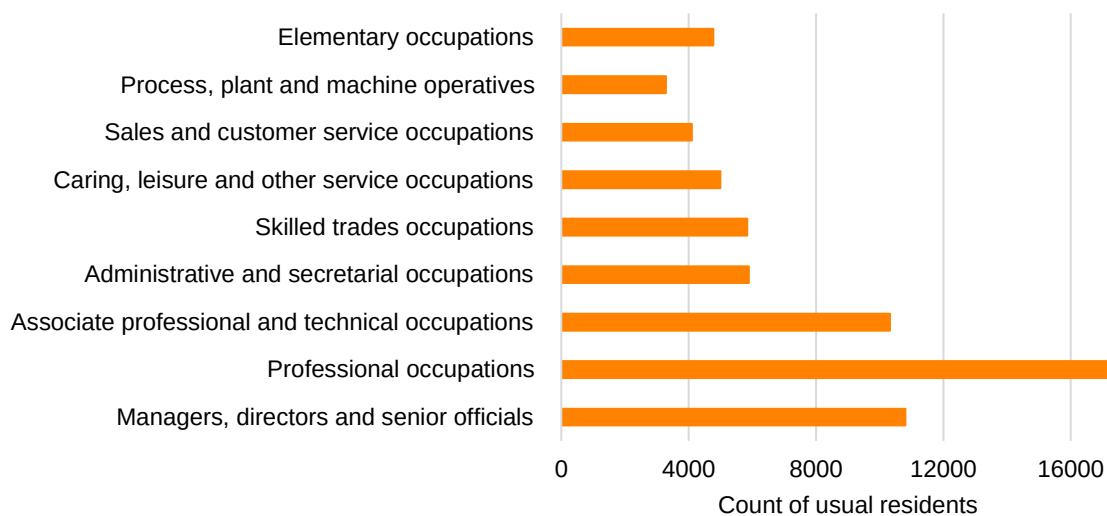
Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over in North Herts in 2021 by economic activity status



Source – [ONS, Census 2021, Table TS066](#)³²

The proportion of people who are economically active in our District is higher than the average of England which was 58.6%.

Count of usual residents aged 16 years and over in North Herts in employment in 2021 by high-level occupation



Source – [ONS, Census 2021, Table TS063](#)³³

The largest proportion of our resident's work in professional occupations, and this proportion is significantly higher than the proportions in the rest of the County and England.

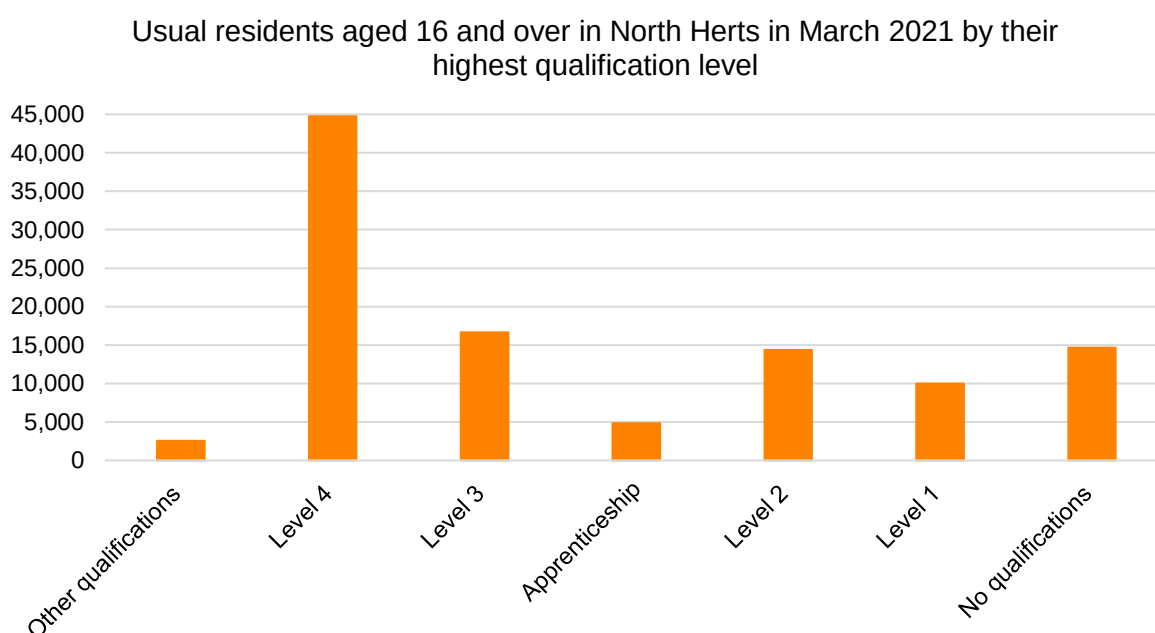
³² <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts066>

³³ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts063>

Education

Census data recorded residents aged 16 years and over to report any qualifications (including academic, vocational, and professional qualifications) they had achieved. This is used to calculate the highest level of qualification (so, the highest level of qualification that an individual reported irrespective of previous qualifications listed) using the following categories

- no qualifications - no formal qualifications
- Level 1 - one to four GCSE passes (grade A* to C or grade 4 and above) and any other GCSEs at other grades, or equivalent qualifications
- Level 2 - five or more GCSE passes (grade A* to C or grade 4 and above) or equivalent qualifications
- apprenticeships
- Level 3 - two or more A Levels or equivalent qualifications
- Level 4 or above - Higher National Certificate, Higher National Diploma, Bachelor's degree, or post-graduate qualifications
- other qualifications - of unknown level



Source – [ONS, Census 2021, Table TS067](#)

A significant proportion of residents in our District are qualified to a high standard. This proportion is significantly higher than the rest of the County and England.

Health and Disability

This is covered in the Disability section above.

Housing

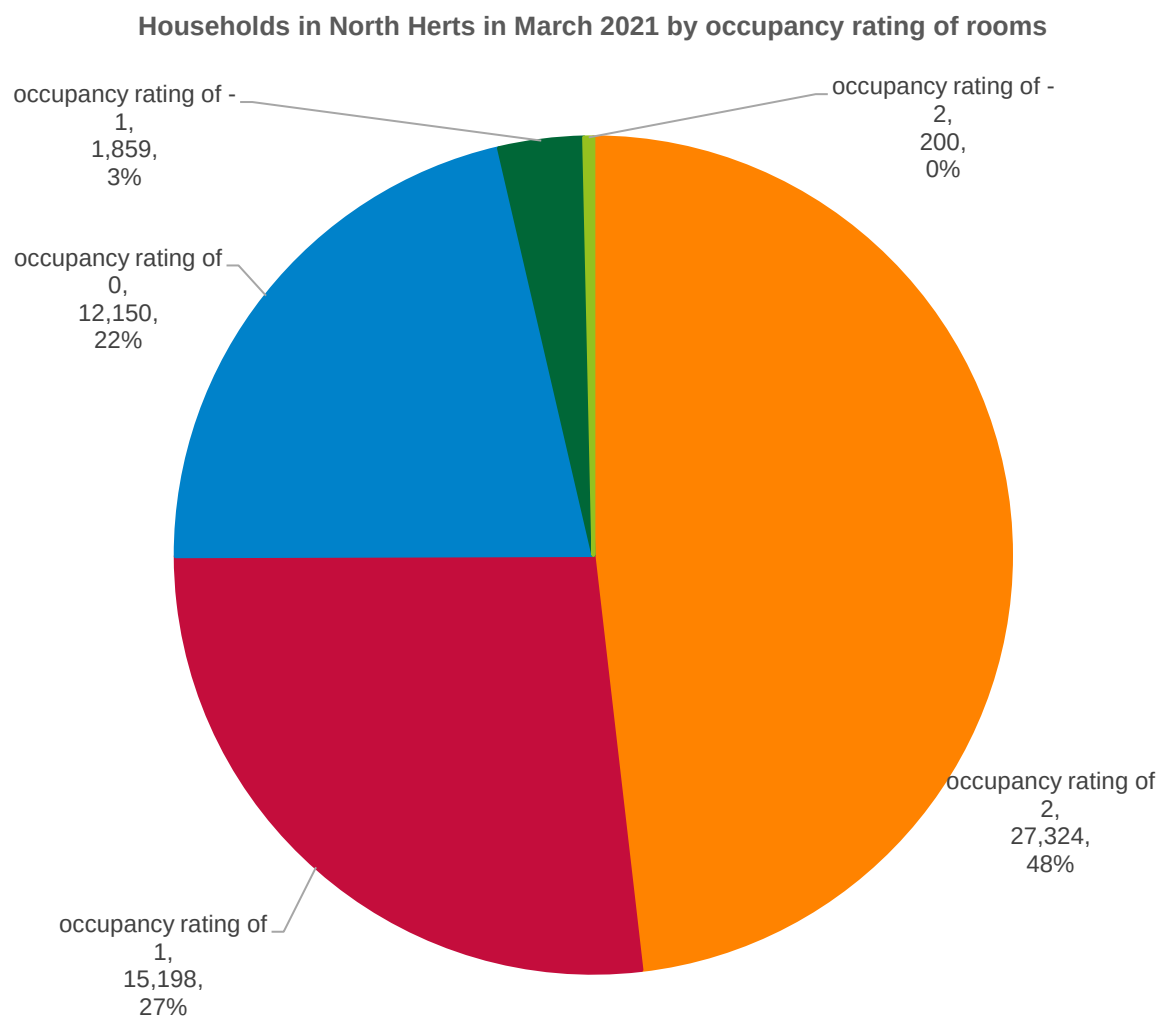
Occupancy rating provides a measure of whether a household's accommodation is overcrowded or under occupied.

There are two measures of occupancy rating

- based on the total number of rooms and
- based only on the number of bedrooms.

The ages of the household members and their relationships to each other are used to derive the number of rooms/bedrooms they require, based on a standard formula. The number of rooms/bedrooms required is subtracted from the number of rooms/bedrooms in the household's accommodation to obtain the occupancy rating values for both rooms and bedrooms.

An occupancy rating of -1 implies that a household has one fewer room/bedroom than required, whereas +1 implies that they have one more room/bedroom than the standard requirement. Therefore, overcrowded households are those with an occupancy rating of -1 or less.



Source – [ONS, Census 2021, Table TS053](#)

Overcrowding in our District is the lowest compared to the rest of the County³⁴ and well below levels in the rest of England.

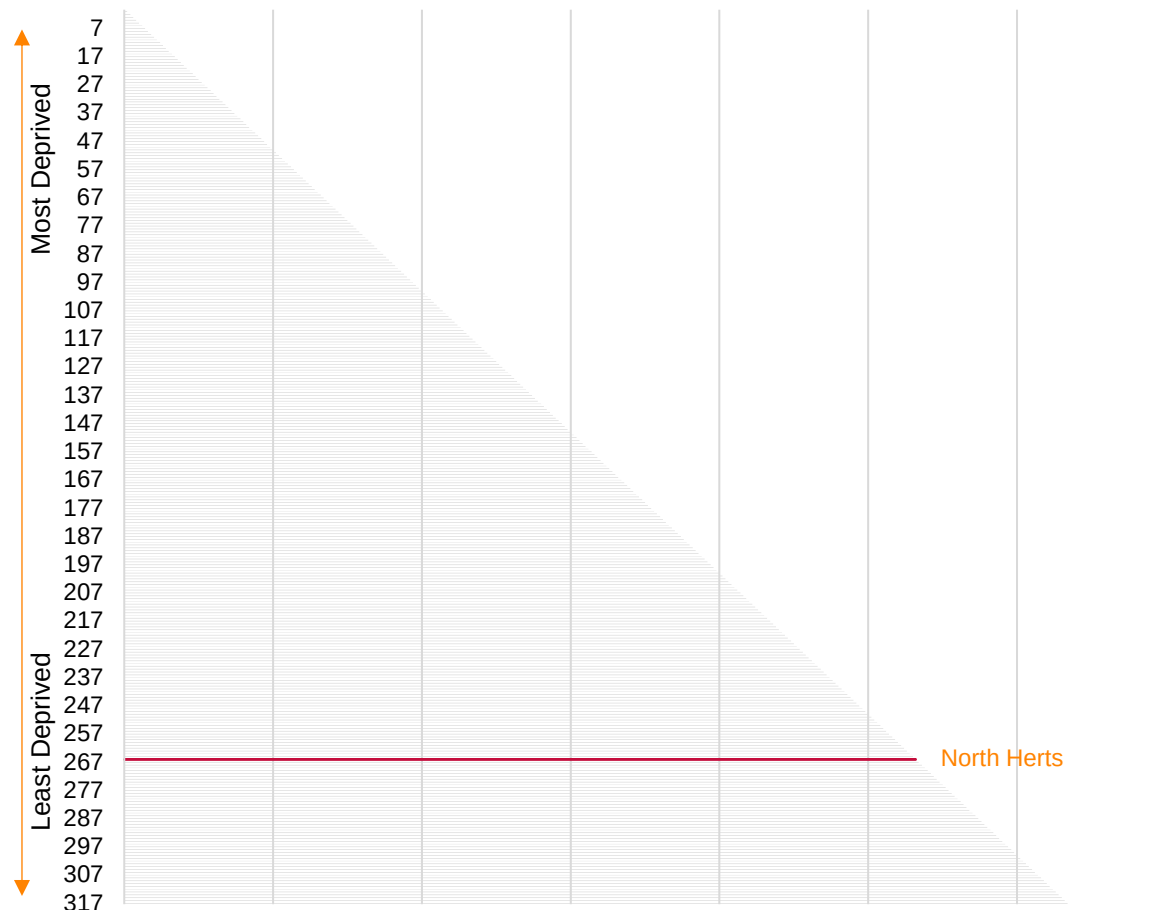
Indices of Multiple Deprivation

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) are a collection of statistical measures used in the country to identify and rank small areas by their relative deprivation.

The IMD combines multiple indicators across different areas to create a single score of deprivation.

The last publication was in 2025³⁵, it ranks local authorities on a scale of 1 – 317 with 1 being the most deprived and 317 being the least deprived. North Herts has ranking of 269 which means we are in the top 15% of the least deprived Local Authorities in the Country.

North Herts IMD ranking, 2025



Key issues that the Local Plan should consider

People experiencing socio-economic disadvantage may face greater difficulties accessing suitable and affordable housing, which can affect health, wellbeing and life opportunities.

³⁴ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS053

³⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2025>

Financial constraints can also increase reliance on local services, community facilities and public transport, making access to these, essential for day-to-day life.

Access to employment opportunities, skills development and affordable transport can have a significant influence on socio-economic outcomes. Individuals and households experiencing disadvantage may face barriers to employment, education and training, which can limit social mobility and economic prospects.

Socio-economic disadvantage is also often associated with poorer health outcomes and greater exposure to environmental inequalities. People on lower incomes may be more likely to experience poor air quality, noise, flood risk, lower-quality living environments and limited access to green spaces and recreational opportunities. These factors can have cumulative impacts on physical and mental wellbeing.

Recommendation

Although socio-economic status is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, it is an important consideration within an EqlA because planning policies can influence access to housing, employment, services, transport and environmental quality.

Our new Local Plan should seek to reduce inequalities and support inclusive growth by ensuring that residents from all socio-economic backgrounds can benefit from investment and development. This should include supporting the delivery of affordable housing, improving access to employment opportunities, education and training, and ensuring that communities are well connected to services and facilities by sustainable and affordable transport options.

The Plan should also promote healthy and high-quality environments by improving access to healthcare, green infrastructure, open spaces and recreational opportunities, while seeking to reduce environmental inequalities.

Consultation and engagement activities should be designed to be inclusive and accessible, ensuring that people from all socio-economic backgrounds have opportunities to participate in the plan-making process and help inform future policies and proposals.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

Assessment Framework

This EqIA Scoping Report provides an initial high-level assessment of the potential equality implications of the Spatial Development Options for the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010, as well as for people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

The assessment framework set out below provides a consistent basis for considering how future Local Plan policies and proposals may affect different groups. As the Local Plan progresses, the assessment will be refined through further evidence gathering, stakeholder engagement and public consultation. This iterative approach will help identify potential positive and negative effects, inform policy development, and ensure that equality considerations are embedded throughout the plan-making process. It will also help identify opportunities to enhance positive outcomes, minimise adverse impacts and promote more inclusive and equitable development across North Hertfordshire.

Assessment of Strategic Development Growth Options

Growth option 1 – Infill development / urban intensification

This option focuses growth within existing towns and villages by redeveloping brownfield land, underused sites and vacant urban land. Development would generally occur within existing settlement boundaries, making better use of existing infrastructure, services and public transport connections. It seeks to accommodate growth without significant outward expansion into the countryside.

	Impact			Commentary	Mitigation
	Positive	Negative	No Impact		
Age	✓	✓		Improved access to housing, employment, healthcare, education and public transport can particularly benefit younger and older people. Walkable neighbourhoods support independence and access to services. However, increased urban densities could reduce access to	Ensure delivery of age-friendly and adaptable housing, accessible public spaces, healthcare capacity and green infrastructure improvements alongside growth.

				informal open space and may place pressure on existing facilities if growth is not matched by infrastructure provision.	
Disability	✓	✓		Development within existing urban areas improves access to services, public transport and employment opportunities for disabled people. New homes are likely to meet higher accessibility standards. However, intensified development may create construction disruption, overcrowding or accessibility challenges if public realm improvements are not delivered.	Require accessible and adaptable housing standards, inclusive design, step-free access, improved pedestrian environments and accessible transport infrastructure.
Sex	✓			Improved proximity to jobs, services, childcare facilities and public transport may particularly benefit groups more dependent on local services and sustainable travel such as women. Regeneration can contribute to safer streets and better overlooked public spaces.	Design developments using Secured by Design principles (referenced in the Design and Placemaking PPG), provide safe walking routes, lighting and accessible community facilities.
Gender reassignment	✓	✓		Improved access to housing, employment, community facilities and public transport within existing settlements may benefit transgender people by increasing access to essential services and support networks. However,	Promote inclusive place-making, design safe and overlooked public spaces, ensure equal access to services and

				increased urban densities may create concerns around personal safety, harassment or exclusion if public spaces are not inclusive and well-designed.	community facilities, and support diversity and inclusion policies.
Marriage	✓			Increased housing supply, access to employment opportunities, sustainable transport and local services may support household stability and wellbeing for people who are married or in civil partnerships. No specific adverse impacts are anticipated.	Ensure a range of housing types and tenures to meet the needs of different household structures and life stages.
Pregnancy	✓	✓		Locating development close to healthcare, childcare facilities, employment opportunities, public transport and local services can benefit pregnant people and families with young children. However, increased pressure on health services, schools and open spaces could adversely affect accessibility and quality of services if infrastructure delivery does not keep pace with growth.	Ensure timely provision of healthcare, childcare, school places, accessible public transport, green spaces and family-friendly housing.
Belief or religion	✓	✓		Good access to community facilities and sustainable transport may improve access to places of worship and faith-based services. However, redevelopment and increased densities	Protect and enhance community facilities, provide flexible community spaces and

				could place pressure on existing community facilities or reduce opportunities for faith groups if community space is lost.	engage with faith groups during planning and development processes.
Race	✓	✓		Increased access to affordable housing, employment, education, services and public transport may help reduce inequalities experienced by some ethnic minority communities. Regeneration can improve environmental quality in urban areas. However, rising land values and redevelopment could contribute to displacement or reduced affordability in some locations.	Promote affordable housing, inclusive engagement, equal access to employment opportunities, community cohesion initiatives and measures to prevent displacement.
Sexual orientation	✓	✓		Improved access to jobs, housing, services and public transport can support inclusion and wellbeing. Regeneration may create safer and more active urban environments. However, concerns about safety, discrimination or exclusion may arise if developments and public spaces are not inclusive.	Apply inclusive design principles, promote community safety, support equality and diversity measures, and provide accessible community spaces.
Socio-economic	✓	✓		Significant positive effects may arise through increased housing delivery, proximity to employment, reduced travel costs, improved public transport	Provide affordable housing, support local employment and skills development,

			accessibility, and better access to education, healthcare and community infrastructure. Urban intensification can also support climate change objectives by reducing car dependency and making efficient use of land. However, regeneration and increased demand may increase property prices and living costs, potentially affecting lower-income households.	improve sustainable transport options, invest in social infrastructure and green infrastructure, and monitor affordability impacts.
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Summary: The infill development / urban intensification approach broadly reflects that urban intensification is generally positive across all protected characteristics due to better access to housing, jobs, services and public transport, but that potential negative effects may arise where infrastructure capacity, affordability, community facilities, green space or perceptions of safety are not adequately addressed.

Growth option 2 – Urban expansion

This option directs growth to planned extensions on the edges of existing towns, such as Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston, and our larger villages. New development would be delivered through larger strategic sites, supported by new infrastructure, schools, healthcare facilities, transport improvements and green spaces. The aim is to create well-connected extensions that integrate with existing communities.

	Impact			Commentary	Mitigation
	Positive	Negative	No Impact		
Age	✓	✓		New homes, schools, healthcare facilities, open spaces and improved transport links can benefit both younger and older people.	Phase development alongside schools, healthcare and transport infrastructure.

				Strategic developments provide opportunities for age-friendly neighbourhoods and access to employment. However, if services and public transport are not delivered early, older people, young people and those without access to a car may experience isolation and reduced accessibility.	Provide accessible walking and cycling routes, age-friendly design and a range of housing suitable for different life stages.
Disability	✓	✓		New development provides opportunities to deliver accessible housing, inclusive public spaces and improved transport infrastructure. Access to new services and employment opportunities may improve outcomes for disabled people. Negative impacts may arise where urban extensions are car-dependent or where access to existing town centres and facilities is limited.	Require accessible and adaptable homes, inclusive design standards, step-free transport infrastructure, accessible public realm and high-quality public transport connections.
Sex	✓	✓		New housing, jobs and community facilities can improve access to services and employment opportunities. Well-designed neighbourhoods can improve perceptions of safety and support sustainable travel. However, poorly connected developments, isolated	Implement Secured by Design principles (referenced in the Design and Placemaking PPG), provide well-lit and overlooked routes, ensure public transport provision and provide

				walking routes or inadequate public transport may disproportionately affect those reliant on non-car travel.	accessible community facilities.
Gender reassignment	✓	✓		New communities can improve access to housing, employment, healthcare and support services. High-quality public spaces and community infrastructure can promote inclusion. However, isolated environments or poorly designed public areas could increase perceptions of vulnerability or exclusion.	Promote inclusive place-making, community cohesion initiatives, safe public spaces and equal access to services and facilities.
Marriage	✓			Increased housing choice, employment opportunities and improved infrastructure may support household stability and wellbeing. No specific adverse impacts are anticipated beyond those affecting the wider population.	Ensure delivery of a mix of housing sizes, tenures and affordability levels to meet diverse household needs; and provision of timely infrastructure to ensure equitable access
Pregnancy	✓	✓		Access to new housing, healthcare facilities, childcare provision, green spaces and improved transport infrastructure can significantly benefit pregnant people and families with young children. However, adverse effects may	Ensure timely delivery of healthcare, childcare, schools, community facilities and accessible public transport as

				arise if healthcare, education and community facilities are not delivered in line with population growth.	development progresses.
Belief or religion	✓	✓		Urban expansions may improve access to community facilities, services and transport that support participation in religious and cultural activities. However, growth may place pressure on existing community facilities or fail to meet the needs of faith groups if provision is not planned.	Engage with faith communities, provide flexible community facilities and ensure accessible transport links to places of worship.
Race	✓	✓		Increased housing supply, employment opportunities and access to services may provide benefits for ethnically diverse communities. Strategic growth can support social integration and improve access to education and transport. However, inequalities may arise if affordable housing, transport and community services are not delivered equitably.	Deliver affordable housing, promote inclusive engagement, support community cohesion and ensure equitable access to services, employment and transport.
Sexual orientation	✓	✓		New development can improve access to housing, services, employment opportunities and community facilities. Well-designed places may enhance inclusion and safety. However, poorly designed public spaces or weak	Promote inclusive community development, safe public spaces, equality policies and accessible support networks.

				community integration could create barriers to participation and wellbeing.	
Socio-economic	✓	✓		Significant positive effects may arise through increased housing delivery, including affordable housing, access to jobs, improved transport connectivity and investment in schools, healthcare and other community infrastructure. Strategic growth may also provide opportunities for sustainable transport and energy-efficient homes. However, development may increase pressure on existing infrastructure, create temporary construction disruption, lead to higher housing costs in some areas and result in loss of greenfield land with implications for biodiversity and climate resilience if not carefully planned.	Secure affordable housing, local employment and training opportunities, investment in transport and social infrastructure, sustainable drainage, biodiversity net gain, green infrastructure, climate-resilient design and measures to reduce car dependency.

Summary: Overall, Urban expansion is likely to have predominantly positive impacts across all characteristics, provided that housing, employment opportunities, public transport, schools, healthcare, community facilities and green infrastructure are delivered alongside development. Most potential negative impacts relate to infrastructure lag, car dependency, affordability pressures and environmental effects, which can largely be mitigated through comprehensive masterplanning and phased infrastructure delivery.

Growth option 3 – Dispersed village growth

This option spreads development across a number of villages through smaller-scale housing schemes. The focus is on meeting local housing needs, supporting rural communities and helping maintain village services such as shops, schools and community facilities. It does not rely on major growth in a small number of locations but distributes development more widely across the District.

	Impact				
	Positive	Negative	No Impact		
Age	✓	✓		Small-scale housing growth can help younger people remain within their local communities and support the viability of village schools, shops and community facilities. Older people may benefit from remaining close to established social networks. However, limited access to healthcare, employment, public transport and other services in some rural locations may disadvantage younger and older residents who are less able to travel.	Ensure provision of accessible housing, support rural transport services, improve digital connectivity, and maintain access to healthcare, community facilities and local services.
Disability	✓	✓		Additional housing may provide opportunities for accessible homes within rural communities and help people remain close to family support networks. However, dispersed development may increase reliance on private vehicles where public transport and services are limited, creating accessibility challenges for disabled people.	Require accessible and adaptable housing standards, improve community transport services, ensure accessible public realm design and support local service provision.
Sex	✓	✓		New housing and support for local facilities may benefit residents by improving access to local services and strengthening communities. However, limited transport options,	Improve public and community transport, provide safe and well-lit pedestrian routes, and

				longer travel distances and isolated locations may affect those who rely more heavily on public transport or local services.	support access to local services and facilities.
Gender reassignment	✓	✓		Supporting the sustainability of rural communities may improve access to housing and local services. Conversely, smaller and more dispersed communities may provide fewer opportunities to access specialist support services, healthcare or community networks.	Promote inclusive communities, ensure equitable access to services, improve transport and digital connectivity, and support access to specialist services where required.
Marriage	✓			Increased housing choice within villages may support household formation, enable families to remain within local communities and improve housing opportunities for those wishing to live close to family networks.	Ensure a range of housing sizes, types and tenures to meet differing household needs and affordability requirements.
Pregnancy	✓	✓		Housing growth may help families remain within local communities and sustain schools, childcare facilities and local services. However, access to healthcare facilities, maternity services and public transport may be more limited in rural areas, resulting in longer journeys.	Support rural healthcare provision, community transport, childcare facilities and accessible pedestrian routes to services.

Belief or religion	✓	✓		Growth may help sustain community facilities that support social, cultural and faith activities and maintain community cohesion in villages. However, dispersed growth may not always provide easy access to places of worship or larger faith communities located in towns.	Engage with faith groups, support community facilities and improve transport links to larger service centres where appropriate.
Race	✓	✓		Additional housing and support for local services may benefit all communities. However, some ethnic minority groups may experience barriers if access to employment, specialist services, public transport and community networks is more limited in rural areas.	Promote inclusive community engagement, improve transport connectivity, ensure equitable access to housing and services, and support community cohesion initiatives.
Sexual orientation	✓	✓		Retaining population and supporting local facilities can help maintain vibrant rural communities. However, dispersed settlements may provide fewer opportunities to access specialist support services, social networks and community groups available in larger towns.	Encourage inclusive community development, improve transport and digital connectivity, and ensure equal access to services and support networks.
Socio-economic	✓	✓		Dispersed village growth may provide affordable housing opportunities, help sustain village services, support local construction employment	Deliver affordable housing, support local employment opportunities,

			and strengthen rural communities. However, limited employment opportunities, reduced public transport provision, increased travel costs and dependence on private vehicles may disproportionately affect lower-income households. Dispersed development may also increase transport-related carbon emissions and place pressure on rural landscapes and biodiversity if not carefully managed.	improve public and community transport, enhance active travel links, protect biodiversity, provide green infrastructure and incorporate climate-resilient and low-carbon development measures.
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Summary: Dispersed village growth is likely to result in a combination of positive and negative impacts across most protected characteristics. Positive effects relate to local housing provision, sustaining rural services and supporting community vitality. Negative effects primarily arise from limited access to employment, healthcare, public transport and other social infrastructure, together with potential climate change and environmental impacts associated with increased travel demand.

Growth option 4 – New settlement

This option accommodates a significant proportion of future growth in one or more new freestanding settlements. These would be comprehensively planned communities with their own housing, employment opportunities, schools, healthcare facilities, green spaces and supporting infrastructure. Rather than expanding existing towns and villages, growth would be focused in entirely new settlements designed to be largely self-sufficient.

	Impact			Commentary	Mitigation
	Positive	Negative	No Impact		
Age	✓	✓		A new settlement provides opportunities to deliver a range of housing, schools, healthcare facilities, employment	Deliver infrastructure alongside housing growth, apply age-friendly

				opportunities, accessible green spaces and sustainable transport from the outset. This can benefit both younger and older people. However, during early phases residents may have limited access to services and public transport until the settlement becomes established.	neighbourhood principles, provide accessible public transport and ensure a range of housing suitable for different life stages.
Disability	✓	✓		A new settlement can be designed around inclusive design principles, providing accessible homes, step-free routes, local employment opportunities and accessible community facilities. However, delays in infrastructure provision or a lack of transport connections in early phases may create accessibility barriers.	Require accessible and adaptable housing, inclusive design standards, accessible public realm, community transport and high-quality public transport links from the earliest phases.
Sex	✓	✓		New housing, employment opportunities and social infrastructure can improve quality of life and access to services. Well-planned neighbourhoods can support safe and active travel. However, isolated locations, particularly in the early stages of development, may create concerns regarding accessibility and personal safety.	Incorporate Secured by Design principles (referenced in the Design and Placemaking PPG), well-lit walking and cycling routes, frequent public transport services and accessible community facilities.

Gender reassignment	✓	✓		A comprehensively planned community offers opportunities for inclusive design, access to employment, healthcare and community facilities. However, there may be limited access to specialist support services during the early phases of development and risks of social exclusion if community integration is not supported.	Promote inclusive place-making, support community cohesion initiatives, ensure equitable access to services and provide strong transport and digital connectivity.
Marriage	✓			A broad mix of housing, employment opportunities and community facilities can support a range of household types and contribute positively to household stability and wellbeing. No specific adverse impacts are anticipated.	Deliver a diverse mix of housing types, sizes and tenures, including affordable housing.
Pregnancy	✓	✓		New healthcare facilities, childcare provision, schools, open spaces and family housing can provide significant benefits for families with young children. However, if facilities are not delivered in step with residential development, access to services may be limited during initial phases.	Phase healthcare, childcare, education and community facilities alongside housing development and ensure good public transport connectivity.
Belief or religion	✓	✓		New community facilities and transport links may improve opportunities for social, cultural and religious activities. However, faith communities may initially	Provide flexible community spaces, engage with faith groups during

				depend on facilities in existing settlements until the new community becomes established.	planning and ensure good transport connections to existing centres.
Race	✓	✓		New housing, jobs, schools and transport infrastructure can improve access to opportunities and support inclusive communities. However, barriers may arise if affordable housing, community facilities and public transport are not delivered equitably across the development.	Deliver affordable housing, undertake inclusive community engagement, support community cohesion and ensure equitable access to services, employment and transport infrastructure.
Sexual orientation	✓	✓		A new settlement can provide inclusive housing, employment opportunities, community facilities and public spaces that support wellbeing and participation. However, in the early stages there may be limited access to support networks and specialist services until the settlement reaches a critical population size.	Promote inclusive communities, provide safe public spaces, support equality and diversity initiatives and ensure strong transport and digital connectivity.
Socio-economic	✓	✓		Significant positive effects may arise through the delivery of substantial housing, including affordable housing, local employment opportunities, schools, healthcare facilities, green infrastructure and	Secure affordable housing, deliver employment land early, phase infrastructure provision with development,

sustainable transport networks. A well-designed settlement can support low-carbon lifestyles and climate change mitigation through walkable neighbourhoods and energy-efficient development. However, the scale of development could result in significant impacts on the natural environment, loss of agricultural land, biodiversity impacts and substantial upfront infrastructure costs. Residents may also rely on private vehicles if employment and services are not delivered early.

achieve biodiversity net gain, provide extensive green infrastructure, protect and enhance ecological networks, incorporate low-carbon and climate-resilient design, and prioritise sustainable transport connections.

Summary: New settlement is likely to have predominantly positive equality impacts because it provides the opportunity to plan housing, employment, transport, social infrastructure and green infrastructure comprehensively from the outset. However, negative effects are also possible for most characteristics if infrastructure, services and employment opportunities lag behind housing delivery, or if environmental impacts are not appropriately mitigated.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement

In preparing the new Local Plan, there are three main stages for consultation and engagement.

- Scoping
- Content and Evidence Base document
- Proposed draft Local Plan

Scoping Stage

We undertook an initial scoping consultation with our communities and stakeholders between 11 May and 28 June 2026 to scope key issues for the Local Plan to cover and asked how they wanted to be involved in the preparation of the Plan as it develops.

The consultation was published as follows:

- The outlook magazine, which was sent to every household
- Emails were sent to everyone on the Local Plan database
- Hard copies were available in the Council Offices and every library.
- Posters in libraries
- Social media posts and webpage

Officers attended the five area forums to present the scoping document and answer questions.

The scoping consultation was also promoted to seldom heard groups via the Council's community team.

Content and Evidence Base document

We have prepared a Content and Evidence Base document, which is the second stage in the new plan-making process. It sets out the Council's proposed approach across a number of thematic issues:

- Introduction
- Vision and Measurable Outcomes
- Our North Herts – Context
- Spatial Strategy
- Homes
- Economy and Employment Opportunities
- Town Centres
- Natural Environment

- Climate Change
- Transport and Connectivity
- Communities and Placemaking
- Communications and Utilities

The Content and Evidence Base document is currently being consulted on alongside this EqlA scoping report, which has assessed the Spatial Development Options, as set out in the Content and Evidence Base document.

We have also prepared a Consultation and Engagement Strategy that was informed by feedback from the scoping stage consultation. As part of that strategy, we have written directly to a number of groups that represent a number of protected characteristic groups to offer to meet directly with them and /or other support in engaging in the preparation of the Local Plan.

NEXT STEPS

Next Steps

The next stage of the Local Plan process will be the preparation and consultation on the Proposed Draft Local Plan, which is currently anticipated to take place in October 2027.

This EqIA Scoping Report forms the first stage of the equality assessment process and provides a high-level review of the potential equality issues that may arise from the Spatial Development Options as set out in the Content and Evidence Base document. It identifies the protected characteristics and socio-economic groups that may be affected by the Plan and highlights key matters that should be explored in greater detail as the Plan progresses.

Full Equality Impact Assessment

The findings of this Scoping Report will inform the preparation of a full Equality Impact Assessment alongside the Proposed Draft Local Plan. The full EqIA will build upon the baseline information and issues identified through this report and will assess the likely effects of proposed policies on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, as well as other groups who may experience disadvantage such as socio-economic status.

Where potential adverse impacts are identified, the Council will consider whether mitigation measures, policy amendments or alternative approaches are necessary to minimise inequalities and maximise opportunities to advance equality, foster good relations and promote inclusive communities.

The full EqIA will remain an iterative document that evolves alongside the Local Plan, ensuring that equality considerations are embedded throughout the plan-making process and continue to inform policy development and decision-making.

Monitoring and Review

Equality considerations will continue to be reviewed as the Local Plan progresses through its subsequent stages. The findings of consultation, updates to the evidence base and engagement with relevant stakeholders and community groups will be used to refine the assessment and ensure that emerging policies respond appropriately to identified needs and issues.

Following adoption of the Local Plan, the Council [subsequent Unitary Authority] will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of relevant policies through the Authority Monitoring Report and other monitoring mechanisms where appropriate. This will help to identify whether the Plan is delivering positive outcomes for different groups within the community and whether any unintended adverse impacts are arising.

APPENDIX

Appendix – Seldom Heard Groups

Young People

- Fearnhill School Maths and Computing College, Letchworth
- Hitchin Boys' School, Hitchin
- Hitchin Girls' School, Hitchin
- The Highfield School, Letchworth Garden City
- The Knights Templar School, Baldock
- The Priory School, Hitchin
- North Hertfordshire College, Hitchin
- Youth Action

Ethnic Minority Communities

- North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum, Hitchin
- Jaswant Lunch Clubs, Hitchin & Letchworth
- Khalsa Youth Football Academy, Letchworth

Faith Communities

- North Hertfordshire Inter Faith Forum, Hitchin
- Churches Together, Hitchin
- Hitchin Mosque
- Letchworth Dhamma Nikethanaya Buddhist Meditation Centre
- Tanki Buddhist Therapists Forum
- Ramgarhia Gurdwara, Hitchin
- Ravidassia Community Centre, Hitchin & Letchworth
- Society of Friends (Hitchin Quakers)

Disabled People

- North Herts Day Service (OPPD), Hitchin
- Always Bee You

LGBTQ+ Communities

- Queers and Peers, Hitchin
- North Herts Pride
- Impactful Lives

Gypsy and Traveller Communities

- GATE Herts (Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment)

Rural Communities

- CDA Herts
- Farming Community Network
- North Hertfordshire Ramblers
- Triangle Community Garden

Small Business Owners

- Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce
- Business Buzz Hertfordshire
- Hertfordshire Growth Hub
- Federation of Small Businesses

Residents

- North Herts 50 Plus
- Green & Growing



Translation

If you have difficulty understanding this publication or English is not your first language, please contact the Strategic Planning Team on 01462 474000 and we will do our best to help you.

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਆ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਜਾਂ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਰਣਨੀਤਕ ਯੋਜਨਾਬੰਦੀ ਟੀਮ ਨਾਲ 01462 474000 'ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ ਅਤੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਮਦਦ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਪੂਰੀ ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ।

(Punjabi)

Jeżeli masz trudności ze zrozumieniem tej publikacji lub angielski nie jest Twoim językiem ojczystym, skontaktuj się z Zespołem Planowania Strategicznego pod numerem 01462 474000, a dołożymy wszelkich starań, aby Ci pomóc.

(Polish)

Dacă întâmpinați dificultăți în înțelegerea acestei publicații sau dacă engleza nu este limba dumneavoastră maternă, vă rugăm să contactați Echipa de Planificare Strategică la numărul de telefon 01462 474000 și vom face tot posibilul să vă ajutăm.

(Romanian)

Se avete difficoltà a comprendere questa pubblicazione o se l'inglese non è la vostra lingua madre, contattate il team di pianificazione strategica al numero 01462 474000 e faremo del nostro meglio per aiutarvi.

(Italian)

Ha nehezen érte ezt a kiadványt, vagy az angol nem az anyanyelve, kérjük, vegye fel a kapcsolatot a Stratégiai Tervezési Csoporttal a 01462 474000 telefonszámon, és mi mindent megteszünk, hogy segítsünk Önnek.

(Hungarian)

இந்த வெளியீட்டைப் புரிந்துகொள்வதில் உங்களுக்குச் சிரமம் இருந்தாலோ அல்லது ஆங்கிலம் உங்கள் தாய்மொழி அல்ல என்றாலோ, தயவுசெய்து 01462 474000 என்ற எண்ணில் வியூகத் திட்டமிடல் குழுவைத் தொடர்புகொள்ளவும், நாங்கள்

உங்களுக்கு உதவ எங்களால் முடிந்த அனைத்தையும்
செய்வோம்.

(Tamil)

જો તમને આ પ્રકાશન સમજવામાં મુશ્કેલી પડતી હોય અથવા અંગ્રેજી તમારી માતૃભાષા
ન હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને 01462 474000 પર સ્ટ્રેટેજિક પ્લાનિંગ ટીમનો સંપર્ક કરો અને
અમે તમને મદદ કરવા માટે અમારા શ્રેષ્ઠ પ્રયાસો કરીશું.

(Gujarati)

Jei jums sunku suprasti šį leidinį arba anglų kalba nėra jūsų gimtoji kalba,
susisiekiite su Strateginio planavimo komanda telefonu 01462 474000 ir
mes padarysime viską, kad jums padėtume.

(Lithuanian)

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INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

What is a Health Impact Assessment?

A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a structured and evidence-based process used to identify and evaluate the potential positive and negative effects that a policy, plan, programme or development proposal may have on the health and wellbeing of a population. The purpose of an HIA is to ensure that health considerations are integrated into decision-making and that opportunities to improve health outcomes are maximised while any adverse impacts are identified and mitigated. HIAs recognise that health is influenced not only by healthcare services, but also by the social, environmental and economic conditions in which people live, work and age, often referred to as the wider determinants of health.

Planning has a significant influence on these wider determinants through decisions about the location of housing, employment, transport infrastructure, green spaces, community facilities and environmental protection. The way growth is distributed across an area can therefore have important implications for physical health, mental wellbeing, social cohesion, access to opportunity and health inequalities. HIA enables these implications to be considered systematically at an early stage of plan-making so that healthier places can be created.

Policy context

The planning system plays an important role in improving people's health and wellbeing. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises that planning is not just about delivering homes and jobs, but also about creating healthy, inclusive communities. Good planning can help people live healthier lives by ensuring that development provides access to healthcare, schools, parks, open spaces, community facilities, and opportunities for walking, cycling and social interaction. It can also help reduce health inequalities by making sure that all communities have access to these benefits.

When preparing new Local Plans, local planning authorities are required to understand the health needs of their population and identify any existing gaps in community facilities or public services. They must plan for the infrastructure needed to support future growth, including healthcare facilities, education provision, recreation and open space. Local Plans should also identify opportunities to improve health and wellbeing through the location and design of development, for example by promoting active travel, mixed-use neighbourhoods, access to green infrastructure and environments that encourage healthy lifestyles. A Health Impact Assessment can help demonstrate how a Local Plan or development proposal will support these objectives and contribute to creating healthier places.

National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) also identifies that healthy places should support healthy behaviours, improve physical and mental wellbeing, reduce health inequalities and provide opportunities for active and socially connected lifestyles.

Hertfordshire Healthy Placemaking Framework (November 2025)

This HIA has been informed by the Hertfordshire Healthy Placemaking Framework (Nov 2025)¹, which establishes a county-wide approach to embedding health within planning and development. The Framework adopts a "Health in All Policies" approach, recognising that around 60% of health outcomes are influenced by environmental, social and economic factors and that planning policy plays a vital role in shaping these determinants.

The Framework identifies seven Healthy Placemaking Principles, which form the health determinants used in this assessment:

1. **Healthy Movement and Connectivity:** Active travel and public transport networks which promote physical activity, social interaction and reduce air pollution.
2. **Healthy Places and Neighbourhoods:** Distinctive, characterful and connected neighbourhoods which are inclusive, welcoming and provide key amenities within walking distance
3. **Healthy and Safe Communities:** Socially connected and resilient communities which support inclusion, feeling safe, culture and creativity.
4. **Healthy Community Infrastructure:** Equitable access to healthcare, recreation, sports facilities, and community amenities.
5. **Healthy Economy:** An inclusive economy which supports skills development and access to good work for all.
6. **Healthy Natural Environment:** A natural environment which supports human health through clean air, water, food production and protection from environmental shocks. It also plays a vital role in climate resilience by helping to manage flooding, reduce heat, and absorb carbon.
7. **Healthy Homes:** Affordable and secure homes which are the right temperature, well ventilated and free from damp, noise and overcrowding

Together, these determinants provide a comprehensive framework for assessing how different patterns of growth may influence health, wellbeing and health equity.

¹ [Hertfordshire Healthy Placemaking Framework \(Nov 2025\)](#)

Methodology

A HIA is designed to assess the likely health impacts of planning decisions in plan making or in development management (planning applications). This HIA will help to identify the potential positive and negative health impacts of the spatial development options proposed in the Content & Evidence document.

There is no fixed way to conduct a HIA. However, there are five key steps which should be accounted for. They are:

Step 1: Screening

This involved determining whether an HIA is needed and justified subject to anticipation of health impacts on population groups. It is considered that the Local Plan is an important framework that can influence health and wellbeing in the district. Therefore, it is useful that an HIA is carried out throughout the plan preparation to maximise the delivery of health benefits.

Step 2: Scoping

This involved identifying the potential health impacts to assess. Spatial development options considered to have a meaningful effect on health are to be assessed. Chapter 3 includes details on the development options and assessments. Policies will be considered in the next HIA as the Local Plan progresses.

Step 3: Assessing

This involved assessing the significance of health impacts of the spatial development options. This can be found in Chapter 3. Policies will be considered in the next HIA as the Local Plan progresses.

Step 4: Reporting

This involved concluding how a spatial development option impacted health and wellbeing and making recommendations on how it could be improved.

Step 5: Monitoring and evaluating

This HIA will inform decision making and future policy formation as the new Local Plan is developed.

Scope of this assessment

This HIA considers the potential health implications of the four spatial development options being examined through the Local Plan process:

1. Infill Development / Urban Intensification
2. Urban Expansion
3. Dispersed Village Growth
4. New Settlement

Each option has been assessed against the seven health determinants identified in the Hertfordshire Healthy Placemaking Framework. The assessment considers the likely positive and negative effects of each growth option on health and wellbeing and identifies recommendations to maximise health benefits, minimise adverse effects and reduce health inequalities.

NORTH HERTS HEALTH PROFILE

2. North Herts health profile

Population and demographics

Population

The 2021 Census showed North Herts' population was [133,210](#)² living in [56,731](#)³ households. This represents a population growth of 4.8% from the 2011 Census figure of [127,114](#)⁴.

This is lower than the population growth at national levels (6.6% for England – [56,490,048](#)¹ (2021) and [53,012,456](#)³ (2011)) levels.

Just over half the population, 68,472¹ (51.4%), were female with males forming 48.6% (64,738¹) of the total.

Age structure

At the 2021 Census, North Herts' [age profile](#)⁵ broadly mirrors the national picture, though 15–34-year-olds are underrepresented and the 75+ age group slightly overrepresented. The District's median age⁶ was 42, compared to 40 for England ([2021 Census](#)⁷)

The [latest available population data](#)⁸ (for mid-2025) estimates the District's population to be [137,365](#)⁹. This is comprised of 70,855 (51.6%) females and 66,510 (48.4%) males. In terms of broad age groups, the resident population is comprised of:

- 18.5% people aged 0-15 years (25,447)
- 61.0% people aged 16-64 (83,795)
- 20.5% people aged 65 years and over (28,123)

² ONS - 2021 Census (TS008) - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E07000099>

³ ONS - 2021 Census (TS003) - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E07000099>

⁴ ONS - 2011 Census (KS101EW) - https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2011_ks/report?compare=E07000099

⁵ ONS - 2021 Census (TS007B) - https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/report?compare=E07000099,E12000006,E92000001

⁶ The age of the person in the middle of the group, meaning that one half of the group is younger than that person and the other half is older.

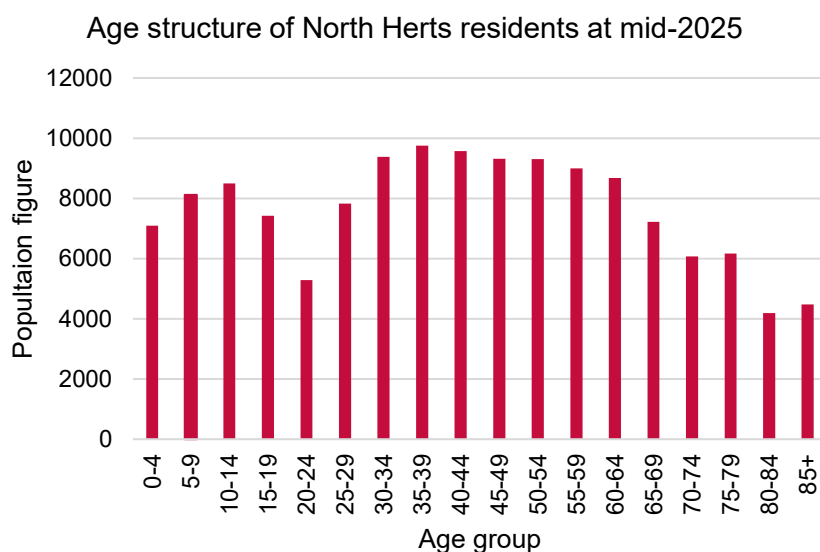
⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000099/>

⁸

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025>

⁹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities>

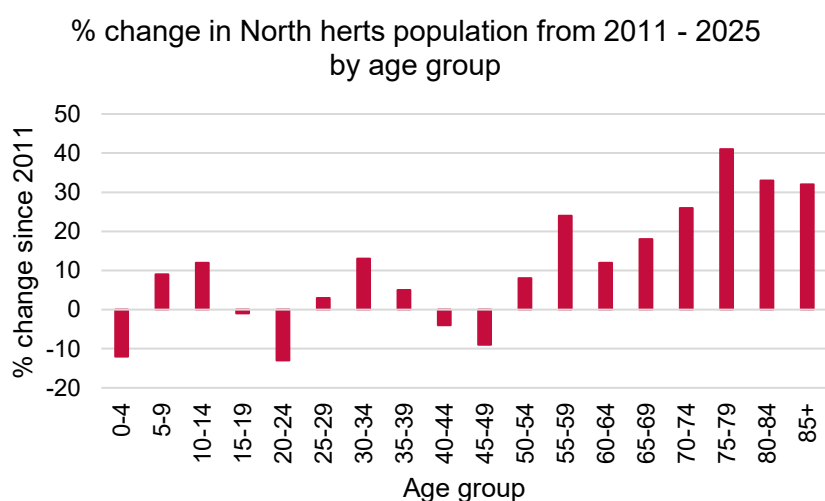


Source – [ONS – Mid-year population estimates 2025](#)

Demographic Trends (2011-2021)

The chart below shows how North Herts' population changed between 2011 and 2025 (based on ONS data). It shows that older age groups grew at the fastest rates (except the 60-64 cohort) with younger age groups either growing at slower rates or declining.

The number of people aged 50 to 64 years rose by around 3,400 (an increase of 14.5%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by around 820 (2.8% decrease).



Source – [ONS – Mid-year population estimates 2025](#)¹⁰

¹⁰

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities>

Future population projections

According to the latest [ONIS population projections](#)¹¹, North Herts' population is forecast to grow to 147,761 by 2047. That is a 7.6% increase from current 2025 population numbers. This compares with projected population growth of 9.8% for England as a whole.

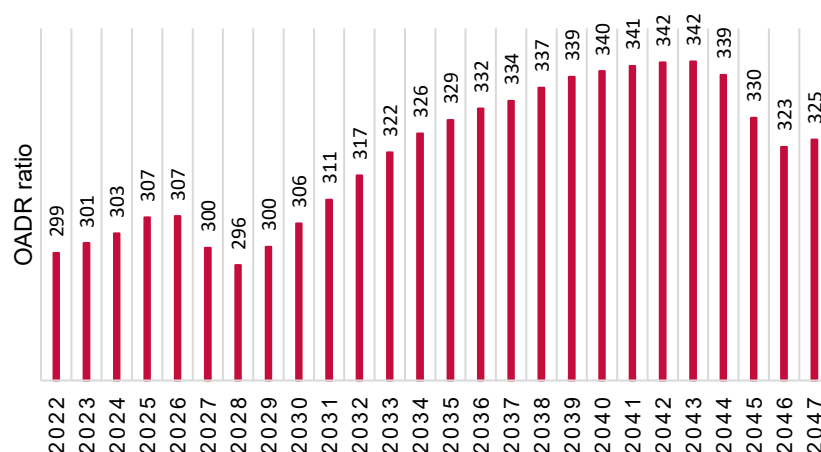
The 65 plus age group, currently a fifth of our population (28,123), is projected to form almost a quarter (35,090 - 24%) of the resident population by 2047.

The data for 2047 also shows males forming a smaller proportion (10%) of the 65+ age group compared to females (13%), due to higher female life expectancy.

The 2025 ONS '[Old Age Dependency Ratio](#)' (OADR)¹² data estimates the number of people of State Pension Age (SPA) per 1,000 people of working age. Note that being over SPA does not necessarily mean someone is retired, nor are all working age people in employment. The ratio for OADR for North Herts from 2022 to 2047 begins at around 300 in 2022, remains relatively stable until 2028, then begins a steady rise, peaking around 340 between 2039 and 2043.

This indicates a growing proportion of older people relative to the working-age population. After 2043, the ratio gradually declines (but remains higher than current levels), reaching about 325 by 2047. Again, this suggests an ageing population with increasing pressure on services and support systems, particularly during the 2030s and early 2040s.

OADR for North Herts 2022-2047



Source – [ONS – Comparison of old age dependency ratio estimates and projections 2025](#)¹³

Overall, the data shows a trend of an ageing population with a reducing percentage of children and working age people (traditionally defined as those aged 16 to 64)¹⁴ as more

¹¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2022based#projected-change-by-local-authority>

¹²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/comparisonofoldagedependencyratioestimatesandprojectionsukandconstituentcountries>

¹³

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/comparisonofoldagedependencyratioestimatesandprojectionsukandconstituentcountries>

¹⁴ This is only an approximation as education is now required until 18, the state pension age is rising to 66–67 and people can work beyond pension age

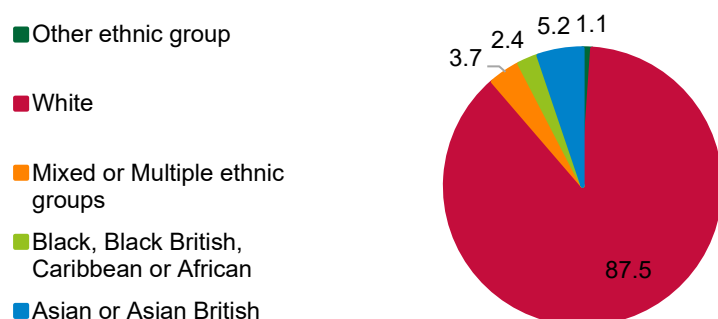
people move into the 65+ age group and the younger age groups grow at slower rates or decline. This potentially presents challenges, such as increased demand for health and social care, and a shrinking labour force.

Ethnicity profile

Data from the 2021 Census showed that [18.7%](#)¹⁵ of North Herts' residents were from an ethnic minority (not white-British). This is lower than the national average (26.5% for England) and the wider county (28.2% for Hertfordshire).

In terms of broad ethnic makeup of the District, the Asian/ Asian British group was the largest ethnic minority in 2021, forming 5.2% of the District's population followed by 'mixed/ multiple ethnic' group (3.7%) and 'black/ black British, Caribbean or African' (2.4%).

North Herts ethnic make up by broad groupings in 2021



Source – [ONS Census 2021, Table TS021](#)¹⁶

Between the 2011 and 2021 censuses, the proportion of residents identifying as 'White' in North Herts fell by 2% from [89.5% in 2011](#)¹⁷ to [87.6% in 2021](#)¹⁸, making up 87.5% of the population.

Meanwhile, the 'Black/Black British' group rose from [1.9% in 2011](#)¹⁷ to [2.4% in 2021](#)¹⁸, and the 'Mixed' group increased to [3.7% in 2021](#)¹⁸ from [2.6% in 2011](#)¹⁷. Although the district remains less diverse than Hertfordshire and England overall, it is gradually becoming more diverse.

Health and Wellbeing

Life expectancy at birth in North Herts stands at 81.2 years for men and 84.0 years for women¹⁹. These figures are slightly higher than the national and regional figures.

¹⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS021/editions/2021/versions/1>

¹⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS021/editions/2021/versions/1>

¹⁷ ONS, Census 2011, Table KS201EW - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks201ew>

¹⁸ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS021 - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts021>

¹⁹ ONS, Health state life expectancies - <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c46f72e1fade4249aad53656d4773ce4/E07000099>

Life expectancy at birth

Geography	Females	Males
North Herts	84.0	81.2
East of England	83.8	80.1
England	83.2	79.3

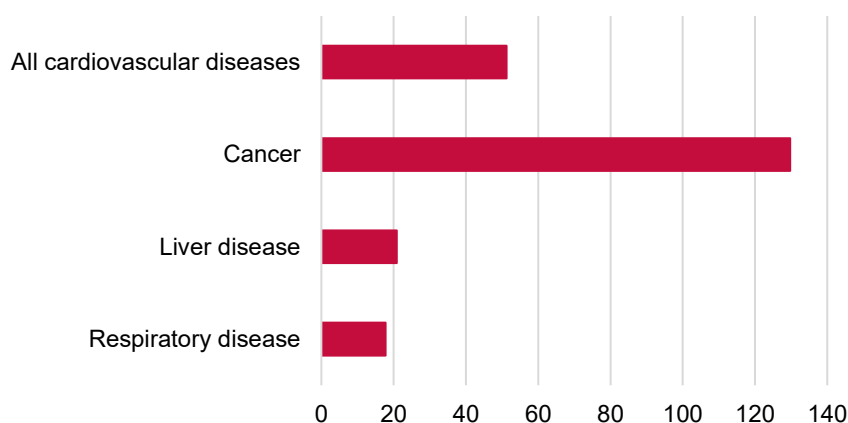
Source – [ONS – Life expectancies](#)²³

In the 2021 Census, [50.6%](#)²⁰ of North Herts' residents reported their general health as "very good". This is slightly below the average for Hertfordshire (52.6%) but above the national average for England (48.5%). 0.8% of residents reported having 'very bad health' in the District which is similar to Hertfordshire (1%) and England (1%).

Mortality rates

The age standardised mortality rate (ASMR) (deaths per 100,000 population) in North Herts is [881.4](#)²¹ which is lower than the regional (910.0 for the East of England) and national (964.5 for England) averages.

Under 75 mortality rates in North Herts, 2025



Source – [Health and Wellbeing Profile - Districts | North Hertfordshire | Report Builder for ArcGIS – PHOF \(Indicators E04a, E05a, E06a and E07a\)](#)²²

²⁰ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS037 - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts037>

²¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregistrationsummarytables/2023#age-standardised-mortality-rates-by-area>

²² <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c46f72e1fade4249aad53656d4773ce4/E07000099>

Disability

In the 2021 Census, [101,159](#)²⁵ (76%) of residents reported that their day-to-day activities were not limited due to health or disability, which is broadly inline with regional and national levels. Conversely, [16%](#)²⁵ of the population stated that their day-to-day activities were limited.

In 2021, [21,236](#)²³ (15.9%) of North Herts residents were disabled (under the Equality Act). This is broadly inline with regional and national levels.

In the 2011 census, [15.1%](#)²⁴ of the District's population reported that their day-to-day activities were limited (either 'a lot' or 'a little') due to a long-term health problem or disability.

Health indicators

The data shows that North Herts performs better than average for instances of preventable cardiovascular mortality and obesity rates (child and adult). However, smoking is slightly more prevalent in the District compared to the national average.

Local Health Indicators for North Herts

Indicator	North Herts	England
Cigarette smokers ²⁵	10.1% (2024)	11.5%
Child obesity - reception age ²⁶	7.7% (2023)	105%
Child obesity - Year 6 age	16.3% (2023)	22.2%
Adult obesity ²⁷	26.4% (2023)	26.6%
Preventable cardiovascular mortality (per 100,000) ²⁸	21 (2023)	26

Source – [ONS – Local Indicators](#)²⁹

²³ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS038 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS038/editions/2021/versions/3>

²⁴ ONS, Census 2011, Table KS301EW - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/2011censuskeystatisticsforenglandandwales/2012-12-11>

²⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain/2024#local-authority-smoking-prevalence>

²⁶ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/obesity-physical-activity-nutrition/data#page/1/gid/8000011/ati/501/iid/90316/age/200/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yrr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

²⁷ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/obesity-physical-activity-nutrition/data#page/1/gid/1938133368/ati/501/iid/93088/age/168/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yrr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

²⁸ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/public-health-outcomes-framework/data#page/4/gid/1000044/ati/501/iid/93722/age/163/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yrr/3/cid/4/tbm/1/page-options/car-do-0>

²⁹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/indicators#health%20and%20wellbeing>

In terms of wellbeing, the data for North Herts is similar to the national average (across all LPAs).

Self-reported wellbeing (score out of 10) for North Herts (2022 – 23)

Indicator	North Herts	England
Anxiety	3.4 (22-23)	3.2
Feeling life is worthwhile	7.8	7.7
Happiness	7.6	7.4
Life satisfaction	7.6	7.4

Source – [ONS – Local Indicators](#)³⁰

Deprivation

Deprivation

The [Index of Multiple Deprivation](#)³¹ (IMD) provides a comprehensive picture of relative disadvantage by combining data across seven key areas.

For the IMD and each of the key areas, every small area (LSOA) in England is given a score which is then used to rank the LSOAs from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area). There is no definitive cut-off at which an area is described as deprived, LSOAs are said to be more or less deprived than others. The ranked areas are split into 10 equal groups (or deciles), from the 10% most deprived to the 10% least deprived. North Herts ranks 269th out of 317 lower-tier local authorities in England with rank 1 being the most deprived.

The IMD breakdown reveals that the District has no areas within the most deprived 10%. However, there are a few neighbourhoods that fall within the 20% most deprived areas in England (Letchworth-South East) and some that are within the 30% most deprived (Hitchin-Oughton and Baldock- Town).

There are no LSOA's within the 10% most deprived when looking at overall IMD. However, examining the individual domains (and sub-domains) reveals areas in the District that fall within the 10% most deprived with respect to the following domains:

Education, skills and training

- Education, skills and training – measures lack of attainment and skills. No LSOAs in the District are within the 10% most deprived with this respect to this domain.

³⁰ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/indicators#health%20and%20wellbeing>

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation>

- Children and young people (sub domain) - measures the attainment of qualifications and associated measures. Around 4 LSOAs within the District are in the 10% most deprived.

Barriers to housing and services

- Barriers to housing and services domain – measures the physical and financial accessibility of housing and local services. The indicators fall into two sub-domains: the Geographical Barriers sub-domain relates to the physical proximity of local services. The Wider Barriers sub-domain includes issues relating to access to housing, such as affordability. 5 LSOAs in North Herts are within the 10% most deprived areas. The geographical barriers sub-domain shows that 11 LSOAs are in the 10% most deprived.

Living environment

- Living environment domain – measures the quality of both the ‘indoor’ and ‘outdoor’ local environment. 2 LSOAs in North Herts are in the 10% most deprived areas.

The above highlights how multiple factors combine to influence levels of deprivation and health outcomes. Areas with higher deprivation often experience poorer physical and mental health, reduced life expectancy, and greater vulnerability to chronic conditions. These interconnected challenges can limit opportunities and access to healthcare, reinforcing cycles of inequality.

ASSESSMENT OF SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

3. Assessment of spatial development options

Spatial Development Option 1 – Infill development / urban intensification

This option focuses growth within existing towns and villages by redeveloping brownfield land, underused sites and vacant urban land. Development would generally occur within existing settlement boundaries, making better use of existing infrastructure, services and public transport connections. It seeks to accommodate growth without significant outward expansion into the countryside.

Health determinants	Description of impact	Impact				Recommendation
		Positive	Negative	No Impact	Unknown	
Homes	Infill development can deliver additional housing in sustainable locations with good access to jobs, services, healthcare and public transport. It can bring vacant and underused land back into productive use. However, higher-density development may affect mental wellbeing if residents experience overcrowding, lack of privacy, insufficient access to outdoor space. Good quality housing can promote wellbeing, independence and social interaction.	✓	✓			Require high-quality design standards, adequate internal and external space, green infrastructure, ventilation, daylight and climate resilience measures. Ensure development achieves nationally described space standards, provides accessible and adaptable homes, incorporate climate resilience measures and delivers a range of housing tenures including affordable homes.

	Provision of affordable housing can help address health inequalities and improve outcomes for lower-income households.					
Natural environment	Focusing growth within existing settlements reduces pressure on greenfield land and support biodiversity enhancements. However, development may increase local air pressure on existing green spaces if mitigation measures are not implemented.	✓	✓			Require air quality assessment where appropriate, secure biodiversity net gain, expand urban tree canopy, minimise light pollution, incorporate sustainable drainage systems and increase climate adaptation measures including cooling, shade and flood resilience.
Economy	Growth within towns and villages can support local businesses, town centre vitality and regeneration. It can improve access to employment opportunities and reduce travel costs. Regeneration can improve employment opportunities, economic participation and household income. However, rising property values and redevelopment pressures may increase housing	✓				Prioritise town centre regeneration, support mixed-use development and ensure housing growth aligns with employment opportunities and skills development initiatives. Support local employment opportunities, skills development initiatives and affordable housing policies to ensure benefits are shared across all communities.

	costs and contribute to displacement of lower-income households if affordability is not maintained.					
Movement & connectivity	Existing settlements are generally better connected by public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure. Concentrating growth in accessible locations can increase levels of walking and cycling, improve physical activity and reduce car dependency. Increased traffic levels within urban areas may however affect road safety and local air quality.	✓	✓			Invest in active travel infrastructure, public transport enhancements and junction improvements where required. Ensure new development is integrated with existing movement networks.
Places & neighbourhoods including living conditions	Intensification can strengthen town and village centres, increase activity levels, support local services and create more walkable neighbourhoods. Poorly planned development may affect local character, reduce access to open space and create perceptions of overdevelopment. Well-designed neighbourhoods can improve	✓	✓			Use design codes and masterplanning to protect local character, deliver attractive public spaces and ensure access to green spaces, services and healthy food options.

	mental wellbeing, social interaction, community identity and perceptions of safety. Poorly designed intensification may reduce access to informal recreation space, children's play opportunities and contribute to perceptions of overcrowding or overdevelopment.					
Communities	Growth within existing communities can support community resilience, strengthen social networks and help sustain cultural assets and community organisations. If growth occurs too rapidly or without engagement, there may be perceptions of exclusion, reduced social cohesion or increased social tensions.	✓	✓			Undertake inclusive community engagement, support voluntary and community sector organisations, promote social integration and ensure development meets the needs of different age groups and protected characteristics.
Community infrastructure	Existing settlements are more likely to benefit from established healthcare, education, leisure and community facilities. Additional population can help sustain	✓	✓			Plan infrastructure delivery alongside housing growth, secure developer contributions where appropriate, and assess capacity requirements for healthcare, education, childcare,

	healthcare, education and community services. Demand for GP services, schools, childcare, leisure facilities and digital infrastructure may increase. Improved digital connectivity can support access to services, employment and education.					recreation and digital infrastructure, and secure investment alongside growth.
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The Infill development / urban intensification option is likely to have a predominantly positive impact on health and wellbeing by directing growth towards sustainable locations with existing services, jobs, infrastructure and public transport connections. This approach supports healthy lifestyles, reduces car dependency, protects the wider countryside and can contribute to urban regeneration. However, benefits will depend on maintaining high-quality design standards, protecting green infrastructure and ensuring community and transport infrastructure keep pace with growth.

Spatial Development Option 2 – Urban expansion

This option directs growth to planned extensions on the edges of existing towns, such as Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston. New development would be delivered through larger strategic sites, supported by new infrastructure, schools, healthcare facilities, transport improvements and green spaces. The aim is to create well-connected extensions that integrate with existing communities.

Health determinants	Description of impact	Impact				Recommendation
		Positive	Negative	No Impact	Unknown	
Homes	Urban expansion provides opportunities to deliver a significant number of new homes, including affordable and specialist housing, in planned locations. Strategic-scale development	✓	✓			Ensure a mix of housing types, tenures and affordability. Apply healthy design principles, minimise overheating risk, maximise energy efficiency and secure access to local services, public transport

	allows healthy homes principles to be embedded from the outset, including energy efficiency, climate resilience and access to services. However, if delivery is delayed or housing is not mixed and inclusive, health inequalities may persist.					and green infrastructure.
Natural environment	Urban expansion may affect local air quality through increased traffic movements and may create construction-related noise, dust and disturbance. New green infrastructure can improve wellbeing, reduce urban heat and support climate resilience.	✓	✓			Protect and enhance ecological networks, achieve biodiversity net gain, retain existing landscape features, provide multifunctional green infrastructure and maximise climate adaptation measures.
Economy	Construction activity and population growth can generate employment, support local businesses and increase investment in towns. New development can strengthen labour markets and spending power. However, if employment opportunities are not provided alongside	✓	✓			Align housing growth with employment land provision, improve access to skills and training opportunities, and promote mixed-use development that reduces the need to travel. Target local recruitment, apprenticeships and skills training initiatives and ensure employment opportunities are

	housing, longer commuting patterns may result.					accessible to disadvantaged groups.
Movement & connectivity	Large-scale developments can support new transport infrastructure, active travel routes and public transport services from the outset. If well connected, they can encourage higher levels of daily physical activity through walking, cycling and public transport use. However, poorly integrated expansion may increase car dependency, congestion and associated air quality impacts.	✓	✓			Deliver integrated walking, cycling and wheeling networks, ensure high-quality public transport provision from an early stage, and connect new communities to existing centres, jobs and services.
Places & neighbourhoods including living conditions	Urban extensions create opportunities to design healthy, walkable and mixed-use neighbourhoods with local centres, schools, services and green spaces. Well-designed neighbourhoods can improve mental wellbeing, strengthen local identity, support community resilience and provide opportunities for social interaction. Poor design or weak integration	✓	✓			Prepare comprehensive masterplans and design codes that create distinctive neighbourhoods, support local identity and ensure easy access to services, open space and healthy food options. Provide formal and informal play spaces, high quality public realm, integrate natural surveillance principles and create attractive, safe and inclusive public spaces.

	with existing settlements could create isolated communities and place pressure on local character.					
Communities	New development can support community cohesion through new community facilities, public spaces and cultural infrastructure. There may be challenges in integrating new and existing residents, particularly during early phases when facilities and services are being established.	✓	✓			Support early delivery of community facilities, encourage community participation in planning, and create inclusive spaces that foster social interaction and integration.
Community infrastructure	The scale of growth can justify delivery of new schools, healthcare facilities, sports facilities, community centres and utilities infrastructure. Access to digital infrastructure is increasingly important for employment, education, healthcare and social connection. Poor digital connectivity may create barriers for some residents. Health benefits depend on infrastructure being delivered alongside growth.	✓	✓			Secure timely infrastructure delivery through phasing plans and developer contributions. Ensure healthcare, education, recreation and community facilities are available early in the development process. Deliver high quality digital infrastructure and high speed broadband.

	Delays may place pressure on existing services and communities.					
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Urban expansion has the potential to deliver substantial positive health outcomes by providing new homes, community infrastructure, green spaces, employment opportunities and sustainable travel connections at a strategic scale. However, significant negative effects could arise where greenfield land is lost, infrastructure delivery is delayed, or developments become car-dependent and poorly integrated with existing communities. The overall health impact is therefore strongly positive provided growth is supported by comprehensive masterplanning, timely infrastructure delivery, high-quality design and substantial green infrastructure provision.

Spatial Development Option 3 – Dispersed village growth

This option spreads development across a number of villages through smaller-scale housing schemes. The focus is on meeting local housing needs, supporting rural communities and helping maintain village services such as shops, schools and community facilities. It does not rely on major growth in a small number of locations but distributes development more widely across the district.

Health determinants	Description of impact	Impact				Recommendation
		Positive	Negative	No Impact	Unknown	
Homes	Dispersed village growth can provide housing that meets local needs, including affordable housing that enables people to remain within their communities. It can help sustain village populations and support rural vitality. However, smaller sites may not always provide a wide range of housing types, services or affordable housing provision.	✓	✓			Ensure an appropriate mix of housing types, tenures and affordability across villages. Apply healthy homes principles, including energy efficiency, accessibility and climate resilience.

Natural environment	Smaller-scale growth may reduce the concentration of environmental impacts in any one location and can be designed sensitively to fit village settings. However, cumulative development across multiple villages could result in the gradual loss of countryside, biodiversity, agricultural land and landscape character if not carefully managed. Development may also introduce additional noise, lighting and environmental disturbance within rural areas.	✓	✓			Protect sensitive landscapes and ecological networks, achieve biodiversity net gain, strengthen green infrastructure and manage cumulative impacts across villages. Assess air quality impacts where required.
Economy	Additional population can help sustain local shops, services and rural businesses, supporting the viability of village centres and community facilities. Increased digital connectivity and opportunities for remote working may improve access to employment, services and education in rural areas while	✓	✓			Support rural employment opportunities, flexible workspaces, digital connectivity and initiatives that reduce the need for long-distance commuting.

	reducing travel demand. However, limited local employment opportunities may result in increased commuting and continued dependence on larger towns for work.					
Movement & connectivity	Rural villages often have limited public transport provision and fewer opportunities for active travel compared with larger settlements. Dispersed growth may increase reliance on private vehicles, affecting physical activity levels and accessibility for those without access to a car. Some villages may benefit from improved transport services if growth supports investment.	✓	✓			Improve bus services, demand-responsive transport, walking and cycling connections between settlements, and invest in digital infrastructure to reduce travel demand.
Places & neighbourhoods including living conditions	Growth can help maintain the vitality and character of rural settlements by supporting local facilities and services. Well-planned development can support mental wellbeing, community identity and sense of belonging. If	✓	✓			Ensure development respects local character through design policies, protects public open spaces and enhances access to local services, green space and healthy food opportunities.

	poorly planned, development may erode village identity, place pressure on local amenities, reduce perceptions of safety and reduce access to open countryside.					
Communities	Supporting population growth in villages can help maintain schools, community halls, local services and social networks. It can strengthen community resilience and reduce the risk of service decline. However, growth may create tensions where development is perceived to change village character or place pressure on existing facilities.	✓	✓			Engage communities in planning decisions, support community-led initiatives and ensure facilities are expanded where needed to accommodate growth.
Community infrastructure	Modest growth may help sustain existing schools, healthcare services and community facilities that might otherwise be at risk. However, infrastructure provision may be difficult to secure through multiple small developments, and some villages may experience increased pressure on	✓	✓			Coordinate infrastructure planning across villages, secure proportionate developer contributions and monitor healthcare, education and community facility capacity.

	already limited services.					
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Dispersed village growth has the potential to generate positive health outcomes by supporting rural communities, maintaining local services, providing homes to meet local needs and sustaining community cohesion across villages. However, the option also presents notable challenges around transport accessibility, car dependency, infrastructure delivery and cumulative environmental impacts. The overall health impact is therefore considered mixed but generally positive, provided growth is carefully managed, infrastructure and transport improvements accompany development, and the distinct character and environmental quality of villages are protected.

Spatial Development Option 4 – New settlement

This option accommodates a significant proportion of future growth in one or more new freestanding settlements. These would be comprehensively planned communities with their own housing, employment opportunities, schools, healthcare facilities, green spaces and supporting infrastructure. Rather than expanding existing towns and villages, growth would be focused in entirely new settlements designed to be largely self-sufficient.

Health determinants	Description of impact	Impact				Recommendation
		Positive	Negative	No Impact	Unknown	
Homes	A new settlement provides a significant opportunity to improve physical and mental wellbeing through high quality housing, adequate living space, natural light, accessibility and adaptable homes. Affordable and specialist housing can help reduce health inequalities and support the needs of older people, disabled people and lower-income households. However,	✓	✓			Embed healthy homes standards in masterplanning, provide a range of housing tenures and types, ensure affordability, and design homes to be energy-efficient, climate-resilient and accessible.

	delivery may take place over a long period, delaying access to housing benefits.					
Natural environment	New settlements can be designed around extensive green infrastructure networks, biodiversity enhancement, sustainable drainage systems and climate resilience measures. However, they are likely to require substantial areas of undeveloped land, potentially resulting in habitat loss, impacts on landscape character and loss of agricultural land.	✓	✓			Avoid environmentally sensitive locations, deliver biodiversity net gain, establish strategic green infrastructure networks, protect ecological corridors and maximise nature recovery opportunities.
Economy	New settlements can create significant employment opportunities during construction and through planned employment areas. By integrating housing and employment, they can reduce commuting and support economic growth. However, if employment provision lags	✓	✓			Deliver employment land and commercial facilities alongside housing, promote flexible workspaces and support skills development and training opportunities.

	behind housing delivery, residents may need to travel elsewhere for work.					
Movement & connectivity	A new settlement can be designed around sustainable transport principles, including walking, cycling, wheeling and public transport networks. High quality walking and cycling networks can support daily physical activity and improve health outcomes. However, unless supported by high-quality regional transport links from the outset, there is a risk of car dependency, particularly in early phases before services and employment opportunities are fully established.	✓	✓			Prioritise sustainable transport in the masterplan, secure early delivery of public transport services, provide high-quality active travel networks and ensure strong connections to surrounding settlements and employment centres.
Places & neighbourhoods including living conditions	New settlements offer a unique opportunity to create healthy, walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods with local centres, schools, healthcare facilities, green spaces and access to healthy food. Well-	✓	✓			Develop a comprehensive masterplan and design code, create a strong sense of place, phase delivery to ensure services are available early, and provide accessible green and public spaces throughout the settlement.

	designed neighbourhoods can promote mental wellbeing, community safety, social interaction and a strong sense of belonging. There is a risk that poorly phased development may result in incomplete neighbourhoods during early stages.					
Communities	New settlements provide opportunities to establish inclusive and connected communities with new cultural, social and recreational facilities. However, community identity and social networks can take time to develop, particularly during the early years of occupation.	✓	✓			Deliver community facilities early, support community development programmes, create shared spaces and encourage participation in shaping the evolving settlement.
Community infrastructure	A key strength of this option is the ability to provide new schools, healthcare facilities, sports facilities, community centres, utilities and digital infrastructure as part of a comprehensive	✓	✓			Secure infrastructure funding and delivery mechanisms at an early stage, align infrastructure phasing with housing delivery, and ensure healthcare, education and recreation facilities

	development. The main risk is delays in infrastructure delivery relative to housing growth, which could affect health and wellbeing outcomes.					are available when needed by residents.
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Summary Conclusion

The new settlement option is likely to have the strongest potential positive health impacts of all spatial growth options because it allows healthy placemaking principles to be embedded from the outset and enables coordinated delivery of homes, employment, green infrastructure, community facilities and sustainable transport networks. However, the success of the option depends heavily on site selection, environmental mitigation, transport connectivity and the timely delivery of infrastructure and services.

Given the scale of development and infrastructure requirements, the delivery of new homes will not be expected in short to medium term. Where these are achieved, the overall health impact is considered significantly positive.

NEXT STEPS

4. Next steps

The findings of this HIA will be used to inform the assessment and refinement of the spatial development options as the Local Plan progresses. At this stage, the assessment has focused on the likely health implications associated with the broad distribution and location of development, recognising that detailed planning policies and site-specific requirements have not yet been prepared. As the preferred spatial strategy emerges, opportunities should be taken to maximise positive health outcomes and address any potential adverse impacts identified through the HIA process.

A further iteration of the HIA should be undertaken alongside the preparation on the proposed draft Local Plan. This will enable a more detailed assessment of proposed policies, site allocations and development requirements, including consideration of how the Plan can support healthy and inclusive communities, reduce health inequalities, promote active and sustainable travel, improve access to services and green infrastructure, and address wider determinants of health.

Recommendations from the HIA should be integrated into policy development and plan-making to ensure health and wellbeing considerations are embedded throughout the Local Plan

The next stage of the Local Plan process will be the preparation and consultation on the Proposed Draft Local Plan, which is currently anticipated to take place in October 2027.



Statement of Community Involvement Adopted – September 2023

Statement of Community Involvement

September 2023

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how North Herts Council will involve the community in the planning process.
- 1.2 The SCI explains how and with whom the Council will consult when carrying out its planning duties. This document relates only to the Council's planning functions, but it is intended to compliment the Council's wider approach to community engagement.
- 1.3 All Local Planning Authorities are required to prepare an SCI to comply with national legislation, policies and guidance¹. The Council first adopted an SCI in 2006 and it has been updated periodically since then.
- 1.4 The SCI must be reviewed every five years. This review follows the adoption of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031 in November 2022. We have tried to reflect the changing priorities which we will need to address in the coming years. This includes explaining how you can be involved in the preparation of:
 - ❖ Supplementary planning document which will support the new Plan;
 - ❖ Neighbourhood plans;
 - ❖ Pre-application masterplans for the largest residential sites in North Hertfordshire;
 - ❖ Individual planning applications for development; and
 - ❖ The review of the Local Plan.
- 1.5 In addition, the SCI sets out the Council's expectations upon developers with regards to involving the community in their planning proposals which are not subject to the masterplanning process.
- 1.6 The Council has recently published a [Community Consultation Strategy](#) for 2022 – 2027. Whilst the SCI has been prepared with reference to the Consultation Strategy, it is specifically written for planning policy consultations and consultations associated with planning applications.
- 1.7 Temporary changes were introduced to the Regulations² in response to the COVID-19 pandemic concerning publicity and the physical inspection of planning documents. Given the uncertain nature of the pandemic and the potential for new variants to emerge, it is feasible that those temporary measures may be reintroduced in the future. If such circumstances arise again, any changes will be implemented locally and will replace the requirements set out in this updated SCI. This will avoid having to revise the SCI.
- 1.8 Where we are unable to meet some of the requirements set out in this document, but have made every reasonable effort to do so, we will consider that the conditions have been met.

¹ Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012(as amended); Town and Country Planning (Development Management procedure) (England) Order 2015; National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance

² Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England)(Coronavirus) Amendment Regulations (2020)

2. Community Involvement in Strategic Planning

- 2.1. The Strategic Planning Team is directly responsible for preparing local planning policies and supplementary planning documents. We also work collaboratively alongside communities preparing their neighbourhood plans as well as landowners or promoters who are developing masterplans for strategic and significant sites.
- 2.2. We are committed to involving as many local people, groups and organisations from the North Herts community as possible in our strategic planning consultations. We have an extensive consultation database in place which includes the following types of organisations:
- ❖ Statutory consultees³consultees; (listed in Appendix 1)
 - ❖ Central government departments;
 - ❖ Town, Parish and Community Councils;
 - ❖ Neighbourhood Planning Steering Groups;
 - ❖ Parish Meetings;
 - ❖ Hertfordshire County Council;
 - ❖ Hertfordshire District and Borough Councils;
 - ❖ Neighbouring local authorities;
 - ❖ Neighbouring Parish Councils; Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation;
 - ❖ Local community groups and organisations (both location specific and topic based groups);
 - ❖ Black and minority ethnic groups;
 - ❖ Religious / faith groups;
 - ❖ Disabled persons organisations;
 - ❖ Developers, landowners and agents;
 - ❖ Businesses and business interest groups; and
 - ❖ Individual members of the public.
- This list is illustrative, not definitive.
- 2.3. When we consult on our planning documents, we will ensure that we meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, which aims to promote equality, eliminate discrimination and encourage good relations between different groups associated with age, disability, gender, race, religion and other protected characteristics. It is recognised that some parts of the community are not always adequately represented in planning consultations and in the planning process.
- 2.4. In North Hertfordshire, these groups are considered to be:
- ❖ People with disabilities;
 - ❖ Black and ethnic minority groups;
 - ❖ Working aged people;
 - ❖ Young people; and

³ The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 defines “specific consultation bodies” and “general consultation bodies”

❖ Gypsy and traveller communities.

- 2.5. The council's Policy and Community Engagement Team has established some links with some of these "seldom heard groups" and continues to engage with these parts of the community. In preparing our planning documents we will work with the Policy and Community Engagement Team to further develop those links and try to encourage more involvement in the future.
- 2.6. Our consultation list for planning policy documents, masterplans for strategic sites and neighbourhood plans is always open to new consultees. If you would like to add your name to that list, the best way is by registering your contact details through our website: <https://north-herts.oc2.uk/register>. Registering your interest this way, allows you to decide which areas of local planning work you are interested in and amend your details when necessary.
- 2.7. You can also register your interest by contacting us, using these details:
- Strategic Planning Team
North Herts Council
PO Box 10613
Nottingham
NG6 6DW
Email : localplans@north-herts.gov.uk
Telephone : 01462 474000
- 2.8. To ensure that you receive all the information that you are interested in, we will need your name, organisation (where appropriate), either an email address or a postal address and an indication of the types of local planning issues you might be interested in. We will only contact you if you "opt-in" to receive details about particular types of local planning documents.
- 2.9. The [privacy notice](#) for the Regulatory Directorate sets out how your personal data will be used and by whom and is available on the Council's website. Where we are directly responsible for carrying out consultations, we will use our database to decide who we should contact. Where we are working with other organisations on planning matters – such as neighbourhood plans or masterplans – we may provide your details so they can contact you to find out your views; but we will only do this if you have told us this is ok.
- 2.10. We will review our local plan consultation list on a regular basis. We may contact you from time-to-time to ensure that your details are kept up to date and that you do not receive any information which you have not requested. Please do not ignore these emails and letters. If you do not respond we may have to delete your details from our database. This is because of changes in the law which say how we must protect your data and personal information.

3. Consultation Methods

- 3.1 Some of the methods we can use for community involvement are listed in the table below. The list is not definitive, but it includes those methods which we consider to be the most effective, practical and cost effective where we are directly responsible for producing planning documents. We will use a variety of these methods to engage and consult with the community as and where appropriate.
- 3.2 Where Parish Councils or developers are carrying out their own consultations on planning matters, we will encourage them to use an appropriate range of methods.

Table 1 : Methods of consultation for strategic and local planning consultations

Methods for notifying and consultation	Comments
Website	It is a statutory requirement that some of our consultation documents are available to view on the council's website (www.north-herts.gov.uk). We will use both the planning pages of the website and the Council's consultation page for our consultation documents. The website will also include any background information and updates on all our consultation documents, including supplementary planning documents, masterplans and the local plan. We have an online consultation portal which you can use to make your comments during open consultation periods.
Letters and email	For some of our consultation documents, it is a statutory requirement that all statutory consultees are notified in writing (which maybe by email) when a document is published for consultation. In some circumstances a number of general consultees may also be notified in writing, where a document may be of particular interest. The council will encourage greater use of email in the future as this helps us to reduce our costs and paper usage.
Social Media	The council uses Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Nextdoor and Twitter to inform the North Herts community about consultations for the local plan, supplementary planning documents, masterplans and neighbourhood plans.

Methods for notifying and consultation	Comments
	The use of social media will increase in importance as a method of raising awareness of the issues and documents being prepared for consultation as well as the publicising the methods of responding to a consultation. For example, the Council has a YouTube channel but there is only very limited content on it at present. At the moment, the Council is not using these social media outlets as a mechanism for collecting consultation responses, but we do use them to promote consultations and they include links to the relevant information. We will review our use of social media in the future, as it might be particularly helpful in the early stages of consultations.
Council Offices and Libraries	We will normally put paper copies of consultation documents which cover the whole District in the Council Offices and the local libraries during the consultation period. These will be available for inspection at the libraries during their normal opening times or by appointment at the Council Offices. As well as paper copies our reception provides access to a computer linked to the NHDC website for those who cannot access or easily use the internet at home.
Local Media	We prepare press releases at the start of consultations for planning documents to raise awareness. These can be supplemented during the consultation period where particular issues are raised or to further raise awareness.
Town, Parish and Community Councils	The council will consult the Town, Parish and Community Councils within the local authority area and in adjoining local authority areas where appropriate. The council will also encourage the Town and Parish Councils to use their own newsletters, magazines and notice boards to further publicise consultations for the local plan, supplementary planning documents (where relevant) and neighbourhood plans.
Advertisements	The council usually publicises all major consultations for the local plan in the local newspapers which are circulated in the District. This presently includes The Comet, The Royston Crow and the Luton Herald and Post. However, advertisements in local newspapers are not used for neighbourhood planning consultations as the newspapers

Methods for notifying and consultation	Comments
	are not necessarily available in these communities. The following types of planning applications are advertised in local newspapers; major planning applications; departures from the development plan; listed building consents and conservation area consents.
Exhibitions	In some circumstances the council may decide to hold exhibitions to help explain the content of a consultation document. However, exhibitions can be expensive to stage in terms of exhibition material, publicity, venue charges and staff time and we need to carefully balance the benefits of these events against the impact on relevant services.
Focus Groups / Discussion Workshops	Focus groups or discussion groups may be used by the council to explore selected issues with particular groups within the community. These groups can be expensive to run and require significant amounts of staff time, however participants can be recruited from the council's Citizens Panel database. They may provide an opportunity to explore issues in some depth and gain detailed and focussed comments. These types of events can also be held online and can be useful for small groups and can be more flexible for participants.
Posters and Leaflets	Posters and leaflets can be a useful and immediate way to draw attention to a local plan consultation. Posters can be particularly effective where there are community notice boards and large numbers of people passing them. There are however issues to be considered in producing leaflets as they can be relatively expensive if delivered to every household and business in the District.
NHDC Outlook Magazine	We have consistently used Outlook to inform residents and local businesses about local planning issues. However, the publication dates for the council's newsletter do not always coincide with consultation periods. We will continue to provide updates on local planning issues through Outlook when appropriate.

Methods for notifying and consultation	Comments
Questionnaires and Surveys	Questionnaires and surveys can be an effective way of gaining focussed views on a consultation document, particularly in the early stages of consultations.
Use of existing partnerships, forums and panels	There are a number of organisations across the District which can provide representative views from a range of organisations and agencies as well as specific community groups. We will consult with these organisations where appropriate and continue to explore further opportunities.

Making comments

3.3 Comments in response to a planning consultation document can be made by:

- ❖ Using the council's online consultation software:
- ❖ Email; or
- ❖ In writing.

Full details of how to make comments are included in all our consultation documents, on our website and in the advertisements that the council places in local newspapers.

3.4 Comments are sometimes submitted to councillors and other elected representatives by email, letter or by other methods. These comments will not be considered as formal representations, unless they are copied to the Strategic Planning team within the consultation period.

3.5 We do not accept responses to consultation documents by telephone.

What will we do with your comments?

3.6 The council will ensure that when consultation is undertaken, all appropriate comments will be used to inform the content of the planning documents. Inevitably there will be some conflict between the comments and representations, and it will not be possible for the council to amend the planning documents to suit everyone, but the council will consider all the comments carefully in preparing the local planning documents. The Council will not respond to all comments and representations individually.

3.7 At the end of a consultation period, the council will analyse all of the comments received and will prepare a summary of the comments. This summary will be presented to Cabinet or Full Council as a background paper to any recommendation for changes to the planning document. When the council submits a planning document to the Secretary of State it must be accompanied by a statement of consultation which sets out a summary of the representations received and the main issues raised. All of the comments and reports will be made available to view on the council's website and at the council's offices on request.

- 3.8 Any individual or organisation making comments on any local planning document, a supplementary planning document or a neighbourhood plan will be added as a consultee for that particular consultation document on our database.
- 3.9 Increasingly, comments and objections are posted onto social media web pages and on-line petitions. There are a wide variety of social media pages and groups which the council is not necessarily aware of, e.g. private Facebook groups and it does not have the resources to monitor the activity on these sites. Comments and objections made in this way therefore will not be taken into account when formally considering all the representations made in response to a consultation document, unless they have been formally submitted to the council, in which case they will be recorded and considered in accordance with paragraph 6.3. Comments made on the council's own Twitter feed and Facebook page will be monitored but will not be taken as formal representations to a local planning consultation.
- 3.10 Please note that the council, in its absolute discretion, reserves the right not to consider or include comments which are inappropriate including:
- ❖ comments of a discriminatory nature (age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religious belief and sexual orientation) including racist and homophobic comments;
 - ❖ inflammatory or offensive comments (of a foul or abusive nature); or
 - ❖ any other comments of a similar nature that it deems inappropriate.
- 3.11 If a written response to a consultation is received which contains inappropriate content as listed above, this will be discarded from the consultation and, where there is a postal address, will be returned. In these circumstances the respondent will be given an opportunity to make their comments using more appropriate language so that they can be considered as part of the consultation process.
- 3.12 In some instances, the council receives hard copy petitions in response to consultation documents. For the purposes of recording representations made in this way, the subject of the petition will be noted as a representation and the person responsible for submitting the petition will be recorded and will be kept informed of the progress on the relevant consultation document. The signatories to the petition will not be recorded or added to our consultation database but the number of signatories will be recorded. The Council will treat on-line petitions in the same way.

4. Social Media

- 4.1 The Council does use Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Nextdoor and Twitter to inform residents, local groups and organisations about Council activities. The Council will continue to make use of social media platforms to promote future consultations for the strategic site masterplans, supplementary planning documents, neighbourhood plans and the review of the local plan. The use of social media will increase in importance as a method of raising awareness of the issues and documents being prepared for consultation as well as the publicising the methods of responding to a consultation.
- 4.2 At the moment, the Council is not using these social media outlets as a mechanism for collecting formal consultation responses; however, any comments made will be reviewed and may be used to review consultation methods in the future.
- 4.3 As the use of mobile technology changes and increases, the Council will need to respond to these changes and will consider how to make future planning consultation documents and accompanying documentation, including digital mapping, as easy as possible to use. Most of our planning documents and maps are presently made available as PDF files. However, these can be large and lengthy and are not always easy to navigate, particularly if readers are interested in a single topic or a specific geographical area. They are a simple electronic copy of the physical document(s) we are consulting on. This approach doesn't necessarily fit well with modern preferences such as:
- ❖ receiving bite-size information;
 - ❖ 'swipe and tap' mobile technology such as tablets and smartphones; and
 - ❖ interactive and shareable content.
- 4.4 We need to strike an appropriate balance between responding to changing trends and technologies, producing the documents we are legally required to and the resources available to the Council.

5. Community Involvement in pre-application Masterplanning

- 5.1 Our new Local Plan allocates a number of strategic and significant sites for development in North Hertfordshire over the coming years. We normally define 'strategic' sites as those which will deliver 500 or more homes and 'significant' sites as those which will deliver 100 or more homes.
- 5.2 We recognise that large-scale developments will have a significant impact on the communities they are located in so it is important that the Council, communities and stakeholders are all involved in the masterplan process so they can meaningfully shape the planning and design outcomes.
- 5.3 We have a requirement ([Policy SP9 in the Local Plan](#)) that a masterplan will be prepared for these sites by the landowners / developers in collaboration with the Council and which will be subject to consultation and engagement with key stakeholders.
- 5.4 We strongly encourage landowners / developers to produce and agree masterplans *before* they apply for planning permission. Where this is the case, good quality public consultation will be a critical element of the project.
- 5.5 We have established a Project Management and Governance framework to effectively and pro-actively shape the masterplans for the strategic sites. We have produced a range of supporting guidance to help guide developers, landowners and communities through the process. Full details are set out in the dedicated [masterplanning](#) area of our website.
- 5.6 A consultation strategy will be developed as part of the pre-application Strategic Masterplan work. In terms of stakeholder and community engagement, the Council anticipates that key stakeholders will normally be engaged through at least one focused workshop event (or equivalent) as proposals are developed. The nature and timing of that engagement will be agreed on a project by-project basis to respond to the individual project needs. The Council will assist landowners to undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise to ensure that all relevant groups are consulted. These groups might include:
- ❖ District Councillors;
 - ❖ Hertfordshire County Councillors;
 - ❖ Adjoining local authorities (where appropriate);
 - ❖ Local and adjoining Parish Councils;
 - ❖ Neighbourhood planning groups (where appropriate);
 - ❖ Natural England;
 - ❖ Environment Agency
 - ❖ Historic England
 - ❖ Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust; and
 - ❖ Local residents and community groups.

- 5.7 At draft masterplan stage, a wider public consultation event should take place. This will normally be arranged and run by the landowner / developer and supported by the Council.
- 5.8 In terms of the ways in which the community consultations will take place, these will be based on the methods of consultation set out in Table 1 above. We will work with the landowners and developers to ensure that the most appropriate methods of community consultation are used for each masterplan. The public engagement event could take the form of an exhibition or drop-in or workshops supported by a dedicated website. We will make staff available to attend such events. The landowner will be responsible for the production of materials, staffing costs and venue hire.
- 5.9 We may share the contact details of individuals or groups where they have told us they have a particular interest in the area or site in question to make sure your views can be heard.
- 5.10 A feedback report from the consultation will be required to feed into the final Strategic Masterplan. This will clearly set out how consultation helped to positively shape and influence the proposals.
- 5.11 This is our preferred approach to producing masterplans for strategic and significant development. However, we cannot insist that this process is followed. We cannot require that a planning application is submitted at any particular time. A planning application for strategic or significant development without a pre-agreed masterplan might be submitted without having engaged with the pre-application process.
- 5.12 Policy SP9 therefore also allows for its requirements to be met by agreeing a Strategic Masterplan following the submission of a planning application and securing this either prior to or as part of the grant of planning permission.
- 5.13 Where this is the case, community involvement and engagement on any masterplan will take place as part of the Development Management process. More information on this is set out in the following section.

6. Supplementary Planning Documents and Planning Briefs

- 6.1 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) provide more detailed advice or guidance in respect of adopted local plan policies, however they cannot introduce new planning policies. SPDs are capable of being a material consideration in respect of a planning decision but they do not form part of the development plan.
- 6.2 The Council has agreed that we will prepare SPDs on Sustainability, Biodiversity and Design. We will consult on the content of these documents, but they are not subject to examination by a Planning Inspector before they are adopted by the Council.
- 6.3 The following table sets out a summary of the consultation stages and methods of consultation which the Council may use in preparing an SPD or Planning Brief. For some consultations we may organise workshops or drop-in sessions where it is appropriate.

Table 2 : Supplementary Planning Documents – Stages of preparation and consultation methods

SPD Stage of Preparation	Consultation duration	Consultation methods
Research / Initial scoping	No minimum	❖ Written consultation, focussed surveys or meetings with key stakeholders where required
Draft SPD consultation	4 weeks (minimum)	❖ Written / email consultations with statutory consultees, relevant general consultees on our database, other relevant stakeholders, individuals and organisations who have expressed a wish to be consulted or have previously made comments on the document being considered; ❖ Consultation documents available for public inspection on the Council's website; ❖ Digital consultation using the Council's on-line consultation portal; ❖ Promotion of the SPD and advice on how to engage with its development through the Council's social media platforms; and ❖ Hard copies of the consultation document available at the Council Offices and at other places considered appropriate.
Final Draft SPD Consultation		

SPD Stage of Preparation	Consultation duration	Consultation methods
Adoption		The adopted SPD, a statement of the representations received and the response to those representations and an adoption statement will be available to view on the Council's website. All those who made comments will be informed.

7. Neighbourhood Planning

- 7.1 Neighbourhood plans are Community-led documents, prepared by Parish Councils or a Neighbourhood Planning Forum. The District Council is committed to supporting local communities preparing neighbourhood plans and they form an important part of how the local community can be engaged in the planning system.
- 7.2 The [Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](#) (as amended) set out the statutory requirements for the preparation of neighbourhood plans. Consultation during the early stages of neighbourhood plan preparation is undertaken by the Parish Council or the neighbourhood forum and is not covered by the requirements of this Statement of Community Involvement. However, the SCI might still contain guidance which is useful to groups preparing neighbourhood plans.
- 7.3 When a neighbourhood plan is “made” it becomes part of the statutory development plan for the District, this means that there are a number of legal requirements that the neighbourhood plan must meet. These are known as the “Basic Conditions”. A neighbourhood plan must;
- ❖ have regard to national planning policy;
 - ❖ be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the saved Local Plan;
 - ❖ contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
 - ❖ be compatible with environmental obligations; and
 - ❖ be compatible with human rights requirements.
- 7.4 The table below sets out the key steps for neighbourhood planning and also outlines the level of support that can be expected from us, the District Council. Further information can be found on the Council’s [website](#).

Table 3 : Neighbourhood Plans – Stages of Preparation

Neighbourhood Plan Stage of Preparation	Commentary
Designation of a neighbourhood planning area	In those areas of the District where there is a Parish or Town Council, the Parish or Town Council must apply for a neighbourhood planning area to be designated. If an application is received to designate the whole parish area, we are required to designate the whole area⁴. At this stage, we expect the Parish or Town Council to provide a formal request to designate the neighbourhood planning area and a map which shows the extent of the neighbourhood planning area.

⁴ [The Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) and Development Management Procedure \(Amendment\) Regulations 2016](#)

Neighbourhood Plan Stage of Preparation	Commentary
	In those areas of the District where there is no Parish Council, a neighbourhood planning forum must be established in order to produce a neighbourhood plan. Where we need to consult on designating a neighbourhood planning area, we will consult statutory consultees and those people and organisations on our database who have expressed an interest in that neighbourhood planning area. We will advertise the application through its website and social media and will ask the relevant qualifying body to assist in publicising the consultation through its own local mechanisms, for example through a community newsletter or local website
Preparation of the first draft neighbourhood plan	During this stage of plan preparation, we have a duty to support the preparation of neighbourhood plans. This could include advice on: ❖ possible themes and topics for your neighbourhood plan; ❖ useful evidence for your neighbourhood planning policies; ❖ the legal requirements that have to be met; ❖ ways to consult the local community; ❖ providing maps where appropriate; and ❖ providing advice on policy writing. This list is not exhaustive; however assistance will be limited to the resources we have available at any given time. If you have a detailed project plan in place, it will be easier to identify when you might need assistance from the Council. At this stage in the neighbourhood planning process, the Strategic Planning Team will offer 30 hours of support for each neighbourhood planning group. Our GIS team can also provide some limited help with digital mapping. Beyond this allowance, further assistance can be provided but will be charged at a rate of £30 per hour to help cover the Council's costs. Whilst we have a duty to support neighbourhood planning, this does not extend to financial assistance. There are other sources of funding which might be available to

Neighbourhood Plan Stage of Preparation	Commentary
	neighbourhood planning groups. Further information is available through Locality: https://locality.org.uk/
Pre-submission consultation on the neighbourhood plan	Once a draft neighbourhood plan has been prepared it will need to be consulted on for six weeks. This consultation is carried out by the Parish Council or the Neighbourhood Forum. Whilst consultation at this stage should be focussed in the local community, we can help Parish Councils and qualifying bodies with the contact details for statutory consultees or other relevant organisations who might have an interest in the neighbourhood plan. Parish Councils and qualifying bodies are encouraged to consult with the wider community which might include community groups, landowners, businesses and developers. Some of the consultation techniques listed in Table 1 might be helpful to use in this early consultation for a neighbourhood plan. The consultation responses can be used to make any changes to the neighbourhood plan as a result of comments from the public in advance of submitting the plan.
Submission of the neighbourhood plan to North Herts Council	Once the neighbourhood plan has been prepared and the first stages of consultation have been completed, the plan will be submitted to NHC to publicise and consult on for six weeks. We will ensure that all of the documents submitted are correct and will arrange for consultation to take place. In most cases, delegated authority will be sought to start the consultation but there are exceptions to this where the neighbourhood planning area includes two or more electoral wards. In these circumstances, the consultation will be referred to Cabinet as a key decision. It may be that the consultation will be undertaken with other local planning consultations to ensure the efficient use of resources. We will publicise the consultation through our website, news releases and through social media. Emails and letters will be sent to statutory consultees, any organisation referred to in the consultation statement, organisations in the local area and anyone who has

Neighbourhood Plan Stage of Preparation	Commentary
	“opted-in” to be notified of consultations for that particular neighbourhood planning area. We will work in collaboration with the qualifying body or neighbourhood planning forum to encourage the use of local media sources (e.g. newsletters, social media pages) to publicise the consultation.
Independent examination of a neighbourhood plan	We will source an independent examiner at the end of the consultation period, once all of the representations have been confirmed to request the details of a suitable and available examiner to undertake the examination of the plan. A decision to appoint an examiner will be made in collaboration with the Parish Council. We will ensure that the independent examiner receives all of the relevant documentation for the examination. It is normal for neighbourhood plan examinations to be conducted by written representations, however, if the examiner decides that an exploratory meeting or a hearing session is necessary, we will make the appropriate arrangements in consultation with the Qualifying Body and the examiner.
Receipt of Examiner’s report	The examiner will prepare a report which will recommend that the neighbourhood plan proceeds to a referendum with or without further modifications and that the referendum area is to be extended beyond the designated neighbourhood planning area.
Referendum	We will make the necessary arrangements for a neighbourhood plan referendum where the neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions.
Making the neighbourhood plan	Once there has been a successful referendum, the neighbourhood plan will become part of the statutory development plan for the District and will be used in determining planning applications.

8. The Local Plan Review

- 8.1 The Local Plan was adopted on 8 November 2022 and we have a statutory duty to keep the local plan under review. At a minimum, plans must be reviewed every five years. There is a commitment in our Local Plan to conduct a review of the whole plan by the end of 2023, which will determine whether the Plan needs to be updated either in whole or part.
- 8.2 The timetable for preparing the Local Plan is set out in the Local Development Scheme (LDS). The LDS is kept under review and is available to view on our [website](#). A new LDS will be produced once the Council has made a decision on whether and how the Local Plan needs to be updated.
- 8.3 Under the current planning system, there are a number of stages involved in the preparation of a local plan and there are opportunities for you to be involved in that preparation, particularly in the early stages. The key stages of local plan preparation are set out in the table below, along with the approaches we might use if this system remains in place.
- 8.4 However, the Government is currently considering how and whether to change the planning system in the future. New laws are currently being considered by Parliament. Updated versions of national policy are expected. The detailed regulations, which set out what we must do at different stages, may change. There may be specific expectations around the use of digital or on-line methods.
- 8.5 We will continue to monitor these changes. We will decide if we need to update this Statement of Community Involvement again to reflect the latest rules and guidance when we begin work on the next version of the Local Plan.

Table 4 : Key stages of Local Plan preparation

Local Plan Stage of Preparation	Description
Research and Issues Phase	During this early stage, we will gather information and evidence about the area so that we can assess and identify the issues facing the District. Consultation during these early stages may include detailed stakeholder consultations or wider more extensive consultations. The Council will also assess the requirements of government guidance, other corporate strategies and technical information in order to put a draft document together.
Draft Plan or proposals (Regulation 18)	We may publish a draft plan or document to get some feedback from both the community and stakeholders. Any draft document would be made available for public

Local Plan Stage of Preparation	Description
	consultation for a minimum period of six weeks, allowing written representations to be made. In addition to inviting written comments, we may also use workshops, exhibitions or online drop-in sessions to engage with different groups of the community. We will use any comments and feedback in the preparation and revision of the local plan before moving onto the next stages. The comments will be made available on the website. At this stage the draft local plan will be subject to a Strategic Environmental Appraisal (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and further technical work maybe commissioned.
Publication (Regulation 19)	The proposed local plan will be published for a formal consultation period. We will ask you for written comments on the content of the documents subject to consultation. We will advertise the consultation period as widely as possible through our website and where appropriate in local newspapers. We will send emails or letters to statutory consultees, local organisations and others listed on our consultation database. The consultation documents will be available on our website, at the Council Offices and in local libraries. Comments and representations received at this stage in the preparation of the Local Plan will be made available on the website and will be sent to the Planning Inspectorate. Summaries of the representations may be prepared to assist the Inspectors.
Submission (Regulation 22)	Once the consultation has been completed, the document will be submitted to the Secretary of State (represented by the Planning Inspectorate) for independent examination. All of the supporting background evidence, the SEA/SA and a statement of public involvement in the process will also be submitted as part of the examination and will be made available on the council's website.
Examination (Regulation 24)	An examination will be held by an Inspector, appointed by the Planning Inspectorate. The Inspector will examine the documents submitted and will identify the matters and issues for discussion at a public hearing. A timetable and

Local Plan Stage of Preparation	Description
	guidance notes for participants will be prepared. Hearing sessions will be arranged with six weeks' notice and if the Inspector considers it necessary, they will ask participants and the Council for additional information on specific issues. The Council will appoint a Programme Officer who will be the single point of contact with the Planning Inspector and their details will be published on the council's website. Only those people who submitted representations at the publication stage (Regulation 19) are entitled to be heard at the examination, although third parties can be invited by the Inspector at their discretion. The Inspector will assess the "soundness" of the plan and will prepare a report for the Council. That report will set out the Inspector's recommendations to the Council. The Council must then consider the report and the recommendations.
Adoption (Regulation 26)	The Council will adopt the local plan as soon as practicable following consideration of the Inspector's report. The local plan will then become part of the statutory development plan for the District. The documents will be published on the Council's website and all of those people who made representations will be informed. Paper copies will be available to view at the Council Offices.

9. Community Involvement in the Development Management

- 9.1 Many people only interact with the planning system when they wish to make a planning application of their own or make comments on an application which affects them directly.
- 9.2 Development management is the process by which the council determines whether a proposal for development should be granted planning permission. Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan (the Local Plan, an adopted neighbourhood plan where appropriate, the Minerals Local Plan and the Waste Local Plan) unless material considerations (such as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) suggest otherwise.
- 9.3 Planning applications can be determined in one of two ways:
- ❖ determination by Councillors on the Planning Control Committee; or
 - ❖ determination by development management officers under the delegated decision making procedure.

Further information is given on our website: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/planning/planning-advice-and-guidance/planning-applications-decision-making-process>.

Pre-application Consultation

- 9.4 We provide an informal general enquiry system for initial queries about planning applications. There is a planning duty officer phone service between 9am and 12 noon each weekday.
- 9.5 Anyone considering making an application for planning permission can also approach the council for informal views prior to submitting a formal application, using our pre-application advice service. Any advice given at this stage is not binding, but it can help to save the applicant's time and money in pursuing schemes which may need radical alteration to be acceptable. There are no statutory requirements for pre-application discussions. The council does make a charge for pre-application advice for certain types of development proposal including:
- ❖ Significant or major proposals – Large scale, complex developments, including masterplans;
 - ❖ Category “A” Proposals – Large scale, complex development – including schemes of between 100 – 499 dwellings;
 - ❖ Category “B” – including schemes of between 25 and 99 residential units, 2000sq m or more of commercial floorspace, mixed use development on a site of more than 1 hectare (ha) or development requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA);
 - ❖ Category “C” Proposals – Other major development – including schemes of between 10 and 24 residential units, provision of 1000sq m – 1999sq m of commercial floorspace, mixed use development on a site between 0.5 and 1ha or change of use proposals for buildings on land exceeding 500sq m;
 - ❖ Category “D” Proposals – including proposals of up to 9 dwellings, advertisements, provision of up to 999sq m of non residential floorspace or change of use of buildings on land exceeding 499sq m; and

❖ Category “E” Proposals – Householder and listed buildings.

- 9.6 Full details of our current charges can be found on our website: [Do I need planning permission? | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](http://north-herts.gov.uk)
- 9.7 The council cannot insist on pre-application discussions with applicants but they are recommended. Where major schemes are proposed, the council will encourage developers to engage with the local interest groups and residents. However, it is important that councillors observe the council’s Planning Code of Good Practice.
- 9.8 Not all planning proposals are discussed with the council before an application is made. However, an applicant may consult at the pre-application stage, where this is appropriate, whether they are significant or more minor applications. The tables below set out how an applicant may choose to consult on their proposals.

Table 5 : Public consultation at the pre-application stage for planning applications
(This includes all applications made under the Town and Country Planning Act and associated legislation.)

Pre-Application Stage : Major Applications (see Appendix 2)		
Consultation Methods	Suggested Course of Action	By Whom
Letters to inform local residents / interest groups of the planning application site	Send letters / emails to local residents / interest groups / relevant statutory consultees	Planning applicant / agent
Public exhibition or public meeting	Publicise & prepare proposals for public consultation.	Planning applicant / agent
Pre – Application Stage – Other Applications		
Inform neighbours in the immediate vicinity	Verbal consultation	Planning applicant / agent

- 9.9 Local residents often express concern regarding construction management and in particular construction vehicle access routes to development sites. Developers are strongly advised to consider construction management issues at the earliest possible stage of the planning process. It is best practice to consider sensitive and well thought out construction management plans at the pre-application stage (as part of engagement with Hertfordshire County Council Highways and the District Council) and to seek the views of the local community before planning applications are submitted. The feedback from any public consultation on construction management (including

construction vehicle access routes) should then be incorporated into the formal submission of a planning application.

- 9.10 For strategic site development proposals or schemes of significant scale and local interest, developers may also consider making presentations to the relevant Area Forum. The [Council's Constitution \(May 2023\)](#) states that Area Forums can receive presentations from developers for schemes for 100 dwellings or more. This threshold may change over the lifetime of this SCI. Whilst Member input into these discussions must be limited in order to avoid pre-determination by Members of the Planning Control Committee and their substitutes, the Area Forums would welcome early engagement for large scale development proposals and will provide comments accordingly.

Public consultation for planning applications

- 9.11 When a planning application is submitted, the council will publicise it in accordance with the legislative requirements. Where required by the legislation, this will include the following:
- ❖ Notices published in local newspapers;
 - ❖ Application details published on the website for inspection;
 - ❖ Site notices;
 - ❖ Letters sent to adjoining properties;
 - ❖ Consultation with statutory consultees (see Appendix 3)
 - ❖ Details of all planning, listed building and conservation area consent applications are sent to Councillors and the Parish or Town Councils weekly.
- 9.12 The council aims to determine all planning applications within a statutory time period, therefore all consultations that take place once a planning application has been submitted must also take place within these time limits. However, bodies such as Natural England will be allowed a longer period of time to comment on applications where this is prescribed by legislation.
- 9.13 The tables below set out how the council will consult at the application stage for planning proposals in the District, whether they are significant or more minor applications.

Table 6 : Consultation for Planning Applications

Planning Application Stage		
Consultation Methods	Requirements	By Whom
Copies of planning applications available at the libraries during normal opening hours and the Council Offices (either during	Prepare information	NHC Officers

Planning Application Stage		
normal opening hours or by appointment) via the NHDC website		
Site notice	Prepare site notices. Site notices are emailed to the applicant or agent for displaying on site. Planning officers are responsible for displaying site notices where the applicant or agent is out of the district and the property is empty.	NHC Officers Applicants and / or agent
Neighbour notification letters	Prepare & send out letters	NHC Officers
Invite representations from statutory & non statutory consultees	Prepare & send out letters	NHC Officers
Public notice in local paper	Prepare advertisement	NHC Officers
Further consultations by way of exhibitions / public meetings for major applications	This would depend on the types of consultation that have taken place beforehand	Planning Applicant / Agent NHC Officers

- 9.14 In some cases, there may be significant amendments to the submitted plans, in which case the council will advise those people who have previously made comments on an application. If there is a change to an application which is material or affects the description of the development, then we will re-consult, but applicants will be encouraged to undertake additional consultation where appropriate. Where representations and comments are received, they will be taken into account in the determination of applications insofar as they are material to the application. Some things are not material planning considerations, such as the impact of a scheme on property values, and therefore cannot be taken into account.
- 9.15 Local planning authorities are required to make a statement on each planning decision notice as to how they have acted pro-actively in their dealings with applicants. Even if a proposal is fundamentally unacceptable the council will handle the application in a pro-active way. This requirement in no way suggests that the application will not be assessed objectively weighing up any concerns expressed by consultees against the planning merits of the case.

- 9.16 Decisions on planning applications will either be made by the relevant Committee or under powers delegated to the Development and Conservation Manager, Principal Planning Officer (Major Projects) and Principal Planning Officer (Development Management). In addition, decisions for some minor applications, discharge of planning conditions and applications in respect of tree works are delegated to Senior Planning Officers. Any councillor can request that an application is decided by Committee instead of being determined under delegated powers, where they have a contrary view to the officer as to the probable decision or consider it raises issues of wider public interest, as set out in [Section 8 of the Council's Constitution](#) (Regulatory Committees).
- 9.17 In the case of those applications which will be reported to the Committees for decision, there is the opportunity for individuals to address the Committee to express their support or objection to the proposals. Anyone who has submitted representations will be informed if an application will be brought before committee for decision.

Post decision information

- 9.18 Once a decision has been made, the details of the decision are published online. Planning files will remain open for inspection once decisions have been made (the Part 2 register). A register of associated legal agreements (Section 106 and Section 278 agreements) will also be available for inspection.
- 9.19 The table below sets out how the council will inform the community of the decisions made on all planning applications.

Table 7 : Public Involvement – Post Decisions

Post Application Stage		
Consultation Methods	Requirements	By Whom
Update web site	Ensure that latest information is on the website	NHC Officers
Press release for major applications	Prepare information	NHC Officers

10. NHC Resource Availability

- 10.1 The SCI is based on a realistic assessment of the likely resources available to the council in the foreseeable future. The council does not have either the staff or the financial resources to undertake large scale community and stakeholder events without impacting upon our ability to deliver important day-to-day services. The SCI sets out how the council will undertake a programme of consultation which is achievable and realistic but which will not raise expectations. In order to make the best uses of resources, the council will endeavour to combine local plan consultations with other consultations for council initiatives where this is appropriate and timely.
- 10.2 The council will be responsible for making the appropriate resources available to implement the consultation methods set out in this SCI. It is envisaged that the proposed consultation measures can be met in house.
- 10.3 The Service Director – Regulatory will be responsible for managing the overall consultation process and its implementation will be the responsibility of the Strategic Planning or the Strategic Infrastructure and Projects Teams.
- 10.4 Public consultation in relation to planning applications will be the responsibility of the council's Planning Control and Conservation Manager.

11. Reviewing the SCI

- 11.1 As required by the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017, the SCI will be reviewed no later than five years after adoption.
- 11.2 However, as explained in paragraphs 7.4 and 7.5, there may be changes in national legislation, regulations or policies on the preparation of the masterplans, SPDs, neighbourhood plans and the local plan review. These will be monitored and if there are any significant changes, the SCI might be subject to a more immediate review.
- 11.3 The SCI will also need to be compliant with any legal requirements for the processing of data or changes to anti-discrimination laws and changes in NHDC policy.
- 11.4 The database of people and organisations will be kept up to date to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations 2016.

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 : Specific and General Consultation Bodies

The specific and general consultation bodies for Local Planning are defined in the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\)\(England\) Regulations 2012](#), as shown in the extract below:

In the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012 “general consultation bodies” means the following

- a) voluntary bodies some or all of whose activities benefit any part of the local planning authority’s area,
- b) bodies which represent the interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups in the local planning authority’s area,
- c) bodies which represent the interests of different religious groups in the local planning authority’s area,
- d) bodies which represent the interests of disabled persons in the local planning authority’s area,
- e) bodies which represent the interests of persons carrying on business in the local planning authority’s area;

“specific consultation bodies” means the following:

- (a) the Coal Authority,
- (b) the Environment Agency,
- (c) the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as English Heritage)⁵,
- (d) the Marine Management Organisation,
- (e) Natural England,
- (f) Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (company number 2904587),
- (g) the Highways Agency⁶,
- (h) a relevant authority any part of whose area is in or adjoins the local planning authority’s area,
- (i) any person—
- (i) to whom the electronic communications code applies by virtue of a direction given under section 106(3)(a) of the Communications Act 2003, and

⁵ Known as Historic England

⁶ Known as National Highways

- (ii) who owns or controls electronic communications apparatus situated in any part of the local planning authority's area,
- (j) if it exercises functions in any part of the local planning authority's area—
- (i) a Primary Care Trust established under section 18 of the National Health Service Act 2006 or continued in existence by virtue of that section;
- (ii) a person to whom a licence has been granted under section 6(1)(b) or (c) of the Electricity Act 1989;
- (iii) a person to whom a licence has been granted under section 7(2) of the Gas Act 1986;
- (iv) a sewerage undertaker; and
- (v) a water undertaker;
- (k) the Homes and Communities Agency; and
- (l) where the local planning authority are a London borough council, the Mayor of London;

Appendix 2 : Definition of Major Development

The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 (as amended)

“Major development” means development involving any one or more of the following:

- (a) the winning and working of minerals or the use of land for mineral-working deposits;
- (b) waste development;
- (c) the provision of dwellinghouses where -
 - (i) the number of dwellinghouses to be provided is 10 or more; or
 - (ii) the development is to be carried out on a site having an area of 0.5 hectare or more and it is not known whether the development falls within paragraph (c)(i);
- (d) the provision of a building or buildings where the floor space to be created by the development is 1,000 square metres or more; or
- (e) development carried out on a site having an area of 1 hectare or more.

Appendix 3 : Statutory Consultees for Planning Applications

Statutory consultee	Type of development
Canal and River Trust	Schedule 4(za) Development Management Procedure Order
Coal Authority	Article 26 and Schedule 4(o) Development Management Procedure Order
Control of major-accident hazards competent authority (COMAH)	Schedule 4(zb) Development Management Procedure Order
County Planning Authorities	Paragraph 7 of Schedule 1 to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Article 21 Development Management Procedure Order and Schedule 4(b)(c) Development Management Procedure Order
Crown Estates Commissioners	Article 26 Development Management Procedure Order
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	Article 26 Development Management Procedure Order
Designated Neighbourhood Forum	Paragraph 8A inserted into Schedule 1 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Article 25A and paragraph (d) of Schedule 4 of the Development Management Procedure Order 2015
Environment Agency	Schedule 4(p)(t)(u) (v)(zc)(zd) Development Management Procedure Order
Forestry Commission	Paragraph 4 of Schedule 5 of Town and Country Planning Act 1990
The Gardens Trust	Schedule 4(s) Development Management Procedure Order and see also guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment
Greater London Authority	Mayor of London Order 2008 (as amended)
Health and Safety Executive	Schedule 4(e) and (in relation to applications for planning permission made on or after 1 August 2020 (zg) Development Management Procedure Order, see also guidance on hazardous substances and advice for local planning authorities on consulting Health and Safety Executive on planning applications; and paragraph 113 of guidance on minerals

Statutory consultee	Type of development
[Relevant]Highways Authority (including Highways England)	Schedule 4(g)(h)(i) Development Management Procedure Order
Historic England	Schedule 4(g)(r)(s) Development Management Procedure Order and see also guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment
Lead local flood authority	Schedule 4(ze) Development Management Procedure Order
Local Planning Authorities	Schedule 4(b)(c), Article 19 and Article 24 Development Management Procedure Order, Paragraph 4(2) Schedule 1 and Paragraph 7 of Schedule 1 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Paragraph 3(b) of Schedule 4 to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
National Parks Authorities	Schedule 4(a) Development Management Procedure Order
Natural England	Schedule 4(w)(y)(zb) Development Management Procedure Order and Paragraph 4 of Schedule 5 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990
Office for Nuclear Regulation	Schedule 4(f) Development Management Procedure Order and see also deciding planning applications around hazardous installations guidance
Oil and Gas Authority	Article 26 Development Management Procedure Order
Parish Councils	Article 25 Development Management Procedure Order and Schedule 4(d) Development Management Procedure Order
Rail Infrastructure Managers	Article 16 Development Management Procedure Order
Rail Network Operators	Schedule 4(j) Development Management Procedure Order and see also guidance on transport
Sport England	Schedule 4(z) Development Management Procedure Order and see also guidance on open space, sports and recreation facilities
Theatres Trust	Schedule 4(x) Development Management Procedure Order
Toll Road Concessionaries	Schedule 4(m) Development Management Procedure Order

Statutory consultee	Type of development
Water and sewerage undertakers	Schedule 4(zf) Development Management Procedure Order

Source: Planning Practice Guidance – [Paragraph: 030 Reference ID: 15-030-20190722](#)

CABINET TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: Strategic Planning Matters Report

REPORT OF: DIRECTOR – PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR DONNA WRIGHT, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLACE

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

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the report on strategic planning matters be noted.
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3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Executive Member has been briefed on the relevant matters in this report. Where appropriate these have also been reported to the Council's internal, informal Strategic Planning Project Board. This includes cross-party representation from all political groups. The Project Board is chaired by the Executive Member for Place.

6. FORWARD PLAN

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

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. Members will be aware of, and familiar with, many of the issues surrounding strategic planning matters. This report is intended to provide Members with the current position on key matters where there has been substantive change since the report in June 2026.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Government Changes

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 8.1 The draft NPPF was published for consultation in December 2025. North Herts provided a response to the consultation. On 17 August 2026, the Government published the final NPPF. The final document provided clarifications, grammatical updates, changes to glossary definitions and annexes. There have also been updates to the objectives in each chapter to clarify the Government's intention in relation to different policy areas.
- 8.2 The new NPPF provides a fundamental overhaul of how national policy is presented. As per the draft NPPF, it is structured under plan-making policies for Development Plans, including both Spatial Development Strategies and Local Plans, and decision-making policies. For decision making policies, these come into effect as of 17 August 2026 for planning decisions. Where there is a conflict between the new National Development Management Policies (NDMPs) and existing Local Plan policies, the NDMPs take precedent. Future planning reports will set out where this is the case.
- 8.3 The main changes from the draft consultation are set out below with a more detailed explanation in Appendix A.

General

- Status of National Development Management Policies
- Weight of existing local plan policy
- Spatial Development Plans - Further details

Local Plans

- Local Plan period
- Test of soundness
- Site allocations

Decision Making

- Viability – removal of standard inputs and flexibility for application stage viability
- Use of Local Development Orders
- Use of model planning conditions
- Use of Article 4 Directions

Sustainable Development

- Spatial strategy - policies for gaps around settlements
- Presumption in favour of development (Policy S3) - explanation that Policies S4 (within Settlements) and S5 (Outside Settlements) should apply to the relevant part a development.
- Policy S4 (within settlements) – extent of impacts.

Climate Change

- Planning for Climate Change (Policy CC1) - references to the Climate Change Act 2004
- Mitigating climate change (Policy CC2) - extraction of fossil fuels
- Wildfires measures (Policy CC3)

Housing

- Travellers (Policy HO1): reference to “as a minimum over the plan period”
- Land for Strategic Development - Policy HO4 references Garden City principles
- Meeting needs of different groups (Policy HO5) - Accessibility requirements and tenure mix
- Build-out rates (Policy HO10) - change in emphasis

High-quality communications

- Telecommunications (Policy CO1) - clarifications

Sustainable use of materials

- Mineral development (Policy M3) - clarifications

Effective use of land

- Planning for an effective use of land (Policy L1) - Scope for intensification
- Densities (Policy L3) – clarification of application of densities within settlements and a reduction of 35 dwellings per hectare within reasonable walking distance of well-connected stations, with a minimum of 45 dwellings per hectare near stations served by at least eight trains per hour.

Green Belt

- Altering Green Belt boundaries (Policy GB3) in relation to land around well-connected stations for development
- Development which is not inappropriate in the Green Belt (Policy GB7) - clarifications
- Golden Rules (Policy GB8) – further detail in relation to criteria for not meeting golden rules

Achieving well designed places

- Key principles for well-designed places (Policy DP3): amendments in relation to refusing applications and additional references to women and girls in relation to designing public spaces.

Transport

- Locating development in sustainable locations (Policy TR3) – clarification on adverse impacts, addition of reference to women and girls, and application of parking standards for retail and other large sites
- Assessing transport impacts (Policy TR6) - change in emphasis on relation to refusing proposals.
- Public rights of way (policy TR8) - addition of enhancing public rights of way.

Health

- Planning for healthy communities (Policy HC1) - explicit reference to reducing health inequalities.
- Community facilities (Policy HC3) – additional text

Pollution, public protection and security

- Planning for clean and safe spaces (Policy P1) - additional text in relation to ground conditions and risks
- Living conditions and pollution (Policy P3) - references to mitigation measures

Natural environment

- Protected landscapes (Policy N4) – clarifications around refusal of applications

Historic environment

- Conservation of heritage assets (Policy HE4) – references to enhance, and additional text in relation to harm

Glossary

- Updates Definition of reasonable walking distance of a well-connected station

Housing Delivery Test (HDT) and 5 year Housing Supply

- 8.4 On 17 August, the Government published the 2024 and 2025 Housing Delivery Test (HDT) results. These showed that North Herts delivered 82% of its housing requirement in 2024 and 75% in 2025 against the targets set out in the Local Plan and the Government's Standard Method. Where delivery falls below 85%, local planning authorities are required to apply a 20% buffer to their housing requirement and prepare an action plan. Where delivery falls below 75%, authorities are considered to have unmet housing need when determining planning applications.
- 8.5 The Council's Five-Year Housing Land Supply Position Statement, published in November 2025, was based on the most recently available HDT results at that time (2022). Those results showed North Herts achieving 105% delivery over the preceding three-year period, resulting in a reported housing land supply of 2.6 years and no requirement to apply the 20% buffer. Had the 2024 HDT results been available at that time, the Council would have been required to apply the buffer because delivery had fallen to 82%. Consequently, the reported supply position as of November 2025 would have been approximately 2.3 years rather than 2.6 years reported.
- 8.6 As of September 2026, we are currently at 2.4 years. Although the headline five-year housing land supply figure has reduced from 2.6 years to 2.4 years, this does not reflect a worsening in the Council's underlying position as housing delivery has actually improved compared with the position reported in November 2025 and we are in an upward trajectory. The difference in the headlines figures is due to the delay in the publication of the HDT by Government for 3 years.
- 8.7 Notwithstanding that, North Herts remains below the five-year housing land supply requirement and is currently delivering housing at 75% of our target. Officers have prepared a separate briefing note for Members covering both the Housing Delivery Test results and the Council's five-year housing land supply position. The updated housing land supply position has also been published on the Council's website.
- 8.8 An Action Plan will be developed by officers in consultation with the Executive Member and the cross-party Strategic Planning Project Board and presented to a future meeting of Cabinet for approval.

Scheme of Delegation

- 8.9 Final regulations on the national scheme of delegation were made on 15 July which places planning applications into two categories: those that must always be delegated to planning officers for decisions and those which are presumed to be delegated to officers but which, in certain circumstances, can be considered by planning committee. Authorities are required to amend their constitutions by 31 October 2026 to reflect the new system. Revisions to the current constitution to give effect to the nation scheme of delegation are scheduled to be taken to Full Council on the 8th October 2026.
- 8.10 An information note was [presented to Planning Control Committee](#) in July. A further briefing for Members is being planned to take place ahead of the Full Council meeting. Parish Councils will be updated as part of engagement sessions which are being arranged in association with the upcoming Local Plan consultation. Information can also be shared through the weekly information bulletin.

New Plan-Making System

- 8.11 New data standards regulations for local plans have been introduced. Local authorities are now required to publish plan timetables and housing requirement information in a consistent format which is aimed at creating a more transparent, digital and data-driven planning system. We have published our Local Plan timetable on our website. Our current housing requirement is set out in the Content and Evidence document. This will be updated as we go through the Local Plan process and will be fixed for the purposes of the Plan at the point we submit for examination.

Compulsory Purchase (CPO)

- 8.12 Since March 2024, the Government have published a register of compulsory purchase orders that have been submitted to Government since 2019. The intention is to increase transparency around how decisions are taken and to improve knowledge and awareness of the purposes for which compulsory purchase powers may be used.

Active Travel England (ATE)

- 8.13 Active Travel England have been a statutory consultee for planning applications over certain thresholds since June 2023. From 25 March 2026, ATE now have a new statutory role as a specific consultation body for new style local plans and supplementary plans.

Sport England

- 8.14 In November 2025, the Government consulted on removing or reducing the statutory consultee role of several bodies, including Sport England, with the aim of streamlining the planning process and reducing delay. As of 17 August, the Government has confirmed that Sport England would retain its statutory consultee role, although the scope of consultation would be narrowed to focus on the most significant planning applications affecting playing fields and sports.

Demolition vs Retrofit Research

- 8.15 New research by MHCLG has found that planning policies are not providing clear or consistent direction in relation to demolition or retro-fit; with demolition commonly driven by viability, delivery and tax considerations and retrofit motivated by sustainability and

reuse. Uptake of whole life carbon assessments is also low. Respondents to the research support a number of measures including a retrofit first approach, better aligned financial incentives for both new build and retrofit, and the introduction of standardised whole life carbon guidance to help the sector move towards net zero goals. We are proposing an approach in the Content and Evidence document that aligns with this approach.

Nationally Signification Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) Innovation and Capacity Fund

- 8.16 MHCLG have launched a third round of the Innovation and Capacity (I&C) fund to support host local authorities involved in Nationally Signification Infrastructure Projects. From 8 June 2026, new regulations will also enable host local authorities to recover costs for relevant services provided to applicants throughout Development Consent Order processes where they have published a statement setting out their fee charging schedule.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 8.17 On 6th August 2026, the following came into effect for biodiversity net gain:
- A new exemption for development on sites below 0.2 hectare
 - New exemption for temporary development which is five years or less
 - Removal of the existing exemption for self and custom build
 - Modify the biodiversity gain hierarchy for minor development so that minor development which remain subject to BNG can choose to go straight to off-site gains in first instance

We will need to reflect these requirements in planning decisions.

Planning Fees

- 8.18 On 16 July the government laid regulations to increase planning application fees and published its response to the consultation on planning fees and local fee setting. The new fees will apply from 8 December 2026 and have been nationally set to achieve around 90% of cost recovery. The implications are being considered through normal budget-setting and budget-monitoring processes and will be reported to Cabinet at a later date.

North Herts Local Plan

- 8.19 The Council undertook a scoping consultation on the new Local Plan between 11 May and 28 June 2026 which asked for views on:
- A vision and what issues the new Local Plan should include
 - And how people would like to be involved through-out the new process.
- 8.20 Further details on the new system, timetable and scoping document consultation can be found here.
[Local Plan Update | North Herts Council](#)

- 8.21 The next stage of the Local Plan is the publication of Gateway 1 and the Content and Evidence Base consultation. A separate paper on these issues along with other supporting documents, including the consultation summary report for the scoping stage has been prepared for this Cabinet meeting.

Proposed Expansion of Luton Airport

- 8.22 In April 2025 the Secretary of State for Transport ('SoS') approved Luton Rising's Development Consent Order (DCO) application for the expansion of London Luton Airport from 19 to 32 million passenger journeys per annum. Following extensive legal proceedings, the Supreme Court declined a final application by The Luton and District Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise (LADACAN) in July 2026. This marks the end of any potential challenges.
- 8.23 Luton Rising are now proceeding with the steps that are required to support the implementation of the DCO. The first of these is to populate the technical officer groups that will monitor the key environmental impacts of development against the parameters in the Order (known as Green Controlled Growth). This includes aircraft noise, air quality, carbon & greenhouse gas emissions and surface access.
- 8.24 Officers are working with counterparts in the other Host Authorities to ensure appropriate representation, to further understand the legal structures being proposed for the Environmental Scrutiny Group (ESG) and to ensure appropriate reporting routes to Members and political oversight of ESG activities. The ESG itself is a wholly technical officer body under the terms of the DCO.

Strategic Sites

- 8.25 The Strategic Planning Project Board continues to meet regularly. The status of work on the six, largest Strategic Sites in the Local Plan is summarised below:

Policy SP14: North of Baldock	The masterplan for this site was adopted as a material consideration for any future planning applications by Full Council in June 2025. An outline application was submitted in October 2025 (application reference 25/02571/OP) and remains under consideration. Additional information has been submitted and public consultation on this is underway. A member briefing took place on 24 July and member site visit on 31 July 2026.
SP15: North of Letchworth	The masterplan for this site was adopted as a material consideration for any future planning applications by Full Council in July 2024. The applicant is currently considering options for bringing forward the site.

SP16: North of Stevenage	The masterplan for this site was adopted as a material consideration for any future planning applications by Full Council in November 2024. Members resolved to approve the outline planning application (23/01935/OP) in March 2025 subject to completion of the s106 agreement. This legal agreement is being prepared.
SP17: Highover Farm, Hitchin	Outline planning permission for this site was granted in November 2024 on completion of the s106 legal agreement following a resolution to grant permission by the Planning Committee in October 2023. Reserved matters for infrastructure were approved following committee resolution in October 2025 alongside a number of conditions including a Design Code for the site. The application for the first phases of new homes was approved in May 2026.
SP18: North-east of Great Ashby	The masterplan for this site was adopted as a material consideration for any future planning applications by Full Council in November 2024. An outline application was submitted in January 2026 (25/03080/HYA) and remains under consideration. A full re-consultation was carried out in July / August following amendments to the description.
SP19: East of Luton	The masterplan for this site was adopted as a material consideration for any future planning applications by Full Council in January 2025. Amendments to the two, separate outline planning applications were submitted November 2025 and are under consideration (Council application references 17/00830/1 and 16/02014/1). There are separate applications for the main access points into the sites (22/02904/FP, 22/02905/FP). It is currently anticipated these applications will be presented to Planning Control Committee in Autumn.

Other Local Authorities' Local Plans

- 8.26 We are neighboured by eight other Local Authorities who are all at differing stages of their Local Plans. We maintain regular contact with regard to the status of their Local

Plans and input to consultations as appropriate. Details of the most recent positions of our neighbours is set out below.

- 8.27 The regulations under the new plan-making system still require authorities to collaborate on strategic issues. Whilst the legal duty has been removed, inspectors will still consider how authorities have collaborated as Local Plans are examined.

Welwyn Hatfield

- 8.28 The next stage for the Local Plan is Regulation 19, where the authority publishes their proposed documents for public consultation. The proposed submission Local Plan (Regulation 19) was considered by the [Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel](#) on 3 September 2026. Consultation will take place in September and October 2026 with submission to the Secretary of State for examination before the 31 December 2026 deadline for the legacy system.

St. Albans City and District Council

- 8.29 St Albans City and District Council are in the final stages of preparing a Local Plan under the legacy plan making system. Following consultation on Main Modifications earlier in the summer, the Inspector's Report was received and published in August 2026. St Albans's City and District Council will consider the adoption of the Local Plan at a meeting of Full Council on 9 September 2026. More details on the Local Plan can be found on [St Albans City and District Council's website](#).

Welwyn Hatfield District Council

- 8.30 Welwyn Hatfield are producing their Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan Review under the legacy plan-making system. The authority concluded their Regulation 18 consultation on their draft Local Plan on 26 March 2026. In this consultation they sought views on the overall approach of the plan, and any additional considerations that should inform the development of the plan. North Herts officers provided a response to the proposal for the 10 year plan period and meeting housing need, proposals for data centres, and comments on potential site allocations. It also emphasises the need to continue to work closely on collaboration on evidence base and policy approaches.

- 8.31 The next stage for the Local Plan is Regulation 19, where the authority publishes their proposed documents for public consultation. The proposed submission Local Plan (Regulation 19) was considered by the [Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel](#) on 3 September 2026. Consultation will take place in September and October 2026 with submission to the Secretary of State for examination before the 31 December 2026 deadline for the legacy system.

Stevenage Borough Council

- 8.32 Stevenage Borough Council have undertaken a partial review of their Local Plan. The Council's examination on the Local Plan was in December 2025. The partial review was adopted on the 22 July 2026. Stevenage Borough Council did receive funding to undertake the new local plan process which required notice of intention to prepare a new Local Plan to be published by 30 June 2026 which has yet to happen. Officers will

continue dialogue with Stevenage officers on collaboration. More details can be found on [Stevenage Borough Council's website](#).

East Hertfordshire Council

East Herts District Council published its formal Notice of its intention to review the Local Plan and a revised timetable on 11th June 2026. They also published a scoping document for consultation which ran between 11 June and 10 July 2026. North Hertfordshire officers provided a response to their scoping consultation that highlighted the continued need for close engagement between officers as our respective Local Plans progress.

- 8.33 East Herts Council is following a similar timetable to North Herts, with Gateway 1 anticipated for the 15th of October 2026 with final plan adoption expected 2nd April 2029. Further details on the new system, timetable and scoping document consultation can be found here. [Local Plan Timetable | East Herts District Council](#)

Luton Borough Council

- 8.34 Luton Borough Council published their notice of intention and timetable on 28 May 2026. They also undertook a scoping consultation and call for sites, both of which ran from 28 May to 23 July 2026. North Herts officers provided a response to the scoping consultation on the following matters; challenges of meeting housing need, supporting economic growth across the region, addressing climate change, support for Luton's design code, and infrastructure funding. It is expected that Luton's Gateway 1 will be published 22 October 2026 and the Content and Evidence Base document will be consulted on in May 2027.

Central Bedfordshire Council

- 8.35 Central Bedfordshire published the notice of intention on 26 March 2026 and undertook their scoping consultation on 6 May – 3 June 2026. They also undertook a consultation on submitted sites on 6 July for 6 weeks until 17 August 2026. North Herts officers provided a response to their scoping consultation. They expect to publish Gateway 1 assessment on 23 October 2026 and to consult on the Content and Evidence base document on 30 November 2026. More details can be found on [New Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire](#)

South Cambridgeshire District Council / Greater Cambridgeshire Shared Planning

- 8.36 The Council are consulting on the Proposed Submission Greater Cambridge Local Plan 2024 – 2045. The Plan sets out the proposed vision, development strategy, site allocations in different parts of Greater Cambridge, and development management policies, organised under 7 key themes which are: climate change; biodiversity and green spaces; wellbeing and social inclusion; great places; jobs; homes and infrastructure. Consultation is open until 25 September 2026 and officers will be making representations as part of the consultation. More details can be found on [Greater Cambridge Shared Planning's website](#).

Neighbourhood Plans

- 8.37 There are currently no Neighbourhoods Plans in preparation. Under planning reforms, local communities will be able to prepare 'Neighbourhood Priorities Statements' (NPS). These are a lighter-touch alternate to Neighbourhood Plans. The (potential) role of NPS will be explored with parish and town councils as part of the scoping consultation in the preparatory stages of the new Local Plan.

Other matters

North Herts Council's Draft Town Centres Strategy

- 8.38 The Town Centres Strategy was consulted on between 3 December 2025 and 30 January 2026. The Town Centres Strategy is proposed for adoption as part of this Cabinet. There is a separate paper which set out details of this. A supporting Delivery Plan will be prepared during winter 2026 in collaboration with the Economic Development team.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Under (Section 5, paragraph 5.7.18) of the Council's Constitution (the Terms of Reference for Cabinet), the Constitution states that Cabinet may exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority and receive reports on strategic planning matters, applications for, approval/designation, consultation/referendums revocations (or recommend revocation) of neighbourhood plans and orders, (except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Service Director: Place).
- 9.2. The preparation of statutory plans and supporting documents is guided by a range of acts and associated regulations including the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended, the PCPA) and the Localism Act 2011.
- 9.3. Under the Council's Constitution (14.6.10 (b) iv B) all functions relating to National Infrastructure Planning including co-ordination of the Council's response to any consultation, examination or other any other matter concerned with major infrastructure projects, is delegated to the Service Director Place.
- 9.4. New regulatory requirements have been issued for the preparation of local plans. This includes enacting various amendments to the PCPA. The planned annual review of the Council's Constitution in Summer 2026 will be used to ensure that relevant requirements and delegations align with the requirements and language of the new plan-making system.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The general costs of activities identified in this report - including the additional, temporary posts identified in Section 15 below - are met through existing revenue budgets, reserves or benefit from external funding or other arrangements to recover costs.

- 10.2. £20k has been set aside in the budget for any additional work associated with the London Luton Airport DCO application following the conclusion of the Examination from the SoS (Secretary of State), and following the outcome of the Judicial Review and any ongoing work arising from a positive decision, such as implementing monitoring levels and the enforcement of the approved scheme. As above, new regulations provide for cost recovery associated with DCO implementation. Luton Rising have previously indicated a willingness to enter into further agreement(s) with the Host Authorities.

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. Delays to the publishing of regulations relating to Local Plans has meant the Local Plan timetable has needed to be revised to ensure compliance with the new regulations. While the Local Plan can still be prepared within the new 30-month timetable, it is unlikely that the Council will be able to submit the Plan for examination before Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in March 2028. However, key decisions will be taken ahead of this.
- 11.3. As it presently stands, the (constituent authorities of the) new Central and East Hertfordshire & Broxbourne authorities would not be able to start work on a new Unitary Plan covering the new geographies until 1 April 2028. Officers are in discussions with MHCLG and each other on an ongoing basis to monitor plan progress and relevant regulations.
- 11.4. As neighbouring authorities advance their own Local Plans, it is essential to maintain alignment on strategic matters, particularly with Welwyn and Hatfield Council and Stevenage Borough Council who are now confirmed as partners through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Officers continue to hold regular meetings with them and other neighbouring authorities to support constructive and collaborative working relationships. This includes any preparatory work for a future Hertfordshire-wide Strategic Development Strategy (SDS) and its relationship with the Local Plan.
- 11.5. A substantial number of Government consultations affecting the planning system—both plan-making and decision-taking—have recently been issued, with more expected. Officers will continue to monitor these developments closely and assess their implications for ongoing and future work at North Herts.
- 11.6. Resourcing issues across the planning profession remain a concern. The inability to recruit or retain experienced officers poses a risk to delivering the required programme of work for the Local Plan.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. There are not considered to be any direct equality issues arising from this report. Future individual schemes or considerations may well be subject to appropriate review to ensure they comply with latest equality legislative need. Any risks and opportunities identified will also be subject to assessment for impact on those that share a protected characteristic.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. Several of the schemes noted at section 8 will have considerable impact on the environment as they come to fruition. Many of these will be subject to their own statutory requirements for environmental assessment such as Sustainability Appraisal or Environmental Impact Assessment. The need for further assessment, for example where there is no statutory requirement, is considered on a case-by-case basis.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 No new implications arising directly from this report. Staffing and capacity within the planning service is monitored and managed on an on-going basis.
- 15.2 Two permanent posts within the Strategic Planning Service have been filled. A GIS / Digital post is currently being scoped to support the transition to the digitalisation of the new Local Plan – a key aim of the new plan making system. The strategic planning manager post is currently filled on an interim basis and is expected to be advertised in the winter 2026. There is also an agency staff post to support the call for sites work.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Final NPPF main changes

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Rachael Rooney	Interim Strategic Planning Manager	rachael.rooney@north-herts.gov.uk , Tel: 01462 474 328
Nigel Smith	Director of Place	nigel.smith@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474847

Ian Couper	Director of Resources	ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243
Jo Keshishian	Human Resources Operations Manager	Jo.keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474314
Natasha Jindal	Governance Consultant	Natasha.Jindal@north-herts.gov.uk
Tim Everitt	Performance & Risk Officer	Tim.Everitt@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474646
Ellie Hollingsworth	Policy & Strategy Officer	Ellie.Hollingsworth@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Appendix A Final NPPF – summary main changes

Set out below is a summary of the main changes of the final NPPF 2026 compared to the draft NPPF 2025.

General

- National Development Management Policies are to remain non-statutory but are material consideration for the purpose of decision making for applications.
- Weight of existing local plan policy: Where an existing local plan policy is materially inconsistent with the new framework that policy will carry “very limited weight” in planning decisions. This is a slightly relaxed position from the draft which previously said that if existing Local Plan policies were in anyway inconsistent they should carry limited weight.
- Statutory Development Plans: Further details on what they should and should not contain, the time period changing from 20 years in the draft to minimum of 25 years in the final, how housing figures can be used, further details on how the tests of soundness will apply.

Local Plans

- Local Plans period: This has been reduced from a minimum of 15 years to 10 years. A 10 year plan would have a lower total housing requirement than a longer plan, but the annualised figure would stay the same. For North Herts this is currently 1,036 homes per year.
- Test of soundness: the test of ‘realistic’ has been altered to ‘effective’ in how Local Plans should be tested at examination.
- Site allocations: authorities are now required to identify appropriate sites rather than the most appropriate sites in order to reduce the burden on authorities

Decision Making

- Viability:
 - The requirement of standardised viability inputs such as develop profit, benchmark land value, development costs etc have been removed between the draft and final version, with the Government concluding that further work and engagement were required before introducing a standardised system.
 - Greater flexibility for application stage viability has been introduced in recognition of the more difficult economic position. The final reinforces the principle that viability should primarily be tested at plan-making stage but removes the reference to ‘limited’ circumstances where sites may not be able to rely on viability arguments to simply circumstances. In relation to the examples where this might apply (see below), it changes the references from significant/ substantial different to materially

different; and amends costs that were unforeseen to costs that were not taken account of:

- where development differs materially from the typologies tested at plan stage;
 - where a site's characteristics differ significantly from plan assumptions;
 - where abnormal or unforeseen costs arise;
 - where economic circumstances have changed substantially, such as during a recession.
-
- Local Development Orders: Change in emphasis, Local authorities are “strongly encouraged” to make use of local development orders (LDOs) to provide certainty to applicants about the prospects of permission rather than “encouraged” to use LDOs.
 - Planning conditions: The final NPPF keeps the requirement for using “model” planning conditions but now states ‘unless there are strong reasons for using a different planning condition’ rather than ‘unless a different planning condition is more appropriate’.
 - Article 4 Directions: The final NPPF endorses the use of Article 4 Directions to remove permitted development rights where it is necessary to protect local amenity or the well being of the area, such as supporting the vitality and viability of parts of town centres. The final NPPF removes the requirement where such directions relate to changes from non-residential to residential use, they should be limited to situations where they are necessary to avoid wholly unacceptable adverse impacts.

Sustainable Development

Plan-making

- Producing a spatial strategy: Policy S2 introduces an explanation that designations and associated policies for gaps around settlements should only be used where necessary to maintain the separate identities of settlements and their physical separation; and should not apply to land in green belt.

NDMPs

- Presumption in favour of development (Policy S3): The final NPPF adds an explanation of where developments falls partly inside and outside a settlement, then Policies S4 (within Settlements) and S5 (Outside Settlements) should apply to the relevant part.
- For proposals within settlements, Policy S4 keeps the reference to Development should be approved unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects. However in relation to the adverse effects, the text now changes the definition from unacceptable impacts to the test being substantial adverse impacts.

Climate Change

Plan-making

- Planning for Climate Change (Policy CC1): The final NPPF adds a reference to “the objectives and provisions of the Climate Change Act 2004” in relation to local plans taking a proactive approach to mitigating climate change and supporting a transition to net zero.

NDMPs

- Mitigating climate change (Policy CC2): The final NPPF amends the references from “should not increase the extraction of fossil fuels” to “should involve the extraction of fossil fuels.”
- Wildfires (Policy CC3): amendments of the incorporation of suitable measures to the incorporation of proportionate measures.

Housing

Plan-making

- Travellers (Policy HO1): For Spatial Development Strategies, and Local Plans where SDS do not yet exist, the final NPPF adds a reference to “as a minimum over the plan period” in relation to the assessment of permeant and transit site accommodation needs.
- Land for Strategic Development: Policy HO4 references Garden City principles instead of New Town principles in relation to example of design principles.
- Meeting needs of different groups (Policy HO5):
 - Accessibility: To set a proportion of housing required to be delivered to the requirements of M4(2) (accessible and adaptable dwellings) and M4(3) (wheelchair user dwellings) of building regulations is now applied to major sites rather than all sites but those requirements can now exceed local needs, not just reflect them.
 - Tenure mix: The final NPPF has amended the expectations of tenure mix to apply to allocated sites rather than for site of 150 homes or more; and that expectations on tenure mix is now caveated by “where this would be appropriate and deliverable”.
- Build-out rates (Policy HO10): The final NPPF puts much more emphasis on the importance of build out rates both in relation to local authorities allocating sites and developers in delivering existing permissions.

High-quality communications

NDMPs

- Telecommunications (Policy CO1): The final NPPF adds that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of maintaining or improving network coverage, capacity, reliability and resilience, including along rail corridors.

Sustainable use of materials

NDMPs

- Assessing benefits of mineral development (Policy M3): The final NPPF adds 'processing; in addition to mineral extraction in relation to substantial weight.

Effective use of land

Plan-making

- Planning for an effective use of land (Policy L1): The final NPPF adds a further requirement that local plans should set out where particular parts of the plan area, there is scope for intensification through additional development.
- Achieving appropriate densities (Policy L3):
 - Within settlements, residential or mixed-use developments should increase density and that while an area's character should be taken into account in decisions, this should not preclude development which makes the most of an area's potential. However, new text has been added which clarifies that the only exception to this should be "where there is a clear justification that this is either inappropriate or not possible".
 - There is an additional clause in relation to proposals on the outside of settlements but on land at edge of the existing built-up area which is either allocated or has permission, that these should also make the best use of the sites' potential.
 - The consultation draft set a minimum of 50 dwellings per hectare within reasonable walking distance of well-connected stations. The final version reduces this to 35 dwellings per hectare, with a minimum of 45 dwellings per hectare near stations served by at least eight trains per hour. Local Plans are still encouraged to set minimum densities for other locations within their areas; and that these should be considered minimum densities, and these should be exceeded especially in areas of high connectivity.

Green belt

Plan-making

- Altering Green Belt boundaries (Policy GB3): "Exceptional circumstances" are still required for altering green belt boundaries in local plans; these include a local authority being unable to meet its identified need for development in full, having examined all other reasonable options for doing so. However, where a development plan's spatial strategy has identified suitable land around well-connected stations for development, exceptional circumstances do not need to be demonstrated to justify altering green belt boundaries.

NDMPs

- Development which is not inappropriate in the Green Belt (Policy GB7): Housing and mixed-use development around stations defined as “well-connected” will not be considered inappropriate, provided it is of an appropriate scale, does not prejudice long-term development proposals and complies with the NPPF’s “golden rules”.
- Golden Rules (Policy GB8):
 - The NPPF sets out three circumstances in which a site-specific viability assessment may be justified to allow developments not to meet golden rules. In relation to criteria a: previously development land, the final NPPF adds an additional requirement that development proposals also have to show it is demonstrably burdened by costs associated with that previous development which were not taken into account in the viability assessment that informed the local plan.
 - The final NPPF also adds that development proposals that provide contributions significantly below the requirements “will only be acceptable in exceptional cases where fully evidenced and justified”.

Achieving well designed places

NDMPs

- Key principles for well-designed places (Policy DP3): The final NPPF has removed the reference to refuse development proposals that are not well designed. Policy DP3 now says that proposals should be refused if, without clear justification, they conflict with key elements of the design policy, or with any explicit design standards set out in the development plan. It also adds that substantial weight should be given to compliance with relevant development plan policies when assessing the design quality of proposals rather than just in relation to NPPF policies.
- Policy DP3 also now includes a specific reference to women and girls in relation to designing public spaces.

Transport

NDMPs

- Locating development in sustainable locations (Policy TR3):
 - The final NPPF has added an additional clause in relation to ensuring significant adverse impacts from the development on the transport network or highway safety should be mitigated to an acceptable degree using a vision led approach.
 - Addition of reference to women and girls in relation to safe and inclusive streets
 - Additional text added in relation to applying a flexible approach to applying parking standards on the recognition of retail and other large sites which attract a large number of people – this is in the context of making better use of land.

- Assessing transport impacts (Policy TR6): The final NPPF takes a stronger stance in relation to refusing proposals that have a severe adverse impact on transport network or an unacceptable impact on highway safety.
- Public rights of way (policy TR8): There is a change from maintain to a requirement of protect and enhance in relation to public rights of way.

Health

Plan-making

- Planning for healthy communities (Policy HC1): There is now explicit reference to reducing health inequalities.

NDMPs

- Community facilities (policy HC3): There is addition of provide 'new and improved' community facilities rather than simply provide.

Pollution, public protection and security

Plan making

- Planning for clean and safe spaces (Policy P1): In relation to land allocations, additional text has been included to ensure that ground conditions do not constrain development or pose risks to its safe and appropriate delivery, including risks associated with land instability.

NDMPs

- Living conditions and pollution (Policy P3): The final NPPF provides more explicit reference to ensuring suitable mitigation measures to secure acceptable living conditions.

Natural environment

NDMPs

- Protected landscapes (Policy N4): The final NPPF reinserts the requirement that proposals for major development in such areas should be "refused" other than in exceptional circumstances. The draft had said such proposals "should only be supported" in exceptional circumstances.

Historic environment

NDMPs

- Conservation of heritage assets (Policy HE4):

- The final NPPF has removed the reference to 'enhance' in the requirement to conserve and enhance appropriate to an asset's significance
 - Text has been added in relation to avoiding harm "(or where that is not possible minimise harm)"
- Loss of removal of heritage assets (Policy HE10): Archaeological assets has been incorporated into policy HE10 loss or removal of heritage assets.

Glossary

- Definition of reasonable walking distance of a well-connected station: The final NPPF defines reasonable walking distance as around 800 metres, or around 10 minutes. A well-connected station is defined as one within a top 80 Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) by Gross Value Added, served throughout the daytime by at least four trains per hour overall. All of North Herts station lie within the top 60 TTWA (as previously defined in the draft).

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CABINET
22 September 2026

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE TOWN CENTRES STRATEGY ADOPTION

REPORT OF: DIRECTOR – PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR DONNA WRIGHT, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLACE

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

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The adopted [Local Plan 2011-2031](#) stipulates that the Council “prepare and maintain up-to-date town centre strategies to support its strategic policy approach and / or adapt to change. These will be used to inform the approach to retail at the time of the early review of the Local Plan”.
- 1.2 The Town Centres Strategy has been prepared to
- provide additional guidance to Local Plan Policies: ETC3: New retail, leisure and other main town centre development, ETC4: Primary Shopping Frontages, ETC5: Secondary Shopping Frontages and SP4: Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops;
 - Set out the Council's planning priorities for its town centres which can be given appropriate weight in relevant planning decisions; and
 - Act as a ‘bridging document’ pending the approved review of the Local Plan.
- 1.3 Until a new Local Plan is adopted, the Town Centres Strategy provides interim policy guidance to protect each town’s character and identity. It guides developers, stakeholders and planning officers, supports town-centre vitality and viability, and aligns with other council strategies, including the Council Plan and the Economic Development and Sustainability strategies.
- 1.4 The draft Town Centres Strategy has been updated following public consultation. The report outlines the results of that public consultation, the proposed modifications to the Strategy and seeks approval to adopt the Town Centres Strategy to be used as guidance in determining planning applications.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. To adopt the Town Centres Strategy attached as Appendix 1

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 2.2 | That delegated authority is granted to the Director, Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Place to make any minor non-material corrections, including but not limited to cosmetic additions or presentational alterations, to the adopted Town Centres Strategy as considered necessary for publication and publicity. |
| 2.3 | That Officers proceed with the preparation of Delivery Plans for each of the town centres following adoption of the Town Centres Strategy. |

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. To allow the Town Centres Strategy to be adopted as a material planning consideration to support developers, landowners and relevant stakeholders when considering developing proposals and to provide policy advice to development management officers when determining planning applications until superseded by any new Local Plan.
- 3.2. To set key priorities which seek to maintain and enhance the unique character and vitality and viability of the district's four town centres through agreed partnership working and the preparation of Delivery Plan for each town.
- 3.3. To reinforce and deliver the Council's ambitions as set out in the Council Plan (2024 - 2028).

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. None. Consultation has taken place on the draft Town Centres Strategy, modifications have been made in response to the representations made, minor non-material corrections have been made for clarity, including relevant updates in response to changes in planning legislation and to the Evidence base in Part 1 to reflect recently adopted Council documents.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The Executive Member for Place has been briefed on the progress of the Town Centres Strategy. Regular updates on the progress of the Strategy have been provided to Cabinet through various Strategic Planning Matters Reports.
- 5.2. Extensive consultation was undertaken on the scope and preparation of the draft Town Centres Strategy with members of the Strategic Planning Matters Project Board, internally with relevant officers across Council departments and externally with relevant stakeholders, such as the town's Business Improvement Districts and business representatives, as well as the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.
- 5.3. Public Consultation on the draft Town Centres Strategy was undertaken between 3 December 2025 and 30 January 2026, where:
 - Residents, businesses, community groups and partner organisations on our Local Plan database were invited to participate in the consultation;

- Business Improvement District (BID) managers in Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston were asked to promote the Strategy consultation to their members to encourage wider business engagement;
 - A leaflet drop was made to local businesses in Baldock town centre to raise awareness and encourage feedback on the draft Strategy;
 - Recognising the importance of our town centres in supporting local villages, and to encourage wider local and community engagement, Parish Council and the Royston Town Council were asked to promote the draft strategy through their own communication channels;
 - Posters were displayed in the libraries and at our leisure centres encouraging people to engage in the consultation;
 - The draft Strategy was actively promoted on the Council's website and through the Council's various social media channels; and.
 - Members were also informed by email and through Member Information Service (MIS) and requested to promote the consultation through their own communication channels.
- 5.4 Both Officers and the Exec Member for Place attended and presented the draft Strategy for discussion at the, Baldock, Hitchin, Royston, and Letchworth December Community Forum meetings to raise awareness and encourage feedback from members and local communities.
- 5.5 A summary of the comments made in response to the draft Town Centres Strategy has been prepared and is attached as Appendix 2.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 17 July 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. This Town Centres Strategy has been prepared taking into consideration relevant national and local policy and guidance and provides a comprehensive overview and summary of the Council's evidence base for development in and affecting town centres. The starting point for the Town Centres Strategy is the Council's Local Plan and, in particular and sequentially:
- a. The recognition that, at the point of the Local Plan's adoption in November 2022, elements of its retail strategy had been overtaken by events – notably Covid-19 - which fundamentally changed or accelerated change in the retail environment and predictions of future requirements
 - b. The conclusion of the Government Inspector examining the Plan that *"this is no criticism of the Council or its work – these factors could not have been accounted for at the time"*
 - c. That the only basis for remedying this in plan-making terms was through an early review of the plan that, among other matters, *will have particular regard to the identification of the needs for retail, leisure, office and other main town centre uses*
 - d. A recognition that even this early review would take some time and that up-to-date town strategies would be prepared in the interim to bridge the gap and inform

the review. [The Local Plan Review is subject to a separate report to this meeting].

- 7.2 The Town Centres Strategy incorporates advice on a range of changes in national policy and guidance and takes account of the updated evidence in the [2024 Retail and Town Centre Study](#) which has identified there is a need to review the retail policies as part of the New Local Plan given changes in consumer behaviour patterns and the changing role and function of town centres in meeting these demands. It recommends that the retail and town centre policies in the New Local Plan will need to be more flexible in their approach whilst ensuring that any development and improvements within the town centres contributes and strengthens the retail, economic, environmental and social benefits of the town centres as well as reinforcing each town centre's local distinctiveness as a special place to invest, live and visit.
- 7.3 As such, the Strategy addresses the relevant policy criteria identified in the adopted Local Plan by providing more robust guidance for developers and stakeholders that should be taken into consideration for any type of development or improvements within the town centres to promote their vitality and viability.
- 7.4 The Town Centres Strategy is a planning-led document and should be read in conjunction with relevant policies in the adopted Local Plan (see listed below) whilst also taking into consideration other important Council Strategies and projects, such as the Economic Development Strategy, the Churchgate Regeneration Zone project, the Council Plan and the Council's Sustainability Strategy. All these documents together contribute towards the Council's overall strategy for its town centres.
- 7.5 The adopted Local Plan, contains policies with implications for town centres, these include:
- Policy SP4: Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops,
 - Policy ETC3: New retail, leisure and other main town centre development,
 - Policy ETC4: Primary Shopping Frontages and
 - Policy ETC5: Secondary Shopping Frontages.

And is to be read alongside other policies and supporting guidance documents in the Local Plan which will have an impact on development proposals – including:

- Policy D1: Sustainable design
- Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets
- Policy SP13: Historic Environment
- Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability
- Policy SP6: Sustainable transport
- Policy HC1: Community Facilities
- Policy D1: Sustainable Design
- Policy SP10: Healthy Communities
- Developer Contributions SPD
- Parking SPD
- Design Code SDP
- Sustainability SPD

- 7.6 The Strategy has been prepared following similar principles to a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) including reference to relevant policies and evidence and stakeholder engagement in its preparation and has been the subject of formal public consultation, following a resolution by Cabinet in November 2025. This took place between 3 December 2025 and 30 January 2026.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. As outlined in the report to Cabinet in November 2025, the Strategy covers all four town centres of the district: Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Baldock, with considerations and implications for the surrounding context of each centre and their relationship to surrounding villages. It sets out the Council's vision for the town Centres across four generic themes: land use and retail, built environment, transport access and movement and communities.
- 8.2. The Strategy is delivery and development focussed, providing a comprehensive overview and summary of the Council's evidence base for development in and affecting town centres at **Part 1: Town Centres Context**. This section will assist landowners, architects, planners, and stakeholders bringing forward development proposals in understanding the relevant context for North Herts' town centres.
- 8.3. In order to bridge the gap between current and emerging Local Plans and to provide further details and guidance to support compliance with relevant town centre policies in the existing Local Plan, **Part 2: Town Centre Guidance**, sets out a series of Guidance Notes. These Guidance Notes provide supplementary information to inform planning applications for development proposals affecting town centres.
- 8.4. Each of North Herts' town centres have specific strengths and weaknesses, offering their own unique offer and **Part 3: Individual Town Centre Strategies**, provides a vision statement, summary of key priorities for each centre including development opportunities for larger parcels of land and how these could be taken forward through partnership working.
- 8.5 **Part 4: Further Council Actions and Funding Opportunities**, identifies opportunities to support the vitality and viability of the town centres and proposes further actions together with several funding and delivery options that the Council could consider in delivering the ambitions set out within the Strategy.
- 8.6 The **Appendices** are to be read alongside the Strategy. These provide hyperlinks to access full documents listed in the Evidence Base at Part 1, policy recommendations from the Town Centre & Retail Study 2024 supporting Parts 2 and 3, and more detailed evidence notes on each town centre supporting Part 3.
- 8.7 Officers, working together with consultants (Lichfields), have updated the Strategy following public consultation. 84 individual responses were received. Three-quarters of respondents were residents of North Hertfordshire. Other respondents included those from the public sector (including Hertfordshire County Council), parish councils, local businesses, Town Centre BIDs and community groups.
- 8.8 A summary of the representations and responses is attached as Appendix 2. All responses have been read and modifications made to the Strategy as considered

relevant. Other comments raised have been documented and may not resulted in a proposed modification as they may already be addressed within the Strategy or in other Council or Hertfordshire County Council documents and strategies

8.9 In response to the representations, a number of further modifications have been made to the Strategy in relation to:

- (i) The status of the Strategy in relation to planning policy and the Council's role in delivering the Strategy.
 - The status of the strategy has been clarified advising that it has not been prepared as formal policy given the substantive and ongoing changes in the retail environment. However, it follows the general processes and principles for Supplementary Planning Documents and should therefore be treated as interim guidance until formal policy is developed and adopted through the Local Plan review.
 - References have been added to Part 1 and throughout the document to explain the Council's role in delivering the Strategy. This includes working with key stakeholders to prepare Delivery Plans for each town centre. Part 4, covering further actions and funding, has also been updated to set out the next steps following adoption, with preparation of the Delivery Plans identified as the next phase of work.
- (ii) The Strategy recognises the strong functional links between each town centre and the surrounding villages and rural areas that depend on them for services and facilities. It also acknowledges the important role of buses in connecting people who cannot drive or do not have access to a car. These points have been reflected throughout the Strategy, including in the individual town centre sections in Part 3 and the Council's further actions in Part 4.
- (ii) Part 2 guidance notes have been updated to:
 - clarify funding requirements and reference the Developer Contributions SPD in Guidance Note 1, which covers promoting town centre vitality;
 - strengthen Guidance Note 2 on built form, public realm and design by addressing safety, including street lighting and forthcoming national guidance on designing safer streets for women and girls;
 - recognise open spaces and trees as important features of the town's historic character, public realm and built environment in Guidance Note 3 on heritage and historic character;
 - prioritise sustainable travel over private car use and clarify the need for travel and mobility hubs, including provision for disabled people, in Guidance Note 4 on promoting sustainable travel; and
 - address access to public conveniences and reference the Department for Transport's Healthy Streets approach, with the aim of improving air quality, public health and the quality of the public realm, in Guidance Note 5 on community facilities.

- (iv) In Part 3, the vision statements, SWOT analyses and key priorities for each town centre have been updated, where relevant, to address the following shared themes:
- promoting public transport and better connections to railway stations and surrounding villages; integrating sustainable travel options, including walking and cycling; respecting heritage assets, conservation areas and local character; supporting cultural and leisure activities, the evening economy and local markets; and improving the public realm and public facilities.
 - The Strategy also identifies an opportunity to develop and strengthen each town centre's vision through its respective Delivery Plan.
- (v) Part 4 updates references to funding opportunities and notes that these may change, particularly in response to local government reorganisation and devolution arrangements. It also concludes with a new paragraph outlining the next steps for delivering the Strategy after adoption.
- 8.10 Other minor non-material corrections have been made throughout the Strategy for clarity, including relevant updates in response to changes in planning legislation and to the Evidence base in Part 1 to reflect recently adopted Council documents such as the Developer Contributions SPD and the Design Code SPD both recently adopted in June 2026 as well as referencing the 2025 Hertfordshire Growth Board Healthy and Safe Places Framework which sets out a county-wide approach to integrating health, community and recreational infrastructure, supporting well-being, reducing health inequalities and promoting active, sustainable lifestyles within settlements including town centres.
- 8.11 The Strategy has been updated taking into account representations received through the consultation process and is attached at Appendix 1
- 8.12 Subject to approval by Cabinet the Town Centres Strategy will be adopted and will be a material consideration for relevant planning applications and would supersede the Council's previous town centre strategies for Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston prepared between 2004 and 2008.
- 8.13 During preparation and consultation, there has been some comments of the scope of the Town Centres strategy and the suggestion of a more holistic approach encompassing areas such as business support and economic development. Officers' view is that this is, in part, due to an understandable friction between what stakeholders might have reasonably anticipated, based on a 'Plain English' understanding of the Council preparing a strategy for its town centres versus the more focused, planning-based origins set out above.
- 8.14 Officers equally accept that, in the past, there has been a fragmented approach to liaison with key town centre stakeholders. This has often involved seeking views through the lens of a particular Council document or project or has been limited by available capacity. There is a recognised need to reset these relationships and discussions are being held with town centre managers on this basis.
- 8.15 The intention is to move forward with a more holistic approach, holding broader conversations regarding our town centres and appropriately reflecting the issues and

priorities that emerge through these through the most appropriate plans, strategies and projects

- 8.16 The effective delivery of the Strategy – and this renewed working relationship - will require the Council to work closely with several partners and stakeholders. This will include the preparation of Delivery Plans for each centre. These will be high-level plans covering at least five years and focus on delivering the key town centre priorities and further actions identified in Parts 3 and 4 of the Strategy.
- 8.17 These would be aligned with the vision for each centre, set out core objectives, key priorities and actions to guide positive development and strengthen the identity, vitality and viability of each town. It is proposed working across service areas that the Council will lead their preparation, working collaboratively with key partners and stakeholders.
- 8.18 In addition to economic development capacity, funding for a Town Centre Project Officer post within the Place Directorate was previously agreed. This has been vacant for a number of months and is currently undergoing recruitment, see section 15 below on Human Resource implications.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Under the Terms of Reference for Cabinet, paragraph 5.7.18 of the Constitution states that the Cabinet should exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Director: Place. This includes the preparation and adoption of planning strategies and guidance notes which do not form part of the Council Policy Framework.
- 9.2. The preparation of statutory plans and supporting documents is guided by a range of acts and associated regulations including the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the Localism Act 2011.
- 9.3 Supporting documents and strategies to the Local Plan have previously been prepared as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). These had a defined meaning and place within the statutory planning system and were subject to various regulatory requirements.
- 9.4 The Town Centres Strategy has closely followed the *process* for the preparation of an SPD. However, because its content diverges from the policies of the Local Plan – due to the changed circumstances outlined in the report – it was not possible to formally adopt it as an SPD. Due to Government changes to the planning system, it would now not be possible to adopt it as an SPD in any event. It is intended that, subject to future approval, the Town Centres Strategy would be adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning applications.
- 9.5 The weight to be attributed to any policy or policy document or material consideration is a matter for the decision-maker on a case-by-case basis. However, by following the steps outlined above it is considered that a future, adopted strategy could be considered broadly commensurate to a formal SPD and applied as such.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. No new financial implications arising from this report. The general costs of preparing the Town Centres Strategy including consultancy and supplementary staffing costs have been met through existing revenue budgets (see also Human Resources Implications below). £90k was carried forward into 2026/27, an estimated £20k will be spent on updating and finalising the strategy. The remaining budget will be used to progress work on the preparation of the Delivery Plans.
- 10.2. The Town Centre Project Officer post as, referenced in para 15.3, will be funded for 2 years, the total cost of this will be £123k. There is £64k earmarked for this post with the planning reserve, and a further £40k of funding will be secured through a grant from MHCLG. The remaining funding will be from a combination of the existing Town Centre budget and Planning earmarked reserves.

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 Town Centres Strategy is listed as a Corporate Risk relating to a key project in the Council Delivery Plan. As part of current Council Delivery Plan monitoring arrangements, the risk entry is reviewed and updated on a quarterly basis and reported to Cabinet. Not having a Town Centres Strategy in place that provides a strategic direction and overall policy guidance could lead to speculative development that undermines the function of town centres thereby impacting their vitality and viability. A lack of sufficient resource could also lead to delays in developing individual delivery plans and achieving strategic aims. Pending adoption of the Town Centres Strategy, the combination of related risks is assessed as a medium risk.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. There are not considered to be any direct equality issues arising from this report. Future individual schemes identified through the preparation of the Delivery Plans supporting the Town centres Strategy or considerations may well be subject to appropriate review to ensure they comply with latest equality legislative need. Any risks and opportunities identified will also be subject to assessment for impact on those that share a protected characteristic.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known direct Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report and its recommendations; this is a procedural decision.
- 14.2 The adopted Local Plan policies which implement the guidance and priorities within the Town Centres Strategy have been subject to statutory environmental assessment as part of the Local Plan examination. Officers will consider the environmental implications of any developments or improvements within or nearby the town centres when assessing planning applications, when reviewing retail and town centre policies in the updated Local Plan and through the preparation of the Delivery Plans.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no new human resource implications arising from the contents of this report, other than officer requirements to publish the Strategy, which is part of their duties.
- 15.2 A Town Centre Project Officer post was established through a revenue budget growth bid a number of years ago with the intention it would lead on delivery of the Town Centres Strategy. This post was never successfully filled on a permanent basis despite multiple rounds of advertisement and recruitment. Resource for the project has been provided through a combination of agency contractors, consultant support, fixed-term appointments to the establishment post and backfilling by other officers.
- 15.3 The Town Centre Project Officer post is currently vacant and is undergoing recruitment. There is sufficient funding within the town centres budget (see paragraphs 10.1 and 10.2 above) and / or arising from salary underspend from this current vacancy, plus seeking further grant award through the MHCLG – Funded Salary Support for Associated Programme Recruitment through Public Practice, to support the work going forward on the Delivery Plans following final adoption of the Town Centres Strategy by Cabinet. The Place Directorate has successfully recruited staff through Public Practice, an organisation committed to leveraging multidisciplinary built environment skills to address shortages of public sector planners.
- 15.4 Any further officer support required to deliver on the projects and priorities in the Town Centres Strategy will need to be discussed with other senior managers across other directorates regarding work priorities and available resources as appropriate.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix 1: North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy (Sept 2026) and Supporting Appendices
- 16.2 Appendix 2: Summary of Consultation: North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Report Authors:

- 17.1 Nigel Smith, Director: Place
01462 474847 nigel.smith@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.2 Louise Symes, Strategic Infrastructure & Projects Manager
01462 474359 louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk

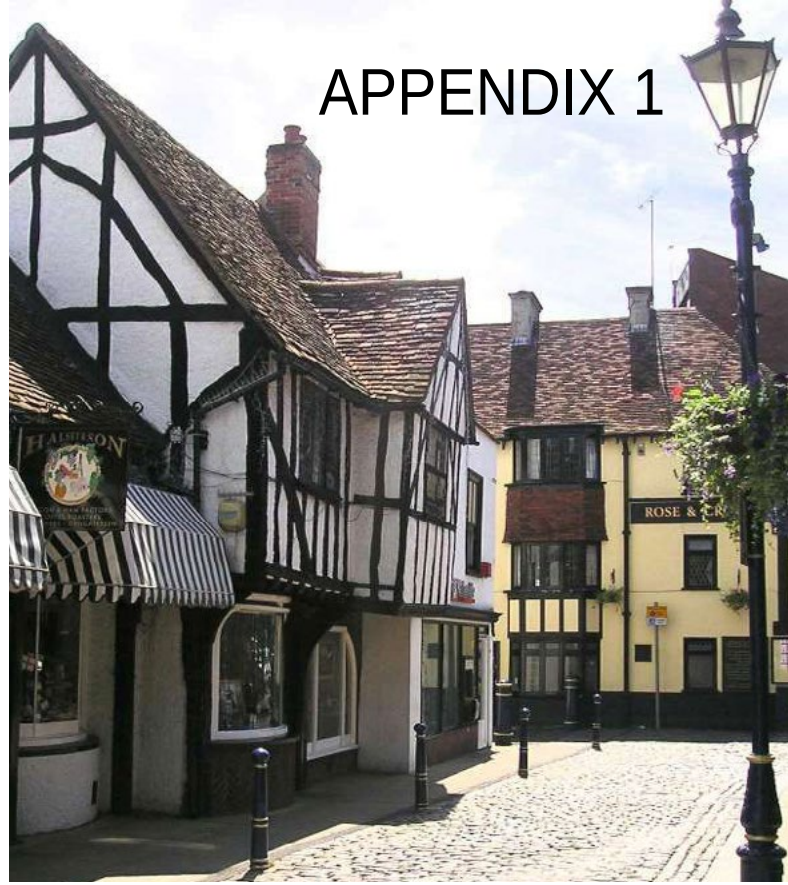
Contributors:

- 17.4 Jodie Penfold, Group Accountant, Ext 4240 jodie.penfold@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.5 Natasha Jindal, Legal Services, Ext 4430 natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.6 Tim Everitt, Performance and Risk Officer, Ext 4646 tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.7 Reuben Ayavoo, Policy & Community Manager, Ext 4212 reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk
- 17.8 Jo Keshishian HR Operations Manager, Ext 4414 jo.keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 [Cabinet Report 19 November 2025 – Draft Town Centres Strategy](#) and associated [Appendix A – Draft North Herts Town Centre Strategy for Public consultation.](#)
- 18.2 [Town Centres and Retail Study \(December 2024\) prepared by Lichfields](#)
- 18.3 [Adopted Local Plan \(2011 – 2031\)](#)
- 18.4 Various [Strategic Planning Matters Reports](#) updating Cabinet at the following meetings:
 - [16 January 2024](#)
 - [19 March 2024](#)
 - [09 July 2024](#)
 - [14 January 2025](#)
 - [24 June 2025.](#)
 - [23 September 2025](#)
 - [20 January 2026](#)
 - [14 April 2026](#)
 - [16 June 2026](#)
- 18.5 Various [MIS Notes](#) published in February 2024, June 2024, and January 2026 available upon request.

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Town Centres Strategy 2026-2030



Executive summary

This Strategy sets out North Hertfordshire District Council's vision, evidence base and priorities for four town centres (Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston, and Baldock) to guide development, investment, and Council action ahead of the review of the North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted 2022). It supersedes the Council's previous town centre strategies (2004-2008).

The Strategy has been prepared following the general principles of a Supplementary Planning Document and, while not formal planning policy, should be treated as an important material consideration in determining planning applications affecting town centres. It draws on updated 2023/24 evidence reflecting the impacts of Covid-19, e-commerce and cost-of-living pressures, together with an independent resident survey (1,001 respondents), a stakeholder workshop and consultation with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), landowners, and town councils. The Strategy will be followed by town-specific Delivery Plans covering a period of at least five years.

Structure of the Strategy

- Part 1** – Town Centre Context: summarises the evidence base across four themes - land use and retail; built environment; transport, access and movement; and community.
- Part 2** – Town Centre Guidance: Guidance Notes bridging the adopted and emerging Local Plan to inform interpretation of current town centre policy.
- Part 3** – Individual Town Centre Strategies: a vision, SWOT analysis and set of key priorities for each of the four towns.
- Part 4** – Further Council Actions: cross-cutting actions across the four themes, together with a summary of funding and delivery options.

Evidence of retail and leisure need

Updated capacity projections indicate no pressing requirement to allocate additional sites for major retail or leisure development over the next decade beyond those already identified in the current Local Plan. Combined retail and food & beverage floorspace need is projected to grow cumulatively to around 5,170 sq.m (gross) by 2036, the majority of which could be met by reoccupying vacant units rather than new development.

Letchworth Garden City has the greatest concentration of vacant floorspace and, reflecting overlapping catchments and population growth from planned development, has the most potential to accommodate capacity redistributed from Hitchin and Baldock. Existing and Local Plan mixed-use allocations (including HT11, HT12, LG19, LG21 and RY12) are considered sufficient to meet any long-term residual need.

Town centre visions and priorities

Hitchin

North Herts' largest town and principal shopping and commercial centre, valued for its historic market-town character and river setting. The vision for the town centre is to maintain this character while creating an attractive, mixed-use, accessible and lively centre, optimising underused assets such as the River Hiz and St Mary's Church.

Key priorities:

- Delivering the Churchgate Regeneration Zone as a mixed-use, significant development.
- Joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding improvements.
- Development of a Cultural Economy Strategy.
- Strengthening Hitchin's role as a sustainable transport hub.

Letchworth Garden City

The second largest town and the country's first Garden City, with distinctive heritage stewarded by the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. The vision for the centre is to serve as a civic and social core for North Herts, that upholds Garden City principles while supporting future growth, investment, and resident and business opportunities.

Key priorities:

- Town centre development opportunities and repurposing of vacant units.
- Enhancement of The Wynd and the markets' offer.
- Growing the evening economy.
- Improved connectivity and links, including improvements to the station forecourt.

Royston

A market town with a rich heritage including Royston Cave, Royston Museum and Priory Memorial Gardens. The vision is a thriving centre with a clearly identifiable, vibrant heart built on heritage, culture, and sustainable travel.

Key priorities:

- Promoting Royston's key heritage assets and exploring the potential for a Destination Management Organisation.
- Supporting independent and speciality operators as the centre evolves.
- Improving the public realm.
- Expanding the market offer.

Baldock

North Herts' smallest market town, with a historic High Street, strong pedestrian character, and café culture. The vision is to maximise these strengths and capture the benefits of significant planned growth around the town as new residents and workers visit and spend in the centre.

Key priorities:

- Managing the growth and evolution of the centre.
- Improving connectivity.
- Ongoing monitoring of town centre health.
- Capturing the benefits of planned growth for the town centre.

Delivery and funding

Delivery of the Strategy cannot be achieved by the Council alone and will depend on close, ongoing coordination with the BIDs, the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, town councils, landowners, and other stakeholders. The Strategy identifies a range of potential public and private funding sources, including government growth and heritage funds, developer contributions, and public-private partnerships, that the Council may draw on to implement the identified priorities.

Next steps

Following adoption, the Strategy will inform planning decisions and future Local Plan policy and will be put into practice through town-specific Delivery Plans setting out detailed objectives, actions and monitoring arrangements for each centre.

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Foreword

Introduction

This Town Centres Strategy will support development in and surrounding North Hertfordshire's four town centres of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Baldock, setting out the Council's vision for the town centres across the following themes:

Land use and retail

The Council will ensure that any significant development within the town centres contributes and strengthens the economic, environmental and social benefits of the town centre as well as reinforcing its local distinctiveness as a special place to invest, live and visit. Built environment

Built environment

The Council requires high quality design from landowners and developers to develop and maintain buildings, the built form, the public realm and open spaces in town centres that will reinforce the local distinctiveness of the town centres, mitigate climate change, support ecological networks and have regard to adopted and emerging design guides, design codes and other guidance as agreed with the Council

Transport, access and movement

The Council will seek to provide inclusive and convenient sustainable transport and active travel options for all users to move with autonomy to support the economic vitality of the town centres as competitive hubs for resources, amenities and experiences, opportunities for social interaction and promoting physical health and well-being.

Community

The Council will utilise the planning system to facilitate social interactions, and the creation of healthy, inclusive communities. The town centres can support community well-being with access to facilities, secure environments and opportunities to thrive.

The Strategy is delivery and development focused, providing a comprehensive overview and summary of the Council's evidence base for development in and affecting town centres at **Part 1**. This part will assist landowners, architects, planners, and stakeholders bringing forward development proposals in understanding the relevant context for North Herts' town centres. It should be noted that the Strategy sits at a high level and will be supported by Delivery Plans for each of the four towns. While the Strategy is a 'point-in-time' document, the Delivery Plans will be kept updated to reflect the latest evidence.

North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted in November 2022, and the Council is currently progressing the Local Plan Update. In order to bridge the gap between current and emerging Local Plan and provide further details and guidance to support compliance with relevant town centre policies in the existing Local Plan, **Part 2** sets out a series of Guidance Notes. These Guidance Notes will provide supplementary information to inform planning applications for development proposals affecting town centres.

Each of North Herts' town centres has specific strengths and challenges, each with a unique offer, and **Part 3** provides a summary of key priorities for each centre. These priorities are informed by the stakeholder consultation and the evidence gathered.

The Strategy then sets out key actions and funding options for the Council at **Part 4**, including a summary of risks and opportunities, and suggested approaches for delivery, in addition to recommendations of suggested Further Actions to be taken forward by the Council. On-going engagement and support of key identified partners and stakeholders will be important in terms of delivering the identified priorities for each of the town centres and the recommended further actions.

The Appendices are to be read alongside the Strategy. These provide hyperlinks to access full documents listed in the Evidence Base at **Part 1**, policy recommendations from the Town Centre & Retail Study 2024 supporting **Parts 2 and 3**, and more detailed evidence notes on each town centre supporting **Part 3**¹.

Overview

This planning-based Town Centres Strategy draws together clear threads from the existing evidence and stakeholder consultation. It interprets relevant Local Plan policies through **guidance** and summarises challenges and opportunities through **SWOT analysis**, presenting the findings as a series of **key priorities**.

¹ The appendices to this Strategy provide a baseline for each town centre, which will be reviewed and updated as part of the delivery plans and the emerging Local Plan using the most current datasets available. The Strategy is a live document and will be updated as new evidence emerges.

How to read this document

The Town Centres Strategy will serve various roles for stakeholders living, visiting, working and investing in North Herts' town centres. As a guide to using this document, example use cases for each stakeholder are summarised below:

- **Council members and officers:** Predominantly focused on Parts 3 and 4, summarising priorities for town centres and next steps and potential funding and delivery scenarios. Part 4, while predominantly applicable to Council Members and Officers, will be of interest for town centre stakeholders to understand how the Council may bring the priorities forward.
- **Town centre stakeholders [business improvement districts (BIDs), residents, businesses etc.]:** Part 3 will be of most interest, informing stakeholders of the Council's key priorities for the centres identified through the planning-based strategy. Part 1 will also provide details of the Council's previous work, evidence base and decisions.
- **Landowners and developers:** Part 3 will provide a steer on the Council's planning-based priorities for the centres, whilst Part 2 will assist with understanding of existing Local Plan policies and Part 1 provides a summary of the Council's broader plans and ambitions.
- **Consultants and development professionals:** Will utilise Part 1 to provide references to key evidence, Part 2 to inform interpretation of Local Plan policies and Part 3 to understand key priorities for delivery within the respective centre. Part 1: Town Centre Context

Image: Market Square, Hitchin



Part 1: Town centre context

1A: Introduction and context

Introduction

In 2022, the Council adopted its Local Plan, a plan which allocates development sites and provides policy to guide developers and development decision-makers over the period 2011-2031. The town centre policies for the district are set out in the Local Plan. These policies establish the amount of retail required to meet the projected population growth and also allocates parcels of land for retail/mixed use development. The policies were developed through evidence gathering from experts and stakeholders and were subject to both public consultation and formal examination by the government's appointed Planning Inspector.

The evidence for the retail and town centre policies in the Local Plan was published in 2016 and provides data to 2031. In 2023, the Council commissioned new evidence for the town centres to take account of the impact of Covid-19, online shopping, the cost-of-living increases, and new population projections to provide fresh retail needs projections to 2031 and 2036.

This Strategy takes account of this updated evidence and its implications for policy and strategy in the context of the North Herts' town centres that informed the planning policy approach set out in the Council's 2022 Local Plan. Following consultation and adoption by the Council's Cabinet, this Town Centres Strategy will inform future policies, strategies and decisions.

This Town Centres Strategy covers all four town centres and will supersede the Council's previous town centre strategies (2004-2008) upon adoption. It will be followed by a suite of Delivery Plans for each town centre with a focus on delivering the key town centre priorities and further actions identified within this Strategy.



Image: Letchworth 1910



Image: Baldock 1965



Image: Royston 1935



Image: Hitchin

North Herts' towns

North Herts is a rural district with four historic towns, a bounty of charming villages and protected townscapes and landscapes. The district has strong transport links by rail and road (A1 and A505), and economic interactions with major settlements that surround it: Cambridge to the north-east, Stevenage to the east, London to the south and Luton to the west. These complement the retail, leisure, business and entertainment offer for the residents and businesses in North Herts. In turn, the district attracts visitors and investors from these and other nearby settlements.

Hitchin

Is the largest North Herts town, with a 2021 Census population of 35,220, and dates back to at least the 7th century. The town centre has a medieval layout and developed out from its marketplace, alongside the River Hiz. The town's trade developed with agricultural goods sales including lavender, corn and malt. Hitchin expanded from the 19th century when it was connected to the Great Northern rail line from London on the Cambridge branch line, and later in the 20th century with the M1 via the A505 to the west, and the A1 (M) to the east via the A602 road connections.

Letchworth Garden City (Letchworth)

Is the second largest town in North Herts with a 2021 Census population of 33,990. It has developed from an ancient parish, as noted in the Domesday Book of 1086, to the world's first Garden City in 1903. The town was connected to the Great Northern East Coast rail line to London with its Cambridge branch line in 1903, and had its first Garden City homes completed in 1904. The modern town was established by investors, who bought up land to create the world's first Garden City. Much of the town's industrial, office and retail premises are now owned by a charity, the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. The A1(M) to the east directly connects the Garden City to the national road network.



Royston

Is the third largest town in North Herts with a 2021 Census population of 17,448. It is located at a crossroads of the Roman Ermine Street and the prehistoric Icknield Way. It was once a settlement straddling both Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. Its market charter was granted by Richard I in 1189 and the market currently takes place every Wednesday and Saturday. A Corn Exchange opened in 1829 and is now home to retail premises. The town is linked to London and Cambridge by the East Coast Cambridge rail branch line and to the national road network via the A10 and A505.

Baldock

Is North Herts' smallest market town with a 2021 Census population of 10,615. As a prehistoric town, Baldock town centre has mainly 14th- to 16th-century buildings. Its wide High Street was formed by the demolition of up to three rows of buildings and now serves as a through road with parking and outdoor seating areas. The Great North Road and the Icknield Way traverse Baldock and the town has traditionally been a resting point along these routes. Baldock is also on Cambridge branch railway line.

The Strategy recognises the strong functional relationship between each town centre and the surrounding villages and rural areas that rely on them for services and facilities. The role of buses in linking these is critical for people who cannot drive or do not have access to a car.

1B: The Council's role

The Council has a strategic role in town centre management and renewal. This is acknowledged in its Council Plan covering the period 2024-2028 which includes four priorities:

Thriving communities: Reducing health inequalities by working closely with partners like Everyone Active, to deliver physical activity programmes for older adults and less active residents. Continuing our commitment to providing grants to local organisations and investing in projects to strengthen the fabric of the district's towns and villages and a continued focus on our community safety priorities to foster safer and more inclusive communities.

Accessible services: The Council will continue modernising its services by enhancing online accessibility, simplifying customer experiences, and investing in facilities like leisure centres and parks.

Responsible growth: As the Local Plan continues to be implemented, North Herts will see much-needed housing and responsible development that considers the district's infrastructure and sustainability needs. Strategies to rejuvenate town centres and support local businesses are also central to the plan.

Sustainability: The Council strives for sustainable service delivery both in terms of budget setting and protecting our environment. Responding to the climate and ecological emergencies, the council is committing to reducing carbon emissions and improving biodiversity.

The priority of Responsible Growth directly supports the creation of a new Town Centres Strategy for North Herts, including individual town-specific delivery plans:

We also want to support economic growth across our district. We will prepare Town Centre Strategies and an Economic Development and Tourism Strategy to outline our approach to enhancing our town centres, business engagement and support, tourism, and emerging economic growth opportunities. We will work closely with businesses and other partners to deliver on our key objectives.

Whilst Responsible Growth is the key priority for this Strategy, the other three priorities of the Council Plan will also contribute to the success of the town centres through its service delivery in working together with partners and the community. The Strategy cannot be delivered by the Council alone and will be dependent on close collaboration with key partners – including business groups such as the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), landlords and leaseholders of town centre premises, community and other organisations – who may best work together to protect and enhance the economic, environmental and social benefits of the district's town centres.

These benefits would include increases in visitors to the town centres, with associated uplifts in spending, alongside more sustainable linked trips within and across the towns and efforts to support the diverse and resilient mix of uses in the centres that will continue to serve residents, visitors and businesses within the centres.

The Council has collaborated with stakeholders including residents and visitors, local organisations, adjacent local authorities, and economic partnerships in producing this Town Centres Strategy. This has included an independent public survey of 1,001 residents by mobile and landline telephone in January to February 2024, a workshop with stakeholders² with an interest in the district's town centres in June 2024 and discussions with relevant BIDs, landowners and Royston Town Council. This Strategy has also been formally consulted upon, including with developers, key stakeholders, local businesses and members of the public.

The Strategy will be supported by Delivery Plans for each of the four towns. These will be high-level plans covering at least five years and focus on delivering the key town centre priorities and further actions identified in Parts 3 and 4 of this Strategy. These would be aligned with the vision for each centre, set out core objectives, key priorities and actions to guide positive development and strengthen the identity, vitality and viability of each town. The Council will lead their preparation, working collaboratively with key partners and stakeholders.

² Stakeholders invited to the workshop include: Hertfordshire Futures, Herts County Council, Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust, Baldock Town Partnership, Baldock Bygrave and Clothall Planning Group, Baldock Events Forum, Hitchin Forum – Transport and Planning Group, The Hitchin Society, Hitchin Market Traders Association, Hitchin Historical Society, Hitchin Youth Trust, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, Royston Town Council, Royston Community Association, On Our Doorstep, North Hertfordshire College, North Herts Minority Ethnic Forum, Martin Group, Visit Hitchin (Business Improvement District), Love Letchworth (Business Improvement District), Royston First (Business Improvement District), settle, Martin Group, Decarbonise Letchworth (Transition Town Letchworth), Garden Square, Town House Publishing, John Shilcock, North Hertfordshire District Council Teams (Community Partnerships, Enterprise, Development Management, Strategic Planning) and Neighbouring authorities (St. Albans, Luton, East Hertfordshire District Council, Welwyn Hatfield, South Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Uttlesford, Stevenage).

1C: The purpose of the town centres strategy

This Town Centres Strategy is to be read in conjunction with North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted 2022), providing town centre businesses, residents, developers and other stakeholders with guidance on the interpretation of relevant town centre policies, and the priorities for the respective centres.

The Town Centres Strategy will provide clear guidance to support and maintain each town's unique successful qualities and place identities, and to improve the vitality and viability of each town centre to ensure that change and development occur in a positive way while the Local Plan is under review. The guidance and recommendations will also inform the Council's future Local Plan policies.

Given the substantive and ongoing changes in the retail environment, this Strategy has not been prepared as formal planning policy. However, it has followed the general processes and principles for Supplementary Planning Documents and should be appropriately interpreted as interim guidance until such time as formal policy is advanced and adopted through the Local Plan review.

The Strategy should be given weight as an important material consideration in the assessment and determination of planning applications in and surrounding North Hertfordshire's four town centres of Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and Baldock. The Strategy supersedes the Council's previous suite of Town Centre Strategies (2004-2008).

Part 1 sets out the Council's evidence base for development in and affecting town centres.

Part 2 provides the Guidance Notes providing supplementary information to support compliance with relevant town centre policies.

Part 3 focuses on the strategies and priorities for North Herts' town centres.

Part 4 summarises the next steps, options and key considerations for delivery and funding.

The following sections have been divided into four themes for ease of reference:

Land use and retail

Built environment

Transport, access and movement

Community

1D: Town centres evidence

Further information on **Part 1: Town Centre Context** is found in **Appendix 1: Resource List and Hyperlinks**

Introduction

This section focuses on the evidence base which will underpin the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy. Each part is structured by a strategic theme and starts by outlining the relevant Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) policies to provide the policy context for each theme. It then outlines which documents from North Hertfordshire's evidence base relate to each theme and explains how each document relates to town centres. Finally, it summarises the recommendations and guidelines that each piece of evidence provides for town centres in the District.

This chapter explains how each document/set of documents can inform the North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy and ultimately, how they help meet the Council's Local Plan goals and vision. These local policy and evidence documents are underpinned by relevant national policy and guidance.

Theme 1: Land use and retail

Relevant subthemes:

Retail Needs, Allocations, Designations, and Impact Assessments; Vitality and Viability in the Town Centres.

NPPF sections of relevance:

Chapter 8: Ensuring the vitality of town centres

Local plan policies of relevance:

- **Policy ETC3:** New Retail, Leisure and Other Main Town Centre Development
- **Policy ETC4:** Primary Shopping Frontages
- **Policy ETC5:** Secondary Shopping Frontages
- **Policy SP4:** Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops.

Appendices are to be read alongside the Strategy, setting out key supporting details. These include:

Appendix 1 lists the supporting Evidence Base documents, including hyperlinks.

Appendix 2 extracts the policy recommendations from the Town Centre & Retail Study 2024.

Appendix 3 provides detailed evidence notes for each town centre.

Relevant evidence

BID brochures

BID brochure – Hitchin (Visit Hitchin BID, 2024): The brochure explains how the Hitchin BID is working to support businesses and the town centre, for the 2024-29 business plan.

The recommendations developed for the town centre include the following:

- New initiatives to encourage the “experience economy”.
- Increase promotions in quieter areas of the Town Centre to encourage visitors to stay longer.
- Increase business support on a local and national level.
- Improvement to town centre parking and accessibility.
- Force the pace of the Council's Town Centre Strategy.

The objectives of the BID fall under four headings: vibrant, clean & safe, promoted, and business support. Under ‘vibrant’, initiatives include winter and summer displays, events, trails and activities. ‘Clean & safe’ focuses on the teams of Day and Night Rangers, measures to reduce crime, and deep cleaning of main streets in the town centres. Initiatives to promote Hitchin include developing the experience economy in the town, producing publications to promote the town centre, and promoting the town online through the VisitHitchin brand. Business support actions include business representation, support for regeneration projects, training sessions and the ‘H-Town Pounds’ scheme.

BID brochure – Letchworth Garden City (Love Letchworth BID, 2024): The brochure outlines the priorities and objectives for the BID which have been proposed for the next five years (Starting 2024). They include: (1) a 21st century Garden City which is connected to its business community, residents, and visitors; (2) a vibrant ‘Go To’ place which is attractive for everyone in Letchworth; and (3) a place that has strong sense of identity and is recognised locally, nationally, and internationally. Letchworth BID propose to undertake the following activities:

- Organise an annual calendar of events, campaigns and street entertainment.
- Introduce ‘shop local’ promotional opportunities and loyalty schemes.
- Maximise marketing and promotional opportunities of the town centre.
- Enhance landscaping, greenery and planting across the town centre.

- Maintain and extend the operation of CCTV cameras across the town centre to help address anti-social behaviour and crime.
- Coordinate an enhanced business waste collection service, including recycling.
- Be the voice of businesses in the wider town centre meetings, such as the Town Centre Recovery Group and Sustainable Travel Group.
- Explore opportunities for businesses to reduce overheads by working and seeking services collectively as a BID.

BID brochure – Royston (Royston First BID, 2024): the brochure outlines the ambitions and initiatives for Royston BID over the next five years including town investment events, smart radios, new industrial estate signage to assist with deliveries, youth employment initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour and support youth, a ShopSafe app to protect employees and customers, fire extinguisher and first aid training for businesses and employees, quarterly networking events and digital signage to provide free advertising space for businesses.



Image: Market Square, Hitchin

How do BID brochures inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The BID Brochures outline proposals and ambitions which are unique to improving the business prospects within each town centre, which have informed the general principles and measures within this Strategy. The BID Brochures contribute towards meeting the Local Plan's vision of North Herts as "attractive and vibrant" with a "robust and prosperous economy", and generally boost the "viability and vitality" of the town centres.

Recovery reports for Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth GC and Royston (People & Places, 2022): These are part of a district-wide initiative by the Council to work with key stakeholders in Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth GC, and Royston. Published in 2022.

In the short term, the reports outline a Covid-19 recovery plan for its town centres. In the medium to longer-term, they set out a development strategy framework to assist town centres in developing successfully over the next decade.

They provide the following recommendations:

- Finalise the development plan and 'forward framework': Key stakeholder organisations to review and comment on the draft development plan and its forward framework to enable People & Places (a partnership independent of the Council with a principal goal of revitalising town centres) to finalise it.
- Publish a stakeholder summary: A short, illustrated version of the development plan findings can be published by People & Places for wider distribution, possibly supported by an accompanying video presentation.
- Initial business engagement and survey: The publication of the summary should be used to begin engagement with businesses through visits, meetings and a survey to gauge their perceptions, priorities and reaction to proposals.
- Meetings of theme-based sub-groups: to discuss the development of proposals for partnership working/governance.
- Partnership development and governance: Existing stakeholders as well as business representatives need to determine the partnership development and governance arrangements for revitalising Baldock's town centre. This includes focusing on the representation and roles for a core group responsible and equipped to manage the coordination of activity, including identifying resources, communication and engagement with wider stakeholders.
- Determine initial delivery priorities: The evolving partnership needs to determine initial delivery priorities that underpin the long-term strategy and capacity, as well as demonstrate 'quick wins' to stakeholders and the wider community. The Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) provides an initial and flexible injection of funds to help achieve this.

Image: Hitchin



How do the recovery reports inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The recommendations of the recovery reports provide governance advice for preparing strategies to improve town centres, including how stakeholders – including the Council and other local bodies and businesses – can best collaborate to implement the proposals, as well as the recovery strategy more generally.

Town centre strategies (2004-2008)

Town centre strategy – Hitchin (NHDC, 2005):

Published in 2005, the Hitchin strategy sets out a vision and key aims that acknowledge the historic character of Hitchin and propose the enhancement of its town centre to serve the local community and attract visitors.

The strategy aims to guide physical development and maximise the future viability and vitality of Hitchin town centre, whilst emphasising its historic character, its local distinctiveness and the needs of its local community. The strategy allocated five key development sites at Paynes Park; Crown House; Post Office; Ransoms; plus Churchgate and its environs. Notably, Crown House, the old Post Office Site, Ransoms and part of the rear of Paynes Park have been developed since the initial publication of the strategy, providing mixed-use developments comprising mostly residential with retail at ground floor level.

Town centre strategy – Letchworth GC (NHDC, 2006): Published in 2006, the Strategy sets out the vision, objectives and planning strategy for the town centre including the allocation of opportunity sites. The Strategy outlines the proposed approach towards conservation management and urban design in the centre, as well as proposals for improving public realm and transport.

It proposes to expand the town centre's retail provision with increased floorspace and more stores, accommodating for greater provision of smaller specialist stores and a greater choice in food shopping, as well as ensuring that its character and design features as the first Garden City are protected and enhanced. Additionally, it explains that tourism, business and investment in the town centre will be promoted.

It proposes measures to improve the public realm and pedestrian environment, to attract visitors and encourage them to spend time there and recognises that more visitors will require improved

parking management, better security, improved public transport, and improved facilities for walking and cycling.

The Strategy also seeks to ensure that open spaces and gardens that contribute to the landscape character of the Garden City are protected and enhanced for their amenity and environmental value including biodiversity.

Town centre strategy – Royston (NHDC, 2008):

Published in 2008, the Royston strategy sets out the Council's vision and aims for the town centre in the next 15 years. Seven opportunity sites were identified as potential locations for development.

The Royston Town Centre Strategy highlighted that through traffic is directed onto local distributor roads outside of the main town centre shopping areas. While allowing access to the town centre businesses, through traffic can interrupt and detract from the appearance, amenity of the town centre and ease of pedestrian movements.

Town centre strategy – Baldock (NHDC, 2004):

Published in 2004, the Baldock strategy promotes opportunities for enhancement of the town centre's street scene.

The Strategy for Baldock also outlines a number of improvements to the town centre following the opening of the Baldock Bypass, including retaining the High Street as a wide, open space when undertaking any future enhancements, and respecting the historic layout and character of the town centre through enhancements to the streets and new developments.

The Strategy also seeks to continue to encourage retail and specialist shops into the town centre, improve and promote the Baldock Market and the use of the market area for other events, develop a strong Chamber of Trade, and promoting Baldock's heritage, cultural and leisure facilities.



How do the existing town centre strategies for the North Herts towns inform the new North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

Although superseded following the adoption of this Strategy, the previous North Herts Town Centre Strategies provide useful context, as their structure and recommendations can be transferable across the documents and across different towns. Further, the set of documents directly address issues of conservation, heritage character, public transport, economic vitality, and viability, all of which are issues which help meet the goals of the town centre vision

North Hertfordshire town centres & retail study (Lichfields, 2024): The study includes an assessment of future retail and leisure-related development needs within the District's main town centres of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth, and Royston.

Since the previous studies, amendments to national planning policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Use Classes Order (UCO) have allowed for greater flexibility of uses within town centres, without requiring planning permission, through the integration of Use Class E. Key trends, such as the implications of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, continue to affect the high street and demand for town centre uses, which means town centres have had to change and diversify over the past years. Shopping behaviour will continue to change, subject to other emerging changes and uncertainties, and town centres will need to respond by providing a combined retail and leisure experience.

There is likely to be a shift from retail space to more food and beverage and leisure, entertainment, and cultural uses, with vacant shop premises converting to these uses. This also provides an opportunity for a flexible approach to new formats and uses where they would support the overall vitality and viability of centres and reoccupy long-term vacant premises. Such uses could be encouraged where they complement the existing mix of uses in the area and would support the evening economy across the District's town centres. Not all vacant units will be suitable for conversion to these uses; therefore, new development may be required to accommodate some new uses.

The combined cumulative total floorspace capacity projections for all retail and food and beverage floorspace is just over 5,000 sq.m gross up to 2036. Based on a reasonable reduction in shop vacancy rates, reoccupied space could in theory accommodate around three quarters of the projected need up to 2036. However, these floorspace projections should not be adopted as rigid targets, nor as maximum or minimum requirements, but be viewed as broad guidance and as a starting point for the review of site-specific allocations and development management policies.

The capacity projections set out at Appendix 3, 4, and 5 of the 2024 Town Centres & Retail Study suggest no pressing requirements to allocate new sites for major retail or commercial leisure developments to accommodate projected growth for the next decade. The priority in the short- to medium-term would be for the reoccupation of vacant shop units, with existing mixed-use development allocations and new facilities in the Strategic Housing Sites being sufficient to cover any long-term residual need.

Recommendations:

- Regarding town centre growth, national policy requires that a range of suitable sites should be allocated to meet the retail development needs of a variety of scales and types, to accommodate for at least ten years and preferably up to 2036. The main concentration of vacant shop floorspace is in Letchworth, which in turn means it has the most potential to accommodate growth alongside existing allocations.
- The potential to redistribute capacity from Baldock and Hitchin to Letchworth should be explored, with opportunities to reoccupy vacated retail spaces across other town centre uses considered viable.
- The leisure expenditure projections indicate there may be potential to accommodate an additional 1,700 sq.m gross of commercial leisure and cultural floorspace by 2036, which could include any combination of two medium-sized health and fitness facilities, new leisure innovations and small-scale tourist attractions and cultural facilities. As main town centre uses, these facilities should be directed to town centre locations. The location and distribution of any new facilities would depend on the nature of the proposal and operator interest. However, it is expected that these facilities would be located within the district's larger towns, unless suitable alternative town centre opportunities present themselves.



Image: Sun Street, Hitchin

- Overall, North Herts has a reasonably strong evening economy, particularly in terms of restaurant uses. The emerging Local Plan review should recognise and foster the potential for uses that enhance the evening and night-time economy in centres, albeit recognising potential negative environmental and amenity effects and considering appropriate management strategies and mitigation measures.
- No change to the existing hierarchy of centres is considered necessary. The network of town, village and neighbourhood centres should be protected and enhanced to ensure sustainable shopping patterns and that there is appropriate accessibility to important facilities for all sections of the community.
- The need for town centre boundaries and primary/secondary shopping frontages should be reconsidered, for example in Baldock, where a separate town centre boundary and a defined secondary shopping frontage is potentially unnecessary.
- The primary shopping area (PSA) designation can fulfil the purposes of both primary and secondary frontages in most town centres. Relatively low retail floorspace capacity projections suggest there is no need to extend the existing town centre boundaries to accommodate future growth, but longer-term projections of an under-supply of floorspace implies a contraction is also unwarranted. However, as town centre boundaries are quite widely drawn in most centres, predominantly residential areas on the peripheries of town centres could be removed. Notably, main town centre uses (as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework) would continue to be protected within town centre boundaries.

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Image: St Mary's Church, Hitchin



How does the town centres & retail study inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The Study informs the overall guidance of the North Herts Town Centres Strategy through updated evidence for retail and leisure floorspace capacity, as well as future recommendations for amendments to town centre boundaries and shopping frontages. The Study Appendices include town centre health checks, which inform the individual strengths and weaknesses of each town centre, and recommendations for subsequent priorities for future growth of the town centres, which in turn, can help meet the Local Plan's vision of a "robust and prosperous economy"..

Developer contributions supplementary planning document (NHDC, 2026): This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) sets out detailed guidance on the type and scale of developer contributions that will be sought to support new development in North Hertfordshire. It contains a section on the economy and town centres. It states that in the town centres, contributions towards future town centre public realm enhancements will be sought from relevant major development schemes, including, but not necessarily limited to:

- schemes for development within existing town centres;
- schemes for out-of-centre development where the contributions may help preserve the vitality and/or viability of the existing centre(s); and
- schemes elsewhere that may result in a substantive increase in footfall in existing town centres.

It also states that improvements to the public realm will not necessarily be confined to the main town centres. Where appropriate, the Council will seek contributions towards public realm improvements in smaller centres and other areas which play an important role in defining place and supporting the day-to-day function of the built environment. Priorities for public realm enhancements may be identified in Neighbourhood Plans or other locally led strategies such as Parish Plans. The Council may also seek contributions towards the ongoing maintenance of any public realm improvements provided.

How does the developer contributions SPD inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The SPD provides guidance on considerations for developers when submitting applications for town centre development, and recommends where and to what type of town centre these contributions should be targeted. This is relevant to the Strategy and will help achieve the Council's vision of North Hertfordshire being an "attractive and vibrant place" where "vitality and viability" has been safeguarded.

North Hertfordshire economic development strategy: The Council adopted its new Economic Development Strategy for the District in July 2025. The strategy is aligned with the Council's economic aspirations, priorities and economic vision. The Council Plan (2024-2028) sets out the importance of 'Responsible Growth'. This demonstrates a clear commitment has been made to "support economic growth across the district", and to "work closely with businesses and other partners to deliver on our key objectives". The strategy is supported by a comprehensive evidence base, that includes stakeholder engagement with a variety of local businesses and an in-depth analysis of economic data in North Hertfordshire (in relation to jobs, trending growth areas, industries, connectivity etc.). The Strategy identified five action areas from the evidence base to focus on:

- business and enterprise;
- people and skills;
- innovation and economic change;
- sites and premises; and
- investment, position and promotion.

The strategy also celebrates North Hertfordshire's position geographically and maps out areas within the district ("looking in") and outside ("looking out") – both themes identify opportunities available to the Council to achieve substantial economic growth. The strategy focuses on economic portraits of each town in North Hertfordshire, mapping out key opportunities in each of them.

How does the North Hertfordshire economic strategy inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

A successful Economic Development Strategy would encourage the productivity of existing businesses and attract new business in and around North Herts' towns, increasing resident and worker spending and further supporting existing businesses. This increase in prosperity and diversification of economic drivers would increase the draw and attraction of the District's centres to a wider variety of retail and leisure operators.

The Strategy also directly references town centre development opportunities, as well as areas where developments in and around the centres would benefit from greater connectivity and links to and through the centres including the Churchgate Regeneration Zone, Garden Square Shopping Centre in Letchworth GC, Growing Baldock, and Royston Gateway. .

How the land use and retail evidence helps meet the Local Plan's vision:

The evidence outlined above helps work towards the following sections of the Council's Vision, as outlined in the Local Plan:

- By 2031 North Hertfordshire will be an attractive and vibrant place where people will want to live, work and spend their leisure time.
- North Hertfordshire will have a robust and prosperous economy (including sustainable tourism) with a greater mix of skilled jobs, focused in locations that best support the District's growing population. Local and smaller scale businesses will have had the opportunity to grow.
- The vitality and viability of the towns of Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and Baldock are safeguarded in a way that takes account of their distinctive role. This will have been achieved through carefully planned development which meets the needs of these centres, retaining their market share in terms of their retail offer, whilst recognising the importance of preserving and enhancing their historic character. In local and village centres, shopping facilities that meet local needs will be supported.
- The District's important natural and historic areas and buildings that help to create the distinctive identity of the District in both urban and rural areas will have been protected

and enhanced where possible. The quality and attractiveness of the landscape of North Hertfordshire, which contributes to its distinctive character, will have been conserved and enhanced where possible.

- Additionally, the 2024 Town Centres & Retail Study provides opportunities and recommendations for town centre policies in the emerging Local Plan update relating to emerging capacity for new floorspace, amendments to boundaries, and suggested controls for the mix of uses.



Image: St Mary's Church, Hitchin



Image: Royston Cave

Theme 2: Built environment

Relevant subthemes:

The Built Form, Public Realm and Design, Heritage and Historic Character; Spatial Layout;

NPPF sections of relevance

Chapter 14: Achieving well-designed places

Chapter 20: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Local Plan policies of relevance:

Policy D1: Sustainable design

Policy HE1: Designated Heritage Assets

Policy SP13: Historic Environment

Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability

Relevant evidence

Character and conservation statements (NHDC) for Hitchin (2011), Letchworth (2001), Royston (2007), and Baldock (2003)

Hitchin: The Statement explains that the designated conservation area, the Hitchin Conservation Area, encompasses the historic town centre as well as public or private parkland and high-quality residential suburbs. The Statement goes on to propose three new conservation area designations, because of their unique character: (1) Butts Close, contained by Fishponds Road and Bedford Road; (2) The Railway Station and associated railway buildings and Ransom's Recreation Ground, and (3) Hitchin Hill Path and Butchers Lane. Character statements and conservation area maps for each of the three proposed conservation area designations were adopted in 2011. Other recommendations for site specific improvements included improvements to Bancroft Recreation Ground (which received a splash park in 2015 and further play equipment in 2025), enhancements to The Dell Woodside Open Air Theatre, as well as "to continue improvements to the River Hiz, including, where possible, the opening up of the river frontage for public access".

Letchworth: Section 3.0 of the Statement describes the special interest and character and appearance of the town centre. In addition, the Statement identifies areas and buildings within the town centre which are not considered to preserve or enhance the special character of the area as opportunity areas for improvement. The Statement highlights these areas and identifies the reasons why they are not considered to be in character. It then goes on to recommend the improvement of these areas or buildings to ensure that they preserve or enhance the special character of the town centre. It is important to note that this document was published in 2001 and as such, some areas or buildings referred to as not preserving the character of the area have been redeveloped or repurposed for alternative uses including Station Parade (amended façade as part of an extension in 2019) and the Council's old Town Lodge and Document Centre buildings on Gernon Road (demolished to provide an office building and residential accommodation) amongst others.

Royston: The Statement assesses the setting, character and appearance of the conservation area, and identifies the areas where improvement or redevelopment opportunities exist. It also identifies the areas in the historic town centre which are redevelopment opportunities, i.e. regarded as having a negative impact upon the character and appearance of the conservation area and where redevelopment is positively encouraged. The majority of the areas identified for redevelopment are on, or in, close proximity to the high street.

Baldock: The Statement outlines steps taken to ensure that changes within the conservation area preserve or enhance its special character or appearance. It identifies and describes the special characteristics of the market town that will need to be considered when considering proposed changes. The Statement identifies areas within the town centre which have a negative or neutral impact on the local conservation area but does not provide any targeted recommendations.

How do the character and conservation statements inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The principles and measures outlined in each of the documents – including preserving each of the conservation areas and the special character of the town centre, the identification of each conservation area's special characteristics, and the redevelopment proposals for areas which have a negative impact on character – have informed the Strategy's guidance. This contributes towards meeting the Council's vision of protecting and enhancing the historic areas and buildings

Design Code Supplementary Planning Document (NHDC, 2026): This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) replaces the 2011 Design SPD and expands on Local Plan Policies SP9 and D1. It applies formally to residential-led schemes of more than two homes, which must comply with, or justify departure from, 40 individual design codes covering settlement structure, open space, streets, parking and built form. Other forms of development, including within the town centres, are also expected to be demonstrably consistent with the Design Code.

How does the design code SPD inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The SPD provides guidance on the key design characteristics that development proposals will be assessed against, and that planning applications will need to clearly demonstrate for proposals within and surrounding the District's town centres.

Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (NHDC, 2024): The 2024 Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) provides the standards required to meet the objectives and policies of the North Herts Local Plan through the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic.

Reflecting the Council's 2019 declaration of a climate emergency and subsequent Climate Change Strategy, recently replaced in August 2025 by its Sustainability Strategy (2025-2030), the SPD includes detailed guidance on sustainability expectations for different forms of development when applying the Local Plan policies. The guidance is presented thematically, covering energy performance and minimising carbon footprints, to healthy placemaking and sustainable travel.

Each theme includes a checklist with a threshold for application alongside expectations for developments

and a ranking system of bronze, silver, and gold that ranges from basic Local Plan policy compliance (the baseline minimum expectation) through to areas where developments excel. It is not expected that all development will achieve gold for all themes and applicants are to identify which themes to aim for gold standard, depending on site context, type and scale of development.

How does the sustainability SPD inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The SPD provides guidance, thresholds and a checklist on what developers need to consider when submitting an application for a development scheme. These include proposals in the town centres, as well as those surrounding centres, and themes including healthy placemaking, sustainable travel, and historic buildings would directly affect how development proposals interact with the District's town centres whilst supporting the Council's Plan sustainability priority..

How the built environment evidence helps meet the Local Plan's vision:

The evidence helps meet the following part of the Council's vision, as outlined in the Local Plan:

- The vitality and viability of the towns of Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and Baldock are safeguarded in a way that takes account of their distinctive role. This will have been achieved through carefully planned development which meets the needs of these centres, retaining their market share in terms of their retail offer, whilst recognising the importance of preserving and enhancing their historic character. In local and village centres, shopping facilities that meet local needs will be supported.
- The District's important natural and historic areas and buildings that help to create the distinctive identity of the District in both urban and rural areas will have been protected and enhanced where possible. The quality and attractiveness of the landscape of North Hertfordshire, which contributes to its distinctive character, will have been conserved and enhanced where possible. New green infrastructure will have enhanced the network of green corridors linking settlements to the open countryside, providing greater opportunities for healthy lifestyles.
- The Council's vision describes how new developments will contribute to sustainable communities, defined as safe, attractive and inclusive, to be achieved through compliance with guiding principles set out within the Local Plan alongside the Sustainability SPD.

Theme 3: Transport, access and movement

Relevant subthemes:

Sustainable Travel, Transport Services, Transport infrastructure

NPPF sections of relevance:

Chapter 15: Promoting sustainable transport

Local plan policies of relevance:

Policy SP6: Sustainable transport

Policy T1: Assessment of transport matters

Policy T2: Parking

Vehicle Parking at New Development SPD

Relevant evidence:

Hertfordshire Active Travel Strategy (Hertfordshire County Council, 2013):

Hertfordshire's Active Travel Strategy sets out how the County Council will deliver and promote interventions to increase the number of people walking and cycling in Hertfordshire. Its recommendations seek to ensure the provision of cycle and pedestrian access arrangements, and links to local cycling and walking networks, across the town centres.

Recommendations include:

- Providing secure cycle parking at key destinations, e.g., railway stations, town centres, and schools.
- Ensuring that all railway stations, key employment sites and key services in towns, especially those associated with high levels of commuting or limited car parking, have convenient cycle and pedestrian access arrangements, high-quality, covered and secure cycle parking and links to local cycling and walking networks.
- Production of up-to-date route and network maps of the cycling and walking network for each town and wider networks.

How does the Active Travel Strategy inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The Active Travel Strategy provides guidance and targeted interventions/recommendations for the promotion of active travel modes in town centres across North Hertfordshire, helping meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking and cycling to combat climate change.

Hertfordshire Highways Place & Movement Design Guide (Hertfordshire County Council, 2024): Chapter 3 of the Guide describes how environmentally sustainable, healthy and future ready movement networks will be delivered in Hertfordshire (including in the town centres).

The Guide recommends the following:

- Promotion of walking by implementing measures to increase the priority of pedestrians relative to motorised vehicles, especially in town centres, and creating walking-friendly town and neighbourhood centres.
- All occupied parts of a development should be within 400m walking distance of a bus stop or transport.
- In a town centre location, areas with a significant proportion of elderly residents, around educational establishments, and commercial and industrial developments, the maximum walking distance should be reduced to 200m.
- Consideration of cycling connectivity should ensure priority links to town centres and sustainable transport hubs and connections.

How does the Hertfordshire Highways Place & Movement Design Guide inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The Hertfordshire Highways Place & Movement Design Guide provides guidance and targeted interventions and recommendations for the provision of walking, cycling and public transport within the town centres, and provide guidance on transport provision for new development. It also provides design measures to promote walking in town centres and help meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking and cycling to combat climate change.

Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP4) 2018-2031 Guide (Hertfordshire County Council, 2018): Objective 5 of the Plan aims to enhance the quality and vitality of town centres. Policy 7: Active Travel (walking) explains that the County Council will aim to encourage and promote walking by implementing measures to increase the priority of pedestrians relative to cars, especially in town centres, and create walking-friendly town and neighbourhood centres.

Objective 5 identifies that there are a number of towns which are in need of renewal and regeneration, and that transport plays a role in improving the urban environment. The negative impact of high levels of car use and congestion on the urban environment (noise, air quality, aesthetics, historic & natural environment) limits the potential to improve provision for other modes. It identifies a need to enhance the accessibility to town centres to support growth, development and vitality.

The Plan makes reference towards balancing the negative impact of congestion and car use with the role of transport in improving the urban environment, which is relevant for town centres, particularly for larger town centre areas experiencing greater levels of demand from shoppers and other visitors.

How does the LTP4 inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The LTP4 provides the reasoning and justification for increasing provision of walking and cycling within the town centres, and balancing car use with more sustainable transport modes around the town centres. This helps meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking and cycling, as well as improving the vitality and viability of town centres.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure

Plan (LCWIP) (WSP, 2022): The Plan references relevant local policies and guidance, including the Local Transport Plan, place and Movement Design Guide and the Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy and highlights the importance of integration of town centres within local walking and cycling routes. The LCWIP goes on to identify a number of routes to be taken forward to improve connectivity to (and within) each of the town centres.



Image: High Street Baldock

How does the LCWIP inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The LCWIP provides guidance and targeted interventions and recommendations for the provision of walking and cycling within the town centres; which can feed into the Strategy. It also provides design measures to promote walking and cycling in town centres. This helps meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking and cycling to combat climate change.

North Central Growth Transport Plan (AECOM, 2022): Provides targeted interventions relating to sustainable transport measures for each of the four North Herts town centres. Recommendations include:

- **Package 7 (Hitchin Centre)** which outlines the aim to encourage use of public transport through support for services and creation of a safe and attractive corridor in which to take advantage of the services within Hitchin Town Centre and Rail Station.
- **Package 10 (Hitchin to Letchworth/Baldock)** seeks to enhance cycling infrastructure between Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock; and make it a safe and attractive option for sustainable trips.
- **Package 11 (Letchworth Centre and Employment Area)** aims to increase active transport provision between Letchworth Centre and Employment Area by providing a signposted and connected active transport network and to improve access to Letchworth rail station.
- **Package 13 (Baldock connectivity, rail station and development)** seeks to make Baldock a safe, convenient and attractive place to make sustainable transport trips through improvements to cycling and walking infrastructure and facilities as well as public transport journeys.
- **Package 15 (Royston)** aims to transform Royston into a town that facilitates safe, attractive and convenient journeys by active and sustainable transport modes.

How does the North Central Growth Transport Plan inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The North Central Growth Transport Plan provides guidance and targeted interventions and recommendations for the provision of walking, cycling and public transport within the town centres. This helps meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking, cycling and public transport to combat climate change.

North Herts Local Transport Strategy (Markides Associates, 2017): Outlines transport strategies for each of the town centres and analyses the results of transport modelling impact assessments. It identifies key issues and transport strategy elements, outlining various measures and recommendations for the town centre areas. Recommendations include:

1. Design focus on walking and cycling through all development, to local facilities and to adjacent areas.
2. Development of a sustainable spine along the A505 enhancing people movement between the towns.
3. Bus-based public transport and interchange in the main urban centres.

How does the North Herts Local Transport Strategy inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The North Herts Local Transport Strategy provides guidance and targeted interventions and recommendations for the provision of walking, cycling and public transport within the town centres. It also assesses the key strengths and weaknesses of the transport system in each town, to develop enhanced recommendations via an evidence-based approach, which has informed the North Herts Town Centres Strategy. This will help meet the Council's vision of improving opportunities for travelling by walking, cycling and public transport to combat climate change.

North Herts Parking Strategy (NHDC, 2019): The Strategy addresses off-street parking capacity in town centres. Policy 2 explains that the Council will periodically review the level of off-street car parking capacity in each of the town centres. The Council will aim to manage the overall level of capacity in line with policy objectives for town centre vitality, while seeking to minimise environmental impacts, recognising the need for encouraging sustainable travel and adapting to new technology and trends in parking. The Council will consider the balance required between short and longer-stay parking needs in its reviews. The Council will manage its off-street car parks in a financially responsible manner. Where appropriate, the Council will work with other off-street parking operators to seek to ensure that the combined car parking capacity in town centres meets policy objectives and is financially sustainable.

How does the North Herts Parking Strategy inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The North Herts Parking Strategy provides guidance on balancing the need for parking provision in town centres for purposes of vitality (part of the Council's vision) with the environmental impacts of parking.

Sustainable Travel Town Documents

- **Letchworth GC Outline (NHDC, 2021):** Makes reference to parking provision in town centres. North Hertfordshire District Council through its adopted Parking Strategy is supportive of the principle of working towards the removal of free parking in its town centres to encourage modal shift towards more active and sustainable travel through walking, cycling and public transport. The Council will work towards achieving no net gain in parking spaces, both for on-street in the town centre and in off-street facilities where it is within the Council's power to do so.
- **Royston Outline (NHDC, 2021):** Outlines recommendations for the town centre including cycle parking in the town centre, at neighbourhood retail centres, and at other key service locations, including improved cycling facilities at the railway station, additional seating in the town centre and on key routes, widened pavements and new planters, and consideration of potential semi-pedestrianisation in the future. References are also made to a phased approach to reducing free parking within the centre to encourage a modal shift towards more active and sustainable.

How do the Sustainable Travel Town Documents inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The Sustainable Travel Town Documents provide targeted recommendations for town centres regarding the promotion of walking and cycling, as well as design and parking measures to help encourage modal shift. These town centre specific recommendations have been distilled into general principles for use in the Strategy, working towards achieving the Council's vision of getting more people walking and cycling.

Active North Herts Strategy Report (SLC, 2023): The report references a key theme outlined within the Council Plan relating to the local economy, highlighting the role of the regeneration of town centres and addressing issues faced by rural communities

How does the Active North Herts Strategy inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The Active North Herts Strategy provides the link between sustainable transport and regenerating the local economy and has informed relevant areas of the Strategy.

Electric Vehicle Strategy (Hertfordshire County Council, 2022): Sets out Hertfordshire County Council's actions to enable the roll out of public EV charging infrastructure to facilitate this transition. It explains that charge points are increasingly installed in supermarkets, retail outlets, leisure facilities, hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, and privately managed town centre car parks. Recommends installation of charge points and roll out of charging infrastructure.

How does the Electric Vehicle Strategy inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The Strategy regarding electric vehicles has informed the development of guidance and recommendations regarding electric vehicles for the North Herts Town Centres Strategy to help meet the Council's vision towards "using natural resources more efficiently" and address climate change.

North Herts Infrastructure Delivery Plan (RS Regeneration, 2018): Outlines strategies for improving and delivering infrastructure in the District, including in town centres. It outlines the potential for significant levels of new investment to deliver growth and impact on the transport network, and how to address this. For example, the delivery plan proposes that cycling infrastructure in Hitchin should include advance stop lines, improved signage, and covered parking in the town centre.



Image: Blue Bus, Letchworth

How does the North Herts Infrastructure Delivery Plan inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan provides guidance for improving transport infrastructure and potential investment strategies, which can feed into this Town Centres Strategy. Although these are location specific, they have been used to inform the general principles of the Strategy.

Air Quality Strategy, and Air Quality Implementation Plan (Hertfordshire County Council, 2019): Although the documents do not make direct reference to town centres, the principles outlined in the documents are relevant towards developing strategies for improving air quality and introducing modes of clean transport, and this is applicable to town centres.

How do the Air Quality Strategy and Air Quality Implementation Plan inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The guidance explains that development coming forward should consider that clean air is a Council priority. The clean air principles outlined in both documents have informed the Strategy's guidance.

How the transport, access and movement evidence helps meet the Local Plan's vision:

The evidence base outlined above helps address the following section of the Local Plan vision:

The District will play its part in addressing climate change by improving opportunities for travelling by public transport, walking and cycling, using natural resources more efficiently, reducing the demand for water, securing high quality sustainable design and managing the risk of flooding

Increased footfall in town centres through increased levels of walking and cycling, can in turn result in improved "viability and vitality" of town centres, and improved local economies, which is also part of the Council's vision.

Theme 4: Community

Relevant subthemes:

Community Facilities, Community Safety, Community Health;

Local Plan policies of relevance:

Policy HC1: Community Facilities

Policy D1: Sustainable Design

Policy SP10: Healthy Communities

NPPF Sections of relevance:

Chapter 16: Promoting healthy and safe communities

Relevant evidence

North Herts Sport Provision and Open Space Review & Standards (NHDC, 2016): Assesses the provision of open space, sport and recreation facilities in North Hertfordshire. In relation to town centres, it explains that small sites of less than 0.1 ha can provide valuable local open space, particularly in residential areas and town centres

How does the North Herts Sports Provision and Open Spaces Review inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

This Review provides guidance for the Town Centres Strategy on open space provision in town centres and helps realise the Council's vision to provide community and recreational facilities accessible to the local population. An updated study is being finalised and will supersede the 2016 work.

Council Plan 2024-2028 (NHDC, 2024):

One of the priorities outlined in the plan is Thriving Communities, which involves focusing on community safety priorities such as anti-social behaviour, violence against women and girls, and environmental crime such as fly tipping. Recommendations include continuing to allocate grant funding to local groups who provide vital services and activities, as well as working with partners to deliver projects which reduce health inequalities. The Council Plan references the importance of street-cleaning services and the leisure centres provided by Everyone Active. It also emphasises efforts to reduce carbon emissions across the District. Further commentary on the strategic role of the Council Plan is set out in Section 1B.

How does the Council Plan inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The Council Plan provides recommendations to improve community safety in the town centres, which has been applied to the North Herts Town Centres Strategy and help realise the Council's vision for thriving communities with accessible services through responsible growth and sustainability.

Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030 (NHDC 2025): The Sustainability Strategy launched in August 2025 and replaces the Climate Change Strategy to align with the Council priority of Sustainability. The Sustainability Strategy takes a broader scope by including many areas of sustainability, including emissions reductions, climate change adaptation and biodiversity, taking into account action needed to tackle climate change, protect nature, and make better use of natural resources. This strategy has five areas of focus: council emissions, district emissions, adaptation, biodiversity, and cross-cutting.

The aims of the Sustainability Strategy are:

- Achieve Net Zero by 2030 for the Council's own operations.
- Achieve a Net Zero North Hertfordshire district by 2040.
- Ensure all operations and services are resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- Become a district that is resilient to unavoidable impacts of climate change.
- Increase biodiversity in North Herts.

How does the Sustainability Strategy inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

This Strategy sets out the key areas of focus for the Council to improve its sustainability, which has informed how the North Herts Town Centres Strategy guides developments within town centres to require consideration of sustainability across biodiversity, emissions and adaptation to climate change.

Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework (Hertfordshire Growth Board, 2025): This framework sets out a county-wide approach to integrating health, community and recreational infrastructure, supporting well-being, reducing health inequalities and promoting active, sustainable lifestyles within town centres. It provides guidance to Local Planning Authorities on how to implement health-focused policies into Local Plans and Spatial Development Strategies. The Healthy Placemaking Principles within the framework targets the social determinants of health across housing, the environment, the economy, places and neighbourhoods, connectivity, infrastructure and communities.

How does the Healthy and Safe Places Framework inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The framework sets out key levers that can be adopted in policy and guidance to promote healthy places and neighbourhoods, including through design, walkability and land uses. These principles have informed the guidance set out within the Town Centres Strategy to improve health outcomes within town centres and across the District more widely.

Resilient Together Report (ResilienTogether, 2017): Resilient Together is a local authority-led partnership which works with the local community to reduce flood risk from the Pix Brook (which flows through Letchworth) and improve water quality. As urban areas have grown, the health of some watercourses has weakened. The Pix Brook has been affected by urban growth and is at increased flood risk from rapid storm runoff, as well as from pollution and a reduction in habitat. ResilienTogether aims to address flooding in urban areas, including Letchworth town centre, and to create a 'smart catchment' to reduce flood risk, enhance the water environment and improve community resilience. It proposes installation of monitoring stations along the Pix Brook to understand the impacts of extreme weather on water flows and water quality.

How does the Resilient Together Report inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The Resilient Together Report provides guidance for the North Herts Town Centres Strategy on how to reduce flood risk in town centres, enhancing community resilience in the process while also protecting and enhancing biodiversity, which is part of the Council's vision.

Green Infrastructure (GI) Principles (Natural England, 2023): Natural England has developed a set of GI Principles that underpin the GI Framework. The Principles are intended to provide a baseline for different organisations to develop stronger green infrastructure policy and delivery. The principles cover the Why, What and How of how to deliver good GI. There are mapped environmental, socio-economic datasets to support the standards. The Principles can be applied to town centres, and include Nature Rich Places, Active and Healthy Places, Thriving and Prospering Places, Water Management and Resilient and Climate Positive Places.

How do the Green Infrastructure Principles inform the North Herts Town Centres Strategy?

The GI principles have informed the Strategy's guidance to enhance and protect green infrastructure in the North Hertfordshire town centres. This will help realise the aim of the Council's vision to enhance and protect its landscape as well as enhance the network of green corridors linking settlements to the open countryside, providing greater opportunities for healthy lifestyles; and the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in the area.

How the community evidence helps meet the Local Plan's vision:

The evidence base outlined above helps meet the following sections of the Local Plan vision:

The District's important natural and historic areas and buildings that help to create the distinctive identity of the District in both urban and rural areas will have been protected and enhanced where possible. The quality and attractiveness of the landscape of North Hertfordshire, which contributes to its distinctive character, will have been conserved and enhanced where possible.

New green infrastructure will have enhanced the network of green corridors linking settlements to the open countryside, providing greater opportunities for healthy lifestyles.

The rich biodiversity and geodiversity of North Hertfordshire will have been protected and enhanced where possible. Where new development could potentially have an adverse impact on biodiversity and geodiversity, measures will have been taken to ensure that the impact was either avoided or mitigated.

North Hertfordshire will have a range of community, leisure, cultural and recreational facilities in locations that are accessible to the local population, creating cohesive communities that enhance the opportunities and recognise the needs of the centres' diverse demographics from the day-to-day workers to the older population, children and young people.

Image: Priory Memorial Gardens, Royston





Image: High Street, Baldock

Part 2: Town Centre guidance

2A: Town Centre developments

How to use this part

This part of the Town Centres Strategy provides a series of Guidance Notes to support developers, consultants, landowners, and decision-makers responding to the requirements of Local Plan policies when progressing development proposals in North Herts' town centres.



Image: Bridge Street, Hitchin



Image: Leitchworth Arcade

The Guidance Notes set out advice to assist with the interpretation of relevant Local Plan policies, providing additional information and guidance to ensure that development proposals take account of the breadth of relevant evidence and the Council's broader strategies affecting, and affected by, development in the town centres. These include:

- clarifying how and where Local Plan policies will be applied in the assessment of planning applications;
- interpretation of Local Plan policies, listing examples of key criteria and principles that would be expected to be addressed when submitting applications for developments within town centres; and
- examples of supporting information, details, design considerations and infrastructure contributions that would demonstrate Local Plan policy compliance.

Early engagement with the Guidance Notes is encouraged when developing proposals within and affecting town centres, including through pre-application discussions with the Council, to address any areas that would require further consideration to meet the requirements of the Local Plan and Town Centres Strategy. Whilst the Guidance Notes reflect Local Plan policy requirements, the broader principles are considered beneficial for all town centre proposals, including those that would not require an application for planning permission (such as changes within the same Use Class, funding bids, licensing, and prior approval applications) to support the Council's aspirations for the town centres.

Part 1 of this document has set out the evidence base documents, supplementary planning documents, and Council strategies relevant to town centres. This section should also be read alongside the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted 2022).

As with **Part 1**, the Guidance Notes are presented thematically, expanding on select Local Plan policies as referenced in the text. The Guidance Notes include requirements and recommendations for approaching policy criteria to: address the requirements of the Local Plan policies, consider the findings of the relevant evidence, and implement the Council's strategies affecting town centres.

2B: Guidance notes

Introduction

To ensure the Strategy is responsive to wider trends and strategic challenges, the Council has reviewed the trends in the usage of the town centres through stakeholder engagement, public telephone surveys and commissioning town-centre experts Lichfields to provide data, trends and recommendations. The surveys provide insights into the shopping habits and desires of residents and visitors using a representative and demographically weighted sample, in addition to multiple consultations and workshops with representative groups.

These findings, together with other relevant evidence, strategies and frameworks summarised across Part 1 have helped to identify a number of common themes which seek to deliver the strategic objectives of this Strategy through a set of Guidance Notes that provide a greater level of detail on Local Plan policies that can be applied to developments across the four town centres. While the Guidance Notes, do not represent formal planning policy, they do provide interim guidance setting out the Council's priorities for its town centres while the Local Plan is under review.

The Guidance Notes in this part provide a framework for protecting, improving and delivering positive changes in North Herts' four town centres. The policies are thematically aligned as follows:

Table B1: Thematically guiding policies that are applied to each town centre strategy.

Guidance Note	Theme
1 Promoting Vitality and Viability in Town Centres	Land use and retail
2 The Built Form, Public Realm and Design	Built environment
3 Heritage and Historic Character	Built environment
4 Promoting Sustainable Travel	Transport, access and movement
5 Community Facilities	Community

Guidance note 1

Promoting vitality and viability in Town Centres

Where viability, developer contributions or mitigation are addressed, Local Plan Policy SP7 and the Developer Contributions SPD should be referred to as the primary guidance.

- a Local Plan Policy SP9 defines significant developments as those 'generally comprising residential development of 100 dwellings or more'. In relation to commercial development and other main town centre uses, development of 1,000 sq.m gross or more, sites greater than 1 ha, or existing allocations within town centres would be considered significant development.
- b To promote, protect and enhance the four main town centres in accordance with Local Plan Policy SP4 a), proposals involving the loss of retail and leisure floorspace will be resisted, other than where evidence can be provided demonstrating that the floorspace would not otherwise be required to meet an identified need over the plan period.
- c Proposals that require planning permission that would result in the loss of Use Class E Uses at ground floor level in the Primary Shopping Area (currently designated as Primary Shopping Frontages) or main town centre uses (including Use Class E, Sui Generis and Use Class F) within the town centre boundaries should only be permitted subject to criteria relating to:
 - adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole;
 - individual or cumulative impact on neighbouring amenity;
 - provision of an active frontage at ground floor level which relates well to the design of the building and to the street-scene and its setting; and
 - adequate marketing of the unit for Use Class E uses in primary shopping frontages or for main town centre uses (including Use Class E, Sui Generis and Use Class F) in other parts of the town centre

- d In accordance with Local Plan Policy SP4 b), it is appropriate for significant developments proposing new or replacement retail and leisure floorspace to provide for a mix of uses (with suitable planning controls, where necessary) to support the vitality and viability of town centres. These uses could include shops, cafes and restaurants (Use Class E) along with pubs and drinking establishments and takeaways (Sui Generis).
- e The Council will consider that any significant development within the town centre boundary, including Local Plan allocations, meets the criteria of Local Plan Policy SP9 and should be subject to a proportionate Strategic Masterplan exercise which, as a minimum, should demonstrate how the proposals have taken account of the guidance set out within this document.

Local plan policies of relevance:

Policy SP4: Town Centres, Local Centres and Community Shops

Policy SP7: Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions

Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability

Policy ETC3: New retail, leisure and other main town centre development

Policy ETC4: Primary Shopping Frontages

Policy ETC5: Secondary Shopping Frontages

Guidance note 2

The built form, public realm and design

- a In accordance with Local Plan Policy D1, proposed streetscapes including roads, buildings, pavements, hard and soft landscaping, lighting and street furniture in significant developments or public realm interventions should:
 - be of high quality and contribute towards the overall user experience in town centres;
 - be safe and accommodating to people with mobility, sensory and neurological impairments;
 - improve wayfinding and legibility, permeability, and key views of landmark buildings; and
 - take account of the existing hierarchy of streets and pathways if proposing a change to the street hierarchy. This should not be to the detriment of pedestrian and cycling routes.
- b Open spaces should be designed and maintained to a high quality to promote active recreation, opportunities for social interaction and physical linkages across and between the town centres to support visitors' health and well-being to support Local Plan Policy NE6.
- c To meet Local Plan Policy SP12 2), biodiversity and habitats should be protected and improved in the town centres, in open and green spaces, riversides (as in the case of Hitchin), as well as in the built environment which supports ecological networks. Developers and landowners for significant developments should demonstrate how they will promote these policy aims through design, layout, land use, lighting and landscaping, and prioritise climate action with a long-term vision, including contributing to biodiversity net gain where relevant to help create an attractive environment for the users of the town centres that will also help to mitigate climate change.
- d To support Local Plan Policy D1 a) building types, massing, building and ground floor heights, sight lines, setbacks, and gaps for non-residential development should be proportional in the context of the town, street and surrounding buildings.
- e In accordance with Local Plan Policy D1 a), materials proposed for buildings and ornamentation should be of high quality, sustainable and long-lasting, with reference to the form and character of the proposed development (and where relevant, in relation to the historic buildings). Designs should be complementary, rather than directly copying or competing with historic styles, with scope for innovation allowing the town centre to evolve. They should enhance the existing fabric through similar materials and sympathetic designs.
- f In line with Local Plan Policy D1 a), town centre development should take all reasonable opportunities to design-out crime and anti-social behaviour. This includes consideration of street lighting and other safety measures in line with forthcoming government guidance on designing safer streets for women and girls.
- g In support of Local Plan Policy D1 b), pavements should be of high quality, clear of obstructions and integrate within the street hierarchy and right of ways. Street trees, planting and shrubs are also important elements contributing to the public realm and built environment, and these should be retained, enhanced and added to wherever possible.
- h In alignment with Local Plan Policy D1 b), developments within town centres should take all reasonable opportunities to optimise the potential of the site by incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and reduce energy consumption and waste, and integrate water efficiency measures.

Guidance note 3

Heritage and historical character

- a In accordance with Local Plan Policies HE1-3, proposed developments should conserve and enhance the special architectural, historic interest, character and appearance of each of the town centres, and integrate new development sensitively to the setting of listed buildings, designated and non-designated heritage assets.
- b Local Plan Policy SP13 sets the Council's strategy for the protection and enhancement of North Hertfordshire's historic environment. Reflecting Strategic Objective ENV3, this should be taken to include the town centres' cultural assets, in addition to buildings of cultural and heritage value. Proposed developments in town centres will be expected to deliver (as appropriate) and fund (or contribute funding towards) the centre's cultural heritage, such as the promotion of Garden City principles in Letchworth Garden City, Royston Town Trail, the River Hiz and historic market in Hitchin, amongst others.
- c As addressed in Guidance Note 2, street trees, planting and shrubs can also be important elements contributing to the public realm and built environment, and form part of a town's historical character, and these should be retained, enhanced and added to wherever possible.

Local plan policies of relevance:

Policy ETC3: New retail, leisure and other main town centre development

Policy ETC4: Primary Shopping Frontages

Policy ETC5: Secondary Shopping Frontages

Policy D1: Sustainable design

Policy NE6: New and improved open space

Policy SP12: Green infrastructure, landscape and biodiversity

Policy SP13: Historic environment

Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets

Policy HE2: Heritage at risk

Policy HE3: Non-designated heritage assets

Strategic Objective ENV3: Protect, maintain and enhance the District's historic and natural environment, its cultural assets and network of open spaces, urban and rural landscapes.



Image: Churchyard Walk, Hitchin

Guidance note 4

Promoting sustainable travel

a Local Plan Policies SP6 and T1 (d) seek to deliver accessibility improvements and promote the use of sustainable transport modes. Proposed developments in or surrounding town centres will be expected to deliver (as appropriate) or fund (wholly or in part):

- i. infrastructure on-site and off-site that provides:
 - safe and direct walking and cycling routes into town centres, and between town centres, key amenities and travel/mobility hubs*
 - travel/mobility hubs* in towns and villages
 - secure cycle parking
 - parking spaces for club cars†, including at or close to railway stations
- ii. new or enhanced services, linked to appropriate triggers, for:
 - bus services
 - bike and/or e-scooter (if and when legal) rental schemes
 - car clubs†
 - ride-sharing services

*Travel/mobility hubs provide a safe and secure environment for switching between transport modes or services, and may also provide complementary amenities, such as parcel lockers. They include railway and bus stations. Some car parking may be provided, but their main purpose is to support sustainable modes of travel for all journey legs.

† Car clubs are membership-based 24/7 short-term car rental services.

b The Council's Vehicle Parking at New Developments SPD (2011) Paragraph 4.8 sets out the evidence needed for the Council to consider a level of parking provision below the minimum standards in accordance with Policy T2:

"Clear evidence must be provided that residents and visitor parking demand will not exceed the parking provided OR that alternative short and long stay daytime and evening parking will be readily available to future residents and visitors. The developer should identify examples of this evidence from other developments or locations in similar circumstances to those found in the district."

A future update to the SPD will provide further details of the level of evidence required where it is considered that existing and future demands for parking is likely to be lower than the current minimum standards. This evidence is likely to be based on the site's location and the quality of sustainable transport options already available, in addition to any transport options that will become available as a result of the application proposal or agreed to be delivered with the development.

c In line with government guidance and the Council's Parking Strategy (2019), parking policies should have regard to the needs of those with disabilities, some of whom depend on the use of a car or taxis.

d The Council's Vehicle Parking at New Developments SPD (2011) Paragraph 4.10 provides criteria where car free developments may be considered in town centres where any of the following apply:

- The extension or alteration or re-use of an existing building with no access to parking;
- The reversion of a previously converted property to its original residential use, including flats above shops;
- The provision of residential accommodation on a small town centre site that may not otherwise come forward for development; or
- Where arrangements are made to share an existing car park within the vicinity of the site that can accommodate development.

Local plan policies of relevance:

Policy ETC3: New retail, leisure and other main town centre development

Policy ETC4: Primary Shopping Frontages

Policy ETC5: Secondary Shopping Frontages

Policy SP6: Sustainable transport

Policy T1: Assessment of transport matters

Policy T2: Parking

Guidance note 5

Community facilities

- a Local Plan Policy HC1 seeks the retention and provision of cultural, recreation and community facilities. For new significant developments in town centres that:
 - i. include community facilities, developers and landowners are expected to reflect best practices for community cohesion, health and safety, as well as opportunities for skill development within their development.
 - ii. do not include community facilities within the scheme, the Council will seek commuted payments from developers through planning obligations towards the provision of new off-site facilities or enhancements to existing community facilities within the town centre, where there is a demonstrable need..
- b In accordance with Local Plan Policy HC1, development of new and improved health, children's and youth facilities will be supported within or close to town centres, as part of town centre allocations and/or through contributions secured through planning obligations for development proposals, where there is a demonstrable need.
- c The Council will resist the loss of community facilities and will require the replacement of existing community facilities in development proposals or through enhancement schemes, in line with Local Plan Policy HC1.
- d The Local Plan definition of community facilities under Policy HC1 should be taken to include public access to toilet facilities. Where public toilets are not available in the vicinity of a proposed development including a community facility use, proposed community facilities should provide the general public access to toilets and changing rooms on their premises, otherwise known as a Community Toilet Scheme.
- e In alignment with Policy HC1 and Policy SP1, developments in town centres should seek to apply the 'Healthy Streets Approach', considering factors such as noise, air pollution, accessibility, seating and shelter.

Local plan policies of relevance:

Policy SP1: Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire

Policy ETC3: New retail, leisure and other main town centre development

Policy ETC4: Primary Shopping Frontages

Policy ETC5: Secondary Shopping Frontages

Policy HC1: Community facilities





Image: Howard Park, Leichworth



Image: Churchyard Walk, Hitchin

Part 3: Individual Town Centre Strategies

Introduction

The following strategies for North Hertfordshire's individual towns focus on a concise series of key priorities for the town centres, that will work alongside the Guidance Notes set out in Part 2 to steer development and investment in and surrounding Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and Baldock.

The priorities identified provide a focus and key actions for the Council, and work within the planning policy context of the Council's adopted Local Plan 2011-2031, ahead of the new Local Plan. Part 4 also sets out further District-wide initiatives for the Council to undertake alongside the key priorities identified. The Council may wish to revisit these sections and update the priorities in due course as actions are undertaken and new opportunities emerge.

The key priorities are informed by the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis for each town, based on the context and evidence summarised in Part 1 and Appendix 3 alongside consultations, ranging from residents to stakeholder workshops, undertaken during the Town Centre and Retail Study (2024), as well as subsequent meetings with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), landowners and stakeholders.

Consideration of the suitability of planning obligations will be particularly relevant where proposals impact town centres, either through trade diversion or any increases in the number of visitors or users of existing or proposed town centre services. Part 4 sets out how the Council may also seek to explore alternative funding options including national government funding opportunities, private investment, or direct funding allocations from District Council or County Council budgets to deliver identified priorities.

The strategies' key priorities identify opportunities to support vitality and viability of the town centres. They also seek to reflect the strong functional relationship between each town centre and their surrounding villages, and the importance of regular and reliable connections between them.

The vision statements within the individual town centre strategies will be built upon and deepened through the Delivery Plans for each town centre.

This Strategy has been developed with a planning and delivery focus, setting out next steps and actions to bring forward the key priorities. One area that this can be achieved is through financial contributions from developments that would affect the town centres in the form of planning obligations³. It is noted that Section 106 sets out the tests for requesting planning obligations, in accordance with Regulation 122 of The Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010. It is not for strategies such as this, to specifically set out formulaic requests for such financial contributions, which would be subject to viability and costings via the Council or applicant.

³ Planning obligations assist in mitigating the impact of unacceptable development to make it acceptable in planning terms. Planning obligations may only constitute a reason for granting planning permission if they meet the tests that are necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms. They must be:

- necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- directly related to the development; and
- fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

3A: Hitchin

Further information on **Hitchin town centre** is found in **Appendix 3A: Hitchin Town Centre Evidence Notes**.

Identity

Hitchin's origins have been traced back to pre-Roman times, aligned with the River Hiz as an important crossing point. Over time, Hitchin developed as a market town, and thus, the layout of the town centre has unfolded with temporary market stalls becoming permanent. In the 19th century, with the arrival of the railway, the previously unchanged street plan rapidly expanded to meet the new demands of the town's growth.

Now, the historic layout of the town centre is linear in structure stretching for over 800 metres north- south along Bancroft and the High Street. Narrow streets are clustered around Market Place adjoining to St. Mary's Church (dating back to the 14th century) and are adjacent to the Churchgate Shopping Centre developed in the 1970s.

There is a mix of typologies and uses in Hitchin town centre; a conservation area, listed buildings and late twentieth century developments, as well as a mix of residential, commercial shopping, recreation, and restaurants or cafe uses. The town centre has evolved over time and will continue to do so, but any changes should respect the overall historic character of Hitchin.

Hitchin is the main shopping and commercial centre in North Hertfordshire, predominantly serving the western half of the District. The centre has the strongest range and choice of comparison and convenience goods retail and services uses, including a wide range of national multiple operators.

Visitors are drawn to Hitchin by the market town's attractive historic character, as well as the variety of restaurants and cafes. The town also serves as a popular filming location, further tying the aesthetics and historic character of the town to its identity. Nonetheless, the River Hiz and the area surrounding St. Mary's Church are underutilised assets, with planned development of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone providing a significantly opportunity to secure the long-term viability of the centre

Vision

Hitchin will maintain and support the quality of its intrinsic historic market town character to develop an attractive, mixed-use, safe, accessible, vibrant and lively town centre for the local community and visitors to shop, work and live in. Hitchin will have strong and sustainable connections to key destinations, such as the railway station, Hitchin Lavender Fields, and nearby towns and villages. Town centre assets will be optimised, such as the River Hiz, St. Mary's Church, museums and its historic market. For the Churchgate Regeneration Zone and any other new development, Hitchin will take advantage of the opportunity to bring people into the town centre, provide quality public spaces, contribute to the cultural heritage and support the retail core.

The Council is committed to restoring Charnwood House, bringing it back into viable use, while safeguarding its historic features. In addition, the vision will embed clear actions for nature recovery, flood risk reduction and water quality improvements, recognising opportunities linked to the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), funding and emphasising the enhancement of the River Hiz and public access as key environmental priorities for Hitchin.

The Delivery Plan will build on and strengthen this vision through specific objectives and actions.



Image: Market Square, Hitchin



SWOT analysis Summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths

1. Hitchin is the main shopping destination in the district, providing a good range and choice of convenience and comparison shops. It has a reasonable selection of national multiple retailers, and it has the strongest range and choice of comparison and convenience retail, and services uses in the district.
2. Large food stores are available which cater for main and bulk food shopping needs.
3. The environmental quality of the centre is good, reflecting its historic character and the centre's attractive mix of period buildings and a varied street scene, including the Market Place.
4. The town centre provides a range of service facilities including banks and building societies.
5. The evening economy is relatively strong with many restaurants, pubs and bars.
6. The vacancy rate is much lower than the national average - suggesting demand for premises is relatively good.
7. Most areas of the centre are maintained in at least moderate condition, with Hermitage Road setting a benchmark for improvement.
8. The centre has a good range of small specialist independent retailers.
9. The centre has a good bus service, with many bus routes serving the centre.
10. Buildings are generally attractive and in a reasonable to good condition.
11. The household survey results suggest Hitchin has higher levels of customer satisfaction than dissatisfaction.
12. Hitchin features a popular market in the town centre, operating on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, in addition to a flea market on Sundays.

Weaknesses

13. The choice of retailers is not comparable with some larger centres, which encourages expenditure leakage to centres with a better range of facilities, such as Cambridge, Luton and Stevenage.

14. The linear form of the centre does not provide a natural circuit for shoppers, and pedestrian flows within peripheral areas are low, i.e. Bridge Street and the top end of Bancroft.
15. Some non-pedestrianised streets have narrow pavements and can be congested, and difficult for those with mobility difficulties at peak times, such as Sun Street and Bucklersbury.
16. The Conservation Area designation and listed buildings could constrain potential redevelopment opportunities. It could restrict the growth of the centre and deter new operators, due to the lack of availability of spaces needed for larger format stores.
17. The Churchgate Shopping Centre and the market area between St Mary's Church and the Churchgate Centre detract from the overall attractiveness of the town centre.
18. Surface car parking around St Mary's Church is visually dominant and detracts from the advantages of the proximity to the river frontage and historic core.
19. The train station is not within a comfortable walking distance of the town centre.
20. Lack of legibility from the town centre to peripheral car parks (e.g. Woodside and Lairage) and key facilities within and on the edge of the town centre (e.g. swimming pool, schools, museums, Priory Park and the rail station).

Opportunities

21. Hitchin has a reasonably affluent population, but a high proportion of the expenditure generated leaks from the area. Population and expenditure are expected to grow in the future. If Hitchin can maintain its current share of market expenditure there is potential to improve and expand retail, leisure and service uses.
22. There remain several opportunity sites within the town centre, which could accommodate new retail/leisure uses, which would help to retain more expenditure and customers in the area.
23. Improved linkages along the River Hiz could provide better access and natural

circuit for pedestrians between Bridge Street, the Churchgate Centre, the Portmill Lane car parks and Hermitage Road.

24. Improved pedestrian, cycling and bus linkages to the railway station would improve overall levels of customer accessibility to the town centre.
25. Enhancement of the Churchgate Centre and market area would significantly improve the attraction and ambience of the town centre as a retail and leisure destination.
26. The centre is already popular as a restaurant and café destination, providing a key opportunity (particularly within or associated with any development of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone) to develop a complementary cultural strategy.
27. A coordinated approach to transport and parking may provide opportunities for reconfiguration of provision, whilst maintaining or increasing footfall and vitality.
28. To restore Charnwood House to bring it back into viable use while safeguarding its historic features.

Threats

29. The number of vacant shop units has increased significantly in recent years. The continuation of this trend could undermine Hitchin's role as a higher order shopping destination in the retail hierarchy.
30. The continued polarisation of national multiples in larger centres and/or the business failure of more national multiples could lead to the closure of outlets. The continued rationalisation and restructuring of national multiples could lead to the closure of outlets. Multiple operators could seek to focus on (sub-)regional centres such as Stevenage, Cambridge and Luton rather than Hitchin.
31. Transport impacts of growth within and around Hitchin, including Luton Airport, could exacerbate congestion. This could deter town centre visits, given the proximity and capacity of through-routes.

Key priorities – Hitchin Town Centre

 Land use and retail Built environment Transport, access and movement	 Priority area: Churchgate Regeneration Zone	 Responsibility: NHDC as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management) Future development partners
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 Actions / Planning considerations: Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, the Council will assess proposals associated with the Churchgate Regeneration Zone (Local Plan Allocation HT11) as a Significant Development in accordance with Local Plan Policy SP9 and the Guidance Notes identified in Part 2. This would require a strategic masterplan demonstrating how the development could: provide a mix of flexible and adaptable commercial units that would enable future reoccupation by a range of town centre uses, as well as a mix of accommodation to increase the town centre's resident population;	- strategically target a mix of retail, food and beverage, and leisure operators, including recognition and assessment of the impact of any potential overlap of catchments for leisure uses; - activate and open up the River Hiz for user recreation; - improve pedestrian and active travel permeability through the site and surrounding area such as introducing street patterns to increase accessibility and linkages across the centre; - support the ongoing vitality of the town centre by increasing potential for visitors and footfall including the promotion of active travel to the centre.	- deliver a coordinated parking strategy; any proposals should be supported by a parking survey to demonstrate the current use of existing car parks in and around the town centre and plan for appropriate levels of parking, integrating with an emerging transport strategy for Hitchin; - ensure any scheme facilitates and does not prejudice further sites being brought forward in the future; and - provide accessible links to, and enhanced utilities infrastructure for Hitchin Market, including electrical connections and water supply.
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 Built environment Transport, access and movement	 Priority area: Public realm, connectivity and way-finding	 Responsibility: NHDC HCC Visit Hitchin Business Improvement District Future development partners
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 Actions / Planning considerations: Develop and deliver a joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding strategy and delivery plan for Hitchin, taking forward the recommendations of the Local Cycling and Walking Infra-structure Plan. For Hitchin: Create a public realm and wayfinding strategy in collaboration with the BID, Churchgate Regeneration Zone development partners and other stakeholders, including viability and costings,	to identify key opportunities for investment from street furniture, lighting and planters, as well as the provision of public realm alongside the River Hiz. Identify funding sources, future joint bidding opportunities, and requests for planning obligations for relevant developments for financial contributions to wayfinding, pedestrian routes, and public realm investments,	particularly between the town centre, new public realm along the River Hiz, and the surrounding open space and gardens. Improve transport links and signage from the town centre to key destinations such as the Hitchin Lavender Fields, the theatre and event space at The Dell, and other leisure destinations outside the town centre.
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Land use and retail
Community



Priority area:
Cultural economy strategy



Responsibility:
NHDC

Visit Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID)



Actions / Planning considerations:

- Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, the Council will recognise the benefits of innovative commercial uses that contribute to the nighttime economy, particularly options for young people, as a positive material consideration when supported through evidence of

viability and long-term vacancies, preventing breaks in active frontages, resolving amenity issues (e.g., noise and smells), impact on the nature and character of the retail frontages.

- Building on the economic opportunities from the Churchgate Regeneration Zone, the Council

and development partners for Churchgate will engage with key stakeholders to identify further commercial and cultural opportunities including investing in The Dell as an open-air theatre and to identify possible future funding sources.



Transport, access and
movement



Priority area:
Hitchin as a key sustainable transport hub



Responsibility:
NHDC
HCC

Visit Hitchin Business Improvement District
Future development partners



Actions / Planning considerations:

In collaboration with HCC, the BID and other stakeholders, the Council will develop a transport strategy for Hitchin that aims to reduce car dependency in the district and promote sustainable modes of travel into and within the town, including to:

- better integrate rail and bus services to facilitate travel by public transport within the district and to major destinations beyond, including Stevenage, Luton (including the airport), Biggleswade and Bedford;

- provide a bus station in the town centre to increase the convenience and comfort for people interchanging between services;
- improve the efficiency of bus routing in the town centre by adding a bus turnaround;
- support the expansion of the HertsLynx demand-responsive bus service to include villages to the northwest, west and south of Hitchin;
- deliver schemes in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan;

- redirect through-traffic and more effectively regulate traffic flows within the town to:
 - minimise congestion that impacts bus journey times and reliability;
 - enable the reallocation of road space for safer walking and cycling, particularly between the town centre and railway station;
 - reduce the severance and other inhibitory effects of the A505 on people walking and cycling into and within the town;
- improve air quality for residents and visitors.

3B: Letchworth Garden City

Further information on **Letchworth Garden City town centre** is found in **Appendix 3B: Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Evidence Notes**

Identity

Letchworth Garden City is a unique town centre as a result of its origins as an intensively planned town – the world’s first Garden City – founded in the early twentieth century. By following masterplan principles to balance high quality residential homes with nature pursuits, local employment and accessible transport, the areas of open space, commercial land uses and housing are integrated and convenient to one another. Detailed buildings contribute to the town centre’s unique flair, as the concept of the Garden City incited innovation and competitive design.

The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation owns a large proportion of the town centre land and assets, and is involved in the visioning, development and investments of the town’s future. Such a large volume of ownership to a single organisation is unique compared to the other town centres and stimulates different commercial decisions and town-centre-wide interventions. This single ownership also provides a key point of difference, providing opportunities for broader strategic alignment.

Letchworth is the only town with the convenience of a railway station within its centre. The town centre, although hosting wide, accessible and pleasant footpaths, lacks a distinct core. There is a variety of uses throughout the town centre, shops, residential flats, restaurants, cafes, with a range of budget priced comparison retail. Letchworth is positioned as an important town centre demonstrating Garden City principles, opportunities for recreation and leisure, and a balanced offer.

More recently, Letchworth is part of Hertfordshire County Council’s Sustainable Travel Town programme, which aims to bring forward a series of measures to reshape the local highways network and achieve a significant switch to walking, cycling and public transport.

Vision

Letchworth will maintain and develop the town centre for civic and social life, connected by accessible public transport networks through leadership, sense of place, and enterprise. Letchworth will: support the future of arts and heritage; will be a great place to live, visit and shop in; will increase residents life chances; and will be a protagonist in raising investment for the local economy; uphold and promote Garden City principles, and therefore its unique identity, as the first of its kind; and present a strengthened, more ambitious vision that reflects its future potential, aligns with the evidence base, builds on its distinctiveness, and recognises Letchworth’s capacity for growth.



SWOT analysis

Summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths

1. Letchworth is a compact well-defined centre with a natural circuit for shoppers. The centre has a relatively pleasant shopping environment.
2. The large Morrisons food store is an important anchor store catering for main and top-up food shopping.
3. Letchworth has retained a reasonable range of comparison goods shops, although this has declined and there is a lower representation of comparison retailers than Hitchin.
4. The Arcade, The Wynd and other secondary areas provide a good range of interesting specialist retailers.
5. The centre is easily accessible by a range of modes of transport, with a railway station located within the town centre. Car access is also convenient with several centrally located car parks.
6. Movement around the centre on foot is supported by wide pavements and pedestrianised areas, and Letchworth is one of the County Council's Sustainable Travel Towns.
7. The centre is attractively landscaped giving the centre a sense of spaciousness. Environmental improvements have enhanced the overall attractiveness of the centre.
8. Much of the town centre is consolidated under the sole ownership of the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, which provides a simpler single point of contact and greater opportunities for longer-term strategies.
9. The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation provides a significant draw for visitors and supports the town's distinctive offer.

Weaknesses

10. The proportion of vacant units is significantly above the national average, with vacancies spread across the centre, which suggest the supply of units is currently greater than operator demand.
11. The centre has a lower number of national multiples when compared with Hitchin and other larger centres in the sub-region such as Cambridge and Welwyn.
12. Like many centres of a similar size, Letchworth has lost most of its banks and building societies.
13. Leakage of higher value comparison spend to other centres within and beyond District.

Opportunities

14. Letchworth has a reasonably large and affluent population, which presents an opportunity to claw-back leakage from this catchment by improving its current offer.
15. The vacant premises across the centre could provide an opportunity to consolidate retail, redevelop and accommodate new facilities.
16. The new Emil Dale Academy school recently opened, providing another source of footfall within the centre and an opportunity to cater to the new student population.
17. The Broadway Cinema helps to boost the evening economy, but this facility could be improved and the number of visitors optimised.
18. There remains a number of opportunity sites within the town centre, including the potential regeneration of Garden Square Shopping Centre, which could accommodate new retail/leisure uses that could help to retain more expenditure and customers in the area.
19. There are a number of open and green spaces in close proximity to the town centre that would provide a draw to the centre (if supported by necessary routes and linkages) in keeping with the town's Garden City principles.

20. There is strong potential for high quality cycleways identified within the LCWIP to enhance active travel links between the town centre, the station and Letchworth Business Park.
21. Activate Broadway Gardens through regular events and markets.
22. Review the town centre one-way system to better support cycling.
23. Consider temporary or part-time closure of Leys Avenue to vehicular through-traffic to create a safer environment for community events.
24. Build on the popularity of The Wynd play area and explore similar interventions elsewhere in Letchworth.

Threats

25. The continued rationalisation and restructuring of national multiples could lead to the closure of outlets. Multiple operators could seek to focus on (sub-) regional centres such as Stevenage, Cambridge and Luton rather than Letchworth.
26. Prominent town centre units remain, vacant with limited interest from suitable occupiers, creating a risk of long term or repeat vacancies driven by wider commercial and market factors.
27. The District Council's offices are located adjacent to the centre, providing a steady stream of workers in the centre each day. Planned Local Government Reorganisation could impact the need for this office space by a local authority.
28. Increased footfall and evening activity may require proportionate security and safety measures to support local businesses.

Key priorities – Letchworth Garden City Town Centre



Land use and retail
Built environment



Priority area:

Town centre development opportunities and allocations (Garden Square Shopping Centre and Arena Parade)



Responsibility:

NNHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management)
Future development partners



Actions / Planning considerations:

Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, the Council will assess proposals associated with the development of Garden Square and Arena Parade (Local Plan Allocation LG21) as a Significant Development in accordance with Local Plan Policy SP9 and the Guidance Notes identified in Part 2. This would require the preparation of a strategic masterplan demonstrating how the developments could:

- provide a mix of flexible and adaptable units that would enable future reoccupation by a range of town centre uses, broadening the diversity of the retail and

dining offer, as well a mix of accommodation to increase the town centre's resident population;

- strategically target a mix of retail, food and beverage, and leisure operators, including recognition and assessment of the impact of any potential overlap of catchments for leisure uses;
- demonstrate consideration of the inclusion of community facilities, including the potential for a primary care/health hub;
- improve pedestrian and active travel permeability through the site and surrounding area, such as introducing street patterns to

increase legibility and linkages across the centre, and provide additional street furniture including benches;

- support the ongoing vitality of the town centre by increasing potential for visitors and footfall, including the promotion of active travel to the centre; and
- ensure any scheme facilitates and does not prejudice further sites being brought forward in the future.



Land use and retail



Priority area:

Repurposing of vacant units



Responsibility:

NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management)
Landowners
Future development partners
Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation



Actions / Planning considerations:

Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, the Council will seek to address higher levels of vacancy by giving positive weight to the repurposing of vacant units by uses that contribute to the vitality and

viability of the centre as a material benefit to be weighed against limited loss of floorspace or limited harm to heritage assets in the determination of planning applications.



Land use and retail
Community



Priority area:
The Wynd



Responsibility:
NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA)
development management



Actions / Planning considerations:

Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, the Council will give positive weight to new uses and formats (including non-main town centre uses) in the Wynd where it can

be demonstrated that they would contribute to the character of the street (to be weighed against any loss of main town centre uses and floorspace).



Land use and retail



Priority area:
Markets



Responsibility:
NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA)
development management
Future development partners
Letchworth Garden City Heritage
Foundation
Love Letchworth Business Improvement
District (BID)



Actions / Planning considerations:

Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, support the reinstatement of regular open air and/or covered markets in Letchworth town centre.



Land use and retail
Community



Priority area:
Evening economy



Responsibility:
NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA)
development management)
Love Letchworth Business Improvement
District (BID)
Letchworth Garden City Heritage
Foundation



Actions / Planning considerations:

- Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, the Council will give positive weight to innovative commercial uses that contribute to the nighttime economy, particularly options for young people, when supported by evidence of viability, long-term vacancies, preventing breaks in active frontages, resolving historic amenity issues (e.g. noise, unpleasant odours, or anti-social

behaviour), and the impact on the nature and character of the retail frontages.

- Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, the Council will give positive weight to planning applications for amendments to operating hours to support an evening economy, where supported by evidence that it will not lead to unacceptable adverse amenity issues.

- Collaborate with the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, alongside the BID, to build on the Letchworth Culture Strategy 'Create the Future' to incorporate the evening economy. This will include identifying funding sources and future joint bidding opportunities to support potential pilot schemes and the roll-out of extended operating hours as part of a wider evening economy strategy.



**Transport, access
and movement**



Priority area:

Connectivity and links to
Broadway Gardens and
Howard Park



Responsibility:

NHDC

HCC

Love Letchworth Business Improvement
District (BID)

Letchworth Garden City Heritage
Foundation



Actions / Planning considerations:

Develop and deliver a joint public
realm, connectivity and wayfinding
strategy:

- Taking account of the findings and recommendations of the Places & People 'Town Centre Access Review' and 'Placemaking Plan' to develop viability and costings to deliver key priorities identified, including orientation and signage improvements at Letchworth Station and Broadway Gardens.

- Progress the recommendations of the LCWIP for improved pedestrian and cycle routes in the town, including creation of a segregated carriageway facility for cyclists around Broadway Gardens, on Bridge Road, Station Place and Station Road.
- Improve the quality and legibility of routes between the town centre and the surrounding open space and gardens.

- Identify funding sources, including future joint bidding opportunities and planning obligations.



**Transport, access
and movement**



Priority area:

Station forecourt and
northern entrance



Responsibility:

HCC

NHDC

Network Rail



Actions / Planning considerations:

- In collaboration with HCC, engage with Network Rail to progress the redevelopment of the Station forecourt as a key gateway into Letchworth, to improve integration between bus and rail, and to make access to the station by cycle safer.

- Explore potential to create a northern pedestrian entrance to Letchworth railway station to improve access.

3C: Royston

Further information on **Royston town centre** is found in **Appendix 3C: Royston Town Centre Evidence Notes**

Identity

Royston has a rich heritage dating back to the 12th century, with surrounding green open spaces and town centre streets with a variety of cafes and restaurants offering a diverse mix of food and drink. Royston is distinctive through its historic qualities of the town centre, such as its medieval street layout, market places and sites of archaeological and historic interests.



An outstanding feature of Royston town centre is its compact size and streets, namely, King Street and High Street, lined with historic shop fronts. Leaning into the rich heritage, the Royston Town Trail has 31 marked stops throughout the centre detailing medieval and cultural buildings of interest.

Royston is smaller than Hitchin and Letchworth and primarily serves the day-to-day shopping, food, beverage, and service needs of local residents. Its town centre is located in the northeast of North Herts, southwest of Cambridge; it is approximately 10 miles away from the Hitchin-Letchworth-Baldock grouping, and thus, plays an important service role for many of the surrounding villages in both Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. There is a large employment estate to the north of the town, Royston Gateway Retail Park and Industrial Estate.

In recent years, the expansion of out-of-town retail at Royston Gateway has developed into a significant draw to the area, bringing visitors from a catchment extending north into Cambridgeshire. However, Royston Gateway is not currently well linked to the town centre, which provides a longer-term opportunity to develop a cohesive wider offer.

In 2022, Royston became a Sustainable Travel Town, and as such, prioritises measures to improve public transport, walking and cycling. Royston Railway Station approximately half a mile north of the town centre and is accessed on foot via narrow pedestrian paths along Kneesworth Street which carries high levels of traffic.

Vision

Royston will have a thriving town centre with a strong sense of identity marked by a clearly identifiable and vibrant 'heart' by tapping into its distinct character marked by rich heritage, medieval layout and a diverse mix of food and drink offerings. The centre features cultural attractions including Royston Cave, Royston Museum, Priory Memorial Gardens, and Royston Town Trail that offer a key opportunity for further economic and cultural growth. The town centre will encourage sustainable travel and serve its local community as a welcoming place that is a pleasure to live in, work in and visit.

The Delivery Plan will build on and strengthen this vision through specific objectives and actions.

SWOT analysis

Summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths

1. The centre serves the day-to-day service needs of residents.
2. The centre is accessible by a choice of modes of transport other than the car, with bus stops and a railway station located close to the centre, supporting a high proportion of trips by walking.
3. Access by car is served by convenient car parks located within and around to the main shopping area.
4. There is a small but interesting range of independent specialist retailers.
5. There is a good selection of pubs and restaurants that strengthen the evening economy.
6. The centre has a relatively low proportion of vacant units compared to both the District and UK averages, showing a healthy level of market demand.
7. Royston Town Council offices are located immediately adjacent to the town centre, providing access to key administrative functions as well as a draw to the centre.
8. The centre features a number of distinct cultural attractions within and in close proximity to the town centre, including Royston Cave, Royston Museum, Priory Memorial Gardens, and Royston Town Trail.
9. Royston features a popular market in the town centre, operating on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Weaknesses

10. The closure of the Morrisons town centre food store has reduced the food and grocery offer and an important anchor store for the centre has been lost.
11. Premises in Royston are generally small which may be less attractive to potential new occupiers looking for more modern premises. The centre has a limited number of larger retail units to accommodate national multiple retailers.

12. The Angel Pavement shopping mall features a number of vacancies but is dated and the design is relatively constrained reducing the attractiveness of the units for new occupiers.
13. Many of the pavements in the peripheral parts of the centre are narrow which causes congestion and vehicular and pedestrian conflict.
14. The opportunity to expand and improve the market is constrained by the existing location and infrastructure, including limited pedestrian access.
15. Although the train station is within a reasonable walking distance from the heart of the town centre, the trip is along pavements that are narrow in places and lack active frontage.
16. A number of large retailers, including Tesco, Aldi, M&S and Costa have located to peripheral locations on the bypass and northern fringe of the town, drawing spending away from the town centre.
17. The main employment area is located to the north of the town, closer to the Royston Gateway Retail Park, limiting the attractiveness of the town centre and the amount of lunchtime / after work spending.
18. The A505 is a major obstacle to active travel between Royston and Melbourn, Kneesworth, Bassingbourn and Litlington.

Opportunities

19. Royston Town Centre benefits from a local customer base, especially as local residents need to travel relatively long distances to reach alternative facilities. Population and expenditure generated by this customer base is expected to grow in the future, which should provide opportunities to improve the range and choice of shops and services in the town.
20. The Corn Exchange is an attractive destination within the centre with key heritage traits, featuring a variety of small specialist independent shops and the potential to offer a range of town centre services building on the popularity of the existing offer.

21. Royston is linked by public transport to Cambridge and intermediate villages (Melbourn, Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton) and has the potential to benefit from increased spending from planned housing growth in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire.
22. Royston Town Centre is dominated by independent traders, which could benefit from planning policy support for growth and opportunities for diversification through potential amalgamation, subdivision and investment in existing units.
23. Both the Royston Gateway Retail Park and Industrial Estate attract different users that could be drawn into Royston town centre for complementary activities.
24. Improved active travel links across the A505 and into Royston town centre would enable more economic activity without a commensurate level in car traffic.

Threats

25. The recent loss of the Morrisons from the town centre further reduces the number of national multiple retailers and the convenience goods shopping draw of the centre (as a distinct destination from Royston Gateway).
26. The potential for further edge-of-town/ out of centre retail development at Royston Gateway (given the limited town centre opportunities) would draw further trade from the town centre.

Key priorities – Royston Town Centre



Land use and retail
Built environment



Priority area:
Royston's key assets



Responsibility:
NHDC

Royston Town Council

Royston First Business Improvement
District (BID)



Actions / Planning considerations:

- Work with the Town Council and BID to establish a joint marketing strategy for the Royston Cave, Royston Museum, Priory Memorial Gardens, and Royston Town Trail to encourage visitors to the town centre.
- Building on the Council's Economic Strategy, collaborate with the BID, Royston Town Council and other stakeholders to support the establishment of a Royston focused Destination Management Organisation (DMO) to promote leisure activities and attractions in and around Royston.



Land use and retail



Priority area:
Growth and evolution of independent and speciality operators, protecting their contribution to Royston's character



Responsibility:
NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management)

Landowners

Future development partners



Actions / Planning considerations:

Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, the Council will recognise the benefits of the viability of existing operators that contribute to the vitality and viability of the centre and give positive weight to applications for the amalgamation, subdivision and investment in existing units to be weighed against limited loss of floorspace or less than substantial harm to heritage assets in the determination of planning applications



**Transport, access
and movement**



Priority area:
Public realm, connectivity
and wayfinding



Responsibility:
NHDC
HCC
Royston Town Council
Royston BID



Actions / Planning considerations:

Develop and deliver a joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding strategy:

- Provide wayfinding signage to improve legibility of routes to railway station, bus station, leisure centre, Royston Cave, Royston Museum, Royston Gateway Retail Park, employment areas, the Priory Memorial Gardens, Therfield Heath, and other destinations;
- Improve the pedestrian experience in and around the town centre, including connections between the High Street and Kneesworth Street, and between Market Hill, The Warren car park and premises within the gyratory; and
- Progress LCWIP recommendations for improved pedestrian and cycle routes in the town and from surrounding villages.
- Explore with HCC how to make bus services more attractive and reliable, and improve the experience for people waiting for buses at the railway and bus stations.



**Land use and retail
Community**



Priority area:
Royston Market



Responsibility:
NHDC
Royston Town Council



Actions / Planning considerations:

- Encourage Royston Town Council to undertake a study to identify the demand and opportunities to expand and enhance the existing market offering, including the potential for additional pitches and a greater range of operating hours and days.
- Collaborate with the BID and the Town Council to identify and apply funding sources to support expansion and promotion of the market.

3D: Baldock

Further information on **Baldock town centre** is found in **Appendix 3D: Hitchin Town Centre Evidence Notes**.

Identity

Baldock is the smallest town centre in North Herts and is located to the east of Letchworth. The town centre provides a mix of independent specialist retailers, food and beverage outlets and service businesses alongside a historic open market that operates every Wednesday.



Baldock town centre has a strong local identity with a thriving cafe and pub culture, which takes full advantage of the wide High Street and its refined old buildings. Baldock's strength lies with its specialist, independent retailers and service business sector which make a valuable contribution to the local economy and community. Combined, the built environment and town identity provides a pleasant social centre for residents and visitors to interact.

The town centre has retained its traditional market town character with the historic core containing fine architecture from the medieval and Georgian periods. St. Mary's Church, a Grade I Listed Building, lies in the northern part of the town centre and is surrounded by historic and more recent residential areas. The town centre is designated a Conservation Area and contains a mix of uses with town houses, inns and commercial buildings.

Since the completion of the A505 bypass, opportunities exist to promote a more vibrant and sustainable town centre, a social centre for residents as identified in the North Herts Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). Moreover, the Tesco Extra – located on the periphery of the town centre – attracts customers from neighbouring villages and towns, as well as locals but would benefit from better links to the town centre.

Looking forward, significant residential development surrounding Baldock town centre will likely increase town centre footfall and demand; the Growing Baldock scheme is planned to provide an additional 3,000 homes.

Vision

Baldock will maintain and maximise its town centre's strengths, namely, its historical market context, network of pedestrian paths, leafy green features, and local identity for cafe culture – by enhancing its attractive, safe, accessible, and lively town centre that incentivises investment for the local community and visitors to work, live and relax. Significant growth surrounding Baldock will provide a vibrant new resident and working population to visit and spend in the centre.

SWOT analysis

Summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths

1. Baldock is an attractive historic market town with period buildings and a pleasant environment. The centre has a wide and attractive tree lined High Street and a high-quality public realm.
2. The town centre is relatively compact, easy to navigate and generally accessible. The pavements are relatively wide and well maintained.
3. The shop vacancy rate is below the District and UK averages, and this has not increased significantly since 2015.
4. The centre has a strong presence of small independent outlets and primarily serves the day-to-day shopping and service needs of local residents.
5. There is adequate on-street parking provided within the centre and off-street parking at the Tesco Extra store and the Twitchell car park.
6. Baldock has a well-established evening economy with a wide selection of restaurants, pubs and bars for a centre of its size. The town centre has a higher-than-average proportion of food and beverage outlets.
7. Following the completion of the A505 Baldock bypass, the centre has benefited from investment and public realm improvements with recent updates including the replacement of street furniture along High Street and Whitehorse Street.
8. The town hosts a variety of regular community events that 'activate' the High Street ranging from Ecofest to Baldock Beer Festival, as well as the weekly outdoor market on Wednesdays.

Weaknesses

9. The large Tesco Extra on the edge of the town centre is a significant draw, but there is little evidence of a commensurate level of linked trips into the town centre. This is potentially exacerbated by the poor wayfinding and a lack of clear pedestrian links between Tesco Extra and the centre. As such, Baldock currently draws trade from a relatively small catchment area, similar to Royston, in contrast to Hitchin and Letchworth.

10. The public realm in the core Market Square is directly adjacent to parking bays, which may detract from the quality and experience of the public realm.
11. High volumes of traffic along Hitchin Street, Whitehorse Street, and High Street undermine the ambience of the shopping environment and inhibit pedestrian movements. Additionally, the pedestrian crossings of High Street, which is a busy road, are far apart (240m and 300m). Pedestrians are often observed walking on the road, especially near Simpson Drive.
12. The centre has no banks or building societies.
13. Shopping areas are fragmented with several breaks in the retail frontage by offices and dwellings located on the High Street.
14. Many of the shops are converted dwellings and some are also listed buildings, which can limit interest from potential occupiers that require a specific spatial format.
15. There are a limited range of retail shops, including national multiples. There are few comparison goods retailers within Baldock, well below the District and UK averages.
16. There is no co-ordinating body between local businesses and the District Council, and limited demand for a group (such as a BID) that would facilitate stakeholder engagement and local representation.
21. If more of the customers drawn to the Tesco Extra, some of whom are from outside the district, could be attracted to other shops and services in the town centre, that would boost the vitality and viability of the town centre. This depends in part on improving pedestrian routes and signage through the memorial gardens from Tesco to the High Street.
22. The transport strategy for Growing Baldock redirects through traffic away from the centre to A505/A1(M)/Letchworth Gate. This provides an opportunity to address east-to-west traffic on Hitchin Road/Whitehorse Road that detract from the centre, as well as to provide an additional pedestrian crossing on High Street (as recommended by the LCWIP).
23. Baldock town centre is dominated by independent traders, which could benefit from planning policy support for growth and opportunities for diversification through potential amalgamation, subdivision and investment in existing units.

Threats

24. Since 2015, the number of comparison goods shops has decreased significantly. The continuation of this trend could undermine the centre's attraction as a shopping, food and beverage destination.
25. Whilst Growing Baldock will increase the resident population within the town's catchment, the edge of centre Tesco Extra store provides an extensive range of food and non-food goods, which may directly attract the new spending, reducing the potential spending available to new and existing facilities in the town centre.
26. The increase in spending and activity generated by the Growing Baldock development may be lost by the limited opportunities/vacant units for existing businesses to expand or relocate within the town centre.
27. Failure to appropriately manage, monitor and influence the Growing Baldock development may result in an adverse impact on the town centre in terms of loss of vitality or footfall, increased traffic etc. if the emerging residents and workers are drawn to alternative destinations.

Opportunities

17. Shop rental rates are lower in Baldock than the other town centres in North Herts and more affordable for small independent traders.
18. The Local Plan (2011 – 2031) allocates 3,360 homes in Baldock. This could significantly increase the resident population supporting new and existing shops and services within the town centre.
19. The BA10 employment land allocation (19.6ha) could increase spending in the town. This will depend in part on improving cycling and walking connectivity between the industrial/employment land and the town centre.
20. The Growing Baldock development will provide a greater critical mass of businesses and commercial activity within the town, attracting a wider variety of retail and leisure operators.

Key priorities – Baldock Town Centre

A Land use and retail Built environment	Priority area: Growth and evolution of independent and speciality operators, protecting their contribution to Baldock's character	Responsibility: NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management) Existing and future operators Landowners Developers
Actions / Planning considerations: Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, the Council will: - recognise the benefits of the viability of existing operators that contribute to the vitality and viability of the centre through amalgamation and subdivision of units, and investment in existing town centre facilities as a material benefit to be weighed against limited loss of floorspace or less than substantial harm to heritage assets in the determination of planning applications. - give positive weight to new uses and formats (including non-main town centre uses) where it can be demonstrated that they would contribute to the character of the street (to be weighed against any loss of main town centre uses and floorspace).		
B Built environment Transport, access and movement	Priority area: Connectivity and wayfinding as the wider centre grows	Responsibility: NNHDC HCC Future development partners
Actions / Planning considerations: Develop and deliver a joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding strategy: - Growing Baldock residential-led development should support new residents access to the town centre via cycling and pedestrian routes, car, and public transport in accordance with the approved masterplan. This will include the redesign of Station Road / Icknield Way junction and additional cycle routes, and overall improvements to Whitehorse Street, amongst others; - new employment floorspace at Local Plan Allocation BA10, including development of new accesses from Royston Road and new/upgraded active travel routes (with associated wayfinding signage) to draw workers into the town centre; - improvements to pedestrian links between Tesco Extra and Baldock Town Centre to incentivise and support linked trips; - progress LCWIP recommendations for improved pedestrian and cycle routes in the town; and - install more interpretation boards, blue plaques and destination/route signage around the town centre.		



Land use and retail
Community



Priority area:

Monitoring of town centre
service provision and
infrastructure



Responsibility: NHDC

Future development partners



Actions / Planning considerations:

The Council will request funding from development such as Growing Baldock to support the Council's monitoring of the mix of uses and services within and surrounding Baldock Town Centre including main town centre uses, supporting infrastructure, community administrative and medical facilities to:

- identify and address any deficiencies through the loss of existing services and/or capacity

as a direct result of the planned increases in residential population, visitors and employees; and

- build an evidence base to support intervention through additional allocations, funding bids, or marketing initiatives.

Explore opportunities to provide public conveniences within the town centre.



Land use and retail



Priority area:

Capture benefits of
planned growth



Responsibility:

NNHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA)
development management)

Future development partners



Actions / Planning considerations:

- Through the Council's development management role in the planning system, the Council will require developments in and surrounding the town centre, such as Growing Baldock to enter into planning obligations for financial contributions to deliver

the actions and town centre priorities (as well as those within the approved masterplan, LCWIP amongst others) to mitigate the impact of otherwise unacceptable developments to make them acceptable in planning terms.



Image: Church Street, Baldock

Part 4: Further Council actions

Further council actions

The Towns Centres Strategy has identified a series of cross-cutting planning-based thematic policies to guide development, Council intervention and investment proposals. The Strategy adopts a place-based approach to identifying key investment priorities, tailored to the needs of each individual town centre to support vitality and viability throughout the district.

The Council should look to support, protect and enhance long-term viability and vitality of town centres. The effective delivery of the Strategy will require the Council to work closely with several partners and stakeholders.

Set out below are recommendations for Council-led priorities for action across each of the town centres.

The ongoing support of key identified partners and stakeholders will be important in terms of delivering the identified priorities for each of the town centres and the recommended further actions. This will inform action-oriented Delivery Plans for each of the centres that can be subject to regular review and updates.

Image: Howard Park, Leichworth

Land use and retail

1. The Council will incorporate the findings and recommendations for new policies from the North Hertfordshire Town Centres & Retail Study (2024, or any subsequent updates) when preparing the emerging Local Plan. The recommendations are reproduced at Appendix 2 of this document.
2. The Council will continue to foster engagement and partnerships with relevant town centre stakeholder groups including Royston Town Council, Visit Hitchin BID, Love Letchworth BID, Royston First BID, and the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation (amongst others). The Council will support the potential to diversify commercial uses in vacant units, and further boost footfall and dwell time, including through promotion and marketing efforts.
3. The Council will explore opportunities to facilitate community programming and spaces for recreation across open and green spaces in and surrounding town centres.
4. The Council will implement the Economic Strategy for North Hertfordshire to build a strong, resilient and sustainable local economy that will provide a critical mass of workers, residents, and commercial activity within the town centres.

Built environment

5. In accordance with Local Plan Policy SP9 and Guidance Note 1, the Council will require 'significant developments', including those within town centres, to be subject to a proportionate Strategic Masterplan exercise.
6. In accordance with Local Plan Policy D1, the Council will:
 - a encourage high density development in town centres that incorporate a mix of commercial uses on the ground floor, with residential or commercial above.
 - b progress and encourage enhancements to the public realm or new developments that ensure that the character and high quality of the historic fabric is maintained and thematically linked to the town centre enhancements.
 - c preserve the historic layout and retain the width of the streets across town centres, with any exceptions to be suitably justified. The towns' pedestrian permeability,

achieved through a network of footpaths, should be protected and enhanced.

- d ensure that new developments are complementary, rather than directly copying or competing with historic styles, with scope for innovation allowing the town centre to evolve. They should enhance the existing fabric through similar materials and sympathetic designs, scale, height, massing and proportions.

Transport, access and movement

7. The Council will work with partners to develop and deliver a joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding strategy and delivery plan for the four towns, building on Hertfordshire County Council's Active Travel Fund work in Stevenage Town Centre.
8. Review and update the Council's Parking Strategy to complement planned improvements in sustainable travel options. This could be by setting parking tariffs to encourage greater use of car parks outside the town centre boundary and reduce the amount of traffic circulating in town centres, or adjusting/implementing new Controlled Parking Zones and/or parking time limits to ensure town centre parking spaces are used efficiently.
9. The Council, in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council, will seek developer contributions and apply for, or support other bodies' applications for, grant funding to support sustainable transport infrastructure and services, including to:
 - a Appoint a transport project officer to deliver the recommendations of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), including measures and schemes that complement the Plan's priorities.
 - b Reduce through-traffic in all towns to reduce congestion (in particular on bus routes), increase safety and space for people walking and cycling, and improve air quality for residents and visitors.
 - c Reduce traffic speeds where these pose a danger or deterrent to people walking or cycling.
 - d Modify junctions where traffic speeds or volumes pose a danger or deterrent to people walking or cycling, in particular those with mobility, sensory or neurological impairments.

- e Increase the frequency and operating hours of bus services within and into all towns.
 - f Invite and support operators of bike/e-scooter rental schemes and car clubs into all towns.
 - g Promote public and shared transport services, including carpooling/ridesharing, to employers, education providers, leisure and sports centres, tourist attractions and information providers, etc.
 - h Create, reconfigure, add waiting facilities or otherwise enhance travel/mobility hubs, including existing railway and bus stations, to better integrate sustainable modes of travel – walking, wheeling (wheelchair, rollator, child buggy, etc), cycling, e-scootering (when and where legal), public and shared transport – and make interchanging more convenient, safe and comfortable.
 - i Support technology initiatives to integrate transport services into a single platform for planning, booking and payment options.
 - j Review the location and quantity of disabled parking bays to ensure that they adequately match demand.
 - k Prioritise buses using smart traffic management (e.g. traffic signals that respond to approaching buses or hold traffic where queues cause least disruption to bus services), bus lanes (provided these do not compromise provision unacceptably for active travel), and bus gates (where access is restricted to buses, other authorised vehicles and cycles).
10. The Council will use its role as a member of the Intalink Partnership to seek greater transparency and responsiveness around unreliable bus services, and to support improved bus services between town centres and surrounding villages.

Community

- 11. The Council through its annual Authority Monitoring Report will record the provision of the community facilities and services within the Primary Shopping Area and town centre boundary to assess any gaps in meeting the needs of the local community.
- 12. The Council will facilitate collaboration between stakeholders and facility providers as appropriate to help meet the needs of the local community.
- 13. The Council's adopted Design Code SPD includes advice on permeability and layout that foster a safe environment and deter anti-social behaviour to help guide developers and landowners.
- 14. The Council will expect licensing regulations of commercial retailers, within the Council's control, to deter 'dead frontages' through recommending appropriate hours of operation based on the surrounding mix of uses, proximity to areas of sensitivity (such as schools), delivery needs in comparison to the public realm and noise and waste pollution from the retailer.
- 15. The Council, through partnership working, will:
 - a Promote each of North Herts' town centres to demonstrate their unique character and strengths.
 - b Communicate and market the town centre offers, events and engagements to keep residents and visitors informed and to increase the frequency of their usage of the town centres.
 - c Support stakeholder groups in town centres to strengthen local networks, connections and skills.

Funding

In order to ensure that the Council can deliver the ambitions set out within this Strategy, there are several funding and delivery factors that will be integral to the implementation of the identified priorities. This section sets out the potential funding and delivery options that could be used by the Council. The list of funding opportunities identified is not exhaustive, and may be subject to change, particularly within the context of local government reorganisation and devolution arrangements.

There are likely to be opportunities for the Council to obtain funding from the Government, building on their previous success with historic funding rounds such as the Growth Area Fund (GAF). This may be complemented by opportunities for grant funding from third sector or other organisations. Developer contributions from strategic and large developments will be a significant source of funding for all four towns. It may be appropriate in some cases to explore public–private partnerships. A summary of potential private and public sector funding opportunities is provided in more detail in Table 1 below.

Table 1 High-level funding opportunities

	Funding Opportunities	Commentary
National	Local Growth Fund	Announced by Government in the Spending Review, awaiting further details. The objectives of these funds align with the priority areas identified in the Strategy.
	Local Mission Fund	
	Heritage Lottery Fund	Funding to support place-specific heritage and cultural interventions, particularly in Letchworth and Baldock.
	Arts Council England	
	National Wealth Fund	Blend of public and private financing to aid local authorities with capital to fund projects across priority sectors including transport, creative industries and digital technology.
Regional	Sub-national / Regional Transport Bodies	Utilising opportunities from regional authorities and dedicated project officer to secure funding for interventions.
	Hertfordshire County Council	Discretionary funding from the County Council.
Local	S106 Contributions	Contributions for non-highway town centre improvements and alignment with HCC contributions for transport interventions from the town centre outward. This may consist of 'Strand 1' contributions from individual schemes within or adjoining town centres or broader 'Strand 2' contributions from developments in the wider area to mitigate cumulative impacts. Collection and spend should be closely coordinated to ensure effective delivery of town centre initiatives.
	Local discretionary funding	From existing capital funding, e.g., Growth Area Funds (GAF) or discretionary funding from council tax or business rate charges. Place-specific funding can also be utilised for targeted investment, such as the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Fund.
	Business Improvement District (BID) Funding	Using funds raised through the mandatory levy charged to businesses within the BID.
	Public Works Loan (PWL)	PWL, now administered by HM Treasury, can be utilised by the Council to fund capital projects.
	Private Loans/Grants	Use of private equity to wholly or match fund capital projects including the Private Finance Initiative where the project will yield sufficient revenue.
	Local Climate Bonds	Use Local Climate Bonds to finance suitable environmental and social impact projects.

Key considerations

While there are a number of potential funding mechanisms the Council could use to deliver the Strategy, there is both opportunity and risk associated with these mechanisms; these are highlighted below:

Opportunities

- Although the timing and criteria of Government funding programmes remain uncertain, the Council can proactively prepare projects to be funding ready. This includes packaging initiatives such as town centre improvements into targeted groups (e.g., walking and cycling infrastructure, wayfinding, and public realm enhancements) to align with specific funding streams.
- The Council should strengthen its capacity and capability to develop high-quality funding applications. Projects should be progressed to a mature stage, supported by a robust evidence base, to enhance the credibility of bids and increase the likelihood of securing funding.
- The Council benefits from a strong network of stakeholders, which is a key asset for the District. The Council should draw on these relationships to coordinate efforts and facilitate joint funding and delivery of projects. Effective collaboration will help ensure that the distinct priorities of each town centre are addressed.
- Additionally, the Council should make greater use of national-level resources. For instance, the National Wealth Fund offers support to local authorities by financing capital projects and providing advisory services to help overcome financial barriers.

Risks

- There is limited transparency in future funding programmes committed by central government. These programmes may therefore not align with project timescales and therefore the Council must develop a clear funding and financing strategy which sets out a series of realistic funding models that deliver the priorities within this strategy.
- Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) will act as both a risk and opportunity. The risk lies in ensuring that the importance of North Herts' town centres is recognised and carried forward to new devolved authorities. LGR also presents an opportunity for additional funding streams through devolved funds, which are more accessible than central government funding programmes.





Image: Baldock High Street

Next steps

Public engagement has helped assess the level of support from key partners and stakeholders for the actions set out in the Strategy.

The Council, working across relevant service areas, will lead the preparation of Delivery Plans for each of the four town centres in collaboration with partners and stakeholders. These would be high-level plans covering at least five years and align with the vision for each centre, setting out core objectives, key priorities and actions to guide positive development and strengthen the identity, vitality and viability of each town. Work will begin following adoption of the Strategy, subject to the availability of resources and funding opportunities across partner organisations.

Glossary

Convenience goods

Consumer goods purchased on a regular basis e.g. food/groceries and cleaning materials.

Comparison goods

Durable goods such as clothing, household goods, furniture, DIY and electrical goods.

Design code

A set of illustrated design requirements, prepared with community input, that translate design principles into detailed parameters (e.g., building form, streets, landscaping) to guide and assess development in a defined area.

Experian

A data consultancy widely used for retail and leisure planning information.

Development brief

A document, typically prepared by a local planning authority (sometimes jointly with a landowner or developer) setting out detailed planning and design requirements for a specific site to guide the preparation and assessment of a planning application. A development brief covers matters such as land use, layout, density, access and infrastructure, and may be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Food and beverage

Use Classes A3 food and drink outlets, selling food and drinks consumed away from the home or hot food takeaway food, but not food and grocery items including convenience goods.

Goad Plans

Town centre plans prepared by Experian, which are based on occupier surveys of over 1,300 town centres across the UK.

Healthy Streets

A Department for Transport-endorsed approach to street design and management that prioritises walking, cycling and public transport, with the aim of improving air quality, public health and the quality of the public realm.

Market share/penetration rate

The proportion of total consumer expenditure within a given area taken by a particular town centre, destination or shopping/leisure facility. It quantifies its performance against other destinations.

Multi-channel shopping

Products made available to consumers on more than one sales channel, such as ecommerce websites, brick-and-mortar stores, marketplaces, comparison shopping engines, social media platforms, and other online channels.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies - economic, environmental and social planning policies - for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally prepared plans can provide for sufficient housing and other development in a sustainable manner.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)

A strategic, evidence-based framework prepared by a Local Highway Authority (LHA) to identify and prioritise walking and cycling infrastructure improvements over a 10-year period, in line with Department for Transport guidance.

Local Plan

The statutory development plan document(s) prepared by a Local Planning Authority (LPA), setting out policies and land allocations that guide decisions on planning applications in its area.

Permitted Development Rights (PDR)

Rights granted under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) that allow specified categories of development to proceed without a full planning application.

Site allocations

Specific parcels of land identified in a Local Plan for a particular use or mix of uses – such as housing, employment or retail – together with the quantum of development expected and any site-specific policy requirements.

Spatial Development Strategy (SDS)

A strategic planning document prepared by a combined authority or equivalent body (following devolution) that sets the long-term framework for housing, employment and infrastructure across a wider area than a single local authority.

Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

A document that provides additional guidance on how a Local Plan's policies should be applied. It is capable of being a material consideration in decision-making but does not form part of the statutory development plan.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)

Drainage systems designed to manage surface water run-off close to where it falls, mimicking natural drainage patterns (e.g., permeable paving, swales, attenuation ponds) to reduce flood risk and improve water quality.

Use Classes Order (UCO)

A categorisation system within the planning process set out by the Government to label types of property and land based on function.

Use Class A1

Commercial units/premises previously classed as retail or shop uses, but now part of the new Use Class E.

Use Class A2

Commercial units/premises previously classed as financial or professional services, e.g. banks and building societies, but now part of the new Use Class E.

Use Class A3

Commercial units/premises previously classed as restaurants and cafés, but now part of the new Use Class E.

Use Class A4

Commercial units/premises previously classed as public houses and bars, but now classed as Sui Generis.

Use Class A5

Commercial units/premises previously classed as hot food takeaway outlets, but now classed as Sui Generis.

Use Class D2

Commercial units/premises previously classed as leisure, sport and recreation uses, but now classed as Use Class E, Use Class F1 or Sui Generis.

Class MA

A new class of permitted development rights allowing certain changes from business and commercial to residential.

Abbreviations and acronyms

BID Business Improvement District

CWZ Core Walking Zone

DMO Destination Management Organisation

EV Electric Vehicle

GAF Growth Area Fund

GC Garden City

GI Green Infrastructure

HCC Hertfordshire County Council

HGV Heavy Goods Vehicle

LGCHF Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

LCWIP Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan

LGR Local Government Reorganisation

LNRS Local Nature Recovery Strategy

LPA Local Planning Authority

LTP Local Transport Plan

LHA Local Highway Authority

LTA Local Transport Authority

NHDC North Herts Council

NPPF National Planning Policy Framework

PSA Primary Shopping Area

SPF Shared Prosperity Fund

SWOT Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

SPD Supplementary Planning Document

SuDS Sustainable Drainage Systems



Image: Hitchin Lavender fields ©dixit-dhinakaran

Appendices

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Appendix 1: Resource list and hyperlinks

Please click on the links with the › symbol before them.

Part 1: Town centre evidence

Theme 1: Land use and retail

- › [BID Brochure – Hitchin \(Visit Hitchin BID, 2024\)](#)
- › [BID Brochure - Letchworth GC \(Love Letchworth BID, 2024\)](#)
- › [BID Brochure – Royston \(Royston First BID, 2024\)](#)
- › [Baldock Town Centre Recovery & Development Plan \(People & Places, 2022\)](#)
- › [Hitchin Town Centre Recovery & Development Plan \(People & Places, 2022\)](#)
- › [Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Recovery & Development Plan \(People & Places, 2022\)](#)
- › [Royston Town Centre Recovery & Development Plan \(People & Places, 2022\)](#)
- › [Town Centre Strategy – Hitchin \(NHDC, 2005\)](#)
- › [Town Centre Strategy – Letchworth GC \(NHDC, 2006\)](#)
- › [Town Centre Strategy – Royston \(NHDC, 2008\)](#)
- › [Town Centre Strategy – Baldock \(NHDC, 2004\)](#)
- › [North Hertfordshire Town Centres & Retail Study \(Lichfields, 2024\)](#)
- › [Development Contributions SPD \(NHDC, 2023\)](#)
- › [North Hertfordshire Economic Strategy \(NHDC, 2025\)](#)

Theme 2: Built environment

- › [Character and Conservation Statements \(NHDC\) Hitchin \(2011\)](#)
- › [Character and Conservation Statements \(NHDC\) Letchworth \(2001\)](#)
- › [Character and Conservation Statements \(NHDC\) Royston \(2007\)](#)
- › [Character and Conservation Statements \(NHDC\) Baldock \(2003\)](#)
- › [North Herts Design Code SPD \(NHDC, 2026\)](#)
- › [Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document \(NHDC, 2024\)](#)

Theme 3: Transport, access and movement

- › [An Active Travel Strategy for Hertfordshire \(Hertfordshire County Council, 2024\)](#)
- › [Hertfordshire Highways Place & Movement Design Guide \(Hertfordshire County Council, 2024\)](#)
- › [Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan \(LTP4\) 2018-2031 Guide \(Hertfordshire County Council, 2018\)](#)
- › [Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan \(LCWIP\) \(WSP, 2022\)](#)
- › [North Central Growth Transport Plan \(AECOM, 2022\)](#)
- › [North Herts Local Transport Strategy \(Markides Associates, 2017\)](#)
- › [North Herts Parking Strategy 2019 – 2031 \(NHDC, 2019\)](#)
- › [Sustainable Travel Town Letchworth GC Outline \(NHDC, 2021\)](#)
- › [Sustainable Travel Town Royston Outline \(NHDC, 2021\)](#)
- › [Active North Herts Strategy Report \(SLC, 2023\)](#)
- › [Electric Vehicle Strategy \(Hertfordshire County Council, 2022\)](#)
- › [North Herts Infrastructure Delivery Plan \(RS Regeneration, 2018\)](#)
- › [Air Quality Strategy, and Air Quality Implementation Plan \(Hertfordshire County Council, 2019\)](#)

Theme 4: Community

- › [North Herts Sport Provision and Open Space Review & Standards \(NHDC, 2016\)](#)
- › [Council Plan 2024-2028 \(NHDC, 2024\)](#)
- › [Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030 \(NHC 2025\)](#)
- › [Resilient Together Report \(ResilienTogether, 2017\)](#)
- › [Green Infrastructure Principles \(Natural England, 2023\)](#)
- › [Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework \(Hertfordshire Growth Board, 2025\)](#)

Appendix 2: Town Centre policy direction

Existing local plan town centre policy

Policy SP4: Town centres, local centres and community shops

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

- a) Promote, protect and enhance the provision of shops, financial and professional services, café or restaurants, pubs or drinking establishments or takeaways in the following centres in our retail hierarchy:
 - i. the town centres of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston;
 - ii. 13 existing local centres consisting of:
 - village centres at Ashwell, Codicote and Knebworth;
 - seven centres in Hitchin;
 - two centres in Letchworth Garden City; and
 - the centre at Great Ashby; and
 - iii. 2 new local centres north of Baldock and East of Luton within the strategic housing sites identified in this Plan;
- b) Support proposals for main town centre uses in these locations where they are appropriate to the size, scale, function, catchment area, historic and architectural character of the centre;
- c) Identify Primary Shopping Frontages within town centres where shops will be expected to concentrate;

d) To ensure the District's towns maintain their role and market share, make provision for up to 38,100 gross sq.m of additional floorspace over the plan period, comprising shops, café or restaurants, pubs or drinking establishments or takeaways including the re-occupation of vacant floorspace, consisting of:

- i. 22,500 gross sq.m comparison goods (e.g. clothes, shoes, furniture, carpets);
- ii. 8,600 gross sq.m convenience (e.g. food, drink, toiletries); and
- iii. 7,000 gross sq.m food and beverage outlets (e.g. restaurants, takeaways and bars).

38,100 gross sq.m is a district wide retail capacity but it is principally derived from the retail capacity projections for the four town centres, as indicated below:

Years	2016-2021	2021-2026	2026-2031	Totals
Baldock	300	1,600	1,400	3,300
Hitchin	3,800	3,600	3,700	11,100
Letchworth	2,400	3,300	3,500	9,200
Royston	3,200	2,000	1,900	7,100
Strategic Housing	1,500	2,700	2,600	6,800
Other	200	200	200	600
Total	11,400	13,400	13,300	38,100

The three town centres of Baldock, Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City have significant overlapping markets, with spend leakage from Letchworth Garden City to Hitchin and a lack of physical space at Baldock to accommodate its projected retail capacity. To address the leakage and physical capacity across these three centres the indicative distribution and phasing of provision is as follows:

Years	2016-2021*	2021-2026	2026-2031	Totals
Baldock	0	0	0	0
Hitchin	0	3,700	3,300	7,000
Letchworth	5,350	5,500	5,000	15,850
Royston	4,350	2,200	1,800	8,350
Strategic Housing Sites	0	3,400	2,900	6,800
Other	0	300	300	600
Total	9,700	15,100	13,300	38,100

*2016 to 2021 projections includes take-up of vacant units and the implementation of commitments.

- e) Prepare and maintain up-to-date town centre strategies to support this approach and / or adapt to change. These will be used to inform the approach to retail at the time of the early review; and;
- f) Support the retention and provision of shops outside of identified centres where they serve a local day-to-day need.

Town centre policy recommendations

(extract from North Herts Town Centres and Retail Study 2024 prepared under the national policy context at the time of publication)

Meeting North Hertfordshire's needs

When planning for growth in their town centres, Local Planning authorities should allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail development needed. It is important that the needs for retail and other main town centre uses are met in full and not compromised by limited site availability. The combined floorspace projections for retail and food/beverage floorspace in 2026, 2031 and 2036 are summarised and rounded in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 Combined retail and food/beverage floorspace requirements (sq.m gross) - cumulative

	Convenience retail (sq.m gross)	Comparison retail (sq.m gross)	Food / beverage (sq.m gross)	Total (sq.m gross)
By 2026	-240	10	870	640
By 2031	-360	180	2,850	2,670
By 2036	-140	390	4,920	5,170

Table 2 Combined floorspace requirements by location (sq.m gross) - cumulative

	By 2026	By 2031	By 2036
Hitchin	290	1,180	2,150
Letchworth GC	160	690	1,350
Baldock	150	550	1,020
Royston	-50	-70	100
Other North Herts	90	320	550
Total	640	2,670	5,170

The early Local Plan review should seek to accommodate for existing and new residents' retail and leisure needs over the plan period. Due to over-lapping shopping catchment areas, there should be potential to redistribute capacity to Letchworth Garden City from Hitchin and Baldock, reflecting planned population growth patterns. Letchworth Garden City also has the main concentration of vacant floorspace and therefore the most potential to accommodate growth within the designated centre.

The combined total floorspace capacity projection up to 2036 is 5,170 sq.m gross. Based on a reasonable reduction in shop vacancy rates, reoccupied space could in theory accommodate about three quarters of the projected capacity need up to 2036.

The leisure expenditure projections indicate there may be potential to accommodate an additional 1,700 sq.m gross of commercial leisure and cultural floorspace by 2036, which could include:

- two medium sized health and fitness facilities (about 140 new fitness stations);
- new leisure innovations e.g. trampolines, indoor climbing, escape rooms, virtual sport activities; and
- small scale tourist attractions/cultural facilities.

The development strategy should be flexible to respond to emerging opportunities for new leisure, entertainment and tourist related facilities.

The updated capacity projections suggest there is no pressing requirement to allocate new sites for major retail or leisure development to accommodate projected growth for the next ten years. The priority in the short to medium term will be the reoccupation of vacant shop units. Existing Local Plan allocated sites for mixed use development i.e. HT11, HT12, LG19, LG21 and RY12 and new facilities in strategic housing sites are more than sufficient to accommodate any long-term residual need.

Future planning policy

Hierarchy of centres

Continuing to identify the hierarchy of centres and the centres boundaries in the early Local Plan review is important in terms of:

- ensuring the vitality and viability of town, village and neighbourhood centres is maintained and enhanced as important hubs for the community, through the application of the impact test;
- directing retail and main town centre uses to appropriate accessible and sustainable locations, through the application of the sequential approach to site selection; and
- identifying a viable role and strategy for each centre, based on the health check analysis in this report.

No changes to the existing hierarchy are considered necessary. The network of town, village and neighbourhood centres should be protected and enhanced to ensure appropriate accessibility to important facilities for all sections of the community and to ensure sustainable shopping patterns.

Impact and sequential tests

Local Plan Policy ETC3 and the supporting text clearly set out the sequential and impact tests and are in the most part consistent with the latest NPPF and not affected by the changes to the use classes order. However, the policy wording implies an impact assessment is required for all main town centre uses. Policy ETC3 criterion b) could be amended to “retail and leisure” rather than “town centre” development for consistency with the NPPF.

In relation to the sequential test the supporting text at Local Plan paragraph 5.13 could be expanded to reflect paragraph 92 of the NPPF, which indicates when considering edge-of-centre and out-of-centre sites preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre.

The NPPF minimum threshold of 2,500 sq.m gross continues to be an inappropriate threshold for North Hertfordshire because this scale of development would exceed the five-year retail and food beverage projections for all centres in the District. The early Local Plan review should continue to adopt lower impact thresholds for retail and leisure uses in Baldock and Royston i.e. 500 sq.m gross. The threshold in Letchworth Garden City could also be reduced from 1,000 sq.m gross to 500 sq.m gross, because the

floorspace capacity projections are much lower. A lower impact threshold of 1,000 sq.m gross rather than 2,500 sq.m gross could be considered in Hitchin.

All retail and leisure developments above these floorspace thresholds (combined) proposed outside or on the edge of designated town, village and neighbourhood centres should be required to prepare a proportionate impact assessment, including retail and leisure uses included within mixed use allocations. The level of detail required in the impact assessment will vary case-by-case and it is for the applicant to provide robust justification that their impact assessment is robust, appropriate and proportionate.

As in the adopted Local Plan Policies ETC6 and ETC7 the early Local Plan review should continue to support small scale shops and services within village and neighbourhood centres and outside designated centres, where a particular market and locational requirement has been robustly justified. Both Policy ETC6 and ETC7 should seek to protect valuable local shops and services.

Town and local centre boundaries

The early Local Plan review Plan should continue to define clear boundaries for town, village and neighbourhood centres on the Proposals Map and should remain the focus for retail, leisure and other main town centre uses. The continued need for town centre boundaries, primary and secondary shopping frontages needs to be considered. For example, a separate town centre boundary and secondary shopping frontages is probably unnecessary in Baldock.

The relatively low retail floorspace capacity projections up to 2036, suggest there is no need to extend centre boundaries to accommodate future growth, but the longer term projected under-supply of floorspace implies a significant contraction of centre boundaries is also unnecessary. However, town centre boundaries are relatively widely drawn in most centres and some predominantly residential areas on the periphery of town centres could be removed. The Council should review the centre boundaries and amend as necessary.

Controlling the mix of uses

The policy approach set out in Policies ETC4 and ETC5 could be challenged following recent changes to the Use Classes Order and Permitted Development Rights. The updated floorspace projections do not indicate an overall reduction in Class E main town centre uses is required in North Hertfordshire's town centres. The continued adoption of Article 4 Directions in the four town centres will help to prevent the loss of town centre uses.

The continuation of the policy approaches set out in Policies ETC4 and ETC5 will be undermined and hampered by the UCO/PDR changes. The continued adoption of Article 4 Directions in the four town centres will help to prevent the loss of town centre uses

The early Local Plan review could designate a primary shopping area (PSA) in Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston town centres to manage the mix of uses and protect the vitality and viability of these centres. This PSA should cover the area currently designated as primary shopping frontages. The PSA will be the area where retail uses will be concentrated for the sequential approach and the area from where edge-of-centre sites will be measured. Leisure and other non-retail town centre uses can be focused in the wider town centre area i.e. the area between the PSA and the town centre boundary.

The continued designation of secondary frontages, in addition to a PSA, is probably unnecessary. The designated town centre boundary in Baldock could be adopted to control the mix of uses, rather than a PSA or frontage designations.

Class E uses should be maintained and enhanced in the PSA and development should maintain an active frontage. This approach would replace Policy ETC3. Within other parts of these three town centres and in Baldock a wider range of main town centre uses including Class E, Sui Generis and Class F could be promoted and protected. This approach would replace Policy ETC4:

- individual or cumulative impact on neighbouring amenity;
- adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the centre as a whole;
- provision of an active frontage at ground floor level which relates well to the design of the building and to the street-scene and its setting; and
- adequate marketing of the unit for Class E uses in primary frontages or Class E, Sui Generis and Class F uses in other parts of the centre.

In the future and in specific cases, it may be appropriate to consider Article 4 directions to prevent permitted changes of use that could undermine the character or vitality and viability of parts of town centres.

Future monitoring

The recommendations and projections within this study will assist the Council in reviewing development plan policies over the coming years and to assist future development management decisions. The study provides an overview of the potential need for further retail and leisure development in the medium and long-term up to 2036. Longer-term projections are subject to uncertainty and forecasts will need to be amended to reflect emerging changes, as and when new information becomes available. These uncertainties include the longer-term implications of the Covid-19 and cost of living crisis that will need to be monitored. Longer-term projections up to 2036 should be treated with caution and provide broad guidance only. Projections should be monitored and the floorspace projections rolled forward. The following key assumptions should be updated as necessary:

- population projections;
- local expenditure estimates (information from Experian or other recognised providers);
- growth rate assumptions for expenditure per capita (information from Experian or other recognised data providers);
- the impact of potential increases in home and internet shopping (Experian regularly provides projections for internet shopping and these projections will need to be updated at the same time as expenditure and population figures);
- existing retail floorspace and average turnover to floorspace densities; and
- implemented development within and around the study area.

These key inputs into the retail/leisure capacity assessment can be amended to provide revised capacity projections.

Appendix 3: Individual town centre evidence notes

3A: Hitchin town centre evidence notes

- Land use and retail
- Built environment
- Transport, access and movement
- Community

3B: Letchworth Garden City town centre evidence notes

- Land use and retail
- Built environment
- Transport, access and movement
- Community

3C: Royston town centre evidence notes

- Land use and retail
- Built environment
- Transport, access and movement
- Community

3D: Baldock town centre evidence notes

- Land use and retail
- Built environment
- Transport, access and movement
- Community

This appendix is a helpful tool to be read alongside Part 3: Individual town centre strategies, as well as and Part 2B: Guidance notes, within North Herts’ town centres strategy.

The following sub-sections to Appendix 3 represent evidence related to each town centre, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Baldock respectively, and across the thematic pillars of the town centres strategy:

Retail and Land Use,
Built Environment,
Transport, access and movement and
Community.

Links to the relevant supporting documents are listed in Appendix 1.

Appendix 3A: Hitchin town centre evidence notes

Land use and retail

The land uses and town centre health indicators for Hitchin are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- mix of uses,
- vacancy rate and economic vitality,
- boundaries and frontages,
- development allocations,
- leisure,
- Local Needs Index and
- Article 4 Directions.

Mix of uses

There are 346 retail and service units within Hitchin town centre’s designated shopping frontages; the mix of uses is set out in Table 1 below, which is compared with the District and UK averages. Approximately a third of these units are comparison retail, which is just over the District and National average. Falling below the District and National averages, Hitchin has only 10 hot food takeaways.

Table 1: Mix of retail and service uses – Hitchin town centre (Town Centres and Retail Study, 2024).

TYPE	# of Units	% of Units	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units (UK avg.)
Convenience retail	23	6.6	5.6	9.5
Comparison retail	107	30.9	27.8	27.7
Financial/Professional	32	9.2	8.3	8.5
Restaurant/Café	42	12.1	12.8	10.0
Public house/Bar	13	3.8	3.0	4.9
Hot food takeaway	10	2.9	4.1	6.2
Other non-retail service	85	24.6	26.3	19.3
Vacant unit	34	9.8	12.3	13.9
TOTAL	346	100.0	100.0	100.0

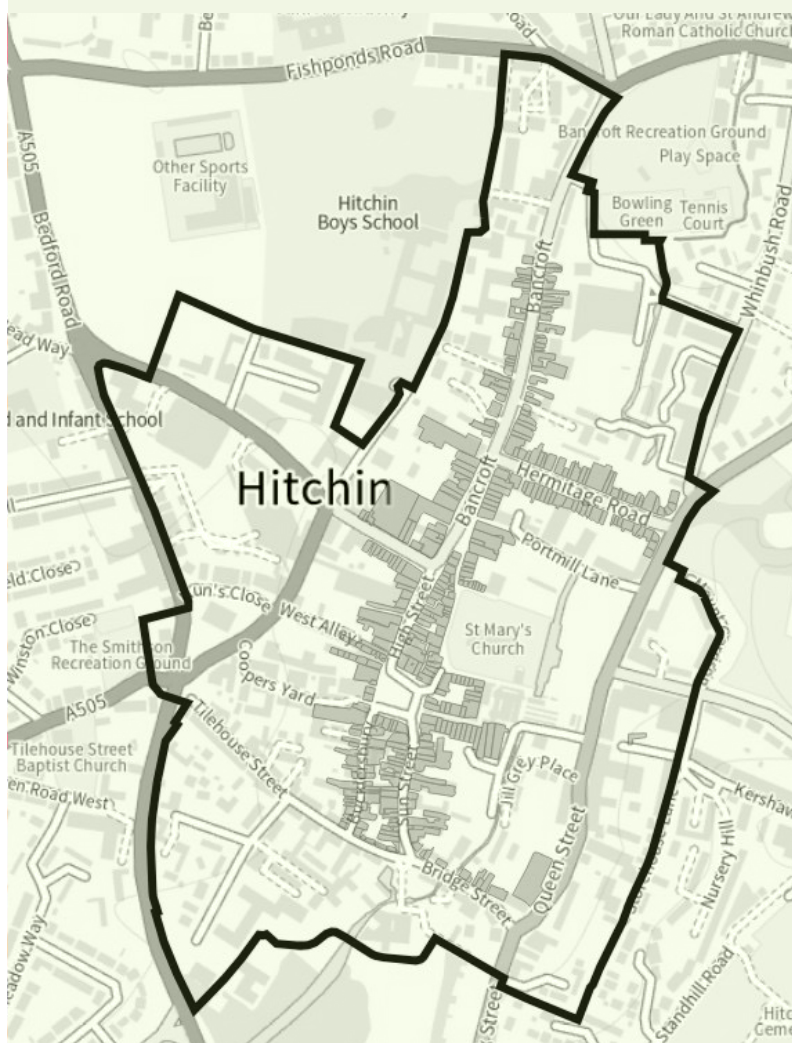
Vacancy rate and economic vitality

At 9.8% shop vacancy, Hitchin is below the District and National averages; there were 34 vacant units within the centre at the time of the 2023 land use survey. From 2015 to 2023 the number of vacant units in the town centre increased from 20 units to 34 units. Although Hitchin town centre has experienced the impact of Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, the vacancy rate remains relatively low compared with other centres. Vacant units vary in size from under 50 square metres to over 1,000 square metres and are relatively evenly spread throughout the centre with no obvious concentrations.

Boundary and frontages

The existing town centre boundary for Hitchin can be found in Figure 1; notably, town centre boundaries evolve over time as required by the Local Plan updates process. In Hitchin town centre boundary, there are areas that do not actively host commercial or mixed-use development, but rather non-main town centre uses, such as residential use.

Figure 1: Hitchin town centre, depicting the current town centre boundary in blue and retail land use in orange (town centre area: 451,274 sq.m).



Development allocations

Based on the Local Plan (2011 – 2031), there are two town centre allocations as mixed-use enhancement opportunity sites in Hitchin.

HT11 Churchgate & its surrounding area: This allocation proposes that the current centre is redeveloped to provide 4,000 square metres of additional shop, café, restaurant, pub, drinking establishment or takeaway and other town centre uses at ground floor level, with other main town uses and residential uses in upper or basement areas. The policy requires a concept framework/masterplan to be prepared and provides further guidance on key considerations to be covered.

To help bring this development forward, the Council has acquired the leasehold for the Churchgate Shopping Centre and is marketing the centre and its locational environment as a redevelopment opportunity and is rebranding this allocation as the Churchgate Regeneration Zone (CRZ). The mixed-use policy allocation, HT11 for Churchgate and its surrounding area in the Local Plan (2011 -2031), has supportive text for the redevelopment of this mixed- use site.

Separate to the Town Centres Strategy, the Council's Enterprise Team has conducted public consultation on this proposed redevelopment site seeking public views. Further information on the CRZ can be found on the Council's website: [Join the Churchgate Conversation](#).

HT12 Paynes Park: This allocation proposes that the current centre is redeveloped to provide 3,000 square metres of additional shop, café, restaurant, pub, drinking establishment or takeaway and other town centre uses at ground floor level, with other main town uses and residential uses in upper or basement areas. The policy requires a concept framework/masterplan, and the policy identifies the key considerations to be covered.

Since the time that Paynes Park was allocated for redevelopment, part of this allocation, known as the former Woolworths building and its car park to the rear, is subject to a Planning Application for the reprovion of retail units and the addition of 44 one-and two- bedroom apartments.

Leisure

Informed by the Town Centres and Retail Study, leisure in Hitchin is oriented around food and beverage pastimes, such as frequenting restaurants and pubs, as well as using hair salons, health facilities and non-food shopping. Within the shopping category and compared to the rest of the district's town centres, visitors report non-food shopping in Hitchin at 10% more, a logical outcome considering this town centre's robust offer of national and smaller boutique comparison shops. Hitchin also hosts other various leisure experiences in the town centre, such as the North Hertfordshire Museum and British Schools Museum, with recreational lavender fields nearby.

Table 2: Participation in leisure activities by Hitchin town centre users (Town Centres and Retail Study, 2024).

Activity	Hitchin %	Average % across all town centres
Go for walk	0.5	0.9
Cafe/pub/restaurant	57.1	46.8
Leisure activity	8.1	9.9
Restaurant/Café	42	12.1

Visit time: According to the NEMS household survey (2024), 71% of respondents dwell for more than 1 hour in Hitchin town centre. Hitchin has the highest percentage of visitors that dwell for longer than 1 hour. Compared to the other town centres within North Herts, the user visit duration to the town centre is unique to Hitchin; this is about 20 – 35% more than the other town centres. It is logical that this town's profile has a longer duration of visits correlated with more 'out of town' users, there is a draw to come into Hitchin and make the journey worthwhile.

Figure 2: Dwell time for Hitchin town centre users (HUQ, 2023 – 2024).

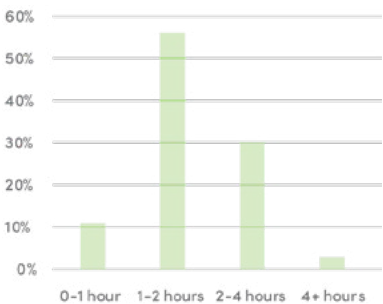
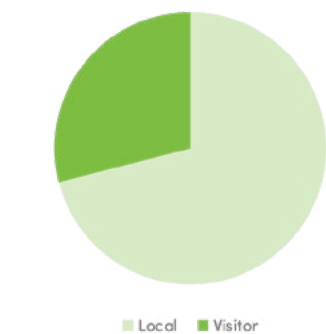


Figure 3: Origin of Hitchin town centre users (People & Places, 2022).



Local Needs Index: A standardised Local Needs Index of Hitchin town centre was undertaken in 2024. This exercise judges against 16 types of shops, services or community uses; Hitchin scored 15 out of 16, only lacking a community hall. Although, the community may access this amenity, a community hall, through the presence of St. Mary's Parish, Hitchin Town Hall and/or the North Herts' Museum, all of which hold rooms for community uses (such as workshops or events) and are located within the town centre.

Table 3: Local Needs Index Summary of North Herts' town centres (Town Centres and Retail Study, 2024)

Centre	Hierarchy Classification	Local Needs Index Score (out of 16)
Hitchin	Town Centre	15
Letchworth Garden City	Town Centre	16
Royston	Town Centre	14
Baldock	Town Centre	12

Planning protections - Article 4 Directions and Listed Buildings: Alongside balancing controls in planning, such as the existing Listing Building designation to protect building heritage and historic integrity, the immediate Article 4 Directions was made to protect the commercial uses in town centres. The Article 4 Directions mandates special controls for planning teams to assess approval for commercial land uses to turn to residential, as this could create a weakening in commercial opportunities and can also create dead frontages within town centres. The Article 4 Direction applies to the current Primary and Secondary frontage designation in the 2022 Local Plan, and importantly, follows to 2022 Local Plan approach to prioritise main uses in town centres first.

Figure 4: Planning protections in Hitchin town centre; Article 4 Directions (purple) protect main town centre uses in town centres first and Listed Buildings (yellow) protect building heritage and historic integrity.



Built environment

The built environmental conditions for Hitchin are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- design and the public realm,
- historic character and
- open and green spaces.

Design and the public realm: The historic layout of Hitchin features narrow streets clustered around Market Place adjoining with St Mary's church. Historically, the buildings are a mix of town houses built on narrow burgage plots and for commercial activities. The town centre has evolved over time and will continue to do so, but any changes should respect the overall historic character of Hitchin.

The scale and typology of new buildings should be dictated by the scale and typology of historic buildings. Architecture of new developments should be complementary, rather than directly copying or competing with historic styles. New designs should use materials that compliment historic styles. There should be scope for innovation allowing the town centre to evolve.

Building heights are generally three storeys, although there is a mix of two and three storey buildings which creates interest and variety. As the roofscape in Hitchin town centre varies in pitch and style, flat roofs are considered inappropriate for new development. Higher densities are appropriate within the town centre, as are a mix of uses including residential, retail and commercial.

Vistas and viewpoints are restricted within the town centre due to the curved character of the streets; this creates a sense of anticipation and interest for the user, with important views of St Mary's Church.

As continuous frontages create strong building lines and thus clear enclosures of places, continuous frontages should be retained in any new development, including larger buildings which should reflect plot sizes in their detailing. Moreover, where appropriate, narrow building plots should be maintained. To activate the facades and naturally build in surveillance of the public realm, building frontages should face the street. Blank walls should be modified to create interest in the plinth.

Historic Character: Hitchin is one of the oldest continually inhabited towns in the county, and arguably, the historic centre of North Herts. The Hitchin Conservation Area spans beyond the current town centre boundary and contains the entire town centre. There are just under 100 listed buildings in Hitchin town centre which are protected through various listed building designations. A few modern buildings exist throughout the town centre, which arguably detract from the overall historical environmental character. The current pattern of roads and footpaths has significantly influenced the development of the town's layout and further, preserves a network of rights of way over the former medieval open fields.

The relationship of buildings to the spaces in the Hitchin Conservation Area is varied according to historical development and uses within each part of the conservation area.

In the south and west, namely Bucklesbury Street and Sun Street, where the streets are narrow, the buildings are all two or three storeys high and mostly listed and sit on the back edge of the pavement providing a complex and closely contained streetscape of great quality.

Churchgate sits between The Market Place Square and the more modern Hitchin Market. It is also adjacent to St. Mary's Church. This site, including the Market Place Square, is currently under consideration for redevelopment (Churchgate Regeneration Zone) and must respect the surrounding context and town character, such as building heights, density, materiality, design, and views.

St. Mary's Church and churchyard are tucked away behind the Market Place and High Street by narrow pedestrianised lanes (Churchyard and Munts Alley). The grounds sit alongside the River Hiz with scenic banks for users to recreate, and also alongside St. Mary's Car Park. Views to the east of St. Mary's Church (along Queen's Street) detract from the high quality and historic character of the grounds and the town centre.

Hermitage Road includes uniform rows of mixed-use buildings dating back to the early 20th century, with a priority towards commercial activities on the ground floor, and office or residential above. This road includes a clear vantage point up to Windmill Hill.

Compared to the other town centres in the district, Hitchin has more listed buildings in number than Baldock, Letchworth Garden City and Royston town centres combined, but in terms of ratio (non-listed compared to listed buildings) within the town centre, Hitchin has less than Baldock and Royston.

Open and green spaces: The town centre contains important public spaces which should be protected and enhanced. The hard character of Market Place contrasts with the soft landscaping to the east of St Mary's church along the banks of the River Hiz. The River Hiz is an important element in the character of Hitchin town centre and its potential for a riverside walk should be fulfilled. Additionally, Priory Park, Windmill Hill and Bancroft Recreation Ground are all close to the town centre and are important open green spaces. It is important to improve connectivity between these spaces and the town centre.

Transport, access and movement

Transport, access and movement conditions for Hitchin are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- access and movement,
- mode of travel
- footfall and
- parking.

Access and movement: Hitchin town centre has a strong urban structure resulting in an informal grid of routes. Some of these routes are for both vehicles and pedestrians, although there are a number which are just for pedestrians making Hitchin town centre permeable for people accessing the town centre on foot. However, due to the historic nature of the centre, some pavements and streets are narrow restricting pedestrian movement when congested (i.e. Sun Street and Bucklersbury). From 1993 onwards, the town centre has been partially pedestrianised, and the impact of this intervention can perhaps be traced in user survey results from Hitchin's 2022 Recovery and Development Plan by People & Places: approximately three quarters of respondents felt positively about the *"pedestrian access around the town centre"*, with an addition 24% feeling neutral.

Motor traffic volumes through Hitchin, particularly on the A505 and B656, and large volumes of HGV traffic, in particular on the A505 and Grove Road (leading to the industrial estate), create significant barriers to walking and cycling. The locations that are least supportive for pedestrian uses in and close to the town centre include Cambridge Road railway underbridge, multiple roundabouts on the A505, and major junctions on the B656 (Walsworth Road and Queen Street). Hills around the town centre are also a barrier to cycling, as cycling routes that minimise climbs and avoid steep climbs are preferred.

Of relevance to Hitchin town centre, connections that have been identified in the Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to be improved include:

- Hitchin to Baldock via Letchworth Garden City via cycling routes and bus networks,
- Hitchin town centre to the railway station via pedestrian routes, and
- Hitchin town centre to Stevenage via bus networks.

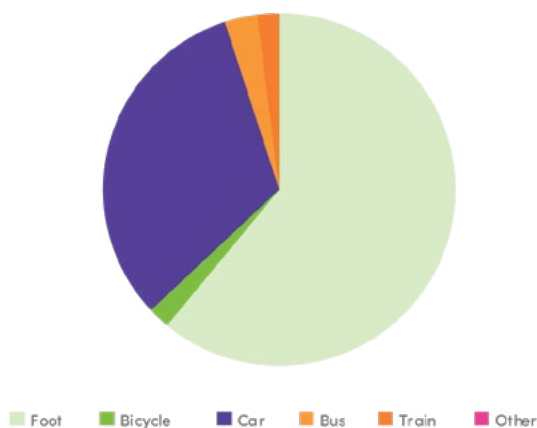
For example, a segregated cycle infrastructure on the route connecting Hitchin to Letchworth Garden City to Baldock has been proposed, with lower speed limits for motorised vehicles on respective roads and an improvement in bus provision. Additionally, the LCWIP determined Core Walking Zones (CWZ) to understand trips that can be optimised to increase walkability. Hitchin is considered a CWZ with routes between its town centre and railway station as Key Walking Routes. There are bus stops on Bancroft, Hermitage Road and Queen Street, and bus services link the centre to Bedford, Luton, Shefford, and Welwyn.

Mode of travel: The Hitchin Railway Station is 1.4km from Market Place, a 20-minute walk for most people. As expected, the Household Survey for the Town Centre and Retail Study suggests that few Hitchin town centre users arrive by train. Although there are various bus stops throughout the town centre, there is no bus station. As the bus stops are dispersed around Hermitage Road, Queen Street and Bancroft, interchanging between routes is difficult.

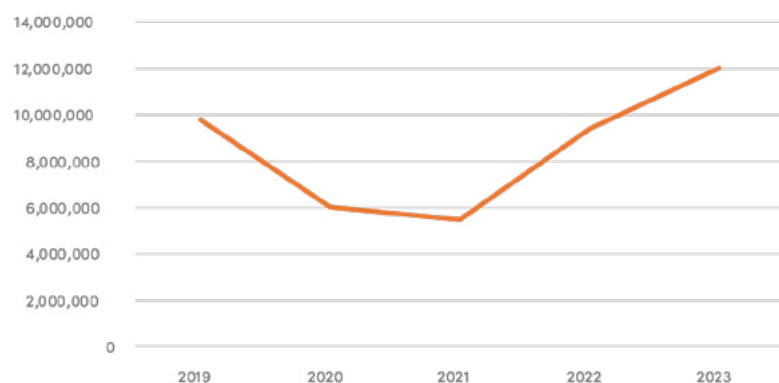
Based on NEMS Household survey, the majority of visitors use the car to reach Hitchin, although this town centre has more walking behaviour compared to the other three town centres. According to the People & Places Recovery Report (2022), 61% Hitchin users reported a preference to travel by foot into the town centre compared to by car (32%). These results indicate that these two studies engaged with different sample populations resulting in different route choice preferences. It can be interpreted that locals are more likely to reach the town centre by foot (who the People & Places Recovery Report engaged with more), while visitors from the wider Study Area reach the town centre by car (who the NEMS Household Study engaged with more).

Following Hertfordshire County Council's public consultation on pedestrianisation and travel preferences in Hitchin town centre, both High Street and Market Square are now closed to vehicles during the day, except on Sundays.

Figure 5: User travel preference in Hitchin town centre (People & Places, 2022).



Footfall: The district's HUQ footfall data indicates that Hitchin town centre has experienced the negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic with a reduced annual footfall from just below 10 million in 2019 to approximately 6 million in 2020 and further to about 5 million in 2021. Likely Recovering from physical isolation measures and businesses temporary closures, the town centre's annual footfall recovered steadily surpassing its pre-covid frequency, to roughly 12 million in 2023.

Figure 6: Annual footfall in Hitchin Town Centre from 2019 through 2023 (HUQ).

Parking: While users report, via the Household Questionnaire and People & Places surveys, a relatively high volume of positive opinions regarding pedestrian access inside the town centre (as well as positive reactions to walking and cycling routes into the town), they also report negative to neutral opinions regarding both on and off-street parking provisions. There is a mix of Council owned and privately owned car parks that are accessible to the main shopping area, but provision is relatively fragmented with some having small capacity and/or located up-hill from the centre. These provide a varied amount of parking in terms of on and off-street, short and long-stay, location, charging periods and price.

Figure 7: On-street parking views by Hitchin town centre users. Users lack positive views. (People & Places, 2022)**Figure 8:** Off-street parking views by Hitchin town centre users. Users are generally split between positive, neutral and negative views. (People & Places, 2022).

Community

Hitchin has a good provision of community facilities, such as the North Hertfordshire Museum and Hitchin Town Hall (both located adjacent to High Street/ Bancroft Road), and various community venues, such as The Block Community Hub, Signing Rooms and St. Mary's Church. The community spaces accommodate a variety of community functions with spaces to hire for external events. Additionally, and linked to promoting the town centre's offer, Visit Hitchin founded in 2009, the town's Business Improvement District (BID), helps to facilitate community culture through programming the Market Square events.

Via the North Herts' Communities Partnership Team, Hitchin users are welcomed to monthly Community Forum meetings to present applications for small grassroot grants and hear about important updates, and also Town Drop-ins to express general concerns or questions.

The Hitchin Market is open four days a week and connects a community of market traders invested in raising and maintaining the profile of the town centre to boost the local economy. Moreover, Visit Hitchin hosts over 600 local businesses contributing via a business rates levy to inspire "visitors to the town to stay longer, spend more money and return more frequently." As is set out to be achieved through events, seasonal displays, nighttime security, graffiti removal, online promotion, and business support.

Design-wise, Hitchin's Primary Shopping Area generally follows good design to deter anti-social behaviour using natural surveillance, interactive shop facades, clear lines of sight, and pedestrian paths, although the historic and cosy character of the wider town does foster narrow side streets and routes that do not clearly indicate an end point or how to exit the area. To benefit the community health in Hitchin, and overlapping with both the built environment and accessibility, wayfinding signs would be helpful to indicate clear routes to key amenities throughout the town centre. This will help to facilitate a more pleasant experience with less stress for users and bolster the existing walking culture.

Churchgate lacks pedestrian permeability and good design to invite users to enter, spend time and shop there; there is also a high vacancy rate for tenants in this development, resulting in dead frontages. Directly attached behind the Churchgate shopping centre, the outdoor market has many physical and metal manmade elements that block lines of sight and provide opportunities to hide behind. Arguably, although the path around St. Mary's Churchyard (Churchyard Walk) has vulnerabilities, such as mid-height walls and darker paths at night, in regard to designing out crime, the cosy and historic nature of this path contributes to the town's unique setting.

Appendix 3B: Letchworth Garden City town centre evidence notes

Land use and retail

The land uses and town centre health indicators for Letchworth Garden City are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- mix of uses,
- vacancy rate and economic vitality,
- boundaries and frontages,
- development allocations,
- leisure,
- visit time,
- Local Needs Index and
- Article 4 Directions.

Mix of uses: There are 244 retail and service units within Letchworth town centre's designated shopping frontages; the mix of uses is set out in Table 4 below, which is compared with the District and UK averages. Generally, Letchworth GC has a broad offer with a variety of type of commercial uses, although participants in the Household Survey have indicated a desire for improved quality in the comparison shops. Of the comparison shops, Letchworth GC has higher than average frequency of charity shops, as well as those that provide books, crafts and hobby materials, but lower than average for shops that sell clothing and footwear. Notably, there is a significant percentage of vacancies at 19.7%, higher than the 13.9% UK average. Of the 244 units, approximately 26% of this is comparison retail, 12% restaurant and 24% other non-retail service (such as hairdressers). Perhaps mirroring the town centre's history of sobriety, Letchworth has 4 pubs making up just 1.6% of retail units; this falls below both the district and the UK averages.

Table 4: Mix of retail and service uses – Letchworth GC town centre (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).

TYPE	# of Units	% of Units	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units
(UK avg.)	23	6.6	5.6	9.5
Convenience retail	12	4.9	5.6	9.5
Comparison retail	64	26.2	27.8	27.7
Financial/ Professional	17	7.0	8.3	8.5
Restaurant/Café	30	12.3	12.8	10.0
Public house/Bar	4	1.6	3.0	4.9
Hot food takeaway	10	4.1	4.1	6.2
Other non-retail service	59	24.2	26.3	19.3
Vacant unit	48	19.7	12.3	13.9
TOTAL	244	100.0	100.0	100.0

Vacancy rate and economic vitality: There were 48 vacant units within the centre at the time of the Council's 2023 land use survey, equating to a vacancy rate of 19.7%, which is well above both the District and UK averages. Such a high vacancy rate could support distributing a portion of the growth capacity projections, especially for retailers that would service Hitchin and Baldock residents, into Letchworth town centre.

Boundary and frontages: The existing town centre boundary for Letchworth can be found in Figure 9; notably a significant area that is included within the boundary does not actively host commercial or mixed-use development.

Figure9: Letchworth GC town centre, depicting the current town centre boundary in blue and retail land use in orange (town centre area: 274,506 sq.m).



Development allocations: Based on the Local Plan (2011 – 2031), there are three town centre allocations as mixed-use enhancement opportunity sites in Letchworth Garden City.

LG19 The Wynd: This allocation proposes that the current centre is redeveloped to provide 4,500 sq.m of additional shop, café, restaurant, pub, drinking establishment or takeaway and other town centre uses at ground floor level, with other main town uses and residential uses in upper or basement areas.

Since the time that The Wynd was allocated for redevelopment, the landowners and tenants have invested in the area. This investment, including a popular play area, has improved the footfall to the area, vibrancy and quality of the public realm.

LG20 Gernon Road: This allocation proposes that the current centre is redeveloped to provide 1,000 square metres of additional shop, café, restaurant, pub, drinking establishment or takeaway and other town centre uses at ground floor level, with other main town uses and residential uses in upper or basement areas.

Since the time that Gernon Road was allocated for redevelopment, the site, excluding the county library, has been redeveloped. The development of homes and an office for Croudace Homes has been completed.

LG21 Arena Parade: This allocation proposes that the current centre is redeveloped to provide 5,000 square metres of additional shop, café, restaurant, pub, drinking establishment or takeaway and other town centre uses at ground floor level, with other main town uses and residential uses in upper or basement areas.

Since the time that Arena Parade was allocated for redevelopment, the site has undergone some improvement works. However, the buildings are outdated with the need for improvements and repairs.

Garden Square Shopping Centre: Since the adoption of the Local Plan (2011 -2031), this proposed development opportunity has arisen and will be subject to a Planning Performance Agreement, including the preparation of a master plan for the site. Guidance is provided in Part 2 and Part 3 of the Town Centres Strategy.

Leisure: Letchworth GC visitors take part in non-food shopping, window shopping and leisure activities more than the combined district average. Compared to other town centres, visitors to Letchworth GC less frequently visit pubs and restaurants. Interestingly, leisure activities are 18.4%, while the district average is 9.9%. Considering Letchworth GC’s origin as a place for craft, art and innovation, future retail and leisure offer could seek to maintain and support such experiences and artistic activities.

Table 5: Participation in leisure activities by Letchworth GC town centre users (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).

Activity	Letchworth %	Average % across all town centres	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units
Go for walk	0.4	0.9	5.6	9.5
Cafe/pub/restaurant	43.5	46.8	5.6	9.5
Leisure activity	18.4	9.9	27.8	27.7

Visit time: According to the NEMS household telephone survey (2024), 49% of respondents (from the wider region and locals) dwell for more than 1 hour in Letchworth GC town centre. Letchworth GC is the second highest town centre for users to dwell for longer than an hour, following behind Hitchin which holds the longest user dwell time.

Similarly, the People & Places Recovery Report (2022) also found that Letchworth GC was the second highest town centre for dwell time for longer than an hour (74%); this was based on users surveyed from Letchworth. While the percentages for Letchworth GC vary between surveys, the order remains the same in relation to the other town centres – this indicates Letchworth GC has maintained its relative status over the years and between users groups, those who live locally or more distant.

Figure 10: Dwell time for Letchworth GC town centre users during one year period 2023 – 2024 (HUQ).

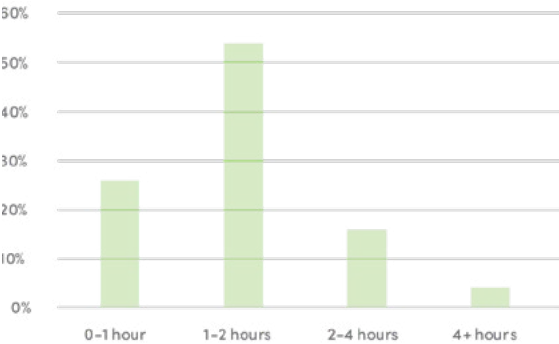
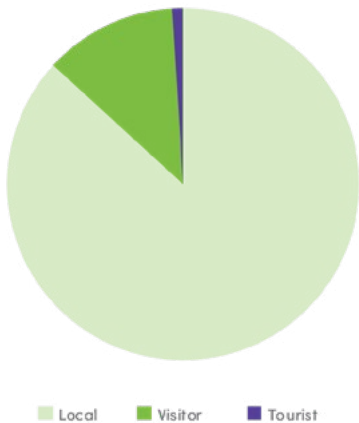


Figure 11: Origin of Letchworth GC town centre users (People & Places, 2022).



Local Needs Index: A standardised Local Needs Index of Letchworth GC town centre was undertaken in 2024. This exercise judges against 16 types of shops, services or community uses; Letchworth GC scored 16 out of 16, meeting all types of listed services. Letchworth GC is in an advantageous position to build on a strong and complete mix of essential services to further incentivise visitors to shop, stay and recreate in the town centre.

Table 6: Local Needs Index Summary of North Herts' town centres (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).

Centre	Hierarchy Classification	Local Needs Index Score (out of 16)	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units
Hitchin	Town Centre	15	5.6	9.5
Letchworth Garden City	Town Centre	16	5.6	9.5
Royston	Town Centre	14	27.8	27.7
Baldock	Town Centre	12		

Planning protections – Article 4 Directions and Listed Buildings:

Alongside balancing controls in planning, such as the existing Listing Building designation to protect building heritage and historic integrity, the immediate Article 4 Directions was made to protect the commercial uses in town centres. The Article 4 Directions mandates special controls for planning teams to assess approval for commercial land uses to turn to residential, as this could create a weakening in commercial opportunities and can also create dead frontages within town centres. The Article 4 Direction applies to the current Primary and Secondary frontage designation in the 2022 Local Plan, and importantly, follows to 2022 Local Plan approach to prioritise main uses in town centres first.

Figure 12: Planning protections in Letchworth GC town centre; Article 4 Directions (purple) protect main town centre uses in town centres first and Listed Buildings (yellow) protect building heritage and historic integrity.



Built environment

The built environment conditions for Letchworth GC are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- design and the public realm,
- historic character and
- open and green spaces

Design and public realm: As outlined in the planning of the world's first Garden City, the town follows a masterplan on the principle of balance using a central town square with radiating axes and grid pattern layouts. This balance integrates high quality residential homes with natural pursuits, local employment and accessible transport, areas of open space, commercial shopping and housing. Letchworth GC was the creation of a town dominated by open space, varied types of trees to symbolise distinct areas of the town, and groups of houses oriented to obtain the maximum benefits of daylight. Such master planning garnered widespread interest and led to the development of pioneer planning legislation and the founding of the Royal Town Planning Institute in 1914.

In the 1990s, the environmental quality of Letchworth GC town centre improved following significant interventions in the public realm focused on consistency of design and was likely supported by the town's unique land ownership context; one main owner (Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation) in combination with the Council's holdings. The centre has a pleasant shopping environment, particularly from pedestrian-oriented improvements along Eastcheap and Leys Avenue, yet the hierarchy of streets lacks clear order and users report that there is no one distinct core area of the town centre. Partial or full pedestrianisation exists in the main shopping area and contributes towards the town's sense of spaciousness; such is the case in The Wynd, Arcade, and Garden Square Centre.

The centre has wide, clean pavements and several areas of open space and planting. Street furniture is provided along the length of Leys Avenue including benches, bins, and street lighting. Commercial units are generally well maintained and are of good quality. Leys Square provides landscaped seating areas, water features and sculptures, which enhances the appearance of the town centre. The centre has attractive arcades, e.g. the covered Arcade, which connects Leys Avenue with Station Road.

The Wynd area has lower density and provides an enclosed pedestrianised area for cafe seating, a children's playground, and community garden. The Garden Square Shopping Centre is partially covered and located off Eastcheap with several units occupied by national retailers. However, although this shopping centre is pedestrianised, it is relatively unattractive compared to the rest of the centre and has a number of vacant units.

According to the People & Places Recovery & Development Plan (2022), and specifically the User Survey Section, Letchworth GC users are less negative towards the status of the public realm and more critical of what services the town centre has to offer. Similarly, the health checks within the Retail and Town Centres Study (2024) indicate that the public realm, or the environmental quality of Letchworth GC's town centre, is regarded positively by users, and thus a strength.

Historic character: Although Letchworth GC is a relatively recent town centre compared to Baldock, Hitchin and Royston, it does hold important historical value as the world's first Garden City. As such, Letchworth GC town centre sits entirely within the wider Conservation Area and hosts a series of heritage and listed buildings, which are protected through listed building designations. In particular, the Museum, The Grammar School and The Town Hall border the important site of Broadway Gardens and feature a distinct Georgian design. Additionally, the Broadway Cinema is a unique repurposed art deco building from the 1930s. Other buildings throughout the town centre represent more modern styles and architecture, dating from the 1960s and 1970s. The more recently built development of Garden Square Shopping Centre stands out compared to other buildings in the town centre; according to the People & Places Recovery and Development Plan, "the frontage within the Garden Square Shopping Centre... was identified of poorer quality and less sympathetic to the character of Letchworth, and this detracts from the town centre appearance."

Overall, Letchworth has large buildings, often formal Georgian in style with rough cast brickwork and rich red tile roofs; they are two or three storeys with continuous façades and provide a high density interspersed throughout the town centre. Following the Garden City principle of balance, the scale and mass of the town's buildings are pleasantly counterbalanced by the relative width of the streets.

Any future development proposals in the town centre of Letchworth GC should be complementary, taking into consideration the design, layout, scale, material and colours of the surrounding character. There should be scope for innovation allowing the town centre to evolve.

Open and green spaces: Letchworth GC town centre has a pleasant public realm with consistent design, wide pedestrian paths, and open and green spaces that include both formal and informal types. Along Leys Avenue, there is water splash zone gently enclosed with street furniture: benches, garden planters, and bins. Additionally, outdoor seating areas nearby spill into this zone. On Eastcheap, there are many benches positioned along the wide pedestrian pavements. At the station, there is a small green park and memorial statue, although this resource is underperforming with reports of antisocial behaviour and a general low-quality environment due to overgrowth and litter, the Love Letchworth BID has undertaken improvements to this area. In the Wynd, there is a small route spanning roughly 70 meters transecting Openshaw Way's curved road that is pedestrianised with garden planters, cherry blossom trees, and outdoor seating from the small cafes. Directly

beside this area is a children's playground and a community garden. In the northwest part of the town centre, along Broadway Avenue, the pedestrian routes are through a wide central footpath with benches, bushes, and small trees.

Formally, there is one green space within Letchworth GC's town centre boundary, Broadway Gardens. Howard Park is directly adjacent to the town centre boundary, and further, there are two formal green spaces nearby, Norton Common and The Grange Recreation Park. Norton Common and The Grange sit relatively close to one another and considering upcoming residential development of 900 homes bordering this area (LG1), there is a unique opportunity to connect the town centre to residences via these green links. Both the formal and informal open spaces should seek to be better connected to improve the town centre hierarchy of streets and user experience.

Transport, access and movement

Transport, access and movement conditions for Letchworth GC are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- access and movement,
- mode of travel,
- footfall and
- parking.

Access and movement: Letchworth GC, according to Town Centre and Retail Study (2024) health checks, the town centre maintains a good quality public realm, including pedestrian paths, accessibility and quality of surfaces. Walkways and pavements within the town centre boundary are well kept and wide enough for users to walk without impediment. In recent years, Eastcheap and Leys Avenue have been resurfaced, as defined in the previous Letchworth GC Town Centre Strategy (2007), and now allocates less space for roads and parking; through this design pedestrians are given more priority to traverse the centre. While design on the material level is perceived positively by both experts and users, as understood from the Town Centres and Retail Study (2024) and the User Survey within the Letchworth Recovery and Development Plan (2022), wayfinding through the town centre and a hierarchy of streets towards a central core is not clear. As the Garden Square Shopping Centre has been identified as detracting from the historic quality of the town centre, future development here could be a catalyst to create a stronger hierarchy and network of streets to clearly symbolise the central core of the town.

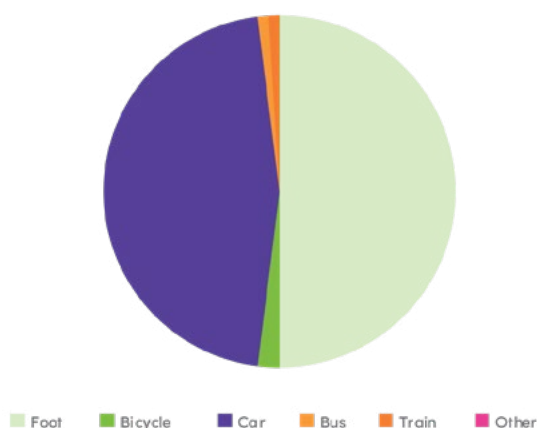
Letchworth GC is a Sustainable Travel Town appointed by Hertfordshire County Council. In collaboration with local town organisations, North Herts seeks to support sustainable travel within the town boundary. This stipulates that “pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users will have a greater priority than they do at present, leading to a higher level of natural enforcement and behavioural change.” North Herts Council is working with Love Letchworth BID, Herts County Council, and The Letchworth Heritage Foundation in this programme.

In 2022, Letchworth GC users were surveyed regarding various town centre perceptions and habits by People & Places. In relation to the built environment, the survey concluded that users wanted more convenient and cheaper parking options. Further, users shared that they travel to the town centre by foot (50%) and by car (47%), with the remaining 3% between cycling, bus or taxi. The Household Survey within the Town Centres and Retail Study (2024) pooled responses from a wide catchment area and found that the majority of respondents who visited Letchworth GC used the car.

Mode of travel: Unique to Letchworth GC, the railway station is accessible and within the core town centre. The station provides direct access to London, Stevenage, Hitchin and Welwyn Garden City to the south, and Baldock, Royston and Cambridge to the north. Bus stops are located near the railway station on Station Road and Broadway and are accessible to the main shopping area. Bus routes link the centre with surrounding town, villages and neighbourhood centres.

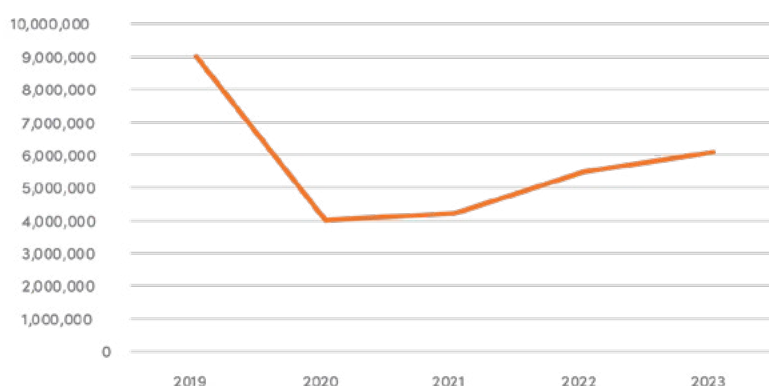
The Household Survey found that the majority of respondents who visited Letchworth GC in the last year used the car as the main mode of transport. Comparatively, the People & Places Recovery & Development Report (2022) found that 50% of users report their preference to travel to the town centre by foot at 50% and by car at 47%. Based on origin of users and duration of visit, it can be concluded that locals and nearby residents (87%) visit the town centre frequently for shorter durations (under 2 hours) and are more likely to travel by foot (50%) compared to visitors traveling in from out of town (12%). who are more likely to stay for longer and use the car.

Figure 13: User travel preference in Letchworth GC town centre (People & Places, 2022).



Footfall: The district’s HUQ footfall data indicates that Letchworth GC town centre has experienced the negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic with a reduced annual footfall from just about 9 million in 2019 to approximately 5 million in 2020 with a plateau in 2021 followed by a gradual uptick to approximately 6 million in 2023. Although the town centre has improved since Covid-19, it has not returned to pre-pandemic vibrancy levels using footfall as an indicator.

Figure 14: Annual footfall in Letchworth Garden City Town Centre from 2019 through 2023 (HUQ).



Parking: As the world’s first Garden City, Letchworth town centre was built with a masterplan, consisting of radiating axes and grid patterns that are interspersed with a variety of parking, public transport, and active travel options. Specific to parking, there is adequate provision with a mix of both private and council-owned lots, as well as on-street and off-street options. In general, the off-street car parks are conveniently located within the town centre and major shopping destinations; for example, the Garden Square multi-storey car park, Morrisons open car park, and The Wynd car park.

Town centre users are roughly 70% content (positive to neutral feelings) towards the on-street parking offer and roughly 80% content (positive to neutral feelings) towards the off-street parking offer. According to the Town Centres and Retail Study (2024), particularly the Household Survey, Letchworth GC parking availability was regarded more positively compared to parking availability in the other town centres. Unsurprisingly, as parking surveys frequently show negative responses on cost, the respondents were relatively more negative than positive for Letchworth GC town centre both for the parking costs and compared to other town centres.

Figure 15: On-street parking views by Letchworth GC users. Over 70% of users respond with positive or neutral views (People & Places, 2022)



Figure 16: Off-street parking views by Letchworth GC users. Users are largely positive to neutral (People & Places, 2022)



Community

Letchworth GC has a good provision of community facilities, including Letchworth GC Library, Letchworth GC Youth Centre, and Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, including an information centre and town history museum. These various community spaces accommodate a variety of community functions with spaces to hire for external events. Additionally, the District's council offices are within the town centre and provide support and services. Via the North Herts' Communities Partnership Team, Letchworth GC users are welcomed to monthly Community Forum meetings to present applications for small grassroots grants and hear about important updates as well as the Town Drop-ins to express general concerns or questions.

A key stakeholder of the town centre that also contributes to the promotion and marketing is Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation (LGCHF); they seek to "manage assets and investment to generate income ... to care for the Garden City estate and support [the] local community, providing access to green spaces and a range of culture, heritage, learning and leisure facilities.

A second key stakeholder of the town centre that also contributes to the promotion and marketing is Love Letchworth BID as this organisation helps to facilitate a community culture through programming public events and building business capacity with locals. Love Letchworth BID works on four streams of projects to boost the town centre's vitality: facilitating regular and seasonal events, bringing accessible transport and parking, marketing promotion with digital media, and improving the range and quality of social, leisure, service, and retail offer in the town centre.

Both LGCHF and Love Letchworth BID work with town centre businesses, including the Garden Square Shopping Centre, to improve user experience and look ahead to the future. At present, the Garden Square Shopping Centre is underperforming, especially regarding above ground floor units, be that commercial or residential leases. There is potential to improve the occupancy and vibrancy of the Garden Square Shopping Centre alongside a paired promotion and marketing campaign.

Considering access to resources and services, Letchworth meets all 16 aspects within the Local Needs Index. Letchworth GC has plentiful resources and services within the town centres, thereby supporting a robust community culture, events and programmes, along with incentivising higher footfall and longer dwell times for visitors.

Letchworth GC's environment includes interactive shop facades, clear lines of sight, pedestrian paths, and opportunities for rest to create high-quality places that support community use and congregating. Leys Avenue, Broadway, Eastcheap and The Wynd promote Garden City principles through balanced design and human-scale architecture. Such design, combined with higher footfall, thus natural surveillance, deters anti-social behaviour. The open and green spaces of Broadway Gardens and Howard Park both supports community well-being to provide uses with recreational opportunities and natural features. These spaces are opportunities to foster deeper well-being for town centre users through physical health, exposure to green features and community event programming.

Arguably, the Letchworth GC railway forecourt poses as a challenge to public safety due to its overgrown plants, lack of lighting and underused pedestrian route through the parklet; station users are often observed walking around the parklet to the wider sidewalk routes.

Appendix 3C: Royston town centre evidence notes

Land use and retail

The land uses and town centre health indicators for Royston are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- mix of uses,
- vacancy rate and economic vitality,
- boundaries and frontages,
- development allocations,
- leisure,
- visit time,
- Local Needs Index and
- planning protections.

Mix of uses: Royston town centre's designated shopping frontages have 145 retail and service units, and the mix of uses is set out in Table 7, which is compared with the District and UK averages. On average, there are more restaurants, professional services and other non-retail services (such as barbers). There is a lower-than-average presence of convenience stores and pubs. Royston retail profile supports a higher dwell time for visitors that do come to the town centre for sit down meal and/or meeting for a professional service.

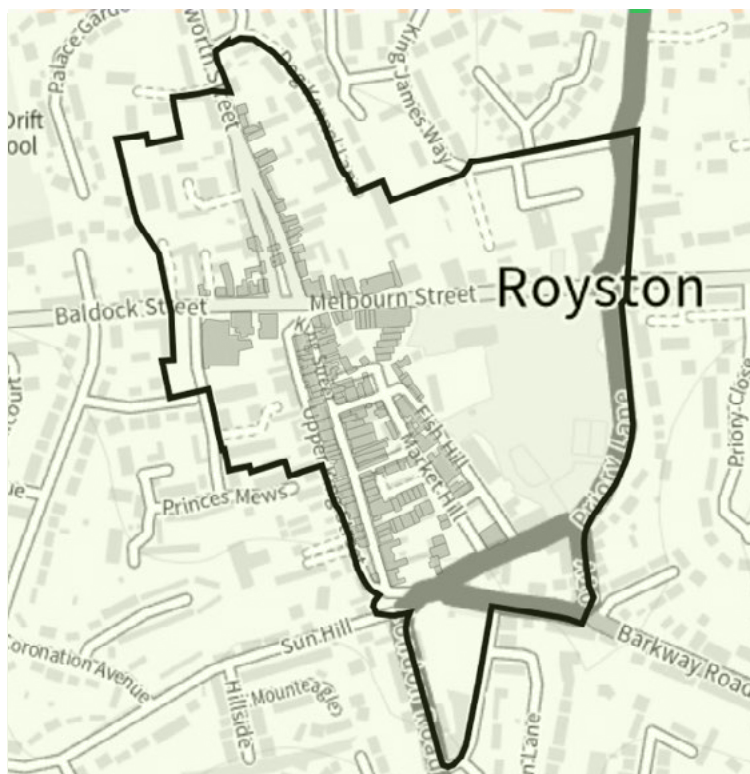
Table 7: Mix of retail and service uses – Royston town centre (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).

TYPE	# of Units	% of Units	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units
(UK avg.)	23	6.6	5.6	9.5
Convenience retail	5	3.4	5.6	9.5
Comparison retail	42	29.0	27.8	27.7
Financial/ Professional	15	10.3	8.3	8.5
Restaurant/Café	19	13.1	12.8	10.0
Public house/Bar	3	2.1	3.0	4.9
Hot food takeaway	8	5.5	4.1	6.2
Other non-retail service	43	29.7	26.3	19.3
Vacant unit	10	6.9	12.3	13.9
TOTAL	145	100.0	100.0	100.0

Vacancy rate and economic vitality: There were 10 vacant units within the centre at the time of the Council's 2023 land use survey, equating to a vacancy rate of 6.9%, which is below the District and UK averages. This low vacancy rate suggests the supply of shop premises is in line with demand.

Boundary and frontages: The existing town centre boundary for Royston can be found in Figure 17, notably a significant are does not actively host commercial or mixed-use development (town centre area: 174,466 sq.m) within the current boundary.

Figure 17: Royston town centre depicting the current town centre boundary in blue and commercial retail land use in orange (town centre area: 174,466 sq.m).



Development allocations: Based on the Local Plan (2011 – 2031), there is one mixed use town centre allocation in Royston.

RY12 Town Hall: This allocation proposes that the current site is redeveloped to provide 4,000 sq.m of additional main town centre use floorspace, and provision of residential accommodation on upper floors. The policy identifies the key considerations to be covered, including the potential retention of the Town Hall.

Since the time that the Town Hall site was allocated for redevelopment, the site has had limited development activity.

Leisure: As shown in Table CX, leisure in Royston is primarily oriented around food and beverage pastimes, such as frequenting restaurants, as to be expected based on the breakdown of type of service unit within the centre. By ratio, Royston has more restaurants by ratio than the UK average and the combined average of North Herts’ town centres, yet based on the household survey, a lower percentage of users frequent Royston’s cafes and pubs as a leisure pastime (34.1%) compared to the North Herts’ town centre average (46.8%).

Table 8: Participation in leisure activities by Royston town centre users (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).

Activity	Royston %	Average % across all town centres	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units
Go for walk	1.3	0.9	5.6	9.5
Cafe/pub/restaurant	34.1	46.8	5.6	9.5
Leisure activity	8.3	9.9	27.8	27.7

Visit time: According to the NEMS household survey (2024), 35% of respondents dwell for more than 1 hour in Royston town centre. Compared to the other town centres, Royston has the lowest frequency for dwell time for more than one hour. Similarly, in the People & Places User Survey, Royston came in last with the lowest percentage for town users to dwell for longer than an hour (58%). Although the percentages vary between NEMS (2024) and the People & Place’s survey (2022), the order remains the same. This indicates that Royston has maintained its status in relation to the other town centres but perhaps has dropped further in attraction to visitors within this order. Alternatively, as the sample populations vary, the NEMS survey is a broader sample from a wider catchment, whereas the People & Places survey engaged with more local users, the visitors are more drastically less enticed to visit Royston compared to the locals and in the context of the other towns in the district.

Figure 18: Dwell time for Royston town centre users in one year period from 2023 – 2024 (HUQ).

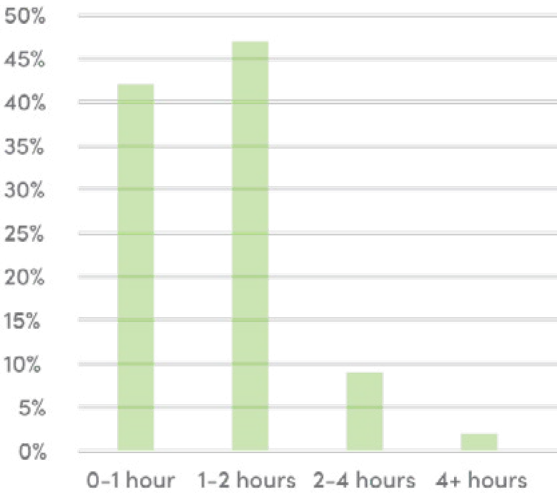
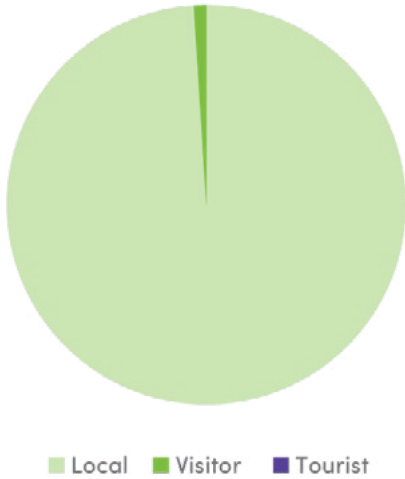


Figure 19: Origin of Royston town centre users.



The great majority are local users (People & Places, 2022).

Local Needs Index: A standardised Local Nees Index of Royston town centre was undertaken in 2024. This exercise judges against 16 types of shops, services or community uses; Royston scored 14 out of 16, technically lacking an off-license and community hall. Whilst Royston does not have a standalone community hall, it does have community halls within several churches on the town centre periphery. Additionally, Royston Town Council premises are within the town centre and have rooms for hire; perhaps this also suffices for community convening. The Tesco Express at the top of Market Hill in the town centre likely provides a similar service to an off-license shop.

Table 9: Local Needs Index Summary of North Herts' town centres (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).

Centre	Hierarchy Classification	Local Needs Index Score (out of 16)	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units
Hitchin	Town Centre	15	5.6	9.5
Letchworth Garden City	Town Centre	16	5.6	9.5
Royston	Town Centre	14	27.8	27.7
Baldock	Town Centre	12		

Planning protections – Article 4 Directions and Listed Buildings: Alongside balancing controls in planning, such as the existing Listing Building designation to protect building heritage and historic integrity, the immediate Article 4 Directions was made to protect the commercial uses in town centres. The Article 4 Directions mandates special controls for planning teams to assess approval for commercial land uses to turn to residential, as this could create a weakening in commercial opportunities and can also create dead frontages within town centres. The Article 4 Direction applies to the current Primary and Secondary frontage designation in the 2022 Local Plan, and importantly, follows to 2022 Local Plan approach to prioritise main uses in town centres first.

Figure 20. Planning protections in Royston town centre; Article 4 Directions (purple) protect main town centre uses in town centres first and Listed Buildings (yellow) protect building heritage and historic integrity.



Built environment

The built environmental conditions for Royston are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- design and the public realm,
- historic character and
- open and green spaces

Design and public realm: Royston town centre is located in the northeast of North Herts, southwest of Cambridge. It is smaller than Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City and primarily serves the day-to-day shopping, food, beverage, and service needs of local residents, although the out-of-centre Tesco Extra, Aldi, and M&S stores serve wider catchment areas. The structure of the centre is linear, stretching over 500 metres north-south with narrow streets and a slight hill incline north-south. The quality of the public realm in terms of maintenance, street furniture, and safety is good. Throughout the town centre, there are several signs and plaques to depict the heritage and history of Royston, especially related to the Royston Cave and King James I hunting expeditions.

Historic character: As a town dating back to late 12th century, Royston holds significant heritage significance. Both the current and proposed town centre boundaries are entirely within the wider Conservation Area, as shown in Figure X.

As noted in the Conservation Area Townscape Analysis and Conservation Area Statement, the town layout is medieval in its pattern with buildings set adjacently to the road on long narrow plots, with the narrowest end onto the street. This arrangement is typical of the medieval period and plots of this shape are known as 'burgage' plots. The main buildings (houses or shops) were positioned closest to the thoroughfare with workshops and outbuildings in the plots behind.

Importantly, the medieval market was situated at the main crossroads of the historic roads known as The Cross, in a wide part of Ermine Street to the north and south of the crossroads. Over time, the stalls occupying these areas became permanent resulting in an island of buildings within Kneesworth Street and the High Street forming Upper and Lower King Streets. The High Street is a relatively narrow, with a slight slope, but straight street, reflecting its origins as the direct route through the town to and from London.

The town centre streets are narrow with narrow pedestrian paths; the streets lack trees and are paved with similar materials: York stone and brown/grey bricks. This results in a cold feeling public realm and certain sections of the town, primarily the narrow alleys linking High Street to Upper King Street, are shaded. Buildings are often two storey and date back to the 18th and 19th centuries.

There are numerous listed buildings within Royston town centre, frequently located on Fish Hill, Baldock Road, Kneesworth Street, and King Street. Important buildings or sites include: The Priory, King James' Palace and Royston Cave.

In accordance with Historic Environment Policy HE1 - Designated heritage assets from the Local Plan 2011 - 2031, historical assets such as designated Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Registered Parks and Gardens must continue to be protected and maintained. Further, any future development must respect an overall emphasis on the preservation and enhancement of the existing fabric in order to maintain continuity throughout the town; and where new building takes place, the design, layout, scale, material and colours should blend with the established character.

Open and green spaces: The layout of Royston town centre has evolved from a medieval market town and has major crossroads with narrow streets, pedestrian paths and plots. The narrow and compact nature of the town centre affords limited open or green spaces. At the base of High Street, an area called The Cross, there is a small recreation area including info boards, benches, a statue, and tree landscaping with views towards north and south. Additionally, Fish Hill has an enclosed square with benches and trees oriented toward the historic Courthouse that has been repurposed as a restaurant.

There is one formal green open space within Royston town centre boundary, the Priory Memorial Gardens; it is located south of Melbourn Street on the eastern side of the town. This green resource is adjacent to the Town Hall and Royston Police Station, and it wraps around the Saint John the Baptist Church. Future interventions should ensure strong access and connections to the Priory Memorial Gardens to offer town centre visitors recess in green space.

Transport, access and movement

Transport, access and movement conditions for Royston are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- access and movement,
- parking,
- mode of travel and
- footfall.

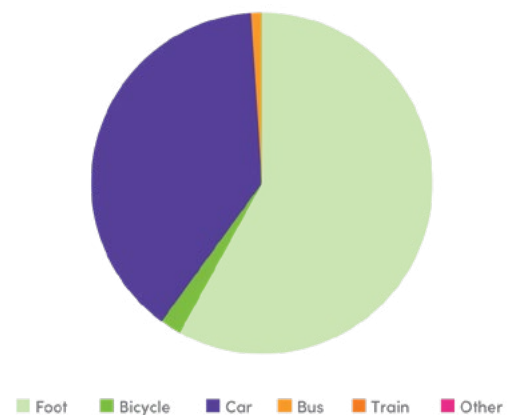
Access and movement: Royston, like Letchworth Garden City, is part of the Sustainable Travel Town programme, which is bringing together Herts County Council, North Herts District Council, Royston Town Council and Royston First Business Improvement District (BID) in a collaboration to develop and deliver plans to support sustainable travel in and around the town. One of the programme's objectives is that *"pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users will have a greater priority than they do at present, leading to a higher level of natural enforcement and behavioural change."*

The town centre is linear in structure whilst High Street, Market Hill and linking streets provide a natural circuit for pedestrians. Pavements are generally well maintained but narrow, particularly on Kneesworth Street and parts of the High Street. Cycle parking is available. The volume of through-traffic along Baldock Street/Melbourn Street acts as a barrier to pedestrian movement between the High Street and Kneesworth Street. Further west and east there are zebra crossings.

Mode of travel: Royston Railway Station is about 600 metres (approximately 9 minutes to walk) north of the Baldock Street and Melbourn Street junction.

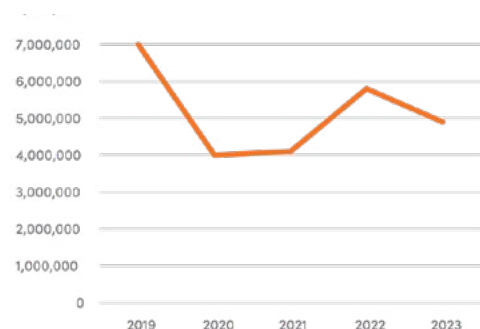
Based on NEMS Household survey, the majority of visitors use a car to reach Royston. Additionally, based on the People & Places Report User Survey, 58% of Royston users surveyed travel to the centre by foot, and 39% travel by car; this sample population was made up of 99% locals and 1% visitors (living outside the postcode, but within a 30-minute drive). This indicates that locals are more likely to walk to the centre, whereas respondents from the wider Study Area will arrive by car.

Figure 20: User travel preference into Royston town centre (People & Places, 2022).



Footfall: Royston town centre's annual HUQ footfall data indicates that this town is no different from the other 3 town centres of the district in that it has negatively experienced the effects of Covid-19 pandemic. In 2019, the annual footfall went from roughly 7 million to 4 million in 2020 and stays relatively constant to 2021. A brief bounce back from the pandemic shows the footfall increasing in 2022 to just shy of 6 million, to then drop back down in 2023 to below 5 million. Interestingly, Royston's trend to bounce back in 2022 and reduce again in 2023 is similar to Baldock's annual footfall data.

Figure 21: Annual footfall in Royston Town Centre from 2019 through 2023 (HUQ).

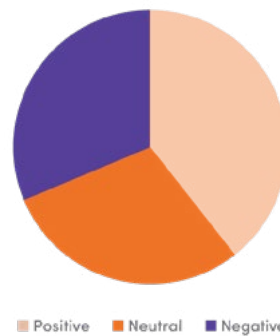


Parking: Royston town centre car parks are accessible to the main shopping area, but provision is relatively fragmented with four of the six car parks providing less than 35 spaces. According to Lichfields' 2024 study, respondents who visit Royston responded relatively more negatively to parking offer, availability and cost, than any other town centre. Similarly, in the People & Places 2022 Recovery and Development Plan, Royston users share negative perceptions on parking especially on-street offer (approximately 85% have neutral to negative views for on-street parking and 65% have neutral to negative views for off-street parking). Due to the physical layout of the town, there is limited ability to provide car parking directly on town centre streets. Interestingly, these same users report positive opinions on both road links and pedestrian access throughout the town centre.

Figure 22: On-street parking views by Letchworth GC users. 60% of users respond with positive or neutral views (People & Places, 2022)



Figure 23: Off-street parking views by Royston users. Users are generally evenly split between positive, neutral and negative views (People & Places, 2022)



Community

For a town centre of its size, Royston has a good provision of community facilities with a library, police station, town hall, and health centre within the core. As previously referenced, users have access to community halls surrounding the town centre via local churches, and further rooms for hire within Royston Town Council. These are essential to the functioning of the town and provide much-needed spaces for communal gatherings and events. Via North Herts' Community Partnerships Team, Royston users are welcomed to monthly Community Forum meetings to present applications for small grassroots grants and hear about important updates, and also Town Drop-ins to express general concerns or questions.

Royston holds a unique historic market town character defined by its medieval street layout, compact size, and heritage, featured on the Royston Town Trail, interspersed between local shops, cafes and restaurants.

Royston is unique compared to the other three towns, as it is the only town in the district with a local town council, Royston Town Council. Royston First, the town's Business Improvement District founded in 2009, often collaborates with the town council to improve the status of Royston town centre. In this aim, Royston First applies the business levy back into local area through 5 key areas: town investment (such as the Youth Employment Initiative), events (local business awards), welcome and security (ShopSafe app), business support (first aid training), and marketing (digital signage).

Royston was awarded the badge of Sustainable Travel Town to pilot active travel mechanisms for overall public health and climate action. These different groups, Royston Town Council, Royston First and Royston Sustainable Travel Town consortium work to promote the profile of Royston town centre. While Royston is within North Herts, it borders Cambridgeshire County Council, and experiences competition in market expenditure to Cambridge.

The health centre, Granta Market Hill Surgery operated by the NHS, is located along Market Hill and is an important resource for community health. This amenity also draws in visitors to the town centre to either trip chain alongside their appointment, or for carers, family members etc. (who have travelled in with the Granta Market Hill patient) can visit the town centre during the appointment.

Whilst Royston town centre has a handful of long-term challenges related to its historic morphology, main vehicle road bisecting the town centre, and topography sloped hill, the main High Street offers users a pleasant experience with good design, such as prioritising pedestrians, interactive facades, and opportunities to rest with natural surveillance. The open space at The Cross and at the intersection of Jepps Lane and Fish Hill are good opportunities to facilitate community programming and spaces for recreation.

Baldock Street / Melbourn Street bisect the town centre and positions users in competition with a major vehicle road to cross safely. This road also arguably acts as a perceptual barrier to disconnect Kneesworth Street and Lower King Street from the rest of the town centre. Further, along these streets, the pedestrian paths are extremely narrow with major traffic going by and in some locations very dark.

Appendix 3D: Baldock town centre evidence notes

Land use and retail

The land uses and town centre health indicators for Baldock are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- mix of uses,
- vacancy rate and economic vitality,
- boundaries and frontages,
- development allocations,
- leisure,
- visit time,
- Local Needs Index and
- planning protections.

Mix of uses: There are 73 retail and service units within Baldock town centre's designated shopping frontages; the mix of uses is set out in Table 10 below, which is compared with the District and UK averages.

Table 10: Mix of retail and service uses – Baldock town centre (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).

TYPE	# of Units	% of Units	% of Units (District avg.)	% of Units
(UK avg.)	23	6.6	5.6	9.5
Convenience retail	5	6.8	5.6	9.5
Comparison retail	13	17.8	27.8	27.7
Financial/ Professional	3	4.1	8.3	8.5
Restaurant/Café	12	16.4	12.8	10.0
Public house/Bar	4	5.5	3.0	4.9
Hot food takeaway	5	6.8	4.1	6.2
Other non-retail service	25	32.9	26.3	19.3
Vacant unit	7	9.6	12.3	13.9
TOTAL	73	100.0	100.0	100.0

Vacancy rate and economic vitality: Of the 73 total retail and service units within the town centre, there were 7 vacant units at the time of the Council's 2023 land use and monitoring survey. This equates to a vacancy rate of 9.6%, which is below the District and UK averages (12.3% and 13.9% respectively). The number of vacant units recorded in 2015 was similar with 6 vacant units. The relatively low vacancy rate suggests the supply of shop premises is broadly in line with operator demand and provides opportunity for churning retail spaces for current and potential occupiers.

Boundary and frontages: The existing town centre boundary for Baldock can be found in Figure 24; notably, there are pockets or areas that exist within the boundary that do not actively host commercial or mixed-use development (town centre area: 109,968 sq.m).

Figure 24: Baldock town centre, depicting the current town centre boundary in blue and retail land use in orange (town centre area: 109,968 sq.m).



Development allocations: The 2022 Local Plan does not allocate any town centre mixed use allocations for Baldock, nor does it have any active allocations, this is due to the highly historic nature of the town centre and proximity to neighbouring Letchworth Garden City.

Importantly, on the northeastern periphery, the Growing Baldock scheme for residential use is under pre-development to create a Strategic Masterplan. This housing area, set to provide 3,000 homes, will require 1,500 square metres amount of retail use that satisfies the immediate needs of residents and will not be a competition to the local economy of the town centre.

Additionally, adjacent to the town centre lies allocated employment land to meet the needs of Functional Economic Market Area, east of Baldock BA10 (19.6ha). This was set out in the 2022 Local Plan and is currently under review. Advantageously, employment land near town centres can have positive impact on the footfall into the centre and the local economy.

Leisure: As shown in Table CX, leisure in Baldock is primarily oriented around food and beverage pastimes, such as frequenting cafes, pubs or restaurants. By ratio, Baldock has more restaurant/cafe and public house/bar units than the other town centres in North Herts' and across the UK. While there is the potential for a distribution of 1,400 square metres of leisure space to develop within the town centres of North Herts, such as a cinema, gyms or escape room, it is less likely to be placed in Baldock town centre considering its limited size, number of listed buildings and low number of vacant units.

Table 11: Participation in leisure activities by Baldock town centre users (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).

Activity	Baldock %	Average % across all town centres	% of Units	% of Units
Go for walk	1.3	0.9	5.6	9.5
Cafe/pub/restaurant	52.6	46.8	5.6	9.5
Leisure activity	4.9	9.9	27.8	27.7

Visit time: According to the NEMS Household Survey (2024), 41% of respondents dwell for more than 1 hour in Baldock town centre. Compared to the other town centres, Baldock dwell time is in the middle, with more users dwelling for an hour or longer than Royston, but less than Letchworth GC and Hitchin. Further, in this survey, respondents shared that visited Baldock in the last year for food shopping (46%) and cafes/pubs (53%): the respondents could select multiple options.

Similarly, in the Recovery & Development Plan (2022), 68% of Baldock users shared that they visited the centre for longer than 1 hour. In comparison to the other town centres, Baldock again sits in the middle, with higher percentage than Royston and lower than Letchworth GC and Hitchin for dwell time of 1 hour or more. Within this survey, research concludes that users often spent their time on comparison shopping (47%), such as food shopping, and for leisure activities (37%).

Figure 25: Dwell time for Baldock town centre users within a 1 year period spanning 2023 - 2024. It is relatively uncommon for users to dwell longer than 2 hours. (HUQ).

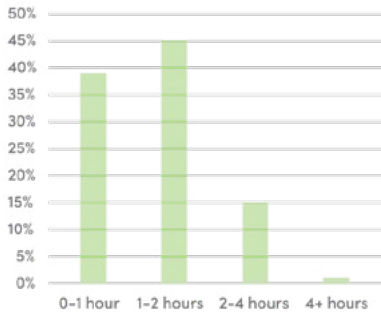
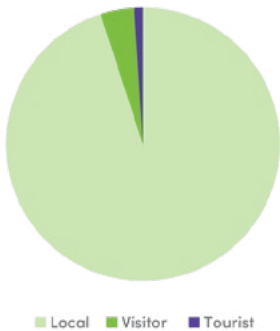


Figure 26: Origin of Baldock town centre users. The large majority are locals (People & Places, 2022).



Local needs index: A standardised Local Needs Index for town centres was undertaken in 2024. This exercise judges against 16 types of shops, services or community uses; Baldock scored 12 out of 16, only lacking a bank, newsagent, florist and off-license. The Tesco Extra, located on the edge of the town boundary, provides some of these missing services within the defined town centre boundary.

Table 12: Local Needs Index Summary of North Herts' town centres (Town Centre and Retail Study, 2024).

Centre	Hierarchy Classification	Local Needs Index Score (out of 16)
Hitchin	Town Centre	15
Letchworth Garden City	Town Centre	16
Royston	Town Centre	14
Baldock	Town Centre	12

Planning protections - Article 4 Directions and Listed Buildings: Alongside balancing controls in planning, such as the existing Listing Building designation to protect building heritage and historic integrity, the immediate Article 4 Directions was made to protect the commercial uses in town centres. The Article 4 Directions mandates special controls for planning teams to assess approval for commercial land uses to turn to residential, as this could create a weakening in commercial opportunities and can also create dead frontages within town centres. The Article 4 Direction applies to the current Primary and Secondary frontage designation in the 2022 Local Plan, and importantly, follows to 2022 Local Plan approach to prioritise main uses in town centres first.

Figure 27: Planning protections in Baldock town centre; Article 4 Directions (purple) protect main town centre uses in town centres first and Listed Buildings (yellow) protect building heritage and historic integrity.



Built environment

The built environmental conditions for Baldock are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- design and the public realm,
- historic character and
- open and green spaces.

Design and public realm: Baldock town centre is characterised by wide main streets enclosed by continuous frontages and narrow side streets. The streets widen towards the junction of High Street, Whitehorse Street and Hitchin Street. This widening of the streets creates spaces for the public realm and community uses. This strategy recommends that the historic layout should be preserved, and the width of the streets should be retained. The town's pedestrian permeability, achieved through a network of footpaths, should be protected and enhanced.

New buildings should enhance the existing fabric through similar materials and sympathetic designs, scale, height, massing and proportions. The buildings are two, three or four storeys with some consistency in height. There are a large number of townhouses which are built on burgage plots, creating continuous frontages which should dictate the scale and typology of new development in the town centre. High density may be acceptable with a mix of commercial on the ground floor with residential above.

Coach arches are common within the town centre and these often open out into small courtyards. These could accommodate mews type development (a row of stables with living quarters above them, set back from the street and accessed through an archway), small commercial units and conversions. Rear walled gardens are important to retain.

The public realm is a sensitive area for new architecture and enhancements because of the quality of the historic buildings.

Any enhancements to the public realm or new buildings should ensure that the character and high quality of the historic fabric is maintained and be thematically linked to the town centre enhancements.

Historic Character: As an historic market town, Baldock has a significant number of listed buildings throughout its town centre. Further, the Conservation Area spans beyond the current town centre boundary and thus includes the entire town centre within it. The overall character of this Conservation Area is largely that of 18th Century buildings. There are large Georgian Town Houses, such as Clare House, The Manor House and Holford House as well as many other older buildings also having been re-fronted in brick in the style of this time.

In accordance with [Historic Environment Policy HE1 - Designated heritage assets](#) from the 2022 Local Plan, historical assets such as designated Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and Registered Parks and Gardens must continue to be protected and maintained.

Open and green spaces: The historic layout of Baldock town centre creates wide open streets with two and three storey buildings that frame the area and support local events and a cafe culture. For example, the town's core square, it includes a memorial garden and recreational seating at the meeting of Bell Row and High Street. High Street spans about half a mile and provides a clear view, east and west with green leafy trees between the pedestrian paths and buildings. This scale and design of open space creates a positive public realm and further inspires walking.

Both the width of the streets and surrounding buildings, as well as the pedestrian permeability, and the network of footpaths, should be retained and protected. Street furniture exists throughout the centre, although they are currently in need of repair due to weathering, they offer users frequent opportunities to sit and relax in the open space. While pedestrian footpaths exist throughout the centre, there are limited zebra crossings on High Street; there is one to the north-west on High Street near Hitchin Street, and one to the south-east on High Street near Manfield Road.

St. Mary's Parish Church offers a protected small green space with views of the historic building dating to the 12th century. It is conveniently adjacent to the open seating area on Sun Street, and nearby High Street's activity.

Tesco Extra, and the Tesco Memorial Gardens, while not within the existing town centre boundary, are located directly adjacent to the town on the southwestern side of High Street. This area is a green buffer between the large car park and the pleasant town centre open realm, this strategy recommends improving the overall quality and connectivity to High Street.

Considering North Herts's register for formal open and green spaces, there are three near Baldock town centre: Avenue Park, Ivel Springs and more distantly, Weston Hills. While none of these exist within the current town centre boundary, it is beneficial to maintain and promote their quality for town centre users' recreation, as well as trip chaining for visitors to also use the town centre.

Transport, access and movement

Transport, access and movement conditions for Baldock are outlined below relating to the following categories:

- access and movement,
- mode of travel,
- footfall and
- parking.

Access and movement: Following Baldock's Town Centre Enhancement Scheme in 2006, significant changes to the street scene and infrastructure have enabled better pedestrian permeability and flows of movement. This was achieved through widening the pedestrian paths, which has enabled wider walking access and space for traders to use the open realm for outdoor seating. The completion of the Baldock (A505) Bypass has aided this through the diversion of traffic around the town centre.

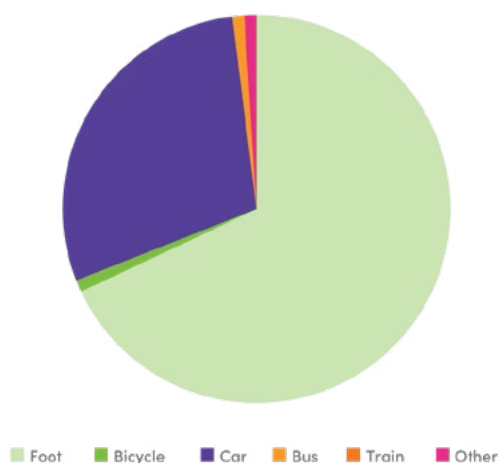
The [Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan](#) was published in 2021 and supports walking and cycling infrastructure, with a specific aim to improve infrastructure. This report also states the importance to reduce congestion and air pollution, thereby supporting walking and cycling journeys within Baldock.

Of relevance to Baldock town centre, connections that have been identified (by the Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan) to be improved include Hitchin to Baldock via Letchworth Garden City and Baldock connectivity to rail stations and development sites, with a desire to improve the A505 transport corridor. For example, a segregated cycle infrastructure on this route has been proposed, with lower speed limits for motorised vehicles on respective roads. To improve pedestrian flow between Letchworth Garden City and Baldock, the A1(M) Pedestrian Bridge would require minimal changes, surfacing, lighting, bollards and vegetation management, to return high impact. Additionally, the [Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan](#) determined Core Walking Zones to understand trips that can be optimised for increased walkability. Baldock is considered a Core Walking Zone with routes between its town centre and railway station as Key Walking Routes.

Mode of travel: The Baldock Railway Station is located about 550 metres (under 10 minutes' average walk) to the northeast of the town centres' market square. Despite this, the household survey within the 2024 Town Centre and Retail Study suggests that few Baldock shop customers arrive by train.

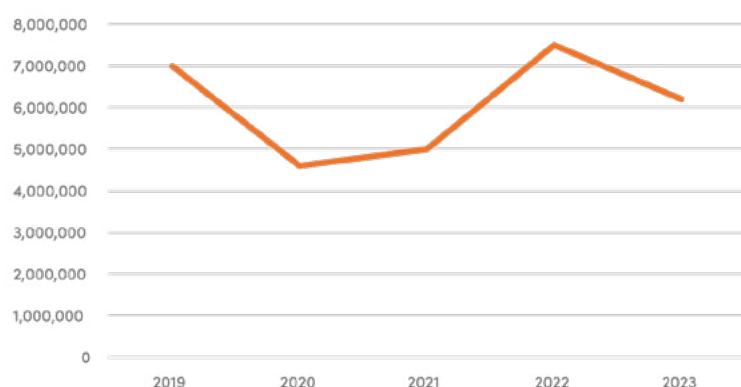
Based on NEMS Household survey, the majority of visitors to Baldock arrive by car. Additionally, based on the People & Places Report User Survey, 68% of Baldock residents surveyed travel to the centre by foot, and 33% travel by car; this sample population was made up of 95% locals and 5% visitors (living outside the postcode, but within a 30-minute drive). This indicates that locals are more likely to walk to the centre, whereas respondents from the wider Study Area will arrive by car.

Figure 28: User travel preference in Baldock town centre (People & Places, 2022).



Footfall: The district's HUQ footfall data indicates that Baldock town centre has experienced the negative effects of Covid-19 pandemic with a reduced annual footfall from roughly 7 million in 2019 to 4.7 million in 2020. Recovering from physical isolation measures, the town centre's annual footfall rose slightly in 2021, and more significantly in 2022 to above the 2019 frequency (7.4 million). Interestingly, in 2023, Baldock town centre's footfall decreases again to just above 6 million visitors annually.

Figure 29: Annual footfall in Baldock Town Centre from 2019 through 2023 (HUQ).



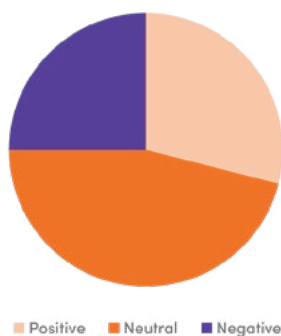
Parking: For local traffic, following Town Enhancement Scheme, work has been done to “organise parking to enable new open public spaces, provide short-term parking on the high street, and improve parking appearance.” Now, on-street car parking is available along the west and east sides of High Street, along Whitehorse Street, Hitchin Street and Sun Street, and is free for up to two hours. Off-street public car parking is located near Baldock Community Centre. The Tesco Extra store also provides car parking spaces for customers. With improved wayfinding, if an appropriate partnership was formed between the district and Tesco Extra, this could be an opportunity to motivate Tesco patrons to walk and enjoy town centre businesses and public realm as well.

The quantity of on- and off-street parking within walking distance of the town centre is sufficient to meet current demand, and there are good pedestrian routes traversing the town. In the [People & Places Baldock Town Centre Recovery and Development Plan \(2022\)](#), users surveyed reported positive (79%) and neutral (18%) views, totalling to 97% combined, towards pedestrian access, with only 3% reporting negative attitudes on this aspect. Regarding on-street parking, users were relatively satisfied (positive and neutral) with the provision, with only 23% reporting negative attitudes. For off-street parking, there were fewer positive reports (29%), but a similar percentage of negative attitudes (25%).

Figure 30: On-street parking views by Baldock town centre users. Over 75% of users respond with positive or neutral views (People & Places, 2022).



Figure 31: Off-street parking views by Baldock town centre users. Users are generally split, with many neutral views (People & Places, 2022).



Community

Baldock town centre has a good provision of community facilities, with a library, community centre and arts and heritage centre within the core. The community centre accommodates a variety of community functions with spaces to hire for external events. The library programmes a range of activities with combined walking and reading discussion groups and meetings with Police Community Support Officer. Additionally, and linked to promoting the town centre's offer, the Baldock Events Forum helps facilitate a community culture through managing the weekly outdoor market. Via the North Herts' Communities Partnership Team, Baldock users are welcomed to monthly Community Forum meetings to present applications for small grassroot grants and hear about important updates, as well as Town Drop-ins to express general concerns or questions.

To entice visitors into the town centre, Baldock should promote its strong offer for cafes, restaurants and pubs with charming historic market town character and pedestrian access.

Design-wise, Baldock Primary Shopping Area follows good design to deter anti-social behaviour using natural surveillance, interactive shop facades, clear lines of sight, and wide pedestrian paths. The public realm and small-town characteristic of Baldock facilitates visitors to walk the high street and interact with familiar neighbours, shop workers or the community in general, especially near the open public space at Bell Row and High Street.

Considering community safety and roads, High Street is the major artery of Baldock town centre, followed by Whitehorse Street; these streets intersect at a roundabout with a pedestrian crossing. There is one other pedestrian crossing on High Street within the town centre and it is a quarter mile south near Mansfield Road, approximately 4 minutes walking one direction. From officer site visits, users of the town centre are often observed crossing the road at unmarked spots and in-between moving cars to access the main town shops sitting directly across from each other. This behaviour is a hazard and highlights the disfunction of the pedestrian infrastructure.

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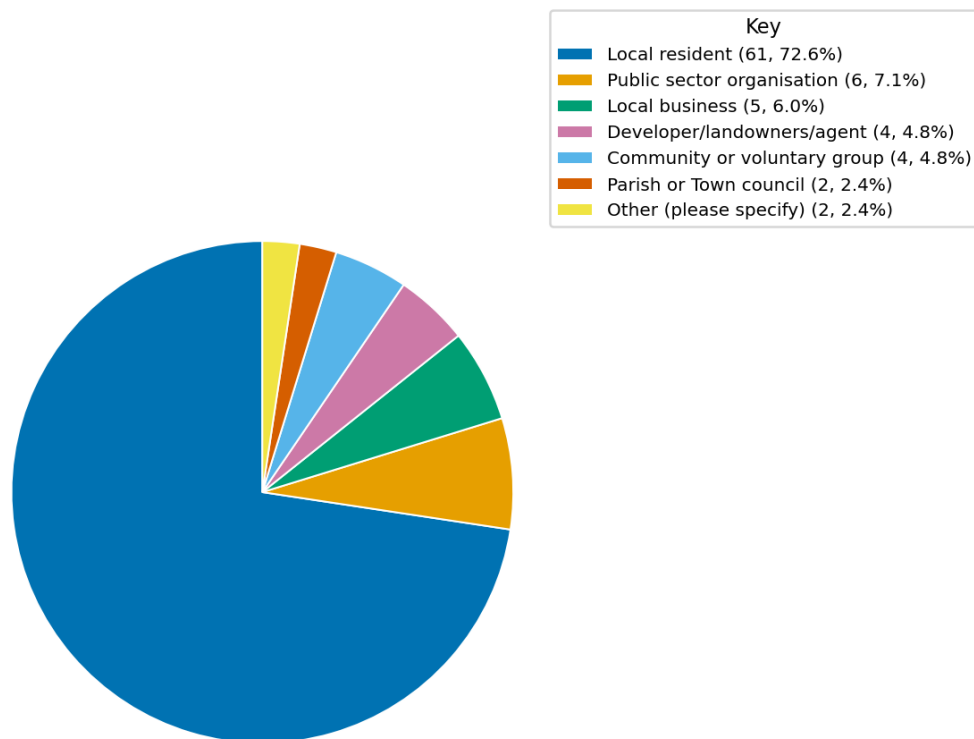
North Herts Town Centres Strategy

Summary of Consultation

This note sets out a summary of the feedback received to the consultation on the draft North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy and the resulting modifications proposed to be made to the final Strategy document. It summarises the consultation feedback, officer responses, and proposed modifications for the Strategy.

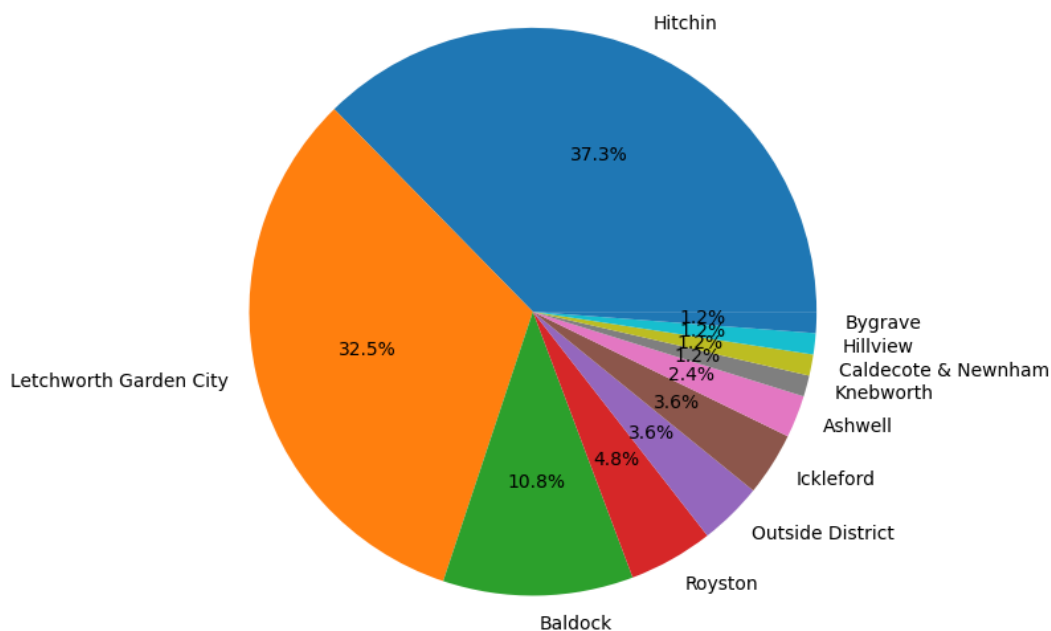
Consultation on the Strategy ran from 3 December 2025 to 30 January 2026. A total of 84 respondents answered the survey. Three-quarters of respondents were residents of North Hertfordshire. Other respondents included those from the public sector (including Hertfordshire County Council), parish councils, local businesses, and community groups. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the stakeholders by group, while Figure 2 shows their locations – the majority from Hitchin and Letchworth.

Figure 1 Response share by type



Source: NHDC

Figure 2 Response share by location



Source: NHDC

Part 1: Town Centre Context

Question 1: Do you have any comments on 1A: Introduction and Context?

Respondents queried the inclusion of location-specific detail, water infrastructure and main development priorities. Respondents also raised concerns regarding severance between Royston and the surrounding villages from the A505, in addition to Baldock experiencing heavy through-traffic.

Respondents questioned the assertion of strong economic interactions with large settlements outside North Herts, given that trips to those settlements are mostly made by car. Comments also noted absence of any mention of buses.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that greater clarity is needed on the Strategy's scope and its role as guidance. The Council has noted comments predominantly relevant to the new Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately. A comprehensive traffic management plan which, among other objectives, seeks to reduce the volume of through-traffic, is set out in the Growing Baldock masterplan.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Added additional clarification of the Strategy's scope and role as guidance within the introduction and throughout the document.
- The Strategy acknowledges A505 severance between Royston and Melbourn, Kneesworth, Bassingbourn and Litlington within the individual town centre strategy for Royston (Part 3C).
- The importance of buses in linking villages to the towns has been emphasised.

Question 2: Do you have any comments on 1B: The Council's Role?

Responses highlighted the need for fair and equal representation of residents within surveys, while some also noted that the Council should take an active role in delivering the Strategy. Respondents recommended that the Strategy clarify the relationship between town centres and the wider district, and concerns were also raised over the adequacy of street lighting while highlighting its importance for community safety.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments, in addition to other comments relating to Council communications more broadly, and agrees that its role in delivering the Strategy, including through the Delivery Plans, should be set out more clearly.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The revised Part 2B Introduction sets out how residents were selected for the telephone survey, and how this sample is representative of district demographics, as well as providing further details of the consultations and workshops undertaken.
- Reference has been added to Part 1 setting out the role and purpose of the Delivery Plans for individual towns. With reference to street lighting and community safety, a modification to Guidance Note 2 is covered under Question 9.

Question 3: Do you have any comments on 1C: Purpose of the Town Centres Strategy?

Respondents indicated that residents should be prioritised relative to business interests within the Strategy. Some queried the lack of clear policy in the document, while elements that resemble policy have not been subject to the same scrutiny as a Local Plan. Similarly, respondents also requested that the Strategy clarify whether it introduces new policy or requirements.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that the Strategy's status as guidance rather than policy should be made explicit and recognises that the needs of residents and businesses must be balanced.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy has been amended to clarify its role as guidance and the weight it will carry within the planning balance.

Question 4: Do you have any comments on the Land Use and Retail Evidence?

Respondents expressed concern over the level of rent for businesses and the variety and quality of the retail offering, particularly in Letchworth. Respondents also commented on low footfall and vehicular congestion in Baldock. Several respondents sought clarity over the redistributive capacity to other centres, while others noted the floorspace figures provided may conflict with the Local Plan. The Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID) commented on the level of recognition given to the BID renewal brochure.

Council Response

The Council agrees that it is important to address gaps in the retail offer within the centres, particularly within Letchworth and Baldock. However, matters relating to footfall and congestion in Baldock have been addressed by the Growing Baldock masterplan and this will be further considered within future infrastructure planning.

Points raised regarding town centre floorspace figures will be noted and will be considered through ongoing evidence gathering for the new Local Plan and transport planning work.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy has been amended to include the aspiration to reinstate regular open-air and/or covered markets in Letchworth and to increase diversity among retail and dining outlets.
- Amendments have been made within Part 1D to provide additional detail on the Hitchin BID renewal brochure.

Question 5: Do you have any comments on the Built Environment Evidence?

Respondents raised concerns over the state of the built environment, including the attractiveness of both older and newer development, historic buildings and property maintenance. Respondents also called for the protection of historic buildings, in addition to better signage, wayfinding and advertisement of historic town centre sites. Some queried the lack of clarity over the development of specific sites, including timescales, while others noted a need for increased consideration of green spaces and wider National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) objectives.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that the Strategy's relationship to development briefs, the Delivery Plans, and the NPPF requires clarification. Broader green space comments have been noted and are relevant to the new Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately.

Timescales and delivery programmes for new developments will be set out within the Delivery Plans.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy has been amended to clarify the use and role of development briefs and Delivery Plans throughout, in addition to the Strategy's relationship to the national policy and guidance.
- The role of this Strategy in setting the overarching vision and priorities for town centre regeneration has been further clarified within Part 1.

Question 6: Do you have any comments on the Transport, Access and Movement Evidence?

Some respondents identified or implied that there are gaps in the evidence base, in particular regarding parking capacity and demand, disabled (Blue Badge) parking bays, the location and use of taxi ranks, and the reliability of bus services.

Several respondents commented on policy and town-specific matters, which are addressed later in this summary document under Part 3.

Council Response

The Council advises that the evidence gaps identified will largely be addressed through the revised Parking Strategy and improved monitoring of bus service reliability, rather than through the Town Centres Strategy. Parking capacity and demand, Blue Badge parking bays and taxi ranks will be audited as part of the planned refresh of the North Herts Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4).

Hertfordshire County Council and the Traffic Commissioner routinely gather data on bus service reliability, and operators frequently adjust timetables to improve reliability.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Part 4 now references that North Herts Council will use its role as a member of the Intalink Partnership to seek greater transparency and responsiveness around local bus services.

Question 7: Do you have any comments on the Community Evidence?

Respondents raised concerns were raised over the representation of respondents and level of consultation. Respondents also highlighted concerns over community safety in town centres and a lack of public toilets. Respondents suggested the addition of further cross-cutting community themes, in particular the arts, and reference to the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework. Others suggested a more holistic town-wide approach to community centres.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that reference to the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework and public toilets should be added. It recognises the importance of community safety, which is reflected in the Strategy and will be addressed further in wider planning considerations. The addition of further cross-cutting community themes extends beyond the scope of the Town Centre Strategy, while broader suggestions to support the arts and community facilities lie outside the scope of the Strategy but will be considered within relevant future work, including the Delivery Plans.

The Council considers the engagement undertaken to have been proportionate in terms of the time and cost of the Strategy.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy now includes reference to the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework in Part 1D under Theme 4.

- Exploring opportunities for public conveniences in the town centre has been added to the key priorities for Baldock in Part 3D.

Part 2: Town Centre Guidance

Question 8: Do you have any comments on Guidance Note 1: Promoting Vitality and Viability in Town Centres?

Respondents requested greater detail on actions to promote vitality and viability in town centres, including site allocations, in addition to reference to specific town centres within the guidance. Respondents also suggested soundproofing mixed-use areas and increasing business support. Additionally, respondents requested greater clarity regarding whether the Guidance Note or Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will take precedence in areas of overlap.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and notes that the Guidance Notes are intended to apply consistently across the district, with town-specific detail addressed separately in Part 3 of the Strategy. Detail on delivery and site-specific plans will be provided within future Delivery Plans. Business support measures will be considered through the emerging Economic Strategy action plans, while soundproofing would be covered by Building Regulations Part E.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The introduction to Guidance Note 1 has been updated to note that the Developer Contributions SPD is the primary guidance for developer contributions, mitigation and viability.
- Reference to Local Plan policy SP7: on infrastructure requirements has been added to Guidance Note 1 for completeness.

Question 9: Do you have any comments on Guidance Note 2: The Built Form, Public Realm and Design?

Respondents raised concerns regarding the level of maintenance of pavements and street furniture in town centres and the impact on existing buildings, with some disagreement noted on the Strategy's current assessment of maintenance. Various parties also requested that the Strategy comment on Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and biodiversity.

Responses to this question regarding parking provision have been addressed under Question 11.

Council Response

The Council agrees that Guidance Note 2 should reference policies relating to street lighting, safety and SuDS. While comments on maintenance have been noted, Guidance Note 2 concerns future development; however, relevant amendments will be made to the SWOT assessments for individual town centres in Part 3 where appropriate.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Added reference to policies relating to street lighting, including forthcoming national guidance on designing streets to be safer for women and girls to Guidance Note 2.
- Added reference to policies relating to SuDS to Guidance Note 2.

Question 10: Do you have any comments on Guidance Note 3: Heritage and Historical Character?

Respondents commented that the overall Strategy and Guidance Note 3 should be focused on the form and design of new development, with the aim to ensure the protection of existing built form and character, and that new development should complement this. Respondents also suggested upgrading open spaces and paths, with a specific comment on planting more trees.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that the retention, enhancement and planting of trees should be given greater prominence in Guidance Note 3.

The delivery and design of new development, alongside addressing complementarity, will be relevant to future work on the Delivery Plans – this strategy sets the high-level principles for town centre development and regeneration and sits at a higher level than a development brief. Meanwhile, upgrading open spaces and the evaluation of paths and green spaces will be considered in future evidence gathering and the new Local Plan.

Specific heritage concerns have been noted by the Council and will be referred to the heritage officer. The Conservation Area Character Statements for each of the town centres provide the necessary historic guidance for new development.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Reference to the retention, enhancement and planting of trees has been added to Guidance Note 3.
- Reference to Local Plan policies ETC3, ETC4 and ETC5 have been added to Guidance Notes 2 and 3 for completeness and consistency with other guidance notes.

Question 11: Do you have any comments on Guidance Note 4: Promoting Sustainable Travel?

Several respondents raised concerns over parking in town centres, including parking management, pricing and provision. Respondents were also concerned that measures to prioritise sustainable modes of travel could disadvantage rural residents, while others suggested the addition of a park-and-ride. Respondents recommended that travel hubs include car parking. A few respondents wanted to see freight (goods deliveries) included within the Guidance Note, while one respondent asked for modal shift targets. Respondents also raised concerns about the safety of e-scooters and potential cluttering of pavements by rental bikes or e-scooters.

Town-specific responses are addressed under questions 13 to 24.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that travel/mobility hubs and the needs of disabled people should be explained for clarity. Parking needs and provision will be considered in the upcoming review of the district's Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4).

However, park-and-rides are not included in the Strategy because they require large areas of land, undermine pre-existing bus services and exacerbate congestion on approach roads. They also only serve people who cannot drive or do not have access to a car, which excludes a significant proportion of the rural population.

The Strategy does not address e-scooters as these are illegal to use on public land. Enforcement of this is the responsibility of the police. Any proposal for a bike or e-scooter rental scheme would be carefully assessed for its safety and equality impacts in consultation with the Highway Authority (Hertfordshire County Council).

Traffic impacts, mode-share targets and wider movement issues will be assessed by Hertfordshire County Council (as the Highway and Transport Authority) as part of making a new Local Plan for North Herts and a new Local Transport Plan for Hertfordshire, both of which will be consulted on separately.

Active travel is addressed in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, an update to which will be consulted on separately. This will focus on improving rural links to the towns. Likewise, the Local Transport Plan, a new edition of which will be consulted on separately, is where transport objectives, outcomes, policies, targets and monitoring are set out.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy puts greater emphasis on improving the quality and integration of transport services in both towns and villages throughout.
- Guidance Note 4 has been updated to explain how travel hubs located in villages will function and that they have a role in both towns and villages for improving sustainable transport links to town centres.
- Clarification has been added to Guidance Note 4 around the extent of parking envisaged for travel/mobility hubs.
- Reference has been added in part (b) of Guidance Note 4 to the general requirement to consider the transport needs of people with disabilities.
- Reference to Local Plan policies ETC3, ETC4 and ETC5 have been added to Guidance Note 4 for completeness and consistency with other guidance notes.

Question 12: Do you have any comments on Guidance Note 5: Community Facilities?

Respondents raised concerns over community, and specifically child, safety in town centres, in addition to potential health impacts from specific town centre uses such as hot food takeaways and pubs. Other respondents noted a lack of site allocations or funding detail within the Strategy. A comment from HCC recommended the Strategy include reference to the Healthy Streets approach.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that Guidance Note 5 should reference the Healthy Streets approach. Site allocations will be considered as part of making a new Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately, while funding mechanisms will be considered in the preparation of Delivery Plans. The Strategy recognises the importance of community safety and the need to consider sensitive locations or receptors when planning future uses; these matters will be addressed through the wider planning process.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Guidance Note 5 now references the Healthy Streets approach.
- Reference to Local Plan policies ETC3, ETC4 and ETC5 have been added to Guidance Note 5 for completeness and consistency with other guidance notes.

Part 3A: Hitchin

Question 13: The North Herts Town Centre Strategy sets out an identity and vision for Hitchin Town Centre. Do you think these reflect what makes Hitchin special and what its future should be?

Several respondents referred to the role of Churchgate and Hitchin Market in the town centre, requesting increased focus on the market's importance and greater detail on the Churchgate plans.

Respondents raised concerns over the lack of amenities for under 18s, and more generally the affordability of amenities in the town centre. Respondents also suggested amendments including reference to nature recovery, flood risk reduction and water quality improvements, as well as further pedestrianisation, public realm improvements, and improved routes between the town and station. Respondents also queried where a bus station could be located in the town centre.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and modification has been made to reference nature recovery, flood risk reductions and water quality improvements. The importance of progressing long-standing projects such as Churchgate is recognised, as is restoring Charnwood House and bringing it back into viable use.

The Strategy seeks only to establish the principle that Hitchin needs a bus station to improve the convenience and comfort of bus users, in particular those needing to change between services (in particular those serving the railway station and those serving other places). This is key to increasing the proportion of trips into Hitchin made by public transport. Potential locations will be explored through the new Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy now references nature recovery, flood risk reductions and water quality improvements within the vision for Hitchin.

- Reference is now made to the Churchgate project throughout Part 3A, and the Strategy reiterates the Council's commitment to bringing Charnwood House back into viable use.

Question 14: Do you have any comments on the SWOT Analysis for Hitchin?

Many of the respondents' comments addressed weaknesses, including a lack of affordable retailers, high rents, levels of through-traffic, heavy vehicles movements (including metal-recycling lorries), and the quality of pavement and public realm maintenance.

Respondents suggested modifications including amending the stated level of town maintenance in the SWOT, highlighting Hitchin's retail diversity as a strength, increasing pedestrianisation, mentioning the flea market on Sundays and improving public realm. Others suggested a wider nature circuit linking the town centre to the Chilterns, promoting a station shuttle, and better signage. Respondents also felt that the characterisation of heritage designations as a constraint implied that the Strategy viewed the historic character of the town as a weakness.

Council Response

The Council agrees that the SWOT analysis should be amended so that heritage designations are not characterised as a weakness of the town. Detail on conservation and heritage guidance is already secured through the Local Plan, particularly Policies HE1-HE4 on conserving heritage assets and using Conservation Area Character Statements in decision-making. Amendments have been made to acknowledge that the statement within the SWOT analysis could be clarified to make clear that only the designations constrain development in planning terms, and that the historic character itself is not a weakness.

The Council will work in partnership with HCC to deliver a range of transport, access and movement improvements, including a public realm, connectivity and wayfinding for the four towns. These will be guided by the North Central Hertfordshire Growth and Transport Plan, the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). The pace of delivery will depend on the availability of funding from central Government and funding contributions from developments in Hitchin.

Comments on traffic congestion are acknowledged, and the Strategy will seek to address this by supporting improvements to alternative modes of travel and diverting through-traffic onto more suitable roads. Points on pedestrianisation, supporting retail and improving active transport all align with the Strategy's existing priorities. The SWOT analysis will be updated to clarify the position on maintenance of streets and street furniture, and include reference to the flea market on Sunday.

The new Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately, and future Spatial Development Strategy (the first of which will be produced by Hertfordshire County Council) will explore opportunities to relocate heavy industrial sites out of Hitchin to more suitable locations.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The SWOT analysis for Hitchin has been rephrased to make clear that the historic character of the town centre is not considered a weakness.
- The key priorities have been updated to clarify the position on street maintenance and furniture.

Question 15: Do you have any comments on the Key Priorities for Hitchin Town Centre?

Several respondents requested increased detail on the Churchgate redevelopment and mention of Charnwood House, as noted under Question 13, in addition to comments on parking provision, connections to the station, and increased pedestrianisation. Some respondents raised concerns over a lack of comment on connecting to Hitchin Lavender and inclusion of the Ickleford parish council in consultation, while others requested dedicated Strategies for each town centre, in addition to inclusion of details on SuDS. Respondents also suggested an access study be undertaken to look at active travel routes between Hitchin station and the town centre.

Council Response

The Council has reviewed these comments and does not consider it necessary to produce a separate strategy for each town, as Part 3 already sets out town-specific priorities. The Strategy sets out high-level principles, with Delivery Plans for each centre to follow as the next stage of work.

The Council recognises the importance of progressing long-standing projects such as Churchgate and amendments have been made to the Strategy to better reflect this. Reference to the plans to bring Charnwood House back into viable use has also been added.

Additionally, comments regarding consultation with the Parish Council on connections to Hitchin Lavender are noted: when planning work or taking decisions, the relevant authorities (NHDC or HCC) consult all relevant consultees.

Specific matters relating to parking will be addressed within the upcoming update to the district Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4). Hertfordshire County Council has audited routes between Hitchin railway station and town centre and will be coming forward with proposals for improvements in due course. It is also looking at creating a safe walking route under the railway bridge on Arlesey Road to improve the link to Hitchin Lavender.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Added an action to support the expansion of HertsLynx into the north-western part of North Herts, most of which is poorly served by bus under Key Priority D: Hitchin as a key sustainable transport hub.
- Guidance Note 2 now references SuDS.
- Within Key Priority C: Cultural economy strategy, reference is now made to the Churchgate project, and the Strategy reiterates the Council's commitment to bringing Charnwood House back into viable use within the vision statement and under the SWOT analysis as stated in Q13 above.

Part 3B: Letchworth Garden City

Question 16: The North Herts Town Centre Strategy sets out an identity and vision for Letchworth Garden City Town Centre. Do you think these reflect what makes Letchworth Garden City special and what its future should be?

Respondents called for a stronger vision reflecting Letchworth's future potential, calling for visible, proactive leadership in town centre delivery. Their suggestions included the redevelopment of Plinston Hall for retail, while some raised concerns over both a reduction in places to eat and a desire for more shopping, cinema and restaurant provision to be included in the Strategy. Respondents also raised concerns over vacant retail units and the underlying assumption of growing demand for retail and leisure floorspace. Respondents called for increased and improved parking in the town centre.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that the vision for Letchworth should be strengthened to better reflect its ambition and potential. The Delivery Plan for Letchworth will build on and enhance this vision through specific objectives and initiatives.

Parking provision is addressed in Strategy Guidance Note 4 and will be further addressed through the planned update of the district's Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4). Regarding the retail uses identified in the Strategy, the mix of retail and food and beverage uses reflects market demand and current planning evidence, including that within the district's Retail Needs Study and Local Plan.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Clarification has been added that the vision for Letchworth will be built upon through the objections and actions within the future Delivery Plan.

Question 17: Do you have any comments on the SWOT Analysis for Letchworth Garden City?

Respondents raised concerns over vacancy levels, the progress of regeneration schemes, and low levels of footfall in the town centre, in addition to leakage to larger centres such as Cambridge. Respondents also noted the importance of retaining key outlets and progressing ongoing investment at sites such as the Wynd and Gernon Road. Some suggested the Strategy overlooks weaknesses in local transport, including a lack of integration with major transport hubs, a lack of safe cycling routes and limited public transport options, in addition to issues relating to town centre parking provision. Respondents also raised community safety and security as missing from the Strategy, noting that greater footfall and evening use could result in increased crime, and that the risk to businesses should also be addressed.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that the SWOT analysis should better reflect recent investment and the impact of increased footfall on safety. Issues raised relating to visitor behaviour, footfall, and the role of retail anchors are already addressed within the Strategy

and are supported by Local Plan policies. An amendment will be made to the SWOT to reference impact of increased footfall on safety.

Parking provision and tariffs, including free short-stay bays, need to be balanced against ensuring that bus services remain viable and can grow to serve more people in and outside the town. This will be considered within the planned update to the district's Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4).

The Delivery Plan will guide sustainable redevelopment opportunities as they arise and support a balanced mix of commercial and residential uses.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The SWOT analysis now includes reference to the investment at Wynd, the redevelopment at Geron Road, and to broader safety measures.
- Reference has been made to seeking opportunities to better integrate sustainable transport modes.

Question 18: Do you have any comments on the Key Priorities for Letchworth Garden City Town Centre?

Respondents called for improved access for commuters, including a better station drop-off and increased parking provision, and for safer cycling, improved active travel and improved public transport links – including the potential for a bus hub at Broadway Gardens. Other public transport suggestions included short local routes and rapid inter-town services.

As noted previously, respondents also raised concerns over the quality of the existing retail offering and Letchworth's position relative to other centres, calling for national retailers to be attracted and for new commercial and residential space to be developed, expanding on the Wynd Road investment. Respondents also highlighted heritage as a potential draw for visitors to Letchworth's centre.

Some respondents sought stronger emphasis on delivering LCWIP-led public realm improvements, while others recommended identifying a Health Hub, potentially at Garden Square, and noted a lack of reference to the Letchworth BID.

Council Response

The Strategy provides the framework for coordinated regeneration and identified projects and highway initiatives will be taken forward with partners-including Letchworth BID-through the preparation of a Delivery Plan. This ensures that future redevelopment opportunities, including those around the Wynd and the station area, are progressed in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

Station access and drop-off arrangements are already addressed within the Town Centres Strategy through Guidance Note 4. Future transport work alongside Hertfordshire County Council will take this into consideration to ensure future improvements align with wider transport planning and infrastructure priorities.

The Council agrees that strong heritage is a strength to the town centre, rather than solely a planning constraint, and the SWOT will be amended to include this. With regard to the comments on

the Health Hub, decisions on primary care facilities sit with health authorities, and any future town centre health hub would complement – not replace – local surgeries.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Added action to support the reinstatement of regular open air and/or covered markets.
- The SWOT analysis has been amended to recognise heritage assets as a strength of the town centre.

Part 3C: Royston

Question 19: The North Herts Town Centre Strategy sets out an identity and vision for Royston Town Centre. Do you think these reflect what makes Royston special and what its future should be?

Some respondents suggested the history and character of the town may have been impacted by population growth, while others raised concerns regarding the quality of the retail offer. Likewise, respondents suggested the town's heritage could be better highlighted through trails and plaques. Some noted that Royston Gateway pulls shoppers from the town centre, and that the centre has been harmed by the volume of through-traffic.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that opportunities to reduce through-traffic and support heritage interpretation in Royston should be pursued through related strategies. The Strategy highlights the role of heritage within Guidance Note 3 and it is also reflected in existing Local Plan policies. Opportunities for enhanced interpretation, trails and signage can be explored through future place-based work and the Delivery Plan, and these have been added to the identified key priorities for the town centre.

The Council acknowledges concerns around through-traffic and Royston Gateway and will address these through measures that make active travel and public transport a more attractive alternative to driving. Specific measures are set out in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, and further measures will be delivered through the Bus Service Improvement Plan, updates to the Growth and Transport Plan, the new Local Plan, the new Local Transport Plan and the future Spatial Development Strategy.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The key priorities for Royston now reference opportunities for enhanced interpretation in the town centre.

Question 20: Do you have any comments on the SWOT Analysis for Royston?

Respondents raised concerns over the quality of retail and food offerings in the town centre which were found to have a lack of variety, and in particular lacking family-friendly options. Respondents suggested improving provision for active travel at the A10/A505 junction and other locations on the boundary between Royston and South Cambridgeshire, which would enhance connections to

villages north of Royston. Some suggested that new edge-of-town developments could enable these improvements for the benefit of both existing residents and future residents of those developments.

Council Response

The Council agrees that active travel connections between Royston and the surrounding area, including across the district boundary, should be reflected in the SWOT. The suggested interventions represent opportunities to include within the analysis.

The Strategy recognises the need to enhance the quality and diversity of Royston's retail and food offer, including supporting facilities for all age groups. These issues are addressed through existing Local Plan town centre policies and the Town Centres Strategy guidance, which support improving unit quality, broadening the mix of uses and strengthening the overall attractiveness of the town centre.

The Strategy aligns with Local Plan transport policies. Guidance Note 4 addresses sustainable transport, parking and movement, including active travel and cross boundary coordination.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The SWOT analysis has been updated to include reference to A505 severance and active travel connections.

Question 21: Do you have any comments on the Key Priorities for Royston Town Centre?

Respondents raised concerns over cycling and walking connectivity and safety, while relevant suggestions included connecting to national routes north and to Icknield. Others noted concerns over safety and vehicle flows in the town centre, with suggestions focusing on junctions, speed limits and the direction of traffic flows.

Some responses questioned the attractiveness of Royston to visitors, with suggestions of improving shops, nightlife, and bringing eating places to the high street, in addition to pedestrianised areas, the addition of seating, shelters in selected areas, and improvement to roads and pavements.

Council Response

The Council agrees that improving the pedestrian experience should be added as a key priority for Royston town centre. While the Strategy does not determine public rights-of-way designations, speed limits or site-specific development restrictions, it supports wider active travel links and improvements through Guidance Note 4. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan also provides guidance on active travel measures. Car parking suggestions will be considered as part of a planned review of the district's Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4).

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Key priorities now include an action to improve the pedestrian experience in and around the town centre.
- The extent of improvements supported by the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan has been clarified.

- An action has been added to explore ways to make bus services more attractive and reliable, and improve the experience for people waiting for a bus at the railway and bus stations.

Part 3D: Baldock

Question 22: The North Herts Town Centre Strategy sets out an identity and vision for Baldock Town Centre. Do you think these reflect what makes Baldock special and what its future should be?

Several respondents raised concerns over the planned growth of Baldock and how it will impact the character of the town centre and sufficiency of the retail provision. Respondents also cited concerns over a lack of independent traders, the quality of some town centre buildings, and parking limits. Respondents suggested the Strategy prioritise investment in buses and cycling networks in Baldock, while community safety was a recurring issue, with some calling for more visible policing in the town centre.

Council Response

The Council agrees that parking management, including Controlled Parking Zones, should be addressed as Baldock grows. The Strategy recognises that significant planned growth around Baldock will require coordinated transport and infrastructure planning. This will also be addressed through ongoing work towards the new Local Plan and in transport work with HCC. This and other strategies, including the Growing Baldock masterplan, are seeking to make alternatives to driving into Baldock centre and railway station more convenient and attractive to reduce pressures on parking.

The Strategy supports a varied and resilient retail mix and recognises the value of independent and specialist traders. In addition, it recognises the importance of community safety, and these matters will also be considered in wider planning processes.

The comment regarding the Conservation and Character Statement for Baldock will be referred to heritage officers.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Part 4 now includes reference to the implementation of Controlled Parking Zones and adjusting parking time limits to ensure town centre parking spaces are used efficiently. This action applies to all four town centres, including Baldock.

Question 23: Do you have any comments on the SWOT Analysis for Baldock?

Several respondents repeated concerns over the planned growth of Baldock and resulting population increase, in particular with regard to its impact on traffic congestion and the provision of community facilities. Respondents also commented on the provision of parking and restrictions harming trade, and the importance of connections between rural villages and the town centre.

Respondents also noted a lack of pedestrian crossings in the town, among more general comments on road safety. Their suggestions included providing a greater level of detail on strategies to

encourage independent traders, and focusing on transforming the High Street into a destination as the town grows, while managing the impact of through-traffic, including along the A507. Several respondents felt that new development should seek to strengthen the historic centre.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that pedestrian safety and support for independent retailers should remain priorities as Baldock grows. The Strategy recognises the need for improved pedestrian safety, support for independent retailers and protection and enhancement of Baldock's town centre character. These aims align with the Strategy's Guidance Note 1, 2 and 4 and wider Local Plan objectives. The Strategy also recognises the importance of maintaining car access for rural communities. Detailed measures, including pedestrian crossings and retail support, will be explored at the delivery stage.

The Strategy recognises that planned growth around Baldock will require coordinated transport planning to address traffic, station access, parking and wider movement pressures. These issues will be considered through the Local Plan and detailed transport work with HCC.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Greater emphasis is placed on transport connections between villages and town centres throughout the Strategy.

Question 24: Do you have any comments on the Key Priorities for Baldock Town Centre?

Respondents' primary concerns centred around increasing the provision of parking and ensuring suitable vehicular access to accommodate visitors and prioritising accessibility. This included comments on enforcement of parking and road rules. Respondents also suggested encouraging greater adoption of renewable energy among businesses and in public buildings, while others raised concerns over the lack of public toilets in Baldock.

Council Response

A planned review of the Parking Strategy will consider whether parking restrictions need to be adjusted or extended and assess whether parking provision and controls are appropriate for Baldock's future growth (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4).

In addition, as noted previously, the Strategy will include reference to adjusting or implementing new Controlled Parking Zones and adjusting parking time limits to ensure town centre parking spaces are used efficiently.

The Strategy supports improving walking and cycling while maintaining necessary vehicular access. Moreover, Guidance Note 2 encourages improved environmental performance, with technologies such as solar panels and heat pumps considered through detailed design and aligns with the Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Exploring opportunities to provide public conveniences within Baldock town centre has been added to the key priorities under town centre service provision and infrastructure.

Part 3: General

Question 25: Do you consider it useful to have a summary table of the priority areas for each of the town centres?

While some respondents found the table useful, several respondents commented that it was overly repetitive and highlighted that many readers would focus on one town. Those who found the table useful suggested that the focus should be on ensuring delivery and materialisation of the strategies.

Council Response

The Council agrees that the summary table of the priority areas is repetitive, and as such it has been removed. The Strategy sets out high-level principles, with the preparation of the Delivery Plans for each town centre to follow as the next stage of work.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The role of the Strategy as a guidance document and its relationship to the future Delivery Plans has been clarified throughout the document.

Part 4: Further Council Actions and Funding Opportunities

Question 26: Do you have any comments on the Council's further proposed actions?

Respondents primarily commented on transport concerns, including enforcement of road rules, improvements in cycle access, concerns over the safety of e-scooter/e-bike hire schemes, parking and greater consideration of those with mobility issues. Some raised concerns that the Strategy lacks spatial integration in the context of growing populations and town centre density.

Respondents also requested clear site allocations and development briefs, and querying whether there will be reference to policies from which action will come. There were also concerns raised as to whether there had been suitable engagement in the creation of the Strategy, and if town centre residents have been overlooked.

Some also noted that the Strategy does not offer practical support for local businesses to adopt sustainability measures and that higher taxes, regulations and bureaucracy can place a burden on small businesses, which could hinder regeneration.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and notes that the Strategy provides interim guidance on the application of policy within the current Local Plan until such time a formal policy is advanced and adopted through the Local Plan review, which will set out the Council's planning priorities for town centres. Site allocations and development briefs will be considered through the emerging Local

Plan and referenced where appropriate in future Delivery Plans. As noted previously, this will be further clarified within the Strategy.

Comments on parking, accessibility and support for local businesses will be considered in ongoing work on town centre planning and future evidence gathering. National taxation and regulatory requirements fall outside the Council's control.

The Strategy promotes high-quality, sustainable design while ensuring development remains appropriate to each town-centre context. Parking, cycle storage and green infrastructure will be guided by Local Plan policies and design standards. The Strategy recognises that car travel remains essential for many residents in rural and edge-of-town areas and for those with mobility impairments, while suitable sustainable transport options will also be considered.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The role of the Strategy as a guidance document and its relationship to the future Delivery Plans has been clarified throughout the document.

Question 27: Do you have any comments on the potential funding opportunities and key considerations for NHDC?

Respondents noted that site allocations would be needed to fund and deliver improvements. It was felt by some that the Strategy relies too heavily on public funding, while others raised concerns that the Strategy – and funding – may not equally apply to all four town centres, with reference to Baldock. As noted previously, some respondents queried which document takes precedent in providing guidance on developer contributions and funding.

Council Response

The Council recognises the importance of ensuring balance between the town centres and confirms that the Strategy will apply equally to all four towns. Detailed site allocation, viability considerations and developer-funded infrastructure are addressed through the Council's Local Plan, supported by the Developer Contributions SPD and related planning policies.

While the Strategy sets out potential funding and delivery opportunities the Strategy's role is to provide high-level guidance, while the Developer Contributions SPD remains the primary document for detailed requirements. This will be clarified within the Strategy.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The role of the Strategy and the precedence of the Developer Contributions SPD has been clarified.

Further Comments

Question 28: Do you have any comments on the Glossary in the Town Centres Strategy? Have we missed any terms that should be included?

Only one respondent commented on the glossary, highlighting that site allocations and development briefs did not feature.

Council Response

The Council agrees that all technical terms used in the Strategy should be defined in the glossary.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Added definitions for all technical terms used in the Strategy.
- Added a list of acronyms and abbreviations used in the Strategy.

Question 29: Do you have any further comments on the Town Centres Strategy?

Several respondents critiqued the format of the survey and the length of the consultation document. Some suggested that in future the Council should consider ways to make the survey more user-friendly, provide a summary document for the consultation, and extend the consultation period to ensure there is sufficient awareness among residents and businesses and provide time.

Some respondents raised concerns that residents were not clearly reflected in the engagement, while others questioned whether some of the data was outdated. Respondents called for increased proactiveness in allocating sites, in addition to a greater focus developer funding such as via S106, while others cited that there should be an increased emphasis on health outcomes. In addition, respondents raised concerns that collating four within one strategy may risk missing some of the nuances that make each town centre unique.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and acknowledges the concerns raised about the length and accessibility of the consultation document and process. As noted previously, detailed site allocations and funding mechanisms are addressed through the Local Plan and supported by the Council's Developer Contributions SPD and relevant planning policies.

While the consultation was open to all residents, businesses and stakeholders for two months, concerns regarding the length and accessibility of the document are noted and will be taken into consideration when designing future consultations. The Council will also consider how information can be presented in a more concise and manageable format to support wider engagement. Concerns surrounding the accessibility of the online form are also noted. Future consultations will explore simpler formats and easier sign-in options to support wider participation.

The Strategy recognises the important role that town centre design, walkability and inclusive environments play in supporting health and reducing inequalities. Reference has been made to the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework, and this will continue to inform future work on implementation. Equality impact assessments will be undertaken alongside the preparation of the Delivery Plans. The evidence base, as presented in the appendices for all four town centres, provides a baseline which will be reviewed and updated separately as part of the Delivery Plans and the emerging Local Plan using the most current datasets available.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Reference has been added to the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework.
- An executive summary has been added to the document.

CABINET TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: Charnwood House, Hitchin

REPORT OF: Director - Enterprise

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Enterprise

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Thriving Communities

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council has a policy for Charnwood House to be brought back into use to support community-based activities.

A Record of Decision dated 3rd August 2026 by the Executive Member for Enterprise approved the re-marketing of Charnwood House on a long lease to organisations with the vision and expertise to transform it into a thriving community asset. This follows a previous Cabinet decision in December 2020 approving the principle of marketing and for the terms of any transaction to be presented back to Cabinet for approval.

The new marketing began on 24th August 2026 and the closing date for applications from suitable interested organisations is 19th October 2026.

This Cabinet report seeks approval to the basis for assessing and scoring the applications, and delegating final approval of the successful organisation to the Executive Member for Enterprise in consultation with the Director of Enterprise.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That Cabinet approve the basis and process for assessing and scoring applications from suitable interested parties (or groups).
- 2.2. That Cabinet delegates authority to the Executive Member for Enterprise in consultation with the Director of Enterprise, to finalise the terms for the lease and to complete any other documentation required to give effect to the decision.
- 2.3. That Cabinet approves grant of a long lease of Charnwood House, including a restriction to community use, and delegates to the Director of Enterprise in consultation officers in Estates and Legal Services to consider rental at a value less than best consideration where it can be shown that the disposal will promote and improve social well-being pursuant to the Local Government Act 1972: General Disposal Consent 2003.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. The Council has a policy for Charnwood House to be brought back into use to support community-based activities, recognising the potential value of the asset to local and regional groups and the wider town centre.
- 3.2. The Council Plan 2024-2028 identifies Thriving Communities as one of the Council's priorities which includes looking for opportunities to develop community hubs that provide public spaces and support for communities.
- 3.3. This recommendation sets out how the successful applicant will be selected to enable the Council to progress granting a lease of Charnwood House and deliver the policy for the property.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 Do Nothing / Continue Holding the Property Vacant

Rejected as:

- The property will have ongoing holding costs (repair, maintenance, security and compliance for example).
- The property will be subject to further deterioration and possible vandalism.
- Reputational risk regarding community expectations.
- Failure to deliver the policy and associated community benefit.

4.2 Disposal / Sale of the Freehold

Rejected as:

- Loss of long-term control.
- Community aspirations may not be achieved unless restrictive covenants are applied (which may reduce value and covenants may have limited enforceability).
- Difficult to guarantee community use and access if privately developed.

4.3 Other options discounted in a previous options paper include:

- Commercial Letting - short or long term.
- A Council managed community use.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The future aspirations and policy for Charnwood House have been communicated to the public through Hitchin Forum and the dedicated web page on the Council's website [Charnwood House | North Herts Council](#).
- 5.2 The Executive Members for Resources and Enterprise have been closely consulted on the plans for the re-marketing and letting of Charnwood House to meet the policy.
- 5.3 Shadow Executive Members have also been kept informed on the plans for re-marketing Charnwood House.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 21st August 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 A Cabinet decision in December 2020 approved the principle of marketing and provided that the terms of any transaction would be presented back to Cabinet for approval.
- 7.2 A marketing exercise in 2023 did not lead to a successful letting.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Charnwood House is a Grade II Listed property. It was formerly used as Hitchin Museum prior to the development of a District Museum at Brand Street. The last public admission to Charnwood House in its capacity as a museum was in September 2012. Following the closure of the museum, Charnwood House was used for temporary storage purposes, pending decisions being made on its future. Final items were removed in March 2022 in preparation for asbestos remediation and other works to facilitate a community letting.
- 8.2 The Council is committed to delivering a policy for Charnwood House to be brought back into use to support community-based activities, recognising the potential value of the asset to local and regional groups and the wider town centre.
- 8.3 The property was conveyed to the Urban District Council of Hitchin (UDCH) by a conveyance dated 1st May 1937 made between Hubert John Moss and Wallace Benjamin Moss as grantors and UDCH with the intention of being for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Urban District.
- 8.4 The former museum is registered as an Asset of Community Value. In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, the Council (as owner) has served a notice of its intention to dispose of the former museum by way of grant of a lease to coincide with the marketing. Following notice of the intention to dispose, eligible local organisations have a six-week period in which to make an expression of interest in the property. If any appropriate expressions of interest are received, there will be a six-month moratorium before any disposal can take place (unless it is to an eligible community interest group).
- 8.5 Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 allows a Council to dispose of land in any manner it wishes provided that the consideration is the best that can be reasonably obtained, save for the provisions of Section 123(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 whereby a sale can be made at less than best consideration (provided this is at less than £2m difference) for the following reasons:
- (i) The promotion or improvement of economic well-being.
 - (ii) The promotion or improvement of social well-being.
 - (iii) The promotion or improvement of environmental well-being.
- 8.6 The preliminary view of the Council is that restricting the use of Charnwood House to community purposes only may result in less consideration being achieved than if the property were offered to the market with no restriction on use.

- 8.7 When a successful applicant has been approved and final terms are agreed for a letting, formal valuation advice will be obtained to establish the level of any undervalue. If this is below the £2 million threshold, as is anticipated, a final evaluation will be undertaken to confirm the social well-being of North Herts is being improved/promoted.
- 8.8 For the reasons of the promotion or improvement of social well-being, Cabinet is asked to approve this proposed disposal by long lease.
- 8.9 Prospective tenants of Charnwood House will be asked to complete the application form as attached at Appendix A. Their responses will allow an evaluation of each proposal against the following criteria:

Criteria	What Assessed
Community benefit	The extent of community use, social and cultural impact, public benefit, local engagement, and contribution to the visitor economy
Deliverability and organisational capacity	The ability of the applicant to implement the proposal successfully in the context of its experience, governance and staffing
Financial sustainability	Robustness of business plan, funding arrangements, financial resilience and ability to meet lease obligations
Stewardship of heritage building	Ability to care for, maintain and enhance Charnwood House over the term of the lease
Terms of lease	Attractiveness of lease terms, particularly in the context of securing a long-term future for Charnwood House

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 This decision follows the previous Cabinet decision of 2020, which approved the principle of progressing the future use of Charnwood House and envisaged that the terms of any agreed transaction would be presented to Cabinet for approval once finalised.
- 9.2 The Local Government Act 1972 (s111) confirms that a local authority has the power to do anything (including in relation to finance and property) which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of its functions.
- 9.3 Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 allows a Council to dispose of land in any manner it wishes provided that the consideration is the best that can be reasonably obtained unless the Secretary of State consents to the disposal for less than best value – see additionally 8.5 above.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Council set a capital budget of £400k towards capital repairs and refurbishment. To date, funds have been spent to safeguard Charnwood House from further decay and to improve its structural integrity, in addition to asbestos removal, and main electrical works so the property is safe for viewings and future use. The balance of funds, set at a maximum of £360,000, will be made available to the tenant to use towards the restoration of Charnwood House, subject to appropriate safeguards. It can be used alongside any

funding that can be provided by an organisation taking on a lease of the property. It can be spent on capital works to support community use of the building. The Council will seek best value in determining how much funding will be made available.

- 10.2 A long lease to a new occupier is proposed to be on a full repair and insuring basis. This will reduce or eliminate the Council's ongoing maintenance and management costs.
- 10.3 Letting the property will also reduce or eliminate the Council's need to spend further capital on future repairs and upgrading likely to be required to the building, in particular due to Charnwood House's Grade II listed status.
- 10.4 Leasing the property could produce some level of rental income at a future date. This will not be known until the applications are received, assessed and final terms agreed.
- 10.5 The chosen proposal will need to be assessed against Subsidy Control principles, but that is not possible at this stage.

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 occupation of vacant property by the successful applicant for the duration of the long lease reduces the risk to the Council arising from the duties under the Occupiers Liability Acts of 1957 and 1984.
- 11.3 There is a risk the marketing does not lead to a successful letting. In this situation, the Council will review the reasons why and consider alternative options for the future of the property.

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 policy for Charnwood House to be brought back into use to support community-based activities, recognising the potential value of the asset to local and regional groups could result in greater community inclusion in the area.
- 12.3. Applicants will be scored on how the organisation ensure that their community venture will be welcoming, inclusive and accessible to all sections of the North Herts community. Uses may include some of the following : Meeting spaces / training rooms; Arts, heritage, and cultural activity; Youth, elderly, or family support services; Wellbeing, counselling, and health support delivered by not for profit organisations; Communal workspaces, or shared offices for Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.
- 12.4. The successful applicant will be required to undertake an Accessibility Audit for their approved use and comply with the Equality Act 2010.

- 12.5. The evaluation of applications will include consideration of the proposal's delivery of a welcoming, inclusive and accessible offering. If appropriate an Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken in respect of the specific details of the offer.

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 Positive or negative environmental impacts have not been identified at the time of writing. When a specific proposal has been agreed an Environmental Impact Assessment will be conducted, if appropriate.
- 14.2 The property has an Energy Performance Certificate rating D. The planned refurbishment and improvements to the property are expected to improve the energy efficiency through upgraded heating, lighting and insulation for example.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no Human resource implications from this report.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1. Appendix 1 – Application Form
- 16.2. Appendix 2 – BTG Eddisons – marketing particulars
- 16.3. Appendix 3 – Lease Plan

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Philip Doggett	Principal Estates Surveyor	philip.doggett@north-herts.gov.uk
Natasha Jindal	Governance Consultant, Legal Services	natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk
Ellie Hollingsworth	Policy & Strategy Officer	ellie.hollingsworth@north-herts.gov.uk
Tim Everitt	Performance & Risk Officer	tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1. Cabinet – 15 December 2020. [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 15th December, 2020, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)
- 18.2. Record of Decision dated 3 August 2026. [3 August 2026 - Market Charnwood House for Community Use.pdf](#)

North Herts Council would like to invite the submission of offers for a long leasehold interest in Charnwood House, Paynes Park, Hitchin SG5 1EH.

To submit an offer, please complete this form and return it by email to Hannah.niven@eddisons.com by **16:00** on **19 October 2026**.

All offers will be evaluated, taking into account the community benefit delivered, viability of project, proposed terms of lease and whether the applicant is soundly run. Your proposal is more likely to be successful if you can demonstrate that you:

- will deliver a project that meets a community need of the people of Hitchin and North Hertfordshire, delivering open and inclusive public access
- will protect and enhance the Grade II listed building
- have identified and costed necessary works
- have secured funding or are in discussions with funders
- are making the application on behalf of an organisation with access to relevant skills, experience and expertise; and
- have developed a resilient business plan showing how the ongoing operation of the community venture and maintenance of Charnwood House will be financed.

However, all applications are welcome and will be judged on their merits.

Name of organisation/applicant:	
Address (including postcode):	
Name and position of person to contact:	
Email address for point of contact:	

Your Proposal

Charnwood House is a grade II listed building in need of refurbishment to be brought back into active community use in keeping with the spirit of its gift by a benefactor in the 1930s.

This section of questions aims to understand how you propose to use Charnwood House to improve the wellbeing of the local community and to honour its historical and architectural significance.

Please provide an overview of your vision for Charnwood House, including a summary of your proposed use for the property and any significant works that you would arrange to be carried out.

Max: 300 words

Please explain how your proposed use of Charnwood House will benefit the social, economic or environmental wellbeing of the Hitchin and wider North Herts community, referring to any specific community needs your proposal will address.

Max: 200 words

Please explain your how your project will sustain and enhance the value and significance of Charnwood House as a heritage building.

Max: 200 words

How will you ensure that your community venture will be welcoming, inclusive and accessible to all sections of the North Herts community?

Max: 200 words

Please provide details of the activities, events, programmes and services which you would offer.

Max: 200 words

Viability

The successful community operation of Charnwood House will require the input of financial resources, skill, experience and commitment, both in terms of the initial refurbishment and of on-going maintenance and operation. The purpose of this section of questions is to understand the viability of your proposal.

Please outline the main steps you would take to deliver your project, and an indicative timescale in which you consider the stages will be achieved.

Max: 250 words

Please outline the alterations you propose to carry out at Charnwood House, an indicative cost of the work and confirm how you intend to fund the works, together with any approval process that will be required to access the funding. If you have carried out any scoping works, commissioned any professional advice or have secured any funding, please provide details.

Max: 300 words

Please outline how you would fund and manage the on-going operation of Charnwood House. If you have a business plan which supports your answer, please provide a copy.

Max: 250 words

What have you identified as the principal risks involved with the refurbishment of Charnwood House and its operation? How would you aim to mitigate these risks?

Max: 300 words

About you

This section of questions aims to understand more about you and why you would be well-placed to refurbish and operate Charnwood House as a community venture.

Please provide details of the entity that you propose will take the lease of Charnwood House, including any charitable, corporate or other status and registered number and explanation of its governance structure. If relevant to your organisation, please provide a copy of its memorandum and articles of association or its constitution.

Max: 150 words

Please provide details of the principal people who will be involved with the refurbishment and running of Charnwood House, outlining why their skills, experience and expertise align to your project and the historic nature of Charnwood House.

Max: 350 words

Please provide details of how long your organisation has been operating and experience you have of managing community facilities, heritage assets or public buildings (if relevant).

Max: 200 words

Please provide details of any local connection to the North Herts Council area.

Max: 150 words

The Lease

Charnwood House will be offered to the successful applicant on the basis of a long-term full repairing lease. The aim of this section is to understand the terms on which you envisage that the lease would be granted to you.

Please outline the terms on which you would anticipate taking a lease of Charnwood House, including the length of lease term, any rent you may pay and the permitted use. You may find it helpful to answer this question by way of completing the draft heads of terms document attached to this form, highlighting the areas where you have made changes.

Max: 300 words

Conditions of application:

1. North Herts Council is not bound to accept any application. Following evaluation of the applications, any preferred proposal will be subject to the Council's appropriate decision-marking and approval process before any lease is entered into.
2. Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

Criteria	What Assessed
Community benefit	The extent of community use, social and cultural impact, public benefit, local engagement, and contribution to the visitor economy
Deliverability and organisational capacity	The ability of the applicant to implement the proposal successfully in the context of its experience, governance and staffing
Financial sustainability	Robustness of business plan, funding arrangements, financial resilience and ability to meet lease obligations
Stewardship of heritage building	Ability to care for, maintain and enhance Charnwood House over the term of the lease
Terms of lease	Attractiveness of lease terms, particularly in the context of securing a long-term future for Charnwood House

The Council has an expectation that the successful applicant will reach a minimum threshold for each of the criteria.

3. Following assessment of the applications, shortlisted applicants may be invited to discuss their proposal with the Executive Member for Enterprise and officers of North Herts Council during the week commencing **02 November 2026**.
4. All applications are subject to the receipt of satisfactory references, identity checks and credit checks.
5. North Herts Council reserves the right to ask for referees.
6. The acceptance of any application shall be subject to the Council's formal decision-making and approval process and, if approved, to completion of a formal lease and any ancillary documents on terms acceptable to the Council.
7. All personal information that you provide is managed in accordance with our privacy policy. Please visit: [Personal Information and Privacy Notice \(UKGDPR\) | North Herts Council](#) where you can find out information about how we handle your information.
8. By submitting this application, you confirm agreement for the Council and the Council's representatives to carry out a credit check on you and/or the applicant organisation.

I declare that I have given accurate information in this form and have read the conditions of application and privacy notice.

Signed:

Dated:

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FORMER MUSEUM AVAILABLE

5,725 SQ FT (532 SQ M)

- Long Lease for Community Use Only
- Grade II Listed Building
- In Need of Refurbishment
- Prominent Building
- Adjacent to Hitchin Library

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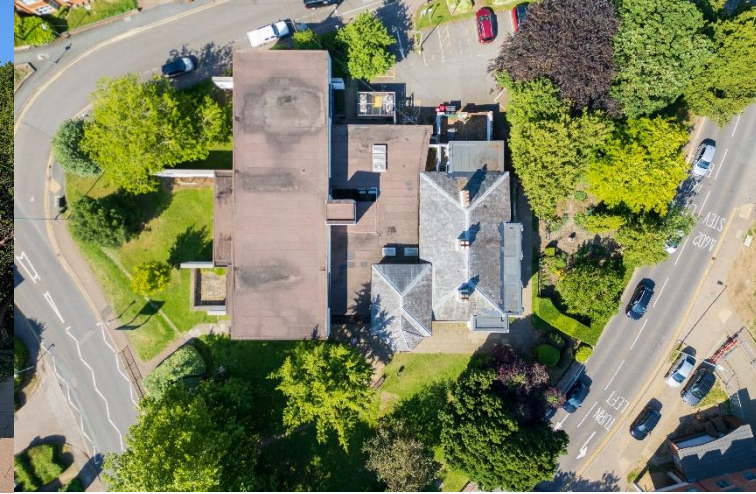


CHARNWOOD HOUSE

Paynes Park, Hitchin, SG5 1EW

Contact: Hannah Niven or Viv Spearing
Tel: 01582 738866
eddisons.com





Location

- The property occupies a prominent position at the junction of Old Park Road and Paynes Park.
- Within easy access of the A1(M) approx 4.5 miles and the M1 approx. 10 miles away via the A505.
- Hitchin railway station is under a mile away with frequent services to London Kings Cross and St Pancras



///grin.splash.outer



[Click here](#)

Description

Charnwood House is a Grade II Listed property and the former home of the Hitchin Museum. Its availability offers a unique opportunity to occupy a characterful and historic building in a central location.

The accommodation comprises a two-storey building adjoining Hitchin Library, together with additional basement storage space. Originally constructed as a private family residence, the property retains a traditional layout with a number of individual rooms arranged across the building.

Prospective occupiers may wish to undertake internal reconfiguration to accommodate specific operational requirements. Any alterations would be subject to the landlord's approval and any necessary statutory consents.

The property benefits from six allocated parking spaces within a shared car park to the rear of the building, together with shared spaces for blue badge holders.

User class

The Council has a strong aspiration for the future occupier to support the improvement of the well-being of the North Herts Community, recognising the building's historic significance and its important role within the wider Hitchin town centre.

The property may be suited to a community-led operator adopting a mixed-use model; a combination of arts, education, local enterprise, meeting and event space, exhibitions, and wider public programming. Such uses have the potential to create a destination that serves local groups and the wider community. Any commercial activity needs to be complementary and ancillary to the community use.

Occupiers proposing alternative uses may also be considered, subject to the Council's requirements the property is put into community use and any necessary statutory consents. Prospective tenants should note that certain uses may require planning permission and/or a change of use, and interested parties are advised to make their own enquiries with the Local Planning Authority.



Planning

For all enquiries relating to the planning, please see the planning statement within the [data room](#).

Current condition

The property has been vacant for a number of years, and the Landlord has undertaken works to ensure the building is in a wind and watertight condition. Further works are likely to be required to bring the property into full use and some funding is available from the Landlord by way of a capital contribution.

Please note that the funding provided by the council is not expected to cover the full refurbishment and fit out costs.

Business rates

Business rates available upon request.

Accommodation

Property Details	Gross Internal Bases	
Basement	49 Sq M	527 Sq Ft
Ground Floor	249 Sq M	2,680 Sq Ft
First Floor	234 Sq M	2,518 Sq Ft
Total	532 Sq M	5,725 Sq Ft

The measurements have been taken from floorplans provided by the Landlord.

Terms

The Landlord will consider lease terms of approx. 30–99 years, but other terms may be considered subject to assessment and agreement.

The lease is to be a full repairing and insuring lease.

EPC

D-79

Procedure for application

All applications are to be submitted by **19th October 2026 at 4pm** on a form provided by NHDC. All applications will be assessed based on a scoring system which can be shared in advance.

Data Room

[Click](#) to register interest.

Viewings:

HANNAH NIVEN

[07425 244 396 | hannah.niven@eddisons.com](mailto:hannah.niven@eddisons.com)

VIV SPEARING

[07810 775 492 | viv.spearing@eddisons.com](mailto:viv.spearing@eddisons.com)

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NUN'S CLOSE

PAYNES PARK

Paynes Park House

Car P

20

71.0m

Sterling House

Chancery Place

Library and Museum

El Sub Sta

ESS

Car Park

Legend

- Exclusive Use Spaces
- Pedestrian Areas
- Shared Use Disabled Spaces
- The Premises
- Car Park

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CABINET
TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: ALLOCATION OF MHCLG HOMELESSNESS GRANT

REPORT OF: Director - Regulatory

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Regulatory

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Accessible services

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
1.1. The Council has received a multi-year funding settlement from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), ring-fenced for the purpose of supporting the Council in meeting its homelessness duties. 1.2. This report details proposals for the allocation of some of this funding in line with grant conditions, national policy and local priorities. 1.3. The financial proposals contained in this report cover the full MHCLG funding period – through to March 2029 – to provide stability and continuity of service provision beyond LGR vesting day and to ensure the new Central Hertfordshire unitary authority is not left with an immediate challenge.
2. RECOMMENDATIONS
2.1 That Cabinet approves the funding proposals for the allocation of Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant received from the MHCLG as outlined in Table 1 in paragraph 8.13.
3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS
3.1. There is a need to secure housing services for homeless households in the district, including key existing services on the single homeless pathway. Adopting the recommendation at 2.1 secures the provision of high-quality local services to help those in need and provides stability into the first year of the new unitary authority. 3.2. The recommendation at 2.1 is consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029) and the Council Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. Cabinet could decide against approving the proposed allocations of government funding, however the services highlighted in this report would not be delivered with resulting adverse housing outcomes for households in need.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The Executive Member for Regulatory, Cllr Mick Debenham has been consulted and is supportive of the proposals contained in this report.

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 19 June 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The Council has received some form of ring-fenced homelessness funding from the government for over 20 years, usually on an annual basis. There is currently a three-year settlement from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) of Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant (HRSDAG) totalling £2.9 million over 2026/27 to 2028/29. The Grant is ringfenced for initiatives to tackle homelessness in line with local authorities' legal duties and the government's policy aims which include ending rough sleeping. A detailed report was submitted to Cabinet at its meeting on [16 June 2026](#), setting out specifics of the HRSDAG settlement and the evidenced local need for homelessness support and assistance.
- 7.2. At its June meeting, Cabinet approved funding proposals for a pilot Herts Young Homeless education project in primary schools, building works to increase capacity at One YMCA's homelessness scheme at Anderson House and three years' worth of support funding for the Keystage scheme (PAIRS) at the former Lord Lister, Hitchin. This report sets out further funding proposals for allocation of the majority of the remaining HRSDAG.
- 7.3 Note that the Grant may not be spent on costs directly related to temporary accommodation (with some exceptions, including for provision of supported accommodation). Funding for temporary accommodation has now been separated out from the HRSDAG, to end the tension between councils having to choose between investment in prevention and meeting temporary accommodation costs. Instead, funding for temporary accommodation has been rolled un-ringfenced into the Revenue Support Grant as part of the wider Local Government Settlement and councils will not have a separate named allocation for temporary accommodation.
- 7.4 Following the launch of the Council's current Housing Strategy two years ago, a [review of achievements](#) has recently been produced. This highlights the degree to which our service and its outcomes rely upon strong and positive working relationships with our local partners.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Council no longer owns or manages any housing stock, and it therefore works closely with housing providers to meet local needs. Keystage Housing and One YMCA provide specialist accommodation and support as part of the Council's single homeless pathway, providing high quality, self-contained accommodation for single people with complex needs.

- 8.2 The Council has provided both Keystage and One YMCA with MHCLG grant funding over past years to ensure that appropriate support levels on the single homeless pathway could be maintained. With existing funding now expired and following on from the funding agreed for Keystage at June Cabinet, this report contains similar proposals to provide funding over the next three years to One YMCA to ensure that equivalent levels of support can continue to be provided on their part of the pathway, at Anderson House in Hitchin.
- 8.3 One YMCA opened Anderson House in April 2025 and the scheme currently provides 22 units of supported accommodation (plus an additional 24 units for young people funded by MHCLG's Single Homeless Accommodation Programme). As with the Keystage scheme, Anderson House has 24-hour support and provides a safe living environment for individuals with multiple disadvantage, enabling them to receive appropriate support, develop skills and confidence to sustain longer-term housing solutions. Residents typically receive 6-8 hours of individual in-house support per week; One YMCA also work closely with Adult Social Care, health services and other agencies to help individuals access appropriate specialist services such as mental health support. The Council has first right of refusal on vacancies arising in Anderson House and the Housing team works closely with One YMCA to secure the best outcomes for clients.
- 8.4 In its first full year of operation (2025/26), Anderson House has supported 56 individuals, most with multiple support needs. Mental health support needs were most common, reported by 80% of residents whilst 71% of residents had physical health related support needs and 71% required support for substance abuse issues. Of this cohort, 16 individuals so far have been supported to move into settled, independent accommodation including private rented accommodation or social housing. A further 15 have left the service, mostly of their own accord but a few as a result of eviction, custodial sentence or long-term hospital admission. Past experience shows that many individuals with complex needs will unfortunately cycle through available services multiple times before independent resettlement is achieved.
- 8.5 The funding proposal agreed at June Cabinet (a single payment of £81,600) will enable One YMCA to increase physical capacity at Anderson House by a further 17 units. The funding proposed in this report, for three years (2026/27 - 2028/29) totalling £910k will ensure that appropriate levels of 24-hour support can be sustained for residents with medium/complex needs. It is anticipated that Anderson House will begin operating at its new, higher level of capacity – 39 units (excluding the 24 units in the SHAP service) - over the coming months. An additional eight spaces will also be created in two four-bedroom houses on the Anderson House site which will be used as step-down accommodation for residents who are ready for more independent living.
- 8.6 The private rented sector (PRS) only provides around 15% of all housing in North Herts according to the last census however remains a valuable housing option for many of the households who approach the Council for homelessness assistance, all the more so since the enactment of the Renters' Rights Act (2025) (RRA) which has greatly enhanced security of tenure for tenants. Private rental properties are the only option for some of our clients, especially for those who are unable to access social housing (for example due to debt or unspent criminal convictions) and often offers a quicker resolution for some housing challenges. Demand for affordable housing in the District greatly exceeds supply and there are currently just over 2,000 households on the Common Housing Register, and average wait times are over two years (though can be significantly longer dependent on supply, and especially for larger properties).

- 8.7 The Council's Lets4U service works with private landlords to secure PRS properties for our clients and has secured over 100 lets in its first two years. To date, the service has been provided by one dedicated officer, and we have been able to offer small financial incentives to landlords funded via Discretionary Housing Payments and a small Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) Fund, alongside Black Squirrel Credit Union loans for those who are able to afford them. This report proposes additional funding of £550k for the HPG Fund over the three-year period to enable the service to expand further (and help more clients into homes), improve the service offered and meet the challenges brought about by the implementation of the RRA which has made landlords much more risk adverse when considering tenants for their properties. The RRA has however exempted local authorities from some of the restrictions around payment of rent in advance which places the Council in a good position to offer better financial incentives in order to secure properties.
- 8.8 The proposed funding will enable the following enhancements to the Lets4U service:
- larger financial incentives to encourage landlords to work with us, with the typical financial packages being in the region of £4k-£5k each. This may take the form of a deposit, a months' rent in advance and one-off incentive payments and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The RRA has made landlords much more cautious about who they let their properties to, making attractive financial incentives a central core of the Council's offer going forward. On occasion, other public bodies such other Councils, especially some who are London based, and the Home Office are also competing for available properties and are typically able to offer good incentives;
 - funding of commercial guarantors for clients who wouldn't otherwise have access to a guarantor, an assurance that is increasingly important to landlords as they view a perceived shifting of risk following the RRA;
 - contributions towards moving and start-up costs (e.g. purchase of furniture, appliances) for tenants, to remove what can be a significant barrier to accessing the PRS. Family-sized properties in particular are unlikely to be fully furnished, resulting in high start-up costs for new tenants.
- 8.9 Cabinet at its meeting on [17th February 2026](#) approved funding for a second dedicated private rented sector officer, who is now in post (the amount of funding proposed for the current year is lower as this additional team member only commenced their role in June). This will enable the Lets4U service to work not just with more clients, but also particularly with those with more entrenched needs, or in more complex circumstances. Such cases are typically more time-consuming and expensive to resolve due to the assurances that landlords require in order to let to people they view to be riskier potential tenants. Securing settled accommodation for a client can however be life-changing for individuals as well as freeing up resources such as temporary accommodation for other households in need.
- 8.10 The RRA has completely changed the PRS landscape, and it will take some time yet for changes to be bedded in. The sector is anticipating a fall in properties available to let, with resulting increases in rents. The proposed funding for the Lets4U service makes allowance for this and funding that remains unspent will be recycled into the budget for the following year. This funding may also allow for potential collaborations with

Stevenage Borough Council and/or Welwyn & Hatfield Borough Council as they also have a similar focus on the PRS.

- 8.11 This report also proposes to extend funding for the following existing specialist services by a further year (into 2028/29). All services are well established and are delivering important services for local people. The proposed extension will maintain continuity and stability through the first year of the new Central Hertfordshire unitary authority, and will ensure it is not left with an immediate challenge:
- domestic abuse advice, support and crisis intervention, provided by Survivors Against Domestic Abuse;
 - housing advice service including free legal and court representation, provided by Citizens Advice;
 - homelessness education prevention work (secondary schools and sixth form colleges), provided by Herts Young Homeless;
 - rough sleeper outreach service, provided by One YMCA.
- 8.12 All of the above services are currently funded for three years, up until the end of 2027/28, as approved at Cabinet on [11th February 2025](#).
- 8.13 Table 1 below summarises the funding proposals detailed above, taking account of the HRSDAG that has already been allocated at June Cabinet:

Table 1. Proposals for homelessness grant allocations for 2026/27 onwards

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Total HRSDAG received	£950,409	£959,683	£965,267	£2,875,359
Unallocated HRSDAG following proposals approved at June 26 Cabinet	£616,546	£708,092	£706,128	£2,030,766
Funding proposed in this report:				
Single homeless pathway (One YMCA)	£294,513	£303,348	£312,449	£910,310
Lets4U	£150,000	£200,000	£200,000	£550,000
Survivors Against Domestic Abuse	-	-	£53,737	£53,737
Citizens Advice	-	-	£30,418	£30,418
Herts Young Homeless	-	-	£8,034	£8,034
Rough sleeper outreach (One YMCA)	-	-	£51,271	£51,271
Total proposed funding	£444,513	£503,348	£655,909	£1,603,770
Remaining unallocated funding	£172,033	£204,744	£50,219	£426,996

- 8.14 The MHCLG have stated that local authorities should consider how they might meet unforeseen seasonal homelessness demands, including winter and other surge provision, as there should be no expectation of additional funding in year. As a result, some funding for each of the three years remains unallocated for this purpose as well as other proposals that will be presented to the Cabinet in due course (unless the decision is taken in accordance with delegated decision-making arrangements).
- 8.15 The Council agreed its latest Housing Strategy (2024-2029) in March 2024, and the proposals outlined in this report are consistent with the priorities highlighted in the Strategy.
- 8.16 All of the financial proposals contained in this report cover the full MHCLG funding period – through to March 2029 – to provide stability and continuity of service provision and to ensure the new Central Hertfordshire unitary authority is not left with an immediate challenge. MHCLG has not confirmed the homelessness funding position beyond March 2029 and the existing LGR ‘Housing and Housing Revenue Account’ workstream is reviewing existing services as part of their work plan and the future of these will be considered as part of that wider process.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The Housing Act 1985 Section 1 (1) confirms that the District Council is the Local Housing Authority (LHA).
- 9.2 LHAs’ homelessness duties are contained within the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which placed significant new duties on English local housing authorities to prevent homelessness.
- 9.3 LHAs have a legal duty to provide interim (also known as emergency) accommodation to homeless applicants, if, at any point during their enquiries, there is a reason to believe that an applicant may be:
- homeless
 - eligible for assistance, and
 - in priority need
- 9.4 The LHA also holds the ‘Relief Duty’ which applies when a council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless and eligible for assistance; it requires the Council to take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that suitable accommodation becomes available for the applicant’s occupation for at least six months. This therefore requires the Council to work with the applicant to help them find and retain accommodation to meet this legal duty.
- 9.5 The Cabinet’s Terms of Reference provides at paragraph 5.7.15; “To oversee the provision of all the Council’s services other than those functions reserved to the Council”.
- 9.6 In approving the funding proposals the Cabinet would therefore be acting in accordance with its statutory requirements and in accordance with the Council’s constitution.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Council has been notified of total allocations of £2,875,359 in Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant, covering the three-year period 2026/27 – 2028/29. Grant is ring-fenced to support delivery of services to prevent and tackle homelessness including amongst those sleeping rough and survivors of domestic abuse.
- 10.2 The proposals contained in this report meet the MHCLG's grant conditions and should the proposals be agreed, grant payments will be made at appropriate intervals throughout the financial year that balance the need to ensure prompt payments to service providers, whilst also protecting the Council's interests.
- 10.3 In accordance with the Subsidy Control Act 2022, the Council has considered whether each award constitutes a "subsidy" using the four-limb test (public resources; economic advantage to an enterprise engaged in economic activity; specificity; and a more-than-incidental potential effect on competition/investment). On that basis, this funding is not considered a subsidy as the services provided are not available in the commercial sector.

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 Affordable accommodation remains extremely challenging to source in North Herts. The One YMCA scheme forms a fundamental part of the Council's single homeless pathway and without funding to support its ongoing operation, the pathway will have significantly reduced capacity to accommodate our most vulnerable clients. The private rented sector is another source of accommodation for our clients and the proposals contained within this report aim to maximise the potential offered by this sector, without which accommodation options are reduced, with knock-on effects for move-on from temporary accommodation and ongoing reliance on hotel placements.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached as Appendix 1. The assessment notes the potential positive impacts this decision will have for some of the most vulnerable members of the community in North Hertfordshire.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 None.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Martin Lawrence	Strategic Housing Manager	martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk, Tel: 01462 474 250
Jo Doggett	Director - Regulatory	jo.doggett@north-herts.gov.uk
Luke Franklin	Service Accountant	luke.franklin@north-herts.gov.uk
Natasha Jindal	Governance Consultant	natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk
Daisy Harris	Policy and Strategy Officer	daisy.harris@north-herts.gov.uk
Tim Everitt	Performance and Risk Officer	tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 [MHCLG's Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant Determination 2026 to 2027](#)

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

Annex A - Equality Analysis Template

1. Name of activity:	Provision of homelessness services for North Herts residents (Homelessness Prevention Grant allocations)			
2. Main purpose of activity:	Specialist services for homelessness prevention Accommodation and support services, including for those with multiple disadvantage			
3. List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025), A National Plan to End Homelessness. Available: www.gov.uk Children's Commissioner (2025), The impact of housing instability on children's GCSE grades. Children's Commissioner for England. Taylor, G., Vale, J., Gay Jackson, B., and Turtle, M. (2025) Dying Homeless Project 2024. Museum of Homelessness MHCLG (2025), Rough Sleeping Questionnaire 2025. Available: www.gov.uk Grant Monitoring returns to NHC (not published) North Herts Council (2024) Review of Homelessness in North Hertfordshire Available: www.north-herts.gov.uk Stonewall (2024) LGBT In Britain. Home and Communities. London: Stonewall Office for National Statistics Census 2021 MHCLG, Statutory homelessness live tables 2024-25			
4. Assessment				
Characteristics	Neutral (x)	Negative (x)	Positive (x)	Describe the person you are assessing the impact on, including identifying: community member or employee, details of the characteristic if relevant, e.g. mobility problems/particular religion and why and how they might be negatively or positively affected. Negative: What are the risks? Positive: What are the benefits?
Community considerations (i.e. applying across communities or associated with rural living or Human Rights)	☐	☐	x	Negative
				Positive
				Homelessness has significant negative impacts upon communities as well as more obviously for the individual. The government's National Plan to End Homelessness details impacts including: - upon children's lives in particular, including a direct correlation between home moves and attainment at GCSE and negative impacts on children's mental and physical wellbeing; - for adults - over 1,000 people died whilst experiencing homelessness in England in 2024, with an average age of death for those sleeping rough or using temporary accommodation of 48 for men and 45 for women; - people sleeping rough use public services more than an average individual, at a cost of around £14,000 per person on average, largely stemming

				from costs to the NHS and the criminal justice system. The proposals contained in this report aim to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place and provide support and alternative accommodation in times of crisis.
A person living with a disability	☐	☐	x	Negative
				Positive
				Almost two-thirds of households owed a homelessness duty by the Council have a support need whilst over one-third have two or more support needs. These include support needs owing to poor mental health (35%), physical ill health and disability (28%) and learning disability (14%). The proposals in this report will specifically support this cohort, especially the funding proposed for the single homeless pathway (One YMCA supported accommodation). As noted in the main body of the report, most residents on the pathway have multiple support needs, particularly relating to mental and physical health.
A person of a particular race	☐	☐	x	Negative
				Positive
				In common with national data, data for North Herts district shows that a disproportionate number of people from ethnic minority backgrounds require homelessness assistance – making up 18% of those owed a duty whilst comprising 12% of the North Herts population.
A person of a gay, lesbian or bisexual sexual orientation	☐	☐	x	Negative
				Positive
				National evidence points to LGBTQ+ people being more at risk of homelessness. District level data suggests a very small number of LGBTQ+ people owed a homeless duty by the Council (3%), although a significant proportion – 20% - of applicants chose not to disclose information about their sexual orientation.
A person of a particular sex, male or female, including issues around pregnancy and maternity	☐	☐	x	Negative
				Positive
				Households with dependent children including pregnancies and victims of domestic abuse (the vast majority of which are women) are two cohorts which automatically receive 'priority need' for homelessness assistance, which will usually

				involve the provision of emergency (temporary) accommodation. Proposals for additional funding to Survivors Against Domestic Abuse will extend the local service for a further year, benefiting those fleeing domestic abuse and includes provision of crisis intervention and accommodation as well as advice and support for those needing to remain safe in their homes.
A person of a particular religion or belief	x	☐	☐	Negative
				Positive
A person of a particular age	☐	☐	x	Negative
				Positive
				Young people facing homelessness are particularly vulnerable and early interventions to prevent homelessness or provide appropriate support are incredibly valuable for life outcomes, particularly if a first experience of homelessness or rough sleeping can be prevented. 16% of main applicants owed a homelessness duty in 2024/25 were aged under 25. The proposal to extend funding for Herts Young Homeless by a further year will particularly benefit this cohort. Proposed funding for an expanded Lets4U service will provide additional accommodation options for this group (amongst others) who in particular struggle with securing affordable accommodation.
Transgender	☐	☐	x	Negative
				Positive
				National evidence points to LGBTQ+ people being more at risk of homelessness, however local data suggests a very small number of LGBTQ+ people owed a homeless duty by the Council (3%), although with a significant non-response rate.
5 Results				
	Yes	No		
Were positive impacts identified?	x	☐	The proposals contained in this report will provide funding for prevention, support and accommodation for local households facing homelessness including those with multiple disadvantage. These households include some of our most vulnerable residents and positive impacts are identified for those living with a disability, women, young people and minority groups, as well as the wider community.	

			Without assistance, many of these, and particularly those with multiple disadvantage, will continue to face ongoing barriers to positive life outcomes including repeated homelessness, poverty, ill health and lack of opportunity.
Are some people benefiting more than others? If so explain who and why.	x	☐	Interventions targeted at assisting homeless households, or those at risk of homelessness, will by their very nature disproportionately benefit those most likely to be at risk of homelessness ie those with support needs including disabilities, victims of abuse (who are more likely to be women) and minority groups.
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	☐	x	.

6. Consultation, decisions, and actions

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

n/a

Describe the decision on this activity

Continue with policy

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

Action	Responsible person	Completion due date
Regular monitoring of all service provision (as per contractual requirements where relevant)	Service managers	ongoing

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

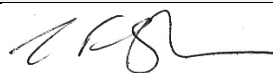
Monitoring and reporting in line with contractual arrangements and/or MHCLG funding requirements where relevant, otherwise internal monitoring will be undertaken.

7. Signatures

Assessor (Report Author)

Name: Tiranah Straughan

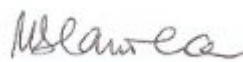
Signature**



Validated by (relevant Senior Manager)

Name: Martin Lawrence

Signature**



Forward to the Policy & Strategy Team

Signature** Daisy Harris

Assessment date: 26/08/2026

Review date: 26/08/2027

**** Please type your name to allow forms to be sent electronically. Please send to policy@north-herts.gov.uk for review by the team.**

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

CABINET
TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: 2026-27 Q1 Council Delivery Plan Update

REPORT OF: Director - Resources

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Resources

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Sustainability

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents progress on delivering the Council Delivery Plan for 2026-27. This is a Quarter 1 update, but generally reflects progress up to the point that the report was prepared (early August 2026). The report includes:

- For the projects identified by Cabinet, it details milestones and progress against them.
- The risks in relation to the delivery of those projects, as well as the corporate risks that could impact the delivery of all our projects and services.
- Latest data for the Council's key performance indicators (KPIs).

Points to note:

- A new item relating to the Royston Learner Pool has been added to the Council Delivery Plan.
- 2 Projects have an amber delivery status – Decarbonisation of Council Buildings, Phase 2 and Resident/Public EV charging in our car parks.
- 6 Projects have proposed changes to milestones - highlighted in yellow on the report.
- 3 Projects have proposed new milestones – highlighted in blue on the report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That Cabinet notes progress against the Council projects and performance indicators, as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) and approves new projects, milestones and changes to milestones.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Cabinet, with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks or opportunities. Overview and Scrutiny Committee have the opportunity to review the monitoring reports sent via the Members Information Bulletin (MIB) and request more detailed updates to be presented.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. In developing the CDP, it was agreed that Cabinet would receive quarterly updates. The updates are also provided to Overview and Scrutiny Committee via the Members

Information Bulletin (MIB), to enable them to provide additional oversight and support to Cabinet.

- 4.2. Therefore, no alternative options were considered for this report.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. Directors and Service Managers have provided updates on progress and will have made Executive Members aware of progress made.
- 5.2. A draft of the Quarter 1 update was provided to the Risk and Performance Management Group (RPMG) in August 2026. The Group has a standing invite to the Executive Member for Resources (who has responsibility for performance monitoring), the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) and the Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FAR). Other members of O&S, FAR, and Cabinet are also invited to attend if they can. RPMG were asked to comment on the Q1 update. There were no specific issues raised by the Group.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1. This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 19th June 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The CDP brings together projects, risks and performance indicators in one document. The projects and performance indicators to be included are agreed by Cabinet in June each year, although can be added to during the year.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. Appendix A provides an update on the progress made in delivering the Council Delivery Plan 2026-27. Whilst it is labelled as a Quarter 1 update, it generally reflects the latest position at the time that the report was written (early August). Milestones are set as far ahead as possible but are not included where there is too much uncertainty over the scope or timing of the milestone. In some cases, the expected actions are included, but without a target date.
- 8.2. The focus of the report is on providing a description of the progress made. Projects are rated on overall progress i.e., shown as completed, on track, some delays, significant delays. Where there are delays, Cabinet will be asked to consider revisions to milestones.
- 8.3. A new project for the Royston Learner Pool has been added to the CDP. The current milestones show that the project is anticipated to complete in April 2028. No projects were completed in this quarter.
- 8.4. 2 Projects have an amber status, with the remaining 9 having a green status. Comments on the amber statuses are provided below. As detailed in Appendix A, some projects with a green status also have proposals for changes to (yellow highlights) or new (blue highlights) project milestones.

Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks	The amber status relates to proposed changes to due dates for the project, following issues identified with the format of the site plans which need to be resolved before the leases can be finalised. Progress has also been hindered by the contractor changing our assigned project manager which has led to delays while they familiarise themselves with the project/issues.
Decarbonisation of Council Buildings – Phase 2	The amber status relates to a change to when we expect to receive planning approval, due to the planning application for Hitchin Town Hall being submitted later than originally planned. Following feedback from the Senior Conservation Officer about proposals for Hitchin Town Hall, the Project Board supported changes to designs with the proposed location of the air source heat pump moving to the rear of the building. Additionally, Project Board agreed to incorporate additional interventions to provide cooling to the site which required designs for inclusion in the planning application. These two additional requirements led to a delay in submission of the planning application to 3 August 2026. Planning permission, with conditions, was granted at North Herts Leisure Centre on 15 July 2026. Planning permission for Hitchin Town Hall is predicted to be granted in late Autumn 2026. The project team are currently procuring a contractor through a two-stage design and build approach to develop detailed designs and, subject to approval, deliver the works. The tender process is anticipated to complete by 1 September 2026. Detailed designs will then be undertaken with these completed, with costings, to inform papers to take a decision to the Cabinet meeting on 19 January 2027. Outside the scope of the CDP project, decarbonisation of the council offices is taking place in August to September 2026.

8.5. Our performance indicators now reflect the overall performance of the Council. Performance levels are rated as either green (achieving or exceeding the target), amber (not achieving the target level and need to look at actions to get back on track) or red (urgent actions needed to get back to the target performance). For this report:

- 13 indicators are rated green
- 3 indicators are rated amber
- 2 indicators are rated red
- 18 indicators are for information only

8.6. For performance indicators that are rated red, the following actions are being taken:

-  Percentage of NNDR collected in Year – Performance remains below target due to technical issues with the new reliefs and multipliers brought in for 2026/27. We undertook the annual billing process without issue, but problems remained with issuing new or amended bills. This caused a delay in issuing amended bills

and the subsequent temporary suspension of recovery. It is expected that we will see an improvement in the in-year collection rate for Q2 and beyond now that the issues have been resolved.

- Number of reported missed household garden waste collections per 100,000 collections - There has been an increase in reported missed garden waste collections since the start of the new subscription period in April 2026. A significant contributing factor has been residents subscribing to the service shortly before, or on the day of, their scheduled collection. While these subscriptions are processed as quickly as possible, there can be a short delay before the information is updated across operational systems. Residents are advised of a 10-working day activation period; however, some collections are still reported as missed during this grace period and are subsequently recorded within the missed collection figures. We have been working closely with our contractor to improve performance. Measures include monitoring missed collection data on a weekly basis, reviewing rounds where issues are identified, and ensuring subscription information is updated and communicated to crews as quickly as possible. These actions are already having a positive impact, with missed collections reducing month on month. Although not related to the reported Q1 2026/27 cumulative figure, there were only 60 missed collections in July 2026 from 69,569 scheduled lifts, equating to 86 missed collections per 100,000. We expect performance to continue improving during the remainder of the year.

8.7. For the indicators that are rated amber, the following actions are being taken:

- Percentage of Careline installations completed within 10 working days (achieving 99.8% against a target of 100%) – Tolerable performance is considered to be between 97% and 100%. Once the indicator has fallen below 100% it cannot be achieved for the year. Only one installation in April was out of time and performance for May and June was 100%.
- Working days lost due to short-term sickness absence in the last 12 months per FTE employee (4.54 days against a target of 4 days) - In the last 12 months KPI data has been relatively consistent, although there has been a slight increase between June 2025 (4.26) and June 2026 (4.54). This is in line with general trends and average sickness absence levels across local authorities with available benchmarking data. There is a risk that such absences could increase with the workload and wider implications of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process. Whilst managers will continue to be supported with absence prevention and management, the risk is that short-term absence may continue to increase.
- Percentage of CSC calls answered within 45 seconds (achieving 62% against a target of 80%) - Quarter one was very strong in terms of calls answered, as we achieved 93%. Whilst the service level of answering calls within 45 seconds was under target at 62%, this is an increase from 2025/26 performance levels. Staffing is stable, with temporary staff continuing to help manage any peaks of demand. Self-service options continue to be promoted via the automated telephony system and online chatbot.

- 8.8. There are 11 risk entries linked to specific projects and four over-arching corporate risks. For this report
- 3 risks are assessed low risk (green).
 - 5 risks are assessed medium risk (amber).
 - 7 risks are assessed high risk (red).

Access to Ideagen

- 8.9.8 All the details behind the projects, risks and performance indicators are available to view in Ideagen, the Council's performance and risk software. A guest login is provided on Sharepoint for any Member to use, along with a procedure note and short video on how to view the data.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The constitution determines the role of Cabinet as including: "To take decisions on resources and priorities, together with other stakeholders and partners in the local community, to deliver and implement the budget and policies decided by Full Council. To monitor performance and risk in respect of delivery of those policies and priorities" (paragraph 5.7.3).
- 9.2. The constitution determines the role of Overview and Scrutiny Committee as including: "To review performance against the Council's agreed objectives/priorities and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or service areas. To consider risk to the achievement of those objectives/priorities. To make recommendations to Cabinet". (paragraph 6.2.7(s)).
- 9.3. There are no specific legal implications arising from the CDP. However, there may be individual legal implications for some of the projects outlined. Any commissioning of work on new and existing projects will follow the standard legal requirements and those required by the Council's internal standing orders, contained within the Constitution.
- 9.4. It is worth noting that a robust and measurable delivery plan is an important tool for the Council to fulfil the 'best value' requirement set out in Section 3 of the Local Government Act. The Act requires authorities, including the Council, to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness". Monitoring reports to Members and actions arising from those reports will ensure discharge of this statutory responsibility.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Where projects are linked to efficiencies or investments then these are included in the budget proposals and monitored through the quarterly finance reports.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

- 11.2. The CDP aims to support the risk management process by directly linking risks to projects being undertaken, and strengthens the link between performance and risk, making risks more current and providing an improved perspective of the risks that the Council faces.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report, however individual projects may lead to procurements that will follow our Contract Procurement Rules.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report. However, some of the projects to be monitored throughout the year are related to key environmental issues. Environmental Impact Assessments are conducted for individual projects as needed.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1. There will continue to be a need to align Council and Service objectives with available people resources to be able to achieve them. The CDP helps to make that link clearer and highlights the risks to achieving them.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1. Appendix A– 2026-27 Q1 Council Delivery Plan Update

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Ian Couper	Director - Resources	ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk , Tel 01462 474243
Rachel Cooper	Controls, Risk and Performance Manager	rachel.cooper@north-herts.gov.uk , Tel: 01462 474 606

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1. None

Council Delivery Plan – Status Key

Status	Description
Projects	
	The project (and all recorded milestones) has been completed.
	All ongoing milestones have not reached their due dates (or do not have due dates).
	There is at least one ongoing milestone that has not been completed by the due date, but the overall project due date has not passed. Proposals to change milestone due dates will be made, which may also lead to a proposed change to the overall project due date.
	Overall project due date has passed and there is at least one milestone that has not been completed. Proposals to change project due date and milestone due dates will be made.
Risks	
	Assessed as a low risk.
	Assessed as a medium risk.
	Assessed as a high risk.
KPIs	
	Data value has met or exceeded the target figure. Performance is at an acceptable level.
	Data value has not achieved the target figure. Need to consider appropriate action to return performance to an acceptable level.
	Data value has not achieved the target figure. Urgent action required to return performance to an acceptable level.
	Data value is reported for 'information only' and there is no requirement to set targets for the KPI.
	Ideagen cannot calculate a status, as officers have not entered a target figure for the period.
	Data value has improved compared with the same time last year.
	Data value has deteriorated compared with the same time last year.
	Data value has not changed compared with the same time last year.
	Ideagen cannot calculate a direction of travel, as previous data is not available for comparison.

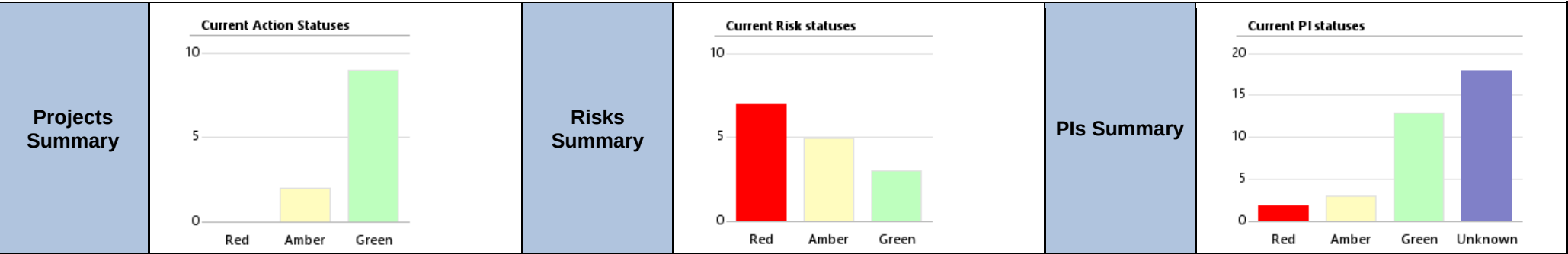
4	7	9
2	5	8
1	3	6

Council Delivery Plan Q1 2026-27 Monitoring Report - Project Statuses



Project	Status	Risk Level
Decarbonisation of Council Buildings - Phase 2		
Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks		
Churchgate		
Digital Transformation		
Leisure Centre Decarbonisation		
Local Plan Review		
Museum Collection Facility		
Oughtonhead Common Weir		
Pay on Exit Parking		
Royston Leisure Centre Learner Pool		
Town Centres Strategy		

Council Delivery Plan Q1 2026-27 Monitoring Report - Status Summaries



Council Delivery Plan Q1 2026-27 Monitoring Report - Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

	Latest Update	Current Value	Current Target	Status	Trend (Compared with the same time last year)	2026/27 Target
Percentage of NNDR collected in year	June 2026	26.44%	29%		 (28.3%)	96%
Number of reported missed household garden waste collections per 100,000 collections	June 2026	164	55		 (110)	55
Percentage of Careline installations completed within 10 working days	June 2026	99.8%	100%		 (97%)	100%
Working days lost due to short-term sickness absence in the last 12 months per FTE employee	June 2026	4.54	4.00		 (4.26)	Not Measured for Years

KPI	Latest Update	Current Value	Current Target	Status	Trend (Compared with the same time last year)	2026/27 Target
Percentage of CSC calls answered within 45 seconds	Q1 2026/27	62%	80%		 (52%)	80%
Percentage of council tax collected in year	June 2026	28.03%	28%		 (27.92%)	97%
Number of reported missed household waste collections per 100,000 collections	June 2026	53	55		 (52)	55
Percentage of Careline installations completed within 5 working days	June 2026	99.1%	90%		 (87.3%)	90%
Staff turnover - rolling 12-month percentage	June 2026	9.12%	15%		 (8.78%)	Not Measured for Years
Number of visits to leisure facilities	June 2026	490,991	421,580		 (462,992)	1,819,404
* Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting	Q1 2026/27	62.17%	62%		 (58.55%)	60%
Percentage of Stage 1 complaints resolved within 10 working days	Q1 2026/27	93%	80%		 (84%)	80%
Percentage of Stage 2 complaints resolved within 20 working days	Q1 2026/27	100%	70%		 (100%)	70%
Percentage of CSC calls answered	Q1 2026/27	93%	90%		 (79%)	90%
Percentage of advertised vacancies filled in first round	Q1 2026/27	92.3%	75%		 (85%)	75%

KPI	Latest Update	Current Value	Current Target	Status	Trend (Compared with the same time last year)	2026/27 Target
Percentage of all planning applications determined within the relevant statutory or agreed time periods	Q1 2026/27	83.54%	80%	✓	↓ (84.65%)	80%
Performance against revenue budget (projection against original budget)	Q1 2026/27	-2.9%	0%	✓	↑ (2.4%)	0%
Section 106 spend – value returned to developers	2025/26	£0	£0	✓	– (£0)	£0
Rolling number of Careline service users supported under the HCC contract	July 2026	7,297	N/A Data Only	📈	↑ (7,141)	Not Measured for Years
Average number of penalty points awarded per Grounds Maintenance contract monitoring inspection. (Lower numbers are good.)	July 2026	3.02	N/A Data Only	📈	↓ (1.93)	N/A Data Only
Working days lost due to long-term sickness absence in the last 12 months per FTE employee	June 2026	4.89	N/A Data Only	📈	↓ (3.82)	Not Measured for Years
Number of Stage 1 complaints (direct to the Council)	Q1 2026/27	92	N/A Data Only	📈	↓ (44)	N/A Data Only
Number of people attending outreach activity and wellbeing sessions	Q1 2026/27	239	N/A Data Only	📈	❓ (New for 2026/27)	N/A Data Only
Number of Community Forum Grants awarded	Q1 2026/27	15	N/A Data Only	📈	↑ (9)	N/A Data Only
Value of Community Forum Grants awarded	Q1 2026/27	£20,968	N/A Data Only	📈	↑ (£11,925)	N/A Data Only
Net number of new dwellings built	2025/26	439	N/A Data Only	📈	↑ (407)	N/A Data Only

KPI	Latest Update	Current Value	Current Target	Status	Trend (Compared with the same time last year)	2026/27 Target
Number of new homes granted planning permission	2025/26	711	N/A Data Only		↓ (1,185)	N/A Data Only
Growth in properties paying Council Tax	2025/26	0.81%	N/A Data Only		↑ (0.5%)	N/A Data Only
Number of biodiversity units to be delivered by Council-approved habitat banks in the district	2025/26	229	N/A Data Only		❓ (New for 2025/26)	N/A Data Only
Number of NHDC-supported electric vehicle charge points available for public use	2025/26	25	N/A Data Only		❓ (New for 2025/26)	N/A Data Only
Number of electric vehicle charge points available to NHDC fleet vehicles only	2025/26	12	N/A Data Only		❓ (New for 2025/26)	N/A Data Only
Percentage of primary schools in North Herts subscribed to the museum loan service	2025/26	37.3%	N/A Data Only		❓ (New for 2025/26)	N/A Data Only
Number of consultations and surveys completed	2025/26	9	N/A Data Only		❓ (New for 2025/26)	N/A Data Only
Number of responses to consultations and surveys	2025/26	4,170	N/A Data Only		❓ (New for 2025/26)	N/A Data Only
Council's Scope 1-3 emissions (tonnes CO2e)	2024/25	3,888.47	N/A Data Only		↓ (3,782.50)	2,755.00
Number of Council-approved habitat banks in the district	2025/26	2	N/A Data Only		❓ (New for 2025/26)	3

* Q1 2026/27 data for 'Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting' is still only provisional.

Council Delivery Plan Q1 2026-27 Monitoring Report - Projects / Risks

	Decarbonisation of Council Buildings - Phase 2				
Council Plan Objective	Sustainability (2024-28)	Due Date	31-Mar-2028	Original Date	31-Mar-2028
Project Summary	Finalise plans and complete works to decarbonise further Council buildings - Hitchin Town Hall, North Herts Museum, and the learner pool at North Herts Leisure Centre. 2025/26 was a planning year, with the project progressing throughout 2026/27 towards works commencing in 2027/28 and due to complete by 31 March 2028. Current milestones only relate to the planning year 2025/26 and activities scheduled to complete in 2026/27. Decarbonisation of the District Council Offices is also part of the wider project but will now be delivered by Property Services using existing contractors.				
Latest Update	04-Aug-2026 Following feedback from the Senior Conservation Officer about proposals for Hitchin Town Hall, the Project Board supported changes to designs with the proposed location of the air source heat pump moving to the rear of the building. Additionally, Project Board agreed to incorporate additional interventions to provide cooling to the site which required designs for inclusion in the planning application. These two additional requirements led to a delay in submission of the planning application to 3 August 2026. Planning permission, with conditions, was granted at North Herts Leisure Centre on 15 July 2026. Planning permission for Hitchin Town Hall is predicted to be granted in late Autumn 2026. The project team are currently procuring a contractor through a two-stage design and build approach to develop detailed designs and, subject to approval, deliver the works. The tender process is anticipated to complete by 1 September 2026. Detailed designs will then be undertaken with these completed, with costings, to inform papers to take a decision to the Cabinet meeting on 19 January 2027. Decarbonisation of the council offices is taking place in August to September 2026.				
Milestone		Due Date	Complete	Note	
Full Council approve NHC capital budget to deliver project.		27-Feb-2025	Yes	On 27 February 2025, Full Council approved a capital budget of £1.98m as part of the Capital Programme 2025-35.	
Salix funding secured.		30-Apr-2025	Yes	In April 2025, Salix awarded the Council £1.17m of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (Phase 4) funding. At this time, the estimated total project cost was £3.15m.	
Commence engagement with officers delivering the Leisure Centre Decarbonisation project.		21-May-2025	Yes	We held discussions with the project team delivering the Leisure Centre Decarbonisation project to share internal lessons learned and help inform our approach to managing this Phase 2 project.	
Submit first Salix monitoring report.		13-Jun-2025	Yes	We submitted our first monitoring report to Salix in June 2025 and had an initial meeting with our Salix relationship manager.	
Project Board established.		17-Jun-2025	Yes		
Appoint Quantity Surveyor to review initial feasibility study.		15-Jul-2025	Yes	We appointed Varsity Consulting (who provide QS support to the Leisure Centre Decarbonisation project) to review the initial feasibility study.	
Feasibility study received from Willmott Dixon Construction Ltd.		01-Aug-2025	Yes	We appointed WDC (the contractor who assisted us with our funding application) to conduct a feasibility assessment. The aim was for this to help us validate the original funding submission, revise/update overall costs, update the project programme, revise cash flow in line with total project value and Salix submission, update anticipated running costs, review planning options, and provide options for procurement of solutions.	
Technical presentation of feasibility study by WDC.		13-Aug-2025	Yes		
Initial meeting with Varsity Consulting to discuss options to take forward to Project Board.		15-Aug-2025	Yes	Initial meeting held.	

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Project Board to agree a preferred procurement option for delivering the pre-construction phase.	08-Sep-2025	Yes	Project Board meeting took place, but no decision was made on a preferred procurement option. Following advice from Varsity Consulting, an additional feasibility study was requested.
Cabinet report seeking funding approval for appointing a Principal Designer and a Quantity Surveyor for the full project.	23-Sep-2025	Yes	Services provided by Quantity Surveyor and Principal Designer were not covered by existing project budget. Cabinet approved the additional funding via the first quarter Capital Budget Monitoring Review 2025/26 report.
CPW to provide updated feasibility study and Varsity Consulting to provide related costings.	04-Nov-2025	Yes	Requested by Project Board on 8 September 2025.
Project Board decision on a preferred delivery route.	13-Nov-2025	Yes	
Design phase commences.	12-Jan-2026	Yes	Following the appointment of a principal designer, the design phase commenced.
Appoint quantity surveyor, designer, and architect to help deliver project.	31-Jan-2026	Yes	On 13 November 2025, Project Board approved the project approach and the appointment of a quantity surveyor, designer, and architect to assist with the delivery of the project. We have now appointed to all of these, with the final one completing on 17 February 2026.
Confirm to Salix that we intend to proceed with the project into the first delivery year, in line with funding conditions.	31-Jan-2026	Yes	Confirmed to Salix via email on 30 January 2026.
Surveys of the buildings completed.	20-Mar-2026	Yes	Surveys undertaken as follows: - A structural survey was undertaken on 9 February 2026 (HTH). - An acoustic survey was undertaken between 13 and 16 March 2026 to identify background noise levels in relation to the air source heat pump (HTH and NHLC). - A solar suitability assessment was undertaken on 2 March 2026, outlining the limited locations suitable for rooftop solar (HTH). - A heritage site visit was undertaken on 16 April 2026 to support production of a heritage statement. - A preliminary bat roost assessment was undertaken on 16 April 2026 (HTH).
RIBA stages 2-3 designs sign-off.	30-Apr-2026	Yes	Completed ahead of planning submission, having been signed off at Project Board on 20 April 2026.
Decision point on proceeding to the procurement of contractor before or after RIBA stage 4 detailed designs.	18-May-2026	Yes	The Project Board approved the recommended procurement route of a two-stage design and build approach where the contractor will oversee detailed designs being developed. The contractor will only be appointed for delivery of works after Cabinet meeting in January 2027.
Planning submission.	31-May-2026	Yes	The NHLC planning application was submitted on 24 April 2026. The HTH planning application was submitted on 3 August 2026. Delays due to change in location of heat pump following planning feedback and inclusion of cooling works in wider project.
Planning approval received.	06-Jul-2026	No	Due date to change to 15 November 2026. Planning approval for NHLC was provided on 15 July 2026. Planning for Hitchin Town Hall is now estimated to be in November 2026 based on submission of the planning application on 3 August 2026.
Pre-construction Service Agreement signed.	01-Sep-2026	No	Due date added. Following procurement of a contractor to oversee RIBA Stage 4 (detailed) designs, a pre-construction service agreement will be signed.
New Milestone - Cabinet decision on progression to delivery stage.	19-Jan-2027	No	New milestone. Following completion of detailed designs with costings, report due to be presented to Cabinet on 19 January 2027.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Key Risks: - Failure to obtain planning permission for Hitchin Town Hall as it is a listed building (currently assessed as a top risk for the project). - NHC responsible for funding all project costs beyond agreed grant funding. - Failure to deliver project in line with agreed grant conditions leads to loss of grant funding - grant spend scheduled for 2026/27 and 2027/28. - Delays obtaining required Distribution Network Operator/Planning approvals lead to delays in commissioning/completing project works. - Unforeseen detailed survey findings require changes to project specifications and lead to additional financial costs e.g., identification of asbestos.		7	7	5

	Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks				
Council Plan Objective	Sustainability (2024-28)	Due Date	31-Jan-2027	Original Date	31-Mar-2025
Project Summary	Finalise contract/leases with private sector partner and install new EV charging points in six of our outdoor surface car parks (subsequently changed to four). OZEV grant secured to help deliver the project.				
Latest Update	28-Jul-2026 As an outcome of this project, new EV charging points are operational in four outdoor car parks - Civic Centre, Hillshott, Warren, and Woodside. Leases have been drafted for these four car parks and shared with the contractor. However, issues with the format of site plans detailing the precise location of installed items and cabling have now been identified, which need to be resolved/corrected before the leases can be finalised. Following the decision to no longer proceed with the full installation/commissioning of EV charging points in the Bancroft and Twitchell car parks, officers continue to work with Legal and the contractor regarding required variations to the existing contract and to agree arrangements for removing installed items and making good the car parks. Progress has been hindered by the contractor changing our assigned project manager and the time required for them to familiarise themselves with the project/issues. Although the draft leases have previously been shared with the contractor and we understand they want to keep contract variations relatively straightforward, progress is reliant on them providing timely input/responses. In view of this, we now estimate that all outstanding actions should be fully completed in the next six months. We have finalised changes to grant funding with the DfT, with £18k of claimed grant funding being paid back. We have also commenced submission of quarterly performance monitoring reports, in accordance with grant requirements. Although not related to this specific project, the contractor has also indicated that they are no longer interested in pursuing works at the Lairage or Garden Square Shopping Centre multi-storey car parks, and due to Cabinet agreeing on 14 April 2026 to surrender the car park lease, plans have now changed for the Garden Square Shopping Centre. However, we now have the opportunity to improve EV charging capabilities at the Lairage, Bancroft and Twitchell car parks (and potentially other car parks) in the future with a different partner and to deliver better outcomes.				
Milestone Page 902			Due Date	Complete	Note
	NHC to start promoting project.		31-Oct-2024	Yes	Our investment in EV charging infrastructure was included in the Winter 2024 edition of Outlook magazine, which was published in early December 2024.
	Contract finalised with private sector partner.		31-Dec-2024	Yes	Contract finalised 7 January 2025. Contract amended to enable the OZEV ORCS funded project (installation of new EV charging points in our outdoor surface car parks) to progress in advance of the further project to replace existing charging points in our multi-storey car parks, which was delayed by the need to satisfy the Council's property insurer regarding potential fire risks.
	Contractor to commence works.		03-Mar-2025	Yes	Having issued authority-to-proceed letters to the contractor, works commenced at the Civic Centre car park in Royston on 22 April 2025.
	Issue progress report to the Department for Transport in line with grant funding conditions.		31-Dec-2025	Yes	
	Installation and commissioning of all new EV charging points completed.		31-Mar-2026	Yes	First phase of installation works was completed, with EV charging points in place at six outdoor car parks. Subsequently, four of these became operational - Civic Centre, Hillshott, Warren, and Woodside. However, full installation/commissioning of EV charging points in the Bancroft and Twitchell car parks is no longer proceeding under the existing contract with the private sector partner. This decision is due to the Distribution Network Operator identifying significant further required works, related complex traffic management issues, the restricted delivery window for grant funding, and the cost/benefit assessment of required works at these relatively low usage locations. Therefore, the project will now only deliver EV charging capabilities in four outdoor surface car parks rather than six, and these charging points are available for use.

Complete relevant leases with contractor for the length of the contract.	31-May-2026	No	Due date to change to 31 January 2027. Leases have been drafted with associated site plans for the four relevant car parks. These have been shared with the contractor. However, issues with the format of the site plans have now been identified, which need to be resolved/corrected before the leases can be finalised. Following the decision to no longer proceed with the full installation/commissioning of EV charging points in the Bancroft and Twitchell car parks, officers continue to work with the contractor and Legal regarding required variations to the existing contract and the removal of previously installed equipment. Progress has been hindered by the contractor changing our assigned project manager and the time required for them to familiarise themselves with the project/issues. Although the draft leases have previously been shared with the contractor and we understand they want to keep contract variations relatively straightforward, we are reliant on them to provide timely input/responses. Therefore, the current estimate is that all outstanding actions should be fully completed in the next six months (by January 2027).			
Risks			Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: 1. Not successful in obtaining grant funding (no longer a risk). 2. Unable to identify/procure a private sector partner (no longer a risk). 3. Unable to agree contract conditions/relevant lease arrangements with contractor. 4. Unable to deliver full project in accordance with OZEV requirements (now materialised, in part due to changes to OZEV grant funding and related inability to further extend funding deadline). 5. Unable to schedule required DNO upgrades in line with implementation programme/funding window (now materialised, due to the cost/benefit implications of relevant DNO surveys and the restricted delivery window referenced above). 6. Insurance requirements lead to changes to installation plans (no longer a risk). 7. Unable to reach agreement with Garden Square Shopping Centre regarding the replacement of existing charging points in Letchworth multi-storey car park (outside scope of OZEV funding, not a risk for this specific Council Delivery Plan project and now agreed to surrender car park lease (Cabinet 14 April 2026)).				5	1	1

	Churchgate				
Council Plan Objective	Responsible Growth (2024-28)	Due Date	31-Mar-2028	Original Date	
Project Summary	Progress the long-term regeneration of the shopping centre and surrounding areas. Project will span a number of years. Currently, recorded action relates to key milestones up to early 2027/28.				
Latest Update Page 904	05-Aug-2026 Over the past year, the Council has undertaken an extensive programme of work including financial analysis, specialist technical work, Project Board workshops, and Member briefings. This work has enabled the Council to move from high-level vision setting into a more informed, evidence-led and delivery-focused phase. Alongside this, the Council has also undertaken a pre-market engagement exercise and early engagement with the development and investment sector to inform future procurement, delivery, and partnership decisions, including hosting a breakfast event at UKREiif 2026. Feedback from this work has demonstrated strong market interest in Hitchin and increased confidence in both the credibility of the opportunity and the Council's commitment to delivering a high-quality regeneration programme for the town centre. The next stage of work aims to ensure that future decisions regarding the regeneration of the site are informed, evidence-led, and commercially robust. Following reports to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet, on 16 July 2026, Council approved additional funding to procure specialist regeneration and development expertise to work alongside the project team in refining a deliverable scheme, testing assumptions in greater detail, reducing uncertainty, and supporting the transition from strategic visioning into delivery planning and implementation. The initial phase of the appointment will comprise of feasibility, viability, master-planning, and delivery planning activities designed to refine the regeneration proposals, test commercial assumptions, assess development risk, and inform the preferred delivery model. The outputs of the initial phase will inform the scope of subsequent phases and will determine whether the Council wishes to proceed or not. Any progression beyond the initial phase will be subject to future Council approval, satisfactory performance of the appointed regeneration specialist partner, approval of any necessary funding, and compliance with the contractual gateway provisions established through the procurement. Due to the challenges, uncertainty, and variables associated with the project, the overall risk level remains high. However, the phased approach detailed above aims to derisk the project and enables the Council to retain strategic oversight and decision-making control as the project develops, whilst ensuring that investment and risk remain proportionate to the level of certainty and information available at each stage. In addition, we are now in a stronger position than we were a year ago, as there is a clearer understanding of the site and the viability and delivery channels, a stronger technical and financial evidence base and a greater insight into market appetite and delivery expectations. Although current project management arrangements and controls enable us to manage these risks as well as we can, certain external factors remain out of our control.				
Milestone		Due Date	Complete	Note	
Start of engagement.		02-Sep-2024	Yes		
Run workshops.		16-Sep-2024	Yes	Hitchin Market Board workshop held 9 September 2024. Hitchin Forum workshop held 9 September 2024 (in the evening). Tenants workshop held 12 September 2024.	
Start public consultation.		17-Sep-2024	Yes		
Public consultation ends.		01-Oct-2024	Yes	The consultation period was extended to 3 November 2024 to take into account the leaflet drop to all North Hertfordshire households.	
Open 'in-person' Churchgate Regeneration Hub on market days, up to the end of the consultation period.		17-Oct-2024	Yes	Churchgate Regeneration Hub opened in an unused Churchgate unit.	
Feedback to Project Board.		29-Oct-2024	Yes	Update on progress presented to Project Board on 14 October 2024.	
Feedback to Project Board.		26-Nov-2024	Yes	Project Board meeting re-scheduled to 4 December 2024. Consultation findings were presented to Project Board at this meeting.	
Publish second stage public consultation feedback report.		28-Feb-2025	Yes	Consultation results published in February 2025 and communicated throughout March 2025.	

Complete detailed evaluation of consultation findings and financial options appraisal.	16-May-2025	Yes	
Project Board decision on overarching direction and preferred pathway.	16-May-2025	Yes	
Attend UKREiIF 2025.	22-May-2025	Yes	Anthony Roche, Steve Crowley and Chloe Gray attended UKREiIF - 20-22 May 2025.
Report to Council and formal decision on overarching direction and preferred pathway.	10-Jul-2025	Yes	At Full Council on 10 July 2025, councillors voted to progress with their preferred approach to regenerate the Churchgate area, following extensive public consultation and technical feasibility work.
Churchgate Project Board Workshop 1	28-Nov-2025	Yes	
Churchgate Project Board Workshop 2	08-Dec-2025	Yes	
Project Board meeting to finalise the position of the project and recommended options prior to Member Briefing and Cabinet report/decision.	27-Feb-2026	Yes	Project Board met on 27 February 2026. Agreed that the Project Team progress to launching a soft market testing phase, in line with the Project Team recommendation.
Member Briefings.	13-May-2026	Yes	Three Member briefings were held throughout April and May 2026, with a total of 43 Members attending.
Undertake soft market testing and other preparatory work prior to UKREiIF 2026.	18-May-2026	Yes	Significant work and soft market testing were undertaken in early 2026 to engage with potential interested parties and to prepare for UKREiIF 2026.
Host event at UKREiIF 2026.	21-May-2026	Yes	Attendance at the hosted breakfast event was healthy and emphasised that there remains a high level of interest in the project from the market/industry.
Project Board decision on next steps.	05-Jun-2026	Yes	Project Board meeting held on 1 June 2026.
Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.	09-Jun-2026	Yes	On 9 June 2026, officers provided an update on progress so far and reported on suggested next steps and milestones in preparation for the Cabinet decision in June 2026 and Full Council decision in July 2026.
Further report to Cabinet.	16-Jun-2026	Yes	On 16 June 2026, officers provided an update on work to assess the viability, deliverability, and regeneration potential of the Churchgate site and sought approval for additional funding required to support the next phase of the project.
Council approval of additional revenue funding to support the next phase of the project.	16-Jul-2026	Yes	On 16 July 2026, Council approved the additional funding to support a single competitive procurement (comprising of two phases) of a partner to assist the Council with the next stage of the project.
New Milestone - Commence procurement of regeneration specialist partner for feasibility study.	07-Aug-2026	No	New milestone. Final timings to be confirmed.
New Milestone - Conclusion of Invitation to Participate procurement step.	15-Sep-2026	No	New milestone. Final timings to be confirmed.
New Milestone - Conclusion of Invitation to Tender procurement step and presentation to Project Board.	27-Oct-2026	No	New milestone. Final timings to be confirmed.

New Milestone - Conclusion of Evaluation procurement step and contract awarded to successful regeneration specialist partner.	30-Nov-2026	No	New milestone. Final timings to be confirmed.			
New Milestone - Commence feasibility, viability, and deliverability program.	04-Jan-2027	No	New milestone. Final timings to be confirmed.			
New Milestone - Feasibility, viability, and delivery options tested, concluding with a review of the preferred option.	05-Apr-2027	No	New milestone. Final timings to be confirmed.			
New Milestone - Delivery route tested, concluding with a further review of delivery strategy and implementation.	26-Apr-2027	No	New milestone. Final timings to be confirmed.			
New Milestone - Gateway approval of preferred delivery route and progression to next project phase.	10-May-2027	No	New milestone. Final timings to be confirmed. Progression subject to future Member approval, satisfactory performance of regeneration specialist partner, approval of required funding, and established contractual gateway arrangements.			
Procurement process for development partner ends and contract awarded.		No	Milestone to be deleted. Superseded by proposed new milestones.			
Start procurement process for development partner.		No	Milestone to be deleted. Superseded by proposed new milestones.			
Risks			Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: 1. The regeneration will not meet expectations of stakeholders. 2. Regeneration of the Centre and surrounding area is not cost effective/not affordable. Including impacts of possible high inflation and increasing cost of building materials. 3. Availability of specific funding for consultants (i.e., agreed budgets and income from existing tenants). 4. Overspends against agreed project budgets. 5. Availability of legal and procurement expertise to progress procurement activity in line with project plan.				9	8	6

	Digital Transformation				
Council Plan Objective	Accessible Services (2024-28)	Due Date	31-Mar-2028	Original Date	31-Mar-2025
Project Summary	Invest in and develop a low code digital platform that can be used to transform our services and applications. Programme to span a number of years, with the Council Delivery Plan project focussing on key activities planned for the short-term.				
Latest Update Page 6 of 7	24-Jul-2026 Scoping Version 2 of the Hitchin Town Hall booking system was completed in early 2026. However, Digital Services are still awaiting input/information from other parties in order for a comparison of different options and a decision on a preferred approach to be made regarding the best way to deliver further enhancements. Depending on the selected preferred option, Digital Services may or may not be directly involved with the implementation. The UKSPF-funded support officer role has been extended by a couple of weeks to mid-September 2026, and they continue to assess our services' digital inclusion, propose related recommendations, and implement some identified improvements. Once the role ends, any outstanding recommendations will be passed on to relevant teams to action. In time, we aim to repeat the digital inclusion customer/staff survey to monitor the outcomes of completed improvements. CRM/Tascomi integrations for a number of regulatory services remain in the planning/scoping phase. Timings are still to be determined, as we are waiting for the third-party supplier to give us access to the required modules on the test system. The Director - Customers and Director - Regulatory are keen for this project to move forward, but the continued delays in the third-party supplier responding to requests remains a key risk to how quickly things progress. Due to finance system integrations for Grants process automations being more complicated than first envisaged, we require direct support from the finance system provider and a related budget to implement a solution. As this is a low priority project, the volume of grants is low, and the Community Partnerships team currently undertake a relatively straightforward manual process, a decision needs to be made on whether continuing with this project delivers best value. This decision is expected to be made by the end of August 2026. Scoping of a replacement incident/accident/near-miss register has been completed, but the required works have not been scheduled into the wider programme yet. Once the planning phase is complete, agreed timings will be confirmed. In general, key risks to the programme continue to be the availability of sufficient resources (including the diversion of resources to the LGR process), LGR creating general uncertainty across the organisation, response times from third-party providers, and delayed decisions on preferred delivery options. The Digital Services team continue to progress several parallel workstreams alongside core programme delivery, including the rollout of Microsoft Copilot across the organisation, undertaking business process analysis to identify options for digitalisation/optimisation and prepare for LGR, and continuing to develop a range of ad-hoc online forms and digital processes to meet service needs. Based on the findings of completed business process analysis exercises, Digital Services are now implementing a number of quick fix/small builds to improve service provision.				
Milestone		Due Date	Complete	Note	
	Scope and investigate replacement of Burials system.	30-Jun-2024	Yes	Initial decision was to provide a replacement system via the new digital platform.	
	Integrate Netcall into Microsoft Azure for wider integration capabilities.	30-Sep-2024	Yes	The Azure tenancy can facilitate single sign on for customers to sign in via MyAccount or for staff to sign into any applications created.	
	Commence development of waste services processes and preparations for integration with new contractors' software.	01-Oct-2024	Yes	Work commenced, with plans agreed with Veolia.	
	Hitchin Town Hall booking system developed.	31-Oct-2024	Yes	The Hitchin Town Hall application was completed and handed over.	
	Waste Services - integrations with contractors' software.	30-Jun-2025	Yes	Completed on 7 August 2025. There was a slight delay fully integrating with Veolia systems, caused by late access to Veolia's ECHO system/data (April 2025) and delays clarifying specific data requirements. This delay did not have any impact from a customer perspective.	
	Waste Services - project delivery.	30-Jun-2025	Yes	High priority waste services processes were available for the start of the contract, with lower priority/frequency processes completed and delivered by 7 August 2025. One additional form, Waste Issues, was not delivered at this time, but there was an alternative way for Customer Services to do this, so the delay did not impact the customer experience.	

Development and delivery of Trade Waste processes.	07-Aug-2025	Yes	This work was outside the scope of the original Waste Services project. The majority of Trade Waste processes went live on 7 August 2025 when we implemented the weekly system updates. There was a small part still outstanding due to needing process clarity, but the rest were live. The outstanding item had minimal impact, and the milestone was considered complete.
Development and delivery of a Grants database.	28-Nov-2025	Yes	Database now live. Officially launched on 24 November 2025.
Safety Advisory Group (SAG) platform.	12-Mar-2026	Yes	The platform went live in mid-March 2026. An additional councillor platform, which was not included in the original scope, was subsequently added later in March 2026.
TechnologyOne integrations: Waste process automations.	31-Mar-2026	Yes	The TechnologyOne/Waste project has been fully signed off and is now live.
Digital Inclusion Project.	31-Aug-2026	No	Due date to change to 11 September 2026. We have utilised UKSPF funding to secure a support officer for six months to assess our services' digital inclusion, propose related recommendations, and start to implement identified improvements. This post has now subsequently been extended to mid-September 2026.
CRM/Tascomi integrations - Regulatory services.		No	Due date still to be confirmed. Still in the planning/scoping phase. Timings still to be determined, as we are waiting for the third-party supplier to give us access to the required modules on the test system. The Director - Customers and Director - Regulatory are keen for this project to move forward, but the continued delays in the third-party supplier responding to requests remains a key risk to how quickly things progress.
New Milestone - Incident/Accident/Near-Miss Register		No	New milestone - Due date to be confirmed. Scoping of a replacement register has been completed, but the required works have not been scheduled into the wider programme yet. Once the planning phase is complete, the milestone will be updated to reflect the agreed timings.
Scoping Version 2 of the Hitchin Town Hall booking system and decision made on preferred option.		No	Due date still to be confirmed. Scoping of Version 2 was completed in early 2026. However, Digital Services are still awaiting input/information from other parties in order for a comparison of different options and a decision on a preferred approach to be made regarding the best way to deliver further enhancements to the HTH booking system. Following a decision on a preferred option, we will then be in a position to update the milestone/timings to reflect if Digital Services will be involved in the implementation.
TechnologyOne integrations: Grants process automations.		No	Due date still to be confirmed. Following initial investigations, we have determined that this is more complicated than first envisaged. To implement the solution, we require direct support from the finance system provider and a related budget. As this is a low priority project, the volume of grants is low, and the Community Partnerships team currently undertake a relatively straightforward manual process, a decision needs to be made on whether continuing with this project delivers best value. This decision is expected to be made by the end of August 2026. Following this, we will then be in a position to update the milestone/timings to reflect if the project is still proceeding.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: 1. Resources within key teams available to deliver. 2. Unexpected limitations within new digital platform (now assessed as low risk). 3. Delays in receiving required access to and/or responses from third party systems/providers. 4. Local Government Reorganisation creates uncertainty around the delivery of the wider programme. 5. Delayed decision-making on preferred options.		6	6	3

	Leisure Centre Decarbonisation				
Council Plan Objective	Sustainability (2024-28)	Due Date	30-Mar-2027	Original Date	02-Feb-2026
Project Summary	Using a combination of external funding and NHC capital funding, deliver a project to decarbonise our three leisure centres. The main activities are replacing end of life gas boilers with Air Source Heat Pumps and installing Solar PV panels to enable on-site generation of electricity. Replacing gas heating for our leisure centres with low carbon alternatives is the single most effective action we can take towards meeting our target of being carbon neutral by 2030.				
Latest Update	23-Jul-2026 The programmes at North Herts Leisure Centre (NHLC) and Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre (HSFC) continue to be delayed due to the extended time required to complete legal easements with third parties. These easements are needed to enable the new electricity supplies for the substations and their connection to the wider electricity network at both sites. We continue to work closely with third-party landowners (Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and Hitchin Cow Commoners Trust) and the statutory authority (UKPN) to progress these easements and subsequent works. However, although both easements are progressing, further delays have still arisen. As a result, the contractor temporary demobilisation period has now been extended to late August 2026, pending conclusion of relevant legal processes. Building works at NHLC and HSFC are now anticipated to be completed in late January/early February 2027 and if required, to have received Building Control Officer sign-off/certification by the end of March 2027. We continue to provide updates to Salix, including via quarterly monitoring reports. Given the ongoing uncertainty around how long it will take to finalise the easements, some of which remain outside our control, the assessed risk level is unchanged. Despite significant consultancy input to date, residual risks remain until the Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHPs) are installed and fully operational. These include potential impacts on performance, the achievement of projected carbon and revenue savings, and the possible requirement to install harmonic filters should distortion levels exceed permitted limits. Harmonic filters at NHLC have been incorporated into the design/budget, but this is not the case for HSFC or Royston Leisure Centre (RLC). UKPN have approved first stage harmonic assessments for HSFC and RLC, although this doesn't completely remove the risk once the new ASHPs are installed and running, and there is no provisional budget for harmonic filters should they be required. However, it should be noted that the ASHP at RLC has now been operational for a number of weeks with no reported issues.				
Milestone		Due Date	Complete	Note	
Council approves an increase in capital expenditure for the decarbonisation work and revenue expenditure for the termination and removal fees of gas CHPs.		11-Jul-2024	Yes		
Pre-Construction Services Agreement with Willmott Dixon signed.		29-Jul-2024	Yes	Agreed and signed on 2 August 2024.	
Appoint external Quantity Surveyor to oversee NHC's interests.		30-Aug-2024	Yes	Appointed Varsity Consulting to act as the Employers Agent for North Herts Council on the leisure decarbonisation project. This includes carrying out tasks of Quantity Surveyor, Cost Consultant and Contract Administrator. Decision taken 24 September 2024. Decision notified 27 September 2024.	
Project Board - hold point to decide whether to continue the project.		04-Nov-2024	Yes	Project Board approved a number of recommendations allowing the project to move into the next phase.	
Complete Stage 3 design phases.		11-Nov-2024	Yes	Stage 3 completed.	
Council decision on preferred option.		15-Jan-2025	Yes		
Willmott Dixon Construction submit contract offer.		20-Mar-2025	Yes	Contract offer received from Willmott Dixon and final costs subsequently agreed.	
Provide Salix with required project updates.		01-Apr-2025	Yes	All grant conditions and updates for the 2024/25 financial year have been issued and reviewed. Conditions 2-4 have been approved by Salix consultants and are with Salix to approve. Condition 1 will need to be reviewed, amended, and resubmitted later.	

Further report to Cabinet to approve contract award and additional budget.	20-May-2025	Yes	Cabinet agreed to increase the project capital budget, approved the extension of lido seasons at both outdoor pools, approved changes to the 2025/26 General Fund budget as a result of the increase in net expenditure caused by planned closures and extended lido seasons, and awarded the contract to WDC.
Salix confirm acceptance of our 2024/25 updates.	31-May-2025	Yes	Salix have approved and paid the Council the 2024/25 grant amount in full.
Commence de-carb works at Royston Leisure Centre.	17-Jun-2025	Yes	Willmott Dixon started setting up on site in the week commencing 14 July 2025 and started to shutdown areas of the building to prepare for works in the week commencing 21 July 2025.
Planning permissions obtained.	19-Jun-2025	Yes	Planning permission received for Royston and Letchworth on 19 June 2025, with Hitchin granted on 11 July 2025.
Commence de-carb works at North Herts Leisure Centre.	23-Jun-2025	Yes	Willmott Dixon started setting up on site in the week commencing 14 July 2025 and started to shutdown areas of the building to prepare for works in the week commencing 21 July 2025.
Commence de-carb works at Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre.	01-Sep-2025	Yes	The start date for commencing works was pushed back due to a delay with Natural England issuing the required Bat Licence.
Enter into construction contract with Willmott Dixon.	07-Sep-2025	Yes	There was a slight delay completing this milestone, as it took longer than expected to reach agreement on how practical completion would be agreed in a way that complies with the new Building Safety Act and to undertake the subsequent Legal work prior to signing.
Provide Salix with an updated application form with finalised project data (including costs and energy values) and a monitoring plan detailing how carbon savings will be monitored/reported following completion of the project.	02-Feb-2026	Yes	Salix confirmed revised final commissioning condition dates and that we needed to submit relevant information to them by 31 March 2026. However, we agreed to do this earlier to ensure Salix had sufficient time to review the information provided and to raise any queries. We submitted the final commissioning conditions to Salix at the end of February 2026, which they subsequently approved.
Complete de-carb works at Royston Leisure Centre.	09-Jun-2026	Yes	Building works completed. Building Control sign-off received 20 March 2026. Formal handover to EA on 14 April 2026.
Complete de-carb works at Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre.	27-Oct-2026	No	Due date to change to 30 March 2027. This factors in the agreed extension of the contractor demobilisation period (to late August 2026) pending formalisation of the required easement over Hitchin Cow Commoners Trust land. The date is also inclusive of a possible eight-week Building Control Officer sign-off period should it be required. Actual building works are currently scheduled to be completed in early February 2027.
Complete de-carb works at North Herts Leisure Centre.	27-Oct-2026	No	Due date to change to 25 March 2027. This factors in the agreed extension of the contractor demobilisation period (to late August 2026) pending formalisation of the required easement over Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation land. The date is also inclusive of a possible eight-week Building Control Officer sign-off period should it be required. Actual building works are currently scheduled to be completed in late January 2027.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: - NHC responsible for funding all project costs beyond agreed grant funding. - NHC paying up front for the larger Air Source Heat Pumps (no longer a risk). - Unforeseen detailed survey findings require changes to project specifications and lead to additional financial costs. - Failure to obtain required planning permissions (no longer a risk). - Delays obtaining required Distribution Network Operator approvals lead to delays in commissioning/completing project works. - Delays obtaining required easements lead to delays in commissioning/completing project works. - Failure to deliver project in line with agreed grant conditions leads to loss of grant funding (no longer a risk). - Short programme delivery timeframes impact the ability to drawdown Year 1 2024/25 Salix grant funding within the agreed financial year leading to loss of funding (no longer a risk). - Disruption to day-to-day operations during works leads to customer dissatisfaction (one-week closures of NHLC and HSFC required to complete commissioning of ASHPs). - Demand on existing officer resources to cover the loss of the dedicated Project Manager. - Once ASHPs are operational, UKPN may require us to install harmonic filters (at Hitchin and/or Royston) to reduce distortion if harmonic levels go above allowed limits.		8	5	3

	Local Plan Review				
Council Plan Objective	Responsible Growth (2024-28)	Due Date	05-Jan-2029	Original Date	31-Dec-2027
Project Summary	To undertake an update of the Council's statutory Local Plan as agreed in principle by Cabinet in January 2024.				
Latest Update	23-Jul-2026 Following the notice of intention that was published on 24 April 2026, the scoping document (first stage of the new Local Plan) was consulted on between 11 May and 28 June 2026. The next stage is the Content and Evidence Base document, which will set out the Council's proposed approach to the Local Plan including findings from evidence base to date as well as what evidence is still expected to be commissioned. This document is scheduled to go to Cabinet on 22 September 2026 and then published for consultation on 13 October 2026. The Strategic Planning Manager role is currently occupied on an interim basis and is likely to be advertised later in 2026 following an internal restructure. Two Senior Planner roles were advertised to assist in the capacity of the wider team, and both have been filled. A temporary contract role, originally filled for six months to provide additional support, has been extended until December 2026. A bid for additional MHCLG funding for local authorities preparing Local Plans under the new system as long as they met certain milestone dates has been successful. This funding will help provide additional staff capacity and skills required for meeting the milestone requirements. Work is continuing on site assessments to feed into the proposed site allocations. A site map will be published in September 2026. This will include all sites submitted as part of the call for sites as well as current Local Plan site allocations that either do not have planning permission or have planning permission but have not yet started as of 31 March 2026. Work is also continuing on a range of evidence base studies that will support the Local Plan. Details of these are published on the website.				
Milestone		Due Date	Complete	Note	
01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11	01. In principle approval that Local Plan review is undertaken.	16-Jan-2024	Yes	Approved by Cabinet in January 2024.	
	02. Approval of Local Development Scheme.	14-Jan-2025	Yes	Approved by Cabinet in January 2025.	
	03. Approval of revised Local Plan Timetable.	20-Jan-2026	Yes	Approved by Cabinet in January 2026.	
	04. Notice of start of plan-making given to Secretary of State.	24-Apr-2026	Yes	Notice published on our website on 24 April 2026.	
	05. Early scoping consultation.	11-May-2026	Yes	Consultation was undertaken between 11 May 2026 and 28 June 2026.	
	06. Complete 'Gateway 1' advisory assessment.	09-Oct-2026	No	Milestone in line with the published timetable.	
	07. Complete first mandatory public consultation - proposed content and evidence base.	24-Nov-2026	No	Milestone in line with the published timetable. Consultation to be undertaken between 13 October 2026 and 24 November 2026.	
	08. Complete 'Gateway 2' (4-6 weeks).	05-Apr-2027	No	Milestone in line with the published timetable. Will be undertaken in March / April 2027.	
	09. Complete second mandatory public consultation - draft Local Plan.	04-Jan-2028	No	Milestone in line with the published timetable. Consultation to be undertaken between 26 October 2027 and 4 January 2028.	
	10. Complete 'Gateway 3' assessment and submit for examination.	31-May-2028	No	Milestone in line with the published timetable.	
	11. Receipt of examination outcome.	30-Nov-2028	No	Milestone in line with the published timetable.	

12. Finalisation and adoption of digital Local Plan.	05-Jan-2029	No	Milestone in line with the published timetable.			
Risks			Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: - Further reforms to the planning system or national policy: The introduction of new or substantive reforms could impact the scope and content of the Local Plan. The new NPPF includes non-statutory Development Management policies. There is currently uncertainty about how these should be applied when decisions must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This may have implications for decision making and could lead to increased challenges through appeals and the courts. - Inability to recruit or retain experienced officers: Previous recruitment exercises have been unsuccessful, with limited interest due to salary levels not aligning with expectations or with those offered by neighbouring authorities. This poses a risk to delivering the required programme of work. - Internal delays in securing necessary resources: Organisational complexities may delay resources needed to progress the Local Plan such as overly complex procurement processes. - Insufficient overall capacity to deliver the Local Plan update: Limited staffing and competing priorities may constrain the ability to complete required tasks within statutory timeframes. - Lack of clear or aligned corporate direction: Conflicting priorities or a lack of shared vision across departments could hinder a joined-up approach to strategy development and policy alignment. - Introduction of new Spatial Development Strategies (SDS): SDS preparation is likely to progress on a similar timeline to the Local Plan, creating risks of divergent work, policy conflict, or delays due to uncertainty or required changes. Early collaboration and shared evidence gathering between authorities will be essential. - Failure to secure adequate funding: Insufficient financial resources could delay or limit the scope of the Local Plan review. - Failure to obtain political or Government approval at key stages: Lack of support or sign off at critical gateways could stall progress. - Risk of Government intervention: If inadequate progress is made on the Local Plan review, the Council may be subject to intervention measures. - Inadequate guidance leading to poor scheme outcomes: Insufficient clarity in national policy or guidance may result in development that does not appropriately support corporate priorities relating to climate change, the environment, the economy, or place making. - Poor design outcomes: Development may fail to respond appropriately to local character and context if policy clarity or evidence is lacking. - Adverse appeal decisions: Delays or stalling of the Local Plan review may increase the risk of unfavourable appeal outcomes on non-Local Plan sites. - Impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR): LGR proposals may divert resources, affect the timetable or approach, or introduce new workstreams. LGR may also result in conflicting policy approaches between authorities; early collaboration will be required to align policy direction where possible. The split of North Herts into two administrative areas creates a number of potential issues after April 2028, including: - Evidence Base/Policy: How the evidence base or specific policy approaches will apply to different parts of the district. - Governance: As North Herts will be under different administrative areas, there is a risk that one authority may not adopt the Plan. MHCLG have indicated that they would expect new authorities to continue with the process where Plans are at an advance stage. They also have powers of intervention if needed in terms of adoption. - Legislative Changes Needed: Currently, only one local plan can apply to one administrative area.				5	5	3

	Museum Collection Facility				
Council Plan Objective	Thriving Communities (2024-28)	Due Date	31-Jan-2029	Original Date	31-Mar-2028
Project Summary	Delivery of a new facility to house the museum collection of North Hertfordshire.				
Latest Update	24-Jul-2026 We continue to progress the project to resolve current museum collection storage capacity pressures and to secure the long-term future and preservation of the museum collection in an environmentally stable facility. Following the renovation of Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City, the museum collection will be relocated from the existing Bury Mead Road site to the new facility. In July 2026, the previous tenants vacated the premises and NHC took possession. In June 2026, we appointed a Professional Technical Services contractor to guide and support NHC through the design phases. Following receipt of an initial report from the contractor and pending approval from Project Board in July 2026, it is likely that the project may be paused for a short period while we clarify our expectations, challenge certain aspects of the report, and possibly request re-submission of the RIBA Stage 1 report. If this happens, project timings will need to be amended to reflect this unprogrammed activity. We have been successful with a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant bid submission (£250k) to fund resources that will be required later in the project e.g., moving the collection and overseeing the volunteer programme. Throughout the project, we will continue to explore other, lower value grant opportunities. Currently, remaining milestone due dates remain indicative, and these will be confirmed following further detailed work to develop a comprehensive and realistic delivery programme. Later in the project, we will be appointing to community engagement and collection relocation related roles (both paid and voluntary) to progress related workstreams at the appropriate time. Key risks include financial pressures, escalating costs from early design stage outcomes, staffing capacity, possible damage to the collection, managing staff/Member/public expectations, and possible loss of accreditation, although this last one has lessened due to the Council embarking on this project. Although the overall risk level is assessed as high (based on the risk scores for the highest risk areas), it should be noted that the majority of risks recorded in the project risk log are assessed as low risk and generally, our capacity to manage risk is going in the right direction.				
Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note		
01. Cabinet approval for the acquisition of a long leasehold interest of Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City.	18-Mar-2025	Yes			
02. NHC formally acquires the long leasehold interest of Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City.	04-Jul-2025	Yes	Sitting tenant was in place until July 2026. NHC agreed an extension to the lease (previously to January 2026) to allow time for project design work and a specification for the procurement of a principal renovation contractor to progress whilst securing an ongoing income stream while this happened and avoiding an extended void period.		
03. Project Board established.	31-Jul-2025	Yes			
04. Commence Project Board meetings.	02-Sep-2025	Yes			
05. Present project information note and update to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.	06-Jan-2026	Yes			
06. Appoint Professional Technical Services contractor to guide and support NHC through design phases.	31-May-2026	Yes	Formally contracted on 4 June 2026.		
07. Sitting tenant vacates premises following expiration of lease.	08-Jul-2026	Yes	NHC took possession of the premises on 9 July 2026. Premises had been left in a satisfactory condition.		
08. Procure principal renovation contractor and mobilise contract.	31-Jan-2027	No	Indicative due date.		
09. Complete recruitment to collection strand project roles (roles potentially grant funded).	26-Apr-2027	No	Indicative due date.		

10. Commence onsite renovation works.	31-May-2027	No	Indicative due date.			
11. Commence recruitment and training of volunteers to support project stages that follow completion of renovation works.	07-Jun-2027	No	Indicative due date.			
12. Complete renovation of Unit 1 City Park, Letchworth Garden City.	17-Sep-2027	No	Indicative due date. Currently, expect renovation works to be completed at the end of Summer 2027.			
13. Commence relocation of museum collection to new facility.	04-Oct-2027	No	Indicative due date.			
14. Complete relocation of museum collection to new facility.	31-Jan-2029	No	Indicative due date. Existing Bury Mead Road site will then subsequently be fully vacated.			
Risks			Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Key Risks: - Failure to deliver project to planned project timescales and within agreed budgets. - Project Team capacity to deliver project is in addition to existing business-as-usual responsibilities. - Failure to secure external grant funding to maximise the ambitions of the project. - Delays in procuring the design technical team and approving designs early in the project utilises all time contingencies built into the overall programme.				7	7	3

	Oughtonhead Common Weir				
Council Plan Objective	Sustainability (2024-28)	Due Date	31-Oct-2026	Original Date	30-Sep-2024
Project Summary	Complete works to rectify the collapsed weir.				
Latest Update	05-Aug-2026 Currently, the plan is to combine the weir works and Affinity Water's wider river restoration and habitat improvements into a single coordinated programme of works. This collaborative approach aims to ensure a smooth delivery process, reduced onsite disruption, and better value for money. CMS have prepared necessary tender documentation, and we have re-emphasised the priority of the project from a NHC perspective. However, we are still awaiting confirmation of the timings to move things forward (and to confirm milestones/dates). Autumn is considered the most suitable time for works from an ecological and habitat perspective (breeding bird season finished, most favourable ground conditions, and lowest river levels) and currently, we still anticipate the weir works being completed in 2026 with a delivery timeframe of approximately four weeks. However, prior to finalising the coordinated arrangements/programme, there remains a risk that the weir improvements may be further delayed in order to achieve the anticipated benefits of a joint approach. Public communications throughout various project stages remains key to managing stakeholder expectations and potential reputational risks associated with delays. The impact of a delay in completing the project is still assessed as low, due to any further short-term deterioration of the existing weir being unlikely to result in significant environmental damage.				
Milestone		Due Date	Complete	Note	
01. Conduct the further modelling requested by the Environment Agency.		31-Aug-2024	Yes	Cost of completing further modelling circa £3k.	
02. Obtain required Environment Agency permits.		31-Dec-2024	Yes	Permits obtained in December 2024.	
03. Commence tender process for undertaking required works.			No	Due date to be confirmed. Awaiting update from CMS regarding project timings.	
04. Appoint contractor(s) to undertake required works.			No	Due date to be confirmed. Awaiting update from CMS regarding procurement timings. CMS initially indicated the tender is likely to be open for six weeks to allow sufficient time for contractors to put their returns together, followed by a two-week period for evaluating and scoring. Therefore, the procurement process is expected to last for approximately two months.	
05. Successful contractor confirms project plan and timings.			No	Due date to be confirmed. Will be confirmed following contract award.	
06. Undertake further communication with the public regarding plans.			No	Due date to be confirmed. Will take place once contract awarded and plans have been finalised.	
07. Commence work on-site.			No	Due date to be confirmed. Will be confirmed when successful contractor confirms project plan and timings.	
08. Works on-site completed.			No	Due date to be confirmed. Will be confirmed when successful contractor confirms project plan and timings. Currently anticipate works being completed in Autumn 2026.	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: - External funding from HCC, EA and residents is not available leading to full allocated Capital budget being used (currently assessed as low risk in view of reduced work now being required and possible new funding stream from Affinity Water). - Existing situation deteriorates prior to any works being undertaken requiring further urgent temporary solutions to manage an immediate changing situation (currently assessed as low risk). - Failure to obtain planning permission (no longer a risk). - Failure to obtain Environment Agency (fish pass approval) and HCC (ordinary watercourse consent) approval/consent (no longer a risk). - Lack of contractor appetite to undertake works prolongs procurement process and delays project delivery (prior to tender process, assessed as relatively low risk). - Without confirmed plans for the procurement process and project delivery, there is a risk that the project will not be completed in line with current stakeholder expectations (currently assessed as low risk, with a current preference for delivery in summer/autumn 2026).		4	2	1

	Pay on Exit Parking				
Council Plan Objective	Accessible Services (2024-28)	Due Date	31-Mar-2027	Original Date	31-Mar-2026
Project Summary	Replace existing parking machines and update tariff boards to implement pay on exit in all our town centre car parks. Capital budget approved to deliver the project over two years - 2024/25 and 2025/26 - although remaining project budget has now been carried forward to 2026/27.				
Latest Update	27-Jul-2026 In May 2026, new parking machines were installed and relevant signage was updated at Norton Common and Hitchin Swimming & Fitness Centre car parks. The installation of new tariff boards in all car parks has still not progressed and depending on the approach taken, may possibly now not be completed until the end of 2026/27. Capital funding for this element of the project was previously carried forward to 2026/27. Discussions with the contractor and Legal continue regarding the quality of installed parking signage, and this needs to be resolved before we commit to proceeding with the current provider to install new tariff boards. Temporary updates to existing tariff boards have been completed, to reflect approved changes to parking tariffs (Cabinet 17 February 2026) and to ensure our car parks remain compliant. Should a change in tariff board provider be required, there is budget available to cover a possible risk of increased contract costs, but it is likely to push the project completion date towards March 2027. This delay does not affect the operation of our car parks or users' ability to park in them. The Parking Team continue to respond to and resolve users' issues, which remains key to managing possible reputational risks, although generally, the majority of users continue to successfully pay for parking without issue.				
Milestone		Due Date	Complete	Note	
Procure supplier to replace tariff boards.		30-Aug-2024	Yes	Procurement complete. Supplier appointed on 2 September 2024.	
Draft implementation programme received from contractor.		30-Nov-2024	Yes		
Full implementation programme agreed with contractor.		31-Dec-2024	Yes	Full implementation programme agreed in December 2024 with some minor modifications finally agreed early February 2025.	
Commence installation of new parking machines on a town-by-town basis, along with new entrance/information signage.		17-Feb-2025	Yes	Rollout commenced in Hitchin.	
Update TROs.		18-Feb-2025	Yes	The majority of updated TROs became effective on 18 February 2025. Updated TROs introduced alternative methods of payment, virtual permits and season tickets, and reviewed the definitions and length of stay for electric vehicle parking bays within the Council's car parks.	
Complete installation of new parking machines and new entrance/information signage.		31-Mar-2025	Yes	Works on site completed. However, as with the introduction of any new technology, the Council and users did experience issues associated with the new machines and payment options. Officers worked with the contractor to address identified issues.	
Norton Common and Hitchin Swimming & Fitness Centre TROs updated.		31-Mar-2026	Yes	The Norton Common TRO was updated (delegated decision notified 27 June 2025). Following discussions with Leisure/Everyone Active we have agreed to retain the existing TRO for Hitchin Swimming & Fitness Centre and to continue with a pay and display approach in the car park for now. Any future proposals to update the TRO and parking options will be considered outside the scope of the current project. As a result, the milestone is now considered complete.	
Complete installation of new parking machines and signage at Norton Common and Hitchin Swimming & Fitness Centre car parks.		31-May-2026	Yes	New parking machines installed and signage updated in May 2026.	

Installation of new tariff boards completed.	30-Sep-2026	No	Due date to change to 31 March 2027. Capital funding for this element of the project was carried forward to 2026/27. Discussions with Legal are ongoing regarding how to respond to and resolve identified quality issues with installed parking signage. This needs to be addressed and resolved before we commit to proceeding with the current provider to install new tariff boards. This has impacted our ability to meet the current target date. Temporary updates to existing tariff boards have been completed to reflect approved changes to parking tariffs (Cabinet 17 February 2026). Should a change in tariff board provider be required, there is budget available to cover a possible risk of increased contract costs, but it will push the project completion date towards the end of 2026/27.			
Risks			Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Risks: 1. Budget implications of selected scheme (no longer a risk). 2. Inability to procure suppliers within approved budget (no longer a risk, as procured suppliers within budget). 3. Negative public reaction to changes and disruption during works. 4. Loss of income during associated works and immediate post-installation period. 5. Failure to bring together separate project elements to achieve seamless project delivery. 6. Public have issues using the new parking machines or understanding new payment options. 7. Issues with installed signage leads to a change in tariff board provider being required.				1	2	1

	Royston Leisure Centre Learner Pool				
Council Plan Objective	Accessible Services (2024-28)	Due Date	14-Apr-2028	Original Date	14-Apr-2028
Project Summary	Project to construct a new learner pool and associated changing facilities at Royston Leisure Centre.				
Latest Update	15-Jun-2026 We have commenced the project to construct a new learner pool and associated changing facilities at Royston Leisure Centre, which represents a long-term investment in Royston's leisure provision and ensures the facility can meet both current and future demand. Following approval of a project budget in February 2026, the establishment of a Project Board, and the appointment of a lead development partner for the pre-construction stages, we have now commenced the combined RIBA Stages 2 and 3 to develop designs. At the end of this process, there is a project gateway that allows the Council to either approve progression to the next RIBA stage and submission of the related planning application or to withdraw from the project completely. This decision is scheduled to be made at the end of September 2026. The current indicative project plan estimates construction works commencing in early 2027 and the project being completed in mid-April 2028. A project risk log has been created and although the majority of the identified risks are assessed as being low, the overall project risk level assessment is medium, which reflects that we are only in the early stages of the project and there is a level of uncertainty relating to definitive project costs and timescales, survey findings, and potential impacts linked to Local Government Reorganisation.				
Milestone		Due Date	Complete	Note	
Feasibility Study report received.		31-Oct-2025	Yes	In 2025, the Council appointed Varsity Consulting to carry out a Feasibility Study for the development of a learner pool at Royston Leisure Centre, including draft indicative design proposals and estimated project costs.	
Full Council approval of project budget - £4.752m.		26-Feb-2026	Yes		
First Project Board meeting.		31-Mar-2026	Yes		
Project Board approval to appoint Alliance Leisure as lead development partner up to the end of RIBA Stage 4 under the UK Leisure Framework.		31-Mar-2026	Yes		
Commence combined RIBA Stage 2 and 3 (design development stage).		03-Jun-2026	Yes		
Combined RIBA Stage 2 and 3 completed.		30-Sep-2026	No		
RIBA Stage 3 Gateway.		30-Sep-2026	No	At the end of RIBA Stage 3, there is a project Gateway allowing the Council to withdraw from the project if it decides not to proceed.	
Commence RIBA Stage 4 (technical design and pre-construction stage).		01-Oct-2026	No		
Submit planning application.		01-Oct-2026	No		
Cabinet approval to proceed to construction phase.		19-Jan-2027	No	Towards the end of RIBA Stage 4, we will receive a final contracting cost for the project and following review, we will seek Cabinet approval to proceed.	
Execute construction contract.		27-Jan-2027	No		

RIBA Stage 4 completed.	27-Jan-2027	No				
Decision received on planning application.	04-Feb-2027	No				
Complete four-week construction mobilisation.	23-Feb-2027	No	Indicative date, as post current contract period.			
Commence works on site.	24-Feb-2027	No	Indicative date, as post current contract period.			
Complete handover of new learner pool.	13-Apr-2028	No	Indicative date, as post current contract period.			
Project completion.	14-Apr-2028	No	Indicative date, as post current contract period.			
Risks			Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Key risk areas: 1. As design develops, project costs escalate and exceed budget and contingency. 2. Programme delays occur during RIBA stages. 3. Delays in submitting the planning application and/or planning permission not being granted. 4. Surveys uncover unforeseen issues. 5. Disruption to existing leisure centre operations during works on site has reputational impacts. 6. HCH officer project responsibilities being in addition to usual day-to-day duties. 7. Project overruns. 8. Local Government Reorganisation creates resource pressures and delivery uncertainty, especially if key decision points are delayed.				5	5	3

	Town Centres Strategy				
Council Plan Objective	Responsible Growth (2024-28)	Due Date	22-Sep-2026	Original Date	31-Mar-2025
Project Summary	Progress development of an overarching Town Centres Strategy, including guidance on developing strategic plans for individual town centres.				
Latest Update	27-Jul-2026 We appointed the previous consultants to help with the review/analysis of consultation responses and preparation of a final draft of the Strategy. We currently still expect the draft Strategy to go back to Cabinet for formal adoption in September 2026. Strategic Planning & Projects are working with the Enterprise Team to develop delivery options linked to the Economic Development Strategy adopted by Cabinet in September 2025. In view of the progress being made, the risk environment associated with this project is improving. However, the overall project risk level continues to be assessed as 'medium' for now, pending the continuation of timely progress and the formal adoption of the Town Centres Strategy by Cabinet.				
Milestone		Due Date	Complete	Note	
1. Undertake work to complete evidence base.		31-Jul-2024	Yes	Consultants presented initial report on evidence base and stakeholder workshop held to review findings.	
2. Further review/refinement of evidence base and final sign-off.		20-Dec-2024	Yes	Finalised retail evidence base in December 2024. Consultants then reviewed wider evidence base for draft Strategy. This was published as supporting evidence base when consulting on the draft Town Centres Strategy.	
3. Project Board review draft Town Centres Strategy.		20-May-2025	Yes	Project Board members requested further work to be undertaken and to see the revised version prior to submitting the Strategy to Cabinet.	
4. Project Board review and approval of draft Town Centres Strategy.		15-Jul-2025	Yes	Presented the detailed overview and priorities for each of the town centres at the Project Board meeting on 15 July 2025. At this meeting, Project Board suggested the draft Strategy should be presented to PLB prior to going to Cabinet.	
5. Development and finalisation of draft Strategy.		15-Aug-2025	Yes	Consultants provided a first full draft of the Town Centres Strategy on 3 September 2025 for officer review and comment. Over the subsequent four weeks, further tweaks were made, and Section 4 (Delivery) was further developed.	
6. Present draft Strategy to Political Liaison Board (PLB).		02-Sep-2025	Yes	Presented on 7 October 2025. PLB were happy with the draft Strategy on the basis that Section 4 (Delivery) was developed further. Working with stakeholders to develop an action plan formed part of the consultation process.	
7. Present draft Strategy to Overview & Scrutiny Committee.		09-Sep-2025	Yes	Following Project Board approval of the draft Strategy and consultation approach, the draft Strategy was presented to O&S on 11 November 2025.	
8. Present details of draft Strategy, including guidance sections for each town, to Cabinet.		23-Sep-2025	Yes	Draft Strategy presented to Cabinet on 19 November 2025. Cabinet endorsed and approved the Strategy for public consultation.	
9. Consultation on draft Town Centres Strategy.		31-Jan-2026	Yes	Following the November 2025 Cabinet decision, an extended eight-week consultation took place over December 2025 and January 2026, ending on 30 January 2026. During this time, the draft Strategy was also presented to Community Forums.	
10. Cabinet adopt Town Centres Strategy.		22-Sep-2026	No	On the Forward Plan (17 July 2026) to go to Cabinet in September 2026.	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
1. Lack of available resource to produce and deliver identified strategies. 2. Lack of strategic direction leads to speculative development that undermines function of town centres.		5	5	1

Council Delivery Plan Q1 2026-27 Monitoring Report - Corporate Risks

Risks	Risk Level	Current Score	Target Score	Original Score
<u>Resourcing</u> Risks: Ability to recruit and retain staff, as well as supporting new priorities and external pressures, affects delivery of the projects and actions in the Council Delivery Plan and service plans. This is particularly relevant for certain service areas where it is especially difficult to recruit and retain staff. Also, impacts of emergency planning events on staff resources. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) increases work pressures and also may affect staff recruitment and retention.		9	8	8
<u>Financial Sustainability</u> Risks: 1. Funding reductions as a result of updates to the funding formula or data used. 2. Sales, fees, and charges income shortfalls, either due to rates not tracking inflation and/or reductions in demand. 3. Not able to make the required decisions to deliver budget savings required. 4. Increases in costs (reductions in income) as a result of inflationary increases, especially linked to inflationary pressures from the global political situation. 5. Uncertainty over levels of pay inflation required. 6. Local government reorganisation adds uncertainty to medium-term financial planning.		7	5	9
<u>Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution</u> Risks: The Government published a White Paper and wrote to all Local Authorities, which required Local Authorities to work together to come up with a proposal that results in unitary rather than 2-tier Councils. It also sought a Strategic Authority structure that allows devolution of powers to a Mayor. Those powers include housing, planning, transport, energy, skills, employment support and more." The risks relate to this being a very substantial project requiring significant change. Specific risks include: - The work to get to a proposal on a unitary structure (noting that proposal needs to be agreed across 11 Councils, although can include multiple options) is significant in terms of the negotiations needed. High additional workload for the collation of information and analysis to support that decision making process, across multiple workstreams with input from Chief Executive (workstream co-lead and co-ordination group), Directors (one as workstream lead) and others. - If there is an inability to agree proposals, it may prolong the period above or lead to a structure being imposed upon Hertfordshire. - Following approval of a new structure, further significant work required to move towards the implementation of that new structure. - Efficiency is mentioned as one of the reasons for moving to a unitary structure. This may lead staff to believe that their job may be at risk. Alternatively, the additional work of moving to unitary status may be seen as too much. - Focusing on a new structure may lead to decision making that is too short-term (getting things done before they can be de-prioritised by a new larger Council with wider priorities) or too long-term (avoid making decisions and leave them to the new unitary Council). The Government have provided guidance that Councils should not make decisions that have negative consequences for new Unitary Councils but unclear how this would work in practice until Government publishes further details as part of a Structural Changes Order. - Under the new Unitary Council(s), some current district services may have to be curtailed e.g., in order to help fund social care. - Ensuring that the views of stakeholders continue to be heard during the transition process and within the new structure.		9	5	9

Risks	Risk Level	Current Score	Target Score	Original Score
Cyber Risks Risks: Prolonged widespread disruption to/failure of IT infrastructure/systems. Possible causes: - Deliberate and unauthorised breaches of security e.g., ransomware, denial of service. - Unintentional/accidental breaches of security e.g., action of individual staff/Members. - Weakness/failure of essential IT infrastructure e.g., loss of internet access. - Evolving risk appetite/profile associated with IT systems, as we pursue increased use of hosted systems and associated risks to individual systems are transferred to suppliers. Leading to: - Inability to deliver services/projects. - Unbudgeted costs to enable recovery. - Reputational damage.		8	8	8

**CABINET
TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2026/27

REPORT OF: Director - Resources

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Resources

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Sustainability;

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the summary position on revenue income and expenditure forecasts for the financial year 2026/27, as at the end of the first quarter. The forecast variance is a £740k decrease in the net working budget of £28.375million, with an ongoing impact in future years of a £84k increase. There are also requests to carry forward unspent budget totalling £303k to fund specific activities in the next financial year. Explanations for all the significant variances are provided in table 3.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet note this report.

2.2 That Cabinet approves the changes to the 2026/27 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £740k decrease in net expenditure.

2.3 That Cabinet notes the changes to the 2027/28 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £387k increase in net expenditure. These will be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2027/28.

2.4 That Cabinet approve the debt write-off as detailed in paragraph 8.19.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

3.2. To comply with the financial regulations in relation to debt write-offs.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

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

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

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

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 21 August 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 Council approved the revenue budget for 2026/27 of £27.524million in February 2026. As at the end of Quarter One, the working budget has increased to £28.375million. Table 1 below details the approved changes to this budget to get to the current working budget:

Table 1 - Current Working Budget

	£k
Original Revenue Budget for 2026/27 approved by Full Council	27,524
2025/26 Third Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring report – 2026/27 budget changes approved by Cabinet (April 2026)	201
2025/26 Revenue Budget Outturn report – 2026/27 budget changes approved by Cabinet (June 2026)	650
Current Working Budget	28,375

- 7.2 The Council is managed under Service Directorates. Table 2 below confirms the current net direct resource allocation of each Service Directorate and how this has changed since the original budget was approved by Council in February 2026.

Table 2 – 2026/27 Service Directorate Budget Allocations

	Original Budget 2026/27	Changes approved at Q3 2025/26	Changes approved at Outturn 2025/26	Other Budget Changes / Transfers	Current Net Direct Working Budget
Service Directorate	£k	£k	£k	£k	£k
Chief Executive	5,099	9	65	(10)	5,163
Customers	4,053	48	75	10	4,186
Enterprise	1,818	186	66	0	2,070
Environment	6,251	(124)	314	0	6,441
Governance	2,540	0	9	0	2,549
Place	977	32	98	0	1,107
Regulatory Services	3,768	42	6	0	3,816
Resources	3,018	8	17	0	3,043
TOTAL	27,524	201	650	0	28,375

- 7.3 The Revenue Budget Outturn 2025/26 report recorded net revenue expenditure of £21.247 million for 2025/26 and a balance on the General Fund reserve at the end of 2025/26 of £18.046million. The report was prepared prior to finalising the draft statement of accounts. Prior to the issue of the accounts, further entries in the ledger were required, including the accounting treatment of the Council's assets held under finance leases.

From the review undertaken as part of the process, two additional properties were identified as meeting the criteria for recognition as right-of-use assets and were therefore transferred to the Council's balance sheet. Previously, the associated rental payments had been charged to the General Fund as operating lease expenditure. The capitalisation of the two properties was financed through a revenue contribution to capital. This increased net revenue expenditure to a revised outturn for 2025/26 of £21.892million, with the closing General Fund balance reduced to £17.401million. The revised General Fund balance is reflected in table 6 below. This change in accounting treatment reduces the lease costs of the assets going forward, so there is a saving against the revenue budget (detailed in table 3 below). Over time the impact on the General Fund will be broadly balanced.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Service Managers are responsible for monitoring their expenditure and income against their working budget. Table 3 below highlights those areas where there are forecast to be differences. An explanation is provided for each of the most significant variances, which are generally more than £25k. The final columns detail if there is expected to be an impact on next year's (2027/28) budget:

Table 3 - Summary of significant variances

Budget Area	Working Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request	Estimated Impact on 2027/28
	£k	£k	£k		£k	£k
All Directorates	78	0	(78)	As detailed in paragraph 7.3 above, the change in accounting treatment of leases results in an initial reduction in the General Fund balance that is then off-set by future revenue savings. The amount varies by year so amounts for 2027/28 onwards will be adjusted as part of the budget setting process.	0	0
All Directorates 2026/27 Staff Pay Award	599	658	+59	The original budget assumed a 3.0% pay award. However, the National Joint Council has since agreed a pay offer of 3.3% with Chief Officers (Directors), and it is therefore expected that the final 2026/27 pay settlements with other Officers will be at least this level. Estimate also includes the impact of the removal of salary point 11 from the North Herts pay scale from 1st April 2026, as explained in the North Herts Council Pay Policy Statement 2026/27 presented to Council in May.	0	59

Budget Area	Working Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request	Estimated Impact on 2027/28
	£k	£k	£k		£k	£k
All Directorates Electricity and Gas Expenditure	420	375	(45)	Forecast outturn is based on updated consumption data and confirmed unit prices for 2026/27. The projected variance is primarily attributable to electricity price inflation this year of 3.1% being much lower than the assumption in the original budget. The budget assumption was based on the supplier forecast of electricity prices received in October 2025, which had predicted a 13.6% increase. The change in gas prices this year has broadly aligned with the budget assumption.	0	(45)
Chief Executive Treasury Investments Interest Income	(491)	(980)	(489)	Increase in estimated interest income receivable relates to significantly higher cash balances available for investment than anticipated when the income budget estimate was prepared at the start of the calendar year. This is due to the reprofiling of planned capital investments. Estimates for future years will be updated when the next Investment Strategy is finalised in January 2027.	0	0
Customers Careline Service Desk Solution	25	0	(25)	Procurement of the service desk management system is expected to be completed in the next financial year. It is therefore requested that the current working budget, carried forward from the prior financial year, is carried forward again into 2027/28 to fund the associated one-off implementation costs. The solution was intended to be developed in-house, with an associated ongoing efficiency of £25k earmarked from 2026/27; however, due to its complexity and the technical resource absorbed with supporting LGR, it must now be procured externally. Budget provision is therefore also required for the ongoing annual support and maintenance costs.	25	25

Budget Area	Working Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request	Estimated Impact on 2027/28
	£k	£k	£k		£k	£k
Customers Careline Call Handling System	34	0	(34)	Procurement of the call handling system is due to be completed in March 2027, with the service contract starting in April. As costs are not expected until the new financial year, approval is requested to carry forward the unspent budget to help fund the one-off implementation costs. Ongoing annual support costs are also expected to be significantly higher than originally estimated, as the market has moved away from locally hosted software towards subscription-based, fully managed cloud platforms.	34	44
Enterprise Directorate Staffing Costs	2,328	2,288	(40)	The Health and Safety Officer post will be kept vacant in this financial year, with specialist health and safety advice provided instead through a service agreement with Hertfordshire County Council. The service period under the current agreement expires at the end of September 2027, with the Council likely to exercise the option to extend it for a further six months to cover the period up to the advent of the new unitary authority from April 2028.	0	(40)
Enterprise Income from the letting of Thomas Bellamy House	(37)	0	+37	The future use of Thomas Bellamy House remains uncertain. An options appraisal is expected to be prepared this year and will consider potential letting arrangements, capital expenditure requirements (including whether prospective tenants could undertake these works on agreed terms), and the potential capital receipt from the sale of the property. Income from letting would not be anticipated prior to Autumn 2027 at the earliest, pending the outcome of the appraisal and subsequent decisions.	0	19 (27/28 only)

Budget Area	Working Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request	Estimated Impact on 2027/28
	£k	£k	£k		£k	£k
Enterprise Royston Town Council Annexe Redevelopment	20	0	(20)	This site requires certainty on the access and collaboration with adjoining owners for a more comprehensive potential re-development, which is taking time to align. Progress has been made in respect of the access alongside renewal of the car park with Hertfordshire County Council. In the meantime, Estates will seek for the site to retain its allocation as a mixed-use redevelopment in the new Local Plan. It is therefore requested that the unspent budget is carried forward again to fund the cost of obtaining appropriate planning and development advice in the next financial year.	20	0
Environment Income from Solar for Business Initiative	(21)	0	+21	This project was closed without any installations being completed, due to difficulties in attracting suitable business interest. As a result, the scheme has not generated any income.	0	21
Place Local Plan Development	460	281	(179)	The Local Plan programme is made up of a number of evidence-based projects, as well as including provision for other costs, such as examination costs. Whilst many of the evidence-based projects are anticipated to be completed in this financial year, a number will span two financial years. The carry forward of the unspent budget is therefore requested to cover the costs of those activities falling in the following financial year.	179	0
Place Development Control – Legal and Consultants expenditure	0	73	+73	Legal and consultants' fees incurred in the first quarter relate to two public planning inquiries. There was a public inquiry into the refusal of planning permission, contrary to officer recommendation, for 280 homes at Barkway Road, Royston. There was also a public enquiry regarding the enforcement notice issued by the Council in relation to the unauthorised conversion into residential flats of The George Hotel in Baldock. The cost associated with a challenge to the decision of the Council was identified as a financial risk when the budget was approved in February 2026.	0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget	Forecast Outturn	Variance	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request	Estimated Impact on 2027/28
	£k	£k	£k		£k	£k
Place Development Control – Software expenditure	45	0	(45)	Investment budget amounts of £20k for the installation of Idox Insights and £25k for the procurement of Agile AI were approved to be carried forward from the prior financial year. Progress with the procurement of Agile AI has however been paused in the new financial year following the Hertfordshire County Council decision not to lead on the procurement and the subsequent collaboration with other Councils not progressing due to LGR. The installation of Idox Insights has also been deferred pending decisions on LGR. It is requested that the allocated budget is carried forward again as these may progress once LGR decisions clarify matters.	45	0
Total of explained variances	3,460	2,695	(765)		303	83
Other minor balances	24,915	24,940	+25		0	1
Overall Total	28,375	27,635	(740)		303	84

8.2 Cabinet are asked to approve the differences highlighted in the table above (a £740k decrease in spend), as an adjustment to the working budget (recommendation 2.2). Cabinet are also asked to note the estimated impact on the 2027/28 budget, a £387k increase in budget, which includes the request to carry forward £303k of unspent budget for specific purposes next year, which will be incorporated in to the 2027/28 budget setting process (recommendation 2.3).

8.3 The original approved budget for 2026/27 (and therefore working budget) included efficiencies totalling £2.894million, which were agreed by Council in February 2026. Any under or over delivery of efficiencies will be picked up by any budget variances (table 3 above). However, there can be off-setting variances which mean that it is unclear whether the efficiency has been delivered. Where this is the case, this will be highlighted. The current forecast at the end of Quarter One is a net underachievement of £59k. This relates to:

- Income from Solar for Business scheme, as highlighted in table three above. £21k underachievement.
- Expenditure saving from the Careline service desk system solution being developed in-house. The planned ongoing saving from the service desk being developed in house will not be achieved, as explained in table 3 above. £25k underachievement. As the new system will not be procured externally until the next financial year, and no expenditure on the new solution is anticipated in the current year, this underachievement has no impact on the projected General Fund balance in the current financial year.

- 8.4 The working budget for 2026/27 includes budgets totalling £1.884million that were carried forward from the previous year. These are generally carried forward so that they can be spent for a specific purpose that had been due to happen in the prior financial year but was delayed into the current year. At Quarter One, it is forecast that £249k of the budget carried forward will not be spent in this year. This relates to the budget carried forward for:
- Careline Service Desk Solution. The £25k budget carried forward will not be spent in this year and is requested to be carried forward again, as highlighted and explained in table three above.
 - Local Plan Development. £179k of the £322k budget carried forward is forecast to be unspent this year and is requested to be carried forward again, as explained in table three above.
 - Planning Control installation of Idox Insights. The £20k budget carried forward will not be spent in this year and is requested to be carried forward again, as highlighted in table three above.
 - Planning Control procurement of Agile AI. The £25k budget carried forward will not be spent in this year and is requested to be carried forward again, as highlighted in table three above.
- 8.5 Six corporate 'financial health' indicators have been identified in relation to key sources of income for the Council in 2026/27. Table 4 below shows the performance for the year. A comparison is made to the original budget to give the complete picture for the year. Each indicator is given a status of red, amber, or green. A green indicator means that they are forecast to match or exceed the budgeted level of income. An amber indicator means that there is a risk that they will not meet the budgeted level of income. A red indicator means that they will not meet the budgeted level of income.
- 8.6 At the end of Quarter One, four of the indicators are green and two of the indicators are red.
- 8.7 The red indicator in respect of Leisure Centres Management Fee income relates to the two one-week closures at Hitchin and Letchworth Leisure Centres originally anticipated in 2025/26 that are now scheduled for 2026/27, following the delay to the delivery of the Leisure Centres Decarbonisation project, as reported at Outturn 2025/26. Corresponding budget provision was approved to be carried forward from 2025/26 to 2026/27 to offset the impact on the General Fund in the current year of the reduction to the management fee income receivable.
- 8.8 The red indicator relating to the forecast shortfall for Commercial waste and recycling income in comparison to the original budget is indicative of the steady decline in the size of the customer base, with a recommended permanent reduction to the income budget approved by Cabinet at Quarter Three 2025/26. The shortfall reported and explained at Quarter Three has been partially reduced by additional demand for commercial food waste collections as, under UK Simpler Recycling rules introduced last year, businesses with 10 or more full-time equivalent employees are legally obliged to separate and recycle their food waste, with smaller businesses required to comply by 31 March 2027.
- 8.9 The high actual to date total relative to the annual budget for Planning Application Fees income is due to the reversal in the current year of the accounting adjustments posted at the end of the prior financial year to ensure that the income totals recorded for 2025/26

only related to activity in 2025/26, i.e. planning applications resolved between 1st April 2025 and 31st March 2026, and is therefore not necessarily indicative of the achievement of surplus planning income in this financial year.

Table 4 - Corporate financial health indicators

Indicator	Status	Original Budget £k	Actual to Date £k	Forecast Outturn £k	Forecast Variance £k
Leisure Centres Management Fee Income	Red	(2,163)	(431)	(2,038)	125
Garden Waste Collection Service Subscriptions	Green	(1,680)	(1,734)	(1,680)	0
Commercial Refuse & Recycling Service Income	Red	(1,306)	(445)	(1,294)	12
Planning Application Fees (including fees for pre-application advice)	Green	(1,484)	(1,527)	(1,484)	0
Car Parking Fees	Green	(1,963)	(508)	(2,088)	(125)
Parking Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)	Green	(573)	(149)	(573)	0

8.10 Table 5 below indicates current activity levels, where these drive financial performance, and how these compare to the prior year to indicate the direction of current trends. As performance against the planning applications fee income budget is generally determined by the number of large applications resolved in the year (rather than the total number of applications received), and this distinction is not captured in the data available, this indicator is omitted from table 5.

Table 5 - Corporate financial health indicators – activity drivers

Indicator	Activity Measure	Quarter One Performance 2026/27	Quarter One Performance 2025/26	Percentage Movement	Direction of Trend
Leisure Centres Management Fee	Number of Leisure Centre visits	490,991	462,992	+6.1%	
Garden Waste Collection Service	Number of active subscriptions	29,612	27,467	+7.8%	
Commercial Refuse & Recycling Service	Number of customers	902	903	-0.1%	
Car Parking Fees	Car park tickets sold / average ticket price sold	299,396 / £1.81	298,891 / £1.68	+0.2% / +7.7%	
Parking Penalty Charge Notices	Number of PCNs issued	4,327	5,780	-25.1%	

FUNDING, RISK AND GENERAL FUND BALANCE

- 8.11 The Council's revenue budget in 2026/27 is funded primarily from Council Tax, Retained Business Rates income and Revenue Support Grant. In November 2025, central government notified the Council of the anticipated Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging payments to the Council in 2026/27. The Council was subsequently notified by Central Government in February 2026 of the amount of Revenue Support Grant and Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant it could expect to receive in 2026/27 and planned accordingly.
- 8.12 Council Tax and Business Rates are accounted for in the Collection Fund rather than directly in our accounts, as we also collect them on behalf of other bodies. Each organisation has a share of the balance on the Collection Fund account. The Council will receive in this year its share of Council Tax Collection Fund surplus and the Business Rates Collection Fund surplus for the prior year, as estimated in January 2026. As reported previously, this means a contribution from the Council Tax Collection Fund to the General Fund of £251k and a contribution to the General Fund of £2.826m from the Business Rates Collection Fund. The final totals recorded at the end of the last financial year was a surplus of £252k in respect of Council Tax and a business rates collection fund surplus of £2.623million. As explained in the Revenue Budget Outturn 2025/26 report, the difference between the January estimates and the final position will affect the calculation of the surplus / deficit for 2026/27 and hence funding available in 2027/28.
- 8.13 While the transfer of the Council Tax surplus amount of £251k is included in the funding total in table 6 below, the business rates surplus amount will be transferred to an earmarked reserve. The balance in the reserve is reviewed annually as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and budget process to assess whether it can be used to support the General Fund budget. The budget estimates for 2026/27 onwards approved by Council in February included a planned total drawdown of £5.75m from the earmarked reserve to the General Fund over the current financial year (as shown in table 6) and the next financial year to mitigate the estimated shortfall in revenue funding.
- 8.14 The Council's expected business rates funding for 2026/27, as shown in the original budget estimates presented to Council in February and included in table 6 below, is £3.027m. This is equal to the baseline funding level (BFL) determined by government, which represents the government's assessment of the business rates income the Council needs to retain to fund its services.
- 8.15 The reset of the business rates retention system on 1st April 2026 updated the Council's business rates baseline (BRB), which is the government's estimate of the total business rates income that North Herts Council can collect locally. The Council currently expects to collect less business rates income in 2026/27 than the BRB. As a result, after paying the business rates tariff to government (the tariff is calculated as the difference between the BRB and the BFL), the amount retained by the Council is forecast to be below its baseline funding level.
- 8.16 In these circumstances, the retention scheme provides a safety net, under which the government makes top-up payments to ensure authorities receive a minimum level of funding relative to their BFL. In previous years this minimum was 92.5% of a local authority's baseline funding level, but for 2026/27 only the government has set the safety net at 100%. Based on the forecast business rates position declared to Government in January, the Council will receive £432k of safety net funding in 2026/27. The final amount

will depend on the actual level of business rates collected; however, the 100% safety net means that business rates funding for 2026/27 will be at least equal to the original budget estimate.

- 8.17 Table 6 below summarises the impact on the General Fund balance of the position at Quarter One detailed in this report.

Table 6 – General Fund impact

	Working Budget	Forecast Outturn	Difference
	£k	£k	£k
Brought Forward balance (1st April 2026)	(17,401)	(17,401)	-
Net Expenditure	28,375	27,635	(740)
Funding (Council Tax, Business Rates, RSG, EPR)	(23,888)	(23,888)	-
Funding from Reserves (including Business Rate Relief Grant)	(3,636)	(3,636)	-
Carried Forward balance (31st March 2027)	(16,550)	(17,290)	(740)

- 8.18 The minimum level of General Fund balance is determined based on known and unknown risks. Known risks are those things that we think could happen and we can forecast both a potential cost if they happen, and percentage likelihood. The notional amount is based on multiplying the cost by the potential likelihood. The notional amount for unknown risks is based on 5% of net expenditure. There is not an actual budget set aside for either of these risk types so, when they occur, they are reflected as budget variances (see table 3). We monitor the level of known risks that actually happen, as it highlights whether there might be further variances. This would be likely if a number of risks come to fruition during the early part of the year. We also use this monitoring to inform the assessment of risks in future years. The notional amount calculated at the start of the year for known risks was £1,682k, and at the end of the first quarter a total of £73k has come to fruition. The identified risk realised in the first quarter relates to:

- Costs associated with a challenge to a decision of the Council, as highlighted and explained in table 3 above - £73k.

Table 7 – Known financial risks.

	£'000
Original allowance for known financial risks	1,682
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 1	(73)
Remaining allowance for known financial risks	1,609

DEBT WRITE-OFFS

- 8.19 The financial regulations require Cabinet approval for most debt write-offs that are over £10k. Cabinet are asked to approve a write-off of a Housing Benefit overpayment debt with a gross value of £16,718. The Council have received subsidy from the Department for Work and Pensions, which makes the net cost £9,336. The original debt relates to overpayments made in 2013 and 2014. £1,738 was recovered via Housing Benefit deductions in 2017 and 2018. It was then not possible to recover through that route. It

was also not possible to recover through earnings as they were self-employed. The debt has been referred to bailiffs but there are no assets available to pay the debt. The person also has Council Tax debt, and efforts will focus on that debt due to the additional recovery options available.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Cabinet has a responsibility to keep under review the budget of the Council and any other matter having substantial implications for the financial resources of the Council. Specifically, 5.7.8 of Cabinet's terms of reference state that it has remit "to monitor quarterly revenue expenditure and agree adjustments within the overall budgetary framework." By considering monitoring reports throughout the financial year Cabinet is able to make informed recommendations on the budget to Council. The Council is under a duty to maintain a balanced budget and to maintain a prudent balance of reserves.
- 9.2 The recommendations contained within this report are to comply with the council's financial regulations with attention drawn to significant budget variances as part of good financial planning to ensure the council remains financially viable over the current fiscal year and into the future. Local authorities are required by law to set a balanced budget for each financial year. During the year, there is an ongoing responsibility to monitor spending and ensure the finances continue to be sound. This means there must be frequent reviews of spending and obligation trends so that timely intervention can be made ensuring the annual budgeting targets are met.
- 9.3 The Council's financial regulations (section 20 of the Constitution) require (at paragraph 15.5) require that write-offs above £10k are approved by Cabinet, except where the debtor is declared bankrupt, is in liquidation or subject to an Individual Voluntary Arrangement, and where the debtor is deceased and there are insufficient funds in the estate to repay the debt

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. As outlined in the body of the report. The process of quarterly monitoring to Cabinet is a control mechanism to help to mitigate the risk of unplanned overspending of the overall Council budget.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

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

- 12.2 For any individual new revenue investment proposal of £50k or more, or affecting more than two wards, a brief equality analysis is required to be carried out to demonstrate that the authority has taken full account of any negative, or positive, equalities implications; this will take place following agreement of the investment.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 Although there are no direct human resource implications at this stage, care is taken to ensure that where efficiency proposals or service reviews may affect staff, appropriate communication and consultation is provided in line with HR policy.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 None

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Antonio Ciampa, Ian Couper	Accountancy Manager, Director - Resources,	antonio.ciampa@north-herts.gov.uk, ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk
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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 None

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**CABINET
TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: FIRST QUARTER CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REVIEW 2026/27

REPORT OF: Director - Resources

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Resources

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Sustainability;

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

To update Cabinet on progress with delivering the Capital Programme for 2026/27, as at the end of June 2026. In addition, to update Cabinet on the impact upon the approved capital programme for 2026/27 – 2035/36. The current estimate is a decrease in spend in 2026/27 of £0.523M and an increase in spend in 2027/28 £0.670M. The most significant individual changes to the forecast spend in 2026/27 for reprofiling into 2027/28 are £0.3M Walsworth Common Pavilion and £0.25M Broadway Gardens Resurfacing.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the forecast expenditure of £13.570M in 2026/27 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approves the adjustments to the capital programme for 2027/28, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend by £0.67M.
- 2.3 That Cabinet notes the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

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

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

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

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 21st August 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 In February 2026, Council approved a capital programme (as part of the overall budget setting report) for the period 2026/27 to 2035/36.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Council has £145.0M of capital assets that it currently owns. The Investment Strategy set out the reasons for owning assets that are not for service delivery, including an assessment of Security, Liquidity, Yield and Fair Value. There have been no significant changes in relation to these since the last quarter.

Capital Programme 2026/27

- 8.2 The full capital programme is detailed in Appendix A and shows the revised costs to date, together with the expected spend from 2026/27 to 2035/36 and the funding source for each capital scheme.
- 8.3 Capital expenditure for 2026/27 is estimated to be **£13.57M**. This is an increase of **£4.438M** on the forecast in the budget report 2026/27 report (reported to Council 26th February 2026). Table 1 below details changes to capital programme.

Table 1- Current Capital Estimates

	2026/27 £M	2027/28 £M	2028/29 to 2035/36 £M
Original Estimates approved by Full Council February 2026	9.132	5.787	18.018
Changes approved by Cabinet in 3rd Qrt 2025/26	3.011		
Changes approved by Cabinet in 2025/26 Capital Outturn report	1.950		
Executive Member – Resources Additional Expenditure for Hitchin Swim Centre Entrance	0.011		
Changes at Q1	-0.534	0.670	
Current Capital Estimates	13.570	6.457	18.018

- 8.4 Table 2 lists the schemes in the 2026/27 Capital Programme that will now start or have an impact on the budget in 2027/28 and onwards:

Table 2: Scheme Timetable Revision:

(Key: - = reduction in capital expenditure, + = increase in capital expenditure)

Scheme	2026/27 Working Budget £'000	2026/27 Forecast £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2027/28 onwards £'000
Walsworth Common Pavilion	300	0	-300	Based on staff capacity, the schemes listed here have been reprofiled into 27/28.	300
Broadway Gardens Resurfacing	250	0	-250		250
Avenue Park Splash Park	70	0	-70		70
Swinburne Rec Hitchin	30	0	-30		30
Other minor changes			-20		20
Total Revision to Budget Profile			-670		670

- 8.5 There are also changes to the overall costs of schemes in 2026/27. These changes total a net increase of £0.136million and are detailed in Table 3

Table 3: Changes to Capital Schemes Commencing in 2026/27:

(Key: - = reduction in capital expenditure, + = increase in capital expenditure)

Scheme	2026/27 Working Budget £'000	2026/27 Forecast Spend £'000	Difference £'000	Comments
S106 Projects	0	140	+140	To date a total of £140K of S106 funds have been released for community schemes.
Other minor changes			-4	
Total revision to scheme spend			136	

- 8.6 Table 4 below shows how the Council will fund the 2026/27 capital programme.

Table 4: Funding the Capital Programme:

	2026/27 Balance at start of year £M	2026/27 Forecast Additions £M	2026/27 Forecast Funding Used £M	2026/27 Balance at end of year £M
Useable Capital Receipts and Set-aside Receipts	0	0.0	0	0.000
S106 receipts			(0.168)	
Other third party grants and contributions			(2.401)	
Revenue Contribution			(1.150)	
Borrowing			(9.851)	
Total			(13.570)	

- 8.7 The availability of third-party contributions and grants to fund capital investment is continuously sought in order to reduce pressure on the Council's available capital receipts and allow for further investment. Additional capital receipts are dependent on selling surplus land and buildings. Ensuring that the Council gets best value from the disposal of land and buildings can take a long time and therefore the amounts that might be received could be subject to change. The Investment Strategy agreed in February 2026 assumed that the Council would generate £3m of capital receipts in this year. A review by the estates team means that no additional capital receipts are now forecast for this year. For one site this is based on letting the site instead, which generates an income and retains future options for the site. The disposal of two other sites can not be completed this year whilst ensuring that best value is achieved. This will have a revenue impact in 2027/28 as it will increase the relative need to borrow (as at 31st March 2027) and therefore lead to a higher Minimum Revenue Provision charge.
- 8.8 The Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) at 31st March 2026 was positive £15.16M. It became positive during 2025/26 as the Council did not have sufficient funding (e.g. Capital Receipts) to finance the Capital programme. As our CFR is now positive, MRP (Minimum Revenue Provision) will be charged to the General Fund in 2026/27. The Council will have to borrow again to fund the Capital programme in this financial year, which will increase the MRP charged to the General Fund in 2027/28. The estimated impact of MRP is included in budget forecasts based on the agreed capital programme and funding assumptions. The impact on the 26/27 revenue budget of MRP will be updated as part of the Q2 revenue monitoring.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Cabinet's terms of reference under 5.6.7 specifically includes "to monitor expenditure on the capital programme and agree adjustments within the overall budgetary framework". The Cabinet also has a responsibility to keep under review the budget of the Council and any other matter having substantial implications for the financial resources of the Council. Asset disposals must be handled in accordance with the Council's Contract Procurement Rules within the Constitution.
- 9.2 Paragraph 4.4.1 c) of the constitution details that Council will approve the budget. Therefore any significant additions to the budget should be approved by Council.
- 9.3 The Council is under a duty to maintain a balanced budget as set out in Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 which states:
"every local authority shall make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs."
- 9.4 Further, Section 28 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires to Council to periodically conduct a budget monitoring exercise of its expenditure and income against the budget calculations during the financial year. There is no statutory requirement of the regularity of such reviews, but quarterly seems to be entirely appropriate. By considering monitoring reports throughout the financial year Cabinet is able to make informed recommendations on the budget to Council. If the monitoring establishes that the budgetary situation has deteriorated, the Council must take such remedial action as it

considers necessary to deal with any projected overspends. This report allows for the periodic monitoring of the budget thereby discharging the Council's statutory obligations.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The main financial implications are covered in section 8 of the report.
- 10.2 The Council operates a tolerance limit on capital projects that depends on the value of the scheme and on this basis over the next ten-year programme it should be anticipated that the total spend over the period could be around £3.2M higher than the budgeted £38.045M.
- 10.3 The capital programme will need to remain under close review due to the limited availability of capital resources and the affordability in the general fund of the cost of using the Council's capital receipts. When capital receipts are used and not replaced the availability of cash for investment reduces. Consequently interest income from investments reduces. £1.0M currently earns the Authority approximately £40k per year in interest. The general fund estimates are routinely updated to reflect changes in income from investments. In the year after the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) reaching zero (i.e. from 2026/27) the Council will need to start charging a minimum revenue provision to the general fund for the cost of capital and will need to consider external borrowing for further capital spend. The current strategy is that the Council will borrow against internal funds for its capital programme. The CFR at the 31 March 2026 was positive £15.162M.
- 10.4 The Council also aims to ensure that the level of planned capital spending in any one year matches the capacity of the organisation to deliver the schemes to ensure that the impact on the revenue budget of loss of cash-flow investment income is minimised.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2 The inherent risks in undertaking a capital project are managed by the project manager of each individual scheme. These are recorded on a project risk log which will be considered by the Project Oversight Group (if applicable). The key risks arising from the project may be recorded on Ideagen (the Council's Performance & Risk management software).

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 There are no direct equalities implications directly arising from the adoption of the Capital Programme for 2026/27 onwards. For any individual new capital investment proposal of £50k or more, or affecting more than two wards, an equality analysis is required to be carried out prior to the agreement of the investment proposal.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to recommendations of this report. The projects at section 8.4 may have impacts that contribute to an adverse impact. As these projects go forward, an assessment will be made where necessary.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no direct human resource implications.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 – Capital Programme Detail including Funding 2026/27 onwards.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Dean Fury	Corporate Support Accountant,	dean.fury@north-herts.gov.uk, Tel: 01462 474 509
Ian Couper	Service Director: Resources	ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk , Tel 01462 474 243
Antonio Ciampa	Accountancy Manager	Antonio.ciampa@north-herts.gov.uk , Tel 04162 474 566

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 [Investment Strategy \(Integrated Capital and Treasury Strategy\)](#)

18.2 <https://srvmodgov03.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s30101/BUDGET%20202627%20REVENUE%20AND%20CAPITAL%20BUDGETS.pdf>

18.3 <https://srvmodgov03.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s30104/Appendix%20C%20Capital%20Programme%202026-36.pdf>

								Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 Funding £	2029/30 Funding £	2030/31 Funding £	2031/32 - 2035/36 Funding £	Funded from Other Grants	Funded from Government Grant	Funded from s106 contributions	Funded from Revenue / IT Reserve	Balance funded from Capital Receipts/ Set- aside receipts/ Borrowing
Air conditioning at Hitchin Town Hall	Enterprise	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000
Air Handling Humidification	Enterprise	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,000
An alternative set of 25 machines that are outside of the Windows Environment for Disaster Recovery	Customers	15,000	0	15,000	0	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	60,000
Audio Improvements to Mountford Hall	Enterprise	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,000
Avenue Park Splash Park	Environment	0	70,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	70,000
Baldock Road Recreation Ground Letchworth	Environment	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Bancroft Lighting	Environment	0	45,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45,000
Broadway Gardens Resurfacing	Environment	0	250,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	250,000
Burials New Management System	Environment	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,000
CCTV at DCO & Hitchin Town Hall	Customers	11,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11,800
CCTV Control Room Upgrade	Resources	0	0	0	0	45,000	0	0	0	0	0	45,000
Charnwood House	Enterprise	370,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	370,000
Community Centres Flat Roof Safety Barriers	Enterprise	43,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43,000
Conference Calling Solutions in Large Meeting Rooms at District Council Offices	Customers	5,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5,100
Council property improvements following condition survey	Enterprise	137,800	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000	250,000	0	0	0	0	587,800
Cyber Attacks - Events Monitoring Software	Customers	2,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,000
Cycle Strategy implementation (GAF)	Place	278,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	278,000	0	0	0
DR Hardware Refresh Inc UPS Battery Pk (unit 3)	Customers	10,400	0	16,000	0	0	32,000	0	0	0	0	58,400
Digital and other signage for car parks in Hitchin, to promote better use of car parks	Place	200,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200,000	0
Everyone Active Projects on NH facilities	Environment	3,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,600
Email Encryption Software Solution	Customers	17,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17,700
Green Infrastructure implementation (GAF)	Place	185,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	185,000	0	0	0
Hitchin Lairage car park - cosmetic coating to four stairwells and replacement windows and doors	Enterprise	69,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	69,100
Hitchin Lido Changing Facilities	Environment	75,000	0	0	0	0	0	75,000	0	0	0	0
Hitchin Swim Centre: Changing Village Refurbishment	Environment	0	225,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	225,000
Hitchin Swim Centre Entrance	Environment	10,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,600
Hitchin Swim Centre: Pool Cover Replacement	Environment	58,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	58,000
Hitchin Swim Centre: Pool Hall Seating Replacement	Environment	73,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	73,000
Hitchin Town Hall Kitchen Enhancement	Enterprise	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
Howard Park Letchworth Path Resurfacing	Environment	23,800	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	33,800
Infrastructure Hardware	Customers	18,000	18,000	190,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	226,000
Installation of trial on-street charging (GAF)	Place	50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	50,000	0	0	0
Ivel Springs Footpaths	Environment	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
King George V Muga Hitchin	Environment	0	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,000	0	0
Laptops - Refresh Programme	Customers	139,300	35,000	40,000	349,000	47,000	234,000	0	0	0	0	844,300
Mel Tax Offices, Royston	Enterprise	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
Members Laptops Refresh Programme	Customers	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Microsoft Enterprise Software Assurance	Customers	0	0	747,000	0	0	1,494,000	0	0	0	0	2,241,000
Museum Storage Facility	Enterprise	2,855,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,855,600

Project	Service Directorate							Funding				
		2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 Funding £	2029/30 Funding £	2030/31 Funding £	2031/32 - 2035/36 Funding £	Funded from Other Grants	Funded from Government Grant	Funded from s106 contributions	Funded from Revenue / IT Reserve	Balance funded from Capital Receipts/ Set- aside receipts/ Borrowing
NH Museum & Community Facility	Enterprise	48,300	0	0	0	0	0	48,300	0	0	0	0
NH Museum Chiller	Enterprise	80,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	80,000
NHLC Lift Replacement	Environment	54,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	54,600
NHLC Pool Cover Replacement	Environment	58,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	58,000
NHLC Water Play Feature	Environment	200,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200,000	0
Northern Transfer Station	Environment	0	0	3,000,000	3,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,000,000
Norton Common Bowls Pavilion	Environment	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	28,000	0	27,000
Norton Common Footpaths	Environment	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000
Norton Common Letchworth Tennis Courts	Environment	48,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	48,700
Off Street Car Parks resurfacing and enhancement	Enterprise	74,400	77,000	70,000	60,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	281,400
Oughtonhead Common Hitchin Weir	Environment	314,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	314,900
Oughtonhead Common Signage and Interpretation	Environment	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000
Parking Charging, Payments & Management	Place	235,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	235,000
Parking Machines Replacement	Place	139,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	139,700
Parking Machines Upgrade - Contactless Payment Facility Installation	Place	38,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	24,200	0	0	13,800
PC's Refresh Programme	Customers	19,000	5,000	8,000	5,000	8,000	0	0	0	0	0	45,000
Playground and Renovation District Wide	Environment	309,000	180,000	180,000	180,000	180,000	900,000	0	0	0	0	1,929,000
Priory Gardens Bandstand	Environment	75,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	75,000
Priory Memorial Gardens MUGA Fencing Royston	Environment	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Private Sector Grants	Regulatory	279,100	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	300,000	0	0	0	0	819,100
Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund	Environment	1,283,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,283,400
Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund Phase 2	Environment	2,761,000	423,000	0	0	0	0	0	1,172,000	0	0	2,012,000
Ransoms Rec Footpaths, Gates and Railing	Environment	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Refuse and Recycling Bins	Environment	167,900	90,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	450,000	0	0	0	0	977,900
Remote testing equipment - Emergency Lights and Water Temperature Monitoring	Enterprise	13,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13,000
Replacement of Newark Close, Royston	Enterprise	55,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,900
Resurface Lairage Car Park	Enterprise	346,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	346,300
Riverside walkway, Biggin Lane	Environment	45,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45,100
RLC Learner Pool	Environment	750,000	4,002,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,752,000	0
S106 Projects	Various	140,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	140,000	0	0
Security - Firewalls	Customers	41,600	0	18,000	0	18,000	36,000	0	0	0	0	113,600
Swinburne Recreation Ground Hitchin	Environment	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Tablets - Android Devices	Customers	24,900	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	0	0	0	0	44,900
Thomas Bellamy House, Hitchin	Enterprise	5,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5,500
Transport Plans implementation (GAF)	Place	250,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	250,000	0	0	0
Walsworth Common Pavilion - contribution to scheme	Environment	0	300,000	0	0	0	0	250,000	0	37,000	0	13,000
Warm Homes	Environment	494,400	478,100	0	0	0	0	0	972,500	0	0	0
Waste and Street Cleansing Vehicles	Environment	0	0	0	0	0	5,500,000	0	0	0	0	5,500,000
WiFi Upgrade	Customers	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Wilbury Hills Cemetery Improvements	Environment	120,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	120,000
		13,569,500	6,457,100	4,488,000	3,798,000	502,000	9,230,000	373,300	2,931,700	260,000	5,152,000	29,327,600

CABINET 22 SEPTEMBER 2026
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*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: FIRST QUARTER TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2026/27

REPORT OF: Director - Resources

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Resources

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Sustainability

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

To update Cabinet on progress with delivering the Treasury Strategy for 2026/27, as at the end of June 2026. In addition, to inform Cabinet of the Treasury Management activities in the first three months of 2026/27. The current forecast is that the amount of investment interest expected to be generated during the year is £0.986M. This is an increase of £0.495M on the original budget.
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2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet notes the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of June 2026 and as set out in Appendix 1.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 There are regular updates and meetings with Treasury advisors MUFG.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 21st August 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 In February 2026, Council approved an Investment Strategy for 2026/27 to 2035/36.
- 7.2 MUFG are contracted to provide Treasury advice. The service includes:
- Regular updates on economic and political changes which may impact on the Council's borrowing and investment strategies
 - Information on investment counterparty creditworthiness
 - Technical updates
 - Access to a Technical Advisory Group.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Council has £145.0M of capital assets that it currently owns. The Investment Strategy set out the reasons for owning assets that are not for service delivery, including an assessment of Security, Liquidity, Yield and Fair Value. There have been no significant changes in relation to these since the last quarter.
- 8.2 The Council invests its surplus cash in accordance with the Investment Strategy (see paragraph 4.1). This surplus cash is made up of capital funding balances, general fund balance, other revenue reserves and provision balances and variations in cash due to the timing of receipts and payments. During the first three months of 2026/27, the Council had an average investment balance of £35.5M and invested this in accordance with the treasury and prudential indicators as set out in the Integrated Capital and Treasury Management Strategy.
- 8.3 The Council has generated £0.540M of interest in 2026/27 from investments already made during the first three months of the year (and accrued interest from deals made in 2025/26). This includes the interest that will be earned during the remaining nine months of the year on investments that have already been made. The average interest rate on all outstanding investments at the 30th June was 4.11%. (31st March was 4.32%). Based on current investments and forecasts of interest rates and cash balances for the remainder of the year, it is forecast that the Council will generate £0.986M of interest over the whole of 2026/27. The increase in interest earned compared to budget is due to higher balances (mainly due to delayed capital spend) and interest rates staying higher than had previously been forecast.
- 8.4 As at 30th June 2026, the split of investments was as shown in the table below.

Banks (call account)	4%
Building Societies	0%
Government	53%
Local Authorities	43%

- 8.5 The level of risk of any investment will be affected by the riskiness of the institution where it is invested and the period that it is invested for. Where an institution has a credit rating this can be used to measure its riskiness. This can be combined with the period remaining on the investment to give a historic risk of default percentage measure. The table below shows the Historic Risk of Default for outstanding investments at 30th June 2026. The most risky investment has a historic risk of default of 0.010%. It should also be noted that in general the interest rate received is correlated to the risk, so the interest income received would be less if the Council took on less risk.

Borrower	Principal Invested £M	Interest Rate %	Credit Rating	Days to Maturity at 30 June	Historic Risk of Default %
Lloyds Bank (call account)	1.125	3.51	AA-	1	0.000
DMO	1.0	3.753	AA-	2	0.000
DMO	2.0	3.71	AA-	2	0.000
DMO	1.0	3.76	AA-	9	0.001
DMO	1.0	3.745	AA-	14	0.001
DMO	1.0	3.73	AA-	16	0.001
DMO	2.0	3.745	AA-	20	0.001
Cheshire East Council	1.0	4.1	AA-	20	0.001
DMO	2.0	3.745	AA-	23	0.001
DMO	1.0	3.73	AA-	30	0.002
DMO	1.0	3.745	AA-	44	0.003
DMO	1.0	3.745	AA-	45	0.003
DMO	1.0	3.785	AA-	49	0.003
DMO	1.0	3.74	AA-	50	0.003
Blackpool Council	1.0	4.15	AA-	57	0.003
Bedford Borough Council	1.0	4.15	AA-	59	0.003
Eastleigh Borough Council	2.0	4.15	AA-	69	0.004
DMO	1.0	3.825	AA-	79	0.005
Lancashire County Council	1.0	4.3	AA-	79	0.005
Walsall Council	2.0	4.25	AA-	84	0.005
Surrey County Council	1.0	4.25	AA-	106	0.006
West Dunbartonshire	2.0	4.20	AA-	111	0.007
London Borough Bexley	1.0	4.35	AA-	121	0.007
Cheshire East Council	1.0	4.20	AA-	168	0.010
	30.125	4.11			

DMO credit rating is the UK credit rating.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Cabinet has a responsibility to keep under review the budget of the Council and any other matter having substantial implications for the financial resources of the Council. By considering monitoring reports throughout the financial year Cabinet is able to make informed recommendations on the budget to Council. The Council is under a duty to maintain a balanced budget. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA's) 'Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2021' requires that committee to which some treasury management responsibilities are delegated, will receive regular monitoring reports on treasury management activities and risks. This

report discharges the Councils statutory and regulatory responsibilities for both the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities.

The Council is required to comply with both Codes through Regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The main financial implications are covered in section 8 of the 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 Risks associated with treasury management and procedures to minimise risk are outlined in the Treasury Management Practices document, TMP1, which is revisited annually as part of the Treasury Strategy review. The risk on the General Fund of a fall of investment interest below the budgeted level is dependent on banks and building societies need for borrowing.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 There are no direct equalities implications directly arising from this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no direct human resource implications.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix 1 – Treasury Management Update

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Dean Fury	Corporate Support Accountant,	dean.fury@north-herts.gov.uk, Tel: 01462 474 509
Ian Couper	Service Director: Resources	ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk , Tel 01462 474 243
Antonio Ciampa	Accountancy Manager	Antonio.ciampa@north-herts.gov.uk , Tel 01462 474 566

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 [Investment Strategy \(Integrated Capital and Treasury Strategy\)](#)

18.2 [Appendix F – Investment Strategy](#)

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Classification: Confidential

Treasury Management Update

Quarterly Report

30TH JUNE 2026

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Treasury Management Update

Quarter Ended 30th June 2026

The CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Code of Practice for Treasury Management 2021 recommends that Members be updated on treasury management activities at least quarterly. This report, therefore, ensures this Council is implementing best practice in accordance with the Code.

1. Economics update

- The first quarter of 2026/27 (April to June) saw:
 - The first sign that the economy is starting to falter with a 0.1% m/m fall in real GDP in April
 - The 3my rate of average earnings growth excluding bonuses stagnate at 3.4% in April
 - CPI inflation stuck at 2.8% in May, with a rise in core CPI inflation from 2.5% to 2.6%
 - The Bank of England leave interest rates unchanged at 3.75% as the economy remains weak
 - The 10-year gilt yield fluctuate between 5.18% and 4.69%, ending the quarter at 4.76%
- The economy performed well in the early stages of the energy shock, with GDP rising by a strong 0.6% q/q between January and March. But that will likely be the high point of the year. Indeed, the 0.1% m/m fall in real GDP in April was the first decline since August 2025 and brought the first signs that the economy is starting to crack.
- Services output contracted by 0.2% m/m in April and activity fell in eight of the 14 services sub-sectors, suggesting the sector is bearing the brunt of the Iran war fallout. Consumer-facing services recorded the biggest monthly fall in output since May 2025, causing the %3m/3m growth rate to ease from 0.9% in March to 0.6% in April, as households cut back on non-energy spending.
- Despite a weak headline number, digging deeper there were some signs of strength. Manufacturing output rose by 0.4% m/m but that was probably in part due to a temporary prop from precautionary stock building. Looking ahead, despite the announced ceasefire of the conflict in the Middle East, Capital Economics expect elevated prices to erode the real spending power of households and businesses, leaving growth to stagnate in Q2 and Q3 this year.
- The fall in the composite Purchasing Manager Index (PMI) from 49.7 in May to a 14-month low of 49.4 in June was entirely driven by services activity. Indeed, the services activity PMI fell from 49.3 to a 41-month low of 48.7 due to rising costs and political uncertainty weighing on consumer confidence. That weakness was partly offset by a rise in the manufacturing output for a third consecutive month but that was due to fears of shortages causing businesses to build stocks. Overall, the composite PMI suggests the strong start to the year will be followed by tepid growth at best. Various prices balances have edged lower more recently as falling oil prices feed through to an easing in cost pressures. While these prices remain too high for the Bank of England, it is clear the upward pressure on prices is easing.,
- With most of the 1.2% m/m rise in retail sales volumes in May driven by promotions and unusually warm weather, this surprisingly strong month is unlikely to be the start of a sustained upturn. Admittedly, the recent fall in oil prices should boost fuel sales as drivers become less cost sensitive, but the GfK measure of consumer confidence in June still points to total sales volumes falling by about 2.0% m/m in June. Moreover, while the war could be over, the expected further rises in inflation and unemployment yet to come through seem consistent with the annual growth rate of retail sales volumes easing from +3.2% in May to about -1.0 this year.
- Public sector net borrowing of £23.3bn in May was above the OBR's forecast of £17.7bn and £5.4bn above May's figure last year. The weak performance in May was mainly due to the strength of government spending, as the rise in Retail Prices Index inflation in March meant debt interest payments were £4.1bn higher than in May 2025, £3.3bn higher than the OBR anticipated in March and the highest in any May on record. Tax receipts of £85.5bn were also below OBR predictions.

- The weak performance in May has come before the full impact from the energy price shock hits. The combination of further energy price support, higher inflation and the weakening economy may cause borrowing to rise from 4.2% of GDP in 2025/2026 to 4.4% in 2026/2027, above the OBR's March forecast of 3.6%. If Chancellor Reeves is replaced, there is scope for borrowing to be even higher.
- The first quarter of 2026 saw significant weakening of the labour market. While the latest PAYE employment figure for May saw a 2,000 rise, that barely offset the big 53,000 drop in April and meant employment was still 64,000 (0.2%) lower than before the start of the Iran war and 0.4% lower than a year ago. Moreover, the number of job vacancies on the single-month measure fell for the fourth month in a row in May and the claimant count saw the largest monthly rise since July 2024.
- In addition to some signs of stabilisation in the labour market figures, the recent easing in pay growth appears to have stalled. Despite some further easing in the private sector pay below the 3.25% that the Bank of England considers consistent with CPI inflation falling to target, the 3myy growth rate of average earnings stayed at 4.4% in April. Excluding bonuses, it stayed at 3.4% whilst regular public sector pay growth accelerated from 4.8% 3myy to 5.1% 3myy.
- Like wage growth, CPI inflation held steady in May at 2.8%. There wasn't much support to inflation from energy effects. The 0.3% m/m fall in fuel prices was smaller than the 1.6% m/m drop last May and meant fuel inflation rose only a bit from 23.0% to 24.6%. After rising to 129.6%, heating oil inflation eased to 95.6%. And the 13.5% rise in the Ofgem utility price cap, which will add 0.6 percentage points (ppts) to CPI inflation, doesn't take effect until 1st July. With food & drink inflation easing to its lowest rate since late 2024, higher energy costs do not seem to be boosting other items of the CPI just yet.
- The delayed rise in utility prices and the lagged indirect energy effect will lift CPI inflation over the next nine months, perhaps to around 3.6%. Even so, the weak labour market and soft economic backdrop will prevent second-round effects, allowing inflation to fall to 2.0% next year.
- There were two monetary policy committee (MPC) meetings in Q2 2026 where Bank rate was yet again left unchanged at 3.75%. Even so, the tone in recent meetings has been increasingly hawkish, with two MPC members voting for a rate hike in June compared to just one in April. While energy prices may be falling, the MPC won't want to unwind some of the tightening in financial conditions priced into the markets. And while there is quite a difference between this energy shock and the one following the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, the Bank of England will want to steer clear of allegations of taking too long to act. Nevertheless, we suspect a weak labour market, and soft activity will keep rates at 3.75% this year, with cuts thereafter leaving Bank rate at 3.5% by the end of next year and 3.25% by the spring of 2028.
- April to June brought more volatility for 10-year Gilt yields. After ending March at 4.92%, the 10-year Gilt shot up to 5.18% in mid-May, its highest level since 2008. While that largely reflects the surge in energy prices, sticky domestic inflation concerns and a rising UK political risk premium also put some upward pressure on the yield at the margin.
- Since, positive developments in the US-Iran conflict has led to a fall in oil and gas prices. The 10-year Gilt yield has generally traced that move, falling back to 4.7% in June. This rally in Gilts has also been supported by the Bank of England keeping rates on hold and some reassurance on the fiscal outlook from the likely replacement of Starmer's leadership with Burnham's. Indeed, while financial markets had been pricing in around four policy rate hikes over the next year or so, they are now pricing in just one rate hike over the coming year. While the full inflationary impact of the war in Iran is yet to be felt, we still think a weaker labour market and subdued growth will prevent second-round effects.
- The FTSE 100 has been slowly gaining back some of the losses of the previous quarter. While the index dropped from an all-time high of around 10,900 in late February to 10,176 by the end of March as the ongoing war weighed on sentiment, the FTSE 100 regained some ground by the end of June. Indeed, the index has increased by around 3.3% over the quarter, rising from 10,176 to 10,516 and volatility has returned to historical norms.
- Nonetheless, with stocks in the energy sector generally providing negative returns amid falling energy prices, the large weighting of the sector in the FTSE 100 has led the index to underperform most peers in common currency terms. But returns from stocks in other sectors, particularly financials, helped to offset some of this weakness. Looking ahead, Capital Economics expect tech sectors to outperform as enthusiasm for AI builds, potentially pushing the FTSE 100 index up above 11,000 before a bursting of the AI bubble causes the index to fall back to 10,500 in 2027.

MPC meetings: 30th April & 18th June 2026

- There were two Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meetings this quarter. The first, on 30th April, saw Bank Rate stay at 3.75% with an 8-1 split vote in favour of that decision. One member dissented and voted for a 0.25% increase to 4%, citing inflation concerns, something generally noted as a primary concern within the minutes and reflecting heightened caution due to potential energy supply shocks caused by the Middle East conflict.
- By the time the MPC next met on 18th June, the hawkish split widened, with two members voting to raise rates to 4%. However, with headline CPI inflation sticking at 2.8%, the market's sentiment that there may, but only may, be a need for a single rate increase over the next few months seems to be aligned to the way the MPC is thinking and is also similar to our own view of rates staying at 3.75% but with upside risk.

2. Interest rate forecasts

The Council has appointed MUFG Corporate Markets as its treasury advisors and part of their service is to assist the Council to formulate a view on interest rates. The PWLB rate forecasts below are based on the Certainty Rate (the standard rate minus 20 bps) which has been accessible to most authorities since 1st November 2012. For Housing Revenue Account authorities, the lower Housing Revenue Account (HRA) PWLB rate has also been available since 15 June 2023 (standard rate minus 60 bps) but is available for HRA borrowing only.

The latest forecast was updated on 25th March 2026:

MUFG Corporate Markets Interest Rate View 25.03.26												
	Jun-26	Sep-26	Dec-26	Mar-27	Jun-27	Sep-27	Dec-27	Mar-28	Jun-28	Sep-28	Dec-28	Mar-29
BANK RATE	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.50	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25
3 month ave earnings	4.00	3.90	3.80	3.80	3.70	3.50	3.50	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30	3.30
6 month ave earnings	4.20	4.10	4.00	3.90	3.90	3.70	3.70	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
12 month ave earnings	4.60	4.50	4.40	4.20	4.20	4.00	4.00	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.80	3.80
5 yr PWLB	5.00	5.00	4.90	4.80	4.60	4.40	4.20	4.20	4.10	4.10	4.10	4.10
10 yr PWLB	5.50	5.50	5.40	5.30	5.10	4.90	4.70	4.70	4.60	4.60	4.60	4.60
25 yr PWLB	6.00	6.00	5.90	5.80	5.60	5.40	5.20	5.20	5.20	5.20	5.10	5.10
50 yr PWLB	5.80	5.80	5.70	5.50	5.40	5.20	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.90	4.90

- Money market yield forecasts are based on expected average earnings by local authorities for 3 to 12 months.
- The MUFG Corporate Markets forecast for average earnings are averages i.e., rates offered by individual banks may differ significantly from these averages, reflecting their different needs for borrowing short-term cash at any one point in time.

The forecast has proved robust over the period since the end of March, setting out a central view that short and long-dated interest rates will start to fall once it is evident that the Bank of England will not have to contend with second-round inflationary effects emanating from the conflict in the Middle East. Nonetheless, the longer dated part of the forecast also reflects the poor state of the public finances and the uncertainty pertaining to the likely Prime Ministership of Andy Burnham from 20th July.

Overall, our central view is that monetary policy is sufficiently tight for the likely uptick in CPI inflation through the remainder of 2026 if growth remains tepid. We forecast the next reduction in Bank Rate to be made in H2 2027, with Bank Rate falling to a low of 3.25% by the start of 2028.

3. Annual Investment Strategy

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2026/27, which includes the Annual Investment Strategy, was approved by the Council on 26/02/26. In accordance with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice, it sets out the Council's investment priorities as being:

- Security of capital
- Liquidity
- Yield

The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return (yield) on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity, aligned with the Council's risk appetite. In the current economic climate, over and above keeping investments short-term to cover cash flow needs, there is a benefit to seeking out value available in periods up to 24 months.

Creditworthiness.

There have been few changes to credit ratings over the quarter under review. However, officers continue to closely monitor these, and other measures of creditworthiness to ensure that only appropriate counterparties are considered for investment purposes.

Investment counterparty criteria

The current investment counterparty criteria selection approved in the TMSS is meeting the requirement of the treasury management function.

CDS prices

For UK and international banks, these have remained low, and prices are not misaligned with other creditworthiness indicators, such as credit ratings. **Nevertheless, it remains important to undertake continual monitoring of all aspects of risk and return.**

Investment balances

The average level of funds available for investment purposes during the quarter was **£35.5m**. These funds were available on a temporary basis, and the level of funds available was mainly dependent on the timing of precept payments, receipt of grants and progress on the capital programme.

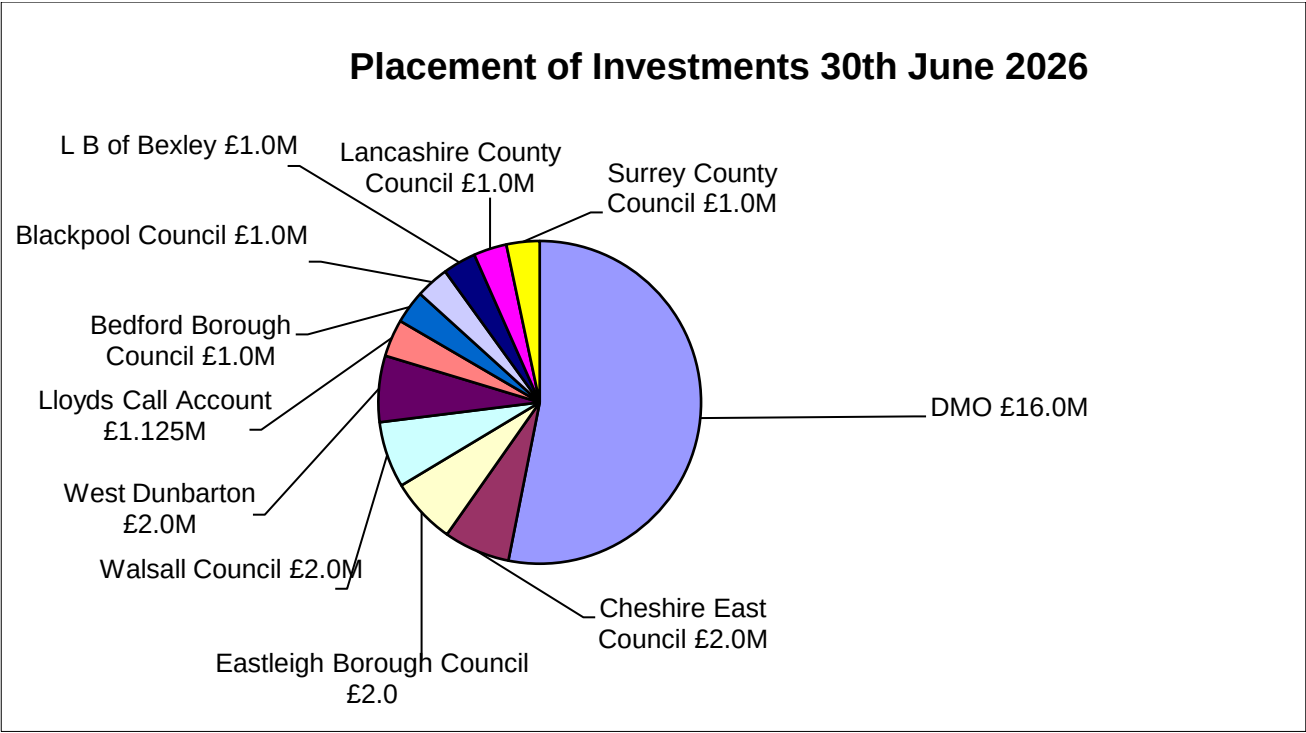
	Amount	Average
	£	Interest Rate %
Managed By NHC		
Banks	1,125,000	3.51
Building Societies	0	0
Local Authorities	13,000,000	4.22
Government	16,000,000	3.76
Total	30,125,000	4.11

In percentage terms, this equates to:

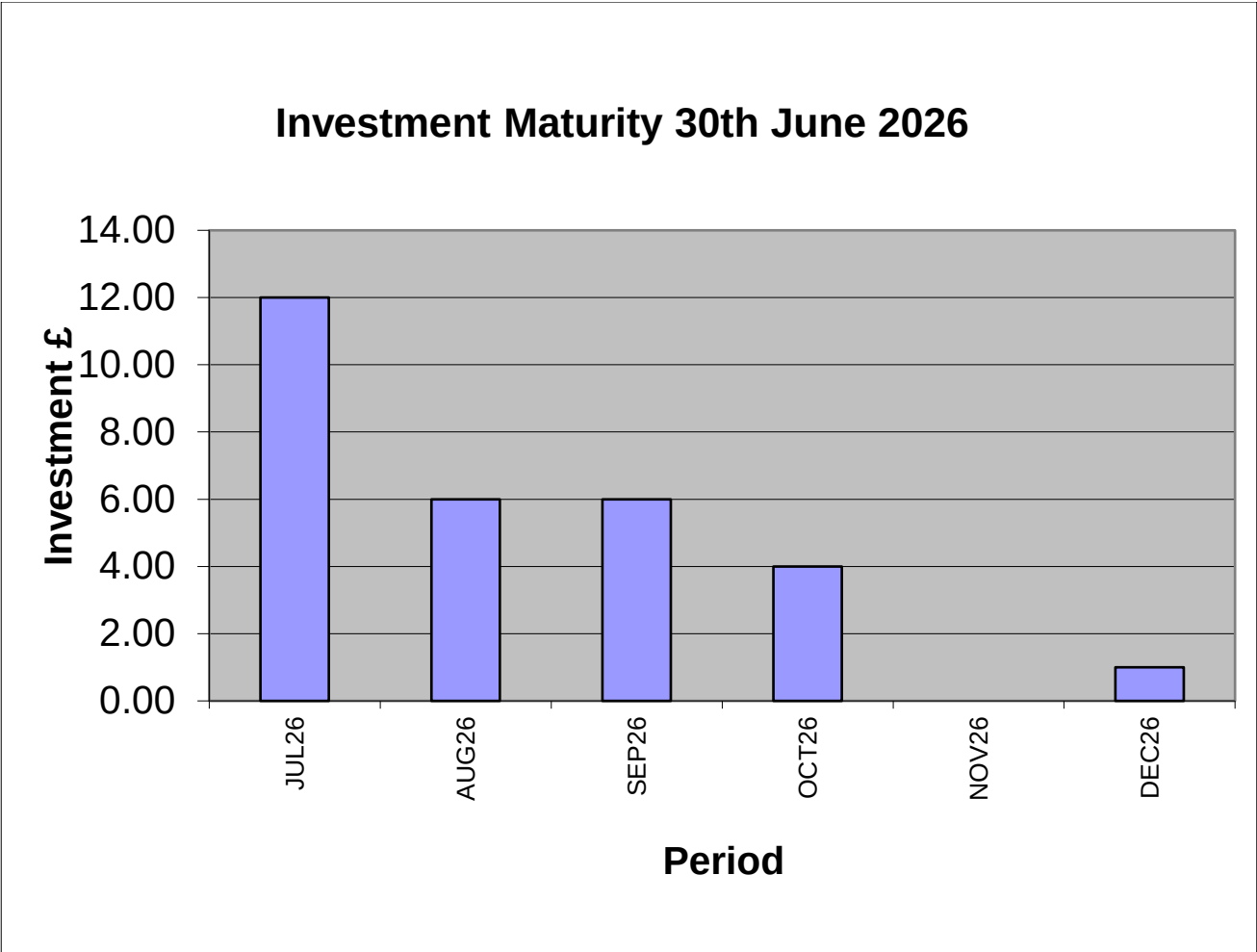
	Percentage
Government	53
Banks	4
Local Authorities	43
Building Societies	0

The approved 26/27 strategy is that no more than 50% of investments should be placed with Building Societies and Property Funds with a maximum value of £11M. The value at 30 June was zero.

The pie chart below shows the spread of investment balances as at 30 June 2026. This is a snapshot in time that demonstrates the diversification of investments.

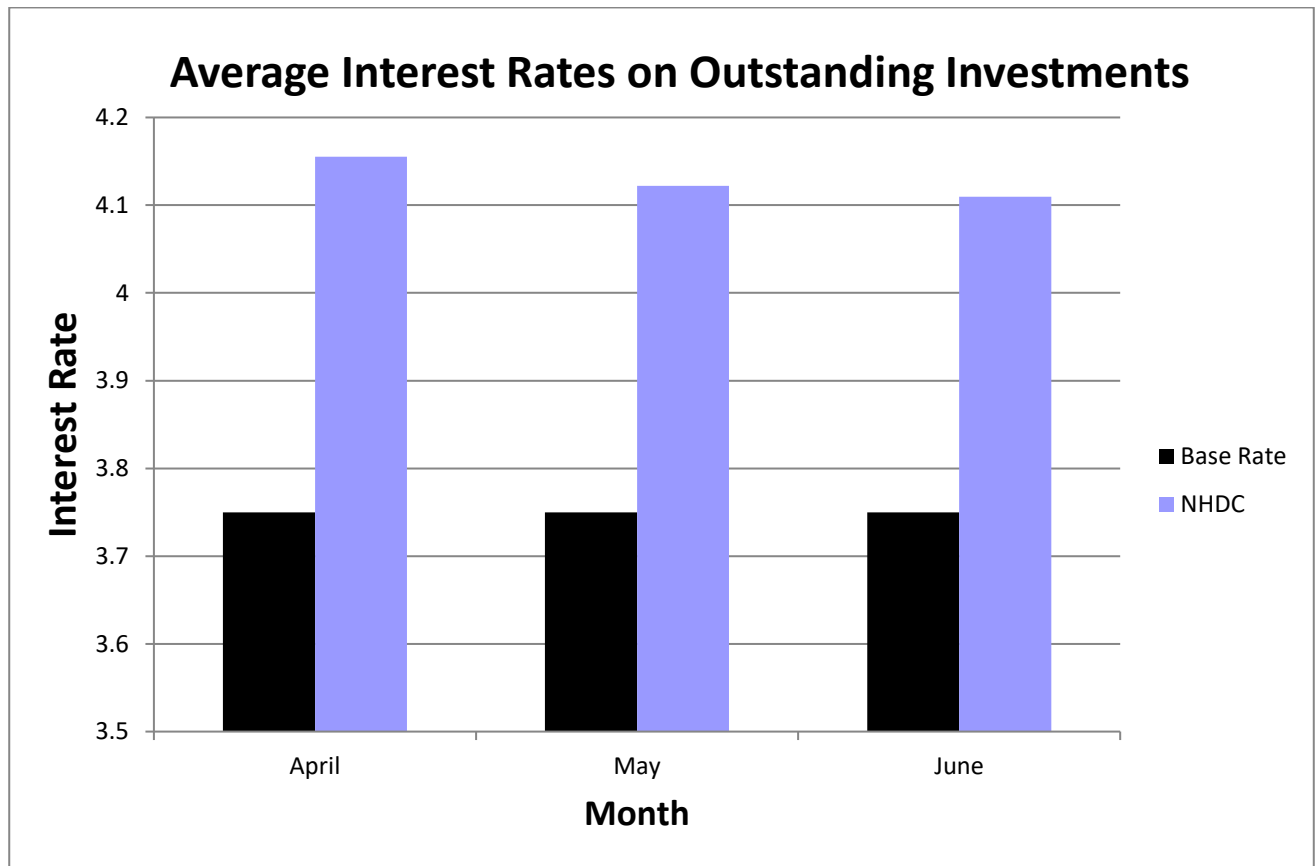


The chart below shows the Council's investment maturity profile.



£1.125M was held in a Lloyds bank Call Account on 30/06/26.

The graph below shows the average rate of interest on outstanding investments at 30 June.



Approved limits

Officers can confirm that the approved limits within the Annual Investment Strategy were not breached during the quarter ended 30th June 2026.

4. Borrowing

No borrowing was undertaken during the quarter ended 30 June 2026.

It is anticipated that new external borrowing will be undertaken during this financial year but this is dependant on the spend in the Capital Programme.

Loans Outstanding at 30 June 2026:

	Amount	Average Interest Rate
	£	%
Public Works Loans Board	£305k	10.96

Estimated outstanding debt:

Year	Forecast Borrowing £m	Forecast other long-term liabilities £m *	Less: Internal Borrowing £m	Forecast Total External Debt £m	Operational Boundary £m	Authorised Limit £m
31 st March 2026 (Forecast)	15.472	0.282	15.167	0.587	26.0	31.0
31 st March 2027 (Forecast)	22.675	0.248	22.385	0.538	29.0	34.0
31 st March 2028 (Forecast)	23.736	0.213	23.461	0.488	29.0	34.0
31 st March 2029 (Forecast)	27.214	0.178	26.949	0.443	32.0	37.0
31 st March 2030 (Forecast)	31.004	0.143	30.747	0.400	35.0	40.0

* Comprises the finance lease relating to Letchworth Multi-storey car park

The external borrowing forecast can be used to give an indication of the borrowing that may be required, which is combined with outstanding existing borrowing. The Council will also borrow for short-term cash-flow needs if required. The actual borrowing that is taken out will depend on the latest forecasts and the offers that are available at the time that it is required. There will also be a consideration of when any other borrowing becomes due, with the aim of achieving a spread of these dates. This is to try and avoid refinancing risk. The Council is required to set indicators for the maturity structure of its borrowing. Given the low level of borrowing that the Council currently has and is forecast to have, it is considered appropriate to maintain full flexibility as to the exact duration of any borrowing undertaken.

To manage refinancing risk, the Council sets limits on the maturity structure of its borrowing. However, these indicators are set relatively high to provide sufficient flexibility to respond to opportunities to repay or take out new debt (if it was required), while remaining within the parameters set by the indicators.

Maturity Period	Lower %	Upper %
Under 12 months	0	100
12 months to 2 years	0	100
2 years to 5 years	0	100
5 years to 10 years	0	100
10 years to 20 years	0	100
20 years and above	0	100

The Prudential Indicator below considers the cost of borrowing as a % of the net revenue budget of the Council.

Year	Estimated cost of borrowing £m	Forecast net revenue budget £m	Estimated cost of borrowing as a % of net revenue budget
2026/27	1.481	27.713	5.344
2027/28	1.572	26.740	5.879
2028/29	1.458	22.073	6.605
2029/30	1.720	22.377	7.686
2030/31	1.889	22.494	8.398

The Council is required to set a prudential indicator that estimates financing costs (cost of borrowing less income from investments) as a percentage of its net revenue budget.

Year	Estimated cost of borrowing £m	Less: Forecast of interest earned £m	Net Financing Costs £m	Forecast net revenue budget £m	Estimated cost of borrowing as a % of net revenue budget
2026/27	1.481	0.986	0.495	27.713	1.786
2027/28	1.572	0.322	1.250	26.740	4.675
2028/29	1.458	0.259	1.199	22.073	5.432
2029/30	1.720	0.144	1.576	22.377	7.043
2030/31	1.889	0.144	1.745	22.494	7.758

5. Debt rescheduling

No debt rescheduling was undertaken during the quarter.

6. Compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits

The prudential and treasury Indicators are shown in Appendix 1.

It is a statutory duty for the Council to determine and keep under review the affordable borrowing limits. During the quarter ended 30th June 2026, the Council has operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2026/27. The Director of Resources reports that no difficulties are envisaged for the current or future years in complying with these indicators.

All treasury management operations have also been conducted in full compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

APPENDIX 1: Prudential and Treasury Indicators for 2026-27 as of 30th June 2026

Treasury Indicators	2025/26 Budget £'000	30.06.25 Actual £'000
Authorised limit for external debt	31,000	305
Operational boundary for external debt	26,000	305
Gross external debt	5,782	305
Investments	14,600 Average for year	30,125
Net borrowing	-8,818	-29,820

Maturity structure of fixed rate borrowing - upper and lower limits		
Under 12 months	15	15
12 months to 2 years	15	15
2 years to 5 years	25	25
5 years to 10 years	0	0
Over 10 years	250	250

Upper limit for principal sums invested over 365 days	5,000	0
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Prudential Indicators	2025/26 Budget £'000	30.06.25 Actual £'000
Capital expenditure	14,093	822 (excluding outstanding accruals)
Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	21,931	15,908
In year borrowing requirement	3,171	746

Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream	3.37%	-0.63%
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CABINET TUESDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2026

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: Grounds Maintenance Contract Review

REPORT OF: Director - Environment

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Environment

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Sustainability

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 To review the grounds maintenance contract and seek approval for a five-year contract extension with John O'Conner (Grounds Maintenance) Ltd until 31 March 2032.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet approve a five-year contract extension of the Grounds Maintenance Contract with John O'Conner (Grounds Maintenance) Ltd to 31 st March 2032.

2.2. That Cabinet comment on the proposal at 8.1 to include a proposal as part of the budget setting process for 2027/28, to enhance the contract specification for border maintenance at key town centre green spaces – at a cost of approximately £25k per year.
--

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. A contract review process has been undertaken in the lead up to a potential break clause (31 March 2027) in the existing contract with John O'Conner for delivering our grounds maintenance services. The recommendations arise following that review process.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 We could have gone out for a full procurement exercise for a new contract; however, this was discounted for the following reasons:

- The contract performance is monitored by the NHDC Greenspace team, and the team are satisfied with the current contractor's performance.
- The current Contract term is for 10 years up until 31 March 2032, with a five-year break clause, therefore there are no legal reasons that it would be necessary to go out to procurement.

- Procuring a new contract of this size would be costly and resource intensive. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) also means that procuring a contract for more than 5 years would not necessarily be in the best interests of the new authority, particularly given the recent government announcement which has amended the initial timeline

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. A project oversight group was set up to provide advice and oversight of the contract extension process. This includes the Director – Environment, members of the Greenspace team and senior legal and finance representatives. The Executive Member for Environment has been briefed on the contract extension and is supportive.
- 5.2. The contractor (hereafter JOC) has also been fully engaged in the review process to identify any potential changes to the contract specification.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 19th June 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 The current contract term commenced on 1 April 2017 for a period of 10 years up to 31 March 2027, but with an agreed mutual break clause of 31 March 2022. At its meeting on 29 June 2021, Cabinet agreed to a change in contract specification, implemented from 1 April 2022 for a period of 10 years, with a mutual break clause after 5 years – extending the current arrangements by a further 5 years to 31 March 2032.
- 7.2 Significant changes to the contract specification were made in the last two consecutive contract review processes, which resulted in savings to the Council which are still being realised.
- 7.3 In addition the Council's Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Settle for management of their ground's maintenance requirements is due to expire on 31 March 2027. At the time of writing the report, the Council is awaiting a decision from Settle Housing – (now SettleParadigm) as to whether they wish to continue for a further five years. The contract review process with John O Conner has therefore looked at both options, including settle's work and one without.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 As significant savings options were agreed during the last two rounds of contract reviews, there was very limited opportunity to consider major contract specification variations, without significantly compromising the quality of the service provided to residents. However, some minor variations are proposed as below:
- Rose pruning has been removed, due to revised meterage and specification resulting in cost savings.
 - Leaf collection reviewed. Leaves only collected in areas such as play parks, paths, steps and selection of other key areas. Leaves not to be collected in natural areas of greenspace, due to the benefits of leaf composition to the soil.
 - The use of pesticide in borders to be stopped at all sites. Pesticides will only be used in a small selection of hard standing areas, submitted to JOC and costed. This will now be within the contract price, rather than charged as an additional cost (Variation Order).
 - In addition, it is proposed to increase the frequency of JOC visits to key town greenspaces to improve standards. Border maintenance including weeding, shrub pruning and general presentation would be carried out twice per month at these important parks. It is proposed that this enhancement be considered as part of the budget setting process. This would be an additional annual cost of £25k.
 - Water fountains were removed from the town centre parks several years ago and therefore there is a small saving on maintenance costs.
 - There have been some amendments to quantities and rates, for example collection of dual - litter bins and dog bins.
 - Water flushing at sports pitches has been removed from the contract, as this is now being managed by property services.
- 8.2 As part of its Sustainability Strategy the Council has an action to “Work with our contractor to transition the green space service contract fleet to fully electric, if feasible, and to fully electric machinery by 2030.” Therefore, as part of the contract review, the greenspace team and contractor have been reviewing options for how we could make progress towards delivering this action.
- 8.3 Our contractor has increased the number of items of electric equipment (18% of electric machinery) and they plan to roll this out further during the next five years. There are however some limitations with the roll out of electric vehicles. The vehicles used on contract need to carry heavy machinery and unfortunately this means that with the additional weight of an EV battery, operationally it would mean the vehicles would largely end up being overweight. Additionally, the operatives take their vehicles home with them overnight which complicates the potential transition, due to the need to install suitable charging points.

- 8.4 There is also very limited space at the Knowles Peace depot to install adequate EV charging infrastructure. For all the above reasons, currently it is not deemed feasible to have 100% electric vehicles on the contract. However, the team will continue to monitor the situation and the further rollout of electric machinery.
- 8.5 Separately, following the rollout of the use of Hydro-treated vegetable oil (HVO) for the large vehicles on the waste contract, which reduces emissions from diesel by around 90%, this was also considered as an alternative to rolling out electric vehicles on the grounds maintenance contract. As part of the contract review process, JOC were asked a number of questions regarding electric machinery and vehicles, and the potential roll out of HVO, to establish what feasible options are. (See Appendix B). The roll out of HVO is complicated as JOC do not currently have a fuel tank on site, as operatives purchase fuel at service stations. This would need to be installed at a cost of up to around £18,000. JOC also indicated that this model of refuelling would impact on productivity, adding on refuelling time, due to only having the one tank to refuel. This means they would also have to travel to the depot to refuel, so increasing mileage. HVO prices are also currently expensive compared to diesel, although there is the ability to mix HVO with diesel. However, one of the key factors in delaying introduction of HVO is the uncertainty over future arrangements post LGR. For example, the long-term depot situation and procurement of any contracts post 2032. For all these reasons, the potential use of HVO will be put on hold.
- 8.6 Under the new unitary arrangements, some of the current NHDC greenspaces which are currently maintained under the contract (those in Royston), will move over to the Eastern authority. The implications of this will be fully considered by both the Central and Eastern authorities in due course. Due to the need for certainty over procurement of vehicles, a shorter extension on the existing contract term would be likely to increase costs and therefore is not recommended.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Cabinet has remit under 5.7.15, "To oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council".
- 9.2 The procurement and contract arrangements will be subject to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and applicable procurement legislation.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Due to the minor variations identified at 8.1, there has been a net increase in the contract cost of £6k. The total annual contract value (including settle housing would be £2.261m (subject to inflationary increases)
- 10.2 The total annual contract value without settle housing would be £1.795m (subject to inflationary increases). The Settle Housing SLA with the Council generates a £50,000 management fee income, set against £40,000 payable to John O Connor, resulting in a net £10,000 income to the Council. This net £10k income would be lost if settle do not continue with a further SLA.

- 10.2 There is an additional optional increase in costs of £25k for enhanced border maintenance in town centre parks. Cabinet are asked to consider whether to include this in the revenue investment proposals for 2027/28.
- 10.3 There are no direct capital implications arising from this decision. However, during the new contract period it is likely that JOC will need to obtain new vehicles. Under accounting rules there is likely to be a need for the Council to treat these as its assets. This will be addressed through the budget setting process. The actual payments to JOC will still be in accordance with the agreed contract sum.

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 LGR may create uncertainty around future council structures, responsibilities and service arrangements which could affect the timing, scope and longer-term arrangement for the grounds maintenance contract. There are issues specifically around boundary change, due to Royston moving to the Eastern authority. These issues will be picked up as part of the relevant LGR workstream.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 There are no equalities implications as a result of this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report as the contract was originally procured prior to formal social value requirements coming into effect. However, as part of the contract review, JOC have agreed to produce a social value delivery plan, progress on which would be monitored at Partnership Board meetings.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 An Environmental Impact Assessment has been undertaken. Please see Appendix A. The impacts of the contract have been reviewed and there are mitigation measures included in the assessment which relate to use of Electric Vehicles and machinery. These actions will be monitored during monthly contract meetings, as outlined in section 7 of the assessment.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 Under the existing Service Level Agreement with settle, the Council's Greenspace team manage and monitor the contractual relationship with John O'Conner on behalf of Settle. Therefore, if Settle do not opt into a further SLA period, there will be some staffing implications for the Greenspace team to consider. This will be reviewed once we have a decision from Settle.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A - Environmental Impact Assessment
16.2 Appendix B - Fuel Alternative Feasibility Questions/Answers

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Sarah Kingsley	Director - Environment	sarah.kingsley@north-herts.gov.uk
Alan North	Greenspace Service Manager	Alan.north@north-herts.gov.uk
Ian Couper	Director – Resources	ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk
Ellie Hollingsworth	Policy and Strategy Team Leader	Ellie.hollingsworth@north-herts.gov.uk
Natasha Jindal	Governance Consultant	Natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk
Tim Everitt	Performance and Risk Officer	Tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 None.

Environmental Impact assessment

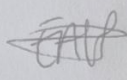
1. Name of activity:	Greenspace Grounds Maintenance Contract Renewal				
2. Main purpose of activity:	To renew the contract between North Herts and John O’Conner for grounds maintenance operations				
3. List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:	Research was carried out with JOC during the contract review period to establish feasibility around electric vehicles, electric machinery and the use of HVO for fuelling vehicles.				
Area of Potential Impact	Examples to Consider (non-exhaustive)	Neutral (X)	Negative (X)	Positive (X)	<i>Describe the contribution/impact on the area that the decision may have - assess whether this impact is a negative or positive or neutral one.</i> Negative: What are the risks? Positive: What are the benefits?
					Negative
1. Impact on greenhouse emission and support adaption to the effects of climate change	Will energy needs be met through renewable sources?				A high percentage of the work under the contract will be undertaken using diesel-fuelled vehicles.
	Will it reduce emissions through retrofitting new technology?		X		Positive
	Will it reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing energy consumption and the need to travel?				An increased percentage of the work under the contract will be undertaken using equipment powered by electricity, including 1 EV, 2 hybrid vehicles, and 18% of John O’Conner’s equipment.
2. Use of natural resources including water and energy	Will it reduce water consumption?				Negative
	Will it reduce energy consumption?		X	X	John O’Conner uses some electricity and water to fuel their vehicles and equipment as part of their grounds

					maintenance operations under the terms of their contract with North Herts.
					Positive
					Efficient machinery, reduced unnecessary journeys and sustainable planting approaches can reduce fuel, energy and water consumption across grounds maintenance operations.
3. Minimisation of flood risks to the area (i.e. promotion of SUD's. protect surface and ground water quality)	Will it minimise flood risk from all sources of flooding? Will it reduce property damage due to storm events/ heavy rainfall by improving flood resistance and flood resilience?			x	Negative
					Intensive maintenance or inappropriate management of soils and drainage could potentially increase surface run off or reduce natural infiltration
					Positive
					Maintaining grassland, trees, planting and drainage features can support natural water infiltration and contribute to local flood resilience.
4. To protect, enhance and create environments that encourage and support biodiversity	Will it protect, enhance and increase biodiversity and protect habitats? Will it improve access to and promote educational value of sites of biodiversity interest?			x	Negative
					Frequent mowing, intensive horticultural management or inappropriate vegetation clearance could reduce habitat value and disturb wildlife if poorly managed.
					Positive

					Appropriate grassland management, tree care, wildflower areas and reduced pesticide can protect habitats, increase biodiversity and improve ecological value.
5. To improve Air Quality <i>(air quality describes how polluted the air we breathe is)</i>	Will it improve air quality? Will it reduce emissions of key pollutants?		X	X	Negative
					Ground maintenance machinery can generate emissions during intensive maintenance operations.
					Positive Well maintained trees, shrubs and vegetation contribute to air quality, while efficient machinery and reduced vehicle movements can help reduce emissions.
6. To reduce need to travel, the use of private motorised vehicular transport as well as encourage walking, cycling, and use of public transport	Will it encourage increased walking, cycling and use of public transport? Will it increase the proportion of journeys using modes other than a car?		X	X	Negative
					Vehicle movement between sites increase exhaust emissions.
					Positive Maintaining grass verges, paths, parks and green spaces provide safe and attractive and accessible route that can encourage walking and cycling.
				X	Negative

7. To reduce waste production and increase recycling, recovery and reuse of waste	Will it lead to reduced consumption of materials and resources?				
	Will it reduce household waste?				Positive
	Will it reduce construction waste?				John O'Conner empty bins in parks under the contract with North Herts which includes recycling bins and they separate out recycling in bins on some sites.
	Will it increase recovery recycling and re-use?				
8. To enhance the public realm and street improvements	Will it reduce litter?				Negative
	Will it enhance the quality of public realm?			x	Positive
					High-quality maintenance of parks streetscapes, and green space improves the appearance and usability of public areas and can discourage litter and antisocial behaviour.
9. To protect, enhance and seek opportunities to increase open space	Will it improve open space?				Negative
	Will it improve landscape character?				
	Will it minimise development on Greenfield sites?			x	Positive
					Effective management of parks, open spaces, trees and landscape features protect their character, quality and recreational; value for existing and future communities.
	Will it reduce noise pollution from vehicles?		x	x	Negative

	Mowers, strimmer's, blowers and other grounds maintenance machinery generate temporary noise.
10. To reduce noise and impact of noise	Positive The increase of electric equipment and well maintained minimises unnecessary noise and reduce disturbance to residents, wildlife and park users.

6.0 Results			
	Yes	No	
Were positive impacts identified?	x	☐	John O'Conner's work under their contract with North Herts provides a number of improvements to the functional, aesthetic, and ecological value of North Herts' green spaces.
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	x	☐	Use of equipment fuelled by non-sustainable sources is kept to a minimum (only where alternatives are not possible).
7.0 Consultation, decisions and actions			
Describe the decision on this activity (refer to section 3.2)			
Adjust the decision			
List all actions identified to address/mitigate negative impact or promote positive impact			
Action	Responsible person		Completion due date
Encourage John O'Conner to procure and use more electric vehicles and equipment under contract with North Herts	Thomas Ayres		Bi-annually during contract term
When, how and by whom will these actions be monitored?			
Actions monitored during monthly contract meetings between North Herts and John O'Conner overseen by Thomas Ayres and Alan North, as well as oversight in monthly meetings between the Greenspace management team and the Director of Environment			
8.0 Signatures			
Assessor (report author):			
Name: Alan North	 Signature**		
Validated by (line manager):			
Name: Sarah Kingsley	 Signature**		
Forward to the Policy inbox: policy@north-herts.gov.uk			
 Signature**			
Assessment date: 03/09/2026		Review date: 03/06/2027	

Alternative Fuel Feasibility: John O'Conner Responses

Appendix B

John O'Conner answers to North Herts' questions

Please answer all of the following questions, giving separate answers for each fuel type.

	Electric	HVO
Would it be possible to fuel all of the vehicles/equipment used to execute the contract between John O'Conner and North Herts using HVO or electricity? If no, please explain why and provide a % figure of what proportion of vehicles/equipment could be powered by HVO or electricity.	No While possible if cutting spec and schedule was altered, significant time would be lost charging at public points. Insufficient charging points at the depot – already have maximum permitted by UKPN. Also, staff take vans home overnight due to space constraints and not all staff can install chargers at home.	Yes Would require upgrades to fuel storage capacity at the depot.
Are you already using vehicles/equipment fuelled by electricity or HVO? If yes, what % of your overall vehicles/equipment are currently fuelled by each type?	Yes Currently using 1 electric and 2 hybrid vehicles (28 vehicles are fossil fuelled). 18% of equipment (30/170) is electric.	No

Environment

Would new vehicles be required to support the change in fuel type? If no, why?	Yes	Unclear what % of current vehicle stock is diesel.
Is it feasible for vehicles to be fuelled at the depot? If no, why?	No Unable to draw enough power from the grid and insufficient space to store vehicles.	Yes Would require upgrades to fuel storage and would negatively impact on productivity due to traffic and downtime length at depot.
What impact, if any, would changing fuel type have on the time taken to refuel vehicles/equipment?	Around 50% longer to refuel	Significant increase in refuel time
What impact, in terms of additional costs or savings, would switching fuel types have on fuel costs for your vehicles/equipment?	Fuel would be around 50% cheaper	Fuel would be around 15% more expensive
How many weeks/months do you estimate it would take to implement a new fuel type for all applicable vehicles/equipment?	Depends on depreciation cycle of current fleet & vehicle availability. Around a year.	Depends on depreciation cycle of current fleet & vehicle availability. Around a year.
Are there any other challenges not mentioned above that you foresee for changing fuel type?	EVs cannot transport grass cutting machinery due to battery weight. Towing using EVs has GTW restrictions. Vans used for weekend/evening work cannot be charged at depot.	

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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