



Council Plan 2024 - 2029

This document will shortly
be available in graphic-
designed format.

Foreword by Cllr Chris White, Leader

Our vision is a happy, inclusive and sustainable community. To help us deliver this, alongside our core services, our five areas of high priority are to:

- Combat the climate emergency,
- Deliver more social housing,
- Support our local economy,
- Enhance the District's cultural offer,
- Promote equality, inclusion, and fairness,

St Albans District is a place of warm welcome, community spirit, and public services we can be proud of. The Council and our partners have invested in local facilities in recent years, and we have a wide range of excellent leisure, sports and cultural centres, award-winning parks and green spaces, great transport links and the backdrop of a Cathedral city and historic town and villages steeped in heritage, yet modern and vibrant too. We are indeed fortunate.

Yet, as this Council Plan is being prepared, we face critical financial pressures and a challenging economic climate. A recent survey by the District Councils' Network, a cross-party network of 168 district and unitary councils, found that 96% of councils expected to see demand rise for temporary accommodation and Council Tax Support, over which we have no control. Many councils surveyed indicated that they will need to make efficiency savings in statutory services to be in a position to set a balanced budget. We share that need. We continue to make tough choices about our spending and how we operate to address the gap in our finances. This is resulting from global, national, and regional challenges; pressures such as those mentioned above; the rise in the cost of energy; the impact of high inflation; rising costs in supply chains; high interest rates; the drop in the commercial rented sector; and spending constraints from central government.

We need to spend every penny of public money wisely, and ensure we focus on the most important things. Our five priorities are set out below.

Combat the Climate Emergency

The Council's Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy, developed with Sustainable St Albans, St Albans Friends of the Earth, and other environmental and community groups, sets out the actions we will take locally to achieve our net zero carbon emissions target by 2030.

Our developing Local Plan – the framework for future development over the next two decades – has climate change and sustainability as its key focus. We have made huge progress with this over the last year and hope to have it fully agreed by the planning inspectorate in 2025. Once adopted, our Local Plan will help us to manage the inevitable changes we face carefully and thoughtfully, respecting the past yet planning for the future too.

Through community leadership, partnership, and active encouragement we are helping to develop the infrastructure improvements we want to see in our District. An example is our work with the County Council to make walking and cycling safer and attractive to those who want to reduce their reliance on cars. This is important to ease congestion, improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions.

St Albans District is one of the best performing local authority areas for recycling in England and, with the support of local residents, we want to ensure we maintain our strong position.

Deliver more social housing

We want to ensure that homes are warm, dry and energy efficient: this is the right thing to do for tenants and leaseholders and of course also recognises that we can and should play our part in combating climate change. By 2030, all Council-owned homes will be carbon net zero* ready for when the grid becomes fully carbon neutral.

Many local people find they cannot afford to buy or rent here. The Council is striving to ensure additional new homes are provided for social rent. For example, Jubilee Square - built on the site of the old police station - has reshaped an important part of St Albans city centre and is providing 93 new homes for social rent and shared ownership.

Social housing is delivered in various ways: through the planning system, through local authority owned housing including Council-led development, and through partnerships using direct investment and joint ventures. In the current economic downturn, the Council is especially alert to changes in the construction market and is seeking innovative ways to deliver housing and community programmes, successfully attracting external funding to do so.

We are also transforming processes to reduce turnaround times for dealing with empty Council-owned properties so families in need can be housed more quickly.

We will continue to support people facing homelessness through our dedicated support services. We are also mindful of the needs of refugees and visitors from Ukraine and will continue to work with our partners to support them.

*Note: Carbon net-zero - by this we mean adopting 'fabric first' measures on existing housing stock (carefully considering the design and construction of a home to lower its energy consumption), including insulation, LED lighting, solar panels, energy efficient windows and doors, and - where feasible - heating that will supply more than one location (known as 'district heating') using renewable energy sources. The Council will look to replace gas boilers with renewable energy heating systems as the grid is decarbonised and energy costs become affordable.

Support our local economy

We know the challenges facing business owners – the high cost of housing, staff and skills shortages, the inequitable business rates system, and high energy costs among them. While these things require Government action at a national level, we can play our part locally.

Broadly, we do this by ensuring that the District remains a great place to live with first class leisure, recreation, and entertainment opportunities, backed by a clean environment and a welcoming community. Together this helps business recruitment and helps deliver, via resident and visitor footfall, customers to our many thriving service industries. We will continue to work with transport authorities to improve the ways that people can move around the District, as well as in and out of it.

Specifically, each year we hold our District Business Summit to bring local business owners and managers together to discuss the local commercial environment and hear back from our community on the matters that concern them.

Our Charter Market is growing and going from strength to strength after the ravages of the pandemic, bringing in footfall to the main shopping areas, giving traders a strong base from which to trade, and boosting the vibrancy of the City Centre. The Market was recognised in the Great British Markets Awards 2024 as the Best Large Outdoor Market in Britain – something we can all be proud of.

Enhance the District's cultural offer

Knowing the importance of cultural life and how it enriches residents and businesses both socially and financially, we are exploring ways to capitalise on our District's strengths and develop our potential.

Meanwhile, we continue to support the District's cultural and community infrastructure, the latest developments being The Eric Morecambe Centre in Harpenden, and our Sopwell Community and Cycling Centre in St Albans. Work to preserve and enhance the beautiful Victorian Cricket Pavilion in Clarence Park is our most recent refurbishment.

Promote equality, inclusion, and fairness

The composition of our community is ever-changing, and, while our traditions remain important, diversity undoubtedly enriches life locally. Tolerance, kindness, and a sense of belonging are what underpin community spirit.

The Council plays a key role in community leadership and place-shaping, and we believe equality, diversity and inclusion should be central to local service delivery. Our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy](#) sets out how we will make sure these are central to our approach in delivering services and conducting our day-to-day business.

Foreword by Amanda Foley, Chief Executive

Local residents expect and deserve value for money, efficient systems, and easy access to public services. The Council continues to develop, both as a modern organisation and as a focus for community development, despite the considerable financial challenges we face.

Over the last two years we have reshaped many of our services to make them fit for the digital age. By upgrading our digital parking services, for example, applications and payments are quicker and easier for residents, who increasingly expect access to services 24/7.

We have been successful in recent years in attracting inward investment funding to help us develop our services, provide energy efficient measures to Council-owned homes, and take forward our work to tackle the climate emergency.

Our structure has been redesigned to streamline and modernise the Council's operations, so they are more efficient and cost effective, and improve services for residents, businesses and visitors.

Last year we introduced a number of shared services with neighbouring councils – our legal, planning enforcement, and audit teams, for example, are now all shared services, providing additional resilience and efficiency. More shared services will follow over the next five years as we develop and extend our partnerships.

We continue to challenge ourselves to ensure we are at the leading edge of service development, benchmarking against other councils and developing our use of data to drive improvements and efficiency. In turn this is releasing the resources we need to continue to support those who still need more traditionally delivered services.

Our values and behaviours – caring for our community, working together, developing confident people – and our desire to be driven by the needs of local people and trusted as individuals and as a Council, are characteristics underpinning all our work. As we prepare this Council Plan, the Council has been named as the winner of the 2023 Local Government Chronicle's Workforce Award in the Best Next Generation Employer category for our entry 'Growing our own - bringing in and bringing on talent'. Our Local Government Association Peer Challenge this year – where we hosted a team comprised of senior leaders from other councils to look at how we operate and make recommendations for the future - commended the Council on its work in bringing in and developing graduates. In their report they said that 'the level of responsibility given and opportunities available to graduates is impressive'.

Many local people and businesses were hit hard by the pandemic and have been dealt a further blow with the increase in the cost of living. They continue to need additional support in greater numbers than before. Our teams work hard to ensure local people are supported, for example through our work with those facing homelessness and debt. Keeping people safe is also a focus through our community resilience and CCTV operations and our regulatory framework. Last year, for example, we introduced new regulations to ensure taxi drivers are obliged

to accept credit cards, as well as cash payments, so people can get home safely after a night out.

Our strong partnerships with third sector organisations are also helping to build the capacity needed to deliver in challenging circumstances. And with our partner councils, we are playing a central role in planning for the future growth of Hertfordshire and delivery of important climate change objectives.

Council Priorities

Combat the Climate Emergency

Activity	Lead Councillor, Officer, and Directorate	Outcomes	Anticipated Delivery Date
<p>Implement the Council's updated Sustainability and Climate Crisis Action Plan.</p> <p>This Action Plan sets out how we plan to reduce our emissions to Net Zero by 2030, focusing on the following themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance and leadership, • Energy and buildings, • Transport and air quality, • The circular economy, waste, and food, • The natural environment and biodiversity, • Water resources and flooding. 	<p>Vice Chair of Planning Policy & Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director – Built Environment</p> <p>Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support</p>	<p>Updated Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy published, and action plan implemented.</p>	<p>For the detailed strategy and plan see:</p> <p>www.stalbans.gov.uk/sustainability-and-climate-crisis-strategy</p> <p>(The specific actions are detailed in the plan – some are also specified below.)</p>

<p>Continue implementation of the Energy Strategy for Council housing stock using Government grant from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and funding from the Housing Revenue Account</p>	<p>Chair of Housing and Inclusion Committee</p> <p>Assistant Director – Housing</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>	<p>All Council owned homes carbon-net zero-ready by 2030.</p>	<p>Strategy took effect in January 2022.</p>
<p>Promote sustainability and energy efficiency in Council housing stock of all tenures as set out in the Council’s Housing Strategy: https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Housing%20Strategy%202023-26.pdf</p>	<p>Chair of Housing and Inclusion Committee</p> <p>Assistant Director – Housing</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>	<p>Sustainability and energy efficiency in Council housing stock of all tenures promoted.</p>	<p>The Housing Strategy runs through to 2026.</p>
<p>Development of the Local Plan</p> <p>We will include ambitious climate change policies in the emerging Local Plan.</p> <p>We will ensure that sufficient funding is available to support and resource the Planning Policy team to enable the completion and the positive and responsive implementation of the Local Plan strategies.</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Planning Policy and Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Spatial Planning Manager</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>	<p>Adopted up to date policies and spatial strategy to address climate emergency.</p>	<p>Adoption by March 2026.</p>
<p>Decarbonise all Council-operated built assets.</p> <p>We will reduce carbon emissions from all our buildings by improving the building fabric, increasing energy efficiency, and decarbonising the heating systems.</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Planning Policy and Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director</p>	<p>A decarbonised Council-operated estate.</p>	<p>Rolling programme up to 2030.</p>

	<p>– Built Environment</p> <p>Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support</p>		
<p>Communicate effectively with the local community to raise awareness, facilitate behaviour change, reduce District greenhouse gas emissions, improve the resilience of the District to climate change and support biodiversity.</p> <p>Through the St Albans Greener Together programme we will work proactively to help our community to learn how to save energy and reduce their environmental impacts.</p>	<p>Vice Chair of Planning Policy & Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director – Built Environment</p> <p>Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support</p>	<p>Residents know how to save energy and reduce their environmental impact.</p>	<p>The St Albans Greener Together programme continues until June 2025.</p>
<p>Manage Council land to promote climate resilience, support biodiversity, and create new habitats.</p> <p>We will work with others to make our land more wildlife friendly and help it cope with extreme weather events such as drought and flooding. We will support projects to restore and create new areas for wildlife to live and thrive.</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Planning Policy and Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director - Built Environment; Assistant Director – Public Realm</p> <p>Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support; Community and Place Delivery</p>	<p>Council land that has high resilience to climate change, supports biodiversity and creates new habitats.</p>	<p>Rolling programme up to 2030.</p>
<p>Improve air quality by reducing transport</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Planning Policy</p>	<p>Improved air quality.</p>	<p>By April 2025 - review of</p>

<p>emissions and supporting the transition to low-carbon vehicles.</p> <p>We will work with communities, businesses, and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to encourage the switch to low emission vehicles by improving the electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure and supporting new sustainable transport alternatives.</p>	<p>and Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director Regulatory and Compliance</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>		<p>existing EV charging infrastructure in the District and, with HCC; develop infrastructure to support existing and future need.</p>
<p>Decarbonise Council travel (including reviewing the fleet used by contractors when renewing contracts).</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Planning Policy and Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director – Built Environment</p> <p>Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support</p>	<p>Reduction in emissions from Council travel.</p>	<p>To be completed by 2027.</p>
<p>All Council buildings to have energy audits as a minimum by 2026.</p> <p>Decarbonisation plans to be developed for all Council buildings with existing audits by 2026.</p>	<p>Vice Chair of Planning Policy & Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director – Built Environment</p> <p>Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support</p>	<p>All Council buildings to have an energy audit.</p> <p>Those with existing audits to have decarbonisation plans.</p>	<p>To be completed by 2026.</p>

<p>Undertake a renewable energy assessment of Council assets by the end of 2024.</p>	<p>Vice Chair of Planning Policy & Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director – Built Environment</p> <p>Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support</p>	<p>Renewable energy assessment of the Council assets completed.</p>	<p>By the end of 2024.</p>
<p>Review Council's Tree Strategy including a Tree Safety Management policy.</p>	<p>Lead Councillor - Vice Chair of Planning Policy & Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer - Assistant Director – Public Realm</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>	<p>Harnessing the long-term benefits that trees bring to local communities.</p>	<p>2024/2025.</p>
<p>Develop effective communication materials to promote and assist community litter-pick groups.</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Vice Chair of Public Realm Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director – Public Realm</p> <p>Directorate Community & Place Delivery</p>	<p>Effective communication materials developed.</p>	<p>April 2024.</p>

Deliver More Social Housing

Activity	Lead Councillors, Officer, and Directorate	Outcomes	Anticipated Delivery Date
<p>Complete the redevelopment of sites at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hedges, Woolam Crescent; • King Offa, Norman Close; • Abbots Avenue West; • Drakes Drive/ Frobisher Road. 	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Housing and Inclusion</p> <p>Lead Officer: Strategic Housing Manager</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>	<p>Delivery of new social rented housing for applicants on the Housing Register</p>	<p>In line with Property Board programming.</p>
<p>Ensure a sufficient supply of temporary accommodation, as set out in the Council's Housing Strategy: https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Housing%20Strategy%202023-26.pdf</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Housing and Inclusion</p> <p>Lead Officer: Strategic Housing Manager</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>	<p>A sufficient supply of temporary accommodation.</p>	<p>The Housing Strategy runs through to 2026.</p>
<p>Identify a 5-year pipeline of Council-owned sites for use in social housing development /enablement</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Housing and Inclusion Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Strategic Housing Manager</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>	<p>A 5-year pipeline of Council-owned sites for use in social housing development /enablement identified (subject to viability).</p>	<p>2024/25.</p>

<p>Evaluate the benefits of setting up an interdisciplinary Legal Project Team to be better able to support housing development projects to support the delivery of more social housing.</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Vice Chair of Strategy and Resources</p> <p>Lead Officer: Head of Legal Shared Service</p> <p>Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support</p>	<p>An overarching legal service (centre of excellence) that can advise on different legal issues relating to local authority housing development projects while maintaining low legal costs and a joined-up approach.</p> <p>Effective procurement of service providers ensuring speed of appointment and value for money.</p>	<p>Evaluation and task scoping completed by June 2024. Drafting of toolkits to be commenced by September 2024. Preparation of Framework tenders to be completed by November 2024.</p>
<p>Redevelopment of Telford Court site</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Housing and Inclusion Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Strategic Housing Manager</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>	<p>A redeveloped site at Telford Court.</p>	<p>Redevelopment stage will commence when the building is fully vacant.</p>

Support Our Local Economy

Activity	Lead Councillors, Officer, and Directorate	Outcome	Anticipated Delivery Date
<p>Establish a baseline for the number of contracts awarded to locally based companies and bring forward options for encouraging local companies to submit tenders once the details of the new Procurement Act are known.</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Vice Chair of Strategy and Resources</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director – Finance</p> <p>Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support</p>	<p>More locally based suppliers encouraged to submit tenders to supply the Council.</p>	<p>Once details of the new Procurement Act are known.</p>
<p>Evaluate the benefits of bespoke framework agreements and encourage participation in the frameworks by local businesses in providing goods and services to the Council (e.g., legal and consultancy services for housing development projects).</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Vice Chair of Strategy and Resources</p> <p>Lead Officer: Head of Legal Shared Service</p> <p>Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support</p>	<p>Effective procurement of goods and services providing speed of appointment and value for money.</p>	<p>Evaluate the benefits of framework agreements by September 2024, and preparation of framework tenders by November 2024.</p>
<p>Modernisation of equipment at Drovers Way and Russell Avenue Car parks.</p>	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Public Realm Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director Regulatory and Compliance</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>	<p>Improved parking facilities for residents.</p>	<p>From April 2024.</p>

Councillor engagement in Town Planning pre-decision advice for developers and capital investment in Development Management System	<p>Lead Councillor: Chair of Planning Policy and Climate Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Development Manager</p> <p>Directorate: Community and Place Delivery</p>	Improved town planning advice and service.	From May 2024.
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Enhance the District's Cultural Offer

Activity	Lead Councillor, Officer and Directorate	Outcomes	Anticipated Delivery Date
Deliver and license additional events in council-owned parks and green spaces (subject to planning permission approval) to offer opportunities to bring our community together.	<p>Lead Councillor: Vice Chair of Public Realm Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Assistant Director - Public Realm</p> <p>Directorate: Community & Place Delivery</p>	Increase in events income in line with budget requirements.	March 2025.
Delivery of Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, Activity Plan*	<p>Lead Councillor: Vice Chair, Public Realm Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Arts, Tourism, Heritage and Culture Manager</p> <p>Directorate: Community & Place Delivery</p>	A range of arts and community benefits outlined in the Arts Council England Portfolio Organisation Activity Plan.	<p>Programme in 2024/25 includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital re-interpretation of Verulamium Park. Revisiting the Romans - a research and re-display project of parts of Verulamium Museum's

			<p>Roman collections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversify our school visitors targeting children with lower levels of cultural engagement. • Programme of co-curated community-led exhibitions. <p>*Programme subject to change under Arts Council funding specification*</p>
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Promote Equality, Inclusion and Fairness

Activity	Lead Councillor, Officer, and Directorate	Outcomes	Anticipated Delivery Date
Refresh the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.	<p>Lead Councillor: Vice Chair of Housing and Inclusion Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Strategy and Policy Manager</p> <p>Directorate: Strategy, Policy and Transformation</p>	An updated and relevant Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.	November 2024.
Customer delivery improvements – increasing digital services and improved customer experience.	<p>Lead Councillor – Chair of Strategy & Resources Committee</p> <p>Lead Officer: Customer Delivery Manager</p>	Improved customer experience in accessing services and allow a reduction in overhead costs as this is embedded.	A developing use of customer data and insight between 2024-2029, learning from customer interactions,

	Directorate: Customer, Business & Corporate Support		surveys and website usage.
Explore further shared services with councils in SW Hertfordshire.	Lead Councillor: Vice Chair of Strategy & Resources Committee Lead Officers: Strategic Directors Directorates: All	Efficient and resilient Council services.	Further options to be delivered during 2024/25.
Work in partnership with local NHS partners on emerging integrated care system, including prevention, as the role of Districts and associated funding becomes clearer.	Lead Councillor: Chair of Strategy and Resources Lead Officer: Strategy and Policy Manager Directorate: Strategy, Policy and Transformation	Improved integrated care system in the District.	Longer term project – specific timing to be confirmed.