



St Albans District Local Strategic Partnership website: [www.stalbanslsp.org.uk](http://www.stalbanslsp.org.uk)

Shaping Our District Together for 2021: St Albans and District Sustainable Community Strategy: <http://www.stalbanslsp.org.uk/strategy/index.htm>

### St Albans District – the local picture

St Albans District has a diverse heritage and is a vibrant community made up of a unique mix of a cathedral city, towns and villages situated within green belt countryside. Being both near to London but with its own distinct culture, built environment and general attractiveness means that St Albans District is a popular place to live, shown by high satisfaction rates in resident polls. However, the District faces many challenges over the next 15 years:

- We have the difficult task of balancing the need to retain our green character and our separateness from London with the need for housing and effective infrastructure (such as education and community facilities and public transport) to support the community.
- Over 50% of our working population commute out and 42% of local employees commute into the District. High house prices mean that people on lower incomes find it difficult to both work and live here, but with few high income jobs in certain industries, a sizable proportion of residents commute out of the District for work. In the long run, this is not a sustainable situation and we need to work to ensure that our local economy is more sustainable for those who live and work here.
- We need to ensure that the communities in St Albans and surrounding settlements retain their distinct nature and identity. We also have to be careful to balance the potentially divergent needs of residents, visitors to the District and businesses.
- Environmental sustainability is a big issue for the District, with higher than average CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Transport is one of the biggest contributors to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in St Albans District, and traffic congestion is at the moment one of the top three issues residents want us to improve. However, residents also tell us that improvements to roads and pavement repairs are important. Therefore, we need to provide an effective transport infrastructure for the District which is environmentally sustainable.
- Overall deprivation levels for St Albans District are low, with St Albans ranked 317 out of 364 in the Index of Multiple Deprivation in 2007. However, the overall picture of relative affluence masks a wider gap between the most and least deprived areas, with five areas above the national average score. Life expectancy also differs markedly between different wards in the District.
- The recession has impacted on the District in terms of increasing demand for financial advice, housing support and unemployment.

### Provisional Results from the Place Survey

- Rated top in Herts as a place to live – 90% satisfied generally with St Albans District as a good place to live (up from 84% in 2006/07).
- Improved ratings for community cohesion and volunteering indicators compared to 2006/07. NI 4 (ability to influence local decision making), NI 27 (understanding local community safety concerns) and NI 123 (support for older people to live independently) all initially identified as areas to improve (data to be confirmed).
- Top three issues to improve in the District in 2008/09 are road and pavement repairs, traffic congestion and activities for teenagers. Partners in the LSP are taking action to see that these issues are addressed.

## 1. How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?

The development of the current [Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2021](#) was based on three elements: evidence base consisting of data from partners, result of previous consultations with residents and specific consultation with stakeholders and residents on the emerging priorities and draft strategy. A summary of where the data supports the development of each priority is summarised in the Community Strategy document.

The Sustainable Community Strategy has a clear overall vision: “a progressive, unique and vibrant district, which values its heritage and cares for the future: an outstanding place to live where everyone can flourish” and consists of 3 headline priorities. The LSP also identified five areas where there were significant gaps in delivery and agreed to take the lead on these. These are listed on [page 9 of the current strategy](#) and [reports on progress](#) are made to the wider LSP on these areas.

Currently, the Sustainable Community Strategy is being refreshed and updated. Already as [part of the review of the data](#), supporting an aging population and producing a sustainable economy have been highlighted as two areas of work to be included. Deprivation levels have also been tracked through the update of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, which shows a particular increase in deprivation in two areas in Cunningham ward. The LSP is also linking up with work on the development of a City Vision for St Albans, a Rural Vision for the rural part of the district, and is aligning with the production of the core strategy of the Local Development Framework, informed by the work of a scrutiny task and finish group. The district has also opted into the Sustainable Communities Act which will help to further strengthen our work with the community. [Until the end of the consultation period on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2009, you can see the draft refreshed Sustainable Community Strategy on our website.](#)

The LSP is also strengthening its work with different groups in the community. Its annual conference is already popular and is being cultivated as a way for the LSP to be in touch with emerging community issues, as well as to report back on progress with priorities. Work with the Equalities Officer at St Albans District Council is supporting the LSP's efforts to engage different groups in the community, with an interfaith group being established. The voluntary and community sector plays an active part in the LSP and with the support of the CVS, it has a variety of opportunities to shape planning. Most recently, feedback has been sought at the CVS annual conference, at commissioning workshops, through focussed forums and e-newsletters.

## 2. How well are the outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?

Strong progress has been seen towards the priorities identified in the Sustainable Community Strategy. This includes:

### Headline Priority 1 – Ensuing the District is a great place to be

- **Supporting the Development of Affordable Housing** - the District Council, in conjunction with local Housing Associations, provided 92 additional units of affordable housing in 2008/09, with the total forecast to reach over 100 by the end of March 2009. This contributes towards the LAA target NI 154 (Net additional homes delivered).
- **Facilities for Young People** – Using a £233,906 three year Big Lottery Fund bid, we have provided a free summer play ranger scheme, developed two multi use games areas (one of which is in one of our most deprived SOAs) and provided a mobile skate park for the district.

### Spotlight – St Albans City Vision

Over 3,500 residents and stakeholders have taken part in the consultation exercise to create a vision for St Albans City Centre.

This consisted of a survey of residents on the issues that matter to them, followed by several workshops using e-voting technology and the creation of spatial maps for the city to guide the planners of the future on where a new cinema and better retailing should be sited. Exhibitions and market stalls encouraged visitors; shoppers and workers to have their say on the city they visit and work in.

The outcome will be a comprehensive vision in May 2009 covering all aspects of life in the city ([initial results are on the City Vision website](#)). A similar exercise is being launched with the District's rural areas, and will report back in 2009.

## Headline Priority 2 – Keeping the District Healthy

- **Encouraging and Supporting Healthy Lifestyles** – Launched an Onside football project for young people in the six most deprived areas in the District, in conjunction with Watford Football Club. The project has also helped to tackle anti social behaviour issues in the area, showing the benefit of cross thematic working.
- **Supporting the Voluntary and Community Sector to Provide Preventative and Support Services** – Awareness raising on commissioning opportunities offered by the Third Sector held in June 2008 involved 56 public/voluntary sector participants with 67% of those surveyed saying that they had increased their knowledge of commissioning opportunities and 79% stated that they were likely to take the next step to third sector commissioning. This work supports the achievement of an increase in the percentage of VCS organisations who say that local statutory bodies influence their success (Herts LAA target NI 7 (Environment for a thriving third sector)).

### Spotlight – Asian Family Health Project

A “one stop shop” community venue, easily reached by residents in Cunningham, Ashley and Clarence wards, was set up to support Asian and Arab families, who have difficulty accessing housing, health and welfare services. The project, developed using feedback from local community groups, and supported by the District and County Councils as well as the PCT helps 15-18 families a week. It has since seen spin off projects, established during 2008-09 and supported by the Health, Housing and Social Care partnership, focussing on exercise and healthy eating with women who are over 45.

## Headline Priority 3 – Supporting an active community that has pride in itself and cares for its future

- **Reducing our Impact on the Environment** – Developed a district wide Carbon Management Plan with the Carbon Trust to reduce the LSP’s carbon emissions by 3% per annum between 2008 to 2025 (compared to a baseline year of 2006/07) and implementing it through the LSP project group. Actions already seen include the introduction of a car club in St Albans city, green energy generation on public buildings and better promotion of energy saving measures through the LSP SAVE roadshows in 2008/09. The project group is also looking for opportunities to link environmental work to focus on managing the recession. Latest outcome progress will be charted through performance against NI 185 and NI 186 (also an LAA target) at the end of 2008/09.
- **Encouraging Green and Sustainable Travel** – Traffic congestion is one of the top three issues that residents in the District want to see improved. The St Albans Traffic Improvement Partnership is looking at the feasibility options such as car free areas and mini park and ride schemes to achieve this, linking up with local aspirations as stated through the emerging St Albans City Vision. Network St Albans was also set up in 2009 to develop the bus network in St Albans city centre through integrated ticketing and routes between different rail/bus operators, implementation of wider travel plans (particularly looking at the City Station area) and better planning of bus routes. Outcomes will be charted through performance against LAA target NI 178 (bus services running on time) as well as a reduction in the level of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the District.

The LSP has also looked towards strengthening our capacity to deliver in **Reducing Inequalities**. Using funding through the LSP Single Pot Fund (which is funded by contributions by partner members) and in kind contributions, a Partnership Project Officer has been recruited to work in the five most deprived areas in St Albans. This has built on the LSP work in Sopwell ward to establish a community partnership, and the Project Officer is following a work programme which has been developed using the District Council scrutiny review of deprivation. The LSP has successfully contributed towards re-orientating activity by local partnerships, most notably the District Children’s Trust Partnership and the Health, Housing and Social Care Partnership, into delivering key schemes such as the GP Referral Scheme and elderly exercise projects in areas of relatively high deprivation. Key deliverables will continue to be seen throughout 2009, with overall deprivation scores to be measured through the Index, as well as other data such as the Active People’s Survey and National Indicators.

As part of the refresh of the Sustainable Community Strategy, the St Albans LSP is developing the performance management arrangements for the whole strategy to ensure that all outcomes

are being monitored and evaluated by the wider partnership as well as clearly communicated to the Annual Conference. It is expected that this will be delivered by the end of 2009.

### **3. What are the prospects for future improvements?**

The challenges for St Albans District are long term challenges, where progress will be seen over a long period of time. St Albans and District LSP has a good track record of delivery and believes it has strong prospects for future improvement. The LSP recognises that it needs to improve the strength of its performance management arrangements and is working on this through the refresh of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

#### **The Recession and the LSP response**

As well as having good plans in place, the LSP needs to be flexible and nimble to be able to address change. Following the start of the recession, providing a local sustainable economy is an issue that is likely to be a future gap area in the refreshed Sustainable Community Strategy. The recession has seen a 130% year on year increase in unemployment<sup>1</sup>, a 2% rise in the number of vacant retail units over six months and increased demand for housing, financial and debt advice services from voluntary and public sector providers. This has caused a short term refocusing of the LSP's priorities, with the emphasis on current LSP activity changing to monitoring the emerging situation and developing joint actions, linked to the delivery of existing priorities where possible. Already, joint actions such as the establishment in March 2009 of the Executive Job Forum are being developed in response to the needs of the community. Evaluation of the impact of actions as well as the ongoing effects of the recession is monitored regularly through a 'scorecard' of key economic indicators affecting the District.

#### **Spotlight – Executive Job Forum**

Since March 2009, a joint venture with Job Centre Plus, the District Council, Oaklands College and the CVS has been providing support and access to training opportunities for 20 people in the district who have been recently made redundant or who are under threat of redundancy. There is currently a waiting list for enrolments, with a second group of 20 people to start in April/May 2009.

#### **Future Action to Further Strengthen the LSP**

External assessment has confirmed that the St Albans and District LSP is a strong, focussed partnership. We are putting in place further evaluation and performance management mechanisms to ensure that we fully understand the performance of our partnerships in meeting local priorities. Representatives from all communities and sectors are clear about the need to ensure the sustainable development of the District and are determined that they will be successful in achieving this. The LSP in 2008/09 and 2009/10 is focussing on taking these forward, and ensuring that the Sustainable Community Strategy has clear, measurable targets to support its priorities. The LSP's key activity is:

- Reviewing the Sustainable Community Strategy (including the evidence base) – due to be completed June 2009
- Reviewing the LSP governance arrangements, including review of membership and links with local and county partnerships, leading to a clear performance management framework - due to be completed December 2009

As part of this work to strengthen the LSP, St Albans District has volunteered to be a part of a Hertfordshire partnership development project with PricewaterhouseCoopers, which will aid us in developing the strongest possible vehicle for delivery.

#### **Conclusion**

St Albans District LSP is working together to listen and respond to the needs of the community. It is becoming more flexible to adjust its short term priorities to deal with new issues such as the recession, as well as seeking opportunities for further achievement. But we also know that we need to improve, and will focus in 2009/10 on building on a strong partnership to achieve the long term challenges for our area.

<sup>1</sup> Job Seeker Allowance claimants, February 2008-February 2009