

**CABINET  
TUESDAY, 16 JUNE 2026**

**PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Strategic Planning Matters Report

REPORT OF: Director - Place

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Place

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Thriving Communities, Accessible Services, Responsible Growth, Sustainability

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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 be noted

2.2. That the response in Appendix A

**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 positions on the following key matters where there has been substantive change since the report to Cabinet in April 2026.

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

### ***Government Changes***

- 8.1. From 11 May 2026, Local Planning Authorities are required to consult the Secretary of State before refusing planning permission for housing schemes of 150 dwellings or more. This procedural step grants Ministers 21 days to decide whether to "call in" the application for central determination. This applies to all relevant applications that had not been determined prior to 11 May.
- 8.2. The Government issued its response on Planning Committee Reform on 2 June 2026. A new National Scheme of Delegation will come into force in Autumn 2026. It mandates which planning applications local councils must delegate to planning officers and which can be referred to committee.
- 8.3. Schedule 1 (Mandatory Delegation) will apply to applications that must be determined by planning officers. These include minor or technical proposals, including householder applications, minor residential developments (fewer than 10 dwellings), and certificates of lawfulness. Schedule 1 also includes reserved matters applications for schemes of less than 500 homes. Schedule 2 (Presumed Delegation) are larger or more complex schemes. These are also presumed to be delegated to officers unless they meet certain criteria (such as specific major infrastructure or substantial local conflict with the Local Plan) that justify referral to the planning committee; or made on behalf of the Local Authority/ officer or member of the Authority and the nominated officer and nominated member of the planning committee agree that it should be referred to the planning committee for determination.
- 8.4. The key changes since the proposals were consulted upon are:
- a. A one-month delay in the proposed implementation date to 31 October 2026
  - b. To include reserved matters for schemes of more than 500 homes in Schedule 2 (the original proposal was for *all* reserved matters to fall in Schedule 1)
  - c. To include a Section 73 application (applications to vary a condition on an existing planning application) in the same category as the original application
  - d. A requirement for the Secretary of State to assess the effectiveness of the new regulations within 12 months of implementation
- 8.5. The regulations will also place a statutory limit on the size of the planning committee at 13 members. Councils should consider whether a smaller number of members would be more appropriate in their area. North Herts' Planning Control Committee currently has 12 members.

- 8.6. The new Local Plan system / regulations came into force on 25 March 2026. Since, the Government have been releasing further guidance on different procedural elements of the new system.
- 8.7. The Government launched a further consultation on planning fees which ended on 18 May 2026. This seeks views on the following:
- establishing a new national default fee schedule, based on 90% of estimated costs, to bring planning fees to a level closer to cost recovery and act as a baseline from which a new local fee setting model will operate;
  - introducing new fees and restructure existing fee categories in order to reduce complexity for users;
  - implementing a surcharge on planning fees for statutory consultees
  - establishing key principles behind local fee setting, as well as seek views on the potential to implement a cap on locally set fees
  - reviewing the future role of discretionary services such as Planning Performance Agreements and pre-application advice in light of proposed increases to default fees and the introduction of the local variation model

### ***North Herts Local Plan***

- 8.8. Following the new plan-making system coming into effect on 25 March 2026, the Council published a formal Notice of its intention to review the Local Plan and a revised timetable based on the new regulations on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2026.
- 8.9. The Council also published its scoping document for consultation. This runs between 11 May and 28 June 2026. The scoping document asks 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.
- 8.10. It is intentionally light touch, with Government recommending a 3 week consultation period – although North Herts will be consulting for a period of 7 weeks to ensure that all community forums are able to meet during this period.
- 8.11. The scoping consultation is a new requirement in the new plan-making system, intended to scope initial ideas and form the basis of a revised consultation and engagement strategy which will replace the authorities' Statement of Community Involvement. The more substantial consultations will be as part of the content and evidence base document consultation and draft Local Plan later in 2026 and 2027.
- 8.12. Further details on the new system, timetable and scoping document consultation can be found here.

[Local Plan Update | North Herts Council](#)

### ***Proposed Expansion of Luton Airport***

- 8.13. In May 2026, the Court of Appeal refused an application by The Luton And District Association for the Control of Aircraft Noise (LADACAN) to appeal the November 2025 High Court ruling in favour of the SoS's (Secretary of State) decision to permit the Luton Rising's DCO application for the expansion of London Luton Airport. The Court also refused to grant leave for that ruling to be appealed.

- 8.14. Luton Rising are seeking to progress with implementation of the DCO later in 2026. Early considerations will include the proposed replacement Country Park that will be located within North Herts along with establishing the monitoring and review groups required by the consent. Following the Court of Appeal ruling, officers are liaising with the other Hertfordshire host authorities (Hertfordshire County Council and Dacorum Borough Council) and will be contacting Luton Rising to ascertain their next steps.

**Strategic Sites**

- 8.15. 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:

<p>Policy SP14: North of Baldock</p>	<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 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.</p>
<p>SP15: North of Letchworth</p>	<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>
<p>SP16: North of Stevenage</p>	<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. This legal agreement is being prepared.</p>
<p>SP17: Highover Farm, Hitchin</p>	<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 for infrastructure have been approved following committee resolution in October 2025 alongside a number of conditions including a Design Code for the site.</p> <p>The application for the first phases of new homes was received in November 2025 (25/02794/RM) and was approved at Planning Control Committee in April 2026 subject to conditions.</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 was submitted in January 2026 (25/03080/HYA) and remains under consideration.</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>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).</p>

- 8.16. 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 \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)).

### ***Other Local Authorities' Local Plans***

- 8.17. 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.
- 8.18. 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.
- 8.19. There are no further updates since the April Cabinet report of the Local Plans for St Albans City and District Council, Uttlesford District Council, Stevenage Borough Council, East Hertfordshire, Welwyn Hatfield District Council and South Cambridgeshire.

#### *Luton Borough Council*

- 8.20. Luton Borough Council is consulting on its Scoping Document which ends on 25 July 2026. It is more extensive than other authorities that have issued scoping consultations. Officers will be providing a response.
- 8.21. More details can be found on [Luton Borough website](#).

#### *Central Bedfordshire Council*

- 8.22. Central Bedfordshire consulted on its Scoping Document which ended on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2026. It was light touch focusing on asking stakeholders to priorities a defined list of issues.

- 8.23. More details can be found on [Central Bedfordshire's website](#)

### ***Neighbourhood Plans***

- 8.24. 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*

- 8.25. The Town Centres Strategy was consulted on between 3 December 2025 and 30 January 2026. Residents, businesses, community groups and partner organisations on our Local Plan database were invited to participate in the consultation. The final Town Centre Strategy will be presented to Cabinet for adoption in September 2026. A supporting Delivery Plan will be prepared during the winter 2026 in collaboration with the Economic Development team.

#### *Chalk Streams*

- 8.26. A resolution was passed at Full Council in April 2026 expressing support for a proposed Parliamentary Bill to make all UK chalk streams a serial UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Executive Member has written to Pippa Heylings MP and Chris Hinchliffe MP on this matter. The letter is attached as Appendix A.

## **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.
- 9.5. Draft regulations for the National Scheme of Delegation have been published. The accompanying statutory guidance states local authorities will need to amend their constitutions to align with the national scheme. Officers will begin preparing for this, and any accompanying and complementary changes to officer delegations and call-in procedures. The expected implementation date for the National Scheme of Delegation is 31 October 2026.

## **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.
- 10.3. A bid for MHCLG funding was submitted in January 2026 to support the preparation of Local Plan as part of the new plan making system. We received £108,474 on 27 March 2026. This will support staff capacity and evidence base preparation and augment the currently identified revenue budget for this corporate priority project. The funding is based on the commitment to publish a Notice to commence the Plan by 30 June 2026 and publish Gateway 1 assessment by 31 October 2026.

## **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 neighbouring authorities advance their own Local Plans, it is essential to maintain alignment on strategic matters, particularly with those authorities that may be integrated with us through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Officers continue to hold regular meetings with neighbouring authorities to support constructive and collaborative

working relationships. This includes ongoing work through the NEC group, as well as preparatory work for the future Strategic Development Strategy (SDS) and its relationship with the Local Plan.

- 11.4. A substantial number of Government consultations affecting the planning system—both plan-making and decision-taking—have recently been undertaken. Officers will continue to monitor these developments closely and assess their implications for ongoing and future work at North Herts.
- 11.5. 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. There are presently no permanent vacancies in the Development Management service following internal and external recruitment. A fixed-term post to provide additional capacity has been filled in the Major Projects team. Interim arrangements have also been put in place in this area following the departure of a contract planner.

15.3 Two permanent posts within the Strategic Planning Service have been filled. There is currently a vacancy for a fixed term post which will be advertised shortly. The strategic planning manager post is currently filled on an interim basis and is expected to be advertised in the 2026. There is also an agency staff post to support the call for sites work.

**16. APPENDICES**

16.1 Appendix A: Letter to Pippa Heylings MP and Chris Hinchliffe MP on Council Motion on Chalk Streams.

**17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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**18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

18.1 None