

### **Policy SLP24 - Visitors, Hotels and Overnight Accommodation**

The Council will support the provision of a range of quality overnight accommodation including:

- Budget and boutique hotels in the existing built up areas across the district, with priority being in or near the City centre.
- Four star hotel with conference facilities. The DLP process will examine need, suitability and deliverability, with the key locational consideration being close proximity to and positive interaction with the City centre of St Albans.

## **9. A Connected District with Ease of Movement for All**

### **Strategic Objective 4 - A connected district with ease of movement**

*The provision of a sustainable movement network which encourages the use of public transport, walking and cycling and which improves access to services, jobs and facilities, particularly for rural settlements and those without the use of private vehicles. Traffic congestion will be managed to an acceptable level while parking will be appropriately priced and located. Improvements will be made to air quality and reductions made in carbon emissions.*

### **Introduction**

- 9.1 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), as the Transport Authority, is a key partner in the provision of a sustainable movement network across the district and therefore most schemes are reliant on HCC funding.
- 9.2 The third Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP3) is a statutory document which sets the County-wide framework for achieving the vision of a better transport system for all. It provides the framework for transport's support of the economic, environmental and social development of Hertfordshire over the period to 2031. LTP3 contains the following vision statement:

“To provide a safe, efficient and resilient transport system that serves the needs of business and residents across Hertfordshire and minimises its impact on the environment.”

9.3 The County Council aims to achieve this vision by:

- Making best use of the existing network and introducing targeted schemes where improvements are required so as to deliver a reliable and readily usable transport network to benefit local business, encourage further economic growth and allow access for all to everyday facilities.
- Promoting and supporting sustainable travel to reduce growth in car traffic and contribute to improved health and quality of life for residents with a positive impact on the environment and on the wider challenge of reducing transport's contribution to climate change.

9.4 LTP3 includes the following commitment statement by the District Council:

“The City and District is committed to the development and implementation of sustainable transport and development policies and strategies to promote the economic, social, historic and general environment of the district. St Albans is an historic city and the policies and strategies have to be sympathetic to the conservation of the historic environment as well as promoting the economic, social and general wellbeing of the district.”

9.5 As well as LPT3, the main documents addressing transport planning issues in the district include:

- Urban transport plan (UTP) for St Albans.
- UTP for Southern St Albans (covering the villages south of the City).
- UTP for Harpenden.
- St Albans City Vision.
- St Albans Rural Vision.
- St Albans Park and Ride Initial Scoping Study.
- City and District of St Albans Walking Strategy.
- City and District of St Albans Cycling Strategy.
- St Albans Traffic Modelling Study.

9.6 Further UTPs and area plans are being considered for other parts of the district, covering more of the village areas.

### **Key issues**

9.7 In the light of the evidence in the documents mentioned above and the results of public consultation on the SLP, a number of key issues are identified below.

- Location of new development
- Trains
- Buses and community transport
- Walking and Cycling
- Roads
- Traffic Congestion
- Park and Ride
- Car Parking
- Travel Plans
- Air Quality
- Luton Airport

## **Location of new development**

- 9.8 New development should be concentrated in accessible locations, which reduce the need to travel, encourage walking and cycling and where good public transport services exist or can be provided to St Albans city centre, Harpenden or London Colney town centres, the railway stations and the main employment areas.

## **Trains**

- 9.9 First Capital Connect carried out improvements to St Albans City Station and introduced the first 12-coach services to run on the Thameslink route in December 2011. The 'Thameslink Programme' will greatly improve train travel to and from London; and beyond with direct links to Gatwick, Brighton and Eurostar at St Pancras International. The programme will improve train capacity as follows:
- 3,200 extra seats in the peak (Bedford to Brighton and Sutton Loop combined)
  - 1,200 off-peak weekday seats (between London St Pancras International and Bedford)
  - almost 3,900 more Saturday seats (between London St Pancras International and Bedford)
- 9.10 The Government and Hertfordshire County Council have announced plans to convert the Abbey railway line between Watford Junction and St Albans Abbey stations into a light rail operation. This will involve more frequent services, with services at least half hourly and possibly more frequently than this. The potential to extend the line to Watford town centre and St Albans city centre and to add additional stops will be examined during the plan period. Public realm improvements will be sought between the town centre and the Abbey station to encourage the use of this enhanced service and provide sustainable alternatives. The Abbey Flyer together with the Croxley Rail Link project will improve rail infrastructure to the south west of the district and deliver economic benefits to the area.

## **Buses and Community Transport**

- 9.11 A 'Quality Network Partnership' branded as 'Network St Albans' has been set up by St Albans Council, Hertfordshire County Council and local bus and train operators. This unique and innovative partnership is an exemplar of multi-agency / stakeholder working. It aims to improve transport usage and quality and to reduce congestion in and around St Albans and forms a major strand of the District and County's sustainable transport strategy. Successes of the QNP include securing Department for Transport funding for many projects, including providing new hybrid, low emission buses and significant improvements in bus service frequency and reliability. The Memorandum of Understanding states:

*"The QNP aims to provide residents of and visitors to St Albans with a real and attractive alternative for many of the journeys currently made by private car. This will help St Albans City and District Council to cut traffic related road congestion, air and noise pollution, help businesses in the city recruit and retain staff, and maintain the city's position as an attractive visitor destination".*

- 9.12 There is a need for improved bus links from the rural areas to the towns and City. Existing bus services are sometimes expensive, unreliable, infrequent and do not sufficiently provide an effective alternative to the car. Diversity of bus service provision, including minibuses, community transport and shuttle buses, is encouraged. Work undertaken through the QNP and the taxi operators will be broadened to investigate and address district wide issues following the success within the City.
- 9.13 The delivery of the proposals and opportunities identified in all current and future UTPs will be supported. At present, the most significant proposal is the Harpenden Urban Transport Plan proposal for accessibility improvements to and at Harpenden railway station. This includes improved road access, additional car parking and improved facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and buses.

## **Walking and Cycling**

- 9.14 The Plans referred to at 9.2 and 9.5 above contain various measures to encourage walking and cycling. Key actions in the Council's Walking Strategy include encouraging walking to school and work, promoting walking as a leisure activity, improving rights of way, addressing the needs of disabled people and designing new development to encourage walking. Policy SLP27 on Green Infrastructure also includes proposals which will help to facilitate increased levels of walking and cycling.

- 9.15 Key priorities in the Council's Cycling Strategy include new cycle routes, secure cycle parking (e.g. at stations) and other facilities, such as shared use of paths in public parks. One stretch of the National Cycleway Network is still to be constructed; part of Route 57 between Harpenden and Wheathampstead. A new link is intended between Route 6 and Route 57 in Harpenden, where there is currently no direct link.
- 9.16 Policy SLP27 on Green Infrastructure also includes proposals which will help to facilitate increased levels of walking and cycling. A key project is the Green Ring around St Albans. This is an orbital route around the City, connected by spokes to the centre. Further connections will be sought to assist in the comprehensive coverage of the district.

## **Roads**

- 9.17 The district has very high levels of car ownership, but most of the road network has a relatively low capacity. Due to the narrow and complicated layout of the historic streets of the City centre, towns and villages, bottlenecks occur at peak hours causing serious traffic congestion with accompanying air quality problems.
- 9.18 The development proposed in the SLP, plus anticipated growth in background traffic levels (including the impact from growth in adjoining local authority areas and impact from the possible increased operations at Luton Airport) is expected to result in increased pressure on the local highway network. However, the evidence including in the Urban Transport Plans and the St Albans Traffic Modelling Study indicates that traffic levels will not necessitate the provision of major new transport infrastructure, when considered at a national scale. The rising trend towards more home-working, both full and part time, the rising trend in fuel prices and the significant extra capacity on the rail network to be delivered through the Thameslink programme may additionally ameliorate impacts on the road network.
- 9.19 Nevertheless, there is expected to be increased stress on the highway network, particularly in St Albans City centre, at key junctions on the main roads into St Albans and in Harpenden town centre. Therefore some road improvement measures, such as junction improvements, will be required and these will be complemented by a range of sustainable movement and public realm enhancements.
- 9.20 HCC has engaged consultants to prepare a county-wide Inter Urban Route Strategy. This will cover all modes of travel, not just travel by road. The Inter Urban Route Strategy will include advice on whether major improvements should be made to the inter-urban road network.

- 9.21 Over the medium to long term, there is a need to complete the Hemel Hempstead North-East Relief Road, to relieve congestion in and around the Maylands Business Park and facilitate development in east Hemel Hempstead (in Dacorum Borough and St Albans District) and on the Spencers Park site, both within this district and in Dacorum. Whilst most of the relief road is within Dacorum Borough, the final section of this road is likely to involve land in St Albans District, north of the Buncefield Oil Depot. This will be addressed as part of joint working with Dacorum, including joint working on the East Hemel Hempstead AAP.
- 9.22 In addition LTP3 includes policies to develop and maintain strategies for roads within the urban and inter urban network which relate to the different hierarchy levels so that a road's character is developed to best suit the function which it has to fulfil. In this way the large volume of through traffic, particularly heavy goods vehicles, are concentrated on the main roads and are kept away from local roads. The local roads can then be developed to give greater priority and safety to pedestrians, cyclists, shoppers and residents. It also aims to ensure that freight is able to move quickly and efficiently through the county without compromising the natural environment, the economy, or affecting the quality of life for residents.
- 9.23 Two policy areas have been highlighted which: seeks to prevent direct access on the primary routes from new development and; in relation to heavy goods movements, seeks to reduce impact on the environment and congestion in both town centres and rural areas. These reflect local priorities and have been included in Policy 25 below.

### **Traffic Congestion**

- 9.24 Traffic congestion and its consequent impact on the amenity of residents is a serious issue across the district and will be addressed in all settlements. One of the Council's main transport aims is to improve conditions in the City centre, in order to upgrade the environment for shopping, working, living, leisure and cultural activities. Within the City centre, there is a need to manage traffic, ease congestion, enhance the public realm and improve conditions for buses, cyclists and pedestrians. Coach management initiatives will be explored.

### **Park and Ride**

- 9.25 The St Albans Park and Ride Initial Scoping Study has concluded that large scale park and ride would be unlikely to be successful in St Albans. Mini park and ride car parks on sites close to the edge of the City could be considered. There would however be no dedicated bus services. Instead car parks would have to be served by existing bus routes, which may run more frequently.

## **Car Parking**

- 9.26 The Council's forthcoming new parking strategy will include proposals to manage parking across the district. The DLP will contain a policy setting out levels of parking for broad classes of development. This policy will be based on a zonal approach which reflects the character and accessibility of different parts of the district. The parking strategy referred to above will also be taken into account.

## **Travel Plans**

- 9.27 Travel plans attached to approved development schemes can have an important part to play in encouraging the use of sustainable forms of transport, particularly for journeys to work and school. The council will expect travel plans to be submitted with all major residential and non-residential developments and other developments, where appropriate.

## **Air Quality**

- 9.28 Congestion and heavy traffic flows are responsible for poor air quality in parts of the district. Three Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) have been declared at the Peahen Junction, St Albans, at Hemel Hempstead Road, St Albans, and adjacent to M1 junction 7 and at M25 near Radlett Road and Frogmore. The Council is investigating measures to improve the air quality at these locations with other key stakeholders, including the Highways Agency, to enable the AQMA designations to be removed or mitigated. Such measures include provision of low emission buses, traffic management, provision of cycling and walking infrastructure and urban greening being delivered through Policy SLP27 on Green Infrastructure, including measures such as tree planting, green roofs and green walls.

## **Luton Airport**

- 9.29 Luton airport is located approximately 5 miles to the north of Harpenden. Its current operations impacts on the wider district, but more intensively on the northern part of the district. The impacts include noise disturbance under the flight paths especially at night and traffic congestion along the A1081, A5183 and B653. Of key importance in regard to Luton Airport operations and proposals are the potential to bring economic benefits to the area and to widen consumer choice; whilst also appropriately addressing any potential detrimental impacts on this district such as on noise levels, road traffic, rail capacity, and the environment.

### **Policy SLP25 – Transport Strategy**

The Council supports measures which ensure the free flow of traffic, reduce

traffic congestion and encourage more sustainable travel, by public transport, walking and cycling, including;

### **New Development**

- New development should be concentrated in accessible locations which will reduce the need to travel, encourage walking and cycling and where good public transport services can be provided or connect into, maintain and improve the existing transport infrastructure and hierarchy.

### **Public Transport**

- Conversion of the Abbey Line to light rail operation, with increased frequency of services and possible extension of services to St Albans City centre
- Accessibility improvements to and at Harpenden railway station
- Improved bus services, particularly in St Albans and from the villages to St Albans, Harpenden, London Colney and adjoining districts
- Additional bus routes / services to ensure connectivity with development at Broad Locations
- The introduction of hybrid and other low emission buses

### **Walking and Cycling**

Proposals to increase walking and cycling, including completion of National Cycleway Route 57 between Harpenden and Wheathampstead and the Green Ring around St Albans.

### **Roads**

- Road improvements, such as junction improvements, to secure environmental and transportation benefits, particularly in St Albans City centre, at key junctions on the main roads into St Albans and in Harpenden town centre
- Completion of the Hemel Hempstead North-East Relief Road, partly through St Albans District
- On primary routes, direct access for new or existing development shall not be permitted except where special circumstances can be demonstrated. This should include consideration of alternative options and viability assessment.
- To reduce impact on the environment and congestion in both town centres and rural area, Heavy Goods Vehicles shall be encouraged to use the primary route network by means of signing and traffic management measures shall be introduced, where appropriate, to restrict inappropriate heavy goods movements on certain other routes, where problems persist.

### **Car parking**

Car parking standards will be based on a zonal approach and set out in the DLP



**Travel plans**

Travel plans are required for all major residential and non-residential developments and other developments, where appropriate. Such plans will set out measures to encourage people to use alternative modes of travel to the single occupancy car. Detailed guidance will be included in the DLP.

**Air quality**

Measures to improve air quality along major roads, including enabling the removal or mitigation of the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) designations.

## 10. A healthy and strong environment

### **Strategic Objective 6 – A healthy and strong environment for a healthy and strong population**

*An integrated and cohesive network of green and blue open spaces and routes will be identified, protected and managed to increase biodiversity, help mitigate and adapt to climate change and encourage active and healthy lifestyles. The district's non-urban areas will be protected and enhanced in order to help bring built development and natural land into greater environmental balance.*

- 10.1 As noted in Chapter 2, paragraph 2.21, detailed work on the environmental capacity of the district has been undertaken. This has reached a number of conclusions, including that the ecological footprint of the district reveals an unsustainable pattern of consumption and that ecosystem services are under increased pressure. It is vital that policies on the natural environment and green infrastructure set out a strong framework which helps conserve and promote enhancements to the local environment over the plan period.

### **Natural Environment**

- 10.2 The district has a rich natural environment, with attractive landscapes and many environmental assets, including habitats of high biodiversity value. It is important that these habitats and the species which inhabit them are conserved and where possible enhanced.
- 10.3 At a broad scale the district's landscape can be divided between that of a Chilterns character to the north-west and that of a Northern Thames Basin

character to the south-east. It is a diverse landscape with a series of broad valleys containing the Rivers Ver, Colne and Lea with ridges and plateau between including areas of broadleaved woodlands, commons and arable farmland.

- 10.4 At the district scale, Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has led to the definition of 26 Landscape Character Areas wholly or partly in the district. For each character area, the LCA includes a strategy and specific guidelines for managing change. Landscapes to the north of the district are generally of a better condition and strength of character than those to the south, some of which have been harmed by minerals extraction and disrupted by major transport corridors.
- 10.5 Areas of landscape importance within the district are defined as 'Landscape Conservation Areas'. Much of the Upper Lea Valley north east of Harpenden together with land around Wheathampstead and a tract between St Albans and Harpenden is currently defined as a Landscape Conservation Area. Further work will be undertaken to review the boundaries to respect the Landscape Character Areas and clearly define areas of intrinsic character and beauty for the DLP.
- 10.6 Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth or in a specified region or area. The district contains two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 6 Local Nature Reserves and 197 County Wildlife Sites (including over 40 areas of Ancient Woodland). In addition, the district also has a number of veteran trees and many ancient hedgerows as well as chalk streams, wetlands, woodlands, heathlands and grassland habitats. Waterways are particularly important in terms of their biodiversity value in the district. The district also contains some areas of geological importance, including a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Moor Mill Quarry West which is designated for its Earth Heritage importance.
- 10.7 The district contains large areas of grades 2 and 3 agricultural land (grades 1, 2 and 3a are classified as the best and most versatile). Agricultural land in the district is of great importance in ensuring a sustainable place to live for current and future generations. The Council is keen to encourage local food production schemes and initiatives, which help to reduce the district's carbon footprint and maximize its self-sufficiency.
- 10.8 The Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and the Habitat Survey for St Albans City and District form the main local sources of information and guidance on biodiversity and nature conservation sites. The BAP includes a series of action plans to protect and enhance key habitats and species across the county. Four Key Biodiversity Areas or 'Living Landscapes' are identified in the district: the Upper Lea Valley and River Ver/Gorhambury in the north and the Upper Colne Valley and Bricket Wood/Moor Mill in the south.

- 10.9 Many species have statutory protection and the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre maintains an important database which includes records of such species.
- 10.10 Residential gardens are often a rich source of biodiversity, the value of which has been highlighted through the Environmental Capacity work. Residential gardens also play an important role in slowing down the flow of water, reducing flood risk and reducing the urban heat island effect. Close proximity to green space also has many social benefits including physical and psychological health benefits, social inclusion, education and sense of place. However, residential gardens have formed a large part of the Council's housing land supply for a long period of time and will continue to form some part in the future (the proportion of gardens lost by development can be an important factor when considering harm to the local area). When considered against policies in the Development Plan as a whole, where development of residential garden land would cause harm to the local area it will be refused.
- 10.11 A Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) covering St Albans and three neighbouring districts has been produced. Large scale flood risk is not a significant constraint (when considered at a national scale); however, some parts of the district are susceptible to small scale flooding from various sources. The risk of flooding is also expected to increase with climate change. Therefore, it is important that appropriate planning control and management is achieved in the wider river basins in order to help reduce this risk.
- 10.12 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) is an approach which can help to reduce the risk of flooding by slowing the speed at which water reaches the river channel or other discharge point. SUDS also have the potential to be integral to landscape proposals and to help enhance amenity space and biodiversity. Techniques to achieve this can range in scale from the creation of balancing ponds and swales to the use of permeable paving and green roofs. Hertfordshire County Council are the SUDS Advisory Body (SAB) for the District and will be producing guidance on the national requirements SUDS scheme need to meet for approval and adoption.

#### **Policy SLP26 - Natural Environment**

The condition and strength of character of the district's landscapes will be conserved, managed, and where appropriate enhanced, with reference to Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), Historic Landscape

Characterisation (HLC) and Heritage Partnership Agreements.

The Council will seek across the district a net gain in biodiversity to be achieved or the replacement with a habitat of a higher quality than that lost through development. Designated sites of importance for biodiversity and sites of local importance will be conserved, enhanced and managed with opportunities to link or reconnect wildlife habitats taken. The objectives of the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan and the Habitat Survey for St Albans City and District will be implemented. Areas of importance for geodiversity in the district will be conserved and managed.

When considered against policies in the Development Plan as a whole, where development of residential garden land would cause harm to the character and environment of the local area it will be refused.

Where development on agricultural land is proposed a detailed survey (approved by DEFRA or an independent expert) should be submitted which includes an assessment of grading. Development resulting in the loss of the most versatile agricultural land (grades 1, 2 or 3a) will normally be refused. An exception may be made where it can be evidenced that there is an overriding need for the development and there is no alternative land of lower quality which could be reasonably used.

Watercourses and their settings will be conserved for their biodiversity value and to improve water quality to meet the standards set out in River Basin Management Plans. The Council will seek to avoid development in areas at risk from flooding in accordance with national policy and ensure that water and flood risk are fully addressed by new development. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) should be incorporated in new development schemes, including flood storage areas if and when necessary. River restoration, including naturalisation and the removal of culverts, are encouraged.

## **Green Infrastructure**

- 10.13 Green Infrastructure is “a network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities” (NPPF). The population of the district is set to increase over the next 15 years and it is vital that existing and new communities are healthy, with sufficient accessible green infrastructure.
- 10.14 There are many benefits of green infrastructure, including social, environmental and economic ones and it is central to ensuring that communities are sustainable. Social benefits include physical and psychological health benefits, social inclusion, education and sense of place. Environmental benefits can include enhancing biodiversity,

ecosystem services and adaptation and mitigation of climate change. Economic benefits include encouraging investment and creating an attractive place to live, work and shop.

10.15 The strong economic benefits of the exceptional overall quality of the environment in the district are particularly recognised in the role played by Green Infrastructure in supporting the highly entrepreneurial culture and very well educated workforce.

10.16 St Albans district has a number of existing high quality areas of green infrastructure. These include:

- The substantial and very well used Commons namely Bernards Heath, Bricket Wood, Colney Heath, Gustard Wood, Harpenden, Kinsbourne Green, Nomansland and Redbourn. These are attractive and popular green spaces and are important for recreation and wildlife. Many of the Commons provide important green links from the centre of settlements to the open countryside. The Council actively works with the Town and Parish Councils and other stakeholders to maintain and facilitate public access to these Commons.
- Local green spaces, playing pitches and parks including Rothamsted Park, Verulamium Park and Clarence Park.
- The Council's Tree Strategy will be an important document in the protection, enhancement and maintenance of the district's tree stock. There are over 600 TPOs, some with woodland designation within the district, as well as trees protected within conservation areas.
- The many valued heaths and grasslands, in Wheathampstead, Sandridge, Park Street and Chiswell Green.
- The watercourses and green corridors, of the Rivers Ver, Lea and Colne, the Nickey Line, Upper Lea Valley Walk and Alban Way. These are important corridors for both recreation and biodiversity and have potential for further enhancement.
- Areas of woodland (including over 40 areas of ancient woodland). These are important areas for wildlife and in some cases recreation.
- Registered and Locally Listed Historic Parks and Gardens, such as Gorhambury and Napsbury.
- Private garden land in both urban and rural areas.

10.17 There are also a number of ongoing green infrastructure projects which will significantly improve the district's green infrastructure network: