

Chapter 1

Introduction

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1.1 What is the District Plan?

- 1.1.1** This District Plan sets out a framework for guiding development in East Herts. It looks at how much, where and when development should take place. It seeks to ensure that development in the district is 'sustainable' and meets the needs of the local area.
- 1.1.2** The District Plan covers the period up to 2031. But it is likely that the Plan will be reviewed well before then. The District Plan replaces the 'East Herts Local Plan Second Review' (2007).
- 1.1.3** The District Plan will be the main basis for making decisions on planning applications. When adopted, planning decisions should be in accordance with the District Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The District Plan sits alongside the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which must also be taken into account when deciding planning applications, and preparing local plans, and the Hertfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plans.

Why Plan?

Having an up to date plan:

- Allows the Council to provide for local community needs in terms of jobs, housing (including affordable housing) and infrastructure (e.g. green space);
- Provides a strong basis for securing benefits from new development – up-to-date policies will provide a robust starting point for negotiations with developers;
- Provides greater certainty for communities and businesses as to where development will go – they can therefore plan ahead with confidence;
- Allows infrastructure providers (e.g. NHS, utilities) to plan future infrastructure provision more effectively – the plan will help them to assess and deliver necessary capacity enhancements;
- Provides the Council with a firm basis on which to apply for infrastructure funding;
- Will help attract investment to East Herts – evidence suggests that having a plan in place helps provide the private sector with greater confidence to invest.

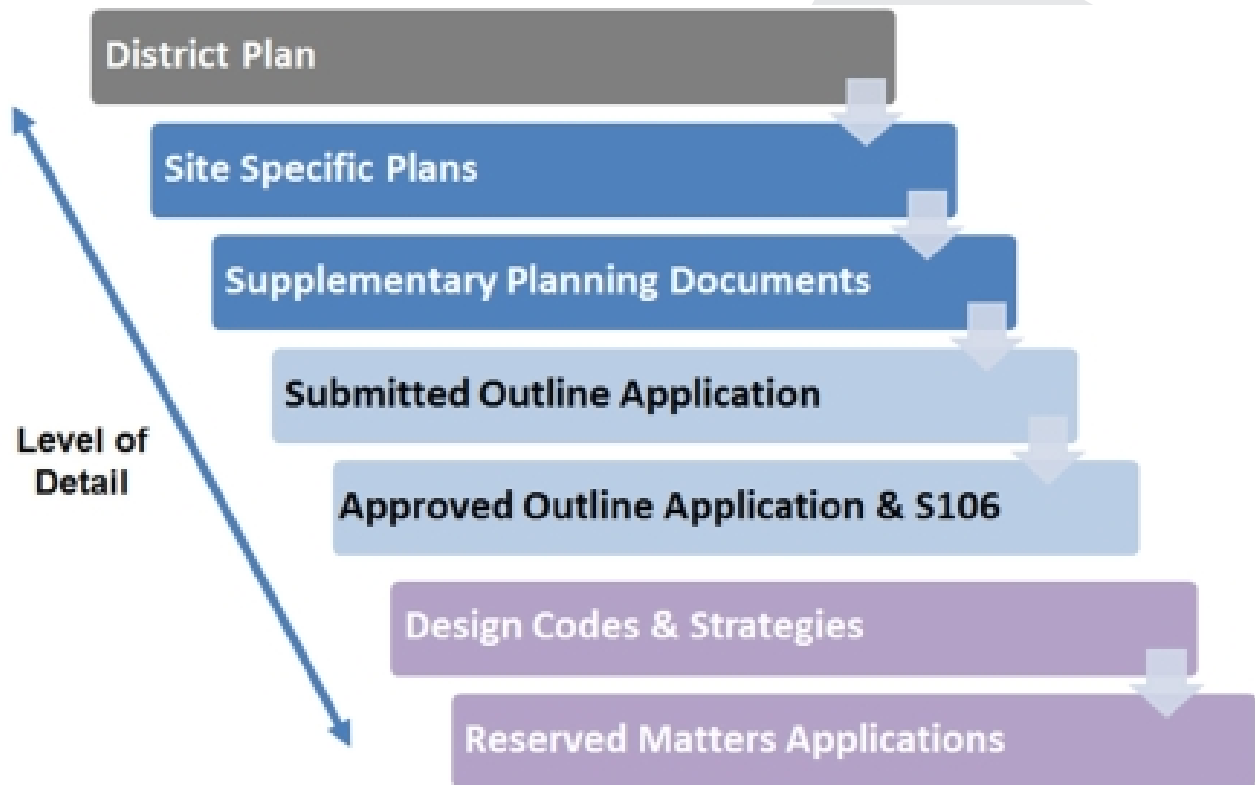
Not having a plan in place:

- More difficult to defend the District against inappropriate development – loss of local control;
- New development may not be supported by adequate infrastructure;
- There is a risk that if planning permission is denied, developers will appeal decisions.

Source: Planning Advisory Service, presentation to East Herts District Councillors 24th October 2013

1.1.4 The District Plan should be understood as the first step in the planning process, as shown in Figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1 The end to end planning process



Source: Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS), presentation to East Herts District Councillors, 24th October 2013

1.1.5 The diagram shows that the District Plan is the first of a number of stages before development may commence. The District Plan sets out the high-level, strategic policy framework, but is not a 'blueprint' for development and does not seek to resolve all the outstanding planning issues. Further detail comes with successive stages in the plan-making process.

1.2 Preparation of the District Plan

- 1.2.1** The District Plan has been prepared in accordance with relevant legislation and guidance, including the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the National Planning Policy Framework (2012).

Evidence Base

- 1.2.2** The preparation of the Plan has been informed by extensive background research and information. This includes research on a range of topics, including housing delivery and supply, transport needs, infrastructure requirements, and economic development. It also includes production of a 'Sustainability Appraisal' which looks at the economic, environmental and social impacts of the District Plan. The full range of background documents can be found on the Council's website at www.eastherts.gov.uk/districtplan.
- 1.2.3** Work on the evidence base is ongoing throughout the Plan process (and beyond), as it is essential that the Council maintains an up to date evidence base that informs the production, implementation and future review of the District Plan. The evidence base is available at www.eastherts.gov.uk/technicalstudies. Information received from developers is available at www.eastherts.gov.uk/developerinfo. This information has been subject to scrutiny as part of the plan-making process.

Strategy Selection

- 1.2.4** The final development strategy included in this District Plan was selected following a rigorous strategy selection process. This is documented in the 'Supporting Document' which accompanies this Plan and can be found on the Council's website at www.eastherts.gov.uk/supportingdocument. A separate 'Strategy Report' draws together the evidence contained in the Supporting Document with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework. A diagram showing the three main components of strategy selection is shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 An integrated approach to plan-making



Next Steps

- 1.2.5** This draft District Plan has been published for a 12 week period for comments and feedback. Details of how to comment are set out below. Following this period the Plan will then be revised as necessary.
- 1.2.6** There will then be a further opportunity for stakeholders and the community to say whether they think the Plan and its preparation is 'sound' and fit for purpose.
- 1.2.7** The District Plan will be independently examined, and a public hearing is expected to be held in summer 2015. The final District Plan will need to be adopted by a full meeting of East Herts Council.

1.3 Working with Neighbouring Authorities and Key Stakeholders

- 1.3.1** The District Council is expected to work together with other local authorities and public bodies across administrative boundaries, to plan for the housing, transport and infrastructure that local people need. This is known as the 'duty to co-operate'.
- 1.3.2** Full details of the process of co-operation and joint working will be set out in a 'Duty to Co-operate Evidence Report' which will accompany the final District Plan.

1.4 Neighbourhood Plans

- 1.4.1** The Government has introduced a number of new planning tools for local communities through the 'Localism Act', including the ability to produce 'Neighbourhood Development Plans'.
- 1.4.2** Neighbourhood Plans can be produced by Town and Parish Councils, and can identify how an area (i.e. a settlement, area or street) should grow and change. The Neighbourhood Plan process provides an opportunity for local people to influence what is built in their area – although it should be noted that Neighbourhood Plans need to be in conformity with the District Plan. A Neighbourhood Plan can become part of the statutory plan for East Herts. For further advice see Section 3.5 below on Neighbourhood Planning.

1.5 How can you comment on the District Plan?

- 1.5.1** Your comments and views on the Draft District Plan are welcomed. Please note that any comments submitted will be published, alongside your name (and organisation if appropriate). Other contact details will not be disclosed. The consultation period runs from \$\$ February to \$\$ May 2014.

Comments should be made online using our Consultation Portal at <http://consult.eastherts.gov.uk>. (note: no 'www.')

All comments should be received by 5pm on Thursday \$\$ May 2014. The Council cannot guarantee that responses received after the consultation deadline will be considered.

- 1.5.2** Alternatively you can email us at planningpolicy@eastherts.gov.uk or write to the Planning Policy Team at East Herts Council, Wallfields, Pegs Lane, Hertford, SG13 8EQ.
- 1.5.3** If you have questions on the Draft District Plan, please contact the Planning Policy Team on 01279 655261 or email at planningpolicy@eastherts.gov.uk.

Chapter 2

Vision and Strategic Objectives

Chapter 2 Vision and Strategic Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This chapter sets out the overall strategic vision for development in East Herts up to 2031, taking account of its current issues, attributes and potential. The vision is supported by a set of strategic objectives.

2.1.2 The chapter includes:

- A brief description of East Herts
- An overview of the key issues and challenges facing the District
- A vision of how the District should be in 2031
- A set of strategic objectives which will help to deliver the vision and guide development in the District to 2031

2.2 A Description of East Herts

2.2.1 The District of East Herts covers an area of 477 square kilometres (184 square miles) and comprises around one third of the area of the County of Hertfordshire. It is predominantly a rural district, with attractive towns and villages set in a rolling landscape. Topographically, the District is shaped like a hand with the principal rivers of the Lea, Mimram, Beane, Rib, Ash, and Stort forming the fingers with the higher ground lying in-between.

2.2.2 East Herts has a dispersed settlement pattern that includes the five market towns of Bishop's Stortford, Buntingford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware. Each of the towns provides a range of services to the surrounding rural area. There are also some hundred villages and hamlets of varying sizes.

2.2.3 Approximately the southern third of the District lies within the London Metropolitan Green Belt.

2.2.4 The District is heavily influenced by the presence of major settlements beyond its borders. The three New Towns of Stevenage, Harlow and Welwyn Garden City are located immediately on the East Herts District boundary, and there is pressure for expansion of these settlements. There are also substantial cross-boundary influences from Cambridgeshire to the north and Essex to the east.

2.2.5 Historical development of the transport network has resulted in the District being largely bypassed by strategic road and rail corridors; with the M11 and the West Anglia Main Line between London and Cambridge to the east; and the A1(M) and East Coast Main Line to the west. The M25 London Orbital Motorway lies further to the south.

2.2.6 Within the District, the main road routes are the A10, which bisects the District roughly in half on a north-south axis; and the A414 in the south of the District, running in an east-west direction. The A120 also runs east-west from the A10 at Puckeridge

to Bishop's Stortford and beyond, and the A602 links the A10 from Ware with the A1(M) in Stevenage. Stansted Airport, whilst outside the district, is immediately to the north-east of Bishop's Stortford and has strategic implications for the area.

2.2.7 The District contains many special landscape, natural and built heritage features including:

- 3 sites of international nature conservation importance
- 1 National Nature Reserve
- 14 Local Nature Reserves
- Over 30 Scheduled Monuments
- Nearly 3,100 Listed Buildings
- 42 Conservation Areas
- 450 Areas of Archaeological Significance
- 16 Registered Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest
- 59 Locally Listed Historic Parks and Gardens

2.2.8 Residents in East Herts enjoy one of the highest qualities of life in rural Britain . In particular residents in East Herts enjoy a good level of health and life expectancy.

2.3 Key Issues and Challenges

2.3.1 East Herts is an attractive and prosperous area, with a high quality of life for its residents. However, there are still a number of important issues and challenges facing the District. These are mainly related to challenges of managing high levels of growth and the effects of population increase. An overview of the key issues is set out below:

2.3.2 Environment – East Herts has a high quality environment, both within the towns and villages and in the countryside. The challenge is to ensure that this is recognised and protected whilst still allowing the necessary development to take place. It means protecting what is most important and ensuring that where new development takes place, it is of a high quality of design that takes account of its local setting. It is also about protecting the rich biodiversity in the District and responding to the challenge of climate change. This includes promoting sustainable development, both in terms of where it is located and how it is constructed.

2.3.3 Economy – Supporting a vibrant local economy and responding to the needs of businesses is another key issue. This means getting the balance right between the delivery of new housing on brownfield sites and ensuring there is enough employment land to meet current and future needs. It also means recognising and responding to the particular issues in East Herts, including the rural economy.

2.3.4 Housing – East Herts is an attractive place to live, which is reflected in high house prices. There is a pressing need for more affordable housing in the District. Achieving housing development that responds to local needs, whilst recognising the

environmental and other constraints in East Herts, is a significant challenge. It is also necessary to recognise the specific accommodation and housing needs of different groups in the local community.

- 2.3.5 Infrastructure and Services** – It is important that the infrastructure and services needed to support new development are provided. This includes transport infrastructure, education provision, utilities such as water and energy and improved broadband provision. The challenge is to ensure that these services and facilities are delivered alongside growth.
- 2.3.6 Transport** – The District is predominantly rural with a dispersed population which creates challenges in providing a comprehensive public transport network. Many local communities are reliant on the private car as their only transport option. This impacts on carbon dioxide emissions, air quality, noise, public safety and the quality of the environment in towns and villages. The challenge is to ensure that development is directed to sustainable locations and that sustainable modes of transport are encouraged to reduce reliance on the car.
- 2.3.7 Population** – East Herts has an ageing population. Meeting the varying needs of older people will be a challenge, whilst ensuring that the district remains attractive and accessible to young people.
- 2.3.8 Town Centres** – The District’s market towns form the core of East Herts retail offer and their vitality and viability are critical to the success of the local economy. The challenge is to support the main town centres in East Herts, which are all different, all serve a particular purpose and all have particular needs.
- 2.3.9 Rural Services** – The retention of local services is a key issue, particularly for rural communities. The challenge is to resist the loss of important facilities and to support the delivery of new ones. This will be especially important in the context of the district’s ageing population and the dispersed rural nature of the district.
- 2.3.10 Cross Boundary Issues** – Understanding and taking account of the significance and impact of cross boundary issues is key. These include those developments planned outside East Herts but that will impact on the District. It also means considering how the developments planned within East Herts might impact on other areas.

2.4 Vision

2.4.1 Having identified the main planning challenges for the District, this section now sets out the vision for East Herts. The vision is founded on realistic, achievable goals developed through public consultation. The vision is a statement of what East Herts will be like in 2031.

East Herts in 2031

1. The high quality environment of East Herts, its distinctive character and its economic prosperity will have been maintained.
2. New homes and jobs will have been provided through well designed and sustainable development. Local communities will have embraced Neighbourhood Planning to deliver their local objectives.
3. A range of sizes, types and tenure of new housing and accommodation will have been provided. There will be an increase in the overall stock of affordable housing and houses built to 'lifetime homes' standards.
4. Working in partnership with other service providers, there will be new and improved infrastructure to support the increased population of the District. Support will have been given to the retention of existing facilities and the provision of new facilities for leisure, recreation and cultural needs of the community.
5. The local economy in the District will have been supported, with provision having been made for the accommodation requirements of existing and new businesses. Important employment assets will have been retained. The emphasis will have been on sustainable economic development, of the right type and in the right place to meet employment needs both within the towns and in the rural areas.
6. The vitality and viability of the main towns of Bishop's Stortford, Buntingford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware will have been safeguarded in a way that takes account of their distinctive roles. This will have been achieved through carefully planned development, which meets the needs of these centres, whilst recognising the importance of preserving and enhancing their historic character. In local and village centres shopping facilities that meet local needs will have been supported.
7. The rich heritage of historic buildings, features and archaeology in the District will have been protected and enhanced. The attractive landscape of East Herts, which contributes to its distinctive character, will have been conserved and enhanced.
8. New building will have contributed to the creation of sustainable communities, which are safe, attractive and inclusive and where the design of new development makes a positive contribution to the area in which it is located.

9. The rich biodiversity of East Herts will have been protected and where possible enhanced. Where new development could potentially have an adverse effect on biodiversity, measures will have been taken to ensure that the impact was either avoided or mitigated.

10. East Herts will be more sustainable through measures to combat the effects of climate change. This will have been achieved by locating new buildings in the most sustainable locations possible so as to reduce car dependency and by ensuring through their design and construction, new buildings produce lower carbon emissions.

11. Measures will have been taken to adapt to the effects of climate change, which will have included steps to minimise the risk of flooding and reduce the demand for water as well as supporting the adaptation of buildings to cope with extremes of heat and cold in an energy efficient manner.

2.5 Strategic Objectives

2.5.1 The following strategic objectives are the stepping stones to deliver the vision and form the basis of the policies contained in the District Plan.

Strategic Objectives

1. To mitigate the effects of climate change by reducing carbon dioxide emissions, supporting decentralised, low carbon and renewable energy and reducing the risk of flooding.

2. To encourage safe and vibrant mixed communities that provide for the needs of all East Herts residents including young, old, disabled and disadvantaged.

3. To balance the housing market by delivering a mix of market, low cost, and affordable homes and accommodating the housing needs of an ageing population.

4. To protect the countryside from inappropriate development and enhance the historic character of East Herts' market towns, villages, hamlets and landscape promoting good design that creates a distinctive sense of place.

5. To foster entrepreneurial endeavour through educational attainment and encourage small and medium enterprises through maximising existing employment opportunities and clusters and supporting rural diversification.

6. To improve access opportunities, minimise the need to travel, and encourage necessary journeys to be made by sustainable means to ease congestion and help reduce East Herts' carbon footprint.

7. To meet the needs of all of East Herts' communities by maintaining and improving existing facilities and providing new facilities including for arts, culture, community, leisure, entertainment, recreation, faith and health.

8. To reduce water consumption, increase biodiversity and protect and enhance the quality of existing environmental assets by creating new green spaces and networks of green space for both recreation and wildlife.

9. To ensure that development occurs in parallel with provision of the necessary infrastructure.

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