

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Environment and Regeneration
Date 11 February 2026



STEVENAGE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN PARTIAL UPDATE: CONSULTATION ON MAIN MODIFICATIONS FOLLOWING EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the progress of the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update now it has progressed to Examination in Public stage.
- 1.2 To seek Members' approval to consult on proposed Main Modifications to the Local Plan Partial Update in order to make the Plan 'sound' and ready for formal adoption.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Approves the proposed changes to the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update, as set out in Appendix A and B, following Examination in Public in order to make the Plan sound.
- 2.2 Approve that the Main Modifications as set out in Appendix A and B be subject to public consultation for 6 weeks, as directed by the Planning Inspector.

3 BACKGROUND

Stevenage Borough Local Plan

- 3.1 The Stevenage Borough Local Plan [BD1] 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.
- 3.2 The Local Plan aligns closely with several themes set out in the Council's Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan 2024–2027 [BD2]. Under the priority “Transforming our Town” and the Council's wider regeneration agenda, the Local Plan's objectives and related policies support the regeneration of the Town Centre and other strategic growth areas. This includes delivering benefits for residents and businesses through new homes, enhanced public services, improved local amenities, increased employment opportunities, better transport connections, and greater access to green spaces.
- 3.3 Under the priority “More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes”, the Local Plan's objectives and policies promote both the delivery of new, sustainable homes and the maintenance of high-quality existing housing.

Local Plan Review

- 3.4 The requirement to review the plan was triggered in May 2024 as it had reached 5 years since it was adopted; with just under seven years of the plan period remaining. The status of the Stevenage Local Plan alongside other Local Plans in Hertfordshire is shown in the table below:

| Hertfordshire Local Authority | Local Plan Status |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Broxbourne | Local Plan adopted June 2020. Plan period 2018–2033. Review: TBC. |
| Dacorum | Local Plan adopted September 2013. Plan period 2006–2031. Review: New Local Plan submitted to Secretary of State March 2025. Plan period to 2041. |
| East Hertfordshire | Local Plan adopted October 2018. Plan period 2011–2033. Review: Regulation 18 planned for 2026. |
| Hertsmere | Local Plan adopted January 2013. Plan period 2012–2027. Review: Regulation 18 in 2024. Plan period 2023–2040. |
| North Hertfordshire | Local Plan adopted November 2022. Plan period 2011–2031. Review: Commenced upon adoption of 2022 Local Plan. LDS produced in 2025. |
| St. Albans | The current plan is at Examination in Public (2025). It is the St Albans Local Plan (2020 – 2036). It is scheduled for Adoption in March 2026. |

| Hertfordshire Local Authority | Local Plan Status |
|--|--|
| Stevenage | <i>Local Plan adopted May 2019. Plan period 2011 – 2031. Review: Examination in Public December 2025, Adoption Summer 2026.</i> |
| Three Rivers | Local Plan adopted October 2011. Plan period 2011–2026. Review: Regulation 18 in Jul7 2025. Plan period to 2041. |
| Watford | Local Plan adopted October 2022. Plan period 2021–2038. Review: TBC. |
| Welwyn Hatfield | Local Plan adopted October 2023. Plan period 2016–2036. Review: Regulation 18 in 2025. |

- 3.5 The Council duly carried out a full review of the Local Plan which revealed a number of areas where policies required updating. In light of the review, the following options were considered by the Council:
- a) Carry out a comprehensive update of the plan, with strategic policies looking ahead over the following 20 years (in effect, an entirely new Local Plan).
 - b) Carry out a comprehensive update of the plan, with the plan period unchanged (a full update).
 - c) Carry out a limited update of the plan, including only the changes most immediately necessary to keep the plan up-to-date and with the plan period unchanged (a partial update).
- 3.6 The Council decided to proceed with option (c) – a partial update of the Local Plan, with the changes limited to those most urgently necessary to ensure that the plan remains up-to-date and effective in dealing with the most pressing issues facing the borough.
- 3.7 It was agreed, following legal advice and internal discussion, that there should be a two-stage process to reviewing the Stevenage Borough Local Plan, given the position the local authority finds itself regarding the age of the current Local Plan being 5 years since adoption; Stage 1 consisting of a Partial Update with Stage 2 comprising a full New Local Plan.
- 3.8 The scope of the Local Plan Partial Update is limited to new and revised policies of the existing adopted Stevenage Borough Local Plan (2019) and that it was limited to making necessary changes only relating to key drivers of change since the Plan was adopted in 2019. Changes proposed to the adopted Local Plan are detailed in the Officer Report to Cabinet in June 2024 [BD3] and November 2024 [BD4] and focus on the continued effort to tackle Climate Change and promoting sustainable and active travel across the Borough.

- 3.9 Proposed changes to tackle Climate Change further strengthened links to the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan 2024–2027, by showcasing connection to the “Tackling Climate Change” priority of the Corporate Plan. In particular, proposed policies aim to reflect the Corporate Plan’s ambition to progress the reduction of carbon emissions to net zero by 2030.
- 3.10 The proposed changes to the adopted Local Plan, as part of the Partial Update, are limited to necessary changes only, in order to have a robust and up to date Plan ahead of the future changes we will be preparing for, under the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025.

Changes to the Planning System

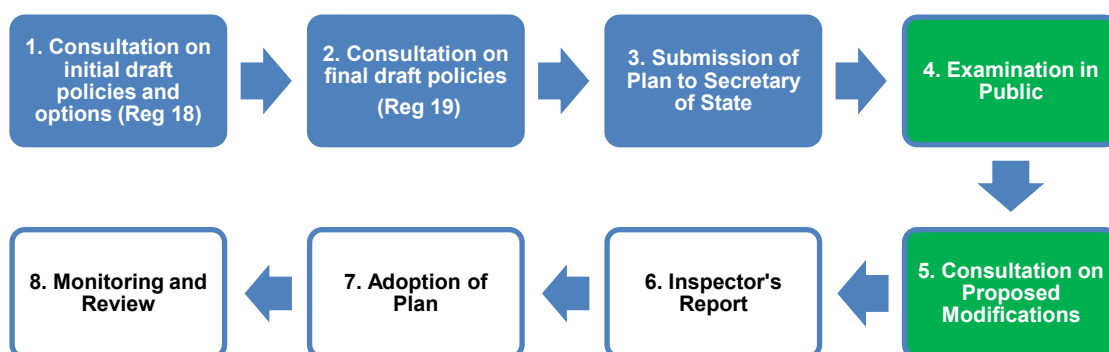
- 3.11 The Partial Update is being developed during a period of unprecedented change to the planning system.
- 3.12 The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 [BD8] gained Royal Assent in Parliament on 18 December 2025 and has now become Law. It sets out changes to the planning system that the Government hopes will speed up decision making and streamline the delivery of new homes and major infrastructure.
- 3.13 The relevant highlights arising from the presenting of the Act include Strategic Planning; the Act restores strategic planning across England, requiring strategic authorities to produce spatial development strategies (SDS). SDS will set housing figures and distribution, contribute to climate change mitigation, and align with local nature recovery strategies. SDS will be assessed via public examination, with modifications reported to the Secretary of State.
- 3.14 It is not envisaged that the new wave of SDSs will be detailed or lengthy and instead will be similar to Joint Strategic Plans (JSP) and more information will follow in due course. Stevenage is part of a 6-authority approach to an emerging North East Central Hertfordshire JSP with Hertfordshire County Council, East Herts Council, North Herts Council, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and Broxbourne Borough Council.
- 3.15 Future Local Plans prepared by unitary authorities will need to conform to the new SDS. In the meantime, local authorities are required to have up to date local plans in place, a message only recently restated by Government.
- 3.16 In addition, on 16 December 2025 Government is published a consultation on a revised, more rules-based National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) [BD7]. Consultation runs until 10 March 2026.
- 3.17 The proposed changes to the NPPF underline the Government’s commitment to a plan-led system that supports sustainable and high-quality development, boosts housing supply, increases affordability, makes effective use of land and supports a modern economy. As part of the consultation on the revised NPPF, the Government is also consulting on National Development Management Policies (NDMP). These will be put in place for the purposes of decision-making.
- 3.18 The 2025 version of the NPPF will replace the version published on 12 December 2024 [BD6], which itself replaced the version published on 19 December 2023 [BD5].

- 3.19 A series of national changes and developments, as explained above, have meant that the planning policy landscape for Stevenage is rapidly evolving. The table below illustrates some of the key issues and challenges being faced.

| | Adopted Local Plan (2019) | Local Plan Partial Update (2026) | New Local Plan (2026 onwards) |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Relevant NPPF | March 2012 | December 2023 (Transitional Arrangements) | December 2024. More likely to be latest version of NPPF (currently out to consultation) or subsequent versions of NPPF |
| Plan Period | 2011 – 2031 | 2011 – 2031 | Beyond 2031; Vision document to outline time horizons |
| Housing requirement | 7,600 homes 2011 – 2031 | 7,600 homes 2011 – 2031 | New requirement to be calculated, beyond 2031 |
| Employment space requirement | At least 140,000 sq m employment floorspace to be completed 2011 – 2031 | At least 140,000 sq m employment floorspace to be completed 2011 – 2031 | New requirement to be calculated, beyond 2031 |
| Spatial Development Strategy | No Spatial Development Strategy | Emerging Spatial Development Strategy (early work on, following Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025) | New Local Plans to conform to Spatial Development Strategy |

- 3.20 There are no proposed changes to housing or employment targets in the Local Plan Partial Update. Housing and employment targets are key pillars of the Local Plan. In Stevenage, housing supply remains a challenge; however, the Council is confident that it can meet the targets of the Plan and that it maintains a healthy housing land supply, as well as meeting employment needs of the borough; in the context of the wider delivery challenges facing the South East region as well as the country.

Recommendation 2.1: That Cabinet approves the proposed changes to the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update, as set out in Appendix A and B, following Examination in Public in order to make the Plan sound.



- 4.1 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).
- 4.2 A second round of public consultation (under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012) was held from 21 November 2024 to 14 February 2025.
- 4.3 The Local Plan Partial Update was submitted to the Secretary of State (MHCLG) on 15 August 2025, ahead of an independent Examination in Public by an appointed Planning Inspector [BD9].
- 4.4 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 was submitted and examined under the NPPF 2023 and not NPPF 2024. This provides more certainty with regard to the need to update the Plan, being 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.
- 4.5 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 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:
- 1. Local Plan – Review and Partial Update (to be submitted and examined under the NPPF 2023)*
 - 2. New Local Plan (to be progressed under the NPPF 2024 or subsequent versions of the NPPF thereafter)*

- 4.6 The Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update Examination in Public Hearing sessions were held from 2–10 December 2025 and conducted by and independent Planning Inspector (PINS). Further details regarding the Examination in Public can be viewed at the dedicated Examination website: <https://www.hwa.uk.com/projects/stevenage-local-plan-partial-update/>
- 4.7 A series of “Matters, Issues and Questions” (MIQs) were addressed in turn by the Inspector, in order to scrutinise our submitted Local Plan Partial Update to assess the Plan against the tests of soundness set out in the NPPF. The MIQs addressed were as follows:
- *MIQ1: Scope, legal and procedural requirements*
 - *MIQ2: Climate Change and Sustainable Development*
 - *MIQ3: Housing and Design*
 - *MIQ4: Employment, Town Centres and Opportunity Areas*
 - *MIQ5: Infrastructure, Transport, Flood Risk, Drainage and Trees*
 - *MIQ6: Monitoring and Review*
- 4.8 The Hearing Sessions invited those who had objections or significant representations to appear at the Hearings. Officers from the Council’s Planning, Climate Change, Regeneration and Stevenage Direct Services were supported by external viability consultants and by Simon Bird KC of Francis Taylor Building.
- 4.9 At the conclusion of the Examination in Public Hearing sessions, the Inspector advised that the Plan was capable of being found sound, but that Main Modifications (MM) would be required. This letter was prepared on 16 December 2025 [BD10] and made the following points:
- *Having considered all the representations and all evidence before him, the Inspector is now satisfied that the Plan is likely to be capable of being made sound and legally compliant through MMs.*
 - *The Inspector invited the Council to prepare a schedule containing the proposed wording for all the MMs discussed as necessary for soundness and legal compliance reasons so far.*
 - *Once the Inspector has agreed the wording of the MMs with the Council, he will invite the Council to publish the final schedule of proposed MMs for a period of public consultation. The nature and duration of the consultation should reflect that of the consultation held at the Regulation 19 stage, where appropriate. This means it should last at least six weeks.*
 - *The MMs will also need to be the subject of Sustainability Appraisal, Equality Impact Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment, insofar as necessary. These documents will need to be published alongside the proposed MMs when they are consulted upon.*
 - *The MMs documents should also make it clear that interested parties can comment on the additional documents that have been submitted to the Examination after the close of the Regulation 19 consultation insofar as they relate to the proposed MMs and the soundness of the partial update Plan.*
 - *Any consequential Submission Policies Map Changes and any additional Modifications being proposed by the Council should be set out in separate schedules and published alongside the MMs for completeness, although these are outside of the scope of the Examination.*

- 4.10 The full schedule of proposed Main Modifications to the Local Plan Partial Update (MMs) is attached as Appendix A and B to this Report and provides a schedule of proposed modifications to the submitted [BD9] Local Plan Partial Update. Appendix A provides a track changes version to show the MMs in the context of the overall Plan Partial Update, as submitted; Appendix B provides a detailed schedule of the MMs only. The substantive changes to the Partial Update (as submitted) and the version of the Local Plan that will be subject to Main Modifications consultation include:
- *Ensure the new Climate Change Policies are effective, justified by the evidence base and are sufficiently flexible to ensure they do not prejudice the delivery of development in the Borough.*
 - *Partial updates to the housing elements of the adopted Plan to make clear that the housing requirement remains unchanged as a result of the partial update.*
 - *Replace the proposed requirement for M4(3)(2)(b) wheelchair accessible dwellings with the requirement for M4(3) wheelchair user dwellings. This is because the specific requirement for M4(3)(2)(b) dwellings is not justified.*
 - *Ensure the updated policies and new policies are consistent with national policy, justified and effective.*

Recommendation 2.2: That Cabinet approve that the Main Modifications as set out in Appendix A and B, be subject to public consultation for 6 weeks as directed by the Planning Inspector.

- 4.11 When Main Modifications (MMs) are recommended at the conclusion of the Hearing Sessions a final consultation on any modifications proposed by the Inspector to the Plan is then held prior to the Inspector's Report, which would confirm whether the Plan can progress to formal adoption.
- 4.12 Subject to Recommendation 2.2 being agreed, public consultation on the proposed MMs to the Local Plan Partial Update, in order to ensure that the Plan is deemed sound and able to be progressed towards adoption, is scheduled to run from 18 February to 31 March 2026, a total of 6 weeks.
- 4.13 Once the Main Modifications consultation is complete, and assuming there are no major issues raised at the consultation, the Inspector will prepare a legally binding report for the Local Plan Partial Update, recommending adoption. We would expect these to be received by May 2026.
- 4.14 Officers will then aim to present the Local Plan Partial Update back to Cabinet in June 2026 to seek approval to adopt the revised Local Plan, after which the revised Local Plan will then be presented to Council for adoption. This report will also include proposals for a forthcoming visioning document as prelude to the next Local Plan. The purpose of this document is to set out the housing and economic growth ambitions for Stevenage as it forms with nearby authorities to form a new unitary authority. This will ensure continued momentum on our Making Stevenage Even Better Plan.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from the Main Modifications to the Local Plan Partial Update.
- 5.2 Any potential future schemes or plans that are referenced in the Local Plan Partial Update and subsequently developed would need to be subject to a business case and / or will require developer or potentially Council funding.

Legal Implications

- 5.3 The Local Plan Partial Update has been prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
- 5.4 Officers have sought legal advice from Counsel on the broad approach and Counsel are content that we are following the most appropriate process.

Risk Implications

- 5.5 Given that the adopted Local Plan is now over 5 years old, there is a risk that if the Local Plan Partial Update is not adopted, policies would be considered out of date and therefore have less material weight in the planning decision making process.
- 5.6 The Local Plan Partial Update serves to provide greater certainty in the plan making process and therefore reduce elements of risk in the overall process. Further delay to progressing the Local Plan Partial Update could also potentially mean that the new NPPF (currently out for consultation) would be in place by the time the Local Plan reached adoption stage, resulting in further uncertainty.

Planning and Policy Implications

- 5.7 The Local Plan Partial Update is proposed to revise, develop and update policies in the adopted Stevenage Borough Local Plan (2019).
- 5.8 The Local Plan Partial Update will align with other corporate Council documents such as the Climate Change Strategy (adopted September 2020), Action Plan and Charter as well as Stevenage's Future Town Future Transport Strategy.
- 5.9 The Local Plan Partial Update ensures that the Council's Making Stevenage Even Better key policies and objectives are improved and reflected as far as possible, as mentioned in paragraphs 3.2, 3.3 and 3.9 of this Report. Officers will work with the Corporate Policy team to ensure the relevant links and references are made.
- 5.10 The Local Plan Partial Update will build upon the adopted Development Plan for Stevenage. It will be a material consideration for planning applications. Future proposals will need to be in accordance with revised and new policies in the Local Plan as it progresses through the process to adoption.

Environmental Implications

- 5.11 The Local Plan Partial Update includes updates to policies relating to environmental protection and management in the borough. This has been informed by internal consultation by officers with officers in the Green Spaces and Environmental Policy and Development team, to ensure the relevant updates have been incorporated.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.12 The Local Plan Partial Update includes updates to policies relating to tackling climate change in the borough. This has been informed by internal consultation by

officers with officers in the Climate Change team, to ensure the relevant policies created and updates incorporated.

- 5.13 The Local Plan Partial Update includes a comprehensive update to policies relating to Climate Change in the borough. Policies were significantly strengthened as part of the submission to the Secretary of State in August 2025. Following Examination in Public Hearings in December 2025 and the fact that Government have reneged on Climate Change ambitions in recent months, the ambition of new Climate Change policies has been scaled back to provide a degree of flexibility in their application, rather than being a strict requirement. However, this still goes significantly above what is prescribed in the adopted Local Plan.
- 5.14 The Local Plan Partial Update supports the aims and objectives of the Stevenage Climate Change Strategy (September 2020) [BD11] and contributes to the overall climate change aspirations of the Council. In addition to being reflected in the Local Plan Partial Update and Climate Change Strategy, the Council's "Making Stevenage Even Better" Corporate Plan includes a priority "Tackling Climate Change" and is therefore applied across a range of Council functions.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.15 There are no significant equalities and diversity risks associated with producing the Local Plan Partial Update.

Community Safety Implications

- 5.16 There are no significant community safety implications associated with producing the Local Plan Partial Update.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- BD1 Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011–2031 (May 2019)
<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/planning-policy/stevenage-borough-local-plan/stevenage-borough-local-plan.pdf>
- BD2 Making Stevenage Even Better: Corporate Plan 2024–2027 (April 2024)
<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/corporate-plan/appendix-a-making-stevenage-even-better-2024-2027.pdf>
- BD3 Meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council Cabinet, Item 4: Local Plan Review and Revised Local Development Scheme (5 June 2024)
<https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s36560/4%20Cabinet%20Report%20Local%20Plan%20Review%20LC%20Final%2030524.pdf>
- BD4 Meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council Cabinet: Item 4: Local Plan Partial Review and Update: Regulation 18 Consultation Feedback and Regulation 19 Consultation (13 November 2024)
<https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s37640/4%20Cabinet%20Report%20Local%20Plan%20Review%20LC%20Final%20011124.pdf>
- BD5 National Planning Policy Framework (December 2023)
<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20231228093504/https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- BD6 National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>
- BD7 National Planning Policy Framework: Proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system (December 2025)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>
- BD8 Planning & Infrastructure Act (December 2025)
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/34/enacted>
- BD9 Partial Update of the Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011 – 2031: Schedule of Changes from Adopted Local Plan to Submission Version – Changes since Adoption of Local Plan in May 2019 (August 2025) <https://www.hwa.uk.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/CD3-Schedule-of-Changes-Adopted-Local-Plan-to-Partial-Update-Submission.pdf>
- BD10 Formal response from the Inspector to the Council, inviting Main Modifications to the Local Plan Partial Update (December 2025) <https://www.hwa.uk.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Stevenage-Partial-Update-PHN-161225-.pdf>
- BD11 Stevenage Climate Change Strategy (September 2020)
<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/about-the-council/climate-change-strategy/climate-change-strategy-september-2020.pdf>

APPENDICES

- A Proposed Main Modifications to the Local Plan Partial Update: Track Changes Version (January 2026)
- B Proposed Main Modifications to the Local Plan Partial Update: Schedule of Changes Version (January 2026)