

Chapter 2

Vision and Strategic Objectives

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2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1** This chapter sets out the overall strategic vision for development in East Herts over the Plan period to 2033. The vision is supported by a set of strategic objectives which, when considered together, provide the framework for the policies set out in the District Plan.

2.2 East Herts District

- 2.2.1** The District of East Herts covers an area of 477 km² (184 square miles) and comprises around one third 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 and 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** East Herts lies in the core area of the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor. The District is also heavily influenced by the presence of major settlements beyond its boundary. 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 on an east-west axis. 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
- 1 National Nature Reserve at Broxbourne-Hoddesdonpark Woods
- 1 Local Nature Reserve at Waterford Heath
- 14 Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust Reserves
- Several chalk streams which support special wildlife habitats and species
- Over 40 Scheduled Monuments
- Nearly 3,100 Listed Buildings
- 42 Conservation Areas
- 550 Areas of Archaeological Significance
- 15 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. Educational attainment is also high with students performing better in East Herts than the wider region.

2.3 Key Issues and Challenges

2.3.1 East Herts is an attractive and prosperous area. 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 previously developed 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, wastewater 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, to reduce the need to travel and, where journeys need to be made, the distance of those trips. Sustainable modes of transport are also encouraged to both reduce reliance on the car and promote healthier lifestyles.
- 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 has been developed through public consultation and sets out what the Council would like the District to be like in 2033.

East Herts in 2033

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; including the provision of accessible and adaptable dwellings to meet the changing needs of occupants over their lifetime. There will be an increase in the overall stock of affordable housing including starter homes.
4. Working in partnership with other service providers, essential new and improved infrastructure to support the increased population of the District will have been delivered. 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. New development will have supported improved sustainable travel, including initiatives contained in Hertfordshire's 2050 Transport Vision. Mitigating measures will have helped ameliorate congestion, particularly on the A414.
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. Outside of the main settlements, strategic development will have been accommodated to the east of Stevenage, east of Welwyn Garden City and in the Gilston Area. These areas will have provided a range of homes, schools, facilities and services for the benefit of East Herts residents.

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. The rich biodiversity of East Herts will have been protected and enhanced. Where new development could potentially have an adverse effect on biodiversity and the ecological network of the District, measures will have been taken to ensure that the impact was either avoided or mitigated.
11. The District's rich and varied green infrastructure centred in the river valleys will have been re-connected and enhanced and its multi-functionality protected providing increased resilience to changing climates, improved ecological connectivity and new spaces for recreation and leisure.
12. 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 so as to reduce car dependency and by ensuring through their design and construction, new buildings produce lower carbon emissions.
13. 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 the young, the elderly and vulnerable people.
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 to protect and enhance the historic environment of East Herts, 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, inter alia, creating new green spaces and networks of high quality green space for both recreation and wildlife.
9. To ensure that development occurs in parallel with provision of the necessary infrastructure, including enhancement and provision of green infrastructure.

2.6 London Stansted Cambridge Corridor (LSCC) Vision

- 2.6.1** The Councils of Broxbourne, East Herts, Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford form the LSCC Core Area which lies at the heart of the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor (LSCC). This corridor has, over the past decade or more, been the engine of UK growth with its world class industries and businesses.
- 2.6.2** Over the past five years the Corridor's dynamic, knowledge-based economy has grown at a rate almost double that of the UK average and as a result rates of population growth have increased. Transport links are excellent; with two major rail routes - the East Coast and West Anglia main lines - serving the Corridor. The A1(M), A10 and M11 motorways link its towns and cities with the capital, while London Stansted Airport offers international connections.
- 2.6.3** With a significant number of jobs in knowledge-based industries, the Corridor is a leading knowledge economy and a showcase for tech industries and firms. There is a high rate of innovation.
- 2.6.4** The Corridor accounts for 24,700 jobs in the life sciences sector contributing 11% of all national employment. This success is built on research institutes and notable firms and organisations, including Amgen and AstraZeneca in Cambridge, GlaxoSmithKline in Stevenage and Ware, and Public Health England in Harlow.

- 2.6.5** The continued success of the Corridor as a great place to live, work, do business and visit provides the opportunity for the Core Area to deliver greater and lasting prosperity for its residents and businesses. As such the Council is working with its partner authorities in the Core Area to deliver the following LSCC strategic vision for the area up to 2050:

Vision for the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor Core Area

The Core Area will build on its key strengths including its skilled workforce in sectors such as health, life sciences and pharmaceuticals, advanced engineering and aerospace, its high quality environment and educational opportunities. Together with Stansted Airport, the local authorities will deliver sustainable growth which supports the economic ambitions of the LSCC and the UK through:

- complementing and supporting the economic performance of the Corridor whilst maintaining and enhancing the special character of the area, including the locally distinctive historic character of its market towns and rural settlements;
- the delivery of housing, supported by good access to social, leisure, community, health facilities, education and jobs, that meets the needs of local people and supports sustainable economic growth, whilst ensuring it remains an attractive place for people to live and locate to;
- capitalising on existing economic sectors and promoting growth of expanding industries including in the food production, life sciences, pharmaceuticals and technology sectors; tourism including hotels, Stansted's expansion, recreation/green assets including the Lee Valley, Stort Valley, Epping Forest and Hatfield Forest National Nature Reserve;
- working with partners to protect and enhance the high quality environment, its unique landscapes and places of special wildlife value. This would be achieved by place-shaping initiatives which would include measures to conserve areas of high biodiversity; the provision of new, alternative green spaces for people and wildlife; and the increase of green infrastructure connections between these areas, to provide greater opportunities for more sustainable access to nature for everyone living in the corridor;
- working with partners to secure investment in major infrastructure including increasing rail capacity on the West Anglia Mainline and maximising the opportunities that Crossrail 2 can deliver, together with road improvements including a new junction on the M11 at 7A and improvements to junctions 7 and 8, and to the A414, A120, A10 and M25; and delivery of superfast broadband;

- supporting the delivery of new jobs in the Harlow Enterprise Zone, and the north side of Stansted Airport, Broxbourne Park Plaza, Brookfield and Bishop's Stortford – all identified as Strategic Opportunity Sites within the corridor; and
- the regeneration of existing urban areas including at Harlow, Waltham Abbey, Loughton and Waltham Cross.

The Core Area supports the development and sustainable growth of Greater Harlow and key growth locations at Broxbourne, Brookfield and Bishop's Stortford together with Stansted Airport growing to its full permitted capacity and as a business growth hub. These centres, with proportionate growth throughout the wider area, and the right investment, would create an economic powerhouse.

Putting in place these critical building blocks will provide the foundations for looking further ahead to 2050. Certainty through further investment and delivery of key infrastructure, including in the West Anglia mainline, Crossrail 2, the M11 junctions, M25 junctions, A414, A120 and A10 is a vital component of this.

