



Content and Evidence Document

October 2026



**North
Herts**
Council

Translation

If you have difficulty understanding this publication or English is not your first language, please contact the Strategic Planning Team on 01462 474000 and we will do our best to help you.

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਆ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਜਾਂ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਪਹਿਲੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਰਣਨੀਤਕ ਯੋਜਨਾਬੰਦੀ ਟੀਮ ਨਾਲ 01462 474000 'ਤੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ ਅਤੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਤੁਹਾਡੀ ਮਦਦ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਪੂਰੀ ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ।

(Panjabi)

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(Polish)

Dacă întâmpinați dificultăți în înțelegerea acestei publicații sau dacă engleza nu este limba dumneavoastră maternă, vă rugăm să contactați Echipa de Planificare Strategică la numărul de telefon 01462 474000 și vom face tot posibilul să vă ajutăm.

(Romanian)

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(Italian)

Ha nehezen érti ezt a kiadványt, vagy az angol nem az anyanyelve, kérjük, vegye fel a kapcsolatot a Stratégiai Tervezési Csoporttal a 01462 474000 telefonszámon, és mi mindent megteszünk, hogy segítsünk Önnek.

(Hungarian)

இந்த வெளியீட்டைப் புரிந்துகொள்வதில் உங்களுக்குச் சிரமம் இருந்தாலோ அல்லது ஆங்கிலம் உங்கள் தாய்மொழி அல்ல என்றாலோ, தயவுசெய்து 01462 474000 என்ற எண்ணில் வியூகத் திட்டமிடல் குழுவைத் தொடர்புகொள்ளவும், நாங்கள் உங்களுக்கு உதவ எங்களால் முடிந்த அனைத்தையும் செய்வோம்.

(Tamil)

જો તમને આ પ્રકાશન સમજવામાં મુશ્કેલી પડતી હોય અથવા અંગ્રેજી તમારી માતૃભાષા ન હોય, તો કૃપા કરીને 01462 474000 પર સ્ટ્રેટેજિક પ્લાનિંગ ટીમનો સંપર્ક કરો અને અમે તમને મદદ કરવા માટે અમારા શ્રેષ્ઠ પ્રયાસો કરીશું.

(Gujarati)

Jei jums sunku suprasti šį leidinį arba anglų kalba nėra jūsų gimtoji kalba, susisiekiite su Strateginio planavimo komanda telefonu 01462 474000 ir mes padarysime viską, kad jums padėtume.

(Lithuanian)

Contents

Translation	2
Introduction	8
Our vision.....	22
A picture of North Herts.....	28
A place-based spatial strategy for North Hertfordshire	35
Homes	58
Economy and employment opportunities.....	73
Town centres.....	81
Natural environment.....	93
Climate change	107
Transport and connectivity	122
Communities and placemaking	137
Communications and utilities.....	146
Evidence Base	154
Glossary.....	156

Figures

- Figure 1 – Hertfordshire Four Unitary Authorities
- Figure 2 – Development Plan for North Hertfordshire
- Figure 3 – North Hertfordshire Map
- Figure 4 – Map showing the parishes of North Hertfordshire
- Figure 5 – Urban areas in and around North Hertfordshire
- Figure 6 – Example of 50dph
- Figure 7 – Example of 40dph
- Figure 8 – Example of 30dph
- Figure 9 - Green Belt in North Hertfordshire
- Figure 10 – Areas potentially suitable for definition as grey-belt
- Figure 11 – Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt in North Hertfordshire
- Figure 12 – Heritage assets across North Hertfordshire
- Figure 13 - Meridan Gate, Royston
- Figure 14 – Net housing completions compared to target completions in North Herts
- Figure 15 - Annual change in house prices in North Hertfordshire, May 2011 - May 2026

Figure 15 – Sun Street, Hitchin

Figure 16 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Baldock

Figure 17 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Hitchin

Figure 18 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Letchworth Garden City

Figure 9 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Royston

Figure 20 – The Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*), native to North Hertfordshire and the official county flower of Hertfordshire

Figure 21 - Map of Areas that could become of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (ACIBs) in North Hertfordshire

Figure 22 - Chalk Streams in North Hertfordshire

Figure 23 - Map of proposed extension of Chiltern National Landscape and Mimram Valley Parklands

Figure 24 – Agricultural Classifications in North Hertfordshire

Figure 25 - Greenhouse gas emissions in North Hertfordshire

Figure 26 – Ashwell Springs

Figure 27 - Source Protection Zones – North Hertfordshire

Figure 28 – Areas of flood risk in Hitchin

Figure 29 – Well-being in North Hertfordshire, 2022 – 2023

Figure 30 - Percentage of premises with gigabit-capable service, Jan 2026

Tables

Table 1 – North Hertfordshire Local Plan Timetable

Table 2 – Ten measurable outcomes to monitor the progress towards meeting our vision

Table 3 – Current residential commitments in North Hertfordshire, 31 March 2026

Table 4 – Advantages and disadvantages of infill development/urban intensification

Table 5 – Advantages and disadvantages of urban expansion

Table 6 – Advantages and disadvantages of dispersed village growth

Table 7 – Advantages and disadvantages of new settlement growth

Table 8 – Affordable Housing (Stepped Approach)

Table 9 - Business Count by Size, 2025

Table 10 - Rivers in North Hertfordshire

Table 11 – Provisional Agricultural Land Classification

Table 12 – Urban Greening Factor

Table 13 - Average number of cars/vans per household in North Hertfordshire for different tenures and dwelling sizes

Table 14 – Life expectancy in North Hertfordshire, 2023 - 2025

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Why are we preparing a new Local Plan?

Every local planning authority in England is required to have an up-to-date Local Plan.

Our current Local Plan was adopted in 2022 following many years of preparation and consultation and included a commitment to review the policies and assess whether a new Plan was needed. Following that review, we concluded that preparing a new Local Plan was the best way to ensure we can continue to plan positively for the future of our District.

Since then, a lot has changed. A new planning system has been introduced, national planning policies have evolved, local priorities have shifted, and new challenges and opportunities have emerged.

Our new Local Plan will cover the current geographical area of North Hertfordshire and will guide decisions about development, growth and investment across our District up to 2040.

However changes to local government arrangements mean that, from 2028, North Hertfordshire will become part of a new Central Hertfordshire Authority. Responsibility for preparing any future Local Plan covering that wider area will rest with the new authority.

By updating our Local Plan now, we can make sure it reflects the needs of our communities today while planning for the future. It will help us provide the homes, jobs, services and infrastructure people need, while protecting the character, environment and heritage that make North Hertfordshire special.

Without an up-to-date Plan, we have less influence over where new development takes place, what it looks like, and how it supports local communities.

Local Government Reorganisation

Local Government in England is undergoing significant change. In July 2026, Government confirmed that North Hertfordshire (minus Royston Heath, Royston Palace, Royston Meridian, Ermine, and Weston and Sandon wards) will join with Stevenage Borough Council and Welwyn Hatfield District Council (minus Northaw and Cuffley ward) to form Central Hertfordshire.

This programme is intended to create single-tier unitary councils that are responsible for delivering all local government services within their area. The aim is to simplify decision-making, improve the coordination of public services, reduce duplication, and provide greater clarity about responsibility and accountability.

In May 2027, elections will take place to establish the Shadow Central Hertfordshire Authority, which will act as the interim governing body responsible for preparing Central Hertfordshire for operation.

The new Central Hertfordshire Unitary Authority is planned to come into full effect on 1 April 2028, known as Vesting Day. From this point, Central Hertfordshire will take on all responsibilities currently delivered by both Hertfordshire County Council, North Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield District Councils and Stevenage Borough Council.

Royston Heath, Royston Palace, Royston Meridian, Ermine, and Weston and Sandon wards will become part of the new East Hertfordshire and Broxbourne unitary authority, along with East Herts and the majority of wards in Broxbourne.

Figure 1 – Hertfordshire Four Unitary Authorities



Source: [One Welwyn Hatfield](https://one.welhat.gov.uk/news/article/509/government-announces-four-unitary-authorities-in-hertfordshire)¹

As we prepare our new Local Plan for North Hertfordshire – including Royston Heath, Royston Palace, Royston Meridian, Ermine, and Weston and Sandon wards, it is important that we consider not only the needs of our District, but also the wider area that we will ultimately form part of. Future planning decisions will need to take account of how growth and investment can be delivered across this broader geography and how different areas can work together to meet shared challenges and opportunities.

¹ <https://one.welhat.gov.uk/news/article/509/government-announces-four-unitary-authorities-in-hertfordshire>

This includes considering wider requirements for:

- Housing growth
- Employment growth
- Infrastructure provision
- Nature recovery and biodiversity enhancement
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Taking this wider perspective will help ensure that future growth is planned in a coordinated way, making the best use of available land, infrastructure and environmental resources, while supporting the long-term prosperity and sustainability of both North Hertfordshire and the new unitary authority areas.

While LGR will create new unitary authorities covering a wider area, we must continue to prepare and maintain our own Local Plan for our existing District until a replacement plan is adopted for the new authority area, which may not be until the mid-2030's.

Once the new unitary authorities are established, they will be able to prepare a Local Plan covering their wider geography. Until then, our new Local Plan will provide the planning framework needed to manage development effectively and ensure growth takes place in the right locations for the existing geography of North Hertfordshire.

What is a Local Plan?

Our Local Plan sets out our vision for the future of North Hertfordshire up to 2040, helping to guide the District through a period of change before a new Local Plan is produced for the new Central Hertfordshire Authority and the East Hertfordshire and Broxbourne Authority.

It is a long-term plan for how our towns, villages and countryside will grow and develop. It helps determine where new homes, jobs, green spaces and community facilities should be provided, and how development can support thriving and sustainable communities.

What a Local Plan can do

Our Local Plan will:

- Set a clear vision for how North Hertfordshire will grow and change over the next 15 years or so.
- Guide planning decisions by providing the framework for deciding where development should take place and what it should look like.
- Support high-quality development by setting standards for design, sustainability and infrastructure.
- Balance competing needs by protecting our environment and heritage while planning for new homes, employment opportunities and local services.
- Create better places by helping to build healthy, well-connected and inclusive communities for everyone.

What a Local Plan cannot do

Our Local Plan cannot:

- Control every change to a building or piece of land, as some works do not require planning permission.
- Decide who lives in, owns or occupies a particular property.
- Replace other regulations and responsibilities, such as licensing, environmental health or building regulations.

Our Current Local Plan

Our current Local Plan was adopted in 2022 and sets out the vision and framework for development across North Hertfordshire up to 2031. It identifies where new homes, employment opportunities and supporting infrastructure should be delivered, while helping to protect the character of our District and its valued landscapes.

Our current Plan includes strategic development sites in and around:

- Baldock
- Hitchin
- Letchworth Garden City
- East of Luton
- Stevenage

These sites are helping to meet local housing and employment needs. Some have already delivered new homes, community facilities and infrastructure, while others are still progressing through the planning and development process.

Our current Local Plan will continue to guide planning decisions until our new Local Plan is adopted. As part of the plan-making process, we will consider which existing policies remain effective and should be carried forward, and where new or updated policies may be needed to respond to changing circumstances and national requirements.

Housing Delivery and Five-Year Housing Land Supply

Our current Local Plan allocated enough land to meet our District's identified housing needs at the time it was prepared. However, a number of allocated sites have been slower to come forward than anticipated. This has been influenced by a range of factors, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, construction market challenges and wider economic uncertainty affecting the development industry.

As a result, housing delivery has not progressed at the rate originally expected and the Council has been unable to consistently demonstrate a five-year housing land supply.

A five-year housing land supply is a national planning requirement. It measures whether there are enough deliverable housing sites available to meet a district's housing needs over the next five years. Maintaining an adequate supply is important because it helps ensure that housing needs can be met in a planned and coordinated way.

Where a local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, the weight that can be given to some Local Plan policies may be reduced when determining planning applications. In these circumstances, there is a greater likelihood that proposals for housing development on sites not allocated in the Local Plan may be approved, provided they comply with national planning policy and other relevant planning considerations.

We monitor housing delivery and housing land supply twice a year, with updates published through our [monitoring reports](#)² on our website.

Supplementary Planning Documents

To support our Plan, we have also adopted a number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's), including:

- Sustainability SPD (2024) - providing guidance on designing and delivering low-carbon, climate-resilient development.
- Developer Contributions SPD (2026) - explaining how new development should contribute towards infrastructure, services and community facilities.
- District Design Codes SPD (2026) - providing guidance on the design requirements of developments.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) will no longer form part of the new plan-making process. Instead, they will be replaced by Supplementary Plans (SPs).

Unlike SPDs, Supplementary Plans will be prepared through a more formal process and will be examined independently, similar to the way Local Plans are examined. This will give them greater weight in planning decisions and help ensure consistency between planning policies and supporting guidance.

We will review the content of our existing SPDs to determine the most appropriate place for their policies and guidance. Where necessary, some matters may be incorporated directly into our new Local Plan, while more detailed guidance may be included within future SPs.

We are currently awaiting further Government guidance on the preparation and content of Supplementary Plans.

Policy Map

Our Local Plan Policies Map shows the main planning designations and development areas across North Hertfordshire. It provides an overview of the policies that currently apply across the district and will help inform the preparation of our new Local Plan.

For more detailed information, including interactive mapping and the full Policies Map, please visit our [Local Plan webpages](#)³.

Neighbourhood Plans

A Neighbourhood Plan is prepared by a Parish or Town Council, with input from their local community. It allows local people to help shape development in their area by setting planning policies that reflect local priorities and issues.

Once made, a Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the Development Plan for North Hertfordshire and is used alongside our Local Plan when planning applications are considered.

Ten of our parishes have prepared [Neighbourhood Plans](#)

² <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/monitoring-reports>

³ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/local-plan-2011-2031>

- Ashwell
- Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall
- Barkway and Nuthampstead
- Codicote
- Ickleford
- Knebworth
- Pirton
- Preston
- Wallington
- Wymondley

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 introduced Neighbourhood Priority Statements (NPSs) as a simpler and more flexible alternative to a Neighbourhood Plan.

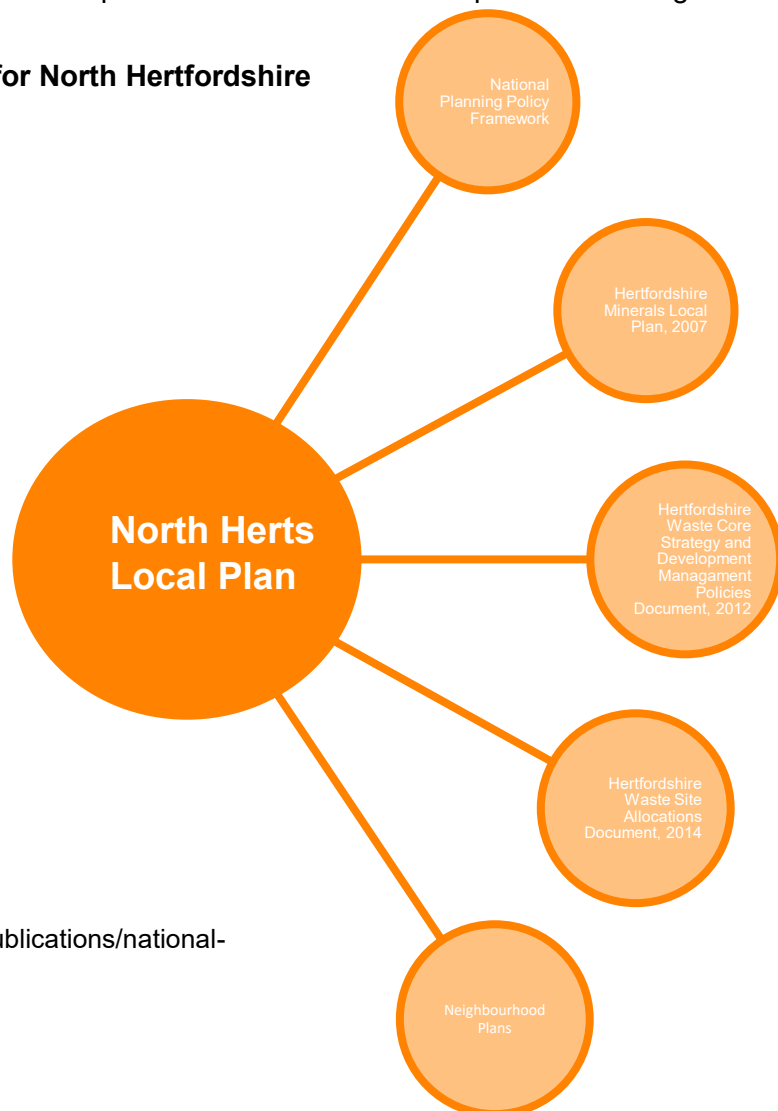
NPSs allow communities to identify the issues, priorities and aspirations that are most important to them, without the need to prepare a full neighbourhood plan. They can help inform both Local Plan preparation and wider planning decisions such as S106 contributions by providing a clear statement of local priorities.

What is our Local Plan's relationship to other plans?

Our Local Plan is shaped by local needs and priorities, but it must also follow national planning policy.

The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2)⁴ sets out the issues every local planning authority must consider when planning for the future. The Government has consulted on a revised NPPF and published the final version on 17 August 2026. This document has been drafted and updated to align with the requirements of the final NPPF published in August 2026.

Figure 2 – Development Plan for North Hertfordshire



⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

Our priorities

Our new Local Plan will be guided by the Council's priorities:



Thriving communities



Accessible services



Responsible growth



Sustainability

These priorities, set out in the [North Herts Council Plan](#)⁵, will help shape decisions about where development takes place and how it contributes to the long-term wellbeing of our communities.

Working together across Hertfordshire

Our Local Plan also works alongside county-wide plans, including the [Hertfordshire Waste Plan](#)⁶ and the [Hertfordshire Minerals Plan](#)⁷. By taking these plans into account, we can ensure that North Hertfordshire's growth is supported by a coordinated and long-term approach to planning for the future.

What new objectives and trends do we need to plan for?

As part of our new Local Plan, we are looking at the latest evidence, local needs and future challenges to help shape how North Hertfordshire grows over the coming years.

We want to create communities where people have easy access to the services and facilities they use every day. This means planning neighbourhoods where shops, schools, healthcare, green spaces and leisure opportunities are easier to reach, reducing the need to make every journey by car and making it simpler for people to walk, cycle or use public transport.

The way we live, work and travel has changed significantly in recent years. Many people now spend more time in their local area and place greater value on nearby services, open spaces and community facilities. This presents a great opportunity to think differently about how we plan future development and improve existing places.

In 2019, North Hertfordshire District Council declared a climate emergency and committed to reducing carbon emissions across our District. The Council's ambition is for North Hertfordshire to become carbon neutral by 2030, and our Local Plan has an important role to play in supporting that goal.

⁵ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/2024%20-%202028%20Council%20Plan%20FINAL.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/planning-in-hertfordshire/minerals-and-waste-planning/waste-planning/waste-planning.aspx>

⁷ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/planning-in-hertfordshire/minerals-and-waste-planning/minerals-planning/minerals-planning.aspx>

To help achieve this, we are exploring ways to:

- Focus new development in locations that are well connected by public transport and have good walking and cycling links.
- Improve access to parks, nature and green spaces for all residents.
- Support healthy, inclusive and resilient communities that meet the needs of people at all stages of life.
- Encourage development that helps reduce carbon emissions and supports more sustainable ways of living.

In July 2023 the Council also declared an Ecological Emergency to recognise that the crisis facing nature requires urgent action and is interlinked with the climate crisis.

These declarations asserted the Council's commitment toward climate action and nature recovery beyond current government targets and international agreements. This is being pursued through our [Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030](#)⁸ which aligns to the Council priority of Sustainability. This strategy replaced the Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027.

What other information makes up the Local Plan?

Engagement

We want as many people as possible to get involved in shaping our new Local Plan.

We consulted on a new Local Plan Scoping Document between 11 May and 28 June 2026 to understand:

- key challenges, opportunities and priorities for North Hertfordshire
- key issues to inform a vision for our plan
- how communities wanted to be involved as our Local Plan evolves

The feedback from the Scoping Consultation has been used to inform the proposed approaches set out in this document. This consultation is, therefore, your next opportunity, as residents, businesses, community groups and other interested organisations, to have your say in the preparation of our Local Plan for North Hertfordshire.

There are questions set out throughout this document where we would like you to set out your thoughts and views.

Every response will be carefully reviewed and considered as we develop the next stage of our Plan. Following the consultation, we will also publish a report summarising the feedback we receive and explaining how it has informed each stage of the preparation of Local Plan.

Building the evidence base

Good planning needs to be based on reliable evidence. As part of preparing our new Local Plan, we are gathering information to help us understand our District today and plan effectively for the future.

Our evidence base will help us identify:

⁸ https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-08/NHDC-1506%20NHDC%20Sustainability%20Strategy%202025-30_V4.pdf

- What is working well and should be protected or enhanced.
- Where there are challenges that need to be addressed.
- What homes, jobs, services and infrastructure may be needed in the future.
- How North Hertfordshire is changing over time.

We will draw on a range of information, including:

- Research, data and analysis.
- Site visits and technical assessments.
- Specialist advice from experts and partner organisations.
- Future trends and forecasts.

Local knowledge is also an important part of the evidence base. Residents, businesses and community organisations have valuable insights into their areas.

As evidence base documents are completed, they will be published to support future consultations and help everyone to understand the information that underpins our Local Plan.

These documents provide the evidence and justification for the policy approaches and options presented throughout this document, and references to relevant evidence are included where appropriate.

A full list of the [evidence base](#)⁹ can be found in the Appendix at the back of this document as well as on our website.

Appraisals and assessments

As we develop our Local Plan, we need to understand how different options could affect people, places and the environment. A range of assessments will help us do this and ensure that our Plan delivers positive outcomes wherever possible.

Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA)

We are undertaking a Sustainability Appraisal, which incorporates the requirements of [Sustainable Environmental Assessment](#)¹⁰, to assess the likely social, economic and environmental impacts of our Plan and reasonable alternative approaches. This helps us identify opportunities, minimise negative effects and improve the overall outcomes of our Plan.

The SA scoping report is published alongside this consultation for comment.

⁹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/1633/contents/made>

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

We are carrying out an [Equality Impact Assessment](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/equality-impact-assessment)¹¹ as part of preparing our new Local Plan. This helps ensure that we meet our responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and gives proper consideration to the needs of people with protected characteristics throughout the plan-making process.

The EqIA looks at how the policies in our Local Plan could affect different groups within our communities. It is an ongoing assessment process and will continue to inform the development of our Local Plan as policies evolve and new evidence becomes available.

We are publishing the EqIA Scoping Report alongside this consultation and welcome your views on the issues identified and the proposed approach.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

A [Health Impact Assessment](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/health-impact-assessment)¹² helps us understand how our Local Plan could affect the health and wellbeing of people living, working and spending time in North Hertfordshire.

The assessment looks at how proposed policies and potential development sites may influence the wider factors that affect health, such as access to housing, green spaces, healthcare, jobs, transport, education and community facilities. It also considers whether different groups may experience impacts in different ways and how the Local Plan can help reduce health inequalities.

Although a HIA is not a legal requirement, it is an important part of developing a Local Plan that supports healthy, sustainable communities and aligns with the Council's commitment to improving quality of life for residents.

The HIA is published alongside this consultation, and we welcome your views on its findings and recommendations.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

A Habitats Regulations Assessment is required by law under the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 \(as amended\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents)¹³. It assesses whether a plan or project could have a significant effect on internationally important wildlife sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

For our Local Plan, the HRA will consider whether proposed policies, site allocations and future development could affect protected habitats and species. It helps ensure that internationally designated nature conservation sites are properly safeguarded and that any potential impacts are identified and addressed at an early stage.

The assessment forms an important part of the evidence base for our Plan and will help inform decisions about where and how growth should take place. Where necessary, it will identify measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate any potential impacts on protected habitats and species.

The HRA will be published alongside our draft Local Plan for consultation next year.

¹¹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/equality-impact-assessment>

¹² <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/health-impact-assessment>

¹³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/contents>

Viability

Our Local Plan needs to be both ambitious and deliverable. As we develop policies for new homes, infrastructure, green spaces and community facilities, we must ensure that these requirements can realistically be achieved. National planning policy requires us to consider viability so that development remains capable of being delivered while still contributing to local priorities.

To help with this, we will carry out a viability assessment as part of the next stage of our Local Plan process. This will assess whether the cumulative costs of Local Plan policies can be accommodated without compromising the delivery of development.

The findings will be published and made available alongside our draft Local Plan consultation, allowing residents and stakeholders to see how the evidence has informed our approach.

About this document

Recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including the introduction of National Decision-Making Policies (NDMPs), means that our new Local Plan will be structured differently from our current Plan. This document explains how these changes will influence the preparation of our new Local Plan and the way planning policies are presented.

In particular, it identifies planning issues that will be addressed through NDMPs. National policy is clear that matters covered by NDMPs should not be repeated in Local Plans. As a result, our new Local Plan will focus on locally specific policies and priorities, avoiding duplication of national policy. The final NPPF was published on 17 August 2026; and made clear that NDMPs are material considerations in planning decisions and should be given 'critical' weight. In effect, this means they should be considered as though they are part of the Development Plan.

This document also sets out our emerging approach to a range of planning issues. It explains where existing policies are expected to remain broadly unchanged and where new or revised policies may be needed to respond to local evidence, national policy requirements and future challenges.

Alongside this, this document summarises the evidence gathered to date and explains how it is shaping our new Local Plan. It also identifies areas where further evidence, studies and assessments are still being prepared to inform future policy choices.

Have your say on the future of North Hertfordshire

This document is an important step in preparing our new Local Plan for North Hertfordshire, and we want to hear your views.

It sets out the key issues we believe our new Local Plan should address, along with some of the options we are considering. These have been informed by:

- Feedback from our previous scoping consultation and engagement with residents and stakeholders.
- Information gathered through monitoring our current Local Plan.

- Changes in housing, employment and development trends.
- New Council priorities, strategies and commitments.
- Changes to national planning policy.

This is an early stage in the process, and we recognise that new challenges and opportunities may emerge as work on our Plan continues. That is why we are seeking your views now.

We would like to know:

- Do you support the approaches and options being considered?
- Are there alternative ideas we should explore?
- Is there anything important that we have missed?

Questions are set out through-out the document where we would like your specific views.

Your comments will help shape the draft policies in our Local Plan and ensure that it reflects the needs, aspirations and priorities of our local communities.

Table 1 – North Hertfordshire Local Plan Timetable

Plan-making stage	Key dates
Council Notice and revised timetable publication	24 April 2026
Scoping Consultation	11 May - 28 June 2026
GATEWAY 1	9 October 2026
Content and Evidence Document Consultation	13 October - 24 November 2026 We are here
GATEWAY 2	5 April 2027
Draft Local Plan Consultation	26 October 2027 - 4 January 2028
GATEWAY 3	27 March 2028
Submission	31 May 2028
Examination	June - November 2028
Adoption	January 2029

Find out more

For more information about our new Local Plan, including supporting documents, consultation materials and future updates, visit our [Local Plan webpages](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/new-local-plan)¹⁴ by scanning the QR code below.



¹⁴ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/new-local-plan>

OUR VISION

Our vision

What is a vision?

At the heart of every Local Plan is a vision - a clear picture of what we want our District to become over the coming years.

The vision sets out our ambitions and provides the foundation for everything in our Local Plan.

A strong vision should be:

- Ambitious - setting out our aspirations for thriving communities, a healthy environment and a strong local economy.
- Realistic - reflecting the challenges we face and building on the opportunities available to us.
- Locally distinctive - recognising the unique character of North Hertfordshire and the qualities that make it a special place to live, work and visit.

We want a vision that reflects the views and priorities of everyone in North Hertfordshire, that reflects the character of our towns and villages, the values we hold, and the future we want to create together.

What do we need to consider and plan for?

The NPPF places sustainable development at the heart of the planning system, and it is a key principle that will guide the preparation of our new Local Plan.

Sustainable development means meeting the needs of people today while ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the same opportunities and quality of life. It is about planning for the homes, jobs, services and infrastructure our communities need, while protecting the environment and making the best use of available resources.

To achieve this, our Local Plan must balance three important and interconnected objectives:

- Environmental
- Social
- Economic

These objectives are most effective when considered together. The challenge for our Local Plan is to achieve the right balance, ensuring that growth benefits our communities, supports the local economy and protects the environment.

We identified a number of challenges and opportunities that our Local Plan needs to address. These were included in our [Scoping Document](#) and the feedback we received has been taken into account in developing this document and our vision for our new Local Plan.



Our proposed vision

We have developed a draft Vision for our new Local Plan.

‘Inspired by Our Past, Planning for a Sustainable Future’

‘By 2040, North Hertfordshire will strengthen its identity as the District shaped by the world’s first Garden City, Letchworth, whose pioneering principles of planned growth, green space, and community wellbeing will continue to influence high-quality design and placemaking across the area. Our District’s historic market towns, Hitchin, Baldock and Royston, each with distinctive medieval and Georgian cores, will thrive as vibrant centres of culture, employment and local services, supported by sensitive development that respects their well-preserved built heritage.

North Hertfordshire’s villages and rural surroundings, set against the backdrop of the Chilterns National Landscape, chalk downland and varied historic environments, will continue to benefit from small-scale, locally appropriate growth that sustains community facilities while protecting the rural character that distinguishes each settlement. Development will preserve the district’s pattern of distinct towns and villages.

Our District will deliver high-quality growth, making use of previously developed land wherever possible and prioritising active travel networks, sustainable transport connections and climate-resilient design. A diverse range of high-quality homes, including affordable and social housing, will help meet the needs of current and future residents, supporting mixed and balanced communities in keeping with Garden City principles. Improvements to walking, cycling and public transport will reduce car dependency and strengthen links between our District’s towns, villages and wider sub-regional destinations.

Economically, North Hertfordshire will build on our strong enterprise base and strategic location along the A1(M) knowledge and growth corridor, supporting the shift toward a more diverse, innovative and resilient local economy. Local businesses will benefit from targeted support aligned with our district’s commitment to responsible, greener growth.

Our District will collaborate on long-term planning for strategic transport, green infrastructure, and climate action, ensuring that our growth needs are met in a coordinated and sustainable way across the area. Community-led renewable energy generation, smart energy networks and low-carbon infrastructure will contribute to greater energy resilience, helping residents and businesses benefit from cleaner and more affordable energy while supporting the transition to net zero.

North Hertfordshire will be a distinctive, heritage-rich and environmentally led district, delivering high-quality homes, strong local economies, and thriving communities while safeguarding the unique character of our garden city, market towns and rural villages.’

Q1. Do you agree with our proposed Vision for North Hertfordshire?

Q2. Is there anything else that we should consider for the Vision?

Measurable Local Plan Outcomes

Table 2 – Ten measurable outcomes to monitor the progress towards meeting our vision

Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
Efficient use of land Balancing housing, jobs, infrastructure, and the environment to build sustainable communities.	Previously Developed Land	At least 20% of new homes completed in the Plan period are built on previously developed (brownfield) land.	% development on previously developed land	Planning permissions/completions database
	Design Quality	100% of major developments achieve compliance with our design code, including Garden City-inspired placemaking principles.	% of major developments compliant with design code	Planning decisions
Housing Meeting the diverse housing needs of all our residents	Affordable and Social Housing Delivery	At least 40%* of all new homes delivered are affordable housing, including an agreed proportion of social rented homes. *This will be updated from findings of viability study complete	% affordable housing delivered categorised by tenure type	Planning permissions/completions database
Economy	Economic Resilience	Growth in the number of businesses operating in knowledge-intensive,	Number of businesses in the defined sectors	ONS UK Business Counts (Nomis)

Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
Supporting a resilient and prosperous local economy		green and innovative sectors by 50% compared with the 2025 baseline.		
	Town Centre Vitality	Maintain or increase town centre occupancy rates to at least 90% in Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Letchworth.	Vacancy rates	Experian GOAD Footfall monitoring Retail/centre health checks
Environment and climate change Addressing the climate and environmental impacts of growth	Low-Carbon Energy and Resilience	At least x%* of the district's electricity demand is met through local renewable or community energy generation by 2040. *TBC once evidence base is collected	% incorporating low-carbon technologies	Energy statements submitted with applications Building regulations compliance data
Transport Managing growth in a way that promotes sustainable and accessible travel	Active and Sustainable Travel	Increase the proportion of short journey stages in towns that are walked, wheeled or cycled to at least 55% by 2035 ¹⁵	Mode share (% short journey stages in towns by sustainable modes)	Census data Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan monitoring

Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
Communities Creating healthy, sustainable and well-connected communities	Access to Services and Facilities	Increase the number of new homes located within a 20-minute walk (approximately 1,300m) of a range of day-to-day services and community facilities, including shops, schools, healthcare and open space	Average number of key services accessible within a 20-minute walk of new housing developments	Planning permissions
	Access to High-Quality Open Space	100% of residents live within a 100m of an accessible, high-quality public open space, as defined by local open space standards.	Percentage of residents living within 100m walking distance of an accessible public open space	Planning permissions

Q3. Do you agree with our proposed measurable outcomes and indicators that support and deliver our vision for North Hertfordshire set out in Table 2?

A PICTURE OF NORTH HERTS

A picture of North Herts

About North Hertfordshire

North Hertfordshire covers around 375 square kilometres, making it the largest District in Hertfordshire by area. Located in the north of the county, it is home to a diverse mix of market towns, villages and countryside, each with its own distinct character and identity.

Our District includes the towns of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston, alongside many smaller villages and rural communities. Together, these places create a unique and varied area with a strong sense of history, community and place.

Much of North Hertfordshire is rural in nature, with open countryside, valued landscapes, green spaces and historic settlements that contribute greatly to its character and appeal. These natural and historic assets are important to our residents, businesses and visitors and play a key role in shaping how our District develops.

We need to balance the need for new homes, jobs and services with the protection of the countryside and the qualities that make North Hertfordshire special.

Figure 3 – North Hertfordshire Map



Source: North Herts Council

Working with our neighbours

North Hertfordshire is part of a wider region, and many of the issues we plan for do not stop at District and Borough boundaries. Residents travel to neighbouring areas, and beyond, for work, education, shopping, healthcare and leisure, which means many planning decisions are interconnected.

We share boundaries with eight neighbouring local authorities:

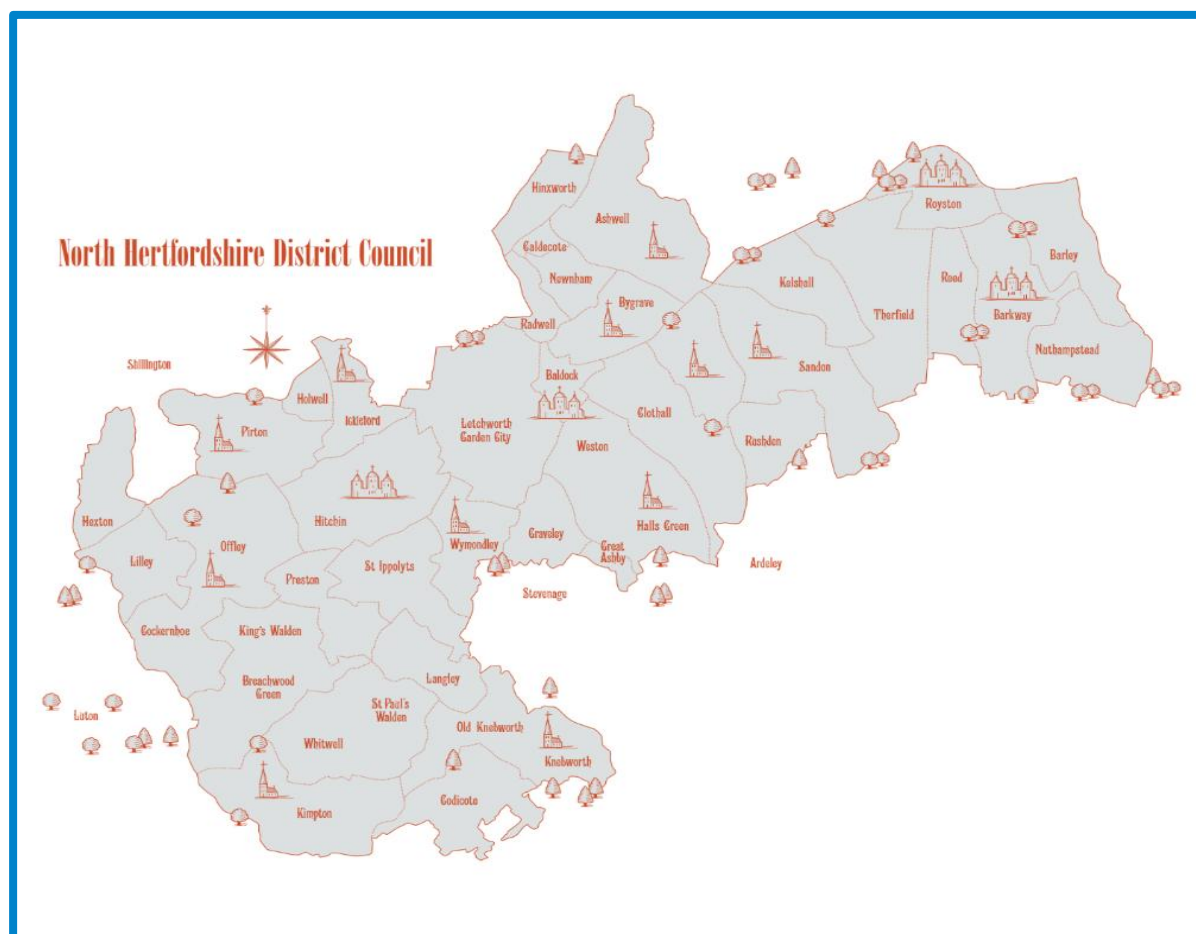
- Central Bedfordshire
- East Hertfordshire
- Luton
- South Cambridgeshire
- St Albans
- Stevenage
- Uttlesford
- Welwyn Hatfield

As we prepare our new Local Plan, it is important that we work closely with our neighbours and other organisations. By understanding the opportunities and challenges that we share, we can help ensure that planning decisions are coordinated and that growth is supported by the right infrastructure, services and connections.

Our towns and villages

North Hertfordshire is home to a diverse network of towns, villages and rural communities, each with its own character and identity.

Figure 4 – Map showing the parishes of North Hertfordshire



Source: North Herts Council

Our four main towns act as the principal centres for housing, employment, services, shopping, leisure and community life:

- **Baldock** - A historic market town with good rail and road connections, a thriving town centre and a growing residential community.
- **Hitchin** - A vibrant and attractive market town, known for its lively town centre, independent businesses, cultural offer and strong sense of community.
- **Letchworth Garden City** - The world's first Garden City, recognised for its unique combination of green spaces, heritage, innovation and carefully planned neighbourhoods.
- **Royston** - A thriving market town with strong transport links, a diverse local economy and easy access to the surrounding countryside.

Alongside these towns, we are home to many villages and smaller rural settlements. These communities play an important role in the life of our District, contributing to its character, heritage and rural economy. Each has its own strengths, challenges and local identity.

In addition, Great Ashby, on the edge of Stevenage, is largely within North Hertfordshire and forms an important part of our community. Its close relationship with Stevenage means residents benefit from access to a wide range of services, facilities and employment opportunities.

Our Countryside and Green Belt

Much of our countryside is protected by Green Belt designation, which plays an important role in preventing urban sprawl, safeguarding the character of towns and villages, and maintaining open areas between settlements.

Our District contains two Green Belt areas:

- The Metropolitan Green Belt, which covers Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock, Stevenage and a number of surrounding settlements.
- The Luton Green Belt, which protects areas in the western part of the district.

Areas outside the Green Belt are designated in our current Local Plan as the Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt. These landscapes remain an important part of North Hertfordshire's identity, supporting farming, wildlife, recreation and the wider rural economy.

Our countryside, open spaces and natural environment are highly valued by our residents and visitors alike. As we plan for future growth, we will seek to balance the need for homes, jobs and infrastructure with the protection and enhancement of the landscapes and green spaces that make North Hertfordshire distinctive.

Transport and Connectivity

We benefit from a strategic location and strong transport connections, helping our residents, businesses and visitors access opportunities both within our District and beyond.

Our area is served by five railway stations, providing direct links to destinations including:

- London and Hertford to the south.
- Cambridge and King's Lynn to the north-east.
- Peterborough to the north.
- Stevenage, which provides onward rail connections to destinations across the Midlands, the North East and Scotland.



While rail connections to London and the east of England are strong, there are currently no direct rail services westwards, making journeys to places such as Luton and Milton Keynes more challenging by public transport.

We are also served by several key road routes, including:



- The A1(M), providing north-south connections between London and the north of England.
- The A505, which links communities across the District from east to west.
- Other important routes include the A507, A600 and A602.

For international travel, both London Luton Airport and London Stansted Airport are within easy reach of our District.

As we plan for North Hertfordshire, we want people to be able to travel safely, efficiently and sustainably. We therefore need to consider how best to:



- Improve opportunities for walking, cycling and public transport.
- Support better connectivity between communities.
- Improve access to key destinations and services.
- Reduce reliance on private cars where practical.
- Ensure that transport infrastructure keeps pace with growth.
- Support our wider environmental and climate objectives.

Key Characteristics of North Hertfordshire



Second largest district in Herts at **375 square kilometres**



Total population **133,583**



59,000 dwellings



Life expectancy

80.9 years Male

83.2 years Female



Working age population of **82,133** people, **85.2%** economically active



9 chalk stream Main Rivers, 3% of the UK total



4 main towns (Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston)



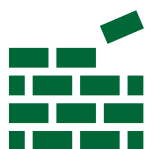
Located between **two** international airports, London Luton Airport and London Stansted Airport



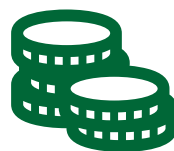
Circa **66,000** jobs



Five railway stations provide direct services to Peterborough, Cambridge, King's Lynn, London and Hertford



6,830 active businesses



Ranked **269 out of 317**
of English Local Authorities
for deprivation (317 = least
deprived)

**A PLACE-BASED
SPATIAL
STRATEGY FOR
NORTH
HERTFORDSHIRE**

A place-based spatial strategy for North Hertfordshire

What is a spatial strategy?

A spatial strategy is a long-term approach for how an area should evolve over time.

The [National Planning Policy Framework, 2026 \(NPPF\)](#)¹⁶ makes clear that we must prepare a spatial strategy that is genuinely plan-led, based on clear and up-to-date evidence. Our strategy should be based on long-term understanding of how much development is needed in North Hertfordshire and should fit with the wider, sub-regional plan, known as the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS), that is being produced by Hertfordshire County Council.

We must set out a positive vision for how our area will change over time. This includes making clear decisions about where growth should happen, how much development is needed, and which places are most suitable for it.

Our Local Plan must identify minimum levels of development, allocate land for growth, set out broad locations for development, and establish a clear hierarchy of settlements so growth is directed to the most sustainable locations.

This means carrying out detailed assessments of housing and economic needs in North Hertfordshire, including understanding land that is available to develop, population changes, market demands, employment trends, and infrastructure capacity. We have already published some evidence on our [webpage](#) and this will be updated when new assessments have been finalised.

The NPPF also promotes the establishment of a settlement hierarchy. This includes looking at:

- access to services;
- transport links;
- infrastructure capacity; and
- environmental constraints.

This helps ensure homes, jobs and town-centre uses are directed to the most suitable and well-connected places in our District, while protecting less suitable settlements from inappropriate development.

Once agreed, the Spatial Strategy will

- Guide future decisions on the location of specific housing sites;

¹⁶

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a8334c03bd75b81e2329ac4/National_Planning_Policy_Framework.pdf

- Provides the framework against which planning applications are considered; and
- Enables infrastructure providers (schools, roads, NHS, and utilities) to plan and deliver services effectively.

Local Plan Call for Sites: Submitted Sites

Between June and September 2025, we carried out a [Call for Sites](#), inviting landowners, developers, organisations and members of the public to suggest land that they believed might be suitable for development through our new Local Plan. The sites submitted to us may have the potential to accommodate different types of development or land use. This could include housing, employment uses, mixed-use development, new open space, or land that could be used to support biodiversity and nature recovery.

We have published a [map](#)¹⁷ showing all the sites submitted through this process.

It is important to understand that this map includes all sites that have been submitted to us. Inclusion on the map does not mean that a site is suitable for development or that it will be allocated in our Local Plan.

We have begun a detailed assessment of all submitted sites and will continue this work over the coming months. This involves a comprehensive review of each site against a wide range of planning, environmental, infrastructure and sustainability criteria. Through this process, sites will be assessed and, where appropriate, discounted if they are not considered suitable, available, achievable or sustainable.

The outcome of this assessment work will help inform the selection of sites to be allocated in our Local Plan. A proposed list of allocations will be published as part of the Draft Local Plan, which is currently expected to be consulted on in Autumn 2027.

Alongside this Content and Evidence consultation, we are also seeking views on the sites that were submitted through the Call for Sites process. We welcome comments on any site that is of particular interest to you, whether you support or do not support its potential development.

However, it is important to reiterate that these sites are only suggestions submitted to us at this stage. They have not yet been fully assessed and should not be regarded as proposed allocations. Any sites that are ultimately recommended for allocation will only be identified following detailed technical assessment and public consultation through later stages of the plan-making process.

Small sites and brownfield sites

As part of allocating a range of size of sites, in order to provide a more robust pipeline for delivery, the NPPF requires local plans to set 10% of allocations of sites under 1ha and a further 10% of sites between 1ha and 2.5ha, unless there are strong reasons for not doing so. It should be noted that of the sites currently submitted, there is a lack of those sizes of sites. In addition, there are a significant number of greenfield sites compared to brownfield sites. We are therefore keeping the Call for Sites open until the end of the consultation

¹⁷ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/call-sites>

period on the Content and Evidence document and would encourage people to consider submission of those types of sites where they are considered deliverable.

Planning for housing growth

Meeting our future housing needs is one of the biggest challenges facing our Local Plan. Delivering enough new homes will require significant change across our District. Our Local Plan must ensure that the right number of homes are built, that they are the right types, and that they are in the most suitable places. This includes making sure the needs of different groups are met, such as families, older people, those who need affordable housing, and people with specialist housing needs.

We recognise the need for a major increase in housing delivery nationwide and the benefits this brings to the wider economy and people's life chances. Increasing the supply of homes is a key priority for the current Government, which has set an ambition to deliver 1.5 million new homes between 2024 and 2029.

Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople are an established part of our District's communities. National planning policy requires Local Plans to identify enough suitable sites to meet their accommodation needs. A strong spatial strategy should ensure these sites are in appropriate places, with good access to services, respect for the local environment, and consideration of travelling lifestyles. Providing well-designed, authorised sites will help meet needs properly and reduce the risk of unauthorised encampments.

Housing need

Using the Government's [standard method](#), we are expected to plan for around 1,036 additional new homes each year. So, for example, over the next 11 years, we would have to plan for around 11,396 new homes.

We currently have over 12,100 homes already planned or have permission in our District – see Table 3. This is based on the existing Local Plan allocations and current planning approvals.

Of our current site allocations without planning permission or with permission but yet to be built out, we have 9,844 homes that could potentially be taken forward as new allocations in the new Local Plan. The NPPF is clear that housing targets should be seen as a minimum and therefore we will still need to consider the appropriateness of other potential sites put forward through our recent [Call for Sites](#) process. If during the next Plan period, some sites are delayed and we are unable to meet our 5 year housing land supply, as is the case now, we would also be required to provide a 20% buffer. This means allocating a further 2,279 homes in that circumstance.

Table 3 – Current residential commitments in North Hertfordshire, 31 March 2026

Source of sites	Number of homes	Less than 1ha	1ha – 2.5ha
Sites under construction	812	-	-
Minor development with permission	262	-	-
Major development with full permission	302	LP allocations 108	LP allocations 125
Other permissions	1,115	0	42
Local Plan allocations without permission	9,611	292	304
Total	12,102	400	471

Important choices still need to be made about where and how our remaining homes should be delivered. These decisions must strike a balance between meeting housing needs, protecting the character of our District, and creating places where people can live, work and thrive.

To help inform these decisions, we are preparing a [Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment](#)¹⁸, in line with Government guidance. This work will help identify suitable land and will inform proposed site allocations in our new Local Plan.

We have prepared a [Strategic Housing Market Assessment](#)¹⁹ to understand what types and sizes of homes will be required over the next 11 years. More detail is provided in the Housing chapter of this document.

Any new planning policy will decide where new homes can be built in our District. The aim is to use land efficiently by choosing locations that suit their surroundings and can be supported by the right schools, public transport options and local services, both now and in the future.

As we prepare our new Local Plan, we need to be mindful of not only the needs of our District, but also the new wider unitary areas, as part of LGR. Future planning decisions will need to take account of how growth and investment may be delivered across this broader geography and how different areas can work together to meet shared challenges and opportunities.

This includes considering wider requirements for:

- Housing growth
- Employment growth
- Infrastructure provision

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>

¹⁹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

- Nature recovery and biodiversity enhancement
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation

Settlement hierarchy

The settlement hierarchy helps shape our Local Plan's spatial strategy by determining where development should be focused. When developing different options for our Local Plan, it is helpful to group settlements into a hierarchy that reflects the role each place plays within North Hertfordshire and their capacity for accommodating growth.

This hierarchy should be based on a range of factors, such as how many people live there, the size of the settlement, the services and facilities available, and how well it is connected by transport.

We have asked our parishes to identify all the services in each of the settlements within their parish boundaries. We will use this alongside information on proximity to sustainable modes of transport to help us categorise settlements according to a range of criteria.

We have identified some key services that are important for each of the settlement as well as other facilities and services that provide a more supporting role.

Key Services

Primary/lower school

Food shop/corner shop

Village/Parish hall

Public House

Place of worship

Bus service

Support Services

Education

- Primary school
- Secondary school
- Further education
- Creche/nursery



Shops

- Food shop
- Retail shop



Hospitality

- Restaurant/pubs/cafes
- Takeaways

Healthcare

- Hospital
- GP surgery

Professional Services

- Post office



- Health clinic
- Dementia day care



- Bank/building society
- Estate agent etc

- Dentist
- Optician
- Pharmacy

Community Services

- Village/community hall
- Place of worship
- Permanent library
- Leisure centre
- Sports club
- Entertainment facilities



Outside facilities/ Open space

- Public park/garden
- Sports pitch
- MUGA
- Playground
- Allotment
- Public open space



Access to public transport

Railway stations (in or serving North Hertfordshire)

- Ashwell and Morden
- Arlesey
- Baldock
- Hitchin
- Knebworth
- Letchworth
- Luton
- Meldreth
- Royston
- Stevenage



Bus services

- Availability of bus stops
- Frequency of bus services to key destinations such as Town Centres



Connectivity

The presence and reliability of quality Broadband coverage

- Gigabit-Capable / Full Fibre (FTTP)
- Superfast (Fibre to the Cabinet - FTTC)
- Standard Broadband
- 5G Broadband



Once all the information has been collected, we will use it to understand what services and facilities each settlement has, including broadband coverage, as well as proximity to sustainable modes of transport and key employment centres and apply the same approach to all of them to create a clear settlement hierarchy.

Q3. Do you agree with the criteria we are using to categorise settlements? Yes/ No

Please explain your reasons

Q4. Are there any other criteria you think we should be using to help categorise settlements?

Spatial Development Options

Our new Local Plan needs a clear strategy that brings all our policies together and helps deliver our overall vision for our District, towns and villages.

We have also been working with neighbouring authorities to look at larger-scale growth across a wider area. A [North East Central Hertfordshire Vision 2050](#) document sets out some of our shared aspirations, including the potential for a new settlement.

There are a number of growth options that could influence how development is planned across North Hertfordshire in the future. In practice, however, it is unlikely that any single option would be capable of delivering the scale and type of development required on its own.

The most sustainable and deliverable approach is likely to involve a combination of the first three options, allowing growth to be distributed across a range of locations while making best use of existing settlements, infrastructure and development opportunities.

Assessing the impacts of growth

As part of the plan-making process, we are undertaking a Sustainability Appraisal, that includes the requirements of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This assessment helps us understand the likely effects of different options for future growth and development across North Hertfordshire by considering the potential impacts of different housing growth

options and development approaches, identifying their strengths, weaknesses and likely consequences. Further details of these impacts across the strategic development growth options are set out in the Sustainability Appraisal scoping report.

Different growth options

The following sections set out the different growth options, presented in our current order of preference for the Local Plan. This ordering reflects our initial assessment of how each option could contribute to meeting housing, employment and infrastructure needs, while protecting the environment and supporting sustainable communities.

1. Infill Development/Urban intensification

This option would focus on building more homes within existing towns and villages. It would make use of available sites within existing settlement boundaries and maximise the use of land, particularly in central locations such as town centres and near transport hubs like railway stations and bus interchanges in urban areas. The focus would be on redeveloping previously used (brownfield) land within urban areas.

Building more homes and welcoming more people into existing urban areas could help bring new life to town centres in North Hertfordshire. This could have a positive knock-on effect on local economies and may also help support jobs and productivity in nearby employment areas.

This approach can make more efficient use of land, but it can also create challenges for infrastructure, character and local services. It is also highly unlikely to meet the District's identified housing needs in full, which could have wider social and economic implications, including reduced delivery of affordable housing, increased housing affordability pressures, difficulties in meeting the needs of different groups within the community, and constraints on economic growth due to a limited supply of homes for the local workforce. The advantages and disadvantages of this approach are shown in the table below.

Table 4 – Advantages and disadvantages of infill development/urban intensification

Advantages	Disadvantages
New housing is directed to locations with existing transport links, schools and town-centre services, making walking or cycling more practical and reducing reliance on private cars	Excessive development may affect the character and setting of historic areas, potentially making
Focusing development on brownfield land and within existing urban areas can reduce the need to build on Green Belt land	Higher concentrations of housing can increase traffic congestion and place pressure on the local environment
More people living in and around town centres can help support shops, cafés, services and local businesses as high streets change	Greater housing density can create additional demand for schools, utilities, healthcare and other community infrastructure

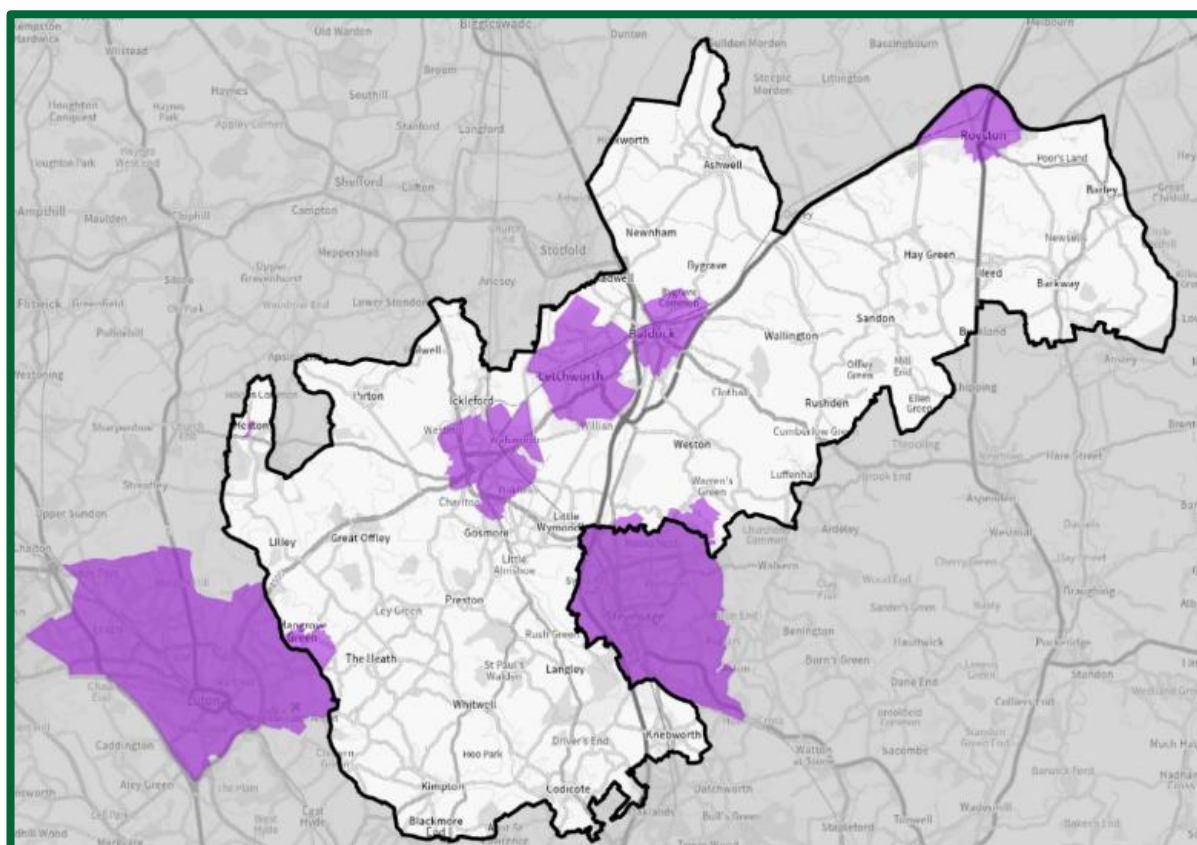
Advantages	Disadvantages
Urban areas provide important opportunities to deliver affordable housing, self-build plots and a wider range of housing types	Increased traffic, hard surfaces and taller buildings can contribute to poorer air quality and intensify to the “urban heat island” effect
Makes efficient use of previously developed vacant, derelict or underutilised land	Some developments may result in the loss of urban green spaces, potentially affecting biodiversity and local amenity unless suitable mitigation or compensation is provided
	Reliance on infill / urban intensification is likely to result in significant under-delivery against the District’s housing targets and may increase the likelihood of planning permissions being granted on appeal for sites such as greenfield sites. This would potentially result in development that is less sustainable and more environmentally damaging.

2. Urban expansion

This option would deliver new housing through strategically planned edge of town extensions. Development would take place around the edges of the main towns, such as Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston, as well as considering one or more larger sites in other possible locations, such as the currently safeguarded site west of Stevenage or potentially further development around Luton.

New homes would be planned as well-designed strategic extensions to existing communities, with careful masterplanning to make sure they connect well to existing towns, services and transport networks. Growth would be phased and supported by new infrastructure, such as schools, transport and community facilities, delivered alongside development. This approach balances spreading growth across several locations focusing development where it can be planned and delivered most effectively.

Expanding towns through development on land at their edges can help meet housing and other development needs, but it can also have impacts on the environment, infrastructure and local character. The advantages and disadvantages of this approach are summarised in the table below.

Figure 5 – Urban areas in and around North Hertfordshire

Source: North Herts Council

Table 5 – Advantages and disadvantages of urban expansion

Advantages	Disadvantages
Building in larger, planned locations can reduce more dispersed development in the countryside.	Can make neighbouring towns appear to expand towards one another, reducing the distinction between settlements and weakening their individual identity.
Makes efficient use of existing schools, healthcare facilities, public transport, roads and utilities, reducing the need for significant new infrastructure.	Development on open land can alter the appearance of settlement edges and the relationship between towns and the surrounding countryside.
Development on the edge of towns can support the vitality and viability of local shops, services, employment opportunities and community facilities.	Large-scale growth can place pressure on schools, healthcare services and transport networks unless infrastructure investment keeps pace.

Can make walking, cycling and public transport more viable, helping to reduce reliance on private cars and lower emissions.	May increase traffic congestion, reduce open space and change the character of an area.
Allows development to be coordinated and planned comprehensively from the outset, ensuring housing, employment, infrastructure, green space and transport are delivered together.	Large strategic sites often require more extensive planning, infrastructure and site preparation, meaning it can take many years before homes are delivered.
Larger developments can support the timely delivery of essential infrastructure, such as schools, healthcare facilities, roads and community amenities.	Housing delivery may depend heavily on a small number of large developers, reducing flexibility if circumstances change.
Fewer, larger sites can enable more integrated development and reduce the risk of piecemeal growth.	Delays to infrastructure funding, legal agreements or site-specific issues can slow down housing delivery.
Can support wider economic growth and facilitate strategic planning with neighbouring areas.	Concentrating growth in a limited number of places can intensify impacts on local communities, transport networks and the environment.
Provides greater opportunity to incorporate low-carbon energy, sustainable drainage and active travel infrastructure that maybe harder to deliver on small sites.	If delivery on major sites stalls, there may be fewer alternative sites available to maintain housing supply.
	May involve development on Green Belt land, raising concerns about the loss of openness and the long-term purposes of the Green Belt.

3. Dispersed village growth

This option would provide new homes through a number of smaller developments spread across villages in North Hertfordshire. Building would usually happen within villages or on land next to them. The focus would be on meeting local housing needs while helping villages remain active, supported and sustainable.

We will use the settlement hierarchy to identify which villages are best placed to accommodate development. This will help ensure that growth is directed to villages with the right level of services, facilities and infrastructure. In some cases, allowing development in some of the smaller villages can help support local services, such as schools, shops and community facilities, and keep them viable where they might otherwise be at risk from declining use.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to dispersed village growth that need to be carefully considered. While this approach can help meet local housing needs and support the vitality of rural communities, it can also create challenges relating to infrastructure,

services, transport and impacts on the countryside. The advantages and disadvantages of this approach are shown in the table below.

Table 6 – Advantages and disadvantages of dispersed village growth

Advantages	Disadvantages
Small-scale housing growth can help sustain villages communities by supporting services, facilities and community life.	Many villages have limited public transport, school places, GP capacity and utilities, making additional development more challenging to accommodate.
Can help deliver homes that meet identified local needs, including affordable housing, smaller homes or housing for older residents.	New housing may increase car dependency, especially in locations where jobs, services and public transport options are limited.
More residents help maintain the viability of village shops, schools, pubs and community facilities.	If not carefully managed, growth can affect the scale, character and rural identity of villages, particularly those with historic significance.
Distributing development across a number of villages can help spread growth more evenly and avoid putting too much pressure onto one single settlement.	The cumulative impact of numerous small developments can have significant effects on countryside character, biodiversity and tranquillity.
Smaller village sites are often easier and quicker to deliver and can attract a wider range of developers, including small and medium sized builders.	Small village sites on their own are unlikely to deliver enough homes to meet overall District needs and would need to be complemented with larger growth locations to meet district-wide requirements.
Can support a more consistent supply of housing, reducing reliance on a small number of large sites.	Providing infrastructure and services across multiple villages can be less efficient and more costly than concentrating development in larger settlements.
Growth across a network of villages may help support improved rural public transport, with increased demand contributing to the viability of local bus services and connections.	

4. New settlement growth

This option would accommodate a significant proportion of future housing needs through the delivery of one or more new, freestanding settlements. These would be comprehensively

planned developments designed to operate as sustainable communities, with their own infrastructure, services and employment opportunities. Rather than relying primarily on existing towns and villages, the new settlements would be largely self-contained. They would be comparable in scale and ambition to developments such as Cambourne (approximately 23,000 residents) and the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (around 45,000 residents).

This option should more appropriately be considered through the Spatial Development Strategy, which should assess growth needs across Hertfordshire as a whole. Any new settlement proposal would likely require close working with neighbouring authorities, such as Central Bedfordshire and South Cambridgeshire, given the potential for cross boundary impacts and opportunities.

It is also unlikely that a new settlement could be delivered within the timeframe of this Local Plan. New settlements typically require significant preparation, including land assembly, masterplanning, infrastructure planning and funding, meaning they often take many years before development can begin. The advantages and disadvantages of this approach are shown in the table below.

Table 7 – Advantages and disadvantages of new settlement growth

Advantages	Disadvantages
Government support can make it easier to deliver large-scale, planned developments, through dedicated programmes, funding and long-term strategic backing.	Requires substantial upfront investment in land, infrastructure and services, often involving significant financial risk and potentially requiring public funding or complex delivery arrangements.
New settlements can enable the early provision of major infrastructure, such as schools, roads, healthcare facilities, utilities and green spaces, rather than relying on existing services with limited capacity.	Requires large areas of land, which can have significant impacts on the landscape and may affect agricultural land, biodiversity, heritage assets and the countryside.
Can help reduce pressure on existing towns and villages by accommodating growth in a planned new location rather than through incremental expansion.	New settlements can take many years to plan, approve and build out, limiting their ability to meet housing needs in the Plan period.
Provides an opportunity to create well-designed communities from the outset, with integrated neighbourhoods, a mix of homes and jobs, attractive green infrastructure and sustainable, low-carbon development.	Delivery often relies on a small number of major developers and partners and can increase vulnerability to changes in the markets or investment priorities.
Offers a clear, long term strategy for accommodating growth, providing greater	Delays to infrastructure funding, governance arrangements or site delivery can have serious

Advantages

certainty for communities, infrastructure providers and developers.

Disadvantages

consequences for housing supply and the achievement of growth targets.

Q5. We intend to use a combination of growth options 1 - 3 as set out above. Do you agree?

If not, why?

Q6. Are there other spatial options that should be considered?

Q7. Are there broad locations that we could consider for a new settlement(s)?

Efficient use of land

The NPPF encourages making the best use of land so that we can provide homes and other development while protecting the environment and creating safe, healthy places to live.

This is a fundamental part of our Local Plan. It means prioritising the reuse of previously developed (brownfield) land, increasing density where appropriate, and bringing sites forward in an efficient and sustainable way to make the best use of the land that we have.

We should make the most of land within existing built-up areas, such as:

- car parks
- service yards
- underused retail sites
- older estates that could be regenerated

This helps reduce the need to build on undeveloped (greenfield) land.

Our Local Plan will use design codes to show how land can be used more efficiently; this could include filling gaps between buildings, making better use of low-density sites, allowing taller buildings in suitable locations, and small infill developments within settlement boundaries. The aim is to deliver more homes without reducing the quality of development.

Minimum density standards will also be set, particularly in town centres and other well-connected locations across our District.

Where sites are allocated in our Local Plan, some will be expected to provide a mix of uses because this helps reduce the need to travel and can improve the local environment. We will also review sites that have been previously allocated in our current Local Plan that are unlikely to come forward and consider whether they are better suited to alternative uses.

National policy requires us to set minimum residential density standards for residential development outside town centres and locations that have a high level of connectivity. NDMPs currently set a minimum density of at least 35 dwellings per hectare (dph) within a reasonable walking distance (800m) of a well-connected railway station (within the top 80 travel to work areas (TTWA)). All North Hertfordshire's rail stations are within the top 80 TTWAs. A density of at least 35 dwellings per hectare should be achieved within the net developable area of the site. Higher densities – of at least 45 dwellings per hectare – should be achieved where the service frequency is at least twice that of the minimum required for a well-connected station.

Figure 6 – Example of 50dph



Source: Levitt Bernstein

We propose the introduction of additional minimum housing density requirements, based on the net developable area, in locations that are well served by services, facilities and public transport:

- 45dph within the town centre boundaries of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston.
- 40dph within the wider town boundaries and urban extension areas.
- 30dph within larger villages, subject to the outcome of the proposed settlement hierarchy review.

These thresholds would only apply to residential sites over 10 units and represent minimum expectations rather than fixed targets. Higher or lower densities may be appropriate in some locations, depending on factors such as local character and prevailing densities.

Figure 7 – Example of 40dph

Source: Levitt Bernstein

Figure 8 – Example of 30dph

Source: Levitt Bernstein

Q8. Do you agree with these minimum housing density requirements? Yes/No

Please provide your reasons

Green Belt

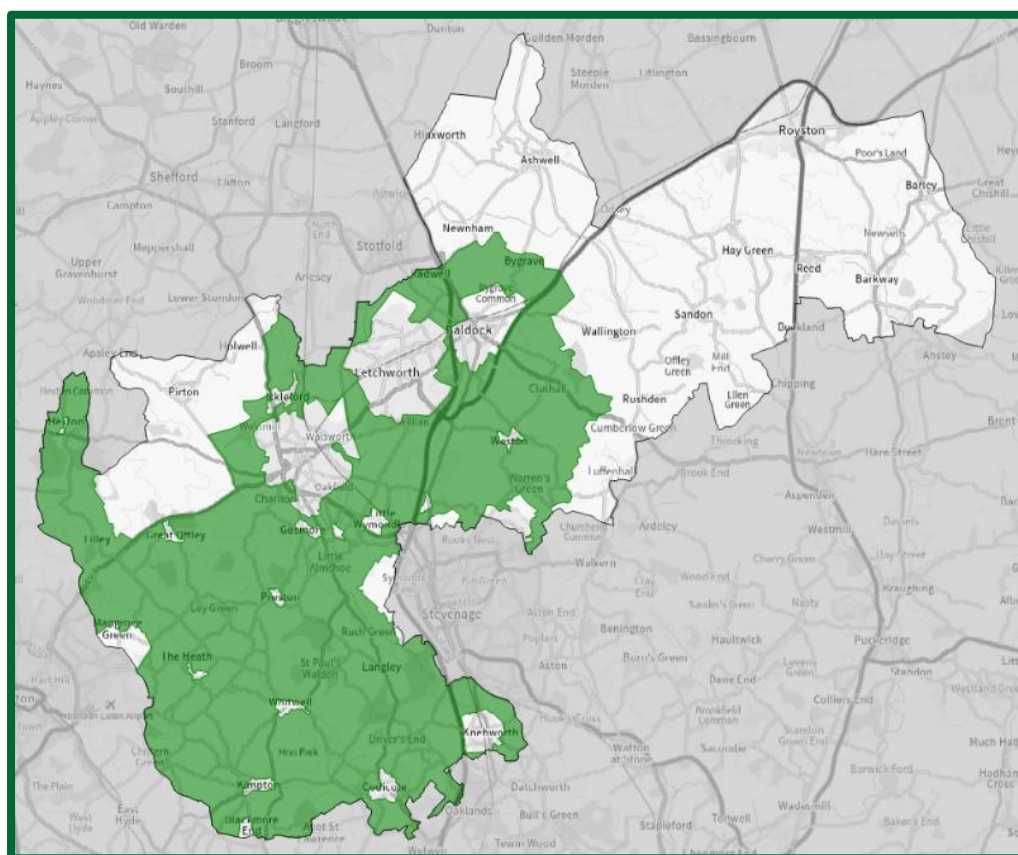
Green Belt is a national planning policy that protects open land around towns and cities to stop them from sprawling into the countryside. Its main purpose is to keep countryside permanently open, prevent nearby towns from merging into one another, and encourage development to take place within existing urban areas instead.

Green Belt land serves five key purposes:

- a. Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b. Prevent the merging of neighbouring towns;
- c. Assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d. Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e. Assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

These purposes help guide decisions about whether development on Green Belt land should be supported or resisted.

Figure 9 - Green Belt in North Hertfordshire



Source: North Herts Council

In North Hertfordshire, we were one of only a small number of councils that added land to the Green Belt when adopting our current Local Plan. Around 4,000 hectares of land were

designated as Green Belt, resulting in a net increase of nearly 25% to 17,590 hectares of Green Belt land in North Hertfordshire in our current Local Plan.

In 2024, the NPPF introduced the concept of “Grey Belt” into policy. It recognised that not all Green Belt land serves the same purpose. Some areas do little to check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas (a), prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another (b), or preserve the setting and special character of historic towns (d).

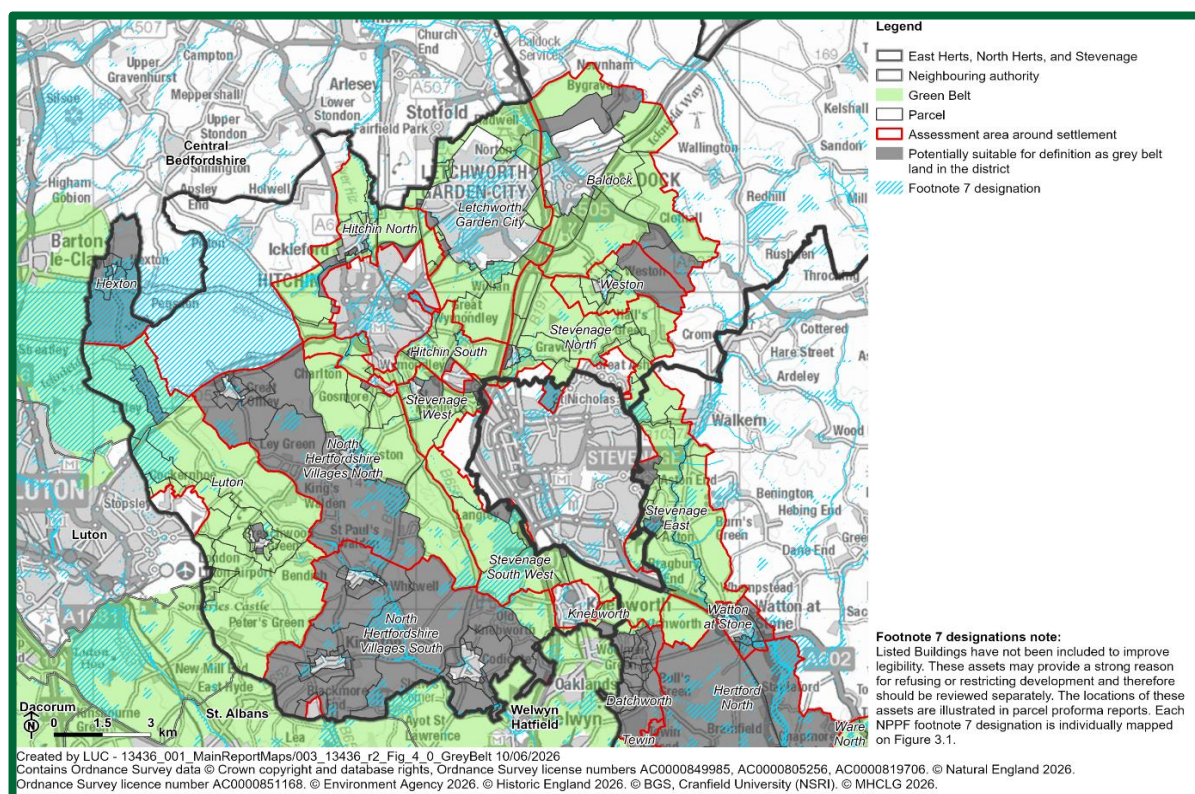
Where land does not perform strongly against these 3 purposes, it may now be considered for development, if other conditions are met. Sites would also need to be in a sustainable location as well as meet what are known as the “Golden Rules”, requiring development to deliver clear public benefits, such as affordable housing, good design, green space and supporting infrastructure.

If land is identified as Grey Belt, is in a sustainable location and the Golden Rules are met, instead of having to prove “very special circumstances,” decisions focus on whether proposals meet planning policies, manage impacts properly, and deliver clear benefits for communities.

The NDMPs also introduce a separate route for development near public transport, particularly around railway stations in the Green Belt. This supports the idea of locating homes where people can travel easily by train, helping to reduce reliance on cars. This approach does not depend on land being classed as Grey Belt.

Overall, these changes move Green Belt policy away from a one-size-fits-all approach. They allow carefully planned development in limited locations where land does not perform strongly against certain Green Belt purposes, while ensuring meaningful public benefits and continued protection for the most important areas.

Figure 10 – Areas potentially suitable for definition as grey-belt



Source: North Herts Green Belt Study 2026

We have reviewed all Green Belt land in North Hertfordshire, in line with the Government's requirements, and identified areas that now meet the definition of Grey Belt. This assessment has been published as part of the [evidence](#) supporting our new Local Plan.

Because the NPPF 2026 now sets out detailed policies for Green Belt land, there is very limited scope for us to introduce our own Green Belt policies specific to North Hertfordshire. For these reasons, we are proposing that our Local Plan relies on national Green Belt policy set out in the NPPF. For decision making purposes, the NPPF provides the policy framework for:

- How development is controlled in the Green Belt (Policy GB6)
- What types of development are acceptable in the Green Belt (Policy GB7)
- The 'Golden Rules' that must be met where development is proposed (Policy GB8)

Q9. Are there any issues in relation to Green Belt that our Local Plan needs to cover that are not already addressed? Yes/No

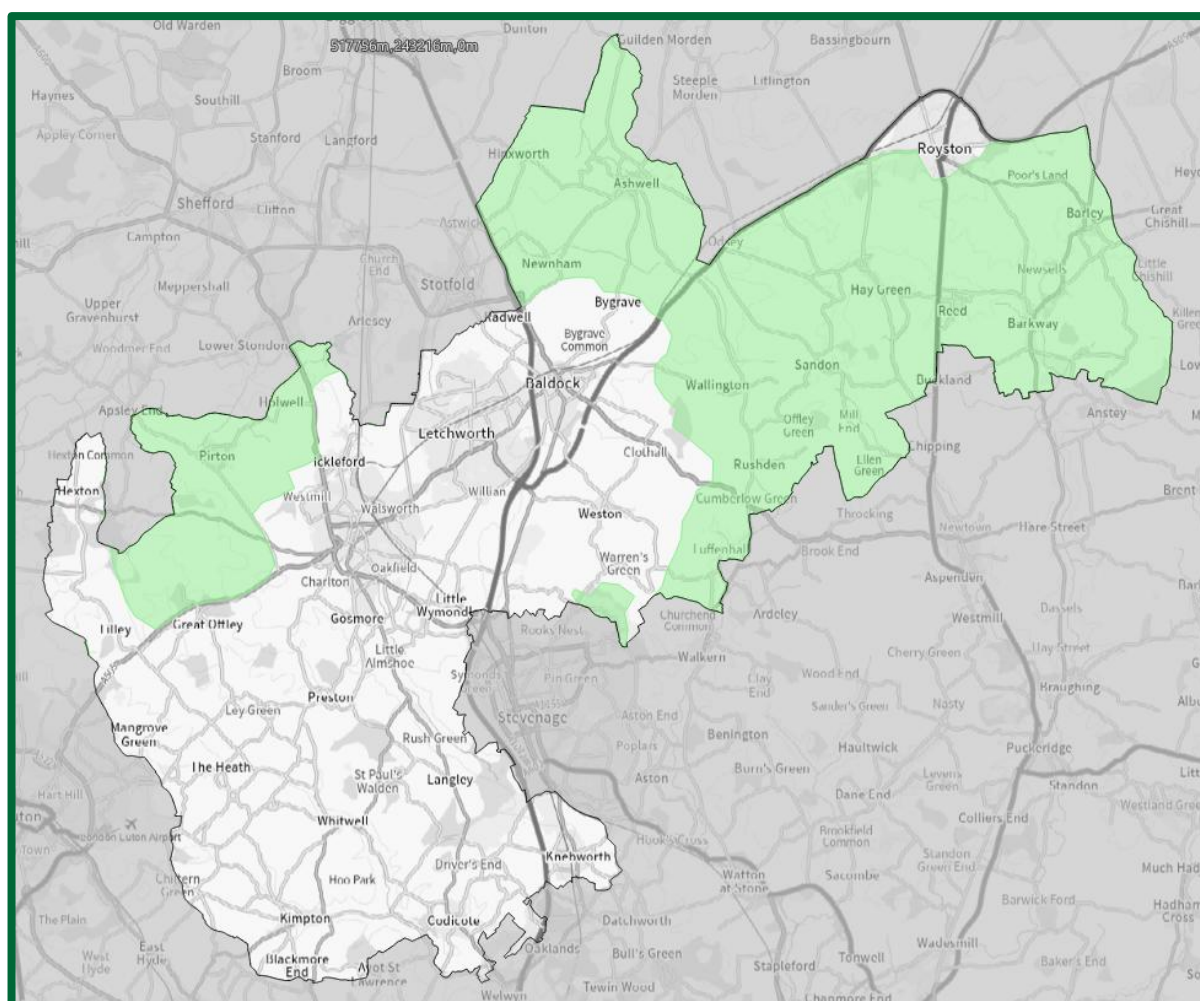
Please explain your reasons

Rural Area beyond the Green Belt

Our current Local Plan designates a large area as 'Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt'. This covers much of the eastern part of our District, including most of the land between Baldock and Royston, the villages and countryside to the south of Royston, and land to the north and west of Hitchin outside the Green Belt.

These rural areas include some of our District's highest-quality countryside. Our use of the term 'Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt' is a local planning designation and is not the same as the NPPF definition of 'rural areas'.

Figure 11 – Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt in North Hertfordshire



Source: North Herts Council

The intention of our current Local Plan policies is to protect the countryside from unnecessary or inappropriate development, while still allowing essential, small-scale, or locally beneficial development that supports villages, the rural economy, and community needs without urbanising the area.

Q10. Should we keep a designation of a “Rural Area beyond the Green Belt”? Yes/No

Please explain your reasons

Heritage

Our District has a rich history, with archaeological evidence of settlements stretching back to the Palaeolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Ages. Our heritage continues through the character of the medieval market towns of Hitchin, Baldock and Royston, each preserving notable historic buildings and distinctive townscapes.

Letchworth Garden City stands as a pioneering example of urban design, celebrated as the world's first Garden City. The town features exceptional architecture by renowned designers including Barry Parker & Raymond Unwin, Bennett and Bidwell, Cecil Hignett, and Mackay Hugh Baillie-Scott.

North Hertfordshire is home to:

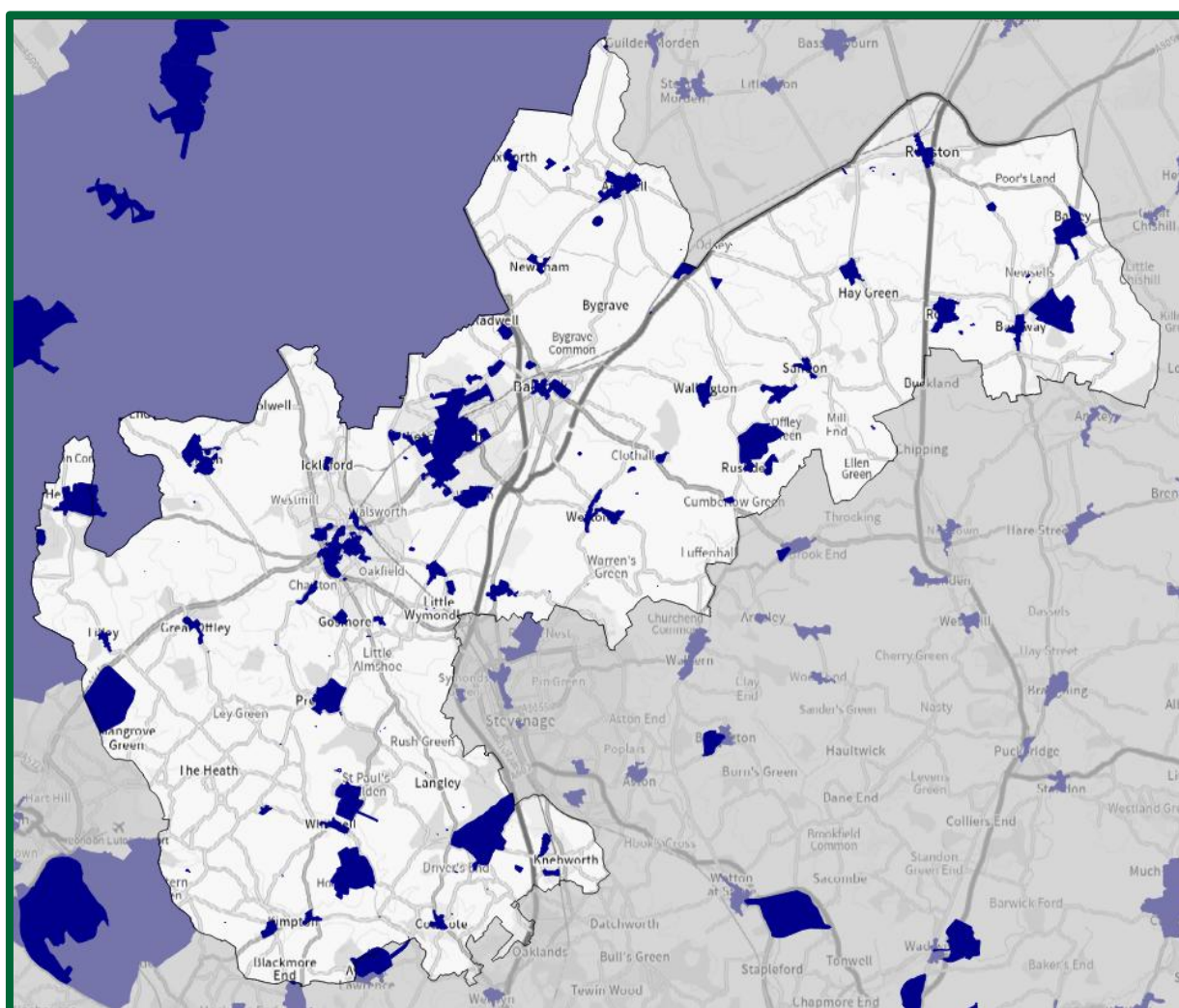
- Around 2,500 listed buildings
- 63 scheduled monuments
- 13 registered parks and gardens
- 44 Conservation Areas

The NPPF requires our Local Plan to support the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the historic environment whilst also setting out detailed policies relating to the heritage assets as an irreplaceable resource.

There is very limited scope for us to introduce our own heritage policies specific to North Hertfordshire. For these reasons, our Local Plan will rely on national historic environment policy set out in the NPPF to conserve and enhance our heritage assets in our District which includes but is not limited to non-designated heritage assets and archaeological sites.

While our Local Plan will rely on the NDMPs for decision-making on heritage matters, we will prepare a North Hertfordshire Heritage Strategy. The strategy will provide a local framework for understanding our heritage assets and identifying opportunities to protect, conserve and enhance their significance and contribution to the character of our District.

Figure 12 – Heritage assets across North Hertfordshire



Source: North Herts Council

Q11. Are there any issues in relation to heritage that our Local Plan needs to cover that are not already addressed?

If so, what?

HOMES

Homes

Good-quality housing can improve health and wellbeing, support stronger communities and help people feel connected to the places where they live. At the same time, new homes have an important role to play in tackling climate change through better energy efficiency, lower carbon emissions and more sustainable construction methods. Our [Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029](#)²⁰ sets out how we'll make sure the right mix of homes is available to meet local needs.

Our current Local Plan includes a target to deliver 13,000 homes between 2011 and 2031. Since the beginning of the Plan period, thousands of new homes have been completed across our District, with further homes already under construction or in the planning process; but it's not enough to meet our current housing requirement.

A significant proportion of future housing delivery is expected to come from strategic development sites around Baldock, Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, alongside smaller sites that come forward over time. These smaller developments, often referred to as windfall sites, continue to make an important contribution to housing supply across our District.

The challenge is not simply to deliver more homes, but to deliver the right homes in the right places. This includes homes that are affordable, accessible, energy-efficient and designed to meet the changing needs of our communities.

Figure 13 - Meridan Gate, Royston



Source: North Herts Council

Planning legislation allows some commercial buildings to be converted into homes without the need for a full planning application. While these conversions can help increase housing supply, they can also result in the loss of employment space and town centre businesses.

To help maintain this balance, we have introduced [Article 4 Directions](#)²¹ in key locations. These directions remove certain permitted development rights, ensuring that proposals for such changes can be properly assessed through the planning process. This approach helps

²⁰ https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-04/NHC%20Housing%20Strategy%202024-2029_0.pdf

²¹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/article-4-directions-0>

protect important employment areas, support vibrant town centres and ensure that housing growth does not come at the expense of local jobs and services.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026)

National planning policy requires us to plan for enough homes to meet the needs of our communities, ensuring that people can access homes that are suitable, affordable and meet a range of needs throughout their lives.

The Government uses a [standard method](#)²² to calculate the minimum number of homes we should plan for. Based on that methodology, North Hertfordshire has a housing requirement of 1,036 homes per year, equating to approximately 11,396 homes between 2029 and 2040.

National planning policy requires us to identify and maintain a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. This is an important part of ensuring that enough homes are available to meet current and future needs. Currently we are facing a challenge in maintaining a sufficient supply of homes in the short term.

Although major housing sites have been allocated through the current Local Plan around North of Baldock (BA1), North of Stevenage (NS1), and North of Letchworth Garden City (LG1), they take time to progress through planning, infrastructure provision and construction before large numbers of homes can be delivered.

National policy recognises that a substantial proportion of new homes may need to come from larger developments, such as urban extensions or new settlements. These developments can provide opportunities to deliver not only housing, but also schools, healthcare facilities, open spaces, community facilities and transport improvements. However, they must be planned and designed carefully to create sustainable and attractive places to live.

At the same time, future housing delivery should not rely solely on large sites. Smaller and medium-sized developments also have an important role to play. The NPPF requires Local Plans to allocate a range of size of sites in order to provide a more robust pipeline for delivery, setting a requirement for 10% of allocations of sites of under 1ha and a further 10% of sites between 1ha and 2.5ha, unless there are strong reasons for not doing so. This is to help create opportunities for different types of developers and can increase the overall supply of new homes.

The NPPF also places a strong emphasis on making more efficient use of land in locations that have good access to public transport, jobs, shops and other services, helping to reduce the need to travel and making the best use of existing infrastructure.

Providing affordable housing remains a key priority. Our current Local Plan requires major residential developments to deliver between 25% and 40% affordable housing, depending on the size and location of the scheme. National policy also places increasing emphasis on meeting the needs of households who require social rented housing, ensuring that homes are available to those most in need.

²² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

The NPPF contains NDMPs that relate to the locating of specialist forms of accommodation, rural exception sites, isolated homes in the countryside, and the locating of traveller sites. Our Local Plan will not duplicate policies for matters that are already covered by these.

What does the data tell us?

Demographics

North Hertfordshire has an ageing population; The median age here is now 42 years old, up from 40 in 2011, and slightly higher than the national median age of 40 across England.

As people's ages change, so too do their housing needs. Older residents may prefer smaller, more accessible homes, while younger families often look for larger spaces.

Our housing provision has to reflect the needs of all our residents, from first-time buyers to retirees, so that our communities remain inclusive, balanced, and supportive for every generation.

Housing completions

Housing completions in North Hertfordshire have fallen below the levels needed to meet our housing targets. This has contributed to a growing gap between the number of homes required and the number being delivered, making it harder to meet the needs of local people and maintain a 5-year housing land supply, which then puts us at risk of more speculative development.

Figure 14 – Net housing completions compared to target completions in North Hertfordshire, 2011 - 2031



Source: North Herts Monitoring 2025/26

We continue to work with developers, infrastructure providers, local communities and other partners to help ensure that planned developments are delivered in a timely way and that

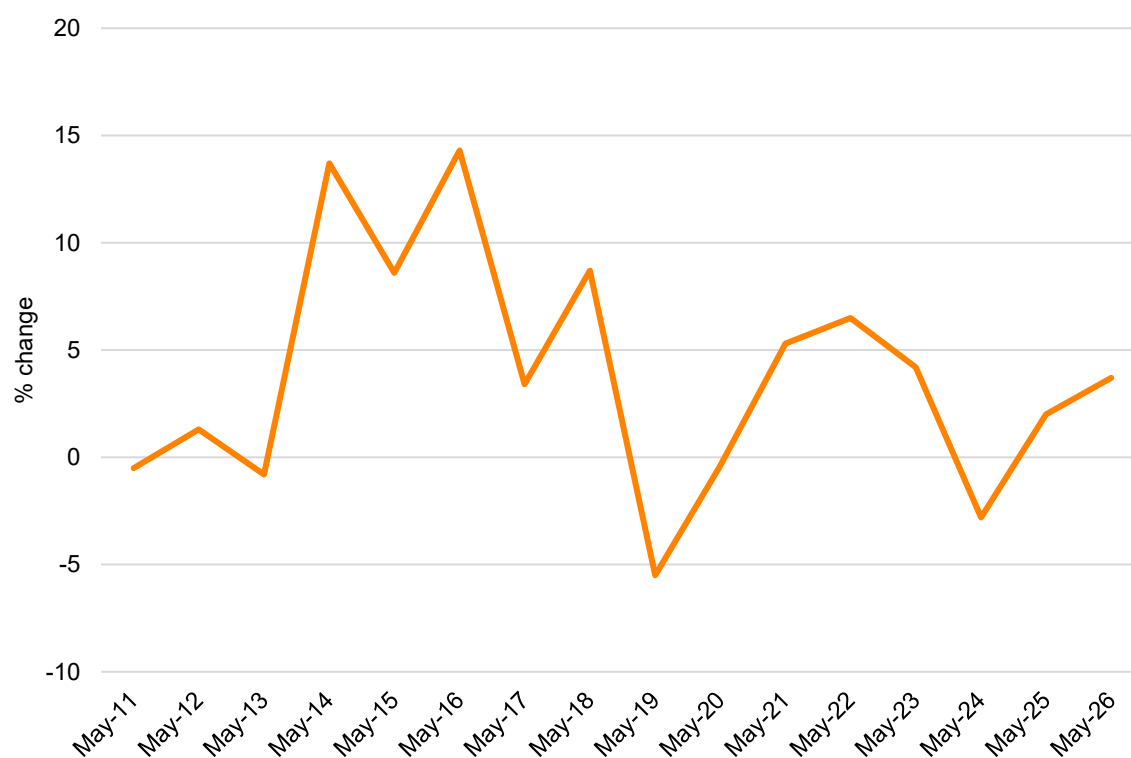
new homes are supported by the services, facilities and infrastructure that communities need.

House prices

House prices in our District have continued to rise in recent years. As of May 2026 (provisional), the [average house price in North Hertfordshire](#) stood at £417,000, up 3.7% from May 2025²³

The rising cost of housing highlights the importance of planning for a greater supply of homes, including affordable housing, across our District to meet local needs, support mixed and balanced communities, and give more people the opportunity to live in a suitable home.

Figure 15 - [Annual change in house prices in North Hertfordshire](#), May 2011 - May 2026²⁴



Source: UK House Price Index from Office for National Statistics and HM Land Registry

Understanding our future housing needs

To help plan for future housing growth, we are preparing a range of evidence studies that will inform our new Local Plan and ensure decisions are based on a clear understanding of local needs.

²³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E07000099/>

²⁴ UK House Price Index from Office for National Statistics and HM Land Registry (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E07000099/>)

Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

We have prepared a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) to better understand the housing needs of North Hertfordshire including helping identify the types of homes needed, and consider the requirements of different groups within our communities, including:

- Families with children
- Young people and care leavers
- Older people
- Students
- People with disabilities or additional support needs
- Serving and former members of the armed forces
- People who rent their homes
- People wishing to build or commission their own homes
- Households in need of affordable housing

The findings of the SHMA will help shape future housing policies ensuring our Plan provides the right range of homes for our diverse communities.

Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)

We are preparing a Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) to identify land that may be suitable, available and achievable for future development. We undertook a call for sites in 2025 and are currently assessing their potential.

It is important to note that inclusion in the HELAA does not mean that a site will be allocated for development. The assessment is simply one of several pieces of evidence that will be considered as our Local Plan progresses.

Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation

We are reviewing the findings of the [Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment](#)²⁵ (GTAA) completed in 2024.

A revised assessment will provide up-to-date evidence on the current and future accommodation needs of Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities; whether additional pitches or plots may be required during our Plan period, ensuring any future needs are planned for appropriately.

The evidence will support the development of Plan policies to ensure suitable accommodation needs are considered alongside wider housing requirements across the District.

Monitoring housing delivery

Each year, we publish a [housing trajectory](#)²⁶ showing how housing is expected to be delivered across North Hertfordshire and whether we are on track to meet our identified housing requirement of 1,036 homes per year.

²⁵ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/North%20Herts%20Final%20Report%20Merged%2005082024.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/monitoring-reports>

Affordable housing

Affordable housing plays an important role in ensuring that people on low and moderate incomes can access homes that are safe, secure and suitable for their needs. A lack of available and appropriate homes can have wider impacts on individuals, families and communities; leading to increased housing insecurity, overcrowding, pressure on local services, poorer health and wellbeing, and difficulties for local employers in attracting and retaining workers.

In planning terms, affordable housing is housing provided for people whose needs are not met by the open market. This can include:

- Social rent
- Affordable rent
- Shared ownership
- Discounted market sale housing
- Other affordable routes to home ownership

Providing affordable housing is an important part of creating balanced and inclusive communities.

Our current Local Plan includes policies that require affordable housing to be delivered as part of larger residential developments using a stepped approach, with different affordable housing requirements depending on the size of the development.

Table 8 – Affordable Housing (Stepped Approach)

Development size	Affordable housing requirement
11-14 dwellings	25%
15-24 dwellings	35%
25 or more dwellings	40%

Source: North Herts Local Plan 2022

This approach reflected the evidence at the time our current Local Plan was prepared and showed larger developments can often support higher levels of affordable housing than smaller schemes.

We will be undertaking an updated Viability Assessment to understand what level of affordable housing can reasonably be delivered in the future. This will help inform any new affordable housing requirements and ensure that policies remain both ambitious and achievable.

Meeting different affordable housing needs

Providing affordable housing is not just about the number of homes delivered. It is also important to provide the right mix of affordable housing options to meet the needs of different households. Our new Plan will consider how best to provide a range of affordable housing options, helping to ensure that local people have access to homes that meet their needs and circumstances.

The findings of our Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) indicate a substantial need for affordable housing, including:

- affordable rented homes, including social rented housing
- affordable home ownership options
- a range of affordable housing tenures

Our SHMA also highlights that affordable housing need is not limited to households in the most urgent housing circumstances. While some households are in acute need of affordable rented accommodation, there are many others who are renting but cannot afford to buy a home in the open market.

Our SHMA identifies an annual shortfall of 277 social/affordable rented homes per year over the plan period (27% of the standard method figure), and a potential demand for up to 526 affordable home ownership homes per year, resulting in a total annual affordable housing need of 803 homes per year.

Our SHMA shows that it would be possible to meet acute needs for affordable housing if delivery of new affordable housing is maximised and priority is given to building social/affordable rented homes. It also shows that some households, particularly families who rely on benefits, are better off in social rented housing. What we prioritise is likely to impact on development viability and this leads to trade-offs which need to be considered, including whether we prioritise delivering more affordable housing overall, or focus on meeting acute needs which may mean delivering less overall.

Q12. Should we require fewer affordable homes overall if it meant a higher proportion of them were social rent?

For example, 30% affordable housing in total, but with 50% of that being social rent.

Housing mix

Providing a range of house types, sizes, and tenures ensures homes are available for families, young people, older people, and those with different incomes.

A varied mix of homes gives residents more options to find homes that suit their lifestyle and circumstances and supports local services (schools, shops, transport) by attracting a stable and diverse population.

The mix of homes provided within a development can also influence how efficiently the land is used. For example, a greater proportion of smaller homes may be able to achieve higher densities than those made up primarily of larger family housing.

We are going to use the findings of the SHMA to inform future housing mix requirements. This will help us understand the types, sizes and tenures of homes needed across our District and ensure that new development responds to the needs of current our residents.

Q13. What types, sizes and tenures of homes do you think are required in the District?

Are you aware of any specific gaps in specific locations?

Specialist forms of housing

It is important that our Local Plan supports a range of specialist housing, including

- specialist housing for older people who want to live independently in smaller, more manageable homes such as sheltered accommodation, retirement living, etc (Use Class C3, dwelling-houses)
- supported housing and care accommodation where care and support is provided as an integral part of residents' living arrangements. This can include accommodation for older people, people with physical or learning disabilities, people with mental health needs, and other groups who require additional support (often Use Class C2, residential institutions)

With an ageing population and our communities becoming increasingly diverse, we must ensure that a range of appropriate housing and care options are available in the right locations to support the needs of all residents.

According to our SHMA, we need around 100 specialist homes for older people each year and this is largely due to the ageing population. There is an additional need for . care accommodation, including with nursing support, particularly for people living with dementia or complex care needs.

Our assessment also highlights a requirement for a mix of specialist supported accommodation, adaptable mainstream housing, and care-linked housing options for vulnerable groups, including people with learning disabilities, and a wider need for age-exclusive, sheltered, and extra care homes to meet the diverse needs of residents.

Q14. We currently require residential developments of over 100 units to provide an element of older persons housing (Use Class C3). Do you agree with this threshold?

Yes/No

If not, what would be an appropriate size of site?

Please explain your reasons

Accessible and adaptable housing

The [2021 Census](#) identified 15.9% of North Hertfordshire's population as being disabled under the Equality Act²⁷.

Providing accessible and adaptable housing that meets needs of our residents throughout their lives can support independence, enable people to remain in their communities, provide greater flexibility when circumstances change and reduce pressure on health and social care services.

[Building Regulations](#)²⁸ set minimum standards for access in all new homes. There are also higher optional standards that local planning authorities can require where evidence shows a need. The relevant categories are:

- M4(2) Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings: Homes designed so they can be more easily adapted to meet the changing needs of older people, disabled people and those with reduced mobility.
- M4(3) Wheelchair User Dwellings: Homes designed to meet the needs of wheelchair users, either from the outset or capable of being easily adapted for wheelchair use.

Our current Plan requires:

- 50% of new homes on major residential developments to meet the M4(2) standard.
- Where 10 or more affordable units are being delivered on a site, 10% of these affordable units should be built to M4(3) standard.

Evidence from our SHMA suggests that the need for accessible housing is likely to increase over the coming years and recommends that all new homes should be built to the M4(2) standard subject to viability testing.

There is also evidence of a continuing need for wheelchair-accessible housing. Our SHMA estimates that around 3.6% of households overall require accommodation suitable for wheelchair users (based on national rates), which would equate to approximately 37 new wheelchair-accessible homes each year based on our identified overall housing need of 1,036 dwellings per year.

Our Housing Register supports this evidence, including 39 applicants who use a wheelchair, as well as 173 with restricted mobility and 277 applicants with health conditions requiring level-access accommodation.

The NPPF allows accessibility standards to be set that exceed local needs. Notwithstanding that, this will need to be tested as part of the viability assessment, we are considering whether M4(3) standards should be increased to 10% to ensure that future housing is inclusive, adaptable and capable of meeting the needs of residents both now and in the future.

By planning for accessible homes today, we can help create communities where people of all ages and abilities can live independently, remain connected to their local area and enjoy a better quality of life.

²⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000099/>

²⁸

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7f8a82ed915d74e622b17b/BR_PDF_AD_M1_2015_with_2016_amendments_V3.pdf

Q15. We propose that 100% of new dwellings in North Hertfordshire should meet the M4(2) (accessible and adaptable dwellings) standards.

Do you agree? Yes/No

Please explain your reasons

Q16. We propose that 10% of all units should meet M4(3) (wheelchair user dwellings) standards on all sites.

Do you agree? Yes/No

Please explain your reasons

Relatives and dependent accommodation

A residential annexe is a self-contained living space that remains part of, and subordinate to, a main home. Annexes are often used to accommodate family members, such as older relatives, adult children or people who need additional support, while allowing them to maintain a degree of independence. They may include:

- Sleeping accommodation
- Living space
- Bathroom facilities
- A small kitchenette

Policy HS6: Relatives' and dependents' accommodation of our current Plan supports proposals for accommodation for relatives and dependants where:

- There is a clear and genuine need for the accommodation.
- The annexe remains closely linked to the main dwelling.
- It is of a scale that would normally be acceptable as an extension to the main property.
- It can be readily incorporated back into the main dwelling if no longer needed.
- Occupation can be controlled through planning conditions where appropriate.

It is important that residential annexes remain ancillary to the main dwelling. In some cases, permitted annexes are converted into separate dwellings without being assessed as such through the planning process, resulting in potentially harmful impacts on the area and its residents. These types of dwellings need to be managed properly. We are considering

strengthening the existing policy by introducing a criterion that requires applicants to set out and evidence how the annex will remain ancillary to the main dwelling. In assessing this, the Council may consider the physical relationship between the annex and the host dwelling, the degree of shared facilities (e.g. bathrooms, kitchens), the intended occupiers, and whether the annex could reasonably function as a separate planning unit.

Q17. Should the policy on residential annexes be strengthened? If yes, do you agree with our proposed approach?

If no, please explain why.

Are there any additional criteria for considering planning applications for residential annexes?

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

HMOs are properties where three or more people who are not part of the same household live together and share facilities such as a kitchen, bathroom or living area.

HMOs can help meet the needs of a wide range of residents, including young professionals, key workers, people on lower incomes and those who may not be ready or able to rent or buy a home of their own, whilst also making effective use of existing housing stock. Larger HMOs, occupied by five or more unrelated people, must be licensed by the Council. As of August 2026, there were [48 licensed HMOs](#)²⁹ in North Hertfordshire.

However, HMOs can also create challenges if they are not well managed or are concentrated in particular areas. Concerns often include:

- Increased pressure on on-street parking.
- Greater demand for waste and recycling services.
- Impacts on the character of residential areas.
- Risks associated with overcrowding and poor living conditions.
- Fire safety and other property management issues.

Planning and licensing controls seek to ensure that HMOs provide good-quality accommodation while minimising potential impacts on neighbouring properties and local communities.

The Government has introduced significant changes to the private rented sector through the [Renters' Rights Act 2025](#)³⁰, aimed at improving standards and providing greater security for tenants.

²⁹ https://onlinepp.north-herts.gov.uk/register/index.html?fa=licence_register§ion=licence_register

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-the-renters-rights-act/guide-to-the-renters-rights-act>

These reforms include measures to improve the quality of rented accommodation and strengthen tenants' rights. The introduction of a national landlord database will help create greater transparency, giving renters access to information about landlords and rented properties. The reforms will also help raise housing standards across the private rented sector, building on existing expectations for safe and decent homes.

Q18. Should we control the number of HMOs across North Herts? If so, what should the criteria be?

Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

We have a responsibility to understand and plan for the accommodation needs of Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities as part of our wider housing responsibilities, ensuring their needs are properly met to enable their continued traditional and nomadic way of life.

Our most recent Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment ([GTAA](#))³¹, published in 2024, identified an additional need of:

- 6 gypsy and traveller pitches for households that met the [planning definition](#)³²
- Up to 3 gypsy and traveller pitches for undetermined households
- 0 plots for travelling showpeople
- 0 pitches for formal public transit sites.

We are currently commissioning a new GTAA which will review the latest evidence and consider whether further provision is needed over the period to 2040.

Our current Policy HS7 allocated land at Danesbury Park Road to help meet identified need, setting out the circumstances in which additional pitches or plots may be permitted.

When considering future provision, it is important to balance a range of factors, including:

- The identified accommodation needs.
- Access to local services and facilities.
- Highway safety and accessibility.
- Impacts on neighbouring communities and the wider environment.
- The availability of suitable and deliverable sites.

³¹ [https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/North Herts Final Report Merged 05082024.pdf](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/North%20Herts%20Final%20Report%20Merged%2005082024.pdf)

³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-policy-for-traveller-sites/planning-policy-for-traveller-sites>

Q19. If we identify a need for additional Gypsy and Traveller provision, should we prioritise allocating new pitches on new land or expand already existing sites?

Self-build and custom housebuilding

Self-build and custom build homes are a form of housing where the future homeowner plays a direct role in creating or commissioning their home, rather than buying a standard property.

The [Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/33/contents)³³ (as amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016) requires us to maintain and update a register of people who are interested in building their own home. We currently have a total of 122 individuals and 0 associations on our self-build and custom housebuilding register (August 2026).

Our current Local Plan does not contain a specific development management policy on self-build and custom housebuilding, but it does contain allocations for 56 plots spread over five Strategic Housing Sites at:

- North of Baldock
- North of Letchworth Garden City
- North of Stevenage
- Highover Farm, Hitchin
- Land off Mendip Way, Great Ashby

56 plots equate to 1% of the number of dwellings on these sites, and they help address the demand for self-build and custom housebuilding plots.

A specific policy for self-build and custom housebuilding in our new Plan could help support the delivery of plots for people on our self-build and custom-build register; providing greater clarity for developers, landowners and local communities about how this type of housing should be considered through the planning process.

Q20. How should we plan for self-build and custom housebuilding need in the district?

Should we identify specific sites to accommodate need, should larger housing sites provide a specified percentage of self-build and custom housebuilding plots, or should there be a combination of the two approaches?

Please explain your reasons.

³³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/17/contents>

Q21. If self-build and custom housebuilding plots are required to be provided by policy, we will require these to be marketed exclusively for this purpose for at least 12 months before the plots can be reverted to open market housing. Do you agree with this approach?

Plot passports

A plot passport is a simple design guide for an individual building plot, setting out the key requirements and opportunities for development.

A plot passport would typically include information such as:

- The size and boundaries of the plot.
- The location and position of any building.
- Permitted building heights and scale.
- Design principles and materials.
- Access, parking and servicing arrangements.
- Utility connections and infrastructure requirements.
- Any planning constraints, restrictions or site-specific requirements.

Providing clear guidance from the outset can make the self-build process more straightforward and give greater certainty to both landowners and potential builders.

Q22. Should we require plot passports for self-build and custom-housebuilding development?

Other housing issues

Q23. Are there any other housing issues that you think we should think about?

ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Economy and employment opportunities

North Hertfordshire has a strong and diverse economy that supports communities across our District. Our four main towns provide key centres for employment, services, shopping and business activity, while our villages play an important role in supporting local businesses, jobs and the rural economy.

Our District currently accommodates around 6,225 businesses and approximately 66,000 jobs, generating an estimated £4.3 billion in Gross Value Added in 2022³⁴. We benefit from our location between London and Cambridge, with strong transport links making our District an attractive place for businesses to invest and grow. Connections via the A1(M), A505, the East Coast Main Line and rail services to Cambridge provide access to major markets, skilled labour and economic opportunities. Strong links with neighbouring areas, including Central Bedfordshire, also support local employment and commuting patterns.

We need to consider how best to support economic growth while responding to changing business needs and ways of working as we prepare our new Plan. Key issues and opportunities include:

- Ensuring there is enough land and premises available for businesses to grow and invest.
- Improving and modernising existing employment areas where appropriate.
- Strengthening links with neighbouring economic centres and labour markets.
- Encouraging innovation and investment in key sectors.
- Supporting tourism, culture and the visitor economy.
- Helping rural businesses diversify and grow, including through the sensitive reuse of existing rural buildings.
- Ensuring that employment opportunities are accessible to people across our area.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

National Policy requires us to support sustainable economic growth and provide a positive vision for the future of local economies.

This means that our Local Plan must set out a clear strategy for supporting businesses, attracting investment and creating employment opportunities. It should identify the land and premises needed for existing and future businesses, while ensuring there is enough flexibility to respond to changing economic circumstances and emerging industries.

National policy also recognises that business needs can change over time. Our Local Plan should therefore avoid being unnecessarily restrictive and allow employment areas and

³⁴ https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/North%20Hertfordshire%20Economic%20Evidence%20Base%202025_0.pdf

commercial sites to adapt when and where appropriate. This will help ensure that North Hertfordshire can respond to new technologies, changing ways of working and future economic opportunities.

NDMPs focus on supporting business growth, meeting the need for business land and premises, supporting freight and logistics and rural business development. As a result, our new Local Plan will focus on issues that require a local approach rather than repeating policies that are already set at a national level.

Regional and Local Strategies

[Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2026–2036](#)³⁵ sets out five strategic priorities to position the county globally as the UK's innovation heartland.

- Digital adoption and AI: Integrating advanced digital capabilities and artificial intelligence across local industries to boost efficiency and modernization.
- Skills and participation: Improving careers education, expanding training opportunities, and helping residents overcome barriers to employment.
- Innovation and clean growth: Driving sustainable business practices, clean tech development, and leveraging research partnerships in key sectors.
- Thriving places: Developing sustainable infrastructure, boosting the visitor economy, and supporting local communities and vibrant commercial spaces.
- Hertfordshire's national and international role: Strengthening globally significant sectors like space, defence, and life sciences while scaling local businesses international

The North Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2025–2030 also sets out a vision for strong, resilient and sustainable local economic growth, supporting businesses, skills development and investment across the District. The strategy is based on a looking in and looking out approach - recognising the identity and strengths of our towns, while also looking at opportunities from links with neighbouring authorities.

We are also preparing an Employment Land Review, which will provide an up-to-date picture of future employment land needs, market trends and the types of workspaces required by businesses.

What does the data tell us?

Gross Value Added (GVA) measures the contribution of economic activity to the economy through the production of goods and services. Analysis of GVA data indicates that the local economy is primarily driven by manufacturing, real estate, insurance and pensions, wholesale and retail trade, construction, and financial services.

The composition of businesses across these sectors is broadly consistent with the national economic profile, as illustrated in the table below.

³⁵ <https://www.hertfordshirefutures.co.uk/economic-strategy>

Table 9 - Business Count by Size, 2025

	North Hertfordshire	UK
Micro (0 To 9)	5,525 (89%)	2,437,850 (89%)
Small (10 To 49)	560 (9%)	241,185 (9%)
Medium (50 To 249)	105 (2%)	44,170 (2%)
Large (250+)	15 (0.2%)	11,415 (0.4%)
Total	6,205	2,734,615

Source: ONS, 2025

Occupational data for North Hertfordshire shows a higher proportion of residents employed in professional occupations, as well as managerial, director and senior official roles, compared with both the East of England and England as a whole. Conversely, the District has a lower proportion of workers employed in sales and customer service occupations, process plant and machine operative roles, and elementary occupations.

Evidence indicates that, while office vacancy rates remain relatively low, demand is increasingly focused on modern, high-quality, flexible and well-specified office space in accessible locations, particularly within Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City.

Market signals also point to strong demand for industrial and warehousing floorspace across the District. Much of the existing employment stock is ageing and no longer fully meets the requirements of modern occupiers. Evidence gathered through the Economic Needs Review suggests there is a shortage of high-quality industrial premises and "grow-on" space for expanding businesses. The Review highlights the need for both the development of new employment floorspace and the renewal and modernisation of existing employment areas to ensure they remain fit for purpose and capable of supporting future economic growth.

Our economic role and strategic connections

North Hertfordshire benefits from its strategic location between London and Cambridge, a highly skilled resident workforce, and a network of vibrant towns, villages and employment areas.

Our District has a greater proportion of residents employed in higher-skilled occupations than the number of higher-skilled jobs available locally. As a result, many residents currently commute to employment centres outside our area, particularly London, Cambridge, Stevenage and Luton³⁶.

Because our economy is closely linked to a number of major economic centres and growth corridors, significant opportunities for future investment and job creation present themselves.

These include:

³⁶ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-02/AMR%202024-25.pdf>

- Cambridge-London Corridor

sitting within the nationally important Cambridge-London corridor, we benefit from excellent rail and road connections to two of the UK's most significant centres for research, technology, innovation and business growth. This provides us with opportunities to attract investment, support knowledge-based industries and strengthen links between homes, jobs and skills.

- Stevenage and Local Government Reorganisation

We have particularly strong functional relationships with Stevenage. Many residents travel between the two areas for work, shopping, education and services. Looking ahead, proposed Local Government Reorganisation and the formation of a new Central Hertfordshire authority may provide opportunities for closer economic integration, stronger labour markets, improved connectivity and a more coordinated approach to economic growth and infrastructure planning.

- London Luton Airport

London Luton Airport is an important economic asset for the wider region, supporting employment, business activity, logistics, tourism and international connectivity. Its continued growth presents opportunities for North Hertfordshire businesses and residents through improved access to markets and employment opportunities.

- Universal Studios Bedford

The Universal Studios development in Bedfordshire has the potential to be a major economic driver for the wider region. Alongside direct employment opportunities, it could generate wider benefits for tourism, hospitality, supply chains and related businesses across North Hertfordshire and neighbouring areas.

Q24. Should we focus on developing our own distinct economic identity, or position ourselves as a complementary partner to Stevenage and Cambridge by supporting their employment sectors? Yes / No

Please give your reasons

Planning for jobs and economic growth

By the time our Local Plan is adopted, North Hertfordshire is expected to form part of two new unitary authorities. At the same time, work will be progressing on a Strategic Development Strategy (SDS) for Hertfordshire, which will consider the future distribution of homes, jobs and infrastructure across a wider geographic area.

As part of the Call for Sites process, a number of potential employment sites have been promoted, including land around Letchworth Gate. If progressed, some of these sites could help meet North Hertfordshire's own employment needs, while others may play a wider strategic role by supporting growth across the region.

Q25. Do you think North Hertfordshire should identify land for strategic employment uses, such as logistics, advanced manufacturing or distribution, where there is evidence of wider regional need? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons.

Meeting employment needs

The [Employment Needs Review](#)³⁷ indicates that, while North Hertfordshire has a range of employment areas and businesses, there is a shortage of suitable "move-on" space for growing companies; this refers to premises that allow businesses to expand when they outgrow small start-up units or home-working arrangements but are not yet ready for large-scale commercial premises.

Without suitable premises, businesses may struggle to expand or may relocate elsewhere, resulting in the loss of investment, jobs and economic activity from our District.

Q26. Do you agree that designated employment sites and employment areas should continue to be protected for employment uses?

Q27. Do you agree that some flexibility should be allowed for appropriate sui generis uses that are not suitable for town centre locations?

Rural and low-impact tourism

Low-impact tourism focuses on sustainable visitor experiences that respect the environment, local communities and cultural heritage. This can include activities that encourage people to enjoy and explore our District while minimising environmental impacts and supporting local businesses.

National planning policy supports appropriate tourism development in rural areas but leaves it to us to determine how this should be managed in line with local circumstances.

North Hertfordshire has many assets that can support sustainable tourism, including:

³⁷ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

- Attractive countryside, including National Landscape and walking routes.
- Historic towns and villages.
- Heritage attractions and cultural assets.
- Nature and wildlife sites.
- Cycling and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Local food and rural businesses.

Supporting these attractions can help diversify the local economy and encourage investment, while providing benefits for residents and visitors alike.

While tourism can bring economic benefits, it is important that development does not harm the very qualities that attract visitors in the first place. Any future policy should seek to balance economic growth with the protection of the environment, local communities and the character of North Hertfordshire.

Q28. Do you agree that specific local planning criteria should be developed for heritage and nature-based tourism proposals, including eco-accommodation and cycling hubs?

Visitor Accommodation

The [North Hertfordshire Economic Strategy 2025-2030](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/North%20Hertfordshire%20Economic%20Strategy%202025%20-%202030.pdf)³⁸ recognises the importance of the visitor economy as a driver of economic growth, investment and local prosperity.

North Hertfordshire benefits from a range of established attractions, including Knebworth House, Hitchin Lavender, its historic market towns, attractive countryside, cultural venues and events. Our urban and rural landscapes are also valued as locations for film and television production, further contributing to the area's appeal and profile.

The Economic Strategy highlights the need to strengthen and support the visitor economy by attracting more visitors, encouraging them to stay longer, and increasing participation by residents in cultural, sporting, leisure and recreational activities. Increasing dwell time is particularly important, as visitors who spend longer in the district are more likely to support local businesses and services.

Visitor accommodation can play an important role in achieving these objectives. Hotels, guesthouses and other forms of visitor accommodation can encourage people to stay longer, enabling them to explore more of the district and make greater use of local businesses, attractions and services.

We will consider how appropriate visitor accommodation and tourism-related development can support the wider ambitions of the Economic Strategy while respecting the character of our towns, villages and countryside.

³⁸ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/North%20Hertfordshire%20Economic%20Strategy%202025%20-%202030.pdf>

Q29. Do you agree that hotels and other forms of visitor accommodation should be permitted in suitable locations where they support major visitor attractions and transport hubs, such as Knebworth House, Hitchin Lavender, London, Luton Airport and Universal Studios?

Please explain your reasons

Other economy and employment issues

Q30. Are there any other economy and/or employment issues that you think we should think about?

TOWN CENTRES

Town centres

North Hertfordshire's four main town centres, Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston, play an important role in supporting our District's and communities. Together they provide a range of shopping, leisure, employment, service and community functions that meet the day-to-day and longer-term needs of residents, businesses and visitors.

Our town centres generally occupy a middle-market position within the wider region and are located within a highly connected area where our town centres compete with and complement nearby destinations, including Stevenage, Luton, Welwyn Garden City and Cambridge.

Our town centres perform different but complementary roles within our settlement hierarchy. Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City function as the principal centres, offering the broadest range of retail, leisure and service provision and attracting visitors from a wider catchment area. Baldock and Royston perform important local and sub-regional roles, providing shops, services, employment opportunities and community facilities that support their residents and surrounding rural areas.

Each town centre has a distinct character and identity:

- Hitchin is North Hertfordshire's principal town centre and strongest-performing retail destination. While larger regional centres offer a wider range of national retailers, Hitchin's appeal lies in its unique character and experience with a strong independent retail sector, and attractive historic environment. As well as being an important shopping destination, Hitchin is a focal point for leisure, culture and community activity. The town centre is also the focus of the Churchgate regeneration project, which represents a significant opportunity to enhance the centre's retail, leisure and public realm offer.
- Letchworth Garden City benefits from its unique Garden City heritage and diverse mix of shops and services. It serves not only the town itself but also surrounding communities, making it an important destination within North Hertfordshire. Alongside its shopping offer, Letchworth benefits from a variety of community, cultural and recreational facilities that support a vibrant and active town centre.
- Baldock is an important local centre serving both the town and surrounding communities. While smaller than Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, it provides a valuable range of shops, services, cafés and community facilities that support everyday needs. The town's historic character, attractive environment and strong mix of independent businesses give it a distinctive identity and appeal.
- Royston provides an important service centre for the north-eastern part of the District and its surrounding villages. While smaller than Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, Royston offers a mix of independent businesses, local services and national retailers that support a vibrant local economy and create an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Figure 15 - Sun Street, Hitchin

Source: North Herts Council

Like many town centres nationally, our town centres continue to adapt to changing economic conditions, consumer behaviour and growth in online retailing; their role increasingly focused on providing a diverse mix of retail, leisure, cultural, community and employment uses, supporting vibrant and resilient centres that remain attractive destinations for residents, businesses and visitors.

As a result of changing consumer behaviour and concerns over the vitality of town centres, the Government changed the Use Class Order to provide flexibility to help businesses respond to changing circumstances. The Use Classes Order groups different types of buildings and land uses into categories for planning purposes. One of the main categories is Use Class E, which covers a range of commercial, business and service uses, including shops, offices, cafés and restaurants, health services, nurseries, and some leisure facilities. The class was introduced to give businesses greater flexibility to change between these uses without needing planning permission in many cases, helping town centres and employment areas adapt to changing needs and market conditions.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

National planning policy requires us to support the long-term success of our town centres by setting out a clear strategy for North Hertfordshire's town centres, helping them remain vibrant, attractive and adaptable as shopping habits and business needs continue to evolve.

Our Local Plan will:

- Establish a hierarchy of centres across our District and define their boundaries.
- Support our town centres as the preferred location for shops, leisure, cultural, community and other main town centre uses.

- Encourage a mix of uses that helps increase activity throughout the day and evening.
- Identify opportunities for regeneration, diversification and the better use of underused sites.
- Support public realm, accessibility and infrastructure improvements that enhance the town centre experience.
- Allocate sites to accommodate retail, leisure, employment, community and other town centre uses, where needed.
- Set a locally defined threshold above which proposals outside town centres will need to demonstrate their impact on existing centres.

Our aim is to ensure that Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston continue to thrive and adapt to changing economic conditions while remaining at the heart of their communities.

The NPPF sets out NDMPs relating to how development proposals in town centres should be assessed, how a sequential test should be applied to main town centre uses outside town centres, and the need for impact assessments for major development that may have negative impacts on existing town centres. To avoid unnecessary duplication these matters will not be covered in the Local Plan.

What does the data tell us?

North Hertfordshire's town centres each play a distinct role in supporting local communities, businesses and visitors.

Our [North Hertfordshire Town Centres and Retail Study \(December 2024\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/19%20Dec%20Final%20Report_Lichfields%20Town%20Centres%20and%20Retail%201.pdf)³⁹ provides an up-to-date assessment of our retail, leisure and town centre needs.

The study examines a range of issues, including:

- shopping habits;
- retail expenditure;
- vacancy rates;
- demand for new retail and leisure floorspace; and
- the impact of changing consumer behaviour and national planning policy.

It shows that North Hertfordshire benefits from a strong and established network of centres, each serving its own community and wider catchment area. However, there is also significant overlap between the catchment areas of Baldock, Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, meaning these centres often compete for the same customers.

Overall, vacancy rates across our District remain relatively low compared with national averages, indicating that our town centres continue to perform relatively well. The study identifies Letchworth Garden City as having the greatest opportunity to accommodate future retail and town centre growth.

³⁹ https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/19%20Dec%20Final%20Report_Lichfields%20Town%20Centres%20and%20Retail%201.pdf

We have commissioned an update to the Retail Needs Study to ensure that we have a more robust understanding of retail, leisure and town centre needs as we progress the Local Plan.

The [Draft North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy \(2025\)](#)⁴⁰ takes a broader view, setting out a long-term vision for how our town centres can evolve and thrive in the years ahead.

The Strategy recognises that successful town centres are about much more than shopping. They are places where people live, work, meet, access services and spend their leisure time; and sets out a planning-led approach to creating vibrant, attractive and resilient town centres across North Hertfordshire.

The Strategy is built around four key themes:

- Land Use and Economic Activity - promotes a balanced approach that supports shops, businesses, leisure, culture, community facilities and town centre living, helping to create centres that remain active throughout the day and evening.
- Built Environment - promotes high-quality design that respects local character, strengthens biodiversity, supports climate resilience and enhances the appearance and functionality of town centres.
- Transport, Access and Movement - supports improvements that make it easier for people to reach and move around town centres using a range of transport options. This includes better opportunities for walking, cycling and public transport, alongside maintaining appropriate access for vehicles where needed.
- Community and Wellbeing - seeks to create welcoming places that encourage social interaction, support health and wellbeing, and provide opportunities for cultural, community and civic activities. By creating lively and inclusive centres, we can help strengthen community connections and support local pride.

Reviewing the hierarchy of centres

Our current Local Plan identifies a retail hierarchy:

- Four Town Centres
 - Baldock
 - Hitchin
 - Letchworth Garden City
 - Royston
- 13 Local Centres
 - Ashwell
 - Codicote
 - Great Ashby
 - Grove Road, Hitchin
 - Jackmans, Letchworth Garden City
 - Knebworth
 - Nightingale Road, Hitchin
 - Ninesprings, Hitchin
 - Redhill Road, Hitchin
 - The Grange, Letchworth Garden City

⁴⁰ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-12/Draft%20North%20Hertfordshire%20Town%20Centres%20Strategy%20for%20Public%20Consultation.pdf>

- Walsworth (Cambridge Road), Hitchin
- Walsworth Road, Hitchin
- Two new Local Centres
 - North of Baldock
 - East of Luton
- Westmill (John Barker Place), Hitchin

As part of preparing our new Local Plan, we will review the hierarchy using the latest available evidence. This will include findings from our Town Centres and Retail Study, Town Centres Strategy and our updated Retail Needs Assessment that is currently underway, to ensure that the hierarchy continues to reflect how people use our centres today and provides an appropriate framework for managing future development, investment and regeneration across our District.

Town centre boundaries

Our current Local Plan defines primary and secondary shopping frontages within a defined Town Centre boundary in each of our four towns. However, in 2018, National Planning Policy changed and we no longer have to define primary and secondary shopping frontages. This is so that town centres can respond faster to changes in the retail and leisure industries that are considered 'main town centre uses'⁴¹.

Evidence from the Town Centre Strategy suggests there is no need for a significant reduction in the overall size of our town centres. However, it also notes that some town centre boundaries are drawn quite widely and, in certain locations, include areas that are predominantly residential and no longer function as part of the active town centre.

The maps below show a revised town centre boundary for each of the Town Centres. These revised boundaries focus on the core retail area, and other active town centre uses, while excluding areas that are predominantly residential in character.

⁴¹ Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); banks; professional services; offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities) – NPPF, 2025

Figure 16 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Baldock

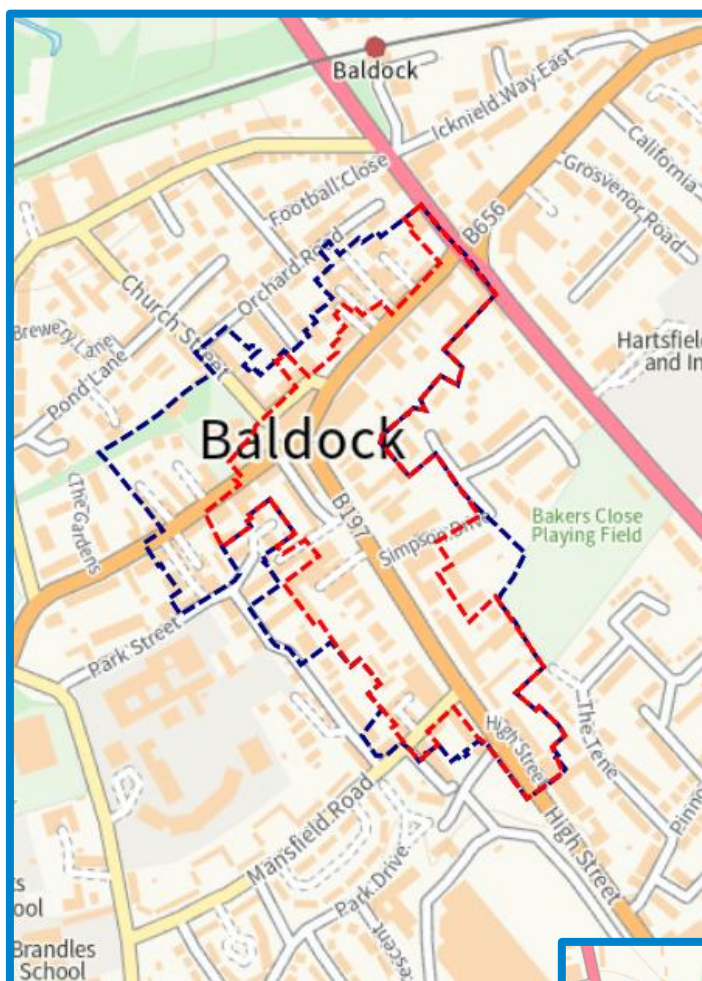


Figure 17 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Hitchin



Figure 18 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Letchworth Garden City

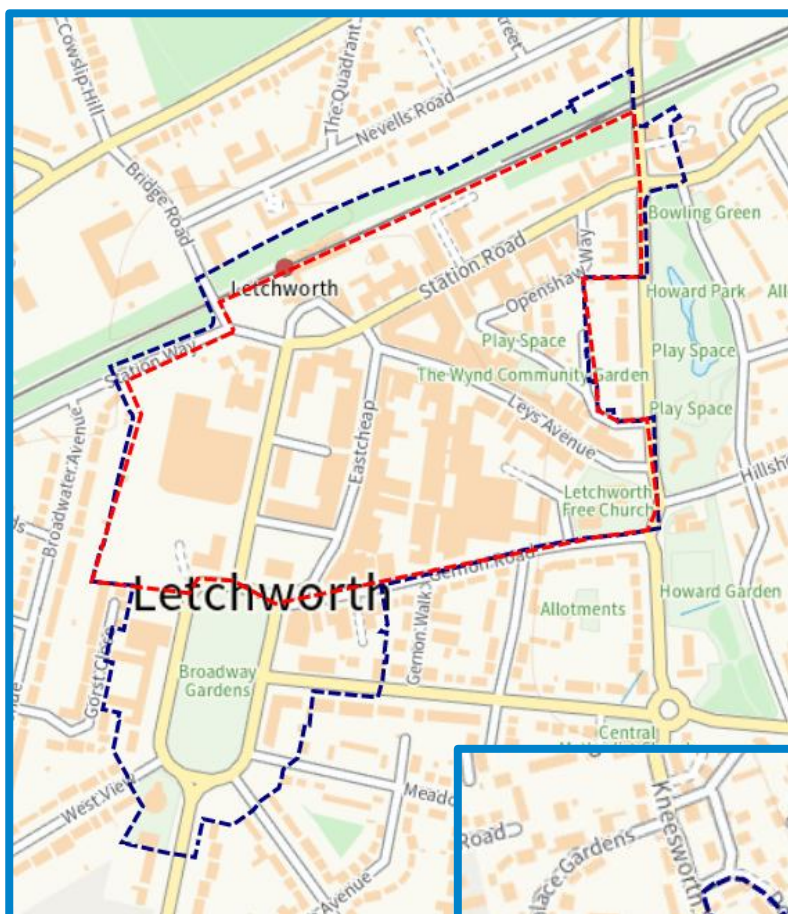
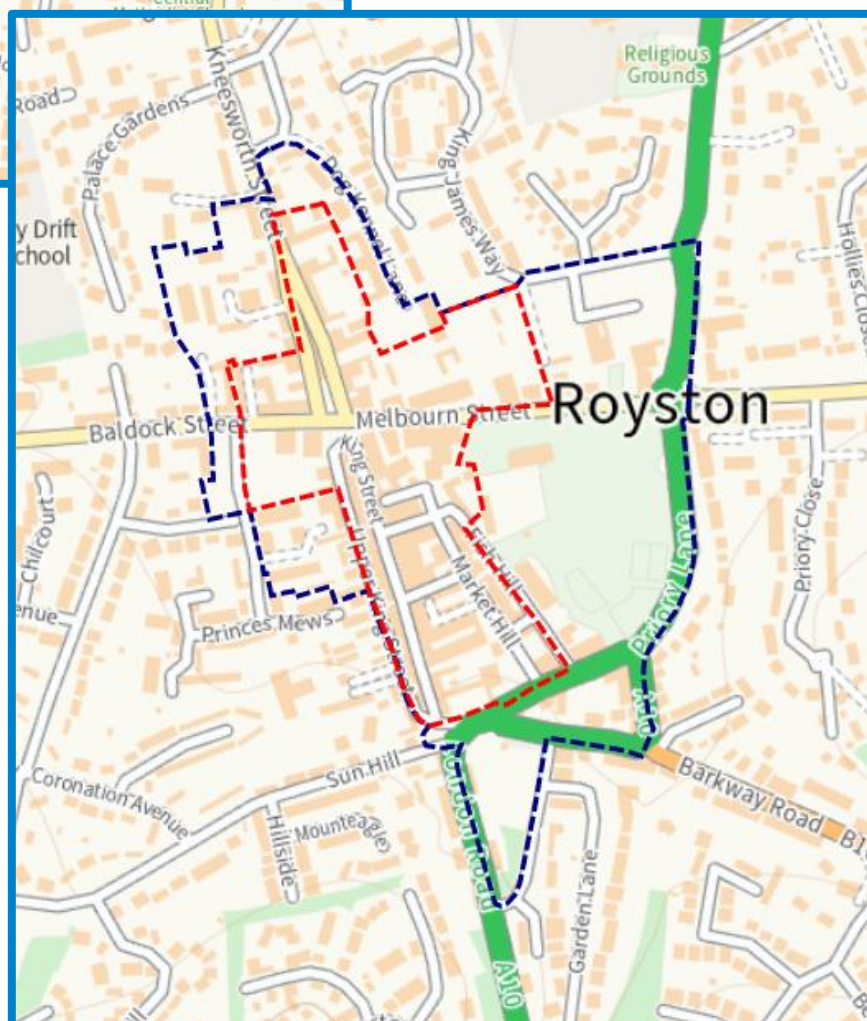


Figure 19 – Proposed revised town centre boundary for Royston



Q31. We propose reducing the town centre boundaries to focus retail activity within the core areas, while allowing a broader mix of uses, such as leisure and hospitality, in the immediate surrounding areas?

Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Town centre uses

Diversification

Town centres across the country are changing. More people are shopping online, and many traditional retailers are using less space than they did in the past. As a result, town centres are increasingly becoming places where people meet, work, spend leisure time, access services and take part in community activities, rather than places focused solely on shopping.

To remain vibrant and successful, our town centres need to evolve and offer a wider range of attractions and experiences. Encouraging a greater mix of leisure, cultural, community and business uses can help attract more visitors, increase footfall throughout the day and evening, and support local businesses.

This could include:

- Cultural and arts venues.
- Community facilities and services.
- Restaurants, cafés and entertainment venues.
- Health and wellbeing uses.
- Co-working and flexible workspace.
- Markets and event spaces.
- Educational and learning facilities.

A more diverse mix of uses can help create town centres that are active for longer periods, attract a broader range of visitors and strengthen the local economy.

Q32. Should our Local Plan prioritise expanding leisure, cultural and community uses to strengthen the town centre economy and increase activity throughout the day and evening? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Supporting flexible and meanwhile uses

As shopping habits continue to change, some town centre buildings may become vacant for periods of time. Empty premises can reduce footfall, affect the appearance of town centres and make it more difficult for existing businesses to thrive.

One way of addressing this is through meanwhile uses. These are temporary uses of vacant land or buildings that bring activity back into underused spaces while longer-term plans are developed.

Meanwhile uses can:

- Bring vacant premises back into active use.
- Attract visitors and increase footfall.
- Improve the appearance of town centres.
- Support local businesses, community groups and start-up enterprises.
- Encourage innovation and new ideas.
- Offer opportunities for events, exhibitions, markets and cultural activities.
- Make productive use of buildings that might otherwise remain empty.

Examples could include pop-up shops, community spaces, artists' studios, start-up workspaces, temporary cafés, cultural events or local markets.

Q33. We are proposing to support meanwhile uses in town centres where they activate vacant premises, support town centre vitality and protect local amenity. Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Public Realm

Evidence from the draft Town Centres Strategy 2025⁴² highlighted the importance of creating town centres that are attractive, welcoming and easy to move around. In feedback from the Strategy consultation, residents told us that improvements to public spaces, walking and cycling routes, signage and wayfinding could help make our town centres more appealing places to visit and spend time.

We will explore opportunities to reduce the impact of traffic passing through town centres where this would improve safety, accessibility and the overall experience for residents and visitors. This could help make town centres more pleasant places to walk, cycle and spend time, while also supporting more reliable public transport services.

⁴² www.north-herts.gov.uk/town-centres-strategy

Q34. Do you support improving the public realm to create safer, more attractive and better-connected places? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Q35. Would you support the removal of through-traffic from town centres to improve people's experience of walking, cycling and taking the bus? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Night-time economy

Our town centres play an important economic role beyond the traditional working day by providing restaurants, cafés, pubs, entertainment venues, cultural attractions and evening events to help create vibrant places where people can socialise, relax and enjoy their local area.

Our [Economic Strategy, 2025 – 2030](#)⁴³, recognises the potential of a strong and well-managed night-time economy to support local businesses, create jobs and attract more people into our town centres during the evening.

As part of the new Local Plan, we are considering an approach that would:

- Encourage a safe, welcoming and vibrant evening economy.
- Support leisure, food, drink, entertainment and cultural activities that contribute positively to town centre vitality.
- Promote the reuse of vacant premises for cultural, creative, flexible workspace and community uses.
- Focus evening and late-night activities within defined town centre areas, where they can benefit from existing facilities and transport connections.
- Balance economic activity with the need to protect the amenity of local residents.
- Ensure new development is designed and managed to minimise issues such as noise, disturbance and anti-social behaviour.
- Support office and workspace development in appropriate locations that complement rather than displace core town centre uses.

A successful night-time economy can help increase footfall, support independent businesses, improve perceptions of safety through increased activity, and create lively town centres that remain attractive destinations throughout the day and evening.

⁴³ Ww.north-herts.gov.uk/economic-development-strategy

Q36. Do you agree that our Local Plan should support a safe and vibrant night-time economy by encouraging leisure, food, drink and cultural uses, while focusing evening and night-time activities within town centres to help manage impacts and protect the amenity of nearby residents? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Neighbourhood Health Hubs

Neighbourhood Health Hubs are becoming an increasingly important part of modern healthcare; designed to bring a range of health and wellbeing services together in one convenient location, making it easier for people to access the support they need closer to home.

The NHS is increasingly moving towards a more joined-up and preventative approach to healthcare, helping people access services earlier and reducing the need for hospital treatment where possible.

The [Central East Integrated Care Board \(ICB\)](https://www.centraleast.icb.nhs.uk/)⁴⁴ is exploring opportunities for Neighbourhood Health Hubs in Baldock, Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City as part of a wider national approach to improving access to healthcare services. Potential locations and site requirements are currently being considered.

Q37. Do you support the inclusion of policies that promote Neighbourhood Health Hubs within our Local Plan? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Other town centre issues

Q38. Are there any other town centre issues that you think we should think about?

⁴⁴ <https://www.centraleast.icb.nhs.uk/>

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Natural environment

What is the natural environment?

In planning, the natural environment means the parts of our surroundings that are not man-made. This includes wildlife, landscapes, rivers and other water sources, soil and air. These natural systems work together to support nature, people's health and the local economy, and we have a duty to protect and improve them.

The key components are:

- Biodiversity and geology - protecting habitats, species and important geological features, including internationally, nationally and locally designated sites.
- Landscape and countryside - protecting valued landscapes and areas with distinctive character, from inappropriate development.
- Green and blue infrastructure - a connected network of green and blue spaces such as parks, woodlands, rivers, allotments and green roofs that support nature, help manage climate change, and improve wellbeing.

Figure 20 – The Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*), native to North Hertfordshire and the official county flower of Hertfordshire



Source: North Herts Council

Biodiversity and geology

North Hertfordshire's natural resources play an important role in supporting the local economy, wildlife, and residents' health and wellbeing. In July 2023 North Herts Council formally declared an Ecological Emergency, recognising that the rapid decline of nature and biodiversity requires urgent and coordinated action.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

The NPPF requires our Local Plan to actively protect, improve and restore nature, guide development to the least damaging locations, and ensure environmental gains are realistic, justified and deliverable.

NDPMs address a wide range of natural environment matters, including:

- the setting out of a hierarchy of designated sites
- requiring opportunities to be taken for the enhancement and recovery of landscapes, protected sites, habitats and species,
- sets out requirements for development within protected landscapes,
- requiring the avoidance of the use of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land for development where lower quality land is available,
- strengthening of ecological networks and protecting important nature sites identified in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy,
- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), and
- water management.

The Local Plan will not duplicate policies already covered within the NDMPs of the NPPF.

Legislation

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 / Environment Act 2021 places a duty on all public authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity. A key purpose of this duty is to embed consideration of biodiversity as an integral part of policy and decision making.

The Environment Act 2021 introduced the need for Local Planning Authorities to have regard to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) in local planning policy and decision-making. The Hertfordshire LNRS⁴⁵ identifies specific areas that are, or could become, of particular importance for biodiversity. This will help inform planning decisions in our district.

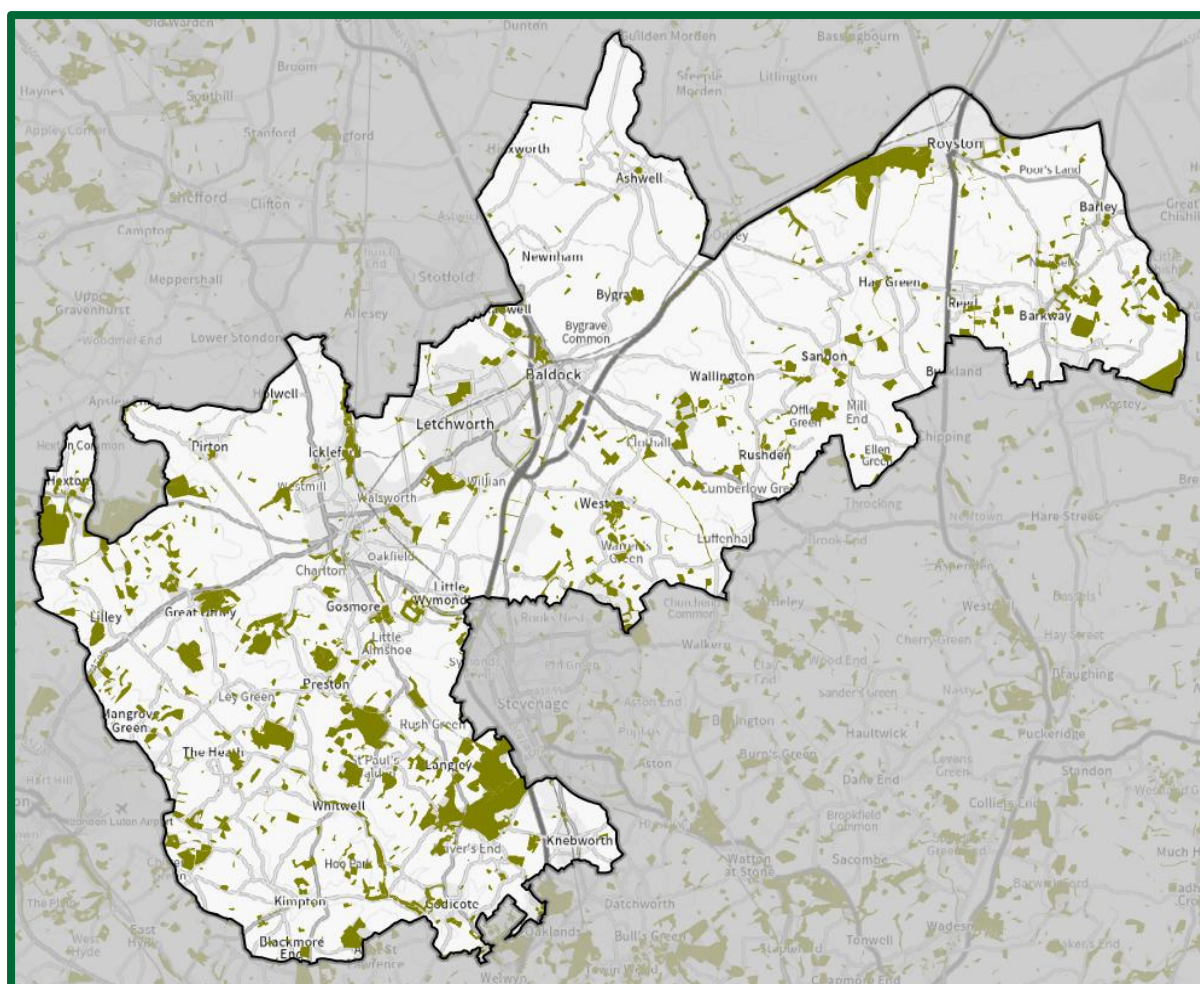
⁴⁵ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/how-the-council-works/partnerships/herts-nature-recovery-partnership/local-nature-recovery-strategy.aspx>

What does the data tell us?

North Hertfordshire contains a variety of habitats for wildlife and plants, including areas of high biodiversity and has many nationally and locally designated sites for nature conservation.

The Hertfordshire LNRS identifies Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (APIBs) across the County. These are locations which already provide valuable space for nature or present a very high opportunity for nature recovery action. APIBs are 'hubs' for nature from which the nature recovery network will be built through growing, enhancing, and better connecting APIBs to each other and new habitat. The LNRS also identifies Areas that Could become of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (ACIBs). These are areas that are targeted for specific actions set out in the LNRS, such as making new and existing buildings and green spaces more nature friendly.

Figure 21 - Map of Areas that Could become of Particular Importance for Biodiversity (ACIBs) in North Hertfordshire



Source: Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Hertfordshire County Council

[Oughtonhead Common Local Nature Reserve](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/oughtonhead-common)⁴⁶ is one of our important local wildlife habitats and forms part of the wider network of habitats associated with the River Oughton and surrounding green infrastructure. Natural England are looking into the opportunity to

⁴⁶ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/oughtonhead-common>

designate a 'super' National Nature Reserve in the wider area which would include Oughtonhead Common.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development that seeks to ensure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than they were before development took place. This requires developers to improve the natural habitat by a net increase of at least 10% using the national biodiversity metric⁴⁷.

The NPPF allows us to set local standards for biodiversity net gain above the statutory requirement of 10% for specific site allocations where it is fully justified and deliverable. Potential criteria for higher BNG requirements could include:

- Ecological opportunities such as habitat creation, restoration, or the delivery of parts of strategic networks;
- Proximity to designated ecological sites;
- The site's contribution to strategic green infrastructure;
- Existing ecological deficit or impact; and
- The deliverability and viability of providing BNG above 10%.

Q39. We are proposing that some site allocations should be required to deliver more than the statutory minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain where this can be demonstrated to be justified, viable and deliverable. Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Habitats

Policy NE4: Biodiversity and geological sites of our current Local Plan require proposals to consider appropriate buffers of complimentary habitat for designated sites and other connective features, wildlife habitats, priority habitats and species. The appropriateness of any buffers should be considered having regard to the status of the relevant habitat. The policy also requires a 12-metre buffer of complimentary habitat around wildlife sites (locally designated sites and above), trees and hedgerows; and states that this may need to be exceeded for fragile habitats such as ancient woodland or to provide appropriate root protection for mature trees.

⁴⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/calculate-biodiversity-value-with-the-statutory-biodiversity-metric>

Q40. We are proposing to keep the requirement of a buffer between development and habitats. Do you think the 12m buffer is appropriate?

If not, what should it be? Please explain your answer.

Q41. Are there any other specific biodiversity or ecological requirements that you think should be included in the new Local Plan?

Please provide your comments.

Chalk Streams

Our District is largely underlain by chalk, evident from the areas of chalk hills and escarpments across the area. The geology affects soil type, drainage, and nutrient levels. The Chiltern Hills is a chalk escarpment which passes through our District, this area is rich in botanical interest and also the basis of internationally rare chalk streams.

Clear water rivers rise from underground chalk aquifers and support a wide variety of plant and animal life. Chalk streams are globally scarce, there are around 200 in the world, and about 170 of these are found in the UK. Ten of these are in North Hertfordshire.

In April 2026, North Herts Council passed a [motion](#) to recognise the importance of, and provide protection for, the ten chalk streams within North Hertfordshire. We have also expressed our support for a local [MP's Private Member's Bill](#)⁴⁸ to seek UNESCO World Heritage Status for the UK's chalk streams, recognising their national and international importance.

Chalk streams are identified in the [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)⁴⁹ as being of high ecological importance. One key action is to create and manage natural buffer zones alongside rivers. These buffer strips help connect habitats, reduce pollution entering the water, and allow the right amount of light to reach the river.

Table 10 Rivers in North Hertfordshire

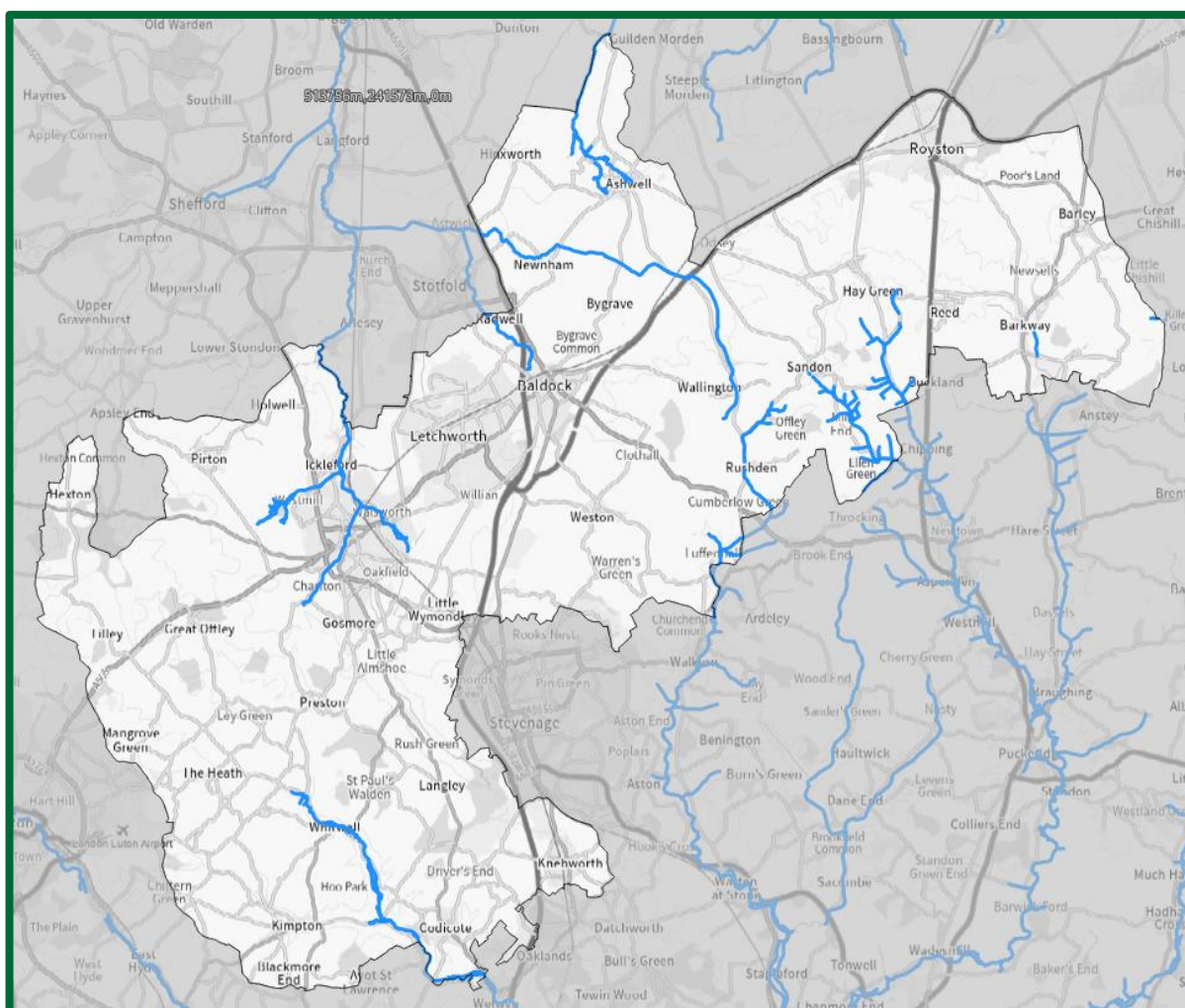
River Catchment	Main River	Tributary
East Anglia – all the chalk streams that flow into the River Ouse	River Cam	River Rhee
	River Ivel	River Hiz / Purwell

⁴⁸ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4084>

⁴⁹ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/how-the-council-works/partnerships/herts-nature-recovery-partnership/local-nature-recovery-strategy.aspx>

Thames – all the chalk streams that flow into the Thames and Thames Estuary		River Oughton
		River Ivel
		Cat Ditch
	River Lea	River Beane
		River Rib
		River Quin
		River Mimram
		River Stort

[The River Restoration Centre](#) and the [Chilterns Chalk Streams Planning Guidance](#) both recommend the introduction of a 10m buffer zone adjacent to chalk streams for the benefit of water environment and the conservation of riverside wildlife. The Council also recently passed a motion supporting this intention.

Figure 22 Chalk Streams in North Hertfordshire

Source: North Herts Council

Q42. We are proposing that new development adjacent to chalk streams and all other rivers should provide and maintain a minimum 10-metre riparian buffer zone, measured from the top of the riverbank, that remains free from built development.

Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Landscape and countryside

High-quality agricultural land is an important natural resource in North Hertfordshire. It supports local food production, helps maintain the rural economy, and forms a key part of the District's wider landscape character. Protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land is therefore important when considering future growth options, particularly where development could lead to the permanent loss of productive soils.

Our countryside also provides environmental, recreational and cultural benefits. Valued landscapes, including areas associated with the Chilterns National Landscape, contribute to local identity, visual amenity, biodiversity and climate resilience. They can help absorb carbon, support water management, provide space for recreation and wellbeing and create ecological connections between habitats.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

Plan-making policies in the NPPF set out that the local plan must identify opportunities for conserving, enhancing, and recovering landscapes, and avoid using higher quality agricultural land and limit development in Protected Landscapes. The local plan should direct development towards locations where environmental harm can be avoided or minimised.

NDMPs in the NPPF make clear that development in protected landscapes (including National Parks and National Landscapes such as the Chilterns) should be very limited and carefully designed, with large-scale proposals only allowed in exceptional, clearly justified public interest cases, and even then, their harm must be minimised.

We are currently preparing a landscape sensitivity study which will provide evidence to help identify areas where potential development could have significant effects on landscape character, visual amenity and the setting of the Chilterns National Landscape. This evidence will inform both site assessment and any locally valued landscape designations.

What does the data tell us?

Landscape

The Chilterns National Landscape lies in the western part of our District and extends westwards towards Oxford. Recent work by Natural England identified potential areas where this designation could be extended eastwards into North Hertfordshire.

Although this work has been [paused](#)⁵⁰ due to funding constraints, we recognise the value of the evidence produced so far. There is an opportunity to use this work to help identify and protect important landscapes outside the existing National Landscape boundary.

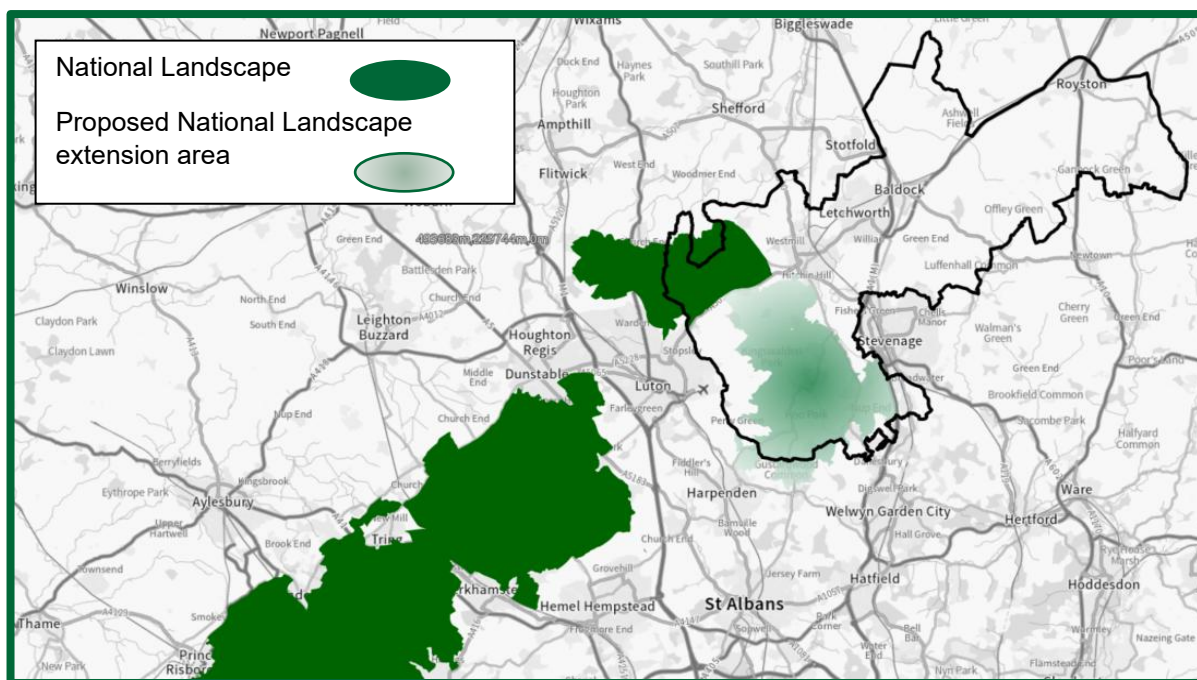
⁵⁰ https://www.chilterns.org.uk/news/deep-disappointment-at-cancellation-of-the-chilterns-boundary-review/?utm_source=ChilternsNL+VIPs+%28MPs%2C+LAs%2C+stakeholders%2C+key+partners%29&utm_campaign=7ff83b4db0-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_12_09_12_43_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-20544265d4-1432794625

Our Local Plan could therefore consider designating areas of locally valued landscape in the west of the District. This would help protect distinctive landscapes of local importance and provide a more consistent and coordinated approach to landscape protection across the wider area.

The map below shows the broad area being considered for possible local landscape designation, including its relationship with the existing Chilterns National Landscape and areas identified through Natural England's preliminary boundary review work.

This area could include the Mimram Valley Parklands, where there is overlap with land previously identified by Natural England as part of its assessment of a potential extension to the Chilterns National Landscape.

Figure 23 Map of proposed extension of Chiltern National Landscape



Source: North Herts Council

Q43. We are proposing that areas of distinctive landscape character and local importance outside the Chilterns National Landscape should be designated as Locally Valued Landscapes in our Local Plan to help recognise and protect them. Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your answer

Agricultural land

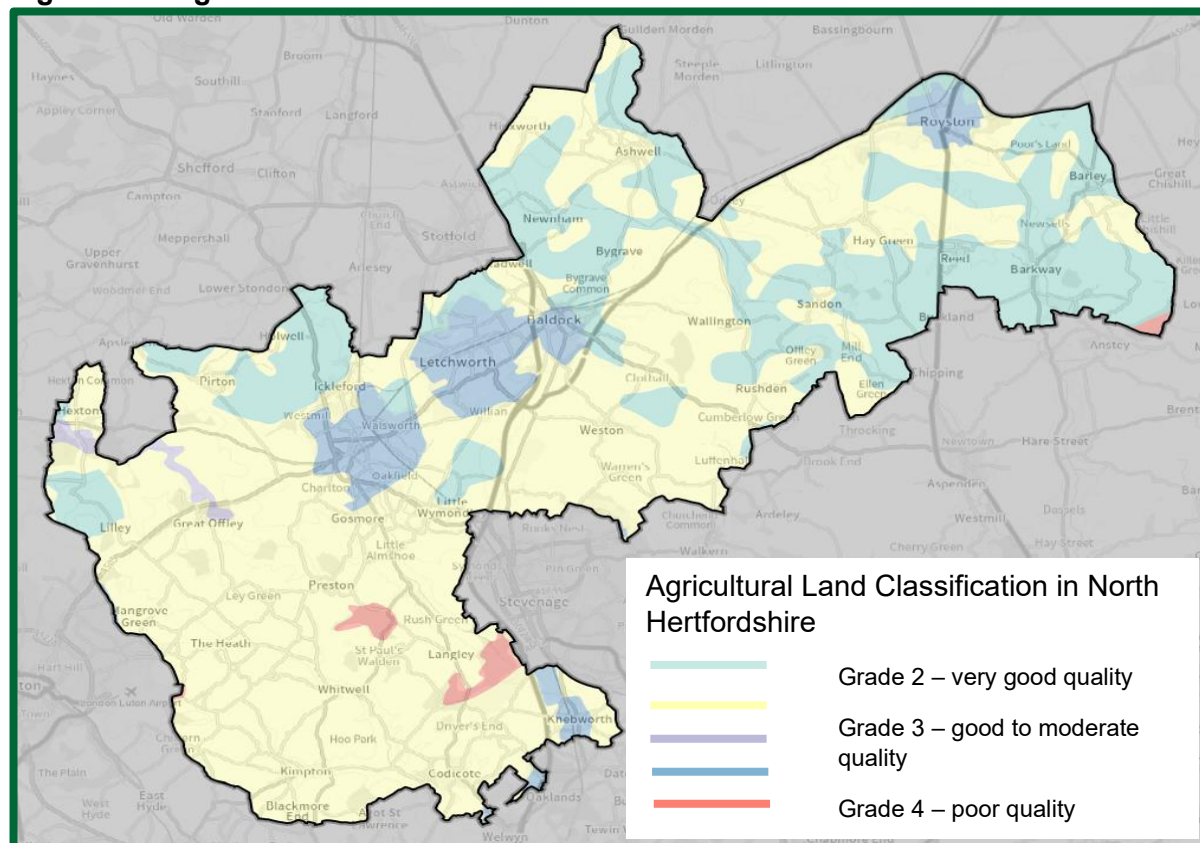
Provisional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) is categorised into five grades; grade one is best quality and grade five is poorest quality.

Table 11 – Provisional Agricultural Land Classification

Grade 1 – excellent quality agricultural land		Best and Most Versatile
Grade 2 – very good quality agricultural land		
Grade 3 – good to moderate quality agricultural land		
	Subgrade 3a – good quality agricultural land	
	Subgrade 3b – moderate quality agricultural land	
Grade 4 – poor quality agricultural land		
Grade 5 – very poor-quality agricultural land		

Source: Defra

NDMPs steer us in how to account for ALC when making decisions about applications and so there is no need for our Local Plan to repeat these policies. However, we will use ALC survey data to assess the loss of land or quality of land for sites submitted through the Call for Sites process and take this into account when deciding which sites are suitable for allocation.

Figure 24 – Agricultural Classifications in North Hertfordshire

Source: Defra

Green and blue infrastructure

Green and blue infrastructure refers to a network of multi-functional green spaces, river corridors and other natural features, urban and rural, which can deliver a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

Plan-making policies in the NPPF requires local plans to set clear standards for green infrastructure provision. These standards should draw upon Natural England's Green Infrastructure Standards for England.⁵¹

NDMPs in the NPPF seek to ensure trees are integrated into new development. These policies require Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) for any development that have implications on drainage and seek to avoid the culverting of watercourses and supports the de-culverting and re-naturalising of river channels. As these matters are covered by national policies, we will not be including these issues in the new Local Plan.

What does the data tell us?

North Hertfordshire has a strong network of green and blue spaces. We want to protect and improve these networks and create new links between them through future development.

We also want to ensure that our green and blue infrastructure connects with networks in neighbouring areas, so that these benefits continue across administrative boundaries.

We have discussed the rarity and importance of our Chalk Streams specifically in our Biodiversity and Geology section, but we need to ensure that we protect all of our rivers and streams. Our main watercourses, their catchments and the areas where development may need to take particular account of water quality, habitat connectivity and riparian buffer requirements will be mapped.

Urban Greening Factor

The Urban Greening Factor (UGF) is a planning tool developed by Natural England that seeks to help developers and local authorities quantify the required provision of greenspace for a proposal. The UGF is used to calculate a score for each proposal by taking the area of proposed green infrastructure surface cover and multiplying it by a factor that Natural England has set for each typology. By then dividing this figure by the total area of the proposal, the UGF score of the proposal is calculated. Natural England sets a national

⁵¹ [GI Standards](#)

standard of UGF of at least 0.3 for commercial development, 0.4 for residential development, and, where appropriate, 0.5 for residential greenfield development.

As an example, a proposal for residential development covering an area of 100 square metres will provide 2.5 square metres of allotment area, 37 square metres of semi-natural vegetation, and 8 square metres of amenity grassland. Natural England has provided allotments a factor of 0.7, semi-natural vegetation a factor of 1.0, and amenity grassland a factor of 0.4. This proposal would score 0.42, which achieves the proposed national standard of 0.4.

Table 12 – Urban Greening Factor

Surface Cover Type	Proposed area	Natural England factor	Total
Allotment	2.5 sqm	x 0.7	1.75
Semi-natural vegetation	37 sqm	x 1.0	37
Amenity grassland	8 sqm	x 0.4	3.2
	Total		42
	Total site area		100 sqm
	UGF (42/100)		0.42

Source: North Herts Council

Q44. Our Sustainability SPD currently requires an Urban Greening Factor of 0.3 for commercial development and 0.4 for residential development, in line with recommended standards for England. We are proposing to incorporate these requirements into our new Local Plan.

Do you support the inclusion of these Urban Greening Factor standards in Local Plan policy? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard

Natural England has developed the Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard in collaboration with the Forestry Commission. It is a tool used to increase the tree canopy cover in urban areas. Tree canopy cover provides areas with a multitude of benefits; helping mitigate the Urban Heat Island effect and keeping our towns cool and shaded, increasing the character and

quality of the built environment, and encouraging biodiversity. The Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard is a percentage of a development's area that should be covered by tree canopies. This percentage will be based on a locally defined baseline, and will take into account local needs, opportunities and constraints. We are proposing to introduce canopy cover standards in our new Local Plan. This will be produced in line with what will be set out in the Natural England Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard User Guide, which is currently in production.

The NPPF now requires streets in new development to be tree-lined, and by setting canopy cover standards we can ensure that the benefits from this new requirement are maximised. These standards will also help achieve the Environment Act 2021 binding targets of achieving 16.5% tree canopy cover nationally, and the LNRS ambition of achieving 19% canopy cover in Hertfordshire.

Q45. Should we set Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standards in our Local Plan?

If yes, what should they be? If no, why not?

Other natural environment issues

Q46. Are there any additional issues relating to the natural environment, biodiversity, landscapes, watercourses or green infrastructure that the Local Plan should consider?

Please provide your comments.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change

The Council has strengthened its response to climate change by declaring a Climate Emergency in May 2019 and an Ecological Emergency in July 2023. Since then, it has adopted a [Climate Change Strategy](#)⁵² and a [Sustainability Strategy](#)⁵³ and produced a [Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document](#)⁵⁴ (SPD). The SPD encourages higher standards of sustainability in new development.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, often referred to as climate change mitigation, involves finding ways to lower the carbon footprint of new development and everyday activities. But even as we work to reduce emissions, we must also prepare for the effects of a changing climate. This is known as climate change adaptation.

Addressing climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing society and will be an important theme running throughout our new Local Plan. By planning for low-carbon development and increasing resilience to future climate impacts, we can help reduce our impact on climate change.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

The NPPF requires our new Local Plan to take a proactive approach to mitigating climate change, and to support the transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The Local Plan will do this by shaping how and where development takes place, setting local water efficiency standards where justified and identifying opportunities for Green Infrastructure provision to safeguard and improve carbon storage and support nature recovery.

The Local Plan needs to take into account available and needed energy supply, network capacity, water supply, drainage and wastewater capacity in planning new development. Our Local Plan needs to support the delivery of new and enhanced renewable and low-carbon energy. This includes identifying suitable locations for such development and promoting opportunities for buildings to use energy from decentralised networks and low-carbon sources. Our Local Plan should also encourage the co-location of energy producers and users, so that surplus heat or energy can be shared efficiently, helping reduce waste and support the transition to net zero.

The NPPF sets out NDMPs that cover issues relating to mitigation and adaptation of climate change, including the creation and restoration of habitats which can act as carbon stores, supporting good access to facilities to limit the need to travel, minimise the risk of flooding of a development and elsewhere, the incorporation of sustainable drainage systems, and compliance with national objectives and targets for air pollutants. The Local Plan will not reiterate national policy and will not cover issues that are already in NDMPs.

⁵² https://climate-hive.hub.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts_community_hub/files/2024-09/NHDC-294%20NHDC%20Climate%20change%20Strategy%202021-26%20web.pdf

⁵³ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sustainability-strategy>

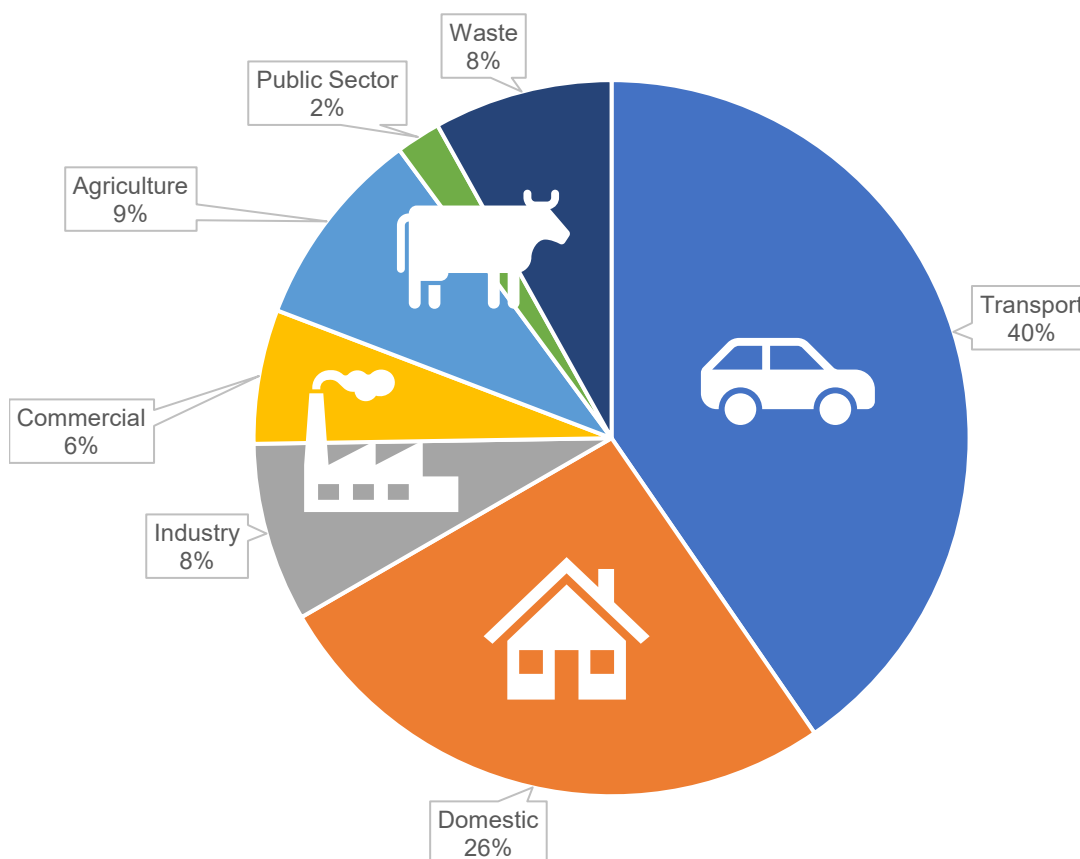
⁵⁴ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sustainability-supplementary-planning-document>

What does the data tell us?

In North Hertfordshire, as across the UK, carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the main cause of climate change and is expected to be responsible for around two-thirds of future global warming.

In 2024, total greenhouse gas emissions in North Hertfordshire were around [613 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent](#)⁵⁵. The below diagram presents the largest sources of emissions.

Figure 25 Greenhouse gas emissions in North Hertfordshire, 2024



Source: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions statistics, 2005 to 2024

Over the last two decades, emissions per person have nearly halved, mainly from cleaner electricity, lower gas use, and improvements in transport.

Air Quality

National and local approaches to air quality have evolved in recent years. Monitoring has traditionally focused on nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), which is primarily associated with road traffic emissions. However, there is now increasing recognition of the health impacts of fine

⁵⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-greenhouse-gas-emissions-statistics-2005-to-2024>

particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), leading to a greater emphasis on monitoring and reducing exposure to these pollutants.

In North Hertfordshire, we previously designated two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in Hitchin:

- Stevenage Road
- Payne's Park Roundabout

Following sustained improvements in air quality and monitoring results that demonstrated national objectives had been achieved, both AQMAs were [revoked](#)⁵⁶ in March 2026.

While this is positive progress, it does not mean that air quality is no longer an issue. We remain committed to maintaining and improving air quality across our District as required by the [National Air Quality Strategy](#)⁵⁷.

Our Local Plan can contribute to improved air quality by:

- Encouraging development in locations where people can walk, cycle, wheel and use public transport more easily.
- Reducing reliance on private car travel.
- Supporting the transition to low-emission and zero-emission vehicles.
- Promoting active travel and healthy lifestyles.
- Protecting and enhancing green infrastructure, which can help improve local environmental quality.
- Ensuring new development is designed to minimise adverse air quality impacts.

Q47. We are proposing requiring an Air Quality Assessment for certain types of development where there is potential for significant air quality impacts, including larger developments and those located close to sensitive uses such as schools, care homes, hospitals and nurseries.

Do you support this approach? Yes / No

Please explain your answer

Q48. What thresholds, distances from sensitive receptors, or other criteria should be used to determine when an Air Quality Assessment is required?

Please provide your reasons for any suggestions

⁵⁶ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/air-quality-monitoring>

⁵⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-air-quality-strategy-for-england>

Renewable energy

North Hertfordshire is continuing to expand its local clean energy generation capacity. There are already more than 3,700 solar panel installations across the District, and as this capacity continues to grow, North Hertfordshire has the potential to be one of the leading areas in the country for solar energy generation, making a significant contribution towards achieving net zero carbon emissions.

National policy requires us to positively plan for clean energy infrastructure. Strategic Development Strategies are expected to identify the type, scale and broad location of strategic infrastructure needed to support development, including utilities infrastructure. We are also expected to support the delivery of renewable and low-carbon energy through plan-making and decision-taking.

To help inform our approach, we will be commissioning evidence to better understand electricity network capacity across North Hertfordshire and identify any opportunities or constraints for future energy infrastructure.

Battery Storage

Renewable energy sources such as solar and wind do not always generate electricity when demand is highest. Battery storage can help address this by storing energy when it is available and releasing it when it is needed. This can improve the resilience and reliability of the electricity network, support the integration of renewable energy and help meet future demands arising from new homes, businesses and electric vehicles.

To help inform our approach, we will be commissioning evidence to better understand electricity network capacity across North Hertfordshire and identify any opportunities or constraints for future energy infrastructure.

We are considering introducing a policy to support battery energy storage development, subject to appropriate safeguards and site-specific considerations. This could include consideration of:

- Location and siting
- Landscape and visual impacts
- Noise impacts
- Biodiversity and environmental impacts
- Transport and construction impacts
- Decommissioning and restoration

Q49. We propose introducing a policy that supports battery energy storage development, subject to appropriate safeguards. Do you agree? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons.

Are there any additional criteria that you think should be included in the policy?

Community energy schemes

Community energy schemes (CES) are locally owned, managed or led by local communities to generate energy from renewable sources such as solar, wind, hydro or biomass. They provide an opportunity for communities to play a direct role in the transition to a low-carbon future while helping to meet local energy needs.

Unlike commercial energy schemes, community energy projects are designed to deliver benefits locally. Any income generated can be reinvested into community initiatives, energy-efficiency improvements, fuel poverty programmes or other local projects identified by residents.

As interest in local energy generation grows, community energy schemes may play an increasingly important role in helping North Hertfordshire meet its climate change objectives while delivering wider social, economic and environmental benefits.

Q50. Do you support the inclusion of a Local Plan policy that encourages Community Energy Schemes, where residents and local organisations collectively develop, own or benefit from renewable energy projects, such as solar photovoltaic installations? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Heat Networks

Heat networks, sometimes known as district heating networks, provide heating and hot water from a central source to multiple homes, businesses or public buildings through a network of insulated underground pipes.

Heat networks can operate at a variety of scales, from a single block of flats or a new housing development to larger networks serving town centres, employment areas, hospitals, schools and other groups of buildings.

They can use a range of low-carbon and renewable heat sources, including:

- Ground source and water source heat pumps.
- Solar energy.
- Biomass.
- Energy from waste facilities.
- Surplus or waste heat from industrial processes and data centres.

Heat networks can provide an efficient and lower-carbon way of heating buildings, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support the transition to net zero. They can also improve energy resilience by reducing reliance on individual gas boilers and making use of heat that might otherwise be wasted.

Heat networks are most effective in locations where there is a high concentration of buildings with a consistent demand for heat, such as town centres, larger mixed-use developments, hospitals, schools, employment areas and major regeneration sites.

Q51. Do you support a policy that prioritises heat networks in suitable developments where they can provide efficient, low-carbon heating, rather than relying solely on individual building heating systems? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Q52. Should developments of 100 dwellings or more be required to assess opportunities to use waste heat from nearby energy-intensive infrastructure, such as data centres and wastewater treatment works, as part of their heating strategy? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Energy efficiency

The Government is introducing the [Future Homes and Buildings Standard](#)⁵⁸ from March 2027 to help ensure that new homes and buildings are more energy efficient and produce significantly lower carbon emissions than those built today. These new standards are intended to support the transition to a low-carbon future by reducing energy use, lowering running costs and helping meet national climate change targets.

The standards are expected to:

- Require low-carbon heating systems in new homes, reducing reliance on fossil fuels.
- Support the use of on-site renewable energy technologies, such as solar panels and air source heat pumps.
- Improve energy efficiency, helping homes use less energy for heating, cooling and everyday living.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from new development.
- Create homes that are "zero-carbon ready", meaning they will not need significant retrofit work in the future to meet net-zero objectives.

Whilst these requirements will be set through national building regulations, the NPPF 2026 says that our Local Plan can set standards beyond them, provided we have a clear and robustly costed rationale showing there will not be an adverse impact on the viability and deliverability of the development scheme.

⁵⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-homes-and-buildings-standards-building-circular-012026/the-future-homes-and-buildings-standards-building-circular-012026-letter>

Q53. Should our Local Plan set energy efficiency standards above those set out in current or proposed Building Regulations?

Yes / No

Please explain your answer

Circular Economy

As buildings become more energy efficient and the energy we use becomes less carbon-intensive, the carbon emissions generated during construction, known as embodied carbon, account for an increasingly large share of a building's overall environmental impact.

A [study](#)⁵⁹ published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in 2026 found that demolition and redevelopment are often favoured over refurbishment or retrofit for financial and commercial reasons. The research also highlighted that uncertainty around planning policy can influence decisions, with developers and landowners not always having clear guidance on whether the planning system supports the retention and improvement of existing buildings.

Retrofitting and refurbishing existing buildings can offer a number of benefits, including:

- Reducing embodied carbon emissions associated with demolition and reconstruction.
- Making better use of existing buildings and materials.
- Preserving local character and heritage where appropriate.
- Reducing construction waste.
- Supporting the transition to a more resource-efficient and circular economy.

For these reasons, we are considering a policy approach that would encourage the retention, refurbishment and adaptation of existing buildings wherever practical and appropriate.

Where demolition is proposed, we may require applicants to demonstrate that alternative retrofit-led approaches have been properly considered, and that retention or refurbishment is not a feasible option. This would help ensure that the environmental impacts of demolition are fully understood and that opportunities to reduce carbon emissions are not overlooked.

Q54. Do you agree that the Local Plan should prioritise the retention, retrofitting and sensitive extension of existing buildings, with demolition only permitted where it is supported by robust evidence? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

⁵⁹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69b3f237ba47c264e6c8cf24/Demolition__redevelopment_and_retrofitting_of_buildings.pdf

Q55. Where demolition is proposed, should developers be required to submit:

- A pre-demolition audit?
- A whole-life carbon assessment?
- A circular economy statement?

Yes / /No

Please explain your answer.

For major development we may require both the construction phase embodied carbon and the whole life-cycle embodied carbon to be below a specified level (usually measured in carbon dioxide equivalent per square metre of floor area, or CO₂e/m²). To evidence this we may require major development proposals to be supported by an embodied carbon assessment.

Q56. We are considering setting maximum amounts of CO₂ equivalent emissions per square metre of floor area for the construction of and/or the whole life cycle of buildings that form part of major development proposals. Do you think this would be an appropriate approach?

Water resources and flood risk

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

The NPPF sets out that in preparing our Local Plan we need to work closely with water companies and drainage authorities and regulators to ensure we have a good understanding of available infrastructure capacities, requirements and limits, and to make provision for required new or enhanced water supply, drainage and wastewater infrastructure development.

Our Local Plan should also minimise flood risk from all sources, including rivers, surface water and groundwater, taking into account the effects of climate change. Our Local Plan should ensure that new development is safe over its lifetime and does not increase flood risk elsewhere.

When choosing locations for development, our Plan must take a risk-based approach and assume that flood risk will increase over time due to climate change with a requirement to reduce flood risk overall, not just manage it site-by-site, and plan for worsening conditions.

NDMPs contained within the NPPF sets out how individual proposals should be assessed for flood risk, how the sequential test should be applied, and the need for the incorporation of Sustainable Drainage Systems for development which could affect drainage. The Local Plan will not duplicate national policy and therefore will not cover issues that are already in NDMPs.

What does the data tell us?

Availability of water

As the population grows and climate change increases the risk of drought and extreme weather, the pressure on water availability will increase. The challenge is to allow necessary development while making sure water is used much more efficiently and sustainably.

Much of North Hertfordshire lies above underground water sources that supply most of our drinking water. The Environment Agency has identified that both rivers and groundwater across most of Hertfordshire are under serious pressure, with too much water already being taken out. This means our District is classed as an area of 'serious water stress', meaning demand for water is already high compared to what is available.

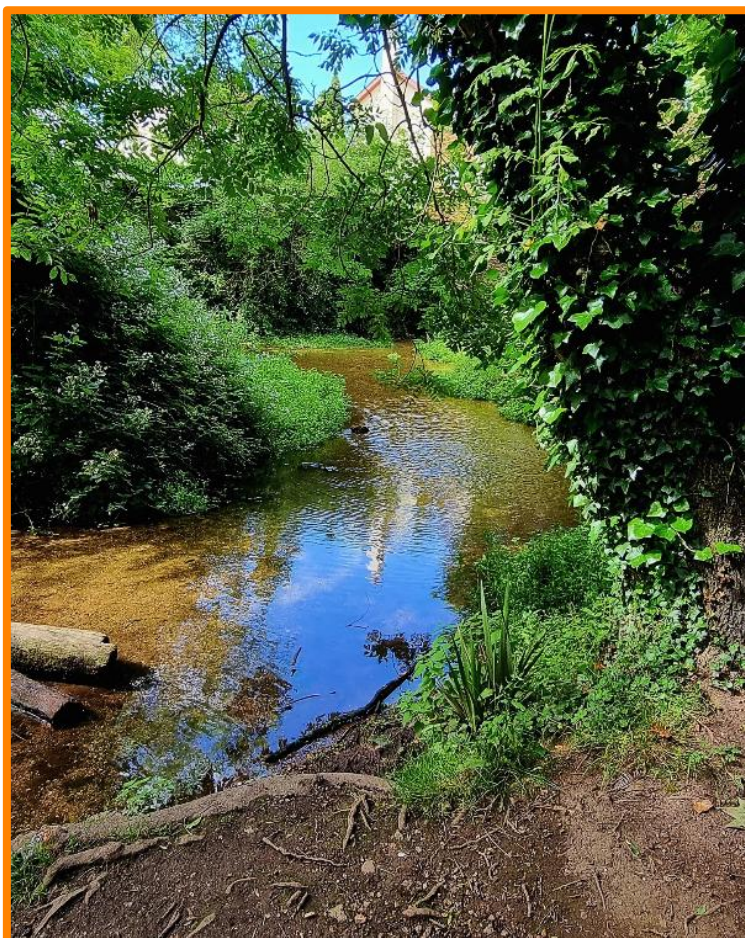
This issue has been brought into even sharper focus by the exceptionally hot and dry conditions experienced during the summer of 2026. Large parts of England have experienced prolonged periods of drought, with below-average rainfall placing increasing pressure on water supplies, rivers, agriculture and the natural environment. These conditions demonstrate how climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of drought events in the future, highlighting the importance of ensuring that new development is designed to use water efficiently and does not place additional strain on already stressed water resources.

Our chalk rivers have reduced water levels, with some sections drying up for long periods. Around half of the River Beane and River Mimram are affected by these dry stretches. Low or no water flow damages wildlife, allows sediment to build up, and reduces plant life in rivers, putting already fragile ecosystems at risk.

We are preparing a new Water Cycle Strategy for North Hertfordshire and this will help us make sure new development does not put too much pressure on water resources. It looks at water supply, wastewater treatment and flood risk to ensure environmental limits are not exceeded. The strategy will assess existing infrastructure and will be informed by [Affinity Water's Water Resources Management Plan](https://affinitywater.uk/engagementthq.com/wrmp)⁶⁰ (WRMP), which identifies significant pressures on the local environment and water resources due to population growth and climate change.

⁶⁰ <https://affinitywater.uk/engagementthq.com/wrmp>

Figure 26 – Ashwell Springs



Source: North Herts Council

Q57. We are proposing to require all new residential development to achieve a maximum water consumption target of 85 litres per person per day, reflecting emerging water-efficiency standards for areas of serious water stress.

Do you support this requirement? Yes / No

Please explain your answer

Greywater recycling

Greywater recycling involves collecting and reusing relatively clean wastewater from sources such as showers, baths and hand basins for non-drinking purposes, including toilet flushing and garden irrigation. These systems can help reduce the amount of mains water used in homes and other buildings.

Greywater recycling is referenced within [Building Regulations Approved Documents G \(Sanitation, Hot Water Safety and Water Efficiency\)](#)⁶¹ and [H \(Drainage and Waste Disposal\)](#)⁶². However, unlike some other water efficiency measures, the installation of greywater recycling systems is not currently a mandatory national requirement.

Q58. Should the Local Plan encourage the use of greywater recycling systems and other water-saving technologies in new development? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons.

Water quality in rivers and groundwater

North Hertfordshire has many rivers and streams, mainly associated to the Rivers Ivel, Hiz, and Beane. At present all rivers in England, including those in our District, fail to meet good chemical water quality standards. In 2025, a total number of 188 sewage spills were recorded at pumping stations and wastewater treatment works in North Hertfordshire lasting for a total duration of 1,142 hours⁶³.

Most of our rivers have moderate or good ecological health, although the River Beane is in poor condition. Pollution comes from a range of sources, including urban development, road run-off, industry, farming and livestock, land management practices, water abstraction, and wastewater discharges.

Changes to rivers themselves, such as barriers, culverts and modifications made for flood management, also harm river health and contribute to their decline.

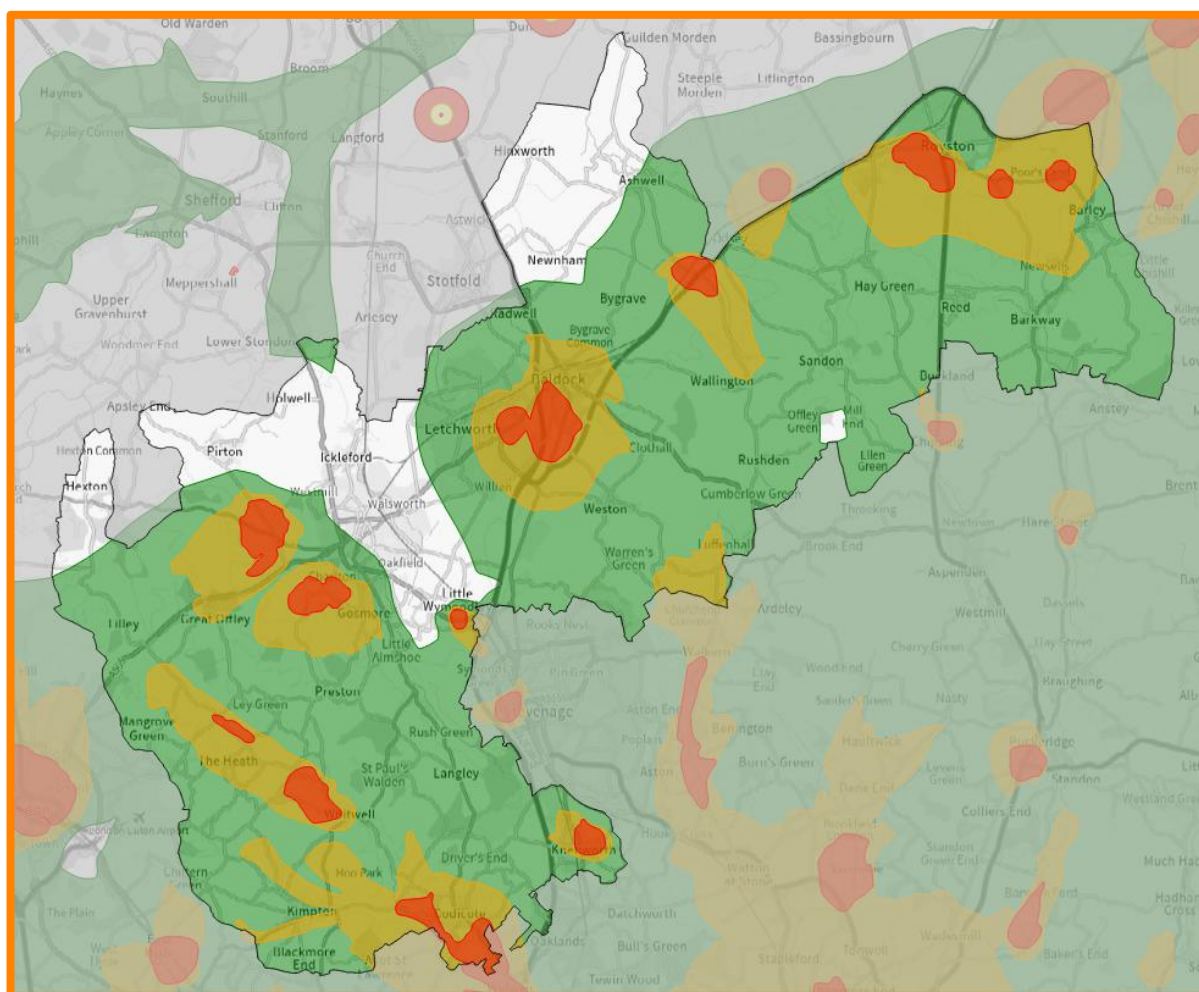
We want to ensure that development in our District helps to improve the chemical and biological quality of the rivers in North Hertfordshire.

⁶¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66f6c6ce3b919067bb4828cc/ADG_with_2024_amendments.pdf

⁶² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drainage-and-waste-disposal-approved-document-h>

⁶³ https://theriverstrust.org/sewage-map?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=23308961225&gclid=EAlaIQobChMIqY3Hvs-mIAMV65RQBh1caxz9EAAAYASAAEgJMHd_BWE

Figure 27 - Source Protection Zones – North Hertfordshire

Source: North Herts Council

In addition to rivers and streams, much of North Hertfordshire sits above underground water sources (aquifers). Some of these aquifers are 'principal aquifers', which can store and supply large amounts of water and help feed rivers over a wide area. Others are 'secondary aquifers', which usually support water supplies at a more local level and provide important flows to nearby rivers.

Water is abstracted from these underground water sources for drinking water and so these areas need extra protection as they are particularly vulnerable to pollution. These areas of protection are called Source Protection Zones, and are mainly around Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock, Royston, Ashwell and Stevenage.

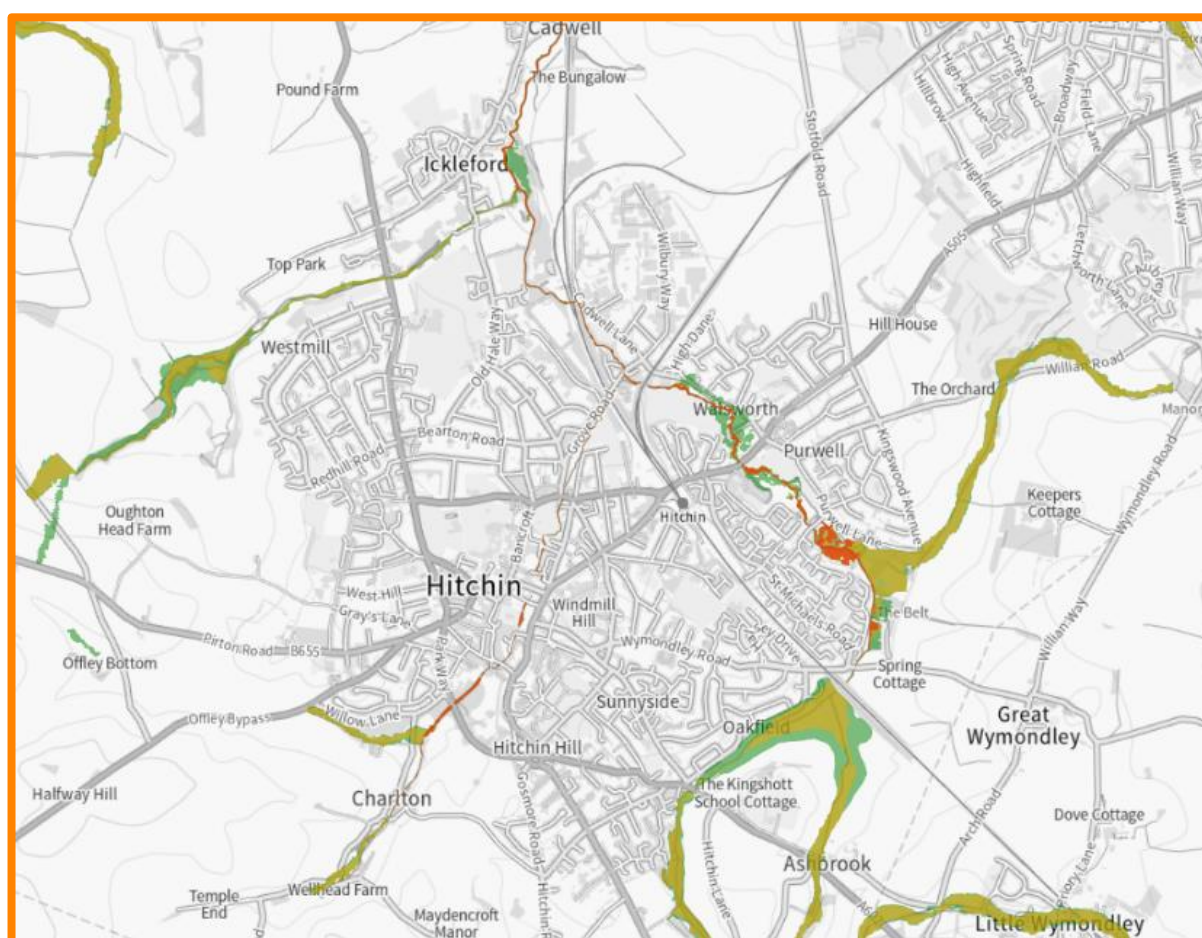
Flood risk

North Hertfordshire faces a number of flood risk challenges, particularly from surface water flooding, which means some areas are more vulnerable than others. Around 4,000 properties in our District are at high risk of surface water flooding (a 1 in 30-year chance), with a further 8,000 properties at medium risk (a 1 in 100-year chance).

The [Hertfordshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2](https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/environment-and-planning/water/flood-risk-management/lfrms-for-hertfordshire-full-report.pdf)⁶⁴ (LFRMS2) explains that climate change is expected to make flooding more frequent and more severe across Hertfordshire. It identifies three main sources of local flood risk:

- Surface water flooding, which is the most common and widespread
- River flooding, from rivers and watercourses
- Groundwater flooding, which is less frequent but can be significant in certain locations

Figure 28 – Areas of flood risk in Hitchin



Source: Hertfordshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

In places where there is already a high risk of river flooding, such as Hitchin, it is important that new development allows space for water and does not increase flood risk on site or elsewhere.

We are currently preparing a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). This will map flood risk across our District and identify where flooding may limit development. The results will help us decide where growth can take place safely and where development should be avoided or would need further testing through the Sequential or Exception Tests.

⁶⁴ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/environment-and-planning/water/flood-risk-management/lfrms-for-hertfordshire-full-report.pdf>

Together, the SFRA and Water Cycle Strategy will provide the technical evidence needed to plan growth responsibly. They will help ensure that new development is environmentally sustainable, supported by the right infrastructure, and follows best practice in managing water-related risks.

Other climate change related issues

Q59. Are there any other climate change issues relating to reducing carbon emissions, renewable energy, energy efficiency, flooding, water resources or climate resilience that our Local Plan should consider?

Please provide your comments.

TRANSPORT AND CONNECTIVITY

Transport and connectivity

The way we plan new development has a major influence on how people travel. Locating homes, jobs and services in accessible locations gives people more choice about how they get around and can reduce the need to make every journey by car.

This is particularly important for those who do not have regular access to a car, including children and young people, older residents, disabled people and lower-income households. Well-connected communities can improve access to opportunities, support independent living and help reduce social isolation. It also leads to lower car usage, which improves air quality, reduces congestion and improves people's health and wellbeing.

Our Local Plan will direct large-scale development to locations that are already well connected, or where there is a policy commitment to provide the infrastructure and transport investment needed to integrate the site with existing networks, enabling residents to have a genuine choice of travel modes.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

National planning policy places a strong emphasis on creating places that are easy to get around and give people genuine choices about how they travel.

Local Plans are required to plan for new homes, jobs and services in locations where people can easily walk, cycle, wheel or use public transport to reach the places they need to go, including schools, healthcare facilities, shops, town centres and transport hubs.

For larger developments, a range of local facilities and services are expected to be provided nearby, helping to reduce the need for people to travel longer distances for everyday needs.

A key principle of NPPF Policy TR3 is designing places around people rather than traffic. This means creating communities where walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport are safe, attractive and convenient options that people have a genuine choice to use. This approach can bring wider benefits, including:

- Healthier and more active lifestyles.
- Improved air quality.
- Reduced congestion.
- Lower carbon emissions.
- Better connected communities

National policy also requires us to set appropriate parking standards for new development, taking account of local circumstances.

NDMPs cover policies on locating development in sustainable locations; street design, access and parking; roadside facilities (EV chargepoints and lorry parks); assessing transport impacts; marine ports, airports and other aviation facilities; and public rights of way.

Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan, 2018 - 2031

The [Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan 2018-2031](#) (LTP4)⁶⁵ provides the strategic framework for how transport infrastructure and services should support population growth, economic development and improved quality of life across the County.

It recognises that future growth in homes and jobs will increase demand for travel; and that without intervention, there will be a continued reliance on private cars. To address this, LTP4 Policy 1 sets out a Transport User Hierarchy by which the County Council will assess development proposals in order of priority:

1. Opportunities to reduce travel demand and the need to travel
2. Vulnerable road user needs (such as pedestrians and cyclists)
3. Passenger transport user needs
4. Powered two-wheeler (mopeds and motorbikes) user needs
5. Other motor vehicle user needs

This is supplemented in Policy 5 by requirements for new development to meet design and safety standards and to mitigate adverse impacts in order to create safe, sustainable and viable places from a transport perspective.

LTP4 Policy 12 seeks to make the most efficient use of the road network by reducing single occupancy car use and encouraging travel by walking, cycling and passenger transport.

What does the data tell us?

Bus travel⁶⁶ has declined markedly across Hertfordshire since a peak in around 2014. Although bus use has stopped falling since the pandemic, it has not recovered to previous levels. People are making fewer bus journeys than before, and bus services are less frequent and cover fewer routes, particularly those that operate without public subsidy.

Most rail stations⁶⁷ in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage have seen passenger numbers return to around pre-COVID levels. However, recovery has been slower at Knebworth, Baldock and Hitchin, where passenger numbers remain below their pre-pandemic highs.

National Travel Survey

Travel levels have fallen over the last two decades. People are making fewer journeys, travelling shorter distances, and spending less time travelling than in 2002. Shopping is now the most common reason for travel, followed by commuting⁶⁸.

⁶⁵ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/planning-in-hertfordshire/transport-planning/local-transport-plan.aspx>

⁶⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/bus-statistics-data-tables>

⁶⁷ <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/estimates-of-station-usage>

⁶⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-travel-survey-statistics>

Hertfordshire Travel Survey 2025

In 2024, traffic across the county was around 4% lower than in 2019, although it is expected to have recovered fully by 2025/26. In North Hertfordshire, traffic levels in 2024 were already nearly 5% higher than before the pandemic.⁶⁹

Travel patterns have changed since COVID-19. Traffic is still lower during the traditional morning and evening rush hours, particularly in the morning; suggesting that more people are travelling at different times of the day, possibly due to flexible and hybrid working. This trend is especially noticeable on Fridays, which are now the busiest day of the week overall.

Congestion remains a problem at a number of locations across and around North Hertfordshire, including junctions on the A1, parts of the A505, A10 and A602, and key routes through Royston, Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Knebworth. Delays can be unpredictable in some areas, leading drivers to use alternative routes that may be less suitable for higher levels of traffic.

Most journeys are still made by car. In 2024, around 21% of monitored trips in Hertfordshire were made by other means, including walking (9%), bus travel (11.5%) and cycling (less than 1%).

Cycling increased during the pandemic but has since fallen back to around pre-pandemic levels. The proportion of children cycling to school has also declined in recent years.

Physical activity levels remain a concern. In 2025, just over half of Hertfordshire residents achieved the recommended level of weekly physical activity, while around one in nine people were active for less than 30 minutes a week.

Many short journeys are still made by car. One in five trips of less than a mile are made by car, rising to almost two-thirds of trips between one and three miles. These distances are often suitable for walking or cycling where safe and convenient routes are available. This suggests there is significant potential to increase active travel through better infrastructure and connectivity.

Car ownership

Car ownership in North Hertfordshire increased between 2011 and 2021. The proportion of households without access to a car fell slightly (from 16.5% to 15.5%), while the number of households owning three or more vehicles increased. On average, households owned 1.42 cars or vans in 2021, compared with 1.37 in 2011.

As the number of households also grew during this period, the total number of cars and vans owned by residents increased by around 10%.

Car ownership varies significantly depending on the type of housing and whether a property is owned, rented privately or rented from a social landlord; suggesting parking provision should reflect the characteristics of the homes being built rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

⁶⁹ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/Highways-roads-and-pavements/Speed-awareness-and-driver-training/Transport-and-Accident-Data/Transport-and-accident-data.aspx#traffic>

The evidence from the 2021 Census of car ownership in North Hertfordshire supports limiting on-plot parking to no more than two spaces per dwelling. This helps ensure land is used efficiently while still providing an appropriate level of parking for most households.

Table 23 - Average number of cars/vans per household in North Hertfordshire for different tenures and dwelling sizes

Tenure	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5+ bed
Social rented	0.5	0.9	1.2	1.5	1.1
Shared ownership	1.1	1.3	1.7	2.0	1.5
Private owned or rented	0.8	1.0	1.3	1.4	1.7

Source: Census 2021

Blue Badges

In Hertfordshire, around 6.3% of residents currently hold a Blue Badge, which is higher than the national and regional averages.⁷⁰

The proportion of older people in North, East and Central Hertfordshire is expected to grow from 18.5% of the population in 2026 to 21.3% by 2040.⁷¹ As people are more likely to need a Blue Badge as they get older, this is expected to increase demand for accessible parking and other age-friendly transport measures.

Based on current trends, the proportion of residents holding a Blue Badge could rise from around 6.3% today to approximately 7% by 2040. This highlights the importance of ensuring that new developments provide suitable levels of accessible parking and are designed to meet the needs of an ageing population.

Connectivity

To support the delivery of sustainable and well-connected communities, we propose some new concepts relating to connectivity, as set out below

Sustainably connected

- A **sustainably connected** site has safe walking routes to
 - Primary school within 800m
 - General shop within 600m
 and

⁷⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/blue-badge-scheme-statistics-data-tables-dis>

⁷¹ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/herts-insight/topics/population.aspx>

- Bus stop within 400m with a **medium quality** of service
or
- Bus stop within 400m with a **low quality** of service
- Secondary school within 5km by a safe cycle route
- Railway station or town centre within 5km by a safe cycle route

Well-connected

- A **well-connected** site⁷² has safe walking routes to:
 - Primary school within 800m
 - Secondary school within 5km by a safe cycle route
 - General shop within 600m
 and
- Bus stop within 800m with a **high quality** of service
or
- Railway station or town centre within 800m

Quality of bus services

- **High quality** – buses run to and from a town centre and railway station at least every 20 minutes during weekday peak periods (6am to 9am and 4pm to 7pm), and at least every 30 minutes at all other times between 6am and 11pm, seven days a week
- **Medium quality** – buses run to and from a town centre and railway station at least every 30 minutes during weekday peak periods (6am to 9am and 4pm to 7pm), and at least hourly at all other times between 6am and 11pm, seven days a week.
- **Low quality** - buses run to either a town centre or railway station at least once an hour between 7am and 10pm, Monday to Saturday

All proposed development sites should be **sustainably connected**, unless there are significant benefits arising from other policy objectives that outweigh this requirement.

Strategic sites of 150 or more dwellings should be **well connected**, and, in line with the NPPF, should generally be developed at higher densities to make the most efficient use of accessible locations.

Larger developments should provide on-site amenities, such as education, community, retail, leisure, cultural and healthcare facilities that complement existing provision elsewhere and minimise the need for residents to travel further afield for their daily needs.

Sites that are not **sustainably connected** should either include measures to improve connectivity or demonstrate that other planning considerations outweigh this deficiency. Bus services below the threshold of a **low-quality service** should not be regarded as

⁷² This should not be confused with the definition of “well-connected station” in the NPPF.

contributing to sustainable transport provision, as they are unlikely to provide the NPPF's required "genuine choice" of travel modes, even where they fulfil an important social function.

Q60. Do you agree with the definition of “sustainably connected” as defined above as a default requirement for new developments?

If not, what changes do you suggest for the definition of “sustainably connected” and/or qualities of bus services?

Q61. Do you agree that housing developments of 150 or more dwellings should meet the requirement of being well connected (as defined above)?

If not, what changes do you suggest for the definition of “well connected” and/or qualities of bus services?

Q62. Do you agree that bus services below the criteria for a low-quality service, as defined above, should not be counted when assessing a site’s connectivity? If not, what threshold do you think we should set?

Q63. Do you have comments on other aspects of these proposals

Travel plans and mitigation

The NPPF promotes a vision-led approach to transport planning, meaning developments should be planned around the travel choices people will want to make in the future, rather than assuming a continuation of historic traffic patterns and trends.

NDMPs require development proposals to assess the likely impacts for transport. Sites that will generate significant amounts of movement are also required to prepare a Travel Plan and to manage adverse impacts with appropriate mitigations.

Our Local Plan will require developments that are likely to generate significant numbers of trips to commit to ambitious but realistic targets for sustainable travel (walking, wheeling, cycling, bus rail and car-sharing) in their Travel Plans.

In accordance with NPPF Policy TR3 and LTP4 Policy 5, developments will be expected to propose a package of measures that is sufficient to mitigate the adverse impacts of the development on existing transport infrastructure, including:

- New or improved walking and cycling routes
- Safer road crossings and junction improvements
- Bus priority measures and improved bus facilities
- Lower speed limits and traffic-calming measures
- Parking management measures
- Car clubs and shared mobility schemes
- Cycle, e-bike and cargo bike hire schemes
- Travel incentives and sustainable travel initiatives

Mitigations should seek to both maximise the share of trips generated by the development by sustainable modes and shift existing trips on the road network to more sustainable modes. Put the other way around, mitigations should seek to minimise vehicular trips generated by the development and release capacity in the existing road network to accommodate unavoidable new vehicular trips generated by the development.

Any proposal to add new road capacity will be accepted only as a last resort and to satisfy NNPF Policy TR6 paragraphs 3 and 4.

A Monitor and Manage Approach

Predicting future travel behaviour is not an exact science and it is not possible to know with certainty whether Travel Plan targets will be achieved.

We are therefore proposing a Monitor and Manage approach to complement the NDMPs for sites that require a Travel Plan: developers would be required to provide a proportionate financial contribution in the form of a bond that may be used to implement additional mitigations if monitoring shows that agreed Travel Plan targets are not being met or if significant adverse impacts of the development are observed that were not anticipated.

Monitor and Manage mitigations may supplement and/or extend mitigations agreed to make the development acceptable in planning terms in the first place, and must be prioritised in the same way.

The bond would be used only if further intervention is required. Unspent funds would be returned to the developer in accordance with the terms of a legal agreement once monitoring after completion of the development shows that Travel Plan targets have been achieved, are likely to be sustained, and no other significant adverse impacts persist.

Q64. Do you agree that developments that require a Travel Plan should contribute to a Monitor and Manage Fund to mitigate unanticipated adverse impacts of the development? Yes / No

If no, how else do you think we can best address uncertain outcomes of a vision-led approach to transport planning?

Cycle parking

Providing safe, convenient and secure cycle parking is an important part of encouraging more people to travel by bicycle. If people are confident that they can store their cycle safely at home and at their destination, they are more likely to choose cycling for everyday journeys.

We are proposing to make a clearer distinction between types of provision:

- Secure cycle parking - Covered parking with controlled access or other measures to help prevent theft, typically for residents, employees and long-stay users.
- Public-access cycle parking - Parking located within publicly accessible areas, primarily for visitors and short-stay users. This may be covered where appropriate.

Residential Development

All new homes should provide sufficient cycle parking to ensure residents have safe, secure and convenient places to store their bicycles.

As people generally do not share bicycles in the same way as cars, our starting assumption is that cycle parking provision should broadly reflect the number of people likely to live in a home. A combination of on-plot and shared provision will often provide the most efficient use of space.

For developments of five or more dwellings, additional cycle parking should be provided for visitors in locations that are easy to find, conveniently located and accessible without entering secure residential areas.

Q65. Are there any specific considerations you think we should take into account when setting cycle parking standards?

Cycle hire schemes

We are hoping to build on initiatives in Stevenage where the Council and Beryl Bikes launched a town-wide e-bike hire scheme in 2024, providing an alternative (alone or in combination with public transport) to private car use for shorter journeys.

To support the growth of shared mobility, we are proposing that residential developments of more than 100 dwellings should:

- Provide suitable space for shared mobility stations that are integrated into the layout of the development from the outset, ensuring they are visible, safe, accessible and convenient to use.

- Work with an appropriate operator to provide shared cycles, e-bikes, cargo bikes and/or e-scooters (where legally permitted).
- Provide residents with access to a booking and management system.

Where an established local shared mobility operator already serves the area, developers would normally be expected to work with that operator to help expand the existing network.

Q66. Do you agree that larger residential developments of 100 dwellings or more should provide space for shared mobility hubs and work with operators to provide cycle, e-bike, cargo bike and other shared transport services? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons.

Car parking

The amount, location and cost of parking can have a significant influence on how people travel. Parking provision affects car ownership levels, travel choices and the overall design of new development. It is therefore an important consideration in creating sustainable, attractive and well-functioning places.

As required by the NPPF, our new Local Plan will set parking standards for both residential and non-residential development.

Residential parking

To support more efficient use of land, we are proposing that a proportion of residential parking is provided off-plot within shared parking courts, parking squares or parking barns. This approach helps to reduce the amount of underused parking space within developments.

For **well-connected** sites, parking standards will generally be treated as maximum standards, with homes in the most accessible parts of a development having lower levels of parking.

For other sites, the parking standards will generally be treated as target levels of provision that should not normally be exceeded.

As illustrated in the evidence above, vehicle ownership can vary significantly between different housing tenures and household types. So, our proposed parking standards will take account of these differences.

Q67. Do you agree with the principle of having less on-plot and more shared parking provision to make more efficient use of land? Yes/No. If not, please explain why

Visitor parking

Visitor parking is an important part of successful residential development to avoid unsafe or obstructive parking (e.g. close to junctions or on pavements). We anticipate that the new standards will be lower than our current Local Plan requirements, which generally require 0.25 to 0.75 visitor parking spaces per dwelling depending on the type and location of development.

Q68. Are there any specific considerations you think we should take into account when setting standards for visitor parking in residential areas?

Car clubs

Car clubs can provide residents with access to a vehicle when needed without the costs and responsibilities of owning a private car. Having conveniently located club cars in new developments is expected to play an important role in supporting sustainable travel and reducing parking demand.

Our new Local Plan will therefore require residential developments over 50 dwellings to provide up to one dedicated car club parking bay per 50 dwellings. Sites larger than 100 dwellings will generally be required to provide, in partnership with a car club operator, one or more club cars so that every dwelling is within around 400m on foot from a club car in a designated parking bay.

Q69. Do you think these are reasonable expectations of residential developments to support access to club cars? Yes / No

If not, please propose alternative thresholds with justifications.

Loading bays

Online shopping and home delivery services are now a routine part of everyday life. New residential developments therefore need to be designed to enable deliveries, carers, tradespeople and other short-stay users to park close to dwellings safely and without causing an obstruction.

Our new Local Plan will require developments to provide convenient loading and short-stay parking facilities close to homes:

- A loading or short-stay parking bay should be provided within 50 metres of every dwelling entrance.
- Bays should be designed to accommodate a large van (up to 3.5 tonnes).

Q70. What do you think is the maximum convenient distance from a loading bay to your front door for home deliveries or loading/unloading your car if it is not parked on a driveway? 50m / 40m / 25m / other (please provide justification)

Non-residential parking

We will review existing non-residential parking standards to ensure they remain appropriate and reflect current evidence, travel patterns and levels of accessibility. Any changes will seek to ensure that parking provision is sufficient to meet operational needs while avoiding excessive provision that can encourage unnecessary car use or result in inefficient use of land.

Public and private car parks should generally provide 7% of parking spaces as accessible bays for disabled staff and visitors.

Parking at retail and leisure destinations will also require a proportion of parking bays close to the building entrance to be wider and prioritised for disabled and family users.

Q71. Are there any specific considerations you think we should take into account when setting car parking standard for non-standard residential and non-residential developments?

Parking Restrictions

Where a residential development proposal has lower parking provision than the target standards, the developer may be required to fund the consultation and, where supported, introduction of parking restrictions, potentially including a Controlled Parking Zone, in areas that would be affected by spillover parking.

For residential and non-residential developments that may attract commuter parking (e.g. that are close to a railway station), our new Local Plan will allow for the introduction of parking restrictions, potentially including a Controlled Parking Zone, within the development site as part of the planning application to be implemented in advance of people taking residence.

Residents of new developments will generally not be eligible for permits to park within current or future Controlled Parking Zones outside of the development.

Q72. Do you agree that developments should be able to include Controlled Parking Zones within their site boundary without a resident consultation? If not, please explain why.

Electric vehicle charge points

Residential development is required to provide EV charging points in accordance with [Building Regulations Part S \(infrastructure for charging electric vehicles\)](#)⁷³.

Non-residential sites will provide charge points in response to market demand. Installing charging points is, in most cases, permitted development.

Disabled parking bays with EV charging points should comply with [Electric Vehicles Accessible Charging Specification PAS1899](#)⁷⁴ standards.

The Local Plan will therefore not include policies on EV charging points.

Travel hubs

Travel Hubs (transport interchanges) can help support sustainable travel by making multimodal journeys easier and more convenient by creating a more connected and sustainable transport network, bringing different travel options together in one convenient location. By making it easier to switch between walking, cycling, public transport and shared mobility services, they can help reduce reliance on private car ownership and provide people with a wider range of travel choices.

Railway stations and bus stations already function as primary Travel Hubs because they already act as transport interchanges. However, there is also a role for secondary Travel Hubs in:

- Town centres
- Village centres
- Neighbourhood and community centres

These need to be highly visible and connected by safe walking and cycling routes from the surrounding area.

Our Local Plan will seek to safeguard land in towns for Travel Hubs and will make it a requirement of Neighbourhood Plans that they also safeguard land in appropriate villages (e.g. on scheduled bus routes) for Travel Hubs.

Q73. Do you agree that our Local Plan should safeguard land for travel hubs in towns? Yes / No. If no, please explain why.

⁷³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infrastructure-for-charging-electric-vehicles-approved-document-s>

⁷⁴ <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/insights-and-media/insights/brochures/pas-1899-electric-vehicles-accessible-charging-specification/>

Q74. Do you agree that Neighbourhood Plans should safeguard land for travel hubs in villages? Yes/No If no, please explain why.

Q75. Do you agree that our Local Plan should require developments of more than 150 dwellings to include a travel hub? Yes / No

If no, please explain why or propose a different threshold

Last-mile delivery

Last-mile delivery is the final stage of the delivery process, where goods are transported from a depot to their final destination, such as a home or business.

The growth of online shopping and home deliveries has increased the number of delivery vehicles on our roads. Last-mile deliveries are mostly undertaken by lorries, vans and cars, generating a large number of relatively short trips in towns that contribute to:

- Traffic congestion.
- Increased air pollution and carbon emissions.
- Road safety concerns where vehicles park unsafely.
- Obstruction of pavements, cycle lanes and bus routes.

One way to reduce these impacts is to create a network of distribution and consolidation depots on the edges of towns where goods to be transferred between large vehicles and electric vans, cargo bikes or other low-emission vehicles for the 'last mile'.

Our new Local Plan will propose safeguarding suitable land for future distribution and consolidation depots where there is evidence that they can support sustainable freight movements and help reduce the impacts of last-mile delivery.

Q76. Do you agree with our proposals to safeguard land for distribution and consolidation depots to reduce the impact of 'last-mile' deliveries and collections? Yes / No

If no, please explain your reasons.

Lorry parking

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) play a vital role in supporting the economy. But to operate safely, drivers are required to take regular rest breaks as part of national road safety regulations.

North Hertfordshire already contains some provision for HGV parking, including:

- The lorry park at Baldock Services on the A1(M) at Junction 10.
- Overnight lorry parking facilities at Woodside Car Park, Hitchin.

As freight activity continues to grow, it is important to ensure that adequate facilities are available for drivers travelling through and working within our District.

We are proposing that our new Local Plan safeguards land in suitable locations for HGV parking and driver welfare facilities, particularly in locations with good access to the strategic road network, including the A1 and A505.

Q77. Are there any locations you believe would be suitable for lorry parking?

Are there any locations you believe would be suitable for driver welfare facilities?

COMMUNITIES AND PLACEMAKING

Communities and placemaking

North Hertfordshire is home to a diverse population, with people of all ages and backgrounds living in our towns, villages and rural communities. It is important that new development creates places that are inclusive, accessible and supportive of people's health and wellbeing.

We want healthy communities to be at the heart of our new Local Plan, and this means ensuring that the homes, neighbourhoods and public spaces we create help people lead active, healthy and connected lives, while providing opportunities for everyone to participate fully in community life.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

National planning policy requires Local Plans to have a clear understanding of the facilities, services and infrastructure needed to support existing and future communities and promote healthy and inclusive places. Our Plan can also designate Local Green Space where national criteria are met. Local Green Space is a designation used to protect green spaces that are important to the local community. This designation protects land from development in almost the same way as Green Belt land, meaning only very limited and exceptional development will normally be allowed.

NDMPs deal with the provision, improvement and retention of community facilities and public service infrastructure in new developments, the restriction of hot food takeaways in areas where children and young people congregate, and also any development that affects existing recreational land facilities or Local Green Spaces. Any green space that is close to the community it serves, holds a particular local significance, and is local in character and not an extensive tract of land can be designated.

What does the data tell us?

Life Expectancy

Life expectancy in North Hertfordshire is reasonably high compared to the national average

Table 14 – Life expectancy in North Hertfordshire, 2023 - 2025

	North Hertfordshire	England
Men	81.2 years	79.7 years
Women	84,1 years	83.5 years

Source - [Health and Wellbeing Profile - County | Hertfordshire | Report Builder for ArcGIS](#)⁷⁵

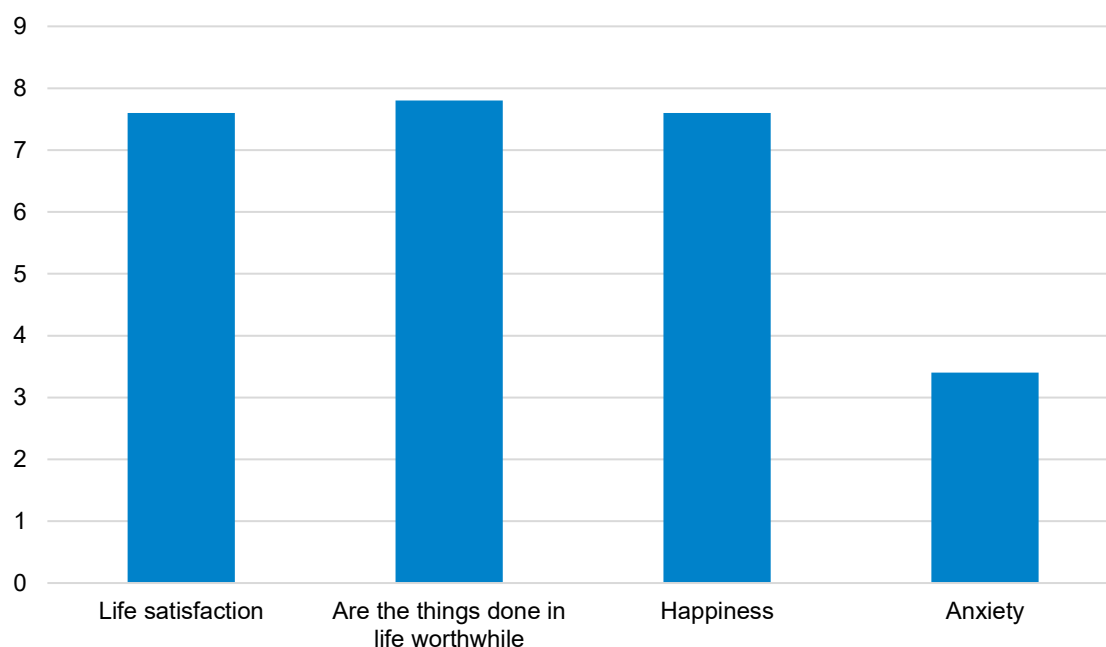
Mental health

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) carry out an Annual Population Survey that asks people in the UK to rate their well-being through four measures:

- Life satisfaction,
- Feeling the things done in life are worthwhile,
- Happiness, and
- Anxiety.

Responses are on an 11-point scale, where 0 is "Not at all" and 10 is "Completely".

Figure 29 – Well-being in North Hertfordshire, 2022 - 2023



Source – [ONS Annual Population Survey](#)⁷⁶

Disability

The 2021 Census shows that 21,236 residents of North Hertfordshire are disabled under the Equality Act, whilst a further 10,814 residents had conditions or illnesses that did not qualify them as disabled under the Equality Act⁷⁷.

Additional data on the wider demographics of our communities is set out in both the baseline for the [Sustainability Appraisal](#) and the [Equality Impact Assessment](#).

⁷⁵ <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/eb7013b48b5c416e814a386cde0b8c81/E10000015?clear=true>

⁷⁶ <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c46f72e1fade4249aad53656d4773ce4/E07000099>

⁷⁷ <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c46f72e1fade4249aad53656d4773ce4/E07000099>

Healthy and wellbeing in our communities

Creating healthy communities is a key part of planning for the future. The [Hertfordshire Safe and Healthy Places Framework](#)⁷⁸ promotes a 'Health in All Policies' approach, recognising that the places where we live, work and spend our time can have a significant impact on our physical and mental wellbeing.

This approach encourages health considerations to be embedded throughout the plan-making process, rather than treated as a separate issue. It recognises that access to good housing, green spaces, community facilities, employment, education and sustainable transport all contribute to healthier lives and reduced health inequalities.

The Framework supports the creation of places that:

- Encourage walking, cycling and other forms of active travel.
- Provide access to parks, open spaces and nature.
- Promote social interaction and community connections.
- Support good mental and physical health.
- Improve access to healthcare and local services.
- Create safe, inclusive and accessible environments for people of all ages and abilities.
- Help reduce health inequalities between different communities.

As we prepare our new Local Plan, we will consider how planning policies can contribute to healthier communities and support the principles of the Hertfordshire Safe and Healthy Places Framework. This will help ensure that health and wellbeing are considered alongside housing, transport, the environment, town centres and other aspects of growth and development.

Q78. Do you support our Local Plan taking a "Health in All Policies" approach to help improve health and wellbeing outcomes across North Hertfordshire? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Q79. Are there any specific health and wellbeing issues that the Local Plan should address or place greater emphasis on?

Please provide your comments

⁷⁸ <https://hertshealthyplacemaking-hertscc.hub.arcgis.com/>

Open space

Open spaces can provide a wide range of environmental, social and health benefits. Socially, they provide places for recreation, informal play, community activity and helping to improve the quality of life of the people who use them. They also support health and wellbeing of people by encouraging physical activity and providing space for leisure.

The NPPF defines 'open space' as all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.

We are currently undertaking an open space study, identifying the overall provision of open space in our District, the main deficiencies in terms of quantity and quality of open spaces, and areas for improvement.

Our current Local Plan does not designate any Open Spaces, nor does it designate any Local Green Spaces. To identify land suitable for Local Green Space designation in the new Local Plan, we are considering a call for Local Green Space sites where anyone can submit sites for our consideration. These will then be assessed against national policy criteria and be designated where suitable.

Q80. Do you support the designation of open spaces in the Local Plan? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Q81. Do you support the designation of Local Green Spaces in our new Local Plan to help protect areas that are demonstrably special to local communities? Yes / No

Please explain your answer.

Social Infrastructure

As North Hertfordshire grows, new homes and jobs need to be supported by the right infrastructure, helping communities remain healthy, connected and resilient.

To help shape our approach, we are preparing and reviewing a range of evidence, including:

- An Infrastructure Delivery Plan, identifying the infrastructure needed to support future growth.
- An [Outdoor Playing Pitch Strategy](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base)⁷⁹, assessing current and future needs for sports pitches and outdoor recreation.

⁷⁹ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

- An Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy, reviewing demand for indoor leisure and sports facilities.
- A Burials Study, considering future cemetery and burial provision.

We will work closely with infrastructure providers and partner organisations to understand how growth will affect demand for services and facilities. This includes organisations responsible for:

- Education and schools.
- Healthcare services.
- Emergency services.
- Community facilities.
- Sports and leisure provision.
- Utilities and other essential infrastructure

This collaboration will help ensure that sufficient land is identified, where needed, for new facilities and that future development supports the delivery plans of key service providers.

For larger development sites, we will also consider whether new facilities should be provided as part of the development itself, helping to create well-served and sustainable neighbourhoods from the outset.

We will also work with town and parish councils, and neighbourhood planning groups to better understand local needs and priorities. This will help inform future infrastructure planning, neighbourhood priorities and the use of developer contributions to support community projects and improvements.

Q82. Do you agree with the proposed approach to planning for social infrastructure? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Public toilets

Public toilets are an important part of community infrastructure and can play a significant role in supporting health, wellbeing, inclusion and accessibility. Access to safe, clean and conveniently located toilet facilities enables people to spend longer in town centres, parks, open spaces and other public locations, supporting both local communities and the local economy.

The availability of public toilets can be particularly important for older people, young children and families, pregnant women, people with disabilities or long-term health conditions, and those whose employment requires them to spend extended periods away from home, such as delivery drivers, bus drivers, taxi drivers and other mobile workers. A lack of accessible facilities can discourage people from visiting local centres, participating in community activities, or travelling independently.

Publicly accessible toilets can be provided in a variety of ways, including:

- Dedicated public toilet buildings.
- Toilets within community facilities, libraries and public buildings.

- Toilets within transport hubs and public transport interchanges.
- Customer and publicly accessible toilets within larger retail, leisure, commercial and mixed-use developments.
- Facilities designed to meet a range of needs, including wheelchair-accessible toilets, Changing Places toilets, family rooms and gender-neutral provision where appropriate.

Changing Places toilets provide larger, fully accessible facilities for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, serious mobility impairments and other complex needs, together with their carers. The provision of Changing Places facilities in key destinations can help ensure that all members of the community are able to access services, facilities, employment opportunities, open spaces and leisure activities with dignity and independence.

Q83. Should the Local Plan seek to protect existing public toilets from unnecessary loss and require larger commercial, retail, leisure, transport or mixed-use developments to provide publicly accessible toilet facilities, including accessible and Changing Places toilets where appropriate? Yes/ No

Please explain your reasons

Design codes

Design codes can help provide clear expectations for developers, communities and decision-makers, ensuring that new development reflects local character while meeting the needs of current and future residents.

Our current [District Design Code](#)⁸⁰ includes principles covering:

- High-quality open spaces.
- Streets that prioritise walking, wheeling and cycling.
- Well-integrated development.
- Communities that include everyone.
- Efficient use of land.
- Neighbourhoods that offer opportunities for everyone.
- Buildings that relate to and define a place.

Q84. Are there any additional design principles that should be included in the District Design Code?

Please provide your comments

⁸⁰ [north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/North Herts Design Code_SPD.pdf](http://north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-06/North%20Herts%20Design%20Code_SPD.pdf)

Whilst a district-wide design code sets broad expectations, there may be benefits in preparing more detailed guidance for specific types of development.

For example, a Householder Design Code could provide guidance on:

- Building relationships, spacing and privacy.
- Building height, scale and massing.
- Materials and local character.
- Parking, access and landscaping.

A Retail and Town Centre Design Code could address:

- Shopfront design.
- Signage and fascias.
- Awnings and canopies.
- Accessibility and frontage treatments.

More detailed design codes could help improve design quality, provide greater certainty for applicants and communities, and ensure consistency across North Hertfordshire.

Q85. Should we prepare more detailed design codes for specific types of development, such as householder extensions, retail premises or town centre development? Yes / No

Please explain your reasons

Masterplanning

Masterplans provide a clear framework for larger developments, helping to ensure that homes, infrastructure, open spaces, facilities and transport connections are planned in a coordinated way.

They can help achieve better outcomes by:

- Creating well-designed and connected neighbourhoods.
- Ensuring infrastructure is planned alongside development.
- Providing certainty for residents, developers and service providers.
- Supporting high-quality placemaking.
- Helping communities understand how sites will be developed over time.

Q86. The current Local Plan requires masterplans for developments of 100 or more dwellings. Do you agree with this threshold? Yes / No

**If not, what threshold do you think would be more appropriate?
Please explain your reasons**

**Q87. Are there any other placemaking, design or community
issues that you think the Local Plan should address?**

COMMUNICATIONS AND UTILITIES

Communications and utilities

Supporting growth in North Hertfordshire relies on a wide range of essential infrastructure and services.

Many of these services are planned, funded and delivered across areas that extend beyond North Hertfordshire's boundaries. Decisions on investment, capacity and future provision are often made at a larger scale by infrastructure providers, utility companies, regulators and public bodies.

To ensure that growth is supported by the infrastructure communities need, we will continue to work closely with infrastructure providers, neighbouring authorities and other partners throughout the preparation of our Local Plan.

What are we required to consider and plan for?

National Planning Policy Framework (2026)

We are required to plan positively for, and support high-quality communications infrastructure as well as the expansion and maintenance of utility infrastructure.

However, our Local Plan will not cover issues of waste and minerals as these are part of the Development Plan that currently sits with [Hertfordshire County Council](#) and will eventually be subsumed as part of the Spatial Development Strategy for Hertfordshire. Nor will it include additional policies on issues such as proposals for the expansion or upgrading of electronic telecommunications networks and infrastructure as these are already addressed through the NDMPsnational development management policy.

What does the data tell us?

Wastewater and Sewerage

Anglian Water

Evidence from Anglian Water's [Drainage and Water Recycling Management Plan 2023](#)⁸¹ (DWMP) identifies significant growth across the Upper and Bedford Ouse catchment, including:

- An estimated population increase of 136,350 people between 2025 and 2050.
- Potential infrastructure investment of up to £476 million between 2025 and 2050.

The DWMP also identifies specific improvements within North Hertfordshire, including:

- Increased wastewater network capacity in Letchworth Garden City by 2035.

⁸¹ <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/siteassets/household/about-us/dwmp/dwmp-1.pdf>

- Programmes to remove 25% of surface water from the wastewater network in Letchworth Garden City and Hitchin by 2050, helping to improve network resilience and reduce the risk of flooding and sewer overflows.

As part of the plan-making process, we will work closely with Anglian Water's Strategic Growth Team to ensure that:

- Infrastructure requirements are identified early in the plan-making process.
- Opportunities to reduce pressure on the sewerage network are explored through sustainable drainage and water management measures.
- New development is supported by the infrastructure needed to operate effectively and sustainably.

Thames Water

Parts of southern North Hertfordshire are served by Thames Water, whose [Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan 2023](#)⁸² (DWMP) and [Hertfordshire Catchment Strategic Plan](#)⁸³ set out the long-term investment and infrastructure improvements required to support future growth and improve network resilience.

The evidence identifies a range of challenges across the catchment of Rye Meads Sewerage Treatment Works, including increased pressure on the wastewater network, the risk of hydraulic sewer flooding and the need to manage surface water more effectively.

As we prepare our new Local Plan, we will continue to engage with Thames Water to ensure that:

- Capacity constraints are identified and understood at an early stage.
- Opportunities for sustainable drainage and surface water management are incorporated into new development.
- Future residents and businesses are supported by resilient and reliable infrastructure.

Water (Mains supply)

Evidence from Affinity Water's [Water Resources Management Plan \(WRMP\) 2024](#)⁸⁴ highlights the importance of using water more efficiently and reducing pressure on water resources.

Many of the measures proposed through our new Local Plan will support the objectives of Affinity Water's Water Resources Management Plan.

As part of preparing the new Local Plan, we will continue to engage with Affinity Water and other infrastructure providers to understand future water supply requirements and ensure that planned growth can be supported sustainably.

By planning positively for water efficiency and environmental protection, we can help ensure that North Hertfordshire has resilient water supplies while safeguarding the district's important water environments for future generations.

⁸² <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/regulation/drainage-and-wastewater-management/dwmp23>

⁸³ <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/media-library/lb2jnaoq/hertfordshire-catchment-strategic-plan.pdf>

⁸⁴ <https://affinitywater.uk.engagementhq.com/wrmp>

Water Cycle Strategy

We will be producing a Water Cycle Strategy that considers water supply, wastewater infrastructure, flood risk and environmental protection to ensure our Local Plan can deliver sustainable growth. It will show:

- whether there is enough wastewater capacity for new development
- whether there is adequate water supply for new developments
- whether there is good water quality within the local catchment
- the risk of flooding, particularly from surface water

Electricity

UKPN's long-term plans focus on enabling the electrification of transport, heating and energy generation while maintaining a reliable and resilient electricity network.

As we move towards net zero carbon emissions, demand for electricity is expected to increase significantly. For North Hertfordshire, this transition is likely to require substantial investment in electricity infrastructure and network capacity over the coming decades. UKPN identifies:

- Reinforcement and upgrading of the local electricity network.
- New grid connections to support housing and employment growth.
- Connections for renewable energy projects, including solar farms.
- Infrastructure to support battery energy storage facilities.
- Increased provision of electric vehicle charging hubs.
- Network improvements to support the decarbonisation of heating and transport.

The transition to a more electrified energy system also places greater emphasis on [Local Area Energy Planning](#)⁸⁵, helping to identify where future energy demand is likely to arise and how infrastructure investment can be coordinated alongside planned growth.

Gas

Cadent Gas has published a [Long Term Development Plan](#)⁸⁶ that recognises the changing role of gas as the UK transitions towards a low-carbon energy system.

Cadent's Long Term Plan acknowledges that future development is likely to rely less on natural gas as buildings become more energy efficient and alternative low-carbon heating technologies, such as heat pumps and heat networks, become more widely used. This shift is also reflected in national policy and building standards, including the Future Homes and Buildings Standards.

At the same time, Cadent identifies opportunities for the gas network to contribute to decarbonisation. In particular, the company highlights the potential role of biomethane, a renewable gas produced from organic materials, as a lower-carbon alternative to natural

⁸⁵ <https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pn-0703/>

⁸⁶ <https://cadentgas.com/getcontentasset/fe78fbee-7896-4c69-8f6b-a4b55772f072/1edc10b3-193a-4a87-9cfc-cbb68531e06b/cadent-long-term-development-plan-2025-final.pdf?language=en>

gas. Cadent's long-term vision includes increasing the use of low-carbon gases within the energy system where this is practical and sustainable to do so.

The transition to a low-carbon energy future will require coordination between electricity, gas and heat infrastructure providers. As heating systems evolve and energy demands change, it will be important to ensure that new development is planned alongside appropriate investment in supporting infrastructure.

Waste and recycling

Whilst the responsibility for waste planning rests with HCC through the [Hertfordshire Waste Local Plan](#) (HWP)⁸⁷, it is important that our Local Plan recognises the facilities that already exist within North Hertfordshire and their role in supporting future growth.

The HWP identifies three allocated waste management sites within North Hertfordshire:

- Cumberlow Green Farm
- Bury Mead Road, Hitchin
- The New Barn, A1(M) J10

These facilities form part of the county-wide network of waste management infrastructure and help provide capacity for the treatment, recycling and management of waste.

In addition, HCC has identified a number of sites within designated employment areas that are considered potentially compatible with waste management uses, although many currently have limited immediate redevelopment potential. These include sites within:

- Wilbury Way, Hitchin (four sites)
- Cadwell Lane / Wallace Way, Hitchin
- Icknield Way East, Letchworth Garden City
- Works Road / Blackhorse Road, Letchworth Garden City
- Orchard Road West, Royston
- Station Approach, Hitchin
- Royston Road, Baldock

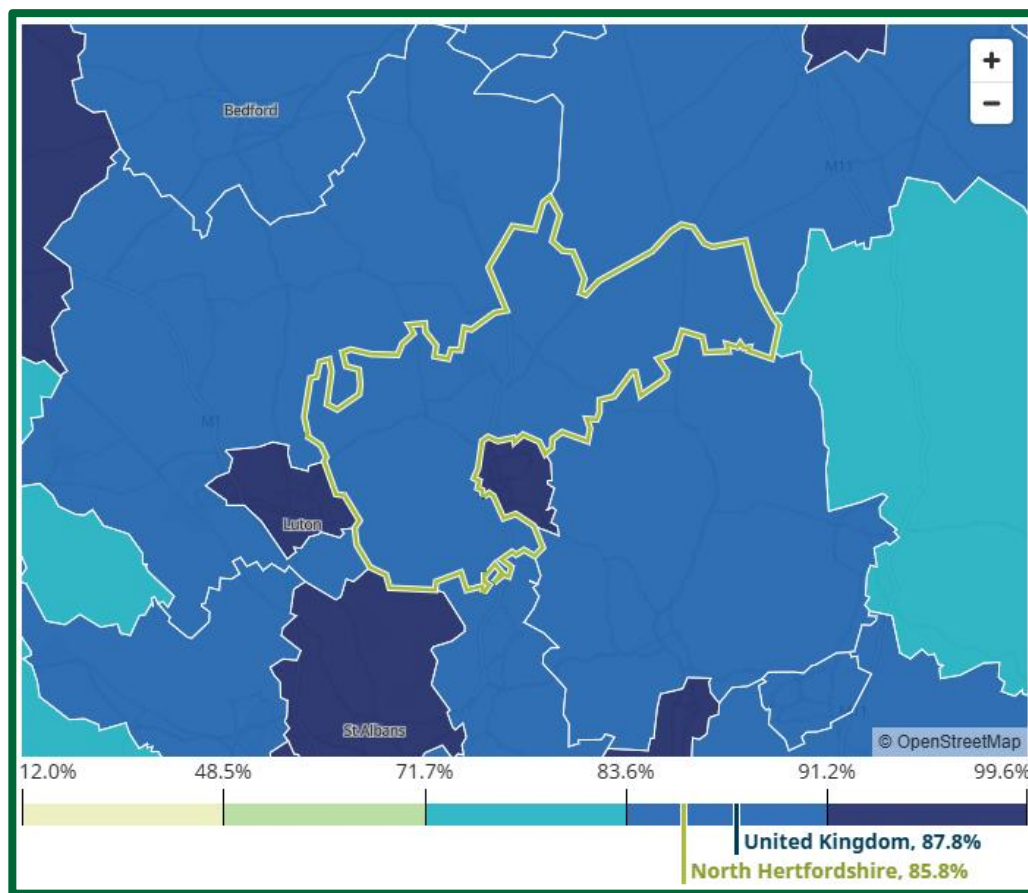
The identification of these locations does not imply that waste development will occur on these sites. Rather, it recognises that they are situated within employment areas where waste-related activities could potentially be compatible with surrounding land uses.

As North Hertfordshire grows, it will be important to ensure that sufficient waste management capacity is available to support households and businesses while helping to increase recycling rates, reduce waste and support a more resource-efficient economy.

Digital Infrastructure

Evidence from the Office for National Statistics shows that 85.8% of premises in North Hertfordshire have gigabit-capable service (download speeds of 1,000Mbps or more) coverage.

⁸⁷ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/planning-in-hertfordshire/minerals-and-waste-planning/waste-planning/waste-planning.aspx>

Figure 30 - Percentage of premises with gigabit-capable service, Jan 2026

Source - [Ofcom](#)⁸⁸

Reliable access to high-quality digital infrastructure, including fixed broadband and mobile networks, enables people to work, learn, access healthcare, communicate and participate fully in society.

Strong digital connectivity supports:

- Economic growth and business competitiveness.
- Home working and flexible employment opportunities.
- Access to public services and healthcare.
- Education and lifelong learning.
- Social inclusion and community wellbeing.
- Innovation and technological advancement.
- More efficient use of infrastructure and public services.
- Reduced need to travel, helping to lower congestion and carbon emissions.

⁸⁸ <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/phones-and-broadband/coverage-and-speeds/infrastructure-research>

As technology continues to evolve, access to fast and reliable digital connectivity will become increasingly important for residents, businesses and service providers across North Hertfordshire.

Our new Local Plan will therefore consider digital connectivity as a key component of sustainable development, helping to ensure that decisions about land use, infrastructure, public services and investment support improved digital outcomes across our District.

Building Regulations ([Approved Document R⁸⁹](#)) requires developers to install gigabit-ready physical infrastructure and a functional gigabit-capable connection for nearly all new homes, subject to a £2,000 per-dwelling cost cap.

Data Centres

Data centres are becoming increasingly important as demand for digital services, cloud computing, artificial intelligence and data storage continues to grow. They provide the infrastructure that supports many of the online services used by residents, businesses and public organisations every day.

Hertfordshire is considered an attractive location for data centre investment due to a number of strategic advantages, including:

- Proximity to London and major digital markets.
- Strong road and rail connections.
- Existing electricity and fibre-optic infrastructure.
- Its location within the wider Cambridge-London growth corridor.

Several data centres have already been developed elsewhere in Hertfordshire. While there are currently no major data centres within North Hertfordshire, there has been some interest in potential locations within our District.

However, data centres can present significant planning challenges. These may include:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high electricity demand. • Potential impacts on the capacity of local power networks. • Water consumption and cooling requirements. • The need for substantial digital and utility infrastructure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects on the landscape and local character. • Potential impacts on the Green Belt. • Relatively low levels of long-term employment compared with the amount of land and infrastructure required. |
|--|--|

At present, we have not commissioned specific evidence to assess the need for, or suitability of, data centre development in North Hertfordshire. Further work is needed to understand potential opportunities, constraints and infrastructure requirements.

There may also be benefits to considering data centres at a wider-than-local scale. The SDS for Hertfordshire could provide an opportunity to take a coordinated regional approach, identifying suitable locations and considering infrastructure requirements across the county

⁸⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infrastructure-for-electronic-communications-approved-document-r>

and neighbouring areas. However, the SDS preparation may not align with the timetable for our new Local Plan.

Q88. What is the most appropriate approach for planning future data centre development in North Hertfordshire?

- 1. Proactively identify and allocate sites in the Local Plan**
- 2. Consider data centre requirements as part of a future SDS covering a wider area**
- 3. Other (please specify)**

Please explain your answer

Q90. Are there any other utilities and communication issues that you think we should think about?

EVIDENCE BASE

Evidence Base

Below is a list of evidence base that has been published, is in preparation or is intended to be published.

Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment

Strategic Housing Market Availability Assessment

5 year housing land supply

Settlement Hierarchy

Area Strategies

Green Belt Study

Conservation Areas Appraisals and local listed buildings

Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment

Employment Needs Review

Town Centres Strategies

Retail Needs Review - update

Landscape Review

Locally Valued Landscape Review

Open Space Study

Water Cycle Study

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

Infrastructure Delivery Plan

Outdoor playing pitch strategy

Indoor sports strategy

Burials Study

To commission

Survey and analysis of car and cycle parking provision and utilisation in non-standard residential and non-residential developments

Grid capacity and renewable energy opportunities

All [evidence base](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base)⁹⁰ documents will be published on our website. Expected dates for those yet to be published are also set out.

⁹⁰ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/evidence-base>

GLOSSARY

Glossary

The Glossary below aligns with the NPPF glossary.

Affordable housing: Housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers or national military housing needs); and which complies with one or more of the following definitions:

- a. Social Rent: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the government's rent policy for Social Rent; (b) the landlord is a registered provider; and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.
- b. Other affordable housing for rent: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the government's rent policy for Affordable Rent, or is at least 20% below local market rents (including service charges where applicable); (b) the landlord is a registered provider, except where it is included as part of a Build to Rent scheme (in which case the landlord need not be a registered provider); and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. For Build to Rent schemes affordable housing for rent is expected to be the normal form of affordable housing provision (and, in this context, is known as Affordable Private Rent).
- c. Discounted market sales housing: is that sold at a discount of at least 20% below local market value. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Provisions should be in place to ensure housing remains at a discount for future eligible households.
- d. Other affordable routes to home ownership: is housing provided for sale that provides a route to ownership for those who could not achieve home ownership through the market. It includes shared ownership, relevant equity loans, other low cost homes for sale (at a price equivalent to at least 20% below local market value) and rent to buy (which includes a period of intermediate rent). Where public grant funding is provided, there should be provisions for the homes to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for any receipts to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision, or refunded to government or the relevant authority specified in the funding agreement.
- e. Military affordable housing: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is sub-market military rent as determined by the Ministry of Defence; and (b) it includes provisions to remain as affordable housing for future eligible households, service personnel and veteran households (including widowed partners and spouses of service personnel), or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.

Air Quality Management Areas: Areas designated by local authorities because they are not likely to achieve national air quality objectives by the relevant deadlines.

Article 4 direction: A direction made under Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 which withdraws permitted development rights granted by that Order.

Best and most versatile agricultural land: Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC). ALC is graded from 1 to 5 and based on yield, range and versatility of use, and need for input.

Brownfield land: See Previously developed land.

Climate change adaptation: Adjustments made to natural or human systems in response to the actual or anticipated impacts of climate change, to mitigate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.

Climate change mitigation: Action to reduce the impact of human activity on the climate system, primarily through reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Community facilities: Meeting places, public houses, places of worship, cultural venues, youth centres, allotments, cemeteries and burial grounds, and facilities for play, sport and informal recreation.

Community-led development: A development taken forward by, or with, a not-for-profit organisation, that is primarily for the purpose of meeting the needs of its members or the wider local community, rather than being a primarily commercial enterprise. The organisation should be created, managed and democratically controlled by its members, and membership of the organisation should be open to all beneficiaries and prospective beneficiaries of that organisation. It may take any one of various legal forms including a co-operative society, community benefit society and company limited by guarantee. The organisation should own, manage or steward the development in a manner consistent with its purpose, potentially through a mutually supported arrangement with a registered provider of social housing. The benefits of the development to the community should be clearly defined and consideration given to how those benefits can be protected over time, including in the event of the organisation being wound up.

Connectivity: As defined in the NPPF, this refers to the degree to which a location provides access to jobs, services, and facilities by sustainable transport modes. The Connectivity Tool (Connectivity Tool - GOV.UK) provides a means of assessing this.

Conservation/conserve (for heritage policy): The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains, preserves and, where appropriate, enhances its significance.

Design code: A set of illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site, or area. The graphic and written components of the code should build upon a design vision, such as a masterplan or other design and development framework for a site or area.

Design guide: A document providing guidance on how development can be carried out in accordance with good design practice, often produced by a local authority.

Designated heritage asset: A World Heritage Site, Scheduled Monument, Listed Building, Protected Wreck Site, Registered Park and Garden, Registered Battlefield or Conservation Area designated under the relevant legislation or the UNESCO World Heritage Convention.

Development plan: Is defined in section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, and includes adopted spatial development strategies, adopted local plans, adopted minerals and waste plans, adopted supplementary plans, neighbourhood plans that have

been made and published and the policies maps for the area. Neighbourhood plans that have been approved at referendum are also part of the development plan, unless the local planning authority decides that the neighbourhood plan should not be made.

Disabled people: People have a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment, and that impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. These persons include, but are not limited to, people with ambulatory difficulties, blindness, learning difficulties, autism and mental health needs.

Edge of centre: For retail purposes, a location that is well-connected to, and up to 300 metres from, a primary shopping area (if no primary shopping area has been defined in the development plan, it should be regarded as a location that is well-connected to, and up to 300 metres from, that part of the town centre within which retail uses predominate – measured from its outer edge). For all other main town centre uses, a location within 300 metres of a town centre boundary. For office development, this includes locations outside the town centre but within 500 metres of a public transport interchange. In determining whether a site falls within the definition of edge of centre, account should be taken of local circumstances.

Electricity network infrastructure: Infrastructure that facilitates the transmission of electricity from generation sources to end users, including transmission, distribution, and interconnection. This infrastructure is essential for the operation and expansion of the electricity network and includes components such as substations, converter stations, interconnectors, and cables.

Freight and logistics: Uses directly associated with the processing, storage, distribution and transportation of goods, alongside supporting infrastructure. This includes (but is not limited to) storage and distribution operations, rail freight terminals, intermodal facilities, HGV operating centres, lorry parking facilities, ports and inland border facilities.

Geodiversity: The range of rocks, minerals, fossils, soils and landforms, together with the natural processes which form and alter them.

Green infrastructure: A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity. It includes parks and gardens, green spaces, green corridors such as rivers and canals, sustainable drainage systems, features for species, street trees and community orchards.

Grey belt: For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in policy GB2.

Gypsies and travellers: Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependants' educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a caravan, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or circus people travelling together as such.

Habitats site: Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and also including candidate Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas, listed or proposed Ramsar sites, relevant Marine Sites, and compensatory habitats which relate to these sites.

Heritage asset: A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes but is not limited to designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing). Potential Special Protection Areas, possible Special Areas of Conservation and proposed Ramsar sites are sites on which the Government has initiated public consultation on the scientific case for designation as a Special Protection Area, candidate Special Area of Conservation or Ramsar Site.

Historic environment: All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora.

Historic Environment Record: Information services that seek to provide access to comprehensive and dynamic resources relating to the historic environment of a defined geographic area for public benefit and use.

Housing Delivery Test: Measures net homes delivered in a local authority area against the homes required, using national statistics and local authority data. The Secretary of State will publish the Housing Delivery Test results for each local authority in England annually.

International, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity: All international sites (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, and Ramsar sites), national sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and locally designated sites including Local Wildlife Sites.

Large-scale shared living accommodation: Accommodation which provides private rooms alongside shared communal spaces and facilities. This type of accommodation does not constitute self-contained dwellings (use class C3), HMOs, student accommodation, hotels, or other residential institutions.

Local Development Order: An Order made by a local planning authority (under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) that grants planning permission for a specific development proposal or classes of development.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies: A system of spatial strategies for nature and environmental improvement required by law under s.104 of the Environment Act 2021.

Local Nature Reserves: A site managed as a nature reserve under s.21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by principal local authorities.

Local plan: A plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community.

Local Wildlife Sites: A term used to describe non-statutory areas identified by local authorities in the development plan for their biodiversity value. There are a number of different terms in use locally to describe these sites, including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) and County Wildlife Sites (CWS).

Main town centre uses: Retail development (including warehouse clubs and factory outlet centres); leisure, entertainment and more intensive sport and recreation uses (including cinemas, restaurants, drive-through restaurants, bars and pubs, nightclubs, casinos, health and fitness centres, indoor bowling centres and bingo halls); banks; professional services; offices; and arts, culture and tourism development (including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities).

Major development: For housing, development where 10 or more homes will be provided, or the site has an area of 0.5 hectares or more. For non-residential development it means additional floorspace of 1,000m² or more, or a site of 1 hectare or more, or as otherwise provided in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015.

Masterplan: A masterplan is a flexible, placemaking tool, providing a three-dimensional spatial framework and long-term vision for the development or regeneration of area-specific or site-specific locations.

Medium development: A sub-set of major development, comprising housing development where 10-49 homes (inclusive) will be provided, and the site has an area of up to 2.5 hectares. Policies in this Framework which relate to major development involving the provision of housing also apply to medium development, whereas policies which apply exclusively to medium development do not apply to larger scales of development.

Mineral Consultation Area: A geographical area based on a Mineral Safeguarding Area, where the district or borough council should consult the mineral planning authority for any proposals for non-minerals development.

Minerals and waste plans: A plan containing policies on mineral and waste development, drawn up by the minerals and waste planning authority in consultation with the community. Minerals and waste matters can be dealt with in separate plans or combined with local plans where an authority is responsible for all these matters.

Mineral Safeguarding Area: An area designated by minerals planning authorities which covers known deposits of minerals which are desired to be kept safeguarded from unnecessary sterilisation by non-mineral development.

Model Design Codes: Standard design requirements published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for common development types that can be used and adopted locally.

National Landscapes: Areas legally designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Neighbourhood plan: A plan prepared by a parish council or neighbourhood forum for a designated neighbourhood area. In law this is described as a neighbourhood development plan in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Net developable area: For the purposes of references to density, net developable area is the part of a site that can be developed for housing and directly associated uses, including access roads, hard landscaping (including footways, paved areas and servicing areas), private gardens, ground floor private and communal amenity space, ground level parking and incidental open spaces (including verges and threshold planting). It excludes land that is not suitable for built development, such as land required for strategic infrastructure, parks and public squares, and open spaces that deliver benefits as part of the wider green infrastructure network (including significant onsite biodiversity net gain enhancements and significant sustainable drainage features).

Older people: People over or approaching retirement age, including the active, newly-retired through to the very frail elderly; and whose housing needs can encompass accessible, adaptable general needs housing through to the full range of retirement and specialised housing for those with support or care needs.

Open space: All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.

Out of centre: A location which is not in or on the edge of a centre but not necessarily outside the settlement.

Pitches and Plots: ‘Pitch’ means a pitch on a gypsy and traveller site and ‘plot’ means a pitch on a travelling showpeople site (often called a ‘yard’). This terminology differentiates between residential pitches for gypsies and travellers and mixed-use plots for travelling showpeople, which may / will need to incorporate space or to be split to allow for the storage of equipment.

Planning condition: A condition imposed on a grant of planning permission (in accordance with the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) or a condition included in a Local Development Order, Mayoral Development Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

Planning obligation: A legal agreement entered into under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to mitigate the impacts of a development proposal.

Policies Map: A map prepared and maintained by a local planning authority, illustrating policies across all parts of the development plan.

Previously developed land: Land which has been lawfully developed and is or was occupied by a permanent structure and any fixed surface infrastructure associated with it, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed). It also includes land comprising large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed. Previously developed land excludes: land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed but where provision for restoration has been made through development management procedures (including development related to minerals extraction, waste disposal by landfill and renewable and low carbon energy development, where provision for restoration exists); land in built-up areas such as residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape.

Primary shopping area: Defined area where retail development is concentrated.

Priority or threatened species: Species which are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of development, including but not limited to species contained in the list of species and habitats of principal importance in England published by the Secretary of State pursuant to section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, protected species listed in Schedule 2 and Schedule 5 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, and species protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Protected Landscapes: Refers to National Parks, the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads and National Landscapes in England.

Public service infrastructure: Education and healthcare facilities of all types, and facilities for blue light, social care, library and criminal justice uses.

Ramsar sites: Wetlands of international importance, designated under the 1971 Ramsar Convention.

Reasonable walking distance: For the purpose of NPPF policies S5, L3, GB7 (relating to land around well-connected stations), this should be considered to be around 800 metres, or

around 10 minutes' walk time if topography, route availability and quality or physical barriers would prevent or discourage walking from up to 800 metres away. For the purpose of NPPF policy HC5 (hot food takeaways) it should be considered to be around 400 metres, or around five minutes' walk time if topography, route availability and quality or physical barriers would prevent or discourage walking up to 400 metres. Where a reasonable walking distance is required to be calculated when applying NPPF policies S5(1)(h), L3(2)(c) and GB7(1)(h), and only part of the site falls within the reasonable walking distance, those sub-paragraphs of NPPF policies S5, L3 and GB7 only apply to the area of the site within that reasonable walking distance.

Renewable and low carbon energy: Includes energy for heating and cooling as well as generating electricity. Renewable energy covers those energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment – including from the wind, the fall of water, the movement of the oceans, from the sun and also from biomass and deep geothermal heat. Low carbon technologies are those that can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions (compared to conventional use of fossil fuels). These technologies include, but are not limited to, nuclear power and supporting infrastructure, low carbon fuels such as biomethane and hydrogen, heat from recoverable sources (such as heat recovered from data centres), and the storage of renewable and low carbon energy, including long-duration and short-duration energy storage such as Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS).

Self-build and custom-build housing: Housing built by an individual, a group of individuals, or persons working with or for them, to be occupied by that individual. Such housing can be either market or affordable housing. A legal definition, for the purpose of applying the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (as amended), is contained in section 1(A1) and (A2) of that Act.

Setting of a heritage asset: The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.

Settlement: Includes cities, towns, villages and other predominantly built-up areas, including land which is allocated or has permission for development which will form part of the built-up area once the development is complete. This includes areas defined as a settlement in the development plan (whether using defined settlement boundaries or equivalent terms, or criteria for identifying settlement extents where boundaries have yet to be defined). Settlements do not include hamlets and scattered groups of houses located outside predominantly built-up areas, unless specifically defined as a settlement in the development plan. For the purpose of the NPPF 2026 they also exclude villages which lie within and are defined as part of the Green Belt in the development plan.

Significance (for heritage policy): The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting. For World Heritage Sites, the cultural value described within each site's Statement of Outstanding Universal Value forms part of its significance.

Site of Special Scientific Interest: Sites notified for their flora, fauna or geological, physiographical or geomorphological features (in England, these sites are notified under s. 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981).

Spatial development strategy: A plan containing policies on the development and use of land on matters of strategic importance to the area prepared by strategic planning authorities.

Special Areas of Conservation: Designated areas which have been given special protection as important conservation sites (in England, these sites are designated under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017).

Special Protection Areas: Areas classified for being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds (in England, these sites are classified under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017).

Strategic environmental assessment: A procedure (set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) which requires the formal environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Supplementary plans: A type of plan that relevant plan-making authorities can choose to prepare to set locally-specific design standards or shape and direct site-specific development. They must undergo consultation and independent examination.

Sustainable drainage system: A sustainable drainage system controls surface water run off close to where it falls, combining a mixture of built and nature-based techniques to mimic natural drainage as closely as possible, and accounting for the predicted impacts of climate change. The type of system that would be appropriate will vary from small scale interventions such as permeable paving and soakaways that can be used in very small developments to larger integrated schemes in major developments.

Sustainable transport modes: Any efficient, safe and accessible means of transport with overall low impact on the environment, including walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport.

Town centre: Area defined in the local authority's policies map in the development plan including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area.

Transport assessment: A comprehensive and systematic process that considers and sets out transport issues relating to a proposed development, in the context of the vision for the scheme. It identifies measures required to support alternatives to the car such as walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport, and to promote accessibility and safety, together with measures that will be needed to deal with the anticipated transport impacts of the development.

Travel plan: A long-term management strategy for an organisation or site that details how agreed sustainable transport objectives are to be delivered, and which is monitored and regularly reviewed.

Travellers: Gypsies and travellers, and travelling showpeople.

Travelling showpeople: Members of a group organised for the purposes of holding fairs, circuses or shows (whether or not travelling together as such). This includes such persons who on the grounds of their own or their family's or dependants' more localised pattern of trading, educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excludes gypsies and travellers as defined separately in this glossary.

Vision-led approach: An approach to transport planning which sets outcomes for a development based on achieving well-designed, sustainable, inclusive and popular places, and provides the transport solutions to deliver those outcomes as opposed to predicting future demand to provide capacity (often referred to as 'predict and provide').

Well-connected station: Railway stations and underground, tram and light rail stops located within a top 80 Travel to Work Area located partially or fully within England by Gross Value Added (GVA)⁷² and which, in the normal weekday timetable, are served (or have a reasonable prospect of being served due to planned upgrades or through agreement with the rail operator) throughout the daytime by at least four trains or trams per hour overall, or at least two trains or trams per hour in any one direction.

Wheeling: The use of wheelchairs, mobility scooters and similar mobility aids as a means of travel.