

Scoping Consultation

East Herts Local Plan

11 June – 10 July 2026



EAST HERTS LOCAL PLAN

SCOPING CONSULTATION

1. INTRODUCTION

East Herts District Council is preparing a new Local Plan to guide development in the district over the coming years. The Local Plan will cover the period up to 2044 and will set out the vision, objectives, and planning policies that will shape how East Hertfordshire grows and changes. It will address matters such as housing, employment, infrastructure, the natural and historic environment, and the health and wellbeing of communities.

Planning authorities are required to review their Local Plans at least once every five years to ensure that planning policies remain up to date. This review process gives us a chance to look at what's changed locally, ensure ongoing conformity with national planning policy, and respond to new or emerging social, environmental, and economic priorities. The preparation of the new Local Plan will be informed by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied.

Purpose of the Scoping Consultation

This Scoping Consultation is the first stage of engagement in the preparation of the new Local Plan. Its purpose is to provide meaningful early engagement with stakeholders and the local community, including residents, businesses, infrastructure providers, and other organisations, to help shape the direction of the Local Plan.

The council is seeking views on:

1. Matters that are relevant to the preparation of the new Local Plan;
2. What the new Local Plan should contain;
3. How the council should engage with stakeholders and the community during the plan-making process; and
4. The content of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping document.

Feedback received through this consultation will help to inform the scope, evidence base, and approach to preparing the new Local Plan.

Consultation Period

This Scoping Consultation will run from **11 June to 10 July 2026**.

2. HOW TO GET INVOLVED AND RESPOND

The best way to respond is through the council's online consultation platform.

Comments can also be submitted by email or post as follows:

Email:

planningpolicy@eastherts.gov.uk

Post:

Planning Policy Team

East Herts Council

Wallfields

Pegs Lane

Hertford, SG13 8EQ

All responses received during the consultation period will be considered and will help inform the next stages of Local Plan preparation. A summary of comments and how they have been taken into account will be published as part of the engagement process.

3. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The preparation of a new Local Plan presents both challenges and opportunities for East Hertfordshire. In particular, the Plan will need to balance the need to deliver new housing, alongside other forms of development, with the protection, preservation, and enhancement of the district's valued characteristics, including its distinctive landscape and the character and identity of towns and villages. Ensuring that growth respects local distinctiveness and responds positively to its surroundings will be a key consideration.

The Local Plan will also need to make sure there is infrastructure in place to support new homes and development. This includes transport and movement, addressing how people travel within and beyond the district, as well as ensuring that essential services and community facilities, such as healthcare, education, utilities, and open space, are maintained and provided in the right locations and at the right time.

Supporting a strong and resilient economy will be another important challenge. The plan will need to consider how to retain existing jobs, attract new businesses and investment, and support economic growth, while also nurturing small businesses, promoting innovation, and maintaining the diversity of the district's rural economy.

In addition, the Local Plan must respond to wider global and national trends that will affect East Hertfordshire over the plan period. These include changing technology, increased home and flexible working, changes in how people shop and access services, and ongoing cost-of-living pressures. Anticipating how these trends may influence future development needs, settlement patterns, and infrastructure

requirements will be essential in ensuring the Local Plan is flexible and future-focused.

CONSULTATION QUESTION

1. What do you consider to be the main challenges and opportunities facing East Hertfordshire over the plan period, and how should the new Local Plan respond to them?

The new Local Plan will need to respond to a range of issues affecting East Hertfordshire. Some of these are set out below, and the council is seeking views on whether these reflect the issues that matter most to local communities and stakeholders.

Housing

The Government sets the minimum housing requirement for each local planning authority through national planning policy, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated guidance. In recent years, the housing requirement for East Hertfordshire has increased significantly, reflecting national priorities to boost housing supply and improve affordability.

East Herts is a largely rural district characterised by a constrained landscape, extensive Green Belt and a network of distinctive and historic market towns. In this context, the new Local Plan will need to establish an appropriate strategy to deliver the required number of homes. This means deciding where new housing should go, how it should be spread across the district, and what impact it will have on infrastructure, the environment, and existing communities.

The Plan will also need to address the diverse housing needs of the district's population. This includes providing a suitable mix of housing types, sizes, and tenures, including affordable housing, in locations where need is anticipated. Specific consideration will be given to the needs of different groups, including older people and those who require care or support, Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities, and people at different stages of life.

Green Belt and the Introduction of 'Grey Belt'

The Green Belt has five defined purposes, including preventing urban sprawl, stopping neighbouring towns from merging, and safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. It is not intended to protect specific landscapes or habitats, which are covered by other planning policies.

National planning policy has recently changed the approach to Green Belt reviews through local plans, including the introduction of the concept of 'grey belt'. Grey belt

refers to areas of Green Belt that perform less strongly against certain Green Belt purposes and may therefore be more suitable for development, subject to wider planning considerations.

In East Herts, the Green Belt covers the southern third of the district, surrounding the towns of Hertford, Ware, Sawbridgeworth and Bishop's Stortford. It also forms part of the separation between the district and neighbouring towns including Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City, Hoddesdon and Harlow.

As part of preparing the new Local Plan, the council is required to review the Green Belt to identify areas that may meet the definition of grey belt.

Employment

The main towns of East Hertfordshire are significant employment centres, providing jobs for residents and those commuting into the district. They accommodate a range of employment uses, including offices, industrial premises, and service-based businesses, located within town centres and across wider built-up areas.

The district's villages and rural areas also play an important role in supporting employment. Traditional activities such as farming and rural crafts remain important alongside growing diversification. This includes the reuse of rural buildings to support small-scale businesses, start-ups and relocations, often reflecting changes in working practices and business models.

East Herts benefits from a strong strategic location, with access to major transport routes including the M11 and A1(M), proximity to Stansted Airport, and links to centres of innovation in neighbouring areas such as Harlow, Cambridge, and Stevenage. Many residents also commute to and from London, reflecting the district's role in a wider labour market.

The new Local Plan will need to support a balanced and resilient local economy. This includes providing a range of employment opportunities, supporting existing businesses, and aligning employment growth with housing, infrastructure, and environmental considerations.

Town Centres

The district's town centres provide a wide range of retail, service, leisure, and community functions, including shops, food and drink uses, cultural venues, and facilities such as libraries. Many are set within distinctive historic environments that contribute strongly to character and sense of place.

Town centres continue to play a vital role in supporting local communities and the economy but face significant change. The growth of online shopping and

home-based entertainment has reduced footfall for some traditional uses and affected long-term viability.

There have also been shifts in the location of activities, with some leisure and service uses increasingly locating outside town centres. In addition, the district's centres face challenges linked to their historic form, such as access, servicing, and parking constraints.

The new Local Plan will need to consider how town centres can adapt while maintaining a strong mix of uses, supporting vitality and viability, and reinforcing their role as focal points for community life.

Recreation and Leisure

Successful and sustainable communities are supported by access to leisure, recreational and community facilities. Good-quality open spaces and services contribute to health, wellbeing, and quality of life.

The new Local Plan will need to ensure that existing facilities, including open spaces, parks, sports facilities, swimming pools, and playing pitches, continue to meet the needs of the current population. It must also plan positively for future growth, ensuring new development is supported by appropriate additional facilities.

Leisure and recreation also include cultural and social facilities such as cinemas, theatres, and other venues. These uses can play an important role in supporting town centres and local economies and may have implications for accessibility, transport patterns, and activity throughout the day and evening.

Community Facilities and Infrastructure

Strong communities depend on access to facilities and services that support health, wellbeing and everyday life. Community facilities and infrastructure play a key role in supporting sustainable growth and in reducing inequalities.

The new Local Plan will need to work with providers of key services and infrastructure, including education, healthcare, water supply and energy, to support future growth. This includes ensuring new development is supported by appropriate infrastructure, either through existing capacity or timely upgrades.

The Plan will also consider infrastructure essential to modern living and economic activity, such as high-quality digital connectivity and wastewater infrastructure.

In addition, the Local Plan will need to remain flexible to respond to future technological and societal change. This includes emerging approaches to service delivery and the infrastructure associated with digital technology, data storage, and the transition to low-carbon energy systems.

Urban Design and Conservation

The district's towns and villages contain historic cores that play a key role in defining local character and sense of place, and across the district there are over 3,000 Listed Buildings. These environments contribute significantly to the attractiveness of the district and its cultural heritage.

The new Local Plan will need to provide a framework for accommodating change in ways that conserve and enhance historic assets. This could include sensitively integrating energy-efficiency measures to ensure historic buildings remain viable and valued.

There is increasing emphasis within planning policy on the importance of good design. High-quality design can reinforce local character, support sustainability objectives, and create adaptable, long-lasting places.

The new Local Plan will need to set clear expectations for design quality, ensuring development respects local character while responding to contemporary and future needs.

Climate Change

Climate change presents a significant challenge for East Hertfordshire, influencing where development should take place, how it is designed, and how communities and infrastructure can remain resilient over time. National planning policy requires local plans to address both the mitigation of climate change, through reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and adaptation to its impacts.

The new Local Plan will need to support the transition to a low-carbon future. This includes promoting energy-efficient buildings, renewable and low-carbon energy generation, and patterns of development that reduce the need to travel, particularly by private car.

Equally important is ensuring that development is resilient to climate impacts. The Plan will need to address increased risks of flooding, overheating, and water stress by directing development away from areas at the highest risk of flooding, by encouraging design approaches that respond to higher temperatures and more extreme weather events, and by supporting sustainable drainage systems and promoting water efficiency.

Particular consideration will be given to the district's water environment, including chalk streams and water resources, which are highly sensitive to climate change and development pressures.

Addressing climate change will require an integrated approach across the Local Plan, linking with policies on housing, movement, design, infrastructure, and the natural environment. The new Local Plan will provide the framework to embed climate considerations into decision-making and support the creation of healthy, resilient and sustainable communities.

Environment and Landscape

East Hertfordshire is predominantly rural, defined by open countryside, scattered villages, and river valleys. This landscape makes a strong contribution to local identity and provides an important setting for settlements.

The district is characterised by a network of rivers draining towards the River Lea, including the Rivers Rib, Ash, Beane and Quin, with the River Stort forming part of the district's boundary. Many of these watercourses are chalk streams, flowing through chalk geology and supporting distinctive habitats. Chalk streams are internationally rare and highly sensitive to pressures such as abstraction, climate change, and development, making river corridors a key environmental consideration.

The wider landscape is gently undulating, with long views that contribute to the district's character. Settlements are often closely related to their surrounding landscape, reinforcing local distinctiveness and sense of place.

The new Local Plan will need to protect and enhance the landscape and natural environment while planning positively for future needs. This includes addressing biodiversity, flood risk, and climate change, and safeguarding the quality and openness of the countryside while enabling well-designed development.

Movement

Movement and transport are key considerations due to the district's size, rural character and settlement pattern. Major routes such as the M11, A1(M), A414 and rail links support travel, but access to transport options varies.

In the southern parts of the district, residents have greater access to walking, cycling, public transport, and rail. Elsewhere, options are more limited, and reliance on the private car is higher.

The new Local Plan will need to consider how development can reduce the impacts of car use, including congestion and environmental effects, while recognising the needs of people in less well-connected areas. This includes reducing the need to travel where possible and supporting realistic alternatives to the car.

Hertfordshire County Council will be a key partner, with responsibility for highways, active travel, and elements of public transport. Rail services will also continue to shape travel patterns.

Sustainability

Sustainability has long been a central principle of planning policy. It underpins national policy and provides the framework for balancing growth with environmental protection and social wellbeing.

Sustainable development encompasses environmental, social and economic considerations. Within plan-making, this involves meeting development needs in a

way that supports strong and healthy communities, enables a resilient local economy and ensures the efficient and responsible use of land and natural resources.

Many of the topic areas identified within this Scoping Consultation contribute directly to sustainable development. For example, efficient land use, sustainable growth patterns, and development in accessible locations can help to reduce the need to travel, to lower carbon emissions, and to support healthier lifestyles.

Together, these considerations will help to ensure that future development in East Hertfordshire is planned and delivered in a balanced and sustainable manner.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- 2. Are there any other issues, in addition to those identified above, that you think the new Local Plan should address?**
- 3. What do you consider to be the three most important issues that should be addressed by the new Local Plan to help shape the future of East Hertfordshire? *Please select up to three topics and provide reasons for your choices.***
- 4. Is there anything else you would like to tell us that should be considered as part of the new Local Plan?**

4. PLAN VISION

In line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the new Local Plan is required to establish a clear vision for the district's future development. In response, the council has prepared a draft Vision to articulate how the district could develop over the plan period, reflecting local priorities, challenges, and opportunities.

The draft Vision is intended to provide a clear and consistent framework to guide the preparation of the Local Plan's objectives, strategy and policies.

The draft Vision document is available to view here: [Vision | East Herts Council](#).

Vision Statement

At the heart of the draft Vision document is a Vision Statement which sets out the council's long-term aspirations for East Hertfordshire and describes how the district should evolve over the plan period. It provides a shared statement of intent, reflecting local priorities, opportunities and challenges, and establishes the overall direction for growth.

VISION STATEMENT

“Renowned for our unique and charming historic market towns and villages set within beautiful countryside, rare chalk streams and rich heritage, East Herts will be an exemplar of sustainability, where innovative design solutions respect local character and are harnessed to mitigate and adapt to climate change and enhance biodiversity.

Our communities will continue to thrive, supported by affordable and accessible housing, reliable public transport, and improved public open spaces—promoting active lifestyles and creating inclusive places for all.

By nurturing local businesses, we will create a resilient, prosperous and secure future for all residents and visitors.

Collectively, we will recognise the responsibility we have to create a district fit for future generations”.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- 5. Does the Vision Statement reflect your aspirations for East Hertfordshire over the next 20 years? *Please explain your views.***
- 6. Do you have any suggestions for how the wording of the Vision Statement could be improved?**

Vision Themes and Aspirations

The Vision has six key themes, which together capture the district’s strengths, challenges and aspirations and will guide future policies and decision-making. The six themes are:

People – supporting healthy, inclusive and resilient communities, with access to high-quality homes, services, and opportunities for all.

Place – protecting and enhancing the distinctive character of towns, villages and the countryside, ensuring that new development responds positively to its surroundings.

Economy – promoting a diverse, adaptable, and productive local economy, supporting existing businesses, attracting new investment, and enabling innovation.

Environment – safeguarding and enhancing the natural environment, addressing climate change, and protecting biodiversity, landscapes and heritage assets.

Infrastructure – ensuring that growth is supported by timely and appropriate infrastructure, including utilities, health, education, and community facilities.

Movement – improving connectivity and accessibility, encouraging sustainable travel choices, and reducing reliance on the private car.

Across these themes, the draft Vision document highlights the need to balance growth with environmental protection, respond to climate change, and ensure a high quality of life for existing and future residents.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- 7. Do you agree that the six themes (people, place, economy, environment, infrastructure and movement) reflect the key priorities for East Hertfordshire? [Yes / No]**
- 8. Are there any themes you think should be changed, added to, or given more emphasis? *Please explain your reasons.***

5. ENGAGEMENT

Meaningful engagement with stakeholders and the local community is a fundamental part of preparing a new Local Plan. Early and ongoing consultation helps to ensure that the Local Plan reflects local priorities, benefits from local knowledge, and is informed by those who live and work in the district. It also supports transparency and builds confidence in the plan-making process.

This section seeks views on how the council should engage with residents, businesses, landowners, infrastructure providers, community groups, and other stakeholders as the new Local Plan is prepared. The council is keen to understand which engagement methods are most effective, how information should be shared, and how people can best be supported to take part throughout the different stages of plan-making.

Feedback will help shape a proportionate and inclusive engagement strategy that encourages broad participation and ensures that communities and stakeholders have meaningful opportunities to influence the new Local Plan as it develops.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

9. How would you prefer to be engaged during the Local Plan process?

Please rank your preferences.

- a) Online consultations
- b) Public events
- c) Workshops
- d) Focus groups
- e) Written updates
- f) Social media
- g) Other methods, *please specify.*

10. Are there any specific engagement methods you think would be particularly effective in helping people understand and contribute to the Local Plan?

11. How can the council ensure that engagement is inclusive and accessible, and that opportunities to participate are available to a wide range of communities and stakeholders?

12. Is there anything else the council should consider when developing its approach to community and stakeholder engagement for the new Local Plan?

6. SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL (SA) / STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA)

Alongside the preparation of a Local Plan, the Council is required to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The purpose of the SA/SEA is to identify, describe and assess the likely economic, social and environmental effects of the Local Plan, as well as to consider reasonable alternatives to the proposed approach. The SA/SEA is undertaken in a number of stages and runs alongside the preparation of the Local Plan.

As part of the first stage of the process an SA/SEA Scoping document has been prepared. The document is available to view here: [\[link to webpage\]](#).

This report identifies relevant plans, policies and programmes that may have an impact on the Local Plan, the existing situation in East Hertfordshire across a range of topics, key sustainability issues and future trends. This information is used to develop an SA/SEA framework that will be used to assess the policies and proposals in the emerging Local Plan, ensuring that proposals are assessed against key environmental criteria as the plan is developed.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

13. Do you have any comments on the SA/SEA Scoping document?

14. Is there anything else that should be included within the SA/SEA Scoping document? *If so, please specify*