Watford Local Plan Review 2029

Scoping Consultation

November 2026







Contents

Introduction 3

Why are we starting the plan at this stage? 4

Why are we doing this consultation? 4

How to respond 4

The Local Plan Process 5

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 6

Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs) 6

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) 7

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) 7

Local Plan Timetable 8

How should we engage with residents and stakeholders? 9

Vision 10

Plan Period 11

Scope of the Plan 11

Spatial Strategy 12

Housing 14

Green/Grey Belt 16

Gypsy and Travellers 18

Economy 19

Town Centre 21

Design 24

Heritage 26

Climate Emergency 27

Natural Environment 28

Infrastructure 30

Sustainable and Active Travel 31

Health and Wellbeing 33

Concluding Questions 34

Call for Sites 34

Next Steps and Timescales 35

Introduction

Local plans are the backbone of the planning system in England. They set a strategy for sustainable growth in a defined area over at least a 10-year period. They provide a vision led approach to meeting local housing and economic needs, whilst allowing local authorities to protect important historic and environmental assets, improve sustainability and encourage high quality design.

It is the document against which all planning applications in the borough are assessed, so having an up to date local plan in place is critical.

National policy requires that local plans are reviewed at least every 5 years. The existing Watford Local Plan was adopted in 2022, and so it is time to start a review of this Plan particularly in light of significant national policy changes to the planning system.

This is not a case of starting all over again from scratch. It is an opportunity for us to consider what is working, what is not working, and how we can update the current Plan to ensure it is most effective and in accordance with a much changed national planning landscape.

This Scoping Consultation is the first formal engagement that we are undertaking on the Plan Review. Your responses will help us to gather the thoughts of the community and other stakeholders at an early stage so that your views can be fed into the Plan from the outset.

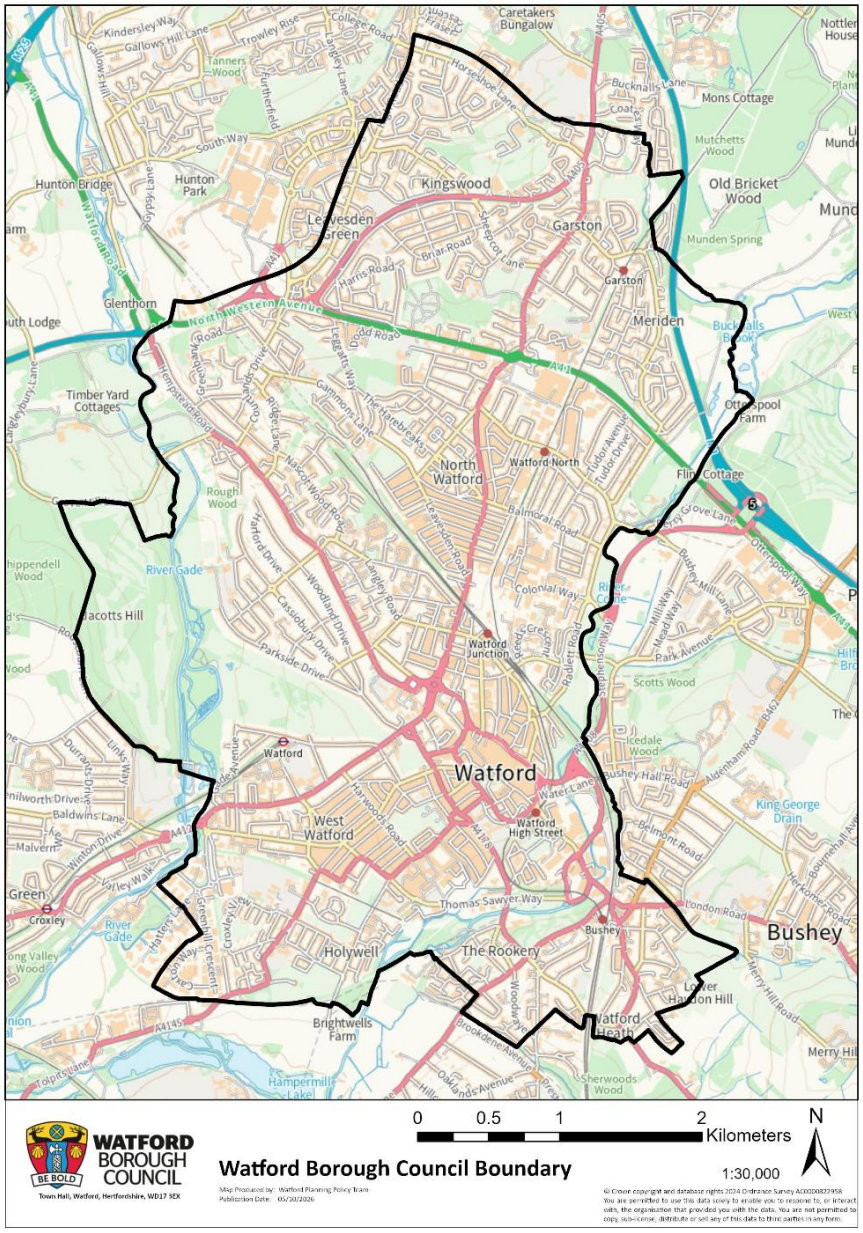


Figure 1: Watford Borough Boundary

Why are we starting the plan at this stage?

National policy requires that local plans are reviewed at least every five years so that they remain up to date. Whilst this means that a review of the current Watford Local Plan does not have to commence until October 2027, we are intending to proactively advance this process ahead of the 5-year deadline. Doing so will ensure that we remain protected against inappropriate speculative development and that Watford can be in the best possible position going into a new local government geography in Hertfordshire.

The national context for plan making is changing at an unprecedented rate. Significant reforms to the planning system are being brought forward by the Government with the ambition to make planning more streamlined and more consistent. This is all happening parallel to a national programme of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) which will fundamentally change how local government services are delivered across the country and here in Hertfordshire.

To ensure that Watford is still compliant with a new national policy context, and that it is ready to fully embrace the opportunities and challenges of LGR, we are proposing to start a review of the current plan at this stage.

Why are we doing this consultation?

The new plan making system requires that a local authority consults on the scope of a new local plan before reaching the first of three formal 'gateways' that must be passed through prior to formal submission of the plan to the Secretary of State. This is the first of, at least, three periods of consultation that we will do during the plan process.

A scoping consultation is an opportunity to seek your initial views on:

- What the plan should contain;
- What the current challenges and opportunities are for growth in Watford; and
- How we should engage with our community, and key stakeholders during the plan making process.

This is an important stage of plan preparation where you can help to shape the plan by telling us what you want it to cover, and how you want us to do it.

How to respond

This consultation will run from **11 November to 23 December 2026** and contains a series of questions which we would particularly value your responses to.

The best way to respond is through the council's online portal here.

Comments can also be submitted by email: localplan@watford.gov.uk or by post: Watford Town Hall, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD17 3EX

The consultation documents are available to view online or in hard copy at Watford Town Hall reception and at Watford Central and North Library during normal opening hours.

If you are having difficulty understanding this document, or English is not your first language, then please contact the policy team at localplan@watford.gov.uk and we will try to assist you.

A summary of the responses received and how the council have taken them into account will be published by the council as part of the next stage of engagement.

Q1: Do you wish to be kept informed of future updates to the Watford Local Plan Review?

The Local Plan Process

The plan making system in England is changing. The intention of central Government is to make plans faster to produce, more streamlined and more focused on matters of local importance.

To achieve this, local plans must follow the process outlined in Figure 2 and Figure 3 which allows 30 months between plan making being commenced and the plan's final adoption.

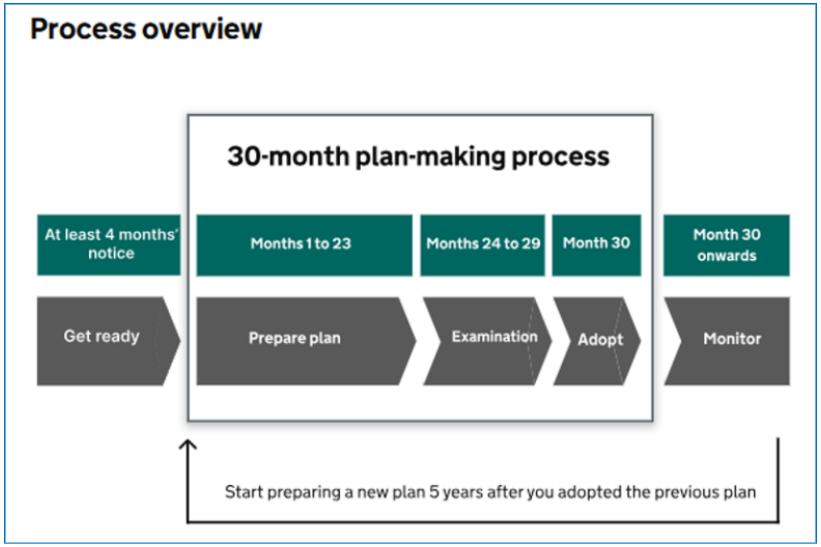


Figure 2: New Plan-Making Process

Within this 30-month framework the council will need to pass through three statutory gateways that will help to confirm if we are on the right track.

The Plan will be supported by a minimum of three statutory consultations, including this scoping stage where we will ask for your feedback.

The 30-month process starts after the local authority has undertaken this scoping consultation and passed through the Gateway 1 Self Assessment. The council published the Plan Timetable and a Notice of Intention to Commence Plan Making on 14th October 2026 and a minimum of 4 months is required between publishing these and passing through Gateway 1.

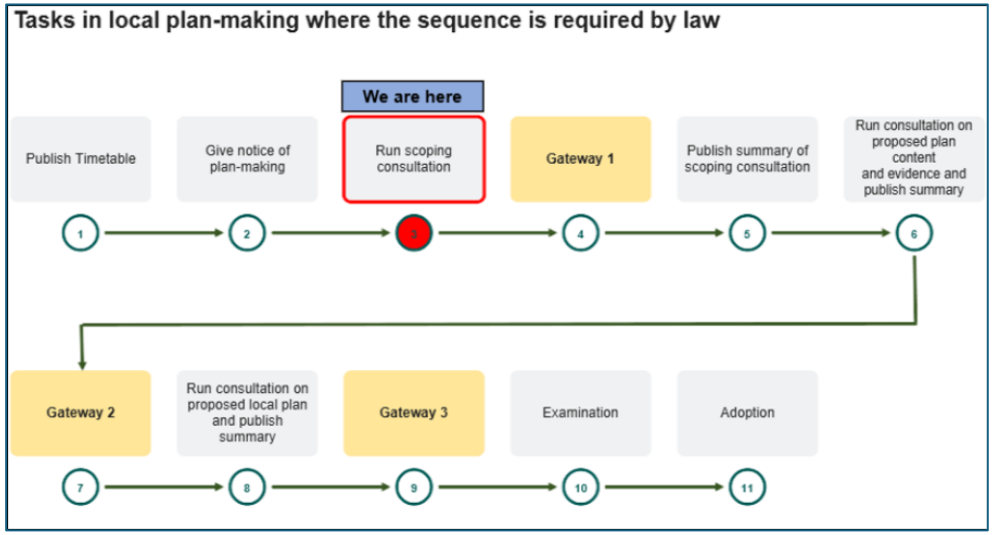


Figure 3: Local Plan Making Stages in order

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the document which all local plans in England are assessed against to ensure they are compliant with national policy.

The current NPPF was published in August 2026. The document is structured into Plan-Making Policies and Decision-Making Policies. Many development management matters are now covered in principle through National Decision-Making Policies (NDMPs) and the NPPF is clear that these NDMPs should not be repeated or duplicated in local plans and that local plan policies should not be inconsistent with them.

Local policies should therefore concentrate on responding to local circumstances and evidence.

The NPPF states that a Local Plan should:

- Cover a minimum of 10 years from the point of adoption;
- Include a positive vision and spatial strategy for an area;
- Set out specific ways of accommodating development needs;
- Conserve and improve the environment at a local level;
- Identify the contributions that are expected from development towards meeting affordable housing targets and infrastructure
- Include other policies only where they are necessary and where there is a clear and justified reason for them

Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs)

Since 2011 there has been no formal requirement to plan at a scale beyond local authority boundaries. This is changing with the Government introducing a mandatory requirement for all areas of the country to produce a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS).

SDSs will be documents that sit above local plans and cover a wider area that crosses local authority boundaries. They will consider the key strategic issues such as housing, economic growth, infrastructure, and climate change.

The assumption is that in Watford, the SDS will be produced on a Hertfordshire wide geography, although this is still to be confirmed by the Government at the time of writing.

National policy states that local plans should be in general conformity with any adopted SDS.

Therefore, with a view to future SDSs, our plan will be developed with full and continuous engagement with neighbouring authorities, the County Council and any subsequent authority that is responsible for producing the SDS.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

Previously, local plan policies could be supported by Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) where there was necessary detail required to support implementation of the policy.

Under the new planning system, the ability for authorities to produce new SPDs is being removed. Additionally, on adoption of a new local plan, all existing SPDs will be revoked.

The council currently has 10 adopted SPDs which cover issues such as: Developer contributions; co-living; conservation areas; residential design; bin storage; and tall buildings. These can be viewed on our website here.

Authorities can produce Supplementary Plans which would have more formal weight than SPDs but less scope as to what matters they can cover. Supplementary Plans can only be used to set locally specific design standards or for responding quickly to unanticipated changes in between plan making cycles.

It is hoped that further national guidance will clarify how the relevant information that is currently in SPDs should be taken forward in the new system. In the absence of this guidance though, the council welcomes any views on the issue as part of this consultation.



Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Alongside the planning reforms mentioned above, there is a wider process of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) going on in Hertfordshire. LGR would see Hertfordshire County Council and the current borough and district councils, including Watford Borough Council, removed and their functions absorbed into a number of Unitary Authorities and a Strategic Authority.

A Unitary Authority includes all the services currently done by district, borough and county councils. This includes housing, planning, waste, parking, leisure facilities, education, highways, libraries, adults care and children social care.

This process was unexpectedly paused by the Government in September 2026 and at the time of writing it is not clear how long this pause will last or what the implications of it are for LGR in Hertfordshire.

Despite this uncertainty, the Government remains keen to see local plans progressed on a borough wide basis ahead of any future unitary wide plan making. Watford Borough Council also needs to ensure that it can continue to manage growth sustainably and encourage high quality design.

This is only possible if an effective and up to date planning framework is in place through an adopted Local Plan. The intention is therefore to commence a review of the Watford Local Plan, albeit engaging collaboratively with neighbouring authorities throughout the process.

Q2: Do you agree that Watford Borough Council should be preparing a borough wide local plan ahead of future Local Government Reorganisation?

Q3: If you answered 'No' to the above question, what alternative approach to plan making should Watford Borough Council take?

Local Plan Timetable

The timetable below aligns with the Government's requirement for a local plan to be adopted within 30 months of passing through Gateway 1. Following this consultation, we will review your responses and use them to develop the plan further and move through the stages in the new plan making system.

The Plan will progress to Gateway 1 in early 2027. The next formal consultation stage will be related to plan content and evidence. This consultation is expected to take place in Summer 2027.

Local Plan Timetable	
October 2026	Notice of intention to commence Local Plan preparation and Publication of Local Plan timetable
November – December 2026	Scoping consultation
March 2027	Gateway 1 self-assessment
July – September 2027	Plan content and evidence consultation
December 2027	Gateway 2 observations and advice sought
June – August 2028	Proposed plan consultation
November 2028	Gateway 3 observations and advice sought
January 2029	Submission of the proposed Local Plan to the Secretary of State for examination
September 2029	Adoption

Figure 4: New Watford Local Plan (2029) Timetable

How should we engage with residents and stakeholders?

Residents, businesses, landowners, community groups and other stakeholders are invited to submit representations as we progress through the Local Plan Review process. The council is committed to ensuring that all interested parties have the opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the Local Plan and help shape the future development of our borough.

The council will continue to work closely with neighbouring authorities and other relevant partners on strategic planning matters to ensure a positive and collaborative process that responds effectively to cross boundary issues.

Watford's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) states that consultation in Watford regularly attracts active participation from those with professional interest, such as planning consultancy firms and developers, and those in older age groups. Whilst all opinions are valuable, the council recognises the need to widen participation and engage harder to reach groups and those with protected characteristics.

Examples of harder to reach groups include young people, the homeless, those in temporary accommodation, gypsies and travellers, people with physical, learning or mental disabilities, and BME communities. To maximise participation the consultation material will be accessible, engaging and interactive and we welcome views on how we should best engage these groups on the Plan.

Views are welcomed on the most effective ways to engage with communities and stakeholders, how information should be communicated, and how participation can be encouraged and supported at each stage of plan preparation.

All data received will be stored within the council's internal database with any personal data collected and stored in line with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Act 2018 and the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025.

A summary of the results from each consultation stage will be made publicly available through Consultation Statements that will be published as required by the regulations.



Q4: Please indicate which of the following methods you would like us to use to engage with you on the Local Plan review.

- ☐ Direct emails
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Online polls/questionnaires
- ☐ Informative videos
- ☐ Council website updates
- ☐ Newsletters/leaflets
- ☐ Posters placed around the town
- ☐ Drop-in sessions
- ☐ Exhibitions

Q5: Are there any other methods of engagement that we should consider which are not listed above?

Q6: Do you agree with our proposed approach to stakeholder and community engagement?

Q7: What could help us to improve our level of engagement with harder to reach groups?

Vision

Policy PM2 of the NPPF states that Local Plans should provide a positive vision for the future of the area.

This vision should be supported by no more than ten measurable outcomes, which:

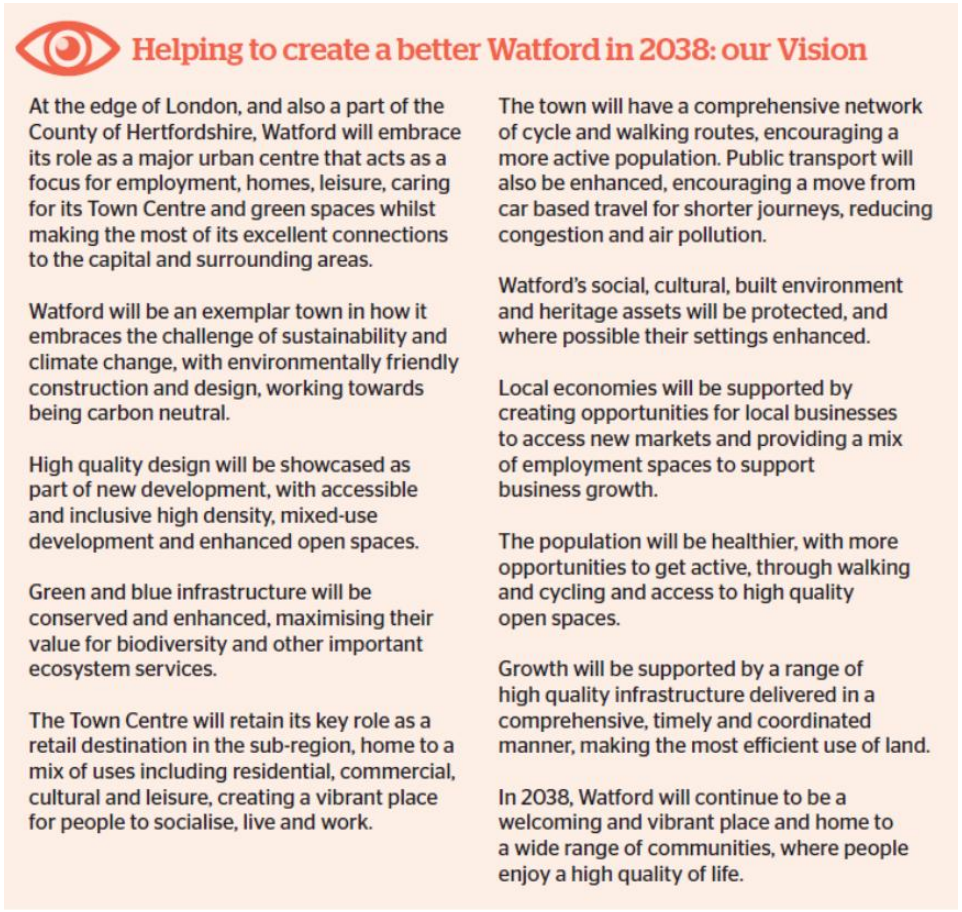
i. Articulate how the area should change over the plan period;

ii. Set aspirational aims and objectives underpinned by a realistic appreciation of what the plan's policies can genuinely shape and deliver;

iii. Reflect longer term expectations extending beyond the plan period where appropriate, including for any broad locations for growth and regeneration identified in the spatial development strategy, and any specific strategic site proposals; and

iv. Have particular regard to meeting the identified development needs of the area in a sustainable manner in accordance with policy S1.

The current Watford Local Plan 2021-2038 includes the Vision replicated in Figure 5 below. The Plan Review gives us the chance to update this vision where necessary. Overall, the principle of the vision could be carried forward as long as it is fit for purpose and it continues to reflect the priorities and ambitions of the council and its residents.



Helping to create a better Watford in 2038: our Vision

At the edge of London, and also a part of the County of Hertfordshire, Watford will embrace its role as a major urban centre that acts as a focus for employment, homes, leisure, caring for its Town Centre and green spaces whilst making the most of its excellent connections to the capital and surrounding areas.

Watford will be an exemplar town in how it embraces the challenge of sustainability and climate change, with environmentally friendly construction and design, working towards being carbon neutral.

High quality design will be showcased as part of new development, with accessible and inclusive high density, mixed-use development and enhanced open spaces.

Green and blue infrastructure will be conserved and enhanced, maximising their value for biodiversity and other important ecosystem services.

The Town Centre will retain its key role as a retail destination in the sub-region, home to a mix of uses including residential, commercial, cultural and leisure, creating a vibrant place for people to socialise, live and work.

The town will have a comprehensive network of cycle and walking routes, encouraging a more active population. Public transport will also be enhanced, encouraging a move from car based travel for shorter journeys, reducing congestion and air pollution.

Watford's social, cultural, built environment and heritage assets will be protected, and where possible their settings enhanced.

Local economies will be supported by creating opportunities for local businesses to access new markets and providing a mix of employment spaces to support business growth.

The population will be healthier, with more opportunities to get active, through walking and cycling and access to high quality open spaces.

Growth will be supported by a range of high quality infrastructure delivered in a comprehensive, timely and coordinated manner, making the most efficient use of land.

In 2038, Watford will continue to be a welcoming and vibrant place and home to a wide range of communities, where people enjoy a high quality of life.

Figure 5: The Current Watford Local Plan's Vision for Watford 2038

Q8: Does the Watford Local Plan 2021-2038 Vision continue to reflect your ambitions and priorities for Watford over the next decade or more?

Q9: If not, how could we change it so that it does?

Q10: Is there anything else that you would like to see addressed in the Vision that is not currently considered?

Plan Period

The current Local Plan covers a period of 17 years (2021-2038). The specific plan period for the new Plan will need to be established through the development and examination of the Plan but national policy states that a Local Plan must cover a period of at least 10 years. A longer time period could be appropriate where it would support the delivery of strategic development and infrastructure. We welcome any initial views on what an appropriate start and end date for the plan period should be.

Q11: Do you have any views on what an appropriate plan period would be for the new Plan?

Scope of the Plan

The remainder of this consultation document outlines some of our initial thoughts on the scope of the Local Plan Review and the topics we envisage that it will need to cover. Where possible we will set out what we think the current challenges and opportunities related to each topic are, and some initial thoughts we have on how a review of the current plan could address them.

We are particularly interested in your thoughts on whether we have included everything that you think a plan for Watford should cover,

your views on how we should approach these topics and what your biggest priorities are.

Q12: Out of all the topics listed below, which are your three biggest priorities for the future growth of Watford?

Topic	Priority
Meeting housing needs	
Gypsy and Traveller accommodation	
Meeting economic and employment needs	
Supporting the Town centre	
Improving the design of new development	
Protecting heritage	
Mitigating and adapting to climate change	
Protecting our natural environment	
Planning for infrastructure	
Encouraging active and sustainable travel	
Enhancing health and wellbeing	
Protecting our green belt	

Spatial Strategy

A spatial strategy is the overall approach that a local plan takes towards where development can and cannot be located. It helps us to achieve a sustainable and vision led plan which meets housing and employment needs whilst protecting our most important historic and environmental assets.

National policy states that a spatial strategy should set clear expectations for where development can be located, and conversely, where land should be protected or enhanced. It should do this by identifying:

- Settlements within the plan area
- The location and boundary of town centres or any other areas where a particular approach to development is needed
- Land that is to be protected by placing limits on development that would be acceptable
- Sites that are to be allocated for development to meet the identified need for housing and other uses

The current Plan focuses growth on a 'Core Development Area' (shown in Figure 6 below) which encompasses the central area of Watford that is most sustainably located with regard access to public transport, services and facilities. 80% of identified housing sites in the current plan are within this boundary and development within it is expected to optimise the use of available land through mixed-use high density development with a scale of change that is transformational in places.

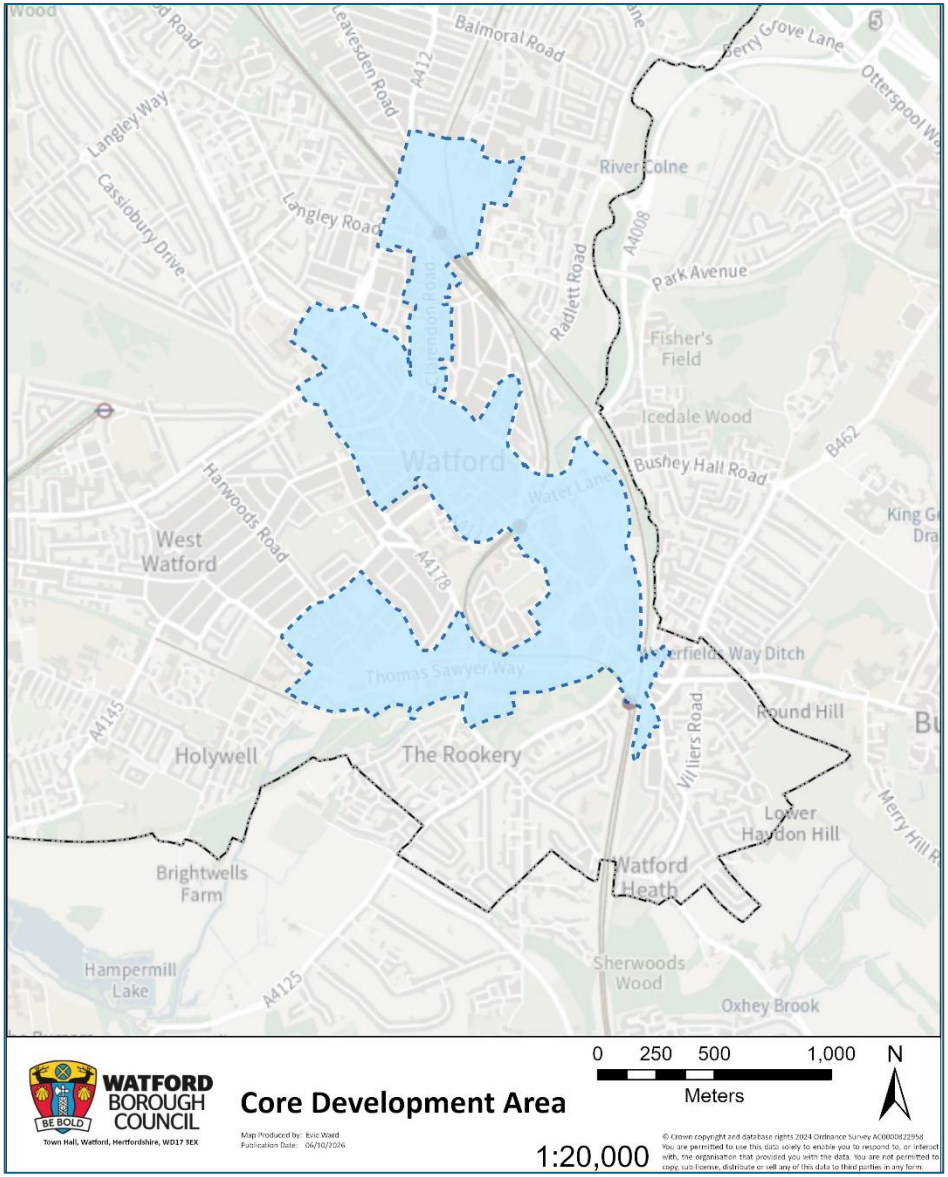


Figure 6: The Core Development Area as defined in the current Watford Local Plan 2021-2038

Outside the Core Development Area growth is managed to make efficient use of land whilst having greater regard to local character. The intention is to maximise opportunities for development on Previously Developed Land whilst protecting as much greenfield and green belt land as possible.

This Plan Review will need to look at this current approach and assess whether it remains an appropriate strategy for supporting sustainable development and for meeting local needs. We are therefore very interested in your views on this current approach and whether it should be taken forward into the new Local Plan.



Challenges	Opportunities
• Availability of land for development • Pressure for increased building height and densities • High levels of housing, employment and infrastructure needs • Deliverability and viability challenges • Pressure for residential uses in identified employment areas • Changing working and retail habits • Green belt constraints around the town and borough restrict options for growth	• Chance to consider how to best meet development needs for Watford based on up to date evidence and national guidance • Promote regeneration opportunities on key sites • Continue to direct growth to Previously Developed Land and the most sustainable locations • Opportunity to reassess the Core Development Area boundary as well as other designations such as employment areas to ensure they are still appropriate

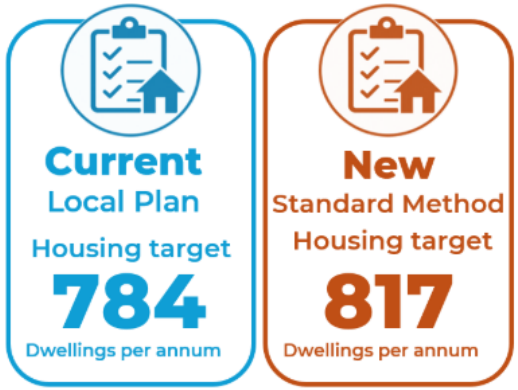
Q13: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take to meeting its needs for growth over the next decade?

Q14: Do you have any views on what types of land should be protected within the borough?

Housing

National Government set all local authorities a housing target that they should meet annually. This target is based on a set formula that is the same for every authority in the country. This is known as the 'Standard Method'.

In Watford, the latest annual housing target set by the Government is approximately 817 homes per annum. This is 33 dwellings per annum more than the current Watford Local Plan target of 784 dwellings per annum.



Meeting this target remains a significant challenge given our constraints on land that is available for development. Whilst delivery has increased under the current plan, it is still not meeting the annual housing target and so we need to do more.

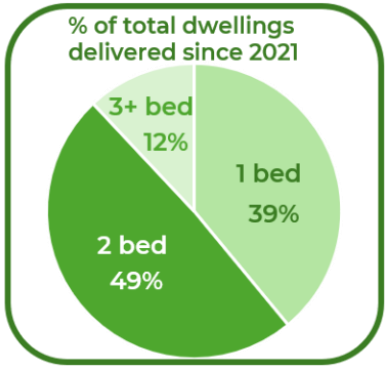


The Government is clear that a local plan should, as a minimum, meet its annual housing target for at least a 10 year period, unless there are exceptional circumstances to justify a lower number.

Taking into account the target of 817 dwellings per annum, this would total a minimum of 8,170 dwellings over a 10 year plan period. The Local Plan review will need to try and identify sufficient supply for at least this number of homes.

We believe however that planning for housing is not just about numbers. Meeting housing need is also about providing sufficient housing of all types and tenures and making sure that all homes are high quality, affordable and in the right places.

Providing a mix of homes of different sizes is important to support a balanced community and to ensure that housing needs are met by new development. The current Watford Local Plan requires 20% of new dwellings to be family sized (three or more bedrooms) but meeting this has been a challenge so far.



Since the Local Plan was adopted, 93% of all housing completions have been flats rather than houses.

Since the adoption of the Watford Local Plan, 736 affordable dwellings have been delivered, equating to 25% of the total net delivery of dwellings. The current Local Plan sets a target for all developments of 10 or more dwellings to provide 35% affordable housing.

We expect that, in addition to setting out a housing target for the plan period, the plan review will assess the need for, and include policies relating to:

- Affordable housing
- Older persons housing
- Build to Rent housing
- Co-living accommodation
- Student and other shared living housing
- Private amenity space standards
- Self and Custom build housing
- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- Standards for space and accessibility



Challenges	Opportunities
• High house prices mean significant affordability pressures in the borough • High housing targets set by central Government • Availability of land for housing development • Viability issues are affecting delivery rates and the ability to secure affordable housing • An ageing population is creating pressure for specialist older persons housing • Predominance of flatted development over houses • Emergence of co-living as a viable product in Watford • Increased prevalence and concentration of HMOs	• Chance to consider our approach to securing affordable housing contributions • Chance to revisit policy approaches to HMOs and self and custom build housing • Opportunity to develop the policy on co-living developments • Chance to review housing land availability • Update our current policies based on an up to date evidence of need for all different housing typologies

Q15: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards meeting housing needs in the borough?

Green/Grey Belt

Approximately 19% of the land in Watford's administrative area is designated as Green Belt.

The Green Belt is a statutory designation that exists to restrict urban sprawl, protect the countryside from encroachment, stop the merging of towns and encourage development of brownfield land. The Green Belt around Watford is part of the Metropolitan Green Belt around London.

In addition to preventing urban sprawl, much of Watford's Green Belt performs a community function as designated public open space with other areas important for wildlife habitats and biodiversity. The adopted Watford Local Plan included very small amounts of Green Belt release, largely to take account of areas where the designated land had already been developed on. An assessment will be undertaken as part of the Plan Review to consider the importance of Green Belt parcels around the borough.

National policy is clear that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances. These circumstances can include where an authority cannot meet its development needs. Before proposing Green Belt release an authority must demonstrate that all other reasonable options to avoid doing so have been taken.

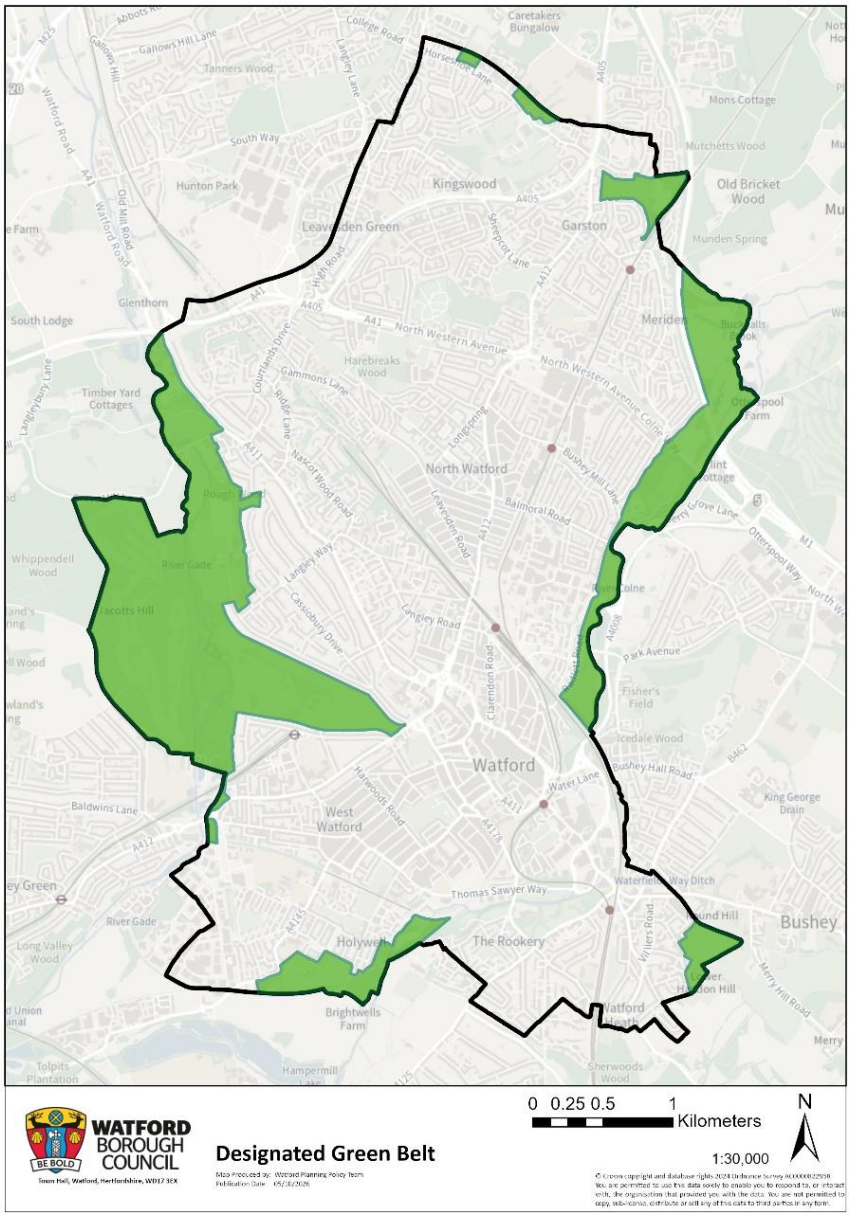


Figure 7: Extent of Green Belt within Watford Borough

Recent changes to national planning policy have introduced the concept of Grey Belt land. Grey Belt refers to previously developed land and other land within the Green Belt that does not make a strong contribution to any of the following Green Belt purposes:

- Purpose A - To check the unrestricted sprawl of larger built-up areas;
- Purpose B - To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- Purpose D - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.



National policy now places greater emphasis on considering whether such land could accommodate development where housing, infrastructure and other needs cannot otherwise be met elsewhere. Part of the assessment of green belt will be to assess whether any of the green belt within our borough could be identified as grey belt land.

National guidance directs Local Planning Authorities to consider previously developed land (or brownfield sites) first before moving onto grey belt sites and then finally green belt sites.

Challenges	Opportunities
• Limited land available for housing and employment growth within the urban area • Uncertainty regarding the implementation of emerging national Grey Belt policy	• Strengthen the protection of important Green Belt land in our borough • Opportunity to identify any suitable Grey Belt land that could accommodate sustainable development, affordable housing, public benefits, infrastructure and environmental enhancements

Q16: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards Green Belt and Grey Belt land?

Gypsy and Travellers

Local plans are required to meet the needs of gypsy and traveller communities by ensuring that there is a sufficient supply of sites to meet identified needs over the plan period.

To do this, plans are required to undertake an assessment of the needs for permanent and transit site accommodation and set pitch targets for gypsies and travellers and plot targets for travelling showpeople to meet this identified need.

The current Watford Local Plan made provision to meet the needs identified in a Gypsy and Traveller Assessment undertaken in 2019. Revisions to national policy have since changed the definition of gypsies and travellers and so a new evidence base will be needed to support this Plan Review and identify current levels of need.

Future engagement stages will summarise the results of this evidence and consider what its implications are for the plan.

Challenges	Opportunities
• Land availability • Lack of an up to date evidence base • The revoking of the 'Planning Policy for Traveller Sites' national guidance • Ensuring effective engagement with the Gypsy and Traveller community	• Chance to update the evidence base to ensure need is identified based on current national policy definitions • Chance to review current policies in light of a new NPPF and the revoking of the 'Planning Policy for Traveller Sites' guidance

Q17: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards meeting Gypsy and Traveller needs in the borough?

Economy

Watford has a strong and diverse economy, with a wide range of businesses delivering investment and job opportunities in the borough. Good transport links, a skilled workforce and a location on the edge of London have helped attract both major companies and smaller local businesses.

Watford has long established office and industrial areas, which collectively make our borough a vibrant place to work, do business and invest in.

The current Local Plan seeks to support sustainable economic growth by protecting existing employment land, delivering new office and industrial floorspace and encouraging training and skills development. The current Plan designates five industrial areas and a Primary Office Location on Clarendon Road (shown in Figure 8).

The designation of Clarendon Road reflects its strategic importance as a sub-regional hub for office based employment. The designation of industrial areas reflect the lack of alternative sites for these uses within the borough and therefore the need to protect the existing sites that we do have.

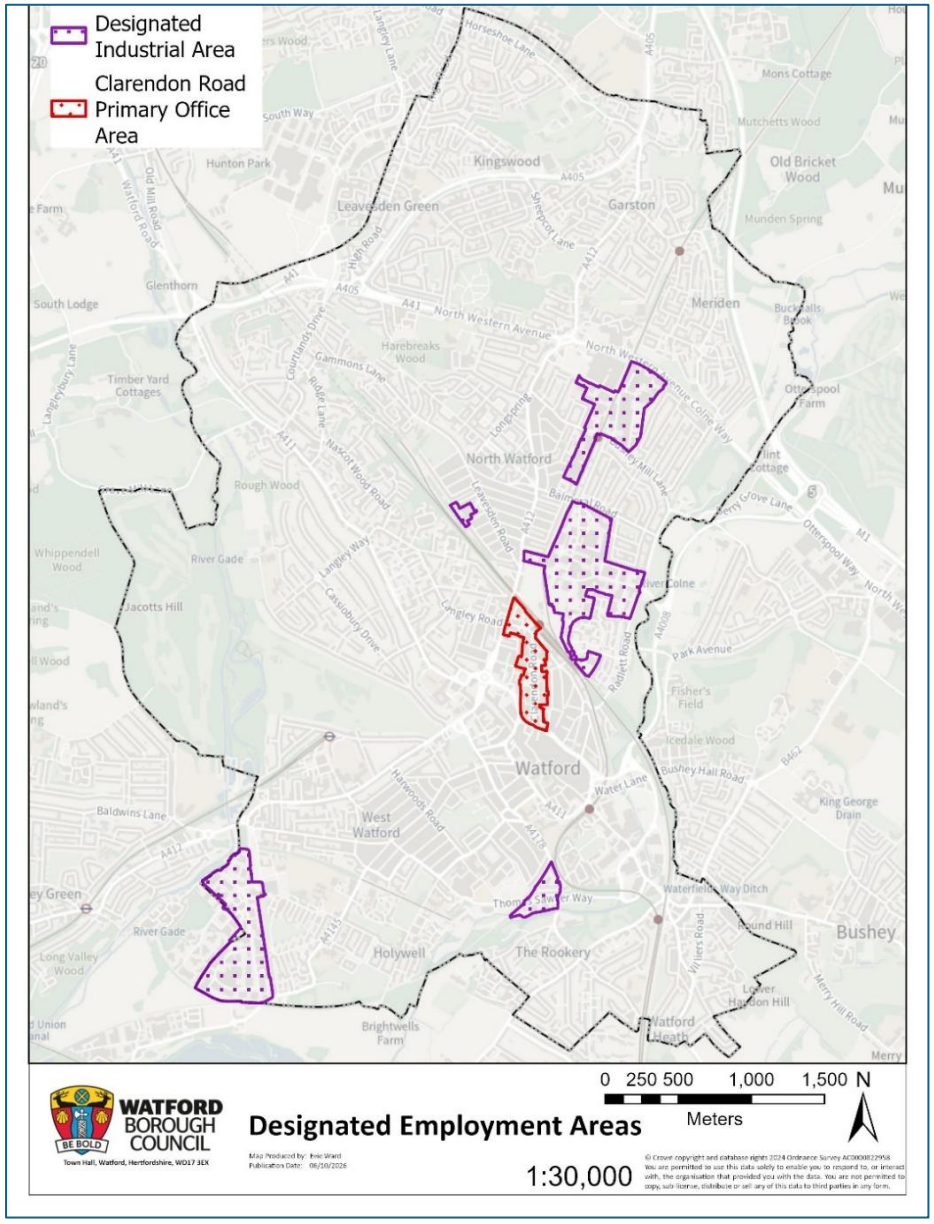


Figure 8: Designated Industrial and Office Areas in Current Watford Local Plan

Since the current Plan was adopted there has been pressure to allow residential uses within these areas, especially within the Clarendon Road Primary Office Area. This Local Plan Review is an opportunity to consider the current policies, gather up to date evidence, and review the extent of these designated areas. Doing so will help us to determine whether the policy approach remains appropriate and effective in meeting economic needs and protecting existing floorspace without unnecessarily constraining other development.



The adjacent table shows the delivery of employment floorspace since the current Plan was adopted relative to the identified target in the Plan. Whilst a proportion of the Local Plans office and industrial floorspace has been delivered already, there remains a significant shortfall.

Employment indicator	Floorspace delivered since 2021 (Net)	Current Watford Local Plan 2021-2038 Target
Office floorspace in the Primary Office Locations of Clarendon Road	27,552 sqm	The total office floorspace that is planned for in the current Local Plan is 85,488 sqm.
Industrial floorspace Five designated industrial areas are identified in the Local Plan.	6,111 sqm	The total industrial floorspace planned for in the current Local Plan is 25,206 sqm.

National planning policy is clear that local plans should support a strong, competitive and productive economy. They are expected to identify the land and infrastructure needed to support economic growth, provide flexibility for businesses to respond to changing market conditions, and ensure that employment opportunities are accessible and sustainable.

Data centres are a key type of infrastructure that support high technology industries and the use of AI and digital technologies. They are however resource and land intensive and so this Local Plan Review is an opportunity for us to consider how we can develop an effective policy approach to these facilities in a compact urban borough like Watford.

Challenges	Opportunities
• Balancing economic growth with competing land-use demands • Pressure for residential uses within designated employment areas • Responding to the growing need for data centres and digital infrastructure • Adapting to changing business requirements and working practices	• Review the designated employment area policies to ensure the Plan is effective and makes best use of land • Consider how best to support Clarendon Road's role as a sub-regional office hub • Encourage flexible workspace, start-up accommodation and innovation-led businesses • Support growth in creative, cultural and knowledge-based sectors • Work collaboratively with local partners to promote training, apprenticeships and skills development linked to new developments

Q18: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards supporting economic growth in the borough?

Q19: Are there particular sectors, industries or employment opportunities that you think the Plan should prioritise?

Q20: How can the Local Plan best support local businesses and skills development in Watford?



Town Centre

Watford Town Centre is a principal regional centre serving the borough and a wider catchment across South West Hertfordshire. It is a key destination for shopping, leisure, employment, culture and community services that support the local economy and the vitality of the borough. Whilst Watford is not immune from the challenges affecting town centres nationally, it remains a strong performer that is vibrant and diverse in its retail and leisure offer.

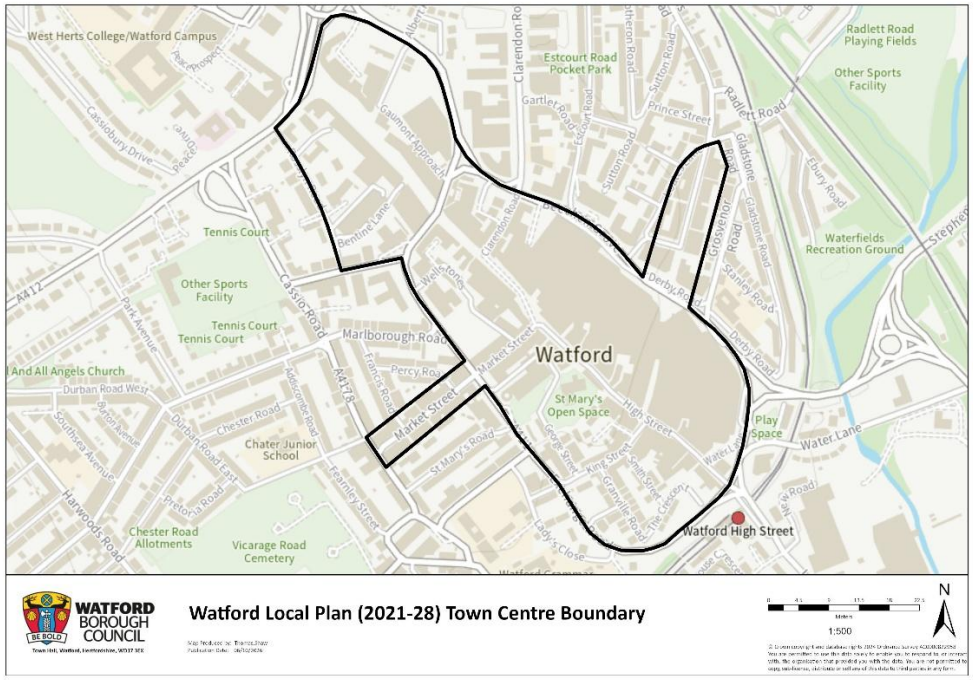
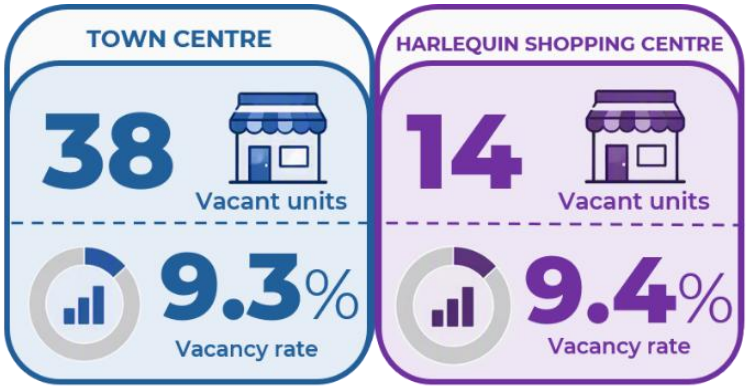


Figure 9: Watford Town Centre boundary as defined in current Local Plan

National planning policy is clear that policies should support the vitality and viability of town centres. Local plans are expected to promote healthy and vibrant centres, support a diverse range of uses, respond to changing retail habits, and provide opportunities for growth, leisure, culture, employment and community activity. The Local Plan Review will therefore consider how the Town Centre can continue to adapt to changing consumer behaviour, business needs and patterns of working whilst remaining an attractive destination for residents, workers and visitors during the day and in the evening.

The number, location and proportion of vacant ground floor units within the Town Centre have been monitored since the adoption of the current Local Plan and they have been consistently under 10%.



Data source: Watford Authority Monitoring Report 2024/2025. Data collect: August 2025

The current Local Plan supports the provision of new retail and Main Town Centre uses within designated centres. Overall, 85% of the Town Centre remains in a Main Town Centre Use albeit there has been a loss over the plan period so far as shown below.

Town centre indicator	Figure	Commentary
Net additional retail space delivered within the Town Centre since 2021	855 sqm	There has continued to be limited delivery of new retail space in Watford Town Centre since the adoption of the current Plan
Net additional Main Town Centre uses delivered in the Town Centre since 2021	-2,702 sqm	There has been a reported net loss of Main Town Centre Uses within the designated Town Centre since the Local Plan was adopted. This was due to a change of use from an office to a Police Station, which is not defined as a Main Town Centre Use in national policy.

In addition to the Town Centre, the current Local Plan designates a District Centre (St Albans Road) and a series of Local Centres which serve more of the day-to-day needs of our communities.

Local and District centres provide important focal points for neighbourhoods, offering shops, services, and community facilities where people live. The current Local Plan recognises that they are increasingly important not just for shopping, but as places for social interaction, leisure and community activity. The current Plan therefore seeks to protect the commercial character of these areas. The location of the designated district and local centres are listed below.

District Centre	St Albans Road
Local Centres	Buckingham Road, Bushey Arches, Garston Park Parade, Goodwood Parade, Langley Road, Langley Way, Leavesden Road, Longspring, Merton Road, North Approach, St Johns Road, The Brow, The Gossamers, Tudor Avenue, Vicarage Road, Villiers Road, Whippendell Road East and Whippendell Road/ Ascot Road

A review of the Town Centre, Local Centre and District Centre boundaries will be conducted as part of this Plan Review to ensure they remain appropriate and justified.

Challenges	Opportunities
• Vacant units and changing demand for retail floorspace • Balancing retail, leisure, residential and employment uses within centres • Responding to changing behaviours and patterns of work and leisure • Keeping centres attractive, accessible and safe at all times	• Mixed-use, and appropriate residential, development can increase activity throughout the day and evening • Promote sustainable and active travel by improving walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure to and from the centres

• The ring road severs surrounding residential areas from the town centre creating an island effect • Managing the clustering of certain uses, such as hot food takeaways, betting shops and vape shops which can affect vitality, character and health and wellbeing	• Bring underused, vacant buildings back into active use • Supporting suitable temporary and community uses that can bring vacant units back into active use

Q21: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take to support Watford Town Centre, District Centre and Local Centres?

Q22: What would encourage you to use the Town Centre more often?

Q23: How can Local and District centres best meet the day-to-day needs of residents and businesses in the future?

Design

The design of buildings, streets and public spaces can influence how people experience and interact with their environment. Good design can create attractive, safe, healthy and sustainable environments that support communities, encourage investment and enhance quality of life. Conversely, poor design can have long-lasting negative impacts on the character and functionality of an area, as well as on the health and happiness of a population.

The current Local Plan seeks to support a transition to a more design-led approach to development, including at higher density within the Core Development Area. Current Local Plan policies are used by the council to refuse poorly designed and poor quality proposals and to ensure that any taller buildings are justified by being of outstanding design, and having significant sustainability and public benefits.

As a compact urban borough surrounded by green belt, Watford needs to make efficient use of what land is available. This will ensure that we can accommodate future growth to meet needs whilst protecting our green spaces and green belt. Issues such as density, building height, public realm quality and the relationship between new development and existing communities are critically important and the approaches we take to these will be considered as part of this Local Plan Review process.

The current Watford Local Plan sets out suitable prevailing base building heights both within the Core Development Area and outside it. Development that is proposed above these base heights is required to meet additional policy criteria before it can be deemed acceptable. Since the Plan's adoption, national and regional planning policy has continued

to evolve with increasing emphasis on making best use of available land including through increased densities where appropriate.

The Plan Review will consider whether the current approach to density, building heights and design remains appropriate. It will also consider how design policies can increase the sustainability of development, to take into account climate resilience, biodiversity enhancement and issues such as overheating.

In addition, the Review will examine how design can improve accessibility, legibility and safety, promote healthy lifestyles, and ensure that development delivers high-quality places that align with national policy objectives whilst reflecting local character.



Challenges	Opportunities
• Balancing the need for growth with protecting local character, and residential amenity • Determining where higher density development is appropriate and how it should be designed • Ensuring new development makes a positive contribution to the skyline, streetscape and townscape • Balancing viability and requirements of the Building Safety Act with excellent design and placemaking • Ensuring that development leads to improvements to public realm and green infrastructure	• Watford's Core Development Area can accommodate higher density development in highly sustainable locations • Well-designed higher density development can help meet development needs while relieving pressure on lower-density residential areas • High quality design can strengthen Watford's identity and its distinctive sense of place • New development can support greener streets, enhanced public spaces and opportunities for active travel • Opportunity to regenerate underutilised brownfield sites

Q24: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards design and placemaking?

Q25: Are there areas where you think taller buildings or higher density development may be appropriate, or any areas where they should be resisted?

Heritage

Watford benefits from having a rich and varied heritage, with several designated conservation areas, and many listed buildings that contribute greatly to the borough's character and sense of place.

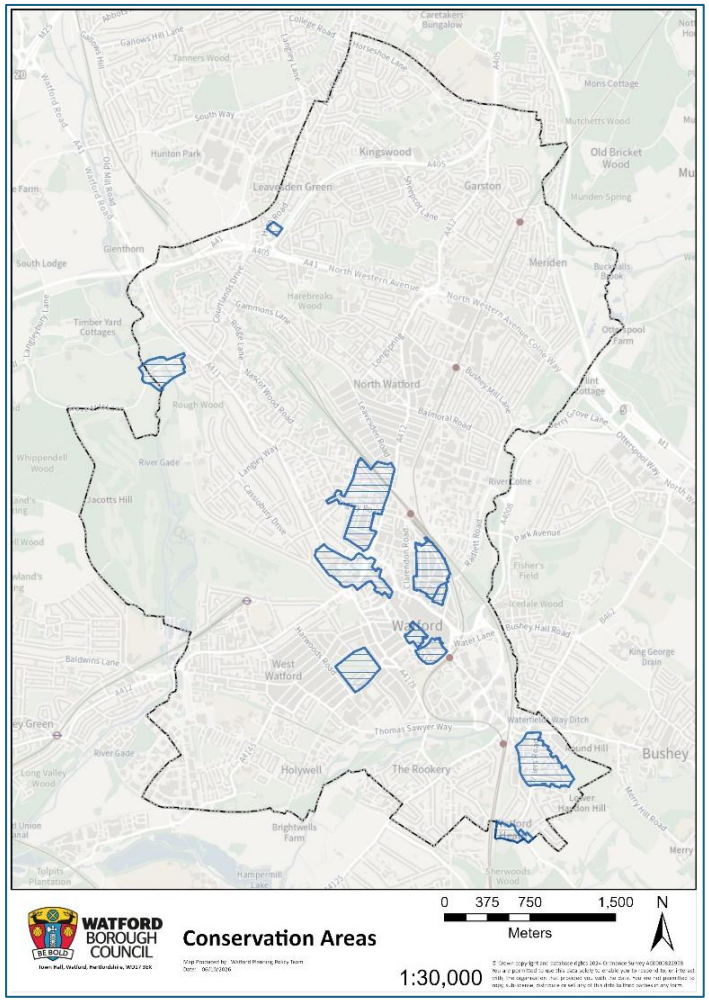


Figure 10: Designated Conservation Areas in Watford

These designated conservation areas and assets reflect the borough's expansion from a small market town into the thriving urban centre it is today. The council is actively managing development in conservation areas, following expert advice, and ensuring that any impacts of development on historic assets are carefully considered. Protecting and enhancing heritage assets for future generations is a critical consideration for a new Local Plan and of any planning decision the council makes.

This Plan Review will consider how new development can successfully integrate with the borough's historic character in a way that protects or enhances heritage assets.



Challenges	Opportunities
• Balancing growth and development needs with the need to conserve heritage assets and their settings • Ensuring new development is designed in a way that respects local character and contributes positively to the historic environment • The cost of maintaining, repairing and restoring historic buildings can be significant	• Historic buildings and historic character can support economic growth, tourism and investment • Update our policies to ensure they continue to positively support development which protects or enhances the historic environment • Heritage-led regeneration can help bring underused buildings and areas back into active use for existing and future generations

Q26: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards preserving our heritage?

Climate Emergency

Climate change is one of the most significant challenges facing our planet and Watford is not immune from its impacts. It will have implications for how the borough functions, grows and develops over the coming decades.

Planning has an important role to play in both reducing greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and ensuring that development is resilient to the impacts of climate change (adaptation). The current Local Plan includes policies relating to carbon reduction, sustainable construction, renewable energy, water efficiency, waste reduction and resource efficiency.

In 2019, Watford Borough Council declared a climate emergency. The council's Environmental Strategy 2023-2030 was approved in March 2023, along with the first two-year Delivery Plan. It explains how the council plans to become net zero by 2030 and how it will work with others to help Watford achieve net zero by 2030 too.

National planning policy is clear that local plans should support the transition to a low-carbon future, help to secure reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, encourage the use of renewable and low-carbon energy, and ensure that places are resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Building regulations set standards for energy efficiency and water efficiency. National policy states that local authorities can only include policies that go beyond these standards where it is clearly justified and where it would not adversely affect the viability of development. This

Local Plan Review process could consider whether there is a justification for going beyond these standards and so we welcome your views on this.

Challenges	Opportunities
• Adapting to increasing risks from extreme weather • Managing overheating in higher-density urban environments • Responding to increase pressure on water resources • Poor air quality and pollution in certain parts of the borough	• Improve energy efficiency and reduce running costs for homes and businesses • Encourage the use of renewable and low-carbon technologies • Contribute towards improving air quality and public health • Encourage modal shift away from cars and towards active and public transport modes

Q27: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards climate change mitigation and adaptation?

Natural Environment

Our parks and open spaces are among Watford's greatest and most valued assets. The borough's 17 Green Flag Award parks provide places for recreation, sport, nature, community events and relaxation, as well as supporting biodiversity, climate resilience, better air quality and healthier lifestyles.

In a dense urban borough, these spaces make a critically important contribution to Watford's character, attractiveness and quality of life and we know they are incredibly important to local residents.

Watford's network of green and blue infrastructure, including parks, rivers, wetlands, trees and wildlife corridors, plays a vital role in supporting biodiversity, managing flood risk and improving water quality.

The borough's rivers, particularly the River Colne and River Gade, provide opportunities for habitat enhancement and climate resilience, as well as supporting recreation. Initiatives such as the Rediscovering the River Colne project demonstrate how river restoration can support biodiversity, flood resilience and wider Local Plan objectives.

Planning has an important role to play in protecting and improving these assets, helping nature recover, reducing flood risk and ensuring that people continue to have access to sufficient and high-quality green spaces.

The current Local Plan includes policies on biodiversity, parks and open spaces, trees, rivers, wildlife corridors and flood risk. Since the Local Plan was adopted, there have been significant changes to national policy and

legislation on these issues. This includes the introduction of statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), which requires most new developments to leave nature in a measurably better state than before development took place. The Hertfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was published in 2025. This strategy identifies the most important opportunities for protecting and enhancing nature across Hertfordshire.

The Local Plan Review will consider how these changes impact current local plan policies in helping Watford better support its natural environment.

Challenges	Opportunities
• Delivering and enhancing biodiversity and ecological connectivity in urban environments • Protecting and enhancing public open space whilst accommodating growth • Managing flood risk from rivers, surface water and climate change	• Assess opportunities to go above and beyond 10% Biodiversity Net Gain • Improving access to parks, waterways and green spaces • Improving ecological connectivity through wildlife corridors and nature recovery initiatives • Enhance the River Colne, River Gade and other water environments as environmental and recreational assets • Deliver multifunctional green infrastructure that provides recreation, habitats, cooling and flood storage

Q28: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards protecting and enhancing the natural environment?

Q29: Are there any open spaces, habitats, waterways or green infrastructure assets that you think should receive greater protection?

Q30: Are there any flood risk or water management issues that you think the Plan Review should address?

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is crucial to sustainable development and to mitigating the impacts of new development. Figure 11 which is replicated from the current Watford Local Plan shows the types of infrastructure that can be considered in a local plan.

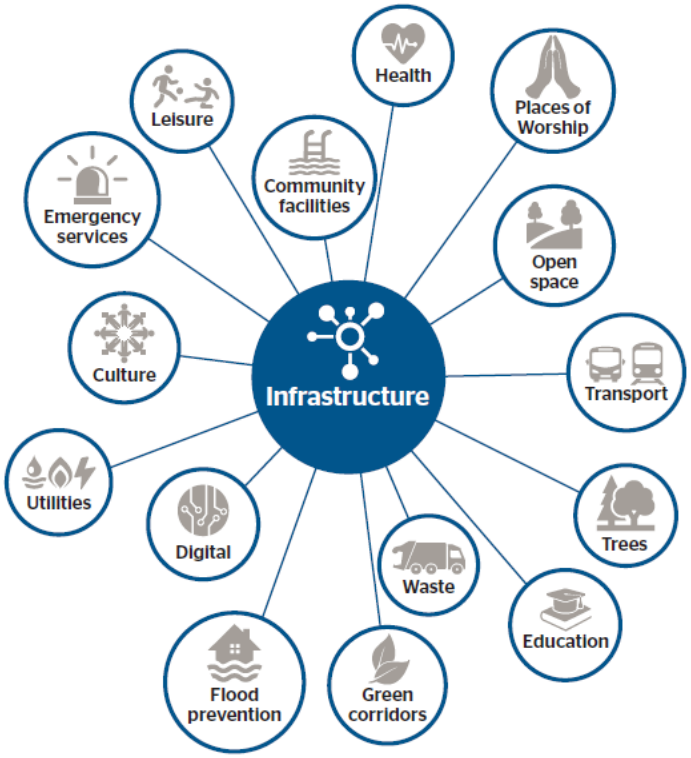


Figure 11: Types of Infrastructure

Watford is in a strategically important location, with strong transport connections by rail and road and a wide range of existing infrastructure assets. Land and viability constraints however mean that infrastructure does not always align with development and securing sufficient contributions towards infrastructure from development is a challenge that we know is frustrating for residents.

The current Local Plan seeks to support growth with infrastructure provision and ensure that new development contributes towards the facilities and services required to support residents and businesses. Since the start of the current plan period, £14,846,555 in CIL and S106 contributions have been collected from developers that can be used to fund infrastructure in Watford.

Current and future infrastructure projects in Watford include the Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit (HERT), Watford to Croxley Link, and the Watford General Hospital redevelopment. So far, progress has mainly been focused on feasibility and design stages due to the scale and multi-stakeholder nature of these larger projects.

There is also an ongoing programme of public realm and junction improvements across the borough.

The Local Plan Review will consider what infrastructure is required to support future growth and how development can contribute towards its delivery. This includes ensuring that infrastructure is planned proactively and delivered at the right time to support existing and future communities.

Challenges	Opportunities
• Population growth and future development will place increased pressure on existing services and facilities • Securing funding and developer contributions can be difficult and subject to external factors such as viability • A lack of a strategic planning system makes planning for infrastructure piecemeal and challenging • Meeting the demand for data centres and safeguarding land for future heat network connections	• The borough's strategic location and excellent connectivity make it an attractive location for investment and growth • Investment in green and blue infrastructure can enhance climate resilience, biodiversity and quality of life • An updated Infrastructure Delivery Plan will ensure the level of infrastructure delivery is compatible with the level of growth planned for

Q31: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards infrastructure planning and delivery?

Sustainable and Active Travel

Watford's compact geography provides significant opportunities for increasing sustainable and active travel and reducing our reliance on cars. This can help to reduce congestion, carbon emissions, improve air quality, and promote a healthy, active lifestyle.

The borough is served by two mainline railway stations, three London Overground stations, a London Underground station and three stations on the Watford to St Albans Abbey branch line.

Watford Junction is the busiest station in Hertfordshire; and it is the gateway for visitors to the town and to the Warner Brothers Studio. The Studios are home to the Harry Potter Studio Tour Experience which attracts tourists from all over the world. The shuttle bus service for both staff and visitors to the studios starts and finishes at Watford Junction bus interchange.

There is strategic road infrastructure with the M1, M25 and A41 all passing through or close to the borough.

There are multiple international airports within easy reach with London Heathrow Airport and London Luton Airport both approximately a half hour drive from Watford.

These are all key opportunities that we need to utilise to make Watford an even more attractive place to live, work, invest in, and spend leisure time.

Since the current Local Plan was adopted, initiatives such as the Green Loop and the expansion of bike share and car club schemes have helped but we still need to do more.

Active and sustainable travel opportunities are not however distributed evenly across the district and there remains issues of traffic congestion at certain points in the borough. Whilst north-south public transport connectivity is excellent east-west connectivity remains challenging and largely reliant on private car use.

We are keen to hear views on how a plan review could further encourage a modal shift away from car use and what the specific barriers are to you using public transport, walking and cycling currently.

Challenges	Opportunities
• East-west connectivity from Watford is limited • There is congestion on certain parts of our road network • Making sustainable travel options accessible and attractive to all users • Balancing the demand for car parking and use with the desire to encourage active and sustainable travel • Securing funding and contributions towards sustainable travel infrastructure	• Watford's compact urban form makes active travel possible • Existing north-south connectivity including into central London • Improving Watford Junction station facilities and the surrounding public realm will create a better experience for regular users and visitors • Major infrastructure projects such as HERT and the Watford-Croxley link could deliver a step change in sustainable travel options • The Green Loop project has opened up a cycling and walking route round the borough, connecting our green spaces and the Town Centre

Q32: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards sustainable and active travel?

Q33: What would encourage you to use more sustainable modes of transport?



Health and Wellbeing

Watford is a vibrant and diverse borough with a mix of assets that contribute positively to residents' health and wellbeing. There are however significant health inequalities across the borough with some communities experiencing poorer health outcomes and greater levels of deprivation than others.

The current Local Plan seeks to create healthy and sustainable communities through the provision of homes, jobs, open spaces, community facilities and opportunities for an active and healthy lifestyle. As the borough continues to grow, it will be important to ensure that new development continues to contribute positively to health and wellbeing and help address existing inequalities.

The current Local Plan requires Health Impact Assessments to be submitted for all major residential applications. These are important for ensuring new developments support a healthy lifestyle and do not have significant negative effects on people's health.

National policy supports the creation of healthy and inclusive places, through the provision of appropriate public services and the retention, improvement and delivery of new facilities which are important for community wellbeing and minimising inequalities.

National policy also promotes healthy eating by restricting hot food takeaways near to schools, other places where young people congregate and locations where there is already an over-concentration.

The Local Plan Review will consider how future development can best support healthier lifestyles, improve access to services and facilities, strengthen community cohesion, and create safe, inclusive and attractive environments for people of all ages.

Challenges	Opportunities
• Health outcomes and life expectancy vary across different parts of the borough • Some communities experience barriers to accessing healthcare, leisure facilities, green spaces and other services • Population growth may place additional pressure on healthcare and community infrastructure	• The borough is home to many parks, green spaces, allotments and recreational facilities that support physical and mental wellbeing • Opportunities to deliver new developments that promote active lifestyles through walking, cycling and access to open space • Supporting investment in community facilities can help strengthen social connections and reduce isolation

Q34: Do you have any thoughts on the approach the council should take towards improving people's health and wellbeing?

Concluding Questions

We are also interested in your wider views now you have considered our proposed scope in full.

These final questions are an opportunity to tell us if we have missed anything, and whether you agree with our overall approach to this Local Plan Review.

Q35: Do you agree with this suggested scope for the Watford Plan Review? Yes/No

Q36: Are there any topics or issues not referenced in this scoping document that you think the Plan should address?

Q37: Is there anything else you want to tell us about in relation to the Plan or the future growth of Watford?



Call for Sites

A Call for Sites is an exercise undertaken by a Local Planning Authority to identify land that may have potential for future allocation for development in a local plan.

Through the process of reviewing the current Local Plan, we will need to identify enough land and sites to meet our housing and employment need. We therefore need to identify any sites that are available, suitable and achievable for development. A Call for Sites process is one way of us doing this.

This process is happening parallel but separately to the Scoping Consultation.

Sites can be submitted by any individual or organisation, although they are most commonly promoted by landowners, developers, agents, local businesses and community groups.

Submitting a site:

- Does not grant planning permission
- Does not mean the site will be allocated for development
- Does ensure the site is recorded and that it will be assessed as part of the plan-making process

If you know of a site that you think should be allocated in the Watford Local Plan review, then please submit the site through this online form and we can consider it.

Sites can be submitted for any of the following uses:

- Housing of all kinds
- Employment
- Mixed use
- Gypsy and Travellers
- Renewable Energy
- Biodiversity offsetting
- Blue/Green infrastructure
- Leisure and Tourism

Any proposed uses outside those listed above can still be submitted for consideration as long as the specific use is explained in the Call for Sites form.

Next Steps and Timescales

Once this consultation ends on **23 December 2026** we will take some time to review your responses and use them to further develop the new Local Plan up to Gateway 1 which is expected to be passed through in early 2027.

The next consultation will be on proposed plan content and evidence and is expected to take place in summer 2027.