

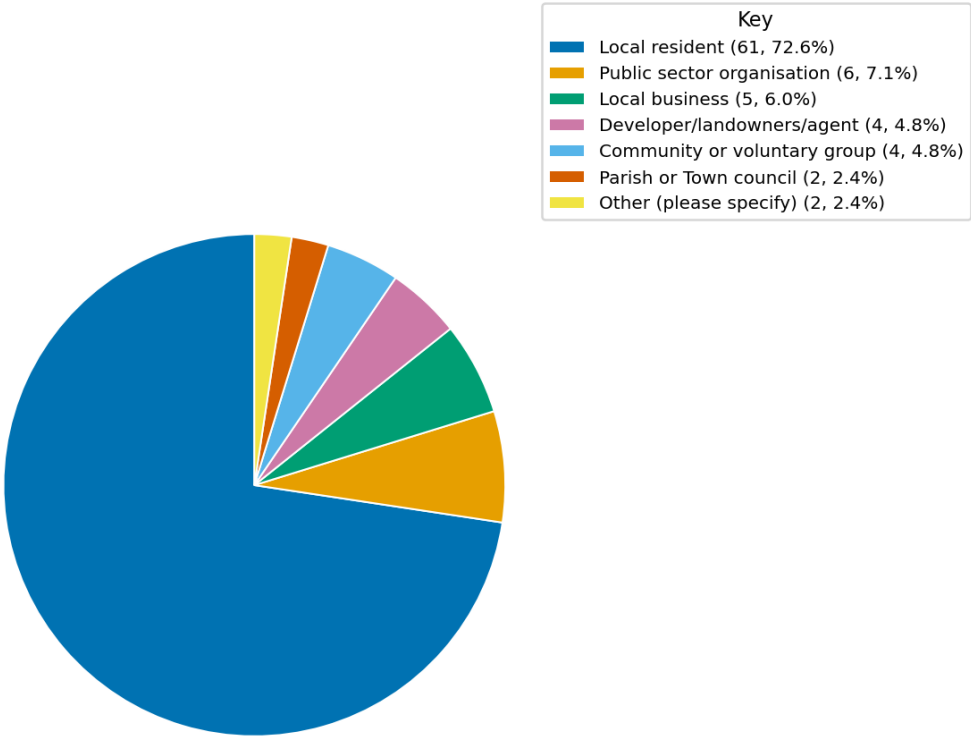
North Herts Town Centres Strategy

Summary of Consultation

This note sets out a summary of the feedback received to the consultation on the draft North Hertfordshire Town Centres Strategy and the resulting modifications proposed to be made to the final Strategy document. It summarises the consultation feedback, officer responses, and proposed modifications for the Strategy.

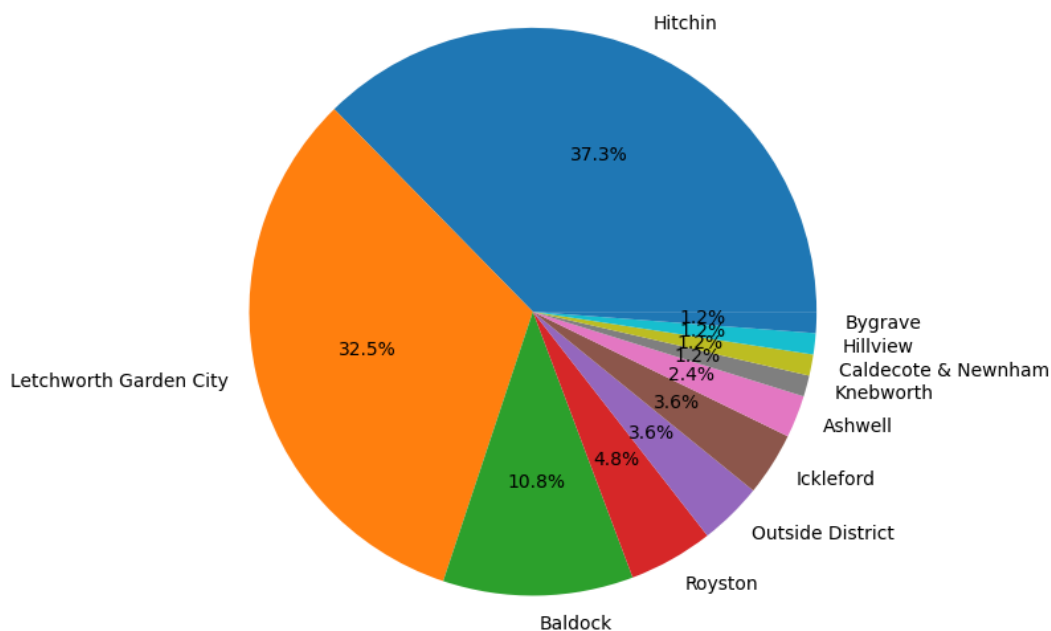
Consultation on the Strategy ran from 3 December 2025 to 30 January 2026. A total of 84 respondents answered the survey. Three-quarters of respondents were residents of North Hertfordshire. Other respondents included those from the public sector (including Hertfordshire County Council), parish councils, local businesses, and community groups. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the stakeholders by group, while Figure 2 shows their locations – the majority from Hitchin and Letchworth.

Figure 1 Response share by type



Source: NHDC

Figure 2 Response share by location



Source: NHDC

Part 1: Town Centre Context

Question 1: Do you have any comments on 1A: Introduction and Context?

Respondents queried the inclusion of location-specific detail, water infrastructure and main development priorities. Respondents also raised concerns regarding severance between Royston and the surrounding villages from the A505, in addition to Baldock experiencing heavy through-traffic.

Respondents questioned the assertion of strong economic interactions with large settlements outside North Herts, given that trips to those settlements are mostly made by car. Comments also noted absence of any mention of buses.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that greater clarity is needed on the Strategy's scope and its role as guidance. The Council has noted comments predominantly relevant to the new Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately. A comprehensive traffic management plan which, among other objectives, seeks to reduce the volume of through-traffic, is set out in the Growing Baldock masterplan.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Added additional clarification of the Strategy's scope and role as guidance within the introduction and throughout the document.
- The Strategy acknowledges A505 severance between Royston and Melbourn, Kneesworth, Bassingbourn and Litlington within the individual town centre strategy for Royston (Part 3C).
- The importance of buses in linking villages to the towns has been emphasised.

Question 2: Do you have any comments on 1B: The Council's Role?

Responses highlighted the need for fair and equal representation of residents within surveys, while some also noted that the Council should take an active role in delivering the Strategy. Respondents recommended that the Strategy clarify the relationship between town centres and the wider district, and concerns were also raised over the adequacy of street lighting while highlighting its importance for community safety.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments, in addition to other comments relating to Council communications more broadly, and agrees that its role in delivering the Strategy, including through the Delivery Plans, should be set out more clearly.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The revised Part 2B Introduction sets out how residents were selected for the telephone survey, and how this sample is representative of district demographics, as well as providing further details of the consultations and workshops undertaken.
- Reference has been added to Part 1 setting out the role and purpose of the Delivery Plans for individual towns. With reference to street lighting and community safety, a modification to Guidance Note 2 is covered under Question 9.

Question 3: Do you have any comments on 1C: Purpose of the Town Centres Strategy?

Respondents indicated that residents should be prioritised relative to business interests within the Strategy. Some queried the lack of clear policy in the document, while elements that resemble policy have not been subject to the same scrutiny as a Local Plan. Similarly, respondents also requested that the Strategy clarify whether it introduces new policy or requirements.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that the Strategy's status as guidance rather than policy should be made explicit and recognises that the needs of residents and businesses must be balanced.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy has been amended to clarify its role as guidance and the weight it will carry within the planning balance.

Question 4: Do you have any comments on the Land Use and Retail Evidence?

Respondents expressed concern over the level of rent for businesses and the variety and quality of the retail offering, particularly in Letchworth. Respondents also commented on low footfall and vehicular congestion in Baldock. Several respondents sought clarity over the redistributive capacity to other centres, while others noted the floorspace figures provided may conflict with the Local Plan. The Hitchin Business Improvement District (BID) commented on the level of recognition given to the BID renewal brochure.

Council Response

The Council agrees that it is important to address gaps in the retail offer within the centres, particularly within Letchworth and Baldock. However, matters relating to footfall and congestion in Baldock have been addressed by the Growing Baldock masterplan and this will be further considered within future infrastructure planning.

Points raised regarding town centre floorspace figures will be noted and will be considered through ongoing evidence gathering for the new Local Plan and transport planning work.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy has been amended to include the aspiration to reinstate regular open-air and/or covered markets in Letchworth and to increase diversity among retail and dining outlets.
- Amendments have been made within Part 1D to provide additional detail on the Hitchin BID renewal brochure.

Question 5: Do you have any comments on the Built Environment Evidence?

Respondents raised concerns over the state of the built environment, including the attractiveness of both older and newer development, historic buildings and property maintenance. Respondents also called for the protection of historic buildings, in addition to better signage, wayfinding and advertisement of historic town centre sites. Some queried the lack of clarity over the development of specific sites, including timescales, while others noted a need for increased consideration of green spaces and wider National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) objectives.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that the Strategy's relationship to development briefs, the Delivery Plans, and the NPPF requires clarification. Broader green space comments have been noted and are relevant to the new Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately.

Timescales and delivery programmes for new developments will be set out within the Delivery Plans.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy has been amended to clarify the use and role of development briefs and Delivery Plans throughout, in addition to the Strategy's relationship to the national policy and guidance.
- The role of this Strategy in setting the overarching vision and priorities for town centre regeneration has been further clarified within Part 1.

Question 6: Do you have any comments on the Transport, Access and Movement Evidence?

Some respondents identified or implied that there are gaps in the evidence base, in particular regarding parking capacity and demand, disabled (Blue Badge) parking bays, the location and use of taxi ranks, and the reliability of bus services.

Several respondents commented on policy and town-specific matters, which are addressed later in this summary document under Part 3.

Council Response

The Council advises that the evidence gaps identified will largely be addressed through the revised Parking Strategy and improved monitoring of bus service reliability, rather than through the Town Centres Strategy. Parking capacity and demand, Blue Badge parking bays and taxi ranks will be audited as part of the planned refresh of the North Herts Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4).

Hertfordshire County Council and the Traffic Commissioner routinely gather data on bus service reliability, and operators frequently adjust timetables to improve reliability.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Part 4 now references that North Herts Council will use its role as a member of the Intalink Partnership to seek greater transparency and responsiveness around local bus services.

Question 7: Do you have any comments on the Community Evidence?

Respondents raised concerns were raised over the representation of respondents and level of consultation. Respondents also highlighted concerns over community safety in town centres and a lack of public toilets. Respondents suggested the addition of further cross-cutting community themes, in particular the arts, and reference to the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework. Others suggested a more holistic town-wide approach to community centres.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that reference to the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework and public toilets should be added. It recognises the importance of community safety, which is reflected in the Strategy and will be addressed further in wider planning considerations. The addition of further cross-cutting community themes extends beyond the scope of the Town Centre Strategy, while broader suggestions to support the arts and community facilities lie outside the scope of the Strategy but will be considered within relevant future work, including the Delivery Plans.

The Council considers the engagement undertaken to have been proportionate in terms of the time and cost of the Strategy.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy now includes reference to the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework in Part 1D under Theme 4.

- Exploring opportunities for public conveniences in the town centre has been added to the key priorities for Baldock in Part 3D.

Part 2: Town Centre Guidance

Question 8: Do you have any comments on Guidance Note 1: Promoting Vitality and Viability in Town Centres?

Respondents requested greater detail on actions to promote vitality and viability in town centres, including site allocations, in addition to reference to specific town centres within the guidance. Respondents also suggested soundproofing mixed-use areas and increasing business support. Additionally, respondents requested greater clarity regarding whether the Guidance Note or Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will take precedence in areas of overlap.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and notes that the Guidance Notes are intended to apply consistently across the district, with town-specific detail addressed separately in Part 3 of the Strategy. Detail on delivery and site-specific plans will be provided within future Delivery Plans. Business support measures will be considered through the emerging Economic Strategy action plans, while soundproofing would be covered by Building Regulations Part E.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The introduction to Guidance Note 1 has been updated to note that the Developer Contributions SPD is the primary guidance for developer contributions, mitigation and viability.
- Reference to Local Plan policy SP7: on infrastructure requirements has been added to Guidance Note 1 for completeness.

Question 9: Do you have any comments on Guidance Note 2: The Built Form, Public Realm and Design?

Respondents raised concerns regarding the level of maintenance of pavements and street furniture in town centres and the impact on existing buildings, with some disagreement noted on the Strategy's current assessment of maintenance. Various parties also requested that the Strategy comment on Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and biodiversity.

Responses to this question regarding parking provision have been addressed under Question 11.

Council Response

The Council agrees that Guidance Note 2 should reference policies relating to street lighting, safety and SuDS. While comments on maintenance have been noted, Guidance Note 2 concerns future development; however, relevant amendments will be made to the SWOT assessments for individual town centres in Part 3 where appropriate.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Added reference to policies relating to street lighting, including forthcoming national guidance on designing streets to be safer for women and girls to Guidance Note 2.
- Added reference to policies relating to SuDS to Guidance Note 2.

Question 10: Do you have any comments on Guidance Note 3: Heritage and Historical Character?

Respondents commented that the overall Strategy and Guidance Note 3 should be focused on the form and design of new development, with the aim to ensure the protection of existing built form and character, and that new development should complement this. Respondents also suggested upgrading open spaces and paths, with a specific comment on planting more trees.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that the retention, enhancement and planting of trees should be given greater prominence in Guidance Note 3.

The delivery and design of new development, alongside addressing complementarity, will be relevant to future work on the Delivery Plans – this strategy sets the high-level principles for town centre development and regeneration and sits at a higher level than a development brief. Meanwhile, upgrading open spaces and the evaluation of paths and green spaces will be considered in future evidence gathering and the new Local Plan.

Specific heritage concerns have been noted by the Council and will be referred to the heritage officer. The Conservation Area Character Statements for each of the town centres provide the necessary historic guidance for new development.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Reference to the retention, enhancement and planting of trees has been added to Guidance Note 3.
- Reference to Local Plan policies ETC3, ETC4 and ETC5 have been added to Guidance Notes 2 and 3 for completeness and consistency with other guidance notes.

Question 11: Do you have any comments on Guidance Note 4: Promoting Sustainable Travel?

Several respondents raised concerns over parking in town centres, including parking management, pricing and provision. Respondents were also concerned that measures to prioritise sustainable modes of travel could disadvantage rural residents, while others suggested the addition of a park-and-ride. Respondents recommended that travel hubs include car parking. A few respondents wanted to see freight (goods deliveries) included within the Guidance Note, while one respondent asked for modal shift targets. Respondents also raised concerns about the safety of e-scooters and potential cluttering of pavements by rental bikes or e-scooters.

Town-specific responses are addressed under questions 13 to 24.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that travel/mobility hubs and the needs of disabled people should be explained for clarity. Parking needs and provision will be considered in the upcoming review of the district's Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4).

However, park-and-rides are not included in the Strategy because they require large areas of land, undermine pre-existing bus services and exacerbate congestion on approach roads. They also only serve people who cannot drive or do not have access to a car, which excludes a significant proportion of the rural population.

The Strategy does not address e-scooters as these are illegal to use on public land. Enforcement of this is the responsibility of the police. Any proposal for a bike or e-scooter rental scheme would be carefully assessed for its safety and equality impacts in consultation with the Highway Authority (Hertfordshire County Council).

Traffic impacts, mode-share targets and wider movement issues will be assessed by Hertfordshire County Council (as the Highway and Transport Authority) as part of making a new Local Plan for North Herts and a new Local Transport Plan for Hertfordshire, both of which will be consulted on separately.

Active travel is addressed in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, an update to which will be consulted on separately. This will focus on improving rural links to the towns. Likewise, the Local Transport Plan, a new edition of which will be consulted on separately, is where transport objectives, outcomes, policies, targets and monitoring are set out.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy puts greater emphasis on improving the quality and integration of transport services in both towns and villages throughout.
- Guidance Note 4 has been updated to explain how travel hubs located in villages will function and that they have a role in both towns and villages for improving sustainable transport links to town centres.
- Clarification has been added to Guidance Note 4 around the extent of parking envisaged for travel/mobility hubs.
- Reference has been added in part (b) of Guidance Note 4 to the general requirement to consider the transport needs of people with disabilities.
- Reference to Local Plan policies ETC3, ETC4 and ETC5 have been added to Guidance Note 4 for completeness and consistency with other guidance notes.

Question 12: Do you have any comments on Guidance Note 5: Community Facilities?

Respondents raised concerns over community, and specifically child, safety in town centres, in addition to potential health impacts from specific town centre uses such as hot food takeaways and pubs. Other respondents noted a lack of site allocations or funding detail within the Strategy. A comment from HCC recommended the Strategy include reference to the Healthy Streets approach.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that Guidance Note 5 should reference the Healthy Streets approach. Site allocations will be considered as part of making a new Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately, while funding mechanisms will be considered in the preparation of Delivery Plans. The Strategy recognises the importance of community safety and the need to consider sensitive locations or receptors when planning future uses; these matters will be addressed through the wider planning process.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Guidance Note 5 now references the Healthy Streets approach.
- Reference to Local Plan policies ETC3, ETC4 and ETC5 have been added to Guidance Note 5 for completeness and consistency with other guidance notes.

Part 3A: Hitchin

Question 13: The North Herts Town Centre Strategy sets out an identity and vision for Hitchin Town Centre. Do you think these reflect what makes Hitchin special and what its future should be?

Several respondents referred to the role of Churchgate and Hitchin Market in the town centre, requesting increased focus on the market's importance and greater detail on the Churchgate plans.

Respondents raised concerns over the lack of amenities for under 18s, and more generally the affordability of amenities in the town centre. Respondents also suggested amendments including reference to nature recovery, flood risk reduction and water quality improvements, as well as further pedestrianisation, public realm improvements, and improved routes between the town and station. Respondents also queried where a bus station could be located in the town centre.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and modification has been made to reference nature recovery, flood risk reductions and water quality improvements. The importance of progressing long-standing projects such as Churchgate is recognised, as is restoring Charnwood House and bringing it back into viable use.

The Strategy seeks only to establish the principle that Hitchin needs a bus station to improve the convenience and comfort of bus users, in particular those needing to change between services (in particular those serving the railway station and those serving other places). This is key to increasing the proportion of trips into Hitchin made by public transport. Potential locations will be explored through the new Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The Strategy now references nature recovery, flood risk reductions and water quality improvements within the vision for Hitchin.

- Reference is now made to the Churchgate project throughout Part 3A, and the Strategy reiterates the Council's commitment to bringing Charnwood House back into viable use.

Question 14: Do you have any comments on the SWOT Analysis for Hitchin?

Many of the respondents' comments addressed weaknesses, including a lack of affordable retailers, high rents, levels of through-traffic, heavy vehicles movements (including metal-recycling lorries), and the quality of pavement and public realm maintenance.

Respondents suggested modifications including amending the stated level of town maintenance in the SWOT, highlighting Hitchin's retail diversity as a strength, increasing pedestrianisation, mentioning the flea market on Sundays and improving public realm. Others suggested a wider nature circuit linking the town centre to the Chilterns, promoting a station shuttle, and better signage. Respondents also felt that the characterisation of heritage designations as a constraint implied that the Strategy viewed the historic character of the town as a weakness.

Council Response

The Council agrees that the SWOT analysis should be amended so that heritage designations are not characterised as a weakness of the town. Detail on conservation and heritage guidance is already secured through the Local Plan, particularly Policies HE1-HE4 on conserving heritage assets and using Conservation Area Character Statements in decision-making. Amendments have been made to acknowledge that the statement within the SWOT analysis could be clarified to make clear that only the designations constrain development in planning terms, and that the historic character itself is not a weakness.

The Council will work in partnership with HCC to deliver a range of transport, access and movement improvements, including a public realm, connectivity and wayfinding for the four towns. These will be guided by the North Central Hertfordshire Growth and Transport Plan, the Bus Service Improvement Plan and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). The pace of delivery will depend on the availability of funding from central Government and funding contributions from developments in Hitchin.

Comments on traffic congestion are acknowledged, and the Strategy will seek to address this by supporting improvements to alternative modes of travel and diverting through-traffic onto more suitable roads. Points on pedestrianisation, supporting retail and improving active transport all align with the Strategy's existing priorities. The SWOT analysis will be updated to clarify the position on maintenance of streets and street furniture, and include reference to the flea market on Sunday.

The new Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately, and future Spatial Development Strategy (the first of which will be produced by Hertfordshire County Council) will explore opportunities to relocate heavy industrial sites out of Hitchin to more suitable locations.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The SWOT analysis for Hitchin has been rephrased to make clear that the historic character of the town centre is not considered a weakness.
- The key priorities have been updated to clarify the position on street maintenance and furniture.

Question 15: Do you have any comments on the Key Priorities for Hitchin Town Centre?

Several respondents requested increased detail on the Churchgate redevelopment and mention of Charnwood House, as noted under Question 13, in addition to comments on parking provision, connections to the station, and increased pedestrianisation. Some respondents raised concerns over a lack of comment on connecting to Hitchin Lavender and inclusion of the Ickleford parish council in consultation, while others requested dedicated Strategies for each town centre, in addition to inclusion of details on SuDS. Respondents also suggested an access study be undertaken to look at active travel routes between Hitchin station and the town centre.

Council Response

The Council has reviewed these comments and does not consider it necessary to produce a separate strategy for each town, as Part 3 already sets out town-specific priorities. The Strategy sets out high-level principles, with Delivery Plans for each centre to follow as the next stage of work.

The Council recognises the importance of progressing long-standing projects such as Churchgate and amendments have been made to the Strategy to better reflect this. Reference to the plans to bring Charnwood House back into viable use has also been added.

Additionally, comments regarding consultation with the Parish Council on connections to Hitchin Lavender are noted: when planning work or taking decisions, the relevant authorities (NHDC or HCC) consult all relevant consultees.

Specific matters relating to parking will be addressed within the upcoming update to the district Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4). Hertfordshire County Council has audited routes between Hitchin railway station and town centre and will be coming forward with proposals for improvements in due course. It is also looking at creating a safe walking route under the railway bridge on Arlesey Road to improve the link to Hitchin Lavender.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Added an action to support the expansion of HertsLynx into the north-western part of North Herts, most of which is poorly served by bus under Key Priority D: Hitchin as a key sustainable transport hub.
- Guidance Note 2 now references SuDS.
- Within Key Priority C: Cultural economy strategy, reference is now made to the Churchgate project, and the Strategy reiterates the Council's commitment to bringing Charnwood House back into viable use within the vision statement and under the SWOT analysis as stated in Q13 above.

Part 3B: Letchworth Garden City

Question 16: The North Herts Town Centre Strategy sets out an identity and vision for Letchworth Garden City Town Centre. Do you think these reflect what makes Letchworth Garden City special and what its future should be?

Respondents called for a stronger vision reflecting Letchworth's future potential, calling for visible, proactive leadership in town centre delivery. Their suggestions included the redevelopment of Plinston Hall for retail, while some raised concerns over both a reduction in places to eat and a desire for more shopping, cinema and restaurant provision to be included in the Strategy. Respondents also raised concerns over vacant retail units and the underlying assumption of growing demand for retail and leisure floorspace. Respondents called for increased and improved parking in the town centre.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that the vision for Letchworth should be strengthened to better reflect its ambition and potential. The Delivery Plan for Letchworth will build on and enhance this vision through specific objectives and initiatives.

Parking provision is addressed in Strategy Guidance Note 4 and will be further addressed through the planned update of the district's Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4). Regarding the retail uses identified in the Strategy, the mix of retail and food and beverage uses reflects market demand and current planning evidence, including that within the district's Retail Needs Study and Local Plan.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Clarification has been added that the vision for Letchworth will be built upon through the objections and actions within the future Delivery Plan.

Question 17: Do you have any comments on the SWOT Analysis for Letchworth Garden City?

Respondents raised concerns over vacancy levels, the progress of regeneration schemes, and low levels of footfall in the town centre, in addition to leakage to larger centres such as Cambridge. Respondents also noted the importance of retaining key outlets and progressing ongoing investment at sites such as the Wynd and Gernon Road. Some suggested the Strategy overlooks weaknesses in local transport, including a lack of integration with major transport hubs, a lack of safe cycling routes and limited public transport options, in addition to issues relating to town centre parking provision. Respondents also raised community safety and security as missing from the Strategy, noting that greater footfall and evening use could result in increased crime, and that the risk to businesses should also be addressed.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that the SWOT analysis should better reflect recent investment and the impact of increased footfall on safety. Issues raised relating to visitor behaviour, footfall, and the role of retail anchors are already addressed within the Strategy

and are supported by Local Plan policies. An amendment will be made to the SWOT to reference impact of increased footfall on safety.

Parking provision and tariffs, including free short-stay bays, need to be balanced against ensuring that bus services remain viable and can grow to serve more people in and outside the town. This will be considered within the planned update to the district's Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4).

The Delivery Plan will guide sustainable redevelopment opportunities as they arise and support a balanced mix of commercial and residential uses.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The SWOT analysis now includes reference to the investment at Wynd, the redevelopment at Geron Road, and to broader safety measures.
- Reference has been made to seeking opportunities to better integrate sustainable transport modes.

Question 18: Do you have any comments on the Key Priorities for Letchworth Garden City Town Centre?

Respondents called for improved access for commuters, including a better station drop-off and increased parking provision, and for safer cycling, improved active travel and improved public transport links – including the potential for a bus hub at Broadway Gardens. Other public transport suggestions included short local routes and rapid inter-town services.

As noted previously, respondents also raised concerns over the quality of the existing retail offering and Letchworth's position relative to other centres, calling for national retailers to be attracted and for new commercial and residential space to be developed, expanding on the Wynd Road investment. Respondents also highlighted heritage as a potential draw for visitors to Letchworth's centre.

Some respondents sought stronger emphasis on delivering LCWIP-led public realm improvements, while others recommended identifying a Health Hub, potentially at Garden Square, and noted a lack of reference to the Letchworth BID.

Council Response

The Strategy provides the framework for coordinated regeneration and identified projects and highway initiatives will be taken forward with partners-including Letchworth BID-through the preparation of a Delivery Plan. This ensures that future redevelopment opportunities, including those around the Wynd and the station area, are progressed in a sustainable and inclusive manner.

Station access and drop-off arrangements are already addressed within the Town Centres Strategy through Guidance Note 4. Future transport work alongside Hertfordshire County Council will take this into consideration to ensure future improvements align with wider transport planning and infrastructure priorities.

The Council agrees that strong heritage is a strength to the town centre, rather than solely a planning constraint, and the SWOT will be amended to include this. With regard to the comments on

the Health Hub, decisions on primary care facilities sit with health authorities, and any future town centre health hub would complement – not replace – local surgeries.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Added action to support the reinstatement of regular open air and/or covered markets.
- The SWOT analysis has been amended to recognise heritage assets as a strength of the town centre.

Part 3C: Royston

Question 19: The North Herts Town Centre Strategy sets out an identity and vision for Royston Town Centre. Do you think these reflect what makes Royston special and what its future should be?

Some respondents suggested the history and character of the town may have been impacted by population growth, while others raised concerns regarding the quality of the retail offer. Likewise, respondents suggested the town's heritage could be better highlighted through trails and plaques. Some noted that Royston Gateway pulls shoppers from the town centre, and that the centre has been harmed by the volume of through-traffic.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that opportunities to reduce through-traffic and support heritage interpretation in Royston should be pursued through related strategies. The Strategy highlights the role of heritage within Guidance Note 3 and it is also reflected in existing Local Plan policies. Opportunities for enhanced interpretation, trails and signage can be explored through future place-based work and the Delivery Plan, and these have been added to the identified key priorities for the town centre.

The Council acknowledges concerns around through-traffic and Royston Gateway and will address these through measures that make active travel and public transport a more attractive alternative to driving. Specific measures are set out in the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, and further measures will be delivered through the Bus Service Improvement Plan, updates to the Growth and Transport Plan, the new Local Plan, the new Local Transport Plan and the future Spatial Development Strategy.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The key priorities for Royston now reference opportunities for enhanced interpretation in the town centre.

Question 20: Do you have any comments on the SWOT Analysis for Royston?

Respondents raised concerns over the quality of retail and food offerings in the town centre which were found to have a lack of variety, and in particular lacking family-friendly options. Respondents suggested improving provision for active travel at the A10/A505 junction and other locations on the boundary between Royston and South Cambridgeshire, which would enhance connections to

villages north of Royston. Some suggested that new edge-of-town developments could enable these improvements for the benefit of both existing residents and future residents of those developments.

Council Response

The Council agrees that active travel connections between Royston and the surrounding area, including across the district boundary, should be reflected in the SWOT. The suggested interventions represent opportunities to include within the analysis.

The Strategy recognises the need to enhance the quality and diversity of Royston's retail and food offer, including supporting facilities for all age groups. These issues are addressed through existing Local Plan town centre policies and the Town Centres Strategy guidance, which support improving unit quality, broadening the mix of uses and strengthening the overall attractiveness of the town centre.

The Strategy aligns with Local Plan transport policies. Guidance Note 4 addresses sustainable transport, parking and movement, including active travel and cross boundary coordination.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The SWOT analysis has been updated to include reference to A505 severance and active travel connections.

Question 21: Do you have any comments on the Key Priorities for Royston Town Centre?

Respondents raised concerns over cycling and walking connectivity and safety, while relevant suggestions included connecting to national routes north and to Icknield. Others noted concerns over safety and vehicle flows in the town centre, with suggestions focusing on junctions, speed limits and the direction of traffic flows.

Some responses questioned the attractiveness of Royston to visitors, with suggestions of improving shops, nightlife, and bringing eating places to the high street, in addition to pedestrianised areas, the addition of seating, shelters in selected areas, and improvement to roads and pavements.

Council Response

The Council agrees that improving the pedestrian experience should be added as a key priority for Royston town centre. While the Strategy does not determine public rights-of-way designations, speed limits or site-specific development restrictions, it supports wider active travel links and improvements through Guidance Note 4. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan also provides guidance on active travel measures. Car parking suggestions will be considered as part of a planned review of the district's Parking Strategy (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4).

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Key priorities now include an action to improve the pedestrian experience in and around the town centre.
- The extent of improvements supported by the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan has been clarified.

- An action has been added to explore ways to make bus services more attractive and reliable, and improve the experience for people waiting for a bus at the railway and bus stations.

Part 3D: Baldock

Question 22: The North Herts Town Centre Strategy sets out an identity and vision for Baldock Town Centre. Do you think these reflect what makes Baldock special and what its future should be?

Several respondents raised concerns over the planned growth of Baldock and how it will impact the character of the town centre and sufficiency of the retail provision. Respondents also cited concerns over a lack of independent traders, the quality of some town centre buildings, and parking limits. Respondents suggested the Strategy prioritise investment in buses and cycling networks in Baldock, while community safety was a recurring issue, with some calling for more visible policing in the town centre.

Council Response

The Council agrees that parking management, including Controlled Parking Zones, should be addressed as Baldock grows. The Strategy recognises that significant planned growth around Baldock will require coordinated transport and infrastructure planning. This will also be addressed through ongoing work towards the new Local Plan and in transport work with HCC. This and other strategies, including the Growing Baldock masterplan, are seeking to make alternatives to driving into Baldock centre and railway station more convenient and attractive to reduce pressures on parking.

The Strategy supports a varied and resilient retail mix and recognises the value of independent and specialist traders. In addition, it recognises the importance of community safety, and these matters will also be considered in wider planning processes.

The comment regarding the Conservation and Character Statement for Baldock will be referred to heritage officers.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Part 4 now includes reference to the implementation of Controlled Parking Zones and adjusting parking time limits to ensure town centre parking spaces are used efficiently. This action applies to all four town centres, including Baldock.

Question 23: Do you have any comments on the SWOT Analysis for Baldock?

Several respondents repeated concerns over the planned growth of Baldock and resulting population increase, in particular with regard to its impact on traffic congestion and the provision of community facilities. Respondents also commented on the provision of parking and restrictions harming trade, and the importance of connections between rural villages and the town centre.

Respondents also noted a lack of pedestrian crossings in the town, among more general comments on road safety. Their suggestions included providing a greater level of detail on strategies to

encourage independent traders, and focusing on transforming the High Street into a destination as the town grows, while managing the impact of through-traffic, including along the A507. Several respondents felt that new development should seek to strengthen the historic centre.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and agrees that pedestrian safety and support for independent retailers should remain priorities as Baldock grows. The Strategy recognises the need for improved pedestrian safety, support for independent retailers and protection and enhancement of Baldock's town centre character. These aims align with the Strategy's Guidance Note 1, 2 and 4 and wider Local Plan objectives. The Strategy also recognises the importance of maintaining car access for rural communities. Detailed measures, including pedestrian crossings and retail support, will be explored at the delivery stage.

The Strategy recognises that planned growth around Baldock will require coordinated transport planning to address traffic, station access, parking and wider movement pressures. These issues will be considered through the Local Plan and detailed transport work with HCC.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Greater emphasis is placed on transport connections between villages and town centres throughout the Strategy.

Question 24: Do you have any comments on the Key Priorities for Baldock Town Centre?

Respondents' primary concerns centred around increasing the provision of parking and ensuring suitable vehicular access to accommodate visitors and prioritising accessibility. This included comments on enforcement of parking and road rules. Respondents also suggested encouraging greater adoption of renewable energy among businesses and in public buildings, while others raised concerns over the lack of public toilets in Baldock.

Council Response

A planned review of the Parking Strategy will consider whether parking restrictions need to be adjusted or extended and assess whether parking provision and controls are appropriate for Baldock's future growth (covered in Town Centres Strategy Part 4).

In addition, as noted previously, the Strategy will include reference to adjusting or implementing new Controlled Parking Zones and adjusting parking time limits to ensure town centre parking spaces are used efficiently.

The Strategy supports improving walking and cycling while maintaining necessary vehicular access. Moreover, Guidance Note 2 encourages improved environmental performance, with technologies such as solar panels and heat pumps considered through detailed design and aligns with the Local Plan, which will be consulted on separately.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Exploring opportunities to provide public conveniences within Baldock town centre has been added to the key priorities under town centre service provision and infrastructure.

Part 3: General

Question 25: Do you consider it useful to have a summary table of the priority areas for each of the town centres?

While some respondents found the table useful, several respondents commented that it was overly repetitive and highlighted that many readers would focus on one town. Those who found the table useful suggested that the focus should be on ensuring delivery and materialisation of the strategies.

Council Response

The Council agrees that the summary table of the priority areas is repetitive, and as such it has been removed. The Strategy sets out high-level principles, with the preparation of the Delivery Plans for each town centre to follow as the next stage of work.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The role of the Strategy as a guidance document and its relationship to the future Delivery Plans has been clarified throughout the document.

Part 4: Further Council Actions and Funding Opportunities

Question 26: Do you have any comments on the Council's further proposed actions?

Respondents primarily commented on transport concerns, including enforcement of road rules, improvements in cycle access, concerns over the safety of e-scooter/e-bike hire schemes, parking and greater consideration of those with mobility issues. Some raised concerns that the Strategy lacks spatial integration in the context of growing populations and town centre density.

Respondents also requested clear site allocations and development briefs, and querying whether there will be reference to policies from which action will come. There were also concerns raised as to whether there had been suitable engagement in the creation of the Strategy, and if town centre residents have been overlooked.

Some also noted that the Strategy does not offer practical support for local businesses to adopt sustainability measures and that higher taxes, regulations and bureaucracy can place a burden on small businesses, which could hinder regeneration.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and notes that the Strategy provides interim guidance on the application of policy within the current Local Plan until such time a formal policy is advanced and adopted through the Local Plan review, which will set out the Council's planning priorities for town centres. Site allocations and development briefs will be considered through the emerging Local

Plan and referenced where appropriate in future Delivery Plans. As noted previously, this will be further clarified within the Strategy.

Comments on parking, accessibility and support for local businesses will be considered in ongoing work on town centre planning and future evidence gathering. National taxation and regulatory requirements fall outside the Council's control.

The Strategy promotes high-quality, sustainable design while ensuring development remains appropriate to each town-centre context. Parking, cycle storage and green infrastructure will be guided by Local Plan policies and design standards. The Strategy recognises that car travel remains essential for many residents in rural and edge-of-town areas and for those with mobility impairments, while suitable sustainable transport options will also be considered.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The role of the Strategy as a guidance document and its relationship to the future Delivery Plans has been clarified throughout the document.

Question 27: Do you have any comments on the potential funding opportunities and key considerations for NHDC?

Respondents noted that site allocations would be needed to fund and deliver improvements. It was felt by some that the Strategy relies too heavily on public funding, while others raised concerns that the Strategy – and funding – may not equally apply to all four town centres, with reference to Baldock. As noted previously, some respondents queried which document takes precedent in providing guidance on developer contributions and funding.

Council Response

The Council recognises the importance of ensuring balance between the town centres and confirms that the Strategy will apply equally to all four towns. Detailed site allocation, viability considerations and developer-funded infrastructure are addressed through the Council's Local Plan, supported by the Developer Contributions SPD and related planning policies.

While the Strategy sets out potential funding and delivery opportunities the Strategy's role is to provide high-level guidance, while the Developer Contributions SPD remains the primary document for detailed requirements. This will be clarified within the Strategy.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- The role of the Strategy and the precedence of the Developer Contributions SPD has been clarified.

Further Comments

Question 28: Do you have any comments on the Glossary in the Town Centres Strategy? Have we missed any terms that should be included?

Only one respondent commented on the glossary, highlighting that site allocations and development briefs did not feature.

Council Response

The Council agrees that all technical terms used in the Strategy should be defined in the glossary.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Added definitions for all technical terms used in the Strategy.
- Added a list of acronyms and abbreviations used in the Strategy.

Question 29: Do you have any further comments on the Town Centres Strategy?

Several respondents critiqued the format of the survey and the length of the consultation document. Some suggested that in future the Council should consider ways to make the survey more user-friendly, provide a summary document for the consultation, and extend the consultation period to ensure there is sufficient awareness among residents and businesses and provide time.

Some respondents raised concerns that residents were not clearly reflected in the engagement, while others questioned whether some of the data was outdated. Respondents called for increased proactiveness in allocating sites, in addition to a greater focus developer funding such as via S106, while others cited that there should be an increased emphasis on health outcomes. In addition, respondents raised concerns that collating four within one strategy may risk missing some of the nuances that make each town centre unique.

Council Response

The Council has considered these comments and acknowledges the concerns raised about the length and accessibility of the consultation document and process. As noted previously, detailed site allocations and funding mechanisms are addressed through the Local Plan and supported by the Council's Developer Contributions SPD and relevant planning policies.

While the consultation was open to all residents, businesses and stakeholders for two months, concerns regarding the length and accessibility of the document are noted and will be taken into consideration when designing future consultations. The Council will also consider how information can be presented in a more concise and manageable format to support wider engagement. Concerns surrounding the accessibility of the online form are also noted. Future consultations will explore simpler formats and easier sign-in options to support wider participation.

The Strategy recognises the important role that town centre design, walkability and inclusive environments play in supporting health and reducing inequalities. Reference has been made to the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework, and this will continue to inform future work on implementation. Equality impact assessments will be undertaken alongside the preparation of the Delivery Plans. The evidence base, as presented in the appendices for all four town centres, provides a baseline which will be reviewed and updated separately as part of the Delivery Plans and the emerging Local Plan using the most current datasets available.

The following modifications have been made to the Strategy:

- Reference has been added to the Hertfordshire Healthy and Safe Places Framework.
- An executive summary has been added to the document.