

Matter 8 – Community Infrastructure

Issue 1 – Community Infrastructure – Policies SP7, SP14 and COM1-COM4

Q1 Are Policies SP7 and SP14 justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy? Will they enable the timely provision of new or enhanced infrastructure where needed to support growth proposed in the Plan?

Are Policies SP7 and SP14 justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy?

- 1.1 Yes, Policies SP7 and SP14 are considered to be justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy. The NPPF at paragraph 35 when considering the tests of ‘soundness’ sets out:
- b) Justified – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;*
- c) Effective – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and*
- d) Consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.*
- 1.2 In respect of paragraph 35 a), the approach set out in SP7 and SP14 has emerged in particular from detailed discussions with infrastructure providers through work on the SADC Infrastructure Delivery Plan (INF 01.01 - SADC Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2024)), through specific discussions based on Local Plan Regulation 18 responses and other discussions. It is based on proportionate evidence, often evidence from the infrastructure providers themselves.
- 1.3 In respect of paragraph 35 b), the approach set out in SP7 and SP14 has been shaped by effective joint working with a variety of relevant bodies, including in particular Hertfordshire County Council for all sites and Dacorum Borough Council in relation to Hemel Garden Communities. There has been further effective joint working on a cross-boundary basis on a south-west Hertfordshire basis on some topics and bilaterally with Hertsmere with regard to Broad Location B8 – Harper Lane.
- 1.4 In respect of paragraph 35 c), the approach set out in SP7 and SP14 is considered to be consistent with national policy, which emphasises the importance of delivery of community infrastructure and infrastructure more widely.
- 1.5 LPCD 03.01 - St Albans Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Report (2024) considers community infrastructure and making ‘*sufficient provision for and access to community infrastructure in sustainable locations*’. It states that:

6.15.10 ... the following bullet points summarise appraisal findings under each of the sustainability topic headings in turn:

- Accessibility (to community infrastructure) – a clear focus of the strategy is directing growth broadly in line with the settlement hierarchy and in response to community infrastructure capacity issues and opportunities, most notably by supporting delivery of several new schools, including to address existing issues....

9.2 Accessibility (to community infrastructure)

9.2.1 The appraisal in Section 6 finds the proposed spatial strategy to perform very well, primarily due to a focus on directing growth broadly in line with the settlement hierarchy and in response to community infrastructure capacity issues and opportunities, most notably by supporting several new schools.

- Chapter 7 – of the plan presents a suite of policies dealing with ‘Community Infrastructure’. Most of the policies are fairly standard, but there is some local specificity, e.g. in respect of St Albans FC. N.B. on the matter of ‘standard’ policies, it should be noted that National Development Management Policies are anticipated, although there is uncertainty on the timescale for their implementation.

9.2.5 In conclusion, a significant positive effect is predicted on the baseline, accounting for both the spatial strategy and a suite of development management policies, and accounting for established objectives. Growth is distributed in line with the settlement hierarchy, and there is a strong focus on strategic sites (not only HGC) suited to delivering community infrastructure benefits.

9.7.5 An important consideration is that a good proportion of growth will come forward at sites above 100 homes in size, at which scale developments can be expected to deliver community infrastructure such as play space and open space.

- 1.6 NB: Following discussions with the NHS and HCC, there are proposed Main Modifications for Policy SP7, as set out in SADC/ED85A and SADC/ED85C and as set out below.

Amended paragraph 7.5 as follows:

7.5 Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board are currently working with Hertfordshire County Council and local NHS organisations to consider the effective delivery of current and future health and social care provision. Within the District there are a range of local healthcare facilities including an acute care hospital, emergency ambulance, GP surgeries, community health services, mental health services, community pharmacy, dentistry, and ophthalmology services. The District has one main NHS hospital at St Albans City Hospital operated by West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust (WHTHT) who are committed to enhancing and upgrading the existing healthcare provision at the hospital. There is also the Kingsley Green mental health and learning disability site, which opened in 2014 and is operated by Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust (HPFT). A limited number of services are also provided at Harpenden Memorial Hospital.

~~Existing provision also includes community health facilities, GP surgeries, dentists and chemists.~~

Amend paragraph 7.7 as follows:

7.7 The key emergency facilities in the District are two police stations at St Albans and Harpenden; four fire stations at St Albans, Redbourn, Harpenden and Wheathampstead; and two ambulance stations response posts (located at fire stations) at Harpenden and St Albans.

Amend clause ii) of Policy SP7 as follows:

ii. Secondary and primary schools, Sixth Forms and further education, early education including nursery provision and childcare provision, and special needs services;

Add new clause viii) to Policy SP7 as follows:

*vi. Cemeteries and burial and crematorium facilities; ~~and~~
vii. Flood defences; and
viii. Recycling centres.*

Amend clause i) of Policy SP7 as follows:

i. A range of local healthcare facilities including acute care hospitals, emergency ambulance facilities, GPs surgeries, community health services, mental health services, dentists, ~~community~~ pharmacy and ophthalmology services;

Amend clause iii) of Policy SP7 as follows:

iii. ~~Ambulance~~, ~~p~~Police & firefighting facilities;

- 1.7 NB: Following discussions with HCC and upon further reflection, there are proposed Main Modifications for Policy SP14, as set out in SADC/ED85A and SADC/ED85C and as set out below:

Amend clause g) of Policy SP14 as follows:

g) Expect that infrastructure requirements set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and the Hemel Garden Communities IDP will be delivered. Where infrastructure requirements could render major development unviable, proposals should be supported by an independent and transparent viability assessment that accords with Planning Practice Guidance. Where proposals comprise part of the HGC Growth Area, a Broad Location, Large Site or Medium Site, the viability appraisal shall include details of its relationship and contribution to respectively the relevant HGC Growth Area or a Broad Location, Large Site or Medium Site allocation-wide financial appraisal. The same approach will be taken for major development windfall sites. Where viability constraints are demonstrated by evidence, the Council will:

i. Use a financial review mechanism to review the viability of the development at the completion to determine whether the viability has improved; and

i-ii. Prioritise (alongside other developments) developer provision / contributions

for critical, essential and required infrastructure based upon the detail of requirements outlined in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan; and / or

~~ii-iii.~~ Use an appropriate mechanism to defer part of the developer contributions requirement to a later date; or

~~iii-iv.~~ Refuse planning permission if the development would be unsustainable without the inclusion of the unfunded infrastructure requirements, taking into account reasonable contributions from elsewhere.

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~~ii-iii.~~ Use an appropriate mechanism to defer part of the developer contributions requirement to a later date; or

~~iii-iv.~~ Refuse planning permission if the development would be unsustainable without the inclusion of the unfunded infrastructure requirements, taking into account reasonable contributions from elsewhere.

Amend clause a)(vi) of Strategic Policy SP14 as follows:

vi. Fund maintenance and / or operating costs of any such new infrastructure provision and / or demonstrate a financially robust and sustainable proposal for funding such costs. Where the Council facilitates or sets up an overarching stewardship body for any particular area or site, the costs of doing so, including retrospective set-up contributions, will be borne by the development within that area or site and secured by a legal agreement.

Add new clause ba) to Strategic Policy SP14 after clause b) as follows:

ba) Ensure access is made available at nil cost to those delivering strategic infrastructure for the purpose of delivering that strategic infrastructure and that the proposed development is designed to ensure good connectivity between the proposed development and adjacent sites including vehicular, cycle and pedestrian/bridleway access without impediment to or financial consideration for such connectivity. Where appropriate developers will be expected to collaborate on the provision of infrastructure which is needed to serve more than one site;

Add new clause h) to Strategic Policy SP14 as follows:

h) Where appropriate, such contributions towards infrastructure referred to in the IDPs shall be payable where infrastructure has been forward funded or delivered by others but is necessary for the delivery of the development.
Will they enable the timely provision of new or enhanced infrastructure where needed to support growth proposed in the Plan?

- 1.8 Yes, it is considered that they will enable the timely provision of new or enhanced infrastructure where needed to support growth proposed in the Plan. This is in particular set out in SP14 at:

Strategic Policy SP14 - Delivery of Infrastructure Proposals should make provision for infrastructure that is necessary in order to accommodate additional demands resulting from the development. The Council will therefore:

a) Require developers to provide, finance and / or contribute towards provision which is fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development. This includes on-site and / or off-site improvements and infrastructure necessary to mitigate the impacts of the development in order to:

i. Ensure appropriate provision of facilities and infrastructure for new residents;

ii. Help address cumulative impacts that might arise across multiple developments;

iii. Avoid placing unreasonable additional burdens on the existing community or existing infrastructure;

iv. Mitigate any adverse impacts;

v. Enhance existing infrastructure, where appropriate, or make good their loss or damage; and

vi. Fund maintenance and / or operating costs of any such new provision.

b) Ensure new infrastructure to support new development is operational no later than the completion of development or phase in which it is needed, unless otherwise agreed with relevant providers;

c) Refuse planning permission where appropriate agreements or processes ensuring criteria (a) and (b) can be met are not in place;

d) Require proposals to have regard to any guidance or requirements in relation to planning obligations and any Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), or their replacement;

e) Work with landowners, developers and other agencies in facilitating the delivery of sites identified in the Local Plan and seek to overcome known obstacles;

f) Require developers to fully justify their approach if they consider that viability issues impact the delivery of key infrastructure and / or mitigation measures; and

g) Expect that infrastructure requirements set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan will be delivered. Where infrastructure requirements could render major development unviable, proposals should be supported by an independent and transparent viability assessment that accords with Planning Practice Guidance. Where viability constraints are demonstrated by evidence, the Council will:

i. Prioritise developer contributions for critical, essential and required infrastructure based upon the detail of requirements outlined in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan; and / or

ii. Use an appropriate mechanism to defer part of the developer contributions requirement to a later date; or

iii. Refuse planning permission if the development would be unsustainable without the inclusion of the unfunded infrastructure requirements, taking into account reasonable contributions from elsewhere.

1.9 Policy SP14 can be read in conjunction with the following documents which provide more detail about infrastructure requirements:

- o INF 01.01 - SADC Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2024)
- o INF 01.02 - Appendix A1 SADC Infrastructure Schedule (2024)
- o Local Plan Part B – site specific requirements

Q2 What is the justification for the requirements for new schools under Policy COM1(d)? Is the approach consistent with paragraph 99 of the Framework, which states that local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to providing a sufficient choice of school places?

What is the justification for the requirements for new schools under Policy COM1(d)?

- 2.1 The requirements have primarily come from discussion with HCC as the Education Authority, who are supportive of the approach at Policy COM1 d). This sits in a particular context in this District where there are several schools adjoining St Albans and Harpenden that lie within the Green Belt and which have been successfully expanded and redeveloped in recent years, whilst remaining in the Green Belt. HCC, schools, Councillors and residents in the District have been clear in wanting a clear Policy approach, as set out in COM1d, to guide future such developments. It is also considered important to note that identical wording was included in the Local Plan Regulation 18 version.
- 2.2 The overall context of school need and provision and the Policy approach in which COM1 was conceived was directly discussed at Planning Policy and Climate Committee (and its predecessor committees) on several occasions during the development of the Plan. This includes most recently on 25 June 2024, as set out in M81Q2 - Appendix 1 - Local Plan Evidence – Education Need and Provision.
- 2.3 The evidence base for schools includes the following:
- INF 04.02 - HCC Feasibility Work List (2017)
 - INF 05.01 - St Albans Primary School Site Search Report Part 1 (Updated 2017)
 - INF 05.02 - St Albans Primary School Site Search Report Part 2 (Updated 2017)
 - INF 05.03 - St Albans Primary School Site Search Report Part 3 (Updated 2017)
 - INF 05.04 - St Albans Primary School Site Search Report Part 4 (Updated 2017)
 - INF 05.05 - St Albans Primary School Site Search Report Part 5 (Updated 2017)
 - INF 05.06 - St Albans Primary School Site Search Report Part 6 (Updated 2017)
 - INF 06.01 - Existing Secondary School Sites HCC (2011)
 - INF 06.02 - Potential Secondary School Sites HCC (2011)

- INF 06.03 - Town Planning Appraisal Summary Report (2011)
- INF 06.04 - Highways and Access Appraisal (2011)
- INF 13.01 - HGC secondary education paper – HCC study part 1 (2020)
- INF 13.02 - HGC secondary education paper – HCC study part 2 (2022)
- HCC Regulation 18 Response (Comment Ref 1085) Appendix 2 Education Statement

- 2.4 LPCD 03.01 - St Albans Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Report (2024) considers community infrastructure and making 'sufficient provision for and access to community infrastructure in sustainable locations'. It includes references to schools:

6.15.10 ... the following bullet points summarise appraisal findings under each of the sustainability topic headings in turn:

- *Accessibility (to community infrastructure) – a clear focus of the strategy is directing growth broadly in line with the settlement hierarchy and in response to community infrastructure capacity issues and opportunities, most notably by supporting delivery of several new schools, including to address existing issues....*

...

9.2 Accessibility (to community infrastructure)

9.2.1 The appraisal in Section 6 finds the proposed spatial strategy to perform very well, primarily due to a focus on directing growth broadly in line with the settlement hierarchy and in response to community infrastructure capacity issues and opportunities, most notably by supporting several new schools.

9.2.2 • East St Albans – performs very well as it should be able to deliver / facilitate delivery of (henceforth 'deliver') a secondary school, a primary school and a local centre (plus other community infrastructure to be expected of any strategic allocation).

9.2.3 • Hemel Garden Communities – the St Albans components of HGC would likely deliver a new secondary school, two large primary schools and a range of other community, transport and green infrastructure....

• Other strategic allocations – Table 3.1 within the plan document lists the strategic allocations in size order and clearly sets out what each will deliver (or facilitate delivery of) in addition to new homes. There is a clear correlation between scale and what can be delivered / achieved, with points to note as follows:

– East St Albans – to reiterate is strongly supported in 'accessibility' terms. – West London Colney – is also notable for delivering a secondary school alongside a very modest number of new homes (324), which is a reflection of the County Council being the landowner.

– West Redbourn – here there has been positive discussions with the landowners (the site is in multiple landownership, and a planning application has been submitted for part of the site... such that there is now confidence that the site will deliver a new primary school (alongside 545 homes).

— North St Albans and NE Harpenden — are the two largest strategic allocations other than HGC...Neither site will deliver a secondary school, but there is no clear need for one at either location; also, NE Harpenden benefits from being located near adjacent to a secondary school with capacity (indeed, one delivered only in recent years). Both sites will deliver a primary school and a local centre, as well as other targeted infrastructure benefits.

- In-combination impacts – planning for secondary school capacity is a challenging issue locally, with a need to account for considerable uncertainties. The County Council commented in detail through the Regulation 18 consultation and were broadly supportive of the proposed strategy. In turn, there is clear merit in taking forward the strategy from Regulation 18 with only fairly modest adjustments.

2.5 NB: Following discussions with HCC, as set out in SADC/ED85A and SADC/ED85C, there are proposed Main Modifications for Policy COM1 as follows:

Amend clause e) of Policy COM1 as follows:

~~e) St Albans is an area of high primary school need and with growth there will likely be a long term need for the provision of a new primary school. A site has been identified at the former Ariston site.~~ St Albans has an identified need for a new secondary school in the long term. A site has been identified at East St Albans near Oaklands College.

Associated change to Policies Map

Amend clause a) of Policy COM1 as follows:

a) Major residential development will be required to make appropriate provision for new schools and early years facilities (~~nursery including 0-2, 3-4, and 5-11-year-olds and childcare 0-2-year-olds~~) and post-16 education provision either on-site or by making a suitable contribution towards the improvement or expansion of nearby existing facilities.

Add new paragraph 7.19A after paragraph 7.19 as follows:

7.19A New schools may include enhanced sports facilities to meet the Council's sports and leisure strategy and responsibilities. Where there is an intention to deliver enhanced sports facilities on a new school site, the Council as the local authority with sports and leisure responsibilities will make appropriate contributions to the enhancements through planning obligations or other funding mechanisms. The policy requirement for a community use agreement alone does not imply that enhanced facilities must be provided. Schools without enhanced facilities can also support community access but will be operationally limited and may not be sufficient to meet a formal sports and leisure need.

Is the approach consistent with paragraph 99 of the Framework, which states that local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to providing a sufficient choice of school places?

- 2.6 Yes, it is considered that the is approach consistent with paragraph 99 of the Framework, which states that local planning authorities should take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to providing a sufficient choice of school places. This proactive, positive and collaborative approach is set out above, including the extensive, proactive, positive and collaborative engagement with HCC, schools, Councillors and residents in the District (including as set out in M8I1Q2 - Appendix 1 - Local Plan Evidence – Education Need and Provision).

Q3 What is the justification for stating through Policy COM1 that playing pitches must be for community use?

- 3.1 The justification is essentially twofold. Firstly, in order to assist with meeting the Council's playing pitch strategy and outdoor sport responsibilities (LCRT 02.01 - Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy & Action Plan (2023)) and this is as agreed with Sport England.
- 3.2 The recommendations of the LCRT 02.01 - Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy & Action Plan forms part of the local plan evidence base and includes reference to the role of education facilities in providing outdoor sports facilities:

Page 43 OBJECTIVE 1 To protect the existing supply of outdoor sports facilities where it is needed to meet current and future needs...

Recommendation (c) - Maximise community use of education facilities where there is a need to do so.

To maximise community use a more coherent, structured relationship with schools is recommended. The ability to access good facilities within the local community is vital to any sports organisation, yet many clubs struggle to find good quality places to play and train. In St Albans, pricing policies at facilities can be a barrier to access at some education sites but physical access, poor quality and resistance from schools to open up provision is also an issue, especially at some private schools and academies.

A large number of sporting facilities are located on education sites and making these available to sports clubs can offer significant benefits to both the schools and local clubs, as well helping to reduce identified shortfalls. It is, however, common for school provision not to be fully maximised for community use, even on established community use sites.

In some instances, facilities are unavailable for community use due to poor quality and therefore remedial works will be required before it can be established. The low

carrying capacity of these facilities sometimes leads to them being played to capacity or overplayed simply due to curricular and extra-curricular use, meaning they cannot accommodate any additional use by the community.

Although there are a growing number of academies over which the Council has little or no control, it is still important to understand the significance of such sites and attempt to work with the schools where there are opportunities for community use. In addition, relevant NGBs have a role to play in supporting the Council to deliver upon this recommendation and communicating with schools where necessary to address shortfalls in provision.

Where new schools are provided in major new residential developments, they should be designed to facilitate community access, with opportunities for meeting the community's outdoor sports needs explored at the outset to maximise the potential for facility provision to be made within the developments, if appropriate. An example of this is ensuring the provision of adult, youth 11v11 and/or youth 9v9 grass football pitches, given current shortfalls and their suitability for the playing format of students, or multi-use provision such as court that can accommodate both tennis and netball activity.

As detailed earlier, NGBs, the Active Partnership and Sport England can often help to negotiate and engage with schools where the local authority may have limited direct influence. This is particularly the case at sites that have received funding from the relevant bodies or are going to receive funding in the future as community access can be a condition of the funding agreement.

...

Page 54 OBJECTIVE 3 To provide new outdoor sports facilities where feasible and there is current or future demand to do so....

Securing community use at school sites including those currently unavailable....

Large scale housing developments and the establishment of new schools may also necessitate the need for new provision. Where new schools are developed, there is an opportunity to combine the building of the school to the development of a new multi-sport site that will be of a benefit to the School as well as the wider community.

- 3.3 Secondly, there has been a very successful track record in recent years of new and existing schools coming forward with community use agreements for a wide range of community and sports facilities that have been hugely beneficial to local youth and adult sports and leisure groups and are enormously valued by these user groups, residents and councillors. The intention is to continue and to build on these successes.
- 3.4 One recent excellent example is the Katherine Warington school adjoining Harpenden, which opened in 2019. As set out on its website at:
<https://kwschool.co.uk/facilities-lettings/>

Facilities / Lettings

Here at Katherine Warrington School we are not only committed to the development of the active and creative minds of our students, we are also committed to supporting our local community. The site sits within over 47 acres of land with some impressive facilities for hire.

We are keen to work with local clubs, organisations, and individuals to find the best solution possible to suit your needs. For more information, and to see how our facilities could complement you, please email us at lettings@kwschool.co.uk or call us on 01582314751.

You can also view and book our facilities online on SchoolHire – <https://schoolhire.co.uk/harpenden/kw>

The areas we currently have for hire are the following:

Classrooms

A typical classroom measures approx 7.5m x 7.5m.

All our classrooms can be adaptable to your teaching and training needs, and the rooms can be set up to your individual requirements. Also ideal spaces for club meets, activity groups.

Main Hall – Approx 21m x 12m

This space comes complete with sound, lighting and a large projection screen, as well as bleacher seating for 180 and additional seating to accommodate 250-300 comfortably. Ideal for shows and performances, exercise classes, dance and music events, and larger scale conferences; and should extra space be required, this room can be paired with our Food Hall to extend the space even further.

Food Hall – Approx 21m x 15m

Directly opposite our Main Hall – This area can seat 250-300 for lunch/dinner functions with stylish wooden benches.

Drama Studio – Approx 10m x 9m

This space comes complete with sound, lighting and a large projection screen. Ideal for smaller dance/activity groups or smaller performances.

Sports Hall – Approx 33m x 20m

Sitting in a purpose-built block to the rear of the school, our Sports Hall has everything you need for indoor activities. We have two separate changing areas, a small reception space and can accommodate:

1 Netball Court

4 Badminton Courts

1 Basketball Court

1 indoor 5 aside football pitch

This area also has its own direct-access carpark

Dance/Activity Studio – Approx 20m x 12m

An excellent indoor space complete with sound system. Available to hire for martial arts, dance classes, fitness classes etc.

Netball/Tennis Courts (outdoors)

Our outdoor courts have markings for four tennis courts, all of which are fenced off and securely enclosed.

Fields

All our fields have been built to Sport England standard and an amazing facility available for training or matches during the evenings/weekends. We have access to 3 full size football pitches, 1 smaller training pitch and a full size Rugby Pitch and Athletics track.

Community Use Agreement

We have entered into a Community Use Agreement with St Albans District Council and Herts Sports Partnership to ensure the best community access to our facilities. A copy of our Community Use Agreement can be found below.

- 3.5 NB: As set out in SADC/ED85A and SADC/ED85C, there are proposed Main Modifications to include new supporting text at 7.19A.

7.19A New schools may include enhanced sports facilities to meet the Council's sports and leisure strategy and responsibilities. Where there is an intention to deliver enhanced sports facilities on a new school site, the Council as the local authority with sports and leisure responsibilities will make appropriate contributions to the enhancements through planning obligations or other funding mechanisms. The policy requirement for a community use agreement alone does not imply that enhanced facilities must be provided. Schools without enhanced facilities can also support community access but will be operationally limited and may not be sufficient to meet a formal sports and leisure need.

Q4 Is Policy COM2 justified and effective in seeking to support expansion, but only where it minimises impacts on openness and the purposes of including land within the Green Belt?

- 4.1 Yes, Policy COM2 is considered to be justified and effective in seeking to support expansion, but only where it minimises impacts on openness and the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.
- 4.2 As set out in the supporting text at paragraphs 7.15 and 7.16, the policy is intended to be generally in line with the approach set out in the NPPF

Cemeteries and Burial Grounds

7.15 National guidance sets out that the provision of appropriate facilities for cemeteries and burial grounds are not classified as inappropriate development in the Green Belt as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

7.16 Evidence suggests that additional cemetery facilities and burial grounds will be required during the Plan period. London Road cemetery is currently considered to be the most suitable and sustainable site for providing additional capacity for the Council and for residents.

- 4.3 The most relevant part of the NPPF sets out:

154. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

...

b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

- 4.4 The issue of cemetery provision is primarily addressed through LCRT 05.01 - Cemetery Provision for Local Plan (2019). Expansion of the existing London Road cemetery is identified in LCRT 05.01 as the most appropriate solution over the Plan period. It can be noted that the Covid pandemic and changes in customer preference and practice have affected the timescale over which additional provision is likely to be needed (existing provision will suffice for longer than previously envisaged), but additional provision is still likely to be needed here within the Plan period.

Q5 For soundness, should Policy COM2 refer to the most up to date guidance on groundwater protection?

- 5.1 Yes. This is understood to be a reference to the updated Environment Agency guidance "Guidance "Protecting groundwater from human burials - Updated 25 June 2025" as can be seen at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-groundwater-from-human-burials/protecting-groundwater-from-human-burials#:~:text=All%20existing%20cemeteries%20that%20do,and%20fractures%20in%20the%20rocks> . On the assumption that this is the correct reference, the

Council is happy to propose a Main Modification to include that reference, as an addition as a new COM2 e).

5.2 A Main Modification is proposed as follows:

Add new clause COM2 e):

Proposals should have regard to the to the most up to date guidance on groundwater protection, currently the Environment Agency guidance “Protecting groundwater from human burials - Updated 25 June 2025”, or any successor document:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-groundwater-from-human-burials/protecting-groundwater-from-human-burials#:~:text=All%20existing%20cemeteries%20that%20do,and%20fractures%20in%20the%20rocks>

Q6 Is Policy COM3 effective in seeking to retain community, leisure and sports facilities, or is this achieved by other policies in the Plan?

- 6.1 Yes, it is considered that Policy COM3 is effective in seeking to retain community, leisure and sports facilities-
- 6.2 It is considered important to note that internal SADC consultees and also Sports England have been supportive of Policy COM3.
- 6.3 Evidence includes that set out in LCRT 01.01 - St Albans Open Space Study (2024) and LCRT 02.01 - Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy & Action Plan (2023) shows that the District's community, leisure and sports facilities are hugely valued locally and that there are in some instances deficits in provision that this policy will assist in seeking to address. In the IDP (INF 01.01 - SADC Infrastructure Delivery Plan (2024)), for each infrastructure type, an assessment was made of the current levels of provision and capacity, and this also provides an overview of existing community facilities that policy would be seeking to retain.
- 6.4 With regard to retention of community, leisure and sports facilities, Policy COM3 should be read with Strategic Policy SP7 - Community Infrastructure. It is considered that effectiveness of Policy COM3 is enhanced when Policy COM 3 and Policy SP7 are read together and this approach reduces need for duplication of text in both policies:
- 6.5 *In relation to community infrastructure the Council:*
- a) *Strongly supports and seeks to protect existing community infrastructure in the District;*
-
- d) *Will not permit development which would lead to the loss of community infrastructure, or land or buildings previously used for such purposes, unless replacement of equivalent or better provision in terms of quality and quantity in a*

suitable location is provided, or unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the building or facility is no longer required.

- 6.6 Policy SP7 also sets out a broad range of infrastructure types that would be subject of policy requirements.

In relation to the above, community infrastructure includes the following categories:

- i. A range of local healthcare facilities including acute care hospitals, GPs surgeries, dentists, community pharmacy and ophthalmology services;*
- ii. Secondary and primary schools, Sixth Forms and further education, early education including nursery provision and special needs services;*
- iii. Ambulance, police & firefighting facilities;*
- iv. Facilities such as community centres, theatres, and new or improved village halls;*
- v. Libraries, sports and leisure facilities, sports pitches, cultural services including places of worship, public realm, public art and Public Houses;*
- vi. Cemeteries and burial and crematorium facilities; and*
- vii. Flood defences*

- 6.7 It is considered that Policy COM3 would be effective in seeking to retain community, leisure and sports facilities, particularly when read in conjunction with Policy SP7.

Q7 Is Policy COM4 positively prepared in seeking to allow for the appropriate reuse of vacant land and buildings?

- 7.1 Yes, it is considered that Policy COM4 is positively prepared in seeking to allow for the appropriate reuse of vacant land and buildings, in the specific context of pubs in this District.

- 7.2 Pubs are important nationally, as reflected in the NPPF:

88. Planning policies and decisions should enable:

...

d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

- 7.3 Pubs are particularly valued locally in the District and this has been reflected in discussion at Planning Policy & Climate Committee (and its predecessor committees) over several years. This is reflected in the draft Plan at:

Public houses

7.20 National policy sets out that that Councils should plan positively for the provision and use of community facilities such as public houses. They also play a role in supporting rural communities and the rural economy.

7.21 Pubs are an important and distinctive part of the District's built, social and cultural heritage. Whether alone, or as part of a cultural mix of activities or venues, pubs are often an integral part of local culture and the economy. An individual pub can be at the heart of a community's social life, providing a local meeting place, a venue for entertainment or a focus for social gatherings.

- 7.4 For further local context, CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale's first ever branch was opened in St Albans in 1972 and it continues to be headquartered in St Albans.
- 7.5 Policy COM4 iterated between the Local Plan Regulation 18 version and the Regulation 19 version to reflect locally expressed concern about the potential loss of public houses and the detrimental impact that can have on local communities. Policy COM4 parts a) and b) are the same, but parts c) and d) were added at Regulation 19 stage.
- 7.6 Policy COM4 does set a high bar for the potential loss of public houses, but in context, that high bar is considered to be entirely appropriate. Should that bar be met, COM4 does allow for the appropriate reuse of vacant land and buildings over a reasonable timeframe and after reasonable endeavours have been undertaken.