

Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011–2031

Local Plan Partial Update to Local Plan (adopted 22 May 2019)

Explanatory Note

Local Plan Review and Partial Update

The Stevenage Borough Local Plan was adopted on 22 May 2019. The Plan sets out a spatial vision for the town to 2031 and contains detailed land use policies for the Borough. The Plan superseded the District Plan Second Review (adopted 2004) as the statutory Local Plan for the Borough and is used to determine applications for planning permission.

The Local Plan was adopted in May 2019 following the lifting of a Holding Direction placed on the Plan following Examination in Public in 2017. One of the conditions of the lifting of the Holding Direction was a requirement to produce an Area Action Plan for the Stevenage Station Gateway Major Opportunity Area, related to Policy TC4 of the Local Plan).

The Station Gateway Area Action Plan progressed through two rounds of consultation. The first consultation, an Issues and Options consultation, in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012) (as amended), held from 12 July to 5 September 2021. The second consultation, a Preferred Options consultation, in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012) (as amended), was held from 30 January to 18 March 2023.

Following the close of the Area Action Plan second consultation, it was agreed, following legal advice, that there should be a two-stage process to reviewing and updating the Stevenage Borough Local Plan, given the position the local authority finds itself regarding the age of the current Local Plan being over 5 years since adoption:

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| Stage 1: Local Plan – Review and Partial Update |
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| Stage 2: Local Plan – New Plan |
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Officers have progressed with undertaking the first stage, a review and subsequent partial update of the Local Plan. The scope of the Local Plan – Review and Partial Update is limited to new and revised policies of the existing adopted Stevenage Borough Local Plan (2019) and incorporates relevant changes related to the two rounds of consultation on the Station Gateway Area Action Plan. There will then follow a new Local Plan which will plan beyond the existing time horizon of 2031.

A comprehensive review of the existing Plan was undertaken as part of the first stage, with relevant updates to policies and new policies to the Plan considered to take forward as part of a Local Plan Partial Update. The second stage will commence with evidence gathered as part of the initial full review of the existing Plan which will be revisited; the second stage will in effect consist of a new Local Plan.

It is important to note that the scope of the update to policies and supporting text is limited to necessary changes only, related to key drivers of change since the Plan was adopted in 2019.

The key changes made to the adopted Local Plan were detailed in the Officer Reports to Cabinet in June 2024 and November 2024 and focus on the continued requirement to tackle Climate Change and promoting sustainable and active travel across the Borough. Other wider changes will be considered for the next stage of the Local Plan Review, the New Local Plan.

The first consultation on the Local Plan Partial Update was held from 5 July to 15 August 2024 and took place in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012) (as amended). A second round of public consultation (under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012) (as amended) was held from 21 November 2024 to 14 February 2025. A third round, an Addendum (Regulation 19 to Pre-Submission) was held from 24 June to 4 August 2025, to provide clarity on issues raised. The next step in the process is to submit the Plan to the Secretary of State (MHCLG), ahead of an independent Examination in Public by an appointed Planning Inspector.

Given that the Local Plan Partial Update was at Regulation 19 stage prior to 12 March 2025 and the draft housing requirement meets in excess of 80% of local housing need, under the transitional arrangements outlined as part of the NPPF 2024, this means that the Local Plan Partial Update will be submitted and examined under the NPPF 2023 and not NPPF 2024. This provides more certainty with regard to the need to update the Plan, which is now over 5 years old and as such progressing the revised Plan to adoption at an earlier stage would mean that policies carry greater weight in decision making.

The consequence of not falling under the transitional arrangements and instead operating under the NPPF 2024, would mean that we would need to prepare a new Plan from scratch, thus increasing the risk that policies in the 2019 Local Plan would lose further weight in decision making over time, until the new Plan progressed to the first stage of consultation. By operating under the transitional arrangements and therefore under the NPPF 2023, we are working to a broad two-stage process:

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| <p>1. Local Plan – Partial Update (to be submitted and examined under the NPPF 2023)</p> <p>2. New Local Plan (to be progressed under the NPPF 2024 or subsequent versions of the NPPF thereafter)</p> |
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Officers have sought legal advice from Counsel on the broad approach and Counsel are content that we are following the most appropriate process. In addition, in January 2025 officers sought the advice of the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) who were also broadly satisfied that we are following the correct process, appropriate to our local circumstances.

Summary

Approval was granted by Stevenage Borough's Cabinet in November 2024 to allow delegated authority to the Assistant Director: Planning & Regulation, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder: Environment and Performance, to proceed to Submission of the Local Plan Partial Update.