

EAST HERTS COUNCIL REPORT

COUNCIL

DATE OF MEETING: WEDNESDAY, 4 MARCH 2026

REPORT BY: COUNCILLOR VICKY GLOVER-WARD– EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND GROWTH

REPORT TITLE: STANSTEAD ABBOTTS AND ST MARGARETS NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - ADOPTION

WARD(S) AFFECTED: GREAT AMWELL AND STANSTEADS

Summary – A referendum on the Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan took place on 29 January 2026. A majority voted in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan and as such the Council now has the opportunity to formally make (adopt) the Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan, in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCIL

a) That the Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Area Plan 2017-2033, as detailed at Appendix A to this report, be formally made.

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 Following the successful referendum on 29 January 2026, the Council are now able to make (adopt) the Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.2 The Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan became part of the statutory development plan once it was approved at referendum and will be used by development management in the determination of planning applications submitted in the neighbourhood area. Unless a neighbourhood plan breaches human rights or EU obligations, the local planning authority is required to formally make the neighbourhood plan.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Neighbourhood Planning was introduced by the Government under the Localism Act in 2011. The Town and Country Planning England Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) came into force on the 6 April 2012 and prescribe both the process, and role of the local planning authority in supporting neighbourhood planning. In East Herts, Parish or Town Councils are qualifying bodies able to produce a Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2.2 The three parish councils of Stanstead Abbots, Stanstead St Margarets and Great Amwell have worked together to prepare this Neighbourhood Plan. Stanstead Abbots Parish Council, as the lead Parish Council, is the qualifying body and submitted an application to East Herts Council for the designation of a Neighbourhood Area in June 2018. The Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Area was then designated on the 11 September 2018. It includes the entirety of Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Parishes, together with the area of Great Amwell, known as the Folly.
- 2.3 The Neighbourhood Plan Group carried out early community engagement between 2017 and 2021 and then undertook a Pre-Submission Consultation from 6 February to the 2 April 2023 under Regulation 14 of the 2012 Regulations. The Neighbourhood Plan was then submitted to East Herts Council on the 13 December 2024 and a six-week consultation on the submission plan was undertaken from the 30 January to the 14 March 2025, under Regulation 16.
- 2.4 A Neighbourhood Plan can be narrow or broad in scope and can include whatever range of policies it sees as appropriate to its designated neighbourhood area. The Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan has a strong vision for delivering sustainable development and this has been translated into a set of objectives and policies. It seeks to protect character, heritage and the local environment, whilst delivering new development and infrastructure to meet local needs. There is particular focus on the following areas:
- Delivering sustainable development and ensuring suitable sites are delivered within the plan period.
 - Delivering well-designed, mixed and affordable housing, including a 6-home scheme of community-led housing.

- Enhancing the river's unique contribution to the village.
 - Protection of non-designated heritage assets.
 - Protection and enhancement of the natural environment, landscape, and local character, including the designation of 16 new local green spaces.
 - Supporting a vibrant economy, protecting employment areas and enhancing the High Street.
 - Promoting safe and sustainable transport links.
- 2.5 District Plan (2018) Policy VILL1 Group 1 Villages, requires Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets to accommodate at least a 10% increase in housing stock between 2017 and 2033, which amounts to 94 dwellings. The policy accepts there may be a need for a change to the Green Belt boundary, to accommodate growth. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms that where a need for changes to Green Belt boundaries has been established through strategic policies, detailed amendments to those boundaries may be made through neighbourhood plans.
- 2.6 The Neighbourhood Plan must be in conformity with East Herts District Plan. So, to meet the policy requirement, the Neighbourhood Plan (Policy SASM HA2) proposes 98 new homes in the plan period, including a strategic site of 60 dwellings on the edge of the village. As the housing requirement could not be accommodated within the existing settlement boundary, the allocation of the strategic site SASM H3 (a mixed-use site on previously developed and green field land) requires changes to the Green Belt boundary.
- 2.7 The Neighbourhood Plan was assessed by an Independent Examiner between May and October 2025. It is assessed against the December 2023 version of the National Planning Policy Framework (not the 2024 version) because it was submitted in December 2024, so transitional arrangements apply. In the final report, the Examiner commended the Neighbourhood Plan for being well presented and for seeking to achieve sustainable development. The report states the Neighbourhood Plan is distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community to safeguard the character and setting of the neighbourhood area, to designate a series of local green spaces and to support residential development to meet the strategic requirement for the neighbourhood area identified in the District Plan.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 The Referendum took place on Thursday 29 January 2026 with an 18% turnout. There was an overall 'yes' vote of 500 votes (79.7%), against 127 (20.3%) who voted 'no'. As outlined within Paragraph 38A(4)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, (as amended by the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017), the Council is able to make the Neighbourhood Plan if more than half of those voting in the referendum have voted in favour of the plan being used to help decide planning applications in the area. The residents within the Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Area voted on the following question:
"Do you want East Hertfordshire District Council to use the Neighbourhood Plan for Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?"

3.2 With an overall successful 'yes' vote, the Council is now able to formally 'make' (adopt) the Neighbourhood Plan as part of the East Herts Development Plan.

Adoption

3.3 Following a successful referendum, the Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan already forms part of the development plan. As such, any planning applications within the Neighbourhood Area will be assessed using the plan alongside the East Herts District Plan (2018), the mineral and waste plans and all other material considerations.

3.4 There are narrow circumstances where the local planning authority is not required to make the neighbourhood plan. These are where it considers that the making of the neighbourhood plan would breach, or otherwise be incompatible with, any EU or human rights obligations (see section 61E(8) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Act as amended). The Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan does not breach these obligations.

3.5 It is considered that the Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan positively contributes to the East Herts Development Management process providing a strong community vision that seeks to contribute to sustainable development and as such the Neighbourhood Plan can proceed to be formally made.

3.6 The final version of the Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan can be found in **Appendix A**.

4.0 Options

4.1 The Council is permitted, in narrow circumstances only, to not make a neighbourhood plan, when it is in breach or incompatible with any EU or human rights obligations (see section 61E (8) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as Amended). However, it is considered that the Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan does not breach these obligations. The Examiner considered these matters in his report and concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan is compatible with EU and human rights obligations.

5.0 Risks

5.1 If the Neighbourhood Plan does not proceed to be formally made, then the Council would not be fulfilling its duties as Local Planning Authority and there is the risk of legal challenge.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 The Neighbourhood Plan has been subject to multiple rounds of public consultation and a referendum.

Community Safety

There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

Data Protection

There are no data protection implications arising from this report.

Equalities

The Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan seeks to advance equality of opportunity by encouraging inclusive design, promoting well-planned, accessible places and promoting healthier communities. The Plan has been subject to multiple rounds of public consultation during its development providing opportunities for extensive community engagement.

Environmental Sustainability

The Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan has been informed by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a

Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA). The Plan also contains policies that aim to protect the environment.

Financial

It is the responsibility of the LPA to cover examination and referendum costs. Government grants are available when a formal decision has been made to proceed to referendum.

Health and Safety

There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.

Human Resources

There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

Human Rights

There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Legal

The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) requires the Local Planning Authority to make the Neighbourhood Plan within 8 weeks of the referendum.

Specific Wards

Part of Great Amwell and Stansteads Ward.

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix A: Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2033

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