

INTRODUCTION

Baldock and neighbouring parts of Bygrave and Clothall will see big changes over the next few decades, due to proposals by the district and county councils for major development around the edges of the town. These proposals are contained in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, produced by the District Council, and are being taken forward by Hertfordshire County Council, who own the land.

The Localism Act 2011 gave communities the right to prepare their own neighbourhood plans to guide future development. A neighbourhood plan cannot block the amount of growth proposed in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, but it does give the community a chance to influence what will happen. The Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan has, therefore, been prepared with one aim in mind: to get the best outcome for Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall from whatever development does take place. This means ensuring that the right facilities are provided, that the character of Baldock and the villages is safeguarded, and that new development is of a high quality.

The Neighbourhood Plan area includes the whole of Baldock and the parishes of Bygrave and Clothall. This is because the proposed developments cross the boundaries between Baldock and the parishes, and it also allows the potential impact of the developments on the villages to be considered as part of the plan.

Annex A explains how the Neighbourhood Plan has been put together. A large number of individuals and organisations have been involved, which is important so that it reflects local views and aspirations as much as possible. Particular thanks are due to members of the steering group, who have invested considerable time in the process, to AECOM for their help with the design work, and [add additional acknowledgements].

USING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The first part of the plan - ‘setting the scene’ - provides a brief overview of the Neighbourhood Plan area as it is today, and some of the key changes that are likely to happen in future, as background for the policies that follow.

The policies themselves are the key statements that will be used in future to inform proposals for development and make decisions about them. The Neighbourhood Plan will form part of the statutory ‘development plan’ for the area that it covers, alongside the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. The law requires that decisions on applications for development are made in line with the development plan unless any other ‘material considerations’ indicate otherwise.

The policies are divided into three groups:

- some general policies that apply to the whole of the Neighbourhood Plan area or particular parts of it;
- policies for the sites proposed for development at the edge of Baldock, and for two redevelopment sites within the town; and
- policies for the villages within the Neighbourhood Plan area (Bygrave, Clothall and Luffenhall).

Each policy is supported by some text that explains the reasons for it.

The policies in the Neighbourhood Plan should not be read in isolation. The plan supplements the policies contained in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, so the two need to be looked at together when considering development proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan area. Where individual policies in the Neighbourhood Plan express support for particular types of development proposal, it is subject to those proposals also being considered against other policies in the development plan taken as a whole.

Alongside its policies, the Neighbourhood Plan contains some important design principles that development on key sites will be expected to follow. These are referenced in policy E3, and set out fully in Annex B to the plan. These principles form an intrinsic part of the plan and should therefore be taken into account when considering relevant development proposals.

There are limits on what a neighbourhood plan can cover: its policies must relate to things that can be dealt with through the planning system, rather than other public services or commercial decisions. However, where wider issues have been raised, they have been recorded, are noted in Annex A, and have been brought to the attention of the district and county councils.

SETTING THE SCENE

Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall today

Baldock is a compact, historic and attractive market town set within the rolling chalk landscape of north Hertfordshire. The town and its surroundings are rich in archaeological remains, reflecting a long history of settlement from prehistoric times onwards. The centre of Baldock retains the layout of the medieval town laid out in the 12th century, and contains a significant concentration of historic buildings, many of which are listed.

The town occupies a strategic location at the crossroads of the old Great North Road and the Icknield Way. It has been bypassed twice: first by the A1(M), and more recently by the Baldock bypass opened in 2006. However, traffic congestion remains an issue in the centre of Baldock, with the Whitehorse Street/Station Road crossroads being a particular bottleneck.

One reason for this congestion is the importance of east-west movement through the town: Baldock sits at one end of a near-continuous urban corridor running through Letchworth to Hitchin, which generates a lot of trips between the towns for work, shopping and leisure. Baldock's employment base is relatively small compared to its population, so many residents commute to these and other centres (such as Stevenage, Cambridge and London).

At the same time, Baldock attracts visits for shopping and leisure, as it has excellent independent retailers, a growing range of cafes and restaurants and a large Tesco superstore. It also has a strong community spirit and hosts a number of events and festivals throughout the year, notably the Baldock Festival in May and the Balstock music festival in September. The opening of the Arts and Heritage Centre in 2013 gave the town an important new venue for performances and exhibitions.

Baldock also enjoys some good public services, with well-regarded schools, a frequent rail service, doctors' surgery and health centre, fire station and library. However, some of these facilities are at or approaching capacity, while Baldock relies on other towns for some services (in particular for various sports like hockey and rugby pitches and swimming pools).

Outside Baldock, most of the land in the Neighbourhood Plan area is in agricultural or woodland use, and is quite sparsely settled (with the majority of it being designated as Green Belt in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan). Two local nature reserves - Ivel Springs and the Weston Hills – are located next to Baldock and provide important recreation opportunities as well as conservation benefits.

The three villages in the Neighbourhood Plan area are small, but have distinctive characters.

Bygrave sits on high land to the north-east of Baldock, and has two distinct parts. Upper Bygrave was a medieval village, and today comprises a small collection of houses around the Grade II* listed church of St. Margaret of Antioch, and a separate cluster along the road to Ashwell. Lower Bygrave is detached from it, and made up of relatively large houses with extensive gardens built in the 1930s. These were intended to form part of a larger

community which would practice self-sufficiency, but this wider plan was abandoned leaving the two streets that exist today. There are no shops or other facilities serving Bygrave apart from the church and a very infrequent bus service.

The village of Clothall also occupies raised ground, to the south east of Baldock, and is situated on the course of the former Roman Road to Braughing. It has, like upper Bygrave, an important medieval church (St. Mary the Virgin, also listed II*), with a small amount of housing scattered mainly to the south of it. Its facilities are marginally better than Bygrave, as a new village hall was opened in 20xx, and there are more bus services during the day, although not at times that would allow journeys to and from work.

Luffenhall is a small and relatively isolated village in the far south-east of Clothall parish, on the border with East Hertfordshire. It has a linear and very rural character, with houses and farms dispersed along a country lane, a number of which are listed due to their special historic interest. There are no public services within the village.

How Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall could change

The North Hertfordshire Local Plan proposes that 3,386 homes are built in and around Baldock over the period to 2031, together with a new employment area to the north of Royston Road. This will not happen all at once, and indeed is likely to take much longer than estimated in the Local Plan. Major sites take time to build – often much longer than anticipated – and the intention of Hertfordshire County Council is to phase the developments, starting with the land at Cambrai Farm (site BA2) and south of Clothall Common (BA3). Even so, the rate and scale of change is likely to be much greater than Baldock has experienced in the past. This will create challenges, but also opportunities.

The developments are much larger than those that would be required to meet Baldock's own needs, and will bring additional people to the town to live and for work. This should help to support local shops and an even wider range of community activities. At the same time, one of the key concerns of existing residents is the impact which this growth will have on the capacity of local services and infrastructure, particularly the road network.

A number of improvements are required by the North Hertfordshire Local Plan to address this, including additional schools, shops and health facilities to serve the development proposed to the north of Baldock (site BA1). It also requires new link roads to the north and south-east of Baldock to help take traffic away from the centre of the town.

The Local Plan does not deal with all of the key facilities that will be needed (in particular open space and recreation), while the impact on local roads will depend on the accuracy of assumptions that have been made about future travel patterns. These are two issues which the Neighbourhood Plan seeks to tackle, so that a full range of necessary facilities is available as Baldock grows, and conditions on local roads do not get any worse.

Large scale development to the north of Baldock could create a town of two halves, due to the physical barrier presented by the railway, and the fact that site BA1 will be provided

with its own facilities. Local people would like to see Baldock's strong sense of community continue, which will mean creating physical connections between old and new parts of the town, as well as efforts to promote community activities that can bring existing and new residents together.

The effect of Baldock's growth on the villages within the Neighbourhood Plan area will vary. Bygrave, Clothall and Luffenhall themselves will see very little new development, as the North Hertfordshire Local Plan restricts what can be built due to their small size and/or location within the Green Belt. However, the proposed expansion of Baldock will bring the edge of the town much closer to Lower Bygrave, and the populations of Bygrave and Clothall parishes will increase significantly (as most of the sites on the edges of a Baldock lie within them).

One thing which can be expected to affect all parts of the Neighbourhood Plan area is the impact of climate change, which is likely to mean higher temperatures, water scarcity and more extreme weather events¹. This makes it important that new buildings are constructed in ways that limit energy and water demands, and that steps are taken to manage the impacts of extreme weather such as surface water flooding (which some parts of Baldock are vulnerable to). Most aspects of construction are controlled through building regulations rather than the planning system, but there are ways in which planning can help to address these issues, and where both the North Hertfordshire Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plan have a role to play.

¹ For further information see the web site of the Committee on Climate Change (www.theccc.org.uk).

OBJECTIVES

Against this background, and taking into account the priorities identified by the local community during our discussions², a small number of key objectives have been identified for the Neighbourhood Plan to pursue:

1. Sustain and strengthen Baldock's character as a historic and vibrant market town, and the rural character and separate identities of Bygrave, Clothall and Luffenhall.
2. Ensure that new development is well designed, retains and reflects important features of Baldock and its surroundings, and is resilient to future climate change.
3. Secure the right infrastructure and facilities needed to serve the expanded town, and to avoid unacceptable impacts from new development.
4. Ensure that Baldock grows in a way that builds strong connections between all parts of the town, and which provides homes, services and job opportunities that cater for both existing and new residents.

The Neighbourhood Plan does not deal directly with every aspect of these, as it supplements the policies already contained in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. For example, it does not contain policies for the mix of homes to be provided, as suitable policies are set out in the Local Plan. A full list of relevant policies contained in both the Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Plan is provided at Annex C.

² See Annex A.

GENERAL POLICIES

Policy G1 Improving access and parking

Proposals for the following access and parking improvements will be supported:

- a) the provision of additional parking to serve Baldock railway station within site BA1 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan [or on part of designated employment area BE2, as an exception to policy ETC1 that applies to that area];
- b) improved access to Baldock station, including the provision of lifts to both platforms, and changes to the Station Approach/Icknield Way East junction (to provide better crossing arrangements for pedestrians and cyclists, and easier and safer turning arrangements for vehicles);
- c) enhanced drop-off and pick-up arrangements to serve Knights Templar school, especially if the school requires enlargement due to the residential allocations in the Local Plan (in which case appropriate contributions towards the improvements should be agreed before permission for residential development is granted); and
- d) improved pedestrian and cycle access from Baldock High Street to the Tesco superstore.

Reason for this policy

There are several locations in Baldock where better access and parking arrangements to existing facilities are needed now, or are likely to be needed within the period of this plan. There are also significant transport issues associated with the proposed developments on the edge of Baldock, which are addressed in policy E1 later in the plan.

The proposed growth of the town will lead to more use being made of Baldock railway station, whose existing car park has limited capacity. Commuter parking elsewhere in Baldock has become a growing problem, and while daytime parking restrictions have helped to manage this, Baldock's expansion will inevitably generate additional demand to park at or near the station. Responses to the Neighbourhood Plan survey showed 72% in favour of providing more parking for the station, and two potential opportunities have been identified, both of which could be connected to the station subject to access being agreed.

Additional parking would need to be proportionate to the anticipated increase in usage resulting from Baldock's growth, so that it does not attract commuter traffic from beyond the town and nearby villages. Using part of the existing employment area (BE2) on Royston Road would need to be an exception to Local Plan policy ETC1, which seeks to maintain business uses on such land. However, it is likely that only a small amount of BE2 would be needed, and its loss would be insignificant given the scale of the additional employment land which the Local Plan allocates further along Royston Road.

Other improvements are needed to Baldock station, in particular to provide better access for those with limited mobility, and improve the safety and convenience of the approach to

the station for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles³. Appropriate contributions to such improvements will be sought from developments that will place additional demands on the station and the junction between Station Approach and Icknield Way East.

Knights Templar school is likely to require further expansion to cater for the early phases of the town's growth, before a new secondary school is provided as part of site BA1.

Appropriate contributions to these will also be sought, and one particular need which has been identified is improvements to the current drop-off and pick-up facilities, to help limit congestion and improve safety.

Previous work on barriers to movement within Baldock has also highlighted the lack of direct and convenient access from the High Street to the Tesco superstore, which is the biggest retail outlet in the town⁴. Policy G1 encourages suitable opportunities to improve the quality and convenience of pedestrian and cycle access to the store to be taken forward.

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³ WYG Transport Planning for Hertfordshire County Council (2017) *Baldock North: Transport Assessment*.

⁴ Urban Practitioners for NHDC (2007) *North Hertfordshire Urban Design Assessment: Baldock*.

Policy G2 Strategic open space

Applications for development should maintain the predominantly open character of the following areas shown on the policies map:

- a) site S1: Walls Field and the area of urban open space lying between sites BA2 and BA3 designated in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan;
- b) site S2: open space lying between Royston Road and the Baldock bypass, adjoining sites BA3 and BA4 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan designates this area as [urban open space, and development within it should be consistent with policy CGB5 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan] OR [an area of Local Green Space, and the control of development within it should be consistent with the relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework].

Proposals that would improve the visual or recreational value of these sites will be supported. Any proposals affecting Walls Field and its setting should conserve and if possible enhance its value as a Scheduled Monument.

Reason for this policy

Baldock contains a variety of open spaces that serve different functions, such as parks and play areas, school playing fields and cemeteries. The two areas named in this policy play a particularly important role in maintaining a sense of openness within and at the edge of the town, the significance of which will grow as proposals for development in the Local Plan are implemented.

The North Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Study identifies the value of Walls Field as part of a ‘green lung’ for Baldock, and the opportunities that exist for enhancing its recreational value. At present, public access is limited to a footpath crossing the site, which forms part of a Scheduled Monument. The latter has been included in Historic England’s Heritage at Risk register, mainly because of the impact of ploughing on its historic interest. The importance of maintaining and improving the quality of the scheduled ancient monument will need to be considered as part of any proposals affecting Walls Field.

The land between Royston Road and the bypass serves an important purpose as a large area of informal open space, and this use is expected to increase once sites BA3 and BA4 in the Local Plan are developed, as both sites adjoin it. Currently the visual quality of the land is relatively poor, and could be enhanced through measures such as additional planting. This land also acts as a buffer between the built edge of Baldock and the bypass. The latter is identified in the Local Plan as the most appropriate boundary for the Green Belt on the eastern side of Baldock; and designating site S2 as [urban open space / Local Green Space] is consistent with the treatment of similar sites in the Local Plan (including the area between housing allocations BA2 and BA3).

Policy G3 Sustainable design

Applications for new buildings or alterations to existing properties that use designs or features to achieve high levels of energy efficiency and/or a sustainable use of resources will be supported (for example through their orientation, use of materials or by employing on-site renewable energy generation). Where roof-mounted solar panels are proposed and are not subject to permitted development rights, they should be sited and designed so as to minimise the effect on the external appearance of the building.

Reason for this policy

The North Hertfordshire Local Plan contains several policies to secure sustainable forms of development – in particular policy D1 (sustainable design). Policy G3 in the Neighbourhood Plan supplements this, to ensure that specific support is given to proposals that aim to be highly energy efficient and/or minimise the environmental impact of their construction.

Minimum standards for the energy performance of buildings and other aspects of their construction are set through building regulations. These have become more stringent over time and are likely to tighten further in the future. Developments can exceed these minimum standards, and proposals within the Neighbourhood Plan area are encouraged to do so. This is particularly important given the amount of new development proposed through the Local Plan, the environmental impact of which should be as limited as possible.

This policy offers support to building designs and features that can help to achieve or exceed national standards. In doing so, proposals should be informed by other policies in the development plan, in particular those relating to other aspects of design, the treatment of historic buildings and Baldock's conservation area.

Various types of microgeneration equipment to produce small-scale renewable energy can be 'permitted development', meaning there is no need to apply for planning permission before they are installed. However, important exemptions and conditions apply. For solar panels, listed buildings and their grounds are exempt; and there is a requirement that such equipment should, so far as practicable, be sited to minimise its effect on the external appearance of the building involved⁵. Where permission is needed – including as part of proposals for new development – policy G3 ensures that similar considerations apply, so that the visual impact of solar panels is taken fully into account and minimised as much as possible. This can be done in various ways, such as by using solar tiles or ensuring that the colour of panels complements that of the surrounding roof.

Because the planning legislation covering the installation of microgeneration equipment is complex, it is important to get advice from North Hertfordshire District Council before any work is carried out.

⁵ Further information is available on the Planning Portal web site: <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/>

Policy G4 Baldock conservation area

Development within Baldock conservation area, or which affects its setting, should conserve or enhance its character and appearance by reflecting the following principles:

- a) maintain and reflect the historic pattern of streets, alleys and medieval burgage plots;
- b) retain the pattern of continuous built frontages to streets, with mainly wide-fronted buildings and minimal set-backs from the pavement, punctuated by frequent gaps giving access to rear yards;
- c) use building forms, materials and details that are characteristic of the conservation area – which comprises mainly buildings constructed or re-fronted in classical style during the 18th century, interspersed with some medieval and more recent buildings; a prevailing height of two-three storeys; and a limited palette of materials (mainly red/orange brick, pale render; plain clay tiles and black weatherboarding for subsidiary buildings in rear yards);
- d) retain, and where possible restore, historic features such as original fenestration, boundary walls and chimneys; and
- e) use shopfront designs and signage that reflect the style of the building and the character of the wider conservation area.

Reason for this policy

Baldock's conservation area is central to the town's character. It embraces the layout of the medieval market town, and the Georgian architecture that reflects its later prosperity as a coaching town on the Great North Road, and a centre for malting and brewing. Further analysis of its architectural and historic character is contained in the Character Statement for Baldock Conservation Area and the North Hertfordshire Urban Design Assessment⁶.

The law requires that planning decisions pay special attention to preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas, in recognition of their particular value. Policy G4 supplements the general policies for the historic environment in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, by providing more specific guidance related to the particular character of the Baldock conservation area. It does not preclude the use of high quality modern design where its form, materials and detailing respect and complement the character of the conservation area, but such designs will need particularly careful consideration so that they conserve or enhance their surroundings.

⁶ NHDC (2003) *Character Statement for Baldock Conservation Area*; and Urban Practitioners for NHDC (2007) *North Hertfordshire Urban Design Assessment: Baldock*.

Policy G5 Local heritage assets

Development that would have a direct or indirect impact on a heritage asset of identified local importance should:

- a) conserve or enhance those qualities and features that make it of value; and
- b) be supported by an assessment of the potential impact on these qualities/features, commensurate with the scale of the works and their likely significance for the asset's value.

Reason for this policy

Baldock contains a number of buildings that are not designated as being of national importance, but which have been identified as being locally significant. This may be due to their historic or architectural interest, their contribution to the wider character of the town, or a combination of these. They make an important contribution to Baldock's distinctiveness and sense of history, so it is important that development recognises and respects this.

Policy HE3 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan seeks to prevent unnecessary harm to (or loss of) these buildings, unless the harm or loss can be justified. Policy G5 in the Neighbourhood Plan complements this, by creating a positive expectation that any proposals affecting such assets should seek to conserve or enhance their special qualities, and be informed and justified by an understanding of their value.

North Hertfordshire District Council maintains a register of buildings of local importance in Baldock⁷, to which this policy applies. The policy also applies to the remains of the garden at Quickswood Farm, to the north of Clothall, which has been identified by the Hertfordshire Gardens Trust as being of significant historic value⁸.

Similar registers have not been prepared for the parishes of Bygrave and Clothall, but should this occur then the application of the policy would extend to these registers as well, as it would to any further historic gardens that are identified as being sufficiently important to merit protection.

⁷ NHDC (2003) *Register of Buildings of Local Importance in Baldock*.

⁸ Further information is available in Dalton, C (2007) *The Gardens at Quickswood, the Hunting Lodge of the Earls of Salisbury in Hertfordshire Garden History: a Miscellany* (ed Anne Rowe).

EXTENDING AND REGENERATING BALDOCK

Policy E1 Transport and air quality

Applications to develop sites BA1, BA2, BA3, BA4 and BA10 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan should not be permitted if they would be likely to result in roads within Baldock operating above, or further above, their design capacity, and/or air quality objectives being breached (taking into account any mitigation proposed). To minimise the risk of increased congestion and/or air quality deterioration, applications for these sites should make provision for:

- a) walking and cycling routes that allow safe and convenient access between the sites and Baldock town centre, railway station, employment areas and primary and secondary schools (including any off-site improvements made necessary as a result of the developments);
- b) the early introduction of bus services that provide access to the town centre and railway station;
- c) information for new residents and business occupiers on sustainable travel options;
- d) parking arrangements and the necessary infrastructure to allow convenient charging of electric vehicles;
- e) measures to divert traffic away from the Station Road/Whitehorse Street crossroads, through appropriate access arrangements (including restrictions on heavy goods vehicles), traffic signals and signage; and
- f) monitoring of NO₂ and fine particle concentrations at this crossroads, in Hitchin Street and at any other locations in Baldock where there could be a risk of significantly increased traffic flows and deteriorating air quality, to inform additional or accelerated actions to promote sustainable transport or manage traffic flows, if required.

Reason for this policy

Although the opening of the Baldock bypass in 2006 provided partial relief from through traffic, the benefit was not universal. In North Road and Hitchin Street traffic increased⁹, many heavy goods vehicles have continued to take the shortest route through the town, and parts of Baldock still suffer from congestion. The Whitehorse Street/Station Road crossroads is a significant bottleneck that operates at or above capacity¹⁰, and causes delays to traffic, particularly from the north.

A further consequence is concern about poor air quality in surrounding roads. While current nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels are within the level set by the relevant national Air Quality

⁹ Report to Hertfordshire County Council's Highways and Transport Panel, 15 November 2007: *Baldock Bypass: One Year On*.

¹⁰ WYG Transport Planning for Hertfordshire County Council (2017) *Baldock North: Transport Assessment*.

Objective, they would deteriorate over coming years without action to mitigate the impact of the developments proposed in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. In addition, there has been no monitoring of fine particulate matter in Baldock, which are linked to vehicle emissions¹¹.

The evidence prepared to support the development of these sites anticipates that new link roads and junction improvements will mitigate the impact of additional traffic on the centre of Baldock. However, as experience with the bypass has shown, the impact of road improvements can be difficult to predict, as it relies on assumptions about trip rates and distributions, and wider factors such as changes in vehicle fuels and usage. In this context it is appropriate to require additional measures, beyond those already set out in the Local Plan, to minimise the risk of unacceptable impacts on congestion and emissions, and to monitor impacts as the developments are implemented (allowing further measures to be pursued if needed).

This is particularly important for sites BA2, BA3, BA4 and BA10, for which the Local Plan sets no specific requirements relating to sustainable travel. These, like site BA1, will result in additional pedestrian and cycle movements to other parts of the town, so should contribute to appropriate off-site improvements. The early introduction of bus services – if necessary with some initial financial support from the development – is important for site BA1; not just to assist those with limited mobility, but also because significant parts of the site are more than 20 minutes' walk from the town centre and/or beyond a ten minute cycle ride¹².

¹¹ NHDC (2017) *Baldock Air Quality Paper*. For information on the national Air Quality Objectives see <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/air-pollution/uk-eu-limits>

¹² Markides Associates for NHDC (2017) *North Hertfordshire Transport Strategy*.

Policy E2 Green infrastructure

Applications to develop sites BA1, BA2, BA3, BA4 and BA10 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan should provide for an appropriate amount and range of publicly accessible green infrastructure which complies with or exceeds North Hertfordshire District Council's standards, including spaces for children and young people, outdoor sport, allotments and informal recreation. In making this provision the applications should take into account existing needs for green infrastructure within Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall, and should:

- a) create an integrated network of open spaces and semi-natural areas that provides net benefits for both people and nature, reflects the wider landscape character of the area, and connects with existing green corridors and public rights of way within and beyond the sites;
- b) ensure that sustainable drainage features such as attenuation basins and swales are designed as an integral part of the overall landscaping scheme, are safe and attractive, and have clear management arrangements agreed prior to permission being granted;
- c) incorporate street trees to enhance the environmental quality of the developments and provide shade;
- d) take a strategic approach to locating land for sport and informal recreation, so that the most appropriate sites for each purpose are used (taking into account the allocations as a whole, as well as neighbouring land within the applicant's control where this would accord with other policies in the development plan);
- e) reflect the most up-to-date advice available from Sport England about local needs for pitches and other formal sports provision, including any off-site contributions that may be appropriate¹³;
- f) design new school sports facilities to allow for appropriate community use, supported by community use agreements;
- g) ensure that new areas for play and recreation are overlooked where this will promote the safety of children and other users, and that any external lighting avoids glare to surrounding properties; and
- h) demonstrate how new green infrastructure will be delivered and managed during both the development phase and beyond, including appropriate arrangements for involving the local community in the design and operation of new facilities.

Reason for this policy

Suitably located and designed green spaces and recreational facilities play a vital role in creating places that are attractive, healthy and which benefit the environment. It is

¹³ At the time of producing this plan, provision across the sites – and neighbouring land where appropriate – is expected to include a multi-pitch playing field for community use; an artificial grass pitch and multi-use games area (for tennis and netball) as part of the new secondary school facilities; with off-site contributions towards enhanced provision for rugby and hockey (*Sport England comments on planning applications for Baldock North and Baldock South East, 2018*).

important to supplement the general policies for securing green infrastructure in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, so that Baldock's expansion is guided by specific requirements that reflect the scale of the development, local needs and appropriate advice.

The most recent assessment of green infrastructure within Baldock shows an existing deficiency in 'amenity' green space compared to North Hertfordshire's standards¹⁴, while the proposed growth of the town will generate a substantial additional requirement for outdoor spaces of different types. Although the Local Plan proposes development on a number of different sites at the edge of Baldock, these need to be considered together so that the best sites are chosen for different types of green infrastructure – an approach which is made possible by the fact that all the sites (and some neighbouring land) are owned by Hertfordshire County Council.

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that opportunities for environmental 'net gains' should be sought through the planning system. The combined scale of the proposed urban extensions to Baldock provides an opportunity to put this principle into practice: it should be possible to create a network of multifunctional green infrastructure that offers an enhanced range of recreational facilities for the town and neighbouring villages, as well as enriching and diversifying habitats for wildlife. Particular care will be required in designing sustainable drainage systems as part of this network so that these benefits are realised, taking into account the SuDS Design Guidance for Hertfordshire and industry best practice¹⁵.

New and expanded school provision can help to meet some of the additional sports requirements generated by the proposed developments, but should not be relied upon to meet all of those requirements, given the limited hours during which school facilities can be made available for wider community use, and the need to avoid over-use of school pitches. In addition, Sport England has recommended that financial contributions towards enhancing off-site provision are likely to be the most appropriate way of meeting additional demand for certain sports, where this can improve existing facilities that serve Baldock and/or the additional population could not sustain a new facility within the town.

In applying this policy, it will be appropriate to take into account the Green Infrastructure Plan for North Hertfordshire¹⁶, which provides specific advice on green infrastructure opportunities in and around Baldock (as well as more general principles that may be relevant), together with the Council's standards for open space.

¹⁴ NHDC (2016) *Open Space Review & Standards*.

¹⁵ Hertfordshire County Council (2015) *SuDS Design Guidance for Hertfordshire* and CIRIA (2015) *The SuDS Manual*.

¹⁶ Land Use Consultants for NHDC (2009) *North Hertfordshire District Green Infrastructure Plan*.

Policy E3 Creating well-designed places

Applications to develop sites BA1, BA2, BA3, BA4, BA6, BA10 and BA11 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan should demonstrate a high standard of design that relates sensitively to both its immediate context and the wider character of Baldock, and establishes a strong sense of place. In doing so, applications for these sites should accord with the design principles set out in the annex to this plan.

Applications for the proposed urban extensions (sites BA1, BA2, BA3, BA4 and BA10) should be subject to an independent design review process, procured by the applicant, and demonstrate how the recommendations of this process have been taken into account.

Reason for this policy

The National Planning Policy Framework indicates that locally-produced design standards should be used to set clear expectations for the sort of development that will be acceptable in each area. This is particularly important for Baldock, given the scale of development proposed in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. This requires completely new places to be designed – not just individual buildings and streets – and it is vital that this is done in a way that creates attractive places to live and work, and which will continue to look good and function well in the future.

The existing community has expressed strong support for designs that reflect the existing character of Baldock. The relationship between existing and new development will require particularly careful consideration where new development abuts existing residential areas, such as around Salisbury Road, Larkins Close and parts of Clothall Common, to achieve an appropriate visual transition and minimise impacts on existing residents.

In response to this challenge a set of design principles for the proposed urban extensions is set out in the annex to this plan. The design principles also cover the two previously developed sites that are proposed for regeneration in the Local Plan¹⁷, as these are particularly prominent and, in the case of the site at Icknield Way, affects the setting of Baldock conservation area.

The National Planning Policy Framework also encourages the use of appropriate processes for assessing and improving the design of development, such as design review panels that provide an independent, expert, assessment of emerging proposals. Given their size and potential impact on the overall character of Baldock, policy E3 requires that design review is used for the proposed urban extensions to the town, for example the Hertfordshire Design Review Service¹⁸.

¹⁷ Land at Icknield Way (site BA6) and Deans Yard, South Road (BA11). The local plan also proposes redeveloping the land around Raban Court on Station Road (BA8-9), but this has already been carried out.

¹⁸ <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/building-futures/design-review-panel/hertfordshire-design-review-service.aspx>

Policy E4 Managing construction impacts

Applications to develop sites BA1, BA2, BA3, BA4 and BA10 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan should ensure that the impact of construction activity on Baldock, Bygrave village and local roads is minimised through:

- a) the use of vehicle routes to take construction activity away from existing residential areas (making use of the proposed link roads through these sites so far as possible);
- b) suitable measures to monitor and manage noise, vibration and dust for the duration of the works (including limiting the hours of operation), and to limit off-site construction waste disposal; and
- c) the early implementation of landscaping measures where these will provide appropriate screening.

Reason for this policy

Construction work on the sites proposed in the Local Plan is expected to take many years – especially on those at the edge of Baldock where new infrastructure such as roads will need to be put in place. To minimise the impact of this work on the existing communities, it is important that suitable mitigation measures are considered and agreed at an early stage. Conditions are expected to be attached to permissions on these sites to ensure that the measures needed are implemented at appropriate points during the construction phase.

Policy E5 Building strong communities

Applications to develop sites BA1, BA2, BA3 and BA4 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan should demonstrate that they have been informed by a process of active engagement with local people, and should include measures to encourage and support the creation of strong and inclusive communities by:

- a) involving both existing and new residents in pre-application discussions about the design of each phase;
- b) providing new community facilities that are required as early as possible in the development process – including the use of temporary facilities where these can provide an interim service before more permanent provision can be made; and
- c) making arrangements for new residents to be involved in the continuing management and evolution of their community.

Reason for this policy

Development on the scale proposed in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan will mean changes in Baldock's size, facilities and feel over a period of many years. It is important that local people have opportunities to influence this process, so that local ideas and preferences can be reflected as much as possible, and the expanded town retains and builds on Baldock's strong sense of community. Involving new residents and businesses will be just as important for this as engaging fully with the existing community.

The early availability of facilities proposed to serve the new developments at the edge of Baldock, especially site BA1, is a particular concern highlighted during initial consultations to produce this plan. This is important not just to avoid placing additional pressure on existing services, but also because of the vital role that accessible local services play in creating new neighbourhoods (through the opportunities they provide for meeting day to day needs, as well as being places to meet).

Successful large-scale developments tend to be characterised by active community involvement in their long-term management¹⁹. Some aspects of this can be provided for at the application stage, such as the arrangements proposed to manage new recreational facilities. However, some developers have realised the benefits of going further, and invest proactively in building new communities (e.g. by initiating and supporting community events). This is particularly valuable where schemes will take some years to realise, meaning the developer needs to build and maintain a long-term relationship with a community as it evolves. Efforts to support the social development of Baldock will, therefore, be encouraged alongside specific measures that may be agreed as part of any planning approvals.

¹⁹ For example, see Berkeley Group (2013) *Creating Successful Places: A Toolkit*.

Policy E6 Development north of the railway

The development of allocation BA1 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan should:

- a) maintain a clear visual and physical gap (of at least 250m) between the expanded built edge of Baldock and Lower Bygrave, reinforced by planting at the periphery of the new development (using a suitable variety of native species, with the mix and density of planting being varied to create a natural appearance);
- b) minimise any adverse visual impacts on longer-distance views from within and towards Baldock, including those from Upper and Lower Bygrave, by giving careful consideration to the positioning and height of development, as well as to appropriate screening;
- c) retain and incorporate existing landscape and built features that contribute to the site's history and character, including Bygrave Road, the existing cottages on Bygrave Road, trees and hedgerows (while safeguarding the habitat value of the Bygrave Road local wildlife site);
- d) make provision for improved pedestrian and cycle access between Bygrave and Baldock, through a new footpath and cycleway using the route of Bygrave Road;
- e) minimise the potential for increased traffic flows through lower and upper Bygrave, by making provision for: suitable access arrangements (including restrictions on heavy goods vehicles); physical features such as gateways and appropriate road surfaces; speed limits and signage; and
- f) make provision within the site for a community hall suitable for meetings of Bygrave Parish Council and other local groups, and for additional indoor recreation facilities to serve the expanded town.

Reason for this policy

Site BA1 is contained largely within Bygrave parish, and will have a significant impact on the relationship between Baldock and Bygrave, as well as on the character and function of Baldock itself. Policy E6 builds on Local Plan policy SP14 to provide additional safeguards, so that Bygrave village retains its separate identity, that necessary new facilities are secured, and the character of the site and the neighbouring edge of Baldock are taken fully into account.

Bygrave village will remain in the Green Belt, and it is important that a meaningful gap between Lower Bygrave and Baldock is retained to prevent coalescence. Appropriate screening of site BA1 will also help to maintain a sense of separation, and additional guidance on a suitable approach to planting is set out in North Hertfordshire's Green Infrastructure Plan²⁰.

Views of the countryside from within and towards Baldock are an important feature of the town, and are a benefit of both its compact size and the rolling nature of the surrounding landscape. It will be important to conserve these longer-distance views so far as possible as the town expands, and to mitigate any adverse impacts through appropriate planting to

²⁰ Land Use Consultants for NHDC (2009) *North Hertfordshire District Green Infrastructure Plan*.

soften and screen new development. Local Plan policy SP14 already requires built development to be contained to the south/south-west of the ridgeline that runs east from the A507 towards Bygrave, and planting to integrate it into the wider landscape. However, the arrangement and height of development within the site will also affect long-distance views, and should be taken into account in the detailed design of the scheme.

Much of site BA1 comprises an open field system with a relative lack of visible historic features²¹, but those features which are present are important to retain and incorporate sensitively within the development, in view of their historic or environmental importance. The Green Infrastructure Plan notes the importance of Bygrave Road as a green corridor, with part of the road being a designated local wildlife site [show on proposals map?]. Some 90% of responses to the Neighbourhood Plan survey thought it was important or very important that such features are kept as part of the new development.

In view of its impact on both Bygrave and Baldock, the development of site BA1 should make some additional contributions towards improving facilities (over and above those specified in the Local Plan), to help make the development acceptable in planning terms. Bygrave has no community hall, but its population will expand considerably once the development gets under way. Therefore, it is appropriate for the development to make provision for a suitable meeting space on-site, which could form part of a multi-use community hall available to local groups as well as the parish council. The proximity of the development to Bygrave village is also likely to generate more pedestrian or cycle trips from the village into Baldock, so a suitable footpath/cycleway between the two – via the new development – should also be provided.

The Local Plan requires a range of facilities to be provided on site BA1 so that many of the needs of its residents can be met, including new schools, a GP surgery, shops and a community hall (which could provide the meeting space specified in this policy, if suitably specified). However, it does not require new recreational facilities to be provided, despite evidence that both outdoor and indoor facilities serving Baldock are either lacking or already at capacity²². As a minimum, therefore, site BA1 should provide additional sports hall facilities for community use, which could be through multi-use of the proposed schools facilities. Policy E2 deals with the need for additional outdoor provision to serve the needs of the Neighbourhood Plan area as it grows.

There is concern within Bygrave about the potential for site BA1 to generate many more traffic movements through the village, which could have a significant impact on its character and tranquillity²³. While access to Ashwell from Baldock and Bygrave will need to be retained, every effort should be made to minimise the number and speed of vehicle

²¹ Land Use Consultants for NHDC (2013) *Land north of Baldock: Landscape Sensitivity Study*. The site also includes several areas of archaeological interest, which the local plan requires are taken into account in the layout of the development.

²² KKP for NHDC (2015) *North Hertfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy Assessment Report*; and KKP for NHDC (2016) *North Hertfordshire Indoor Sports Facilities Study Assessment Report*.

²³ Other developments proposed in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan could also contribute to increased traffic through the village, albeit to a much lesser degree; particularly site AS1 at Ashwell, where 33 homes are planned.

movements through Bygrave as site BA1 is developed. Consequently, contributions will be required towards a suitable package of traffic management measures. These should be appropriate to the rural character of the village, by avoiding features that would have an urbanising effect and keeping signage to a minimum.

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Policy E7 Royston Road

The development of allocations BA4 and BA10 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan should:

- a) create a high quality and distinctive entrance to the town along Royston Road, using well-designed buildings and a consistent approach to landscaping and lighting;
- b) relate sensitively to the existing houses fronting onto Royston Road through the scale, massing and landscaping of the new development;
- c) incorporate a landscape buffer between the new commercial units on site BA10 and the railway line, and use building materials and colours that will help to soften the visual impact of the development in both near and long-distance views (which could include the use of green roofs); and
- d) make provision for an improved footpath and cycleway along Royston Road.

Any applications for the redevelopment of existing commercial units on employment site BE2 should also reflect this policy.

A landscaping strategy for Royston Road should be agreed with North Hertfordshire District Council before any applications for reserved matters consent on sites BA4 and BA10 are approved.

Reason for this policy

The developments proposed in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan will have a significant effect on the character and appearance of Royston Road. It is important to ensure that these schemes are implemented in a way that enhances Royston Road's appearance, as this is one of the main routes into the town, and currently there is a fragmented pattern of development and barriers to movement between Clothall Common and other parts of the town. The relationship between commercial and residential uses will also require particularly careful treatment to ensure satisfactory living conditions for existing and future occupiers.

This requires a coordinated approach to the proposed developments, which will allow opportunities to enhance the appearance and accessibility of this corridor to be considered and reflected in the design of the buildings, landscaping and other infrastructure.

Establishing an appropriate landscape framework for Royston Road at an early stage will help to ensure that this coordinated approach is realised. The Landscape Sensitivity Study for land to the north of Baldock, and the North Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Plan, highlight the potential prominence of development in this part of Baldock, and suggest appropriate mitigation measures through appropriate landscaping and building design.

There is scope to improve the appearance of the Ashville Trading Estate (employment site BE2 in the Local Plan) over time, as proposals to redevelop existing units come forward²⁴.

²⁴ This plan has also identified the potential to use a small part of this site as additional parking for Baldock station – see policy G1.

Applying policy E6 to such proposals will help to ensure that they contribute to the wider opportunities for improving the appearance of Royston Road.

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Policy E8 Cambrai Farm and south of Clothall Common

The development of allocations BA2 and BA3 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan should:

- a) incorporate a landscape buffer between the edge of the developments and the Baldock bypass, using an appropriate mix of native species, to provide visual screening, an enhanced green corridor and noise attenuation;
- b) reinforce the planting between Hillside Park mobile home site and new residential development on site BA2, to provide a stronger green margin and additional screening, using an appropriate mix of native species; and
- c) make connections to existing public rights of way, and provide a new right of way to the Icknield Way trail and Weston Hills local nature reserve through site BA2.

Reasons for this policy

Sites BA2 (Cambrai Farm) and BA3 (south of Clothall Common) both occupy prominent positions at the eastern edge of Baldock, within Clothall parish. Development on both sites will affect views from a number of locations within Baldock, and the Green Infrastructure Plan has identified the need for careful treatment of the site boundaries to limit their visual impact. Policy E7 supplements the measures proposed in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, in particular to ensure that other sensitive boundaries to these sites incorporate appropriate landscaping and screening.

Development bordering the Baldock bypass could be particularly intrusive, both from the road itself and adjoining public rights of way, and so it is particularly important that a soft edge is provided in these locations. This should be implemented in a way that supports necessary levels of noise reduction for new properties, as well as achieving visual screening.

The Green Infrastructure Plan also highlights the opportunities that exist to improve access and recreation by linking development in these locations to the public rights of way network, in particular from site BA2.

VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT

Policy V1 Bygrave village

Development within or immediately adjoining Upper or Lower Bygrave should:

- a) be limited to those forms of development specified as 'not inappropriate' in the Green Belt in the National Planning Policy Framework, including limited affordable housing on a rural exception site to meet an identified local need;
- b) preserve the physical and visual separation between the two parts of the village;
- c) maintain the distinctive characters of Upper and Lower Bygrave (with scattered, low density development around St Margaret's Church; modestly-scaled houses set back from the road along Ashwell Road in upper Bygrave; and the linear arrangement of detached houses set in large plots along Ashwell Road and Wedon Way in Lower Bygrave); and
- d) not introduce additional lighting that would harm Bygrave's rural character.

Reason for this policy

The village of Bygrave is classed as a category c settlement in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, and is 'washed over' by the Green Belt. As a result, opportunities for development within or immediately adjoining Bygrave are very limited, although national policy does allow for replacement buildings and modest extensions, limited affordable housing to meet identified local needs (where provided for in Local Planning policies), and facilities for agriculture, outdoor sport and recreation²⁵.

Any rural exception site proposed under policy V1 would need to be small in size, address a specific local need for affordable housing, and ensure that the affordable homes provided remain affordable in perpetuity (in line with the definitions in the National Planning Policy Framework).

The different architectural characters, arrangements of buildings and physical separation of Upper and Lower Bygrave are distinctive features of the village, and it is important that any development recognises and reflects this. Another important characteristic is Bygrave's rural feel, and in particular the relative absence of light pollution, so new development should also avoid introducing lighting that would be intrusive.

²⁵ For a complete list see Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) *National Planning Policy Framework*.

Policy V2 Clothall and Luffenhall

Development within or immediately adjoining Clothall and Luffenhall should:

- a) in the case of Clothall, be limited to those forms of development specified as 'not inappropriate' in the Green Belt in national planning policy, including limited affordable housing on a rural exception site to meet an identified local need;
- b) in the case of Luffenhall, be limited to those forms of development allowed by policy CGB1 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, including [together with] limited affordable housing on a rural exception site to meet an identified local need;
- c) maintain the rural appearance of these villages, with narrow lanes bordered with trees and hedgerows, a lack of continuous urban frontages, most houses set well back from the road and an absence of footpaths and street lighting.

Reason for this policy

The village of Clothall is, like Bygrave, classed as a category c settlement in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, and 'washed over' by the Green Belt. This means that opportunities for development within or immediately adjoining Clothall are limited in the same way as they are in Bygrave, with national policy allowing for replacement buildings and modest extensions, limited affordable housing to meet local needs (where provided for in Local Planning policies), and facilities for agriculture, outdoor sport and recreation²⁶.

Slightly different considerations apply in Luffenhall, which because of its small size is not recognised as a settlement in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. It also lies in the rural area outside the Green Belt, where the Local Plan applies a general policy of restraint (policy SP5). The Local Plan allows a limited range of development under policy CGB1, similar to the uses that may be permitted in the Green Belt. It includes development relating to an existing building, or which meets a proven local need for rural housing or services; modest proposals for rural economic development; and facilities for agriculture, outdoor sport and recreation.

Any rural exception site proposed under policy V2 would need to be small in size, address a specific local need for affordable housing, and ensure that the affordable homes provided remain affordable in perpetuity (in line with the definitions in the National Planning Policy Framework).

Clothall and Luffenhall share a very rural character and appearance. Their narrow roads, and preponderance of substantial hedgerows and trees, mean that vegetation rather than buildings tends to dominate, and creates a strong sense of enclosure. Their position away from through roads, and relative absence of urban features, add to this rural character, and it is important that this quality is retained where any development does take place. This

²⁶ For a complete list see Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) *National Planning Policy Framework*.

means that particular care should be taken with the siting and scale of proposals, and with the planting and materials used, especially around the site boundaries.

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