

CABINET

23 September 2025

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

REPORT OF: NIGEL SMITH, DIRECTOR: PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR DONNA WRIGHT, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING & TRANSPORT

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

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report identifies the latest position on key planning and transport issues affecting the Council.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the report on strategic planning matters and appendices be noted.

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 Planning & Transport. Local ward members have been invited to participate in relevant meetings of the Board

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 the strategic planning matters referred to in paragraph 1.1 above. This report is intended to provide Members with the current positions on the following key matters where there has been substantive change since the report in June 2025.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Government Changes

- 8.1. In May 2025, the government launched two consultations; one on the *Speed Up Build Out* paper, which outlined a series of proposals aimed at accelerating the build-out rate of new homes and the second on reforms of planning committees.
- 8.2. The Speed Up Build Out paper outlined measures focused on creating effective incentives and tools to support timely housing delivery. Key proposals included:
 - **Delayed Homes Penalty:** Financial penalties for developers who fall significantly behind their agreed build-out schedules.
 - **Mandatory Reporting Requirements**, including:
 - A *Build Out Statement* submitted with planning applications, detailing the proposed construction timeline.
 - An *Annual Development Progress Report* submitted to local planning authorities.
 - A *Commencement Notice* issued prior to the start of construction.
 - **Enhanced Compulsory Purchase Powers** to unlock stalled development sites.
 - **Support for SME Developers**, aimed at reducing regulatory burdens and ensuring timely planning decisions.
 - **Promotion of Accelerated Delivery Models**, such as partnerships and public sector master-planned sites.
 - **Reform of Developer Contributions**, exploring a simplified national levy to replace the existing system.
 - **Fast-Track Planning for “Beautiful” Developments**, supported by local design guidance.
 - **Increased Development on Brownfield Land**, encouraging more efficient land use.
- 8.3. A joint response to the consultation was submitted by the Hertfordshire Infrastructure & Planning Partnership (HIPP), representing eleven Hertfordshire councils and other stakeholders, including North Herts District Council (Appendix 1).
- 8.4. While HIPP expressed strong support for the principle of timely housing delivery, the response raised several concerns regarding the practicality and effectiveness of the proposals:
 - **Administrative Burden:** Questions were raised about whether the additional reporting and procedural requirements would lead to meaningful improvements in delivery outcomes.
 - **Enforcement Challenges:** Concerns were noted around the complexity of enforcing build-out schedules, particularly on strategic sites involving multiple developers, and the potential for inconsistent approaches.

- **Impact on SMEs:** Although intended to support smaller developers, some proposals may inadvertently increase bureaucracy and costs.
 - **Infrastructure and Cashflow Constraints:** The response acknowledged that slow delivery is often linked to cashflow issues and the need for upfront infrastructure investment, which the proposals do not address.
 - **Local Authority Capacity:** Doubts were expressed about whether the measures sufficiently tackle the resourcing and capacity challenges faced by planning authorities.
 - **Data-Driven Monitoring:** The response recommended better utilisation of local data to inform and improve monitoring practices.
- 8.5. The second consultation on the reform of planning committees sought views on a national scheme of delegation, control of the size and composition of planning committees, and mandatory member training.
- 8.6. The HIPP response (Appendix 2) covered the following:
- **Delegation:** limiting democracy and removing the democratic process through removing the right for members to call-in applications by restricting transparency in the decision-making process is worrying and do not believe this will increase the speed of housebuilding.
 - **Size and Composition of committees:** no observations.
 - **Mandatory training for planning committee members:** no objection to involvement of other organisation such as PAS in process, however any national training and certification process will require considerable resource.
- 8.7. On 19 August, MHCLG issued a letter to Chief Planners which outlined a number of changes including:
- **An update on the new plan making system,** advising LPAs to undertake preparatory work in advance of the legislation and regulations including, early scoping of issues; progressing evidence base; preparing for engagement; developing project management, resource and governance arrangements; and establishing risk monitoring.
 - **Response from MHCLG about Statutory consultees** – removing statutory consultee status from Sport England, the Theatre Trust and the Garden Trust; reforms to the scope of other statutory consultee, establishing a new performance framework; and ensuring the system is appropriately resourced.
 - Announcing a PAS (Planning Advisory Service) **national survey about planning fees.**
 - An update on creating a more **standardised approach to planning data.**
 - Informing the **CPOs thresholds** will be maintained.
 - Inviting stakeholders to respond to a **consultation on electricity networks.**
 - Informing LPAs that Public Practice will be launching a year-round recruitment for built environment professionals rather than a once year opportunity.
 - Informing that the pathways to planning (graduate recruitment) is open for September 2026 starts.

- Request to share views on digital design codes.
 - Highlighting PAS best practice self-assessment toolkit which helps Councils to review their planning committees.
 - Highlighting the Nature Towns and Cities Green Infrastructure support.
- 8.8. There is still no update as to when the consultation on National Development Management Policies (NDMPs) is likely occur. The Council intends to submit a formal response to the NDMP consultation once it is published. Given that NDMPs will form part of the statutory Development Plan, their content will need to be fully considered during the preparation of the Local Plan.
- 8.9. The forthcoming changes to the local plan-making process are expected to have significant implications for the overall programme and timeline of the Local Plan. While the legislation underpinning the new process is not expected to be laid before Parliament until the end of the year, it is hoped that accompanying guidance will be released in the autumn to support transitional planning and implementation.

Proposed Expansion of Luton Airport

- 8.10. As previously reported, the Council received a copy of the Notice of the decision by the Secretary of State for Transport on [3 April 2025](#) to approve Luton Rising's Development Consent Order (DCO) application for the expansion of London Luton Airport to increase passenger numbers from the currently consented 19mpa to 32mpa by 2040s following completion of a lengthy Examination on 10 February 2024. This decision was despite National Planning Inspectors recommending refusal against the proposed development due to its significant environmental harms. The decision was subject to a 6-week High Court challenge period called a Judicial Review.
- 8.11. The Luton And District Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise (LADACAN) initiated legal proceedings to challenge the Transport SoS decision considering it to be unlawful, and after seeking legal advice, the association launched a Judicial Review to have the SoS's decision quashed. Permission has been granted by the High Court to proceed with a full judicial review hearing into the minister's consent. This hearing is due to take place in early November 2025.

Strategic Sites

- 8.12. 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	<p>The masterplan for this site was adopted as a material consideration for any future planning applications by Full Council in June 2025.</p> <p>An outline application is expected in December 2025.</p>
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SP15: North of Letchworth	<p>The masterplan for this site was adopted as a material consideration for any future planning applications by Full Council in July 2024.</p> <p>The applicant is currently in the process of procuring a development partner.</p>
SP16: North of Stevenage	<p>The masterplan for this site was adopted as a material consideration for any future planning applications by Full Council in November 2024.</p> <p>Members resolved to approve the outline planning application (23/01935/OP) in March 2025 subject to completion of the s106 agreement.</p> <p>A draft design code is being prepared for the site.</p>
SP17: Highover Farm, Hitchin	<p>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.</p> <p>Reserved matters applications have been received for infrastructure and the first phases of new homes, along with a proposed Design Code for the site.</p>
SP18: North-east of Great Ashby	<p>The masterplan for this site was adopted as a material consideration for any future planning applications by Full Council in November 2024.</p> <p>An outline application is expected in September 2025.</p>
SP19: East of Luton	<p>The masterplan for this site was adopted as a material consideration for any future planning applications by Full Council in January 2025.</p> <p>Two outline planning applications are under consideration (Council application references 17/00830/1 and 16/02014/1).</p>

- 8.13. Other masterplans for significant sites are being progressed through a variety of PPAs, pre-application discussions and current planning applications lodged with the Council ([Masterplans in current applications | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/masterplans)).

North Herts Local Plan

- 8.14. As previously reported in the June Strategic Planning Paper, the current *Local Development Scheme* outlines an indicative timetable for the preparation of the next Local Plan:
- **Regulation 18 Consultation** (Options Document): anticipated for late 2025
 - **Regulation 19 Consultation** (Draft Local Plan): expected in late 2026
 - **Examination in Public**: scheduled for summer 2027
 - **Adoption**: targeted for the end of 2027
- 8.15. The Council continues to await the publication of government legislation detailing the new arrangements for local plan making. These changes are expected to have significant implications for the Local Plan programme. Once formal guidance is issued—anticipated in autumn 2025—the timetable will be reviewed and updated to reflect any new statutory requirements.
- 8.16. In the meantime, work is progressing on the development of the evidence base to support the Local Plan. Key studies currently being procured /underway include:
- Strategic Market Housing Assessment
 - Economic Land Review
 - Joint Green Belt Review
 - Viability Study
 - Landscape Study
- 8.17. An initial expression of interest for the Call for Sites was conducted from June to September 2025, inviting submissions from landowners and stakeholders to submit sites for development. Officers are currently reviewing the information received. A more formal Call for Sites will be launched from November 2025 through to January 2026 which will request more detailed information for those sites which have potential for development. This process will inform the site allocation work that underpins the emerging Local Plan.

Other Local Authorities' Local Plans

- 8.18. We are neighboured by eight other Local Authorities who are all at differing stages of their Local Plans. As part of Duty to Co-operate, 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.

St. Albans City and District Council

- 8.19. Examination of the St Albans Local Plan started 29 April 2025. North Herts did not appear at the hearing sessions. Local Plan Stage 2 is likely to take place in autumn 2025.
- 8.20. Examination is expected to continue until February 2026 with a view to adopt in March 2026. More details can be found on St Albans City and District Council's website.

Uttlesford District Council

- 8.21. Examination of the Uttlesford Local Plan took place in June 2025. The Inspector published a post-hearing note in July 25 which requested the Council undertake some amendments. These will be consulted on for a minimum of six weeks, after which the inspector's report will be published. It is expected that the Local Plan will be adopted in Spring 2026.
- 8.22. More details can be found on [Uttlesford District Council's website](#).

Stevenage Borough Council

- 8.23. Stevenage Borough Council are undertaking a partial review of their Local Plan. The Council have submitted the Plan for a examination which is expected to be undertaken in the autumn 2025.
- 8.24. We have made representations on the Plan and await direction as to the next steps in terms of the examination of the Plan. More details can be found on [Stevenage Borough Council's website](#).

Luton Borough Council

- 8.25. Luton Borough Council are undertaking a review of their Local Plan. The Regulation 18 issues and options consultation closed in February 2025. A further Regulation 18 consultation is planned for March – April 2026.
- 8.26. More details can be found on Luton Borough Council's website.

Central Bedfordshire Council

- 8.27. A Call for Sites exercise was carried out November 2024 to January 2025. This has been published and can be viewed here [Call for Sites | Central Bedfordshire Council](#).

East Hertfordshire District Council

- 8.28. East Hertfordshire District Council anticipate beginning the plan making process in October 2025, allowing 30-month period to start in Feb 2026. Consultation will begin in June 2025 with adoption looking to be taken in 2028. This remains subject to secondary legislation.
- 8.29. A Call for Sites exercise was carried out July to September 2024. Results of this exercise are currently being assessed and will be published in due course.
- 8.30. Moe details can be found on [East Herts Council's website](#).

Welwyn Hatfield District Council

- 8.31. A Call for Sites exercise was carried out recently and closed March 2025. A second Call for Sites has been launched, focusing on brownfield and urban land, which closed on 19 September 2025. Results of this exercise are currently being assessed and will be published in due course.
- 8.32. More details can be found on [Welwyn Hatfield District Council's website](#).

South Cambridgeshire District Council

- 8.33. The Council are undertaking a Local Plan with Cambridge City Council under the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. A Call for Sites was previously undertaken and they plan to consult on a draft Plan in autumn/winter 2025.
- 8.34. More details can be found on [Greater Cambridge Shared Planning's website](#).

Neighbourhood Plans

- 8.35. A referendum on the Codicote Neighbourhood Plan was held on 15 August and was agreed. A separate report on this is included in this agenda.
- 8.36. Separately, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has announced the closure of financial support for local neighbourhood planning groups. Previously, these groups could apply for funding for technical studies to support their neighbourhood planning work. This may have an effect on the number of neighbourhood plans that come forward in the future. MHCLG have not announced whether they will continue to support local planning authorities for the work involved in supporting neighbourhood plans.

Other matters

North, East & Central Herts Authorities Strategic Planning

- 8.37. Since 2019 the Council together with East Herts District Council, Stevenage Borough Council, Welwyn Hatfield District Council, Broxbourne Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council along with the help of consultants, have been working together on the strategic planning of the area. This included establishing a Vision and a Growth Study for North East Central (NEC) Herts. The intention of the Growth Study is to create a key piece of initial evidence to support the preparation of a joint strategic plan for the area and inform the next round of Local Plans from the 2030s to 2050.
- 8.38. The Stage 2 Growth Study is currently being finalised with a final report expected mid – end of September with a member briefings prior to final publication. Outcomes of this will be reported in the next Strategic Matters Report.

North Herts Council's Draft Town Centres Strategy

- 8.39. Officers presented an overview of the Town Centres Strategy to the Strategic Planning Project Board on 15 July 2025. The Board received a presentation from officers and their consultants, Lichfields, on the status of the project and an overview of the interim Draft Strategy. This presentation included a detailed discussion of Section 3: Individual Town Centre Strategies within the Draft Strategy, which provides per town centre a vision statement, summary of key priorities including development opportunities for larger parcels of land and how these could be taken forward through partnership working. The discussion also revolved around the requirements for a further section (Section 4) outlining next steps to identify various funding and delivery opportunities to support the future vitality and viability of the town centres. The Board members acknowledged receipt of the presentations and the comprehensive work undertaken by officers and their consultants.
- 8.40. The proposed timeline for delivery of the Draft Strategy for September Cabinet was agreed with the Board, officers, and their consultants, with intentional consideration for time to review further redrafts. However, due to the number of comments received and the detailed amount of work associated with Section 3 to review the priorities for the individual town centres, including drafting a further section (Section 4: Funding and Delivery), the consultants have taken longer than anticipated. This extra time and effort towards the project have allowed for re-reviewing the evidence base and cross-checking across the various sections of the Draft Strategy.
- 8.41. For officers, the Executive Member and Strategic Planning Project Board Members to have sufficient time to review the completed Draft Strategy it has been agreed to defer the Draft Strategy to the November Cabinet meeting. This will result in a more robust and comprehensive document to be presented to Cabinet for public consultation in December and January. This revised programme will also afford wider public engagement with the Area Forums during the consultation period, in addition to consulting with key stakeholders, local businesses and members of the public registered on the council's Local Plan data base.

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: Regulatory).
- 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. 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.

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, 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.

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 secondary legislation relating to Local Plans poses risks to the progression of the Local Plan update. However, we will keep this under review.

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 from this report. Staffing and capacity within the planning service is monitored and managed on an on-going basis. Several new posts – approved through revenue budget bids – are currently being advertised to provide new or additional capacity for transport, tree & landscape and administrative matters.
- 15.2. There is presently one vacancy in the Development Management service which will be advertised shortly. Additional capacity through fixed-term posts is currently being explored.
- 15.3. Of three posts within the Strategic Planning Team, two fixed-term posts have been filled. Recruitment to a permanent post was not successful and will be readvertised shortly.

16. CONTACT OFFICERS

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