

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY
23 JUNE 2026, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor V Glover-Ward (Chair)
Councillors B Crystall and J Dumont

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors E Buckmaster, R Buckmaster,
M Butcher, A Daar, T Deffley, Y Estop,
A Holt, S Hopewell, T Hoskin, T Smith,
V Smith, T Stowe and S Watson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Richard Crutchley	- Team Leader (Planning Policy)
Laura Guy	- Principal Planning Policy Officer
Maria Hennessy	- Principal Planning Policy Officer
Peter Mannings	- Committee Support Officer
Claire Sime	- Assistant Director (Place Shaping)

1 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

2 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reminded Members and Officers to use their microphones as the meeting was being webcasted.

The Chair explained an additional recommendation would be added to each motion and decision being taken and

this would be that any minor amendments to the context of the report would be delegated to the Director for Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

4 MINUTES - 19 MAY 2026

Councillor Crystall proposed, and Councillor Dumont seconded, a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2026, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5 LOCAL PLAN: GREEN BELT ASSESSMENT

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) presented a report seeking approval of the Green Belt Assessment Report (Appendix A) and the accompanying parcel assessment maps (Appendix B) as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan.

Members were advised that the report covered the key findings of the green belt assessment and seeks agreement to use the document as part of the new local plan evidence base and to inform development management decisions.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that the assessment had been commissioned jointly with North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Borough Councils using MHCLG grant funding. The work was required due to

changes in national planning policy relating to the green belt, including the introduction of the concept of grey belt.

Members were advised that Appendix A contained an outline of the methodology and results with a general narrative around the issues raised by green belt and grey belt. The report also covered locally defined matters including which settlements were considered to be large built-up areas and historic towns for the purpose of the review.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that the accompanying assessments covered around 260 parcels of land which were defined in East Herts and for each parcel, Appendix B contains a map and a description of the parcel, an assessment against each of the purposes of green belt and a conclusion about whether or not it was grey belt.

Officers explained that the assessment provides crucial information and evidence to determine how green belt and grey belt issues may fit into an overall local plan strategy. The sole aim of the work was to look at the performance of the existing green belt against the 5 purposes of green belt, which were:

- (A) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
- (B) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
- (C) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
- (D) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
- (E) to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that grey belt was defined as any land in the green belt that did not perform strongly against purposes A, B and D. He emphasised that rules and regulations around green belt

and green belt assessments were clearly set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and national planning policy guidance.

Members were advised that grey belt was still green belt and government guidance required councils to look at all options for meeting development needs before looking at green belt and the release of green belt was a last resort.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that grey belt land was sequentially preferable if green belt was required to meet development needs. The Panel was advised that officers would be using other evidence alongside the green belt assessment to develop the strategy.

Members were advised that although grey belt was defined by purposes A, B and D, the assessment does also record outcomes against all of the purposes.

The covering report included a summary of the findings at paragraph 3.14, and the assessment outcomes were only an indication of performance against green belt purposes and not an indication of the suitability of a site for development. The panel was advised that identifying an area as grey belt did not make a parcel more suitable for development or more likely to come forward for development.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that in the event of green belt being required to meet need, grey belt parcels of land would be sequentially preferable to parcels that meet the purposes of green belt more strongly.

Members were advised that it had been discovered that local greenspaces had been omitted from the report and maps, and this would be resolved in the final document and the second recommendation that the chair had already mentioned was added to the report.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that there had been two late representations from Urbana on behalf Tarmac Trading Limited and from Mr Rubino, a landowner with landholdings west of Hertford Heath.

The Urbana comments related to three principal issues:

- the presentation of parcel boundaries at varying map scales.
- whether assessments had taken account of development yet to come forward but already allocated in the current District Plan.
- the differing assessment outcomes for parcels HFW12 and HFW14.

The Panel was advised that that there was only one set of parcel boundaries and that any perceived variation resulted from differences in map scale and presentation. Officers would seek clarification from the consultants regarding the treatment of committed allocations and the differing assessments of the two parcels identified. The outcome of those discussions would be reported before consideration by Executive.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that the second representation, made via two emails, concerned parcels HF1, HH10 and HH12 located between Hertford and Hertford Heath. The comments had pointed out that parcel assessment boundaries should follow established parish boundaries and questioned the methodology used in assessing the relationship between settlements.

Officers advised that parcel boundaries had not been derived from parish boundaries but had been defined according to landscape characteristics and the contribution of land to Green Belt purposes. Members were advised that crossing administrative boundaries was a normal feature of the methodology.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) further clarified that parcel numbering was an organisational tool only and did

not indicate a relationship with particular settlements. He set out the consultant's responses had indicated that parcels were defined to reflect identified variations in contributions to green belt purposes and in some cases a parcel adjacent to a settlement would be grouped with parcels adjacent to different settlements. The numbering system was there to aid legibility of the study.

Officers advised that the representation also challenged the assessment of parcels on the basis of the relationship between Hertford and Hertford Heath. The Panel was advised, for the purposes of the assessment, the relevant relationship is between Hertford and Hoddesdon as the larger built-up areas and neighbouring towns to which the Green Belt purposes apply.

The Team Leader (Planning Policy) said that Hertford Heath was classified as a village within the assessment and is therefore not assessed in the same way as larger built-up areas. He advised that the relationship between Hertford and Hertford Heath was not relevant to the assessment methodology.

The Panel was advised that, notwithstanding this acknowledgement, the representation continued to misunderstand that the Green Belt purposes are assessed in relation to the larger built-up areas and neighbouring towns. Officers had therefore concluded that no amendments to the assessment were required.

In response to a question from the Chair, officers confirmed that while Green Belt land existed around Hertford Heath, villages were not assessed in the same way as large built-up areas for the purposes of the Green Belt assessment methodology.

The Chair said that officers would provide further feedback on the matters raised by Tarmac before the report progressed to Executive and that any necessary amendments could be incorporated at that stage.

The Panel Members sought clarification on the purpose of the Green Belt Assessment and its relationship to national planning policy. Officers explained that the assessment had been commissioned in response to updated Government policy and guidance on green belt and grey belt and had been prepared using a nationally prescribed methodology.

Members discussed the role of the assessment within the wider Local Plan process and raised concerns regarding the naming of parcels and the potential for public misunderstanding. Officers advised that parcel names were used for identification purposes only and had no bearing on the assessment outcomes.

In response to questions regarding grey belt, officers emphasised that grey belt remained green belt and that the assessment did not identify land for development. The assessment provided a consistent evidence base to assist the Council in considering Green Belt matters and responding to planning applications.

Members expressed concern that residents might interpret grey belt designations as indicating future development opportunities. Officers reiterated that the assessment was a technical evaluation of Green Belt performance against national policy purposes and not an assessment of development suitability. It was suggested that additional explanatory guidance for residents would be helpful.

Further questions were raised regarding a specific parcel, the methodology used to define parcels, the role of other land uses and designations, and the ability to alter Green Belt boundaries. Officers advised that existing planning protections remained in place and that any changes to Green Belt boundaries could only be made through the plan-making process in exceptional circumstances.

The Panel noted the clarification provided by officers regarding the purpose and status of the Green Belt

Assessment.

The Members present who were not on the District Plan Executive Panel welcomed the report and asked whether future development needs could potentially be met on land outside the green belt and Grey Belt. Officers advised that this would be considered through the Local Plan process and that it was too early to reach conclusions.

Members commented that the report was clear and robust but were concerned that Grey Belt designations could be perceived as indicating land suitable for development. They emphasised the need to make clear that Grey Belt remained Green Belt and continued to be subject to planning constraints. There were also raised questions regarding land uses, parcel definitions and Green Belt boundaries.

Officers explained that the assessment considered Green Belt purposes only and did not determine future land uses or development suitability. Parcel boundaries had been identified through landscape and landform characteristics as part of the assessment methodology. Green Belt boundaries could only be altered through the Local Plan process in exceptional circumstances.

Members raised concerns that residents may misinterpret Grey Belt designations, particularly in relation to parcels containing community facilities such as allotments and sports grounds. Members suggested that a frequently asked questions document be published to explain the purpose of the assessment and the meaning of Grey Belt, which officers agreed would be helpful.

The Panel noted that similar concerns had been raised regarding the designation of land containing North Road Cemetery. Officers reiterated that the assessment was a technical evidence base and did not indicate that any site was proposed for development.

Councillor Dumont proposed and Councillor Crystall seconded, a motion that the Executive be advised that (A) the Green Belt Assessment, attached as the main report at Appendix A and a series of individual parcel maps and reports at Appendix B (parts 1 to 19), be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications and (B) any minor amendments to the content of the Green Belt Assessment be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, this motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that (A) The Green Belt Assessment, attached as the main report at Appendix A and a series of individual parcel maps and reports at Appendix B (parts 1 to 19), be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications.

(B) any minor amendments to the content of the Green Belt Assessment be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

6 LOCAL PLAN: RETAIL AND TOWN CENTRES STUDY

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the council's latest Retail and Town Centre Study was completed in 2013 and an updated study, found at appendices A and B of the report, had been prepared to provide the latest retail and town centre needs position in the district, and support the preparation of the new local

plan.

Members were advised that the study also provides an evidence base to support future development management decisions. There had been many changes that have occurred nationally that have impacted retail and town centres since 2013.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the study identifies the latest changes to the retail market, forecast and future retail and leisure needs for the district, assesses and recommends changes to the existing retail policies where appropriate and assesses the health of the 5 town centres within the district.

The Panel was advised that the study provided a baseline that would help to inform future town centre strategies. The study was supported by various data sets including forecasting and population information and occupancy information. Research had also been undertaken including stakeholder engagement and also business and household surveys.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the study had forecasted the needs of the convenience floorspace and comparison floor space. She said that in both scenarios, there was no quantitative need to plan or allocate new sites for new convenience or comparison goods floor space within the plan period.

The Panel was advised that whilst there was scope for improvements in the district in terms of commercial leisure needs, there was no need to specifically allocate sites for new leisure facilities, and a more flexible approach was recommended to allow for these uses within town centres.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the study assessed the role of Madford Retail Park and concluded that, while it made a modest contribution to comparison retail provision overall, it played a more significant role in

terms of market share for DIY and garden retail needs. It was recommended that any future redevelopment proposals at Madford Retail Park should be required to justify the loss of existing retail uses and any proposed future mix of uses.

Members were advised that the study also reviewed the existing retail hierarchy, the sequential and impact tests and provides recommendations for future policy changes. The study recommends changes to the town centre boundaries and primary shopping areas based on where the town centre or non-town centre uses are located.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that the study reviewed each of the town centres and creates a health check for each place and a SWOT assessment based upon strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The health checks focus on accessibility, the environment and public realm, mix of uses, vacancies, frequency of visits, trading prospects and consumer views and behaviours.

Members were advised that the towns in the district were found to be in good or relatively good health. There were however a number of ways in which vitality and viability could be improved for each centre. Following this piece of work, there would be town centre strategies that would build on the work of the retail and town centre study.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that aims and objectives would be created for each of the towns and propose a way forward to enhance the vitality and viability of each of the towns. It was recommended that the study be endorsed as part of the evidence base for the emerging East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Members welcomed the interesting report and commented on one finding of the study in that people were looking for a mix of leisure, shopping and food all in

one place. A concern was raised that, in most of the towns, there was a very high percentage of businesses that thought that improved free short/long-term parking would be a good idea and would make more customers come to shops and increase footfall.

The Panel had noted that the above view had not been replicated when customers were asked. The Chair commented on the percentages of businesses in Hertford and Ware that thought that there should be more short and long-term free parking in comparison with the much lower percentages of customers that had reached the same view.

The Chair said that the recommendation made by the consultants had been based upon the business percentage view and not what the customers had thought in terms of what would make them want to go shopping more.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the study was more to present the findings, and it would be down to the strategies to make recommendations for particular places. She said that future town centre strategies would consider the range of views expressed by stakeholders, business and customers. The Chair suggested having coloured charts that represented the views of customers, in the same way that had been done for the views of business.

Members commented on the importance of leisure uses, independent businesses, active travel infrastructure and public realm improvements in supporting town centre vitality. Questions were raised regarding the residents' survey result that showed a suggested improvement in multi-screen art house cinema.

Officers explained that the strategy could link back to some of the points made by Members. The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the strategy could make specific broader recommendations such as improvements

that could be made to the public realm, and this could be linked back to healthy streets.

A member not on the panel made a reference to a need for more secure e-bike parking and active travel transport parking. Comments were also made regarding data being included in the evidence base in respect of dwell times in towns and pedestrianisation helping people to spend more money and time in town centres.

Members asked for some more information on sequencing and how developments were allowed to come forward. The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the report had picked up that if places were nicer to be in then people would want to stay there for a bit longer.

The Chair said that there were links to various studies on this topic. She also said that in most towns in East Herts there were medieval townscapes, and this made pedestrianisation a challenge in terms of avoiding cutting off residents from accessing High Streets.

Members discussed perceptions and how these mattered. There were a few comments about the make-up of town centres and the need for proactive methodologies to help other people come into town centres. A comment was made about introducing e-bikes parking for Ware and also in changing town centre boundaries to include the Baldock Street car-park.

Officers advised that these matters had been considered within the evidence base, and all of these points would help inform future policy development and town centre strategies. The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that in terms of the town centre boundary changes, these were based on what was in place at this time and the town centre uses.

Members were advised that the sequential test was included in the NPPF, and it said that town centre uses in the town centre boundary would be considered in

advance of looking at sites elsewhere in terms of a hierarchy. There was a threshold for impact tests on sites outside of the boundary.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the town centre and retail study and the subsequent strategy were town centre based and if there were proposed changes to junctions this would come forward in a transport study at a later date.

Members commented that all of the villages and market town centres were all in their own way unique and could not be treated as a whole in the new local plan. A comment was also made about the fluidity of the shopping situation on offer to customers in the town centres. The Chair said that the discussions around industrial and employment zones and the location of town centre type uses were dealt with within the employment studies and the matter of out-of-town shopping was more about policy rather than the evidence base for retail and town centre studies.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the study had looked at stores, and there was wording in the methodology about this had been forecasted. Members were advised that Experian data had been used, and this had been referred to as special forms of trading. This was expected to increase as more people shopped online.

Members were advised that the evidence base had picked out a desire from people for more independent retailers. The retail strategies could look at how to make them more attractive and having a range of store sizes to attract independent retailers.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that study had made recommendations in respect of impact tests for sequential test purposes. She referred to the higher impact tests within the existing policies and a recommendation in the study suggesting that the impact test be reduced to 280 square metres net sales space

from the present 350 square metres gross.

Members were reminded that the smaller sized stores of that size were exempt from Sunday trading rules and if this threshold was used, this served a local need and anything above that would draw a larger audience and encourage people away from town centres.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the study had drawn on the text from the NPPF in terms of local centre definitions and the retail hierarchy of neighbourhood significance.

Councillor Dumont proposed, and Councillor Crystall seconded, a motion that that the Executive be advised that (A) the Retail and Town Centres Study and appendices be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications and (B) any minor amendments to the content of the Retail and Town Centres Study be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that (A) the Retail and Town Centres Study and appendices (attached at Appendices A and B) be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications; and

(B) any minor amendments to the content of the Retail and Town Centres Study be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

At 20:32 (8:32 pm), Councillor Glover-Ward proposed, and Councillor Crystall seconded, a motion for a 5-minute adjournment for a comfort break. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - the meeting be adjourned for a 5-minute comfort break.

7 LOCAL PLAN: HERTFORD AND WARE EMPLOYMENT STUDY

The meeting reconvened at 20:40 (8:40 pm).

The Principal Planning Policy Officer submitted a report regarding the Hertford and Ware Employment Study and inviting the Panel to agree that it can be used as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan and as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Members were advised that the Hertford and Ware Employment Study was the third in a series of reports covering the employment position in the main towns. The Executive had already approved reports in Bishop's Stortford and Buntingford, and this report covered the closely related settlements of Hertford and Ware.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that using desktop research, officer employment site visits and feedback from local market agents, the employment study provides an updated assessment of the employment market in Hertford and Ware. Members were advised that the report made recommendations about the types of land and jobs that were likely to be required.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that the study area was defined to be large enough to accommodate the planned development north and east of

Ware. The study updates the previous 2016 study and recognises changes in the towns employment sectors. This includes major new development in Hertford, losses of employment land at Mead Lane in Hertford and Crane Mead in Ware.

Members were referred to societal changes due to Covid and Brexit and also in the use classes order, which allows greater flexibility for business to change between employment, retail and community uses without planning permission. There were also some crossovers between the retail and town centre study work presented under the previous agenda item.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the report covers the conclusions and recommendations of the study at paragraphs 3.5 to 3.12 covering key points and these were summarised for the panel. Members should note that there was a typographical error in the policy context section where the planning period for the Sele Neighbourhood Period was set out as starting in 2021 as opposed to 2018.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that when considered alongside other studies within the evidence base, including all the town employment studies, a district wide employment demand assessment and land supply work, the Hertford and Ware Employment Study would effectively support decisions about the future economic strategy for both towns.

Members were being asked to agree that the study becomes part of the evidence base for the new local plan and was a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The Panel chair welcomed the report and said that she was pleased to see that large GSK site has been revitalised with River Labs taking over the spare space on the site. She said that although the site had contracted slightly, she was pleased to see that the employment

space on the land had been protected.

The Panel commented on the small independent and professional companies in Hertford. Members of the Panel referred to the commentary in the study that office stock was ageing and might not meet energy requirements and there was a recommendation for the council to work with businesses in that regard.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the government had proposed tightening up the energy efficiency proposals on the basis that rental properties had to meet higher energy efficiency ratings. She said that the consultation proposed that this would happen in 2030, but this had not yet been finalised.

Members were advised that this matter could affect office uses in the town centres in the district. The panel discussed the impact on the older estates such as Caxton Hill, Dicker Mill and Mead Lane in Hertford and Crane Mead in Ware.

In response to questions regarding commuting patterns and creating balanced communities with balanced needs, the panel was advised that the AECOM report relied on 2011 census data because the 2021 census had been significantly affected by COVID-19 and changing working practices.

The Panel also discussed office vacancy rates and referred to the rate in Hertford which had jumped from a typical rate of 2 to 3% to a level of 20%, largely attributed to the vacating of County Hall. Officers confirmed that prior to the County Hall vacancy, the fluctuations had followed normal patterns of vacancy, where you might see slight fluctuations.

Members were advised that although Hertford and Ware was the biggest market in East Herts, relatively speaking the market is quite small. A few vacancies would affect the data, and the recent large increase did reflect the

significant vacancy level attributable to Hertfordshire County Council vacating its office accommodation at County Hall. Members were advised that vacancy levels would likely return to levels more consistent with historic trends.

Members not on the panel expressed concerns about the continuing loss of employment space, particularly through the conversion of office buildings to residential use. It was suggested that the council should continue to explore opportunities to support and attract employment sectors, including those linked to culture and emerging technologies, and work collaboratively with local partners to help retain and grow employment opportunities across the district.

Councillor Crystall proposed, and Councillor Dumont seconded, a motion that the Executive be advised that (A) the Hertford and Ware Employment Study be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications and (B) any minor amendments to the content of the Hertford and Ware Employment Study be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that (A) the Hertford and Ware Employment Study, attached as Appendix A, be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications.

(B) any minor amendments to the content of the Hertford and Ware Employment Study be

delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

8 LOCAL PLAN: SAWBRIDGEWORTH EMPLOYMENT STUDY

The Principal Planning Policy Officer submitted a report regarding the Sawbridgeworth Employment Study and inviting the Panel to agree that it can be used as part of the evidence base for the new Local Plan and as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Members were advised that the Sawbridgeworth Employment Study attached at Appendix A was the fourth and final study covering the employment positions in the main towns. The study provides an assessment of the employment market in the town and makes recommendations about the type of jobs and employment land likely to be required. This was the first such study for Sawbridgeworth and the town had a much smaller land employment land market than the other main towns.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer advised that Sawbridgeworth did not have any designated employment sites in the district plan. The Panel was advised however that as a main town, officers felt that it was important that Sawbridgeworth was included to ensure that there was a comprehensive understanding of all the main urban areas in the district.

Members were advised that, as with the other towns, local employment sectors had been shaped by societal changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit alongside the changes to the use class order which allows businesses more flexibility to change between uses without planning permission.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that with a focus on both office and industrial sectors, there was once again also some crossovers with the retail and town

centre study work. To ensure that all of the built-up area of Sawbridgeworth was included with the analysis, the study area also covers Lower Sheering in Epping Forest district and draws on the advice of local commercial agents.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the report covers the conclusions and recommendations in paragraphs 3.5 to 3.10 of the study and covered in particular on three key points and these were summarised for the Panel.

Members were advised that the study revealed that the population growth for Sawbridgeworth had been relatively modest and many residents out commute. The scale of pressure for new office and industrial employment land is not significant, and new land was unlikely to limit the scale of out commuting.

The Panel was advised that the study concludes that employment growth is better focussed within the larger centres such as Harlow and Gilston Garden Town and Bishop's Stortford. The study recognises employment opportunities should be protected and encouraged in Sawbridgeworth, and this includes potentially safeguarding existing employment clusters and supporting opportunities for infill development and refurbishment.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that, when considered alongside other studies within the evidence base, the Sawbridgeworth Employment Study will effectively support decisions about the future economic strategy for Sawbridgeworth.

The Panel was advised that this report asks Members to agree that the study becomes part of the evidence base for the new local plan and was a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The Chair of the Panel had noted that the study area was

relatively compact and mostly focused on the town centre unlike some of the other towns. She commented that all of the towns were slightly different.

Councillor Crystall welcomed the report and referred to the presence of a major lawn mower manufacturer in the town, noting that this had been of particular interest. He sought clarification on the likely impact of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town within the District Plan period and asked whether this had been considered within the study.

In response, officers confirmed that the report identifies Harlow and Gilston Garden Town as a key influence on future employment demand within the area. Members were advised that feedback from commercial agents had indicated that the scale of development at Gilston, together with existing commuting patterns and links to Harlow, was likely to have a significant effect on Sawbridgeworth.

Members who were not on the panel indicated that the impact and contribution of Gilston would be significant in terms of employment and the report was a fair assessment. They highlighted discussions held with Places for People regarding the proposed skills hub, with a particular emphasis on construction employment. A comment was made that links with educational providers, including Hertford Regional College, would help create opportunities from the associated growth.

Councillor Dumont proposed and Councillor Crystall seconded, a motion that the Executive be advised that (A) the Sawbridgeworth Employment Study, attached as Appendix A, be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications and (B) any minor amendments to the content of the Sawbridgeworth Employment Study be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED - that the Executive be advised that (A) the Sawbridgeworth Employment Study, attached as Appendix A, be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications; and

(B) any minor amendments to the content of the Sawbridgeworth Employment Study be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

9 LOCAL PLAN: INDOOR SPORT NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGY

The Principal Planning Policy Officer submitted a report that set out that Members had agreed to prepare a new Local Plan including an update of the evidence documents needed to support the new Plan.

Members were advised that the Indoor Sport Needs Assessment and Strategy provided updated and robust evidence to support the new local plan and development management decisions, thereby replacing the previous 2017 study.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the first part of the sports evidence, the Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy, was endorsed by the Executive at the end of 2025. This study on indoor sport-built facilities was the second part of the evidence in relation to sport requirements in East Herts and replaces the previous 2017 study.

The Panel was advised that the study had been developed collaboratively, in accordance with Sport

England guidance, and the report assesses the supply of and demand for indoor sports facilities and sets out a framework for protecting and enhancing existing facilities and providing new facilities, to meet future needs.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that since the latest assessment in 2017 housing growth, together with changes to leisure facilities, has reshaped both the demand for and supply of provision. Notably, there has been the closure of some public leisure provision and significant development of a number of new sport halls.

Members were advised that paragraph 3.4 of the report summarises the findings of the needs assessment attached at Appendix B. In general, East Herts residents have access to a range of good quality sports facilities and closure of the three public leisure centres had created a small amount of localised unmet demand for swimming pools particularly to the north of the district where residents had to travel further to access a pool.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the community group plans to reopen Ward Freman pool would positively help to address the unmet demand while also reducing travel time. Other key findings included the reliance on education facilities for sports hall provision, the important role played by community and village halls as locations for sport and physical activity in rural areas.

Members were advised of an identified club demand for more space for Badminton, Gymnastics and Padel. There are a number of strategic site allocations in the adopted District Plan that are yet to be built out, and it is important that Gilston Leisure Centre is delivered, and the community use of new secondary school sports facilities are secured to meet the needs of future growth.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said that the strategy document, Appendix C to the report, provides a framework for the provision, maintenance and improvement of indoors sports facilities. Key highlights

include the importance of working with developers to deliver new facilities, the need to protect existing facilities, the need to ensure new development supports the provision of enhancement of facilities to address demand and the importance of securing community use agreements at education sites.

Members were advised that the strategy includes an action plan to help prioritise improvement and guide investment, including through developer contributions. It should be noted that in many instances, the council will not be responsible for the delivery of the recommendations and actions as clubs, national governing bodies, town and parish councils, education providers and landowners can also be responsible.

Members were being asked to agree that the indoor sports and needs assessment and strategy becomes part of the local plan evidence base and is used as a material consideration in development management decisions. The action plan would be updated to ensure that the action plan document remained current and responsive, in accordance with guidance from Sport England.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer said in the combat sport section of the document, there was missing explanatory text about the combat sport Krav Maga, which has a facility in Hertford. Officers would speak to the consultants to address that omission.

The Committee discussed the findings of the report and noted the importance of ensuring that sports facilities were accessible to local communities. Members commented on the shortfall of squash facilities and the lack of indoor bowls.

The Panel highlighted the contribution made by community halls and programmes supporting physical activity, particularly for older people. The potential benefits of locating future sports facilities close to town centres to support wider economic activity were also

discussed.

In response to questions, officers confirmed that East Herts had a long-standing history of securing community use of school sports facilities through planning obligations and community use agreements. Members were advised that this approach would continue to be important in meeting future demand. Officers also confirmed that the strategy's action plan would be reviewed annually in accordance with Sport England guidance.

The Committee discussed the proposed leisure centre at Gilston. Officers advised that the facility was secured through the Section 106 agreement for the outline planning permission. Detailed planning permission for the facility will come forward in due course. This assessment indicates a six-lane swimming pool would better meet future needs than a four-lane pool. It was also confirmed that the facility was expected to be operated by Places for Leisure.

Members welcomed the report and noted the overall findings regarding current and future indoor sports provision across the district. Discussion highlighted opportunities to align future leisure facility development with town centre regeneration, recognising the potential benefits of locating sports and leisure facilities close to retail and hospitality uses.

The Committee discussed the importance of partnership working with schools to secure community access to sports halls and other facilities. Officers confirmed that the Council had a long-standing history of such arrangements, often secured through Section 106 agreements and formal Community Use Agreements, and acknowledged the importance of maintaining these partnerships in the future.

Members reiterated the importance of swimming pool provision across the district and welcomed progress in reopening facilities for swimming lessons. It was noted

that existing and proposed facilities, including those at schools and future developments, would help meet demand.

Officers also confirmed that the proposed leisure facility at Gilston, including swimming provision, were part of the relevant Section 106 obligations. In response to questions regarding the evidence base, officers advised that the action plan would be reviewed annually to ensure the strategy remained current and compliant with Sport England requirements. It was further noted that while the study focused on priority sports identified through the agreed methodology, emerging and locally identified needs could still be considered through future reviews, Local Plan consultations and the planning process.

The Panel noted the recommendation to establish a cross-boundary strategy implementation group to support collaboration with neighbouring authorities and leisure operators, recognising that participation in sport and leisure activities frequently extended beyond district boundaries.

Members also highlighted the significant contribution of community halls and local venues in supporting physical activity, particularly among older residents. The role of facilities such as Sawbridgeworth Memorial Hall was acknowledged, together with the importance of wider infrastructure, including accessible walking routes, community spaces and seating, in promoting healthy and active lifestyles.

Councillor Dumont proposed, and Councillor Crystall seconded, a motion that the Executive be advised that (A) the Indoor Sport Assessment and Strategy, attached as Appendix A, B C and D be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications; (B) future updates of the Indoor Sport Action Plan be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with

the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

Councillor Dumont proposed, and Councillor Crystall seconded, a motion that any minor amendments to the content of the Indoor Sport Needs Assessment and Strategy be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Executive be advised that (A) the Indoor Sport Assessment and Strategy, attached as Appendix A, B C and D be agreed as part of the evidence base to inform the new East Herts Local Plan and as a material consideration for Development Management purposes in the determination of planning applications;

(B) future updates of the Indoor Sport Action Plan be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth; and

(C) any minor amendments to the content of the Indoor Sport Needs Assessment and Strategy be delegated to the Director for Place, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

10 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

11 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC (IF REQUIRED)

There was no urgent part two business.

The meeting closed at 9.25 pm

Chairman

Date