

North Herts Council Plan 2024-2028

Front Page

Text version only, the plan will be designed, formatted and images added after content approved

Introduction

Over the last few years we have achieved many things together. We have approved our Local Plan which will help deliver much-needed homes in our district. We have awarded grant funding to local groups so that they can continue supporting our communities. We have improved our online services and made them easier for residents to use. And we have won £7.7million of central government funding to reduce emissions from our leisure centres. We have achieved all of this and more, despite the challenging circumstances of the last few years, and the broader challenges posed by more than a decade of cuts to our funding.

The previous national government reduced funding to our district by around £5.5 million in real terms since 2010. This amounts to almost 28% of our current annual budget. At the same time, the population of North Herts has increased by around 5%. Essentially, we have been trying to do more with less.

The new government has shown that it recognises the need for longer term funding reform for local government, as well as the ability to plan further ahead. However, there remains uncertainty around the timeframes for this and exactly what that will look like for us. This means that the next four years will not be without challenges, but we are committed to achieving financial sustainability while continuing to serve our communities and provide the services that you use every day.

North Herts is a great place to live but we know that it can be even better. We know that there are things we can do to make our communities healthier, safer, and fairer. We know that we can improve our services and make them easier for residents to use. We can play a key part in supporting our local economy and town centres, and the delivery of much-needed homes in the district. And we can help make sure that this growth happens in the most responsible way possible. We also have a role to play in protecting our environment and tackling climate change, which are two of the most important challenges of our time. This plan and its priorities reflect these ambitions. Over the next four years we will focus on supporting and delivering:

Thriving Communities

Accessible Services

Responsible Growth

Sustainability

We can't achieve what we want to without your help and knowledge. There are various ways to get involved outlined in this plan and we hope you'll work with us to make North Herts a better place to live and spend time in.

Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council

This Council Plan sets out our vision for North Herts and our strategic priorities for the next four years. The plan will guide how we manage our finances, monitor progress and ensure we are meeting the needs of the communities we serve. We have highlighted some of the initiatives that will support our priorities, but this is not an exhaustive list. Other policies and strategies, such as our Medium-Term Financial Strategy and delivery plans, will all flow from this plan's vision and provide more detail.

Our staff are critical to the delivery of this plan. Without them we would not be able to deliver all that we do, which is why we try to make the Council as inclusive and welcoming a workplace as possible. It is that care for our staff that allows us to recruit and retain high-quality people. We will continue to look at how we can be even better, whilst promoting our values of Adaptable, Inclusive, Learning, Listening, and Together.

With the funding challenges faced by the whole Local Government sector, we recognise that we cannot deliver this Council Plan on our own. We are committed to working collaboratively with all of our resident and business communities; Hertfordshire County Council; Parish, Town and Community Councils; other public sector bodies; and our Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sectors.

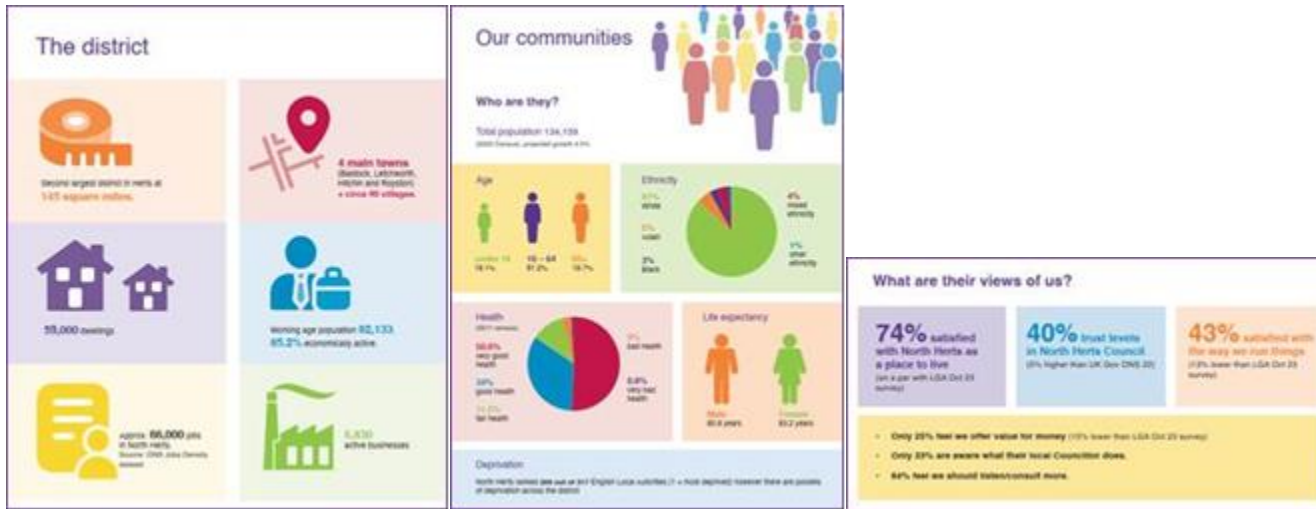
Anthony Roche, Managing Director

It is a huge privilege to serve the people of North Herts and we have achieved so much together already. We know that there are challenges ahead but together we can make North Herts a better place for all of us.

Daniel and Anthony

About North Herts (1 of 2)

Graphics from the 'About North Herts' document are being collated for this section. This page will focus on the district itself and the communities within it. See examples below:



About North Herts (2 of 2)

Graphics from the 'About North Herts' document being collated for this section. This page will focus on the council itself – our services and our staff. See examples below



Our Vision

Working with you for a fairer, greener North Herts

Our Priorities

Thriving Communities

Accessible Services

Responsible Growth

Sustainability

Thriving Communities

North Herts is a mix of vibrant towns and beautiful villages, each with their own unique sense of place and a range of communities. We want to support all the communities across our district to thrive.

We know that inequalities still exist here, including health inequality, and economic and social inequality. We will make sure we support our communities to improve their health and wellbeing. We will consider how we can reduce social and economic inequalities and continue to support local groups who provide important services to our residents.

We also want you to feel safe. We will continue working with partners like the Police through The North Herts Community Safety Partnership to identify current crime and disorder issues and set priorities for tackling these.

We know that residents across our towns and villages are proud of their communities and want to preserve the things that make them special. We will continue to support local people to have a say in the future of where they live and on the issues that matter locally.

Accessible Services

We provide a wide range of services for you, our residents and communities, from waste collection and planning, to benefits and leisure facilities. We want to make sure that our services are accessible to everyone and easy to use.

Our Digital Strategy sets out our vision for transformation, and as part of this we're investing in projects which make our services more modern and more accessible to you. This means that we're making our services available online, including on mobile devices, wherever possible so that you can access them 24/7.

We recognise that some of our residents can't or don't use online services, so we're committed to remaining accessible in other ways including by post, phone and via our Customer Service Centre.

We also want to deliver high-quality services and to do this we need to be able to retain and recruit high-quality staff. We will continue to look at ways to improve recruitment and retention, making sure North Herts Council is an excellent place to work.

Responsible Growth

We want North Herts to be a thriving and prosperous district, where we meet the current and future needs of our communities. We need responsible growth to deliver much-needed homes including social housing and homes that residents can afford to live in. We want the places that are created here to have the necessary infrastructure to make new development sustainable and to be well-designed, reflecting the local landscape and character of the area.

Over the course of this Council Plan, we will be implementing our Local Plan which sets out the development planned for our district. Supporting guidance like Supplementary Planning Documents and Masterplans will help ensure good design, appropriate infrastructure, connectivity and opportunities for active and sustainable travel. We will review our Local Plan to see where we can strengthen and improve it to deliver more sustainable growth.

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.

Sustainability

Sustainability means the ability to fulfil the needs of today's generation, without compromising the needs of future generations. Sustainability is important to us. We recognise the climate and environmental challenges our district faces, as well as the financial challenges that we face as a council.

The previous government reduced funding to our district by around £5.5 million in real terms since 2010, whilst our population increased by 4.8% between 2011 and 2021. This puts us in a difficult position and means that careful financial planning is necessary to achieve financial sustainability for the council so that we can continue to provide the services you use every day. Our finance strategies support the delivery of our priorities, and we regularly review these to make sure we make the best use of taxpayers' money.

We have also declared a climate emergency and an ecological emergency, and set goals to become net zero, to show we understand the seriousness of these crises, the impact on our district, and that we will do what we can to act on these issues.

We strive to be sustainable in our service-delivery and will continue to follow a policy-led budget, while placing our environmental responsibilities at the centre of our policymaking. We will work with you to achieve balanced budgets, improve environmental sustainability, and reduce carbon emissions as much as we can to work towards our net zero ambitions.

Thriving Communities

What we've achieved so far

Tackling health inequality

Continued to run projects to improve the health and wellbeing of residents via our Healthy Hub.

Safe and equal communities

Conducted a review of homelessness in North Herts to inform our new Housing Strategy.

Responded to almost 1,800 requests for help with housing in 2023/24 and helped hundreds of households, including those facing homelessness, into secure accommodation.

Worked with partners to reduce fly-tipping through pro-active stop and check operations.

Worked with partners to launch a Women's Safety Charter to make pubs and clubs in our district safer for women.

Won an Outstanding Partnership award for our Community Safety Partnership work with victims of anti-social behaviour (ASB).

Investing in our communities

Provided grants for local groups to support communities and distributed a £100,000 Community Investment Fund to help groups improve or expand their activities.

Set up and facilitated various co-operative networks including food provision, arts and culture, support for asylum seekers, and greenspaces and nature. These networks bring together local groups and individuals to co-ordinate community action.

Shaping communities

Created online community hubs so residents can have their say on the Churchgate regeneration, our budget, and our climate change work.

Provided ways for people to discuss issues of local importance including surveys and consultations, Councillor Surgeries, and Community Forums.

Over the next four years we will

Tackling health inequality

Work with partners to deliver projects that improve the health of our residents and reduce health inequalities. This will include working with Everyone Active, our leisure provider, to deliver physical activities for beginners, older age groups, and those who are less active.

Safe and equal communities

Continue to work on our Community Safety Priorities and other areas of community safety:

- Anti-social Behaviour
- Violence against Women and Girls
- Environmental Crime e.g. fly tipping
- Tackling crime against young people

Respond to the Government's Young Futures programme.

Protect our communities from environmental and noise hazards and ensure that restaurants and hospitality in the district are hygienic and safe.

Work towards becoming an awarded District Council of Sanctuary. This means committing to the values of the City of Sanctuary charter and being welcoming to those fleeing persecution and violence.

Re-affirm the Armed Forces Covenant which is a commitment to support those who have served in the armed forces and their families. This includes supporting former members of the armed forces at risk of homelessness.

Develop a Homelessness Strategy to support those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in our district.

Develop and launch a Good Landlords Charter to encourage landlords to voluntarily commit to higher standards than are currently required by law.

Investing in our communities

Continue to allocate grant funding to local groups who provide important services and activities for our residents and enable our communities to thrive.

What difference will this make?

Grants help local groups to improve their communities and support residents including in the areas of food provision, mental and physical health, and social issues.

A greater range of physical activity opportunities so people of all ages and abilities can improve their physical health.

People in our district are supported when they are vulnerable, including homeless people, asylum seekers, former veterans, and those affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

The ability to shape the development that occurs in your local area through Neighbourhood Plans.

Opportunities to discuss local issues via Councillor surgeries and Community Forums.

Look at opportunities to develop Community Hubs that provide public spaces and support for our communities.

Continue to improve our museum service and archives including loaning objects and archives to schools and digitising our archives so the wider museum collection is accessible to the community.

Continue to look for the best option for museum storage so we can preserve the collection for future generations.

Shaping communities

Support communities to create Neighbourhood Plans which give them more control over the type, location, size, and design of development in their local area.

Conduct a Community Governance Review (CGR) of the whole district focusing on arrangements at parish level. This includes looking at parish boundaries, numbers of parish councillors, and parish election dates to establish whether changes are needed.

Continue providing support and advice to communities seeking to register Assets of Community Value.

Accessible Services

What we've achieved so far

Interacting with the Council

Developed and launched a new MyAccount customer portal where you can access information, report problems, pay for services, and apply for council tax reductions.

Launched a website chatbot (Nova) to help you with common queries and a live chat function for more complex queries.

Implemented a digital consultation and engagement platform to make it easy for you to have your say.

Digitised files like planning documents so that you can easily access these online.

Continued to operate our Customer Service Centre and worked with partners to improve its offering, including health improvement services like NHS health checks and blood testing.

Improving key services

Implemented our Council Tax Reduction Scheme to help those in most need. Under this scheme, households on the lowest incomes don't need to pay any council tax.

Entered a new ten-year Leisure and Active Communities Contract with Everyone Active to ensure we continue to provide high-quality leisure services for you.

Agreed changes to waste collection and recycling including providing an additional bin for cardboard and paper and introducing collection of soft plastics. These changes will come into effect with our new Waste and Recycling Contract in 2025.

Improved our facilities for children and young people by continuing to fund regular playground renovations and updated skate parks.

Over the next four years we will

Interacting with the Council

Continue to improve the customer experience for you including improving our online services and developing our translation services so we are more accessible to those who do not have English as their first language.

Look at opportunities to simplify and improve the customer experience for you when your issue or query involves more than one organisation.

Improving key services

Implement the new Waste Collection, Recycling, and Street Cleansing contract which will provide you with more opportunities to recycle.

Work with Everyone Active and other partners to deliver our Active North Herts Strategy to make physical activities and leisure facilities accessible to more people. This includes a programme of walking sport, and sport for older people and beginners.

Work with Everyone Active to enable improvements to our leisure centres including a gym extension at Royston Leisure Centre, and full gym refurbishments at North Herts Leisure Centre and Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre.

Review car parking arrangements including alternative payment options to make it easier for you to spend time in our towns and help rejuvenate town centres.

Look at how we can use Artificial Intelligence (AI) to modernise routine processes and increase efficiency.

What difference will this make?

High-quality services that are quicker and easier to use at the most convenient time for you.

Improved efficiency by reducing the need for manual administration. This means our staff can spend time dealing with more complex issues.

Better quality facilities and opportunities to make good use of them.

Responsible Growth

What we've achieved so far

Planning development

Approved our Local Plan for 2011-2031 which sets out the development that will take place in North Herts across this period.

Started the Local Plan review process.

Published our [Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document](#) (SPD).

This sets out the contributions we will seek from developers to make sure new developments have the right infrastructure and facilities.

Drafted and consulted on our Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This sets out our expectations for sustainable development and encourages developers to commit to higher standards.

Worked with the Hertfordshire Growth Board to launch the Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter which encourages developers to pledge higher-quality sustainable development.

Prepared for the Biodiversity Net Gain legislation by hiring an ecologist to review developer proposals for delivering biodiversity and advise on how significant developments will affect nature in North Herts.

Economic development

Purchased the leasehold for the Churchgate Shopping Centre in Hitchin and begun consulting residents on what improvements they would like to see to the area.

Over the next four years we will

Planning development

Continue to implement our Local Plan 2011-2031 by working with housing providers to develop new homes for residents.

Review and update our Local Plan to align with the national government's approach to growth and set out how North Herts will develop beyond 2031.

Finalise and publish our Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to encourage high-quality sustainable development in North Herts.

Economic development

Develop and implement our Economic Development and Tourism Strategy, and our Town Centre Strategies to set out how we will support businesses, enhance our town centres, and take advantage of upcoming economic opportunities.

Continue to engage with the community to establish the best option for regenerating the Churchgate area of Hitchin. This includes progressing the development of a River Walk between Bridge Street and Biggin Lane to increase footfall in this part of the town centre.

What difference will this make?

More social rented and affordable housing delivered across the district.

More new homes in the area for people to buy or rent.

Well-planned growth with our Local Plan policies and Supplementary Planning Documents driving responsible and higher-quality development.

Rejuvenated local economies and town centres where people want to spend time, supporting local businesses to thrive.

Harnessing economic growth opportunities will support local job creation.

Sustainability

What we've achieved so far

Financial

Balanced budgets and income generation.

Secured external grant funding for projects which meet our priorities, including Electric Vehicle charge-points for residents and visitors, low-impact exercise classes for older people and those with dementia, and a multi-million-pound decarbonisation of our three leisure centres.

Worked with the District Councils Network and the Local Government Association to lobby for a fair multi-year funding settlement for local government.

Environmental

Hired a Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager to deliver some of our key sustainability projects.

Made our assets more sustainable by transitioning our fleet to Ultra-Low Emission Vehicles, installing Electric Vehicle chargers at our council offices, and improving our buildings through energy efficiency measures and solar panels.

Calculated the Council's emissions to help us target and measure the success of efforts to reduce them.

Supported retrofit and renewable energy schemes like Solar Together.

Worked with partners to develop guidance for developers to help them create more sustainable development in North Herts.

Worked with partners and residents to develop a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) which identifies opportunities, constraints, and the approach to improving walking and cycling in North Herts over the next ten years.

Improved nature in our district by reducing the frequency of grass-cutting including on highway verges, and through rewilding projects, including supporting the Bee Corridor.

Established the [North Herts Climate Hive](#) to engage and update residents on our sustainability work.

Over the next four years we will

Our finances and assets

Return a balanced budget.

Continue to look for grants to deliver projects which support our priorities.

Maximise the use of our assets for community benefit, including looking at the potential to re-purpose empty buildings as community hubs.

Continue to review income generation opportunities through our Enterprise Team. For example, ongoing work to progress the Churchgate project.

Give you the opportunity to have your say on our budget through our [Budget Hub](#).

Our Environment

Develop a Sustainability Strategy which sets out our approach to reducing carbon emissions, adapting to climate change, and improving nature in North Herts.

Continue to work with partners like the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership and the Regional Climate Change Forum on projects to help North Herts become a net zero district.

Support nature in North Herts through rewilding projects, expansion of the bee corridor, and supporting the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain.

Support efforts to protect the chalk streams in North Herts.

Monitor air quality in the district.

Engage with residents on climate change and environmental sustainability using the North Herts Climate Hive, and the Cabinet Panel for the Environment.

What difference will this make?

Planning for the future means we can continue providing the services you use every day.

More homes made energy efficient and more comfortable through retrofit schemes.

More Electric Vehicle charge points, making it easier for residents to access chargers in our town centres and to switch to an electric vehicle.

Nature will be protected and improved across the district.

Reducing our contribution to climate change and the ecological crisis will help minimise damage to our district and make where we live more resilient.

Involving you

As our vision says, we're working **with you** for a fairer, greener North Herts.

You know the district best, and we want to provide you with as many opportunities as possible to have your say on issues that are important to you and your community.

The feedback you give us enables us to find out what we're doing well, where we could do better and, crucially what is important to you so that we can continue to shape our services in the future.

Our council plan is just the start of working with you for North Herts. We want to ensure that you are involved at every step, so here are all the ways you can get involved and have your say:

How we will reach you

We use lots of different channels to ensure that our news and updates reach you on whichever platform you prefer. These include:

- **Local media:** for example, The Comet and Crow newspapers.
- **Social media:** you can find us on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn and NextDoor.
- **Our website:** www.north-herts.gov.uk. This includes a dedicated page to live consultations: www.north-herts.gov.uk/consultations
- **Weekly email newsletters:** sent every Friday straight to your inbox.
- **Outlook magazine:** delivered twice a year to your home.
- **In-person:** at our monthly councillor surgeries and area forums.

How you can reach us

- Our Customer Service Centre: you can contact us [online](#) or give us a call on 01462 474000
- **Facebook:** @northhertsdc
- **X (formerly Twitter):** @NorthHertsDC
- **Instagram:** @northhertsdc
- **LinkedIn:** North Herts Council
- **NextDoor:** [click here](#) to join us on NextDoor today.
- **Email newsletters:** [click here](#) to sign up
- **Outlook magazine:** please email outlook@north-herts.gov.uk if you do not receive our residents' magazine.
- **Councillor surgeries:** www.north-herts.gov.uk/councillor-community-surgeries
- **Community Forums:** www.north-herts.gov.uk/area-forums

Get involved:

If you'd like to play a bigger part in helping us shape future ideas, why not sign up to one of our online community hubs or our Citizens Panel. These give you the opportunity to get involved with future initiatives from the beginning and ensure your voice is heard.

- [Online community hubs](#)
- [Citizens panel](#)
- [Cabinet Panel for the Environment](#)

Thank you. We look forward to working with you as we deliver a fairer, greener North Herts.