



St Albans
City & District Council



2021 CORPORATE PLAN 2026



Photo: Pete Stevens



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE | Gold

Contents



Foreword by Cllr Chris White, Leader	3
Foreword by Amanda Foley, Chief Executive	6
The Context Of Our Work: The District In Numbers	8
The Council's Vision and Priorities:	11
Combating the climate emergency	12
Deliver more social housing	17
Enhance business	20
Support our communities	22

Foreword

by Cllr
Chris White,
Leader



As ever in local government, tough choices about our spending and how we operate must be made. Much is about cultural change, how we conduct business, and close working with other districts and public agencies, and with our partners.



Coronavirus hit us all hard in 2020 and continues to present great challenges. Not least is the devastating social and economic damage to many local people and businesses, and the huge budget gaps that public service providers like the Council are left with.

These factors, together with the climate emergency, the urgent requirement for more social housing, the need for better community facilities and our desire to enhance local businesses, are the Council's key areas of focus for the coming year.

These are challenging times and difficulties lie ahead. There remains much uncertainty and the extent of the Council's continued role in the Covid-19 response and what this may mean for our plans in 2021/22, and for our finances, is by no means clear.

As ever in local government, tough choices about our spending and how we operate must be made. Much is about cultural change, how we conduct business, and close working with other districts and public agencies, and with our partners.

Combat the Climate Emergency

Our work with Sustainable St Albans, St Albans Friends of the Earth and a range of other environmental groups has been instrumental in developing our **Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy** setting out the actions we will take locally to make the Council's and the community's carbon emissions net zero by 2030.



Sustainable growth will be necessary, and our work must dovetail with that of the County Council to ensure highways can be improved to make travel easier for pedestrians and cyclists.

Much can be achieved through encouragement and leadership. Our Local Plan – the blueprint for what can be built how and where for the next two decades – was not accepted by Planning Inspectors in 2020. While this is disappointing on one level, it also presents accelerated opportunities to hardwire sustainability into local development activities sooner than might otherwise have been the case, as we work on a new version.

Deliver more social housing



Our location and beautiful surroundings mean lots of people want to live here. High demand for local housing means many local people find they cannot afford to buy or rent. Homelessness is a pressing issue here as elsewhere.

The Council – not least to help deliver the housing numbers sought by central government – needs to become a large-scale developer in our own right. Social housing rent levels should be our aim. Such housing is delivered in various ways: through the planning system, through the Council's Housing Revenue Account, through the mechanism of a new registered provider housing company, and through partnerships using direct investment and joint ventures.

The principal demand in the District is for three-bedroom homes.

New housing schemes will need, for the foreseeable future, to involve a mix of housing to provide Council income or profits from sale, and social housing. It is obviously impossible to prescribe a hard and fast rule for every case, but in general, projects controlled by the Council should involve 40% social housing, measured by projected value. An exception to this would be where housing is being provided to fund investment in community facilities, where a greater proportion of homes may be needed for sale.

We are also closely monitoring turnaround times for dealing with empty Council-owned properties to ensure they can be let again swiftly to families in need. This requires fast work from our contractors to undertake the necessary works and repairs.

And we need to prioritise the climate emergency when it comes to ensuring that homes are warm, dry and energy efficient.

Enhance local business



Covid-19 has taken its toll here as elsewhere and there is significant uncertainty as a result of this and the challenges presented by leaving the European Union.

These complexities are on top of the day to day challenges we face like the high cost of housing, skills shortages, the unfair and damaging business rates system, the loss of office accommodation due to permitted development rules, and poor-quality broadband in some areas.

Many of these require Government action at a national level. Locally though we can play our part. For instance, we can recognise the importance of the visitor economy – both tourism and the night-time economy – and work with our partners to develop these markets for the benefit of visitors, residents and businesses locally. Important too is ensuring our contractors deliver high quality services that meet the needs of all sections of our community.

It is evident that there is a need for new plans, for example in the areas of street markets, City Centre Vision, cultural strategy and destination management. The museum service is a unique cornerstone for the active promotion of the City and District providing rich cultural opportunities throughout the year for local people and visitors alike and supporting city centre vibrancy. Above all we need to ensure that we continue to listen to business and work with our partners to address their needs.

Support our communities

We continue to work with town and parish councils and consider further devolution of community assets where that makes mutual sense so can we achieve the best outcomes for local people.



Our Local Plan presents opportunities for the community to lead in neighbourhood planning such as the St Peter's Street area of the City Centre.

Communities also depend on facilities. Significant improvements to local leisure and museum facilities have been made over the last few years, including most recently in Harpenden. But community halls and similar facilities elsewhere need improving too. Our work to develop the Marlborough Pavillion in the Sopwell area continues apace and Fleetville Community Centre is in the pipeline.

The Council's own commercial and development operations will be our primary means of delivering many of our desired social housing, construction and community facility improvements. Such projects will also generate new developments and investment income that can fund more housing locally, especially much needed social rented homes. This income will be used additionally to regenerate, redevelop and refurbish Council assets to support future retail, commercial, cultural and community needs in our towns and villages post Covid including St Albans City Centre and the Alban Arena.

A large part of the Council's work this year will be about filling our huge budget gap and reshaping our services for the digital age. And underscoring everything is the Covid response and the Climate Emergency which must be at the forefront of all our minds.

Chris White

Foreword by Amanda Foley, Chief Executive



None of us could have imagined the effect that a virus like Covid-19 would have on the day to day lives of people.

The pandemic has challenged us severely and we have all been forced to rethink the way we go about our business.

Local people have come together to help each other. Businesses and charities have made innovative changes to keep afloat.

Overnight, like most organisations across the world, councils have had to change the way we work. In St Albans, most of our staff have been working from home since March 2020, and many have also doubled up to deliver both the day job and support the considerable coronavirus response. The way our staff have adapted has been remarkable. It has been a mighty challenge, and it continues as I prepare this foreword for the coming year.

Our budgets, always under pressure, were severely hit by the pandemic, as many of our income streams - from services like car parks, leisure centres, and museums - shrank to almost nothing for months on end.

My role, as Chief Executive, is to ensure the Council is ready for whatever lies ahead. We will continue to do all we can to support our local communities and keep local services going whatever happens.

The crisis showed us all what we are capable of when the chips are down and change is thrust upon us. Working from home has meant we have had to become experts at remote working and embrace the new technologies that we put in place as part of our digital transformation programme in recent years.

Lots of other changes are accelerating our digital transformation. There is much work to do to ensure we take from our experiences during the pandemic all that is positive and worth keeping. Beyond the bad news, the good news is that there is potential for creating an increasingly modern and efficient council. Our work to put this in place has already begun.

Despite the changes ahead, customer focus, developing our workforce and digital transformation remain the key building blocks for our future development, and for tackling the areas of focus outlined by Cllr Chris White in his Leader's foreword.

Caring for our community, working together, and developing confident people are at the heart of our values and behaviours. These themes are helping us to develop our services to become the trusted and customer driven Council we aspire to be. The overarching priorities we are working to support are: a vibrant economy; a thriving community; a great place to live and work; and a cost-effective Council.

Covid has taught us that we are stronger when we work as one with our partners. It is partnership working that has helped us to support our most vulnerable residents during the pandemic, and it is our partnerships that will help us build the capacity needed to transform our services for the future. Most importantly perhaps, it is our partnerships that are helping us get to grips with what we need to do to combat the climate emergency and build on the action plan put in place over the last year. We hope that local people, businesses and organisations will continue to work with us to play their part too.

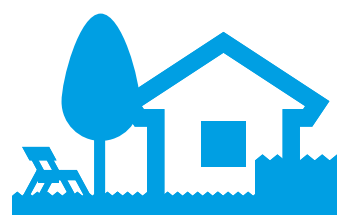
Amanda Foley, Chief Executive

The Context of Our Work: The District In Numbers



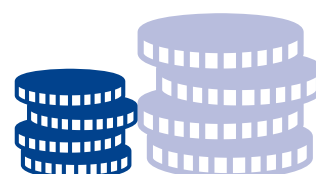
District

Population	148, 500
Size	62.2 square miles
Houses (and other dwellings)	61,723
Band D Council Tax properties	16,329 (average rate £1,918.32)
Businesses	9,300
Employment rate	78.6% (national average 75.2%)
Average household income	£37,688 (national average £29,661)
Residents with HND, degree (NVQ 4) or above (2020)	66.7% (national average 43.1%)
MPs	2 (Daisy Cooper – St Albans; Bim Afolami – Hitchin and Harpenden)



Council

Income	
Council Tax	£11.4m
Revenue Support Grant	£0m
Expenditure	
General Fund	£14.6m
Housing Revenue Account	£26.9m
Business Rates collected (2020/21)	£23.7m
Business Rates retained (2020/21)	£2.4m
Council staff	368 (Full Time Equivalent)



The Context of Our Work: The District In Numbers



Public health

Life expectancy at birth

Male

82 years

Female

85 years

Clinical Commissioning Group

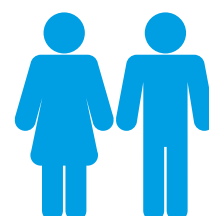
1

GP practices

13

Hospital

1



Planning and housing

Average house price (March 2020)

£567,000

(national £320,000)

Greenbelt

82%

Annual planning and building control applications

4,245

Additional dwellings per year estimated required

893

Houses built per year

395

Council owned and managed dwellings

4,909



Democracy and customer services

Wards

20

Elected members

58

Parish councils

8

Town council

1 (Harpenden)

Councillor meetings per year

252

Over **49,146** calls received by our Customer Service Centre every year.



The Context of Our Work: The District In Numbers

Community, leisure and sport

Community centres	24
Libraries	6
Primary schools	53
Secondary schools	12
Further education college	1
Managed parks and open spaces	439.1 hectares
Leisure centres and sports facilities	24
Cemeteries	3
Museums	2
Heritage sites	3
Charter Market	1
Visitors to St Albans per year	228,2000 (2018)



Parking and environment

Visitors to District car parks (2020/21)	873,165
Spaces in car parks	2,701
On-street parking spaces	4,504
CCTV monitoring and control centre	1
Recycling rate - measured by weight (2020/21) <i>(in the top 10 best recycling areas in the country)</i>	63%



The Council's vision and priorities

Our overarching vision is: a vibrant economy; a thriving community; a great place to live and work; and a cost-effective Council.

Outside the Covid-19 response, our four key priorities, designed to deliver a viable, happy, inclusive and sustainable community, are set out below:

Combat
the climate
emergency



Deliver
more social
housing



Enhance
local
business



Develop
community
facilities



Combating the climate emergency

Combating the climate emergency

What we are doing to achieve this priority

Priority projects for 2021/22

Priority Projects and Targets	Lead Portfolio	Lead Department
Climate Emergency		
Take forward the Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy and Action Plan published in 2020/21 and implement Year 2 Measures and Actions.	Climate, Environment and Transport	Community Services
Increase the quantity of tree cover in the District, planting 3,000 trees in 2021/22.	Climate, Environment and Transport	Planning and Building Control
Lead initiatives to reduce the impact of aircraft pollution and noise arising from proposals to expand Luton Airport capacity.	Climate, Environment and Transport	Planning and Building Control
Progress the installation of additional solar PV panels at the Council's Leisure Centres – for delivery by June 2021.	Commercial, Development and Wellbeing	Commercial and Development
Progress the installation of electric car charging points at Cotlandswick Leisure Centre Car Park – for delivery by Nov 2021.	Climate, Environment and Transport	Commercial and Development



Combating the climate emergency



<p>Continue to improve Council houses and flats to reduce energy use and CO₂ emissions, providing better homes and lower energy bills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Grade A boilers in 300 properties; • New windows and doors in 100 properties; • New bathrooms and kitchens in 40 properties; • Loft insulation and cavity wall insulation in 300 properties identified from the Council's stock condition survey and energy pilot studies; • Adopt an energy strategy for Council housing stock using Government grant funding and funding from the Housing Revenue Account. 	<p>Housing, Inclusion and Protection</p>	<p>Housing</p>
<p>Progress the River Ver and Verulamium Lakes development Project. In 2021/22:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline scheme design completed: estimated April 2021; • 2 Cross-Party Working Group meetings held during 2021/22, timing dictated by overall project timetable; • Full Business Case (to progress from agreed design to implementation phase) completed: estimated March 2022. 	<p>Leisure, Heritage and Public Realm</p>	<p>Community Services</p>

Combating the climate emergency



Sustainability		
Implement a new operating model for the Council which supports the delivery of a more sustainable organisation, using digital technologies to support a more flexible and mobile workforce; reduced and better use of Council office space; and the continuing development of online services for residents.	Resources	Corporate Services
<p>Implement measures and actions in the Council's Litter Management Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25. In 2021/22:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch campaign to encourage local businesses to help reduce the amount of litter dropped in and around retail premises (linked to 2021 Keep Britain Tidy Spring Clean Programme): May 2021; • Complete review of cleaning schedules on strategic routes and review litter bin provision - estimated September 2021; • Engage with Parish Councils to become actively involved in the implementation of the Litter Management Strategy. Summarise progress through Parish Conference: Autumn 2021. 	Leisure, Heritage and Public Realm	Community Services

Combating the climate emergency



What else do we plan to do to manage the climate emergency?

Other background work:

	Department(s)
Implement key outcomes of the Council's 'Towards a Wilder St Albans' project delivery partnership with Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.	Community Services
Develop a plan to encourage walking and cycling.	Planning and Building Control
Pedestrianisation of Market Place and more 20 mph zones (with Herts County Council).	Community Services
Take forward a Citizens' Assembly to drive community engagement in addressing the climate emergency.	Community Services Chief Exec & Policy
Develop plans for car exclusion and no car idling zones around schools.	Community Services
Develop plans to encourage the introduction of electric taxis.	Community Services
Develop a plan for greater use of solar panels on Council-owned property.	Housing
Where we have influence, encourage businesses to reduce single-use plastics.	Community Services
Improve the energy efficiency of Council office buildings.	Commercial & Development
Ensure the energy efficiency of Council-sponsored developments.	Commercial & Development
Establish a partnership to reduce the cost of trade waste for businesses.	Community Services
Review the method statement for replacing damaged bins, benches and planters to ensure they can be repaired or replaced as efficiently as possible.	Community Services
Continued campaign work with the Herts Waste Partnership and evidence-based enforcement action and use of Fixed Penalty notices to reduce fly-tipping.	Community Services

Combating the climate emergency



Further develop recycling rates in flats including through engagement with managing agents, visits, and the supply of information boards.	Community Services
Actively support our Green Triangle partners: the Building Research Establishment; Rothamsted Research; and the University of Hertfordshire.	Chief Exec & Policy
Act as a champion for rail commuters and use our influence to work with rail partners to seek improvements to local rail services and facilities.	Chief Exec and Policy



Deliver more social housing



Deliver more social housing

What we are doing to achieve this priority

Priority projects for 2021/22

Priority Projects and Targets	Lead Portfolio	Lead Department
<p>Progress a high-quality development at the St Albans City Centre Opportunity Site (CCOS) South (subject to planning approval):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33 social apartments; • 60 apartments for sale • 6,064 sq metres of office space; • 100 car parking spaces. 	Commercial, Development and Wellbeing	Commercial and Development
<p>Progress a high-quality development at the St Albans City Centre Opportunity Site (CCOS) North (subject to planning approval).</p>	Commercial, Development and Wellbeing	Commercial & Development
<p>Progress social housing on Council owned land:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holyrood Crescent garage site –development of 2 two-bedroom houses on former garage site - due for completion in June 2021; • The Hedges mobile home site –redevelopment of former temporary accommodation site for social housing -estimated completion April 2022; • King Offa and Norman Close mobile home site – redevelopment for social housing - estimated completion June 2022; • Progress feasibility studies on 3 sites for future social housing development by March 2022. 	Housing, Inclusion and Protection	Housing

Deliver more social housing



Continue to progress the redevelopment of Ridgeview in London Colney to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 apartments for use as temporary accommodation for homeless people including families - estimated completion November 2022; • 19 private rental homes. 	Commercial, Development and Wellbeing	Commercial & Development
Complete the development of Noke Shot in Harpenden by March 2022 to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 three-bedroom social rented houses; • 4 three-bedroom houses for sale, and 2 two-bedroom bungalows for sale. 	Commercial, Development and Wellbeing	Commercial & Development
Complete the development of land at Leyland Avenue in St Albans by October 2021 to provide 7 three-bedroom houses for sale.	Commercial, Development and Development	Commercial & Development
Progress the development of Harpenden Public Halls to provide: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 social rent apartments; • 16 apartments for sale; • 300 sq metres of commercial space; • 26 car parking spaces. 	Property, Commercial and Development	Commercial & Development

Deliver more social housing

What else do we plan to do to deliver more social housing?

Other background work:

	Department(s)
Maintain the number of voids (empty Council homes) below 1%.	Housing
Work with key contractors to deliver a high percentage of repairs completed at first visit and customer satisfaction above 4.5 out of 5 (using the 'Rant and Rave' tool implemented in 2020).	Housing
Review the way we provide adaptations to existing Council properties and new homes which we develop occupied by people with disabilities.	Housing
Seek fresh sites and develop them as a developer in our own right, or through joint ventures, or through a wholly owned company.	Housing Commercial and Development



Enhance business

Enhance business

What we are doing to achieve this priority

Priority projects for 2021/22

Priority Projects and Targets	Lead Portfolio	Lead Department
Achieve break-even against budget at St Albans Museum + Gallery by the end 2021/22.	Leisure, Heritage and Public Realm	Commercial and Development
Implement revised Markets Service operational structure, moving towards break-even against budget.	Business, Tourism and Culture	Community Services
Engage market traders and the BID more formally in the development and management of the market in the city.	Business, Tourism and Culture	Community Services
Progress the Hertfordshire IQ enviro-tech enterprise zone.	Planning	Planning and Building Control
Work in partnership with the BID to deliver a successful BID renewal.	Business, Tourism and Culture	Chief Exec and Policy Finance and Legal
Support the Visitor Partnership (through the BID) in implementing a new visitor economy strategy for the District.	Business, Tourism and Culture	Chief Exec and Policy
Support the BID in developing a Vision and Neighbourhood Plan for the City Centre.	Planning	Planning and Building Control



Enhance business



What else do we plan to do to enhance business?

Other background work:

	Department(s)
Hold a third business summit and promote other opportunities for businesses to engage with, and influence, the Council.	Chief Exec & Policy
Work with partners to make businesses aware of how to appeal Valuation Office assessments.	Finance and Legal
Consider having a local discretionary relief for 2022/23 or grants direct to businesses (subject to budget constraints).	Finance and Legal
Maintain the engagement with government and parliament about the need to reform business rates.	Chief Exec & Policy
Continue close liaison between the Council, BID and other partners to develop new Covid-secure cultural events.	Community Services



Support our communities

Support our communities

What we are doing to achieve this priority

Priority projects for 2021/22

Priority Projects and Targets	Lead Portfolio	Lead Department
Progress a new Local Plan.	Planning	Planning and Building Control
Progress the redevelopment of Marlborough Pavilion in St Albans with new community and leisure facilities – due to open in early 2022.	Commercial, Development and Wellbeing	Commercial and Development
Progress play area development proposals and initiatives, including at Clarence Park.	Leisure, Heritage and Public Realm	Community Services
Progress the redevelopment of Fleetville Community Centre for anticipated delivery in November 2023.	Commercial, Development and Wellbeing	Commercial and Development
Progress the development of a new Mausoleum at the London Road cemetery. In 2021/22: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed scheme design and feasibility work completed: estimated May 2021; Project construction plan agreed for implementation: estimated August 2021. 	Climate, Environment and Transport	Community Services



Support our communities



What else do we plan to do to support our communities?

Other background work:

	Department(s)
Continue with leisure contract procurement exercise with the aim of achieving an outcome which maintains high quality, popular leisure facilities which generate income for the Council.	Commercial and Development
Work towards a plan to support redevelopment of the St Albans Sub Aqua Club venue.	Commercial and Development
Progress the refurbishment of the Clarence Park Pavilion.	Commercial and Development
Through the property and investment strategy and plan completed in 2020, consider longer leases/licences to enable local groups to bid for a wider range of external funding.	Commercial and Development
Continue to engage with St Albans City Football Club to support it in finding a new stadium.	Planning and Building Control
Explore opportunities for a community or social based Sunday transport scheme.	Planning and Building Control
Develop new Homelessness Strategy.	Housing
Work with our partners in the local Community Safety Partnership to provide strong safeguarding of vulnerable residents, including victims of domestic violence, modern slavery and radicalisation.	Chief Exec & Policy
Continue rolling programme of reviews of Controlled Parking Zones to assess residents' views.	Community Services

2021 CORPORATE PLAN 2026

