

**North Hertfordshire District Council**  
North Hertfordshire Housing Capacity Study  
Final Report  
May 2003

**Halcrow Group Limited**



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# North Hertfordshire District Council

## North Hertfordshire Housing Capacity Study

### Final Report

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- Appendix B      Schedules of Housing Capacity Sites and Estimates
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- Appendix D      Maps of the Four Towns and Fifteen Villages showing Housing Capacity Sites
- Appendix E      Homogenous Residential Area Maps

# 1

## Introduction

### 1.1

#### *Purpose of the Study*

North Hertfordshire District Council commissioned Halcrow in April 2001 to undertake a Housing Capacity and Edge of Settlement Study. The purpose of this study is to provide objective advice to the Council on the housing potential within four main urban areas and 15 villages, in order to assist the Council's decision-making in respect of housing allocations in the current Local Plan Review. The findings of the Edge of Settlement element of this study are set out in a separate report. This comprehensive study has surveyed potential sites for housing within the towns of Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston and the villages of Ashwell, Barkway, Barley, Pirton, Sandon (Church End), Therfield, Codicote, Ickleford, Kimpton, Knebworth, Whitwell, Little Wymondley, Breachwood Green, Great Offley and Weston, because these are the settlements with services and facilities to justify consideration for housing allocations. The study does not cover other less well-served settlements within the District.

Halcrow's approach to urban capacity studies follows the stages of: identification of capacity sources; surveying capacity; assessing yield and discounting potential; as set out in the guidance produced by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) on urban capacity studies. This is entitled "Tapping the potential - Assessing urban housing capacity: towards better practice", and was first published in December 2000 to inform the PPG3 "Plan, Monitor and Manage" approach. Therefore, Halcrow's approach is considered to meet the requirements of PPG3 Housing (March 2000). Further information comparing the DTLR's Better Practice Guide and the Consultant's approach is appended in *Appendix A*.

### 1.2

#### *Important Notes*

As with all urban capacity studies, estimating the potential for urban housing indicates what is possible, not necessarily what will happen in practice. The study will inform the Council about the identification of housing land and the formulation of housing policies and supporting text in the new Deposit Draft Local Plan. Estimates provided within this study reflect the potential for urban housing and **do not represent actual housing allocation figures for direct inclusion in the new Local Plan. Other planning issues have to be considered.**

As an initial discount of unconstrained development opportunity some identified sites have been removed from the capacity estimates on the basis of sustainable development and design criteria, and the nature of the local housing market. All sites retained within the capacity estimates are considered by the Consultant to be suitable for future residential development (or for mixed-use development, including an element of residential). Estimates are provided of the realistic capacity of sites taking account of their physical characteristics, location and likelihood of being brought

forward for development within the plan period of the new Deposit Draft Local Plan. However, in discounting capacity, access to detailed site information (for example ownership, covenants and contamination) has not been complete. Nevertheless the information obtained and the methodology used is made as transparent as possible. Therefore, it is possible that some sites may not, in practice, come forward for development within the plan period for practical or commercial reasons.

The outputs of this study will assist North Hertfordshire District Council in making informed decisions on future development within the District. In particular, the information gained will be critical to the Council's monitoring of housing land supply – the pivotal component of the Government's new "Plan, Monitor and Manage" approach to planning for housing. Site information, e.g. ownership, covenants and contamination site conditions, can be updated as new data is made known to the Council.

As in all studies of this nature exploring urban capacity potential is a matter of judgement and choice. This report therefore reflects the findings and advice of the Consultant, and does not necessarily reflect the opinion or policies of North Hertfordshire District Council. Council Officers, however, have assisted in the Consultant's findings by providing local information and knowledge of sites and their availability for development. Halcrow are extremely grateful for their assistance while this study was undertaken.

### **1.3**

#### ***Overview of Report***

The report contains:

- background information on government guidance and policies that have formed the basis of the methodology adopted for this study (section 2.2);
- urban design principles that set the context for the design exercises undertaken (section 3.1);
- agreed criteria for selecting, retaining or eliminating sites through the site survey work (section 3.4);
- an overview of the methods and survey findings for incorporating or excluding sites within the urban capacity analysis together with a summary of the results (section 4.1);
- design exercises to inform urban capacity estimates, based on an assessment of site characteristics, density, the provision of parking and open space, and appropriate building form and dwelling configuration (section 5.4);
- urban capacity estimates resulting from combining the site survey results with the design exercise density figures (sections 6.3 and 6.4);
- phasing and further discounting considerations (section 6.5); and
- a brief commentary on the findings (chapter 7).

## 2 Background

### 2.1 *Key Policy Issues*

There is significant political, professional and public interest in planning for new housing resulting from the increase in demand through new household formations and other factors. In particular, there continues to be wide-ranging debate about accommodating the provision of new housing by re-using previously developed land within urban areas in preference to the development of 'greenfield' sites, and the quality of design of new housing development.

Since the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations was adopted in April 1996, there has been sustained pressure from central government to recycle previously developed urban land for residential uses. This pressure has been part of an overall objective to achieve a more sustainable pattern of development. A national target has been set seeking to achieve 60% of additional housing on previously developed land and through conversions by 2008. This crucial, fundamental change in emphasis on the location of new housing has been combined with an equally significant change in the approach to planning for new housing; namely from "Predict and Provide" to "Plan, Monitor and Manage". This is having noticeably fundamental implications on how house builders locate, plan, design and market residential schemes, and how Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) plan for, monitor, facilitate and control the location, supply and design of new housing development. Urban capacity studies, although at present relatively untested through the Local Plan process, are proving to be an increasingly key management tool in this new policy climate.

### 2.2 *Government Policy and Guidelines*

Three key policy documents, published by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR; formerly the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions or DETR), have embodied and promoted the new values set out above. These are "Planning for Sustainable Development: Towards Better Practice" (1998); the White Paper on the Future of Transport "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" (1998); and, most significantly, the Urban White Paper "Our Towns and Cities: The Future: Delivering an Urban Renaissance" (2000).

Arising from these White Papers have been a number of more specific documents and guidance notes that are particularly relevant to urban capacity studies; these include:

- Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (PPG3): Housing (March 2000), *with particular emphasis on a sequential approach to housing development, density guidelines and monitoring requirements;*
- Tapping The Potential – Assessing Urban Housing Capacity: Towards Better Practice (December 2000), *which gives guidance on how to conduct urban capacity studies;*

- Planning To Deliver – The Managed Release Of Housing Sites: Towards Better Practice (July 2001), *which advises LPAs about phasing housing development through the Local Plan process;*
- Planning Policy Guidance Note 11 (PPG11): Regional Planning (October 2000), *with particular emphasis on requirements for monitoring housing at a regional level;*
- Monitoring Provision of Housing through the Planning System: Towards Better Practice (October 2000), *which advises LPAs about monitoring housing supply;*
- Better Places to Live – A Companion Guide to PPG3/ By Design/ Places, Streets and Movement (September 2001), *which sets out the quality agenda and design code for sustainable residential development to follow;*
- National Land Use Database (NLUD) (2001) and the South East of England Regional Assembly (SEERA; formerly SERPLAN) Annual Housing Supply Monitoring Report (2001), *with reference to data needs.*

### 2.2.1

#### *Tapping the Potential*

Of crucial importance is the recent publication by the DTLR entitled “Tapping the Potential – Assessing Urban Housing Capacity: Towards Better Practice”. This document provides guidance and does not specify precisely what method should be used. It advises on the steps to transparently and comprehensively explore the capacity of urban areas to accommodate residential and mixed-use development. The four key steps outlined in the guidance – identifying capacity sources, surveying the capacity, assessing yield, and discounting potential – have been closely followed in the approach developed by Halcrow.

### 2.2.2

#### *PPG3: Housing*

The Government’s main focus for additional housing is to promote more sustainable patterns of development and make better use of previously developed land in existing towns and cities. The Government is committed to promoting more sustainable patterns of development by:

- Concentrating most additional housing development within urban areas;
- Making more efficient use of land by maximising the re-use of previously developed land and the conversion and re-use of existing buildings;
- Assessing the capacity of urban areas to accommodate more housing;
- Adopting a sequential approach to the allocation of land for housing development;
- Managing the release of housing land; and
- Reviewing existing allocations of housing land in Development Plans and planning permissions when they come up for renewal.

In meeting the future housing requirements, LPAs should:

- Plan to meet the housing requirements of the whole community, including those in need of affordable and special needs housing;

- Provide wider housing opportunities and choice and a better mix in the size, type and location of housing than is currently available and seek to create mixed communities;
- Provide sufficient housing land but give priority to reusing previously developed land within urban areas, bringing empty homes back into use and converting existing buildings, in preference to the development of greenfield sites;
- Create a more sustainable pattern of development by building in ways that exploit and deliver accessibility by public transport to jobs, education, health, shopping, leisure and local services;
- Make more efficient use of land by reviewing planning policies and standards;
- Seek to reduce car dependence by facilitating more walking and cycling, by improving linkages to public transport between housing, jobs, local services and local amenity and by planning for mixed use;
- Place the needs of people before ease of traffic movement in designing the layout of residential developments; and
- Promote good design in new housing developments in order to create attractive, high quality living environments in which people will choose to live.

### 2.2.3

#### *Urban White Paper*

In 1998, the Government's Urban Task Force was commissioned to examine the causes of urban decline and recommend solutions to bring people back into towns and cities. The report confirms that urban policies are not just about bricks and mortar but also about improving people's prosperity and quality of life.

The Report contains over 100 recommendations for change, relating to design, transport, management, regeneration, skills, planning and investment. The key themes are as follows:

- *Recycling land and buildings* – To enable the Government to meet its 60% target for accommodating new dwellings on previously developed land, we must make the best use of derelict, vacant and under-used land and buildings before we develop on greenfield sites;
- *Improving the urban environment* – Urban neighbourhoods should be attractive places to live. This can be achieved by improving the quality of design and movement, creating compact developments, with a mix of uses, better public transport and a density which supports local services and fosters a strong sense of community and public safety;
- *Achieving excellence in leadership, participation and management* – Local Authorities will lead the urban renaissance. They should be strengthened in powers, resources and democratic legitimacy to undertake this role in partnership with citizens and communities they represent. We have to manage our urban areas

more effectively and respond to the special needs of deprived neighbourhoods; and

- *Delivering Regeneration* – Local Authorities and their partners should be given more freedom to target long-term resources on areas in need of regeneration. Public investment should be used to lever larger amounts of investment into the process of regenerating our towns and cities.

The resulting Urban White Paper presents the Government's holistic 'big vision'. It brings together the vast range of current initiatives affecting the urban environment and sets out proposed policy and fiscal measures to improve the quality of life in these areas. The aim is to achieve sustainable development, a high quality of life and opportunity for all, and thereby relieve the pressure for development in the countryside. Measures include the production of new planning policy guidance putting urban renaissance at the heart of the planning system and a new drive to bring brownfield land and empty buildings back into use.

Urban capacity studies are central to enabling local authorities to assess the potential of their urban areas to contribute to a renaissance of urban living. Recommendation 55 of the Urban Task Force's Draft Final Report, suggested that local authorities be obliged to carry out urban capacity studies on a regular and consistent basis. The White Paper refers to the inclusion of a sequential test in PPG3 and the publication of practical guidance on urban housing capacity and managing land release, in response to this recommendation (see para. 4.24 of the White Paper).

#### 2.2.4

##### *Implications for Urban Capacity Studies*

Combined with more detailed planning guidance, the above documents have clearly linked sustainable development and urban renaissance with re-using urban land, the need to reduce car dependency and promote more sustainable transport and development patterns. The four common sustainable development principles that underpin these concepts are:

- social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
- effective protection of the environment;
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

More specifically, objectives to re-use urban or brownfield land are:

- to provide a variety of land uses on vacant and under-utilised sites thus revitalising urban areas;
- to facilitate a more sustainable urban form by providing the opportunity for residents to make a choice about living closer to jobs, public transport, shops and leisure facilities; and

- to assist in the economic regeneration of towns through physical redevelopment and investment in existing urban areas.

Thus growth within urban areas is proposed to become more sustainable by focusing development that attracts a lot of trips in existing urban areas or in areas well served by public transport. Further, densities should be increased in areas with high public transport accessibility and in new public transport corridors. This, in our view, has implications for the methodology of calculating urban housing capacity through urban capacity studies, as explained later in this report.

A common theme within the objectives is accessibility – to jobs, services, public transport, community resources, and leisure facilities. The White Paper on the future of transport promotes accessibility, achieving this by better planning and co-ordinating transport and development. The location and form of residential development should incorporate public transport facilities, walking and cycling networks to reduce car dependency.

With regard to urban development, government policy supports reinforcing existing public transport facilities such as railway stations and increasing bus frequencies on key routes to the advantage of new development close to their provision. By identifying public transport corridors, land use planning policies can then contribute to the closer integration of transport. This is an important element of urban capacity analysis.

Current Planning Policy Guidance notably PPG1: General Policy and Principles, PPG3: Housing, PPG6: Town Centres and Retail Developments and PPG13: Transport reflect the above objectives. They provide further guidance on implementation mechanisms to achieve sustainable development principles. PPGs 3, 6 and 13 incorporate the principle of a sequential approach to identifying land for development. This prioritises locating development within existing settlements, and in close proximity to existing public transport corridors or in areas that could create an urban public transport corridor, and in areas with available utilities and social infrastructure capacity.

By implementing a sequential approach to developable land, land elsewhere would only be developed as urban sites are exhausted or found to be unsuitable for development. It thus helps to focus development on reinforcing town centres and making the best use of existing urban facilities. This is behind our rationale for “Ped Sheds” (or catchments) that are explained later in this report (paragraph 3.3.1).

The other form of development promoted in the PPGs is mixed use development. This has the advantages of making urban areas more attractive places to live, improving the viability and vitality of town centres, making them active places both day and night, and reducing the need to travel by providing a range of adjacent services. Mixed uses can also improve streetscape and townscape by generating visual

interest and creating visual quality in the neighbourhood. Mixed-use developments containing a residential component support the objectives of re-using urban land, developing on brownfield sites and revitalising existing urban areas. Some of the urban design case studies carried out for this study allow for a mixed use element; they are especially relevant to centrally located sites.

### 2.2.5

#### *Summary*

Government policies and planning advice promote reusing urban sites and buildings particularly in locations close to public transport facilities and town centres. This is seen as helping to achieve sustainable development by:

- reducing pressure to develop on greenfield sites thus helping to protect the countryside;
- improving and fully utilising public transport, existing services and facilities, and making better use of urban public transport corridors;
- increasing residential densities and population thresholds to support and enhance urban services; and
- contributing to urban regeneration by encouraging inward investment, increasing an area's viability and vitality and improving the urban environment.

Government guidance and policy has been followed in the methodology adopted within this study, including that contained within "Tapping the Potential" (see **Appendix A**). Criteria used to retain and eliminate sites in the capacity estimates are based on the sustainable development principles embodied in recent Government guidance and the UK Sustainable Development Strategy.

### 2.3

#### ***Regional Guidance and Structure Plan***

Sustainable development principles and urban capacity objectives have also been incorporated at regional and local levels. Revised Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9, March 2001) incorporates these, while balancing the demands of the regional economy. While there is a continuing wide ranging debate on the amount of household growth in the South East and the location of such growth, the general thrust of concentrating rather than dispersing development has received less criticism and complements sustainability principles discussed above.

The current Hertfordshire Structure Plan was adopted in April 1998. It covers the period 1996-2011 and provides the strategic planning framework for local plans. North Hertfordshire's Structure Plan housing requirement is a net increase of 10,400 dwellings, which includes an allocation at West of the A1(M) at Stevenage. This was anticipated to provide 3,600 dwellings in the period up to 2011, of which 2,600 are to be in North Hertfordshire with 1,000 in Stevenage. Following legal advice in 2000 about the more thorough sequential approach to planning for housing required by PPG3, the District Council decided to withdraw its Draft District Local Plan and to

undertake this detailed urban housing capacity study. In addition, the County Council is reviewing the Structure Plan and promoting alterations in line with PPG3 principles.

While the above housing requirement figures reflect current regional planning advice on housing provision, they do not indicate the potential for housing in the existing urban area, nor do they question the effect of current residential standards on housing potential. There is, in the Consultant's view, significant potential in the District to provide high quality, attractive, residential and mixed use living environments, which the results of this study can help to bringing forward. It is exploring and identifying this potential, using scenarios that can reflect and relax current standards, on which the following sections of this study are focused.

## 3 Study Approach

### 3.1 *Methodology*

The approach to the study builds on previous studies undertaken by Halcrow, up-to-date experience of the ‘testing’ of urban capacity studies through Local Plan inquiries (including Colchester Borough’s), the technical background work already undertaken by the Council for the Local Plan Review, and government guidance (particularly the DTLR’s Tapping the Potential guidance).

We have refined our study method over time and our previous study experience. It is based on a design-led approach to determine the maximum amount of housing that could be accommodated on sites within the existing urban area, given a presumption for housing (or mixed use with a significant element of residential) development. Within this context, sites and buildings selected for inclusion in the urban capacity estimates take account of the following design and development factors:

- site or building’s physical suitability for housing or mixed use development to create or enhance a residential environment;
- minimal impact to existing and/or surrounding uses and residents respecting their amenity and access requirements;
- the existing use (if relevant) being able to be accommodated into the scheme or moved to a more suitable location;
- the use of a design-led approach on the site which would create or enhance a residential environment; and
- the streetscape being enhanced by residential or mixed use development.

In more detail, the methodology involved seven steps as discussed below.

#### 3.1.1 *Step 1: Definition of the Study Area*

The urban area boundaries of Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston, as broadly defined in the adopted District Local Plan, were identified as the areas to be assessed, along with the general extent of the built-up areas for other well-served settlements, to ensure that previously developed land is considered first. This will assist in consistency with the Local Plan Review. Greenfield urban extension sites allocated within the Local Plan are included within the urban boundary. The possibility of urban extensions to Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston are considered in a separate report.

#### 3.1.2 *Step 2: Definitions within the Study Area*

Using desk top surveys, sites considered unsuitable for development – such as historic or formal parks and gardens, schools and community uses where no change in usage is desirable or expected, environmentally sensitive land and nature reserves – were considered “inviolable” and therefore excluded from the initial urban capacity

assessment. The remaining land in the four towns has been divided into three main categories for survey purposes, again via a desktop analysis:

- *town centre area* which includes the prime retail areas of each of the four urban areas;
- *homogeneous residential areas* which have been further broken down into seven typical areas broadly based on plot layout/ratio, age and density characteristics; and
- *one-off sites* within the homogeneous residential areas that are not characteristic or typical of the residential areas.

The town centre areas were widely drawn, to match the town centre boundaries defined in the adopted District Local Plan.

The town centre areas were surveyed on a street-by-street basis, with the one-off sites inspected individually.

As a more manageable, but sufficient, approach for the homogeneous residential areas, street surveys were undertaken of about 10% of typical or representative sample areas. Seven residential area types were identified, reflecting plot layout and size, street pattern and architectural style. Their definitions are given below in Table 3.1:

**Table 3.1: Housing Type Definitions**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Colour shading on maps</i>	<i>Description</i>
H1	Orange	Mixed architectural style, large plots, mainly located along main roads
H2	Green	Close knit historic/Victorian terrace
H3	Purple	Pre-war or inter-war predominately semi-detached
H4	Red	Post-war suburban townhouses with curvilinear streets (up to mid 80's)
H5	Yellow	Contemporary development from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s
H6	Blue	Large plots, detached, low density in character
H7	Pink	Garden City

The homogenous housing area maps for Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston are contained at ***Appendix E***.

### 3.1.3

#### *Step 3: Definition of Site Suitability and Urban Design Criteria*

The need to provide criteria for selecting sites in the urban capacity estimates is particularly important. Before surveys were undertaken, sustainable development criteria were developed. These have been used to determine which sites should be included in the capacity estimates and explain why other sites are excluded. The criteria also provide a framework for the urban design exercises. . The criteria, described in full in Section 3.4, were presented to and agreed by Council Members before the “sieving” process began.

### 3.1.4

#### *Step 4: Survey of Sites and Sample Areas*

The surveys involved an initial desktop review to identify sites of about 0.5 hectares (ha) or more throughout the four towns and fifteen villages. Some smaller sites were also identified.

When identifying sites, an inclusive approach was taken at the first stage. Sites were identified irrespective of their designation within the adopted Local Plan. Site suitability and selection, at this stage, was based simply on the site being physically able to accommodate residential development.

To incorporate all sites of less than 0.5 ha into the study and to check on sites identified in the desktop review, street surveys were undertaken. This involved a street-by-street survey of the town centre areas and a visit to the one off sites identified from the desktop survey. The investigations also included conversions, particularly of vacant space located above shops or outdated office buildings.

A sample area of roughly ten per cent of each type of homogeneous residential area was surveyed on a street-by-street basis to identify infill sites and possible backland development.

The Consultants, as far as physically possible, checked sites with limited potential on an initial assessment identified by each survey in order to determine if residential development would be feasible. All sites surveyed were recorded on a spreadsheet and mapped on a Geographical Information System (GIS) using the Council’s computerised OS map base. Maps of all identified (*i.e. retained and removed*) sites for the four towns and fifteen villages are provided in **Appendix D**.

### 3.1.5

#### *Step 5: Analysing the Site Survey Results*

The site surveys were deliberately inclusive to enable the study to identify *potential* housing sites comprehensively. Analysis of the sites was then necessary to determine:

- which sites would be retained and which would be removed from consideration within the capacity estimates;
- the reasons for inclusion or rejection;
- types or common forms of sites identified to select case study examples for the design exercises; and

- which development scenarios would suit each category of site.

The criteria used in this evaluation are discussed in Section 3.4 .

Sites retained within the urban capacity estimates are documented in **Appendix B** of this report (Tables B.1). Table B.2 of **Appendix B** sets out those sites that were excluded from the capacity estimates following the sieving process. The sieving process was supported by discussions with Council Officers that provided local knowledge and planning history information.

### 3.1.6

#### *Step 6: Input from the Development Industry*

Early in the study process, a workshop was held and facilitated by the Consultants with five representatives of house builders and their agents with a current interest in the District. The purpose of the seminar was to inform the development industry about the study, its purpose and methodology, and to obtain information and generate debate on the following topic areas:

- housing needs and demand in North Hertfordshire District;
- trends in the local housing market; and ideas on planning mechanisms that could encourage, or which presently inhibit, residential development.

Participants conveyed the following views and key points that are relevant to this Study:

#### **(a) Key Findings**

- Developers are receiving mixed messages: there is a perceived conflict between PPG3 aims and principles and some of the planning policies and standards of North Hertfordshire District Council.
- Planning standards and “gain” requirements can stifle the commercial viability of higher density housing, e.g. NHDC private amenity space standards affect the viability of building two-bedroom houses; the requirement for affordable housing can also reduce the viability of developing brownfield sites.
- Highway regulations and standards are inflexible. A more flexible approach should be applied to the use of these standards.

#### **(b) Barriers and mechanisms to development**

Participants were concerned about the requirements of certain policies and standards that, they believe, inhibit urban renaissance in the District. Overall, policy is driving the nature and location of residential development., but conversely it is inhibiting the commercial viability of certain types of dwellings. The points raised in the ensuing discussion are set out below.

### **Public opinion and awareness**

- Despite policy guidance advocating higher densities, developers face local concerns among residents when proposing higher density development.
- Councillors are normally unwilling to stand up to residents; Members not prepared to take flak, but pass it back to developers.
- Participants perceive that Councillors currently have a poor understanding of PPG3; they are still getting to grips with the implications of it.
- The development of back garden areas is strongly resisted by the public.
- Accusations of “over-development” and the public’s view on traffic and car parking can make achieving PPG3 densities difficult.
- Getting residents to support/speak up is also a problem.
- The “right school”, post code, etc. matters when development proposals are considered locally.

### **Amenity standards and Urban Design**

- Garden sizes and standards are major problems as they affect the viability of developments, particularly smaller dwellings.
- Back to back standards are also far too much.
- Density/urban renewal objectives can be constrained by current planning standards.

### **Commercial viability factors**

- Affordable housing – cost of this to the developer and knock on effects on viability of development – often causes difficulties and can prevent some schemes going ahead.
- Over priced sites can be a temporary barrier to development, for example.
- The economics and commercial viability of development, and a lack of understanding of this on the part of planners, residents and Councillors.
- S106s, commuted payments – NHDC do not fully appreciate cost and developers margins – wish lists and commuted payments often work against the re-use of sites.

### **Lack of proactive planning**

- The Council must be enablers of development and urban renaissance – “sell” to the public; access/infrastructure; assembling sites/CPOs etc.
- Developers etc. do want to see things happen.
- Timing – lack of urgency in planning decisions.

### **Parking standards and infrastructure**

- Infrastructure has to work and cope with volumes if urban renaissance is to be achieved – NHDC has to be prepared to invest.
- Rigid application of highways/adoption standards and regulations is a barrier in the District.

- Conflicts between developments in parking policy to reduce provision and the higher requirements of current standards.
- Sell houses on quality in the case of developments with fewer parking spaces, but people will always want cars!
- There are potential design solutions to the parking problem, but some are costly, e.g. underground parking.

#### **Housing need, demand and trends**

- Demand is generally good across the District, but smaller dwellings such as “starter” homes are more appropriate in the larger towns.
- Development including a mix of commercial and residential uses should be encouraged in town centres.
- Lower density developments are more appropriate in the villages.

#### **Urban capacity study process**

- Developers will have their first opportunity to comment on the study’s findings at the Local Plan Inquiry – it would be better if they could make their views known beforehand.

These issues provided useful property market intelligence for the case studies, as well as important background information on the context to this study. Specific views on densities, car parking and the market for different types of housing have been incorporated in the design exercises, influencing the overall capacity estimates.

### *3.1.7*

#### *Step 6: Preparation of the Design Exercises*

Based on the property market intelligence, urban design criteria and the site analyses, urban design exercises were prepared for 16 site categories, including different densities of development for most of the site categories. The sites selected for the exercises are representative of the types of sites found in the town centre areas, and one-off sites within the towns and villages, as these contained the most potential in terms of the number of sites and buildings suitable for residential or mixed use development. Design exercises were prepared for sites within the 16 site categories and the results of the exercises are set out in Section 5.

The purpose of the design exercises is to provide a density multiplier to use on other sites with similar characteristics. Each design exercise contains housing density figures based on a range of assumptions, including dwelling type, amenity provision, car parking and mix of uses appropriate to the location.

### *3.1.8*

#### *Step 7: Determining the Urban Capacity Estimates*

The final step in the method involved applying the design exercise densities to the identified sites in order to determine the urban capacity estimates on the basis of: a standard density multiplier; three different scenarios; and a “best fit”. The Consultant’s capacity estimates are contained in Section 6 of this report.

### 3.2

#### ***Use of Scenarios in Urban Capacity Estimates***

The use of scenarios is an important element of the approach we have adopted to define the urban capacity potential. It involves the application of different design approaches (or scenarios) to each category of site. These involve: (1) the application of current standards (parking provision, open space, etc); (2) the relaxation of current standards (thereby providing higher densities); and (3) a more creative approach. The latter involving a relaxation of current standards, but also combining identified sites, often with additional land, providing opportunities to create better residential and mixed-use environments at still higher densities. In more detail, the scenarios are:

***Scenario 1: Local Plan Led Development*** – includes sites designated for housing within the adopted District Local Plan or unconstrained (with respect to land use) by Local Plan policies. This scenario reflects current policies and standards regarding land use, density, off-street car parking and private open space. Scenario 1 is not applied to sites that, from an urban design perspective, would be better developed more intensively due to the scale of surrounding development and central location.

***Scenario 1 cases:*** For sites some distance from the town centre or public transport facilities, Scenario 1 design exercises are generally identified as the most suitable application. However, there are a number of categories of sites whose Scenario 1 densities are lower than the average minimum 30 dwellings per hectare prescribed by PPG3. In these cases, Scenario 2 has generally been applied unless poor public transport accessibility or townscape character dictate otherwise.

***Scenario 2: Design Led Development*** – includes sites and buildings where relaxing existing land use designations and standards within the adopted District Local Plan may enable residential development to occur. Within this scenario sites and buildings have been included where higher densities are considered appropriate and where parking standards, open space and land use allocations have been re-evaluated so that a more appropriately designed development may occur, in line with the ethos of PPG3. Sites that are allocated for uses other than residential within the Local Plan have been included in Scenario 2 as are sites that are under-utilised by their current occupant or user. To show what can be achieved by relaxing current standards, some sites identified in Scenario 1 have also been selected as suitable for higher density development in Scenario 2.

***Scenario 2 cases:*** In and around the town centre areas, where in our view sites are more suitable for higher densities, Scenario 2 exercises are most likely to be appropriate (see 3.3 below for a further explanation).

***Scenario 3: Urban Area Development*** – includes sites and buildings where a more creative approach is taken in the design-led solution and, by including more than one identified site and/or additional neighbouring land, a more suitable residential or mixed-use environment is created. This may involve land swaps, road closures, land take and redefining land uses in a wider context compared to a site-specific solution.

In some instances operational uses are moved to a more appropriate location freeing up more land for development. This scenario incorporates an innovative urban management solution to land use issues and areas rather than being constrained by existing property boundaries and uses. It is provided for comparison purposes and to indicate how an area-wide response to urban housing capacity can influence the estimates obtained.

**Scenario 3 cases:** Scenario 3 exercises can be applied within the best fit for appropriate sites, whether in the town centre or in more suburban locations. However, the opportunities for these to be realistically achieved are more limited, unless the same landowner or the local authority owns the sites, or development is being promoted through a design/development brief or regeneration initiative.

Design exercises have been prepared which reflect the scenarios outlined above, and these are presented in **Appendix C**.

Two other capacity estimates have also been calculated: (1) applying a standard density of 50 dwellings per hectare to each site, to provide a comparison with the Scenario exercises; and (2) applying the most appropriate scenario to each site, a “Best Fit” exercise. These approaches are explained in more detail below.

**Standard Density Comparator**– A density of 50 dwelling units per hectare has been applied to all retained sites. This acts as a useful comparison, indicating what relaxing current planning standards and consistently applying a higher density figure could achieve. This comparator figure was obtained from reviewing densities achieved within recent planning permissions in the District, and is in line with other urban capacity studies carried out by Halcrow.

**Best Fit**–The ‘Best Fit’ exercise applies the most appropriate scenario to each site, based on urban design criteria, location and realistic capability of being developed. This exercise does not always return the highest possible dwelling capacity. In the Consultant’s experience, the highest density figure possible is not always applied as more desirable environments may be achieved through applying lower density figures, particularly in more suburban or semi-rural locations within the study area.

### 3.3

#### **Accessibility and Urban Capacity**

The methodology to determine urban capacity has been developed to incorporate government guidance on promoting more sustainable forms of urban development, enabling a closer association between urban development and transport networks.

In studies previously undertaken by Halcrow and others, a link has been made between catchment distances to town centres and public transport corridors and prioritising land within these catchments for development. These catchments have been used in part to select sites considered particularly suitable for residential or mixed-use development. The purpose and role of public transport corridors should

also be clearly defined both locally and strategically so that actions to link land use and transport can be mutually reinforcing.

### 3.3.1

#### *Catchments*

A walking distance of 800 metres, representing a less than ten minute walk, has been used to identify a catchment area around facilities which would give residents living within them an opportunity to walk to community facilities. LPAC's "Sustainable Residential Quality: New Approaches to Urban Living" (1998) used ped shed catchment criteria to identify sites for inclusion in urban capacity estimates for higher density development in town centres in Greater London. This concept supports both sustainability principles and government guidance, and is particularly applicable to the four towns in North Hertfordshire, as they have strongly defined town centres linked to public transport facilities. Using the distance of 800m around the town centre and around the railway stations enables the site selection process to align with government advice and guidance.

Other recent studies by Halcrow have refined the catchment distance around public transport facilities, most notably along bus routes that link the services and facilities at employment areas, town centres and railway stations with residential areas. These studies looked at individual settlements containing one or two stations and a town centre rather than a series of interlinking centres and rail facilities more typical of a large metropolitan area. Within individual settlements bus routes were identified as an important component of urban transport corridors.

The studies revealed that catchments to such services should be considered carefully. Research by Halcrow into employment related trips and non-local journeys in the South West of England Region indicated that a five minute walk (400m) to a bus stop was a convenient distance for people to walk to access this mode of public transport. The frequency of the bus service along the corridor was the other key factor in influencing travel decisions.

Rather than use the 800m walking distance around frequently served bus routes or a 400m catchment around a bus stop, a 400m isochrone representing around a five minute walking journey to an urban transport bus corridor is considered an appropriate tool for utilising the results of these studies to influence the selection of sites for higher density development.

By generally applying higher density solutions to sites that fall within the pedestrian catchment areas for town centre amenities, key bus routes and railway stations, this will make the Best Fit capacity estimate more in tune with the direction of sustainable development.

### 3.3.2

#### *Urban Transport Corridors*

The Transport White Paper discussed in Section 2, promotes the use of urban transport corridors especially those offering multi-modal transport services. By

improving public transport within such corridors the conditions are created to provide a viable alternative to using the car.

Again, recent studies by Halcrow investigated the impact of bus frequency in defining the role of urban transport corridors particularly for settlements without an intra-urban rail service. Frequency of service of four buses an hour (one bus every 15 minutes) was considered to offer the passenger a reasonable level of service in medium sized towns of over 10,000 population.

Bus corridors have only been identified within the four towns but some parts of the settlements do not have a sufficiently frequent bus service to warrant the application of this concept at present. However, in the interests of long-term sustainability, it is important that this is kept under review – there is certainly potential to identify further corridors in the future.

### 3.3.3

#### *Application of Accessibility Catchment Areas to Urban Capacity Potential*

In the Consultant's view, sites within catchments around town centres and public transport facilities should as far as possible be prioritised for development as a basis for the managed release of sites through the Local Plan. As previously indicated, sites within these catchments may be more suitable for Scenario 2 or 3 development than town centre or one-off sites located outside the catchment areas. For sites located away from the identified catchments, selection criteria focus on urban design (particularly townscape character) principles, land use suitability and developability. Thus if residential development was considered appropriate on a site by creating or enhancing a residential environment, it should be considered in the capacity estimates. The style of development on these sites would again be design-led, acknowledging the lower scale and more suburban character of surrounding development. In practice, this has meant that Scenario 1 densities have been applied to sites outside catchment areas in the Best Fit exercise.

### 3.4

#### *Site Selection Criteria*

Based on a review of current policy and guidance set out in Section 2 of this report and in the context of accessibility objectives outlined in Section 3.3 above, a set of criteria for retaining or eliminating sites was agreed with the Council. These site selection criteria are contained in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Agreed Site Selection Criteria**

<i>Sustainable Development Objectives</i>	<i>Site Selection Criteria</i>
<p>Providing for a variety of uses within an urban area to maintain high and stable levels of economic growth and employment. (NHDC withdrawn draft District Local Plan)</p>	<p>Sites should be retained in their present use if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The site is in a location and/or of a size which does not enable a good quality residential environment or residential amenity to be created</li> <li>• The site is better suited to remain in its present use (e.g. multi-storey car park, open space, employment) due to location, need for present function or the impact of, or on, surrounding development</li> <li>• The site is better suited to another use than residential or mixed use (parking, retail, employment, community)</li> <li>• There would be a significant, unacceptable loss of shoppers' off-street car parking in the town centres</li> <li>• Development of a site would detract from the existing character, urban form or urban context</li> <li>• The surrounding development is not conducive to achieving a good quality residential environment (closeness to heavy industry, major infrastructure works or operations)</li> <li>• Additional residential development would lead to an over-development of the site and or area</li> <li>• New development would compromise the residential amenity enjoyed by existing residents particularly with regard to privacy, overlooking, lighting, noise, and open space</li> <li>• The site is environmentally or physically unsuitable for development due to geophysical conditions such as slope or is environmentally sensitive</li> </ul>
<p>Ensuring effective protection of the environment and using natural resources prudently (NHDC withdrawn draft District Local Plan)</p>	<p>Open space and nature conservation areas should not be considered for development if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is a formal town park providing a significant recreational (passive and active) function to residents, workers and visitors to the area;</li> <li>• is integral to the context and setting of civic buildings, structures and amenities;</li> <li>• complements natural features within the town (for example, the parks and open spaces alongside rivers);</li> <li>• incorporates formal recreation facilities (sports fields, children's playground, informal active play areas);</li> <li>• are allotments which are accessible, secure and/or used well (say, over 40% let) by local residents now or in the foreseeable future</li> <li>• contains formal gardens;</li> <li>• protects environmentally sensitive and ecologically valuable land;</li> <li>• has historical significance; and</li> <li>• forms part of a green link or chain through the urban area.</li> </ul>

<i>Sustainable Development Objectives</i>	<i>Site Selection Criteria</i>
<p>Intensifying the use of urban land and buildings while maintaining and enhancing quality as well as encouraging long-term quality in new housing design. (NHDC withdrawn draft District Local Plan)</p>	<p>Sites should be selected as suitable for residential or mixed use development if the following urban design criteria can be met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A use should be appropriate for its location. In mixed-use areas for example, other uses (than residential) may be more appropriate at ground floor level as residential habitable rooms would have little privacy. Street frontages should be retained both in terms of design and use and to provide active edges.</li> <li>• The privacy of existing residents should be respected so that new development should not have habitable rooms looking onto existing private open space.</li> <li>• Communal parking and open space areas should be overlooked by habitable rooms.</li> <li>• New development should respect the existing scale and form of surrounding development particularly with regard to building height and roofscape.</li> <li>• There should be no new development where it would unacceptably restrict views or the amenity of existing residents.</li> <li>• There should be, where possible, a mix of dwelling unit sizes from one-bedroom flats to larger three to four bedroom houses within new developments.</li> <li>• Access to the development should be clear and still respect the streetscape.</li> <li>• New development should recognise pedestrian networks and connections.</li> <li>• Off street parking should ideally be located on the periphery or rear of the site respecting the streetscape.</li> <li>• New development should define the street space wherever possible.</li> <li>• New dwelling units should maximise views and access to sunlight wherever possible.</li> <li>• Communal open space within new developments should be safe and usable.</li> </ul>
<p>Improving and fully utilising public transport, existing services and facilities and making better use of urban transport corridors by giving as many people as possible an opportunity to walk to such facilities and public transport. (NHDC withdrawn draft District Local Plan)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing urban transport corridors by identifying frequent bus routes of a minimum 4 buses an hour. Once clarified concentrating on identifying sites within a reasonable walking distance of 400m of such corridors.</li> <li>• Maximising the use of railway stations and town centre facilities by identifying sites within 800m walking distance, in each urban area.</li> </ul>

### **3.5**

#### ***Summary of Urban Capacity Estimates***

As described within this section, a range of capacity estimates has resulted from the application of the methodology:

- Standard density comparator figures, using a density of 50 dwellings per hectare for each site retained in the capacity estimates;
- Scenario 1 estimates, reflecting Local Plan designations and standards;
- Scenario 2 estimates, reflecting an urban design led approach;
- Scenario 3 estimates, reflecting an urban management/urban regeneration approach; and
- Best fit estimates showing what scenario is considered the most appropriate for the site depending on its location, accessibility and townscape character.

## 4 Site Surveys and Definition of Catchment Areas

### 4.1 *Overview*

Surveys were undertaken to visit all sites identified in the desktop review. An on-the-ground survey of sample residential areas, one-off sites and all areas within the town centre areas was undertaken to supplement the desktop survey. All sites visited within the four towns and fifteen villages have been mapped and are contained within *Appendix D*.

A comprehensive list of all sites investigated is contained in *Appendix B*. Each site has been recorded and numbered with site characteristics documented. Mapping of the sites is on a GIS base that has provided site area details for the capacity estimates. The maps also provide a database for the Council to update and monitor in future years. Removed sites are set out separately in Table B.2 and the sieving process analysis is set out in Table B.3 of *Appendix B*.

### 4.2 *Site Survey Totals*

The site survey has resulted in 405 sites being identified and 257 sites being retained. The split of the latter figure by area is shown in *Table 4.1* below.

*Table 4.1 – Site Survey Results*

<i>Urban Area</i>	<i>Town centre</i>	<i>One-offs</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Hitchin	32	36	68
Letchworth	13	23	36
Baldock	5	11	16
Royston	15	32	47
Villages	N/A	90	90
<b>Totals</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>257</b>

The key findings of the site survey and analysis are:

- 25% of all retained sites are located in the four town centres, with 19% of identified sites located within these areas.

- One-off sites within the homogeneous housing areas, employment areas and mixed use areas of the four towns contribute significantly to sites investigated for their urban residential capacity, comprising 48% of all sites identified. In addition, 33% of all sites identified were found in the 15 villages. One-off sites contain a variety of non-typical sites such as under-utilised allotments, land in excess of school needs, vacant or under-utilised employment sites, rundown and/or vacant garages, under-utilised open space and sites used for storage.
- In the homogeneous residential areas, sample surveys were undertaken for each of the seven housing types. Sample areas are shown pecked on the maps in *Appendix E* and sites identified within these areas are listed in Table B.1.14 of *Appendix B*. Table B.1.15 sets out the corresponding capacity estimates for the homogeneous areas, based on the dwelling yield achieved in the sample areas.

### 4.3

#### ***Overall Summary of Site Surveys and Definition of Catchment Areas***

The survey to identify all sites with urban capacity potential was inclusive rather than exclusive at the initial stage. Investigations of sites were comprehensive comprising desktop and on-ground surveys. All sites identified have been recorded on a GIS database for future reference (see *Appendix D*).

The 405 identified sites have been analysed using the site selection, retention and elimination criteria set out in Section 3.4 above. The results are explained in Section 6 of this report. Sites within the catchment areas can be targeted for higher density development.

## 5 Urban Design Exercises

### 5.1 *Urban Design Principles*

Section 3.4 sets out urban design criteria for retaining or eliminating sites. To provide a context for the design exercises consideration has been given to other guidance, particularly the urban design principles set out in “By Design”, published by the DTLR and CABE. These sound, practical principles help to ensure that the prepared schemes reflect an appropriate character, scale and dwelling type and have been incorporated into the 16 design exercises undertaken.

The Design exercises are contained in *Appendix C*. Each exercise is titled with the site type category and the identification number of the selected site (or sites). It also contains a layout plan of the site (or sites) and explanatory notes. A table is also provided summarising dwelling types, parking spaces and densities achieved. All densities are net, in accordance with the advice in PPG3, unless otherwise stated.

### 5.2 *Local Plan Standards*

In addition to the advice in “By Design”, the standards and guidelines contained within the adopted Local Plan (No. 2 with Alterations) were also considered. The adopted Local Plan sets out specific policies with regard to residential layout, garden layout and size, public open space requirements, etc. Such standards influence the densities that can be achieved on site and are significant in determining urban capacity estimates, particularly in Scenario 1. The car parking standards applied to Scenario 1 accord with Local Plan requirements.

Each design is physically compatible with local plan policy on the provision of affordable housing, but has not taken account of the financial implications of this policy. The principle policy guidance comes from:

- Policy 22 (Urban Environment);
- Policy 26 (Housing Proposals);
- Policy 27 (Hostels, Multi-occupied Buildings and Dwelling Conversions to Flats);
- Policy 27A (Flats over Commercial Property);
- Policy 29A (Affordable Housing for Urban Local Needs);
- Policy 55 (Car Parking Standards); and
- Policy 57 (Residential Guidelines and Standards).

These standards and policies do not alone, however, determine the type of residential development within the District. North Hertfordshire District and Hertfordshire County Council produce supplementary planning guidance that sets out urban design

principles and parameters that must be considered when designing housing developments. The key principles within this guidance follow the sound, practical advice set out in “By Design”. They seek to:

- Promote higher standards in urban design;
- Take into account the layout and form of existing development;
- Retain and important landscape features; and
- Respect building type and materials.

These principles have been recognised within the urban design exercises, particularly for Scenario 1.

### **5.3**

#### ***Typical Sites***

In reviewing the sites identified in the survey process the sites were analysed to determine site types. Sixteen site types were identified and typical sites were then identified from this list to be the subject of design exercises to provide a density multiplier for sites with similar characteristics. Site types, design exercises, site numbers and site areas, and densities achieved are contained in ***Table 5.1***.

**Table 5.1 – Explanation of Design Exercises and Typical Sites**

No	Site type	Sites within category	Design Exercise	Scenario	Density (dph)
1	Small/Medium, Mixed, Conversion	1009, 1015, 1017, 1018, 1019, 1023, 1024, 1034, 2042, 2043, 2049, 3001, 3006, 3007, 3008, 3013, 3014, 5001, 5004, 5007, 7004, 7007, 7009, 7012, 7013, 7014, 7018, 7019, 17006	1015, 1017, 1018, 1019	2	99
2	Small, Mixed, Regular	1002, 1010, 1014, 3004, 3012, 7008, 17007, 17008, 17010, 3010, 3011	17008	1	50
3	Small, Residential, Regular	1005, 1026, 1036, 2030, 2040, 2044, 2057, 4040, 6002, 6014, 7020, 8001, 8002, 8010, 8014, 8017, 8018, 8042, 8044, 8045, 8046, 10003, 11004, 13003, 13009, 16005, 17014, 17015, 20007, 22003, 23004, 23005, 8041, 9019	2030	1	48
				2	72
4	Small, Residential, Conversion	1001, 1008, 1012, 1025, 2046, 7021	1025	1	46
				2	122
5	Small, Residential, Irregular / Backlands	1003, 1007, 1022, 1027, 1031, 2008, 2018, 2038, 4047, 6001, 8040, 13001, 13005, 10004, 15003, 15004, 15011, 17017, 22007, 23002, 23003, 3002	2018	1	30
				2	44
6	Medium, Mixed, Regular	3005, 3009, 4001, 4002, 4009, 4026, 4028, 4032, 5002, 5003, 5006, 6004, 6005, 6015, 7010, 7016, 17018	4009	1	36
				2	80
7	Medium, Residential, Conversion	1028, 2054, 2056, 7017, 8020, 8023, 8010, 13006, 13007, 13011, 15012, 16002, 17011, 22006	13007	1	19
				2	28
8	Medium, Residential, Regular	1004, 1013, 1016, 1029, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2023, 2028, 2031, 2051, 4005, 4010, 4012, 4014, 4024, 4033, 4036, 4037, 4046, 4069, 6003, 6023, 7015, 8011, 8019, 8025, 8031, 8043, 9001, , 9009, 9014, 9015, 11001, 11003, 13012, 15010, 17002, 17004, 18005, 19006, 20001, 20002, 20005, 20008, 20009, 21001, 21003, 21006, 21007, 22009, 23009, 23007	9014	1	38
				2	52
	2 x Medium Residential, Regular		9014/9016	3	52
9	Medium, Residential, Irregular/ Backland	2007, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2020, 2032, 2033, 2034, 2035, 3003, 4003, 4007, 4011, 4013, 4015, 4018, 4019, 4020, 4023, 4034, 4044, 4045, 4049, 4050, 4051, 4053, 4068, 5005, 6009, 6010, 6012, 6016, 6018, 6020, 6021, 6022, 8003, 8024, 10001, 10005, 10006, 13008, 13010, 15006, 15007, 15008, 16001, 17012, 17013, 20003, 20004, 23001, 1006, 1011, 1020, 1030, 1035, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2019, 2021, 2024, 2027, 2039, 2045, 7001, 7003, 7005, 7006, 8005, 8012, 8030, 9011, 13002, 13004, 13013, 14001, 14005, 14007, 14009, 15001, 15009, 17003, 17005, 17009, 17016, 18001, 18004, 19003, 19007, 19008, 19009, 21002, 23006	8012	1	30
				2	50
	2 x Medium and Large Residential, Irregular/ Backland		8012/8034	3	52
10	Large, Residential, Regular	2048, 6007, 8028, 9004, 9005, 16006, 18003, 19001	18003	1	46
				2	61
11	Large, Residential, Irregular / Backlands	1021, 1032, 2003, 2006, 2013, 2015, 2026, 2029, 2037, 4006, 4039, 6011, 6013, 6017, 6019, 8008, 8013, 8016, 8034, 8038, 9007, 9012, 9013, 9018, 10002, 11002, 15002, 17001, 19005, 20006, 21005, 22002, 22005	8034	1	45
				2	61
12	Large./Very Large, Residential Conversion	4043, 9017, 14006, 15005, 22001	9017	1	19
				2	35
13	Large./Very Large, Mixed, Regular	1033, 4008, 4021, 4025, 4027, 4054, 4056, 4057, 4060, 4061, 6006, 6008, 7011, 9002	7011	1	53
				2	77
14	Very Large, Mixed, Irregular / Backlands	4022, 4029, 4058, 4063, 8033	4022	1	20
				2	26
15	Very Large, Residential Regular	2052, 2053, 2055, 2058, 4017, 4042, 4052, 4059, 4062, 4064, 4065, 4066, 8029, 8032, 9003, 9008, 14004, 14008, 21004, 22008	2058	1	49
				2	67
16	Very Large, Residential, Irregular / Backlands	2022, 2025, 2036, 2041, 2047, 2050, 4004, 4016, 4030, 4031, 4038, 4041, 4048, 4055, 4067, 8004, 8006, 8007, 8009, 8015, 8021, 8022, 8035, 8036, 8037, 8039, 11005, 16003, 19002, 19010, 23008	8015	1	26
				2	35

## 5.4

### *Explanation of Design Exercises*

Each design exercise scheme is shown using a site layout plan and a smaller diagram indicating the dwelling type(s) and typical floor plans for the dwellings proposed within that exercise. Some notes are provided to explain key features of the design scheme.

A summary table explains the number of units, bedrooms, habitable rooms, and off-street parking spaces as well as site area, for each exercise. To provide the density figures, the total number of dwellings and habitable rooms are divided by the site area. Density (net) is provided in two forms – dwellings per hectare and habitable rooms per hectare. Where appropriate, the summary table also contains information on other uses within the development, for example where a mixed-use scheme is proposed. Each design exercise is clearly marked with its reference number, site type category, the identification of the site on which it is based and whether Scenario 1, 2 or 3 has been used.

Each design exercise reference number relates to the identification number of the site that has been used for the case study, followed by the scenario number i.e. Site 2018 - Scenario 1 or Site 2018 - Scenario 2. Site 8012/8034 - Scenario 3 refers to a Scenario 3 study of sites 8012 and 8034.

### 5.4.1

#### *Car Parks*

Surface car parks, both private and publicly owned, can often be an inefficient use of valuable urban land, as acknowledged in paragraph 49 of PPG13 (March 2001). Under-used or poorly maintained car parks, or those in highly accessible locations, have been included in the range of sites identified in the capacity estimates. However, Council Members and Officers expressed concerns about the loss of car parks and possible impact on the vitality and viability of town centres and railway stations. It was agreed that any potential housing capacity on such sites should not normally lead to significant net loss of available public car parking spaces for shoppers and commuters respectively.

Design Exercise No. 13 involves Site 7011, which includes the underused The Warren Car Park, overgrown land and designated Public Open Space, is located off London Road in Royston. This site was included in the design exercises as a representative site from Royston. To prevent the resulting density multiplier being unacceptably low and depressing the capacity of similar sites, in this particular exercise the existing car parking was not retained. **In the event of a planning application being submitted for the site, the design exercise indicated will not necessarily be acceptable to North Hertfordshire District Council**

### 5.4.2

#### *Scenario 3*

In Scenario 3 situations, such as Design Exercise Nos. 8 and 9, planning and development briefs that have undergone public scrutiny and support are recommended as useful tools to realise such development opportunities. Compulsory

purchase powers (CPOs), if necessary, should also be used as encouraged by ODPM Circular 02/03 “Compulsory Purchase Orders” (March 2003).

## 6 Urban Capacity Estimates

### 6.1 *Application of Sustainable Development Criteria to Sites*

Before urban capacity for the District can be estimated, identified sites and/or buildings must be evaluated against the sustainable criteria set out in Section 3 and included or rejected. These criteria received the support and input from Council Members.

From the 405 sites identified, 257 sites (over 63%) within the four towns and fifteen villages are retained for the urban capacity estimates as evaluated by the Consultants with the advice of Council Officers.

### 6.2 *How the Design Exercises have been used in the Capacity Estimates*

The design exercises are used to provide density multipliers for the sites identified and retained within the urban capacity site analysis. The characteristics of the identified site, such as its location (town centre, residential, catchment area), scale and dwelling types in surrounding development, shape of the site and existing access arrangements, are noted by the Consultant's Urban Designer. A design exercise is then selected which provides an appropriate scale of development on the identified site and has similar characteristics to the identified site and its surroundings.

**It should be emphasised that the design exercise case studies, although taking account of urban design principles and policies, are not prepared to a detailed planning application standard; rather they are designed to provide an indication of the kind of development possible on different types of sites. The design exercises and subsequent capacity estimates for individual sites, therefore, should not necessarily be assumed to be acceptable to North Hertfordshire District Council in the event of a planning application being submitted on a design exercise site.**

#### 6.2.1 *Applying the Scenarios*

Each identified site can have a range of capacity estimates depending on the scenarios that can be achieved. If the identified site is allocated for housing, mixed use or is not defined for any use within the Local Plan, a Scenario 1 scheme can be used. If it is allocated for another use or a more dense development would be suitable given the scale of surrounding development or proximity to public transport facilities, then a Scenario 2 scheme can also be considered. In the case of identified sites that are grouped together, a Scenario 3 scheme may also be appropriate.

For one-off sites located in residential areas, a Scenario 1 design scheme may be used even if the site is allocated for another use in the Local Plan. In the capacity estimates however, the capacity of the site would normally be recorded under a Scenario 2 estimate. Using a spreadsheet containing identified site information, including site

area; the density figure from the relevant design exercise is applied to the identified site by multiplying the relevant density figure with the identified site's area.

### 6.2.2

#### *Residential Areas*

Capacity estimates for the homogeneous residential areas have also been identified:

- using a sample survey of areas to identify typical situations;
- applying a relevant design exercise to the sites identified and classified as suitable for retention in the urban capacity estimates;
- determining a density figure for the whole of the sample area by dividing the dwellings obtained on the sites by the total site area of the sample area; and
- applying this density figure to the whole of the same homogeneous residential area.

Given the generally suburban nature of the residential areas, Scenario 1 densities have generally been applied. A significant proportion of housing capacity could be achieved in these areas on predominately infill or small “windfall” type sites.

It should be noted that the “Tapping the Potential” guidance suggests that consideration should be given to the potential of sub-division of housing. Sub-division of some housing, living above the shop and redundant office/industrial buildings is included in the capacity estimates. Within the homogenous housing areas very limited opportunities were considered to exist for conversion. The Study capacity estimate takes account of those limited opportunities by including a small allowance for conversions. Conversions on “one-off” sites within predominantly residential areas are considered to cater for the limited demand for “warehouse-style” flats in heritage areas of the District. The town centres include some conversion estimates, mainly for the use of space above shops and offices.

### 6.3

#### *Urban Capacity Estimates*

A range of urban capacity estimates is provided below. The best fit estimates, which incorporate a realistic allowance for Scenario 2 and 3 schemes being implemented, are provided as a more reliable estimate of urban capacity. The other estimates are provided for comparison purposes. The Scenario 1 estimates demonstrate the more limited potential capacity of the urban areas for housing if the provisions of the adopted District Local Plan were “rolled” forward and implemented rigorously. The Standard Density of 50 dwellings per hectare provides a yardstick against which to judge sites in seeking to achieve higher density forms of housing throughout the urban areas.

Full schedules of sites and the application of design exercises are appended at *Appendix B*.

Each schedule specifies:

- the site reference number (ID) which can be linked to the GIS database and maps;
- the address of the site;
- the type of site and zone within which it falls;
- site description and surrounding uses;
- OS map reference for ease of locating the site on a GIS system;
- site area;
- design exercise applied under each scenario;
- the density obtained from the application of the design exercises;
- additional notes and comments where appropriate; and
- the total housing capacity obtained for all retained sites.

#### 6.4

#### *Summary of Estimates*

**Table 6.1** below summarises the estimates as proposed by the Consultants for retained sites under the three scenarios, Best Fit and standard comparator exercises.

**Table 6.1: Breakdown of Capacity Estimates**

Urban area	Zone	Net Dwelling Capacity, by Scenarios					Number of Sites Identified		
		1	2	3	Best Fit	Standard 50dw/ha	Retained	Removed	Total
<b>Hitchin</b>	Town centre	207.805	299.148	286.972	299.148	237.322	32	4	36
	One-offs	694.179	975.698	976.439	694.179	1,023.619	36	22	58
	Homogeneous areas	84.613	124.525	115.579	84.613	99.169			
	<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>986.597</b>	<b>1399.371</b>	<b>1378.99</b>	<b>1077.94</b>	<b>1359.109</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>94</b>
	% share of total	26	26	23	28	26			
<b>Letchworth</b>	Town centre	39.519	59.278	59.278	59.278	36.476	13	1	14
	One-offs	535.657	762.427	745.587	535.657	825.210	23	45	68
	Homogeneous areas	110.337	162.706	156.309	110.337	143.213			
	<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>685.513</b>	<b>984.411</b>	<b>961.174</b>	<b>705.272</b>	<b>1004.899</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>82</b>
	% share of total	19	20	25	19	19			
<b>Baldock</b>	Town centre	9.351	13.283	13.514	13.283	9.929	5	2	7
	One-offs	140.684	217.095	219.247	140.684	177.661	11	13	24
	Homogeneous areas	21.927	32.258	29.723	21.927	25.112			
	<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>171.962</b>	<b>262.636</b>	<b>262.485</b>	<b>175.894</b>	<b>212.702</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>31</b>
	% share of total	5	5	5	5	4			
<b>Royston</b>	Town centre	92.092	130.223	128.410	130.223	95.348	15	6	21
	One-offs	661.270	907.986	873.218	907.986	1103.821	32	13	45
	Homogeneous areas	32.643	46.841	38.089	32.643	40.672			
	<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>786.005</b>	<b>1085.051</b>	<b>1039.716</b>	<b>1070.853</b>	<b>1239.841</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>66</b>
	% share of total	21	20	19	22	24			
<b>Villages</b>	One-offs	1,091.594	1,590.584	1,507.799	1,091.594	1,459.891	90	42	132
	Homogeneous areas	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A			
	<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>1,091.594</b>	<b>1,590.584</b>	<b>1,507.799</b>	<b>1,091.594</b>	<b>1,459.891</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>132</b>
	% share of total	22	22	19	20	24			
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>Potential Dwelling Unit Capacity for All Urban Areas</b>	<b>3721.671</b>	<b>5322.052</b>	<b>5150.164</b>	<b>4121.553</b>	<b>5276.442</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>405</b>

## **6.5**

### **6.5.1**

#### ***Development and Phasing Considerations***

##### *Policy Context*

Having reviewed the capacity estimates for the towns and villages, it is important to consider the phasing or order in which certain sites ought to be allocated for development in the Local Plan and the criteria against which the sites should be assessed. The Government has firstly, given specific advice in this respect in both PPG12 (December 1999) and PPG3 (March 2000). Overall the government now requires Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to “Plan, Monitor and Manage” the provision of new housing in their areas rather than using the previous traditional approach of “Predict and Provide”. This change in emphasis has significant ramifications for the way in which Councils monitor and then actively pursue the provision of new housing and the phasing of and release of specific sites in the Local Plan.

The Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9 March 2001) establishes the broad strategic locational priorities for new development in the region. It is the task of the Development Plan, through the Hertfordshire Structure Plan and Local Plans, such as the adopted District Local Plan, to then identify specific sites which can be allocated in the emerging Local Plan for housing to assist in meeting the regional strategic targets and, of course, local needs.

It is incumbent upon the LPA to ensure that there is also a regular flow of housing and that the supply is not distorted by new sites being brought forward all at the same time. This is a difficult area of policy because of its interaction with the market, namely housing need and demand, and the requirements of the house building industry and its customers. The needs of the market do have to be considered in the plan-led system. Notwithstanding this, in certain circumstances (see advice in PPG1 in paragraph 47 onwards), it can be considered to be premature to grant planning permission for a development, as has become clear through the decisions of the Secretary of State in a number of recent appeals. The principle, that prematurity can be a material consideration in determining a planning application, is accepted in PPG 1.

For North Hertfordshire District Council to take a robust approach to future planning applications for the development of sites which it does not consider should yet be brought forward, the Local Plan must include a rigorous and robust approach to the phasing and release of such sites. It must also set out clearly how it, as the LPA, will actively pursue the monitoring of that supply and then the delivery of those sites that it believes should be prioritised.

The Secretary of State in PPG 3 has set out a number of criteria against which any allocation of sites in a Local Plan should be assessed by the LPA, including:

- The availability of previously-developed sites
- Location and accessibility of the sites to employment and local services, and choice of mode of transport including public transport
- The capacity of existing infrastructure
- The ability to build and reinforce communities
- Physical constraints on development.

PPG 12 makes more specific reference to the phasing of development and should be read in conjunction with the advice in PPG 3. The principle that it is appropriate for the LPA to phase potential housing sites is reiterated. However, it is made clear that such phasing should be primarily related to the availability of physical and social infrastructure and/or the availability of other services and resources. PPG 12 advises that phasing policies in Local Plans should normally take the form of a broad indication of the time scale envisaged for the release of the main areas or identified sites, rather than impose an arbitrary numerical limit on permissions or a precise order of release of sites in particular periods. A precise specification of the number of houses to be provided on an annual basis is not considered to be appropriate by the Secretary of State.

The advice encourages regular monitoring of progress. Phasing policies should also recognise the need for possible adjustment to the timing of land releases to take account of the emergence of unidentified sites that may exceed or fall short of the assumptions in the Local Plan.

#### 6.5.2

##### *Other National Guidance*

The DTLR has also recently published guidance on the “Managed Release of Housing Sites: Towards Better Practice”. This Paper considers the release of sites through the Local Plan process in three different ways:

- By site release based on identified criteria;
- By the ranking of sites for development;
- By releasing sites over defined periods within a plan-phasing approach.

The Guidance deals with issues such as greenfield sites, and windfall sites as well as how phasing plans could be rolled forward. It is not the purpose of this Report to repeat the constituent parts of that Paper, but where relevant it will be referred to. The overall conclusion is that the careful management of the release of sites over identified periods of time is probably the most likely way to be able to provide the necessary flexibility and robustness to deliver the Government’s objectives as set out in PPG 3.

#### 6.5.3

##### *Implications of the Housing Capacity Study*

This Housing Capacity Study has established a range of potential yields of new housing that, depending on the scenario concerned, could be achieved from within the urban areas and without utilising greenfield sites. This report identified a number of specific sites, which could be developed in this regard, many of which could

provide a significant number of dwellings. As part of the Local Plan Review process the Council must decide, by taking account, inter alia, of the allocation criteria in PPG3, which of those specific sites it wishes to phase in or allow to be released in the Local Plan and secondly, how it should carry out future monitoring and other more proactive measures. This will be needed to be able to review progress rigorously and roll such sites forward in the Local Plan timetable if it becomes necessary.

#### 6.5.4

##### *Other Key Development and Phasing Considerations*

Agreement on three other matters must be considered at this stage. Firstly what the cut off point should be in terms of the size of site, the potential number of dwellings and the scale of development that would be warranted in any phasing policy approach in the Local Plan (this will be partly influenced by existing protocols of the County and Regional planning authorities). Given the number of potential new urban housing sites that this Study has identified, it would be inappropriate for the Council to impose a definition of what constitutes a 'major' housing site at too low a level. For example, a minimum level of only 10 or 20 dwellings, would make any phasing policy meaningless and be rightly criticised by the house building industry as being too restrictive and unwieldy. In addition too low a figure would restrict the Council from taking into account other policy considerations in allocating sites, such as the provision of agreed levels of affordable housing.

The Study has shown that, in terms of the 'best fit' scenario, there are **13** retained sites that could each accommodate 50 or more dwellings and could be developed in the District's four main urban areas. The Consultants consider that the Council should therefore consider a figure of 50 dwellings as a helpful cut off point, in defining a major housing site, in relation to its proposed phasing policy.

Secondly, phasing policy should have regard to locational and geographic needs. The Local Plan should not be so prescriptive that it requires all of North Hertfordshire's housing needs and supply to be accommodated in only one urban area. It should have regard to the fact that local market requirements and pressures will inevitably seek to develop some of the identified sites in each of the towns and villages within the District. Therefore we recommend that any phasing policy make allowance for the development of a range of sites within the four main urban areas over regular but broad time periods during the Local Plan period.

Thirdly, the order of priority of the development of allocated or identified sites should be firmly seated in the context of a sustainable and sequential approach to the release of such sites. This would mean, for example, that the Council clearly sets out the criteria that it considers are significant in meeting the aims of sustainable development. The criteria set out in PPG 3 and PPG 12 have already been referred to in this regard.

### 6.5.5

#### *Criteria for Release of Sites*

In order to establish a robust prioritisation of the sites, the Council should seek to bring them forward sequentially during the Local Plan period. The following assessment criteria should be used, enabling the capacity figures to be discounted further according to more robust marketability and developability considerations:

- Proximity to public transport corridors and interchanges
- Relationship to catchment areas
- Capacity of the existing infrastructure to accommodate the development
- The level of contamination on the site; remediation costs and methods
- The availability of EU and Government Funding to deal with the above
- Potential impact on local education facilities and other local community services (and vice versa)
- Potential positive reinforcing traits of the development, e.g. improving linkages with the Town Centre, or enabling a better bus service to be provided
- The potential for a mixed use and/or urban regeneration (comprehensive redevelopment) approach
- Physical constraints
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Access to the site; highways constraints
- The propensity of the site to provide for affordable housing, or to meet other policy aims
- Market considerations
- Ownership fragmentation
- Existence of restrictive covenants.

It is also important to note that in carrying out an assessment of the above criteria, some sort of weighting needs to be applied to the relative value and priority that the Council wishes to apply to the above criteria. In accordance with sustainable development principles, the Consultants consider the greatest weight is attached to the “proximity to public transport corridors and interchanges” and the “relationship to catchment areas” criteria. This process needs to be transparent and subject to public consultation through the Local Plan Review process so that the Council can be assured that the criteria and the weighting applied has public and if possible, development industry support. This will then enable the Council to rank the order of release of sites on a robust and justifiable basis.

We would recommend therefore that further detailed consultation on the results of this study with environmental, development and landowning interests would be beneficial, and should smooth its passage through the Local Plan review process and subsequent public inquiry.

#### 6.5.6

##### *Further Considerations*

Next, the policy must have regard to the potential for windfall sites coming forward. The DTLR guidance “Managed Release of Housing Sites: Towards Better Practice” points out that these can make a considerable contribution to meeting housing supply targets and can also help reduce the pressure to release green field sites. However, they can also complicate the managed release of urban housing land and, if large enough, could throw the Local Plan strategy off-course. The DTLR guidance recommends identifying as many potential sites as possible to help avoid this, and, of course, this Report has satisfied that requirement. Having examined North Hertfordshire District’s urban areas, the Consultants consider that the chances are slim of a major windfall site coming forward in the future that this Housing Capacity Study has not identified.

#### 6.5.7

##### *Monitoring and Proactive Planning*

Once a phasing or managed release policy has been established in the Local Plan Review, it will be incumbent on the Council to establish a much more proactive and robust monitoring approach than might have previously been required. This will enable the Council to regularly review the progress towards bringing forward those major sites identified in the phasing policy, in line with PPG3 and detailed Government advice on monitoring. It is recommended that the Council’s current computer databases are upgraded and expanded for this purpose. The sites identified in this study are a useful comprehensive resource in this regard and will be developed into a database format for use by Council Officers.

A flexible phasing policy should also allow for the possible amendment of the order of release of sites, particularly if a persistent gap exists between what has been planned for and what is occurring in reality. The results of the phasing policy should be monitored throughout the plan period to establish whether allocated sites are being released for development and a continuous supply of housing land is being provided as anticipated. If it is not, the Council must establish what actions are required to address this.

The Council will also need to ensure that the phasing policy is capable of allowing the rolling forward of sites between phases. The success in securing windfall sites in the first period will often define which sites need to be rolled forward. Sites with a range of development lead-in times should be identified so any shortfalls could be met by amending the order of release.

As part of a more proactive approach to the bringing forward and phasing of potential housing sites, the Council should urgently consider which of the identified sites should be subject to the preparation of new or revised development and/or design briefs, and potentially Supplementary Planning Guidance, in the future. If presented in an attractive and accessible way, such briefs can help make the development industry more aware of the potential of a site when also used as a marketing tool, and give specific planning guidance on what the Council expects to see on such land. They can

also help in advising the industry on ownership and covenant issues, and in advising on the range of planning benefits and infrastructure requirements that the Council considers ought to be the subject of Section 106 Agreements. The costs of such Agreements can then be taken into account by developers in their negotiations with landowners.

If negotiations on land purchase or related agreements break down, or are clearly very difficult and they could delay such sites being brought forward, then the Council should begin to more rigorously use its compulsory purchase powers to assemble land. PPG 3 makes this a specific requirement of all local planning authorities but also emphasises the need to try to negotiate with landowners in the first instance. All these factors mean that the Council will, in the context of its staffing resources need to give full consideration to the skills and experience of its planning staff, and potentially what future training needs might arise, i.e. Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) procedures.

# 7 Conclusions

## 7.1 *Key Conclusion*

It is apparent from the range of housing capacity figures obtained that there is potential in the towns of Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston and the villages of Ashwell, Barkway, Barley, Pirton, Sandon (Church End), Therfield, Codicote, Ickleford, Kimpton, Knebworth, Whitwell, Little Wymondley, Breachwood Green, Great Offley and Weston to accommodate additional development. However, depending on the extent of double counting as compared with the Council's more recent housing land availability work, the Best Fit figure of 4,122 additional dwellings is the equivalent of almost 40% of the Structure Plan housing requirement of 10,400 between 1991-2011.

Our market viability assessment of the retained sites, based on a broad assessment of residential amenity (suitability of residential use, noise, adjacent commercial uses, etc) and residential environment (housing quality and access to local services and facilities, etc), indicates that these additional dwellings would be phased as follows: 1312 dwellings between 2003-2010; 1510 dwellings between 2011-2015; and 1300 dwellings 2016 plus.

This level of development potential reinforces the importance of comprehensive and regular monitoring of housing provision in the light of this housing capacity study. The Council, we recommend, should therefore consider reviewing housing allocations and phasing under its monitoring of the District Local Plan at more frequent intervals than on a standard five yearly basis, perhaps at least bi-annually.

## 7.2 *Delivery Considerations*

The National Land Use Database – Previously Developed Land (NLUD) should be the starting point for the work on capacity. It provides information on previously-developed sites that are vacant or derelict, or if in use have a planning allocation, permission for redevelopment or known development potential without planning status. Information is also provided on conversions. Due to limited resources, however, NLUD data is not always up-to-date.

The Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) will enable high-performing authorities to provide extra resources in a number of service delivery areas. The Consultants recommend that this should include the up-to-date recording of NLUD data to inform the urban renaissance in North Hertfordshire.

The Consultants also recommend that North Hertfordshire District Council should consider the benefits of setting up an inter-departmental Corporate Delivery Team, underpinned by a Members Panel, with a range of skills, including: planning

implementation and policy, housing, regeneration, commercial, property, finance and legal; which would facilitate the assembly and delivery of key or difficult housing sites.

### 7.3

#### ***The Effect of Local Plan Policies and Standards***

The urban capacity estimates indicate that in reflecting the Local Plan amenity, off-street parking and private open space standards within Scenario 1, 3,722 additional dwellings could be accommodated in the four towns and fifteen villages. If standards are revised in line with PPG3 to focus on a flexible, design-led approach, the capacity figure could be 5,322 additional dwellings (almost 43% more than Scenario 1). These figures, as indicated within Scenario 2, could be achieved by still respecting urban design principles and avoiding what could be perceived as ‘town cramming’.

Scenario 3 estimates normally indicate that a more innovative development approach could further increase the capacity estimates in some locations (particularly the town centre areas). In this case, however, the overall urban capacity estimate would be 5,150 additional dwellings, over 3% less than Scenario 2. This lower figure has arisen principally because the Design Exercise 8 Scenario 3 study, in echoing the generally spacious and lower density characteristics of the surrounding area, has produced a lower capacity estimate than the Design Exercise 8 Scenario 2 study. The **Best Fit** estimate of **4,122 additional dwellings**, however, provides a composite estimate based on a judgement as to which scenario is most appropriate and realistic for each site. This is a significant 10% increase on the Scenario 1 estimate.

**It should be emphasised that these figures are based on density ‘yardsticks’ derived from a series of design case studies that provide an indication of the development possible on different types of sites. The design exercises and capacity estimates for individual sites, therefore, should not be assumed to be acceptable to North Hertfordshire District Council in the event of a planning application being submitted on a design exercise site.**

### 7.4

#### ***Development and Phasing Considerations***

Criteria for ordering sites within the Plan period are set out in Section 6.5.5. These criteria should, we suggest, be applied at least to major housing sites with a potential capacity of 50 dwellings or more. The application of the criteria will be undertaken by North Hertfordshire District Council and will assist in planning, monitoring and managing release of residential sites within the District over the plan period, and beyond.

The Consultant also recommends that the PPG3 presumption, that previously developed sites (or buildings) should be developed before greenfield sites, is applied to phasing the release of the greenfield sites allocated in the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations. If monitoring reveals that previously developed sites were performing poorly, managing the phased release of one or more greenfield sites would be the planned response to meeting the shortfall.

## 7.5

### ***Balancing Planning Objectives***

Some of the sites identified as suitable for inclusion in the urban capacity estimates are currently used for car parking – both public and private – or are under-utilised employment sites or areas of poorly-maintained open space. Policies for such land uses cannot be considered in isolation from encouraging housing in existing urban areas, and so will need to be reviewed in more detail as part of the District Local Plan Review.

Other key sites in central and accessible locations, particularly when considered comprehensively, provide a significant opportunity to diversify uses and contribute to a renaissance of urban living in market towns. In the case of those requiring an innovative approach, the Consultant recommends the use of development and planning briefs, design guides and competitions and strategic partnerships. These are all advocated by the Government in the Urban White Paper and PPG3, to provide greater certainty to developers and enhance the ability of schemes being realised sympathetically on the ground.

Different amounts of housing that could be developed within the existing urban areas under different scenarios are identified in the Study. It is important to note that relaxing Local Plan policies and standards resulted in significantly higher capacity (over 45% more) than that achieved using current policies and standards.

The Study also indicates what may be achieved through a rigorous analysis of unused and under-utilised land. Design-led use of such land for development can significantly reduce pressure on open space outside the town and assist in the protection of valued open space and other greenfield land within built up areas.

This urban housing capacity study is intended to assist greatly in North Hertfordshire District Council's "Plan, Monitor, Manage" approach to the level of provision of new housing in its area.