

Why has the Local Plan been prepared?

We have a legal duty to produce a Local Plan. Preparing the plan also allows us to look at what's good about the district and needs to be protected, what challenges the district may face in the future and what needs to be improved. The plan sets out a development framework which looks at the whole district. It will help attract and co-ordinate investment and infrastructure and sets out where we will (and will not) grant planning permission for new development. The Government could take over our Local Plan and cut our funding if we do not submit it for examination by March 2017.

How has the Local Plan strategy been prepared?

The plan has been prepared by Council officers with the help of the elected Councillors. We have considered the findings of our evidence and the requirements placed upon us by the Government. The plan also takes into account the responses to public consultations held in 2013 and 2015. A Local Plan Project Board has guided the development of the plan. This is made up of Councillors and senior officers. Full Council endorsed the strategic policies and site allocations of the plan at a meeting in July 2016. The Local Plan was approved for consultation by the Council's Cabinet in September 2016.

What consultations have taken place so far and what are the next steps?

The local plan must go through a number of stages before it can be adopted. The table below shows the stages we have already gone through and when we expect the next stages to take place.

Stage	Date
1. Local Plan Housing Growth Targets and Locations	February 2013
2. Local Plan Housing Additional Locations and Options	July 2013
3. Local Plan Preferred Options consultation	December 2014
4. Local Plan Proposed Submission consultation	October – November 2016
5. Submission of Local Plan to Secretary of State	March 2017
6. Public examination of Local Plan	August 2017
7. Receipt of Inspector's report	December 2017
8. Adoption of the Local Plan	March 2018

How were views on the consultation taken into consideration and what has changed since the consultation last year?

The last consultation on the local plan finished in early 2015. We received responses from more than 4,500 individuals, groups or organisations. All the responses have been considered. A wide range of additional work has been carried out. This includes further investigation of a number of issues including transport, wildlife and heritage. A summary of the consultation responses is available on our website.

All of the policies in the plan have been reviewed. More detail has been provided to guide development on those sites which have been selected. The largest housing sites now have their own policy. The Communities chapter in the plan sets out specific criteria for all other development sites.

What is the relationship between the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans?

Neighbourhood Plans are a new tier of planning which allow a local community to develop its own plan and have it formally adopted as planning policy. Once adopted (or 'made') the neighbourhood plan attains the same legal status as the Local Plan and at this point it becomes part of the statutory development plan. Applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

How did the Council select its preferred Housing sites?

Potential sites have been identified from a range of sources. This includes those put forward by landowners and areas identified by council officers. All potential sites that have been investigated and taken into consideration for this version of the plan are included in our evidence. Please see the *Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment* and *Housing and Green Belt Background Paper* reports which are available on our website.

All sites have been evaluated to see if they should be considered for inclusion in the plan. In selecting sites, we have considered a range of evidence. As well as detailed information about each site we have also considered the need for new homes across the district as a whole, the findings of other local plan examinations and relevant court cases.

Does the Local Plan identify specific sites to be removed from the Green Belt?

Yes. The boundaries of the Green Belt within North Hertfordshire have not been reviewed for 20 years. The plan identifies a number of sites currently within the Green Belt which the Council considers should be released to meet future development needs.

Government guidance says we can change the Green Belt through our Local Plan if we think there are "exceptional circumstances". More information on "exceptional circumstances", and why we think they exist in North Hertfordshire, is available in our evidence.

How much of the new housing will be affordable?

The plan says 1 in every 3 new homes built between 2011 and 2031 should be for affordable housing.

When will new housing be built?

The new plan covers the period to 2031. All of the housing sites identified in the Local Plan will need to gain planning permission before development can take place. The Delivery chapter of the plan sets out a detailed schedule of when we currently expect the new homes to be built.

Why do we need this number of houses?

The Government have provided clear guidance on how we should work out the number of homes that are needed. Official government statistics are the starting point. They take into account the way the existing population is expected to change and also the amount of people that may move into and out of an area. We also have to look at other matters such as the amount of affordable housing which is required and the needs of our older residents.

Based on this guidance, the plan sets a target for 14,000 new homes to be built to meet the needs of North Hertfordshire.

Luton lies immediately to the west of North Hertfordshire. Based on the same guidance, we know that Luton does not have the room to meet all of its future housing needs. We are required by law to consider how we can help. The Local Plan identifies an area to the east of Luton which can contribute almost 2,000 homes to Luton's unmet needs.

Why do we need to provide housing for residents outside the district?

The Council has a legal Duty to Cooperate with neighbouring authorities and other organisations to deliver housing, employment land, infrastructure etc.

Local Plans are examined by independent Inspectors who check to ensure that the Duty to Co-operate has been properly carried out and that councils are working together on cross-boundary issues. Plans failing to meet this legal requirement will be rejected as unsound.

Why is so much housing proposed for Baldock/some areas?

The number of new homes needed by 2031 is significant. The total number of homes in the District needs to increase by a quarter in just 20 years.

Large sites make a significant contribution to these requirements. They also provide better opportunities to provide new roads, schools, shops and other services on-site rather than placing a burden on existing facilities.

We consider the sites that have been chosen represent the best solution for the district as a whole. This means that some areas will take more new development than others.

What about schools, shops, roads etc?

The plan and its evidence base set out where new schools, roads and shops will be needed. Each of the largest sites has a specific policy which sets out our requirements. There is an expectation that all of these sites will provide new school places and local facilities.

The Communities chapter of the plan identifies other locations where specific new facilities will be required. More information on the infrastructure that is likely to be needed to support growth within the District to 2031 is available in our evidence.

What is the process of the Local Plan going forward /what happens next?

A consultation will be held on the Local Plan for a period of six weeks. This will begin on Wednesday 19 October and close on Wednesday 30 November.

Following the consultation, the Council has to decide whether to submit the plan and all of the consultation responses to the Government for examination. We aim to make this decision by March 2017.

If the plan is submitted, an Inspector will be appointed. He or she will then carry out an examination of the plan.

Can I still have my say on the Local Plan before it has been submitted to Government for inspection?

The six-week consultation beginning on Wednesday 19 October is your final opportunity to have your say before the Council decides whether to submit the plan.

Why have I been sent a letter / email?

The Planning Policy team hold a database of people who have told us they are interested in the local plan, or who have responded to a previous consultation. This includes people who may have signed a petition or sent a pre-printed postcard response.

Everyone on this database has been notified of the local plan consultation. If you no longer wish to be notified, please contact us using the details provided on the letter or email.

Are there going to be any public meetings or workshops to discuss the local plan?

The District Council will not be holding any further public meetings, workshops or similar. This consultation is on the version of the plan the Council wishes to send for examination and see adopted. We now have no further powers to make significant changes to the plan.

Any respondents to the consultation are effectively writing for the attention of the Inspector that is appointed to conduct any future examination. This examination is now the appropriate place for the Council to explain, or 'defend', the proposals in the Plan and the associated evidence base.

However, many Parish Councils and local interest groups will be holding meetings to discuss how their local community should respond to the plan. Please contact these groups if you would like to be involved.

I have already submitted my comments – why do I need to do it again?

The last consultation was an opportunity for you to tell the Council about the changes you thought should be made to the Local Plan. We have made a number of changes to the plan in response to the last consultation. However, we know that there are many changes that people asked for which have not been made.

This consultation is now the opportunity for you to tell a Government Planning Inspector whether you think this Council has prepared an appropriate Local Plan for the District.

By resubmitting any comments, you are asking the Inspector to consider your view. He or she will then decide whether our Local Plan is the most appropriate strategy. We have to review all of your comments before making a final decision on whether to send this plan for examination.

When will the Government Inspector's Report be available?

The Inspector's report will be available once they have completed the examination. The Inspector will decide on the best way to conduct the examination. Some Inspectors may choose to just look at certain issues and then decide whether or not to continue the examination. Some Inspectors will examine all of the issues before coming to a decision. We hope to complete the examination by the end of 2017 but we do not control this.

What happens after the Council receives the Inspector's Report?

This depends on what the Inspector's report says.

The Inspector may decide that the plan has failed and that this cannot be corrected. In this case, we would have to withdraw the plan and start again.

The Inspector may say that the plan can be adopted if we make certain changes. These are known as modifications. If the Inspector recommends modifications we cannot adopt the plan without including them.

The Inspector may say that the plan we have written is fine as it is. This is very unlikely. Almost all Local Plans will have changes made to them as they go through examination.

How can I get more information on the Local Plan and how do I respond?

More information on the plan, its evidence base and the consultation – including details and guidance on how to respond – are available on the NHDC website: <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/local-plan>

The Local Plan, Proposals Map and supporting evidence can be viewed at the Council Offices during normal opening hours.

Copies of the Local Plan and Proposals Maps are also available to view in the District's libraries and at Stevenage Central, Stevenage Old Town and Luton Central libraries during their normal opening hours.

Our preferred method for accepting your representations is through our website. There are guidance notes to help use the software which are available on the website.

You can also send representations by

- email: local.plans@north-herts.gov.uk; or
- post: Strategic Planning and Projects Group, North Hertfordshire District Council, PO Box 480, M33 0DE.