

4 Strategic Policies

Sustainable Development

Policy SP1: Sustainable development in North Hertfordshire

This Plan supports the principles of sustainable development within North Hertfordshire. We will:

- a. Maintain the role of key settlements within and adjoining the District as the main focus for housing, employment and new development making use of previously developed land where possible;
- b. Ensure the long-term vitality of the District's villages by supporting growth which provides opportunities for existing and new residents and sustains key facilities;
- c. Grant planning permission for proposals that, individually or cumulatively:
 - i. Deliver an appropriate mix of homes, jobs and facilities that contribute towards the targets and aspirations in this Plan;
 - ii. Create high-quality developments that respect and improve their surroundings and provide opportunities for healthy lifestyle choices;
 - iii. Provide the necessary infrastructure required to support an increasing population;
 - iv. Protect key elements of North Hertfordshire's environment including **biodiversity**, important landscapes, heritage assets and green infrastructure (including the water environment); and
 - v. Secure any necessary mitigation measures that reduce the impact of development, including on climate change; and
- d. Support neighbourhood plans and other local planning initiatives where they are in general conformity with the strategic policies of this Local Plan.

- 4.1 Government policy is clear that the purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development. This means improving our lives today while not compromising our ability to do so in the future. It means supporting growth whilst protecting key elements of the natural and historic environment.
- 4.2 In implementing this Plan, we will take a positive approach that ensures we can continue to permit the significant majority of planning applications for new development.
- 4.3 Policy SP1 sets out guiding principles for planning in the District over the period to 2031. We will seek to grant permission wherever proposals support these strategic aims and meet the requirements set out in this Plan.
- 4.4 These principles are already evident across the District. Letchworth has a global reputation as the world's first garden city. Hitchin, Baldock and Royston are established market towns built around a historic core. Our villages provide highly valued environments in which to live away from the main towns, yet also have provided opportunities for sensitive growth over time.

- 4.5 These settlements are located within a wider setting of which the District can be proud. North Hertfordshire has a rich and varied historic environment while high quality landscapes and areas of national importance surround our towns and villages. These factors help to maintain separate identities and also provide opportunities for residents to interact with the wider countryside around them.
- 4.6 This Plan accommodates necessary growth whilst maintaining these characteristics. New development will integrate with its surrounds rather than being remote. We will make use of previously developed land where possible. Key protections will be respected.
- 4.7 In setting a framework for growth, this Plan also recognises the value of local knowledge and the importance of local choice. A number of parishes within the District are already designated Neighbourhood Planning areas and our Local Plan is structured flexibly in response. This chapter contains the **strategic** policies and aspirations with which any neighbourhood plans, or other local planning initiatives, must be in general conformity.
- 4.8 Beyond this, there remains scope for local interpretation. Local housing allocations and, beyond the Green Belt, village boundaries are examples of issues which are open to debate and change through the Neighbourhood Planning system. Local communities will be able to supplement the policies in this Plan or identify alternate approaches whilst adhering to the key principles we have set out.
- 4.9 Our Sustainability Appraisal says that our policy provides an overarching expression of what sustainable development would look like in North Hertfordshire; it is strategic in nature and broadly covers sustainable development priorities.

Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy and Spatial Distribution^x

Between 2011 and 2031, the plan seeks to make provision for at least 15,950 new homes.

Approximately 80% ~~The majority of the District's~~ **housing development and the substantial majority of new employment, retail and other development** will be located within **the adjusted settlement boundaries of** ~~or adjoining~~ the following towns:

- Baldock (3,298 homes);
- Hitchin (1,679);
- Letchworth Garden City (2,167);
- Royston (1,797);
- Stevenage (including Great Ashby)³² (1,830); and
- Luton³² (2,100)

Approximately 11% of housing, along with supporting infrastructure and facilities will be delivered in five villages identified by this Plan for growth:

^x The figures shown in this policy for individual settlements are the total of planned, permitted and completed development for the period 2011-2031 as shown in Chapter 13 of the submitted plan. These figures are not a target and do not necessarily represent the maximum number of new homes that will be built.

³² These settlements are (substantively) located outside of North Hertfordshire's administrative area, but the urban areas adjoin, or already lie partially within, the District.

- **Barkway (209)**
- **Codicote (367)**
- **Ickleford (210)**
- **Knebworth (736)**
- **Little Wymondley (306)**

The remaining development will be dispersed across the District as set out below.

In Category A villages, general development will also be allowed within the defined settlement boundaries of the Category A villages of:

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| • Ashwell; | • Hexton; | • Pirton; |
| • Barkway; | • Ickleford; | • Preston; |
| • Barley; | • Kimpton; | • Reed; |
| • Breachwood Green; | • Knebworth; | • Sandon; |
| • Cockernhoe & Mangrove Green; | • Little Wymondley; | • St Ippolyts & Gosmore; |
| • Codicote; | • Lower Stondon ³² ; | • Therfield; |
| • Graveley; | • Oaklands ³² ; | • Weston; and |
| | • Offley; | • Whitwell. |

Infilling development which does not extend the built core of the village will be allowed in the Category B villages of:

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|--------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| • Blackmore End; | • Kelshall; | • Old Knebworth; |
| • Great Wymondley; | • Lilley; | • Rushden; |
| • Hinxworth; | • Newnham; | • Wallington; and |
| • Holwell; | | • Willian. |

Only limited affordable housing and facilities for local community needs **meeting the requirements of Policy CGB2** will be allowed in the Category C settlements of:

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| • Bygrave; | • Langley; | • Peters Green; and |
| • Caldecote; | • Nuthampstead; | • Radwell |
| • Clothall; | | |

Development outside of these locations or general parameters will be permitted where this is supported by an adopted Neighbourhood Plan. Under the provisions of national policy at the time of this Plan's examination, Neighbourhood Plans cannot allocate sites in the Green Belt or amend Green Belt boundaries.

- 4.10 North Hertfordshire includes a range of settlements, including isolated rural hamlets, numerous villages, the four towns of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston, and large parts of the Great Ashby estate on the edge of Stevenage.
- 4.11 The Council wishes to focus the majority of new development on the towns (including urban extensions to existing towns) in order to make maximum use of existing facilities, social networks and infrastructure, and maximise opportunities to deliver new infrastructure. However, it is important to allow growth of the villages in order to allow those communities to continue to function.
- 4.xx Based on the policies and allocations of this plan, it is anticipated that at least four in every five new homes delivered over the plan period will be built within the adjusted settlement boundaries of the towns. These will remain the primary focus for employment, retail and other development. The balance of new development will be distributed across North Hertfordshire's villages and the remainder of the District.**
- 4.xx Much of this growth will be delivered on sites allocated for development by this Plan. This will be supplemented by (often smaller) 'windfall' sites which come forward within the settlement boundaries and parameters identified in Policy SP2 as well as any further sites subsequently identified through Neighbourhood Plans. These schemes may include opportunities for self-build development.**
- 4.12 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) acknowledges sometimes development in one village may support services in other nearby villages. Although some communities may lack a full range of facilities themselves, they should not be barred from further development. In many of the District's rural areas the average number of people per household is falling. Some of the villages have seen very little growth in recent years and their populations have actually fallen. Our evidence gives further consideration to these issues and explains how the settlement hierarchy has been developed³³. For those areas within the Green Belt, we have additionally considered how villages contribute to openness³⁴.
- 4.xx Five villages have been identified that can support higher levels of growth:**
- **Knebworth and Codicote are the two largest villages within North Hertfordshire and support a range of services, including a station at Knebworth;**
 - **Ickleford and Little Wymondley provide opportunities to accommodate further residential development in close proximity to neighbouring towns along with sustainable transport connections; and**
 - **Barkway as a focus for development in the rural east of the District.**
- 4.13 ~~The~~ **The** Category A villages, normally ~~those~~ containing primary schools, ~~all~~ **also** have defined boundaries within which development will be allowed and sites have been allocated to meet the District's overall housing ~~total~~ **requirement**. ~~Category A villages have defined settlement boundaries and~~ **These villages** are excluded from the policy designation (either Green Belt or Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt – see Policy SP5) which affects the surrounding countryside.

³³ Housing and Green Belt Background Paper (NHDC, 2016)

³⁴ Green Belt Review (NHDC, 2016). Paragraph 86 of the NPPF explains how planning authorities should consider villages within the Green Belt when setting boundaries.

- 4.14 Category B villages are those with a lower level of facilities such as village halls and public houses. Category B villages will be allowed to accommodate limited infill development that does not expand the built core of the village into the surrounding countryside.
- 4.15 Blackmore End has been excluded from the Green Belt because of its limited contribution to the openness and purposes of the Green Belt. For the remaining Category B villages, this Plan does not define a settlement boundary or the extent of the built core. The Council believes it should be possible to assess on a case-by-case basis whether a site is in the built core. However, that may be something that affected communities wish to explore through neighbourhood plans.
- 4.16 The Category C settlements are
- those which give their names to a parish that does not contain any category A or B villages; and / or
 - those with a modest level of facilities but which make an important contribution to the open character of the Green Belt.
- 4.17 Within Category C settlements, a more restrictive approach will be taken. We will support limited affordable housing and schemes for community facilities which meet proven needs from that parish in line with the detailed policies of this Plan.
- 4.18 Our Sustainability Appraisal says that our policy will have a range of positive effects in seeking to focus new development within or adjoining existing settlements. There may be some potential negative impacts in terms of interaction with exiting residential areas and environmental aspects due to development being on greenfield sites. However these impacts can be mitigated and addressed through design and layout considerations and other policies in this Plan.