

IN THE MATTER OF THE ST ALBANS CITY AND DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN**OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE COUNCIL**

1. The draft Local Plan that has been submitted for Examination provides a positive Vision for the future of the District. It meets the development needs of the area for housing and employment land in full; will improve the environment and biodiversity; and mitigate and adapt to climate change. It provides for essential new and improved infrastructure of all forms, including schools, GP surgeries, public transport, cycle paths, play areas, parks and access to nature. It has been positively prepared, is justified, effective and consistent with national policy. In total, the evidence clearly demonstrates that St Albans City & District Council (SADC) has met the Duty to Cooperate (DtC) and all other legal and regulatory requirements.
2. With regard to the DtC, SADC has engaged with the relevant DtC bodies from the earliest stages in Plan-making all the way until Submission, in order to maximise the effectiveness of the preparation of the draft Local Plan (and other activities) so far as they relate to strategic matters. The engagement has been on-going, constructive and active.
3. This engagement has included all “strategic matters” relating to the sustainable development or use of land or infrastructure that has or would have a significant impact on at least two planning areas.
4. No DtC body, including all relevant Local Authorities (including Hertfordshire County Council) or key statutory consultee (Natural England, Historic England, Environment Agency and National Highways) considers that the Council has not met the ‘Duty to Cooperate’.
5. There are demonstrable effective DtC outcomes across the whole range of relevant matters. These include in particular:
6. All the South West Herts Councils have agreed the joint South West Herts Housing Market Area and all the South West Herts Councils support SADC’s approach to meeting SADC’s ‘Standard Method’ calculation of housing needs in full within SADC’s area.

7. All the South West Herts Councils have agreed the joint South West Herts Functional Economic Market Area. They also all support SADC's approach to meeting SADC's employment needs in full and providing significant employment land within SADC's area, within Hemel Garden Communities, that supports Dacorum Borough Council's and potentially wider South West Herts employment land needs.
8. SADC has from the start of this Local Plan 2041 process been very mindful of being in the rare position of having had to withdraw two Local Plans previously (in 2016 and 2020) due to issues with the DtC. This current situation is completely different, with the DtC matters that impacted those previous two draft Plans having been wholly and successfully resolved.
9. Indeed, this is a Plan that has very considerable support from a wide range of DtC bodies and stakeholders; including Hertfordshire County Council, all the other SWH Councils, all other adjoining and nearby Councils and Hertfordshire Futures. There are a very wide range of supportive landowners and developers, including the Crown Estate.
10. Resident and councillor views have been taken on board throughout the process, through well attended public exhibitions, public consultations and public meetings, which has resulted in a better Plan because of their input, challenge and local expertise.
11. As reported regularly in public to the Council's Planning Policy & Climate Committee, officers have sought feedback and advice, from a wide range of informed and independent professional advisors and bodies, in order to give confidence in the draft Local Plan throughout its evolution. There has been a comprehensive array of 'check and challenge' to the approach set out in the draft Plan and its evidence base, including from officials from MHCLG in quarterly meetings, the Planning Inspectorate in three Advisory Visits, the East of England Local Government Association and nearby Councils.