



# Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031

First consultation - June 2013



## About this consultation

This document is the first consultation on a new local plan for Stevenage.

Once it has been completed, the local plan will say how much development will take place in Stevenage in the future. It will be used to help us decide whether to grant applications for planning permission. More information is provided in Chapter 1.

You can comment on this document from Tuesday 11 June 2013 for six weeks. Please send your comments to the Planning Policy team at Stevenage Borough Council. The deadline is **5pm on Monday 22 July 2013**.

You can send us your comments using the addresses below.

### On line

[www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk) and click on "Have your say"

### By email

Planningpolicy@stevenage.gov.uk

### By mail

Planning Policy  
Stevenage Borough Council  
Daneshill House, Danestrete  
Stevenage  
SG1 1HN

### By fax

01438 242922

### By textphone

01438 242555

We will read all comments that are sent to us by the deadline.

If you have any questions about this document, please contact the Planning Policy team using the details above or by telephone on 01438 242752. This number is for queries only. We cannot accept your response to the consultation over the phone.

## Why are you consulting?

We have to complete a number of stages before we can adopt and use our new local plan. The diagram below shows how this consultation fits in to the overall preparation of the plan.

## About this consultation

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Stage 1<br>Preparing the Evidence Base          | This stage involves us collecting up-to-date information on a range of social, economic and environmental matters. This is an on-going process.   |
| Stage 2<br>1st Consultation                     | <b>This is the stage we are at now.</b> We use the results of Stage 1 to identify the main issues that the plan needs to deal with and the options that are available. An environmental assessment is also produced.  |
| Stage 3<br>Preparing a detailed draft plan      | At this stage we continue to develop our plan. This includes considering your comments from Stage 2 and the findings of any new studies. We decide on the exact policy wording we want to use in the plan.  |
| Stage 4<br>Publication of the draft plan        | We publish what we think should be the final version of the plan. A consultation is held for six weeks. More detailed environmental assessments are also published. A draft proposals map shows sites that we want to develop or protect.   |
| Stage 5<br>Formal consideration of objections   | We will consider the points raised by the consultation. If there are significant issues, we may withdraw the plan and start again. If smaller changes are required, we can make these and consult on them.  |
| Stage 6<br>Submission to the Secretary of State | We will send the plan and any supporting documents to the Secretary of State to be examined.  |
| Stage 7<br>Examination                          | An Inspector appointed by the Government will examine the plan. People who have objected to the plan may be allowed to appear in front of the inspector in person.  |
| Stage 8<br>Inspector's report                   | The inspector writes a report of the examination and decides whether or not the plan can be adopted in its current form. If the Inspector decides the plan cannot be adopted, we may be able to ask him or her to suggest changes (or modifications) that would make the plan acceptable. |
| Stage 9<br>Adoption                             | Once the Inspector says that our plan is acceptable (either with or without modifications) it can be adopted.   |

### How will you make sure I can have my say?

We have written a document called the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The SCI says how we will involve you when we prepare our plans. Our SCI was updated in 2012. It is available to view on our website, [www.stevenage.gov.uk](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk), or at our offices in Danestrete.

The diagram above shows that there must be at least two stages of public consultation on a plan before we can send it to the Government to be examined. A variety of methods will be used to make sure you know about these events and can have your say. These might include:

- Making plans available for you to view in our offices, local libraries and on our website;
- Letters to members of the public, businesses and organisations that have asked to be involved with planning matters. There are more than 300 people on our consultation database;
- Press releases and adverts in local papers and in Chronicle, the Council's regular magazines sent to all households in the Borough;
- Holding meetings with members of the public, business and organisations; and
- Using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to ask for your views.

### **How have you decided what to consult upon?**

This consultation identifies the main issues that we will need to deal with in the new local plan. It tells you the options that we are considering and what we propose to do.

It is important to understand that our final choices will not only be based on the results of this consultation. We have to base our decisions on:

- National laws, policies and guidance;
- The findings of evidence studies on a wide range of topics;
- The results of environmental assessments; and
- Feedback from interested members of the public, business and organisations.

The options that we present for some subjects may be more limited than you would like. It is not possible, for example, to say that we will not allow any more development to take place in the future.

It is important that we consult you on the matters where you have a genuine opportunity to influence the outcome.

### **When will this plan be finished and how long will it be used for?**

The timetable for writing the plan is set in a document called the Local Development Scheme (LDS). Our LDS was adopted in September 2012<sup>(1)</sup>. It says we hope to adopt a new plan in June 2015.

Government guidance says that our plans should look at least fifteen years into the future from the date they are adopted. The local plan will cover the period from 2011 to 2031.

### **Do I need to be a planning expert to respond to this consultation?**

No. We have tried to write this document so that as many people as possible can understand it.

If you would like to have anything explained to you in more detail please contact us.

### **What do I need to comment upon and how should I respond?**

This consultation document has been split into a series of topics and issues. For each issue we have tried to explain the options that are available to us, what we would like to do, and why.

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1 It can be viewed online at <http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/>

## About this consultation

### Issue 1

The most important issues and options are shown in a box like this.

We have identified a series of questions throughout the consultation. These highlight the things that we would most like to hear your opinions about.

### Question 1

Each question appears in a box like this.

Some issues tell you what our preferred option is. These will be shown in **bold**. There are some matters where we have not yet decided how to proceed.

If there are any parts of this document you would like to respond to, please tell us if you agree or disagree with what we have said. If you do not agree you should clearly explain why. Any reasons should be genuine planning considerations. Where possible, they should relate to the tests of soundness that the Inspector will use to examine our plan (see below for more information).

You may find it helpful to keep a copy of the comments that you send us.

Any comments that you send us will be public documents. They will be available for other people to see on request. We cannot accept confidential or anonymous comments. We will not reveal personal data such as signatures, email addresses or telephone numbers but we cannot keep your name or address secret.

The deadline for your comments is **5pm on Monday 22 July 2013**. Late comments will not be considered. We will not accept any comments that are offensive, obscene, racist or illegal. We may pass any such material to the police.

### What is a genuine planning consideration?

There are certain things we are allowed to take into account when making decisions about the new local plan. There are also some things we are not allowed to consider.

Examples of genuine planning considerations might include (but are not limited to):

- Loss of privacy or light;
- Traffic, parking and highway safety;
- The effect on a listed building or conservation area;
- National planning policies and the findings of evidence studies;
- Noise; or
- The layout, design and appearance of new developments.

Examples of things that we cannot take into account can include (but are not limited to):

- Any (potential) increase or decrease in the value of your house;
- The loss of a view;
- The financial impact on a business; or
- General assertions or stereotypes that are not supported by facts or evidence.

### What is 'soundness'?

The new Local Plan will need to be examined by an independent Planning Inspector before we are allowed to adopt it. The Inspector will firstly consider whether the plan has met relevant legal requirements. They will also have a list of questions that they will have to consider. These are known as the 'test of soundness'. They are set in a document called that National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

#### National Planning Policy Framework - Examining Local Plans<sup>(2)</sup>

A local planning authority should submit a plan for examination which it considers is “sound” – namely that it is:

- **Positively prepared** – the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- **Justified** – the plan should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence;
- **Effective** – the plan should be deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities; and
- **Consistent with national policy** – the plan should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework

### What will you do with any written comments I send you?

We will write to you to say that your comments have been received.

At the end of the consultation period we will read all of the responses. We will use your feedback to help us write a detailed draft plan. We hope to consult on the draft plan early in 2014.

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## Part I: Introduction and context



## 1 Introduction

### What is planning and the local plan?

**1.1** Planning is about making sure that development happens in the right place at the right time. Development includes things like building new houses or changing a shop into an office.

**1.2** Most new development in Britain needs planning permission before it can be built. We use planning policies to help us decide if we should grant planning permission for new development. Policies might say which sites can be built on and which sites should be protected. They can also say what types of uses developments must contain, or what they should look like.

**1.3** Planning policies for Stevenage are currently set in a document called the District Plan Second Review. This was adopted in 2004. There have been many changes since 2004 and we now need to update and replace our planning policies.

**1.4** The new local plan will need to identify the main issues that are likely to affect Stevenage and set policies to deal with them. It will provide the answers to some important questions:

- How much housing and employment will be needed in the future and where will this be built?
- Is any new land needed for important services like schools and hospitals?
- How will we protect the environment and make sure that everyone can use open spaces near their home?
- How do we reduce our impact on climate change and make people think about the way in which they travel?
- What do local people, businesses and organisations think?

**1.5** By considering all of these issues at the same time, we will be able to produce a plan to meet the future needs of Stevenage. We also need to set out who is responsible for making sure that the ideas in the plan actually happen and say how we will measure if our policies are working.

**1.6** This plan contains three main sections:

- **Part I: Introduction and context** ~ This section explains how the planning system works and why the local plan is important. It provides background information about Stevenage and the wider area. It sets a vision for the future of the town.
- **Part II: Strategic policies** ~ These provide guidance on the main issues that the plan will address. It sets out our overall approach to topics such as housing and employment. These will be the policies that any neighbourhood plans will need to follow.
- **Part III: Detailed policies and delivery** ~ These are the detailed requirements that we will set to make sure that our vision and strategic policies can be achieved.

### Why are you preparing a new plan?

**1.7** There have been a lot of important changes since we wrote the District Plan. These include:

- **Legislation:** This refers to Acts (or laws) that are passed by Parliament and regulations that are written by the Government. They tell us the things that we legally have to do. The 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act changed the way we have to prepare and adopt our

plans. The 2011 Localism Act has introduced more new requirements. The District Plan was written before these came fully into force.

- **Government:** The last General Election was held in 2010. Since then, the Coalition Government has made major changes to the planning system. These have altered how we must plan for the future. It means the Council can decide more things for itself at a local level.
- **National planning advice:** A new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012. This replaced all previous advice into one, much shorter, document. We have to take the NPPF into account when we write our new Plan.
- **East of England Plan:** The East of England Plan was the regional strategy for Stevenage. It was adopted in May 2008 and it said how Stevenage should change in the future. A significant amount of development was planned to take place in and around the town between 2001 and 2021. This included building on land outside the Borough boundary in North Hertfordshire. This plan was scrapped, or 'revoked', in January 2013. North Hertfordshire District Council suspended joint work to plan for development around Stevenage in May 2010.
- **Local Development Framework:** Between 2004 and 2011, we did a lot of work to produce a new set of plans for the Borough called the Local Development Framework (LDF). They reflected the requirements of the East of England Plan. In 2010 we sent the most important part ~ called the Core Strategy ~ to the Government to be examined and approved. However this was found 'unsound' and had to be withdrawn. This was because it needed the co-operation of North Hertfordshire District Council. The Inspector said he could not be certain if the necessary commitment from them was present or if it would ever be.
- **Neighbourhood Planning:** The 2011 Localism Act introduced neighbourhood plans. This is a new type of plan that has to be taken into account when we decide planning applications.
- **Deleted policies:** When the District Plan was adopted in 2004, it was a 'saved' plan. We could use its policies for three years but could only carry on using them after December 2007 if the Secretary of State agreed. The Secretary of State deleted around one-third of the District Plan's policies. These are no longer used to determine planning applications. Some policies were deleted because we were going to use national advice, the East of England Plan or policies in our draft Core Strategy instead. We now cannot use these documents to decide planning applications.
- **Local evidence:** We have carried out a large number of new evidence studies. These have provided us with important and up-to-date information. This includes things like the type of homes that should be built in the future, what facilities are provided in the town's neighbourhood centres and the likely effect of our policies on the environment.

**1.8** Between them, these changes mean that there are a number of topics and areas where new information has become available. Some advice that we have used to make decisions in the past has gone or been replaced.

**1.9** It is now important that we put the right policies in place. This will help us make the best decisions when we are deciding planning applications.

## What is the National Planning Policy Framework and why is it important?

**1.10** The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England. We have to take the NPPF into account when we prepare this plan or decide if we should grant planning permission for new developments.

**1.11** The NPPF says that we should try to meet the development needs of our area. We should identify future housing, business and other requirements and then use our plan to say where and when these will be met.

**1.12** The NPPF provides advice on a wide range of matters. It says we should:

- Do everything we can to support sustainable economic growth;
- Recognise the importance of our town centres and other shopping areas;
- Minimise the need to travel, support reductions in greenhouse gases and reduce congestion;
- Build enough market and affordable housing to meet identified needs;
- Plan positively for high quality and inclusive design;
- Deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities needed by the community;
- Protect Green Belts and only alter them in exceptional circumstances;
- Say how we will meet the challenges of climate change. We should consider issues such as flood risk and water supply and demand;
- Contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment;
- Make sure we can conserve and enjoy the historic environment;
- Base our plans on up-to-date and relevant evidence; and
- Co-operate on planning issues that go beyond our administrative boundaries. This includes deciding whether we should work with other authorities to meet development needs across a wider area.

**1.13** We have considered all of these matters in writing this plan. Throughout this document we have highlighted relevant guidance in the NPPF and shown how this has been taken into account.

### What will happen to the draft plans you have already prepared?

**1.14** Our draft Core Strategy was found 'unsound' in 2011. This was because we could not show that we could deliver the development strategy it set out. We withdrew the draft Core Strategy in February 2012 so that we could start work on this new plan.

**1.15** As well as the Core Strategy, we had prepared a number of other documents. We currently use three of them to help us decide if we should grant planning permission for new developments. These documents are:

- Draft Gunnels Wood Area Action Plan (GWAAP)
- Draft Old Town Area Action Plan (OTAAP)
- Draft Site Specific Policies DPD (SSP)

**1.16** These plans say what we wanted to do with certain areas wholly within the Borough boundary, such as the employment areas at Gunnels Wood and Pin Green. We still think that some of the ideas in these documents would be the best solution. This consultation tells you where we propose to carry forward ideas into the new local plan.

**1.17** We will stop using the three documents above when this new plan reaches the next stage of consultation.

**1.18** We have also adopted our Interim Planning Policy Statement (IPPS). We are using the IPPS to help us decide if we should grant planning permission for new developments while this plan is being prepared. We will also stop using the IPPS when this new plan reaches the next consultation.

### What is neighbourhood planning?

**1.19** The local plan will cover the whole of Stevenage. But local groups can now draw up neighbourhood plans for their local area. Both documents will shape what gets built in local neighbourhoods: both will be used to determine planning applications. Any neighbourhood plans will have the same legal status as the local plan.

**1.20** In Stevenage, new neighbourhood forums would need to be created to write a neighbourhood plan. There can only be one forum in any given area. The forum must have at least 21 people who live or operate a business in the area to be designated. We would need to approve the creation of the forum by checking the application against a set list of criteria.

**1.21** Any neighbourhood plan would include maps and policies. These would say how the local area would develop. This might include identifying land for affordable housing or new allotments or saying which areas are to be protected for wildlife. The length of a neighbourhood plan and the topics it covers would be decided by the neighbourhood forum.

**1.22** Any neighbourhood plan will need to go through a process. This will include evidence gathering, testing options, public consultation, policy writing and checking the plan meets any legal tests. The plan would then be handed over to the Borough Council. It would be independently examined. A local referendum would be held before the plan could be adopted.

**1.23** Any neighbourhood plan must be in conformity with the strategic policies of the local plan (see Part II of this document). But beyond this requirement, the neighbourhood plan can set the policies that it thinks are appropriate. The neighbourhood plan takes priority if it says something different to the detailed policies of the local plan (see Part III of this document).

### What is environmental assessment?

**1.24** Our plans must go through two different processes while they are being written. The first of these is called strategic environmental assessment. This is required by European Law. It makes us consider the likely effect of our plan on the environment.

**1.25** The second process is called sustainability appraisal. This is required by UK law. This makes us think about how our policies might affect our society and economy as well as the environment.

**1.26** We do both of these things at the same time when we are writing our planning documents. We will need to write a number of different documents as the local plan is prepared. When we talk about Sustainability Appraisal (SA), we are referring to both processes and all of the documents

we have written. This is to avoid any confusion. We have written SA reports to accompany this consultation. This has helped us to understand the most important issues facing Stevenage and the likely effects of the different options we are suggesting<sup>(3)</sup>.

**1.27** We tell you about the most important findings of the SA report in this plan. The full SA report is available to view on our website, at our offices in Danestrete and the libraries in the town centre and Old Town.

**1.28** A third process, called Appropriate Assessment (AA), says if our plan will harm certain types of wildlife habitat known as European Sites. We will carry out an AA screening exercise when we draft our detailed plan.

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3 Stevenage Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (Stevenage Borough Council (SBC), 2013); Sustainability Appraisal Report (SBC, 2013)



## 2 Strategic context

### Strategic planning

**2.1** Strategic planning refers to some of the most important decisions that need to be made through the planning system. This includes the number of homes that must be built in a given area. It is setting out which towns or cities should take the greatest share of development in the future, looking at the issues across a wide area and deciding on the best solutions.

**2.2** Until recently, strategic planning for Stevenage was not carried out by the Borough Council. The County Council used to write strategic plans for the whole of Hertfordshire. These were called Structure Plans. They said how much development would take place in each of the ten local authorities in the county<sup>(4)</sup>. The last Structure Plan was adopted in 1998.

**2.3** In 2004, this role was taken over by regional plans. Stevenage was part of the East of England region. This region included the whole of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. The East of England Plan was adopted in 2008.

**2.4** Both the Structure Plan and the East of England Plan said that Stevenage was a place where development should take place. Both plans identified the town for growth. They said Stevenage was a good place to provide housing and jobs to meet the needs of a wider area.

**2.5** The East of England Plan was formally revoked in January 2013. Each local authority became responsible for strategic planning matters in its own area. It is now up to us to decide about the important issues discussed above.

**2.6** However, we cannot plan for the future of Stevenage in isolation. We have to think about areas outside of the Borough. This includes considering how important these areas are to Stevenage and vice versa. It means thinking about the impact different plans will have upon one another.

**2.7** We are also required by law to work together with councils and other bodies. This is known as the Duty to Co-operate. Many important matters cross administrative boundaries. People may live in one authority but work in another. They may go to school in one place but spend their leisure time somewhere else. The Duty to Co-operate means we have to work together to consider how best to meet the needs that this creates.

**2.8** We have long-established and important relationships with the nine other local planning authorities in Hertfordshire as well as the County Council. We take part in regular meetings where planning issues are discussed. However, there are no longer any rules about which authorities have to work together. This means we can think about the best way to plan on matters that cross boundaries. It means we can decide who are the most appropriate bodies with which to do this.

### Strategic context

**2.9** Stevenage is around 30 miles to the north of central London in the county of Hertfordshire. It lies in an area which is one of the major drivers of the national economy.

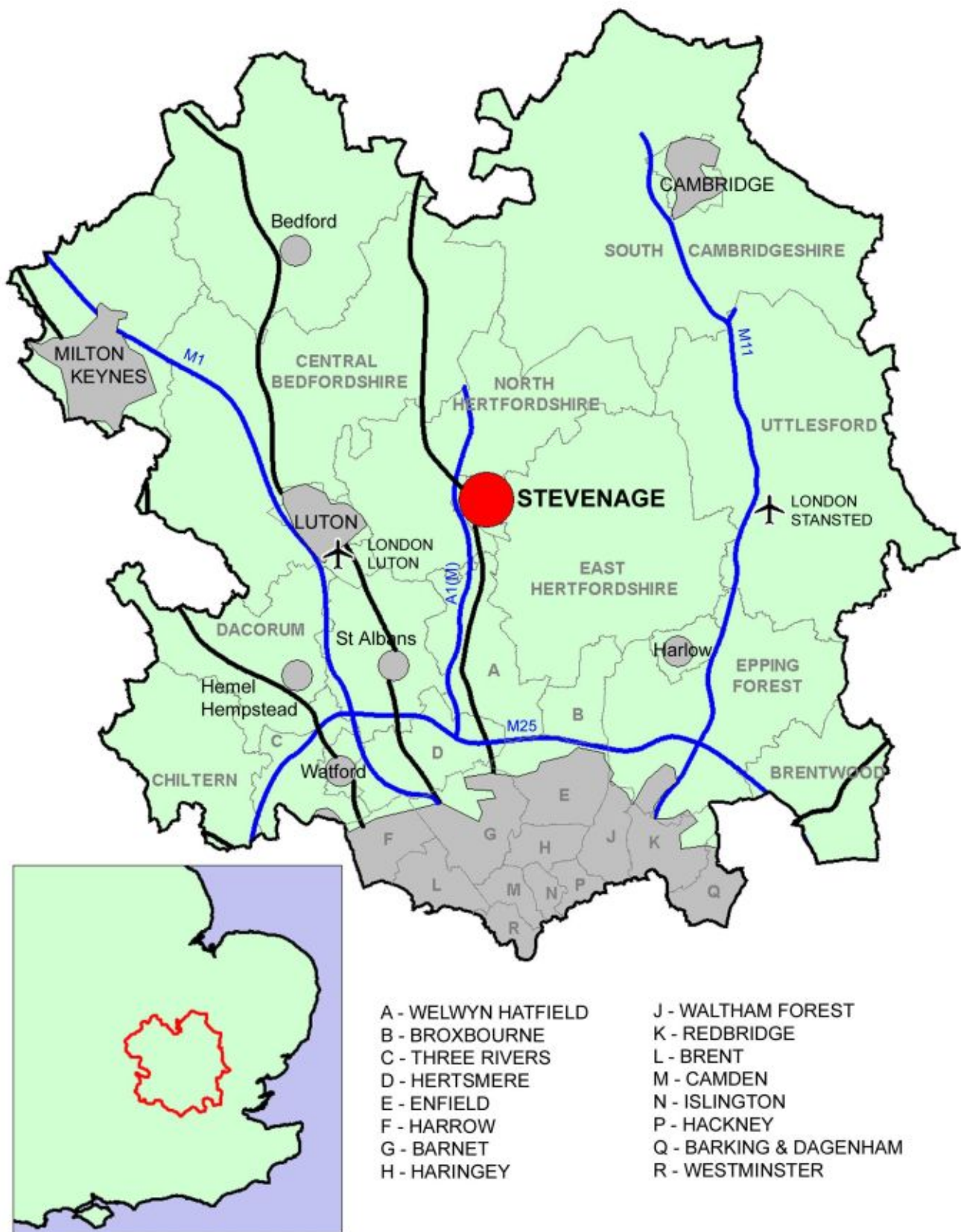
<sup>4</sup> The ten local planning authorities in Hertfordshire are Broxbourne, Dacorum, East Hertfordshire, Hertsmer, North Hertfordshire, St Albans, Stevenage, Three Rivers, Watford and Welwyn Hatfield.

**2.10** Nearly six million people live within 25 miles of the Borough. This area covers the northern boroughs of London and all of Hertfordshire. It also includes parts of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, and Essex. The map on the following page shows Stevenage in this strategic context.

**2.11** Hertfordshire itself does not have one, dominant population centre. Instead there are a number of historic market towns, garden cities and new towns. Larger urban areas such as Milton Keynes, Luton and Cambridge lie outside of the county but within this area of influence.

**2.12** This area shares a number of common characteristics<sup>(5)</sup>:

- Average house prices are high. This is partly driven by the fact that more people move into the area than move out. It is partly because of how close we are to London.
- People generally move from the south of the area to the north.
- House prices are lower further away from the capital.
- Homes cost many times more than average wages. Most authorities have significant housing waiting lists that have grown in the last five years.
- The amount of money that people earn, along with the levels of qualification they have, is higher than the national average.
- There is an emphasis on service industries along with clusters of 'high-end' sectors. These include pharmaceuticals and advanced manufacturing.
- Commuting patterns generally run in the opposite direction to home moves. People live further north and travel south. All areas see significant commuting flows to central London. Certain towns and cities provide a strong local 'pull' from their surrounding area.
- Transport connections from north to south are strong. This is because the main road and rail routes radiate out from the capital. Links from east to west are generally less well developed.
- There are good connections to mainland Europe and beyond. There are two major airports at London Stansted and London Luton. Continental train services run from St Pancras International in central London.
- Transport connections, particularly by road, to international entry and exit points outside of this area are reasonable. This includes links to Heathrow Airport and the major east coast ports at Felixstowe and Harwich;
- There is a limited supply of easily developable land. This is due in part to the Metropolitan Green Belt around London. This extends from the northern suburbs of the capital beyond Luton, Stevenage and Harlow. There is a smaller Green Belt around Cambridge.
- Although this picture is generally affluent, there are areas of deprivation and under-performance. This is particularly the case in centres such as Harlow, Luton and Milton Keynes. Areas of suburban London are among the most deprived in the country.



### Strategic context

## What does this mean for Stevenage?

### Issue 1: The role of the sub-region

*We have not identified specific options for you to choose from. However, we would still like to hear your thoughts on this matter.*

**2.13** Our evidence shows that, within Hertfordshire, our strongest relationships are with our near neighbours of North Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield. We also have important links with East Hertfordshire. There are significant interactions in terms of both housing and employment.

**2.14** We also have important connections with authorities outside of the county boundary including Central Bedfordshire. Our links are strongest with towns along the A1 and East Coast Mainline railway. This means places such as Biggleswade, Sandy and, to a lesser extent, St Neots.

**2.15** There are also consistent trends of people moving to Stevenage from local authorities in north London. The strongest links here are with Enfield and Barnet. This is perhaps partly due to Stevenage's New Town origins. The New Town began by providing homes for parts of the capital that had been bombed or were being cleared. Many people living in Stevenage still have family and cultural ties with the area.

**2.16** Our connections with these areas are stronger than with some other parts of Hertfordshire. This is particularly the case with the south-west of the county and authorities such as Three Rivers and Watford. These areas have relationships that are concentrated along other transport corridors such as the M1 and West Coast Main Line.

**2.17** Within the wider area discussed above, we have identified a smaller number of authorities with whom we believe our connections are greatest<sup>(6)</sup>. These are shown below as 'core authorities'. There are a number of further authorities with whom our connections are not as strong, but are still significant. These are shown below as the 'outer core authorities'.

| Core authorities   | Outer core authorities   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>STEVENAGE</b></li> <li>• Central Bedfordshire</li> <li>• East Hertfordshire</li> <li>• North Hertfordshire</li> <li>• Welwyn Hatfield</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barnet</li> <li>• Broxbourne</li> <li>• Enfield</li> <li>• Hertsmere</li> <li>• Luton</li> <li>• St Albans</li> </ul> |

<sup>6</sup> Based upon analysis of house moves, commuting flows and infrastructure connections, see Supporting Technical Information (SBC, 2013).

**2.18** We are most likely to need to co-operate with the councils and other bodies that are responsible for these areas. We will need to make sure that our plans work together to provide the homes, jobs, facilities and infrastructure that are required. However, this list is not exhaustive. There will be organisations in other areas who we will still need to co-operate with on certain matters.

**2.19** In addition to the broader matters identified above, the following issues are likely to be particularly important:

- Balancing housing needs against maintaining the Green Belt and other environmental constraints;
- Considering the impact of welfare changes such as the housing benefit cap. This may result in more families moving out of London and other, more expensive, areas;
- Delivery of any strategic development sites which are next to or cross administrative boundaries;
- Providing sufficient capacity on key transport routes. This includes the A1(M) and the East Coast Main Line; and
- Considering how new development will impact on water infrastructure including both supply and waste water<sup>(7)</sup>.

### **Emerging plans for 'core' and 'outer core' authorities**

**2.20** The Duty to Co-operate is a particularly important issue for Stevenage. The Borough is very small. It is completely surrounded by North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire (see map on following page). This means that the decisions we make and the decisions our neighbours make are closely related. We will have to make sure that our respective plans complement one another so they can be delivered.

**2.21** North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) recently carried out a consultation on how many homes they should build in their area in the future and possible locations for new development<sup>(8)</sup>. This included seven options. Three of these involved development around the edge of Stevenage:

- North of Stevenage: development of up to 1,700 homes on land within NHDC;
- North-east Stevenage: up to 5,700 homes; and
- West of Stevenage: up to 3,100 homes.

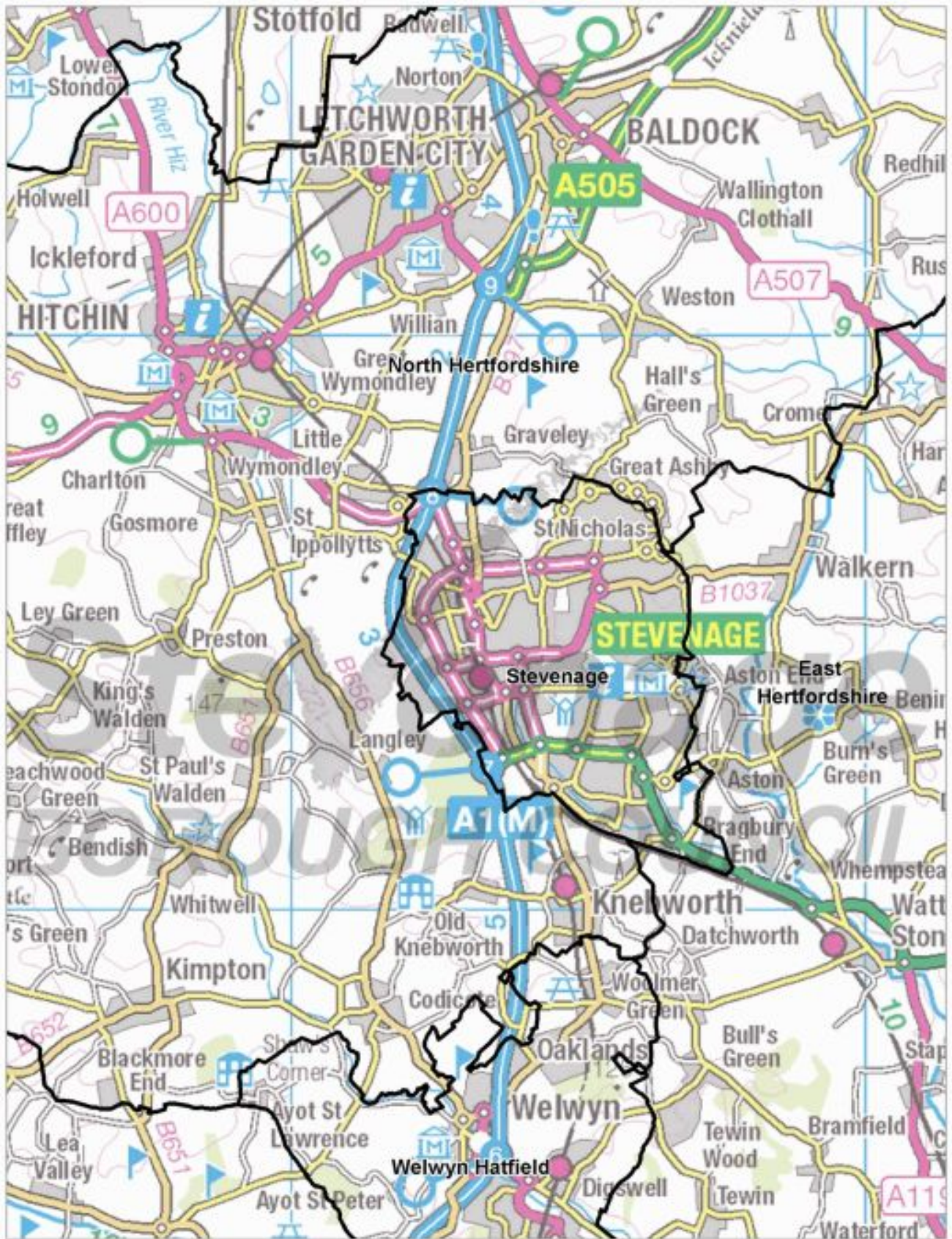
**2.22** At this stage NHDC say that any provision they make around Stevenage would be to meet their own housing needs. They have not yet decided whether any of these options will be taken forward in their own plan. We expect them to make a final decision and carry out their next consultation early in 2014.

**2.23** East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) have not consulted on their plan since the East of England Plan was revoked. This means we do not yet know how much development they want to plan for or whether or not this will involve land around Stevenage. We do know that land around the eastern edge of the town has been promoted to EHDC by landowners and developers.

7 This will also require consultation with other authorities who lie (partially) within the catchment of Rye Meads including Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford.

8 Housing Options Growth Levels and Locations 2011-2031 (NHDC, 2013)





Local context

**2.24** We will also have to consider, and understand, what other authorities are proposing in their plans. This may influence the decisions that we take.

**2.25** Development around or close to Stevenage could provide benefits. These might include new homes for people that want to work and spend time (and money) in Stevenage. It could support schemes within the town that provide growth and regeneration. This could include the town centre. However, it can also lead to more pressure on facilities and infrastructure within the Borough. This might include things such as schools, open spaces and roads.

**2.26** The table on the following page says what the authorities in our 'core' and 'outer core' areas are currently saying they will do in their own plans. It identifies the key issues that affect us.

**2.27** It is important to be clear that we cannot make plans for any areas outside of our own boundary. Although we have a duty to co-operate, it may not be possible for us to agree. The other councils we have identified will make the final decision about any development within their own areas.

**2.28** We have included more information throughout this document where proposals could be affected by our neighbours or other bodies, or require their co-operation. We will continue to talk with our neighbours and other relevant bodies to make sure we can deliver the best plan for the town.

### Question 1

Have we correctly identified those authorities with whom we have most in common? Do you have any further thoughts on how we should try to make the Duty to Co-operate work?

| Local Authority         | Population | Projected new households                                      | Proposed / actual housing target           | Progress with local plan (date of most recent stage) | Key issues affecting Stevenage  |
|-------------------------|------------|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Core authorities</b> |            |   |  |  |   |
| Central Bedfordshire    | 254,400    | 1,590 additional households per year (average rate 2011-2021) | 1,435 new homes per year (28,700 in total) | Publication (January 2013)                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High levels of house moves to and from Stevenage</li> <li>Very high level of travel to work journeys to Stevenage; Moderate level of travel to work journeys from Stevenage</li> <li>Shared strategic road and rail corridors</li> </ul>   |
| East Hertfordshire      | 137,700    | 770   | Unknown                                    | -  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High levels of house moves to and from Stevenage</li> <li>High levels of travel to work journeys to Stevenage; very high levels of travel to work journeys from Stevenage</li> <li>Adjoining authority</li> <li>Shared road and rail corridors</li> <li>Shared waste water infrastructure</li> </ul> |
| North Hertfordshire     | 127,100    | 650   | 535 (10,700)                               | Preparation (January 2013)                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very high levels of house moves to and from Stevenage</li> <li>Very high levels of travel to work journeys to and from Stevenage</li> <li>Adjoining authority</li> <li>Shared strategic road and rail corridors</li> <li>Potential shared waste water infrastructure</li> </ul>                      |
| Welwyn Hatfield         | 110,500    | 870   | 400 (7,200)                                | Preparation (November 2012)                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High levels of house moves to and from Stevenage</li> <li>High levels of travel to work journeys to Stevenage; very high levels of travel to work journeys from Stevenage</li> <li>Shared strategic road and rail corridors</li> <li>Shared waste water infrastructure</li> </ul>                    |



| Local Authority               | Population  | Projected new households | Proposed / actual housing target        | Progress with local plan (date of most recent stage) | Key issues affecting Stevenage  |
|-------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Outer core authorities</b> |             |                          |   |  |   |
| Barnet                        | 356,400     | 2,840                    | 1,870 (28,000)                          | Adopted (September 2012)                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate level of house moves to Stevenage</li> <li>Moderate levels of travel to work journeys to and from Stevenage</li> <li>Shared rail corridor</li> </ul>                        |
| Broxbourne                    | 93,600      | 300                      | Unknown                                 | -  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate level of house moves to Stevenage</li> <li>Moderate level of travel to work journeys from Stevenage</li> <li>Shared waste water infrastructure</li> </ul>                   |
| Enfield                       | 312,500     | 2,210                    | 730 (11,000)                            | Adopted (November 2011)                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High level of house moves to Stevenage</li> <li>Moderate level of travel to work journeys from Stevenage</li> <li>Shared rail corridor</li> </ul>                                    |
| Hertsmere                     | 100,000     | 550                      | 266 (3,990)                             | Adopted (January 2013)                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate level of house moves to Stevenage</li> <li>High level of travel to work journeys from Stevenage</li> <li>Shared strategic road corridor</li> </ul>                          |
| Luton                         | 203,200     | 1,030                    | Unknown                                 | Preparation (July 2012)                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate level of house moves to and from Stevenage</li> <li>High level of travel to work journeys to Stevenage; moderate level of travel to work journeys from Stevenage</li> </ul> |
| St Albans                     | 140,600     | 530                      | Unknown                                 | Preparation (December 2010)                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate level of house moves to Stevenage</li> <li>High levels of travel to work journeys to and from Stevenage</li> </ul>  |
| Source:                       | 2011 Census | Household projections    | Individual authorities plans / websites |  | SBC analysis  |

## Other plans and programmes for Stevenage

**2.29** The local plan needs to take account of other relevant plans and strategies. This can include documents written by the Council. It also includes documents that have been written by other organisations but will affect Stevenage or its surrounding area. This section contains a brief summary of some of these. There is a full review of relevant plans, policies and programmes in our Sustainability Appraisal<sup>(9)</sup>.

**2.30** The Council's **Corporate Plan** is being reviewed. It will set priorities for the period to 2018. The draft version of the plan identifies three outcomes and six priorities:

| Outcome               | Priorities   |
|-----------------------|--|
| A vibrant town        | Improve the economy and encourage financial resilience |
|                       | Regenerate the town centre and neighbourhood centres   |
| A quality environment | Help people feel safe                                  |
|                       | Provide affordable homes and housing growth            |
| An excellent council  | Deliver value for money                                |
|                       | Putting customers first                                |

**2.31** The local plan will have a key role to play in realising the aims of the corporate plan. It will set the planning framework to deliver the first four priorities in the table above. We will need to ensure that the local plan gives us the best chance to realise these.

**2.32** The **Stevenage Sustainable Community Strategy** is a long-term plan that aims to provide a better quality of life for everyone in the town. It was produced by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The LSP is made up from key bodies with an interest in Stevenage. This includes the Borough Council and representatives from commerce, education, community & voluntary and public sector bodies.

**2.33** The first community strategy was published in 2004. The second community strategy was published in 2007. The vision in this document is:

*to create a town that is prosperous, healthy, clean, green and safe. We want Stevenage to be a town with a strong sense of community in which people are proud to live, work, visit and do business. We want Stevenage to grow in a sustainable way and to be an important regional centre looking ahead and building on its new town heritage.*

**2.34** A new draft community strategy was published in January 2013. Once it has been finalised, it will replace the 2007 version. Eight draft priorities are identified. These are arranged into three themes:

9 Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (SBC, 2013)

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Healthy economy     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the local economy and housing</li> <li>• Increase skills and employability</li> <li>• Address financial education and inclusion</li> </ul> |
| Healthy communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure clean and green spaces</li> <li>• Help people feel safe</li> <li>• Support and encourage volunteering</li> </ul>                            |
| Healthy people      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage healthy lifestyle choices</li> <li>• Support good mental health</li> </ul>   |

**2.35** The third community strategy is due to be finalised in the summer of 2013. The local plan will need to address any land-use implications of the priorities and schemes it sets out.

**2.36** The Council has also written a range of documents that support the community strategy. They focus on particular topics or areas of service delivery. Documents relevant to the local plan include:

- **Affordable Housing Strategy** (2007). This recognises the provision of affordable housing as a key priority and set out our approach to meeting housing needs and dealing with homelessness;
- **Climate Change Strategy** (2009). This recognises that our response to climate change needs to be based on two key principles: mitigation and adaptation;
- **Green Space Strategy** (2010). This sets open space standards for the town and identifies key projects and objectives for the future;
- **Housing Strategy** (2009). This sets four strategic priorities: understand our housing market; future homes and sustainable development; inclusive communities; strengthen the private sector. It includes a target to deliver 150 new affordable homes per year;
- **Regeneration Strategy** (2010). This reinforces the commitment to regenerating the town and neighbourhood centres. It supports growth, inward investment and improvements to the town's image.

**2.37** A number of key documents are produced by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). HCC are the highway authority and authority responsible for education in Stevenage. They are a member of the county-wide LSP. They are also responsible for waste and minerals planning in the town. Key documents include:

- **Hertfordshire 2021: A Brighter Future** (2008). This is the county-level community strategy. It identifies a wide range of high level objectives. Many of these are similar in nature to the priorities in Stevenage's own community strategy.
- **Local Transport Plan** (2011). The third local transport plan for Hertfordshire identifies thirteen key goals. These include ensuring efficient use of the transport network, supporting housing and economic growth and encourage use of alternative modes of transport including walking, cycling and public transport.
- The **Waste Development Framework** (2012) and the **Minerals Local Plan Review** (2007). These form part of the statutory development plan for Stevenage. Any specific proposals in these documents (or their successors) for Stevenage will need to be reflected in the local plan and / or shown on the proposals map.

**2.38** Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are a government initiative. They are led by local authorities and businesses. The role of the LEPs is to drive economic growth and job creation. Stevenage is within the area covered by the Hertfordshire LEP. They recently published a **Plan for Growth** (2013). This included four key objectives:

- To encourage enterprise and business growth and building on our innovation assets;
- To maintain and improve the skills and employment prospects of residents;
- To identify and prioritise the strategic infrastructure required for economic growth; and
- To secure greater investment from business and government in Hertfordshire by improved promotion and advocacy activity.

**2.39** Other key documents to be taken into account include:

- The **Water Resource Management Plans** of water companies responsible for the supply (Affinity) and disposal (Thames) of water in Stevenage;
- **Route Utilisation Strategies** produced by Network Rail along with any major schemes or programmes identified by the the franchise holders; and
- Any other relevant strategies or plans by utilities or infrastructure providers such as the Highways Agency or National Grid.

## 3 A picture of Stevenage

### History

**3.1** The history of Stevenage goes back to prehistoric times. Stevenage grew around what is now the Old Town High Street because of its position on the Great North Road. Small villages developed at Shephall, Letchmore Green, Fishers Green and Symonds Green. Stevenage became an important coaching stop on the road to London.

**3.2** The railway arrived in 1850. By the time the Second World War started in 1939, Stevenage had a population of about 6,000. Most people lived in what is now called the Old Town.

**3.3** Stevenage was designated as England's first New Town in 1946. Lewis Silkin, the Minister for Town and Country Planning, said that:

*“Stevenage will in a short time become world famous. People from all over the world will come to see how we in this country are building for the new way of life.”*

**3.4** Stevenage was followed by a series of New Towns across the country as many large urban areas needed to be repaired or rebuilt following the Second World War<sup>(10)</sup>.



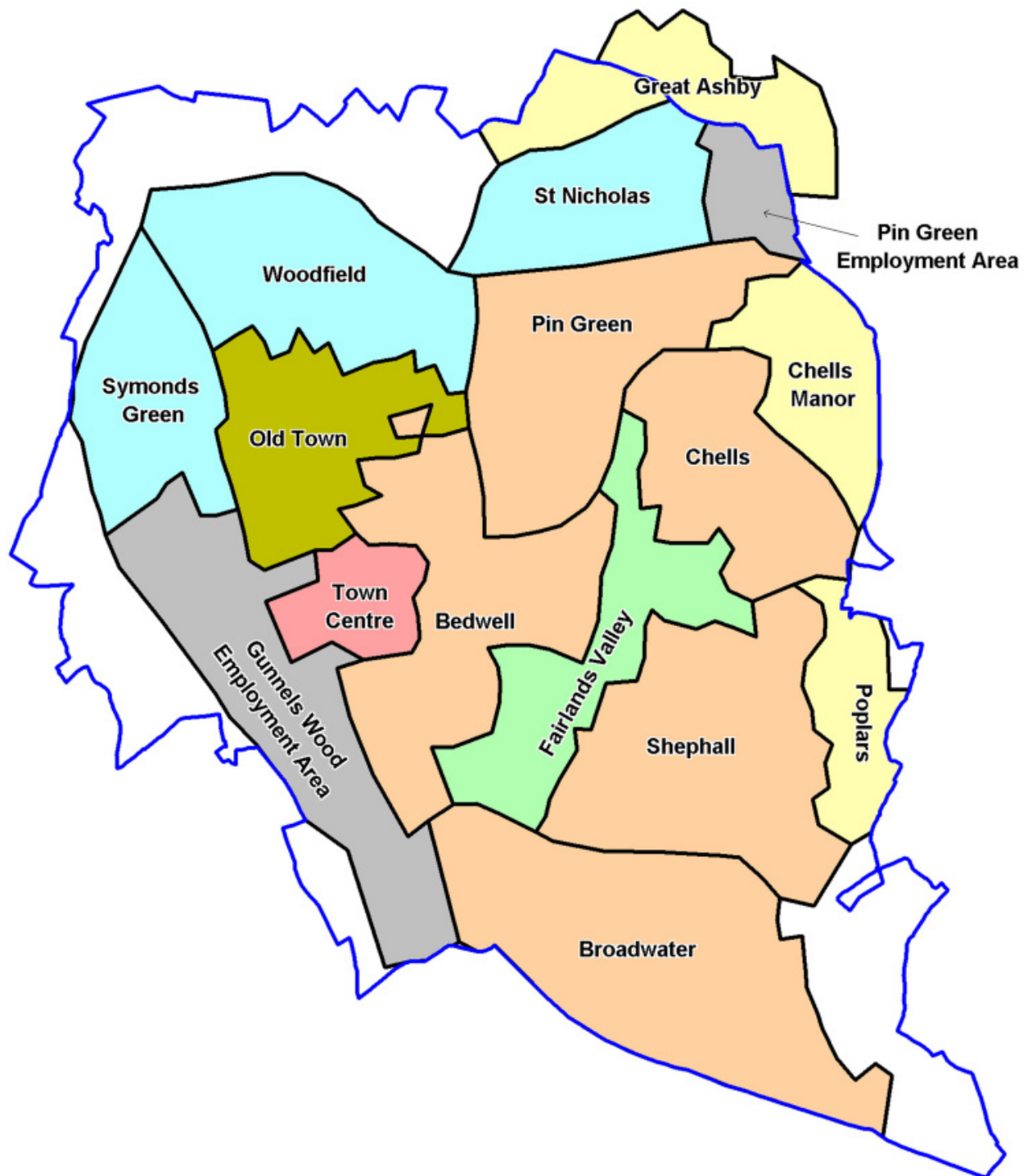
Old Town High Street; New town centre

**3.5** From 1946 until 1980, the planning and growth of Stevenage was overseen by a Development Corporation. The first masterplan was for a town of 60,000 people. The first new homes were built in 1951. Major residential development followed throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The first new factory opened in 1953. The new town centre, to the south of the original High Street, was opened by the Queen in 1959.

**3.6** The Lister Hospital opened in the north-west of the town in 1972. The new town centre railway station opened a year later. Residential development during this decade was focused to the north of the town. In more recent times, the town has continued to grow, mainly to the east and north-east. This has seen the town expand into the neighbouring district of North Hertfordshire.

<sup>10</sup> As well as Stevenage, the first wave of New Towns around London included Basildon, Bracknell, Crawley, Harlow, Hatfield and Hemel Hempstead.

## Stevenage today



Most development during 1950s and 1960s

Most development since 1980

Most development during 1970s and 1980s

Borough boundary



**3.7** Stevenage is divided into distinct land use areas. The town centre, Old Town and railway station are the centre of the town. They are surrounded by individual residential neighbourhoods that contain about 38,000 homes. 4,500 of these have been built in, or on the edge of, the town since the turn of the century<sup>(11)</sup>.

**3.8** Local neighbourhood centres provide shops and community facilities for residents. There are two main employment areas to the west of the town centre at Gunnels Wood and north east at Pin Green.

**3.9** There are a range of leisure facilities, retail parks and supermarkets. Open spaces and play areas are well spread throughout the town. Wide roads and a cycle and pedestrian network link all parts of the town. Stevenage's railway station is on the East Coast Main Line. There are long distance rail links between London and the north. Commuter services connect the town to Kings Cross, Cambridge and Peterborough. There are also trains to London Moorgate and Hertford.

**3.10** The town is connected to Junctions 7 and 8 of the A1(M) which links London, the midlands and the north. The A602 connects Stevenage to Hitchin and Ware while the nearby A505 provides connections between Luton Airport and Cambridgeshire. The urban road network comprises three main north-south routes and four main east-west routes.

**3.11** There is an extensive commercial bus network. Most homes are within 400 metres of a bus stop. It is a short walk from the bus station to the train station.

**3.12** Stevenage is surrounded by the districts of North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire. Beyond the edge of the town is open countryside and villages such as Aston, Codicote, Datchworth, Graveley, Knebworth, Langleigh, Walkern, Weston and Wymondley.

## Main challenges

### Issue 2: Identifying the main challenges

*We have not identified specific options for you to choose from. However, we would still like to hear your thoughts on this matter.*

**3.13** Stevenage does many things well. Gunnels Wood is the largest employment area in Hertfordshire. All of our neighbourhoods have local shopping and community facilities. There are large areas of open space while the cycle network is as good as anything you might find in a European town.

**3.14** However, there are also areas where our town could do better. Through our evidence gathering, monitoring and environmental assessments we have identified the key challenges that we should address:

11 These figures include homes in North Hertfordshire District at Great Ashby. These form part of the urban area but they are outside of the Borough Council's administrative control. See Supporting Technical Information (SBC, 2013)

### Geography

- The Borough is 'underbounded'. The urban area extends beyond the local authority boundary. Recent neighbourhoods have been built partly in neighbouring North Hertfordshire District.
- Stevenage does not have the types or amount of brownfield land to build on that you might find in other towns. This is because most of the town was built in the last fifty years.
- Stevenage is surrounded by Green Belt.

### Population

- People living in Stevenage earn less than people living elsewhere in Hertfordshire and are employed in lower grade jobs.
- Stevenage is the most deprived district in Hertfordshire. There are some areas of serious deprivation, particularly in the Bedwell neighbourhood.

### Image and aspirations

- Some development designs and layouts that were innovative and exciting in the 1950s are now criticised for encouraging crime, anti-social behaviour and other problems.
- Many people opposed the creation of a New Town at Stevenage. This negative perception of the town still exists today.
- Aspirations are low. Many pupils leave school at 16. There are low levels of progression into higher education or higher earning jobs.

### Housing

- There is a serious lack of affordable homes. More than 7,500 households are on our housing waiting list. The average terraced home costs seven times the average salary.
- The Development Corporation mainly built homes for 'blue collar' working families. More than half of our housing stock is terraced homes. Only 12% of homes are detached. There is a lack of more expensive homes to attract high earners.

### Employment

- There is a lack of high quality office space in or around the town centre.
- There are many towns nearby where people may choose to work or companies might choose to (re)locate in preference to Stevenage.

### Retail

- The town centre badly needs investment. It struggles to compete with surrounding towns. It is not 'fit for purpose' in the 21st Century.
- The amount of shopping floorspace outside of the town centre is larger than the amount inside. There is increasing pressure to allow traditional 'high street' retailers to move out of centre.
- Many neighbourhood centres require investment.



### Health

- Life expectancy is lower than the Hertfordshire average. The proportion of adults who smoke is significantly higher than average.
- Death rates from cancer are high. One in four adults is obese.

### Built fabric

- Most of the buildings in the town were built between the 1950s and 1970s. Some of the public and community buildings now need investment or renewal.



**Uniform housing in Chells; Canterbury Park is mainly laid out for sports and recreation**

### Education and skills

- Stevenage residents have fewer qualifications than the Hertfordshire average.
- Less than one in every four Stevenage residents is qualified to NVQ Level 4 or above<sup>(12)</sup>. This compares to one in three across the rest of Hertfordshire.
- There is a mismatch between skills and jobs. Residents earn less than people who work in the town. Higher paid jobs are held by people who commute in from elsewhere.

### Environment

- There are many open spaces in the town but some urban spaces are of poor quality and are not well used by the public. Many of our designated parks are in fact recreation or sports grounds.
- There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest immediately adjacent to the Borough boundary at Knebworth Woods.

### Transport

- The A1(M) narrows to two lanes between junctions 6 and 8. This section has a significantly worse accident rate than the three lane sections to the north and south. There are frequent peak hour tailbacks. Road congestion is also getting worse on some local roads.
- Trains are full at peak times while the cycle and pedestrian network is underused.

<sup>12</sup> NVQ Level 4 is equivalent to a HNC qualification.

**3.15** Overall Stevenage is less prosperous, less successful and is regarded as less desirable than other Hertfordshire towns.

### Drivers of change

**3.16** Drivers of change are the things happening in the wider world that influence how we solve our problems. It is difficult to predict all future drivers of change. For example, 20 years ago fewer people had personal computers or the internet. 10 years ago it was much easier to buy a house. The best we can do is to make sure that our plans respond to the things that we know about and are flexible enough to deal with any unexpected changes.

**3.17** Some of the drivers of change that we need to think about are identified below.

#### Population

- The population is getting older because people are living longer.
- The average household size has been falling as more people live alone.
- More houses would be needed even if the population stayed the same.

#### Housing

- The Government sees the provision of new homes as a key priority.
- Access to mortgages has become increasingly difficult. More people are now renting homes instead of buying. The average age of people buying their first house is rising.
- There may be some need to 'trade' housing between authorities under new planning rules.

#### Employment

- The type of work we do and the way we work are changing. Manufacturing is being replaced by technology and services. Working hours are more flexible.
- We are close to London. Changes in the City affect commuters that live in this area.
- After a period of relative stability in the period to 2008, unemployment doubled during the economic downturn and recessions and has yet to return to previous low levels.
- Inflation means that the cost of living is rising faster than people's wages.

#### Retail

- The number of people shopping through the internet is growing.
- Supermarkets are becoming bigger and selling a wider range of items.
- Many high street chains and stores have gone bust in the last five years.

#### Education and skills

- The County Council planned to introduce fewer, bigger secondary schools in the town. This project was scaled back but changes are still being made.
- The Government wants to introduce changes to the ways in which pupils are examined at both GCSE and A-Level.



**The recessions have affected the town centre; Major changes at the Lister Hospital**

### Health

- Healthcare is being provided in different ways. Doctors will be increasingly responsible for commissioning the services they need.
- Emergency health services for north and east Hertfordshire have been centralised onto the Lister Hospital site in north Stevenage.

### Environment

- People are becoming more aware of the threat of climate change. We will need to find ways of addressing this. One option is to use renewable energy such as the sun or wind.
- Over time, new homes will need to be more energy efficient.

### Transport

- The number of people who own a car is much higher than it was twenty years ago.
- Congestion on the roads, rising fuel costs or schemes such as road charging may change how people make their journeys.

### Political

- Political change may result in new planning policies or priorities. This could be at the national, county or local level because of elections.

## Question 2

Do you think we have correctly identified the main issues and challenges for Stevenage? Are there any other issues or challenges that you think we should be talking about?

## 4 Vision and objectives

### A vision for the future

#### Issue 3: A vision for the future

*We have not identified specific options for you to choose from. However, we would still like to hear your thoughts on this matter.*

**4.1** It is important that our new plan establishes a vision for the future of the Borough. This will set out how the town and its surrounds will look by the end of the plan period in 2031. National guidance says we should work with neighbourhoods, local organisations and businesses to set a vision and a set of priorities for our area.

**4.2** It is difficult for us to produce a detailed vision for you to comment on at this stage. This is because we have yet to hear about your views or make a final decision on the issues that are discussed in this document. The choices we make about our strategy for the town will be a strong influence on our vision and objectives.

**4.3** We will also need to be guided by other plans and strategies written by the Council (see Chapter 2). A vision for the town is also set out in our Interim Planning Policy Statement:

*"A prosperous town with vibrant communities and improved life chances" - draft Corporate Plan, 2013*

*"Stevenage: a prosperous town with vibrant communities and healthy people" - draft Community Strategy, 2013*

*"Stevenage will be prosperous, healthy, clean, green and safe. It will be a place where people are proud to live, work, visit and do business" - Interim Planning Policy Statement, 2012*

**4.4** We can use the vision statements in this document as a starting point for the new local plan. Once we have considered these along with the findings of our evidence studies and the results of this consultation we can start making the choices that will shape how Stevenage will change in the coming years.

**4.5** We will develop a detailed draft vision and a set of objectives. These will be included in the next consultation on this plan. This will provide you with the opportunity to have your say.

#### Question 3

What do you think should be included in our vision? How do you think Stevenage should change by 2031?



## Part II: Strategic Policies



## 5 Strategic Policies

**5.1** Strategic policies will be a very important part of the new local plan. They will be used to set out the big decisions such as the amount of development that will take place and the broad locations where this will be. Our strategic policies, here in Part II, will set the framework for all planning decisions we take in Borough.

**5.2** The NPPF says that strategic policies should deliver:

- The homes and jobs needed in the Borough;
- The provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development;
- The provision of infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and the provisions of minerals and energy (including heat)
- The provision of health, security, community and cultural infrastructure and other local facilities; and
- Climate change mitigation and adaption, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape.

**5.3** The more detailed policies set out in Part III of the plan will need to conform with, and help to deliver these strategic policies.

**5.4** Under the Localism Act 2011, the Government has established a mechanism for local people (not the Borough Council) to draw up plans for their local area. We have published a detailed step-by-step guide to this process, which is available on our web-site<sup>(13)</sup>. Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the local plan. They should plan positively to support those policies. To support local neighbourhood groups, we will construct our strategic policies carefully, to ensure that they provide both adequate guidance and enough freedom for neighbourhood plans to make informed, relevant local choices. We are, for instance, contemplating the setting of ward-level housing targets as a strategic policy, as well as identifying individual housing allocations as detailed policies, in the next version of this plan.

**5.5** We will set out our local plan so that it broadly reflects the structure of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). We hope this will make it easier for applicants and decision-makers to use. Our proposals are set out under the following headings:

- Sustainable Development;
- A strong, competitive economy;
- A viable town centre;
- Transport and infrastructure;
- High quality homes;
- Good design;
- Healthy communities;
- The Green Belt;
- Climate change and flooding;
- The natural environment; and
- The historic environment.

13 'Planning in your Neighbourhood', [stevenage.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/66360/](http://stevenage.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/66360/)

## Sustainable Development

**5.6** Sustainable growth is the main aim of the planning system. This means getting the balance right between:

- Our economic role in supporting a strong economy;
- Our social role in providing necessary housing and services; and
- Our environmental role in protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment.

**5.7** The NPPF says our plan should positively address the issue of sustainable development. This is both in the broad senses set out above, and also in relation to the local issues we have identified (see Chapter 3). It says we should plan to meet development needs, and be flexible to change, unless specific circumstances suggest otherwise<sup>(14)</sup>.

### NPPF Model policy

#### Issue 4: NPPF model policy

*We have not identified specific options for you to choose from. However, we would still like to hear your thoughts on this matter?*

**5.8** The NPPF says that plans should contain clear policies that will say how sustainable development will be delivered locally. The Planning Inspectorate have published a model policy. They suggest that this is a good way for local plans to show they will meet the general expectations of the NPPF. It is shown below:

#### **National Planning Policy Framework - Presumption in favour of sustainable development**

When considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework.

It will always work proactively with applicants jointly to find solutions which mean that proposals can be approved wherever possible, and to secure development that improves the economic, social and environmental conditions in the area.

Planning applications that accord with the policies in this Local Plan (and, where relevant, with policies in neighbourhood plans) will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the Council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise – taking into account whether:

14 As set out in paragraph 14 of the NPPF



- Any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole; or
- Specific policies in that Framework indicate that development should be restricted.

**5.9** Local authorities are being encouraged to include this text as a policy in their new local plans. The Planning Inspectorate have already said that the words above are a good way for plans to show they will meet the requirements of the NPPF. It is very unlikely that an Inspector would object if we included this.

**5.10** However, you may have some alternate views. You may not think that this policy is required<sup>(15)</sup>. You may think that we should make some changes. We would be interested to hear any views you may have.

**5.11** Our SA has tested the broad effects of including the NPPF model policy in our plan, not including it or making some changes. It tells us that that all three options perform well in encouraging sustainable development. Not including the policy, or making changes, could allow us to respond better to local issues.

#### Question 4

Should we include the model policy that is being suggested by the Planning Inspectorate in our new Local Plan? Are there any changes that you think we should make?

**5.12** The new plan will also contain a strategic policy on Sustainable Development. This will set out the broad principles that we will take into account when we decide whether or not to grant planning permission.

**5.13** We have not set out specific options for this policy in this consultation. This is because its contents will be determined by the decisions we make about all of the other issues that are set out in this document.

**5.14** We will include a draft policy in the next version of this plan to make sure that you can have your say.

<sup>15</sup> We are already required to take the policies in our plan and national guidance into account when making decisions. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 says that planning applications must be decided in accordance with the local plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Government guidance, such as the NPPF, is recognised as a material consideration.



## A Strong, Competitive Economy

**5.15** In planning, employment land usually refers to areas that are set aside for offices and industry. These are known as 'B-class' uses and include:

- B1(a) - offices
- B1(b) - research and development
- B1(c) - light industry
- B2 - general industry; and
- B8 - Storage and distribution<sup>(16)</sup>.



**The Business Technology Centre in Gunnels Wood; Offices in the Old Town**

**5.16** Within what Government allows us to control, we can use policies to say whether all, some or none of these uses will be allowed in different areas.

**5.17** Stevenage is an important place for doing business. Around 48,000 people work here. Just under half of these are jobs in B-class uses. Gunnels Wood is the largest employment area in Hertfordshire. It is home to a number of international companies. A second area at Pin Green provides several thousand jobs. Stevenage is a successful economy. However, we are also aware of a number of challenges:

- The town centre, in particular, contains a number of vacant offices. These are not considered 'fit for purpose' and are unlikely to come back into use;
- The amount of employment floorspace that has been lost over the last ten years is higher than the amount that has been built;
- Other centres with better access to London and the M25 are seen as more attractive; while
- Local companies do not have a problem finding workers to fill vacancies. Local residents can find it difficult to secure appropriate jobs within the town<sup>(17)</sup>.

**5.18** The local plan will need to set out a clear economic strategy. This will need to:

- Say how many, and what type, of jobs we want to provide in the future;

16 Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Order 2010

17 Stevenage Employment & Economy Baseline Study (Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners (NLP), 2013)

- Identify our approach to existing employment areas and premises;
- Allocate any sites that are required to meet future needs; and
- Set out how we will deal with proposals for employment uses outside of these areas.

**5.19** The strategic issues below deal with the first of these points. More detailed options and questions on the other employment matters are set out in Chapter 6. Taken together, your responses will help to set our overall approach to employment.

### The relationship between homes and jobs

#### Issue 5: The relationship between homes and jobs

- Prioritise jobs over homes and / or seek higher levels of self-containment
- Seek a reasonable balance between new homes and jobs**
- Prioritise new homes over jobs and / or seek lower levels of self-containment

**5.20** Jobs in Stevenage can be filled in one of two ways:

- By local residents who live in the town; or
- By people who live outside the town and commute to Stevenage as their place of work.

**5.21** The original masterplans for Stevenage intended that the town would be self-contained and balanced. This meant:

- Encouraging people to live and work in the town (self-containment);
- Delivering a suitable number of jobs in relation to the amount of homes being built; and
- Providing the types of jobs that matched residents' skills and qualifications (balance).

**5.22** During the 1960s, around 8 out of every 10 working residents were employed within the town. This figure has been gradually falling ever since. It is now estimated that around 6 out of every 10 working residents are employed in Stevenage<sup>(18)</sup>. The remainder travel elsewhere to their jobs. Destinations include places such as London or Welwyn Garden City. Around 8,000 more people travel to work in Stevenage than leave the town to work elsewhere. This adds to pressure on transport networks. We need to consider how we take these concepts forward over the period to 2031.

**5.23** These trends and changes are driven by wider factors that we cannot control. This includes increases in personal car ownership and house prices. However, we can also see that our level of self-containment is lower than nearby towns such as Harlow, Luton and Bedford.

**5.24** People are free to choose where they live and work. We cannot make them do both in Stevenage if they do not want to. What we can do is seek to encourage or discourage the creation of new jobs and therefore self-containment through the amount and type of employment development that we plan for.

18 Supporting Technical Information (SBC, 2013)

**5.25** We also need to consider that Stevenage is a small, constrained Borough. The town is already larger than the area which the Council controls. There will only ever be relatively small amounts of land available for new development. Because of this, we need to carefully consider what the best balance of land uses across the town should be. It may be necessary to prioritise certain land uses to give us a greater chance of successfully tackling the key issues we have identified.

**5.26** Finding land for new homes and new jobs will be among the biggest issues that the local plan has to address. The relationship between the two will be a significant influence on how the town changes over the period to 2031. In May 2013 the Government altered the rules that control changes of use between one use and another, in particular allowing Class B1 office uses to become Class C3 residential without the need for express planning permission. Whilst this change is now permitted development in most of the Borough, there are parts of Gunnels Wood in which planning permission is still needed for this change.

**5.27** Prioritising either jobs or homes will unavoidably limit the amount of land that is available for the other. This will especially be the case if we pursue a strategy that says we will give priority to maintaining the full current extent of the Green Belt in the Borough (see Issue 26).

**5.28** Our employment evidence has considered a range of possible scenarios. These look at the number of B-class jobs that might be provided in the future. They tell us how much new land we may need to provide for employment development. A summary of these results is shown in the table below<sup>(19)</sup>. We have also shown how these relate to the options we are consulting upon.

| Scenario            | New 'B-class' jobs 2011-2031 | Land required (net) | Most closely relates to... |
|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Past take-up (high) | 6,300                        | 47 hectares (ha)    | Option a                   |
| Higher enterprise   | 1,620                        | 22ha                | Option b                   |
| Labour supply       | 1,280                        | 30ha                |                            |
| Baseline            | 960                          | 21ha                |                            |
| Past take-up (low)  | -2,500                       | -6ha                | Option c                   |

**5.29 Option a** would see us prioritise economic growth and jobs, rather than new homes. If we carry on building new employment floorspace at the same rate as in the past, we might expect more than 6,000 new B-class jobs to be created over the lifetime of the plan<sup>(20)</sup>.

**5.30** The NPPF says we should support sustainable economic growth. Making jobs the highest priority would support this aim. We would identify a large amount of new employment land for development. We could use some sites for employment development that might otherwise be needed for housing.

19 Data source: Stevenage Employment & Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013). Please refer to this study for more information about these scenarios and their results.

20 This scenario is based upon gross completions. It excludes any demolitions or losses of employment floorspace.

**5.31** Option a could help us reverse past trends. We would provide jobs at a significantly greater rate than we provide new homes over the lifetime of the plan. This could increase levels of self-containment. It might create more opportunities for people that live in the town to also work here.

**5.32** However, there are difficulties with this approach. There is no guarantee that the new jobs we provided would be the 'right' jobs for people that live in the town (see Issue 6 on skills below). It could actually result in more commuting, both in and out of the town. We would also need to think about what this approach would mean for the number of new homes we would be able to build. This is an important consideration (see Issue 9).

**5.33** There would be less land available for new housing under this option. This would especially be the case if we decided that we should give priority to maintaining the full current extent of the Green Belt in the Borough. A lower housing target would make it less likely that we could support other projects that might improve the image of Stevenage. This might include any improvements to the town centre. It may be difficult to attract more new businesses to come here if there isn't market confidence in the town as a whole.

**5.34** This approach would also require very high rates of new employment development. It would rely on the fact that very few existing sites would be redeveloped for other uses. However, we know that this has not been the case in the past (see option c).

**5.35** **Option b** would attempt to strike a reasonable balance between new homes and new jobs. This would continue the thinking that has underpinned Stevenage since the New Town was developed.

**5.36** Our evidence has considered three scenarios that might broadly allow for this to happen. However, it also recommends that we should plan for at least 1,600 new B-class jobs to be created over the lifetime of the plan. A significantly higher target might be appropriate. This would depend on economic conditions and our aspirations. The projections in our evidence have been influenced by the state of the economy and uncertainty about what might happen in the future<sup>(21)</sup>.

**5.37** These figures might all support a housing target in the region of 6,000 new homes over the plan period (see Issue 9). We would need to identify between 20 and 30 hectares of new employment land through the local plan. Some of the options for achieving this are set out in Chapter 6.

**5.38** Option b is our preferred approach. It would continue the self-containment model that has been used to plan for the growth of Stevenage over the last fifty years. We think that balancing homes and jobs provides the best opportunity to make positive improvements to the town as a whole.

**5.39** **Option c** would see new homes being made a higher priority than new jobs. Over the last decade, the amount of employment floorspace in Stevenage has fallen. This is due, in part, to the redevelopment of large industrial sites such as British Aerospace in Gunnels Wood. It is also due to the permanent loss of employment sites to other uses. The best example of this is the redevelopment of the former Dixons warehouse site into the Chrysalis Park residential area.

21 The long-term average is for 135 new B-class jobs to be provided in Stevenage. This is equivalent to 2,700 new B-class jobs over the plan period.





**A number of employment sites have been cleared or redeveloped**

**5.40** Option c would plan for this trend to continue. It would assume that these large-scale redevelopments would continue to come forward. Our evidence shows that this approach might allow us to release around six hectares of employment land. This would most likely be used to provide new homes. This approach could make a valuable contribution to the housing target we choose (see Issue 9). This would especially be the case if we decided that we should give priority to maintaining the full current extent of the Green Belt.

**5.41** This approach could result in less commuting to Stevenage. This may help to relieve capacity on the A1(M). We know that this is a significant issue that we will have to deal with through the local plan (see Chapter 8).

**5.42** However, we do not support this approach. The evidence shows that option c could result in the loss of 2,500 valuable B-class jobs from the local economy. It would most likely result in more local residents having to travel to work outside the town. It could result in increased unemployment, if people could not find suitable new job opportunities. This approach would run counter to the way in which the New Towns were designed and built. The Borough Council is strongly opposed to an approach which would be likely to result in these things happening. We think it would be bad planning.

**5.43** Our sustainability appraisal indicates that option b would perform the best. Prioritising jobs or homes (options a and c) would have positive impacts on economic and social indicators respectively. However, they do not perform as well against other elements of the assessment.

### Question 5

Should we continue the New Town model of balancing homes and jobs? Is it time to take a different approach?

## Skills

## Issue 6: Skills

- a. Allow the free market to decide what types of jobs are provided in Stevenage
- b. Focus on highly-skilled and professional jobs
- c. **Make sure we provide an appropriate range of jobs to meet the rising skill levels of all residents**

**5.44** We also need to consider whether we want our future strategy to concentrate on a relatively narrow range of sites, uses and skills or whether we would actually want to provide more opportunities.

**5.45** Our evidence tells us that there are two distinct markets for skills and labour in Stevenage:

- The market in which firms in the Borough seek labour, which is working well; and
- The market in which residents seek work, which is working much less well<sup>(22)</sup>.

**5.46** People that live in the town consistently earn less than the people that work in the town. This broadly suggests that more senior, higher paying jobs in Stevenage are more likely to be held by people that live outside the town and travel to work here.

**5.47** This is not a particular issue for local companies, as they are able to attract labour from a wide surrounding area. However, it is an issue for local people. Education and skills levels, although rising, are below county and national levels. There is a below average amount of residents employed in high skilled or high earning jobs.

**5.48** We need to consider how to best approach this issue in the new local plan. We have identified three possible options.

**5.49** **Option a** would let the free market decide what jobs were provided. We would not make any effort to match the types of jobs being provided with the skill sets of local residents.

**5.50** In reality, this would probably result in more highly-skilled and professional jobs. It would rely on the types of scheme that we have seen over the last ten years ~ such as the Bioscience Catalyst and the offices at the Arlington Business Park.

**5.51** Our evidence shows that, without intervention, most new jobs that will be created in Stevenage by 2031 will require degree-level qualifications or higher. This reflects the type of jobs that a number of the companies in the town already provide. It shows that sectors of the economy which rely on high levels of skills and knowledge are likely to grow and will allow Stevenage's economy to remain competitive over the lifetime of the plan<sup>(23)</sup>. This option would be most likely to require around 20ha of new employment land. This is because the 'baseline' and 'higher enterprise' scenarios in the above table both assume that job growth will be driven by economic trends, rather than by the skills of local people.

22 Stevenage Employment & Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

23 Stevenage Employment & Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

**5.52** Under option a, we would not set any particular policy direction through the local plan. We would identify sites for a range of B-class uses and let the market decide what should be built.

**5.53** Under **Option b**, we would seek similar outcomes to option a. However, our policies would say what types of new employment development would be allowed.

**5.54** We would need to reserve more than three-quarters of new employment land for B1(a) office or B1(b) research and development uses to support growing, high-skilled sectors of the economy. We would allow B1(c), B2 and B8 industrial and warehousing uses to be developed on the remaining land<sup>(24)</sup>.

**5.55** Neither of these approaches would be likely to meet the future employment needs of Stevenage's residents. Although we welcome and support the types of scheme mentioned above, they do not necessarily provide the best opportunities for people who live in the town.

**5.56** **Option c** would make sure we delivered sites and land for a full range of employment uses and job types.

**5.57** Raising the skill levels and aspirations of our residents is a key priority (see Issue 25). However, under options a and b, it is predicted there could still be a significant oversupply of local residents with lower levels of qualifications by 2031. There would still be job opportunities for these people. However, there would be fewer job opportunities, and competition for those jobs would be greater<sup>(25)</sup>.

**5.58** If we do not take positive steps to address this, more residents may have to commute outside the town to find work. Unemployment could rise.

**5.59** Under option c we would need to make special efforts to attract, retain and support certain types of businesses. These would be sectors that might otherwise be expected to shrink or make up a smaller amount of employment in the future. It would help us provide jobs that more closely match the rising skills of local people.

**5.60** Our evidence suggests that industrial employment ~ in use classes B2 and B8 ~ is expected to fall in the future. Option c would see us attempt to slow down this trend. Many of the companies in Stevenage's industrial areas are in these sectors. They provide important job opportunities and they include businesses such as small manufacturing or distribution operations.

**5.61** We would need to identify appropriate locations where these types of jobs could be accommodated in the future. We would need to reserve more than half of any future employment land for B1(c), B2 and B8 industrial and warehousing uses. The remainder would be reserved for offices or research and development.

**5.62** Option c is our preferred option. We think it is vital that we try to give local people the best chance to secure jobs appropriate to their skill levels, albeit that they continue to rise. However, we also appreciate that this approach will require a higher level of employment development. The

24 These splits are based on the land requirements identified for the 'baseline' and 'higher enterprise' scenarios in the Employment and Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013).

25 Employment and Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

labour supply scenario above assumes that future employment will continue to supply the types of jobs that people are doing now. It suggests that around 30 hectares of new land might be required.

**5.63** This is more employment land than would be required if we focused upon the 'high-end' sectors and trend-based growth of options a and b. This would have implications for the number and type of sites we identify for employment development in the future (see Chapter 6).

**5.64** We would also need to do more to encourage higher levels of skills and education among our residents. We only have limited formal responsibility here. Hertfordshire County Council is the local authority responsible for education in Stevenage. Higher education is provided by other organisations such as North Hertfordshire College. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 11.

**5.65** Our sustainability appraisal supports us identifying option c as our preferred approach. It considers that this will lead to the most sustainable outcomes.

### Question 6

Do you agree with the overall strategy we have suggested? Or should we plan for more people that live in Stevenage to commute elsewhere for their jobs?



## A Viable Town Centre

**5.66** The NPPF is clear that we should plan positively for town centre development. The local plan should set out a network of centres where retail, leisure and office development will be concentrated. We should aim to support our centres, especially where they face particular challenges or decline. Town centre development broadly include uses in the following classes<sup>(26)</sup>:

- A1 - shops
- A2 - financial & professional services
- A3 - restaurants & cafes
- A4 - drinking establishments
- B1(a) - offices
- C1 - hotels
- D1 - non-residential institutions<sup>(27)</sup>; and
- D2 - assembly & leisure

**5.67** The town's retail offer is concentrated in four main areas:

- The town centre;
- The Old Town High Street and Leisure Park;
- The town's retail parks; and
- The neighbourhood centres

**5.68** Our strategic retail policy will set out, in broad terms, our key aims for these areas. It will identify any new sites for development. It will identify a retail hierarchy for the Borough where the majority of any future provision should be made.

**5.69** The first three of these areas are described in more detail below. Our strategic issue considers how we should distribute future new comparison floorspace between these locations. Further information and the question of how to distribute future new convenience (food) shopping floorspace is set out in Chapter 7 of this document (see Issue 13).

**5.70** Within Stevenage, the term 'neighbourhood centres' traditionally describes all of the locally available shopping facilities. Our potential approach to these is set out in Issues 14 and 22 of this document.

### Stevenage town centre

**5.71** Despite being seen as unfashionable and the economy being in the middle of a prolonged recession, Stevenage town centre is today quite healthy in terms of low vacancy rates and continued interest from retailers in locating in the town. However, our town centre stores trade markedly less well than stores in other centres. We should not, therefore, be complacent.

26 A full definition of main town centre uses is set out in the NPPF

27 Insofar as this use class relates to arts, culture and tourism development

**5.72** Levels of car ownership in Stevenage are higher than the national average. People today are willing and able to travel significant distances for comparison shopping if they wish. Comparison shopping includes more expensive items like clothes, books or furniture that are not bought on a day-to-day basis.

**5.73** Stevenage could, in theory, be vulnerable if a competing town centre provided a more attractive shopping experience. It could lure away people that currently shop in the town centre. However, our research shows that Stevenage town centre offers the type of shopping demanded by much of the town's population. It enjoys high levels of loyalty from local customers.

**5.74** The town centre is dominated by mid-range and value retailers. These meet the needs of the majority of the town's population. Competing towns are not targeting this market. Consequently it is likely that the town centre will be relatively resilient to challenges from other towns.

**5.75** Outside the town, Stevenage is not attracting more affluent shoppers living in surrounding small towns and villages. They are choosing to shop in other town centres, when it might reasonably be expected that they should be attracted to Stevenage as the nearest large town.

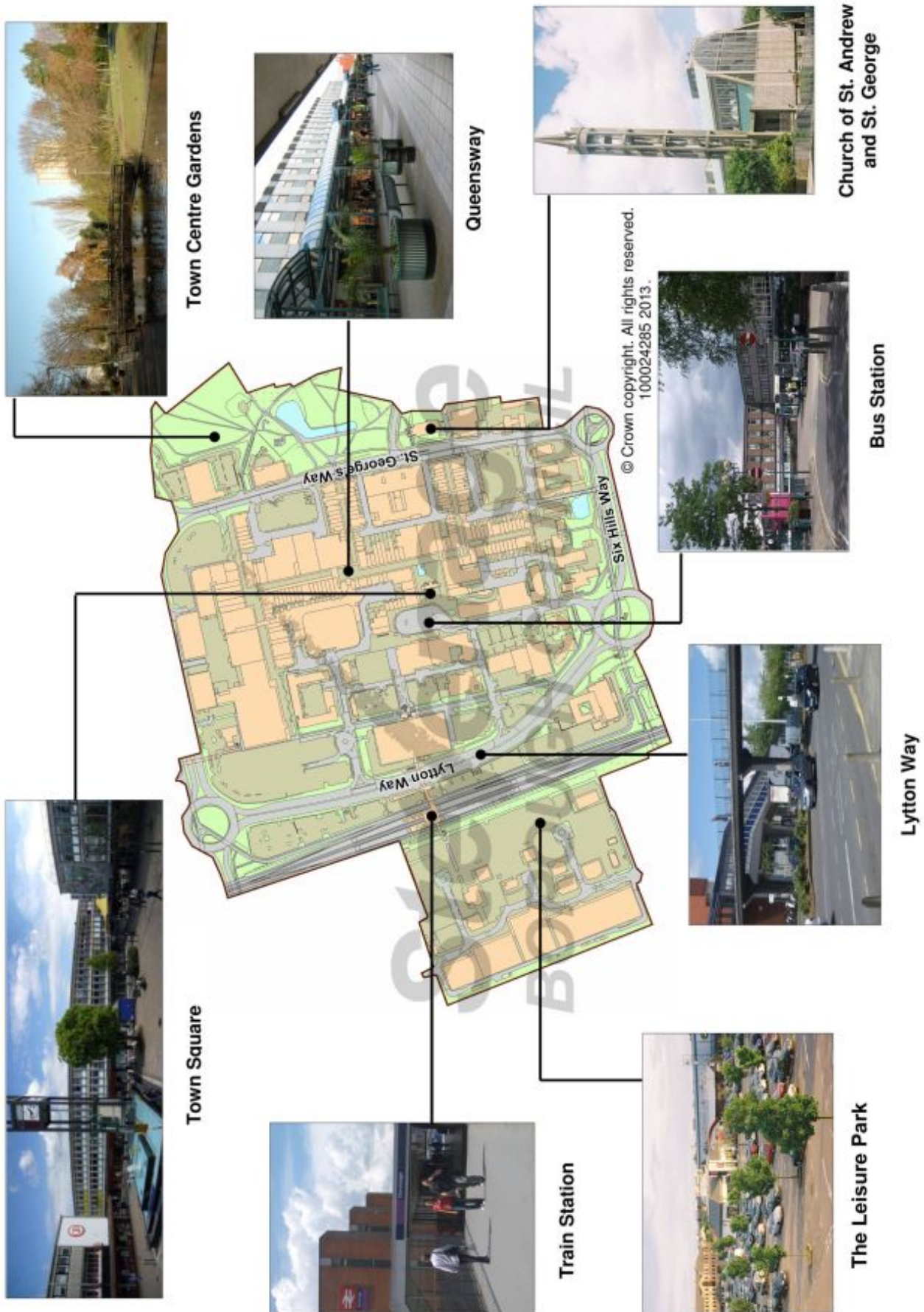
**5.76** This position is unlikely to change without a significant transformation in the town's retail profile. In turn, this is unlikely to happen without a significant amount of new residential development close to Stevenage. This would bring about an increase in demand for more mid-market shops and support a new town centre shopping scheme. In both cases, a critical mass in terms of new shops and resident population would have to be achieved. This is what was lost when the East of England Plan was revoked.

**5.77** All towns have their own characteristics, but Stevenage is unusual. This is due primarily to the design and character of the town centre and the demographic make-up of the Borough. The New Town centre was constructed in a short period in the 1960s and '70s, when it was considered innovative and eye catching. It was built to a deliberately austere style, that is today often considered to be unattractive and unfashionable because of its design, layout and character.

**5.78** This makes it less attractive to shoppers. In particular, to those who drive and can easily reach other centres. It is recognised that the public realm and the shopping environment no longer meet the demands of modern shoppers.

**5.79** The NPPF says that town centres need to be recognised as at the heart of their communities. Councils should pursue policies to support their vitality and viability. The local plan should allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development needed in town centres. This is often referred to as the 'town centres first' policy.

**5.80** If suitable and viable sites within the town centre are not available, appropriate edge of centre sites should be allocated. Only if sufficient edge of centre sites cannot be identified should policies be set to meet the identified needs in "*...other accessible locations that are well connected to the town centre.*" This is often referred to as the 'town centres first' policy.



The town centre and Leisure Park area

### Old Town High Street and the Leisure Park

**5.81** The Old Town High Street is the historic core of Stevenage. Today it forms the heart of a vital and viable Conservation Area. It serves the immediate local community, meeting day-to-day shopping needs. It also attracts visitors from a wider catchment, drawn by bars and restaurants that are not available in the town centre. The Old Town has a historic market-town character, a busy local business sector and a relatively affluent local residential community. These combine to make the High Street an attractive place for a meal or a convivial evening out. We consider that the Old Town is healthy and successful in retail terms.

**5.82** The Stevenage Leisure Park is adjacent to the town centre and the train station. It is an altogether different type of environment to the Old Town. It contains a range of industrial-scale buildings with smaller units pepper-potted around its large surface car park. Nonetheless, it offers a complementary range of commercial leisure facilities that are well used by people from a wide area. The principal attractions are the multi-screen cinema and the ten-pin bowling alley. Around them are a range of bars and restaurants that are not available in the town centre.

**5.83** There is relatively little evidence of linked trips between the town centre, the High Street and the Leisure Park. However, our study tells us that the three act in a complimentary manner. People see all three locations as a part of what Stevenage has to offer. Thus, although they are too far apart to physically act as a single town centre, they act functionally in many people's minds as such.

**5.84** Most of the town's bars and restaurants are located in the Old Town High Street or on the Leisure Park, where they perform well. One consequence of this is that these types of uses are under-represented in the town centre itself. The advice that we have had says there is little value in trying to attract these uses into the town centre, even though it would benefit<sup>(28)</sup>.

### The retail warehouse sector

**5.85** Stevenage has a well developed retail warehouse sector. This includes the retail parks at Roaring Meg, Monkswood, Roebuck and The Firs as well as the B&Q superstore on London Road. The location of these within Stevenage is different to many other towns. They are close to the town centre rather than on the edge of town. They are shown in the map on the following page.

**5.86** Most units are occupied by 'bulky goods' retailers. These are the types of shops found on many retail parks. It includes units that sell furniture or 'white goods' such as washing machines and televisions.

**5.87** However, there has been a growing trend in recent years towards more mainstream comparison retailing. Seven units at Roaring Meg North have the benefit of unrestricted Class A1 (shop) use. This means that they can effectively sell any goods that they wish, although not all of these have been implemented. This form of selling has many attractions to town centre retailers. The buildings are less expensive to build and alter than conventional town centre shops, larger units can more easily be built than in town centres and there is the ready availability of free, surface car parking close to the front door.

28 Stevenage Retail Study (CACI / Applied Planning, 2013)





**5.88** The move towards open A1 consents and less restrictions on the sale of different types of goods is a national one. It has raised concerns about the impact that these changes might have on the vitality and viability of town centres. This is one of the reasons why successive governments over the last twenty years have initiated and maintained a 'town centres first' policy. This is now contained within the NPPF.

**5.89** Our evidence says there is no specific need for additional out-of-centre comparison goods floorspace during the plan period. The exception might be as an ancillary element to any convenience-based stores. In reality this means allowing supermarkets to sell a wider range of goods, such as clothes or electrical items (see Issue 14).

**5.90** We have also been advised to manage the existing portfolio of out-of-centre space. This would be achieved by resisting any proposals to relax or remove conditions that control the types of goods that can be sold. We are minded to accept this advice, subject to the results of this consultation.

**5.91** In many parts of the country bulky goods units have become vacant due to the effects of the recession. Owners are seeking relaxation of user conditions in order to re-let the units. The danger is that if the number of bulky goods units is reduced, pressure could grow in the future for new bulky goods floorspace once the recession ends.

### A retail strategy

#### Issue 7 - The town centre, the Old Town and the retail warehouses

- a. **Allocate all of the predicted new comparison floorspace to the town centre, replace existing small shop units with larger units (especially in places like Park Place and the area of the bus station) and improve the shopping streets and car parks.**
- b. Split the predicted new comparison floorspace between the town centre, the Old Town High Street and the retail warehouses.
- c. Allocate all of the predicted new comparison floorspace to the retail warehouses, either through allowing new units to be built or existing units to be extended

**5.92** Our evidence suggests that any increase in available expenditure to 2031 should primarily be used to improve the retail efficiency of existing floorspace. This would allow existing shops to trade better.

**5.93** There is no quantitative need for additional comparison goods floorspace across the whole of Stevenage Borough until 2026. By 2031 there is a small quantitative need for 4,000m<sup>2</sup> net new floorspace. That is around the same as a new unit the size of Primark (4,300m<sup>2</sup>) in the town centre or Currys (3,800m<sup>2</sup>) at the Roaring Meg North retail park.

**5.94** The new local plan will need to decide where this new floorspace will be provided. We have identified three possible options.



**5.95** It is important to note that this assessment is primarily based on future expenditure within the Borough. Although it allows for expenditure growth outside of our boundary, it does not directly consider any potential development around the edge of Stevenage in North Hertfordshire<sup>(29)</sup> or East Hertfordshire.

**5.96** We would expect any authority proposing growth around Stevenage to model the implications through their own evidence base. We would anticipate that we would be advised of any relevant matters through the Duty to Co-operate (see Chapter 2).

**5.97** **Option a** would accept the advice of our retail consultants. We would identify land in the town centre to allow the full amount of new retail floorspace to be developed towards the end of the plan period.

**5.98** The amount of new floorspace that we need is relatively small. Because of this, a redevelopment of part of the existing town centre would be preferable to an extension to the town centre. This could provide the type of larger shop units that modern retailers want and an improved retail environment. It would avoid the potential for any new floorspace to undermine the viability of existing stores and the town centre as a whole.

**5.99** We may be able to support more new floorspace if any scheme would clearly attract new spending to the town.

**5.100** Any new floorspace is unlikely to be required before 2026. Until that point, we would support schemes that would improve the quality of existing floorspace in the town centre. Ideally this would be through the redevelopment or refurbishment of existing retail areas.

**5.101** We could encourage the enhancement of secondary areas in the town centre. This could include the Market Hall, Park Place and the area around the current bus station. A redevelopment of a part of the centre to replace small shop units with the type of larger shop units that modern retailers want would form a part of this option. There would be little or no net gain in floorspace.

**5.102** We would improve the pedestrianised areas. This would involve investing in landscaping and improved street furniture. Option a would also see an improvement to the quality of some of the town centre car parks, which are often the first impression of the centre.

**5.103** Option a is our preferred option. One consequence of this would be to rule out any (significant) new retail floorspace for the Old Town High Street and for the retail warehouse sector. The alternatives to this are set out below.

**5.104** **Option b** would split the future requirement between the town centre, the Old Town High Street and the retail warehouse sector. We have not yet decided how this split might be made.

**5.105** This approach might be considered to be fairer. However, it might be considered inconsistent with the Government's 'town centres first' policy.

29 As consulted upon in their recent Housing Options Growth Levels and Locations document (NHDC, 2013)

**5.106** The predicted amount of new floorspace is relatively small. Splitting it three ways might lead to no significant competitive advantage for one location over the other. Equally it might result in no increased competitive edge for Stevenage over other towns and other town centres. Although it is a relatively modest total, allowing some of it to go to the retail warehouse sector could potentially put at risk the future vitality and viability of the town centre.

**5.107** Option b would not necessarily rule out the possibility of the town centre environmental improvements identified in option a. However, there would be less opportunity to capitalise on any improved performance of the town centre due to those works.

**5.108** We do not support option b at this stage. This is because it is contrary to the advice in our evidence and the NPPF.

**5.109** **Option c** would allocate all of the predicted new comparison floorspace to the retail warehouse sector. We would either allow new units to be built or existing units to be extended.

**5.110** Although it is a relatively modest total, allowing all new retail floorspace to go to the retail warehouse sector is a risk. By directing growth away from the town centre we could affect its future vitality and viability. It could deprive the town centre of much needed new investment towards the end of the plan period.

**5.111** In one sense, the diversion of new floorspace from the town centre to the retail warehouse sector could be seen as a reflection of the significant role that our retail warehouses play in the overall 'offer' that Stevenage provides. It might, conversely, be seen as a vote of 'no confidence' in the future of the town centre. This could undermine investors' willingness to commit to the town centre. It could spark a cycle of reduced investment and loss of confidence.

**5.112** Option c would not necessarily rule out the possibility of the town centre environmental improvements identified in option a. However, there would be less opportunity to capitalise on any improved performance of the town centre due to those works.

**5.113** We do not support option c at this stage. This is because it is contrary to the advice in our evidence and the NPPF.

**5.114** Our sustainability appraisal supports the choice of option a as our preferred approach. It recognises that this would provide greater opportunities for existing and future residents by focusing activity within the highly accessible town centre. This will support the local economy and could provide further employment opportunities through secondary effects. Options b and c perform more poorly in sustainability terms. These areas, particularly the retail parks, are not as accessible. They would require a number of mitigation measures to make development acceptable.

### Question 7

Where do you think we should provide additional comparison floorspace in the future? Do you agree that we should seek to refurbish or redevelop existing sites in the town centre ahead of new floorspace being required?



## Transport and Infrastructure

**5.115** We need to make sure that any new development is supported by suitable infrastructure. This includes providing any new or improved roads. It also means making sure that new developments have access to key utilities such as water and electricity. Any major infrastructure schemes that are required to support growth will need to be delivered on time.

**5.116** Our strategic policies will say which are the key items of infrastructure that will be needed to deliver our plan. They will say what types of contributions new development will have to make to ensure they are acceptable.

**5.117** We have begun thinking about the infrastructure that we are likely to require for our new plan. We have prepared a draft delivery plan<sup>(30)</sup>. This has been published as part of this consultation and is available to view on our website. It says what improvements might be needed and who would be responsible for delivering them.

**5.118** It is hard to do this precisely at the moment. This is because we haven't decided how much development the plan will support and where it will go. Our thoughts on these matters, and the options for dealing with them, are set out throughout this consultation. Our evidence studies and discussions have already made us aware of some important issues and facts:

- The A1(M) will need to be improved if we are to meet the requirements of the NPPF (see Issue 9 and Chapter 8);
- The road network in the town should be able to cope with minor schemes and changes. This is unless we choose a high housing target and either North Hertfordshire or East Hertfordshire decide to place some development around the edge of the town;
- A review of land and buildings that are owned by the council is being carried out. This will help us to decide which social and community facilities should be retained (see Chapter 11);
- The number of schools and school places available across the town as a whole is likely to be about right for the different housing targets we are considering. However, we need to ensure that these will be in the right place to meet demand (see Chapter 11);
- There are enough open spaces across the town as a whole for the size of population. However, there are both surpluses and shortages of certain types in different parts of the town. More open space may be needed for an increased population (see Chapter 14);
- The sewage treatment works at Rye Meads should be able to cope with the levels of development we are suggesting for a number of years. However, local upgrades to the sewer network will be required to support any growth within Stevenage.

**5.119** We will exercise our Duty to Co-operate and work with all relevant providers as we prepare our detailed plan. We will continue to update the delivery plan as new information becomes available. This will include talking to:

- Utilities providers such as Thames Water;
- The County Council in their roles as highway authority, waste disposal authority and the authority responsible for education;
- Transport companies such as bus and train operating companies;
- The Highways Agency and The Environment Agency.

30 Infrastructure Delivery Plan (SBC, 2013)



**The new local plan will need to make sure transport links and open spaces are provided**

**5.120** The local plan will say what is needed to support new development. We will also need to decide how we collect contributions for this. This will be done separately to the local plan process.

**5.121** Government guidance lets us ask for developer contributions towards infrastructure and services. This can be done by using a legal agreement known as a planning obligation. Any obligation must be fair and reasonable. It should make the development acceptable in planning terms. Planning permission must never be bought or sold through the use of obligations.

**5.122** These obligations are currently known as Section 106 agreements. These are negotiated for individual sites. However, these may be replaced in the future. We are currently considering proposals for a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). This would see us collecting standard charges from new development.

**5.123** It might mean that every new home, or every new non-residential building, paid a standard rate based on how large it was. We are currently carrying out the studies that will tell us how a CIL might work in Stevenage. Any CIL proposals that we produce will be subject to separate consultation and an independent examination before they are introduced.

**5.124** We will set out our draft policy on infrastructure provision in the next version of this plan. This will make sure that you can have your say.

### **Development viability**

#### **Issue 8: Development Viability**

*We have not identified specific options for you to choose from. However, we would still like to hear your thoughts on this matter.*

**5.125** Another key issue that we need to consider is development viability. Viability is a term that is used when working out whether a scheme will generate enough money (known as receipts) to cover the costs of development (such as construction and the buying of land).

**5.126** The NPPF says that new development should provide 'reasonable returns' to a willing landowner or investor. A local plan can introduce a number of additional costs into a new development that we have to consider. These might include:

- Building local infrastructure such as roads or contributing towards more school places;
- Providing affordable homes alongside the houses that are being built for sale; or
- Making homes more energy efficient;

**5.127** We will carry out a new study later in 2013. This will tell us what we can ask for without harming viability.

**5.128** We obviously do not know the results of the study at this stage. However, we may need to reach a compromise between the different demands we have identified above. We might have to do this to make sure that we can guarantee the 'reasonable returns' required by national guidance.

**5.129** Prioritising CIL would give us the best chance of making sure that all necessary new infrastructure could be provided. This might include things like new cycle paths or improved open spaces. However, it could mean that we have to lower our requirements for other matters.

**5.130** Providing affordable homes is a key priority for the Council. In recent years, we have built affordable homes on our own land. This includes projects at Haycroft Road and Almonds Lane on the edge of the Old Town and at Longmeadow Green and Cotney Croft in the New Town.

**5.131** However, most new affordable housing is provided by private developers as part of their own schemes. Prioritising affordable housing could give us the best chance of tackling the very high levels of housing need in the Borough.

**5.132** The NPPF also tells us that climate change is an important issue. Certain measures can be incorporated into new development to reduce energy consumption and / or carbon production. However, some of these methods are not cheap to include in a new building.

**5.133** Our SA tells us what would happen if we prioritise each of these matters. Each approach brings positive and negative effects. Indicators that relate to the prioritised matter score best. However, this is offset by weaker scores against other matters.

**5.134** We have not identified detailed options for you to choose between at this stage. This is because our consideration of CIL is still at a very early stage. We do not currently have enough information to make a fully-informed choice about what our options might be. We also want to deliver the maximum benefits possible through our new plan. We will not compromise on any of these issues unless we have to. However, we would like to hear any views you may have on this matter at this stage. This will help us make a decision when our study is completed. It will inform the next version of this plan.

### Question 8

What steps, if any, do you think we should take to make sure new development in Stevenage can be viable?

### High Quality Homes

**5.135** Housing is one of the key issues that any local plan has to set policies for. Government projections show us that the number of people living in Stevenage will continue to increase. This, along with changes in the ways people choose to live, will continue to drive demand for new homes. The price of housing is a key issue. The number of people on our housing waiting list has trebled in the last decade.

**5.136** Our strategic policy on housing will cover a range of issues. These include:

- A target for the amount of affordable housing that will be provided
- Guidance on the types of homes we will build
- Broad advice on the sites and locations we choose to allocate for development. This will include ward-level housing targets. This is to make sure that there is clear guidance about development that can be taken into account in any neighbourhood plans; and
- Our approach to meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers.



**The local plan will set a target for new homes and identify the sites where these will be built**

**5.137** Further information on all of these matters is included in Chapter 9. This includes the options we have identified for dealing with each issue. The outcome of these issues will be reflected in the strategic policy we write at the next stage of this plan.

**5.138** The new plan will also be responsible for setting a housing target. This will say how many homes will be built within the Borough between 2011 and 2031. Between 2001 and 2011, an average of 230 new homes a year were built in Stevenage.

**5.139** Until recently, the housing target for Stevenage was always set for us in strategic plans (see Chapter 2). It is now up to us to decide how many homes should be built in the future. However, there are certain guidelines that we have to follow in doing this.



**5.140** The NPPF says plans should normally meet the full requirements for market and affordable housing in the housing market area<sup>(31)</sup>. This includes taking account of likely patterns of migration into and out of the area.

**5.141** Before choosing a target, we have to explore a range of reasonable options. This is required by national and European law. It helps to make sure that we understand the likely effects of the option we finally choose.

**5.142** Any target also has to be justified. This means that we can't just make a number up. We have to look at different evidence to see what it tells us about the number of new homes that might be needed in the Borough. We have to explain how we have used the evidence to meet this requirement.

### Borough housing target

#### Issue 9: Borough housing target

| Option                     | Number of homes 2011-31 |                   |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
|                            | Total*                  | Average per year* |
| a: Urban capacity          | 2,800                   | 140               |
| <b>b: Borough capacity</b> | <b>5,300</b>            | <b>265</b>        |
| c: Population led          | 6,600                   | 330               |

\* These targets could go up, down or stay the same when the next plan is produced. This depends on the findings of our evidence and / or new information being made available.

**5.143** We are consulting on 3 different housing options for the future. Based on current information, these would see between 2,800 and 6,600 homes being built over the period to 2031. Options b and c would require development on land outside the edge of the existing town. This is because there is not enough space within the existing urban area to build this number of homes. Option c would require the help of other authorities to build new homes on our behalf.

**5.144** We have looked at a range of evidence to help us develop these options. This includes studies which look at demand for new homes and the amount of land which might become available<sup>(32)</sup>. These numbers may change as the plan is developed and new information is made available. This means that, at this stage, we are consulting about the concept as much as the number itself:

31 Exceptions are only allowed where (i) the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits; or (ii) specific policies in the NPPF indicate development should be restricted. Examples include policies relating to Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Green Belt or Local Green Space.

32 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (David Couttie Associates (DCA), 2013); Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SBC, 2013); Housing Targets Paper (SBC, 2013). The NPPF says that 'SHMAs' and 'SLAAs' should form part of the evidence base for local plans.

- **Option a** would build the maximum number of homes that we could accommodate within the boundaries of the existing town. This could still require some difficult decisions about which sites we built on;
- **Option b** would build the maximum number of homes that we could accommodate within the Borough boundary. This would include developing sites which are currently outside of the town in the Green Belt. It would deliver enough homes to meet Government projections of population and household growth;
- **Option c** would have the same effects as option b but it would also aim to deliver enough homes to stop people from having to leave the town.

**5.145** Please read the more detailed information about each option before you answer this question. This is set out on the following pages. We would also suggest that you read sections on other important matters such as transport, employment and the location of new homes.

**5.146** It is important to be clear that these options do not directly take into account any plans for development around the edge of Stevenage that may be put forward by our neighbours in North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire districts (see Chapter 2). If they do this, we will need to decide what our reaction should be.

### Question 9

Which housing option (a to c) do you think we should work towards? What are your reasons for choosing this level of development? Are there any options that we have not included in this document that we should be considering?



## Option a: Urban capacity ~ 2,800 homes

| Possible advantages of this option  | Possible disadvantages of this option  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No need to identify or develop any new greenfield or Green Belt sites for housing outside of the town;</li> <li>Focuses development within the existing urban area;</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would not meet national policy requirements on housing;</li> <li>Would not provide enough affordable homes;</li> <li>Would not support any significant employment or retail growth;</li> <li>Could require some open spaces within the town to be developed;</li> <li>Would require significant improvements to the A1(M) and its junctions.</li> </ul> |

### Overview

**5.147** Our first option would involve building homes on all suitable sites within the limits of the existing town. This is known as urban capacity. This means using brownfield sites first, in line with national guidance. This figure does include some, mainly small, greenfield sites within Stevenage<sup>(33)</sup>.

**5.148** Our evidence suggests that we could deliver 2,800 homes from sites within the urban area. However, any target higher than 2,500 new homes would currently still rely on:

- More landowners confirming that their sites were available to be used in the plan; and / or
- Finding a way forward on difficult schemes and projects such as development in the town centre or the regeneration of the neighbourhood centres; and / or
- Making some difficult decisions about a larger number of greenfield sites that are within the existing urban area (see Chapter 9).

**5.149** We would not alter the existing inner Green Belt boundary or release land that is currently outside the town for development. There would be no further greenfield or Green Belt development beyond the current edge of the town until at least 2031.

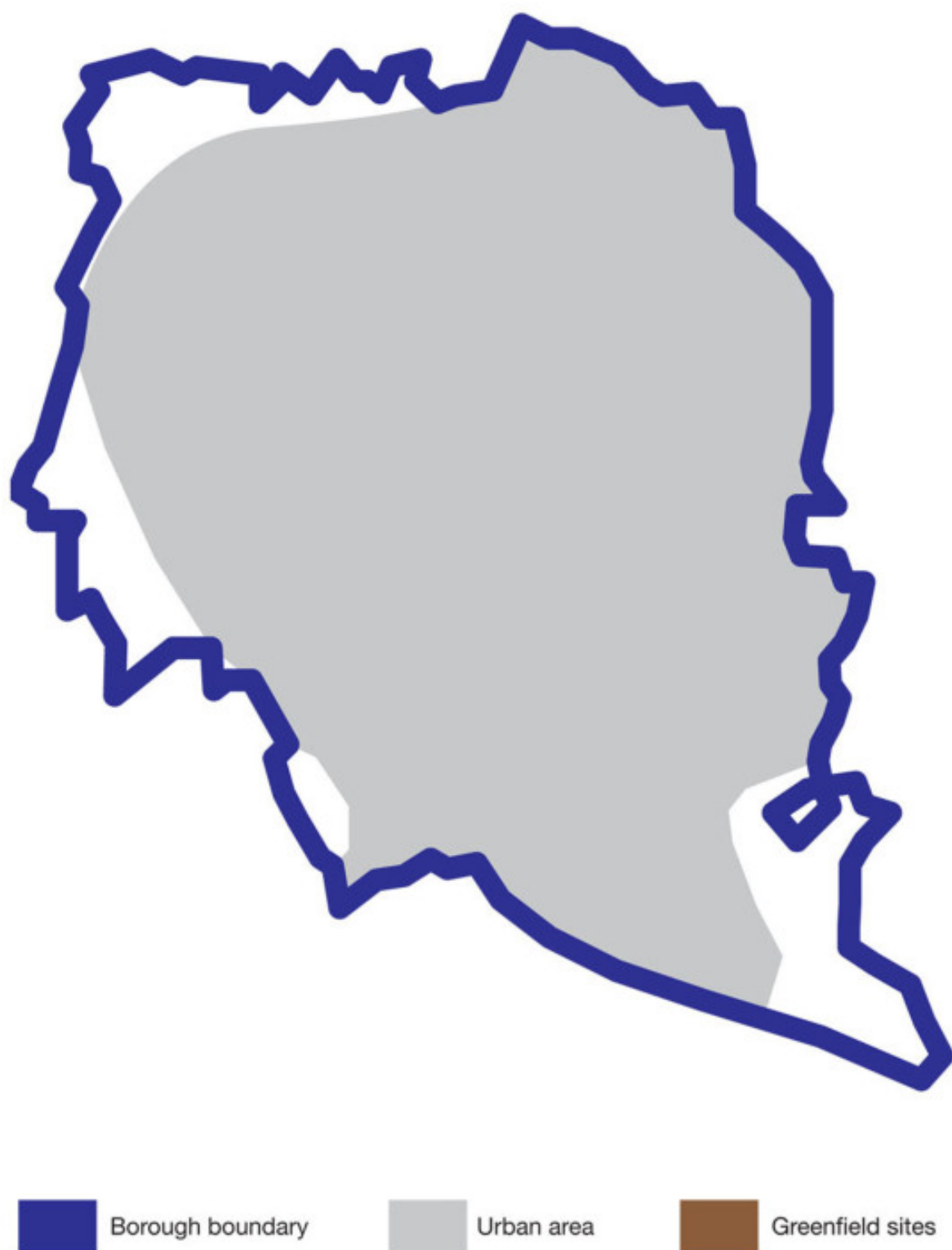
### NPPF housing requirements

**5.150** This option would not provide enough homes to meet the Government's latest household projections. It would not satisfy the requirements of the NPPF in terms of meeting future housing needs. It would deprive Stevenage people of the right to have their own home locally. A large number of new forming households would need to leave the Borough or remain within a shared home.

### Development outside the existing town

**5.151** The NPPF says that the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. They are one of the reasons we can use to restrict development if the evidence says this would be appropriate (see Issue 26).

33 This option of 2,800 homes is lower than the numbers in the SLAA. This is because the SLAA considers individual sites and does not look at cumulative impacts. It is not required to consider the best overall pattern of development. See Supporting Technical Information (SBC, 2013) for more information on how we have reached the figures in this option.



**5.152** A plan based on option a would adopt this position. It would say we could build 2,800 homes without causing unacceptable harm. It would say that the NPPF requirement to meet housing needs does not provide the 'exceptional circumstances' that are required to alter Green Belt boundaries<sup>(34)</sup> to make further provision.

**5.153** We would not use the greenfield land to the west of the A1(M) that has already been removed from the Green Belt. As a result of these choices, there would be no material impact upon the countryside or landscape as a result of housing development.



**Option a would rely on sites within the existing town to meet the target.**

### Delivery

**5.154** This level of development could be accommodated within the Borough boundary. We would not need to approach other councils to take development on our behalf.

**5.155** It would not be possible for North Hertfordshire District Council to plan to build any homes to the west or north of Stevenage<sup>(35)</sup>. The schemes they have proposed here both rely on development taking place within our Borough boundary. This would be needed to provide infrastructure connections. Without complementary schemes in our area, the District Council's proposals would be isolated developments in the countryside.

**5.156** Option a would require an average of 140 new homes to be built each year in Stevenage. This is significantly lower than the average number of homes that have built in the Borough over the last ten, 20 and 30 years. We are very confident that the market could deliver this amount of housing over the plan period.

**5.157** We might be able to deliver around 1,000 new affordable homes. This would meet a small amount of local needs but would be nowhere near enough to meet all future requirements (see Issue 18).

34 As per Policy 83 of the NPPF.

35 Included as options in their recent consultation: Housing Options Growth Levels and Locations (NHDC, 2013).

**5.158** It would be necessary to identify significant improvements to the A1(M). We would need to widen the motorway between junction 6 (Welwyn) and junction 7 (Stevenage south). It is estimated that this scheme could cost around £40m. We cannot guarantee that this will happen as there is currently no approved scheme or funding. There would also be a need for smaller-scale works to junctions within the existing town.

#### Sustainability appraisal

**5.159** Our sustainability appraisal shows that this option would perform well on environmental grounds. This is because it would not propose any large-scale releases of greenfield land. However it would not meet local housing needs. This means the option performs very poorly against social indicators.

#### Conclusions

**5.160** The Council does not support the approach set out in option a. We think that constraining housing supply significantly below identified needs, particularly for affordable housing, means that this is not an appropriate strategy.

## Option b: Borough capacity ~ 5,300 homes

| Possible advantages of this option   | Possible disadvantages of this option  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could be said to meet national policy requirements</li> <li>• Accommodates all housing development within the Borough boundary</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires the release of Green Belt and greenfield sites outside of the urban area.</li> <li>• Would not provide enough affordable homes and assumes people will continue to leave the town;</li> <li>• Would not support any significant employment or retail growth;</li> <li>• Could require some open spaces within the town to be developed;</li> <li>• Would require significant improvements to the A1(M) and its junctions.</li> </ul> |

### Overview

**5.161** The second option would involve building homes on all suitable sites within the Borough. We have called this our Borough capacity. We would still identify brownfield sites first, but we would also use greenfield and Green Belt sites beyond the edge of the existing town<sup>(36)</sup>.

**5.162** Our evidence suggests that we could deliver 5,300 homes from sites within the Borough boundary. However, any target higher than 4,800 new homes would currently still rely on:

- More landowners confirming that their sites were available to be used in the plan; and / or
- Finding a way forward on difficult schemes and projects such as development in the town centre or the regeneration of the neighbourhood centres; and / or
- Making some difficult decisions about a larger number of greenfield sites both within and outside the existing urban area (see Chapter 9).

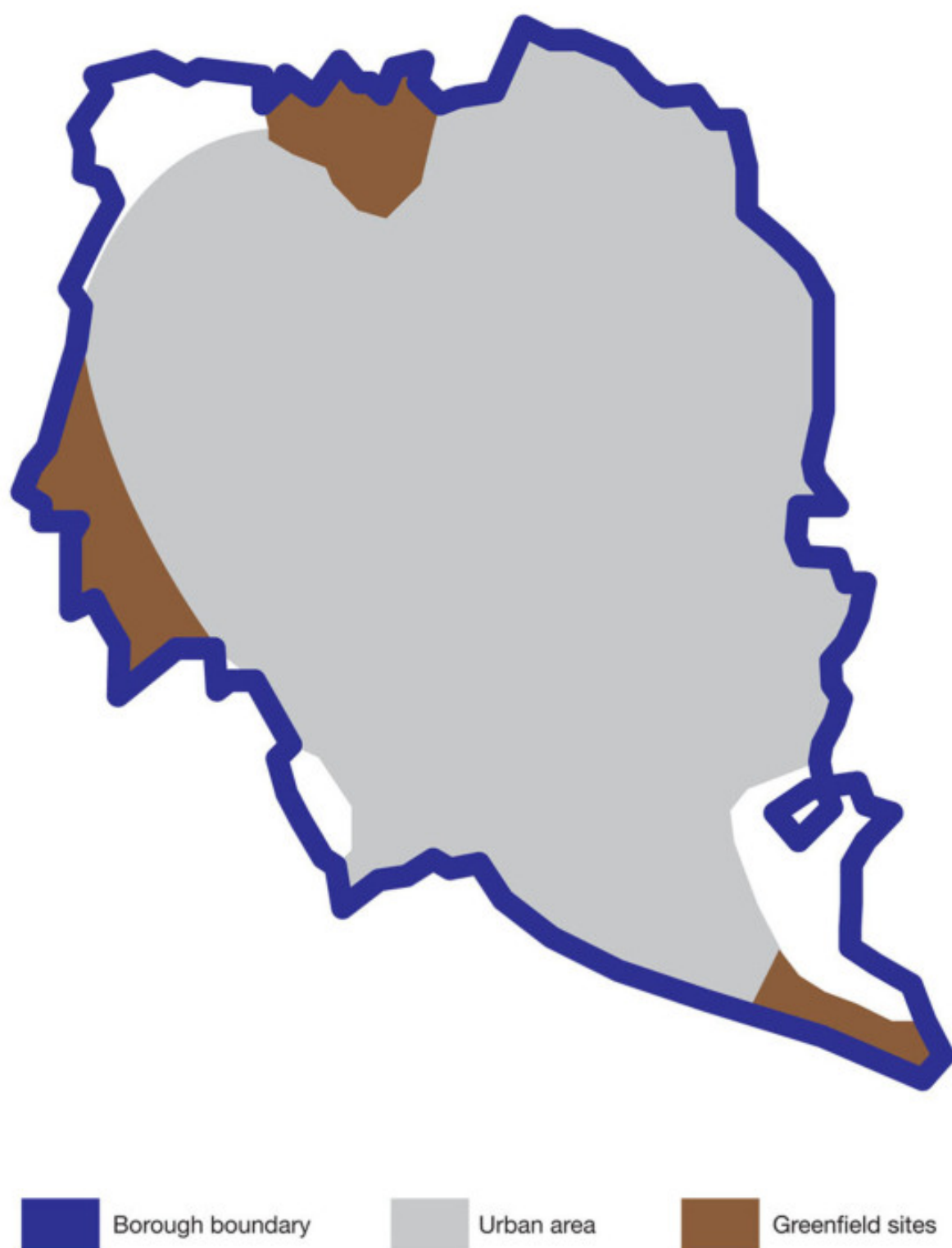
**5.163** We would use sites within the urban area (as option a). However, option b would also use the land to the west of the A1(M) and roll-back the Green Belt to the north and south-east of the town.

### NPPF housing requirements

**5.164** This option would provide enough homes to meet the Government's latest household projections. This means that option b meets the requirements of the NPPF, which says that our housing target should be guided by Government projections. We should take migration into account<sup>(37)</sup>.

36 This option of 5,300 homes is lower than the numbers in the SLAA. This is because the SLAA considers individual sites and does not look at cumulative impacts. It is not required to consider the best overall pattern of development. See Supporting Technical Information (SBC, 2013) for more information on how we have reached the housing numbers for this option.

37 see Housing Targets Paper (SBC, 2013)





### Development outside the existing town

**5.165** The land to the west of the A1(M) within the Borough boundary has already been taken out of the Green Belt. Our evidence says we could not justify putting this land back into the Green Belt as it does not fulfil the purposes identified in the NPPF<sup>(38)</sup>. Under Option b, we would identify this land for new homes and other supporting land uses.

**5.166** We would also review the Green Belt boundary around the town and release land for development. We would say that the future development needs of the Borough provide the 'exceptional circumstances' that are required to alter Green Belt boundaries<sup>(39)</sup>. Sites to the north and south-east of the town would be needed to meet the target.

**5.167** Our evidence says that these areas make a contribution to Green Belt purposes. However, there is also scope for some change in these areas without compromising the overall function of the Green Belt<sup>(40)</sup>. There is capacity for development to the west, north and south-east of the town on landscape grounds<sup>(41)</sup>.

### Delivery

**5.168** A plan based on this target would be NPPF-compliant, meeting in full our housing requirements taking migration into account. It would say that we did not need to make any arrangements with our neighbouring District Councils (or any other local authority) to deliver homes in another area which we could not meet within the Borough.

**5.169** Option b would give North Hertfordshire District Council the opportunity to build homes to the west and north of Stevenage if they decided they wanted to pursue this<sup>(42)</sup>. The schemes we would need to build in the Borough boundary would provide infrastructure that they could connect to.

**5.170** This option would require an average of 265 new homes to be built each year in Stevenage. This is slightly higher than development rates over the last ten years. However, it is lower than development rates over the last 20 and 30 years. We are confident that the market could deliver this amount of housing over the plan period.

**5.171** We might be able to deliver around 1,800 affordable homes. This would meet some local needs but would be less than is required (see Issue 18).

**5.172** Significant improvements would be needed on the A1(M). We would, at minimum, need to widen the motorway between junction 6 (Welwyn) and junction 7 (Stevenage south). It is estimated that this scheme could cost around £40m. This could release capacity for around 4,500 new homes<sup>(43)</sup>. However, the Highways Agency have indicated that they will be flexible about any ceiling placed on development by the lack of government investment in enhancing capacity on the A1(M).

38 Review of the Green Belt around Stevenage: Part 1 - Survey against Green Belt Purposes (AMEC, 2013)

39 As per Policy 83 of the NPPF.

40 Review of the Green Belt around Stevenage: Part 1 - Survey against Green Belt Purposes (AMEC, 2013)

41 Stevenage Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study, Halcrow, 2006

42 Included as options in their recent consultation: Housing Options Growth Levels and Locations (NHDC, 2013).

43 Infrastructure Delivery Plan (SBC, 2013)

**5.173** If we wanted to deliver the full target, we would also need to widen the motorway between junction 7 and junction 8 (Stevenage north). The total cost of widening the motorway between junction 6 and junction 8 could be as much as £175m. This is significantly more than a scheme between junctions 6 and 7. We cannot guarantee that this will happen as there is currently no approved scheme or funding.

**5.174** There would also be a need for smaller-scale works to junctions within the existing town.

#### Sustainability appraisal

**5.175** Our sustainability appraisal recognises that this approach performs better in social and economic terms than option a. This reflects the larger amount of development. However, it performs less well against environmental indicators. This is because we would need to identify a large amount of greenfield land outside of the existing town to be developed on. This option would not address the issue of people leaving the town.

#### Conclusions

**5.176** Option b is currently our preferred option. It would provide enough homes to meet the Government's latest household projections. We would release land from the inner Green Belt to meet development needs. We would use all reasonable and available capacity within the Borough.

**5.177** However, this is subject to further work which:

- Updates the findings of our housing land studies to identify the most suitable sites;
- Carries out more detailed analysis of the latest projections released by the Government and any new information which might change the number of homes we would have to build under this option;
- Helps us to decide whether the amount of greenfield and Green Belt development that would be required is justified by 'exceptional circumstances'.

## Option c: Population led ~ 6,600 homes

| Possible advantages of this option  | Possible disadvantages of this option   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meets national policy requirements;</li> <li>Meets local needs based on past trends;</li> <li>Supports new employment development</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires the release of greenfield and / or Green Belt sites to meet the target;</li> <li>Would not provide enough affordable homes;</li> <li>Would require significant improvements to the A1(M) and its junctions.</li> <li>Could require complex negotiations with our neighbours.</li> </ul> |

### Overview

**5.178** This option would set a target that is higher than our currently identified Borough capacity. We would still need to do all of the things set out under Option b:

- Use previously developed and small greenfield sites within the existing town;
- Develop the greenfield land to the west of the A1(M);
- Alter the inner Green Belt boundary and release land to the north and south-east of the town for new homes; and
- Make significant improvements on the A1(M).

**5.179** However, we would also seek further development beyond this. We would need to find a willing council to build new homes on our behalf. This is because the housing target for option c is larger than the amount of development we think we can fit within the Borough.

### NPPF housing requirements

**5.180** The NPPF says we should take account of migration when calculating our housing requirements. We currently think that option b would provide enough homes to meet this requirement. However, projections for Stevenage indicate that more people will leave the Borough than will arrive. This is quite unusual<sup>(44)</sup>.

**5.181** Providing enough homes to be able to slow down, or stop, this trend might be appropriate. We could plan to balance the number of people moving in and out of Stevenage. We would need to provide 6,600 new homes between 2011 and 2031 to be able to do this<sup>(45)</sup>.

**5.182** We consider this approach would exceed the requirements of the NPPF.

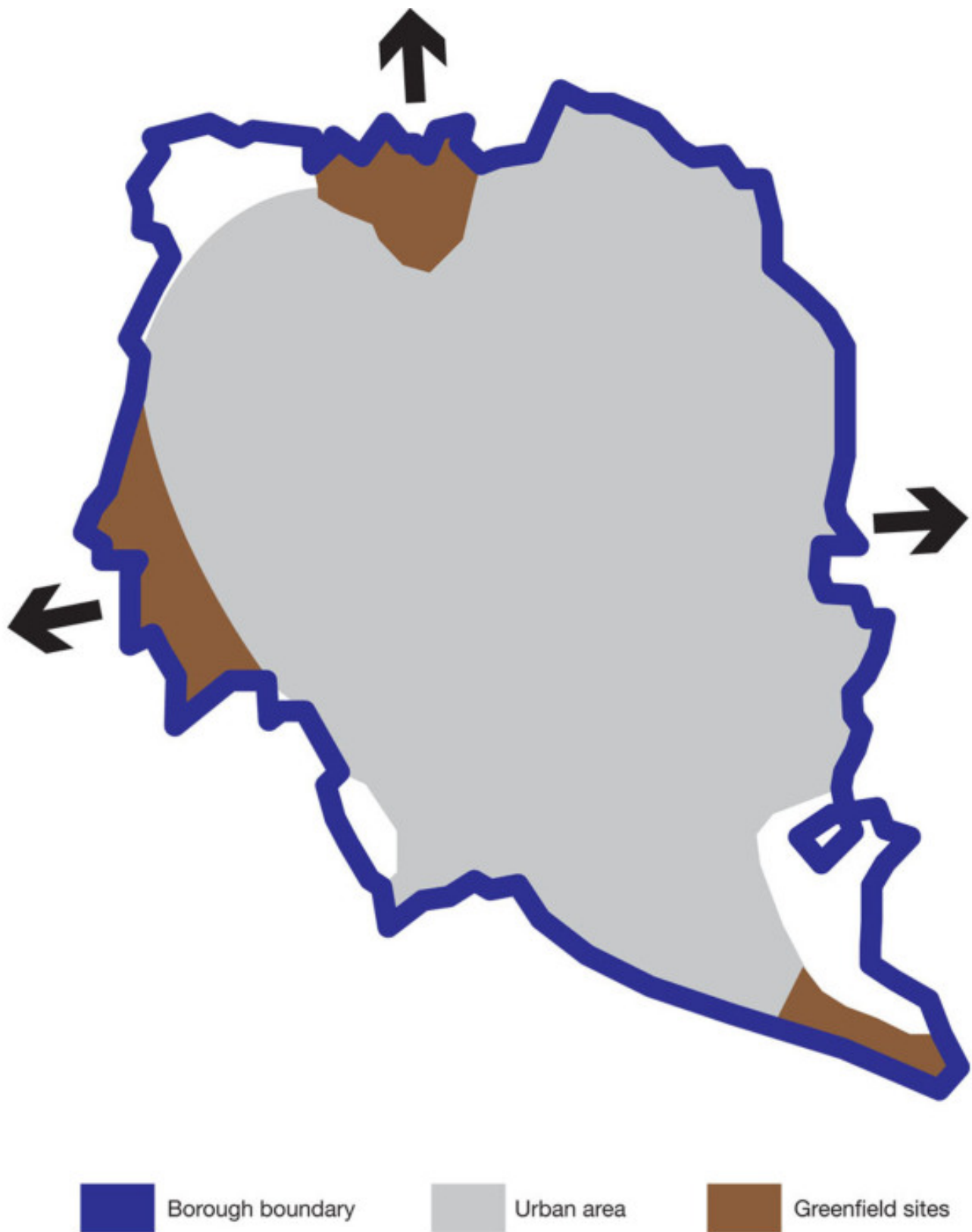
### Development outside of the existing town

**5.183** Under this option, we would still plan to build around 5,300 of these homes within the Borough boundary.

**5.184** This would require us to allocate the land to the west of the A1(M) that has already been removed from the Green Belt. We would also release land on the inner Green Belt boundary to the north and south-east of the town for development.

44 Government projections are based on past trends. In recent years it is estimated that more people have left Stevenage than have arrived. This trend is carried forward and reduces the projected number of new households.

45 Housing Targets Paper (SBC, 2013)



**5.185** The likely implications of this are discussed under option b.

#### Delivery

**5.186** Based on current information, we could not build this number of homes within the Borough boundary. There would be a shortfall of around 1,300 homes<sup>(46)</sup>. Meeting a target of 6,600 new homes would require one or more of the following things to happen:

- A significant number of new or unexpected development sites coming forward within the Borough when we review our evidence later in 2013; and / or
- Reaching an agreement with another Council to make up the shortfall. This might be in an area next to Stevenage. It might be further away. In either case, another Council would need to agree to build new homes to meet the needs of Stevenage and say this in their own local plan. We would try to reach an agreement within our 'core' area first (see Chapter 2).

**5.187** Option c would give North Hertfordshire District Council the opportunity to plan for homes to the west and north of Stevenage if they decided they wanted to pursue this<sup>(47)</sup>. The schemes we would need to build in the Borough boundary would provide infrastructure that they could connect to.

**5.188** Building all of the homes required under this option would need an average of 330 new homes to be built each year. This is around 10% higher than the average rate of completions in the Borough over the last 20 and 30 years. It is significantly higher than the rate at which housing has been built in Stevenage over the last decade.

**5.189** Option c could produce around 2,300 affordable homes. Part of this total could meet some Stevenage needs but would still be less than is required (see Issue 18). Affordable housing built in another Council area could end up being used by that Council to meet its own affordable housing needs. To achieve the full benefit, we would need to make sure that any affordable homes built in other Council areas to meet our needs were allocated to households on our own waiting list.

**5.190** We would need to deliver the improvements to the A1(M) identified under option b. There could be a need for further improvements. This would depend on where the shortfall in development was to be made up.

#### Sustainability appraisal

**5.191** Our sustainability appraisal shows that this option scores strongest against social measures. This is because it proposes the highest housing target. However, the option does not score as well against environmental objectives because of the amount of greenfield development that would be required to meet the target.

46 This shortfall could be higher if further investigation of the Government's projections suggest a higher figure or if the A1(M) can only be improved between junctions 6 and 7 (See option b for further information).

47 Included as options in their recent consultation: Housing Options Growth Levels and Locations (NHDC, 2013).

### Conclusions

**5.192** We think there is an argument for building this number of homes to meet the future needs of Stevenage. In recent years, more people have left the town than have arrived. However, we do not support option c as our preferred option because:

- Our preferred target in option b meets the requirements of the NPPF;
- There are many reasons that people choose to move house. These can include to be nearer to family, a new job, or to go to college or university. We cannot make people stay in Stevenage if they do not want to do so;
- We cannot build this number of homes in the Borough boundary. We would not have full control of our new local plan under this approach;
- North Hertfordshire District Council have consulted on potential sites around Stevenage for development. However, these have been identified to meet their own housing needs<sup>(48)</sup>. They have not firmly committed to bring any of these sites forward for development; and
- Our new plan has to be deliverable. We need to be able to show that what we are planning for will actually happen. We would not be able to do this for option c at this point. Our local plan would fail at examination if we could not resolve this.

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48 Housing Options Growth Levels and Locations 2011-2031 (NHDC, 2013)



## Other housing target options we have considered

**5.193** This consultation sets out three options for a future housing target. We also thought about a number of other possible targets. We did this to meet the requirements of national and European laws.

**5.194** These options included targets based on:

- The number of houses that have been built in Stevenage in the past;
- How the economy might change in the future; and
- Alternate estimates of how the population may change in the future.

**5.195** More information about these can be found in our Sustainability Appraisal and evidence<sup>(49)</sup>. We have not included these as specific options in this report. This is because our evidence shows that a number of the targets based on these matters would be similar to some of those which we have presented.

**5.196** We have set out the three options that have the clearest differences. These are either in terms of the concept and / or the likely implications. We think that it would be difficult to identify enough significant differences for some of the other options we thought about. Providing too many choices would make it difficult for us to get a clear picture of what is important to you.

**5.197** One other group of options we considered related to affordable housing need. We have a very large housing waiting list, while the levels of income and savings amongst our residents are relatively low. This means there is a very high demand for new affordable homes.

**5.198** We currently require all new development sites to contribute towards this need. New developments in the town have provided more than 1,000 affordable homes over the last decade. However, on private development sites it takes the construction of at least two new market homes to ensure the building of one new affordable home.

**5.199** To meet housing need in the Borough over the next twenty years we would need to build at least 13,900 new homes. However, to meet all affordable housing requirements, this number could be as high as 30,000<sup>(50)</sup>. These figures are significantly above the highest target we have suggested. We do not think that these levels of development could be achieved even with the active co-operation of our neighbouring District Councils. Our sustainability appraisal also says that the environmental cost of this approach would be very high.

**5.200** These approaches have not been included as options in this consultation, but if you wish to express opinions about them, we would be happy to receive your comments.

49 Housing Targets Paper (SBC, 2013)

50 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (DCA, 2013); Housing Targets Paper (SBC, 2013)

### Other Strategic Policies

**5.201** The draft local plan that we produce at the next stage of consultation will also contain strategic policies on a range of other matters:

- **Good design** ~ This will set out the general requirements that we expect all new developments to meet.
- **Healthy communities** ~ This will set out our overall strategy for neighbourhood centres, health, social, community, leisure, cultural and education facilities.
- **Green Belt** ~ This will explain the future role of the Green Belt within the Borough. It will identify which land, if any, is to be released from the inner edge of the Green Belt and establish a new Green Belt boundary.
- **Climate change and flooding** ~ This will say what we expect new development to include, or take into account, to make sure it does not have an unacceptable impact
- **The natural environment** ~ This will set out our general approach to green infrastructure, noise and pollution. Green infrastructure includes many types of land that we think should remain (largely) undeveloped including parks, important open spaces, wildlife sites and rights of way.
- **The historic environment** ~ This will say how we will protect important features such as Conservation Areas and listed buildings.

**5.202** We have not included issues or options for you to comment upon in this part of the document. This does not mean that these matters aren't important to us. There are a number of detailed questions in Part III of this document that will help us decide on the best approach.

**5.203** We will also have to take into account the decisions we make about other things that will influence our approach. The number of homes we decide to build will, for example, help to shape our strategy for the Green Belt. The outcomes of these matters will help to inform our draft strategic policies.

**5.204** We will include draft strategic policies covering all of these matters in the next consultation on this plan. This will make sure you have the opportunity to have your say.

## Part III: Detailed Policies and Delivery



## 6 A Strong, Competitive Economy

### Gunnels Wood

#### Issue 10: Gunnels Wood

- a. Continue with a very open policy approach
- b. Identify specific areas for specific uses
- c. Allow a range of job-creating uses in addition to traditional employment uses
- d. Allow a specified part of the area to be redeveloped from employment use to housing

**6.1** Gunnels Wood is the main employment area in Stevenage and the largest in Hertfordshire. It is home to international companies such as MBDA, GlaxoSmithKline, EADS Astrium and Fujitsu Services. It also provides a hub for smaller businesses. This includes start-up companies and new premises such as the Business & Technology Centre. It also includes more established companies in workshops and older buildings across the employment area.

**6.2** Gunnels Wood is well located in transport terms. It has excellent access to the A1(M) at Junction 7. The railway station is just to the east between the leisure park and the town centre. The central part of Gunnels Wood in particular is a highly sustainable location, within walking distance of passenger transport connections and other services.

**6.3** Our evidence recognises that parts of Gunnels Wood perform differently. Some areas have modern premises and are well occupied. Others lack a coherent identity, have high levels of vacancy or are characterised by older buildings. Some sites are only developed to low density. However, the lack of new sites limits opportunities for companies to relocate to alternate premises within the town. This prevents under-used sites from being redeveloped<sup>(51)</sup>.

**6.4** **Option a** would continue our existing approach. Gunnels Wood is protected as an employment area by the saved policies of the District Plan. Class B1, B2 or B8 uses can be developed anywhere within the employment area<sup>(52)</sup>. Option a would not offer any specific guidance or set any requirements other than saying B-class uses would be allowed.

**6.5** This approach has been in place since the District Plan Review was adopted in 1994. The policies are very flexible. This has helped attract a wide range of developments to the area. Nearly all of the sites and land within Gunnels Wood are developed. There is a very wide diversity of uses.

**6.6** However, this approach has also sent mixed signals to the market and to local employers. Lower quality environments have been allowed in some locations. Uses that you might expect to be close to the station and town centre, such as offices, have been allowed at the edge of the employment area near the motorway. Uses which it was not originally envisaged would be appropriate have been permitted due to the openness of the policy approach. There are no specific

51 Stevenage Employment and Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

52 Though the Gunnels Wood Supplementary Planning document encourages offices and more intensive uses to locate in more central areas

policies on design, landscape or layout in the employment area. This approach has led to a degrading and fragmentation of Gunnels Wood, which has been to its overall detriment even if certain areas have benefited.

**6.7 Option b** would introduce more detailed, zonal planning controls. This is the approach we set out in the draft Gunnels Wood Area Action Plan (AAP). This proposed more detailed policies and suggested that parts of the employment area could be remodelled.

**6.8** The full range of B-class uses would be supported when the employment area was viewed as a whole. However, option b would set out a zonal approach that guided development to the most appropriate locations. The plan would set out which B-class uses would, and would not, be allowed in each area. The most intensive uses, such as offices, would be located in the most accessible locations. This includes the areas closest to the station between Fairlands Way and Six Hills Way. They would not be allowed in other areas.



**Gunnels Wood is home to international companies including Fujitsu and MBDA**

**6.9** The plan would also set out policies to improve the appearance of the employment area. It would encourage high quality layouts and building designs. It would include policies relating to building heights, active street frontages, boundary treatments and landscaping.

**6.10** We think that more detailed guidance would, over time, bring beneficial changes to Gunnels Wood. We do not think we would propose exactly the same approach as in the draft Gunnels Wood AAP, but it would be similar. This is because:

- The overall scale of development in and around the town is likely to be lower than we were previously planning for. This means that some schemes may come forward differently to how we previously thought or may not happen at all; and
- We have now updated the evidence that we used to write the policies in the draft AAP. This has provided us with new information about Gunnels Wood.

**6.11** If we decide to carry forward this approach we will set out detailed proposals in the next version of this plan.

**6.12 Option c** would introduce a more relaxed policy approach. Employment uses in Gunnels Wood have changed over time. The area now features a diverse mix of development. The area has seen an increase in non-traditional employment uses in the last decade. This includes car showrooms, hotels, training facilities and a household waste site.

**6.13** Our third option would recognise that these uses can generate jobs and support the operation of the employment area. Applications for non B-class uses are currently dealt with as an exception to policy. Options a and b would continue this approach. Option c would specifically say certain uses would be allowed in Gunnels Wood in addition to B-class uses. The range of uses we allow might be expanded to include:

- C1 - Hotels;
- D1 - Non-residential institutions. This would most likely be restricted to certain uses such as day nurseries, exhibition or conference facilities or education and training centres; or
- Certain Sui Generis uses, such as builders yards.

**6.14** This would formalise and encourage an approach we have sometimes taken in the past. It would allow for a greater diversity of employment-generating uses in Gunnels Wood. This could support our efforts to deliver economic growth and new jobs.

**6.15** However, option c could also lead to the permanent loss of some important sites. Some B-class employment land uses have lower land values than the uses described above<sup>(53)</sup>. Option c could make these sites vulnerable to redevelopment for higher value uses. This could lead to the loss of companies and jobs to the local economy. Once they had been lost to other uses, it would be impossible to bring them back.

**6.16** Traditional B-class employment plays a vital role in the local economy. They help us to provide a range of jobs for people of all skill levels. We would prefer to carry on treating any applications for uses such as hotels and car showrooms as exceptions to policy. This means we can consider each application individually and decide whether it would be appropriate.

**6.17 Option d** would see an identified part of Gunnels Wood released from employment use and comprehensively redeveloped for housing. This would be a significant step-away from the original 1946 masterplan for the town<sup>(54)</sup>.

**6.18** However, it could be a valid option for consideration if we wanted to:

- Set a low target for new jobs; and / or
- Protect greenfield or Green Belt sites from housing development; and / or
- Release poorer performing sites and provide new employment land to replace them.

**6.19** Our strategic options show that, if we do not prioritise the creation of new jobs, we might be able to release around 6 hectares of employment land for redevelopment (see Issue 5).

53 This particularly includes uses in the B2 (industrial) and B8 (storage and distribution) classes.

54 It would, however, reflect a previous decision in the 1958 Third Stevenage Masterplan, to reallocate what is now Symonds Green from employment to residential.



**6.20** Our evidence studies have not considered if any areas of Gunnels Wood might be suitable for housing<sup>(55)</sup>. This means that any land could provide extra urban capacity in addition to what we have already identified (see Issue 9).

**6.21** It might be possible to allow part of Gunnels Wood to be redeveloped for housing without damaging the rest of the employment area. However, such a radical change might damage business confidence and create a 'domino effect' of pressure for more land to be released.

**6.22** This option does not necessarily have to result in an overall loss of employment land. Our evidence says that some areas of Gunnels Wood do not perform as well as others. It says that the lack of new land for development means that some companies are unable to upgrade their premises as they might like. You may think it would be better to identify a larger amount of new sites (see Issue 12) and release parts of our existing employment areas that do not perform so well.

**6.23** The Council does not currently support option d. It would almost certainly mean closing down existing businesses or forcing them to move. This could result in the loss of jobs and harm future employment opportunities. It would be inconsistent with the preferred options we have identified in other parts of this draft plan.

**6.24** If we followed option d, we would need to identify a specific area for a planned and comprehensive redevelopment. We would not want lots of small sites to be redeveloped in an uncoordinated way.

**6.25** The sustainability appraisal confirms many of the points made above. Option a would be beneficial to business as it would take a less restrictive approach. However, it may encourage journeys by car and make the use of alternate modes of transport less attractive. This is because more intensive uses could be located away from key connections such as the train station.

**6.26** Option b would help to address this, although it may deter some investment. Option c would perform well in terms of general job creation. However, it may be more difficult to ensure the overall range of job opportunities we provide was appropriate (see Issue 6). Option d would perform well against many social indicators as it would deliver new homes. But it would not support growth and investment.

### Question 10

What do you think is the best approach for the town's main employment area?

55 Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SBC, 2013)

## Pin Green

## Issue 11: Pin Green

- a. Continue with a very open policy approach
- b. Identify the area for specific uses
- c. Allow a range of job-creating uses in addition to traditional employment uses
- d. Allow a specified part of the area to be redeveloped from employment use to housing

**6.27** Pin Green is in the north-east of Stevenage. It was developed as an employment area through the late 1960s and early 1970s to provide additional jobs for a growing population. Today, Pin Green is the second largest employment area in Stevenage. It is of a fairly low density with a mix of uses including small warehousing, light industrial and some offices.

**6.28** Access to the A1(M) is not as good as in Gunnels Wood but it is still reasonable. Housing has been built on the former Dixons warehouse site in recent years and there continues to be interest from developers in further releases for housing and other uses. Our evidence suggests that the remainder of the site, nonetheless, performs reasonably well <sup>(56)</sup>.

**6.29** There are limited opportunities for new development within Pin Green as all plots have been developed, while the site as a whole is closely surrounded by other land uses. However, there may be opportunities for sites to change their use or be redeveloped during the lifetime of the plan.

**6.30** We have identified the same four options for Pin Green as for Gunnels Wood above.

**6.31 Option a** would continue our existing approach. Pin Green is protected as an employment area by the saved policies of the District Plan Second Review. Class B1, B2 or B8 uses can be developed anywhere within the employment area. Option a would not offer any specific guidance or set any requirements other than saying B-class uses would be allowed.

**6.32** However, Pin Green is located a relatively long way from the town centre and the main transport hub. National guidance says we should not encourage high intensity uses, such as offices, in areas like this. Continuing with the District Plan approach would allow for this to happen.

**6.33** This would not allow us to direct office uses towards more accessible parts of Stevenage or reinvigorate the town's office market. Our evidence is clear that we should try and present a coherent office 'offer' to the market. Allowing office developments in lots of locations across the town would not support this approach.

**6.34 Option b** would follow the approach set out in the draft Site Specific Policies DPD in 2010. We would keep Pin Green as an employment area, but office uses (B1a) would not be allowed. The plan would ensure that unit sizes should be controlled.

56 Stevenage Employment & Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

**6.35** There are some large premises in Pin Green and we would encourage existing businesses to stay. However a number of sites provide workshop and smaller units of up to 1,000m<sup>2</sup> or mid-sized premises of up to 3,000m<sup>2</sup>. Under option b, we would generally apply these limits if any existing sites were redeveloped. We think that new, larger units are more suited to Gunnels Wood.



**Pin Green is generally home to smaller and medium sized businesses**

**6.36** Option b would be in line with national guidance. It would promote growth while discouraging offices, which are seen as a town centre use. It would support the conclusions of our evidence. This said that we should adopt a stricter approach to the change of use, or loss, of existing industrial floorspace <sup>(57)</sup>.

**6.37 Option c** would introduce a more relaxed policy approach. It would allow a range of uses in addition to employment. It would recognise that other uses can generate jobs and / or support the operation of the employment area. Applications for non-B-class uses are currently dealt with as an exception to policy. Options a & b would continue this approach. Option c would specifically say which additional uses would be allowed in our policies. We would probably only allow a narrower range of additional uses in Pin Green. This is because some of the things we are considering in Gunnels Wood, such as hotels, would not be appropriate here.

**6.38** A more relaxed approach could make it easier to bring any vacant premises back into use. It might make it easier to encourage development. However, this could lead to the permanent loss of some important sites including the types of industrial premises we have been advised to protect.

**6.39** Under all of these options we would re-draw the employment area designation to exclude the area which has been redeveloped for housing since our last plan was adopted.

**6.40 Option d** would see an identified part of Pin Green released from employment uses and comprehensively redeveloped for housing. This is a valid option for consideration because we know we will not be able to fully meet our housing needs from other sites within the urban area (see Issue 9). It would provide extra urban capacity <sup>(58)</sup>.

57 Stevenage Employment & Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

58 It would also be a valid in any of the circumstances described in paragraphs 6.17 to 6.21 where we have included the same option for part of Gunnels Wood.

**6.41** Pin Green is a relatively small employment area. Any further release could trigger a 'domino effect' and negatively affect investor confidence in the remainder of the site. It would affect the balance between homes and jobs in the town. However, we recognise that options c and d are 'reasonable alternatives' that should be tested as part of the plan process.

**6.42** Our sustainability appraisal suggests the effects of our options would be similar to those we have identified for Gunnels Wood. A less restrictive approach can encourage investment. It can also make it harder to control those matters which may have a negative impact. Any loss of employment land would support housing objectives. It would not support employment growth and investment.

### Question 11

Do you agree that the approach we are suggesting for the Pin Green employment area is the most appropriate for the future?

## New employment land

### Issue 12 - New employment land

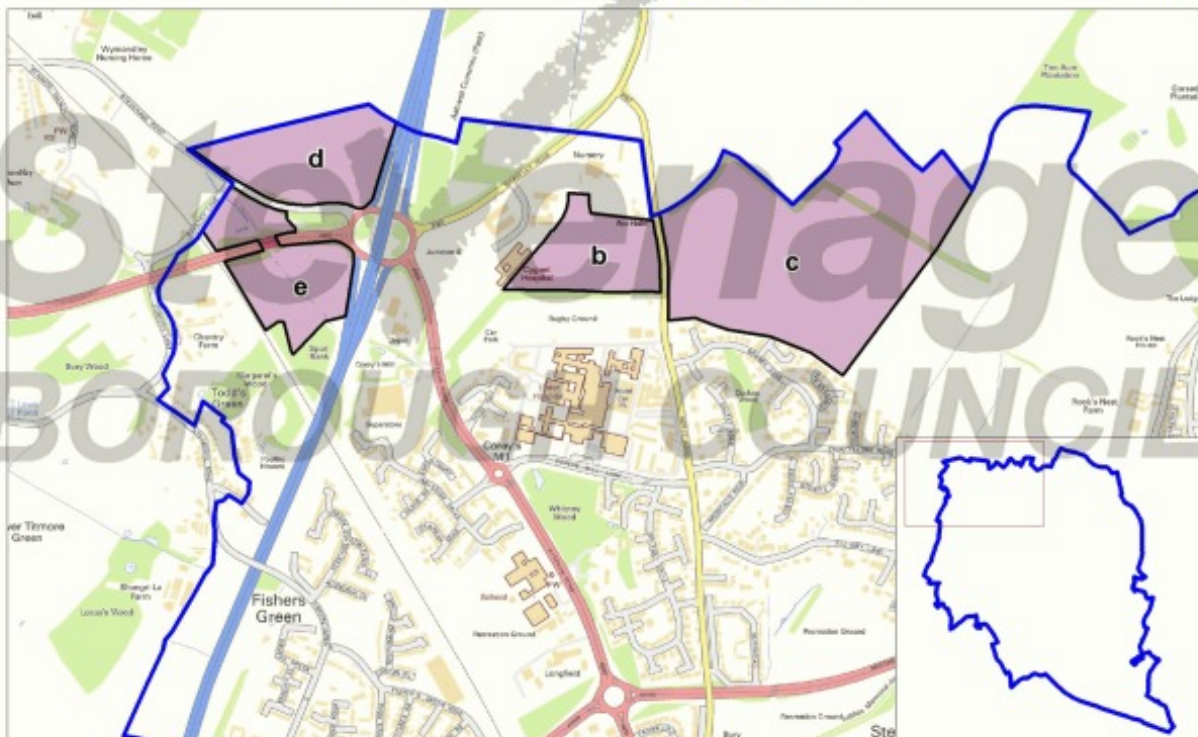
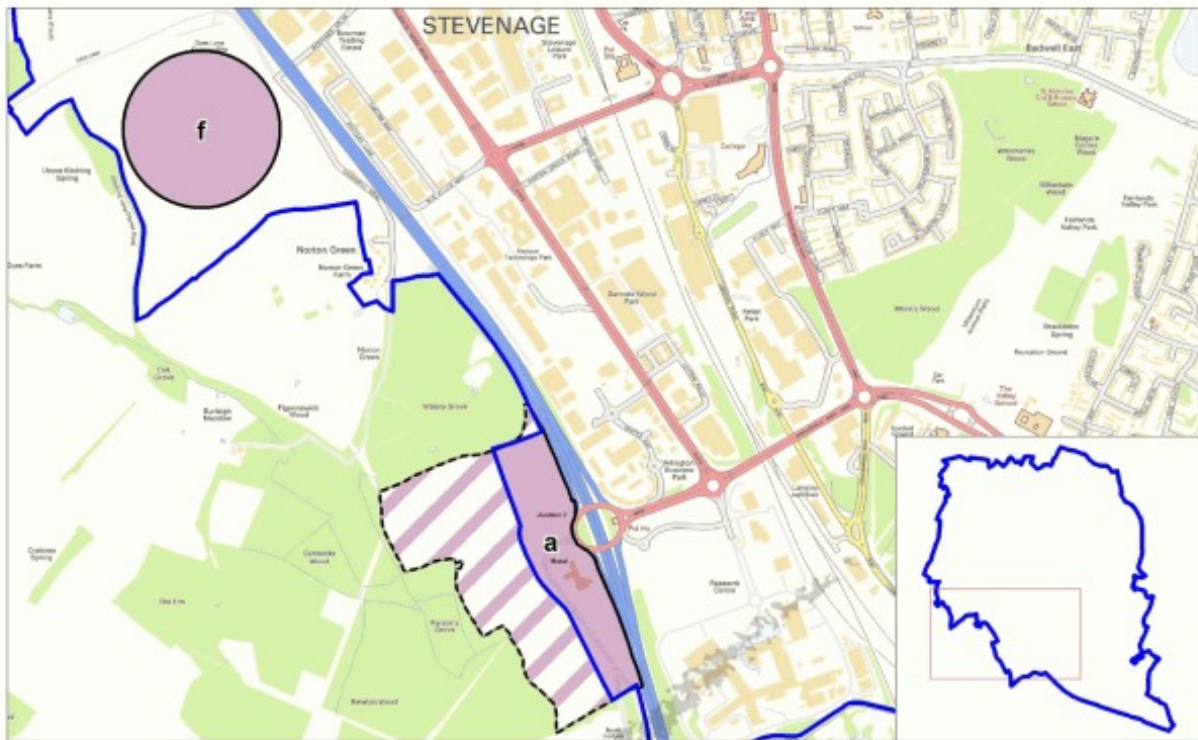
- a. Work with North Hertfordshire District Council to deliver a new 30 hectare (ha) employment site at Junction 7 of the A1(M)
- b. **Safeguard or allocate around 6 ha of land to the west of North Road**
- c. Safeguard or allocate up to 10 ha of land to the east of North Road as part of a new neighbourhood
- d. **Safeguard or allocate around 7 ha of land to the north of Stevenage Road**
- e. Safeguard or allocate around 7 ha of land to the west and south-west of Junction 8
- f. Safeguard or allocate up to 10ha of land to the west of the A1(M) as part of a new neighbourhood
- g. Do not safeguard or allocate any new employment land

**6.43** The NPPF is clear that we should plan positively and encourage sustainable economic growth. This includes deciding if any new land is required for employment uses. We think we will need to identify new employment land if:

- We choose anything more than the lowest employment target (see Issue 5); and / or
- We want to encourage the regeneration or redevelopment of our existing employment areas; and / or
- We want to provide a balance between the provision of new homes and new jobs; and / or
- We want to provide an appropriate range of jobs to match resident's skills.

**6.44** We have identified six possible sites for future employment development. These are shown in the maps on the following page.





- option a. land at Junction 7  
 option b. land to the west of North Road  
 option c. land to the east of North Road  
 option d. land to the north of Stevenage Road  
 option e. land to the west and south-west  
 of Junction 8  
 option f. land to the west of the A1(M)

**Notes:**

1. The hatched area adjacent to option a shows land in North Hertfordshire. The future of this land cannot be decided by our local plan.
2. Options c and f show general areas of search.
3. The precise boundaries of any allocation have yet to be decided. Any draft allocations will be included in the next consultation

**6.45** We have a long-term aspiration to make better use of the land to the west of the station. This includes the the Leisure Park (see Issue 24). We would like to see a greater mix of uses here, including some employment alongside leisure facilities and new homes. However, any comprehensive scheme here is unlikely to come forward before 2021. The site is also not big enough to meet all of our future needs while it would not be an appropriate location for some of the employment uses that we need<sup>(59)</sup>.

**6.46** We would also like to make better use of some sites on Gunnels Wood (see Issue 10). We can only expect a limited amount of new development to come forward here. New land will be required to allow existing occupiers to relocate and 'unlock' their existing premises.

**6.47** For these reasons, we will need to identify a new site or sites even if we allow for some employment development to take place within the existing town in the future.

**6.48** **Option a** would use the land to the east of Junction 7. Around 11 hectares of land lie within the Borough boundary. It has direct access on to the motorway junction. The site is currently within the Green Belt.

**6.49** Our employment study says that this site has the strongest strategic location of any potential new sites on the edge of Stevenage. They recommend that this site should be released for employment use. It provides the opportunity to build on recent successful development at Arlington Business Park and the Bioscience Catalyst. It advises that a range of B-class uses should be allowed to 'unlock' the site. This is because only allowing a narrow range of uses may stop the site from coming forward<sup>(60)</sup>.

**6.50** We could not deliver a site here by ourselves. The land within the Borough boundary forms a long and narrow site. It would not be suitable for employment development by itself. Land would also need to be identified in North Hertfordshire. This could deliver a site of around 30 hectares in size. This means it could meet our requirements for new employment land in full (see Issue 5).

**6.51** Our initial evidence says this area makes a contribution to Green Belt purposes<sup>(61)</sup>. Previous studies tell us this site has moderate capacity for employment development in landscape terms<sup>(62)</sup>.

**6.52** This site would be our preferred location for employment development over the plan period. However, at present, the landowner is not willing to make this site available for employment use. This means that we cannot show any site here would be deliverable. Any plan which tried to include this site would fail at examination. This currently means that we will have to identify alternate sites for employment.

**6.53** Even if the landowner brought this site forward, there would still be risks. We cannot plan for sites or areas outside of our boundary. It would be up to North Hertfordshire to release their part of the site from the Green Belt through their own plan. They may want to use some or all of the site to meet their own employment land requirements. Any scheme here would also be subject to the constraints we have identified on the A1(M) (see Chapter 8).

59 Such as more intensive manufacturing uses or warehousing

60 Stevenage Employment & Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

61 Review of the Green Belt around Stevenage: Part 1 - Survey against Green Belt purposes (AMEC, 2013)

62 Stevenage landscape sensitivity and capacity study (Halcrow, 2006)



**6.54** Because of this, we have identified a number of possible employment sites in the north and west of the Borough. These sites could be used for one or more of the following reasons:

- To deliver the employment land that is needed within the plan period; and / or
- To provide enough land for development beyond the plan period. This would provide certainty, confidence and flexibility; and / or
- To allow greater 'churn' on our existing employment sites. Our evidence recognises that the redevelopment and regeneration of parts of Gunnels Wood and Pin Green cannot happen as there is nowhere for existing companies to move to; and / or
- To provide more of the types of uses we might need if we are to meet the skills and qualifications profile of our residents (see Issue 6).

**6.55** The exact role of any new site(s) will depend on the choices we make against other matters in this plan and whether there are any changes in circumstances at Junction 7.

**6.56** If we needed to release land in the north or west of the Borough at the start of the plan it would be allocated for immediate development. If any land at the north or west of the Borough was to be used as a longer-term site, it would be safeguarded.

**6.57** **Option b** is the undeveloped land to the west of North Road. It is approximately 6 hectares in size. It would be possible to create direct access onto the road. This site is outside the existing built-up area of the town but it has already been removed from the Green Belt<sup>(63)</sup>. We would need to remove the existing Local Rural Area designation on the site. This site has high capacity for employment development in landscape terms<sup>(64)</sup>.

**6.58** An employment site here would have reasonable access to Junction 8 of the A1(M) and to nearby public transport routes. It would allow for new employment opportunities without prejudicing the future of the hospital (see Issue 23).

**6.59** This is one of our preferred options at this stage. The landowner is prepared to make the site available for employment use. We do not think that this is a good locations for other uses such as housing.

**6.60** However, development would need to be appropriately designed to take the pylon lines into account. The site is close to hospitals and residential properties. We would need to ensure that any employment development here would not have an unacceptable impact on amenity. The western boundary of the site is an area of flood risk. Any proposal would need to mitigate against this. The site is also untested in market terms.

**6.61** **Option c** is to identify land on the opposite side of North Road. The whole area that we have identified on the map is approximately 27 hectares in size. However, it is very unlikely that we would use the whole of this site for employment. We could provide some employment here as part of a larger development if we needed to release land for new homes.

**6.62** It would be possible to create direct access onto the road. An employment site near to the road would have reasonable access to Junction 8 of the A1(M) and to public transport routes which currently run via the Lister Hospital.

63 This decision was made almost twenty years ago through the District Plan 1990 Review (adopted 1994)

64 Stevenage landscape sensitivity and capacity study (Halcrow, 2006)



Option a: land at Junction 7



Option b: land to the west of North Road



Option c: land to the east of North Road



Option d: land north of Stevenage Road



Option e: land to the west and south-west of Junction 8



Option f: land to the west of the A1(M)

**6.63** The site is currently in the Green Belt. Our evidence says that this area makes a contribution to Green Belt purposes<sup>(65)</sup>. This site has moderate capacity for employment development in landscape terms<sup>(66)</sup>.

**6.64** Any scheme would need to be appropriately designed to take the pylon lines into account. The southern boundary of the site is next to homes on Granby Road. The land within the Borough boundary is an irregular shape. It might be difficult to deliver both new homes and new jobs. We would need to ensure that any employment development here would not have an unacceptable impact on amenity. The site is also untested in market terms.

**6.65** The constraints on this site mean that it might only be possible to provide employment land here as part of a larger scheme which extended into North Hertfordshire District. This would allow for a better designed layout which could accommodate new homes, new employment and any other facilities. We cannot plan for areas outside of our boundary. However, North Hertfordshire have consulted on using land to the north of Stevenage within their own authority to meet future development needs<sup>(67)</sup>.

**6.66** **Option d** is to identify land in the north-west corner of Junction 8 of the A1(M). There is approximately seven hectares of land wholly within the borough boundary here. It could be possible to create an access from Stevenage Road into the western half of the site. Our evidence says that this site offers good potential for strategic employment development. It "would represent a prominent, high profile location at the 'gateway' to Stevenage on the A1"<sup>(68)</sup>. With the exception of option f, this would be the largest site that is not constrained by the pylon lines.

**6.67** This site is in the Green Belt. Our evidence says that this area makes a significant contribution to Green Belt purposes. However, this does not necessarily mean that there is no potential for development<sup>(69)</sup>. This site has low capacity for employment development in landscape terms<sup>(70)</sup>. Any development could be prominent in the landscape and would require sensitive design and landscaping to create a new boundary. It would narrow the gap between Stevenage and Little Wymondley.

**6.68** We recognise there are issues surrounding the possible development of this site. However, we believe it is a good location for free-standing employment uses. It is one of our preferred locations for new employment development in the current circumstances.

**6.69** **Option e** would use the land bounded by the A1(M), the railway line and the A602. This site is around seven hectares in site. Access could be created into the north of the site from Stevenage Road or Chantry Road. The site is in the Green Belt. Our evidence says that this area makes a significant contribution to Green Belt purposes<sup>(71)</sup>. However, the site is well contained in relation to some other options. It could have a more limited impact. This site has high capacity for employment development in landscape terms<sup>(72)</sup>.

65 Review of the Green Belt around Stevenage: Part 1 - Survey against Green Belt purposes, AMEC, March 2013

66 Stevenage landscape sensitivity and capacity study, Halcrow, 2006

67 Housing Options Growth Levels and Locations (NHDC, 2013)

68 Stevenage Employment & Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

69 Review of the Green Belt around Stevenage: Part 1 - Survey against Green Belt purposes, AMEC, March 2013

70 Stevenage landscape sensitivity and capacity study, Halcrow, 2006

71 Review of the Green Belt around Stevenage: Part 1 - Survey against Green Belt purposes, AMEC, March 2013

72 Stevenage landscape sensitivity and capacity study, Halcrow, 2006



**6.70** Major infrastructure improvements would be needed to provide access to the land south of the A602. There is currently a single lane track under the dual carriageway into the larger part of the site. The topography may constrain development. A narrow area of flood risk runs through the southern part of the site. There is a designated wildlife site to the south.

**6.71** Because of this, we think it could be difficult to develop a scheme that would be viable.

**6.72** **Option f** would use land to the west of the A1(M). We consider that up to 10 hectares of employment development could be delivered here. This could be as part of a larger development that also provides new homes (see Issue 9). Our evidence says this area could offer potential for employment development subject to access and infrastructure provision <sup>(73)</sup>.

**6.73** This site is outside the existing built-up area of the town but it has already been removed from the Green Belt <sup>(74)</sup>. This site has moderate capacity for employment development in landscape terms <sup>(75)</sup>.

**6.74** The most likely access to this land would use the existing road under the A1(M) at Bessemer Drive. New infrastructure would be needed to get access into the site itself.

**6.75** Two of our housing options would require us to use some or all of this land to provide new homes. We would need to carefully consider the balance between these uses. We would need to make sure that any employment site did not compromise our ability to deliver new homes.

**6.76** The final option, **option g**, is to not allocate or safeguard any new employment sites. All of the possible new sites we have identified are on either greenfield or Green Belt land.

**6.77** The NPPF says that protecting Green Belts is very important. They are one of the reasons we can use to restrict development if the evidence says this would be appropriate. This option could be a valid course of action. You may think that stopping development outside the existing town is more important than meeting local employment needs. The Council does not currently think that this is the case. We do not support this option. However, this is an important decision that we will have to make.

**6.78** An approach which combined option g with low jobs and housing targets (see Issues 5 and 9) could be used to contain development and stop the Green Belt from being reviewed and greenfield sites from being used.

**6.79** Under option g, we would focus solely on regenerating or redeveloping existing sites. We would need to make more intensive use of existing sites within the town to provide new employment development. This might include locations such as the leisure park or surface car parks within the town centre.

**6.80** However, even if we did this, it is likely that option g would only support a very modest target for new jobs or floorspace. It might even result in a 'nil' target or a small decline. It would be very unlikely to support the preferred options we have identified elsewhere in this document.

73 Stevenage Employment & Economy Baseline Study, Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners, 2013

74 This decision was made through the existing District Plan which was adopted in 2004

75 Stevenage landscape sensitivity and capacity study, Halcrow, 2006

**6.81** The sustainability appraisal has assessed all of these alternatives. Option a performs poorly in environmental terms. It performs best in terms of socio-economic opportunities as a strategic site. Option b is considered to perform the best overall but does not offer the same scale of opportunity. Option c would lead to negative environmental impacts but it is more sustainably located than some other options.

**6.82** Options d and e perform poorly in environmental terms and would be very difficult to access by foot or by bike. Option g performs best in environmental terms as it would not lead to the allocation of new sites. However, this would lead to negative social and economic impacts.

### Question 12

Which site(s), if any, do you think should be used for employment in the future? Should more than one new site be identified to meet long-term needs and / or make sure our plan can deal with changes in circumstances?

## 7 A Viable Town Centre

### Detailed retail policies

#### Issue 13: Detailed retail policies

*We have not identified specific options for you to choose from. However, we would still like to hear your thoughts on this matter.*

**7.1** As well as our overall strategy, the new local plan will need to set detailed retail policies. These will help us to decide if applications to change the use of existing shops, extend premises or provide new stores are acceptable.

**7.2** In the main, these are detailed policy issues. We will include draft policies and any relevant allocations at the next stage of consultation. This will make sure that you can have your say.

**7.3** However, there are some areas where you may have early views that you want to make us aware of.

**7.4** The local plan will need to identify the spatial extent of the town centre, and other centres in the retail hierarchy, in policy terms. This will allow us to determine whether any applications for main town-centre uses such as shops, offices or leisure are in, on the edge of, or outside of centres.

**7.5** The NPPF is clear that main town centre uses should preferentially be located in identified centres. Certain applications outside of the town centre will also need to carry out impact assessments. The extent of our identified centres is therefore an important issue.

**7.6** The District Plan sets the current policy boundary for the town centre. This runs around the inside of the ring road<sup>(76)</sup>. This area contains a diverse range of main town centre uses in addition to the town centre shops. These include homes, offices and hotels.

**7.7** However, there are also similar uses just outside of the town centre boundary. This includes the hotel and leisure facilities on the east side of St George's Way, the Leisure Park and the train station. These areas are currently less preferred locations for town-centre uses in policy terms.

**7.8** We need to consider whether to retain the existing boundary, reduce it to concentrate main town centre uses (and investment) in a smaller area or enlarge it to encompass additional areas.

**7.9** The spatial extent of the Old Town High Street is not defined in the District Plan. The draft Old Town Area Action Plan contains a proposed District Centre allocation. This broadly extends from the junction between the High Street and Letchmore Road at the south to the one-way system at the north. We will need to decide whether this is still the most appropriate boundary.

**7.10** Options for the town's neighbourhood centres are set out in Chapter 11 (see Issue 22).

<sup>76</sup> Those parts of Lytton Way, Six Hills Way, St George's Way and Fairlands Way which encircle the pedestrianised area



**7.11** The NPPF also advises that we should clearly define primary and secondary frontages within our identified centres. Primary frontages are those areas where a higher proportion of retail uses are found. Secondary frontages normally allow greater opportunities for supporting uses such as banks and restaurants. The District Plan currently identifies primary frontages within the town centre and the Old Town.

**7.12** The primary frontages in the town centre run in a broadly L-shape from the town square northwards to The Forum and then west to the Tesco superstore. The shops in the Westgate Centre are also designated primary frontages. Our current policy approach is that only A1 retail uses are acceptable in these units. Any alternate uses should be refused or treated as an exception to policy.

**7.13** The secondary frontages include The Plaza, Market Place, much of Park Place and the units around the bus station. A more diverse range of uses is permitted here. However, some of our retail options could encourage more A1 uses in these locations (see Issue 7).

**7.14** In the Old Town, the primary frontages are currently staggered on different sides of the road. However, they broadly take in the areas around Middle Row and immediately to its north and south. Our approach here recognises that some units already provide non-A1 uses. Current policies seek no further losses of A1 units.

**7.15** Our draft Old Town Area Action Plan takes a similar approach. It identified that 60% of primary frontage was in A1 use and seeks to maintain this level<sup>(77)</sup>. It stated that 74 High Street, currently occupied by Waitrose, would not be permitted to change from A1 use. This was in recognition of the supermarket's 'anchor' role in the High Street.

**7.16** The NPPF encourages us to set local thresholds for retail impact assessments. These are the point at which we require applicants to describe the likely effect of their proposal on existing shops and centres within their catchment area. The default threshold is for proposals of 2,500m<sup>2</sup> or more. However, our evidence base suggests a tiered approach. This could require impact assessments for proposals of 300m<sup>2</sup> or more in certain areas<sup>(78)</sup>.

**7.17** The next version of this plan will contain draft policies relating to centres, frontages and impact assessments. However, you may have some particular views on these matters that you would like to bring to attention. This could include which units should, or should not, be reserved for retail uses. You may consider that our existing approaches are too restrictive, or about right. This may depend, in part, on your views on the town centre and how we should plan for retail floorspace in the future (see Issue 7). We would be interested in hearing any views.

### Question 13

*Are there any particular issues that you think we should take into account when writing our detailed retail policies?*

77 This figure was correct at the time the draft Old Town Area Action Plan was published in January 2010.

78 Stevenage Retail Study (CACI / Applied Planning, 2013)

## Supermarkets

### Issue 14: A new foodstore

- a. Identify two or more neighbourhood centres to be redeveloped with new foodstores.
- b. Identify a completely new site for a large foodstore.
- c. **Allow extensions to existing large foodstores and/or neighbourhood centre shops.**

**7.18** Convenience retailing refers to essential, everyday items. This includes food, drinks, newspapers, magazines and confectionery.

**7.19** Stevenage has a wide range of convenience stores. All of the neighbourhood centres are anchored by at least one foodstore. The town is also served by a series of six large supermarkets and superstores, ranging in size from Waitrose in the High Street (1,400m<sup>2</sup>) up to Asda on Monkswood Way (6,700m<sup>2</sup>). There are other convenience stores in the town centre and the Old Town High Street. Our evidence tells us that the town is well served by a choice of stores catering for both main and 'top up' convenience shopping trips<sup>(79)</sup>.

**7.20** This analysis shows that, at present, the amount of convenience floorspace across the town is appropriate for the size of the population and available expenditure. There will be a small need for an additional 500m<sup>2</sup> of floorspace by 2016. This rises to 6,300m<sup>2</sup> by the end of the plan period in 2031. The NPPF says we must plan positively for any identified need. This means the new local plan will need to set out how this new floorspace should be distributed and make any necessary allocations.

**7.21** We have identified three possible options which are set out below. It is important to note that none of these explicitly consider the possible need for new foodstores in any new neighbourhoods or urban extensions beyond the existing town (see Issue 9). At present we think that only small stores would be necessary or appropriate in these locations. It is also possible that North Hertfordshire District Council might wish to use a small part of this total to supplement existing shopping facilities at Great Ashby/Burleigh Park. Within each of the options, therefore, a small allowance should be made for these possibilities. We will set out any requirements in the next version of this plan once we have decided upon our housing target and chosen the sites that will be required to meet it.

**7.22** This issue considers how we might best provide new convenience floorspace in the future. We also need to think about the relationship between this issue and the broader question of how we manage our neighbourhood centres in the future (see Issue 22).

**7.23** We will also need to make sure that any additional floorspace is delivered at an appropriate time. We have no current need for additional floorspace. However, we need to allow time for the construction of any schemes and for any new store or floorspace to establish itself. Although the need for significant new floorspace is not identified until 2026, there can be significant lead-in times. This is especially the case for complex regeneration or redevelopment schemes or new superstores.

79 Stevenage Retail Capacity Study (CACI / Applied Planning, 2013)

**7.24** We would be prepared to consider a planning application by 2021 if a single, large store was to be provided. If floorspace was to be provided in smaller units, we would consider planning applications prior to that date. This would allow new needs to be met as they arise.

**7.25** **Option a** would seek to protect the existing network of neighbourhood centres. It would also recognise that people's shopping habits have changed since they were first built. We would select two or more of the neighbourhood centres to be redeveloped with large supermarkets. Any redeveloped sites could be similar to our existing neighbourhood centre at Poplars. This contains a large supermarket with some supporting facilities.

**7.26** It is most likely that option a would focus on the larger neighbourhood centres. These are generally well located in relation to the town's principal highway network, and are also well served by public transport. It would see future floorspace provided within existing centres in line with the NPPF. However, there are also a number of issues that we would need to resolve.

**7.27** The supermarket at The Poplars is approximately 3,600m<sup>2</sup> in size and provides 460 car parking spaces. By comparison, the largest of our existing neighbourhood centres at The Oval contains almost 3,000m<sup>2</sup> of floorspace. However, this is spread across 25 separate shop units, including four foodstores. There are only 110 car parking spaces.

**7.28** The Glebe and The Hyde are the other largest neighbourhood centres. These are slightly smaller than The Oval in terms of floorspace, but have a similar number of shops. Each centre only has a limited number of parking spaces.

**7.29** The existing amount of floorspace in these centres is already comparable to that of a large supermarket. However, this is spread across 20+ units. There is only limited potential to provide additional floorspace within the existing boundaries of our neighbourhood centres. This leads to questions about how deliverable option a might be. It could be difficult to redevelop existing sites in a way which achieves multiple objectives:

- Supplying additional supermarket floorspace to meet future demand;
- Retaining or replacing at least some existing small shop units; and
- Greatly increasing on-site car parking provision.

**7.30** It is likely that new land would be required adjacent to any centres chosen for redevelopment. Given the developed, suburban nature of many of the neighbourhood centres and their surroundings, this could be difficult to obtain. This highlights one of the challenges in pursuing this option. These issues would be even more acute if smaller neighbourhood centres were to be selected for redevelopment.

**7.31** Large new supermarkets essentially draw their trade from existing superstores. This would reduce the overall impact on our network of neighbourhood centres. However, within any selected centres, the most important impact would be the closure of small stores (including foodstores) in the redevelopment process. This is another one of the major challenges in pursuing this option.

**7.32** These are all significant issues. Because of these, option a is not our preferred option.





**7.33 Option b** would see future needs met by a single new superstore. The new local plan would identify a site where this would be built. Our identified need is for 6,300m<sup>2</sup> of convenience floorspace. However, we would allocate a site for a store of up to 7,800m<sup>2</sup>. This would allow for additional floorspace to be devoted to ancillary comparison goods, such as clothes, books, CDs or toys. A store of this scale would be slightly larger than the existing Asda superstore at Monkswood Way.

**7.34** Our evidence suggests that any new major superstore should not be trading before 2026. We would consider a planning application by 2021. This would allow time for a scheme to be constructed and become operational.

**7.35** A new superstore would essentially draw its trade from the town's existing superstores. However a number of these are located in existing retail centres. The impact on these would need to be assessed as part of any new proposal (see Issue 13). There could also be effects on small foodstores in any neighbourhood centres close to a new site. We would give priority to safeguarding the existing network of centres.

**7.36** However, our evidence also tells us that a plan-led superstore delivered prior to 2026, as part of a new or enhanced neighbourhood centre and incorporating a range of unit shops and community facilities, need not necessarily be a cause for concern. The majority of any impact will fall on out-of-centre stores which are not protected by policy.

**7.37** Any new development of this size would need to be well connected to the town's main highway network. It would need to be linked to public transport routes and maximise access for the local community.

**7.38** We would need to make sure that any new store was in an appropriate location. We would try to ensure a more even geographic distribution of superstores across the Borough. The existing superstores in Stevenage are, with the exception of Poplars, located in the west of the Borough. We would begin our search for potential sites in the east of the town. This would help to minimise overall travel distances for residents. However, we are not currently aware of any new sites of a suitable size in this part of the Borough.

**7.39** Option b is not our preferred option. This is mainly because of concerns about the potential impact of a large new superstore on existing retail centres in the town. We also do not have a deliverable site at this time.

**7.40 Option c** would try to overcome these concerns by allowing extensions to existing large foodstores and/or neighbourhood centre shops. Our evidence suggests that at least 20% of the identified need, around 1,250m<sup>2</sup>, should be reserved to allow for extensions to existing small convenience stores in neighbourhood centres. This would allow local services to be preserved and strengthened.

**7.41** The remainder of the identified convenience floorspace need, around 5,000m<sup>2</sup> would be reserved to allow for possible extensions to the six existing large foodstores in the town, namely:

- Tesco Extra, The Forum\*
- Tesco, Broadwater
- Asda, Monkswood Way
- Sainsbury, Corey's Mill

- Sainsbury, The Poplars\*
- Waitrose, High Street\*

\*within centre currently identified as part of the retail hierarchy.

**7.42** This might prove to be the most deliverable option. There has been recent interest in extending both the Corey's Mill and Poplars stores.

**7.43** With this option, a significant proportion of the new floorspace could be located within the existing retail network, including the neighbourhood centres. This would be broadly in line with NPPF policies, and the overall impact on the network of centres should be reduced. Limiting new superstore floorspace to extensions to existing foodstores would act to 'lock out' any new entrants from the foodstore sector in the town. This is an unsought consequence that would need to be carefully considered.

**7.44** It could be necessary to assess the potential effects of individual schemes on small foodstores in neighbourhood centres. This would depend on the scale and location of any proposals and any threshold we set for impact assessments. By reserving some of the future floorspace for these smaller centres, some impact could be off-set. We would give priority to safeguarding the network of neighbourhood centres.

**7.45** Option c is our preferred option. We think that, at present, it is the most deliverable of the options we have presented. It would essentially maintain the existing retail hierarchy in the town. It is considered to be broadly consistent with the NPPF.

**7.46** Our sustainability appraisal recognises that, at this stage in the local plan process, option c would be the most appropriate. However, it is difficult to recognise many of the effects until specific sites or locations are identified.

### Question 14

How do you think that we should meet our future food shopping needs?



## 8 Transport and Infrastructure

### Infrastructure and developer requirements

**8.1** This section of the new local plan will set out any detailed requirements relating to infrastructure and developer requirements. This might include:

- Any land that we need to allocate or 'safeguard' to make sure important infrastructure can be provided; or
- Any rules that we may have to set about the timing or phasing of new development.

**8.2** We have included questions about infrastructure and developer requirements in Section 5 and also below. We will include detailed draft policies at the next stage of consultation to make sure you can have your say.

### The A1(M) and local road network

**8.3** The A1(M) is one of the main north-south routes through Hertfordshire. It carries local, regional and some long-distance traffic. However, the Government no longer considers it to be a principal route for long journeys from London to the north-east. This section is now widely used for relatively short commuting journeys.

**8.4** The A1(M) is getting full. The section between Junction 6 at Welwyn and Junction 8 to the north of Stevenage provides two-lanes in each direction. Either side of this, the motorway has three lanes. We know that there are already times when the road struggles to cope with the amount of traffic. This is particularly the case during the morning rush hour (heading south) and the evening rush hour (heading north).

**8.5** Our transport modelling shows that improvements will be required to Junctions 7 and 8, and to the northbound carriageway between Junctions 6 and 7 as a direct result of the housing targets we are consulting upon. These sections of the road will also reach their full capacity as a result of background traffic growth during the lifetime of the plan<sup>(80)</sup>.

**8.6** The future of Stevenage is closely related to the future of the A1(M). If we people cannot travel safely and easily to and from the town it will become a less attractive place to live, work and spend leisure time.

**8.7** There are also strong commuting patterns. Many people live in places such as Letchworth, Baldock, Biggleswade and Sandy. They travel to work in Stevenage or other destinations further south. This also includes people that live in Stevenage who join the motorway to drive to work in Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield or beyond. This means that nearby councils which lie on the A1 - such as Central Bedfordshire, North Hertfordshire and Welwyn Hatfield - will also be directly affected by what happens to the motorway around Stevenage.

80 Stevenage Local Plan Model Testing (AECOM, 2013)

**8.8** It is essential that we identify a deliverable solution for the A1(M) if our plan is to proceed. The Highways Agency has drawn up an outline scheme that would provide three lanes in each direction between junction 6 (Welwyn) and junction 7 (Stevenage south). This could provide enough capacity to deliver some of the housing options we are considering. It could provide enough capacity for at least the first ten years of the plan for other options (see Issue 9).



**A long-term solution for the A1(M) is crucial to the future of Stevenage**

**8.9** At the moment there is no identified funding to make this happen. We are talking with the Highways Agency, the County Council, the Local Enterprise Partnership and our neighbours about the best way to progress. If we cannot find a solution, there will be increased congestion on the A1(M) with the amount of development that we are likely to propose in the plan.

**8.10** Beyond the A1(M), there is an extensive urban road network within the town. There are three main north-south routes and four main east-west routes.

**8.11** All of the housing targets we are considering would only need minor changes to be made to the existing road network within the town. We know what these improvements are likely to be<sup>(81)</sup>. Individual sites could require upgrades or alterations to connect them to the road network. We will identify the schemes that are required to support the plan by carrying out further, detailed transport modelling. We will do this once we confirm our housing target and identify which sites we would like to see developed. This will inform our Infrastructure Delivery Plan and the detailed policies that we write.

**8.12** Any development on the edge of the town in North and/or East Hertfordshire Districts may have an effect. It could require some new roads to be built or improvements to be made to existing junctions within Stevenage Borough. We will need to know where any development is going to be located in East and/or North Hertfordshire Districts before we could say if we would need to include any measures in our own plan. Under the Duty to Co-operate, our two neighbouring District Councils will be required to advise us in a timely manner of their plans.

81 Stevenage Local Plan Model Testing (AECOM, 2013)

**8.13** The amount of highways works that might be required is closely related to the level of development we choose and any increase in car usage. You should bear this in mind when selecting options relating to housing and employment.

## Sustainable Travel

### Issue 15: Passenger transport, walking and cycling

- a. Provide new or improved bus services
- b. Encourage more flexible working and home-working
- c. Improve pedestrian and cycle facilities
- d. **Do all of the above where practicable**

**8.14** The NPPF encourages us to deliver sustainable patterns of land use. Putting homes, offices, schools and shops close together makes it easier for people to walk, cycle or catch the bus.

**8.15** Stevenage is well served by passenger transport. Most bus services in the town are provided by Arriva and Centrebus. Buses run to most areas of the town and nearly all homes are within walking distance of a bus stop. There are a number of circular routes. These connect residential areas to the town centre, the Lister Hospital and our employment areas. Longer-distance services connect Stevenage to Hitchin, Letchworth, Welwyn Garden City and beyond.

**8.16** The pedestrian and cycle network is one of the most important legacies of the development of the New Town. Wide paths and cycleways are provided alongside all main routes. Key junctions are mostly grade separated to allow walkers and cyclists to pass safely under or over them.

**8.17** However, use of non-car modes is low. Less than one in ten journeys to work are made on foot. Around one in fifteen are by bus. Only one in forty are made by bike<sup>(82)</sup>.

**8.18** Some of this is due to lifestyles. Many people, for example, have to take their children to school before continuing their journey to work. This can make travelling by more sustainable means difficult. However, we can work to increase the share of journeys using these sustainable modes.

**8.19** **Option a** would encourage new or improved, high-quality bus services. These would be on routes that link residential areas in towns to major employment destinations. This might include a 'showcase', high quality, frequent and fast triangular service between key areas of Stevenage, Hitchin and Letchworth. This route is being proposed by the County Council in response to suggestions by us<sup>(83)</sup>.

**8.20** The last Census told us that more than 20,000 car journeys were made within or between these towns for work each day. We would need to work with bus companies and Hertfordshire County Council to identify the best routes and areas where a service might be most useful. Promotional offers and the support of local employers could make this an attractive measure.

82 2011 Census, Table QS701

83 Inter Urban Route Strategy (Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), 2012)

**8.21** There have also been proposals to relocate the existing town centre bus station. This would be replaced by new bus waiting provision and improved connections with the train station<sup>(84)</sup>. This would provide the opportunity to improve bus-train transfers. We continue to support this proposed improvement in principle.

**8.22** Under option a, we would require new developments to contribute to, or provide, new or altered bus routes where this is necessary. It would be possible to identify more detailed requirements once we have decided on our housing target and identified which sites should be developed to meet it.

**8.23 Option b** would take advantage of advances in technology. It is now much easier for employees to work remotely from home or another locations. This is particularly relevant for people with jobs based in offices. Encouraging more companies to allow home-working or flexible hours could reduce the number of journeys that need to be made in the peak hours. This may require some improvements to broadband connections and other IT infrastructure.



**Grade separated cycle and pedestrian facilities; the town is well served by bus routes**

**8.24 Option c** would encourage walking and cycling. The distance between the main towns in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire is too large for most people to realistically go by foot or bike. This option would encourage people to use these modes for trips within Stevenage or for parts of longer journeys, using public transport for the remainder.

**8.25** Measures might include:

- New or improved walking and / or cycling routes within the town including to and from stations and bus stops;
- Storage and changing facilities where people work; or
- Bike hire schemes at key locations.

**8.26** Our evidence identifies some 'missing links' in the footpath and cycle network. Closing these gaps will improve the number of homes and businesses that can be easily and safely reached.

<sup>84</sup> This was included in the redevelopment scheme for the town centre which was granted planning permission in 2011



**8.27** The County Council are investigating whether targeted cycle hire might work in Stevenage<sup>(85)</sup>. This could allow for journeys between key locations such as the train station and major employers.

**8.28** We would also aim to improve connections between the train station and Gunnels Wood. Pedestrians and cyclists can easily reach the train station from the town centre and nearby residential neighbourhoods. However, connections to the west into Gunnels Wood are poor. The existing layout of the Leisure Park is dominated by surface car parking and does not provide good access to the employment area beyond.

**8.29** The Leisure Park has previously been promoted to us as a suitable location for a more intensive, mixed use development. We will consider the appropriateness or otherwise of this as we finalise our plans for the town (see Issue 24). However, as part of any future redevelopment we would require improved connections into, and through, this site. This would open-up Gunnels Wood to easier east-west access on foot or by cycle from the train station and the town centre.

**8.30** Our evidence has also recognised that the important link between the town centre and the Old Town is poor<sup>(86)</sup>. The existing footbridge is regarded as unattractive. It is not a good route for cyclists and the less able. It directs users through a large supermarket car park at the southern end. We will encourage opportunities to deliver improvements to this link.

**8.31** We cannot require people to leave their cars at home and make their journeys on bike or by foot. What we can do is try and create the conditions where more people are encouraged to this. This can come about because of improved facilities and better communication.

**8.32** A number of the lanes and footpaths that pre-date the building of the New Town now provide important connections and leisure routes. Many of these are protected by existing policies and we propose to continue this (See Chapter 14).

**8.33** Under **option d** we would try to do as many of these things as possible. This is our preferred option. We need to explore all possible options that will encourage people to travel more sustainably.

**8.34** It is important to be clear that there are very few steps we can take directly. As local planning authority, the powers and influence that we have in relation to transport are limited. We are not responsible for roads, public transport, or what goes on beyond our administrative boundaries.

**8.35** The sustainability appraisal identifies positive effects for all of these options. These range from improvements to human health to better air quality arising from lower congestion and less use of private cars.

### Question 15

Of the options we have identified, which would be most likely to encourage you to use an alternative mode of transport rather than driving ?

85 Inter Urban Route Strategy (HCC, 2012)

86 Stevenage Urban Transport Plan (HCC, 2010)

## Rail

**8.36** Stevenage station is on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) providing regular commuter services to London, Cambridge, Peterborough and longer-distance services to towns and cities in the north of England.

**8.37** Most long-distance services calling at Stevenage are currently provided by East Coast Trains. First Capital Connect provide commuter services and are also responsible for managing the station. The ECML is close to capacity heading into London. There are also overcrowding problems on some individual trains. There are plans to address both of these issues.

**8.38** Network Rail have published their plans for the ECML for the next five years<sup>(87)</sup>. This includes proposals to replace the current signalling system over the next twenty years: this should release additional capacity for more trains. There is a proposal to build a new fifth, terminating, platform at Stevenage station. We currently expect this to be in place by December 2018. At this point, we expect a new timetable to be introduced for both commuter and long-distance services.

**8.39** During the lifetime of this plan, the current rail franchises operating from Stevenage station will change. This may bring about changes to the pattern of rail services, destinations served and the timing of services. This includes new services from Stevenage, going south of the Thames to Gatwick and Brighton. There will also be new trains, which should speed-up journey times and increase levels of passenger comfort.

**8.40** We support improvements to all rail services to / from Stevenage. However, as we have no responsibility for railways, there are limits to what we can do directly. We are limited to lobbying.

## Car parking

**8.41** We published new guidance on parking in 2012<sup>(88)</sup>. This sets the standards that we use to decide planning applications. They say less parking should be provided in locations near passenger transport and local facilities. However, they also reflect the levels of car ownership that we expect from new development. We are not proposing any further update or changes through the local plan. This is because we have only just reviewed and adopted our standards.

**8.42** The local plan can only say how much parking will be required when new developments are built, or when existing premises are extended. It cannot set parking charges, say where there will (or will not) be yellow lines or control on-street parking.

87 Network Specification 2012: London North Eastern (Network Rail, 2012)

88 Parking Provision Supplementary Planning Document



## 9 High Quality Homes

### Housing allocations

#### Issue 16: The location of new homes

*We have not identified specific options for you to choose from at this stage. However, we would still like to hear your thoughts on this matter.*

**9.1** Once we have decided on a new housing target, we will need to say where these new homes should be built. The next version of this local plan will allocate sites for housing development. Government guidance says these should be split into two categories:

- **Deliverable sites** ~ These are sites which we think are suitable for development and are available immediately. Our plan should include enough deliverable sites for at least the first five years of the plan.
- **Developable sites** ~ These are sites which we think are suitable for development and where there is a reasonable prospect they will be brought forward by landowners. We should include enough sites for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15 of the plan.

**9.2** We have to carry out detailed studies to identify the sites that meet these requirements. These are called SLAAs<sup>(89)</sup>. A SLAA can consider both brownfield (previously developed) and greenfield sites. It can consider land which is currently in the Green Belt. We have recently updated our SLAA. This process has identified a number of sites that we think might be:

- Broadly suitable locations for new or additional homes to be provided<sup>(90)</sup>; and
- Made available for development in the future based on information provided by landowners.

**9.3** It is important to be clear that **we are not suggesting that any of these sites be allocated for housing at this stage.**

**9.4** Over the last ten years, most new homes in the Borough have been built on previously-developed land. However, the Borough is very small<sup>(91)</sup>. Most of the town has been built in the last 60 years. Previously developed land is mostly associated with Victorian and pre-War industrial and commercial premises. This means that the number of previously-developed sites that we can expect to find within the town is limited.

**9.5** We will have to identify sites that are currently outside the built-up area of the town if we want to build more than 2,800 homes before 2031. Two of our housing options would require at least some greenfield or Green Belt sites to be developed (see Issue 9).

**9.6** We could, theoretically, reduce the amount of greenfield or Green Belt land that might be needed for housing by using land that is currently used for other purposes. Issues 10 and 11 ask what you think about releasing land from our employment areas at Gunnels Wood and Pin Green.

89 Stevenage Strategic Land Availability Assessment, Stevenage Borough Council, 2013.

90 Although some of these sites may require us to change or remove existing planning designations

91 Only Watford is (slightly) smaller in the whole East of England region.

**9.7** Our SLAA has not considered whether any sites in these areas might be suitable for housing at this stage. This is because we do not currently support the option of redeveloping our employment areas. It is not something that our evidence says we should do. It would make it much more difficult to provide the right number and type of jobs in Stevenage in the future<sup>(92)</sup>. We will decide whether or not to consider using parts of our employment areas for housing when we update the SLAA later in 2013. This decision will be influenced by what you tell us during this consultation.

**9.8** The update will help us decide if anything has changed. It will also consider any new or different sites that are suggested to us as a result of this consultation. Any sites that do not fully satisfy the relevant tests will not be proposed as allocations in the new local plan. They will not be included in any future calculations of land supply. This applies to brownfield and greenfield sites.

**9.9** The updated SLAA will provide us with a revised estimate of urban capacity and total capacity within the Borough. This may turn out to be higher, lower or the same as the figures presented in Issue 9. The figures in the SLAA update will inform the next version of this plan.

**9.10** The sites and areas we can consider for development will be influenced by a number of matters that have yet to be completed or decided. These include:

- The housing target that we decide to proceed with;
- The decisions that we make about the other issues in this document;
- The results of further evidence work; and
- Sustainability appraisal

**9.11** The next consultation on this plan will say which sites we think should be used to build homes in the future and let you have your say.

**9.12** Our sustainability appraisal has looked at the broad effects of using different types of site for housing. Previously developed sites generally perform the best. Using sites that are currently used for other purposes, such as employment, could have negative effects.

**9.13** Using greenfield and Green Belt sites can have some benefits, as they can allow services such as schools and shops to be planned into new development. However, they do involve the (potentially significant) loss of existing habitat.

**9.14** If you would like to suggest a site for us to consider, please make sure you provide enough information to let us identify it correctly. If you are a landowner and have a site you would like to bring to our attention, please complete a 'call for sites' form and send it to us with a site plan and any supporting information you consider necessary<sup>(93)</sup>.

## Question 16

Are there any new sites that you think we should be considering for housing development?

92 Stevenage Employment and Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

93 These forms are available on our website or on request from [planningpolicy@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:planningpolicy@stevenage.gov.uk)

## Windfall sites

**9.15** Windfalls are sites that come forward for housing (or other) development that we have not formally allocated. Windfalls may arise for several reasons:

- They are too small to have been considered in our evidence<sup>(94)</sup>;
- They involve the small-scale (re)development of existing residential land<sup>(95)</sup>; or
- They involve non-residential land that has unexpectedly become available.

**9.16** The local plan will contain a policy or policies on windfall development. It will set the criteria that sites will have to meet before they can be developed for housing.

### Issue 17: House conversions

- Permit the conversion of houses into flats in all circumstances.
- Only permit conversions when existing and potential residents are not adversely affected.**
- Do not permit any further conversions of houses into flats.

**9.17** Conversions of houses into flats can be an important source of windfall dwellings. Around half of the New Town housing stock is made up of generously sized three-bedroom properties. These can be relatively easily reshaped into smaller flats or maisonettes. Larger homes in other parts of the town might also be appropriate for conversion.

**9.18** On one hand, conversions are a good way of meeting housing needs. They increase the number of smaller units and can reduce the over-supply of three-bed terraced homes. However, an increasing number of conversions can increase pressure on facilities such as parking and open space.

**9.19** **Option a** would see us actively encourage conversions. This issue is closely related to housing mix. There is an imbalance in the housing stock and an increasing demand for smaller properties<sup>(96)</sup>. House conversions have the potential to improve the current housing mix.

**9.20** In large enough numbers, house conversions would also help to reduce pressure on greenfield or Green Belt sites. We may be able to encourage enough conversions to take place through windfalls that less land needs to be released for development.

**9.21** **Option b** would take a balanced approach. We recognise that house conversions are an important way of delivering the demand for smaller units. However, additional homes can have negative impacts in crowded residential areas. They can create demand for car parking spaces, open space, education and health services. This might not be apparent looking at individual schemes. But converting a number of properties in a relatively small area can have a notable impact.

94 The SLAA uses a threshold. Sites that are likely to deliver less than five additional units are not included

95 This is generally excluded from the SLAA

96 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (DCA, 2013)

**9.22** Some residential areas have inadequate space to provide off-street car parking. Allowing too many house conversions can change the character of an area. This is in terms of both the built environment and the social mix.

**9.23** Option b is our preferred option. This would allow conversions only where any impacts can be successfully mitigated.

**9.24** **Option c** would take a more robust approach. This would recognise that most areas of the New Town were designed for a specific purpose ~ to provide family homes. Infrastructure such as parking provision, open space, health and education provision were specifically designed and built to support this type of housing.

**9.25** This option would ensure that no areas experience additional pressures from house conversions. However, this option would also remove the ability for us to deliver more smaller units in a sustainable, but low-rise, way. It could lead to pressure for more land to be released for development.

**9.26** Our sustainability appraisal shows that option a performs well to begin with. However, incremental change would, over time, lead to pressure on existing services. Option b performs best by taking a balanced approach. Option c performs poorly. It would increase the number of new homes that would be needed from alternate, potentially greenfield, sources.

### Question 17

In which circumstances should we allow existing homes to be converted into smaller units?

## Homes for all

### Affordable housing

#### Issue 18: Affordable housing

- a. **Set targets that require up to 40% affordable housing on qualifying sites**
- b. Set targets that are higher than Option a
- c. Set targets that are lower than Option a

**9.27** Hertfordshire is an expensive place to buy or rent a home. Stevenage has some of the lowest prices in the county. A relatively high income is still needed to afford even the cheapest home.

**9.28** Stevenage experiences significant levels of housing need. Many people require a home of their own but cannot afford one without help. The level of need can be linked to a number of factors. These include house prices, earnings and deprivation. Other issues such as family breakdowns also lead to more people needing homes.

**9.29** Affordable housing is for people whose needs are not met by the private housing market. It includes social rented and intermediate housing. The new plan will say how much affordable housing should be built in Stevenage between 2011 and 2031.

**9.30** 'Social rented' homes are normally owned and managed by local councils or other providers known as registered social landlords. Target rents are set nationally. They are significantly lower than private rents. The average weekly social rent for a two-bed property in Stevenage is £86. The average weekly private rent for a two-bed property in Stevenage is £177<sup>(97)</sup>.

**9.31** 'Affordable rent' is a new initiative. It can be applied to newly built affordable homes. Affordable rents can be set at a level which is no more than 80% of private rents in an area. Affordable rent is a form of social rent. It is expected to be the main element of future affordable housing supply.

**9.32** 'Intermediate' means housing at prices above those for social rent but below market price or rents. These include key worker homes, shared equity schemes, and other low cost homes for sale and intermediate rent.



**Affordable housing built at Cotney Croft (l) and Peartree Way (r)**

**9.33** The NPPF says that, where affordable housing is required, local plans should set policies that meet local needs.

**9.34** Our studies confirm that it has become much harder to buy homes over the last decade. Lower quartile income in Stevenage is around £19,000<sup>(98)</sup> and the smallest properties are, on average, £92,500. This means that entry-level properties are almost five times entry-level income.

**9.35** The credit crunch and economic downturn have also had a major impact. Most banks now require much larger deposits before they will approve a mortgage. Very few new-forming households in Stevenage have enough savings and income to be able to support a mortgage.

97 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (DCA, 2013)

98 This means that 25% of people living in Stevenage earn less than this amount. 75% earn more than this amount. Lower quartile income is used to work out how easy or difficult it is for people to access the private housing market.

**9.36** Renting on the private market has become much more common. The number of privately rented homes in Stevenage almost trebled between 2001 and 2011<sup>(99)</sup>. Deposits for rental properties are generally much lower. However many would still struggle to fund these or monthly rents. These factors all fuel demand for affordable homes.

**9.37** Even if we built all of our new homes as affordable housing, we would not meet demand. Our Strategic Housing Market Assessment identifies a requirement for 575 affordable units per year. This is higher than any of the annual rates of development identified in Issue 9. It is not realistic for us to expect this to happen. However, we can ask sites that will provide additional homes to contribute towards affordable housing. Deciding on an appropriate level of affordable housing is an important decision.

**9.38** Our current approach to affordable housing is set out in our Interim Planning Policy Statement (IPPS). The IPPS says that affordable housing should be provided at the following levels:

- 10% for sites of 1 - 4 homes (to be secured as a financial contribution)
- 20% for sites of 5 - 9 homes
- 30% for sites of 10 - 14 homes
- 35% for sites of 15 - 24 homes; and
- 40% for sites of 25 or more homes<sup>(100)</sup>.

**9.39** **Option a** would carry forward the requirements in the IPPS into the new local plan. These say that all new housing sites should contribute towards affordable housing. The amount of affordable housing that we ask for increases on larger sites. This approach has been quite successful. In the last five years, around half of the new homes built have been affordable<sup>(101)</sup>.

**9.40** Our evidence says that we can justify asking for affordable homes at the levels set out in the IPPS. This is based on the levels of affordable housing need that are expected in the future. Option a could deliver around 1,800 new affordable homes within the Borough boundary over the plan period<sup>(102)</sup>. This is an average of 90 new affordable new homes per year. This would meet some affordable housing needs but it is still well below the levels that our evidence suggest is needed.

**9.41** However, housing need needs to be balanced against the amount of affordable homes that developers can provide. The NPPF tells us to make sure any affordable housing requirements do not affect viability. Previous studies have told us that asking for affordable housing at these levels can be viable<sup>(103)</sup>. We will update this evidence later in 2013. This will take into account changed economic conditions and the other things we may need to ask developers to provide (see Issue 8).

99 Supporting Technical Information (SBC, 2013)

100 This means, for example, that a scheme for 50 homes should provide 20 of these (40%) as affordable housing.

101 This figure includes a number of schemes on council-owned land where up to 100% affordable housing was provided.

102 This is based on option b of Issue 9.

103 Affordable Housing Development Economics Study (Adams Integra, 2007)



**9.42** Option a is currently our preferred option. Providing new affordable homes is a key priority for the Council. We think that it is very important that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent home that is suitable for their needs. We also have to be realistic about what we can achieve. The target recommended by our evidence takes these factors into account.

**9.43** **Option b** would see us set a higher target than the evidence suggests. This option could enable us to provide more affordable housing. Raising the target provides us with the chance to meet a greater proportion of local needs.

**9.44** However, higher targets are a risk. The NPPF says we should make sure that any developers can make reasonable profits on the sites they bring forward. Sites may not come forward at all if we set our target too high. Option b could actually result in less affordable homes coming forward than under option a.

**9.45** Because of this, it is likely that we would need to make compromises to achieve any higher targets. We would have to ask for less of the other things we might look for in new developments. This might include open spaces and play areas or contributions towards infrastructure. By doing this we might be able to remove enough costs from development to make sure sites still came forward.

**9.46** Stevenage has a history of well planned development. There are open spaces, schools and facilities spread throughout the town. It would be a significant change to begin saying some of these things were less important. For these reasons we do not currently support option b. However, we recognise this is something that we will have to think about very carefully (see Issue 8).

**9.47** **Option c** would set lower targets. This would result in fewer affordable homes being provided. However, this approach might be useful if we wanted to stimulate the market. Providing affordable housing is a significant cost for developers. If we lowered this cost, it might make certain schemes or projects more likely to happen. It could give Stevenage an advantage over other areas with higher targets.

**9.48** This approach might also allow us to do other things better by letting us ask for higher infrastructure contributions or sustainability requirements (see issues 8 and 27). Option c would also result in a greater number of private homes being built in Stevenage. We know there is significant demand for these across Hertfordshire and beyond. This demand is not likely to go away. It could give us a greater chance of diversifying the overall housing stock of the town.

**9.49** The sustainability appraisal supports our choice of option b. It maximises the potential for affordable housing without compromising viability or other objectives.

### Question 18

Do you agree with our suggested approach to affordable housing? What target do you think we should set?

**9.50** As well as the overall targets, the new local plan will need to say what types of affordable housing will be required. This will include setting a tenure split. We currently ask for 65% of new affordable homes to be social rented. The remainder can be intermediate tenures. We will use the results of our evidence to help decide if this is still the most appropriate approach. We will need to think about the likely impacts of the new 'affordable rent' option.

**9.51** We also need to think about which development types would be most appropriate. We normally secure 'general needs' affordable housing. These are normal homes which can be used to accommodate households from our housing waiting list.

**9.52** However, the largest amount of household growth in the future will be amongst older age groups. These groups will have particular needs over the plan period. In particular, we will need to provide more affordable sheltered and extra-care accommodation for older people.

**9.53** We may want to require that some new affordable housing provision helps to meet these demands. This could help us to better manage our existing stock, as older people whose families have moved away choose to move out of houses now too large for them into new, sheltered accommodation. Our evidence suggests more than 2,500 houses are currently considered to be under-occupied. These could be re-used to meet the needs of families on our waiting list.

**9.54** This type of 'moving on' programme could significantly reduce the level of affordable need. We could encourage developers to follow this approach by requiring lower overall levels of affordable housing where supported or sheltered schemes are provided.

**9.55** These are detailed issues that require further consideration. We will set out our proposed approach and draft policies in the next version of this plan. This will make give you the opportunity to have your say.

## Housing Mix

### Issue 19: Housing mix

- a. **Build 60% one- and two-bedroom homes; 40% large family homes.**
- b. Focus on building large family homes.
- c. Focus on building one- and two-bedroom flats and houses for first time buyers.

**9.56** A good mix of housing types and sizes is needed for a balanced community. This means providing the right mix of flats, houses and bungalows to meet the needs of all age groups and providing the right combination of smaller and larger properties for each of these types. The new plan will say what type of homes should be built within the Borough between 2011 and 2031. This is known as the housing mix.

**9.57** The NPPF says that we should deliver a wide choice of quality homes. The original masterplan for Stevenage did not incorporate this balance. Over half of all houses in the Borough have three bedrooms, a significant proportion of which are terraced units. There is a shortage of both smaller and larger homes.

**9.58** In recent years we have made progress towards addressing this issue. This is particularly the case with smaller homes. Between 2006 and 2011, more than three-quarters of the new homes we built had either 1 or 2 bedrooms. However, new homes only represent a small proportion of the existing stock<sup>(104)</sup>. We have identified three options to deal with this issue. The table below shows the impact that each option could have on the housing stock by 2031. It is important to note that all of our options would provide some units of all sizes<sup>(105)</sup>.

| Year            | % of properties that (would) have |            |                    |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|------------|--------------------|
|                 | 1 or 2 bedrooms                   | 3 bedrooms | 4 or more bedrooms |
| 2011            | 36%                               | 49%        | 15%                |
| 2031 (option a) | 39%                               | 45%        | 16%                |
| 2031 (option b) | 37%                               | 45%        | 18%                |
| 2031 (option c) | 41%                               | 44%        | 15%                |

**9.59** **Option a** would see us follow the recommendations of our evidence. This is our preferred option. It is predicted that the number of people living on their own will increase during the plan period. There is already an existing shortage of smaller units. To deal with these issues our evidence recommends that just under 60% of new homes should have either 1 or 2 bedrooms. It says the remainder should have three or more bedrooms.<sup>(106)</sup>

**9.60** This approach would see the proportion of three-bedroom homes across the town fall. It would see the proportion of other house sizes rise slightly.

**9.61** We think that option a gives us the best chance of meeting the future needs of the population. It is most likely to satisfy the requirements of the NPPF.

**9.62** **Option b** would require more larger homes to be built. Some areas that were developed later on in the New Town, such as Chancellors Road and parts of Chells Manor, contain larger family homes. However, there is still a significant shortage of these types of units in Stevenage.

**9.63** Option b would deliver more family housing. This might include a greater proportion of 'aspirational' housing (see below). It would provide a larger number of the types of homes that are currently missing in the town. It could encourage a greater number of higher earners to live in the town. This could help to raise levels of self-containment (see Issue 5). We predict that this approach would see the amount of larger homes in the Borough increase by one-third by 2031.

**9.64** However, option b would also result in a lower number of smaller units being built. Smaller units are important for first time-buyers. They represent a significant amount of affordable housing need. It would also require us to release more land as larger homes are generally built at lower densities than flats or small houses.

104 Our Borough capacity of 5,300 homes would represent an approximate 15% increase over a twenty-year period

105 See Supporting Technical Information (SBC, 2013) for further details.

106 Specific splits are recommended for private market and affordable housing. Strategic Housing Market Assessment (DCA, 2013)

**9.65** **Option c** would do the opposite. It would say that we will deliver a greater proportion of small units. Smaller units are perhaps more likely to deal with some of the main issues we have identified. Smaller units are the types of properties that first-time buyers normally look for. They can be suitable for people looking to 'downsize' their existing home. The greatest affordable housing need is for small units. This option could also reduce the amount of land we needed for development. We would build up instead of out.

**9.66** However, small units could place a greater strain on local services. Development, and therefore the population, would be concentrated in smaller areas. Some sites are less appropriate for higher density development.

**9.67** The sustainability appraisal identifies that option a would have the most beneficial impacts. It would provide a more flexible and responsive approach. Options b and c would meet specific needs. However, this would be at the expense of meeting other requirements. Option b would have greater, negative environmental impacts. This is because it would require more land to be released for development.

### Housing density

**9.68** Housing density refers to the number of homes that are built on a given area of land. Large family homes are normally low density. Blocks of flats are normally high density. The NPPF says that we should set out a local approach to housing density in our plan.

**9.69** The original masterplan for Stevenage involved building at relatively low densities. This is because the plans included wide roads, generous gardens and green spaces. However, where sites are easily accessible, higher densities can ensure more efficient use of limited land resources. Higher densities can also help to support local amenities and improve the viability of passenger transport. The pictures on the following page give examples of different development densities.

**9.70** Our District Plan Second Review policies say that developments of between 30 and 50 dwellings per hectare (dph) will normally be acceptable. Higher densities will be encouraged in the town centre, at neighbourhood centres and other locations with good public transport links.

**9.71** At this stage, we are not proposing a numerical target for the density of new housing. We think that the best approach to density is to ask for good design. This means that when applications are submitted we can think about whether the type of building being proposed is appropriate to its location. We can decide if it will fit in with its surroundings and have an acceptable impact on any properties that are already there (see Chapter 10).

**9.72** If we set a target, schemes can concentrate too hard on meeting it. Good design can then sometimes become less important. It can be harder to resist a development that we do not think is appropriate in design terms if it meets the requirements of any density policy.

**9.73** We have not set out any options or asked a specific question on this matter. However, we would still be interested in hearing any thoughts that you may have.





Large family homes - 15dph



New town terraces - 25 to 30dph



Victorian terraces - 40 to 50dph



Mixed flats / houses - 50 to 70dph



Low rise flats - approx 100dph



Medium or high rise flats - 200dph+



### Aspirational housing

**9.74** The New Town was built to attract working families. This is reflected in the significant amount of three-bed houses in Stevenage, discussed above. As a result there are few large family homes in the town. Only 1 in 100 homes are in the highest Council Tax brackets, compared to 1 in 10 in the rest of Hertfordshire<sup>(107)</sup>.

**9.75** There are two main reasons for this. Very few of these types of homes were built by the Development Corporation. In more recent years, this trend has continued because of a perceived lack of market demand. A 2007 survey showed that 9 out of 10 high earners would not consider moving to Stevenage<sup>(108)</sup>.

**9.76** Through our local plan we aim to change the way people see Stevenage. We want to make it a more desirable place to live. It is likely that this will include asking for 'aspirational homes' in suitable locations. Aspirational homes will normally refer to large, low-density executive homes or 'penthouse'-style flats in more central locations. We expect aspirational homes to make up a small, but important, part of housing supply in the future<sup>(109)</sup>.

**9.77** We have not included a specific issue at this stage. The decision about whether to ask for aspirational homes, and how many we should seek, is a detailed policy matter. We will include any draft policies at the next stage of consultation. This will make sure that you can have your say.

#### Question 19

Which of the options on housing mix would you prefer us to take and why? Do you have any views on housing density or aspirational homes?

### Gypsies and Travellers

#### Issue 20: Gypsies and Travellers

- a. Extend the existing site at Dyes Lane
- b. Identify a new site - probably near to Junction 8 of the A1(M)\*
- c. Identify a new site elsewhere\*

\* These options will only be pursued if our evidence clearly shows a new site is needed.

**9.78** Gypsies and Travellers are people who have a nomadic way of life. Some groups travel more than others. We should plan for Gypsies and Travellers in the same way that we plan for other forms of housing.

107 Aspirational Housing Research (SBC, 2010)

108 Aspirational Homes Survey (DCA, 2007)

109 Our previous evidence suggested a target of around 3% of new homes. It set out criteria that should be considered to define aspirational homes. See Aspirational Housing Research (SBC, 2010)

**9.79** We have a legal duty to consider how much accommodation is required for Gypsies and Travellers. Sites or pitches can be provided to meet the need for either long-term (permanent) or short-term (transit) use.

**9.80** There are many advantages to planning positively for the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community. These include:

- Providing certainty for both the settled and travelling community;
- Meeting identified accommodation needs;
- Improving the health and education of Gypsies and Travellers;
- Allowing for the pro-active design and delivery of high quality sites by partner organisations; and
- Reducing the likelihood that sites will be built without planning permission, along with the associated costs and tensions that these can bring.

**9.81** There is currently one Gypsy and Traveller site within the Borough. This is at Dyes Lane, to the west of the A1(M).

**9.82** Our withdrawn draft Core Strategy included a target to identify land for 20 new Gypsy and Traveller pitches. This reflected the target for Stevenage that was set in the East of England Plan. The target was influenced by the likely level of need across the region. We were, in effect, asked to meet some demand from other areas.

**9.83** The East of England Plan has now been revoked. It is now up to us to determine how many pitches will be needed. We can do this on the basis of local need. This means that the target in the local plan will be lower than our old target in the regional plan.

**9.84** We are currently updating our evidence. This will tell us how many new pitches will be required over the period to 2031. National guidance says that, once this is done, we should identify specific sites where future needs will be met<sup>(110)</sup>.

**9.85** We have identified three broad options at this stage. We would like to hear any thoughts you may have on this issue.

**9.86** **Option a** would see us extend the existing site at Dyes Lane. This currently provides 17 pitches.

**9.87** Guidance suggests that Gypsy and Traveller sites should ideally consist of up to 15 pitches<sup>(111)</sup>. Our existing site is slightly larger than this. However, by extending the site further, it would be possible to then split it into two, separate sites each of approximately 10 - 12 pitches.

**9.88** The owner of the land immediately surrounding the existing site has agreed, in principle, to support this option. The current site managers are also willing to explore this approach.

110 Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (CLG, 2012)

111 Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Good Practice Guidance (CLG, 2008)

**9.89** Option a provides a number of advantages. It would allow us to provide future pitches where the need is most likely to arise ~ from new households that form from existing families on the site. We have also identified a willing landowner and a potential site manager. The existing site is well established. The land here has already been taken out of the Green Belt. It could provide a deliverable solution.

**9.90** However, if our evidence shows that future need is higher than we currently expect, it might not be possible to pursue option a. It could require more land than the landowner is willing to make available. It might make any new, split sites larger than appropriate.

**9.91 Option b** would see us identify a new site for Gypsy and Traveller pitches. Our previous evidence identified that the best opportunities for a new site were in the north-west of the Borough near to Junction 8 of the A1(M)<sup>(112)</sup>. This was supported by the Gypsy and Traveller community who said that a location to the north of the town with good access to the A1(M) would be their preferred location.

**9.92** This was the broad area we identified for a new site in the withdrawn draft Core Strategy. However, there were a number of problems with this approach. These would still need to be resolved:

- There are only a limited number of undeveloped sites here that are within the Borough boundary. Some of these have been identified for other potential uses (see Issues 12 and 16). We would need to find an appropriate location and consider the best overall mix of land uses that we needed;
- We have not been able to find a landowner willing to provide a site for Gypsies and Travellers in this area;
- We have approached a number of organisations but have not been able to find a manager for any potential new site;
- Any new site would almost certainly require us to release land from the Green Belt; while
- We would need to make sure that the release of any new site could be phased to meet needs over the plan period.

**9.93** These are significant issues. At present, we could not show that a site near Junction 8 is a deliverable solution.

**9.94 Option c** would, therefore, look for a site in an alternative location. We would try to find a willing landowner with a suitable site in another part of the Borough. This would most likely be on the edge of, or just outside, the town. This is because Government guidance says that “*many Gypsies and Travellers express a preference for a rural location which is on the edge of or closely located to a large town or city consistent with traditional lifestyles and means of employment*”<sup>(113)</sup>.

**9.95** Options a and b would make provision in the west and north of the Borough respectively. The only other undeveloped parts of the Borough are to the east and the south-east of the existing town. Alternatively, we could look to make any provision jointly with a neighbouring council through

112 Accommodation Needs of Gypsies and Travellers in Northern and Eastern Hertfordshire (Scott Wilson, 2007)

113 Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites: Good Practice Guidance (CLG, 2008)

the Duty to Co-operate. Both East and North Hertfordshire Districts are significantly larger, and more rural, than Stevenage: theoretically, it should be easier for them to find suitable sites than it is for Stevenage as a small and heavily urbanised council.

**9.96** At this point, no sites have been put forward for us to consider in this part of the Borough. If our evidence showed a new site was needed, we would carry out a search. This would tell us if there were any suitable locations.

**9.97** Our sustainability appraisal suggests that option a performs best. This is because it would extend a well established site to the benefit of its community. Options b and c are considered more difficult to appraise as specific sites are not identified. The provision of pitches to meet future needs would meet social objectives.

**9.98** We would like to hear any views that you may have at this stage. In responding to this issue, please note the following important points:

- It is not certain that we will need to identify land for a new Gypsy and Traveller site;
- We are identifying options now but we will only take forward proposals if our evidence shows that it is needed;
- We have not identified any preferred locations for options b and c at this stage;
- We also need to understand, and consider, how the other local authorities in Hertfordshire are planning for Gypsies and Travellers. There may be benefits in working together. This could, or could not, include making joint-provision for any new sites and / or providing them outside the Borough boundary.

### Question 20

Where should we make any new provision for Gypsies and Travellers?

## 10 Good Design

### Design

**10.1** One of the main purposes of the planning system is to make sure that new development results in places and buildings that improve an area and the way it works. The NPPF recognises this is a key element in achieving sustainable development.

**10.2** The new local plan will include detailed design policy. This will set out what is and what isn't acceptable in new developments. High quality design creates places that people want to live, work and relax in. This includes considering the social and environmental impacts of a developments as well as how it looks.

**10.3** Stevenage is a mix of pre-New Town, New Town and post-New Town development. All of these combine to make Stevenage what it is today. They define the character of the town and how we see it. It is therefore important that we preserve what is good and, where necessary, improve the built environment of the town. We want people who live in, work in, or just look at the new developments to know they are part of Stevenage.

**10.4** We already have the Stevenage Design Guide. This is a supplementary planning document (SPD) that was adopted in 2009. It contains guidance on detailed design issues such as layout, building orientation and sustainability. It is used to help us decide planning applications. We do not propose to update or revisit the advice that it provides at this stage.

**10.5** Design is a detailed policy issue. We will include draft policies at the next stage of consultation. However, before we do this, we would like to hear your thoughts on one particular approach to design that we could take. The options for this are set out below.

### Character Zones

#### Issue 21: Character zones

- a. Carry forward the approach in the Old Town Area Action Plan for this part of the town
- b. Extend the character zone approach to cover the whole town
- c. **Do not use area-based policies and apply generic criteria to all applications for new development**

**10.6** One way of promoting appropriate design is through the use of character zones. These identify important or sensitive design features within a given area. Developers are required to take these into account when building up their proposals. Character zones are normally made up of areas or streets with similar characteristics. This does not mean that all buildings within a zone look the same. It does not mean that any new buildings should just copy existing styles. It simply means that it is possible to identify some common characteristics that are:

- Different from surrounding areas; and
- Worthy of protecting and promoting.



**10.7 Option a** would apply this approach to the Old Town only. Left unchecked, the special character of the Old Town could become diluted or even disappear over time.

**10.8** The draft plans we prepared in 2010 said that we would introduce character zones in the Old Town. The High Street area already enjoys some protection. It is a Conservation Area and also has a significant number of listed buildings. Our approach recognised the historical importance of the whole of this part of Stevenage. It recognised that the Old Town covered a much wider area than just the High Street<sup>(114)</sup>.



Our draft LDF included policies to safeguard historic character

**10.9** For each character zone, broad guidance was set covering matters including:

- Building heights;
- Materials;
- Active frontages; and / or
- Transport matters.

**10.10** Option a would carry forward these proposals into the new local plan.

**10.11 Option b** would 'roll-out' this approach to the remainder of the Stevenage. Much of the New Town was built in a single generation. Some of this design is becoming historically important in its own right. However, some of the New Town buildings need investment or replacing.

**10.12** Stevenage's unique position as Britain's first New Town, means that it forms an important part of the country's development history. New development needs to be carefully balanced and integrated. We already have good examples of modern, post-New Town buildings. These include North Hertfordshire College and the flats at Silkin Fields. These provide more contemporary building designs and help to improve the image of Stevenage.

**10.13** Option b would divide the town into areas of similar character and set broad guidance on the design of new development over the plan period. We have already carried out work which tells us about the main design features in each of the town's neighbourhoods.

114 Draft Old Town Area Action Plan (SBC, 2010)

**10.14** We would use this work as the basis for developing character zones across the rest of the town. We would decide if any neighbourhoods needed to be sub-divided to provide guidance for smaller areas.

**10.15** Option b would provide guidance in areas of modern historical importance. This approach might help us to preserve specific elements of new town design. It would identify features that we felt should be reflected in new additions. This option might give us a greater chance of resisting too much change in areas where we feel the original New Town character is under threat (see Issue 17).

**10.16** Under **Option c**, we would not introduce character zones either in the Old Town or across the rest of the town. We would use a generic (town-wide) design policy that said what new development should achieve. This would be used to assess all relevant planning applications.

**10.17** The new local plan needs to strike a careful balance. It must set out enough detail to allow us to properly consider any applications. However, it also needs to be accessible and easy to use. It should not contain unnecessary requirements or be used to stifle innovation.

**10.18** We recognise that areas of the town have specific characteristics. However, this can be reflected in more general requirements that ask new development to integrate with and enhance the existing character of an area. We already have detailed design guidance set out in our Design Guide SPD. Some matters which might be included in an assessment of character zones, such as transport, might equally be covered by other policies in the plan.

**10.19** Option c is currently our preferred option. However, we would like to know if you think we should change our minds.

**10.20** The sustainability appraisal recognises that options a and b perform well in preserving and enhancing key features of the town. However, it is considered that an overly-restrictive approach could deter investment and development. Option c would lead to broadly opposite effects. A less regulated approach would allow our approach to design to be more flexible and responsive. This approach could encourage schemes to come forward.

### Question 21

What would be the best way of ensuring high quality design in new developments?

## 11 Healthy Communities

### Neighbourhood centres

#### Issue 22: Neighbourhood centres and facilities

- a. Keep the existing neighbourhood centre designations
- b. Make changes to the designations that reflect the current nature of our centres and their facilities
- c. Allow for more flexibility and let the market decide what to provide

**11.1** The original masterplan for the New Town provided for essential facilities within half a mile of all homes. This is reflected in the network of neighbourhood centres that are found across the town. These are a key feature of Stevenage's built heritage and an important part of the town's character.

**11.2** Within Stevenage, the term 'neighbourhood centres' traditionally describes all of the locally available shopping facilities. Larger centres such as The Oval and The Hyde provide a wide range of uses. These can include shops, churches, pubs, community centres and flats. There are also a number of smaller centres such as those at Hydean Way and Rockingham Way. These do not provide the same number or range of uses but they still provide valuable facilities for local residents.

**11.3** A number of these centres are now in need of investment and repair. The design and layout of some centres encourages anti-social behaviour and leads to a fear of crime. This stops some people from visiting them. Some works have been carried out to address these concerns, such as the recent improvements at The Glebe and The Hyde.

**11.4** Changes in lifestyles over the last 60 years have also had a significant impact. Many more people now own a car. Supermarkets are larger. Many people do their food shopping on-line. These changes mean that people now travel further and can more easily buy food and access services. This means that the neighbourhood centres no longer fill the role for which they were originally created.

**11.5** However, local facilities continue to play an important role for day-to-day convenience (food) shopping. They are vital for residents who have difficulty accessing the town centre or shops that are further away.

**11.6** **Option a** would keep the existing designations set out in the District Plan Second Review, 2004. The Plan identifies 10 large neighbourhood centres and 12 small neighbourhood centres. This approach would make sure that important facilities continue to be protected for the lifetime of the new local plan. Our existing policies have generally been successful in keeping our neighbourhood centres at the heart of community life.

**11.7** However, there have been changes since these designations were agreed. Some small centres now only consist of a single shop ~ such as Whitesmead and Austen Paths. Some large centres ~ such as Canterbury Way and Chells Manor ~ do not provide the same number or range of facilities as are found in locations such as The Hyde or Bedwell Crescent.



Neighbourhood centres at Oaks Cross and Symonds Green

**11.8 Option b** would make some changes based on the findings and recommendations of our evidence<sup>(115)</sup>. Three centres would change from being large centres to small centres. One centre would go from being a small centre to a large centre. These moves would not lessen the degree of policy protection that these centres enjoy: they would merely reflect changes since 2004. Seven centres would be removed from the hierarchy completely.

**11.9** These would be the centres at Archer Road, Austen Paths, Burwell Road, Fairview Road, Kenilworth Close, Lonsdale Road and Whitesmead Road. Several of these centres now consist of just a single shop. We would write a new 'local shops' policy that would protect these shops.

**11.10** One centre would have its own, new designation: district centre. This is The Poplars. This distinctive designation is justified because The Poplars is different from all of the other large neighbourhood centres. It is anchored by a large Sainsbury supermarket and has a small number of other shop units, a doctor's surgery and a pub. No other neighbourhood centre is anchored by a large supermarket. No other large supermarket has a range of other adjacent facilities.

**11.11** The effects of options a and b are shown in the table on the following page. The changes from the existing designations that would result from choosing option b are shown in bold. Under option b we would have one district centre, seven large centres and six small centres.

**11.12 Option c** would take a more flexible approach. It would take account of the changes in lifestyle discussed above. It would ask whether it is viable to carry on supporting a large number of centres across the town over the next twenty years.

**11.13** This policy approach would continue to support the range of uses currently seen in our neighbourhood centres. However, it would take a more relaxed approach to the minimum levels of provision. It might only require, for example, a small number of shops to be kept. This would allow the market to decide on the level of services that could be supported in each centre. It could release parts of our existing neighbourhood centres to provide more homes.

115 Stevenage Retail Study (CACI / Applied Planning, 2013)

| Centre                         | Option a     | Option b                    |
|--------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| Archer Road                    | Small centre | <i>(local shops policy)</i> |
| Austen Paths                   | Small centre | <i>(local shops policy)</i> |
| Bedwell Crescent               | Large centre | Large centre                |
| Burwell Road                   | Small centre | <i>(local shops policy)</i> |
| Canterbury Way                 | Large centre | <b>Small centre</b>         |
| Chells Manor                   | Large centre | <b>Small centre</b>         |
| Fairview Road                  | Small centre | <i>(local shops policy)</i> |
| Filey Close                    | Large centre | <b>Small centre</b>         |
| The Glebe                      | Large centre | Large centre                |
| The Hyde                       | Large centre | Large centre                |
| Hydean Way                     | Small centre | Small centre                |
| Kenilworth Close (Hertford Rd) | Small centre | <i>(local shops policy)</i> |
| Lonsdale Road                  | Small centre | <i>(local shops policy)</i> |
| Marymead                       | Large centre | Large centre                |
| Mobbsbury Way                  | Small centre | Small centre                |
| Oaks Cross                     | Large centre | Large centre                |
| The Oval                       | Large centre | Large centre                |
| Poplars                        | Large centre | <b>District centre</b>      |
| Popple Way                     | Small centre | Small centre                |
| Rockingham Way                 | Small centre | Small centre                |
| Roebuck                        | Small centre | <b>Large centre</b>         |
| Whitesmead Road                | Small centre | <i>(local shops policy)</i> |

**11.14** Option c could provide much-needed new homes. We already know that we can only accommodate a limited amount of development within the existing town (see Issue 9). Our evidence makes some allowance for new homes to be built in and around our neighbourhood centres<sup>(116)</sup>. Option c could allow us to increase this.

**11.15** Land values for residential uses are higher than the other types of facilities normally found in our neighbourhood centres. Once shops and facilities were lost, it would be unlikely that we would be able to replace them again at a later date. It might also create a domino effect. If some facilities closed, it might become harder to keep those which remained.

116 Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SBC, 2013)



**11.16** Our sustainability appraisal shows that, in the short-term, option a scores well. It provides access to facilities and reduces the need to travel. However, it could have negative effects if under-performing centres are not able to adapt or change. Options b and c perform well against economic indicators though it is recognised that this could reduce access to services for some. Option c, in particular, could lead to a more significant loss of facilities as it would be a market-led approach.

### Question 22

Which option would be the best way of providing local facilities for people's day-to-day needs?

### The Old Town High Street

**11.17** The High Street provides a range of uses that complement the centre of the New Town. It is characterised by a wide range of independent retailers, together with cafes, restaurants and pubs. A medium-sized supermarket anchors the High Street and draws in trade. There are other services including a second supermarket, a post office and a part-time library.

**11.18** The High Street clearly fulfils a greater function than the neighbourhood centres. The quantity of floorspace here, along with the range of services, clearly makes the High Street different from other centres elsewhere in the town. It attracts people in from a much wider area. This includes a number of outlying villages that surround Stevenage<sup>(117)</sup>.

**11.19** The NPPF is clear that local plans should protect important retail centres. Because of this, we do not think there are any realistic alternative options to consult you upon at this stage. The new local plan will seek to protect the role and character of the High Street with an appropriate designation.

**11.20** We will include a draft policy and designation at the next stage of consultation on the plan to make sure that you can have your say.

### Health, social and community facilities

#### Issue 23: The Lister Hospital

- a. Do not identify land for the future expansion of the hospital.
- b. **Safeguard land to the north of the Lister Hospital for future expansion.**

**11.21** The Lister Hospital, in the north-west of Stevenage, was opened in 1972. It offers general and specialist hospital services for people across Hertfordshire and south Bedfordshire. A number of services have been centralised onto the Lister Hospital site in the last few years. Many of these have moved from the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Welwyn Garden City. This includes accident and emergency, maternity, acute elderly and acute mental health units.

117 Stevenage Retail Study, CACI / Applied Planning, 2013



**There has been significant change on the Lister Hospital site in recent years**

**11.22** This has led to significant development within the existing hospital site: 'densification'. Around £170 million has been invested. By 2014, a new surgery unit, an expanded maternity unit, a multi-storey car park and major changes to the emergency and in-patient services will have been provided.

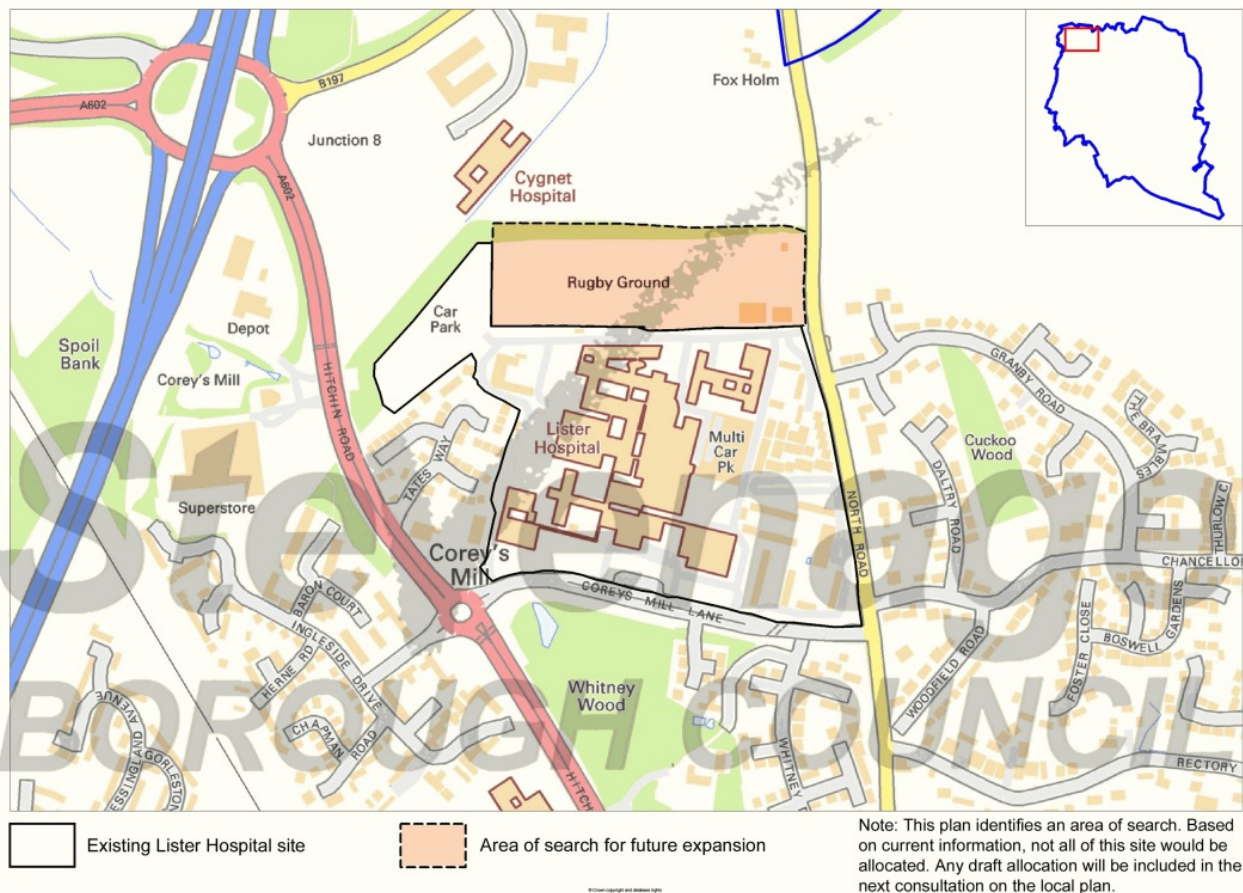
**11.23** The Lister Hospital is the largest employer in the town providing more than 2,700 jobs. The hospital trust have previously said they would like to be able to identify land for the future expansion of the hospital.

**11.24** **Option a** would require the hospital to grow within its existing site. We would not allocate any new land. Any future development would require the existing approach of 'densification' to be continued: existing buildings would have to be redeveloped at a higher intensity and any small areas of remaining land to be infilled.

**11.25** However, the long term needs of the hospital could exceed what might reasonable fit on the existing site. New technology, additional surgical specialities and changes in the way healthcare is provided may require additional development. If there is not enough space at the Lister, these services might need to be provided elsewhere. In the long-term it might lead the NHS to move to a less constrained site elsewhere.

**11.26** This could have a significant impact in terms of both local healthcare provision and local jobs.

**11.27** **Option b** would safeguard land for future development. We would work with the hospital to work out how much land they might need in the future and identify a site for this. This would give the hospital confidence that their future growth requirements could be delivered. This is our preferred option. The map on the next page shows the hospital site location and the area of search for any safeguarded land.



**11.28** The Lister Hospital has been identified as the preferred location for a satellite cancer treatment centre. This would support the work of the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre near Rickmansworth. It would provide additional capacity and could significantly reduce journey times for patients who currently travel to Mount Vernon from across Hertfordshire and southern Bedfordshire.

**11.29** The current hospital site is bounded on three sides by:

- North Road and residential development to the east;
- A wildlife site and residential development to the south at Whitney Wood (Wildlife Site); and
- Residential development and the Hitchin Road dual carriageway to the west.

**11.30** This means that the most realistic option for future expansion of the site lies to the north. Identifying land for expansion would provide confidence that any future growth requirements could be delivered. The NHS Trust currently think they will need around 1 hectare of additional land to meet their needs to 2031.

**11.31** The land to the north of the hospital is currently occupied by Stevenage Rugby Club. However, this land is identified as a possible housing site in our evidence. The Rugby Club has told us they could move if they found a suitable, alternate site<sup>(118)</sup>. The whole of the rugby club site is around 4 hectares. Based on current information, it is unlikely that the whole of the site would be required for future use by the hospital.

118 Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SBC, 2013)

**11.32** If we choose Option b, we will include a draft allocation in the next version of the plan. This will identify the precise area of land that will be reserved for use by the hospital.

**11.33** The sustainability appraisal shows that option a performs well against environmental objectives. This is because new land would not be identified. However, it is also acknowledged that this could limit the long-term development of the hospital. This could lead to negative effects. Option b performs better in socio-economic terms by making sure future health needs are met.

### Question 23

Do you agree that we should safeguard land for the possible future expansion of the hospital site?

### Other health and community facilities

**11.34** It is important that we plan for an appropriate range of health and community facilities. Residents should be able to make use of good quality services close to where they live.

**11.35** As well as the hospital, there is a network of local General Practitioner (GP) surgeries and dental practices across the town. These provide good coverage in geographical terms. However some practises are in cramped or inappropriate accommodation. New or larger premises will be required during the lifetime of this plan<sup>(119)</sup>. Upgrading premises is a process that we will encourage and support, in principle.

**11.36** New healthcare arrangements were introduced in 2012. GPs are now responsible for commissioning many of the services they need for themselves. We will support the provision of new healthcare buildings where it would improve services or accessibility for patients. We will require new development to provide or contribute towards expanded facilities where appropriate.

**11.37** Many community buildings in Stevenage are outdated and coming towards the end of their operational life. Some buildings require modernising and some may be surplus to requirements. The Borough Council is currently carrying out a comprehensive review of all its buildings.

**11.38** There are currently a large number of community centres. These are dispersed across the town. However, this pattern of provision may not be viable in the future. Some facilities might need to be refurbished or replaced. Some centres may become surplus to requirements. These decisions will be made outside of the local plan process. However, we will reflect the outcomes as they are confirmed.

**11.39** We are not currently aware of any proposals that will require us to identify new sites through the plan. The local plan will say how we will deal with applications for:

- New health and community facilities on unallocated sites
- The extension or refurbishment of existing facilities
- The redevelopment, replacement or loss of any existing facilities



**11.40** These are detailed matters. We will include draft policies in the next consultation on this plan so you can have your say.

### Leisure and cultural facilities

#### Issue 24: Leisure and cultural facilities

*We have not identified specific options for you to choose from. However, we would still like to hear any views you may have.*

**11.41** Leisure and cultural activities include recreation, sport, tourism and entertainment. These activities vary greatly both in nature and scale. Stevenage has a wide range of built leisure and cultural facilities. Many of these facilities perform a town-wide, and even sub-regional, role. Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre, the Leisure Park and Fairlands Lakes sailing centre all attract people from beyond the town.

**11.42** A number of facilities have been improved in recent years. This includes the athletics track at Ridlins End. Other sites will require investment during the plan period.



The leisure box; the sailing centre; Ridlins athletics track

**11.43** The swimming pool was built in 1962. The 'leisure box' was built in 1973 and is home to the Gordon Craig Theatre and other facilities. It is appropriate for the Council to now consider the longer-term future of both buildings. We also need to consider any existing shortages of facilities in Stevenage as part of these discussions.

**11.44** New indoor sports facilities are likely to be required to meet future demands. We originally hoped that this would be provided within the Building Schools for the Future programme (see Issue 25). This project has been cancelled. We are considering how best to make provision in the future.

**11.45** Demand for leisure activities is expected to increase over the plan period. The types of facilities that people want to use may also change. This could have have land use implications. We are not currently aware of any proposals that will require us to identify new sites through the plan.

**11.46** The local plan will say how we will deal with applications for:

- New leisure and cultural facilities on unallocated sites



- The extension or refurbishment of existing facilities
- The redevelopment, replacement or loss of any existing facilities

**11.47** These are detailed matters. We will include draft policies in the next consultation on this plan so you can have your say.

### Stevenage Leisure Park

**11.48** The Leisure Park occupies a site of around eight hectares. It lies immediately to the west of the train station. It provides a range of leisure activities ~ including a multi-screen cinema, bowling alley and children's play centre ~ alongside a number of restaurants. It provides an important function and attracts visitors from across the town and beyond.

**11.49** The Council has a long-standing ambition to make better use of this site. There are large areas of surface car parking. The layout and external design is more closely associated with an edge-of-town facility than a prominent site next to the town centre. We consider that the leisure park has the potential to:

- Deliver more homes and jobs;
- Improve connections between the town centre and Gunnels Wood; and
- Provide a 'gateway' development with links to the station.

**11.50** Our employment evidence recognises that the site is attractive in terms of employment as it has good transport links. It is in a central location with other employment uses around it. It may be possible to promote a mixed-use scheme to make more efficient use of the site and improve links with the town centre and Gunnels Wood<sup>(120)</sup>

**11.51** None of this means that we want to see the existing uses move away. Leisure facilities are an important part of the town's commercial offer. Our overall approach to the Leisure Park will be influenced by the responses we get to other options in this document and the findings of our evidence studies. We will include detailed policies for the Leisure Park in the next consultation on the local plan. This will give you the opportunity to have your say.

### Question 24

How do you think we should plan for leisure and cultural facilities to be provided in the future?

## Education

### Issue 25: Education

*We have not identified any specific options at this stage. However, we would still like to hear any thoughts you may have on this issue.*

120 Stevenage Employment & Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

**11.52** Raising levels of education is a key priority for the Council. This includes attainment at school by the town's children as well as the skills and aspirations of older residents.

**11.53** Levels of qualifications amongst the working population are lower than county averages. The levels of achievement in local schools are also lower than elsewhere in Hertfordshire. Many children leave full-time education at 16. There are low levels of progression into further and higher education. Stevenage has the lowest levels of participation in Hertfordshire<sup>(121)</sup>.

**11.54** Hertfordshire County Council is the local authority responsible for education in Stevenage. The Borough Council is not responsible for running schools or raising standards. The local plan can only be concerned with education in terms of land-use. We can identify sites that may be required in the future, or sites that might become surplus to requirements.

**11.55** There is a link between the number of homes we will build in the future and the number of school places we will need. The relationship between schools and proposed development will need to be examined once we have decided on our housing target (see Issue 9). The largest schemes will need to provide new schools on-site. This will make sure they meet the demand their new development creates. However, smaller developments will feed into existing schools. This will create demand for new school places.



**11.56** We already know that there is pressure upon primary school places in the north and north-west of the town. Most primary schools ~ and therefore school places ~ are concentrated in the south and east.

**11.57** Hertfordshire County Council say there is enough capacity to meet future primary school needs arising within the town. This is based on the number of places that could be created by making existing schools bigger. However, some of these proposals would need to use existing open spaces to provide playing fields. This land is currently outside the county council's control. There is currently no agreement for this to happen. We need to make sure that school places will be available in the locations where they are most needed.

**11.58** At this stage, we are not aware of any proposals that would require new sites or land to be allocated for primary schools. We will continue to work with the county council as our proposals are developed. Once we know our housing target, and which sites are most likely to be used for housing, it will be easier to say what needs to be done in the future. We will need the county council to demonstrate that any schemes upon which they will rely can be delivered.

121 Stevenage Employment and Economy Baseline Study (NLP, 2013)

**11.59** There are six secondary schools in the town. The previous government had significant plans for secondary schools in Stevenage. The *Building Schools for the Future* programme would have seen major investment in a number of sites. This programme has now been cancelled. Funds were provided to complete works at the first two schools. New facilities and buildings at The Nobel and Marriotts schools opened in the 2012/13 academic year.

**11.60** Other changes are being made. Barnwell School continues to grow. In recent years it has taken in pupils from two other schools. Thomas Alleyne School will have Academy status from 2013.

**11.61** Current forecasts suggest that we may need to make additional secondary school places available by 2018<sup>(122)</sup>. This might be achieved by making existing schools bigger. We may be able to re-use the former Collenswood School in the east of the town. This will be vacated in 2014 as pupils move to the Barnwell site in Shephall. We will continue to work closely with Hertfordshire County Council to show that future secondary school demands from within the town can be met.

**11.62** North Hertfordshire College (NHC) has a campus near the centre of the town. It provides students with Further and Higher Education qualifications. There is a particular focus on courses in practical, or vocational, areas. A specialist studio school opened on the site in 2012. This provides a focus on science and engineering for pupils aged 14-19. NHC also provide a skills centre to the north of the Leisure Park. They are sponsoring the conversion of the Thomas Alleyne School to Academy status. We are not currently aware of any proposals from NHC that would require us to identify new sites through the plan.

**11.63** The local plan will say how we will deal with applications for:

- New education facilities on unallocated sites
- The extension or refurbishment of existing facilities
- The redevelopment, replacement or loss of any existing facilities

**11.64** We will include any draft policies at the next stage of consultation.

## Question 25

Are there any issues surrounding education likely to require new land or sites during the lifetime of our local plan?

## Public Realm

**11.65** The NPPF says that our plans should consider the effect they have on the public realm. Our policies should help to deliver safe and accessible environments and developments. This means taking into account things like:

- Designing out crime ~ development layouts and building designs can help to prevent crime. This relates to how spaces are used at different times of the day. It covers whether passers-by

122 Draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan (SBC, 2013)

or residents can see what is going on. It considers whether development will result in areas that are underused, badly lit or cannot be easily seen; and

- Active frontages ~ this is related to the previous point. It means designing buildings so that they look out on their surrounds. This allows people walking past, or around, a development to be seen. It can increase the feeling of personal safety and reduce fear of crime.

**11.66** These are detailed policy matters. We will consider whether we need to include specific public realm policies in the Local Plan. It might be best to include any relevant matters in our design policies (see Chapter 10).

**11.67** We will set out any draft policies in the next consultation on this plan to make sure you can have your say.

## 12 The Green Belt

### Issue 26: Green Belt

- a. Give priority to maintaining the full current extent of the Green Belt within Stevenage Borough and do not attempt to fully meet the objectively assessed needs of the Borough.
- b. Give priority to fully meeting the objectively assessed needs of Stevenage Borough to 2031 and pursue the rolling back of the inner Green Belt boundary (i.e. releasing land from the Green Belt) to allow development to happen.
- c. **Give priority to fully meeting the objectively assessed needs of the Borough to 2031 and beyond. Pursue the rolling back of the inner Green Belt boundary (i.e. releasing land from the Green Belt) and seek the identification of 'safeguarded land' for future development in neighbouring council areas.**

**12.1** The Government attaches great importance to the Green Belt: any perceived threat to it is often a highly emotive issue. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The essential characteristic of Green Belts is their openness and permanence.

**12.2** Green Belt serves five purposes:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

**12.3** Nationally, there are 1.6 Million hectares of land in 14 different Green Belts that have been designated by councils across England. The Hertfordshire Green Belt was first designated in the south of the county in the Hertfordshire County Development Plan, approved in 1958.

**12.4** The Green Belt was not extended northwards to surround Stevenage until more than twenty years later: the Hertfordshire County Structure Plan, approved in 1979. The inner Green Belt boundary clings, for the most part, very tightly to the urban edge of Stevenage. Previous releases from the inner Green Belt boundary have been made to allow for the development of Great Ashby/Burleigh Park and Stevenage West. Following the revocation of the East of England Plan, the Borough Council is now solely responsible for setting and reviewing Green Belt boundaries within the Borough.

**12.5** Across England, Green Belt policy has been highly effective in achieving its objectives despite considerable development pressures in the last half century. This was a key finding of a major Government study in 1993 and it was supported by a 2010 report by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and Natural England.

**12.6** Green Belts perform a number of other useful functions. They make a contribution to green infrastructure, which is important to the successful functioning of urban areas and their relationship with the rural areas around them. Green Belts improve the connectivity between areas designated



for their environmental importance, urban green spaces and the wider countryside to form ecological networks and green recreation networks. Stevenage has a network of Green Lungs stretching from within the heart of the urban area out to the countryside: many of these form public access routes and wildlife corridors.

**12.7** Green Belt land across England has a greater proportion of woodland and a more concentrated range of public access opportunities than other parts of England. The Ramblers Association's Stevenage Outer Orbital Path (STOOP) runs through the Green Belt in a broad circle around Stevenage. Green Belt land is also making a significant contribution to the ecosystems that are essential to help mitigate against, and adapt to, climate change. Green Belts help in creating a healthier society, through providing for active outdoor lifestyles.

**12.8** For these, and a variety of other reasons, it is important to recognise that the concept of Green Belt has strong public support. People feel deep-seated emotional resonances to the countryside surrounding their towns and cities. This is as true of Stevenage as it is elsewhere in England.

**12.9** Green Belts are expected to endure for the long term and have a high degree of permanence. For this reason, the NPPF states that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of local plans, such as this. The term '*exceptional circumstances*' is not defined.

**12.10** The NPPF also requires councils, in their plan-making, to "*positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area*", specifically to meet "*objectively assessed needs...unless (i) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in [the NPPF] taken as a whole; or (ii) specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted*". Green Belt land is one of those policies specifically identified as meeting criterion (ii).

**12.11** Whilst the Government has not indicated any lessening of their commitment to Green Belts, a written ministerial statement of 6 September 2012 said "*We encourage councils to use the flexibilities set out in the NPPF to tailor the extent of Green Belt land in their areas to reflect local circumstances.*" As an incentive to use these powers, the minister promised that councils which review Green Belt land in their local plans will have their local plan examination process prioritised.

**12.12** Our evidence studies (see references in 'High Quality Homes' and 'A Strong, Competitive Economy' elsewhere in the plan) suggest that we will not be able to meet our objectively assessed development needs to 2031 within the existing urban area. Therefore, in preparing this local plan, there is clearly a tension between responding to the Government's requirement that we meet our objectively assessed development needs and protecting the role and permanence of the Green Belt surrounding the town.

**12.13** To assist us in determining where to strike the balance between meeting our objectively assessed needs and protecting the Green Belt, we commissioned a Green Belt review from external consultants in 2012<sup>(123)</sup>. We have had regard to the results of that review in formulating the policy options in this iteration of the plan.

123 Review of the Green Belt around Stevenage: Part 1 - Survey against Green Belt purposes (AMEC, March 2013)

**12.14** We asked the consultants to:

- Provide an independent assessment of the extent to which the land around the urban edge of Stevenage still fulfils the five purposes of Green Belt policy as defined in the NPPF;
- Evaluate the sensitivity of the land to any development and/or change; and
- Identify broad areas for potential compensatory Green Belt provision, in the event that Green Belt releases are required around Stevenage.

**12.15** So far, the consultants have purposely completed only Part 1 of the study. This is strategic in nature and explores the performance of 30 segments of the Green Belt, up to approximately 1 mile around Stevenage, against the NPPF criteria in isolation from other potential factors.

**12.16** The segments have been individually assessed and, following analysis of the results, have been clustered into three groups: those segments that are considered to make a 'significant contribution' to the five Green Belt purposes; those that are felt to make a 'contribution'; and those that make a 'limited contribution'.

**12.17** The inclusion of a segment in the 'limited contribution' category should not be taken to mean that all, or part, of that segment should be released from the Green Belt. The Part 1 findings will be placed within their broader context in the Part 2 study.

**12.18** In addition to the formal question and options posed in this section, we would be interested to hear any views that you might have on the methodology employed in the Part 1 study and upon the findings.

**12.19** Part 2 of the Green Belt review will be commissioned – should it be determined to proceed with any further rolling back of the inner boundary of the Green Belt - following upon the completion of the First Consultation, when the results of the consultation can be combined with the results of the other evidence studies to consider detailed land parcels and boundaries.

**12.20** It is important to note that much of the land in the Green Belt review is necessarily, because of the tight inner boundary of the Green Belt on the urban edge of the town, in neighbouring East Hertfordshire and North Hertfordshire districts. Both of those councils declined to participate in the commissioning of the study and none of the Part 1 results within their administrative areas is in any way binding upon them (although they are free to use them in their own local plan preparation work, if they choose).

**12.21** **Option a** would mean that we would give absolute priority to maintaining the current extent of the Green Belt within the Borough, not altering the inner Green Belt boundary in any location. This would mean that we would not roll-back the inner Green Belt boundary to permit new employment and housing sites to be allocated. To follow this course, we would need to establish to the satisfaction of a Government-appointed Planning Inspector that the development needs of the Borough did not constitute "*exceptional circumstances*" justifying the release of land on the inner Green Belt boundary. We could argue that the adverse impacts of meeting our development needs - by rolling back the inner Green Belt boundary - significantly and demonstrably outweighed the benefits of meeting those development needs. We could also argue that maintenance of the Green Belt is one of the specific policies in the NPPF that indicates that the scale of development should be restricted.

**12.22** Maintaining the extent of the Green Belt as it is now would be our absolute priority in this option. This would recognise the important role that it plays locally in meeting the five purposes of Green Belt and its effectiveness in achieving its objectives since it was first designated in 1979. This option would also recognise the importance of the permanence of the Green Belt and acknowledge the significant role that the Green Belt around Stevenage plays in the relationship between the town (and its residents) and the rural area surrounding it. Pursuing this option would recognise the deep-seated emotional connection that people feel with the Green Belt concept.

**12.23** However, under option a we would significantly under-provide for our development needs during the plan period, contrary to the results of our evidence studies and our assessment of the Borough's housing need to 2031. We would not be able to identify any significant new employment land to allow the local economy to grow and we would be able to provide for only just over half of our NPPF-compliant housing target. Either those needs would go completely unmet, to the disadvantage of local people and businesses, or we would need to find a partner local authority willing to meet those needs on our behalf. Our research thus far has shown very little appetite amongst other local authorities to fulfil such a role, raising questions about the deliverability of this option and, thus, the local plan as a whole.

**12.24** Under this option, North Hertfordshire District Council would not be able to proceed with urban extensions to the west or north of the town, as canvassed in their recent Strategic Housing Options consultation<sup>(124)</sup>, which might leave us open to a charge of not meeting our obligations under the Duty to Co-operate. Whilst we recognise the value of the Green Belt, we consider, on balance, that the benefits of meeting our development needs and co-operating with our neighbouring District Council outweigh the loss of Green Belt within the Borough. We do not support option a as our preferred option.

**12.25** Under **option b** we would give priority to fully meeting the objectively assessed needs of Stevenage Borough to 2031 and pursue the rolling back of the inner Green Belt boundary (i.e. releasing land from the Green Belt) to allow development to happen. We would argue that, in view of the large local housing need; the scale of our NPPF-compliant housing target; the identified need for new employment land; the shortage of developable land to meet these housing and employment needs within the urban area; and a persistent shortage of affordable housing, we believe that these conditions constitute '*exceptional circumstances*' that justify the release of land from the inner Green Belt boundary on the edge of the town. This aspect of option b is reflected elsewhere in the plan in our preferred housing and employment land options.

**12.26** In pursuing this option, plainly, we will continue to seek to maximise the use of suitable brownfield sites within the town to meet our development needs. Unlike many larger councils, we do not have the option of considering the release of land beyond the outer Green Belt boundary in this plan, as the outer boundary around Stevenage lies in East Hertfordshire and North Hertfordshire Districts. Therefore, addressing this issue lies with these District Councils in their local plans. Option b would allow North Hertfordshire District Council to plan for further housing on the edge of the town to meet their own housing requirement, as canvassed in their recent local plan consultation, if they choose to do so. This option would be consistent, therefore, with our obligations to the District Council under the Duty to Co-operate.

124 Housing Options Growth Levels and Locations (NHDC, 2013)

**12.27** Whilst we recognise the distress that will be caused to local people by the suggestion of taking land out of the Green Belt, the countervailing argument is that removing land from the Green Belt within the Borough will still leave a significant area of Green Belt surrounding Stevenage in neighbouring East Hertfordshire and North Hertfordshire districts. There will also be the opportunity for one or both of those councils to make compensatory Green Belt provision in their emerging local plans, if they wish to do so. Should we pursue this option, we will seek to establish a new, clear and defensible inner Green Belt boundary.

**12.28** We consider that, whilst this option would be a good choice for the Borough in order to meet its development needs to 2031, it would fail to plan for the longer-term. Consequently, this is not our preferred option.

**12.29** **Option c** would allow us to plan for the future needs of the Borough, both to 2031 and beyond. Under this option we would give priority to fully meeting the objectively assessed needs of the Borough to 2031 and beyond. We would pursue the rolling back of the inner Green Belt boundary (i.e. releasing land from the Green Belt as in option b) and also seek the identification of 'safeguarded land' for future development in neighbouring council areas.

**12.30** The NPPF states that "*where necessary, [councils] should identify in their plans areas of 'safeguarded land' between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period*". This is consistent with the principle that Green Belt boundaries should enjoy a high degree of permanency. There is currently no 'safeguarded land' around the town to meet longer-term development needs beyond 2031.

**12.31** If we pursue the release of land from the inner Green Belt boundary on the edge of the town under the '*exceptional circumstances*' outlined above, we believe that we will have developed virtually all of the current Green Belt areas within the Borough by the end of the plan period. Only scattered, relatively small parcels of Green Belt would be left within the Borough boundary by 2031. This would seriously limit the options necessary to meet the long-term development needs of the Borough for the post-2031 period.

**12.32** We would - under option c - seek the identification of 'safeguarded land' for the post-2031 period, which would primarily have to be located in one or both of neighbouring East and North Hertfordshire Districts. This 'safeguarded land' would not be allocated for immediate development. Whilst it would be identified as 'safeguarded land' in the current round of local plans, planning permission for the permanent development of 'safeguarded land' would only be granted following a further local plan review by the relevant District Council, which proposes development.

**12.33** We would not be able to identify such 'safeguarded land' in neighbouring districts ourselves: it is an issue on which we would have to ask our neighbouring District Councils to co-operate with us in their own plan-making. As both of our neighbours have not yet quite reached the same stage in the development of their local plans as we have with ours, this is a viable option that is open to us and would be consistent with the operation of the Duty to Co-operate.

**12.34** Option c is our preferred option because it enables us to plan for our development needs to 2031 and, in recognising that further release of Green Belt will be necessary to meet the Borough's needs after 2031, would allow us to seek the co-operation of our neighbouring councils to plan for that post-2031 period.

**12.35** Our sustainability appraisal shows that, of the three options presented, option c provides the most appropriate option. In sustainability terms, option c provides the greatest benefits in terms of meeting local needs and future provision, but also in terms of supporting the local economy ~ particularly over the longer term. Whilst this option, along with option b, does have an adverse impact on biodiversity (and environmental objectives more generally) option a will not enable the Council to meet the socio-economic requirements of a growing population without significant development in neighbouring districts. The overall positive effects of options b and c could be seen to outweigh the negative environmental impacts, which could be mitigated to some degree.

### Question 26

Should we place our priority on maintaining the full current extent of the Green Belt within Stevenage Borough or should we roll back the inner Green Belt boundary in order to fully meet the objectively assessed needs of the Borough?



## 13 Climate Change and Flooding

### Climate Change

**13.1** Climate change is one of the greatest global challenges facing society today. Human activities emit greenhouse gases. These collect in the earth's atmosphere and trap heat from the sun. This melts ice caps, raises sea levels and changes weather patterns.

**13.2** The planning system can help to tackle climate change in one of two ways:

- Managing the causes of climate change ~ This means reducing or mitigating against activities which result in greenhouse gas or carbon emissions; and / or
- Managing the effects of climate change ~ This means managing things such as flood risk or water supplies

**13.3** Efforts to tackle climate change fall within the broader concept of sustainability. This also covers a range of issues such as health and well-being.

**13.4** The NPPF says we should consider both of these ideas in our plans. A number of the issues we are consulting upon direct or indirect influence on sustainability or climate change. This includes choices we make, for example, about the number of homes (see Issue 9) and jobs (see Issue 5). The location of new development will affect the number and distance of journeys that people have to make.

**13.5** We also have the option of placing specific requirements on new developments that require them to take sustainability and climate change into account. The options we have identified to do this are set out below.

### Sustainability standards

#### Issue 27: Sustainability standards

- a. Use Code for Sustainable Homes / BREEAM standards
- b. Set local targets for renewable energy and low carbon technologies
- c. Set standards for water consumption in new development
- d. Use higher emissions standards than building regulations
- e. Introduce local targets or standards for more than one or all of these things (please specify)
- f. Do not introduce local targets or standards and rely on national standards and / or existing guidance.

**13.6** The built environment is responsible for around half of the UK's energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. This makes it important that new buildings are designed and constructed in a sustainable manner.

**13.7** In 2009, we produced a Design Guide SPD. This aims to ensure new developments are sustainable in terms of both their design and location. It provides a wide range of advice in relation to building construction. Developers are encouraged to consider features such as passive solar design, renewable energy, sunlight/daylight, water saving systems and the use of sustainable construction materials.

**13.8** This guide and other advice<sup>(125)</sup> provide encouragement. They do not set targets or requirements which new developments must meet. The new local plan provides the opportunity to introduce these.



Solar heating, water efficiency and insulation can all reduce the impact of new buildings

**13.9** **Option a** would require new developments to be assessed against one of two schemes:

- New houses would be assessed against the *Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH)*;
- Non-residential buildings would be assessed against so-called '*BREEAM*' standards<sup>(126)</sup>.

**13.10** Both schemes assess the performance of new developments against a wide range of factors:

- |                              |                                   |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • Energy and emissions;      | • Health and well-being;          |
| • Water (including run-off); | • Management;                     |
| • Materials;                 | • Ecology; and                    |
| • Waste;                     | • Transport ( <i>BREEAM</i> only) |
| • Pollution;                 |                                   |

**13.11** All new social housing funded by the Homes and Communities Agency must be built to at least CSH Level 3 (out of a possible 6). The Code is still voluntary for privately built housing. The Government have said they will not make the CSH compulsory at a national level.

125 Such as Hertfordshire County Council's *Building Futures* series

126 Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method

**13.12** Our Design Guide SPD encourages new developments to meet a minimum Code for Sustainable Homes rating of Level 3 or BREEAM rating of at least 'Very Good'. Option a would go further than this. It would require new development to meet a set standard. We have not made any decisions about the levels at which this might be set. However, a possible example of how the policy could work is shown in the table below.

**13.13** We would expect new buildings to achieve increasingly higher ratings over the plan period. In the example below, we would raise the standard every three years. You may think that we should introduce these standards more slowly or more quickly than this.

| Year                 | Possible standards for new developments |               |
|----------------------|---|---------------|
|                      | Code for Sustainable Homes              | BREEAM        |
| From 2015 (adoption) | Level 3                                 | Very Good     |
| From 2018            | Level 4                                 | Excellent     |
| From 2021            | Level 5                                 | <<no change>> |
| From 2024            | Level 6                                 | Outstanding   |

**13.14** Our Sustainability Appraisal says that introducing BREEAM or CSH standards would have a positive environmental impact. However, it could have negative economic impacts. This is because it would make it more expensive to build new homes.

**13.15** This could mean that schemes don't come forward. We will need to carefully consider what we can reasonably ask developers to provide. We may need to balance sustainability requirements with other demands such as infrastructure or affordable housing contributions (see Issues 8 and 18).

**13.16** One possible solution to this would be to focus any sustainability requirements on specific matters. This could result in lower costs for new development. It could also allow us to set higher standards for a small(er) number of things. This would be because we would not require the full range of standards in CSH / BREEAM to be met.

**13.17** We have identified three areas where this might be possible:

- Renewable energy and low carbon
- Water consumption.
- Emissions standards

**13.18** We have not yet made any decisions about the levels at which any requirements might be set.

**13.19** **Option b** would concentrate on renewable energy and low carbon technologies. This is one of the most common types of planning policy that is used. It is known as 'the Merton Rule'. It is named after the first council to introduce the standard.

**13.20** This can involve things such as putting solar panels on the roof of a new house. It might include a small wind turbine which is used to meet the requirement on a larger scheme. The target can also be met by making new homes more energy efficient.

**13.21** Our IPPS sets an interim target. It says at least 10% of predicted household energy use should come from decentralised and renewable or low carbon energy sources. At the moment this only applies to major schemes<sup>(127)</sup>. Under Option c this target would be adopted as part of the new local plan. This requirement has been achieved in a number of Local Authority areas.

**13.22** An evidence study was produced in 2010 which showed that opportunities for renewable and low carbon technologies do exist within Hertfordshire<sup>(128)</sup>. We consider that the study's findings could be applied in Stevenage. We will carry out further work later in 2013 to confirm if this is the case.

**13.23** It might be possible to increase the target at some point during the plan period. Costs should fall as these types of technology become more widely used. This would make it easier to include these types of measures in new developments.

**13.24** We would like to hear any thoughts that you may have on the levels at which targets could be set in Stevenage.

**13.25** **Option c** would set targets for water consumption. Hertfordshire is within the driest region in the UK. We are already aware that some rivers in the area, such as the River Beane, experience low base flows. This is due in part to the amount of water that is taken out of the ground for our use. Requiring new developments to include water efficiency measures would help to safeguard our long-term water supplies. It could also help restore local rivers and habitats to natural levels.

**13.26** The water companies are confident that water supply can be maintained over the plan period. However, this does rely on some increases in water efficiency in both new and existing buildings<sup>(129)</sup>.

**13.27** The water standards required by the Code for Sustainable Homes are shown below. Most new affordable homes are already required to meet the Code 3 standard. Standards for non-residential buildings would be based on the water savings that were achieved measured against a baseline.

| CSH Level   | Water consumption                          |
|-------------|--|
| Level 1 / 2 | 120 litres per person per day (lpd)        |
| Level 3 / 4 | 105 lpd (12.5% reduction against baseline) |
| Level 5 / 6 | 80lpd (33% reduction against baseline)     |

**13.28** We would require all new buildings to meet the equivalent of the Level 3 standard when we started using the plan. We could raise this standard during the plan period.

127 Schemes for 10 or more new homes or 1,000m<sup>2</sup> or more of non-residential floorspace

128 Hertfordshire Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Technical Study (AECOM, 2010)

129 Rye Meads Water Cycle Strategy (Hyder Consulting, 2010)

**13.29 Option d** would concentrate upon emissions standards. Since 2010, Building Regulations have required new homes to reach the energy standards of 'Code for Sustainable Homes' level 3. The Government is currently considering the best way to further increase these standards. They have recently changed the definition of 'zero carbon' to make the targets easier to meet.

**13.30** We could introduce a policy that required new buildings to meet higher standards. This would mean we could make new buildings more energy efficient before this was required by the building regulations. This could make new development more sustainable. However, building regulations requirements could catch up, or overtake, any standard we set. This could make any policy confusing or redundant. The table below shows the reductions against currently acceptable levels that are required to meet different standards on the CSH.

| Reduction against current levels | Reduction required against current levels |             |
|----------------------------------|---|-------------|
|                                  | Code for Sustainable Homes                | BREEAM      |
| -25%                             | Level 4                                   | Excellent   |
| -40%                             | -   | Outstanding |
| -100%                            | Level 5                                   | -           |
| Zero net carbon emissions        | Level 6                                   | -           |

**13.31** If we chose option d, we would need to decide what level any target should be set at. We would need to decide how this standard might increase over the plan period.

**13.32 Option e** would introduce local targets for any combination of options b, c or d. We could introduce standards for renewable energy, water consumption *and* energy efficiency. This still might be more achievable than requiring new developments to meet all the requirements of CSH or BREEAM. However, a compromise could lead to a less satisfactory outcome. There may be other aspects of these schemes that you think we should be concentrating on.

**13.33 Option f** would not see us set any local standards. We would encourage high levels of sustainability in new developments<sup>(130)</sup>. However, we would not require it before granting planning permission. We would rely on building regulations or any other legislation to enforce any mandatory standards.

**13.34** Our sustainability appraisal finds that all the options perform well in environmental terms. This is because they reduce the impact of new development. However, they could impose additional costs of development. This could lead to negative impacts against social and economic indicators if it means developments do not come forward.

**13.35** We have not yet come to a preferred view on this matter. This is partly because we need to consider all of the demands that we place on new developments as a whole. We do not want to stop essential new development from taking place because we have made it too difficult or too expensive. We will carry out a further study later in 2013. This will look at all the things that we

130 Through continued use of our Design Guide SPD, the County Council's *Building Futures* guide or any other appropriate means



might ask new developments to provide such as affordable housing, infrastructure and sustainability measures. It will recommend which of these we should concentrate upon and / or any compromises we should reach (see Issue 8).

**13.36** We would like to hear about any preferences you have at this stage. This will help us decide the best way forward. We will explain the decisions we have made the next time we consult on the local plan. We will also include draft policies for you to comment upon.

### Question 27

Which, if any, of these matters should we set standards for through the local plan? At what level should any requirements be set?

### Water and flood risk

**13.37** The NPPF says that we should not allow inappropriate development in areas of flood risk. We should reduce the overall risk of flooding. It requires development proposals to

- Avoid adding to the causes of flooding at their likely source;
- Reduce the risk of flooding by maximising the use of drainage systems; and
- Minimise any negative impacts on buildings and land uses that may suffer from flooding.



Stevenage Brook; Flood storage reservoir at Elder Way

**13.38** We completed a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) in 2009. This showed that some small areas of the Borough are at risk from flooding. Broadly speaking, these locations run along Stevenage Brook and Aston End Brook in the south of the town. There is another small area of risk around junction 8 of the A1(M). The latest flood risk maps for Stevenage should be referred to for detailed zone locations.

**13.39** We will update the SFRA later this year. This will make sure that we take the latest guidance and information into account when we develop our policies.

**13.40** We will identify sites for development in line with its findings. This means using all suitable sites outside of the flood zone first.

**13.41** Small-scale measures can also play an important role in reducing the risk of flooding. Sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDs) direct rain water run-off back into the ground at suitable locations. These mimic natural drainage systems. They reduce run off rates and ease pressure on storm drainage networks. Our evidence says that SUDs should be used in all new developments<sup>(131)</sup>.

**13.42** River corridors and water meadows also play an important role. They can store excess run-off during storms. Much of Stevenage was built on greenfield sites in a short period of time. This meant that a lot of additional surface water run off was created. The plans for the New Town included a solution for this. A number of flood storage reservoirs (FSRs) were created. These are also known as 'water meadows'. They help to regulate the discharge of water in times of storm.

**13.43** The town's FSRs are currently identified and protected by policies in the District Plan. We will carry forward these designations in the local plan.

**13.44** Draft policies will be included in the next consultation on this document so you can have your say. These will reflect the requirements of national guidance and the findings of the most up-to-date evidence.

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131 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (AECOM, 2009)

## 14 The Natural Environment

### Green Infrastructure

**14.1** Green Infrastructure refers to a planned network of high-quality green spaces and environmental features. Green Infrastructure includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, allotments and private gardens. The new local plan will contain a number of policies on this matter. We will:

- Allocate specific areas to protect them from development. This will include parks and open spaces, wildlife sites and important green corridors;
- Identify important routes and connections that people use for leisure or in their day-to-day lives;
- Say how much open space new developments need to provide and what types they should be; and
- Explain when the loss of existing trees or open spaces might be acceptable.

**14.2** Many of these issues are detailed matters. We will include draft policies and allocations at the next stage of consultation. This will make sure you can have your say. At this point, we are interested in hearing your views on the broader issues below. These will shape the overall approach we take to green infrastructure in our new plan.

### Open space designations

#### Issue 28: Open space designations

- a. Carry forward the District Plan allocations unchanged
- b. Designate two new Green Lungs and extend protection to allotments
- c. **As option b, but also protect smaller areas of open space**

**14.3** Open space plays an important role. It provides habitat for plants and animals. It creates a setting for surrounding development. It can improve people's sense of well being, encourage healthy living and prevent illness. It is important to make sure that enough open space is provided for current and future residents. Identifying and preserving an appropriate network of green spaces is a vital part of the planning process.

**14.4** Open spaces are an important part of Stevenage. Around a quarter of the town is taken up by parks, playing fields, woodlands and other amenity spaces. Local people value open spaces in the town. They create a pleasant environment in which to live and work, and provide a vital role in linking the town to the countryside. These areas also include sites that are particularly important for wildlife and biodiversity.

**14.5** The current District Plan identifies and protects a series of open space designations. These include:

- **Principal Open Spaces:** The most important areas in terms of providing formal open space for leisure and outdoor sports activities;

- **Green Links:** A continuous system of green spaces and natural features which formed part of the New Town design; and
- **Wildlife Sites:** Areas which have been identified and designated for their flora and / or fauna.

**14.6** Some sites or areas of land are covered by more than one of these designations. All un-designated areas of open space are covered by general policies. These say that open spaces should not be built on unless certain criteria can be met.

**14.7** Generally speaking, there is a good provision of open spaces within the town. Looking across the Borough as a whole, the amount of green space is suitable for the size of the population. However, we do know there are local areas where people do not have access to the right type or amount of open space.



**Woodland at Brighton Way; open space at Great Ashby**

**14.8** We have identified three options. The map on the following page shows the broad implications of each. More detailed allocations will be included in the next consultation on this plan.

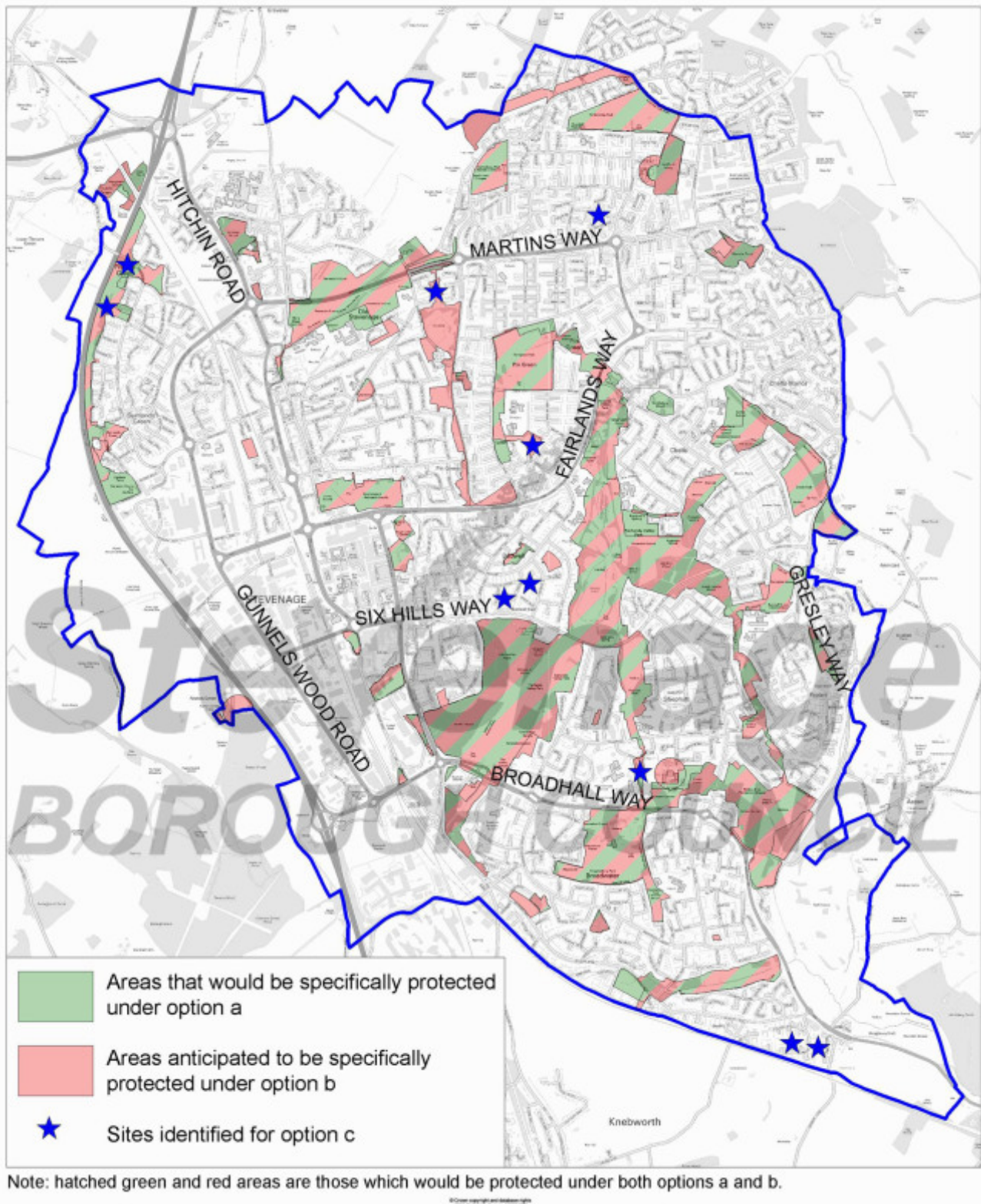
**14.9 Option a** would simply carry forward the existing designations in the District Plan. It would recognise that the most significant areas of open space in the town have been successfully protected over the last decade. We would carry on protecting the Principal Open Spaces, Green Links, and Wildlife Sites it identifies.

**14.10** However, since the District Plan was published, we have carried out further work. This has provided us with a detailed understanding of the open space, sport and recreation facilities that exist within the town. It tells us which facilities should be protected or improved. It identifies areas where there is currently a shortage of certain types of open space. It says which spaces could be surplus to requirements in the future<sup>(132)</sup>.

**14.11** This evidence informed our draft Local Development Framework (LDF) documents. **Option b** would follow the approach we set out in these documents. The draft LDF proposed some changes to the designations in the District Plan:

132 Sport, Open Space and Recreation Study (PMP, 2006)







- Additional sites were to be designated as Principal Open Spaces. These included:
  - All allotment sites reflecting the significant increase in their popularity in recent years; and
  - Previously unrecognised sites such as large churchyards and cemeteries;
- The removal of the current Principal Open Space designations at The Noke and Meadway Park; and
- Two new Green Lungs connecting important areas of open space at Grace Way and through Great Ashby / St Nicholas respectively.

**14.12** Our second option would broadly carry forward these proposals. It would also recognise the most important open spaces in the areas that are not covered by our draft plans. This includes the town centre, that part of Great Ashby within our boundary and the undeveloped land to the north and west of the town.

**14.13** Under option b we would carry out a review later in 2013. This would make sure that the designations we were proposing remained appropriate.

**14.14** It is important to be clear that certain decisions about open space cannot be controlled by the planning system. We can identify areas of land to be protected or developed in our new local plan. However, we cannot control management issues such as how often the grass is mowed or any decisions to change an area of recreation land into a formal park or vice versa.

**14.15** **Option c** would follow the approach set out in option b. However, we would also identify extra areas that perform an important local function.

**14.16** The District Plan and our draft plans mainly seek to protect sites that provide formal opportunities. This includes areas such as parks, sports pitches and allotments. With the exception of allotment sites, these sites are normally more than 1 hectare in size. These are considered to be the most significant<sup>(133)</sup>. Under options a and b, any other sites would be protected through the general policies we have talked about above.

**14.17** However, there are also smaller sites which provide an informal function. A number of these have been identified as being particularly important<sup>(134)</sup>. This might include smaller grassed areas amongst housing. These provide important local amenity space. Some of these areas can include maintained equipment such as a small children's play area.

**14.18** Option c would identify some of these in a specific policy. We have identified 10 potential sites of at least 0.5 hectares:

- |                  |                                    |
|------------------|------------------------------------|
| • Shephall Green | • Chester Road / Canterbury Way    |
| • Holly Copse    | • Blenheim Way / Pembridge Gardens |
| • Ramsdell       | • Blenheim Way / Stirling Close    |
| • Archer Road    | • Brighton Way / Berwick Close     |
| • Trent Close    | • Fishers Green                    |

133 One hectare is approximately the size of an adult rugby, cricket or football pitch

134 Sport, Open Space and Recreation Study (PMP, 2006)



Shephall Green



Holly Copse



Ramsdell



Archer Road



Trent Close





Chester Road / Canterbury Way



Blenheim Way / Pembridge Gardens



Blenheim Way / Stirling Close



Brighton Way / Berwick Close



Fishers Green

**14.19** We would create a new designation for these sites. This would give them greater protection than the general policies for other sites<sup>(135)</sup>. The location of these sites is shown on the map above. More detailed information is included in our evidence base<sup>(136)</sup>.

**14.20** Our sustainability appraisal recognises that option c performs the most positively. Option a does not provide the opportunity to review sites and protect sites which are now considered of higher value. Option b is more responsive but does not provide the additional level of protection to smaller sites.

### Local Green Spaces

**14.21** The NPPF says that local communities should be able to identify areas of particular importance to them. These designations should be called Local Green Spaces. They should be designated when a local plan or neighbourhood plan is prepared or reviewed. However, the NPPF is clear that sites should meet certain criteria<sup>(137)</sup>. Many areas of green or open space in Stevenage are unlikely to be appropriate for this designation.

**14.22** We are not, at this stage, promoting any sites to be protected as a Local Green Space. However, if there are any sites that you think we should be protecting as Local Green Space, we would like to hear from you.

### Question 28

How do we best protect the key open spaces and features of Stevenage? Are there any other areas near you that we should be protecting?

### Other designations and wider connections

**14.23** As well as protecting important spaces, the new local plan will also need to make sure that important connections are safeguarded. These can provide opportunities for horse riding, walking or cycling. They can be used for leisure or as part of a journey to school or work.

**14.24** The District Plan identified and protected a number of linear routes:

- **Ancient Lanes and Associated Hedgerows:** These are old country lanes and routes which pre-date the New Town and were preserved as part of the town's urban structure; and
- **Horse & Pony Route:** A circular route around the edge of the town, incorporating a route diagonally across the town through Fairlands Valley

**14.25** The draft LDF said that these routes would continue to be protected. It also identified a new leisure route around the town. This was to be known as the Green Way. It provided a continuous link around the edge of Stevenage. The majority of the identified route is within the

135 Some of these sites are also within existing or proposed Green Links / Green Lungs

136 Supporting Technical Information (SBC, 2013)

137 Local Green Space designations should only be used where the space is near to the community it serves, is demonstrably special and hold a particular local significance and where the area is local in character and not an extensive tract of land.

Borough boundary. It uses existing footpaths, ancient lanes and public rights of way. A small section of the identified route, to the west of the town, is proposed within North Hertfordshire District Council.



**Horse & pony route; Chells Lane is a protected ancient lane**

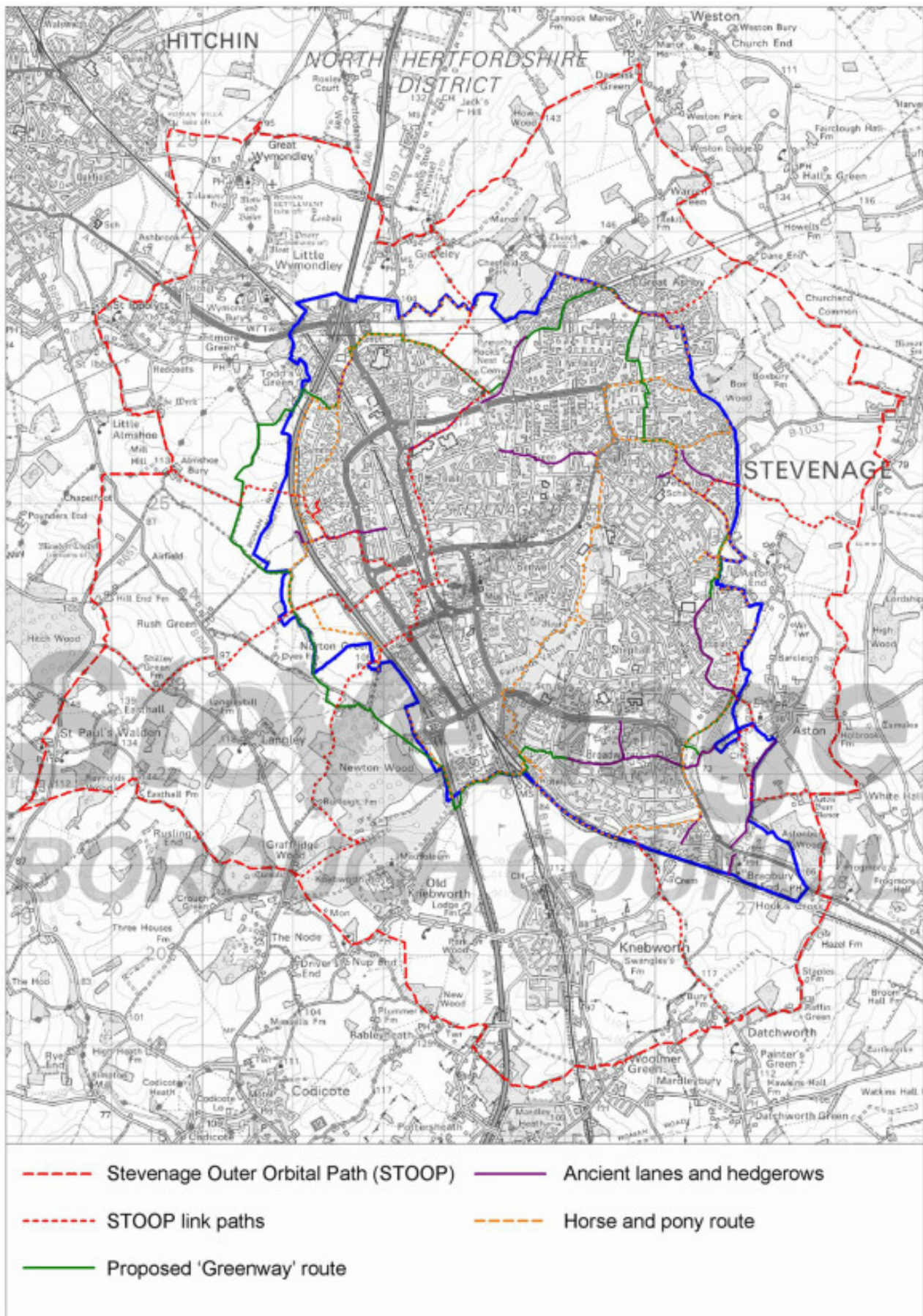
**14.26** We continue to support the provision and protection of these routes. The next consultation on the plan will contain draft allocations and criteria. This will ensure you can have your say on our proposals.

**14.27** We also need to think how these routes fit into the wider picture. Other towns such as Peterborough and Bedford have adopted the idea of 'green wheels'. This means providing circular routes for non-car users around urban areas as well as connections into, out of and across the town. The name is based on the hub and spokes of a wheel

**14.28** The Stevenage Outer Orbital Path, or "STOOP", was opened in 2008. This is a 28-mile route which circles the town. The whole route lies outside of the Borough boundary in North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire's administrative areas. A number of link paths have also been identified. These connect STOOP to the urban area and public transport connections. This means that smaller segments of the walk can be tackled.

**14.29** The map on the following page shows the location of all of these routes. We will need to consider how any development proposals in our new plan can sensitively incorporate these routes. We will need to consider any relevant policies or routes in the plans of North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire.





## Pollution

**14.30** The NPPF says that we should minimise pollution and its impacts. The local plan will need to set out policies for noise and light generating uses, noise sensitive uses and hazardous installations. It will consider if there are any particular measures that will be required to mitigate against flights to and from Luton Airport which cross the town.

**14.31** These are detailed policy requirements. We do not think there are reasonable alternatives to consult upon at this stage. It isn't realistic to say we might not provide policies about these matters. We will include draft policies and reasoning at the next stage of consultation to make sure that you can have your say.

## 15 The Historic Environment

**15.1** The local plan will promote new development. However, it is also important to conserve or protect the best of what already exists. Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas are two types of designation which are used to protect historic buildings and areas. The local plan will set out our approach to archaeology. It will say how we will preserve other historically important assets such as Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

**15.2** The NPPF contains clear advice on the historic environment. It says we should set out a positive strategy for the conservation of the historic environment in our local plan. It says we should conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

### Conservation

#### Issue 29: Heritage assets

- a. Include local policies to help determine applications that affect heritage assets
- b. Do not include local policies and rely instead upon national guidance and legislation

**15.3** The history of Stevenage dates back to the prehistoric period. Its development has been influenced by a wide variety of factors. These range from the coaching trade along the Great North Road to the arrival of the railway in 1850 and the development of the New Town from 1946. Stevenage has grown from a small hamlet to become one of the largest towns in Hertfordshire.

**15.4** This history is reflected in the range of heritage assets found in the town. This includes relics from the Bronze Age, thatched cottages, medieval timber framed buildings, manor houses, twentieth century new town neighbourhoods and modern sculpture. Many of these are protected by special designations. These include Listed Buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Conservation Areas.

**15.5** Listed Buildings are of particular historic or architectural interest. There are 127 Listed Buildings in Stevenage. Most are located in the Old Town and other areas that pre-date the New Town. Two are Grade I listed. These are St Nicholas Church and Rooks Nest House. This designation is reserved for buildings of exceptional interest. They are sometimes internationally important.

**15.6** There are seven Conservation Areas in Stevenage. We have Conservation Areas at:

- Marymead
- The Old Town High Street
- Orchard Road and Julians Road
- The Town Square
- Shephall Green
- St Nicholas Church and Rectory Lane
- Symonds Green

**15.7** Some of our Conservation Areas are well established areas designated for their historic value. Two are newer areas designated for their New Town value. Two (Town Square and St. Nicholas/Rectory Lane) are identified as being 'at risk'.





**St Nicholas Church; Town Square Conservation Area**

**15.8** The most important archaeological and historical sites are known as Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs). There are three SAMs in Stevenage. These are:

- The Old Malthouse and Kiln on the Old Town High Street;
- The Six Hills Roman Barrows; and
- Whormerley Wood moated site.

**15.9 Option a** would see us set detailed policies in the local plan. These would identify matters that need to be taken into account when applying for work that might impact upon a heritage asset. This option would let us identify any particular matters of local interest that we think should be taken into account.

**15.10** This might include more detailed advice about development in our Conservation Areas. It might identify particular things that we would take into account if a proposal might affect a listed building.

**15.11** We need to make sure that our local plan does not repeat (or contradict) advice or policies in other relevant documents. We would also need to be aware that any new legislation could overwrite our policies.

**15.12 Option b** would rely on existing guidance and legislation. We would use this to carry on protecting the town's heritage assets. We would not include any detailed policies in the local plan. We would just have a general requirement to take these matters into consideration.

**15.13** The NPPF provides a range of general advice. This says how we should consider applications that might affect a heritage asset. Conservation Areas, SAMs and Listed Buildings are all designated under different rules to the ones that say how we must prepare our local plan. These areas are already subject to strict controls regardless of what we may or may not put in the local plan. The relevant acts and regulations say we must look after these designations and keep them under review.

**15.14** We have produced detailed guidance for each of our Conservation Areas. A series of management plans were adopted in 2012. These identify the matters that we will think about when deciding whether to grant planning permission in these areas.

**15.15** These requirements and documents provide a lot of information that we can use to consider proposals that may have an impact upon heritage assets in the town. You might think that this is enough. There would be no need to produce additional, detailed local plan policies.

**15.16** There are risks with option b. Our heritage assets would be affected by any changes to legislation or the NPPF. This could result in their level of protection being reduced. We would not have any control over this process or any local policies to make sure the level of protection remained unchanged.

**15.17** The local plan will not make any changes to the historical assets currently designated within the Borough. This is because this is controlled by other legislation and processes. We may review these designations ourselves, or be advised of changes by other bodies over the lifetime of the plan<sup>(138)</sup>. These would need to be taken into account in any decisions that we made.

**15.18** The sustainability appraisal recognises that both of these options would protect historically important assets. Option a provides the opportunity to better reflect local character.

### Question 29

What is the best approach to ensure the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment?

## Archaeology

**15.19** A number of areas in Stevenage may contain archaeological remains. The District Plan identified 15 Areas of Archaeological Significance.

**15.20** Hertfordshire County Council are responsible for archaeology within the planning system. They suggest that any new plan should refer to Archaeological Alert Areas (AAAs). One new AAA has been identified in Stevenage since the District Plan Second Review was adopted in 2004. This covers parts of Fairlands Valley and Pestcotts Wood.

**15.21** However, the whole of the Borough has the potential to contain historic remains. There was not much archaeological work or surveying carried out when the New Town was being built. This means that any new development has the potential to uncover archaeology that we have not seen before.

**15.22** We intend to use the new AAAs in the local plan. We will say what should be done on sites where archaeological remains might exist. We will work with Hertfordshire County Council on this. We will include draft allocations and policy wording for you to comment on at the next stage of consultation.

<sup>138</sup> The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation) Act 1990 requires local authorities to keep our Conservation Areas under review. From time to time we must consider if any existing areas need changing or any new areas need designating. We last reviewed our Conservation Areas in 2009. England Heritage oversee the listing of historically important buildings and would advise us of any new listings or changes.



## 16 Monitoring and Delivery

### Infrastructure and Delivery

**16.1** The NPPF says we must plan positively for development. This includes identify the infrastructure that will be needed to support growth.

**16.2** We have begun thinking about the infrastructure requirements of our new plan<sup>(139)</sup>. It is hard to do this precisely at the moment. This is because we haven't decided how much development the plan will support, and where it will go. Our thoughts on these matters, and the options for dealing with them, are set out earlier in this consultation.

**16.3** However, we are already aware of some important issues:

- The A1(M) will need to be improved while the road network within the town should be able to cope with only minor schemes and changes (see Chapter 8);
- A review of council-owned assets is ongoing. This will help us to decide which social and community facilities should be retained (see Chapter 11);
- The Lister Hospital may need room to expand in the future while local GPs will require new facilities;
- The number of schools available across the town is likely to be about right. However, there may be a localised shortage of places in certain areas (see Issue 25);
- The amount of open space across the town as a whole is about right for the size of the population, but there are surpluses and shortages of certain types in some parts of the town (see Issue 28);
- Our housing target options can probably be accommodated without exceeding the capacity of the sewage treatment works at Rye Meads for a number of years. However, local upgrades to the sewerage network will be required to support any growth within Stevenage.

**16.4** We are currently deciding whether to prepare a Community Infrastructure Levy for the town. This could contribute towards some, or all, of the issues identified above. We may, alternately, continue to collect contributions from sites using individual legal agreements known as Section 106s (see Chapter 5).

**16.5** We will prepare a detailed Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) to support the Local Plan and any CIL. This will be prepared as we complete our evidence studies and begin to make our choices about the matters we have discussed in this document.

**16.6** It will answer some important questions including:

- What new infrastructure and services need to be provided?
- Why will these be needed? This will include the identification of any specific 'trigger-points' at which any improvements will be required.
- Who will be responsible for delivering any schemes or upgrades?
- How much will these items cost?

139 Draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan (SBC, 2013)

**16.7** We will exercise our Duty to Co-operate. We will work with all relevant providers to prepare the IDP and make sure that the schemes within it are progressed. This will include utilities providers such as Thames Water, the County Council as both highway and education authority, the bus operating companies, the Highways Agency and the Environment Agency.

**16.8** Any development around the town but outside of our boundary will also have an impact. It may require improvements to be made within the Borough to support any schemes. We will work closely with our neighbours in North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire to make sure these matters are taken into account.

**16.9** By taking this approach we will make sure that any necessary improvements are properly programmed. This means that new services and infrastructure will be provided in time to support new development.

**16.10** We will set out a detailed schedule relating to services, infrastructure and delivery in the next consultation on this plan. This will make sure you can have your say. We have published our draft IDP alongside this consultation. We would welcome any comments that you may wish to make at this stage.

### Monitoring

**16.11** We are required by law to monitor the effectiveness of our policies and plans. We produce a comprehensive Annual Monitoring Report every year. These are available on our website.

**16.12** Recent changes mean that we now take more responsibility for monitoring at a local level:

- The purpose of monitoring is now to share information with the local community rather than central government.
- We can set the time period that our monitoring reports to cover. This must not be longer than 12 months.
- We are responsible for our own performance management and can choose which indicators and targets to include in the report.

**16.13** As a result of this, our monitoring report can focus on locally important issues.

**16.14** The local plan will need to set out a monitoring framework. This will show how we will measure the effects of our new plan. It will help to tell us whether our policies are working or having the right effect. It will let us know when things are not going so well. It will help us to decide if we need to review the plan or parts of it.

**16.15** The monitoring framework will need to say how we are progressing against key targets and requirements. These will include:

- The amount of employment development that has been completed and the amount of employment land available for new development;
- Employment rates and the types of jobs people are doing;
- Where any new retail development is taking place and the number of vacant shops;
- Whether new infrastructure is being provided in the right places at the right times;
- How people are travelling from their homes to work, school or other destinations;

- The number of homes built against the target we have set ourselves;
- Whether enough sites are coming forward to make sure we can keep building new homes in future years;
- The type and size of new homes being built, including affordable housing;
- Whether new buildings are being built sustainably and efficiently
- The amount of open space we are providing and whether this is enough for the local population; and
- Whether we are successfully preserving heritage assets.

**16.16** We will set out a detailed monitoring framework in the next consultation on this plan. This will take account of the decisions we have made and will tell you:

- What we propose to monitor;
- How we will measure it;
- Any target(s) that we will try to meet;
- How frequently we will gather information; and
- Any steps we might take if the information shows that the plan is not having the desired effect.

**16.17** We will also monitor the wider effects of the plan through the Sustainability Appraisal. The SA sets out a list of indicators that we will use to measure the social, economic and environmental impacts of the plan. Some of these indicators may also form part of the monitoring framework for the plan.



**Appendices**



## A Glossary

Our planning documents contain some technical terms that you may not understand. This appendix explains some of the words and phrases used in this document.

A term that is written in *italics* mean that an explanation for a word or phrase is also provided in the glossary.

**2004 Planning Act:** This is the Act of Parliament which says how we must write planning policy documents. Its full name is the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. It says authorities should prepare *local development documents*. *Local Development Documents* must set out the *local planning authority's* policies relating to the development and use of land.

**2011 Localism Act:** This is the Act of Parliament which made changes to the *2004 Planning Act* and has changed how we must write planning policy documents. It contained provisions allowing *Regional Strategies* to be revoked and abolished the idea of regional planning. It introduced the *Duty to Co-operate* and the concept of *Neighbourhood Plans*.

**Adopted / Adoption:** This is the final stage of producing a *local plan*. Once a plan has been to *examination* and approved, it can be adopted. *Modifications* may be made to the *local plan* before it is adopted. Once the *local plan* is adopted it can be used to decide planning applications. A plan remains adopted until it is *revoked* ~ either in whole or in part.

**Appropriate Assessment:** This is a special type of *environmental assessment*. It says if a plan is likely to cause harm to certain types of wildlife sites known as European Sites. European Law says that all *local plans* should be subject to an Appropriate Assessment.

**Biodiversity:** This word is a shortened form of "biological diversity". It refers to the variety of life within a given species or area.

**Brownfield (previously developed) land:** Land that has already been developed for another use. This term is often used when we are talking about housing development. The *National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)* says we should re-use brownfield land where this is appropriate. *Local planning authorities* should consider setting targets for the use of brownfield land. A full definition is in Annex 2 of the *NPPF*.

**Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):** CIL is a new means of collecting developer contributions from new developments towards things such as infrastructure, open spaces or schools. It takes that form of a fixed tariff or rate which is applied to new development. Different rates can be set for different areas or types of development. Any CIL must be subject to consultation and *examination* before it can be *adopted*.

**Comparison retail floorspace:** Comparison retail refers to items that we do not buy regularly. It includes things like clothes and shoes. It also includes household goods such as televisions. See also: *Convenience retail floorspace*.

**Conservation Area:** Conservation Areas are areas of particular architectural or historical interest. They are areas which we want to preserve and enhance. A Conservation Area might contain a number of old buildings or features. There are currently seven Conservation Areas in Stevenage. This includes the Old Town High Street.



**Convenience retail floorspace:** Convenience retailing refers to essential, everyday items. This includes foods, drinks, newspapers/magazines and confectionery. See also: *Comparison retail floorspace*.

**Daneshill House:** The headquarters of the Council. Daneshill House is located on Danestrete in Stevenage town centre. It is opposite the bus station and a few minutes walk from the train station.

**Development Plan:** The Development Plan is those documents that we must consider when deciding whether or not to grant applications for planning permission. The law says that we must decide applications against policies in the development plan unless *material considerations* suggest otherwise. The Development Plan is currently made up of the *District Plan* and the waste and minerals plans written by *Hertfordshire County Council*. Once it is *adopted*, the *local plan* will become part of the Development Plan along with any *Neighbourhood Plans*.

**District Plan / District Plan 2nd Review (SDP2R):** The Stevenage District Plan Second Review (SDP2R) is the Borough's current *local plan*. It was adopted in December 2004. It was automatically 'saved' on the date of its adoption. This meant that we could use its policies to decide planning applications. Approximately one-third of the local plan policies were deleted on December 8th 2007 and are no longer used to decide planning applications.

**Draft Core Strategy:** The draft Core Strategy was part of the *Local Development Framework* for Stevenage. It was sent to the Government in 2010 but was found 'unsound'. It reflected the strategy for the town that was set in the *East of England Plan*. The draft Core Strategy was *withdrawn* in February 2012.

**Duty to Co-operate:** This is a legal requirement introduced by the *2011 Localism Act*. It says *local planning authorities* and other relevant bodies must engage constructively in the preparation of *local plans*. These bodies must work together to consider strategic matters. Strategic matters include the development or use of land across at least two planning areas as well as county matters such as education or highways. Deciding whether or not the Duty to Co-operate has been met will be a key part of the *examination* of the *local plan*.

**East of England Plan (EoEP):** See *Regional Strategy*.

**Environmental assessment:** Any of the reports that we have to write by law to show how our plans will affect the environment. This includes *Appropriate Assessment*, *Strategic Environmental Assessment* and *Sustainability Appraisal*.

**Examination:** The *local plan* must be sent to the Government for independent examination before it can be adopted. An inspector will consider all of the written representations that have been made about the plan. The inspector may invite certain groups or individuals to give further evidence. After the examination, the inspector will write a report. This will tell us if the plan has met the necessary legal requirements and is 'sound'. In certain circumstances, we can ask the inspector to recommend *modifications* that will allow us to adopt the *local plan*. Further information can be found in the *National Planning Policy Framework*.

**Government (role of in planning):** The Government set the laws and write guidance that we have to follow when we prepare our plans. We are required by the Government to write certain documents, such as the *Local Development Scheme*. The Government also stops plans that are unsatisfactory through the *examination* process. Government planning guidance is set out in the *National Planning Policy Framework*.

**Green Belt:** Green Belts are one of the oldest and best known planning designations. They are designed to prevent the sprawl of large built-up areas. They also stop neighbouring towns from joining up with one another. The most important features of any Green Belt are its openness and permanence. Stevenage is surrounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt. *Local planning authorities* can review the Green Belt 'in exceptional circumstances, when preparing or reviewing a *local plan*. Further information can be found in the *National Planning Policy Framework* .

**Greenfield:** Any piece of land which has not been developed. Greenfield is the opposite of *brownfield land*. This term should not be confused with *Green Belt* as it also includes undeveloped land within a town, such as an open space.

**Heritage assets:** This is a collective term used in the *National Planning Policy Framework*. It is used to refer to *Listed Buildings*, *Conservation Areas*, *Scheduled Ancient Monuments* and other assets of historical importance.

**Listed Building:** The Government keeps a list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. The older a building is, the more likely it is to be listed. Once a building is listed, a special type of planning permission is needed to make any changes to it. This is called Listed Building Consent. It is against the law to make changes without this. There are more than 150 Listed Buildings in Stevenage.

**Local Development Documents (LDD):** This is the formal, legal name for certain planning documents. The *local plan* is a LDD.

**Local Development Framework (LDF):** The Local Development Framework was the name used to refer to *local planning authority's* planning documents following the *2004 Planning Act*. Between 2004 and 2011 we did a lot of work to produce a new LDF for the Borough. We stopped work on the LDF when the *Core Strategy* was withdrawn. Several of our draft LDF documents are still used as *material considerations* when deciding planning applications. These are the Gunnels Wood Area Action Plan, Old Town Area Action Plan and Site Specific Policies DPD. We will *withdraw* these documents when the new *local plan* reaches the *publication* stage.

**Local Development Scheme (LDS):** This document sets out a timetable for preparing the *local plan*.

**Local plan:** The local plan is the document(s) which contains policies for the development and use of land. A new local plan must go through a number of stages before it can be *adopted* ~ *preparation*, *publication* and *examination*. A local plan must set out how an area will change in the future. It will include allocations for areas which are to be developed or protected. It will include policies which will be used to decide whether or not to grant *planning permission*.

**Local Planning Authority (LPA):** A local authority has a legal duty to prepare planning documents and decide planning applications. District and Borough Councils have planning powers for all development except minerals and waste. County Councils have planning powers for minerals and waste within their areas. A unitary authority combines the role of a district and county council. It has all the planning powers in its area. There are no unitary authorities in Hertfordshire.

**Major development:** The definition of major development is set in Government regulations <sup>(140)</sup>. It includes:

- Residential development of 10 or more dwellings or having a site area greater than 0.5 hectares where the number of dwellings is not known;
- A building or buildings creating 1,000m<sup>2</sup> or more of floorspace;
- Development on a site area of 1 hectare or more; or
- Various mineral, waste or highway developments.

**Material consideration:** A material consideration is a matter, document or piece of information that can be considered when deciding a planning application that is not part of the *Development Plan*. The *National Planning Policy Framework* is a material consideration. *Supplementary Planning Documents* and evidence studies can also be material considerations. In certain circumstances, material considerations will indicate that a planning application should not be determined in accordance with the *Development Plan*.

**Modifications:** Modifications are changes that are made to the plan after its *submission* for *examination*. A *local planning authority* can request that the inspector recommends modifications where its plan would otherwise be unsound.

**Monitoring:** We have to collect monitoring information and make it available to the public. This includes the progress in preparing any new *local plan* and the number of new houses built. We use monitoring results tell us if the policies in our plans are working.

**National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):** The NPPF was published in 2012. It sets out Government planning policies and its expectations for the way *local plans* will be prepared. It consolidates national guidance that was previously set out in a series of Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance Notes. The NPPF is a *material consideration* in the determination of planning applications.

**Neighbourhood Plan:** The *2011 Localism Act* introduced powers for community groups, businesses and / or groups of individuals to prepare Neighbourhood Plans. Neighbourhood Plans can be prepared for smaller areas within *local planning authorities'* administrative areas. Upon adoption, any Neighbourhood Plans become part of the statutory *Development Plan* for the area. Neighbourhood Plans must be in conformity with any strategic policies in the *local plan*. Beyond this, the Neighbourhood Plan takes precedence where there is any conflict.

**New neighbourhood:** A large-scale development next to the edge of an existing town. A planned new neighbourhood should make use of existing infrastructure and provide good access to passenger transport, jobs, schools, shopping and leisure facilities. Some new neighbourhoods can be large enough to make their own provision for the facilities listed above.

140 The Town & Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Amendment) (England) Order 2006

**Preparation:** This is the name given to the period when we are beginning to write our *local plan*. It covers the activities we carry out up until the *publication* of the draft plan. We must consult with the public when our plans are under preparation. It is up to each authority to decide what to consult on, how long to consult for, and how many times to hold consultation.

**Previously developed land:** See 'brownfield land'.

**Proposals map:** The proposals map shows all policies that are linked to a certain site or sites. This might include land which is allocated for housing development or the *Green Belt*. The proposals map must be updated when the *local plan* is *adopted*. A draft proposals map should be produced at *Publication* stage. This shows how the proposals map would change if the *local plan* was *adopted*.

**Publication:** This is the last stage of consultation on a *local plan* before *submission* and *examination*. The Council writes what it thinks should be the final version of the plan. They must make it available for consultation for at least six weeks. It should be accompanied by a *Sustainability Appraisal* and a draft *proposals map*.

**Regional Strategy (RS):** Regional Strategies were part of the *Development Plan* between 2004 and 2013. They were responsible for setting out strategic matters such as the number of homes to be built in each *local planning authority* area and where development should be concentrated. It also includes policies on subjects such as design, transport and employment. The East of England Plan was the RS for Stevenage. It was adopted in 2008. It was *revoked* by the Government in 2013.

**Revoked / revocation:** This is the process by which a plan, or parts of it, stop being used after it has been *adopted*. Following revocation, the plan or policies stop being part of the *Development Plan*.

**Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM):** Scheduled Ancient Monuments are nationally protected buildings or sites. There are over 200 types of monument that can be protected. These range from pre-historic standing stones to war-time defences. There are three SAMs in Stevenage: The Six Hills burial mounds, the ancient moat at Whomerley Wood and the Old Malt House and Kiln in the Old Town.

**Statement of Community Involvement (SCI):** The Statement of Community Involvement is part of the *Local Development Framework*. It says how we will involve the public when we write our plans or decide major planning applications. An updated SCI for Stevenage was adopted in 2012.

**Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA):** This is required under European law. We have to test our *local plan* to make sure we understand the environmental effect it will have. SEA is undertaken at the same time as *Sustainability Appraisal*.

**Submission:** This is the point at which the draft *local plan* is sent to the Government for *examination*. It will include any final changes that are made after *Publication* consultation.

**Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD):** Supplementary Planning Documents provide more details on policies contained in *local plans*. The community will be involved in their preparation, but there is no *examination* of the document.

**Sustainability Appraisal (SA):** An assessment of environmental, economic and social effects of a *local plan*. SA should improve the ‘performance’ of a plan. It is carried out at the same time as *Strategic Environmental Assessment*. *Sustainability Appraisal* is also used as a single term to explain these two processes.

**Sustainable development:** Meeting the needs of today’s society without harming the prospects of future generations. One of the Government’s key aims for the town planning process is that it should deliver sustainable development.

**Typologies (open space):** Typologies are sub-categories of matters, such as retailing or open space. The Borough Council’s open spaces study uses a number of grouping or typologies of open space. This includes parks, outdoor sports facilities and children’s play areas.

**Use Class / Use Classes Order:** All uses of land have a use class. It is a way of putting development into categories. Shops, for example, are Class A1 while offices are Class B1(a). The Use Classes Order is the piece of legislation which tells us what uses fall into each class. Use classes are a useful way of directing certain types of development to certain locations.

**Withdrawal (of plan documents):** This is the process by which a plan stops being used or prepared before it has been *adopted*. A *local planning authority* may withdraw a plan at any point before *adoption*.





