



NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL



2021-26

COUNCIL PLAN

Working with our communities, *it's your Council*



FOREWORD BY THE LEADER



In this plan our administration is demonstrating how we are continuing to keep the promises we made to you, our residents, in the last election, now taking into account the need to continue to keep residents safe and give support to our local businesses as we respond to the pandemic.

In putting the plan together, we have again sought to use the skills and insights of all our councillors, working with the professional advice of our officers.

We trust you will find the plan readable and find in it a clear understanding of our vision and priorities as we ensure your Council provides the best services we can, within the constraints of continuing government cuts to our resources.

Martin Stears-Handscomb
Leader of the Council

INTRODUCTION BY THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

The Council Plan and the Objectives are the cornerstone for how we organise and undertake our work. The Plan provides the policy context for our budget setting, shapes the services that we provide and how those services are delivered to the community.

This Plan is of course being published whilst we are still responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and we will have to be flexible on how we deliver our services and objectives whilst the pandemic is ongoing.

Our recent Corporate Peer Challenge has identified some really exciting and interesting opportunities for the Council and our community, and I look forward to working with colleagues, councillors and the community as we develop those ideas.

Anthony Roche
North Hertfordshire District Council's Managing Director





Build thriving and resilient communities

Support the delivery of good quality and affordable homes

A WELCOMING, INCLUSIVE, AND EFFICIENT COUNCIL

Respond to challenges to the environment

Enable an enterprising and co-operative economy

OUR VALUES

We will operate in line with the principles of a co-operative council. The Council will be one that builds the co-operative values of mutual support, accountability, fairness and responsibility into everything it does.

New organisational values have recently been adopted. These are expected to be demonstrated by staff and these values are embedded in our appraisal system to ensure our plan is delivered in a co-operative manner. The values (“We are”) are matched with corresponding behaviours for staff (“I am”). The values and behaviours are:-



PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The Council plan sets out the priorities that the Council will address over the next five years.

The plan also lays out how North Hertfordshire District Council will achieve its aims for the district. Appendix A sets out the administration’s proposed actions and these will be supported by the more detailed Service Delivery Plan and supporting Action Plans on how these Objectives and actions will be delivered by the individual service areas. Appendix B also sets out the achievements of the Council in 2019/20.

OUR VISION

To make North Hertfordshire a district in which everyone who lives, works or visits is able to flourish.



OBJECTIVES

- ✓ Be a welcoming, inclusive, and efficient council;
- ✓ Build thriving and resilient communities;
- ✓ Respond to challenges to the environment;
- ✓ Enable an enterprising and co-operative economy;
- ✓ Support the delivery of good quality and affordable homes.

Be a welcoming, inclusive, and efficient council

This means:

We will engage with and welcome the contributions of residents, community groups and businesses; working collaboratively with local people.



Build thriving and resilient communities

This means:

We will work on frequent and regular opportunities to improve the partnership and relationship that the Council has with local citizens. Some of this will be achieved by change in culture, tone and communications but more will be done through direct measurable activity, intervention and consultation.

We will develop a range of innovative ways in which local communities, from small groups to whole towns and communities of interest can be encouraged to become more involved in supporting, planning, improving and maintaining local environments.

This work stream will focus particularly on engaging with young residents and those who are disadvantaged or in any way socially excluded, to ensure such innovations are fit for the future and imaginative in concept and delivery.



Respond to challenges to the environment

This means:

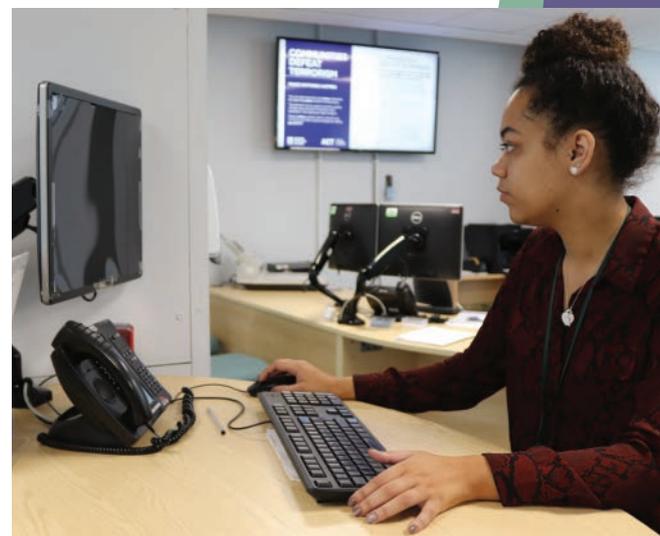
We will seek to provide a clean and safe environment, in consultation and partnership with local people. We will engage local people and organisations as we progress towards our target of net zero carbon emissions by 2030, whilst taking action to enable and encourage residents to minimise their own carbon impact. We will protect the natural and built environment through our planning policies and an effective green spaces strategy. We will take action against environmental crime and ensure that our approach to waste and recycling promotes the hierarchy of reduce, re-use, recycle. We will complete the elimination of single use plastics from the council and support reductions in their use across the district. We will work to improve the monitoring and management of air quality across the district, prioritising those areas where air quality is most in need of improvement



Enable an enterprising and co-operative economy

This means:

We will aim to become an increasingly innovative and inclusive Council, committed to generating community wealth, by seeking commercial and investment opportunities and through proactive engagement with a wider range of small and medium sized businesses to build a sustainable local economy. We will continue to engage with residents, staff and Councillors to continue to embrace modern working practices through the use of IT and a commitment to working towards a paperless Council whilst increasing the efficiency of services and access to them by residents.



Support the delivery of good quality and affordable homes

This means:

We will enable and support the delivery of good quality and affordable homes in the district, ensuring both new and existing homes are fit for purpose, including a commitment to consultation and ensuring communities have the infrastructure they need. We will build more effective relationships with local housing associations and recognise our role in the fight against homelessness. We will continue to support Parishes with Neighbourhood plans.



Appendix A: Proposed actions

Objective One - Be a welcoming, inclusive, and efficient council

- Continue to ensure that individuals and community groups presenting petitions, grant applications, opinions or objections to Committees, Cabinet and Council are treated as welcome guests at all times; that Chairs are encouraged to take a flexible and enabling approach to their participation.
- Maintain our programme of regular engagement and survey activities which will enable us to measure progress in how the Council's work with residents and community groups is perceived, and how it encourages new ideas for improvement.
- Continue to review the 3C's (Comments, Compliments, and Complaints) Policy and where appropriate act on feedback from customers.
- Trial a range of additional online activities for events such as Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), Local Democracy week (now will be Parliamentary Week), Chair's Reception/ Volunteer Awards, Town Talks, Village Voices, Cabinet Question Times, Young People's Question Times, and Village Talks.
- Launch the established Community Engagement and Co-Operative Development Cabinet Panel to give local organisations and residents a district wide voice on strategic decisions.
- Encourage young people to become more involved in local democracy through increased work to promote local democracy week, working with youth councils, schools and youth clubs as well as other organisations working with young people.
- Encourage councillors to actively engage with children and young people to enable them to have a voice and better influence decision making.
- Ensure that we maintain access to our services for all residents.
- Ensure that all parts of the district are given opportunities to participate fully in a range of engagement activities such as both general and subject specific Town Talks and Village Voice forums, as well as all-party councillor surgeries, whether remote or in person.
- Ensure that new and existing councillors are offered a range of opportunities to become fully equipped to help residents through induction and on-going development opportunities in all aspects of their roles, including the use of remote (Zoom) meetings for Council and Community Engagement purposes, accessing Local Government Association learning platforms, and other relevant training modules.
- Undertake some specific work to ensure that we find new and innovative ways to ensure the involvement and engagement of our Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in Council work, to include learning and development from the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement and other relevant bodies.
- Continue to value our staff and the staff of our contractors, who are also part of our community.

- Continued focus on delivering services as efficiently as possible, but mindful of potentially significant reductions in our funding. Any fundamental budget reviews will involve public consultation to help identify the services that residents value the most.
- Continue to ensure that the Council's website encourages public use and engagement, particularly in relation to high use areas.

Objective Two - Build thriving and resilient communities

- Continue to work with the full range of voluntary and charitable organisations both during Covid-19 and afterwards to assist with the needs of all local residents in terms of food, housing and financial assistance.
- Ensure that we have the best possible officer and member-led partnership working with the County Council and the Police and others, to ensure that the views of the public are heard and that partners are fully engaged on matters of local priority.
- Ensure that the public and councillors are fully aware of the District Council's remits and initiatives in Community Safety Matters including: Health and Wellbeing, Safeguarding and Community Safety concerns (such as environmental crime and other types of anti-social behaviour).
- Work with our Executive members (Community Engagement and Co-operative Development) to promote and support Arts & Culture across North Herts including the Hertfordshire Year of Culture 2020 activities which have been postponed due to Covid-19, and encourage outdoor visual and performance art.
- Exploring opportunities for funding the Healthy Hub and its associated activities such as inter-generational work and support for carers and people living alone, from its current remote status back to active community engagement as soon as this is possible. Review all charges for council services and introduce concessions where they're needed and it's possible.
- Aim to restore indoor and outdoor leisure facilities as rapidly as can be achieved safely, to reflect their importance as a community asset.
- Deliver Council-led community safety events across the district to raise public awareness and address specific issues such as dog fouling, fly tipping, household waste duty of care, and other community and environmental issues.

Objective Three - Respond to challenges to the environment

- Set up a community tree planting programme to provide 10,000 whips and help the residents of North Herts plant them and care for them.
- Rewild areas of council land including wildflower areas and bee corridors and support the setting up of community orchards and gardens, consulting with residents as necessary.
- Identify the Council's current carbon footprint and set a target for the reduction of the council's own carbon emissions (compared with a 2019/20 baseline) for this year and the following four years and review annually.

- Further involve local people in the discussion around the Climate Emergency and the necessary plans and actions to tackle it, by Town Talks & Village Voice forums around the district focussed on Climate Change.
- Hold Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Events (WEEE) for people to dispose of their electrical equipment for recycling or repurpose. This will take the form of one event per town, per year, once the pandemic is over. We will investigate large village venues too.
- Roll out the separated recycling bins across the district (including bins in parks and green spaces) not just in Hitchin and Royston.
- Run campaigns to improve rates of recycling and composting across the district.
- As part of the ‘Sustainable North Hertfordshire’, work to include the development and support of policies that encourage electric vehicle use and other ‘cleaner air’ initiatives. This includes the issue of bus and car idling, particularly outside schools and on taxi ranks.
- Continue to oppose the adverse environmental and transport impacts of the current planned expansion of Luton Airport Expansion upon North Hertfordshire.
- Work to progress the implementation of a better cycle network in North Herts, linking the District and beyond.
- Introduce trial/experimental Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points in North Hertfordshire.

Objective Four - Enable an enterprising and co-operative economy

- Ensure that the Council’s income generating activities should never look to disadvantage non-profit or charitable community groups out of principle.
- Explore how the ‘real living wage’ could be incorporated into NHDC contracts.
- Develop and support projects that not only provide good value for the council, but which also have a clear community and social benefit.
- Support business rates reform with particular regard for small business and the self-employed and protect the services provided by the Council to its communities.
- Work with BIDs (Business Improvement Districts) and other town partnerships to relaunch and recover our local economy.
- Promote and support the creation of cooperatives and community interest companies.
- Support different ways of trading as we develop a new normal, including the creation of flexible workspaces and business hubs.
- Continue to expand promotion of Credit Unions and advice organisations particularly in light of the current economic uncertainty.
- Investigate how to promote a local, ethical supply chain to benefit local businesses.

- Promote and support local people to complete applications for assets of community value through the development of sustainable, alternative business models, such as co-ops or Community Interest Companies.
- Continue our support and give advice to local organisations on apprenticeships.
- Continue to pursue the possibilities for renewable community energy schemes.
- Improve and simplify the means for Council car parking payments, including investigating the possibility of introducing pay on exit parking at NHDC car parks.

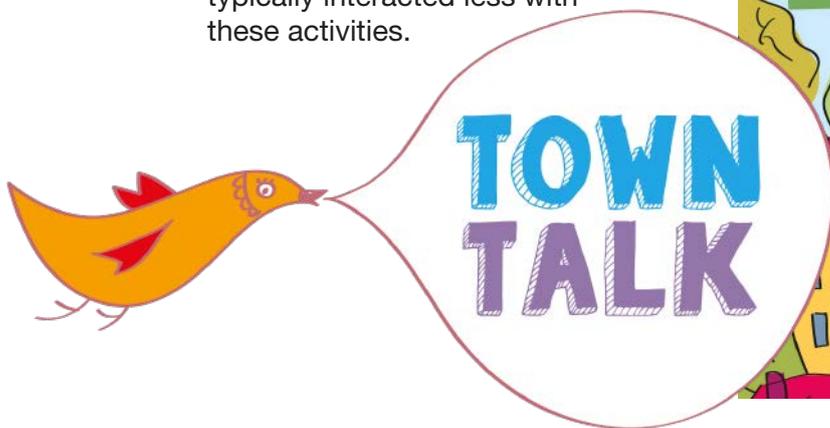
Objective Five - Supporting the delivery of good quality and affordable homes

- Assess and plan for current and future housing needs for the local population (development of the Local Plan and promotion of Neighbourhood Plans).
- Continue to build strong relationships and to work with our local social housing providers to build new 'General Needs' housing, and to work together to support initiatives/institutions which provide for the needs of those most vulnerable in our society.
- Seek opportunities to support new co-operative and community-led housing schemes, in line with our commitment to engage with communities and work with our residents.
- Seek to drive up the quality of existing housing for all residents through the disabled facilities grants (via Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency - HHIA) and the Home Improvement Grant (HRG).
- Actively work with and support SADA (Survivors Against Domestic Abuse) who provide help to the victims of domestic abuse in ensuring the victims get the housing support they need.
- Encourage local Housing Associations to implement robust tenant engagement policies that enable all tenants to have their voices heard on the management of their homes.
- Work jointly with our partners to prevent homelessness and support the development of a new homeless shelter in Letchworth.
- Develop and implement a cohesive Empty Homes strategy.
- Urge any new developments to include and deliver the appropriate infrastructure (e.g. roads, education, health care), include links to existing communities, and implement high standards in quality, design and environmental standards.
- Work robustly to deal with and address statutory nuisance.

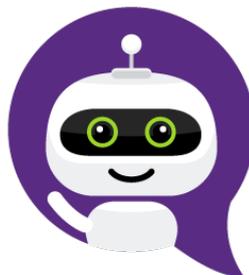
Appendix B: Achievements

Objective One. Be a welcoming and inclusive council:

- The Council has created a programme of regular engagement and begun survey activities which will enable us to measure progress in how our work with residents and community groups is perceived, and how it encourages new ideas for improvement.
- We have expanded the use and promotion of Town Talks and Councillors' Surgeries. Since the COVID-19 pandemic this has included the use of virtual Town Talks and Councillors' Surgeries which has helped to engage demographics which have typically interacted less with these activities.



- Throughout the lockdown, we have worked with our IT and Committee Services staff to ensure that our democracy continues through video conferencing and public streaming of meetings on our YouTube channel.
- The Council is in the process of implementing a “customer account” for customers to access specific information relating to them and to enable them to transact with the Council from a single log-on.
- The Council is testing and in the process of implementing a Chatbot on our external website for online assistance for residents.
- The Council has joined the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network (CCIN), declared itself a Co-operative Council, and used funding from the CCIN to develop our engagement with Young People in the District and to prioritise work on Enterprise and Co-operative Development.



Appendix B: Achievements

Objective Two: Building thriving and resilient communities

- The Council has created a programme of regular engagement and begun survey activities to measure progress in how the Council’s work with residents and community groups is perceived, and how it encourages new ideas for improvement.
- The Council has established productive and active engagement with young people across the District, including engagement with YC Herts and their Youth Council. It also engaged young people in events for Local Democracy Week.
- The Community Safety team have assisted Councillors in re-establishing regular communications with police and other community safety partners.
- Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council established the Community Support Fund in order to ensure the continued functioning of community groups who had come under pressure as a result of the crisis. The Council has provided funding through this to groups working on food provision, mental health support, and domestic abuse support, and continues to do so in order to ensure the resilience of our communities.

Objective Three: Responding to challenges to the environment



We Declare A Climate Emergency

At the Annual Meeting we declared a Climate Emergency, set up a Cabinet Panel on the Environment, and have since made progress on reducing the Council’s carbon footprint, ensuring the Council uses renewable energy and “greening” the Council.

- We reversed the previous administration’s policy of reducing waste and recycling collections for flats, etc. and made progress in tackling the failings of the Waste Contract.
- Under consideration is having Ultra Low Emission Vehicles for all future operational vehicles leased or purchased by the council and encouraging contractors to adopt similar measures.
- The Council have begun exploring opportunities for tree planting throughout the district and have conducted meetings with the Woodland Trust in order to explore how best to do this.
- The Council is working on establishing its carbon footprint in order to move towards our net zero carbon by 2030 target. We have gone through the procurement process and selected a consultant who has now begun undertaking this work.
- The Council has reviewed our approach to air pollution and taken action to limit idling, particularly outside schools.



Objective Three: Responding to challenges to the environment

-  The Council established Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Events, to help residents dispose of their electrical equipment to be repurposed/recycled. These events have currently been put on hold due to the pandemic.
- The Council have explored ways to encourage local communities to take some responsibility in supporting, improving, and maintaining their local environment. For example, we have made it easier for residents to access litter picking toolkits and equipment.
- Through the Environment Panel, the Council has consulted and engaged with the public and with interest groups on strategies for tackling challenges to the environment and on achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030. It will continue to do this.
- The Council has switched to renewable energy sources for our buildings' gas and electricity.

As part of our work on sustainable transport, the Council have conducted a public consultation to inform the development of the Electric Vehicle Strategy found here: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-and-democracy/consultations/electric-vehicle-strategy-consultation>, and has outlined an Electric Vehicle Charging in Town Centres Policy here: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/North%20Hertfordshire%20District%20Council%20Operational%20Guidelines.pdf>

<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-and-democracy/consultations/electric-vehicle-strategy-consultation>

Objective Four - Enabling an enterprising and co-operative economy

The development of a Property Acquisition & Development Strategy with a view to its adoption by NHDC for the next 5 years. The key elements of the Strategy are:

- ✓ **NHDC's core goal and objectives for property acquisitions and developments.**
- ✓ **Funding the acquisitions and developments.**
- ✓ **Risk management and governance.**
- ✓ **Due diligence.**

Objective Four - Enabling an enterprising and co-operative economy

- The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 ('the Regulations') came into force on 4 April 2020. The Council has therefore put in place arrangements for meetings to be held remotely in line with these new regulations. Council meetings are also available to view on YouTube.
- During the full implementation of the national lockdown, staff were able to transition to full homeworking with minimal disruption to services, with the ability to access systems online and use video conferencing to conduct internal and external meetings.
- The Council has established the Cabinet Panel for Community Engagement and Co-operative Development.
- Ensured all Officers & Councillors were able to undertake suitable commercial training to support their roles
- Introduced Purchasing Annual Leave scheme for Officers
- Fully opened North Hertfordshire Museum and the Mountford Hall (Town Hall)
- Worked for and gained Full Museums accreditation
- Letting the 2nd floor of the District Council Offices
- Secured £75k back rent on the aerial phone mast at the Council Offices
- Secured an extension to the current contract with Hitchin Markets Ltd

Objective Five - Supporting the delivery of good quality and affordable housing

The Council has continued to look at opportunities to make infrastructure more ecologically friendly. Examples include the planned pedestrian/cycle bridge over the A505 at the A10 roundabout, as well as new bicycle racks across the district.

The Council has continued to support and progress the development of John Barker Place.

A review of the Planning Code of Good Conduct was completed and presented at the Council meeting in January 2020.

Our correspondence address for Planning,
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Designed by NHDC Design team