



Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

September 2026



**North
Herts**
Council

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Our Local Plan

Our new Local Plan will set out the long-term vision for our District from 2029 - 2040; identifying how and where new homes, jobs and infrastructure will be delivered. It will seek to address climate change mitigation and adaptation and encourage high-quality sustainable design and protection of the natural environment.

The duration of the Local Plan is 11 years from 1 April 2029 to 31 March 2040. This reflects the new 2026 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (PM2: Local Plans), which states that spatial strategy and policies should look ahead over a minimum 10 year period from adoption.

A key objective of the proposed plan period is to identify enough land to deliver the district's full objectively assessed housing need of 1,036 dwellings per annum, in line with the Government's standard method. The Plan will also need to remain sufficiently flexible to consider any future requests to accommodate unmet housing needs from neighbouring areas, where these are supported by evidence and the Duty to Cooperate requirements.

Our Priorities

We declared a climate emergency in 2019 and committed to take action to address the causes of climate change across our District. Subsequently we declared an ecological emergency in 2023

identifying biodiversity and nature recovery as a strategic priority for planning. Therefore, our new Local Plan will seek to promote sustainable development, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and enhance resilience through adaptation measures.

What is Sustainability Appraisal?

Sustainable Development¹ can be defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

A [Sustainability Appraisal \(SA\)](#) is a methodical and iterative process that must be carried out during the preparation of local plans and spatial development strategies; it is used to evaluate emerging options identified in our Local Plan development against the three elements of sustainability;

- social;
- environmental; and
- economical

SA helps us to select the most sustainable options for our District and helps us fine-tune the policies in our Local Plan.

The [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#) requires us to carry out SA for all proposals in our Plan to ensure we deliver sustainable development. These appraisals integrate the requirements of [the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004](#).

¹ [The Sustainable Development Agenda - United Nations Sustainable Development](#)

Progress to date

A SA Scoping Report was prepared and consulted upon between October and November 2025 as part of the statutory consultation process. The report was shared with the statutory consultees; Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England to seek their views on the scope and methodology of the appraisal. Comments received during the consultation were carefully reviewed and considered, and where appropriate incorporated into the assessment framework. This informed the preparation of a post-consultation updated version of the SA Scoping Report, which is **Part 1** of this report.

The updated Scoping Report established the Sustainability Appraisal Framework that will be used to assess the likely social, economic and environmental effects of the plan. The framework comprises 11 Sustainability Appraisal objectives, each supported by a set of appraisal questions to provide a consistent and transparent basis for assessment. Together, these objectives and questions guide the appraisal of plan policies, site allocations and reasonable alternatives, enabling sustainability considerations to be integrated throughout the plan-making process. The appraisal of spatial development options is **Part 2** of this report.

PART 1 – SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SCOPING REPORT

Part 1 - Introduction

The Scoping process

As shown in the diagram below, scoping involves identifying a set of sustainability issues and objectives that provide a 'framework' for the appraisal of our emerging Plan (including reasonable alternatives).

The SA Topics

The topics included in the SA are listed below:

The Natural Environment	The Historic Environment
Climate Change & Flooding	Social & Cultural Infrastructure
Population, Health & Wellbeing	Local Economy & Employment
Transport, Air Quality & Noise	Land, Soils & Waste
Housing	Water Resources & Quality

The SA process

Stage A – setting the content & objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope

- Identify other relevant policies, plans and programmes, and sustainability objectives
- Collect baseline information
- Identify sustainability issues and challenges
- Develop the SA framework
- Consult the statutory consultees on the SA scoping report

Stage B – developing and refining alternatives and assessing effects

- Test the Local Plan objectives against the SA framework
- Develop the Local Plan options including reasonable alternatives
- Evaluate the likely effects of the Local Plan and alternatives
- Consider ways of mitigating adverse effects and maximising beneficial effects
- Propose measures to monitor the significant effects of implementing the Local Plan

Stage C – prepare the SA report

Stage D – seek representations on the SA report from consultation bodies and the public

Stage E – post adoption reporting and monitoring

- Prepare and publish a post-adoption statement
- Monitor significant effects of implementing the Local Plan
- Respond to adverse effects

Consultation responses

The SEA regulations require that we consult the statutory consultees; Environment Agency (EA), Natural England (NE) and Historic England (HE) on the SA scoping report. This consultation was carried out between the 17 October to 24 November 2025 and the statutory consultee responses are summarised in the table below:

Environment Agency (EA)	
Introduction & policy review: Agreed with the principles and objectives outlined and welcomed the consultation on the report. River Basin Management: Pleased to see the inclusion of Plans and the Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy.	Noted.
Water (Cycle) Studies: Strongly recommended an updated water cycle study, to include strong engagement with the relevant water companies and the EA.	Noted. NHDC will be conducting a new Water Cycle Study to inform the new Local Plan. This will include engagement with the EA, utilities and other stakeholders.
Additional comments – Recommend the Council takes into account the National Framework for Water Resources 2025	This has been added to the policy review and will be considered in the LP process.

NHDC Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is out of date and will need to be updated	A new SFRA is currently being carried out.
The Natural Environment Chalk streams - Recommended incorporating robust planning policies aimed at deculverting, promoting natural river morphology, promoting nature-based solutions and ensuring the security of buffer zones along chalk rivers. These considerations to be explored in the evidence base and LP policies including 10-metre buffer zone requirements where appropriate.	Noted. We will consider these issues in the water cycle study, the SFRA and the new LP.
Recommended the inclusion of blue infrastructure (in addition to green infrastructure on page 27) and the associated benefits and considerations.	Reference to green infrastructure now changed to green and blue infrastructure, including in the objectives.
Climate change and flooding Recommended the use of the latest data including NaFRA & new national flood and coastal erosion risk information.	The new local plan will be informed by a new SFRA which will be based on the latest available flood risk data including those noted. The EA will be consulted during the SFRA process.
Water resources, additional comments:	Amended this section to emphasise need to

Key sustainability issues should be extended to all forms of flooding as later outlined in the appraisal guide questions on page 35.	consider all sources of flood risk. New appraisal guide question added to reflect.
Population, health and wellbeing: No specific comments but noted the benefits of blue infrastructure on health and wellbeing.	Noted, an additional paragraph has been added to this section highlighting the importance of blue infrastructure to health and wellbeing.
Land, soils and Waste: requested added emphasis on contaminated land	A contaminated land section and appraisal guide questions added to this chapter.
Water resources and quality: agreed with the information included and welcome inclusion of SPZs and SuDS.	Noted.
Main rivers and chalk streams: Welcomed the inclusion of chalk streams and recommended the inclusion of all watercourses (including main rivers). This is to be followed by robust policies that call for the protection of all main rivers, inc. 8-metre buffer zone requirements and a 10-metre buffer zone requirement for chalk streams where appropriate.	Noted. There is a substantial section on river/ water bodies in this chapter in addition to Chalk streams. The buffers required will continue to be implemented through LP and DM policies.
Catchment Data Explorer: LPA must integrate WFD consideration into LPs	Noted. We confirm these points will continue to be

promoting SuDS, avoiding development likely to cause deterioration / cause alteration of river, morphology and supporting catchment-based approach.	considered in planning policies and decision making.
Historic England	
General comments: Strongly advised that the North Herts conservation team be closely involved in the SA preparation and identified Historic England advise on undertaking SA.	Noted. We confirm that the conservation team are involved in the SA process and that we are following the HE guidance on SAs.
Policy review: considered that the Report identified the main plans and programs of relevance to the LP.	Noted.
The Historic Environment: Welcomed the inclusions of baseline information and the recognition of locally significant non-designated heritage assets, the HER, Heritage at Risk and importance of the setting of heritage assets.	Noted.
Key sustainability issues, SA objectives and appraisal guide questions: considered that the Report correctly identifies the key issues and supported the objectives.	Noted.
The SA Framework & Next Steps: Strongly recommended that Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) be prepared for all sites where	Noted. We confirm that HIA's will be required where a site has the potential to impact

development could affect the significance of nearby heritage assets. Ideally, conducted prior to site selection so that they can meaningfully inform this process as well as to identify any site-specific criteria considered necessary for inclusion in the corresponding site-specific policies.	heritage assets. The initial site assessment/selection process is also informed by the local historic environment context.
Allocations (e.g. within a Conservation Area) may provide opportunities for enhancement and addressing heritage at risk. Allocations at considerable distance from a heritage asset could still harm its significance. The cumulative effects of site options on the historic environment should also be taken into account.	Noted. This point will be considered in LP /SA process – We have also tried to reflect these in the objectives/ appraisal guide questions.
Natural England	
Natural England had no comments to make but added that this should not be interpreted as a statement that there are no impacts on the natural environment.	Noted.

Policy Review

A vital first step in any SA is a thorough review of relevant plans, policies, policies and programmes. This helps to set the strategic context, ensuring the appraisal aligns with existing frameworks and supports broader sustainability aims. By identifying synergies, and any potential conflicts, this review sharpens the focus of the SA and strengthens its ability to guide truly sustainable decision-making.

The policies, strategies and plans reviewed are briefly discussed below under the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. Within each pillar, documents will be considered in order of their geographic scale—starting with international, followed by national, regional, and finally local.

Environmental

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2015

World leaders came together in 2015 and made a promise to secure the rights and well-being of everyone on a healthy, thriving planet, this sets out 17 sustainable development goals. These range from access to clean and affordable energy to improved health outcomes.



Kyoto Protocol and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1997

The Local Plan must also align with the ambitions for climate change. Both protocols underline the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The SA should play a key role in steering the plan toward low-carbon, climate-resilient development, assessing how policies and proposals can support emissions reductions and contribute to long-term environmental targets.

The Paris Agreement, 2015

The Agreements central aim is to keep global temperature rise well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, while striving to limit it to 1.5°C. To achieve this, participating countries have pledged to cut GHG emissions through their own nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and strengthen their resilience to climate-related impacts. The agreement represents a united global commitment to long-term environmental stewardship and sustainable development.

European Directive 2001/42/EC

Commonly known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive, it was transposed into UK law through the Environmental Assessment of Plans or Programmes Regulations 2004. This legal framework outlines how the SA process must comply with the Directive, ensuring that environmental considerations are integrated into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes from the outset.

The European Landscape Convention, 2000

The Convention champions the protection, planning, and sustainable management of landscapes across Europe, while fostering international cooperation on landscape-related issues. Open to all member states of the Council of Europe, as well as European non-members, the ELC underscores the value of landscape in shaping cultural identity, environmental health, and community wellbeing. Crucially, it calls for landscape considerations to be fully embedded in regional and local planning, as well as in policies spanning culture, agriculture, the environment, the economy, and social development, recognising its far-reaching impact on people and place.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations, 2019

Updated the 2017 Regulations following the UK's departure from the EU, transferring key responsibilities for habitat and species protection to domestic authorities in England and Wales. This legislation ensures continuity in safeguarding the UK's most valuable natural environments by requiring authorities to maintain and restore protected habitats and wildlife. Where a plan or project could significantly affect a designated site, it must undergo a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to evaluate potential impacts. In addition, authorities are responsible for regular monitoring and reporting on the condition of these protected areas, reinforcing long-term environmental stewardship.

The Environmental Protection Act, 1990

This legislation aims to safeguard the environment by establishing clear rules around waste management and pollution control. It sets out legal duties for businesses, local authorities, and individuals to prevent environmental harm and ensure that waste is handled, stored, and disposed of responsibly. The Act provides a broad

framework for environmental protection, covering key areas such as air and water quality, noise pollution, and the sustainable management of waste.

The Environment Act, 1995

One of its key provisions requires local authorities to regularly assess air quality in their areas and, where standards are not being met, to designate Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). In such cases, local authorities must prepare and implement Air Quality Action Plans (AQAPs) to address the issues identified. Reflecting this responsibility, the Council published its most recent Annual Status Report (ASR) in June 2023, outlining current air quality conditions and actions underway to support improvement.

The Climate Change Act, 2008

Legally commits the UK to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, initially by 80% compared to 1990 levels, later strengthened to a net zero target by 2050. This means that by mid-century, the UK must balance the amount of emissions produced with those removed from the atmosphere. The Act also introduced a pioneering carbon budgeting system, setting binding five-year emission caps to ensure steady progress.

Safeguarding Our Soils – A Strategy for England, 2009

Sets out a long-term vision to ensure all soils are sustainably managed and degradation threats are successfully addressed by 2030. It emphasises the need to better protect agricultural soils, conserve vital stores of soil carbon, enhance resilience to climate change, and prevent pollution. Recognising that development pressures are likely to intensify, the strategy calls on the planning system to play a proactive role in mitigating impacts on soil health. By valuing soil as a critical natural resource, the strategy aims to secure its essential functions for future generations.

The Air Quality Standards Regulations, 2010

Established legally binding limits and targets for key air pollutants, aimed at protecting both public health and the environment. They implement the EU Ambient Air Quality Directive (2008/50/EC) and the Fourth Daughter Directive (2004/107/EC). These regulations set concentration limits for pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), ozone (O₃), and heavy metals. Following Brexit, these standards remain in force, with domestic legislation and regulatory bodies now responsible for monitoring compliance and enforcement.

Flood and Water Management Act, 2010

Outlines a comprehensive approach to managing flood risk from all sources, rivers, surface water, groundwater, and coastal flooding. It promotes the integration of resilience measures into the design of new buildings, ensuring developments are better prepared for future flood events. It also encourages the use of natural processes to reduce flood risk, such as restoring wetlands and creating areas for temporary water storage. A key component is the implementation of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), which help manage surface water runoff in a way that mimics natural drainage, reducing pressure on traditional infrastructure and enhancing local biodiversity.

UK Biodiversity Framework, 2024

This Framework supersedes the previous Framework (the UK post-2010 UK Biodiversity Framework). This Framework sets out shared objectives, governance arrangements and priorities for collaborative action on nature recovery, biodiversity monitoring, reporting and evidence gathering, while allowing each UK nation to pursue its own biodiversity policies and delivery plans. This Framework supports coordinated action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and contribute to wider environmental and climate objectives.

National Planning Policy for Waste, 2014

Sets out national waste planning policies aimed at advancing a more sustainable and resource-efficient approach to waste management. It promotes the integration of waste considerations into the design and layout of new developments, ensuring that infrastructure supports waste minimisation, reuse, and recycling from the outset. By aligning spatial planning with the waste hierarchy, the policy encourages modern, well-located waste facilities and supports the transition to a circular economy.

UK Plan for Tackling Roadside Nitrogen Dioxide Concentrations, 2017

Aims to improve air quality by meeting statutory nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) limits, cutting carbon emissions, and accelerating the shift to cleaner vehicles. As part of the UK's 25 Year Environment Plan, it also promotes broader environmental benefits, such as mandatory BNG, urban tree planting, and cleaner fuel supplies. Together, these measures support healthier communities, greener transport, and a more resilient natural environment.

The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations, 2017

These regulations apply to both surface water and groundwater, emphasising the need to prevent further deterioration of aquatic ecosystems and to prioritise the protection, enhancement, and restoration of water bodies. They require development proposals to assess impacts on water sources and set out tangible improvements in water quality and ecological health. This includes ensuring that there is adequate wastewater treatment capacity to cope with new development and incorporating water efficiency measures and sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS). The overarching goal

is to return water bodies to a condition that is as close as possible to their natural state, ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience.

The National Framework for Water Resources 2025

Sets out England's long-term water needs to 2055, highlighting severe pressures from climate change, population growth and environmental requirements, and projecting a potential 5 billion litres per day public water supply deficit without urgent action. It emphasises a coordinated national, regional and local approach focused on demand reduction, leakage control, new supply infrastructure, sustainable abstraction, and multi-sector planning, recognising that more than 60% of the deficit must be met through demand management before major infrastructure comes online. The Framework calls for accelerated collaboration across government, water companies, abstractors, industry and regulators to secure resilient water supplies, support economic growth, and protect the water environment.

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment, 2018

The strategy sets out a long-term vision to improve the natural environment within a generation. Its core ambition is to leave the environment in a better state than it was found. The plan outlines how government, businesses, and communities will work together to achieve this through cleaner air and water, thriving wildlife, reduced waste, and more sustainable use of resources. It also promotes stronger connections between people and nature and commits to measurable progress through regular reporting and updates.

The Clean Air Strategy, 2019

Sets out measures to reduce public exposure to air pollution through strengthened legislation and enhanced local authority powers. Under the Environment Act 2021, the UK Government is legally required to

set and achieve air quality targets, including for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), one of the most harmful pollutants to human health. The Environmental Targets (Fine Particulate Matter) (England) Regulations 2023 establish two key targets: an annual mean concentration limit of 10µg/m³ and a 35% reduction in population exposure compared to 2018 levels, both to be achieved by 2040. While these are national targets, local authorities play a vital role in delivering the actions needed to meet them.

Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener, 2021

Provided the government's plan to achieve its legally binding 2050 net zero emissions target, outlining policies for decarbonizing all sectors of the economy and framing the transition as an economic opportunity for jobs. The 10-point plan promotes renewable energy, low emissions vehicles, green public transport, sustainable aviation, greener buildings, carbon capture and storage, protecting the environment and green finance.

The Environment Act, 2021

This sets out legally binding targets covering air and water quality, biodiversity, and waste reduction, marking a shift toward long-term environmental improvement. The Act makes a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) mandatory for most new developments, ensuring that nature is left in a measurably better state. It also introduces Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), providing a coordinated, place-based framework for boosting biodiversity and restoring natural habitats across the country. The requires a review of the strategy every 5 years, a review took place leading to the [2023 Air Quality Strategy](#), and links to the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 (EIP23) (discussed see below).

UK National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP), 2023

The National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP) sets out how the UK can meet the legally binding 2020 and 2030 emission reduction commitments (ERCs). These commitments apply for 5 pollutants: nitrogen oxides, ammonia, volatile organic compounds, particulate matter and sulphur dioxide.

Air Quality: Revised UK National Air Pollution Control Programme, 2023

Provides a framework for local authorities in England to meet the government's long-term goals, seeking to reduce public exposure to fine particulate, establishing new binding targets for PM_{2.5} by 2040. This is to be achieved by managing domestic burning, reducing transport emissions, and improving regulatory frameworks for industrial sources.

Environmental Improvement Plan, 2023

Building on the long-term vision of the 25 Year Environment Plan, it sets out clear actions and interim targets to improve air and water quality, protect and expand habitats, reduce waste, and promote sustainable land use. It also reinforces legally binding commitments under the Environment Act 2021 and introduces tools like LNRS and mandatory BNG to ensure measurable progress. At its core, EIP23 aims to leave the environment in a better state for future generations, through collaboration with communities, landowners, and businesses.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2026

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), together with the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), sets out national planning policy in England. It promotes sustainable development, supporting the

creation of resilient, well-designed communities while balancing economic, social and environmental objectives.

The NPPF seeks to protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment through biodiversity improvement, nature recovery, and the conservation of landscapes and heritage assets. It also supports action on climate change by encouraging climate-resilient development, sustainable water management, and the transition to clean energy.

To promote sustainable and healthy communities, the framework encourages development in accessible locations and prioritises public transport, walking, wheeling and cycling as alternatives to private car use.

National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for 2030

Outlines how the UK will meet all 23 global targets aimed at halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. The plan focuses on protecting and restoring nature, promoting the sustainable use of natural resources, and embedding biodiversity considerations across all sectors of society. It reflects a coordinated effort across the four nations of the UK, as well as its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, to deliver measurable progress toward a nature-positive future.

River Basin Management Plans

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is primarily delivered through River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs), which identify the key pressures on the water environment and outline the actions needed to meet WFD objectives. In North Herts, this includes both the [Thames Water](#) (2022) and [Anglian Water's RBMPs](#) (2022). These plans play a vital role in guiding local and strategic interventions to protect and enhance water quality. Under the WFD, all public bodies are legally required to 'have regard to' these plans when exercising

their functions, ensuring that water environment considerations are embedded in decision-making across sectors.

Affinity Water Resources Management Plan, 2024

Outlines how Affinity Water will maintain a sustainable and secure supply of drinking water from 2025 to 2075. It focuses on reducing leakage, improving water-use efficiency, and transferring water from surplus to deficit regions. The strategy also includes developing new long-term supply options, such as reservoirs, water recycling, and desalination, to meet growing demand, adapt to climate change, and protect the environment. The plan reflects a collaborative effort between government, regulators, and water companies to ensure resilient water infrastructure for future generations.

Green Infrastructure Framework, Natural England, 2023

The Framework is a national planning and design framework that provides guidance, standards and mapping tools to help local authorities, developers and other stakeholders deliver high-quality green infrastructure. The Framework promotes the creation of connected networks of green and blue spaces that support biodiversity, climate resilience, health and wellbeing, sustainable development and access to nature. It is intended to inform plan-making and development decisions, helping to ensure that growth is accompanied by accessible, multifunctional and nature-rich green spaces.

UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, 2022

This is the UK Government's statutory assessment of the key risks and opportunities arising from climate change across the UK. Published under the Climate Change Act 2008, it evaluates the potential impacts of climate change on communities, infrastructure, the economy, health and the natural environment, and identifies

priority areas where adaptation action is needed. The assessment provides the evidence base for national adaptation policies and programmes, helping to ensure that decision-making and future development are resilient to the effects of a changing climate.

[North East Central Hertfordshire: Vision 2050, 2024](#)

A collaborative strategy developed by five local authorities, East Herts, North Herts, Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield, and Broxbourne, together with Hertfordshire County Council. It sets out a shared vision to guide sustainable growth and development across the sub-region up to 2050.

The vision is structured around six key themes: *Place, Environment, Infrastructure, Movement, People, and Economy*. It aims to ensure that future planning meets the evolving needs of residents, businesses, and the natural environment. By identifying strategic sites for investment, the plan supports modern economic activity, job creation, and skills development, while also prioritising infrastructure improvements in transport, digital connectivity, and utilities to unlock growth potential.

Serving as an outline for Local Plans, the Vision 2050 promotes cross-boundary collaboration and long-term resilience, seeking to achieve a thriving, inclusive, and well-connected region.

[Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, 2025](#)

The Strategy is prepared by Hertfordshire County Council and the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership to provide a strategic framework for protecting, enhancing and connecting the county's network of green infrastructure. The Strategy assesses existing green infrastructure assets, identifies priorities for improvement and sets out actions to deliver a more resilient, accessible and healthy environment. It supports sustainable growth by promoting the integration of green spaces, biodiversity, landscape

character, recreation and ecosystem services into planning and development decisions.

[Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework, 2026](#)

The Framework aims to ensure health is considered in planning policy to ensure inequalities in health across the county are addressed. This document focuses on the environmental and social determinants that influence health outcomes and how they can be improved through strategic planning.

[The Management Plan for the Chilterns National Landscape, 2025](#)

North Herts District partially overlaps the Chilterns National Landscape (also known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or AONB), which is nationally protected as one of the finest areas of countryside in the UK. The AONB's management plan requires that planning decisions put the conservation and enhancement of the AONB first, ensuring that development leaves it better than it was before – richer in wildlife, quieter, darker at night, designed to have a low impact on the environment, and beautiful to look at and enjoy. The plan expects opportunities to be pursued to restore sites currently degraded by unsympathetic development, infrastructure or dereliction.

The Council is part of the [North Chilterns Landscape Partnership](#); a group of organisations working together to shape nature's recovery across the North Chilterns landscape, connect people with nature, support delivery of the Chilterns Management Plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and other relevant work through joint projects delivered across the North Chilterns landscape.

[The Hertfordshire Water Study, 2017](#)

Identifies how future growth is likely to affect water infrastructure, what changes are potentially needed to facilitate this growth and how could new systems impact the environment. It also identifies a range of options to meet local and strategic infrastructure needs.

[Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan, 2018](#)

Sets out a strategic vision to improve air quality and public health by transforming how people move around the county. It prioritises reducing emissions from transport, one of the largest contributors to local air pollution, by shifting away from private car use and investing in sustainable alternatives.

Key measures include expanding infrastructure for walking and cycling, enhancing public transport, and supporting the rollout of low-emission zones and cleaner fuel technologies.

[Hertfordshire's State of Nature 2020](#)

Provides an overview of the county's wildlife over the past 50 years, highlighting changes in species and habitats. The report produced a new dataset of Hertfordshire Species of Conservation Concern.

[Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy, 2020](#)

Sets out a county-wide commitment to embed sustainability across all operations and services delivered by Hertfordshire County Council. In response to the 2019 Climate Emergency Declaration, the strategy outlines a bold vision for a cleaner, greener future, anchored by key targets such as achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions across the county before 2050 and enhancing nature by 20% within the same timeframe. The strategy comprises three pillars: *leading by example* in council operations, *enabling sustainability* through policies and programmes, and *inspiring action* among residents and businesses. It promotes a whole-systems approach to tackling climate change, improving biodiversity, and building resilience across communities.

[Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#)

Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) identify priorities, map areas for nature restoration, and propose actions to expand and connect habitats for the Nature Recovery Network. Introduced in the Environment Act 2021, LNRS will map out the action needed to restore nature and meet the Government's England-wide nature targets. The Hertfordshire LNRS will:

- Map areas of habitat across Hertfordshire.
- Agree on local biodiversity priorities.
- Identify where practical action would be most beneficial to create, enhance or recover habitat.

[Hertfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2040 Draft Plan, 2022](#)

The emerging plan will eventually replace Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan (2007). Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), as Minerals and Waste Planning Authority (MWPA) for the area, is required to prepare Minerals and Waste Local Plans, to guide minerals and waste management development. The Minerals Local Plan (adopted 2007) is a strategic document setting out the spatial strategy for minerals planning in Hertfordshire. It includes strategic policies that aim to meet the need for mineral extraction alongside more detailed development management policies to be used when determining planning applications for minerals related development. The document also identifies preferred areas for sand and gravel extraction along with other safeguarded mineral extraction sites and rail aggregate depots.

[Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership - Strategic Action Plan for Biodiversity, 2023](#)

Outlines the Hertfordshire Climate Change & Sustainability Partnership's (HCCSP) intention to take actions to restore and enhance biodiversity across Hertfordshire. It aims to harness opportunities from new development, improved agricultural practices, and management of local authority greenspaces to help restore and enhance biodiversity.

North Hertfordshire Landscape Study, 2011

Provides a description of the distinctive characteristics of each landscape character area based on factors such as the geology, landform, soil types and historical activities for each area. It also identifies the inherent sensitivities of each character area in landscape and visual terms together with its capacity to accommodate a range of different types of development.

A new landscape study is being prepared as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.

North Hertfordshire Contaminated Land Strategy, 2012

Strategy produced in line with statutory requirements to ensure that contaminated land is identified and remediated to a state such that the land becomes suitable for use and does not pose a significant risk to health or the environment.

North Hertfordshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, 2016 Update

A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) provide the basis for applying the sequential and exception tests for development sites. Areas at risk of flooding are identified in the SFRA so that appropriate mitigation measures can be incorporated when designing development in order to reduce the risk of flooding from surface water. The Council will produce an updated SFRA as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.

North Hertfordshire Air Quality Action Plan, 2018

Local Planning Authorities are required to publish annual Air Quality Annual Status Reports (ASRs) to discharge their monitoring obligations under the Environment Act (1995). This requires local authorities to review air quality in their area and designate Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) if improvements are necessary. Where an AQMA is designated an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) must then be put in place. The Council's most recent ASR is published on its website ([ASR](#)).

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 (adopted 2022)

The current North Herts Local Plan was adopted in November 2022. It sets out the growth strategy and the long-term vision for the District by identifying how and where new homes, jobs and infrastructure will be delivered. Plan policies seek to achieve high-quality sustainable design and consideration for the natural environment.

North Hertfordshire Climate Change Strategy (2022-2027)

Seeks to reduce carbon emissions by working along other initiatives at district and county levels addressing issues relating to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The strategy's objectives are to:

- Achieve carbon neutrality across the Council's own operations by 2030
- Ensure that operations and services are resilient to impacts of climate change
- Achieve a Net Zero district by 2040
- Become a district that is resilient to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

North Hertfordshire Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document, 2024

Sets out sustainable construction requirements for climate change mitigation and adaptation including energy efficiency, renewables/ low-carbon energy and water conservation. The SPD sets three standards of sustainability: bronze, silver and gold where bronze aiming to encourage developers to target higher sustainability standards (silver/ gold) beyond current building regulations requirements (bronze level).

Social

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2015

World leaders came together in 2015 and made a promise to secure the rights and well-being of everyone on a healthy, thriving planet, this sets out 17 sustainable development goals. These range from access to clean and affordable energy to improved health outcomes.

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990

Governs the granting of planning permission for building works, with a particular emphasis on protecting listed buildings and conservation areas. It introduces special controls over the demolition, alteration, or extension of buildings, structures, or objects that hold architectural or historic significance. These protections ensure that any proposed changes preserve the character and heritage value of these designated sites, maintaining their contribution to the cultural and visual identity of local areas.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000

Upholds the public's right to access open land for open-air recreation, granting greater freedom to explore the countryside while safeguarding the natural features that make these landscapes special. It also strengthens the protection and management of National Landscapes (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or AONBs), requiring the preparation and publication of management plans every five years. These plans set out a shared vision for conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of these designated areas, ensuring they remain vibrant and accessible for future generations.

Planning for healthy places, 2024

Guidance produced by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), the University of the West of England and the University of Bristol to help local authorities integrate health and wellbeing considerations into plan-making and development management. The document provides an evidence-based framework for preparing Local Plans and planning policies that promote healthier places, reduce health inequalities and address the wider determinants of health. It covers topics including healthy neighbourhood design, healthy homes, active travel, access to green infrastructure, food environments, climate change and Health Impact Assessments, supporting planners and public health professionals to embed health objectives across all stages of the planning process.

Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review, 10 Years On, 2020

Assesses progress since the 2010 Marmot.: Key findings include life expectancy in England stalled, and even declined for some groups, while health inequalities have deepened, especially among the most deprived communities. The findings highlight a steepening social gradient, with poorer populations experiencing shorter lives and worse outcomes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Crucially, the report underlines that improving health outcomes requires action beyond the healthcare system, by tackling the root causes of inequality, including housing, income, education, and employment.

Building for a Healthy Life, 2026

A nationally recognised design toolkit that supports the planning, design and assessment of new neighbourhoods, streets, homes and public spaces. Published by Homes England and partners, it provides a practical framework for creating healthy, inclusive and sustainable places, helping planners, developers and communities to evaluate the quality of development proposals. The 2026 edition places increased emphasis on active travel, nature-based solutions,

green and blue infrastructure, climate resilience, biodiversity net gain and healthy placemaking, and is intended to support the implementation of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and wider design guidance. Its 12 design considerations are organised around the themes of Integrated Neighbourhoods, Distinctive Places and Streets for All, promoting development that supports health, wellbeing, social interaction and environmental sustainability.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2026

The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and places sustainable development at the heart of plan-making and decision-making. It promotes the creation of strong, vibrant and healthy communities through the delivery of sufficient and diverse housing, accessible community facilities, public service infrastructure, open space and opportunities for social interaction. The 2026 Framework places greater emphasis on promoting healthy communities, reducing health inequalities, supporting active travel, securing high-quality green infrastructure, and ensuring development contributes positively to wellbeing and social inclusion. It also strengthens requirements for planning authorities to consider education, healthcare, recreation, community facilities and wider social infrastructure needs alongside housing growth, ensuring that new development supports inclusive, healthy and sustainable places. The Framework recognises the importance of safeguarding existing community facilities and delivering new infrastructure to meet the needs of growing populations.

Hertfordshire & West Essex Integrated Care System (ICS) “Our strategy for a healthier Hertfordshire and west Essex”, 2023

Sets out how the ICS will work to ensure healthy and safe communities. It focuses on the following priorities:

- *Give every child the best start in life*
- *Support communities and places to be healthy and sustainable*
- *Support residents to maintain healthy lifestyles*
- *Enable residents to age well and support people living with dementia*
- *Improve support to people living with life-long conditions/ long term health conditions, and their families*
- *Improve residents' mental health and outcomes for those with learning disabilities and autism.*

[Hertfordshire's Plan for Children and Young People \(2026-2031\)](#)

Hertfordshire's overarching strategic plan for improving outcomes for children, young people and families over the period 2026 to 2031. It sets out a vision for ensuring that children and young people are safe, healthy, included, resilient, ambitious and independent, alongside four delivery ambitions focused on education, early help, safeguarding, family support, stable homes and successful transitions to adulthood. The Plan is underpinned by three organisational enablers relating to partnership working, leadership and workforce development, and provides the strategic framework for the commissioning, delivery and evaluation of children's services and related programmes across Hertfordshire.

[Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework, 2026](#)

The Framework aims to ensure health is considered in planning policy to ensure inequalities in health across the county are address.

This document focuses on the environmental and social determinants that influence health outcomes and how they can be improved through strategic planning.

[Hertfordshire Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2028](#)

Sets out to inform health and care services and influence service delivery in the county. The strategy sets out to prevent poor health through supporting residents to make the right choices for themselves to improve their health and wellbeing.

[North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Borough Councils Strategic Housing Market Assessment \(SHMA\) Part II Update \(2023\)](#)

The North Herts District and Stevenage Borough Councils Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) Part II Update (2023) provides the evidence required to support the Local Plan process updating the previous (2016) version of the assessment. It provides an estimate of housing need (market and affordable) for the period 2022-2031 after considering housing delivery since 2011 and updated guidance.

[North Hertfordshire Housing Strategy 2024-2029](#)

Sets out how the Council intends to maximise the supply of affordable housing by working with developers to achieve up to 40 percent affordable housing on new sites.

Economic

[United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 2015](#)

World leaders came together in 2015 and made a promise to secure the rights and well-being of everyone on a healthy, thriving planet, this sets out 17 sustainable development goals. These

range from access to clean and affordable energy to improved health outcomes.

The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, 2025

The Government's long-term, 10-year economic strategy for increasing business investment, boosting productivity and supporting sustainable economic growth across the UK. The Strategy focuses on creating the conditions for investment and innovation within eight priority growth sectors, including advanced manufacturing, clean energy industries, life sciences, digital technologies and the creative industries. It aims to strengthen regional economies, develop skills, improve infrastructure, accelerate the transition to net zero, and support high-quality employment opportunities. The Strategy is particularly relevant to planning and sustainability as it promotes coordinated investment, clean growth, infrastructure delivery and place-based economic development to support prosperous, resilient and sustainable communities.

Planning and Infrastructure Act, 2025

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 became law in December 2025 to accelerate the delivery of 1.5 million homes and fast-track major economic infrastructure. It overhauls the planning system by streamlining approvals for major projects, reforming local planning committees, and introducing strategic environmental frameworks.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), 2026

The NPPF supports sustainable economic growth by promoting a strong, competitive and productive economy and ensuring that sufficient land is available in the right locations to meet business, employment and infrastructure needs. The 2026 NPPF places greater emphasis on supporting the delivery of the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, enabling investment in key growth sectors such

as advanced manufacturing, digital technologies, life sciences, clean energy industries and logistics. It encourages planning authorities to identify suitable sites for business growth, safeguard strategic infrastructure, support innovation clusters, facilitate freight and logistics development, and address barriers to investment such as housing and infrastructure constraints. The Framework also promotes sustainable transport, digital connectivity and the efficient use of land to support long-term economic prosperity, productivity and resilient local economies.

Functional Economic Market Area Study, 2015

Defines the geographical extent of 'Functional Economic Market Area(s)' (FEMAs) that fall within and across the three local authorities of Stevenage, North Herts and Central Bedfordshire. A new FEMA study is being undertaken as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.

Perfectly Placed for Business: The Refreshed Strategic Economic Plan: 2017 – 2030, 2017

Is the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Strategic Economic Plan. It outlines a vision for the county's economic development up to 2030. It proposes that Hertfordshire could become a central part of the *Golden Triangle* (Oxford–London–Cambridge); an important hub for scientific research and development. The plan focuses on enhancing productivity, supporting the creation of high-quality employment, and unlocking the county's economic potential. The strategy addresses several challenges, including relatively slow productivity growth, transport infrastructure pressures, limited availability of housing and employment land, and the need to improve workforce skills. It sets out a framework for promoting sustainable and inclusive growth, both within Hertfordshire and in contribution to the wider UK economy.

North Hertfordshire Economic Development Strategy 2025-2030, 2025

Sets out the Council's vision and priorities for supporting a strong, resilient and sustainable local economy over the period to 2030. The Strategy identifies the district's key economic strengths, opportunities and challenges, and seeks to promote responsible growth by supporting existing businesses, encouraging investment, improving town centres, fostering innovation, and strengthening links with major economic hubs including Cambridge, London, Stevenage and Luton. It recognises the importance of the district's diverse business base, skilled workforce, visitor economy and strategic transport connections, while also addressing challenges such as commercial property provision, economic productivity, town centre vitality and the transition to a low-carbon economy. The Strategy provides a framework for partnership working and investment to enhance economic prosperity, business competitiveness and sustainable growth across North Hertfordshire.

North Hertfordshire Retail Needs Study, 2024

Provides the evidence base to support planning policy and future decision-making relating to North Hertfordshire's town centres, retail provision and leisure uses. Prepared by Lichfields on behalf of North Hertfordshire Council, the study assesses the health, performance and function of the district's main centres, including Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Royston, and evaluates current and future needs for retail, leisure and town centre development. The study reviews existing planning policies, forecasts future retail and commercial requirements, and identifies opportunities to enhance the vitality, viability and resilience of town centres, helping to inform the Council's emerging Local Plan and wider economic growth objectives.

North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy, Draft 2025

Provides a strategic framework for supporting the vitality, viability and long-term sustainability of North Hertfordshire's four principal town centres: Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Baldock. Building on the Council's evidence base, including the Town Centres and Retail Study, the Strategy sets out a vision, planning guidance and town-specific priorities focused on land use and retail, the built environment, transport and movement, and community wellbeing. It aims to support investment, regeneration and high-quality development, strengthen local distinctiveness, improve accessibility and active travel opportunities, enhance town centre resilience, and promote thriving, inclusive and sustainable centres that continue to serve residents, businesses and visitors. The Strategy is intended to inform planning decisions, future policy development and the ongoing Local Plan review.

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Designated biodiversity sites

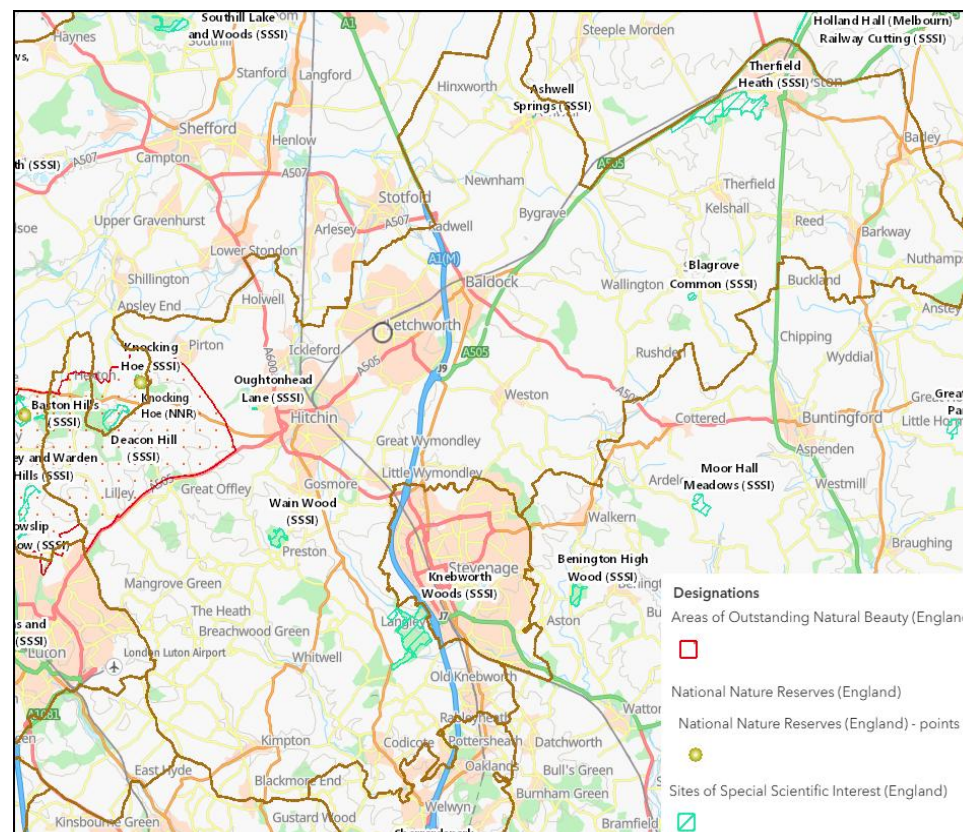
These include:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- Priority Habitat Sites
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- Locally Designated Sites, including Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) and Local Wildlife Site (LWS)
- Ramsar Sites (for wetlands of international importance)

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

North Herts is home to a rich variety of SSSIs - nationally recognised areas that protect important habitats and geological features. These include a variety of habitats such as wetlands, rivers, meadows, moorland, and ancient peat bogs. Each SSSI plays a crucial role in supporting biodiversity and conserving rare species. Set out below

North Herts biodiversity designations



Source: MAGIC

¹are descriptions of each SSSI, the key features that support their designation and the potential threats for each site².

Therfield Heath SSSI 143ha

Natural England describes Therfield Heath as one of the finest examples of East Anglian chalk grassland in England. According to Natural England this rare habitat has declined dramatically since the post-war period mainly due to intensive farming and the loss of traditional sheep grazing, making surviving areas like this one critically important for conservation.

In addition to its species-rich grasslands, the site includes areas of mixed scrub and two mature beech woodlands, adding to its ecological diversity.

Therfield Heath is especially notable for:

- The Pasque flower, a nationally rare and *priority species*
- The Chalk hill Blue butterfly, a *species of conservation concern*

It holds multiple designations as a Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site reflecting its environmental value.

However, the site is sensitive to disturbance. Threats include:

- Recreational pressures (e.g. dog fouling, nutrient enrichment)
- Inappropriate management (such as overcutting, undergrazing, or invasive species)
- Chemical impacts from fertilisers and pesticides

Protecting Therfield Heath means careful stewardship—balancing access with long-term habitat health.

Wain Wood SSSI 19ha

The site is located just north of Preston and protects valuable areas of ancient broadleaved and mixed lowland woodland, including mature oak, hornbeam, and yew.

This habitat supports a variety of wildflowers such as field scabious, hairy St John's wort, lady's mantle, and eyebright, creating a vibrant woodland floor. The wood is also home to an interesting mix of butterflies, with the purple hairstreak standing out as a particularly notable species.

Threats include Inappropriate woodland management, invasive species, and damage from rabbits, deer, and livestock

Oughtonhead Lane SSSI 0.9ha

This nationally important geological site was once a marsh nourished by natural springs and is renowned for its layers of **tufa** - a rare type of limestone formed by freshwater springs.

Its rich collection of fossilised land snails and ancient mammal bones offer unique insights into environmental conditions during past interglacial periods. It is one of only two such sites in the UK known for their exceptional fossil snail records, critical for understanding the glaciation history of East Anglia.

Natural England's [Views about Management Statement](#) (VAM) recommends avoiding any deep soil disturbance like ploughing,

¹

² The information in this section is from: [Natural England Designated Sites View](#)

trenching, or construction, and managing vegetation to preserve the delicate sediment layers that hold the information on the past.

Knebworth Woods SSSI 121ha

One of the finest ancient woodlands in the region, lying on rare acidic clay-with-flints soils. This nationally important SSSI is celebrated for its rich mix of habitats - from broadleaf woodland and grassy rides to seasonal ponds and diverse grasslands.

The site supports:

- Two rare aquatic plants in Hertfordshire: *Water violet* and *Fine-leaved Water Dropwort*
- A thriving fungal and bryophyte community
- Breeding nightingales, a sign of high biodiversity
- The county's best neutral grassland meadow for Green-winged Orchids

The [VAM](#) identifies the following threats: undergrazing, inappropriate woodland and parkland management (felling, thinning, coppicing), and damage from deer threaten the balance of its delicate ecosystems.

Blagrove Common SSSI 5ha

This site supports one of the last surviving patches of unimproved marshy grassland in Hertfordshire, making it a site of high conservation value.

Bisected by a meandering stream, the Common hosts a mix of habitats:

- Marshy areas dominated by rushes and *Tufted Hair-grass*, with abundant wild orchids such as Early Marsh, Southern Marsh, and Common Spotted Orchid

- Drier grassland zones that support species like *Meadow Foxtail*, *Common Cat's-ear*, and *Common Sorrel*

This diversity supports a rich collection of plants and associated wildlife. According to Natural England's VAM the site is sensitive to pressures such as scrub encroachment and fluctuating water levels threaten the delicate balance of its ecosystems.

Conserving Blagrove Common means protecting not just its plants, but the character of a landscape that's becoming increasingly rare.

Ashwell Springs SSSI 0.23ha

Is one of the primary sources of the River Cam. These freshwater springs maintain a steady, cool temperature year-round, flowing into shallow pools lined with chalk and flint gravel.

This site is home to a specialised cold-water invertebrate community, with several species that are rare in Hertfordshire and uncommon across southern England, making this a vital haven for biodiversity.

However, Ashwell Springs faces ongoing threats including pollution from urban runoff, agricultural land, and roads that puts the delicate ecosystem at risk.

There are two further SSSI located just outside the Plan area.

Barton Hills SSSI (48 ha) and National Nature Reserve (NNR), The site comprises lowland chalk grassland, a habitat with numerous wildflowers in summer, and rich beech woodland, offering an important home for wildlife.

The woodland supports a rare population of large-leaved lime trees, while the grasslands provide a stronghold for the uncommon plant Herb-paris.

However, like many sensitive sites, Barton Hills faces pressures from:

- Recreational impacts
- Undergrazing or overgrazing
- Scrub encroachment
- Invasive species and tree disease

Knocking Hoe SSSI and NNR (8.1 ha) is just southwest of Pirton and is one of the best-preserved examples of lowland calcareous (chalk) grassland, famed for supporting large populations of rare and specialist plant species, some found in very few places across the country.

Scrub encroachment and overgrazing by wild animals pose serious threats, making sensitive and well-informed management essential to maintain its biodiversity.

Priority Habitat Sites

Some semi-natural habitats in England are especially rare or under threat. These are known as **Priority Habitats**, identified under Section 41 of the [Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act \(2006\)](#) as being most in need of conservation.

To help safeguard these and other important ecological features, areas can be formally protected as **Designated Sites**, such as:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- National Nature Reserves (NNRs)
- Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)

Often, priority habitats lie within designated sites, enhancing their biodiversity value. For example, a SSSI might be chosen for its mix of priority grassland, heathland, or woodland.

Both receive legal and policy protections, with a shared goal: to conserve vital habitats, safeguard rare species, and support long-term nature recovery.

Throughout the District, a diverse variety of priority habitats contribute to the area's rich natural heritage. These include:

- **Ancient Woodland** - unchanged since at least AD 1600, these are some of the most ecologically valuable landscapes in the District. North Herts' Brooches Wood and Pryor's Wood are prime examples, hosting rare birds, plants, fungi, and invertebrates. These long-established woodlands are not only rich in biodiversity but also serve as spaces for recreation, education, and a connection to our shared natural and cultural heritage. Preserving them safeguards both the past and the future.
- **Deciduous Woodland** - seasonal and scenic, these woodlands are scattered throughout the district. Notable sites include Wintergreen Wood near Knebworth, Furzen Wood south of Hexton, Weston Park, and Therfield. These habitats support a broad range of wildlife and provide year-round visual and ecological variety, from springtime blossoms to autumn foliage.
- **Lowland Calcareous Grassland** - located mainly southwest of Royston and south of Hexton, these vibrant chalk grasslands are among the most species-rich in the UK. They support a stunning diversity of wildflowers and insects, making them a crucial resource for pollinators and a highlight of the local landscape.
- **Chalk Rivers** - rare and ecologically significant, chalk rivers such as the Rib, Mimram, Oughton, Hiz, Ivel, Beane, and Cat Ditch flow across the district. These waterways provide

habitat for a range of specialist freshwater species and are internationally recognised for their environmental importance.

- Wood-Pasture and Parkland - are historically managed landscapes, where open grassland meets ancient trees, are found at Hexton, Old Knebworth, Letchworth, Ayot St. Lawrence, and other sites. Shaped by centuries of grazing, wood-pastures support diverse species including bats, birds, and fungi, while also carrying cultural and historical value.
- Traditional Orchards – are scattered throughout villages such as Great Offley, Wandon End, Kimpton, and Barkway, traditional orchards are biodiversity hotspots. They're home to heritage fruit varieties, bees, lichens, and other species linked to long-standing rural practices. These orchards form an essential part of the district's ecological and cultural landscape.

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

There are no SACs designated within North Herts. However, the nearest SAC is located approximately 10km north of Royston at Eversden and Wimpole Woods in South Cambridgeshire. This proximity provides important regional context and contributes to the broader ecological network influencing conservation priorities in and around the District.

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

There are no designated SPAs within North Herts. However, the nearest SPA is the Lee Valley SPA, located approximately 17km southeast of the District in East Hertfordshire. This site forms part of a wider network of internationally important habitats for bird conservation and adds valuable ecological context to the region

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are special sites managed by local authorities to safeguard biodiversity and connect people with nature. Designated for their ecological value, these sites support local wildlife, offer opportunities for learning and discovery, and provide peaceful green spaces for recreation.

The designation process includes:

- Identifying ecologically important sites
- Formally declaring them as reserves
- Creating tailored management plans to enhance habitats and ensure community access

There are several LNRs across the District, each contributing to local natural heritage and helping deliver biodiversity close to where people live.

- Burymead Springs
- Ivel Springs
- Norton Common
- Oughtonhead Common
- Purwell Meadows
- Therfield Heath
- Weston Hills

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), sometimes known as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), highlight areas of locally significant ecological value. North Herts is home to over 100 of these sites, which support rare habitats, protected species, and rich biodiversity. LWS play a key role in:

- **Connecting landscapes** – acting as corridors and stepping stones that help wildlife move and adapt
- **Safeguarding local character** – preserving unique habitats found nowhere else in the country
- **Boosting resilience** – supporting nature’s ability to respond to climate and environmental changes

Ramsar Sites

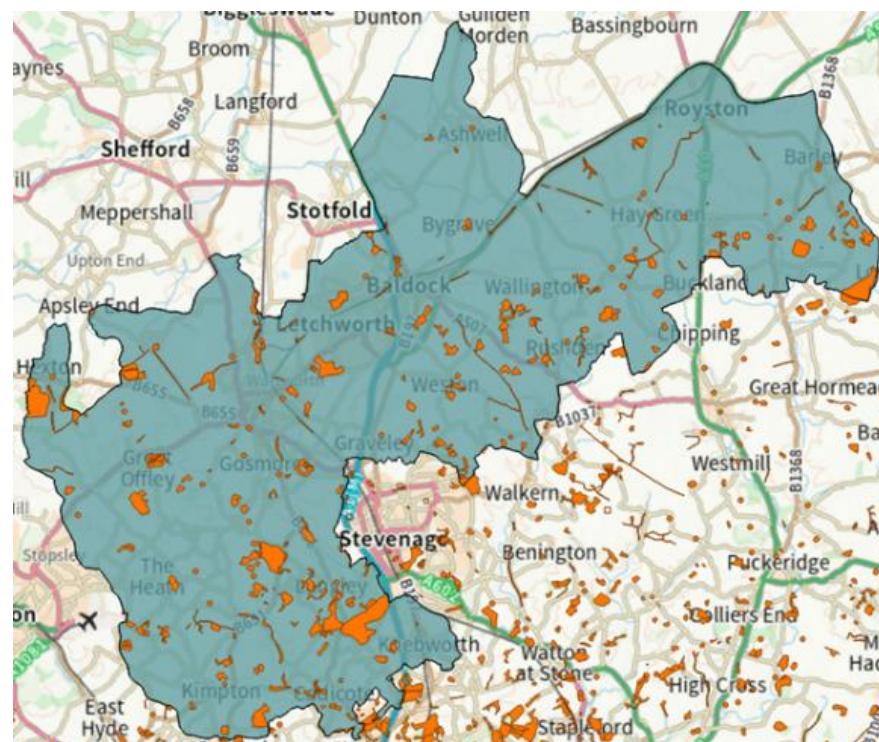
Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, also known as the [Ramsar Convention](#). These sites are selected for their significance in conserving biological diversity, supporting ecosystems, and for their representative, rare, or unique wetland characteristics. North Herts doesn’t have any Ramsar sites. The nearest Ramsar site is the Lee Valley Ramsar 15km southeast of Knebworth near Ware and extending along the Lee River into London.

Landscape

National Character Areas (NCAs) are distinct zones in England defined by their shared natural and cultural landscape features such as geology, landform, soils, habitats, and settlement patterns. They are defined by [Natural England](#). NCAs follow the natural contours of the land and helps define the character of different landscapes.

In North Herts, three major NCAs shape the environment and identity of the District:

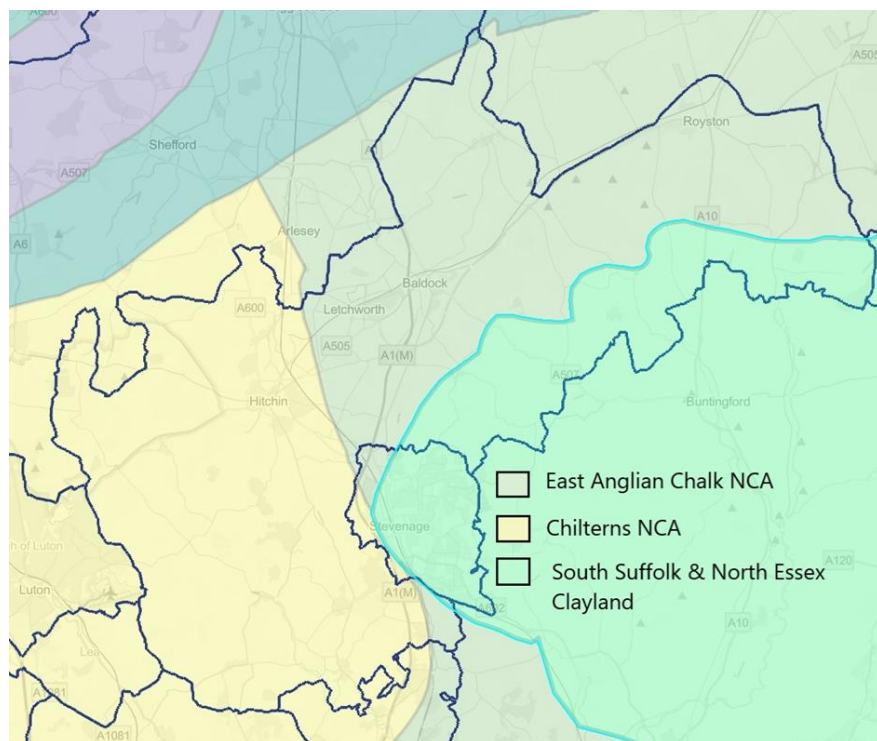
North Herts Local Wildlife Sites (LWS)



Source: North Herts [Authority Monitoring Report 2023/24](#)

- **NCA 86: South Suffolk & North Essex Clayland** – Featuring gently undulating farmland, hedgerows, and traditional orchards
- **NCA 87: East Anglian Chalk** – A landscape of dry valleys, open arable fields, and chalk grassland
- **NCA 110: Chilterns** – Characterised by rolling chalk hills, beech woodlands, and historic villages

North Herts National Character Areas



Source: Natural England. © Natural England copyright.
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These NCAs provide a vital framework for planning, conservation, and understanding how landscape and heritage influence place-making.

NCA 86: South Suffolk & North Essex Clayland stretches across parts of Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, and Cambridgeshire, covering gently rolling farmland, from Bury St Edmunds to Ipswich, and across

to Bishop's Stortford and Stevenage. It encompasses quiet villages, fertile fields, ancient woodlands, and tranquil river valleys—a landscape rich in heritage and natural beauty.

Natural England NCA Profile notes that this NCA offers the following key environmental opportunities:

- Maintain and enhance the rural landscape by promoting sustainable agriculture and land use—helping to protect soils, water quality, biodiversity, geodiversity, and the district's character.
- Protect ancient woodlands, parkland trees, river valley plantations, and hedgerows through thoughtful woodland management and new planting—strengthening habitat connectivity, cultural identity, and ecosystem services.
- Enhance slow-flowing rivers and floodplains, including disused extraction sites—boosting biodiversity, supporting water flow regulation, and enriching recreational and heritage value.
- Enhance public enjoyment and understanding of historic landscapes by improving access, interpretation, and opportunities for quiet recreation. This should be balanced with protecting the tranquillity and special qualities of protected areas, while also supporting wider goals for health, learning, and community well-being.
- Promote sensitive enhancement of historic settlements and heritage assets, including archaeological sites, through thoughtful design of new development and infrastructure. Investment in high-quality green infrastructure can deliver social, cultural, and environmental benefits—strengthening connections between people and place.

NCA 87: East Anglian Chalk forms a narrow sweep of rolling chalk hills stretching from southwest to northeast across southern England. Its landscape is defined by smooth open ridges, large rectilinear fields, and low hawthorn hedgerows, offering far-reaching views and a strong sense of place.

Key environmental opportunities within this NCA include:

- Supporting sustainable agriculture while reconnecting fragmented chalk grasslands through sensitive verge management and wider field margins that improve soil health, water quality, and pollinator habitats.
- Safeguarding chalk groundwater and chalk streams via catchment-scale water management, benefiting biodiversity, the landscape, and community enjoyment
- Celebrating the chalkland's unique character, its sweeping landforms, linear ditches, and archaeological legacy such as the Icknield Way, while protecting its geodiversity and strong equine traditions.
- Enhancing sustainable drainage and green infrastructure within and around settlements, strengthening the resilience and liveability of both new and existing communities.

NCA 110: Chilterns is a distinctive landscape marking the northwestern edge of the chalk aquifer beneath the London Basin. It features a mosaic of wooded hills, hedgerow-lined fields, and mixed farmland, shaped by small streams and the River Thames. Major towns such as Luton, Hitchin, Stevenage, Hemel Hempstead, and High Wycombe sit within or near this landscape, offering access to open commons, chalk downland, ancient woodlands, and an extensive network of public rights of way.

The NCA's key priorities include:

- Managing the landscape (including woodlands, hedgerows, commons and parklands) with the aims Conserving and enhancing biodiversity and the historic landscape and its significant features; maximising the potential for recreation; and securing sustainable production of biomass and timber.
- Restore historic landscape patterns, improve ecological networks, and conserve soil through careful land management.
- Safeguard chalk streams, groundwater, and the River Thames, adopting a catchment-scale approach to protect water quality and maintain vibrant floodplains.
- Enhance green infrastructure and local character, especially in areas of growth, ensuring people have access to nature-rich spaces close to where they live.

National Landscape

National Landscapes (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) are designated areas in the UK recognised for their exceptional natural beauty and national importance. The area between Hitchin, Lilley, and Hexton, following the escarpment of the Chiltern Hills, lies within the Chilterns National Landscape. Designated in 1965 and extended in 1990, the Chilterns National Landscape supports:

- Climate resilience through carbon storage and water management
- Thriving communities via support for local food production, heritage, and recreation
- Wildlife restoration and enhancement of ecological networks

In planning terms, National Landscapes are afforded the same status as National Parks. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

places a legal duty on local authorities to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of these protected landscapes when making decisions that affect them.

The Chilterns National Landscape extends into only a portion of North Herts. Recognising the significance of this landscape, Natural England initiated a programme to explore the opportunity to expand the designated area to include more of the district's unique natural and cultural features.

In June 2021, Natural England sought to consider both boundary extension and enhanced approaches to landscape management and governance. However, in May 2025, they announced the cancellation of the Chilterns Boundary Review project due to national budget reductions, resulting in the early closure of the initiative.

Despite this outcome, the Council, which is part of the North Chilterns Landscape Partnership, remains committed to safeguarding the district's valued landscapes and will continue to assess the potential for further designation to ensure long-term protection and recognition of North Herts' distinctive environmental and cultural assets as part of the Local Plan evidence base.

Local Landscape Character

The [North Herts Landscape Study](#) provides a detailed assessment of the different characters across the district, identifying 37 unique landscape character areas. Each has its own visual qualities, sensitivities, and ability to accommodate different types of development. Carefully tailored guidance is provided to help manage change, ensuring that new development aligns with the local character and strengthens rather than weakens it.

Views and vistas also play a vital role. They frame our experience of a place, connecting us visually to natural landmarks, heritage features, and memorable skylines. Whether it's a glimpse of open

countryside through a village green or the silhouette of a historic church tower, these views contribute to identity, continuity, and a powerful sense of belonging.

The Council has commissioned a new Landscape Sensitivity study which will form part of the evidence base of the new Local Plan.

Key sustainability issues

Informed by current data and policy context, several important considerations emerge for the natural environment in the District:

- Protecting Designated Sites** North Herts contains numerous sites of national and local biodiversity importance. It is essential that new development respects and supports the integrity of these designated areas. Key pressures include direct encroachment as well as indirect impacts such as increased recreational use, and pollution from water runoff, light, and noise.
- Conserving landscape character** With much of the District being rural, its distinctive landscapes, including the Chilterns National Landscape, contribute significantly to local identity and ecological richness. These special areas must be safeguarded and, where possible, enhanced through careful planning and design.
- Strengthening habitat networks and green infrastructure** The diversity of habitats across North Herts underpins the presence of many protected and priority species. Planning should aim to expand and improve green infrastructure and recreational opportunities, maximising the environmental and social benefits of these landscapes while avoiding harm to their most sensitive features.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Considering the key sustainability challenges identified, ranging from the protection of designated biodiversity sites to the enhancement of landscape character and green and blue infrastructure, it is recommended that the Sustainability Appraisal includes the following objective and supporting questions. These will help assess whether a given option or policy positively contributes to environmental resilience, ecological value, and the distinctiveness of place.

SA Topic	Objective
The natural environment	<i>Protect, conserve, and enhance biodiversity, priority habitats, designated sites, and landscape character, while promoting the multifunctional benefits of green and blue infrastructure and avoiding harm to sensitive environments</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

Biodiversity & GI

- Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?
- Protect and enhance priority habitats, semi-natural habitats, species, and the ecological network connecting them?

- Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?

Landscape

- Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscapes and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?

Recreation & access

- Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?

CLIMATE CHANGE & FLOODING

Climate Change and Flooding

Current Data and Context

Decarbonisation targets

The UK has set a series of ambitious national carbon reduction targets to meet its climate commitments and drive the transition to a low-carbon future. These milestones are (relative to 1990 levels):

- **By 2030: A 68% reduction** in greenhouse gas emissions, as part of the UK's [Nationally Determined Contribution](#) (NDC) under the Paris Agreement. This excludes international aviation and shipping and was formally submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- **By 2035: An 81% reduction**, confirmed at COP29 in November 2024, aligning with the UK Climate Change Committee's advice. This also excludes international aviation and shipping.
- **By 2050: A 100% reduction (net zero)** in emissions, legally binding under the [Climate Change Act 2008](#) (as amended in 2019)

In May 2019 the North Herts Council declared a climate emergency asserting the Council's commitment toward climate action beyond current government targets and international agreements. This is currently pursued through our Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030¹ which seeks to:

- achieve Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions for the Council's own operations by 2030
- ensure that all operations and services are resilient to the impacts of climate change
- achieve a Net Zero Carbon North Herts district by 2040
- become a district that is resilient to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Tackling greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is central to addressing climate change, and in North Herts, like the rest of the UK, carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the dominant contributor and expected to drive around two-thirds of future global warming. The other main greenhouse gases are methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O) and fluorinated gases (F-gases), each of which has a different capacity to trap heat.

In 2023, GHG emissions in the District totaled approximately 612 kilotonnes CO₂ equivalent (ktCO₂e)². The largest share came from:

¹ North Herts Council Sustainability Strategy is available at: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sustainability-strategy>

²According to the latest available set of data (as of September 2026) from [UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions statistics](#)

- **Transport (40%)** - mainly from road vehicles with transport related to minor roads, likely to be local traffic, making up just under half of those emissions
- **Domestic energy use (26%)** - heating, cooking, and electricity
- **Industry and commercial sectors (15%)**

Per capita emissions stood at 4.5 tonnes, below the England average (4.7 t), but slightly higher than Hertfordshire's overall average (4.4 t). Since 2006, emissions per person have fallen 46%, broadly mirroring national trends, though at a slightly slower pace than Hertfordshire as a whole.

Emissions trends in North Herts by sector since 2005³:

- A 74% reduction in domestic electricity emissions
- A 28% fall in domestic gas-related emissions
- Transport emissions have reduced 19% over that period

These figures reflect significant progress, but also highlight areas where further action is needed to accelerate the district's transition to net zero, particularly related to transport and use of gas in buildings.

Renewable Energy

North Herts has made a steady start to clean energy generation, with over 3700 PV installations⁴ generating around 32,000 MWh. The combined renewable energy capacity is 45.1 megawatts (MW) which includes anaerobic digestion and landfill gas installations. However, solar PV alone accounts for 87% of installed capacity, highlighting its central role in the local energy mix. In national rankings, this puts

North Herts at 136th out of 354 English local authorities in terms of installed PV capacity, and 24th in the East of England region. While currently modest, this standing is in a position to shift dramatically once proposed Tophams, Bygrave, and Priory Farm solar farms (each with 50 MW capacity) are completed. These projects would place the District among the UK's largest contributors to solar energy, marking a step change in its role in the national transition to net zero.

North Herts renewable energy capacity – as at end of 2024 ([Regional renewable statistics](#))

Type	Number of installations	Capacity (MW)	Generation (MWh)
Photovoltaics	3,740	39.4	30,839
Anaerobic Digestion	1	2.7	Not disclosed
Landfill Gas	2	3.1	Not disclosed
Total:		45.2	30,839

³ Source: Dept. for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ), [UK Local Authority and Regional Greenhouse Gas Emissions](#)

⁴ [Renewable electricity by local authority, 2014 to 2024](#) ([Regional Renewable Statistics - GOV.UK](#))

Climate Change Adaptation

North Herts district falls within the East of England – the UK’s most vulnerable region to the impacts of climate change, making adaptation and resilience-building urgent priorities⁵.

Climate Change Projections

Updated projections from the [UK Climate Projections \(UKCP18\)](#) suggest that by the 2050s, under a medium emissions scenario, the South East of England could face a combination of significant climate-related challenges. These projections are modelled to show both the range and likelihood of change, down to regional scales.

Key projected impacts include:

- **Water stress and quality issues** due to lower summer stream levels followed by more turbulent flows after intense rainfall
- **Increased flood risk**, including greater susceptibility to what were once considered 1-in-100-year floods
- **Strain on wastewater infrastructure** as treatment plants and sewer systems struggle with extremes in flow
- **Soil degradation and erosion** caused by flash flooding events
- **Shifts in species distribution** with some southern species declining and northern ones expanding
- **Higher demand for cooling**, especially in buildings not designed for elevated summer temperatures

- **Greater drought- and flood-related impacts**, such as **subsidence** and **soil shrinkage**, threatening buildings and infrastructure
- **Road surface damage and flooding**, disrupting transport networks more often
- **Human health impacts**, including both physical and emotional trauma, ill-health, and personal loss

Flood Risk

The [Hertfordshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2](#) (LFRMS2), published in 2017, builds on earlier work to highlight how climate change is expected to increase both the frequency and severity of flooding across the county. The strategy identifies three main sources of local flood risk:

- **Surface water** – the most common and widespread source in Hertfordshire
- **Fluvial flooding** – from rivers and watercourses
- **Groundwater flooding** – less frequent but locally significant in some areas

Crucially, the strategy confirms that flood risk is not isolated to a few locations, but rather scattered across the county, with many urban and rural communities affected.

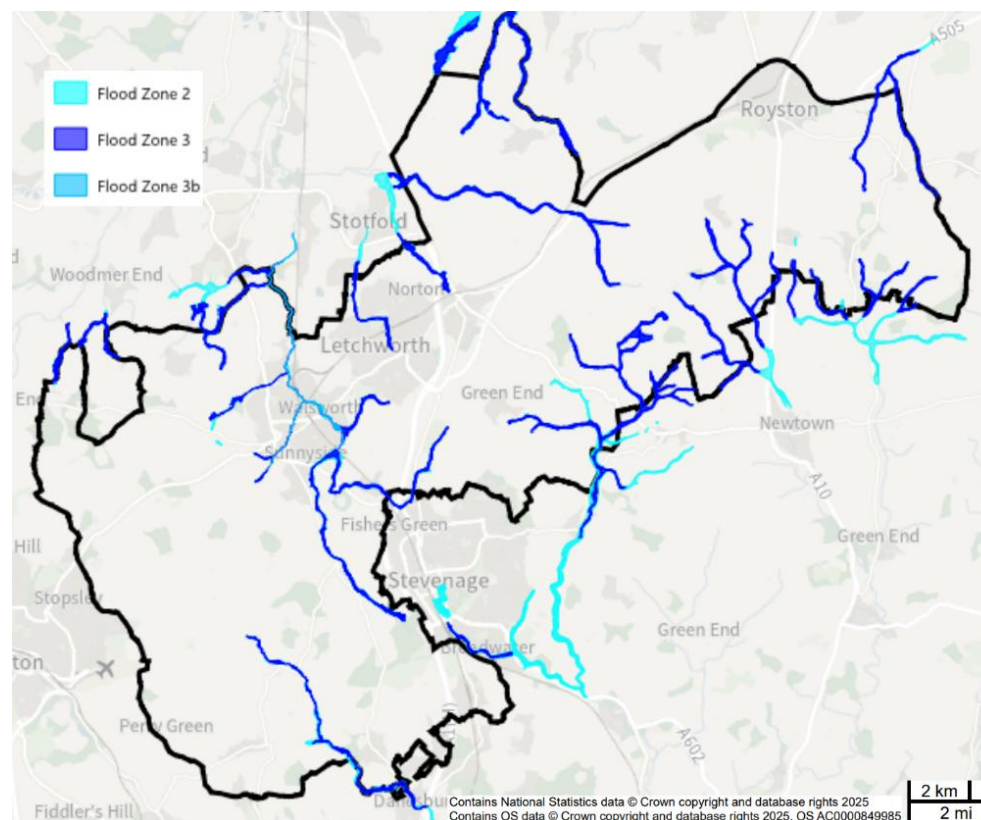
Within the District, around 4,000 properties are considered to be at high risk of surface water flooding (a 1 in 30 year chance), with a further 8,000 properties at medium risk (1 in 100 year chance).

⁵ [The University of East Anglia Tyndall Centre for Climate Research Briefing for the East of England All Party Parliamentary Group Meeting \(6-Dec.-2023\)](#)

As the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) plays a central role in managing and communicating flood risk. This includes:

- Keeping up-to-date risk information available for the public and stakeholders
- Supporting communities, especially vulnerable groups, who are most likely to experience the impacts of flooding
- Integrating flood awareness into planning and infrastructure decisions.

North Herts Flood Zones Map



Surface Water Flood Risk – Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock & Royston ([Long term flood risk - GOV.UK](#))



Water Resources

North Herts lies within an area officially classified as being in “serious water stress”, meaning that demand for water already rivals available supply, a situation likely to worsen with climate change. Rising temperatures, more frequent droughts, and increasingly extreme weather events are expected to strain water systems further, especially in tandem with continued population growth.

This challenge is underlined in Affinity Water’s Water Resources Management Plan ([WRMP](#)), which identifies significant environmental and water resource pressures now and in the years ahead. The WRMP also recognises the need for both infrastructure upgrades and public demand reduction, as well as a shift in how water is valued and managed at the local level.

This issue is explored further in the Water Resources and Quality area of this report.

Wastewater

The Hertfordshire Water [Study](#) (published in 2017) modelled a range of future population growth scenarios (2021 to 2051) and the likely impacts on wastewater treatment infrastructure. It concluded that:

- Development proposals around the northeast of Letchworth Garden City are likely require significant new infrastructure and / or upgrades to the existing sewerage system near Ashbrook Sewage Treatment Works (STW)
- The majority of STWs in North Herts are predicted to require focused planning from 2021 onwards to ensure they can accommodate the quantum of growth projected

- Under the high growth scenario, strategic interventions could be required at Ashbrook, Whitwell and Weston STWs to ensure it has sufficient capacity in 2051.

Key sustainability issues

Having reviewed the current data and policy context, several priority issues emerge where the Local Plan can help drive climate action:

- **Managing emissions amid growth:** While per capita CO₂e emissions are on a downward trend, due to cleaner energy, better efficiency, and the rise of electric vehicles (EVs), population growth could undermine that continued trend, particularly in the context of the council’s goal for a Net Zero district by 2040. The Local Plan can shape development that reduces demand, boosts energy performance, and embeds low-carbon living, to support delivery of both the council’s and national climate goals.
- **Tackling transport emissions:** With transport the largest contributor to district wide emissions, the plan should steer growth to well-connected, sustainable locations, support active travel infrastructure, and promote low-carbon transport technology, from EV charging to shared mobility hubs.
- **Decarbonising the built environment:** The plan can seek more energy-efficient building design, subject to viability, through policies and a strengthened sustainability criterion, while directing growth to areas where emissions can be most effectively managed. There are also opportunities to measure and address embodied carbon from development in the district.
- **Scaling up renewable energy** Support is needed for onsite renewables and district heating, but also for strategic-scale

schemes (e.g. solar farms). The plan can help identify sites and include policy support to unlock these opportunities while maintaining community support through support for community energy schemes.

- **Adapting to water stress** With the District in an area of serious water stress, the plan should promote water efficiency, reuse, and sustainable supply, ensuring that growth doesn't place unsustainable pressure on water resources.
- **Managing flood risk naturally** Surface water flooding is a key concern, and climate change will increase flood frequency. Site allocations and policies will be informed by flood risk (from all sources) data to guide growth to lower-risk areas and promote natural flood management, SuDS, and river restoration to boost resilience.
- **Future-proofing wastewater infrastructure** Climate change and housing growth could potentially lead to exceedance of wastewater treatment infrastructure capacity. Early alignment between planning and utilities will be vital to ensure timely infrastructure upgrades.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Considering the key sustainability challenges identified, it is recommended that the Sustainability Appraisal includes the following objective and supporting questions. These will help assess whether a given option or policy positively contributes to climate change resilience.

SA Topic	Objective
Climate Change & Flooding	<i>Support the transition to net zero by minimising greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy efficiency, enabling renewable energy, and building resilience to climate-related risks such as flooding, water scarcity, and infrastructure stress</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

Greenhouse gas emissions

- Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings and land use?
- Focus development in sustainable locations?
- Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?

Low-Carbon, energy efficient places

- Improve the energy performance of new buildings beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?
- Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support the wider transition in North Herts.

Climate change adaptation/ resilience

- Steer development to areas of low flood risk following the sequential approach outlined in the NPPF and guidance.
- Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources to people, property, infrastructure?
- Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood management, river restoration, and tree planting?
- Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?

Water resources

- Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?
- Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?

POPULATION, HEALTH & WELLBEING

Current Data and Context

Population

The 2021 Census showed North Herts' population was [133,210](#)¹ living in [56,731](#)² households. This represents a population growth of 4.8% from the 2011 Census figure of [127,114](#)³.

This is lower than the population growth at national levels (6.6% for England – [56,490,048](#)¹ (2021) and [53,012,456](#)³ (2011)) levels.

Just over half the population, 68,472¹ (51.4%), were female with males forming 48.6% (64,738¹) of the total.

Age structure

At the 2021 Census, North Herts' [age profile](#)⁴ broadly mirrors the national picture, though 15–34-year-olds are underrepresented and the 75+ age group slightly overrepresented. The District's median age⁵ was 42, compared to 40 for England ([2021 Census](#)⁶)

The [latest available population data](#)⁷ (for mid-2025) estimates the District's population to be [137,365](#)⁸. This is comprised of 70,855 (51.6%) females and 66,510 (48.4%) males. In terms of broad age groups, the resident population is comprised of:

- 18.5% people aged 0-15 years (25,447)
- 61.0% people aged 16-64 (83,795)
- 20.5% people aged 65 years and over (28,123)

Age structure of North Herts residents at mid-2025



Source – [ONS – Mid-year population estimates 2025](#)⁹

¹ ONS - 2021 Census (TS008) - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E07000099>

² ONS - 2021 Census (TS003) - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea?compare=E07000099>

³ ONS - 2011 Census (KS101EW) - https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2011_ks/report?compare=E07000099

⁴ ONS - 2021 Census (TS007B) - https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/report?compare=E07000099,E12000006,E92000001

⁵ The age of the person in the middle of the group, meaning that one half of the group is younger than that person and the other half is older.

⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000099/>

⁷

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025>

⁸

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities>

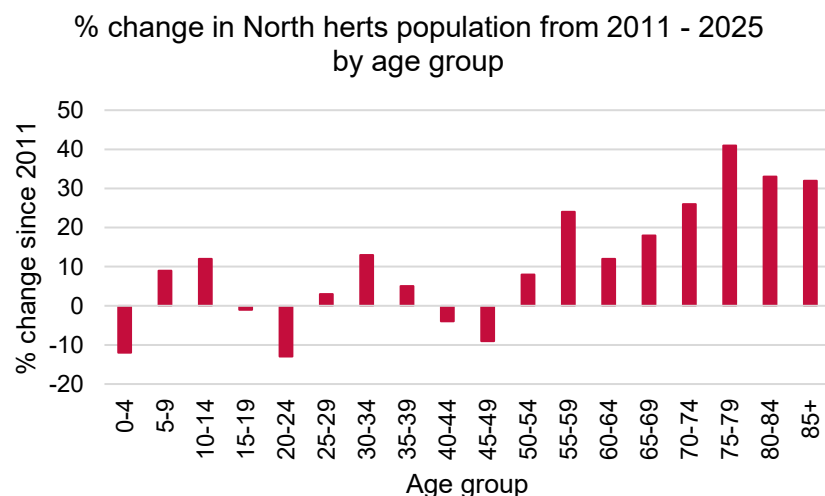
⁹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities>

Demographic Trends (2011-2021)

The chart below shows how North Herts' population changed between 2011 and 2025 (based on ONS data). It shows that older age groups grew at the fastest rates (except the 60-64 cohort) with younger age groups either growing at slower rates or declining.

The number of people aged 50 to 64 years rose by around 3,400 (an increase of 14.5%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by around 820 (2.8% decrease).



Source – [ONS – Mid-year population estimates 2025](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities)¹⁰

Future population projections

According to the latest [ONIS population projections](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2022based#projected-change-by-local-authority)¹¹, North Herts' population is forecast to grow to 147,761 by 2047. That is a 7.6% increase from current 2025 population numbers. This compares with projected population growth of 9.8% for England as a whole.

The 65 plus age group, currently a fifth of our population (28,123), is projected to form almost a quarter (35,090 - 24%) of the resident population by 2047.

The data for 2047 also shows males forming a smaller proportion (10%) of the 65+ age group compared to females (13%), due to higher female life expectancy.

The 2025 ONS '[Old Age Dependency Ratio](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/comparisonofoldagedependencyratioestimatesandprojectionsukandconstituentcountries)' (OADR)¹² data estimates the number of people of State Pension Age (SPA) per 1,000 people of working age. Note that being over SPA does not necessarily mean someone is retired, nor are all working age people in employment. The ratio for OADR for North Herts from 2022 to 2047 begins at around 300 in 2022, remains relatively stable until 2028, then begins a steady rise, peaking around 340 between 2039 and 2043.

This indicates a growing proportion of older people relative to the working-age population. After 2043, the ratio gradually declines (but remains higher than current levels), reaching about 325 by 2047. Again, this suggests an ageing population with increasing pressure

¹⁰

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesforenglandandwales/mid2025#local-authorities>

¹¹

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2022based#projected-change-by-local-authority>

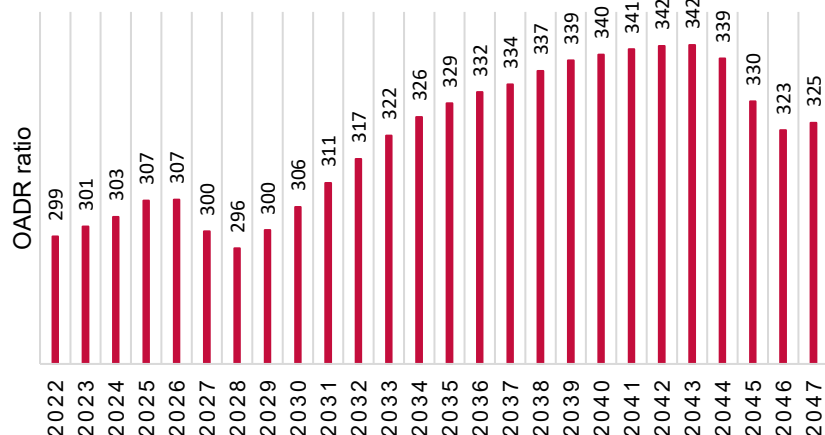
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/subnationalpopulationprojectionsforengland/2022based#projected-change-by-local-authority>

¹²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/comparisonofoldagedependencyratioestimatesandprojectionsukandconstituentcountries>

on services and support systems, particularly during the 2030s and early 2040s.

OADR for North Herts 2022-2047



Source – [ONS – Comparison of old age dependency ratio estimates and projections 2025](#)¹³

Overall, the data shows a trend of an ageing population with a reducing percentage of children and working age people (traditionally defined as those aged 16 to 64)¹⁴ as more people move into the 65+ age group and the younger age groups grow at slower rates or decline. This potentially presents challenges, such

as increased demand for health and social care, and a shrinking labour force.

Ethnicity profile

Data from the 2021 Census showed that [18.7%](#)¹⁵ of North Herts' residents were from an ethnic minority (not white-British). This is lower than the national average (26.5% for England) and the wider county (28.2% for Hertfordshire).

In terms of broad ethnic makeup of the District, the Asian/ Asian British group was the largest ethnic minority in 2021, forming 5.2% of the District's population followed by 'mixed/ multiple ethnic' group (3.7%) and 'black/ black British, Caribbean or African' (2.4%).

North Herts ethnic make up by broad groupings in 2021



Source – [ONS Census 2021, Table TS021](#)¹⁶

¹³

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/comparisonofoldagedependencyratioestimatesandprojectionsukandconstituentcountries>

¹⁴ This is only an approximation as education is now required until 18, the state pension age is rising to 66–67 and people can work beyond pension age

¹⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS021/editions/2021/versions/1>

¹⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS021/editions/2021/versions/1>

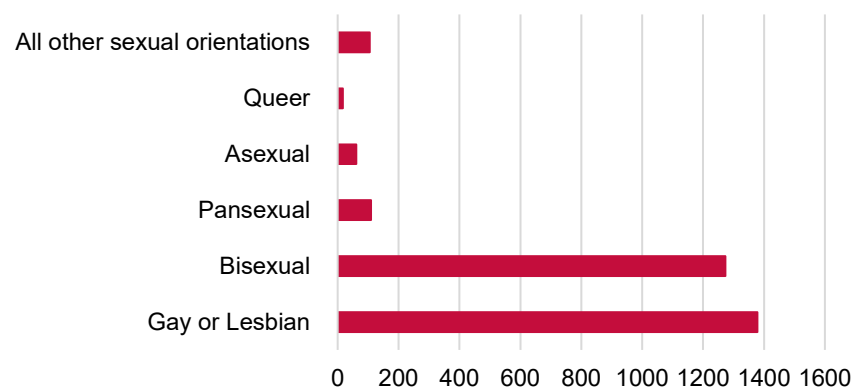
Between the 2011 and 2021 censuses, the proportion of residents identifying as 'White' in North Herts fell by 2% from [89.5% in 2011](#)¹⁷ to [87.6% in 2021](#)¹⁸, making up 87.5% of the population.

Meanwhile, the 'Black/Black British' group rose from [1.9% in 2011](#)¹⁷ to [2.4% in 2021](#)¹⁸, and the 'Mixed' group increased to [3.7% in 2021](#)¹⁸ from [2.6% in 2011](#)¹⁷. Although the district remains less diverse than Hertfordshire and England overall, it is gradually becoming more diverse.

Sexual orientation

In the [2021 Census](#), 90.8% of residents aged 16 plus, identified as straight, 1.3% as gay or lesbian and 1.2% as bisexual¹⁹.

Number of usual residents aged 16 years and over in North Herts by sexual orientation



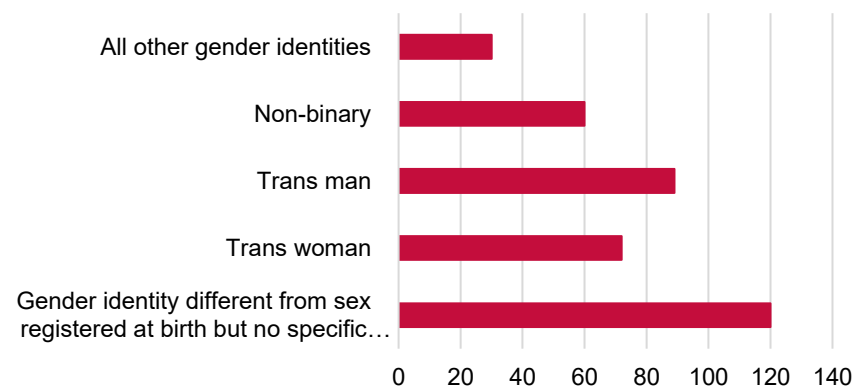
Source – [ONS – Census 2021, Table TS079](#)¹⁹

Gender Reassignment

According to the 2021 Census, the proportion of residents aged 16 years or over across our District who indicated that they have a gender identity different from their sex registered at birth is broadly in line with the average across the country.

94.9% (102,208) of usual residents aged 16 years and over in our District, in March 2021, said their gender identity was the same as sex registered at birth¹⁹.

Number of usual residents aged 16 years and over in North Herts by gender identity



Source – [ONS – Census 2021, Table TS079](#)¹⁹

¹⁷ ONS, Census 2011, Table KS201EW - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks201ew>

¹⁸ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS021 - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts021>

¹⁹ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS079 - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts079>

Health and Wellbeing

Life expectancy at birth in North Herts stands at 81.2 years for men and 84.0 years for women²⁰. These figures are slightly higher than the national and regional figures.

Life expectancy at birth

Geography	Females	Males
North Herts	84.0	81.2
East of England	83.8	80.1
England	83.2	79.3

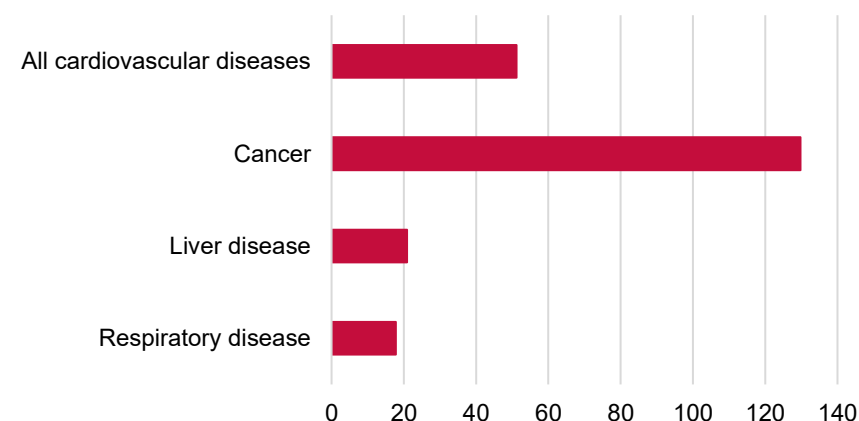
Source – [ONS – Life expectancies](#)²³

In the 2021 Census, [50.6%](#)²¹ of North Herts' residents reported their general health as "very good". This is slightly below the average for Hertfordshire (52.6%) but above the national average for England (48.5%). 0.8% of residents reported having 'very bad health' in the District which is similar to Hertfordshire (1%) and England (1%).

Mortality rates

The age standardised mortality rate (ASMR) (deaths per 100,000 population) in North Herts is [881.4](#)²² which is lower than the regional (910.0 for the East of England) and national (964.5 for England) averages.

Under 75 mortality rates in North Herts, 2025



Source – [Health and Wellbeing Profile - Districts | North Hertfordshire | Report Builder for ArcGIS – PHOF \(Indicators E04a, E05a, E06a and E07a\)](#)²³

Disability

In the 2021 Census, [101,159](#)²⁵ (76%) of residents reported that their day-to-day activities were not limited due to health or disability,

²⁰ ONS, Health state life expectancies - <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c46f72e1fade4249aad53656d4773ce4/E07000099>

²¹ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS037 - <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/c2021ts037>

²²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsregistrationsummarytables/2023#age-standardised-mortality-rates-by-area>

²³ <https://www.reports.esriuk.com/view-report/c46f72e1fade4249aad53656d4773ce4/E07000099>

which is broadly inline with regional and national levels. Conversely, [16%](#)²⁵ of the population stated that their day-to-day activities were limited.

In 2021, [21,236](#)²⁴ (15.9%) of North Herts residents were disabled (under the Equality Act). This is broadly inline with regional and national levels.

In the 2011 census, [15.1%](#)²⁵ of the District's population reported that their day-to-day activities were limited (either 'a lot' or 'a little') due to a long-term health problem or disability.

Health indicators

The data shows that North Herts performs better than average for instances of preventable cardiovascular mortality and obesity rates (child and adult). However, smoking is slightly more prevalent in the District compared to the national average.

Local Health Indicators for North Herts

Indicator	North Herts	England
Cigarette smokers ²⁶	10.1% (2024)	11.5%

²⁴ ONS, Census 2021, Table TS038 - <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/TS038/editions/2021/versions/3>

²⁵ ONS, Census 2011, Table KS301EW -

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/2011censuskeystatisticsforenglandandwales/2012-12-11>

²⁶

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandlifeexpectancies/bulletins/adultsmokinghabitsingreatbritain/2024#local-authority-smoking-prevalence>

²⁷ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/obesity-physical-activity-nutrition/data#page/1/gid/8000011/ati/501/iid/90316/age/200/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

Child obesity - reception age ²⁷	7.7% (2023)	105%
Child obesity - Year 6 age	16.3% (2023)	22.2%
Adult obesity ²⁸	26.4% (2023)	26.6%
Preventable cardiovascular mortality (per 100,000) ²⁹	21 (2023)	26

Source – [ONS – Local Indicators](#)³⁰

In terms of wellbeing, the data for North Herts is similar to the national average (across all LPAs).

Self-reported wellbeing (score out of 10) for North Herts (2022 – 23)

Indicator	North Herts	England
Anxiety	3.4 (22-23)	3.2

²⁸ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/obesity-physical-activity-nutrition/data#page/1/gid/1938133368/ati/501/iid/93088/age/168/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1>

²⁹ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/public-health-outcomes-framework/data#page/4/gid/1000044/ati/501/iid/93722/age/163/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/3/cid/4/tbm/1/page-options/car-do-0>

³⁰ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/indicators#health%20and%20wellbeing>

Feeling life is worthwhile	7.8	7.7
Happiness	7.6	7.4
Life satisfaction	7.6	7.4

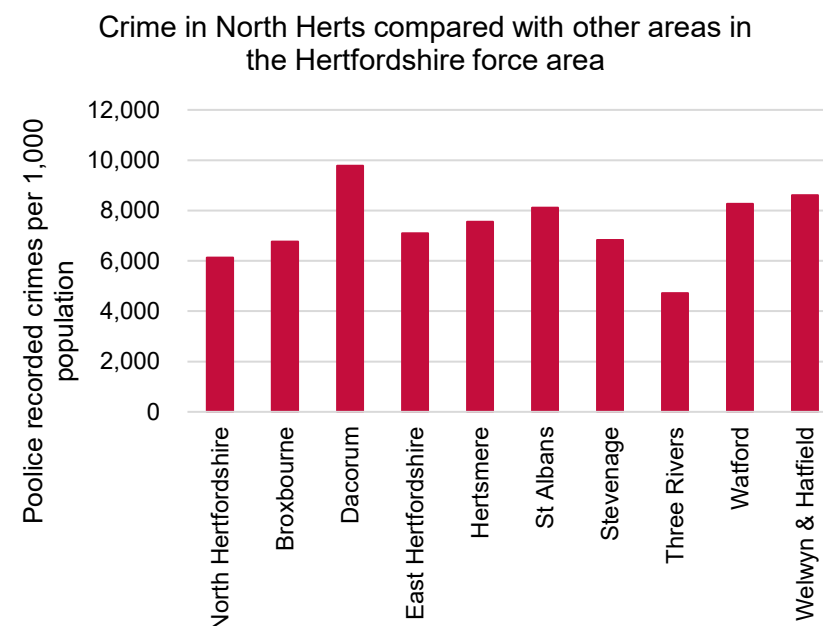
Source – [ONS – Local Indicators](#)³¹

Crime

The chart below compares the crime rate in North Herts to the crime rate across the rest of Hertfordshire. It shows the total number of crimes over a twelve-month period per thousand residents.

In the year ending March 2024, the crime rate in North Herts was lower than the average crime rate across Hertfordshire.

All types of crime were lower in North Herts than across Hertfordshire except for criminal damage and arson, and sexual offences.



Source – ONS – [Recorded crime data by Community Safety Partnership area](#)³²

³¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/indicators#health%20and%20wellbeing>

³²

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/recordedcrimedatabycommunitysafetypartnershiparea>

Deprivation

The [Index of Multiple Deprivation](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation)³³ (IMD) provides a comprehensive picture of relative disadvantage by combining data across seven key areas.

For the IMD and each of the key areas, every small area (LSOA) in England is given a score which is then used to rank the LSOAs from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area). There is no definitive cut-off at which an area is described as deprived, LSOAs are said to be more or less deprived than others. The ranked areas are split into 10 equal groups (or deciles), from the 10% most deprived to the 10% least deprived. North Herts ranks 269th out of 317 lower-tier local authorities in England with rank 1 being the most deprived.

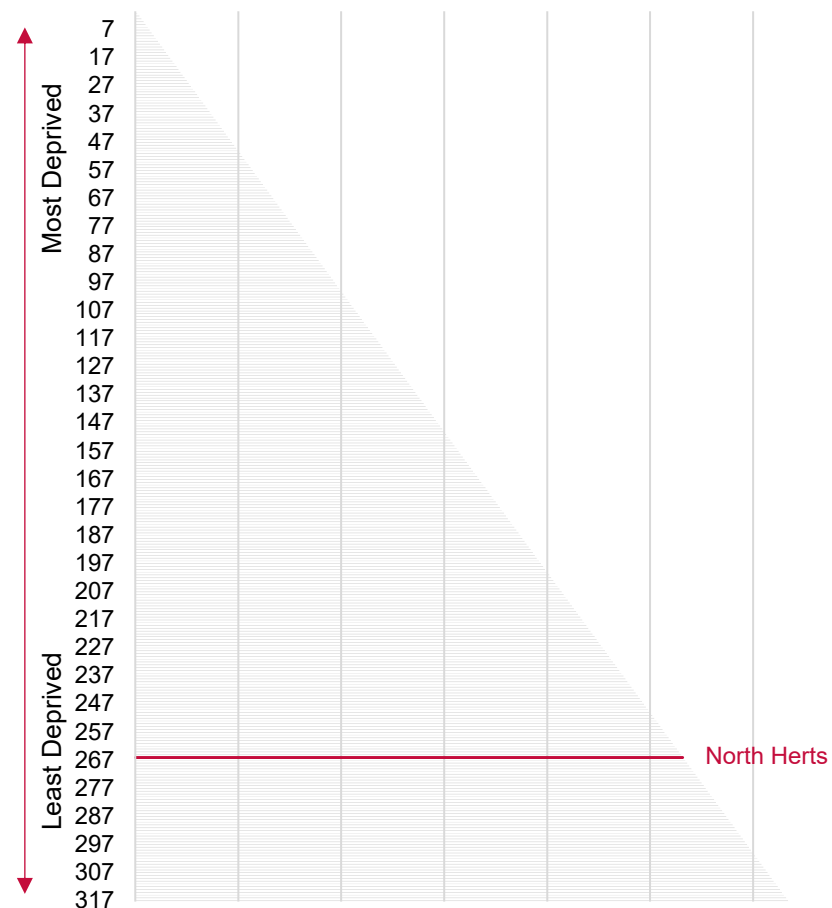
The IMD breakdown reveals that the District has no areas within the most deprived 10%. However, there are a few neighbourhoods that fall within the 20% most deprived areas in England (Letchworth-South East) and some that are within the 30% most deprived (Hitchin-Oughton and Baldock- Town).

There are no LSOA's within the 10% most deprived when looking at overall IMD. However, examining the individual domains (and sub-domains) reveals areas in the District that fall within the 10% most deprived with respect to the following domains:

Education, skills and training

- Education, skills and training – measures lack of attainment and skills. No LSOAs in the District are within the 10% most deprived with this respect to this domain.

North Herts IMD ranking, 2025



³³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation>

- Children and young people (sub domain) - measures the attainment of qualifications and associated measures. Around 4 LSOAs within the District are in the 10% most deprived.

Barriers to housing and services

- Barriers to housing and services domain – measures the physical and financial accessibility of housing and local services. The indicators fall into two sub-domains: the Geographical Barriers sub-domain relates to the physical proximity of local services. The Wider Barriers sub-domain includes issues relating to access to housing, such as affordability. 5 LSOAs in North Herts are within the 10% most deprived areas. The geographical barriers sub-domain shows that 11 LSOAs are in the 10% most deprived.

Living environment

- Living environment domain – measures the quality of both the 'indoor' and 'outdoor' local environment. 2 LSOAs in North Herts are in the 10% most deprived areas.

The above highlights how multiple factors combine to influence levels of deprivation and health outcomes. Areas with higher deprivation often experience poorer physical and mental health, reduced life expectancy, and greater vulnerability to chronic conditions. These interconnected challenges can limit opportunities and access to healthcare, reinforcing cycles of inequality.

Open Space

North Herts has an assortment of green and blue infrastructure, offering both ecological value and recreational opportunities. The District is home to several minor river valleys, including the Oughton, Purwell, Mimram, Hiz, Pix, and Ivel, which meander through the landscape alongside a broad network of waymarked routes and scenic trails. Residents and visitors can access ancient woodlands (some designated as SSSI's), heathlands, commons, chalk grasslands, and a number of registered parks and gardens. The local landscape is also dotted with historic deer parks, particularly across the southern areas. A portion of the Chilterns National Landscape extends into the District near Hitchin.

The North Herts [Open Space Review & Standards](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/OSC4%20North%20Hertfordshire%20Open%20Space%20Review%20%26%20Standards%202016.pdf)³⁴ (2016) identifies around 2,343 hectares of public open space in the District which can be classified as follows:

Open Space Provision in North Herts

Types of open space	Primary purpose
Parks and gardens	Accessible, high-quality opportunities for informal recreation and community events
Amenity Greenspace (including recreation space)	Opportunities for informal activities close to home/work or enhancement of the appearance of residential areas

³⁴ <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/OSC4%20North%20Hertfordshire%20Open%20Space%20Review%20%26%20Standards%202016.pdf>

Provision for children and young people	Areas designed primarily for play and social interaction involving children and young people
Outdoor sports facilities	Opportunities for the participation in outdoor sports such as pitch sports, tennis, bowls etc
Natural and semi-natural greenspace	Areas for wildlife conservation, biodiversity and environmental education/awareness
Green Corridors	Connecting areas for walking, cycling or horse riding, whether for leisure purposes or travel and opportunities for wildlife migration
Cemeteries and churchyards	Providing areas of quiet contemplation and burial of the dead, often linked to the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity

According to the 2016 evidence our open space provision equates to 18.4 hectares per 1,000 residents, a figure considered indicative of strong provision. It should be noted that we are in the process of updating this evidence and this will be published in due course.

While rural areas benefit from extensive Natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces, the four main towns (excluding Baldock) tend to offer more formal recreational spaces, such as outdoor sports facilities.

The OSRS estimates that by 2031 the open space ratio will reduce to around 14.83 hectares per 1,000 people due to population growth. The study concludes that:

- The District has a high level of open space provision
- Fields in Trust benchmarks tend to exceed local adjusted provision once very large sites are excluded.
- Consistent open space standards are crucial for shaping high-quality, accessible spaces in new developments.
- Provision varies widely across neighbouring authorities, underscoring the value of a locally tailored approach.
- Long-term management must be built into standards, considering both funding limitations and future opportunities.

Blue Infrastructure

North Hertfordshire's blue infrastructure comprises a network of water-related natural and semi-natural features within the District, including rivers, ponds, lakes, and other water bodies. Proximity to high-quality blue spaces, such as canals and rivers, is associated with lower psychological distress, reduced anxiety, and improved mental well-being through restorative properties and stress reduction. These environments promote healthy lifestyles by encouraging active travel, walking, and cycling, while also offering unique opportunities for recreational physical activity.

Key sustainability issues

Based on current data and the policy context, several key challenges and opportunities have been identified in relation to population, health and wellbeing in North Herts:

- **An ageing population:** With a growing proportion of older residents, pressure on health and social care services is

expected to rise over the plan period. This underlines the need to maximise the benefits of new development to enhance local health infrastructure and community facilities. As age-related health issues, such as reduced mobility, sensory impairments, and dementia, become more common, it will be essential to design housing, public spaces, and services that are more accessible, inclusive, and adaptable.

- **Pockets of deprivation:** While the District performs well overall, some neighbourhoods face notable levels of deprivation. Regeneration and improved accessibility to health, education and employment services offer opportunities to tackle inequality and improve outcomes in these more vulnerable areas.
- **Strong green and blue infrastructure network:** North Herts enjoys a diverse and valuable range of open spaces and green and blue infrastructure. Future development can strengthen these health benefits by enhancing connectivity and delivering new green and blue infrastructure, such as SuDS, river corridors enhancements, and water features. These features provide high-quality environments that encourage active travel and outdoor recreation with positive impacts on health and wellbeing.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

In light of the key sustainability issues identified, it is proposed that the Sustainability Appraisal framework should include a clear set of objectives alongside appraisal questions to assess how well each plan option or proposal supports these objectives.

SA Topic	Objective
Population, health and wellbeing	<i>Promote inclusive, healthy, and sustainable communities by improving access to health and social care, reducing inequalities, supporting active lifestyles, and enhancing the quality of local environments</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

- Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?
- Encourage healthy/ active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?
- Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?

TRANSPORT & CONNECTIVITY

Current Data and Context

North Herts and the wider county are defined by a dispersed pattern of small to medium-sized urban centres, with no single dominant hub. This spatial arrangement has shaped a transport network built around interurban corridors and strategic routes, rather than a centralised system.

Roads Network

Key connections include:

- **North–South:** A1 (passing between Letchworth and Baldock); A600 (Hitchin to Bedford); A602 (Hitchin to Stevenage); A10 (through Royston).
- **West–East:** A505 (Luton to Royston) and A507 (Baldock to Buntingford).

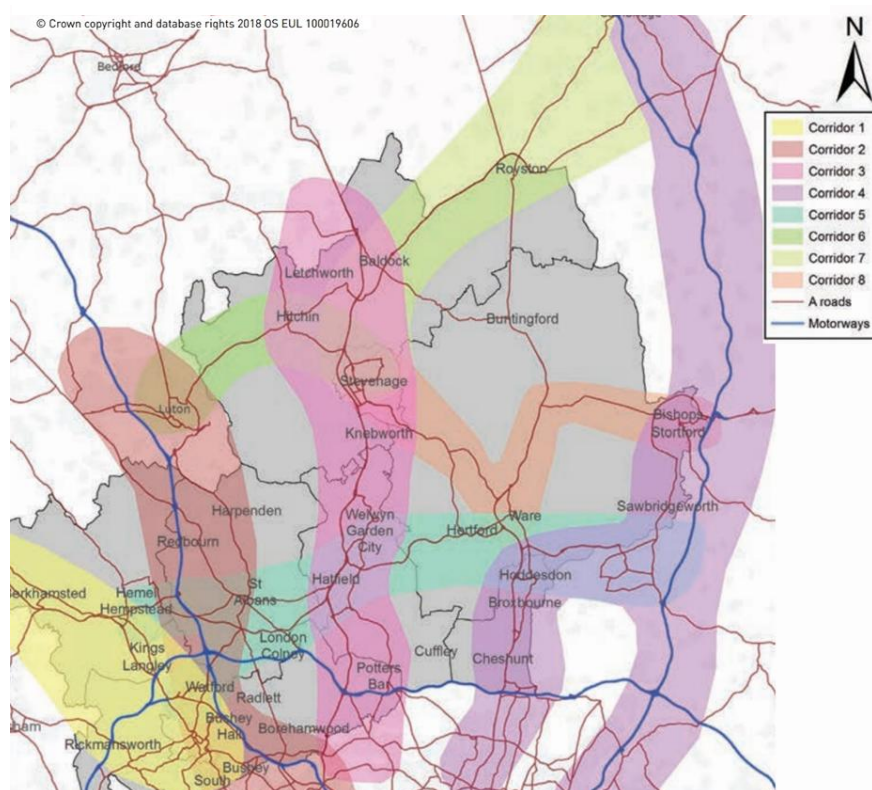
Lower order roads support cross-district movement and underpin the District's economic and social connections to its market towns and nearest large conurbations, including Stevenage, Luton and Cambridge.

[Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan 4 \(LTP4\)](#) identifies key multimodal movement corridors that are critical to the county's future transport strategy, which aims to support sustainable growth, aligned with local and regional housing and economic development plans, improve air quality and reduce car dependency.

Three of these strategic corridors pass through the District:

- Corridor 3: London↔Stevenage↔Peterborough
- Corridor 6: Luton↔Stevenage
- Corridor 7: Stevenage↔Cambridge

Key multimodal movement corridors (LTP4)



Source: HCC [LTP4](#), pg. 38

London↔Stevenage↔Peterborough Corridor (Corridor 3)

Primary infrastructure includes:

- A1(M) and M25, which are intended to facilitate long-distance travel but also carry substantial local traffic.
- East Coast Main Line, a major rail artery linking London and Scotland via Stevenage.

The corridor experiences significant commuter flows, particularly:

- Hitchin ↔ Stevenage
- Hitchin ↔ London
- Hitchin ↔ Arlesey

Strategic priorities for this corridor include:

- Ensuring that any future plans for the A1 consider the role of all transport modes and focus on maximising existing capacity rather than defaulting to road expansion.

This corridor plays a vital role in supporting sustainable growth, reducing car dependency, and improving access to jobs, services, and housing across the region.

Luton↔Stevenage Corridor (Corridor 6)

The A505 and A602 carry local traffic between Luton, Hitchin and Stevenage, but also serve as a key connection for longer-distance movements between the A6 in the west and the A1 in the east, and between Luton Airport and its wide catchment area. Some traffic is known to divert through villages to the south of the A505 to avoid congestion hotspots in Luton and Hitchin.

Notable travel flows include:

- Luton/Dunstable ↔ Hitchin and Stevenage

Strategic priorities for this corridor include:

- Improving bus connectivity between Luton and Hitchin station and wider, more frequent bus/coach connectivity to Luton Airport.

Stevenage↔Cambridge Corridor (Corridor 7)

Primary infrastructure includes:

- A505, which supports both local journeys and longer-distance traffic between the A1 (Letchworth) and M11 (Cambridge).
- Rail line between Hitchin and Cambridge

Key travel flows include:

- Stevenage ↔ Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, and Baldock
- Royston ↔ London
- Royston ↔ Cambridge

Strategic priorities for this corridor include:

- Enhancing station access and rail service levels.
- Enhancing walking and cycling links between Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Stevenage.
- Improving bus connectivity into and between the towns.
- Collaborating with Cambridgeshire authorities to improve sustainable travel options between Royston and South Cambridgeshire.

This corridor connects Hertfordshire's innovation clusters with Cambridge's knowledge economy, and improving sustainable transport links will be key to unlocking its full potential.

The [North Central Hertfordshire Growth and Transport Plan](#) (GTP) (2022) highlights a range of transport challenges that affect the District's connectivity, sustainability, and inclusivity.

Key issues identified include:

- **Congestion:** Persistent delays on major routes such as the A1 (especially junctions 8 and 9), A505, and A602, particularly during peak hours, undermine journey reliability and economic efficiency.
- **Public Transport:** Limited bus services, especially in rural areas like the northeast of the District which suffer from low frequency and reliability. A lack of bus priority measures further reduces the appeal of public transport.
- **Active Travel:** Walking and cycling infrastructure is often fragmented and of poor quality. Major roads and rail lines create severance, making it difficult to establish safe, direct routes for non-motorised users.
- **Accessibility:** Many residents, particularly those without access to a car, including vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled, face barriers in reaching key services and employment areas.
- **Environmental Impact:** High car dependency contributes to air pollution, carbon emissions, and noise and light pollution, affecting both environmental quality and public health.

Car ownership data reinforces these trends: only 15.5% of households in North Herts don't have access to a car or van, compared to 23.5% nationally (Census 2021). A higher proportion of households own multiple vehicles, indicating a strong reliance on private transport.

These findings underline the need for integrated, multimodal solutions that reduce car dependency, enhance sustainable travel options, and improve access for all residents.

Rail services

The District has good rail and road connections. The rail network provides a transport backbone through the district, connecting all four towns and Knebworth with Stevenage, London, Cambridge, Peterborough and other destinations on the rail network. There is a notable gap between the East Coast Main Line and the Midland Main Line (through Luton), which will be bridged by East West Rail between Bedford and a new station at Tempsford.

The rail services in North Herts are operated by GTR (Great Northern and Thameslink). Interchanging at Stevenage, Peterborough or Cambridge gives passengers access to other services, including to Hertford, North East England, Scotland, Stansted Airport, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Great Northern services to King's Cross can be overcrowded at peak times. Thameslink services (via St Pancras) have spare seating capacity in North Herts at all times of day. The frequency with which services can run is constrained in part by the two-tracked section through the Welwyn valley. The East Coast Digital Programme will increase line capacity with cab-based (rather than track-side) signalling and is due to be fully rolled out by 2030.

The [North East Central Hertfordshire Vision 2050](#) (NEC 2050) notes that stations at Hitchin and Royston are not located in town centres impacting on accessibility and transport connectivity particularly for the less mobile and increasing need to drive to get to a train station.

Hertfordshire County Council's Rail Strategy includes a long-term aspiration for a new Stevenage–Luton Airport rail link.

Bus services

Bus services are generally poor in North Herts, in part because they compete with the railway for inter-urban travel, which would normally support commercially viable (profitable) services. Furthermore, the limited number of rail–road bridges and historic road layouts make it difficult to design efficient bus routes in many parts of the district.

It is not viable for operators to serve widely dispersed villages on a commercial basis, so these rely on subsidised services, including the demand-responsive HertsLynx. However, for the vast majority of residents, these do not provide a level of service (availability, reach, hours of service) that can replace owning a car.

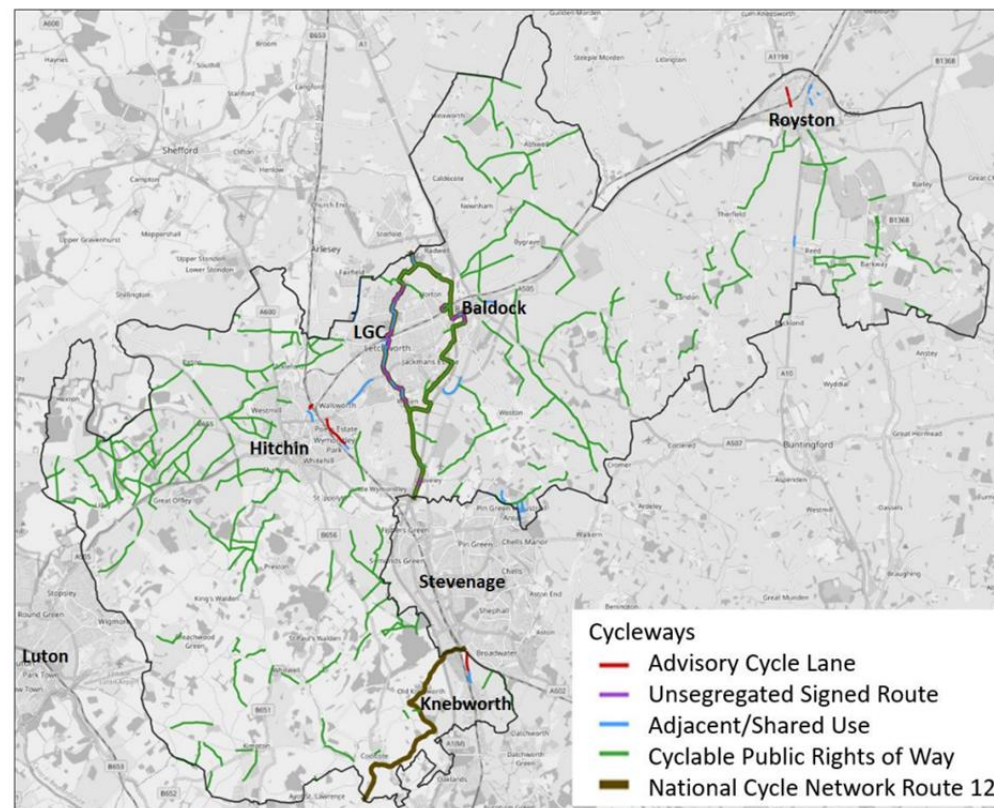
Fares are often not commensurate with the quality of service provided, especially when a trip involves more than one bus or operator or mode of transport (e.g. rail or taxi).

Cycle Network

National Cycle Network Route 12 (NCN12) runs north–south through the District, linking Welwyn Garden City, Stevenage, Letchworth, Baldock and Stotfold. The route contains some traffic-free sections, but the general quality, capacity and legibility of the route is poor.

The North Hertfordshire Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), adopted in 2023, sets out improvements to be prioritised in the four towns and Knebworth, and between Hitchin and Stevenage. An update is being prepared that will include more inter-urban and rural routes.

North Herts Cycle Routes [North Hertfordshire District Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan](#), p. 32



Travel to Work

Travel patterns across North Hertfordshire have changed considerably since the COVID-19 pandemic, with traditional commuting patterns becoming less pronounced. Traffic levels remain lower during the conventional morning and evening peak periods,

particularly in the morning, suggesting that flexible and hybrid working continue to influence when people travel. Fridays are now reported to be the busiest day of the week overall ([Hertfordshire Traffic and Transport Data Report, 2025](#)).

Despite these changes, travel in North Hertfordshire and the wider county remains predominantly car-based. In 2024, around 21% of monitored trips in Hertfordshire were made by other modes, including walking (9%), bus (11.5%) and cycling (less than 1%). Many short journeys also continue to be undertaken by car; around one in five journeys of less than one mile are made by car, increasing to almost two-thirds of journeys between one and three miles.

Congestion remains an issue at a number of locations across and around North Hertfordshire, including junctions on the A1 and sections of the A505, A19 and A602, as well as key routes through Royston, Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth and Knebworth. Unpredictable delays can encourage drivers to use alternative routes which may be less suitable for higher volumes of traffic.

These patterns indicate continued reliance on private vehicles, while also demonstrating significant potential to increase the proportion of shorter journeys undertaken by walking and cycling where safe and convenient routes are available. Improving active travel infrastructure, public transport provision and connectivity will therefore remain important in supporting more sustainable travel patterns across the District.

Airports

The primary international airports serving North Herts are London Luton Airport (LTN) and London Stansted Airport (STN). Luton is the closest, just west of the District.

Strategic Infrastructure Projects

Expansion of London Luton Airport

An application to expand capacity from 18 to 19 million passengers per annum (mppa) – was granted permission in October 2023. A DCO application to expand capacity to 32 mppa was granted consent in April 2025 (GOV.UK, 2026). As of October 2025, it is still subject to a judicial review.

While this growth will increase travel to the airport through the District, leading to higher traffic volumes and congestion on some roads, it also offers an opportunity to improve public transport links to the airport, which could enhance regional connectivity and reduce reliance on car travel.

Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor

Championed by Lord Vallance, this government project to “supercharge growth” (GOV.UK, 2026) in the region between Oxford and Cambridge encompasses various projects:

- Dualling of the A428 east of the A1, reducing journey times to Cambridge and Felixstowe (via the A14)
- East West Rail, a new and upgraded railway line between Oxford and Cambridge via Milton Keynes and Bedford. Trains are expected to start running between Oxford and Milton Keynes in 2025. An application for a Development Consent Order to construct the section between Milton Keynes and Cambridge is expected to be made in 2025/26 (East West Rail, 2026).
- Cambridge Growth Company, headed by Peter Freeman, is a subsidiary of Homes England and is tasked with enabling and supporting housing (in the region of 150,000 new homes)

and economic growth in the Cambridge area beyond the current and emerging Local Plans (GOV.UK, 2024).

- New settlement at Tempsford, between St Neots and Sandy, which was announced by the New Towns Taskforce in September 2025 (Central Bedfordshire, 2026). “The new town proposal near Tempsford in Bedfordshire is a unique opportunity with potential to provide over 40,000 homes in a standalone greenfield settlement at the intersection of the East Coast Main Line (ECML) and East West Rail (EWR), in the heart of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor.”

These projects will all have an impact on North Hertfordshire, in terms of creating new employment opportunities for residents, more travel options, but also potentially more traffic on strategic roads, such as the A1 and A505.

Digital connectivity

High quality digital connectivity including home broadband, mobile coverage, and Wi-Fi in public areas (trains, stations, public libraries, community rooms, cafés, etc) supports remote and hybrid working, learning and meeting, which became more prevalent following the Covid-19 pandemic. This reduces commuting, in particular at peak times, easing congestion and lowering transport emissions. Continued investment in fibre-to-the-cabinet (FTTC), fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP), 5G and other communications infrastructure, in particular in rural areas, will help sustain flexible working patterns, contributing to more sustainable travel patterns, greater social equality, and improved quality of life.

As of 2023 81.4% of premises in the District were able to receive gigabit broadband and 98.6%, 30Mbps or faster. This compares with 76.9% and 97.4%, respectively, for England.¹

Overall, there is a good level of high-speed internet provision in the District. However, there are other factors that could potentially lead to digital exclusion such as ability/ confidence in accessing the Internet, and the affordability of broadband and mobile data contracts ([Herts Insight](#))

Key sustainability issues

Informed by current data policy context, the following key issues are identified in relation to the transport, air quality and noise SA theme:

- **Strategic Connectivity and Congestion:** In the absence of effective plans to enable and promote sustainable travel, housing growth will increase transport carbon emissions and exacerbate congestion in town centres and on the A1, A505, A602 and other roads in the District. It would not be compliant with policy, affordable or, in most cases, practical, to increase road capacity to accommodate more vehicles. Therefore, the District must pursue policies, strategies and plans that minimise travel demand, enable and promote modal shift to active travel and to public and shared transport, and support emerging mobility solutions. It should support the shift from petrol/diesel to electric vehicles, but recognise that, though this will reduce carbon emissions and some forms of air pollution, it will not reduce traffic volumes or congestion. In

¹ Source: Ofcom, Connected Nations Report, 2023

fact, access to cheap electricity can encourage EV owners to drive *more* than they would in a petrol/diesel vehicle.

- **Public Transport and Active Travel Gaps:** Rail and bus usage is relatively low in most of the District. Existing active travel routes are often fragmented or severed by major roads and rail lines, reducing safety and discouraging use. New development presents opportunities to invest in public transport and active travel infrastructure. Priorities include improving access to railway stations by active travel and bus; creating and improving bus stations in the towns to create attractive and safe waiting environments; integrating public transport services better to reduce travel times and costs; improving the quality and availability of information about sustainable travel options, including reliable bus time data; rationalising car parking so that it does not undermine sustainable travel alternatives or exacerbate congestion in town centres.
- **Digital Connectivity and Home Working:** A significant proportion of residents work mainly from home, above regional and national averages. Enhancing broadband and mobile data and WiFi coverage could help sustain and extend this trend, reducing pressure on transport networks and lowering emissions.
- **Cumulative Impacts of growth:** The Luton Airport expansion, Oxford–Cambridge growth corridor, and East West Rail are likely to have both positive and negative impacts on the District. Cumulative impacts of growth and new infrastructure needs to be assessed as part of planned development in the District, particularly in relation to carbon emissions and road congestion.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the following objectives

SA Topic	SA Objective
Transport & Connectivity	<i>Maximise sustainable transport and active travel opportunities while minimising the need to travel.</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/proposal help to ...

Facilitating modal shift

- Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?
- Help improve public transport, including the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without compromising existing provision)?
- Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared with driving and parking?
- Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?

Reducing transport emissions

- Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?

Digital connectivity

- Enhance communications core infrastructure?

HOUSING

Housing

Current Data and Context

Housing stock

North Herts has approximately 60,020 homes.¹ Most are in good condition with no significant concentrations of substandard stock².

According to the ONS Census 2021, semi-detached dwellings are the most common type of dwelling (30.5%), followed by terraced dwellings (24.6%), detached dwelling or bungalows (24.3%), and purpose-built flats (17.1%). There are also a small number of park homes (0.6%) which offer an alternative to the main housing stock.³

House Prices and Affordability

Housing affordability in North Herts continues to be a significant challenge. The average house price in the District has risen to £423,000 as of June 2026, marking a 7.8% increase since June 2025⁴. Entry-level homes (the bottom 25% of properties by value), now average £318,00 as of September 2025,, a 34% increase over since September 2015. For comparison, the average house price in England was £291,000 in 2025.⁵

Affordability ratios (house price divided by earnings), compare house prices to household incomes, with higher ratios indicating decreasing affordability. The average affordability ratio in North Herts stands at 10.1 (i.e. average house price is 10.1 times average earnings), up from 7.85 a decade ago. For entry-level homes the ratio was 9.92 in 2025,, compared to 9.51 in 2025. These figures exceed both the East of England average (8.76) and the national average (6.98), highlighting the District's relative unaffordability ([ONS](#)).

Looking ahead, our Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2026 projects a shortfall of 2,834 affordable rented homes to 2045.⁶

This trend underlines the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve affordability, expand affordable housing supply, and support lower-income households in accessing secure, suitable homes.

Housing Tenure

In North Herts, the housing tenure profile is dominated by owner-occupation, which accounts for approximately 65% of all homes. The private rented sector makes up around 15%, while affordable housing tenures represent the remaining 20%.⁷

Within the affordable housing category, the vast majority (19%) are provided as affordable rent, typically managed by registered providers, who face increasing challenges in maintaining and upgrading an ageing housing stock amid rising regulatory and financial pressures. A small proportion, around 1%, comprises affordable home ownership options, such as shared ownership

¹ Source: [VOA Council Tax statistics](#) for 2025

² [North Herts' Housing Strategy 2024-2029](#)

³ [Housing, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

⁴ [ONS Housing affordability in England and Wales 2025](#)

⁵ [Lower quartile price paid for administrative geographies September 2025](#)

⁶ [SHMA Update 2023 \(F&S\)](#) SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SCOPING REPORT | SEPT 2026

⁷ [Census - Office for National Statistics](#)

schemes. This tenure mix reflects a relatively stable housing market, though the limited supply of affordable ownership options may present challenges for lower-income households seeking a first step onto the property ladder. There are around 200 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the District, with the Council holding licensing responsibilities for just under 40 of these.

Housing Need

The North Herts Local Plan (NHLP) 2011–2031 sets a housing requirement of 11,600 new homes, excluding an additional 1,400 homes accepted to meet unmet need from Luton. The Plan adopts a stepped trajectory for delivery:

- 2011–2020: 350 homes per year
- 2020–2024: 500 homes per year
- 2024–2031: 1,120 homes per year

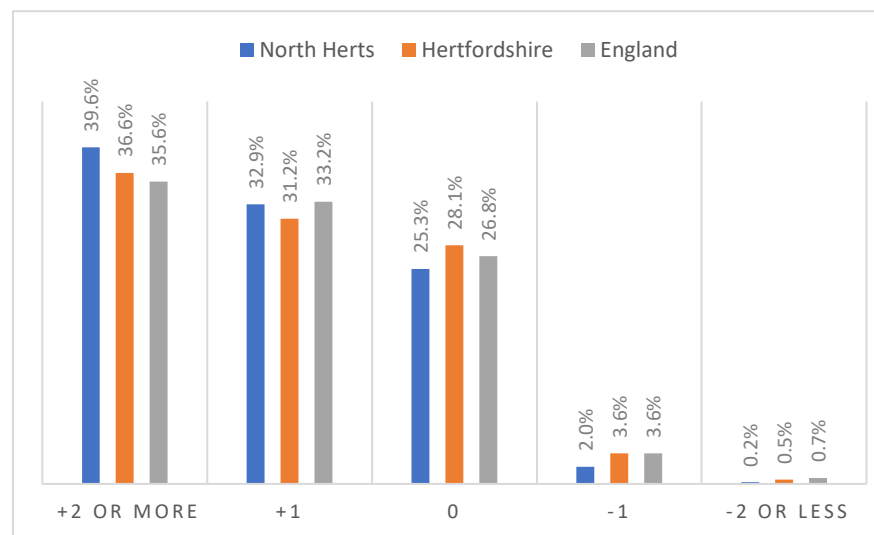
Since the start of the current plan's period (2011) a total of 5,456 new dwellings have been delivered in North Herts. This leaves a total of 7,544 remaining for the period 2025-2031.

The government's standard method for calculating housing need was revised in Dec. 2024. Under the [new method](#) North Herts' housing need is 1,018 dwellings per year⁸ or 20,360 homes over a twenty year period.

Occupancy rates

Occupancy rating provides a measure of whether a household's accommodation is overcrowded or under-occupied. An occupancy rating of negative 1 or less implies that a household has fewer bedrooms than required, so is overcrowded (for example, negative 1 means one bedroom fewer than required, negative 2 has two fewer than required). An occupancy rating of positive 1 or more implies that a household has more bedrooms than required, so is under-occupied (for example, positive 1 means one bedroom more than required, positive 2 has two bedrooms more than required), and 0 implies that they are occupied-to-standard. The data shows that around 2% of households live in overcrowded homes which is lower than in the

Occupancy rating for bedrooms (Census 2021 TS052)



⁸ [Local Housing Need outcome-of-the-new-method](#)

wider geographies. However, there is a significant proportion of households (over 70%) living in underoccupied homes with 1 or more surplus bedrooms. This suggests that larger housing in the District isn't being occupied by households with the most family members. It is likely that larger homes are occupied by wealthier and potentially older people who have chosen not to (or are unable to) downsize into smaller properties.

Affordable Housing

The current Local Plan commits to delivering at least 11,600 net new homes to meet both market and affordable housing needs. It sets a strategic target for 33% of all homes to be delivered as affordable housing across the plan period, with a higher target of 40% on the largest allocated sites.

In total, North Herts will need 2,834 affordable homes by 2045.

This evidence underscores the importance of delivering a balanced mix of affordable tenures to meet both current and future needs. The Council's [Housing Strategy](#) (2024-2029) and [Tenancy Strategy](#) (2024-2029) highlight the need for genuinely affordable homes, noting that the affordable rent product is becoming increasingly unaffordable as it is tied to market rents.

There have been 1,167 affordable dwelling completions since 2011.

Demand is consistently high for affordable housing, with generally over 2000 households on the Council's register for affordable housing at any one time ([NHDC Summary statistics: Common Housing Register 2024/25](#)). This includes households and individuals who are either homeless, living in overcrowded conditions, or whose health is negatively affected by their current accommodation.

This sustained demand highlights the ongoing pressure on affordable housing in the District and the critical need to accelerate

delivery of suitable, genuinely affordable, secure homes for those in greatest need.

Temporary Accommodation

North Herts reported 97 households (in fourth quarter of 2024/25) being in temporary accommodation. Whilst the rate of households in temporary accommodation per 1,000 households is significantly lower than at county, regional, and national levels, purpose built temporary accommodation consistently operates at near to full capacity and the Council continues to rely on hotel placements in times of particularly high demand.

This further highlights the need for continued investment in affordable housing, homelessness prevention, and support services, especially as national trends show no sign of easing.

Older Persons' Housing

The [2013 'Ready for Ageing'](#) report by the Select Committee on Public Service and Demographic Change warned that the housing market is failing to deliver enough specialist homes for older people, a concern that remains highly relevant today.

According to the 2026 SHMA, North Herts currently has 1,924 specialist housing units for older people (including housing with support or care). However, based on projected population growth, unmet demand, and existing stock, the SHMA estimates a need for 82-105 specialist dwellings per year, and an additional 425-791 care home beds per year until 2045.

While this figure represents nearly half of the District's total housing need over the period, and may be difficult to fully achieve, it underlines the critical role that dedicated older persons' housing must play in shaping a balanced and inclusive housing mix. Delivering even a portion of this requirement will be vital to supporting healthy

ageing, freeing up under-occupied family homes, and reducing pressure on health and care services.

Gypsy and Traveller Provision

The [Gypsy, Traveller and Showperson Accommodation Assessment, 2024 \(GTAA\)](#) for North Herts identifies a need for 6 additional pitches to be delivered by 2038. This reflects the projected accommodation requirements of Gypsy and Traveller households who meet the planning definition. There is also a need for up to 3 additional pitches for undetermined Gypsy and Traveller households that may meet the planning definition. Meeting this need will help support the rights and wellbeing of the travelling community, while also ensuring that future provision is planned, sustainable, and appropriately located. An updated GTAA will be produced to support the emerging local plan.

Key sustainability issues

Having considered the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues are identified in relation to the housing SA theme:

- **Meeting Identified housing need;** the District faces a significant housing challenge, with the government's revised standard method setting out a need for 1,018 homes per year. Addressing this will require not only local delivery but also cross-boundary collaboration, recognising that the Housing Market Area (HMA) spans multiple authorities with varying land constraints and growth pressures.
- **Affordability and market pressures;** house prices have outpaced earnings, with the average home now costing over 10 times the average household income. This declining affordability highlights the need for robust affordable housing policies, while also considering accessibility, space standards, and development viability.

- **Diverse and specialist housing needs;** a balanced housing strategy must cater to a range of tenures and types, including lower-cost market housing, sociate rents, affordable rents, ownership options, and specialist accommodation, particularly for older people. With an ageing population, the need for age-appropriate housing will become increasingly urgent and should be embedded in future housing delivery plans.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the objectives

SA Topic	Objective
Housing	<i>Ensure that everyone has access to a decent, affordable home that meets their needs, while supporting a mix of housing types, tenures, and specialist provision across the district</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

- Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of housing sizes, types and tenures?
- Deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of all residents?

THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

The Historic Environment

Current Data and Context

Heritage and Historic Environment in North Herts

The District has a rich history, with archaeological evidence of settlements stretching back to the Palaeolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Ages. The District's 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 Herts is home to:

- Around 2,500 listed buildings (North Herts Council, 2025)
- 63 scheduled monuments (North Herts Council, 2026)
- 13 registered parks and gardens (North Herts Council, 2026)
- 44 conservation areas (North Herts Council, 2026)

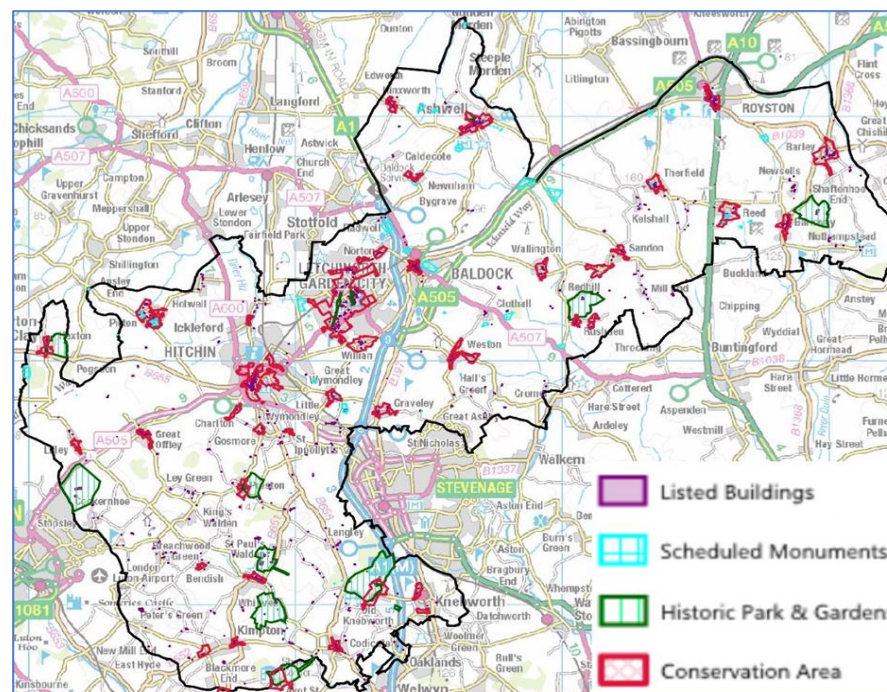
The District also contains ancient monuments and historic parks such as Howard Park and Gardens and Rushby Mead, in Letchworth Garden City. These spaces are preserved under the Ancient

Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act and recorded in Historic England's national register, established in 1983 (Historic England, 2026).

Conservation areas are designated for their special architectural or historic interest, often centred around clusters of listed buildings. They may also encompass features like open spaces, trees, historic street patterns, and locally important archaeological sites.

Each conservation area is supported by a character statement, and many are guided by appraisal and management plans.

North Herts Heritage Assets ([MAGIC](#))



The Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) includes locally important non-designated heritage assets which shape local identity. These include historic buildings, archaeological remains, and locally cherished landmarks. The HER plays an important role in cataloguing features that contribute to the county's character and identity. A search via the Heritage Gateway reveals over 4,000 records within North Herts alone, encompassing a wide array of built and archaeological assets across various historic periods.

To safeguard vulnerable heritage sites, Historic England maintains the Heritage at Risk Register, which identifies assets considered at risk of decline or loss. In North Herts, the register currently lists 10 heritage assets as at risk, listed in the table.

However, it's important to note that this national register excludes information about Grade II listed buildings outside of London. As such, the status of Grade II sites within the District remains unclear at this stage.

As the SA process progresses, the local 'At Risk' Register will be closely examined to assess whether any of the District's vulnerable heritage assets may be affected by the proposals in the emerging Local Plan.

North Herts Heritage at Risk¹

Entry name	Location	Grade
Church of St Mary	Mill Lane, Ashwell	I
Church of St John the Baptist	Melbourn Street, Royston	I
Royston Cave	Royston	Scheduled monument
Romano-British small town and late Iron Age settlement at Baldock	Baldock	Scheduled monument
West Barn at Rectory Farm	Shillington Rd., Pirton	II*
Knebworth House	Knebworth	II*
Church of St Vincent	Codicote Rd., Newham	II*
North Hertfordshire Masonic Lodge (the Cloisters)	Barrington Rd., Letchworth	II*
Ruins of Church of St Etheldreda	Chesfield, Gravely	Scheduled monument & II*
Church of St Mary	Church St., Baldock	I

¹ Source: [Historic England Heritage at Risk Register](#)

An important consideration is the relationship between heritage assets and their wider surroundings or their setting. The setting of a heritage asset encompasses not only its immediate environment but also its visual, spatial, and historical context—how it relates to other assets and the broader landscape. Understanding why assets are located where they are, and recognising patterns across an area, can reveal valuable insights into the historic development of a place.

Key sustainability issues

Drawing on the current data and policy context, several important themes have emerged in relation to safeguarding and enhancing the historic environment during development of the new Local Plan:

- **Preserving Heritage**
With an abundance of designated and non-designated heritage assets across the District, there is a significant opportunity to shape the spatial strategy and policy that actively protects historic assets. It is essential that new development respects the fabric and setting of these assets to preserve their integrity and character.
- **Raising Awareness and Understanding**
A more robust evidence base will support greater public appreciation of North Herts's historic assets, fostering a deeper sense of place among residents and enriching the experience for visitors.
- **Protecting At Risk Heritage Assets**
Opportunities to restore, re-purpose, or support management plans for assets identified as at risk particularly those listed on the Heritage at Risk Register, should be actively pursued.
- **Enhancing the Public Realm and Green Infrastructure**
Improvements in green infrastructure and the quality of public spaces can deliver indirect benefits to heritage settings,

enhancing their visibility, accessibility, and long-term stewardship.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the objectives below.

SA Topic	SA Objective
The Historic Environment	<i>Protect and enhance the historic environment of North Herts by ensuring that development respects and conserves the character, fabric, and setting of heritage assets while supporting their long-term viability and public appreciation</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

- Conserve and enhance the significance of designated and non-designated heritage assets and their setting?

SOCIAL & CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Social and Cultural Infrastructure

Current Data and Context

North Herts is home to a diverse and structured hierarchy of retail and service centres, which play a vital role in supporting local communities and reducing reliance on travel to alternative destinations. To maintain and enhance this network, the current Local Plan aims to improve and protect these centres, ensuring that local expenditure stays within the District and our communities remain well-served.

Hierarchy of centres

Town centres

The four main town centres, Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Letchworth Garden City offer a range of shopping, employment opportunities, and community services. Each centre not only caters to its urban population but also serves the surrounding rural hinterlands. [The North Herts Town Centres & Retail Study \(2024\)](#) (TCRS) concluded that the mix of use in the District is broadly in line with the UK average in terms of comparison goods retail and financial professional services. There is a higher provision of restaurants/cafés and other non-retail services. However, the provision of convenience goods shops, hot foods takeaways and pubs/bars is

below the UK average. All four centres have a reasonable mix of retail and service uses, but Baldock has a lower proportion of comparison goods retail than the District and UK averages. Baldock has a strong provision of non-retail services and food/ beverage outlets. The food/ beverage sector is proportionately lowest in Letchworth Garden City, particularly in terms of pubs/bars. There are relatively low vacancy rates through the District, significantly below UK average, aside from at Letchworth Garden City.

Village Centres

Located in Ashwell, Codicote and Knebworth, the District's village centres provide essential local services and shopping, acting as key focal points for their communities.

Neighbourhood Centres

Found predominantly around Hitchin, Letchworth and Great Ashby, the designated village neighbourhood centres vary significantly in size from only 2 units (Grove Road) to over 40 units (Knebworth). Most village/neighbourhood centres have 10 or more retail/service units¹. The designated neighbourhood centres are:

- Great Ashby
- Grove Road
- Jackmans
- Nightingale Road
- Ninesprings
- The Grange
- Redhill Road

¹ [North Hertfordshire Town Centres and Retail Study \(Dec.2024\)](#)

- Walsworth (Cambridge Road)
- Walsworth Road
- Westmill (John Barker Place)

Two new centres within strategic housing sites in north of Baldock and east of Luton are proposed in the adopted Local Plan. These centres will introduce a range of facilities, from medium-sized town hubs to small village and neighbourhood clusters.

North Herts Designated Centres: Current Services (TCRS), pg. 25

	Letchworth	Hitchin	Royston	Baldock	Knebworth	Codicote	The Grange	Great Ashby	Redhill Road	Ashwell	Walsworth Rd.	Jackmans	Walsworth (Cambridge Rd.)	Nightingale Road	Ninesprings	Westmill	Grove Road
Food/ convenience																	
Banks																	
Post office																	
Newsagent																	
Off licence																	
Chemist																	
Takeaway, café or restaurant																	
Public house																	
Bookmakers																	
Launderette, dry cleaner																	
Hairdresser, beauty salon																	
Florist																	
Estate agents																	
Community hall																	
Doctor's surgery																	
Library																	

Leisure, entertainment & cultural facilities

Residents in the District have a reasonable range of commercial leisure and entertainment uses within the authority area and within neighbouring authorities. Public transport access to facilities within Stevenage, Cambridge and Central London provides additional opportunities for leisure, entertainment and cultural trips (TCRS).

Cultural & entertainment venues

Key cultural and entertainment venues are:

- North Herts Museum (Hitchin) showcases the District's history and traditions.
- Baldock Arts and Heritage Centre which a space for exhibitions, performances and heritage appreciation.
- Broadway Cinema and Theatre is the District's only cinema with 4 screens with a capacity of 809 seats.
- There are five main theatre venues with up to 969 seats:
 - Broadway Cinema and Theatre (Letchworth Garden City)
 - Market Theatre (Hitchin)
 - Queen Mother Theatre (Hitchin)
 - The Factory Playhouse (Hitchin)
 - Hitchin Thespians at Woodside Hall

Future Provision & Development

The Town Centres and Retail Study finds no immediate need for new major leisure developments over the next ten years. Instead, the focus will be on:

- Reoccupying vacant units

- Advancing mixed-use developments already allocated in the Local Plan – site allocations (HT11, HT12, LG19, LG21, RY12)
- Supporting new leisure hubs within strategic housing growth sites

Health and fitness clubs

The Sport England/ [Active Places data](#) indicates that there are 21 registered health and fitness facilities in the District, with 1,336 fitness stations North Herts which exceeds regional benchmarks in fitness infrastructure.

Outdoor sports pitches

The Council's [Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy \(2025\)](#) (PPOSS) assesses provision of playing pitch and outdoor sports facilities in accordance with Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) [Guidance](#) and Sport England's Assessing Needs and Opportunities [Guide](#) (ANOG) for "non-pitch" sports. The assessment considered current supply and estimated future demand up to 2043. Its conclusions are summarised in the table below.

Type of provision	Current provision	Summary
Football	155	155 pitches across 61 sites, shortfall for youth 11v11, 9v9 and mini pitches.
3G	6+2 small pitches	shortfall of 3.5 11v11 pitches.
Rugby union	14 across six sites	Shortfall of 28.25 match equivalent sessions identified when accounting for future demand.
Tennis	110 courts	insufficient provision, under-provision equivalent to 261 members
Hockey	3 pitches	Insufficient - new full-sized sports lit hockey pitch is required to meet current demand.
Netball	66 across 33 sites	adequate netball provision
Athletics	No purpose-built tracks within the District – Ridlins Wood Athletic Track (in Stevenage) serves North Herts.	
Lawn Bowls	13 bowling greens across 13 sites	There is sufficient provision – but demand likely to increase due to growth in 65+ age group
Cricket	28 across 26 sites	insufficient capacity to meet demand
Water sports	2 outdoor pools	Sufficient provision

Golf	5 facilities	sufficient supply.
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Education

Most of the District operates a two-tier education system, with children attending primary schools from ages 4-11 and secondary schools from ages 11-16 (and up to 18 where sixth-form provision is made). The east of the District operates a three-tier system of lower (ages 5-9), middle (9-13) and upper (13-16/18) schools. Below is a summary of current provision in the District.

Schools provision in North Herts (Source: [HCC Schools directory](#))

School Type	Number of Schools
Nursery	32
Infant/ Nursery	6
First (ages 5 to 9)	8
Junior	6
Primary	33
All through	1
Secondary	6
Special	2

Further Education

North Hertfordshire College (NHC) plays a key role in vocational and occupational learning. With campuses in both Hitchin and Stevenage, the college offers:

- Full and part-time programmes across multiple sectors
- Specialist support for students with additional learning needs
- Close alignment with local employment and skills development priorities

Planned provision

The current [Local Plan](#), Policy SP14, identifies a need for new school provision North of Baldock to include:

- A new primary school
- A new secondary school

Health Care

North Herts benefits from a network of healthcare services that support residents' everyday medical needs while providing access to specialised treatment through nearby regional hospitals.

- **Emergency Care:**
The nearest Accident & Emergency (A&E) facility is Lister Hospital in Stevenage, serving as a vital resource for urgent care needs across the District.
- **Local and Regional Hospitals:**
Residents also have access to the following healthcare facilities within and around the District:
 - Royston Hospital
 - Hertford County Hospital (Hertford)

- New Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (Welwyn Garden City)
- Renal Medicine Departments: Bedford, Harlow, St Albans, and Dunstable
- For advanced and specialist services, Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, serves the wider East of England region, including parts of North Herts.
- **Local Primary Care Services**
Healthcare at the community level is provided by GP surgeries across the District (www.nhs.uk):
 - Hitchin, Whitwell, Ashwell, Letchworth & Baldock are served by the Herts & West Essex Integrated Care Board, with 10 GP practices.
 - Royston is covered by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care Board, with a further 6 GP surgeries.

Residents can also access approximately:

- 22 dental clinics
- 28 pharmacies
(Source www.nhs.uk)

Community Centres and Village Halls

North Herts has a selection of village and community halls that serve as vital hubs for social, cultural, and recreational activities. These venues provide spaces for events, clubs, celebrations, and local initiatives, helping strengthen the fabric of community life across the District (www.north-herts.gov.uk).

Larger venues in more urban settings provide extended capacity for community-led programming and larger gatherings:

- Hitchin Town Hall – A central and historic location for events, exhibitions, and civic functions
- St. John's Community Centre
- Westmill Community Centre
- Walsworth Community Centre

Key Sustainability Issues

Informed by current data and policy context, several important considerations emerge for the natural environment in the District:

- **Revitalise Retail Spaces** by prioritising the reoccupation of vacant shop units, especially in underused centres and supporting small-scale shops and services in both designated and underserved areas where need is evident.
- **Ensuring Educational Capacity** through collaboration with Hertfordshire County Council to secure sufficient school places across all age groups and expanding existing capacity and plan new facilities to meet growth-driven demand.
- **Strengthening Health Infrastructure** by working with Integrated Care Boards to ensure that the provision of primary healthcare services, GPs, dentists, and pharmacies, can meet current and future needs.

SA Objectives and Appraisal Questions

Considering the key sustainability challenges identified, several strategic considerations have been identified that relate to wider development challenges

SA Topic	Objectives
Social and Cultural Infrastructure	<i>Promote environmentally responsible and socially inclusive development that supports local communities, protects natural resources, and enhances long-term wellbeing across our District</i>

Appraisal supporting questions:

Will the proposal or policy...?

- help create resilient communities by improving access to social and cultural facilities while ensuring equitable distribution of services?

LOCAL ECONOMY & EMPLOYMENT

Local Economy and Employment

Current Data and Context

North Herts is well-positioned with a strong transport network that connects it regionally and nationally and supports our local economy. Situated in a dynamic sub-region, the District benefits from access to major roadways, including the M1, A1, A1(M) and A505. and the East Coast, West Coast, and East Midlands routes. The District benefits from 5 railway stations offering direct services to London, Cambridge and further afield. Luton and Stansted airports are within close proximity to the District.

Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA)

Economic activity in North Herts extends beyond its administrative boundaries, operating within a broader Functional Economic Market Area ([FEMA](#)) that encompasses the eastern half of Central Bedfordshire, forming an interconnected economic zone along the vital A1 corridor. Notably, 70% of people who work in this FEMA also live within it, underscoring strong residential and employment integration.

The A1(M) corridor stands out as the most commercially significant area within the wider study zone. It supports:

- A high concentration of employment space
- Excellent strategic access to Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, London, and the M25 orbital route
- A thriving ecosystem for property occupiers seeking connectivity and market reach

There is a significant amount of commuting between the settlements of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Baldock.

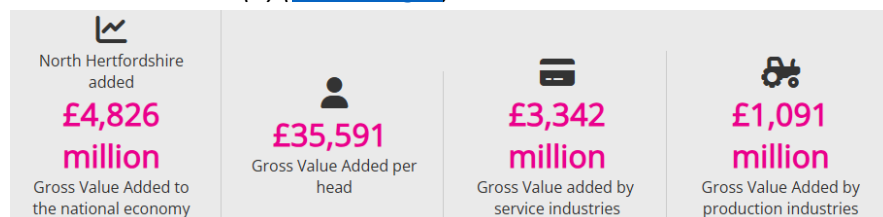
The proximity of Stevenage and Luton means that many of those with the highest level of skills commute out of the District to work. The 2021 Census took place mid-pandemic, and the recorded volume of commuting was substantially affected by lock down. Post-pandemic there is little to suggest that the patterns observed a decade earlier have materially changed. At the time, North Herts was characterised as a net exporter of labour, with an overall net outflow of 12,385 persons and approximately 22.9% of working residents commuting to Greater London¹. Today, hybrid working is likely to feature much more strongly, but the links to Greater London – through both the labour market and the housing market – continue to be strong (NHDC Economic Strategy 2025) .

The Local Economy

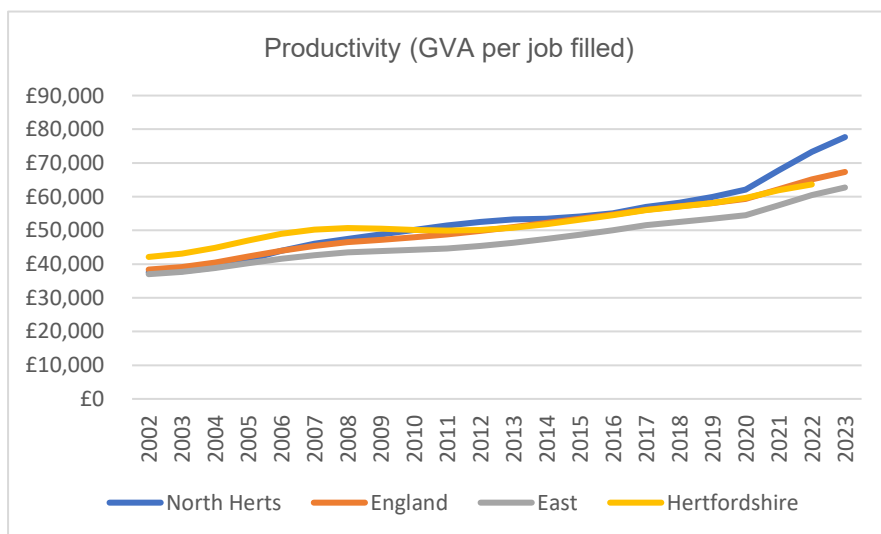
There are 6,225 businesses employing around 69,400 people in the District. The economic output of an area can be evaluated using the Gross Value Added which is a measure of the economic output of an area; representing the value of goods and services produced minus the cost of inputs and raw materials ([Herts Insight](#)).

¹ [Functional Economic Market Area Study, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, 2015](#)

North Herts's GVA(B) ([Herts Insight](#))



In 2023 the GVA was estimated to be £4.8Bn equating to £35,591 per head. Almost 70% of this was attributable to service industries and 30% to production industries.



Source: [ONS](#)

Productivity, as measured by the overall value of output (GVA) per filled job,² was £77.7k – higher than both the regional (£62.3k) and national (£67.3k) averages.

Workforce and Skills

The employment rate is around 82.1% of the working age population (for year ending Mar. 2025) which is higher than the national average of 75% ([ONS](#)) and slightly higher than the rate for Hertfordshire (80.1%). The unemployment rate was 3% in 2023 which is slightly below the national average of 3.4% ([ONS](#)).

The economic inactivity rate refers to working age (16-64) people who are not working and not actively looking for work (includes students, early retirees, long-term sick, disabled or those looking after family etc.). The economic inactivity rate for North Herts was 14.8% in 2023, below the national average of 20.8% ([ONS](#)).

In terms of adult qualification levels, 51.5% of residents hold Level 4 qualifications³ or higher, which is a little below the level for Hertfordshire (56.6%) but higher than regional (43.8% for the East region) and national (47.1%) averages. Only 3.8% of residents have no formal qualifications, compared to 5.2% regionally and 6.4% nationally.

² ONS [Subregional Productivity June 2025 release](#).

³ Certificate of higher education, higher apprenticeship, Level 4 diploma or NVQ

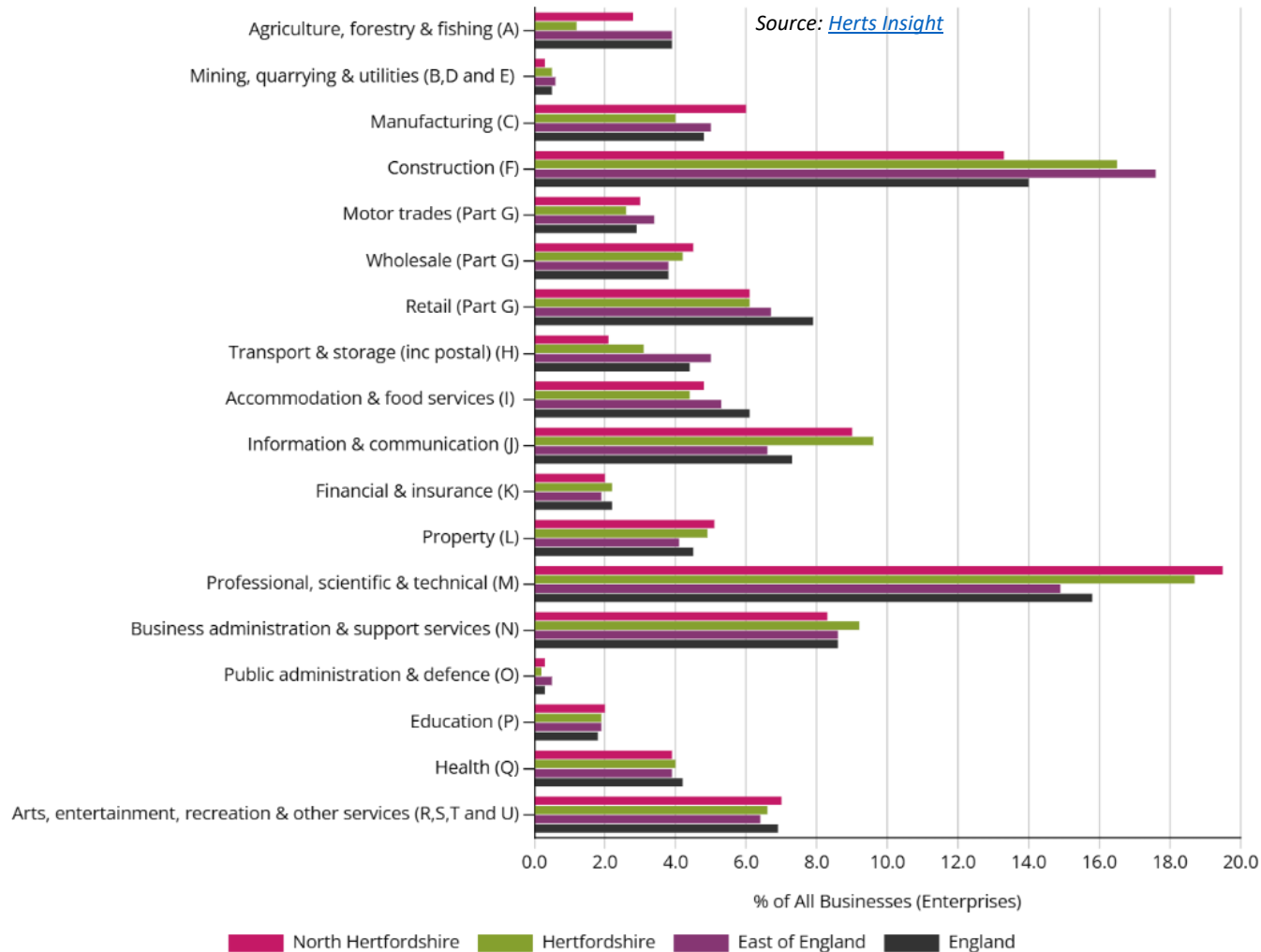
Businesses by Industry

The largest proportion of businesses in North Herts (19.3% of total) specialise in the Professional, Scientific & Technical sector. This compares to 18.7% in Hertfordshire and 15.8% nationally. The second largest sector in North Herts is construction, which makes up 13% of the total.

There are around 5,525 micro-businesses (up to 9 employees) in the District making up 89% of total businesses followed by small businesses (10-49 employees) represented by 560 businesses. There are 100 medium-sized (50-249 employees) businesses and only 15 large businesses (250+ employees) in the District (source: [ONS](#)).

The Council's Economic Strategy 2025-30, notes that the District has a mix of high and low productivity businesses and sectors. It is home to some major research-intensive advanced manufacturing businesses; with manufacturing accounting for about 13% of employment in North Herts. This is double the proportion at national level and almost three times the County average. Among the advanced manufacturing businesses, Johnson Matthey and Sartorius, both in Royston, are two important examples. Letchworth Garden City also has a concentration of manufacturing businesses and employment. For some of these

Percentage of Businesses (Enterprises) in each Industry Group as at March 2024



businesses, links to the Cambridge sub-region, particularly to the major technology consultancies, is very important (DEC25).

Key Employment Areas

Within the four main towns there are a number of established Employment Areas, where the majority of employment premises are located. They include certain E class uses (office, research and development, industrial processes), B2 (industrial) and B8 (storage and distribution) class uses. These include:

- Works Road and Avenue One Employment Area, Letchworth
- Hitchin Industrial Estate
- York Road and Orchard Way Employment Area, Royston

Commercial Floorspace

Total commercial floorspace in the District equates to around 1,346,000 sq.m with the majority of this is made up by the industrial sector followed by the retail and office sectors ([Valuation Office Agency data Mar. 2023](#)). There is a need to modernise and to improve the environmental performance of business premises, especially in Letchworth. Currently there is more demand for industrial sites/premises than office buildings, but both need to be better aligned with the district's economic ambitions and potential.

Retail Floorspace

Most of the District's comparison and convenience goods retail outlets are focused in Hitchin and to a lesser extent Letchworth Garden City. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 9.

The North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy [TCRS](#) projected the following retail floorspace requirements up to 2036:

Location	Requirements by 2036 (sq.m)
Hitchin	2,150
Letchworth GC	1,350
Baldock	1,020
Royston	100
Other	550

The combined total floorspace capacity projections above total 5,170 sq.m gross by 2036. The study concludes that based on a reasonable reduction in shop vacancy rates, reoccupied space could in theory accommodate about three quarters of the projected capacity need up to 2036. Any residual floorspace capacity up to 2036 could be met by the development of the existing mixed-use allocations in the town centre.

The adopted Local Plan includes mixed use allocations in Churchgate and surrounding areas (Policy HT11), where redevelopment could provide about 4,000 sq.m gross of additional retail and food/beverage uses and Raynes Park (Policy HT12) where mixed use development could provide about 3,000 sq.m gross of additional retail and food/beverage uses. One or other of these two mixed use allocations is more than sufficient to meet projected need over the plan period (TCRS).

Office stock

Offices are generally focused in town centre units, a mix of purpose-built spaces and conversions of older buildings, concentrated in Letchworth, Hitchin, and Royston. There is further provision within key employment zones at:

- Hitchin Industrial Estate (Wilbury Way)
- Works Road Employment Area in Letchworth

- York Road/Orchard Way Employment Area in Royston

Additionally, there are standalone office blocks, notably the landmark Spirella Building in Letchworth and premises on Walsworth Road near Hitchin Station, with further smaller rural schemes adding variety.

The NHDC Economic Development Strategy (2025) concludes that there is a need to modernise and to improve the environmental performance of business premises, especially in Letchworth. Adding that there is currently more demand for industrial sites/ premises than office buildings, but both need to be better aligned with the district's economic ambitions and potential.

Given its proximity to both Cambridge and London, the district's asset base should be valuable. The York Way industrial area in Royston is already home to some major advanced manufacturing and life sciences businesses and this could be further strengthened by forging deeper links to the Cambridge region.

Key sustainability issues

Having considered the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues are identified in relation to the economy and employment SA theme:

- Supporting the resident population with good access to a variety of job and training opportunities will help maintain the high economic activity rate in the District.
- Maintaining and improving the vitality and viability of town, local and retail centres in the District will help ensure their continued strong economic performance.
- The Local Plan should seek to protect and support the modernisation of commercial floor space particularly in strategic employment sites.

- It will be important to continue to support small business which form the bulk of the employment opportunities in the District. At the same time the Plan should seek to attract larger businesses and foster greater connections to the high tech and research centres in the Cambridge sub-region.

SA Objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the below objective

SA Topic	SA Objective
Local Economy & Employment	Support a strong, diverse and resilient economy that provides opportunities for all, enhances the vitality of the District's town and local centres, and employment areas.

Appraisal supporting questions:

Will the policy/ proposal help to...?

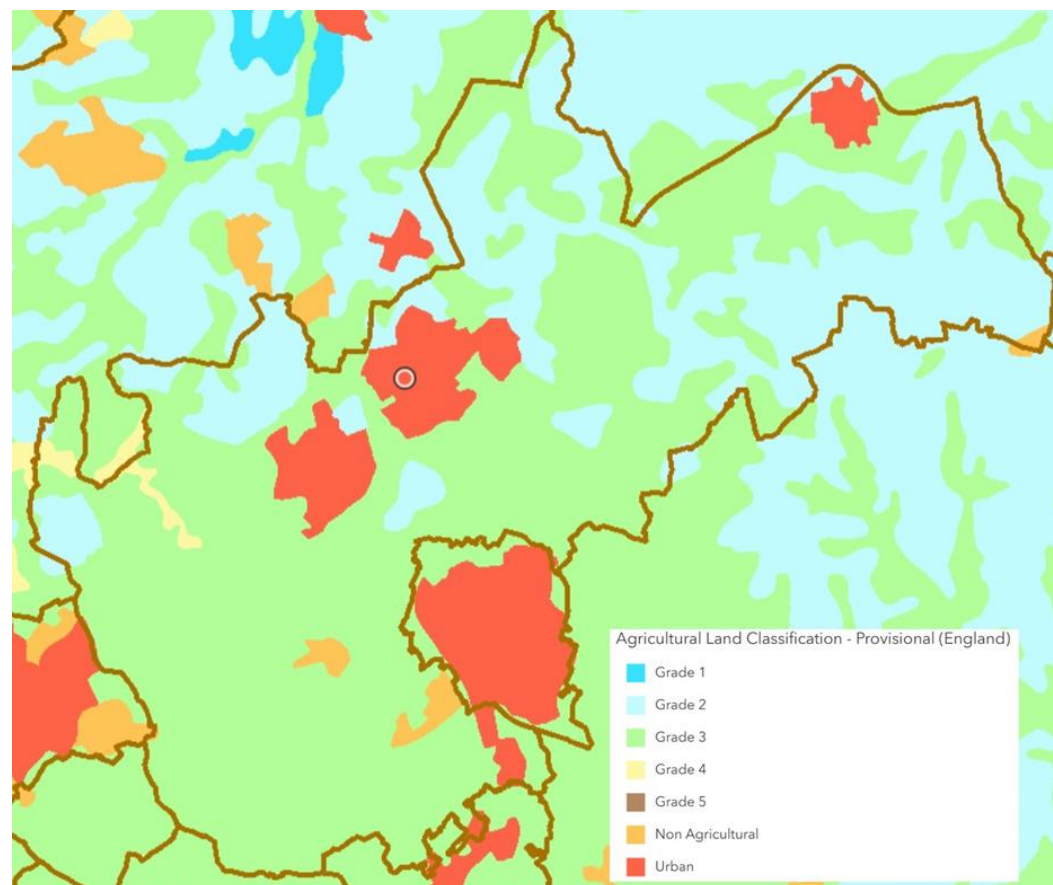
- Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?
- Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?
- Encourage the growth of existing businesses?
- Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres

LAND, SOILS & WASTE

Current data and Context

Soil resources

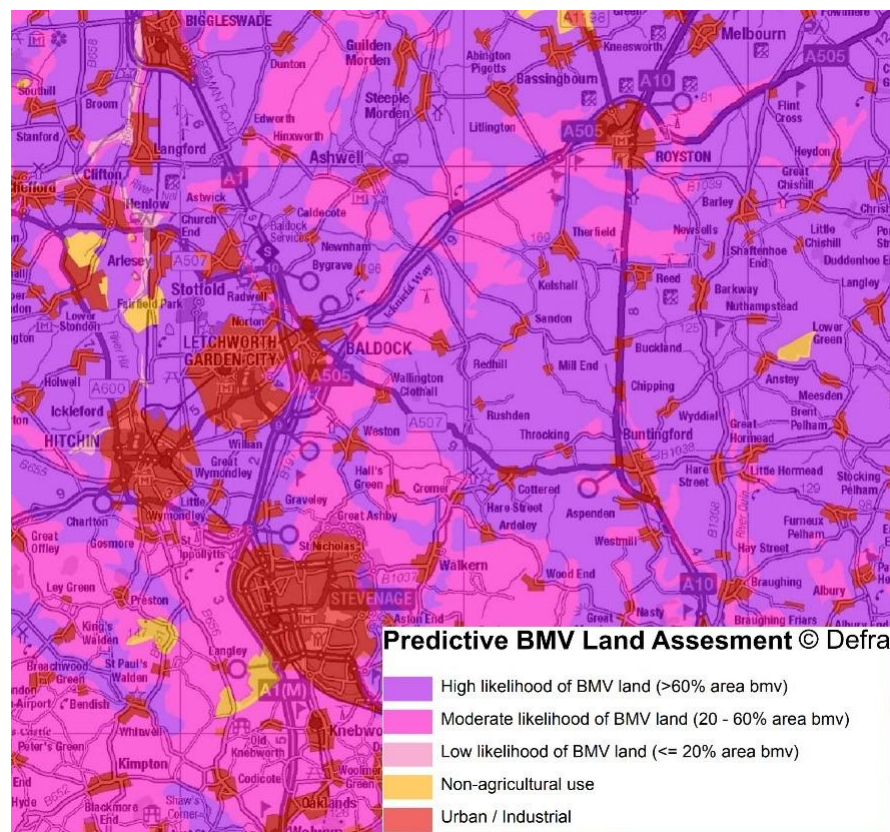
The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) classifies land into six grades (plus 'non-agricultural' and 'urban'), where Grades 1 to 3a are recognised as being the 'best and most versatile' (BMV) land and Grades 3b to 5 are of poorer quality. The provisional ALC dataset provided by Natural England¹ demonstrates that the majority of North Herts District area is underlain with Grade 3 'Good to Moderate' agricultural land with some Grade 2 'Very Good' agricultural land and a small pocket of Grade 4 'Poor' land and areas of urban land and land in non-agricultural use around major settlements. Nevertheless, in the absence of a detailed ALC assessment for the whole of North Herts, it currently cannot be determined whether this Grade 3 land is Grade 3a (i.e., BMV land) or Grade 3b (not BMV land).



Agricultural Land Classification (Source: [MAGIC](#))

¹ [Agricultural Land Classification map Eastern Region - ALC008](#)

Predictive BMV Land Assessment



Source: [Natural England](#)

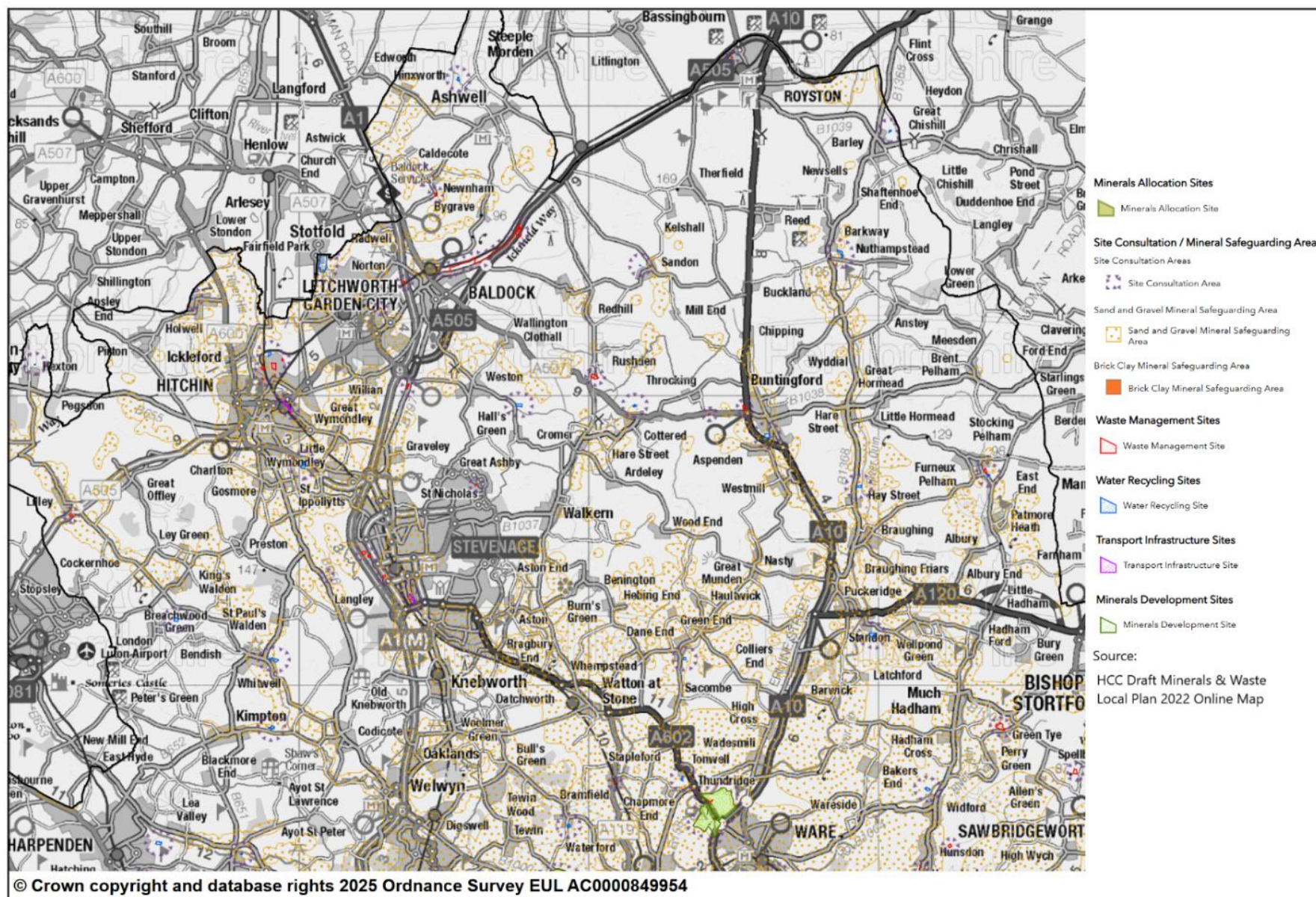
The 'Predictive Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land Assessment' for the Eastern Region provided by Natural England shows the District as having significant areas of high (>60%) and moderate (20-60%) likelihood of BVM areas outside urban areas in the main settlements.

Mineral resources

Mineral resources are defined as natural concentrations of minerals or bodies of rock that have the potential to be of economic interest. As minerals are a non-renewable resource, minerals safeguarding is used to ensure that non-minerals development does not needlessly prevent (or sterilise) the future extraction of mineral resources. A minerals safeguarding area (MSA) is an area designated by a Mineral Planning Authority (HCC) which covers known deposits of minerals which are desired to be kept safeguarded from unnecessary sterilisation by non-mineral development. A minerals consultation area (MCA), is an area, based on a MSA, where the Council should consult the Mineral Planning Authority (HCC) for any proposals for non-minerals development. North Herts has numerous areas of sand and gravel mineral safeguarding areas as shown on the map below.

Waste

North Herts collected 48,696 tonnes of waste in 2024-2025, achieving a recycling rate of around 56.5% for household waste ([DEFRA](#)); including waste sent for recycling, composting, anaerobic digestion or reuse. This rate compares favourably with the Eastern region (44.9%) and England (43.8%). The Hertfordshire Waste Development Framework [Waste Site Allocations](#) (WSA) (adopted 2014, identifies sites for waste management facilities across the County, including three sites in North Herts at Bury Mead Rd. (Hitchin), Cumberlow Green (Buntingford) and at Stotfold.

Minerals & Waste Sites ([HCC](#))Source: [HCC](#)

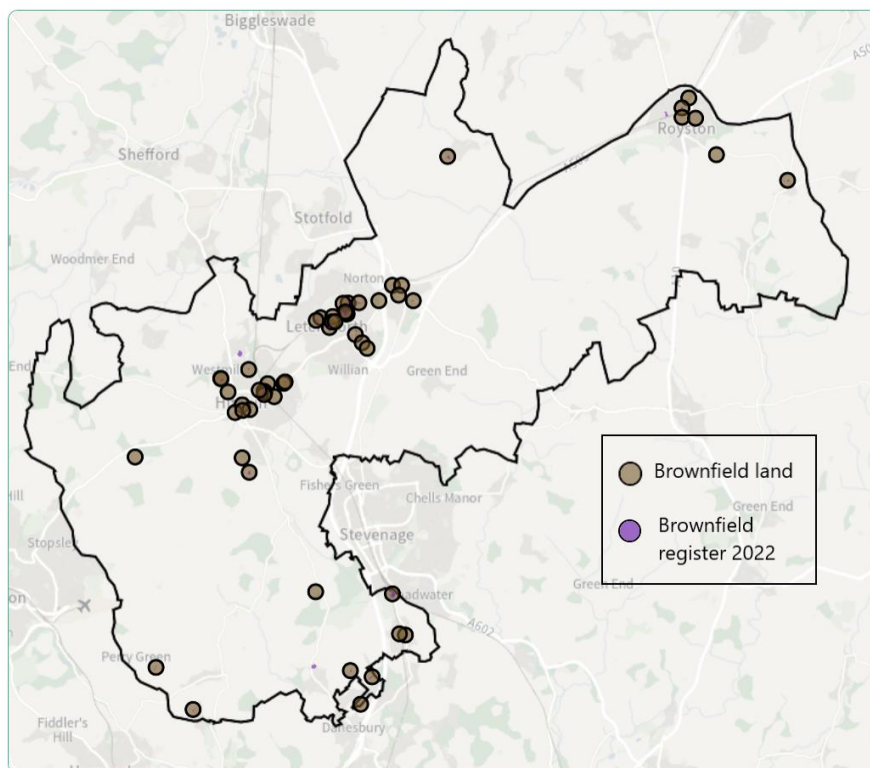
Brownfield land

Brownfield or of previously developed land (pdl) is defined as *land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land and any associated fixed surface infrastructure* (NPPF). The adopted Local Plan promotes the re-use of brownfield (or previously developed land) setting a target of 20% of new homes to be built on previously developed land (Policy SP8). For example, within Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, employment area designations released some modest brownfield sites for residential development. Within Letchworth, the former power station site at Works Road has been brought back into use for employment purposes. The North Herts Brownfield Land Register identifies capacity for up to 618 new dwellings on brownfield sites. However, it is important to note that there are often obstacles associated with pdl sites such as abnormal costs associated with removing contamination, underground obstructions, the demolition of existing buildings, poor quality /nature of used topsoil and lack of suitable amenities and infrastructure.

Contaminated Land

Contaminated land refers to sites where substances such as chemicals, gases, or waste materials are present at levels that could pose risks to human health, property, water resources or the wider environment. For example, in North Herts there are some historic landfill sites. Other examples include former factories, chemical works, historic landfill sites but other examples include petrol stations, farmland (with pesticide build up) etc. In the context of Local Plans, LPAs are required to consider the implications of land contamination when allocating or assessing land for development, ensuring that sites are suitable for their intended use and that any unacceptable risks are appropriately identified, assessed, and mitigated through the planning process. This includes ensuring that developers undertake adequate site investigations and risk assessments so that contaminated land is remediated to a standard that prevents significant harm and enables safe, sustainable development. Therefore, it will; be important for the local plan to identify and consider the risk posed by contaminated sites when allocating sites for development. This can include remediation of contaminated brownfield sites and the reuse of land where it can be made safe and it is viable to do so.

North Herts Brownfield Sites (NHDC)



Source NHDC

Key sustainability issues

Having considered the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues are identified in relation to the land, soils and waste SA theme:

- The District contains large swathes of high-quality and 'best and most versatile' agricultural land which is likely to face increasing pressures from new development.
- There are opportunities to deliver some new development on brownfield sites within the District, though there is a limited supply of suitable sites and it can be challenging to fully unlock such sites.
- There are mineral-related facilities and activities, and waste sites safeguarded in the District. Many settlement areas also lie within a Minerals Consultation Area. The impacts of new development on natural resources and sustainable waste management will need to be taken into consideration.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the objectives outlined below

SA Topic	SA Objective
Land, soils & waste	<i>Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect soil and mineral resources</i>

Appraisal supporting questions:

Will the proposal/ policy help to ...

- Promote the use of previously developed land & support the remediation of contaminated land?
- Prevent development on land where contamination poses unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?
- Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?
- Protect the integrity of mineral resources?

WATER RESOURCES & QUALITY

Current Data and Context

Water resources

North Hertfordshire District is within an area of 'serious water stress'¹. This implies that water demand is high compared to available water resources. Population growth coupled with droughts and extreme weather events associated with climate change are expected to exacerbate this issue. Affinity Water's Water Resources Management Plan 2024 ([WRMP](#)) identifies significant pressures on the local environment and water resources due to population growth and climate change.

Water stored in geological strata (for example, in rocks) below the water table is called groundwater. The geological strata that hold water are called aquifers; these are the subsurface layer or layers of rock or other geological strata of sufficient porosity and permeability to allow either a significant flow of groundwater or the abstraction of significant quantities of groundwater.

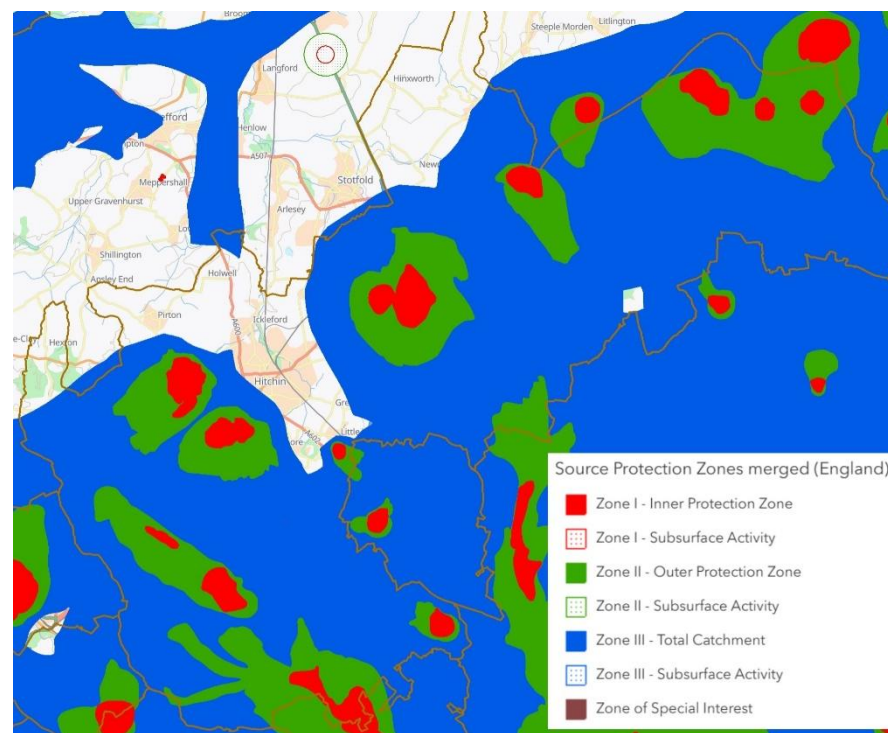
Much of North Herts is underlain by principal and secondary aquifers from which the area's drinking water is sourced. The Environment Agency (EA) classifies both surface water and groundwater resources within the majority of Hertfordshire as over-licensed or over-abstacted.

Source Protection Zones (SPZ)

SPZ are areas designated by the EA around large and public potable groundwater abstraction sites. These provide additional protection to safeguard drinking water quality through constraining the proximity of an activity that may impact upon a drinking water abstraction. Zone

1 (Inner Protection) is closest to the source, with a 50-day pollutant travel time, aimed at preventing microbial contamination. Zone 2 (Outer Protection) extends further out (400-day travel time), and Zone 3 (Source Catchment) encompasses the full recharge area needed to sustain abstraction. There are 12 SPZ1's across the District.

North Herts Source Protection Zones



Source Protection Zones ([MAGIC](#))

¹ [Environment Agency: Water stressed areas – final classification 2021](#)

The EA uses SPZ as generic indicators of risk. Developers or operators may need to supply site specific information to demonstrate that the risks are acceptable and can be mitigated².

Chalk Streams

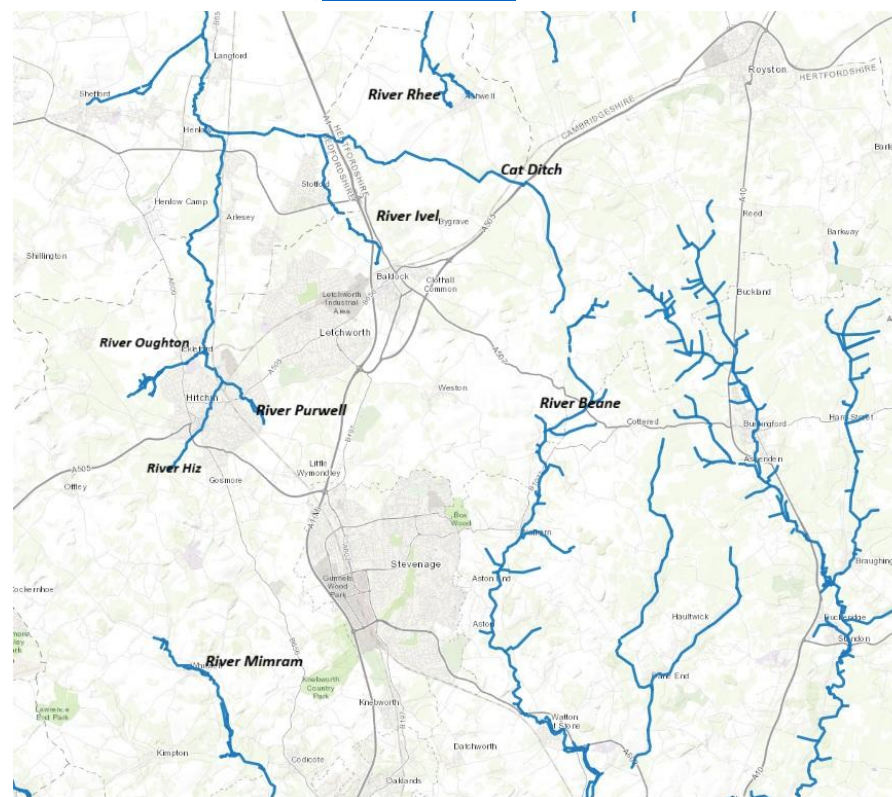
Groundwater abstractions have contributed to reduced flows along several chalk rivers in Hertfordshire³, leading to increased periods of dry bed conditions along winterbourne sections (stretches of chalk rivers that are normally dry in summer and flow after winter rains) that are routinely affected by seasonal drying out account for roughly half the course of the river Beane and river Mimram. Any extension of such periods impacts local wildlife and biodiversity. The secondary effects of prolonged periods of low flow / no-flow conditions can include amongst other detrimental impacts the accumulation of fine sediment (silt) on the riverbed which can adversely affect the diversity of aquatic vegetation thus impacting the balance of fragile natural ecosystems.

North Herts is located at the head of both Great Ouse and Thames river catchments. The Thames River Basin Management Plan ([RBMP](#), 2022) and the [Anglian RBMP](#), 2022) identify a range of significant water management issues that can adversely impact the water environment including:

- Physical modifications - e.g. flood defences and weirs that alter natural flow characteristics, cause excessive accumulation of fine sediment in surface water bodies and the degradation and loss of wildlife habitats and recreational uses.

- Pollution from wastewater – sewer discharges (from combined sewer overflows, treatment works, and due to foul flooding) can contain large quantities of contaminants, with population growth and changes in rainfall patterns increasing the pressure on the sewer networks.

North Herts Chalk Rivers ([Natural England](#))



² [The Environment Agency's approach to groundwater protection](#)

³ [Hertfordshire Water Study \(Arcadis 2017\)](#)

- Pollution from towns, cities and transport - rainwater draining from roofs, roads and pavements into watercourses.
- Changes to the natural flow and depth of water - caused by human activity (such as abstraction) or during drought conditions, which adversely affects the health of aquatic ecosystems.

Status of Water Bodies

The following table shows a summary of the ecological and chemical status of water bodies within the District associated with the rivers Ivel, Hiz, Beane and Rhee. It shows all water bodies failing chemical status. The majority have good/ moderate ecological status except the Beane which has poor ecological status. The main sources of pollution are associated with urbanisation, road transport run-off, industry, agriculture and livestock, land management, water abstraction and wastewater discharge. Physical (ecological) barriers and water course modification (including for flood management) are also major causes of deterioration.

Wastewater

The [Hertfordshire Water Study \(2017\)](#) modelled a range of future population growth scenarios (up to 2051) and the likely impacts on wastewater treatment infrastructure serving the district. It concluded that:

- Development proposals around the northeast of Letchworth Garden City are likely to require significant new infrastructure and / or upgrades to the existing sewerage system near Ashbrook Sewage Treatment Works (STW).
- The majority of STWs in North Hertfordshire are predicted to require capacity planning from 2021 onwards to ensure they can accommodate the quantum of growth projected.

Status of North Hertfordshire water bodies ([Catchment Data Explorer](#))

Water body	Ecological status	Chemical status	Issues (contaminants, sources/ causes)
Hiz (DS Hitchin)	Moderate	Fail	Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDE), physical modification/ barriers/ ecological discontinuity, transport drainage, invasive species, urbanisation
Ivel (US Henlow)	Good	Fail	PBDE, Perfluorooctane sulphonate (PFOS) & groundwater abstraction
Purwell	Moderate	Fail	PBDE, physical modification / water level (flood protection management) barriers, Phosphate (sewage discharge)
Pix Brook	Moderate	Fail	PFOS, PBDE, Phosphate (sewage discharge), Nickel, urban transport
Rhee (DS Wendy)	Moderate	Fail	PFOS, PBDE, Phosphate (sewage), physical modification
Beane (source to Stevenage Brook)	Poor	Fail	Macrophytes and Phytobenthos and Phosphate (agriculture/ rural land management, livestock & abstraction), PFOS, PBDE,

- Under the government's revised housing targets the new local plan would need to plan for 1,018 homes per year. This may require strategic interventions to ensure that the current wastewater treatment infrastructure can meet the planned growth.

Blue infrastructure

North Hertfordshire's blue infrastructure comprises a network of water-related natural and semi-natural features within the District, including rivers, ponds, lakes, and other water bodies. Blue infrastructure is a key component of the broader green and blue infrastructure, which can create a network of natural spaces that provide various benefits for nature, communities, and the local environment. These benefits include flood risk management, biodiversity enhancement, improved water quality, and enhanced recreation opportunities. Whilst most local plans have strong policies on green infrastructure (GI), blue infrastructure is generally poorly referenced or recognised as part of GI/GBI. Examples of blue infrastructure in North Herts include the River Lee, various ponds and lakes, and the floodplains along the River Mimms.

Combining green and blue infrastructure within a development can be an effective way of providing ecological connectivity whilst also delivering sustainable, natural solutions to the changing climate as well as creating pleasant places to live and work.

Key sustainability issues

Having considered the policy context and baseline information, the following key issues are identified in relation to the water SA theme:

- The District is in an area of 'serious water stress'. This is likely to be exacerbated by future population growth and the effects of climate change (e.g. more frequent droughts).
- Future growth is likely to increase pressure on wastewater infrastructure due to increased demand from development and an increasing population alongside the impacts of climate change (e.g. more frequent flooding/ storm events).
- The District is underlain by important groundwater source protection zones where development and increasing abstraction can harm the aquifers and damage chalk stream habitats.
- Water bodies in the District are under increasing pressures due to manmade physical barriers and pollution associated with agriculture, industry, road transport, urbanisations, abstraction and sewage effluent.

SA objectives

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the objectives

SA Topic	SA Objective
Water	<i>Promote sustainable development which minimise pressure on water resources, whilst maintaining and enhancing the quality of the District's rivers, lakes and aquifers.</i>

Appraisal supporting questions

Will the policy / proposal help to ..?

- Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support improvements to water bodies and blue infrastructure?
- Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development?
- Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water recycling?

AIR QUALITY & NOISE

Current Data and Context

Air Quality

Breathing in polluted air affects our health and costs the NHS and our society billions of pounds each year. Air pollution is recognised as a contributing factor in the onset of heart disease and cancer and can cause a range of health impacts, including effects on lung function, exacerbation of asthma, increases in hospital admissions and mortality.

The [North Herts 2025 Air Quality Annual Status Report](#) (ASR) identifies road traffic as the primary source of air pollution.

Key Pollutants

- Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) is a gas which is generally emitted from high-temperature combustion processes such as road transport or energy generation. The regulations set an annual mean limit or 'air quality objective' of 40 µg/m³ for NO₂.
- Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) is a corrosive gas which is predominantly produced from the combustion of coal or crude oil. The air quality objective for SO₂ is not to exceed 350 µg/m³ for a 1-hour mean, a value that should not be exceeded more than 24 times per year.
- Particulate Matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) is everything in the air that is not a gas. Particles can come from natural sources such as pollen, as well as human made sources such as smoke from fires, emissions from industry and dust from tyres and brakes. PM₁₀ refers to particles under 10 micrometres and fine particulate matter or PM_{2.5} are particles under 2.5 micrometres. The annual air quality objective for PM₁₀ is 40 µg/m³. The Environment Act 2021 introduced 2 new targets for PM_{2.5}: a 10 µg/m³ annual mean concentration by 2040, with an interim target of 12 µg/m³ by January 2028.

Air quality monitoring

The Council air quality monitoring takes place at traffic hotspots within Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Letchworth. This is carried out via diffusion tubes placed at 42 monitoring sites and then collected for analysis in a laboratory (referred to as non-automatic or manual monitoring). Automatic monitoring (uses electronic real-time monitoring equipment) also took place for 8 years (ended in late 2023) at Stevenage Rd., in Hitchin.

However, public health data shows that there is no safe lower threshold for human exposure to ambient air pollution, particularly Fine Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}). The Council is therefore changing the way it undertakes monitoring from reactive hotspot remediation to proactive, district-wide exposure reduction.

Air Quality Management Areas

Until recently North Herts had two historic sites declared as Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA). These were established where national air quality objectives were not being met, and they serve as focal points for targeted interventions to protect public health and the environment. The AQMAs were both in Hitchin, at:

- Stevenage Road (AQMA 2012)
- Payne's Park Roundabout (AQMA 2017) along the A602

The [ASR](#) (2025) concluded that the AQMAs should be revoked as the Council's long-term monitoring shows that nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels along both streets have remained consistently below national air-quality objectives for more than five years. With no recent

exceedances, the evidence met the statutory criteria for ending the enhanced monitoring status previously required under an AQMA. The Council subsequently confirmed the revocation of the two AQMAs following a Cabinet decision on 20 January 2026.

Interventions to improve air quality

The adopted Local Plan promotes the integration of active travel routes within strategic development sites and supports sustainable transport provision and EV charging. It also seeks to enhance green infrastructure provision which helps reduce pollution and act as a buffer between roads and residential areas, reducing exposure to harmful emissions. Other interventions that the Council is pursuing to reduce air pollution include:

- Promoting low-emission freight and working with businesses to reduce traffic through congestion hotspots.
- Transitioning the Council's fleet to low-emission vehicles and expanding EV infrastructure.
- Encouraging active travel, school travel plans, and car-sharing schemes.

In conclusion, traffic levels have increased to almost pre-pandemic levels, whilst long term average pollution levels (as measured at roadside sites) fell by 37% between 2016 to 2024 (ASR). However, it will be challenging to maintain reduced levels of air pollution within the District due to the increased traffic related to housing and infrastructure growth, and the potential growth in traffic that would be stimulated by the consented expansion to Luton Airport to the south-west of the district (currently subject to a judicial review).

Noise

Ensuring that new development is appropriate for its location requires careful consideration of noise pollution and its cumulative effects on health, quality of life, and the natural environment. The sensitivity of both the site and surrounding area must be factored into planning decisions.

In North Herts, noise impacts from residential development are managed through national regulations and adopted Council policies. Common mitigation measures include insulation, landscaping and appropriate orientation of living spaces.

Transport infrastructure projects, such as new roads or public transport systems, can generate significant noise during both construction and operation. These schemes are expected to incorporate noise reduction strategies, including quieter road surfacing, speed management, and route design that avoids sensitive receptors.

Aviation noise is another source of noise pollution, this could be exacerbated by the planned expansion and operational changes at London Luton Airport. Flight paths associated with Luton Airport cross into North Herts and the Airport's monitoring [reports](#) show that it has received complaints from residents in the District (including Hitchin, Codicote, Wheathampstead and Blackmore End). The airport's proposed expansion, from 19 million to 32 million passengers annually, could potentially lead to increased noise exposure (from aviation and road traffic) for local communities. Luton Airport has that *"Under all the noise assessment scenarios [...] no properties are expected to be at risk of being unacceptably affected"* citing its environment impact assessment for [project \(Luton Rising, 2024\)](#). The Airport also offers compensation measures such as voluntary acquisition policy (for properties experiencing noise above certain thresholds, financial compensation for directly impacts properties and noise insulation schemes).

Key sustainability issues

Informed by current data policy context, the following key issues are identified in relation to the air quality and noise SA theme:

- **The AQMAs** have been revoked due to sustained improvements, with no exceedances of national air quality objectives in recent years.
- **Large scale infrastructure projects** such as Luton Airport expansion have the potential to adversely impact air quality and noise. It will be important to consider cumulative effects of locally planned growth and major infrastructure projects on air quality and noise.

SA objectives and appraisal questions

Based on the key sustainability issues discussed above, it is proposed that the SA should include the following objectives

SA Topic	SA Objective
Air Quality & Noise	<i>Reduce sources of air and noise pollution and seek appropriate mitigation measures in new developments.</i>

Appraisal guide questions

Will the policy/ proposal help to...

- Consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?

THE SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The SA Framework

The SA framework below takes the form of a list of topic headings; each associated with sustainability objective(s). The framework comprises the 11 themes discussed in the previous chapters of this report.

SA Topic	Objective	Appraisal supporting questions (<i>will the proposal/ policy help to...?</i>)
The Natural Environment	<i>Protect, conserve, and enhance biodiversity, priority habitats, designated sites, and landscape character, while promoting the multifunctional benefits of green infrastructure and avoiding harm to sensitive environments</i>	Biodiversity & GI <i>Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?</i> <i>Protect and enhance priority habitats, species, and the ecological networks connecting them?</i> <i>Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?</i> Landscape <i>Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscape and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?</i> Recreation & access <i>Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?</i>
Climate Change & Flooding	<i>Support the transition to net zero by minimising greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy efficiency, enabling renewable energy, and building resilience to climate-related risks such as flooding, water scarcity, and infrastructure stress</i>	Greenhouse Gas Emissions <i>Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings, and land use</i> <i>Focus development in sustainable locations?</i> <i>Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?</i>

SA Topic	Objective	Appraisal supporting questions (<i>will the proposal/ policy help to...?</i>)
		Low-Carbon, energy-efficient places <i>Improve the energy performance of new buildings, beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?</i> <i>Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support the wider transition in North Herts?</i> Climate change resilience / adaptation <i>Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources of flooding to people, property, infrastructure?</i> <i>Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood management, river restoration, and tree planting?</i> <i>Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?</i> Water resources <i>Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?</i> <i>Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?</i>
Population, Health & Wellbeing	Promote inclusive, healthy, and sustainable communities by improving access to health and social care, reducing inequalities, supporting active lifestyles, and enhancing the quality of local environments	<i>Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?</i> <i>Encourages healthy/ active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?</i>

SA Topic	Objective	Appraisal supporting questions (<i>will the proposal/ policy help to...?</i>)
		<i>Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?</i>
Transport & Connectivity	<i>Maximise sustainable transport and active travel opportunities while minimising the need to travel.</i>	Facilitating modal shift <i>Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?</i> <i>Help improve public transport including, the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without compromising existing provision)?</i> <i>Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared with driving and parking?</i> <i>Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?</i> Reducing transport emissions <i>Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?</i> Digital connectivity <i>Enhance communications core infrastructure?</i>
Housing	<i>Ensure that everyone has access to a decent, affordable home that meets their needs, while supporting a mix of housing types, tenures, and specialist provision across the district</i>	<i>Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of housing sizes, types and tenures?</i> <i>Deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of all residents?</i>

SA Topic	Objective	Appraisal supporting questions (<i>will the proposal/ policy help to...?</i>)
The Historic Environment	<i>Protect and enhance the historic environment of North Herts by ensuring that development respects and conserves the character, fabric, and setting of heritage assets while supporting their long-term viability and public appreciation.</i>	<i>Conserve and enhance the significance of, designated and non-designated, heritage assets and their setting?</i>
Social & Cultural Infrastructure	<i>Promote environmentally responsible and socially inclusive development that supports local communities, protects natural resources, and enhances long-term wellbeing across our District</i>	<i>Help create resilient communities by improving access to social and cultural facilities while ensuring equitable distribution of services?</i>
Local Economy & Employment	<i>Support a strong, diverse and resilient economy that provides opportunities for all, enhances the vitality of the District's town and local centres, and employment areas.</i>	<i>Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?</i> <i>Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?</i> <i>Encourage the growth of existing businesses?</i> <i>Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres</i>
Land, Soils & Waste	<i>Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance soil and mineral resources</i>	<i>Promote the use of previously developed land & support remediation of contaminated land?</i> <i>Prevent development on land where contamination poses unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?</i> <i>Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?</i> <i>Protect the integrity of mineral resources?</i>

SA Topic	Objective	Appraisal supporting questions (<i>will the proposal/ policy help to...?</i>)
Water Resources & Quality	<i>Promote sustainable development which minimise pressure on water resources, whilst maintaining and enhancing the quality of the District's rivers, lakes and aquifers.</i>	<i>Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support improvements to water bodies and blue infrastructure?</i> <i>Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development?</i> <i>Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water recycling?</i>
Air Quality & Noise	<i>Reduce sources of air and noise pollution and seek appropriate mitigation measures in new developments.</i>	<i>consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?</i>

PART 2 – ASSESSMENT OF SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

This Interim SA Report has been prepared to support the Local Plan Content and Evidence consultation. This report assesses the likely environmental, social and economic effects of the draft spatial development options, ensuring that sustainability considerations are integrated into plan-making from an early stage. This provides a transparent evidence base for evaluating alternative development options, development sites and planning policies, identifying potential benefit and harm effects, and helping to inform the selection of our preferred approach. In doing so, it fulfils the requirements of Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment legislation and supports the preparation of a Local Plan that promotes sustainable development across the district.

This part of the report presents an appraisal of the draft spatial development options based on the identified SA themes, objectives and guiding questions. For each of the spatial development option, there will be a summary of the appraisal followed by strengths, weaknesses, effect characteristics and conclusion.

Housing need

The Local Housing Need (LHN) is a minimum starting point. The Government's standard method identifies the minimum annual housing need figure that authorities are expected to use when preparing plans. It is described as an unconstrained assessment of need and does not itself set the housing requirement.

The LHN for North Hertfordshire is 1,036 dwellings per annum on the basis of the Government's standard method, which accounts for: a) existing dwelling stock; and b) affordability. This equates to 11,396 homes over the 11 year plan period of 2029-2040.

If during the next Plan period, some sites are delayed and a five year housing land supply cannot be demonstrated, as this is the case now,

there is a requirement to provide a 20% buffer. This means allocating a further 2,279 homes in that circumstance. This would increase the overall need to 13,675 homes for the plan period.

Government guidance states that the housing requirement in a Local Plan may be higher than the identified housing need, and authorities should consider planning for higher growth where, for example, this supports economic growth aspirations.

However, the NPPF expects plans to meet identified housing needs. The standard method figure is intended to be the basis for plan-making, and authorities must provide a robust justification where constraints affect delivery if planning less than the LHN.

It is important to note that constraints that may affect the housing requirement, it does not automatically reduce the housing need. Government guidance distinguishes between housing need (the minimum unconstrained need); and housing requirement (what the Local Plan seeks to deliver after considering land availability, constraints and other evidence).

The NPPF also requires local planning authorities to allocate land to accommodate at least 10% of the housing requirement on sites no larger than one hectare and a further 10% on sites of between one and two and a half hectares. Any departure from these requirements would need to be supported by strong planning reasons demonstrating why it is not possible or appropriate to allocate sufficient sites within these size categories, taking account of local circumstances, site availability and deliverability constraints.

If the plan period increases to 15 years, applying the annual local housing need figure of 1,036 dwellings results in a total housing need of 15,540 homes across the plan period, or 18,648 homes with a 20% buffer. This will mean further sites are needed overall as well as smaller sites to meet the NPPF requirements.

Housing capacity

We currently have 12,102 homes already planned or have permission in our District (at 31 March 2026). This is based on existing Local Plan allocations and current planning approvals. Existing Local Plan allocations that have not started at 31 March 2026 will also be considered as possible allocations in the new Plan. From the existing commitments, there is a total of 9,844 homes on existing allocations, not started.

A review of the existing allocations without planning permission that are proposed to be carried forward indicates there is insufficient provision to meet the NPPF requirements on smaller sites. As a result, additional sites will need to be identified through the new Local Plan to ensure compliance with the NPPF's requirements for a diverse supply of housing sites.

Based on existing Local Plan allocations, not started, there is a need to identify a further 3,831 homes to meet the full local housing need plus 20% buffer.

Existing commitments at 31 March 2026

Source of sites	Number of homes
Sites under construction	812
Minor development with permission	262
Major development with full permission (includes LP allocations)	302
Other permissions (includes LP allocations)	1,115
Local Plan allocations without permission	9,611
Total	12,102

A call for sites exercise was carried out between June and September 2025 which resulted in approximately 150 sites. Detailed site assessments are being undertaken as part of the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), and until the assessments are complete and tested through transport modelling and other evidence studies, the housing capacity arising from these site submissions is unknown at this stage.

At present, it is not possible to place housing numbers against the draft spatial development options as the site assessments are unfinished.

Draft 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.

There are a number of development 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.

We have identified four spatial development options which are presented below.

Spatial development option 1 – Infill development / urban intensification

This option focuses growth within existing towns and villages by redeveloping brownfield land, underused sites and vacant urban land. Development would generally occur within existing settlement boundaries, making better use of existing infrastructure, services and public transport connections. It seeks to accommodate growth without significant outward expansion into the countryside.

Spatial development option 2 – Urban expansion

This option directs growth to planned extensions on the edges of existing 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 development would be delivered through larger strategic sites,

supported by new infrastructure, schools, healthcare facilities, transport improvements and green spaces. The aim is to create well-connected extensions that integrate with existing communities.

Spatial development option 3 – Dispersed village growth

This option spreads development across a number of villages through smaller-scale housing schemes. The focus is on meeting local housing needs, supporting rural communities and helping maintain village services such as shops, schools and community facilities. It does not rely on major growth in a small number of locations but distributes development more widely across the district.

Spatial development option 4 – New settlement

This option accommodates a significant proportion of future growth in one or more new freestanding settlements. These would be comprehensively planned communities with their own housing, employment opportunities, schools, healthcare facilities, green spaces and supporting infrastructure. Rather than expanding existing towns and villages, growth would be focused in entirely new settlements designed to be largely self-sufficient.

Emerging Local Plan objectives

Emerging Local Plan objectives

The Content and Evidence document sets out the Local Plan objectives covering environmental, social and economic.

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

Commented [RR1]: Need to check with design team - remember they amended the requirements of the design code - so that its comply or justify. Therefore it should be 100% - but that also then makes the figure meaningless??

as they said justify rather than comply - we can't have a target of 90%

Commented [DC2R1]: We can change it to 100%

Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
Economy Supporting a resilient and prosperous local economy	Economic Resilience	Growth in the number of businesses operating in knowledge-intensive, green and innovative sectors by 50% compared with the 2025 baseline.	FILL THIS IN	
	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	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 ¹	'Mode share (% short journey stages in towns by sustainable modes)	Census data Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan monitoring

1

Objective	Opportunity	Measurable Outcome	Indicator	Data Sources
sustainable and accessible travel				
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

Objective of the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 3: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-third-cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy/active-travel-active-england-the-third-cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy-cwis3>

Compatibility of Local Plan objectives with SA objectives

The Local Plan objectives are tested against the Sustainability Framework to ascertain how compatible the aims for the district are with the principles of sustainable development. The results are shown in the table below.

The following compatible symbols have been used in the analysis:

+	Objectives are compatible and/or enhance one another
—	Objectives incompatible and/or in conflict with one another
○	Objectives have no clear relationship
?	Relationship between objectives is mixed or uncertain

Table X: Compatibility of Local Plan objectives with SA objectives

	Local Plan objective					
SA topic	Efficient use of land	Housing	Economy	Environment & climate change	Transport	Communities
The natural environment	?	?	?	+	○	+
Climate change & flooding	+	?	?	+	+	+
Population, health & wellbeing	+	+	+	+	+	+
Transport & connectivity	+	+	+	+	+	+
Housing	+	+	+	?	+	+
The historic environment	?	?	+	?	○	+
Social & cultural infrastructure	+	+	+	+	+	+
Local economy & employment	+	+	+	?	+	+
Land, soils & waste	+	?	?	+	○	○
Water resources & quality	?	?	?	+	○	+
Air quality & noise	+	+	?	+	+	+

ASSESSMENT OF SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

Appraisal matrix

The appraisal matrix has been developed to assess the relative sustainability performance of the four spatial development options. Each option has been assessed against the eleven Sustainability Appraisal objectives contained within the SA Framework, covering environmental, social and economic considerations.

The appraisal draws on the characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of each development option and applies the significance criteria as set out below. Effects have been judged using professional planning judgement, taking account of factors such as the likely impact, scale, duration and probability of effects, together with the sensitivity of the environmental, social and economic assets that may be affected. The matrix uses the following scoring system ranging from major benefit effects to major harm effects, allowing a consistent comparison of the sustainability implications of each growth option and helping to identify the most sustainable strategy, or combinations of strategies for the area.

The summary of assessments is set out in this section, with the detailed assessments included in Appendix A.

Assessment criteria

- Impact – The nature of the effect on sustainability objectives; whether the effect is benefit, harm or neutral, and what aspect of the environment, economy, or community is affected.
- Scale – The geographical extent or magnitude of the effect; for example, whether the impact is experienced across parts of the district or across most or all of the district, and how

many people, properties, or environmental assets are affected.

- Duration – How long the effect is expected to last; typically classified as no harm/benefit, short term (months or 1-5 years), medium term (6-10 years) or long term (10+ years/permanent)
- Probability – The likelihood that the effect will occur; often described as certain, likely, potential or unlikely.

The level of significance is determined when considering the impact, scale, duration and probability.

Explanation of the assessment scoring

Each assessment parameter is associated with a numerical score:

- Impact: -3 to +3
- Scale: 1 or 2
- Duration: 1 or 3
- Probability: 0 to 1

The initial score is calculated by multiplying all the scores for each assessment criterion. These scores range from -18 to +18.

To map the scores onto a five-point scale of indicators (double-minus to double-plus), the score range is compressed to -2.5 to 2.5 (spanning five whole points) by dividing the initial scores by 18 and multiplying by 2.5 – which is the same as multiplying by 0.1389. Each indicator corresponds to a single point with the adjusted score range as follows:

- — Major negative ($-2.5 \leq \text{adjusted score} < -1.5$)
- Minor negative ($-1.5 \leq \text{adjusted score} < -0.5$)

- Neutral or no effects ($-0.5 \leq \text{adjusted score} < +0.5$)
- +
- ++ Minor positive ($-0.5 \leq \text{adjusted score} < 1.5$)
- ++ Major positive ($1.5 \leq \text{adjusted score} \leq 2.5$)

To arrive at a score for each assessment theme (e.g. Climate Change & Flooding), the adjusted scores for each criterion within that theme are averaged. The averaged score is then also mapped to the five-point indicator scale. The numerical scores that are averaged, not the indicators, so as to avoid rounding errors.

Finally, the averaged themes scores for each spatial strategy and also averaged to yield an averaged spatial strategy score. This too is mapped onto the five-point indicator scale.

Level of significance

Symbol	Significance of effects
++	Major benefit
+	Minor benefit
○	Neutral or no effects
-	Minor harm
--	Major harm

Summary of assessment

		Infill		Urban expansion		Dispersed village		New settlement	
SA objective	Description	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator
The natural environment	Protect, conserve, and enhance biodiversity, priority habitats, designated sites, and landscape character, while promoting the multifunctional benefits of green infrastructure and avoiding harm to sensitive environments.	-0.21	○	0.38	○	0.06	○	0.50	+
Climate change & flooding	Support the transition to net zero by minimising greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy efficiency, enabling renewable energy, and building resilience to climate-related risks such as flooding, water scarcity, and infrastructure stress.	0.83	+	0.43	○	-0.08	○	1.34	+
Population, health & wellbeing	Promote inclusive, healthy, and sustainable communities by improving access to health and social care, reducing inequalities, supporting active lifestyles, and enhancing the quality of local environments.	1.25	+	0.94	+	0.80	+	2.29	++
Transport & connectivity	Maximise sustainable transport and active travel opportunities while minimising the need to travel.	0.97	+	0.43	○	-0.85	-	0.24	○
Housing	Ensure that everyone has access to a decent, affordable home that meets their needs, while supporting a mix of housing types, tenures, and specialist provision across the district.	0.73	+	2.50	++	0.63	+	0.00	○

		Infill		Urban expansion		Dispersed village		New settlement	
SA objective	Description	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator
The historic environment	Protect and enhance the historic environment of North Herts by ensuring that development respects and conserves the character, fabric, and setting of heritage assets while supporting their long-term viability and public appreciation.	-0.63	—	-0.21	○	-0.42	○	-0.42	○
Social & cultural infrastructure	Promote environmentally responsible and socially inclusive development that supports local communities, protects natural resources, and enhances long-term wellbeing across our District.	0.63	+	0.94	+	1.88	++	2.50	++
Local economy & employment	Support a strong, diverse and resilient economy that provides opportunities for all, enhances the vitality of the District's town and local centres, and employment areas.	1.04	+	0.55	+	0.63	+	1.51	++
Land, soils & waste	Ensure the efficient and effective use of land, and protect and enhance soil and mineral resources.	0.99	+	-0.13	○	-0.05	○	-0.03	○
Water resources & quality	Promote sustainable development which minimise pressure on water resources, whilst maintaining and enhancing the quality of the District's rivers, lakes and aquifers.	0.42	○	0.31	○	0.10	○	1.67	++
Air quality & noise	Reduce sources of air and noise pollution and seek appropriate mitigation measures in new developments.	-0.63	—	-0.31	○	-0.63	—	0.63	+

		Infill		Urban expansion		Dispersed village		New settlement	
SA objective	Description	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator	Average score	Indicator
Overall average (unweighted)		0.49	○	0.53	+	0.19	○	0.93	+

Spatial development option 1 – Infill development / urban intensification

Strengths	The infill and urban intensification option performs particularly strongly against objectives relating to climate change mitigation, sustainable transport, healthy lifestyles, regeneration and efficient land use. Major positive effects are identified for focusing development in sustainable locations, reducing carbon emissions, encouraging active travel, supporting healthy and active lifestyles, enhancing local centre vitality, and promoting the reuse of previously developed land. Development within existing settlements enables residents to access services, employment, education and community facilities more easily, reducing reliance on private vehicles and supporting more sustainable patterns of movement. The option also generates a range of additional minor benefits through improved access to health and community infrastructure, increased support for public transport, opportunities for sustainable drainage and water efficiency measures, and the delivery of new housing within established communities. Overall, the option demonstrates a consistently positive sustainability performance across social, economic and environmental objectives.
Weaknesses	The principal weaknesses relate to the environmental effects associated with redevelopment and intensification within existing settlements. Minor adverse effects are identified for biodiversity, ecological connectivity, landscape and townscape character, heritage assets and local environmental quality. Redevelopment may result in the loss of urban habitats, fragmentation of ecological networks and changes to the character of established areas. Increased development activity may also contribute to localised air quality and noise pressures. While opportunities exist to incorporate biodiversity enhancements, green infrastructure and sustainable design measures, delivery can vary between sites and may not

	fully offset cumulative impacts. Housing delivery is supported by the option but is unlikely to make a substantial contribution towards meeting overall housing needs when compared with more spatial options.
Effect characteristics	The effects of the option are predominantly long term and permanent, reflecting the enduring influence of redevelopment on settlement patterns, infrastructure use and environmental conditions. Positive effects are generally widespread across the District and are frequently assessed as certain or likely because they arise directly from concentrating development within sustainable urban locations. The strongest positive effects relate to climate change, transport, health and regeneration objectives. Negative effects are fewer in number and are mostly assessed as minor harms, occurring as cumulative consequences of urban intensification. Several objectives relating to green infrastructure, renewable energy, flood risk management, water resources and economic growth are assessed as minor benefits but remain dependent on site-specific opportunities and implementation, creating a degree of uncertainty. The majority of adverse effects are capable of mitigation through effective planning, design, environmental enhancement and heritage-sensitive development.
Conclusion	Overall, the infill and urban intensification option represents a strongly positive and sustainable growth strategy. The assessment identifies numerous beneficial effects, including several major positive outcomes relating to sustainable locations, carbon reduction, active travel, healthy lifestyles, town centre vitality and the reuse of brownfield land. Although some minor adverse effects are identified for biodiversity, heritage, townscape character and environmental quality, these are relatively limited in scale and are generally capable of mitigation through appropriate planning and design measures. Opportunities for delivering new homes could be challenging due to limited available land suitable for development. By not meeting the District's housing targets could lead to increased risk of speculative applications and appeals in the longer term. On balance, the option is expected to deliver significant sustainability benefits and performs particularly well in supporting climate objectives, reducing the need to travel, making efficient use of land and infrastructure, and reinforcing the vitality of existing settlements and centres but unlikely to contribute substantially towards meeting the District's housing needs. This 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.

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Spatial development option 2 – Urban expansion

Strengths	The urban expansion option performs strongly across a wide range of sustainability objectives and records several major positive effects. The option performs particularly well in relation to housing delivery, affordable and specialist housing provision, sustainable locations, health and wellbeing, community cohesion, active travel and social infrastructure. Strategic urban extensions provide opportunities to deliver substantial numbers of homes alongside new community facilities, healthcare provision, public open space and supporting infrastructure. Significant benefits are also identified for multifunctional green infrastructure, access to nature, sustainable drainage, flood risk management and employment generation. The scale of development allows comprehensive masterplanning, enabling development to integrate green corridors, recreational spaces, active travel networks and infrastructure improvements from the outset. Overall, the option offers a strong balance between housing growth, service provision, community development and environmental enhancement opportunities.
Weaknesses	The principal weaknesses relate to the environmental effects of expanding settlements onto greenfield land. Minor adverse effects are identified for landscape character, climate change, wastewater infrastructure, heritage, previously developed land objectives, mineral resources, water quality and local air quality and noise. Development beyond existing settlement boundaries may result in permanent changes to the character of the countryside and the loss of undeveloped land. Although biodiversity net gains and ecological enhancements can be incorporated through masterplanning, there remains potential for habitat loss and ecological disruption where development affects greenfield sites. Additional pressure on wastewater infrastructure and water environments may also occur unless supporting infrastructure is delivered in a timely manner. Furthermore, some reliance on private vehicle travel is likely to remain despite improvements to active travel and public transport connections.
Effect characteristics	The effects of the urban expansion option are predominantly long term and permanent because they are associated with strategic changes to settlement form, land use patterns and infrastructure provision. Positive effects are generally assessed as likely or certain and arise directly from the scale and planned nature of urban extensions. Benefits are particularly strong in relation to housing provision, affordable housing, health and wellbeing, social

	infrastructure, green infrastructure, active travel, flood risk management and employment opportunities. These benefits are often experienced both within growth areas and more widely across the District. Negative effects are generally minor in nature and primarily relate to environmental objectives, including landscape change, greenfield land loss, water resources, heritage and environmental quality. While many adverse effects can be reduced through mitigation, masterplanning and infrastructure investment, some residual environmental impacts are likely to remain due to the permanent conversion of undeveloped land to urban uses.
Conclusion	Overall, the urban expansion option performs strongly against the majority of sustainability objectives and generates a substantial number of positive effects, including several major benefits. The option is particularly effective at delivering housing growth, affordable housing, community infrastructure, health benefits, active travel opportunities, green infrastructure and economic growth. It also provides significant opportunities for comprehensive masterplanning, enabling the coordinated delivery of services, open space, sustainable drainage and supporting infrastructure. Although there are environmental trade-offs associated with greenfield land release, landscape change, infrastructure pressures and some environmental quality objectives, these adverse effects are generally minor in significance and can be reduced through careful planning, mitigation and design. On balance, the urban expansion option is expected to generate a strong positive sustainability outcome and represents a robust and deliverable spatial option capable of meeting a wide range of economic, social and environmental objectives.

Spatial development option 3 – Dispersed village growth

Strengths	The dispersed village growth option performs particularly strongly in supporting rural communities, social cohesion and the vitality of local economies. Minor positive effects are identified for community inclusion and cohesion, resilient communities, housing delivery although limited, support for existing businesses and enhancement of communications infrastructure. Growth distributed across a range of villages can help sustain schools, shops, community facilities and local services, strengthening the long-term viability of rural settlements. The option also supports local housing needs and can contribute to maintaining balanced communities across the district. Additional benefits are identified through
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	opportunities for biodiversity enhancement, green infrastructure provision, improved recreational access, water efficiency measures and support for local employment. Improvements to broadband and mobile connectivity could also generate wider economic and social benefits for rural areas. Overall, the option performs particularly well against objectives relating to community resilience, social wellbeing and the rural economy.
Weaknesses	The principal weaknesses relate to climate change, transport sustainability and the cumulative environmental effects of dispersed development patterns. Major adverse effects are identified for transport-related carbon emissions and traffic volumes, reflecting the increased reliance on private vehicles and longer travel distances associated with growth in smaller villages. The option also records a major negative effect for minimising carbon emissions overall and minor adverse effects relating to sustainable locations, wastewater capacity, landscape character, heritage assets, water quality, air quality, brownfield land use and mineral resources. While some public transport improvements may be delivered, dispersed growth makes it more difficult to achieve efficient and sustainable travel patterns compared with more concentrated development strategies. The widespread use of greenfield sites also limits opportunities for regeneration and the efficient use of existing urban infrastructure. Delivery of new homes will be of smaller scale across smaller sites in rural areas and highly unlikely to meet the District's identified housing needs in full.
Effect characteristics	The effects of dispersed village growth are predominantly long term and permanent because they result in enduring changes to settlement patterns, travel behaviour and land use across numerous locations. Positive effects are concentrated around social, community and economic objectives and are generally assessed as likely, reflecting the ability of growth to support local services, businesses and community infrastructure. Benefits are distributed across a large number of settlements and therefore contribute to district-wide rural resilience. However, adverse effects are also cumulative in nature and occur across a wide geographic area. The most significant negative effects relate to transport behaviour and carbon emissions, where dispersed development patterns make sustainable travel more challenging to achieve. Environmental effects are generally assessed as minor adverse effects, but their cumulative nature means they may become more pronounced over time unless effectively managed through planning, infrastructure provision and mitigation measures.
Conclusion	Overall, the dispersed village growth option generates a more mixed sustainability outcome. The option performs strongly against several social and economic objectives, delivering

	significant benefits for community cohesion, rural service provision, housing delivery, local businesses and the resilience of village communities. However, these benefits are offset by substantial disadvantages in relation to climate change and transport sustainability, with major adverse effects identified for carbon emissions and traffic generation. The option also generates a range of minor environmental harms associated with cumulative development across multiple rural locations and continued reliance on greenfield land. While mitigation measures could reduce some of these impacts and public transport investment could improve accessibility, the dispersed nature of the strategy inherently limits opportunities to achieve the same level of sustainability benefits associated with more concentrated growth patterns. On balance, the option offers clear social and rural economic advantages but performs less favourably against climate change, transport and resource-efficiency objectives, resulting in an overall mixed sustainability performance. Delivery of new homes is highly unlikely to meet the District's identified housing needs in full with consequential implications for affordable housing and affordability pressures more generally, as well as potentially leading to more speculative applications in the longer term if housing targets are not met.
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Spatial development option 4 – New settlement

Strengths	The new settlement option performs strongly across the sustainability framework and records the greatest concentration of major positive effects of all the growth options. Significant benefits are identified for housing delivery, affordable and specialist housing, health infrastructure, community facilities, social inclusion, economic growth and employment creation. The comprehensive masterplanning of a new settlement provides unique opportunities to integrate extensive green infrastructure, active travel networks, renewable energy systems, low-carbon technologies, sustainable drainage, water recycling and climate-resilient design from the outset. Major positive effects are also identified for flood risk management, wastewater infrastructure, water efficiency, green infrastructure provision and access to nature. The scale of development enables the coordinated delivery of schools, healthcare facilities, employment land, community infrastructure and environmental enhancements alongside housing growth, creating the potential for a highly sustainable and resilient new community. The option also performs particularly well in supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy and delivering high standards of resource efficiency and environmental management.
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Weaknesses	The principal weaknesses arise from the substantial land-use change required to create a new settlement. Major adverse effects are identified for landscape character and the use of previously developed land, reflecting the likelihood that development would occur on a large greenfield site and result in permanent changes to the rural landscape. Additional minor adverse effects are identified for ecological networks, sustainable location objectives, heritage assets, mineral resources and local centre vitality. Although extensive mitigation and environmental enhancement can be incorporated through masterplanning, the scale of development means some residual effects on landscape character and undeveloped land are likely to remain significant. There are also potential sustainability challenges during the early stages of development, when services, employment opportunities and transport connections may take time to become fully established, potentially affecting self-containment and travel patterns. Furthermore, while the option scores highly for housing provision overall, the significant lead-in times associated with major infrastructure delivery mean that housing benefits are unlikely to be realised in the short to medium term and therefore unlikely to contribute towards five year housing land supply and/or to delivery much within the Plan period.
Effect characteristics	The effects of the new settlement option are predominantly strategic, long term and permanent in nature, reflecting the transformational changes associated with creating an entirely new community. Positive effects are generally district-wide and are frequently assessed as likely or certain because they arise directly from the ability to comprehensively plan and deliver infrastructure, services and environmental measures as part of an integrated masterplan. The strongest benefits relate to housing, health and wellbeing, social infrastructure, water management, flood resilience, low-carbon development, renewable energy, economic growth and community creation. Many of these benefits have the potential to operate at both settlement and district scales. Negative effects are fewer in number but include some significant environmental impacts, particularly those associated with greenfield land take and landscape change. Whilst many adverse effects can be reduced through careful site selection, masterplanning, design and mitigation measures, some permanent changes to landscape character and land use are likely to remain unavoidable consequences of the option.
Conclusion	Overall, the new settlement option performs strongly against the majority of sustainability objectives and offers significant long-term benefits through the coordinated delivery of

	housing, infrastructure, employment, community facilities and environmental enhancements. However, the substantial infrastructure requirements and long lead-in times associated with a new settlement mean that housing delivery is likely to be delayed, with little or no housing completions expected within the 11-year plan period. Consequently, despite its strong sustainability performance and long-term potential, the option is unlikely to make a meaningful contribution towards meeting the District's identified housing needs during the plan period, raising significant concerns regarding its effectiveness as a strategy for addressing immediate housing requirements.
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CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Conclusion

The Sustainability Appraisal identifies clear differences in the performance of the four growth options, although all options generate a combination of benefit and harm effects across the appraisal framework.

The appraisal suggests that more concentrated forms of growth generally perform better than dispersed patterns of development. The New Settlement option emerges as the strongest-performing strategic option overall, followed by Urban Expansion and Infill/Urban Intensification, both of which deliver positive sustainability outcomes but with different strengths and constraints. Dispersed Village Growth offers important local and community benefits but performs less favourably when assessed against the wider sustainability objectives of reducing carbon emissions, supporting sustainable transport and maximising infrastructure efficiency.

The assessment indicates that a growth strategy focused on new settlements, urban expansion and/or urban intensification is likely to provide the strongest overall sustainability outcomes for North Hertfordshire, provided that environmental impacts are appropriately mitigated and infrastructure is delivered in step with growth. However, the substantial infrastructure requirements and long lead-in times associated with a new settlement mean that housing delivery is likely to be delayed, with little or no housing completions expected within the 11-year plan period.

Consequently, despite its strong sustainability performance and long-term potential, the option is unlikely to make a meaningful contribution towards meeting the District's identified housing needs during the plan period, raising significant concerns regarding its effectiveness as a strategy for addressing immediate housing requirements. It is therefore considered that this option is more

appropriately taken forward as part of the work on the Spatial Development Strategy.

Next steps

Subsequent to the Content & Evidence consultation, the Council will undertake further work in respect of spatial strategy and site selection process. There will also be a need for further work in respect of Development Management policies and area/site specific policies.

The assessment criteria used for the draft strategic development growth options will also be used to consider policies and sites as part of this Local Plan process.

A full Sustainability Appraisal Report will be prepared to support the proposed Local Plan. This will involve updating the interim SA Report as necessary, as well as establishing potential monitoring measures. Further mitigation or enhancement measures will also need to be considered, as well as revisiting the consideration of alternatives in light of any new evidence.

The timetable moving towards adoption of the Local Plan is set out in the table below. At each of these stages, it may be necessary to undertake additional iterations of the SA to account for changes/modifications to the Plan.

Plan event	Date
Publish Notice of Intention to Commence	24 April 2026
Scoping Consultation start - end	11 May - 28 June 2026
Gateway 1 Self Assessment	9 October 2026
Plan Content & Evidence Consultation start-end	13 October - 24 November 2026
Gateway 2 Advice sought	5 April 2027

Proposed Plan Consultation start - end	26 October 2027 - 4 January 2028
Gateway 3 Advice sought	27 March 2028
Submission of the proposed Local Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination	31 May 2028
Examination Recommendations published	30 November 2028
Adopted	5 January 2029

Spatial development option 1 - Infill development / urban intensification

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
The natural environment							
Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?	Minor harm	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect is identified as infill development may result in the loss of urban habitats and biodiversity features despite opportunities for mitigation and biodiversity net gain. Effects could occur across the District through cumulative redevelopment activity and would be permanent where habitats are lost. The effect is considered likely due to the widespread nature of urban redevelopment.
Protect and enhance priority habitats, species, and the ecological networks connecting them?	Minor harm	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect is anticipated because redevelopment may fragment ecological corridors and reduce habitat connectivity within urban areas. Effects would occur across multiple settlements, remain long term and permanent, and are considered likely due to cumulative impacts from intensification.
Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified as redevelopment can incorporate urban greening, SuDS and public realm improvements. Benefits could be experienced district-wide and remain permanent where delivered. However, implementation opportunities vary between sites, making the effect potential.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscape and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is identified because higher densities and redevelopment may alter local character and visual appearance. Effects would occur across existing settlements, be permanent, and are considered likely given the nature of urban intensification.
Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated through potential improvements to parks, green spaces and access routes. Benefits may be experienced throughout the District and would be long term, although delivery opportunities vary, making the effect potential.
Climate change & flooding							
Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings, and land use	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because development is focused in accessible locations with existing services and public transport. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, continue permanently, and are considered certain as they arise directly from the growth strategy.
Focus development in sustainable locations?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified as growth is directed to settlements with existing infrastructure, services and employment opportunities. Benefits would occur across the district, be permanent, and are considered certain because this is a defining characteristic of the option.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is expected through sustainable redevelopment and support for energy-efficient development. Benefits would be district-wide, long term, and are considered likely to occur.
Improve the energy performance of new buildings, beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because new buildings are likely to outperform existing stock in energy efficiency. Benefits would apply across the District, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support the wider transition in North Herts?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified as some redevelopment schemes may incorporate renewable technologies. Benefits could occur district-wide and be long term, although delivery depends on site viability and is therefore potential.
Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources of flooding to people, property, infrastructure?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because redevelopment can avoid high-risk areas but may also increase pressure on drainage systems. Effects would occur across the district, be long term, and remain uncertain, resulting in a potential rating.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood management, river restoration, and tree planting?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because redevelopment provides opportunities to introduce SuDS and improved drainage infrastructure. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.
Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because impacts depend on existing capacity and future infrastructure upgrades. Effects would be district-wide, long term, and only potential at this stage.
Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated through the use of modern water-efficient technologies. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because redevelopment can incorporate water-sensitive design measures. Benefits would occur across the district, be long term, but remain potential depending on individual schemes.
Population, health & wellbeing							
Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because development is concentrated in locations with existing health and community facilities. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Encourages healthy / active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated due to excellent access to services, walking and cycling routes, parks and recreation facilities. Benefits are district-wide, permanent, and certain.
Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because infill development can support diverse and accessible communities. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Transport & connectivity							
Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because development occurs in locations already well served by walking and cycling infrastructure. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and certain.
Help improve public transport including, the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated as increased population can support the viability of existing services. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
compromising existing provision)?							
Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared with driving and parking?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Unlikely	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because the option has limited influence over fares and parking charges. Effects would be district-wide, long term, but unlikely to materially alter costs.
Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because compact growth can reduce travel demand and support sustainable transport. Benefits would be district-wide, long term, and potential.
Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified due to shorter journeys and increased use of sustainable transport modes. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.
Enhance communications core infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated as redevelopment can facilitate infrastructure upgrades. Benefits would be localised, permanent and potential.
Housing							
Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.83	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because infill development contributes to housing supply while making efficient use of land but unlikely to contribute considerably towards meeting the full local housing need given the small scale of

[illegible]

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Unlikely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because links between infill development and higher-skilled employment growth are indirect. Effects would be district-wide, long term, but are considered unlikely to be significant.
Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Under 10 years	Potential	0.14	○	A minor positive effect is anticipated through construction activity and increased economic activity. Benefits would occur across the district, persist for 6-10 years or longer, and are considered potential.
Encourage the growth of existing businesses?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified through increased local spending and population growth. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.
Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because development directly supports existing centres through increased footfall and expenditure. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and certain.
Land, soils & waste							
Promote the use of previously developed land & support remediation of contaminated land?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because redevelopment of brownfield land is a key feature of the option. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and certain.
Prevent development on land where contamination poses	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated through remediation and risk-management processes.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?							Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and potential.
Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because redevelopment can incorporate modern waste-management practices. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and potential.
Protect the integrity of mineral resources?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because redevelopment generally avoids undeveloped mineral-bearing land. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Waste resources & quality							
Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support improvements to water bodies and blue infrastructure?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because redevelopment presents both opportunities for improvement and risks associated with increased urban pressures. Effects would be district-wide, permanent, and potential.
Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because redevelopment can improve drainage systems and surface water management. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.
Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water recycling?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified through modern water-saving technologies and design standards. Benefits would be district-wide, permanent, and likely.
Air quality & noise							

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is identified because increased density and activity may generate localised increases in traffic, noise and air quality pressures. Effects could occur across multiple settlements, remain long term, and are considered likely despite mitigation measures.

Spatial development option 2 - Urban expansion

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
The natural environment							
Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because strategic urban expansions can deliver biodiversity net gain, habitat creation and ecological buffers through comprehensive masterplanning. Benefits would be experienced across multiple expansion locations throughout the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely because biodiversity enhancement is a standard requirement of strategic development.
Protect and enhance priority habitats, species, and the ecological networks connecting them?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is anticipated because expansion onto greenfield land may result in habitat loss, fragmentation and disruption to ecological networks. Effects would occur across several urban-edge locations, remain permanent, and are considered likely despite mitigation measures due to the scale of land-use change.
Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is identified because strategic urban expansions can deliver coordinated networks of parks, green corridors, SuDS and recreational open space. Benefits would be realised across growth areas and surrounding communities, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to the comprehensive design of strategic sites.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscape and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is identified because urban expansion would extend development beyond existing settlement boundaries and alter the character of the surrounding countryside. Effects would occur across multiple settlement edges, remain permanent, and are considered likely as landscape change is an inherent consequence of this option.
Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is anticipated because urban expansions can provide extensive public open space, green corridors and enhanced rights of way. Benefits would be experienced within and around strategic growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to policy requirements for accessible green infrastructure.
Climate change & flooding							
Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings, and land use	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is identified because edge-of-settlement locations may increase travel demand and maintain some dependence on private vehicles despite sustainable design measures. Effects would be experienced across the district, continue throughout the plan period, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Focus development in sustainable locations?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because growth is located adjacent to existing towns with established services, jobs and infrastructure. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered certain because proximity to existing settlements is fundamental to the option.
Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because strategic development can support investment in low-carbon technology, sustainable construction and supporting infrastructure. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Improve the energy performance of new buildings, beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because new development is likely to achieve significantly higher energy standards than existing building stock. Benefits would occur across all strategic sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because the scale of development may support renewable energy generation and low-carbon heat networks. Benefits would occur within growth areas, remain long term, but are considered only potential because delivery depends on viability and detailed design.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
the wider transition in North Herts?							
Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources of flooding to people, property, infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because strategic planning enables flood risk to be addressed through site selection and design. Benefits would occur within development areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood management, river restoration, and tree planting?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is anticipated because urban expansions provide significant opportunities for SuDS, natural flood management, tree planting and flood storage measures. Benefits would be experienced across development areas and surrounding catchments, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is identified because substantial growth may place pressure on existing wastewater infrastructure if upgrades are not delivered in a timely manner. Effects would occur within affected catchments, persist throughout the plan period, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because modern development can incorporate water-efficient fixtures and landscaping. Benefits would occur across strategic developments, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because strategic masterplanning provides opportunities for water-sensitive design and integrated drainage systems. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Population, health & wellbeing							
Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is identified because urban expansions can deliver new healthcare facilities and improve access to services for existing and future communities. Benefits would occur across strategic growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Encourages healthy / active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is anticipated because strategic sites can provide active travel networks, sports facilities and extensive green infrastructure. Benefits would be experienced across development areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is identified because comprehensive masterplanning can provide community facilities, public spaces and a mix of housing types. Benefits would be experienced across new neighbourhoods, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Transport & connectivity							
Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	1.25	+	A major benefit effect is identified because strategic developments can deliver new walking and cycling routes linking homes to services and public transport. Benefits would be experienced across growth corridors, remain permanent, and are considered certain given the requirement of the NPPF, Local Plan and Local Transport Plan policies to fund enhanced connections and services through S106.
Help improve public transport including, the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without compromising existing provision)?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because additional population can support new and enhanced bus services. Benefits would occur within growth areas and nearby settlements, remain long term, and are considered certain.
Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because the option has limited influence over fare structures and parking costs. Effects would be

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
with driving and parking?							experienced locally, remain long term, and are considered only potential.
Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?	Neutral	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is anticipated because new travel options may mode-shift some background trips, but these are likely to be offset by new car trips from the suburban development. Benefits would occur within nearby towns, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because development adjacent to towns can support shorter journeys and greater use of sustainable transport. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered potential.
Enhance communications core infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because the spillover (e.g. from new mobile phone masts) is likely to be small, especially as 5G masts serve a relatively small geographical area. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Housing							
Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of housing	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because strategic urban expansions can deliver substantial numbers of homes and a wide range of housing types. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, remain permanent,

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
sizes, types and tenures?							and are considered certain as housing delivery is a primary purpose of the option.
Deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of all residents?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because larger strategic sites provide strong opportunities to deliver affordable housing and specialist accommodation. Benefits would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
The historic environment							
Conserve and enhance the significance of, designated and non-designated, heritage assets and their setting?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.21	○	A minor harm effect is identified because urban expansion may affect the setting of heritage assets located on settlement edges and within surrounding landscapes. Effects could occur across strategic growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered potential because impacts depend on site location and design.
Social & cultural infrastructure							
Help create resilient communities by improving access to social and cultural facilities while ensuring equitable	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is identified because urban extensions can provide schools, community facilities and social infrastructure alongside growth. Benefits would occur within strategic growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

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SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Promote the use of previously developed land & support remediation of contaminated land?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	-0.83	—	A minor harm effect is identified because urban expansion predominantly requires greenfield land and offers limited opportunities for brownfield regeneration. Effects would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
Prevent development on land where contamination poses unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because site assessment and remediation processes can manage contamination risks. Benefits would occur at individual sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because strategic developments can incorporate modern waste management and recycling practices. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Protect the integrity of mineral resources?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is anticipated because expansion onto undeveloped land could sterilise safeguarded mineral resources. Effects would occur within growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Waste resources & quality							
Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is identified because growth may increase runoff and place additional pressure on water environments.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
improvements to water bodies and blue infrastructure?							Effects would occur within affected catchments, remain permanent, and are considered likely despite mitigation measures.
Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is anticipated because strategic sites can incorporate comprehensive drainage strategies and SuDS from the outset. Benefits would occur across development areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water recycling?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because modern development can incorporate water-saving technologies and recycling systems. Benefits would occur across growth areas, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Air quality & noise							
Consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is identified because additional development and associated traffic may increase localised air quality and noise pressures. Effects would occur across strategic growth areas, remain long term, and are considered likely, although mitigation measures would help reduce the overall impact.

Spatial development option 3 - Dispersed village growth

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
The natural environment							
Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because small-scale village growth can provide opportunities for biodiversity enhancement, habitat creation and biodiversity net gain alongside development. Benefits would occur across multiple villages at a district level, remain permanent, and are considered likely as biodiversity enhancement is increasingly required through development proposals.
Protect and enhance priority habitats, species, and the ecological networks connecting them?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is anticipated because dispersed development may fragment habitats and ecological corridors across several rural locations. Effects would occur across a wide geographic area, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to cumulative impacts arising from multiple development sites.
Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because development can provide local open spaces, green infrastructure and sustainable drainage features that benefit residents and biodiversity. Benefits would occur at a district level across multiple villages, remain permanent, and are considered likely through normal planning requirements.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Protect and enhance the character of local landscapes, townscape and villagescapes, including key features, views and vistas?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect is identified because incremental village expansion may alter rural character, settlement form and important local views. Effects would occur across numerous settlements, be permanent, and are considered likely due to the cumulative nature of dispersed growth.
Improve access to nature (e.g. by maintaining and enhancing public rights of way)?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because some developments could improve access to green spaces, public rights of way and surrounding countryside. Benefits would be experienced across multiple villages, remain long term, and are considered likely where access improvements are secured through development.
Climate change & flooding							
Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings, and land use	Major harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-1.88	— —	A major harm effect is identified because dispersed development is likely to increase reliance on private vehicles and generate longer travel distances for employment, education and services. Effects would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to the rural nature of many growth locations.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Focus development in sustainable locations?	Minor harm	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect is identified because many villages have fewer services, employment opportunities and public transport connections than the main towns. Effects would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to the spatial distribution of growth.
Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because new development can support energy-efficient construction and investment in low-carbon technologies. Benefits would be largely localised to individual developments, remain permanent, but are considered potential because delivery will vary between sites.
Improve the energy performance of new buildings, beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because new housing is expected to perform better than much of the existing housing stock in terms of energy efficiency. Benefits would be experienced across multiple villages, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support	Minor benefit	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because some sites may accommodate renewable energy technologies such as solar panels and heat pumps. Benefits would generally occur at individual site level, remain permanent, but are considered potential as implementation depends on viability and design.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
the wider transition in North Herts?							
Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources of flooding to people, property, infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because development can be guided away from areas of highest flood risk and designed to incorporate resilient drainage measures. Benefits would occur across development locations, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood management, river restoration, and tree planting?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because village developments can incorporate sustainable drainage, tree planting and natural flood management measures. Benefits would occur at a district level through multiple sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Ensure wastewater infrastructure is planned for and capable of accommodating growth and climate stresses?	Minor harm	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is identified because growth in numerous villages may increase pressure on wastewater networks and treatment facilities. Effects would occur across multiple catchments, persist throughout the plan period, and are considered likely unless infrastructure upgrades are delivered.
Promote water efficiency and conservation in buildings, landscapes, and public realm?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because new developments can incorporate modern water-efficient technologies and landscaping. Benefits would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support water reuse, sustainable drainage, and protection of groundwater and water bodies?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because development can include water-sensitive design and sustainable drainage measures. Benefits would be experienced across development locations, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Population, health & wellbeing							
Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because growth may help sustain local services and support investment in community facilities. Benefits would be experienced across multiple villages, remain permanent, but are considered potential because service improvements are not guaranteed.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Encourages healthy / active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because development can improve access to green spaces, recreation facilities and local walking opportunities. Benefits would occur across participating villages, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because growth can help sustain village communities, schools, shops and shared facilities, supporting social cohesion. Benefits would be experienced across numerous settlements, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Transport & connectivity							
Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because some developments may improve local footpaths, cycle routes and village connectivity. Benefits would occur within individual settlements, remain permanent, but are considered certain given the requirement of the NPPF, Local Plan and Local Transport Plan policies to fund enhanced connections and services through S106.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Help improve public transport including, the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without compromising existing provision)?	Major benefit	Under 100 km ²	Under 10 years	Certain	0.42		A major benefit effect is identified because it would lead to a large expansion of rural bus services. Effects would be localised, short-lived because rural services require long-term subsidy and considered certain give it is a policy requirement.
Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared with driving and parking?	Minor harm	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63		A minor harm effect covering a wide area which is considered likely because the cost of operating rural bus services exceeds revenue, so the pressure will be to increase fares across the region.
Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?	Major harm	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	-2.50		A major harm effect is identified because even with a good bus service, most trips to destinations across the district (and beyond) will be by car. Few existing trips would be mode-shifted from car. Effects would occur across the district, remain long term and are considered certain.
Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?	Major harm	Over 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	-2.50		A major harm effect is identified as car dependency will increase both embodied and carbon from the purchase and use of more cars. Effects would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered certain.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Enhance communications core infrastructure?	Major benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.94	+	A major benefit effect is anticipated because it would bring significant boosts in broadband speeds and mobile phone coverage in rural areas. Benefits would occur across multiple settlements, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Housing							
Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of housing sizes, types and tenures?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because dispersing development across numerous settlements can provide a flexible and deliverable supply of housing however of smaller scale. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of all residents?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because village growth can contribute to local housing needs and affordable housing provision, although opportunities for specialist housing may be more limited. Benefits would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
The historic environment							

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Conserve and enhance the significance of, designated and non-designated, heritage assets and their setting?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.42	○	A minor harm effect is identified because development on village edges may affect the setting of listed buildings, conservation areas and other heritage assets. Effects would occur across numerous settlements, remain permanent, but are considered potential because impacts depend on site selection and design.
Social & cultural infrastructure							
Help create resilient communities by improving access to social and cultural facilities while ensuring equitable distribution of services?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because additional population can help sustain schools, community halls, local shops and cultural facilities. Benefits would occur across many villages, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Local economy & employment							
Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because improved digital connectivity and home-working opportunities may support knowledge-based employment. Benefits would be localised, remain permanent, and are considered potential due to their indirect nature.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because development would generate construction employment and support local service-sector jobs. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain long term, and are considered likely.
Encourage the growth of existing businesses?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because increased population can support village shops, services and small businesses through additional expenditure. Benefits would occur across numerous settlements, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.21	○	A minor harm effect is identified because some spending may be retained within villages rather than directed towards larger town centres. Effects would be localised, remain long term, and are considered potential.
Land, soils & waste							
Promote the use of previously developed land & support remediation of contaminated land?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is identified because dispersed village growth would largely rely on greenfield land and provide limited opportunities for brownfield regeneration. Effects would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Prevent development on land where contamination poses unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because development proposals would be subject to site investigations and remediation where required. Benefits would occur at individual sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because modern development can incorporate improved waste-management and recycling practices. Benefits would occur across development sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Protect the integrity of mineral resources?	Minor harm	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.21	○	A minor harm effect is anticipated because some sites may sterilise safeguarded mineral resources. Effects would be localised, remain permanent, and are considered potential because impacts depend on site location.
Waste resources & quality							
Avoid any negative impacts on water quality and support improvements to water bodies and blue infrastructure?	Minor harm	Under 100 km ²	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.31	○	A minor harm effect is identified because development across multiple catchments could create cumulative pressure on water quality and aquatic environments. Effects would occur across development locations, remain permanent, and are considered likely despite mitigation measures.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Ensure appropriate drainage and mitigation is delivered alongside proposed development?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because development can incorporate sustainable drainage and water-management measures. Benefits would occur across multiple sites, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Maximise water efficiency and opportunities for water recycling?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because new development can incorporate water-efficient technologies and water-saving measures. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Air quality & noise							
Consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	—	A minor harm effect is identified because dispersed development may increase vehicle movements across the district, creating cumulative pressures on air quality and noise levels. Effects would occur across multiple settlements, remain long term, and are considered likely despite mitigation.

Spatial development option 4 - New settlement

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
The natural environment							
Avoid/ minimise impacts on biodiversity, including designated sites and watercourses, while providing net gains?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can be comprehensively planned to deliver strategic biodiversity net gain, habitat creation, ecological buffers and landscape-scale green infrastructure. Benefits would extend across the settlement and wider ecological network, remain permanent, and are considered likely as biodiversity enhancement can be embedded from the outset.
Protect and enhance priority habitats, species, and the ecological networks connecting them?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-0.63	-	A minor harm effect is anticipated because development on a large greenfield site may result in habitat loss and disruption to existing ecological networks despite opportunities for mitigation and enhancement. Effects would occur across a strategic area, remain permanent, and are considered likely given the scale of land-use change required.
Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure (e.g. for health, recreation, and climate resilience)?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can provide extensive green corridors, parks, recreational space, SuDS and climate-resilience infrastructure as part of a single masterplan. Benefits would be experienced across the settlement and surrounding area, remain permanent, and are considered certain as green infrastructure is

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SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Minimise carbon emissions from transport, buildings, and land use	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because a well-designed new settlement can reduce travel demand through mixed uses, active travel and highly energy-efficient buildings. Benefits would occur at a strategic scale, remain permanent, but are considered potential as outcomes depend on location, self-containment and delivery standards.
Focus development in sustainable locations?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.42	○	A minor harm effect is identified because a new settlement may initially be isolated from existing employment, services and transport networks and could take time to become self-sustaining. Effects would occur across the strategic growth area, remain long term, and are considered potential because sustainability performance will depend on site selection and infrastructure delivery.
Promote the transition to a low carbon economy?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because a new settlement creates opportunities to incorporate low-carbon infrastructure, modern construction techniques and green technologies at scale. Benefits would be experienced district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to the comprehensive nature of development.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Improve the energy performance of new buildings, beyond minimum building regulations where viable, including in relation to embodied carbon?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because all homes and buildings could be constructed to high energy-efficiency standards, significantly outperforming existing stock. Benefits would occur across the entire settlement, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Utilise on-site renewable energy for heat and power, or low-carbon heat networks? And where this is not possible, support the wider transition in North Herts?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because the scale of development can support district heating, heat networks and large-scale renewable energy generation. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered likely due to economies of scale and integrated infrastructure planning.
Minimise the risk of flooding from all sources of flooding to people, property, infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because site selection and masterplanning provide opportunities to avoid higher-risk areas and integrate resilience measures into development design. Benefits would occur within the development area, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Manage residual flood risks appropriately and avoid new flood risks? Promote the use of SuDS, natural flood	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because a new settlement can incorporate strategic SuDS networks, natural flood management, river restoration and extensive tree planting from the outset. Benefits would occur across the settlement and surrounding catchment, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

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SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Enhance access to health and social infrastructure and reduce health inequalities?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	+ +	A major benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can provide purpose-built healthcare, education and community facilities alongside housing delivery. Benefits would occur across the settlement population, remain permanent, and are considered certain because infrastructure provision is fundamental to the concept.
Encourages healthy / active lifestyles through the enhanced provision of active travel, sport/ leisure facilities and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	+ +	A major benefit effect is anticipated because active travel routes, parks, recreation facilities and green spaces can be integrated throughout the settlement. Benefits would occur across the whole community, remain permanent, and are considered certain through planned design.
Promote inclusion, reduce inequality and provide opportunities for community interaction?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	+ +	A major benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can provide a mix of housing, community facilities and public spaces that support social cohesion. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Transport & connectivity							

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Expand or enhance access to safe and attractive active travel routes, in particular to schools, bus stops, railway stations, town centres and social/leisure/sports centres?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because walking and cycling networks can be planned as the primary means of movement throughout the settlement. Benefits would occur across the development area, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
Help improve public transport including, the reliability, frequency and geographic extent of local bus services (without compromising existing provision)?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because a critical population mass can support new bus services and other sustainable transport infrastructure. Benefits would occur across the settlement and surrounding area, remain permanent, and are considered certain given a policy requirement.
Reduce the relative cost of public transport compared with driving and parking?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	0.21	○	A minor benefit effect is identified because increased patronage may improve commercial viability and service provision. Benefits would be localised, remain long term, and are considered potential because outcomes depend on future service arrangements.
Reduce traffic volumes in town centres?	Neutral	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is anticipated because only a relatively small proportion of existing trips will be shifted to sustainable modes and this is likely to be offset by new car trips from the development. Benefits would be localised, remain long term, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Reduce per-capita transport carbon emissions in line with the District's emissions targets?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because only a relatively small proportion of existing trips will be shifted to sustainable modes and this is likely to be offset by new car trips from the development. Benefits would occur at a strategic scale, remain permanent, and are considered likely where sustainable transport is embedded within the masterplan.
Enhance communications core infrastructure?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.42	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated as there will be little if any spillover benefit. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
Housing							
Support the timely delivery of well-designed homes with an appropriate mix of housing sizes, types and tenures?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because, although a new settlement has the potential to deliver substantial housing numbers and a wide mix of housing types over the longer term, the significant infrastructure requirements and long lead-in times mean that housing delivery is unlikely to occur within the plan period. Consequently, the option is unlikely to make a meaningful contribution towards meeting identified housing needs during the period covered by the Local Plan.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing that meets the needs of all residents?	Neutral	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	0.00	○	A neutral effect is identified because, although a new settlement could deliver high-quality, affordable and specialist housing and provide a broad mix of homes over the longer term, the substantial infrastructure requirements and lengthy lead-in times mean that housing delivery is unlikely to occur within the short to medium term or within the Local Plan period. Consequently, the option is not expected to make a meaningful contribution towards meeting identified housing needs during the plan period.
The historic environment							
Conserve and enhance the significance of, designated and non-designated, heritage assets and their setting?	Minor harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.42	○	A minor harm effect is identified because a new settlement could affect the setting of heritage assets depending on its location and design. Effects would occur across the strategic development area, remain permanent, and are considered potential because impacts will vary between sites.
Social & cultural infrastructure							
Help create resilient communities by improving access to social and cultural facilities while ensuring equitable	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can deliver schools, community centres, sports facilities and cultural infrastructure as part of an integrated community. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered certain.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
distribution of services?							
Local economy & employment							
Encourage higher skilled economic sectors in the district?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because modern employment space, digital connectivity and new infrastructure can attract knowledge-based industries. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Encourage new employment opportunities that are consistent with local needs?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Certain	2.50	++	A major benefit effect is identified because construction, service provision and employment land development would create substantial job opportunities. Benefits would occur district-wide, remain permanent, and are considered certain.
Encourage the growth of existing businesses?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is anticipated because increased population and economic activity would generate additional demand for local goods and services. Benefits would occur across the district, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Enhance the vitality of North Herts' local centres	Minor harm	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Potential	-0.21	○	A minor harm effect is identified because a self-contained settlement may retain some expenditure that might otherwise support existing town centres. Effects would be localised, remain long term, and are considered potential.
Land, soils & waste							
Promote the use of previously developed land & support remediation of contaminated land?	Major harm	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	-1.88	--	A major harm effect is identified because new settlements generally require extensive greenfield land. Effects would occur at a strategic scale, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Prevent development on land where contamination poses unacceptable risks that cannot be remediated?	Minor benefit	Under 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.31	○	A minor benefit effect is anticipated because new settlement proposals would require comprehensive site investigation and remediation where necessary. Benefits would occur at site level, remain permanent, and are considered likely.
Support the minimisation, reuse, and recycling of waste?	Major benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	1.88	++	A major benefit effect is identified because a new settlement can incorporate integrated waste-management infrastructure and circular economy principles from the outset. Benefits would occur across the settlement, remain permanent, and are considered likely.

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SA objective	Impact	Scale	Duration	Probability	Significance	Indicator	Commentary
Consider and mitigate cumulative impacts from development and strategic infrastructure on air quality, noise, and environmental assets?	Minor benefit	Over 100 km2	Over 10 years / permanent	Likely	0.63	+	A minor benefit effect is identified because a single comprehensively planned settlement allows environmental impacts to be managed through coordinated design, green infrastructure and mitigation measures. Benefits would occur across the strategic development area, remain permanent, and are considered likely, although some residual impacts would remain inevitable.