

East Herts Council Report

Executive

Date of meeting: Tuesday, 2 June 2026

Report by: Councillor Vicky Glover-Ward – Executive Member for Planning and Growth

Report title: Local Plan Timetable and Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Summary

- East Herts Council has a statutory duty to produce the East Herts Local Plan. The government published details of a new plan-making system in November 2025. Regulations¹ to implement the new system came into force on the 25 March 2026.
- This report initiates the first two stages of the new plan-making system, namely the publication of the East Herts Local Plan Timetable and Notice of Intention to Commence the East Herts Local Plan.
- This report was considered at the District Planning Executive Panel on [19 May 2026](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE: to recommend to Council that:

- A) The East Herts Local Plan Timetable, attached at Appendix A, be approved for publication; and**
- B) The Notice of Intention to Commence the East Herts Local Plan, attached at Appendix B, be published on the Council's website.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

¹ The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to publish the East Herts Local Plan Timetable. This sets out the key stages and milestones for preparing the new East Herts Local Plan. Publication of the timetable will in turn enable the Council to publish the statutory Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation, as required under the new plan-making system.
- 1.2 The report also provides the context for, and links directly to, the accompanying report on the 'Local Plan Scoping Consultation'. That report sets out the first stage of formal engagement under the new plan-making system and explains how the Council will gather early views on the scope, issues and priorities that the new Local Plan should address.
- 1.3 The Scoping Consultation will invite stakeholders, statutory bodies, community groups and residents to comment on the key themes the Local Plan should cover, the challenges the district faces, and the opportunities for shaping its long-term growth strategy.
- 1.4 Together, the two reports will ensure that Members have a clear understanding of both the statutory requirement to publish the Timetable and Notice and the immediate next step in the plan-making process, which is to undertake focused, early-stage consultation to inform the development of the new Local Plan.
- 1.5 Both reports will be considered by the District Planning Executive Panel (DPEP) for scrutiny and comment prior to being referred to the Executive for consideration and recommendation. The Executive will then determine whether to recommend the reports to full Council for approval, in accordance with the Council's constitution and decision-making framework.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Government has introduced a new plan-making system designed to deliver faster, clearer and more accessible Local Plans across England. The reforms were announced through a Written Ministerial Statement in November 2025. The new system introduces a 30-month statutory timetable for preparing and adopting a Local Plan, replacing the longer, less structured timelines under the previous arrangements.

- 2.2 Before the formal 30-month period begins, local planning authorities are required to complete a prescribed ‘getting ready’ period of at least four months. During this stage, authorities must publish a Local Plan timetable, establish governance and project management arrangements, begin early engagement, set out the anticipated content of the plan, and commence work on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). These preparatory tasks must be demonstrated through the Gateway 1 self-assessment before the formal plan-making process can start.
- 2.3 A key requirement of the new system is that authorities must publish a Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation. This Notice acts as the formal signal that the plan-making process is starting and must be issued before or at the same time as the Scoping Consultation, the first formal stage of public engagement. Its purpose is to ensure communities and stakeholders understand when the Local Plan process is beginning and how they can participate. The Notice must also be published in a clearly accessible format on the Council’s website.
- 2.4 Collectively, these changes are intended to simplify and standardise plan-making while improving transparency, engagement, and the speed at which Local Plans are produced. The publication of the Local Plan timetable and Notice, along with the Scoping Consultation, mark the first formal steps for East Herts in implementing this new national plan-making framework.

Local Government Reorganisation

- 2.5 Members should note that local government reorganisation in Hertfordshire remains subject to a decision by the Government. While no decisions have yet been made, the Government has been clear that councils should continue to progress local plans to support plan-led decision-making. Advancing the East Herts Local Plan will maintain an up-to-date and robust planning framework, provide clarity and certainty for local communities on future growth and development, and ensure that key evidence, policies and local priorities are in place to inform and support any future changes to governance or plan-making arrangements.

3.0 Reason(s)

Local Plan Timetable

- 3.1 The publication of the East Herts Local Plan timetable is a requirement of the new plan-making system and must occur before or on the same day as the publication of the Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation.
- 3.2 The timetable provides a clear and publicly accessible schedule of the stages involved in preparing the new Local Plan, including early engagement, the Gateway assessments, formal consultation stages, examination, and adoption. It sets out the key milestones the Council must achieve within the statutory 30-month plan-making period, offering transparency for communities, stakeholders, developers and statutory bodies regarding when and how they can participate in plan-making.
- 3.3 The timetable also forms one of the prescribed elements of the 'getting ready' phase that must be demonstrated before the Council can pass through Gateway 1. It underpins project management and governance arrangements by setting expectations for resource planning, evidence commissioning and consultation activity.
- 3.4 Publication of the timetable ensures the Council complies with the requirements of the new plan-making system and establishes a clear structure for the programme of work that will follow. The Council will be required to maintain this timetable and update as appropriate in accordance with the regulations.
- 3.5 The East Herts Local Plan Timetable is attached at **Appendix A** and provides a detailed schedule of the key stages, milestones and statutory processes involved in preparing the new Local Plan.

Timescales

- 3.6 It should be noted that the dates included in the timetable are indicative and may be affected by a range of factors outside the Council's control. For example, it is not possible at the outset to predict either the volume or the nature of representations received during consultation stages. In addition, certain elements of the process, such as the availability of external examiners, are not within the Council's control and may affect progress against the timetable.

- 3.7 As set out above Hertfordshire is also undergoing local government reorganisation during the preparation of the East Herts Local Plan. This may affect the programme for plan preparation, as changes to governance arrangements, decision-making structures and electoral cycles could influence the timing of key decisions and stages in the process. As a result, some elements of the timetable may need to be reviewed as local government reorganisation progresses.

Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation

- 3.8 The Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation must include the following elements:

1. *A clear statement that the Council is commencing preparation of a new Local Plan.* The notice must explicitly state that the Council is preparing a new Local Plan and that this marks the start of the formal plan-making process.
2. *The area to which the Local Plan will apply.* The notice must identify the administrative area covered by the Local Plan. This ensures that communities and stakeholders understand the geographic scope of the plan.
3. *The expected date for starting the 30-month plan preparation period (Gateway 1).* The notice should set out when the Council expects to pass through Gateway 1, as this marks the beginning of the statutory 30-month preparation period. The notice must be given at least four months before this point.
4. *Publication of the Local Plan timetable.* The Local Plan timetable must be published before or on the same day the Notice is issued and should therefore be referenced or linked within the Notice.
5. *How stakeholders can access information.* The Notice must be published on the Council's website as text on a webpage (not solely as a PDF). This is required to ensure accessibility and transparency for all users.

6. *Contact information for further enquiries.* The Notice should include contact details through which stakeholders can request further information or clarification about the Local Plan.

3.9 The Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation is attached at **Appendix B**. This provides the wording proposed for publication on the Council's website, including the required information on the Local Plan area, the expected timing of Gateway 1, and the link to the East Herts Local Plan timetable.

4.0 Options

4.1 *Option 1: Do Not Publish the Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation.* Not publishing the Notice would place the Council in breach of national requirements that the Notice must be issued before the 30-month plan-making process can begin, preventing the Scoping Consultation from taking place and blocking progress through Gateway 1. This would cause significant delays to starting the new Local Plan, and undermine transparency and stakeholder confidence.

4.2 *Option 2: Publish the Notice but Not the Local Plan Timetable.* Publishing the Notice without the Local Plan timetable would still result in non-compliance, as the timetable must be published at the same time, and would leave the Council unable to demonstrate completion of the required preparatory work for Gateway 1. Stakeholders would lack clarity on key milestones, the effectiveness of engagement would be reduced, and internal project management risks would increase due to uncertainty in the programme.

4.3 *Option 3: Publish Neither the Notice nor the Timetable.* Failure to publish both documents would prevent the Council from initiating the Local Plan process under the new legal plan-making framework, leaving it unable to commence the Scoping Consultation or progress toward Gateway 1. This would create a high risk of non-compliance with statutory plan-making duties, weaken the policy position for development management, expose the district to speculative development, and cause reputational harm with stakeholders and government bodies.

4.4 *Option 4: Publish both the Notice and the Local Plan Timetable.* Publishing both the Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation and the Local Plan Timetable would ensure full compliance with the statutory and national plan-making requirements and enable the Council to formally initiate the 30-month Local Plan preparation period. This option would allow the Scoping Consultation to proceed. Publication of both documents would provide transparency and clarity for stakeholders, set out a clear programme and key milestones, support effective engagement, and strengthen internal project management and governance. This option represents the most robust and appropriate approach to commencing preparation of the new Local Plan.

5.0 Risks

5.1 Local planning authorities must give notice before starting the 30-month plan preparation process, and this notice must be published on the Council's website as required under national guidance. Failure to do so would put the Council in breach of the legal duty to give notice.

5.2 The 30-month statutory period begins when the Council passes Gateway 1. Authorities must give notice at least four months' notice before passing Gateway 1. If notice is not given, the Gateway 1 self-assessment cannot be completed, delaying the formal start of plan preparation.

5.3 The purpose of publishing the notice is to alert communities, statutory bodies, and stakeholders to the start of plan-making and give them advance warning of when and how they can participate. Without the notice, stakeholders would not be aware of the process or upcoming consultations, undermining inclusive and effective engagement.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 The Local Plan Timetable and Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation are prescribed in guidance/regulations and are therefore not subject to public consultation. However, preparation of the Local Plan itself will include three rounds of public consultation.

- 6.2 Following publication of the Notice, the Council will undertake a Scoping Consultation, which is the first formal stage of engagement under the new plan-making system. National guidance specifies that the Notice must be issued before or at the same time as this consultation to ensure that stakeholders are aware that plan-making has formally begun.
- 6.3 The Scoping Consultation is fully detailed in the accompanying 'Local Plan Scoping Consultation Report', which sets out the proposed scope, objectives and approach to early engagement. This consultation forms a key part of the required 'getting ready' phase prior to Gateway 1, during which authorities must begin early engagement and initial assessment work.

Community Safety

Preparation of a new Local Plan can positively influence community safety by shaping policies on design quality, public realm, lighting, and layout of developments to discourage crime and anti-social behaviour. Early plan-making helps ensure community safety considerations are embedded from the outset.

Data Protection

The Notice does not involve processing of personal data beyond standard consultation contact details managed under existing council protocols. No new data protection risks arise from commencing Local Plan preparation.

Equalities

Local Plans must advance equality of opportunity in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty. Commencing preparation enables the Council to develop policies that for example address accessibility, inclusive design, Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs, and equitable access to housing, facilities, and employment. An Equalities Impact Assessment will accompany the Plan's development.

Environmental Sustainability

The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to sustainable development. Preparation of the East Herts Local Plan must balance three overarching objectives – economic, social and environmental. This includes supporting climate resilience, conserving natural resources, protecting biodiversity, and reducing carbon emissions. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is legally required and will evaluate

the positive and negative impacts of policy options throughout the plan-making process.

Financial

Formal commencement of the Local Plan entails resource implications, including staff time, evidence commissioning, public consultation, and statutory examination. These costs are planned for within the Council's budget for Planning Policy work.

The Council has also received £108,474.57 from the government to support Local Plan implementation. Acceptance of this funding is based on the Council's commitment to the following milestones:

- Publishing a Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan preparation by 30 June 2026; and
- Publishing our Gateway 1 self-assessment by 31 October 2026.

Health and Safety

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

Human Resources

Preparation of the new Local Plan requires continued staffing within the Planning Policy team. Workload demands may require prioritisation of tasks or temporary specialist support depending on the scale of evidence production and consultation activity.

Human Rights

The decision to commence Local Plan preparation does not infringe on the rights set out in the Human Rights Act 1998. The plan-making process includes statutory opportunities for public participation, supporting rights relating to consultation and fair process.

Legal

Issuing the Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation formalises the Council's compliance with the new plan-making system and associated regulations.

Specific Wards

All

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 **Appendix A** : East Herts Local Plan Timetable

7.2 **Appendix B**: Notice of Intention to Commence Local Plan Preparation

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