

## **Information Report for Noting and Discussion by the Community Forum**

<b>ROYSTON COMMUNITY FORUM</b> <b>10 DECEMBER 2025</b>
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### **DRAFT TOWN CENTRES STRATEGY FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

#### **SERVICE DIRECTORATE: PLACE**

#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform the Community Forum of the draft Town Centres Strategy agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2025 for public consultation in December and January.

#### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 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.”
- 2.2 As such, we are preparing an overarching Town Centres Strategy to
- provide additional guidance to current 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.

#### **3.0 OVERVIEW OF THE CONSULTATION DRAFT STRATEGY**

- 3.1 In summary, the draft Strategy:
- Incorporates advice on a range of changes in national policy and guidance and takes account of the updated evidence in the Town Centres and Retail Study (2024).
  - 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.
  - Is a planning-led document and should be read in conjunction with relevant policies in the adopted Local Plan whilst also taking into consideration other important Council Strategies and projects, such as the emerging Economic Development Strategy, the Churchgate 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.

- Has been prepared following similar principles to a Supplementary Planning Document including reference to relevant policies and evidence and stakeholder engagement in its preparation and will be subject to Cabinet approval and public consultation.
  - Provides the overall direction of travel with clear policy guidance and priorities for each town centre to guide developers when submitting planning applications and other town centre improvements. It is based on a sound evidence base with clear connections to published policy and supplementary planning documents, including other Council and external organisations documents. These together inform the Strategy and contribute towards meeting the Council's Plan and the Local Plan goals and vision.
- 3.2 The Strategy covers a range of town centre topics including land use capacities and distributions, mixed-use needs, vacancy reoccupation, public realm quality, heritage preservation, sustainable transport, connectivity, active travel, and community facilities and community well-being.
- 3.3 The draft 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. 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.
- 3.4 The Strategy is delivery and development focussed. **Part 1** sets out the purpose of the Strategy providing a comprehensive overview and summary of the Council's evidence base for development in and affecting town centres. This section will assist landowners, architects, planners, and stakeholders bringing forward development proposals in understanding the relevant context for North Herts' town centres.
- 3.5 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** sets out a series of Guidance Notes. These Guidance Notes provide supplementary information to inform planning applications for development proposals affecting town centres.
- 3.6 Each of North Herts' town centres have specific strengths and weaknesses, offering their own unique offer and **Part 3** 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. An extract from Part 3 of the Strategy incorporating Royston at section 3C is attached at **Appendix 1** and should be read alongside other parts of the Strategy.
- 3.7 **Part 4** 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 draft Strategy. The effective delivery of the Strategy will require the Council to work closely with several partners and stakeholders. It is proposed to gauge the support of key identified partners

and stakeholders through the formal consultation process of the Strategy. This will be important in terms of delivering the identified priorities for each of the town centres and the recommended further actions. This approach will help inform a clearer, action-oriented delivery plan to be included in the final version that can be subject to regular review and update.

3.8 The **appendices** to the draft Strategy comprise:

- Appendix 1: providing a full reference list and hyperlinks to the comprehensive evidence base at Part 1.
- Appendix 2: outlines the Town Centre Policy Direction recommending alterations to the adopted Local Plan given the significant changes in retail floorspace demand, changes in use classes and other policy recommendations identified in the 2024 Retail and Town Centre Study. This has informed the guidance principles outlines in Part 2 of the draft Strategy, but its recommendations will be formally considered and taken forward through the Local Plan review.
- Appendix 3: includes further background evidence notes for each of the town centres to be read alongside Part 3.

3.9 The full draft Strategy can be viewed on the Council's Website at [Town centres strategy | North Herts Council](#)

3.10 Appendix 1 of this Information note is an extract from Part 3 of the Strategy incorporating Royston at section 3C. **It is to be noted that all parts of the Strategy should be read alongside the respective town centre section outlined in Part 3.**

## 4.0 CONSULTATION

4.1 The consultation period will run from **3 December 2025 to 30 January 2026**. This will be through an online consultation platform available on the Council's website.

4.2 We encourage, members, local businesses, organisations and residents to submit their comments via the Council's consultation platform 'Placemaker' or visit our [website](#) for more information. Request for any further information regarding the draft Strategy or the consultation period should be made through the following email address: [towncentres@north-herts.go.uk](mailto:towncentres@north-herts.go.uk)

4.3 The draft Strategy will be a topic for discussion at all Town Community Forums through December affording wider public consultation in addition to consulting with key stakeholders, local businesses and members of the public registered on the Council's Local Plan data base.

4.4 A leaflet outlining the details of where to view the consultation documentation, together with a QR code link to the Council's website will be available as a handout at the Community Forum.

- 4.5 The consultation will be widely publicised on the Council's website and through various social media channels. Members will also have been informed through Members Information Service (MIS)

## **5.0 NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 Following the public consultation, any comments received will inform the final version of the Strategy which would then be re-presented to Cabinet for approval and adoption at an appropriate time in early 2026. The final version of the Strategy will be desktop published with graphics, photos and designed as a readable and well-presented document.
- 5.2 If / once adopted, the Town Centres Strategy would be a material planning 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.

## **6.0 APPENDICES**

- 6.1 Appendix 1 - Extract from Part 3: Individual Town Centre Strategies - Section 3C Royston (North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy draft for public consultation 21.10.2025)

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## **APPENDIX 1**

- **Extract from Part 3: Individual Town Centre Strategies - Section 3C Royston (North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy draft for public consultation 21.10.2025)**

# 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.

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 obligations. It is noted that Section 106 sets out the tests for requesting planning obligations<sup>1</sup>, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

## 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.

## **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 narrow pedestrian paths, inactive frontages and with little buffer to vehicular traffic.



16. A number of key retailers including Tesco, Aldi M&S and Costa have located to peripheral locations on the bypass and northern fringe of the centre, drawing spending from the core 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.

## **Opportunities**

18. Royston Town Centre benefits from a local customer base, and local residents need to travel large 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.
19. 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.
20. Royston Town Centre is closely linked by public transport to Cambridge and intervening villages (such as Melbourn, Shepreth etc.) and has the potential to benefit from increased spending from planned strategic housing growth around Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire.
21. 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.
22. Both the Royston Gateway Retail Park and Industrial Estate attract different users that could be drawn into Royston town centre for complementary activities.

## **Threats**

23. 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).
24. 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**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Priority areas</b>	<b>Actions / Planning considerations</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>A</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land use and retail</li> <li>• Community</li> </ul>	Royston's key assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Building on the Council's Economic Strategy, collaborate with the BID, Royston Town Council and other stakeholders to support the establishment of a Royston focussed Destination Management Organization (DMO) to promote leisure activities and attractions in and around Royston.</li> </ul>	NHDC Royston Town Council Royston First Business Improvement District (BID)
<b>B</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land use and retail</li> </ul>	Growth and evolution of independent and speciality operators, protecting their contribution to Royston's character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through the Council's <b><i>development management role</i></b> 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</li> </ul>	NHDC (as Local Planning Authority (LPA) development management) Landowners Future development partners
<b>C</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport, access and movement</li> </ul>	Public realm, connectivity and wayfinding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and deliver a joint public realm, connectivity and wayfinding strategy taking forward the recommendations of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). For Royston:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide signage and facilitate transport links to improve links, legibility and wayfinding routes to and from the key retail areas to the</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	NHDC HCC Royston Town Council Royston BID

		<p>north of Royston and surrounding industrial areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve transport links and signage from the town centre to the Priory Memorial Gardens, railway station, bus station, Royston Cave, Royston Museum, Therfield Heath, Royston Gateway Retail Park, and other destinations with a focus on visitors from South Cambridgeshire</li> <li>- Progress LCWIP recommendations, in particular to facilitate north and south cycle movements.</li> </ul>	
<p>D</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land use and retail</li> <li>• Community</li> </ul>	Royston Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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 addition pitches and a greater range of operating hours and days</li> <li>• Collaborate with the BID and the Town Council to identify and apply funding sources to support expansion and promotion of the market.</li> </ul>	<p>NHDC</p> <p>Royston Town Council</p>