

Meeting Council
Portfolio Area Environment, Transport and Planning
Date 22 July 2026



STEVENAGE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN PARTIAL UPDATE: ADOPTION

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the adoption of the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update.
- 1.2 To note that the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update was considered by the Council's Cabinet on 10 June 2026 and Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 15 June 2026.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council:

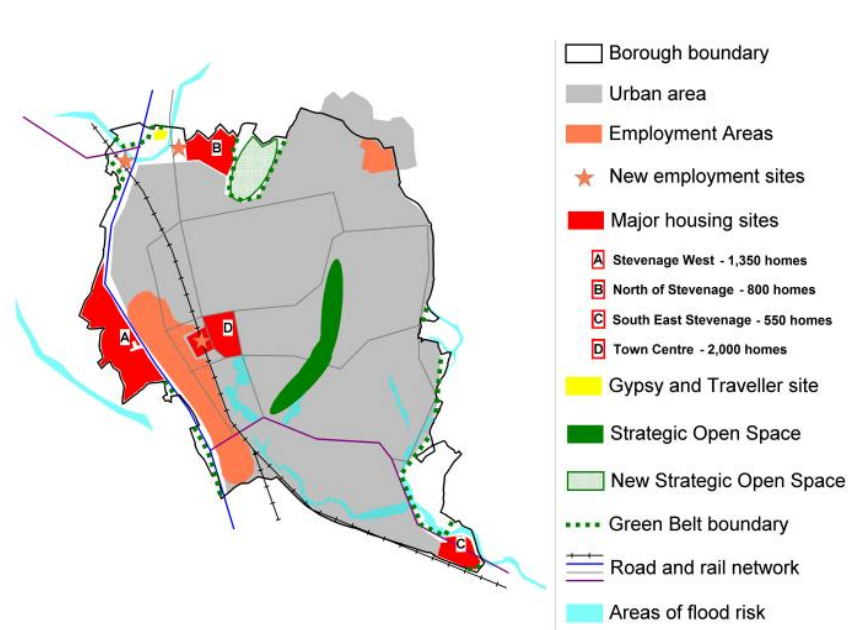
- 2.1 Agrees to adopt the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update, incorporating Main Modifications (Appendix C to E) and associated Proposals Map (Appendix F).
- 2.2 Notes the feedback from the Planning & Development Committee on the content of this Report.

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 The Government places high importance in having an up-to-date Local Plan in place and in there are implications for the Council if it does not, including severely weakening a local authority's control over its area. It would open the Council to speculative development, results in a loss of power to dictate where and what gets built and hinders the delivery of much-needed affordable housing and infrastructure.
- 3.4 Without an up-to-date Plan in place, Councils struggle to mandate developer contributions (like Section 106 agreements) toward critical community assets like schools, healthcare facilities, green spaces, and transport links. Delays in passing Local Plans consistently lead to a drop in overall housing delivery, which exasperates housing affordability crises. Ultimately, if a Council continually fails to produce an updated plan, the Government can step in and directly intervene, essentially writing and imposing a Local Plan on the local area, taking local decision-making completely out of the Council's hands
- 3.5 Therefore, the adoption of this plan is also important in safeguarding the Council and its communities as well as enabling the delivery of our strategic priorities including Stevenage Even Better.
- 3.6 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. The following key diagram illustrates the key spatial illustration of the Local Plan (2019).

Figure 1. Local Plan Key Diagram (2019).



Local Plan Review and Partial Update

- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 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 Council considered the following options:
- 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).
- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 It was agreed, following legal advice 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.

- 3.11 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. There are no proposed changes to housing or employment targets in the Local Plan Partial Update. More information on the 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.
- 3.12 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. The following table compares key provisions of the 2019 Local Plan with the Partial Update.

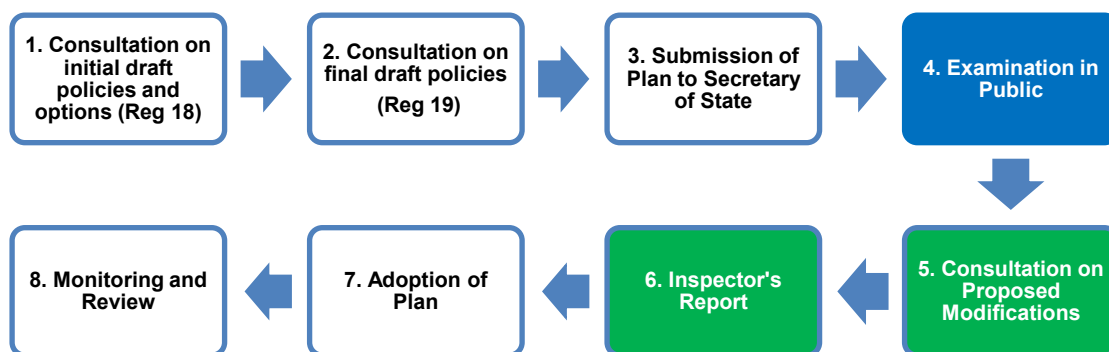
Figure 2. Local Plan Status Comparison (2019 to 2026).

	Adopted Local Plan (2019)	Local Plan Partial Update (2026)
Relevant NPPF	March 2012	December 2023 (Transitional Arrangements)
Plan Period	2011 – 2031	2011 – 2031
Housing requirement	7,600 homes 2011 – 2031	7,600 homes 2011 – 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

Progress with Local Plan Partial Update

- 3.13 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).
- 3.14 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.
- 3.15 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 [BD5].
- 3.16 The Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update Examination in Public Hearing sessions were held from 2–10 December 2025 and conducted by an 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/>

Recommendation 2.1: That Council agrees to adopt the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update, incorporating Main Modifications (Appendix C to E) and associated Proposals Map (Appendix F).



Main Modifications Consultation

- 4.1 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. The letter setting out the detail was received on 16 December 2025 and is attached as a supporting document [BD6].
- 4.2 Officers reported to Cabinet in February 2026 [BD8] to seek approval to consult on the Main Modifications to the Local Plan Partial Update, following Examination in Public Hearings.
- 4.3 The full schedule of proposed Main Modifications to the Local Plan Partial Update (MMs) [BD7] provides a schedule of proposed modifications to the submitted Local Plan Partial Update [BD5]. The substantive changes to the Partial Update (as submitted) and the version of the Local Plan that were 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.*
- 4.4 Consultation on the Main Modifications, and associated Sustainability Appraisal (SA), was held between 18 February and 31 March 2026.
- 4.5 A total of 12 representations were received from 9 respondents. Responses were received from the National Grid Electricity Transmissions, Hertfordshire Gardens

Trust, Natural England, Historic England, Environment Agency, Hertfordshire County Council, National Highways, NHS and McCarthy & Stone / Churchill Living. A full schedule of responses can be found in Appendix A.

- 4.6 Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency responded to the SA and agreed with our conclusions or gave no comment in relation to this specific area. Representations received on the Main Modifications generally agreed with the flexible approach proposed in the modified policies.
- 4.7 Other comments were out of scope for this part of the consultation; however, these have been noted in preparation for a new Local Plan. Officers will work with these respondents going forward to ensure future work can incorporate new approaches or evidence.
- 4.8 Overall, the comments welcomed the flexible approach to the modified comments. The Inspector took them into consideration when preparing his final report, and where required, proposed further changes to the modifications.

Inspector's Report

- 4.9 Following consultation on the Main Modifications of the Plan the Council has received the Inspector's Final Report into the Local Plan on 27 May 2026 (Appendix B).
- 4.10 The Inspector's Report contains his assessment of the Partial Update Plan in terms of Section 20(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and as applied by Regulation 4 and paragraph 2 schedule 1 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Commencement No. 11 and Saving and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2026. It considers whether the Partial Update Plan is compliant with the relevant legal requirements (including in terms of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, also as applied by Regulation 4 and paragraph 2 schedule 1 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (Commencement No. 11 and Saving and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2026) and whether it is sound.
- 4.11 The Inspector's Report concludes that with the Main Modifications proposed the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update satisfies the requirements referred to in Section 20(5)(a) of the 2004 Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act and is sound and is recommended for adoption.
- 4.12 Upon receipt of the Inspector's Report, the Council can either adopt the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update, with the recommendations proposed, or it must withdraw the Plan completely.

Local Plan Partial Update Adoption

- 4.13 The final draft version of the Local Plan Partial Update, incorporating the main modifications recommended by the Inspector, as well as any minor modifications, is attached to this report at Appendix C to E and should be read in conjunction with the 2019 Local Plan, as the 2019 Plan is being partially updated. Appendix C provides the updates to the 2019 Plan as submitted to the Government in August 2025; Appendix D provides the final Main Modifications as consulted on from February to March 2026 and agreed by the Planning Inspector; Appendix E provides some minor "Additional Modifications" (AMs) for the purposes of clarity and consistency. This is

supported by an updated Local Plan Proposals Map at Appendix F and an Adoption Statement at Appendix G.

- 4.14 It was requested that Cabinet agree to delegate powers to the Director for Planning and Regulation to make any required inconsequential final amendments to the Local Plan prior to being published for adoption. This will include producing a clean version of the revised Plan, final wording amendments, graphics, maps, and any final publishing as required. This will accompany the Local Plan Partial Update documents on the Council's website, once adopted on 22 July 2026.
- 4.15 Cabinet considered the Local Plan Partial Update at its meeting on 10 June 2026.
- 4.16 Cabinet resolved that Council agree and adopt the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update (attached at Appendix C to E) and Proposals Map (Appendix F).
- 4.17 Once adopted, the Local Plan as partially updated will update the adopted 2019 Stevenage Borough Local Plan. Following adoption at Council on 22 July 2026, a mandatory 6-week legal challenge period will follow.

Recommendation 2.2: That Council notes the feedback from the Planning & Development Committee on the content of this Report.

- 4.18 Planning & Development Committee Chair and Vice Chair were briefed in advance of the Cabinet meeting. The views of the Planning & Development Committee Members are of significant value in shaping the future direction the Local Plan takes, as future Committee decisions will be based on revised and new Local Plan policies. Comments were reported back orally at the Cabinet meeting and were not substantive.

Post Adoption and New Local Plan

- 4.19 Following adoption of the Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update, the Local Plan will have less than five years remaining before the Plan is timed out. As such, officers will provide Cabinet with a further report setting out the new Local Plan system, as set out in regulations laid in March 2026 and the implications this has for preparing a new Local Plan for Stevenage.
- 4.20 Whilst the Local Plan as partially updated runs for the remaining 5 years of the 2011–2031 plan period, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires Local Plans to be kept up to date and Government legislation is changing; Government issued a new roadmap in May 2026 for a more efficient plan making process. Officers will report back in late Summer / early Autumn on the options.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial implications arising from the adoption of 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.
- 5.3 A legal challenge(s) to the Local Plan following its adoption would have financial implications for the Borough Council. These costs will be dependent upon the nature of the challenge(s).

Legal Implications

- 5.4 The Local Plan Partial Update has been prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
- 5.5 Officers have sought legal advice from Counsel on the broad approach and Counsel are content that they are following the most appropriate process.
- 5.6 The Local Plan Partial Update, once adopted on 22 July 2026, is subject to a 6-week legal challenge period.

Risk Implications

- 5.7 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 will be considered out of date and therefore carry reduced weight in planning decision-making, increasing reliance on national policy and the risk of speculative development being approved.
- 5.8 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, as well as the pressures under the new Local Plan system to prepare a brand new Plan.

Planning and Policy Implications

- 5.9 The Local Plan Partial Update is proposed to revise, develop and update policies in the adopted Stevenage Borough Local Plan (2019).
- 5.10 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.
- 5.11 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. Officers will work with the Corporate Policy team to ensure the relevant links and references are made.
- 5.12 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.
- 5.13 The Local Plan Partial Update will build upon the adopted Development Plan for Stevenage and will form part of the statutory development plan once adopted. In

accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. As such, future proposals will be expected to accord with the revised and new policies within the Local Plan, ensuring decisions are made against an up-to-date and robust policy framework.

- 5.14 In the absence of adoption, there is a risk that existing policies will increasingly be considered out of date and therefore attract reduced weight in decision-making. This would increase reliance on national policy and could result in less certainty in determining planning applications, including an increased risk of speculative development proposals being approved where the Council's policy framework is afforded limited weight.

Environmental Implications

- 5.15 The Local Plan Partial Update includes revisions to policies on environmental protection and management. These have been informed by internal engagement with the Council's Green Spaces and Environmental Policy and Development teams to ensure the policies are robust, up-to-date and deliverable.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.16 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.
- 5.17 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.
- 5.18 The Local Plan Partial Update supports the aims and objectives of the Stevenage Climate Change Strategy (September 2020) [BD9] 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.
- 5.19 The Government has published the Future Homes and Buildings Standards (Building Circular 01/2026), introducing significant changes to the Building Regulations. These will come into force from 24 March 2027. The new standards amend the Building Regulations 2010 to require low-carbon heating and significantly improved energy efficiency in new homes and buildings. This is intended to ensure that new development achieves high environmental performance and will not require future retrofit to meet net zero as the electricity grid decarbonises.
- 5.20 With respect to wider planning reforms, the proposed reforms to the NPPF seek to strengthen the role of the planning system in supporting the Government's net zero 2050 target, including through enhanced requirements relating to both climate change mitigation and adaptation. The reforms place a greater emphasis on energy-efficient design, sustainable transport and a more "vision-led" approach to development, alongside improved resilience to climate impacts such as overheating and flood risk.

- 5.21 Once the new NPPF is in place, it will enable the Council to embed policies within a future Local Plan with a stronger emphasis on achieving net zero carbon development. Alongside the introduction of National Development Management Policies and updated Building Regulations relating to future homes standards, these would when combined will help support the Council's ambition to become net zero by 2030.
- 5.22 Given the changes to Building Regulations and the revisions to the NPPF, the new Local Plan should consider stronger measures to tackle Climate Change and related challenges.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.23 There are no significant equalities and diversity risks associated with producing the Local Plan Partial Update.
- 5.24 An Equalities Impact Assessment [BD10] on the Main Modifications to the Local Plan Partial Update was prepared to accompany the Main Modifications consultation in February to March 2026.

Community Safety Implications

- 5.25 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%20230524.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 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>
- BD6 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>
- BD7 Full Schedule of MMs for Consultation (February to March 2026)
<https://www.hwa.uk.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/local-plan-partial-update-mms-schedule-of-changes-final.pdf>
- BD8 Meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council Cabinet, Item 6: Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update: Main Modifications following Examination in Public Hearings (February 2026)
<https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s42518/6%20Cabinet%20Report%20Local%20Plan%20MMs%20FINAL.pdf>
- BD9 Stevenage Climate Change Strategy (September 2020)
<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/about-the-council/climate-change-strategy/climate-change-strategy-september-2020.pdf>
- BD10 Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update: Main Modifications Equalities Impact Assessment (February 2026) <https://www.hwa.uk.com/site/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/eqia-local-plan-partial-update-mms.pdf>

APPENDICES

- A: Proposed Main Modifications to the Local Plan Partial Update: Consultation Responses (February to March 2026)
- B: Inspector's Report on the Examination of the Stevenage Local Plan 2011–2031 Partial Update (May 2026)
- C: Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update: Submission to Secretary of State (August 2025)

- D: Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update: Main Modifications to make the Plan Partial Update sound (July 2026)
- E: Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update: Additional Modifications (July 2026)
- F: Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update: Final Draft Policies Map (July 2026)
- G: Stevenage Borough Local Plan Partial Update: Adoption Statement (July 2026)