

The Meeting: Planning and Development **Agenda Item:**
Committee

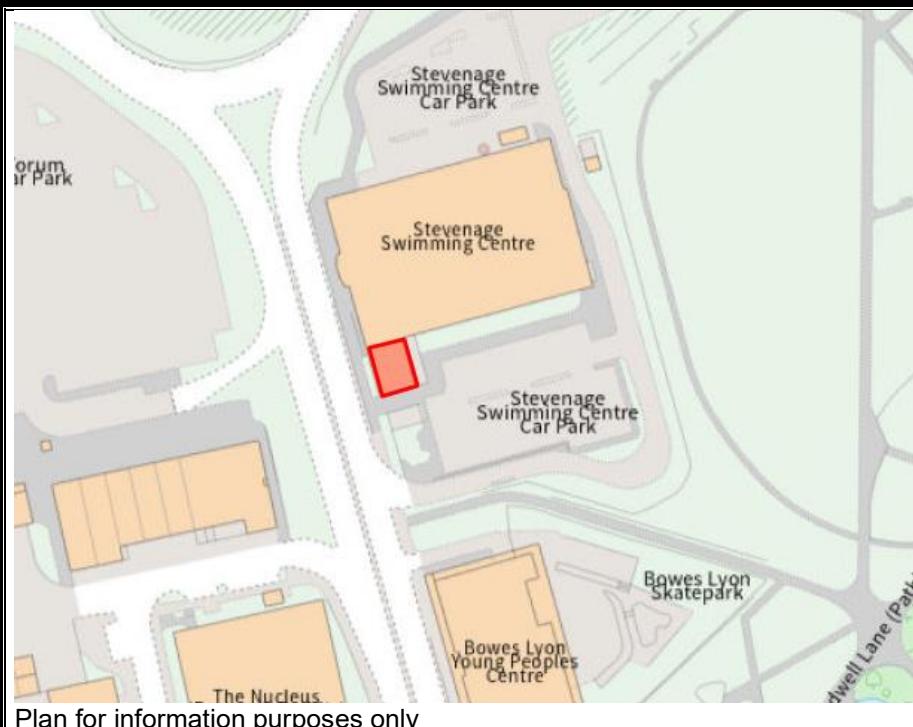
Date: 12 February 2026

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Application Nos:	26/00002/FP
Location:	Stevenage Swimming Centre St. Georges Way Stevenage.
Proposal:	Partial demolition of existing Swimming Centre.
Drawing Nos.	SSLH-FBA-01-ZZ-D-A-0109-P02; SSLH-FBA-01-ZZ-D-A-0108-P02; SSLH-FBA-01-ZZ-D-A-0184-P02;;
Applicant:	Stevenage Borough Council
Date Valid:	5 January 2026
Recommendation:	GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION



1. SITE DESCRIPTION

1.1 The proposal site is the existing Stevenage Swimming Centre and surrounding land. The site is located on the eastern side of St Georges Way and is bounded to the north by Fairlands Way. To the east is the Town Centre Gardens and residential flatted blocks which overlook the gardens. The Bowes Lyon Centre is sited to the south of the site, including an existing footway connecting St Georges Way to the Town Gardens. Beyond

St Georges Way is the Town Centre, with the approved life sciences quarter to be immediately to the west on the site of the existing The Forum shopping area.

1.2 The site is accessed by vehicles coming off St Georges Way to the south of the building, entering one of the two car parks serving the centre before heading north around the eastern side of the building to the second car park to the north. The site is exited to the north on to Fairlands Way. The existing building has a larger block located centrally, with single storey elements wrapping around the front and northern side of the building.

2. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

2.1 There have been various permissions granted in the past for advertisements, but these are not relevant to this planning application.

2.2 Full planning application reference 99/00492/FP for the refurbishment, recladding, refacing and entrance extension was approved on 28.02.2000.

2.3 Planning permission reference 06/00181/FP for access road alteration, refurbishment of north car park and construction of new south car park including coach drop off point and canopy assembly point was approved on 25.06.2006.

2.4 Planning permission reference 09/00397/FP for retention of combined heat and power unit adjacent to the north elevation of the building was approved on 13.01.2010.

2.5 Planning permission reference 25/00424/FPM for the demolition of existing Swimming Centre and erection of new sports and leisure centre with associated parking, landscaping and access, has a resolution to grant planning permission as determined by the Committee subject to the signing of a S106 agreement and removal of outstanding LLFA objection.

2.6 Lawful Development Certificate (proposed) reference 25/00700/CLPD for the construction of a replacement substation to the south of Stevenage Swimming Centre was issued on 22.10.2025.

3. THE CURRENT APPLICATION

3.1 The proposed development seeks full planning permission for the partial demolition of the single storey element of the existing Swimming Centre. The application follows the assessment of and approval in principle of the demolition of the Swimming Centre and erection of a new Leisure Centre.

3.2 The application has been submitted to enable the partial demolition of the building ahead of the issuing of the decision for the new Leisure Centre (Planning reference: 25/00424/FPM). This will ensure works relating to the wider redevelopment of the site can be implemented more seamlessly and timely given the timeframes and parameters of this strategic project.

4. PUBLIC REPRESENTATIONS

4.1 Following notification of the application via letter to the Bowes Lyon Centre, and the posting of a site notice, no comments have been received at the time of drafting this report.

5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1 Environmental Health

5.1.1 I have reviewed the documentation submitted in support of this case, with particular regard to the contents of the *Demolition Plan of Works – Method Statement* (dated 10/11/2025). I would advise the Local Planning Authority (LPA) that if the proposed demolition works are undertaken in the way prescribed in these documents that the harm to local amenity (by way of the release of pollutants such as noise, vibration, and dust) is likely to be in line with relevant national guidance documents such as British Standard 5228. Accordingly, I would invite the LPA to condition any permission so that these control measures are implemented in practice.

5.1.2 I would nonetheless like the LPA to take this opportunity to remind the applicant and appointed contractors, by way of Informative, of the following -
The Council's powers under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 to restrict methods of working and the hours of noise generating construction (including demolition) activity.
The Council's powers under Part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to prohibit nuisances arising from dust, smoke, artificial light, and a range of other pollutants that may arise on construction/demolition sites.

6 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

6.1 National Planning Policy Framework

6.1.1 The latest revision of the NPPF was published in December 2024. The policies it contains are material considerations which will be taken into account in dealing with applications. Due weight will be given to development plan policies according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF.

6.1.2 The NPPF provides that proposals which accord with an up-to-date development plan should be approved without delay (para.11) and that where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan, permission should not usually be granted (para.12). This indicates the weight which should be given to an up-to-date development plan, reflecting the requirements of section 38(6) of the 2004 Act.

6.2 Planning Practice Guidance

6.2.1 The Planning Practice Guidance (“PPG”) is an online resource containing guidance supplementing the NPPF. The PPG is a material consideration which should be taken into account in determining planning applications.

6.3 National Design Guide

6.3.1 The National Design Guide 2019 is Government guidance on the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. It has the same status as the PPG and should similarly be taken into account when determining planning applications.

6.4 The Development Plan

6.4.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For Stevenage, the development plan comprises the following documents:

- Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031
- Waste Core Strategy & Development Management Policies DPD 2011-2026
- Waste Site Allocations DPD 2011-2026

- Minerals Local Plan Review 2002-2016

6.4.2 The Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted in 2019. The council concluded a full review of the plan in 2024, as required by regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

6.4.3 In response to the review, the council has completed a partial update of the local plan and this is now with the Secretary of State for assessment. Weight will be given to emerging policies according to:

- a) the stage of preparation of the emerging plan;
- b) the extent to which there are unresolved objections to the policies; and
- c) the degree of consistency between the policies and the most recent revision of the NPPF.

6.4.4 In determining applications, regard will be had to other material considerations, including (but not limited to):

- The Planning Practice Guidance;
- The National Design Guide;
- Written ministerial statements and directions;
- Guidance published by Hertfordshire County Council;
- Stevenage Borough Council supplementary planning documents.

6.4.5 Where there are emerging policies which are relevant to the application, these will be highlighted in the main body of this report. The policies set out below are most relevant in the determination of this application:

Policy SP1: Presumption in favour of sustainable development:

Policy SP8: Good design:

Policy SP13: The historic environment:

Policy FP7: Pollution:

Policy NH10 Conservation areas.

6.5 Supplementary Planning Documents

6.5.1 The following supplementary planning documents are relevant to determining the application:

Stevenage Design Guide SPD (2025)

6.6 Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule

6.6.1 Stevenage Borough Council adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule in 2020. This allows the Council to collect a levy to fund infrastructure projects based on the type, location and floorspace of a development. This proposal would be CIL liable at £0/m².

7 APPRAISAL

7.1.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires that all planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

7.1.2 The principle of demolition of the Swimming Centre has already been established following the approval in principle of planning application 25/00424/FPM for the

demolition of existing Swimming Centre and erection of new sports and leisure centre with associated parking, landscaping and access.

- 7.1.3 The above mentioned application specified that the single storey element of the swimming centre that makes up the red line area for this application was not included as it was hoped it could be demolished under permitted development, to enable preliminary works on site to be carried out at an earlier date, and without affecting the long term progress of the major application and conditional matters.
- 7.1.4 A 'Prior Notification for the Demolition of a Building' was submitted to the Local Planning Authority for assessment under relevant permitted development regulations. However, on closer inspection of the regulations and review of case law it was established that the permitted development regulations only related to demolition of a building in its entirety. As such, it does not allow for partial demolition of a building.
- 7.1.5 Given the aforementioned, the current application has been submitted to authorise the partial demolition and enable the new Leisure Centre works to commence on final issuing of a decision notice.
- 7.1.6 The application therefore only needs to look at and assess any implications on the partial demolition of the single storey element of the building. In this regard, the main considerations are the impact on neighbouring properties in terms of noise and disturbance, and impact on the setting of heritage assets.

7.2 Impact on the Environment and Neighbouring Occupiers

- 7.2.1 Paragraph 135 of the NPPF (2024) sets out that planning decision should ensure create places with a high standard of amenity for existing and future residents. Paragraph 124 of the National Design Guide states that "*Good design promotes quality of life for the occupants and users of buildings. This includes function – buildings should be easy to use. It also includes comfort, safety, security, amenity, privacy, accessibility and adaptability*". Paragraph 126 of the National Design Guide also emphasises that "*well-designed homes and communal areas within buildings provide a good standard and quality of internal space. This includes room sizes, floor-to-ceiling heights, internal and external storage, sunlight, daylight and ventilation. The quality of internal space needs careful consideration in higher density developments, particularly for family accommodation, where access, privacy, daylight and external amenity space are also important*".
- 7.2.2 Whilst the policies contained in the Local Plan have limited weight, Policies SP8 and GD1 of the Local Plan (2019) which generally reflect the good design principles outlined in the NPPF and National Design Guide, require that development does not adversely impact the amenities of neighbouring occupiers. In the emerging Local Plan review and partial update, criterion (e) of policy GD1 is updated to refer to "unacceptable" adverse impacts. The intention behind the change is to make clear that in some circumstances, an adverse impact might still fall within acceptable bounds and that this is a matter of judgement for the decision maker. This emerging policy carries significant weight under paragraph 49 of the NPPF.
- 7.2.3 Policy FP7 requires all development proposals to minimise, and where possible, reduce air, water, light, and noise pollution. Planning permission will be granted when it can be demonstrated that the development will not have unacceptable impacts on general amenity and the tranquillity of the wider area.
- 7.2.4 Whilst the application relates specifically to demolition rather than construction works on site, these works can be noisy and intrusive for neighbouring occupiers, particularly

in terms of noise, vibration, air quality (dust), and odour. Noise and vibration disturbance can arise from demolition techniques and possible machinery, with the likelihood of some dust being created during demolition of a building, even in part.

7.2.5 The nearest residential properties are contained to the east with Brent Court and Harrow Court, and also to the west of the site off Marshgate. The nearest buildings due west of the site, side facing on to St Georges way appear to be offices above existing retail and commercial premises. The known residential properties are at least 90m or more away from the nearest respective edge of the red line plan.

7.2.6 The application is accompanied by a Demolition Method Statement which identifies measures to be employed to reduce disturbance during demolition. These measures include –

- Pressurised water bowser to suppress dust for the duration of the works;
- Erect acoustic screens at appropriate locations to mitigate against noise created by demolition works;
- Secure access to the site from the live building;
- Partial separation of structures using careful removal of external masonry walls using handheld breakers;
- Demolition excavator to undertake majority of demolition works starting with removal of roof structure;
- Skip on site for debris, including periodic load away of hardcore;
- Periodic removal of hardcore into 8-wheel tipper wagons.

7.2.7 Site work would take place during the hours of 8:00 – 17:00 Monday to Friday. The proposals have been assessed by Environmental Health Officers and no objections are raised subject to a condition securing the method of demolition be undertaken in line with the details prescribed in the Method Statement.

7.2.8 With the relevant mitigation measures in place which would be secured by condition, the impact on neighbouring properties, including overall disturbance, is therefore considered to be limited.

7.3 Impact on Heritage Assets

7.3.1 The site is in close proximity to the Town Centre Conservation Area and Grade II listed Parish Church of St Andrew and St George located due south of the site at the junction of St Georges Way and Cuttys Lane. The Grade II listed 'Scenes of Contemporary Life' sculptural wall mural by William Mitchell is also in close proximity within the St Georges Way underpass to the south west of the site.

7.3.2 Paragraph 203 of the NPPF (2024) states that 'in determining applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- a) the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b) the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c) the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.'

7.3.3 As established through case law, if there is *any* harm to designated heritage assets, great weight must be given to it. Paragraph 212, it stipulates that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential

harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss, or less than substantial harm to its significance. Paragraph 200 sets out that any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

7.3.4 Turning to the adopted Local Plan, Policy SP13 relates to the historic environment. This states that the council will preserve and enhance the most important area and characteristics of Stevenage. The policy goes on to state that the Council will:-

- a. Have carried out Heritage Impact Assessments for development sites within, or adjacent to, conservation areas. Site specific mitigation measures have been incorporated to minimise the impacts of development.
- b. Will use national guidance and legislation to review, designate and determine planning applications affecting heritage assets.
- c. Will protect areas of archaeological importance and other relevant heritage assets by applying the detailed policies set in this plan.

7.3.5 Finally, Policy NH10 Conservation Areas states that development proposals within, or affecting a conservation area should have regard to the guidance provided by the relevant Conservation Area Management Plan Supplementary Planning Document.

7.3.6 Given the nature and scale of the demolition works proposed the application did not need to be accompanied by a Heritage Statement. However, given the proximity of several assets, and the assessment of the demolition of the swimming centre as considered under application 25/00424/FPM, this report will only cover the level of harm caused as a result of the partial demolition.

7.3.7 Looking firstly at the Town Centre Conservation Area, this largely covers Town Square and Queensway and extends down Market Place to the border with St Georges Way and opposite the Church of St Andrew and St George. Therefore, given the proximity of the Conservation Area from the site and the presence of multiple built forms, including the St Georges Multi-storey Car Park and the Park Place development, the proposed new Leisure Centre was determined to have a neutral impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

7.3.8 The Grade II listed Church of St Andrew and St George is prominently located further south on St Georges Way. The 1950s church comprises of reinforced concrete frame with precast concrete flint-faced wall panels, buff brick to narthex and copper covered barrel roofs. The layout is traditional in plan with a rectangular, aisled space with the altar against the east wall. The church is visually recognised because of its circular tower. The tower is comprised of a reinforced concrete frame with six uprights and five stages plus a spire, formed of the convergence of the upright members.

7.3.9 Given the majority of the existing swimming centre and the Bowes Lyon Centre to the south will remain in-situ, the impact of the partial demolition of the building on the setting of the church is considered to be neutral, causing 'no harm' as the wider setting of the heritage assets is well screened by existing infrastructure and built form.

7.3.10 The site lies due north of the Grade II Listed William Mitchell wall mural 'Scenes of Contemporary Life' which is located in the northern subway providing pedestrian and cyclist access from the Town Centre to the Town Centre Gardens under St Georges Way. In this case, the mural is already well screened and protected from built form due to its location 'underground'. As such, the impact on this heritage asset is also considered to be less than substantial and at the lower end of the scale.

7.3.11 The impact of the partial demolition on the identified assets is considered to be neutral, with no harm caused, due to the scale of the area identified to be demolished, as well as the presence of the existing pool building and other built form in the vicinity. When considered cumulatively with the works proposed in application 25/00424/FPM for the demolition of the main swimming centre building and construction of the new Leisure Centre, the harm was still assessed as only less than substantial and at the lower end of the scale, and as such the harm is not of sufficient significance to warrant a refusal.

7.4 Other Matters

Human Rights and Equalities

7.4.1 Consideration has been given to Articles 1 and 8 of the First Protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights. It is not considered that the decision would result in a violation of any person's rights under the Convention.

7.4.2 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking. Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the Council's obligations under the Public Sector Equalities Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

7.4.3 The Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex and sexual orientation.

7.4.4 The proposal does not affect the accessibility into the Swimming Centre, nor would the partial demolition affect the use of the Swimming Centre by members of the public, including those covered by the Equalities Act. The proposed development is not considered therefore to have any material impact on persons with any of the protected characteristics listed under the Equalities Act.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 This application seeks planning permission for the partial demolition of the single storey element of the swimming centre. This would enable works associated with the approved in principle new Leisure Centre. The works will cause some level of disturbance whilst being carried out, however adequate measures are proposed to mitigate this disturbance to an acceptable level. The partial demolition would no harm, having a neutral impact when considering nearby heritage assets, and as such the proposal is acceptable.

9 RECOMMENDATION

9.1 That planning permission be GRANTED subject to the following conditions, and Authority would be given to the Assistant Director of Planning and Regulation in consultation with the Chair of Planning Committee, to amend or add to the suggested draft conditions set out in this report, prior to the decision notice being issued, where such amendments or additions would be legally sound and most effectively deliver the development that the Planning Committee has resolved to approve. These suggested conditions are as follows:

Conditions

- 1 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans:
SSLH-FBA-01-ZZ-D-A-0109-P02; SSLH-FBA-01-ZZ-D-A-0108-P02; SSLH-FBA-01-ZZ-D-A-0184-P02;
REASON:- For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning
- 2 The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.
REASON:- To comply with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by Section 51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).
- 3 The development shall be carried out in accordance with the measures as contained in 'Demolition Plan of Works - Method Statement' (dated 10.11.25) for the duration of the demolition.
REASON:- To ensure the development minimises the impact on neighbouring properties.

INFORMATIVES

1 Building Regulations

To obtain advice regarding current Building Regulations please contact Hertfordshire Building Control Ltd. by emailing us at building.control@hertfordshirebc.co.uk or phoning us on 01438 879990.

To make a building regulations application please apply through our website portal at <https://www.hertfordshirebc.co.uk/contact-us/> payment can be made online or by phoning the above number after the application has been uploaded. Please phone Hertfordshire Building Control for fees guidance on 01438 879990.

Hertfordshire Building Control can also be contacted by post at Hertfordshire Building Control Ltd, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 6AE.

Once a building regulations application has been deposited with relevant drawings and fee building work may commence. You will be advised in their acknowledgement letter of the work stages we need to inspect but in most instances these are usually:

Excavation for foundations
Damp proof course
Concrete oversite
Insulation
Drains (when laid or tested)
Floor and Roof construction
Work relating to fire safety
Work affecting access and facilities for disabled people
Completion

Please phone Hertfordshire Building Control on 01438 879990 before 10.00am to ensure a same day inspection (Mon - Fri).

2 Biodiversity Net Gain

Applications where Biodiversity Net Gain is not required as development is considered De Minimis

The effect of paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is that planning permission granted for the development of land in England is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition "(the biodiversity gain condition") that development may not begin unless:

- a) a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and
- b) the planning authority has approved the plan.

The planning authority, for the purposes of determining whether to approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan if one is required in respect of this permission would be Stevenage Borough Council.

There are statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not apply.

Based on the information available this permission is considered to be one which will not require the approval of a biodiversity gain plan before development is begun because the following statutory exemption or transitional arrangement is considered to apply.

1. Development below the de minimis threshold, meaning development which:
 - a) does not impact an onsite priority habitat (a habitat specified in a list published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006); and
 - b) impacts less than 25 square metres of onsite habitat that has biodiversity value greater than zero and less than 5 metres in length of onsite linear habitat (as defined in the statutory metric).

Where the local planning authority considers that the permission falls within paragraph 19 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the permission which has been granted has the effect of requiring or permitting the development to proceed in phases. The modifications in respect of the biodiversity gain condition which are set out in Part 2 of the Biodiversity Gain (Town and Country Planning) (Modifications and Amendments) (England) Regulations 2024 apply.

Biodiversity gain plans are required to be submitted to, and approved by, the planning authority before development may be begun, and, if subject to phased development, before each phase of development may be begun.

If the onsite habitat includes irreplaceable habitat (within the meaning of the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat) Regulations 2024) there are additional requirements for the content and approval of Biodiversity Gain Plans. The Biodiversity Gain Plan must include, in addition to information about steps taken or to be taken to minimise any adverse effect of the development on the habitat, information on arrangements for compensation for any impact the development has on the biodiversity of the irreplaceable habitat. The planning authority can only approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan if satisfied that the adverse effect of the development on the biodiversity of the irreplaceable habitat is minimised and appropriate arrangements have been made for the purpose of compensating for any impact which do not include the use of biodiversity credits.

More information can be found in the Planning Practice Guidance online at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain>

10 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

1. The application file, forms, plans and supporting documents having the reference number relating to this item.

2. The Stevenage Local Plan 2011-2031 (2019) and Stevenage Local Plan Partial Review (2024).
3. Stevenage Borough Council Supplementary Planning Documents – Design Guide SPD (2025).
4. Hertfordshire County Council Local Transport Plan LTP4 2018-2031
5. Central Government advice contained in the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 and the National Planning Practice Guidance.
6. Responses to consultations with statutory undertakers and other interested parties referred to in this report.