

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

3 FEBRUARY 2026

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: LOCAL PLAN NEXT STEPS

REPORT OF: RACHAEL ROONEY, INTERIM STRATEGIC PLANNING MANAGER: 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 is to note Cabinet Report of 20 January 2026 which provided an overview of the new plan-making system and sets out a revised Local Plan programme aligned with the requirements of that system.
- 1.2 The Cabinet Report sought the approval of delegated powers to formally submit notice of the Council's intention to review the Local Plan and to publish a revised programme in line with the new regulations as soon as the new plan-making system is enacted.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the broad 'direction of travel' for the Local Plan Review pending formal laying and enactment of the relevant legislation and regulation; and provide any commentary as required.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure the Council is well-positioned to progress preparation of the Local Plan as quickly as possible once the new plan-making system comes into effect. Cabinet previously first resolved, in principle, that a review of the Local Plan should take place in January 2024. However, the Council did not progress on the review which was held back due to the delays in the publication of the regulations and guidance on the new local plan system.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 An alternative option would be to wait for the new regulations to be published, including any amendments arising from stakeholder feedback to MHCLG, before revising the Local

Plan timetable. This could minimise the need for further changes and ensure full alignment with the finalised system.

- 4.2 This option is not recommended, as any additional delay poses a significant risk to North Herts Council's ability to submit a draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State before April 2028 and the potential dissolution of this authority under proposed Local Government Re-organisation. Early progress would allow the Council to leave a legacy of having prepared a final Local Plan under the current organisational structure and to meet key milestones set in the new system in a manner that is compatible with the civic cycle.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. Strategic Planning Project Board were consulted on, and endorsed, the proposed programme in December 2025. They were also advised of the key issues discussed in this report.
- 5.2. The Executive Member has been kept up to date with the development of the Local Plan programme.
- 5.3. A report was taken to Cabinet on 20 January 2026 to agree the broad direction of travel and delegated powers to the Director of Place to publish the formal notice of intention to undertake a review of the Local Plan; and approve and publish a revised Local Plan timetable, subject to any alterations necessary to ensure alignment of timings with the new statutory framework.

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 19 September 2025.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 As per attached Cabinet Report.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Details of the new plan-making system and the revised Local Plan timetable are set out in the attached Cabinet Report. Members should note that the proposed timings assume the Government will lay the necessary legislation in January 2026; this has not yet occurred.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 As per attached Cabinet Report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As per attached Cabinet Report.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 As per attached Cabinet Report.

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 equality, diversity or inclusion implications in this report. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out for the Local Plan Update in accordance with The Equality Act 2010 or any specific requirements laid in relevant legislation and regulations.

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 update.
- 14.2. However, the update of the Local Plan will allow the Council to put climate change mitigation and adaptation at the heart of the Development Plan to contribute to meeting the Councils environmental and sustainability objectives.
- 14.3. The Local Plan Review will be subject to statutory requirements to consider its environmental effects.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1. The Local Plan programme is subject to our Strategic Planning Team being fully resourced and staffed.
- 15.2. Currently the Strategic Planning Team is understaffed and whilst efforts have been made to recruit into vacant posts, these have not all been successful. This is a known issue within Planning Departments across Local Authorities, and we are not unique in this sense. Permanent, establishment staff are currently augmented by fixed-term and contract appointments.
- 15.3. 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

Appendix A - Local Plan Programme

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Local Plan next steps Cabinet Report 20 January 2026](#)