

Foreword

This Sustainable Community Strategy is about Hertfordshire; our people and our places, and what it means to live and work here.

Many of our residents enjoy a good quality of life – and I am confident that this will remain the case. But there is no room for complacency particularly if we are to go through more difficult economic times. Some of our residents face issues which mean they are unable to share the benefits enjoyed by others and we all need to work together to maintain and improve our county and the well-being of all its people.

I want Hertfordshire to be an even better place for people to live and work; somewhere they wish to settle, can prosper and live full, healthy lives and feel safe. At the same time I want it to remain a place which retains its unique character and blend of urban and rural settlements, avoiding urban sprawl and preserving its attractive built and natural environment.

Hertfordshire Forward is the county's Local Strategic Partnership bringing together leaders of local government and the public, private and voluntary sectors. Its work touches the lives of all those who live and work in the county. Its members spend around £4 billion in the county every year and share common aims in improving the lives of local people. It is for that reason we have taken the bold step of outlining our vision:

Hertfordshire 2021: A brighter future.

As you read this strategy, I hope you will recognise Hertfordshire, its strengths and challenges and will share our commitment to its brighter future.

Robert Gordon, Chairman of Hertfordshire Forward

Our County

Hertfordshire is a prosperous place, situated just north of London with a population of just over one million. Despite having no major cities or towns it is the second most densely populated county in the country, with a mix of new towns, market towns and rural villages. This gives it a semi-urban feel without the problems associated with large cities. Our residents are generally well-educated, well-paid, healthy and living in safe communities. But despite this overall picture of Hertfordshire being a good place to live, there are some areas of growing concern which need to be tackled so that all our residents can continue to enjoy the good quality of life offered here.

When Hertfordshire Forward asked people who live and work in Hertfordshire what the best things about our county are, they said:

- It has a good quality of life
- It benefits from being close to London
- It is a prosperous, affluent county
- It is a good place for families
- It has good services
- It is a green county
- It is a safe county

However they also told us there are a number of problems too:

- Traffic congestion is bad
- The cost of housing is high
- There is disadvantage here, despite the overall affluence
- People are getting older and living longer (which is great), but that increases the pressure on our services
- We know lots more houses have to be built – this needs to be managed effectively

The following pages tell the story of what it is like to live in Hertfordshire, highlighting the key challenges we all face and outlining Hertfordshire Forward's long term proposals for dealing with them.



Jobs, Prosperity and Skills

Hertfordshire is a prosperous county with high standards of living. The economy is built upon several sectors (including financial and business services, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals). Our workforce is highly skilled and well paid; the number of employees with high qualifications is well above the national average, as are average earnings, with many people working in London.



However this masks a number of growing challenges which we need to address if the county is to remain competitive. Despite the overall affluence we enjoy, there are pockets of high unemployment (for example in Broxbourne). Despite the generally high levels of skills among our workforce, there are as many residents with little or no formal qualifications as there are with degrees. Employers also face difficult competition, with London directly to the south of the county attracting many of our more skilled staff to higher wages and better opportunities.

It is also important to recognise that Hertfordshire exists within a global economy. The so-called “credit crunch” has led to predictions that economic growth in the UK will slow from 2008. Concerns about this happening locally, and slight rises in unemployment, suggest more challenging conditions for sustaining our relative prosperity lie ahead. We also know that, despite global conditions, the government expects the county to create a further 68,000 new jobs by 2021. Whatever these jobs may be, we need to ensure they are filled by local people, and complement Hertfordshire’s existing dynamic and innovative knowledge-based economy.

Between now and 2021 we want to:

- Support the growth and retention of existing businesses and encourage high value inward investment
- Ensure the skills of the workforce meet the demands of employers
- Provide opportunities for everyone to share in our prosperity
- Encourage lifelong learning and an entrepreneurial culture

Safer and Stronger Communities

Overall, Hertfordshire is a safe place to live with one of the lowest crime rates in the country. However perceptions of crime, anti-social behaviour and drug dealing are higher than would be expected given the county's relatively safe nature. Low level crime such as vandalism and graffiti can leave many people feeling unsafe. Notably, a quarter of all violent crime in the county is domestic in nature and this affects a wide range of people.

Community safety is vital to our future prosperity. Those small numbers of individuals who have a disproportionately high impact on crime levels (priority and prolific offenders) need to be targeted. We must focus on early and speedy rehabilitation, breaking cycles of crime, supporting and preventing those at risk of offending and their families. We need to reduce drug and alcohol abuse through effective policing and expanded rehabilitation facilities.



Strong, supportive communities are the biggest contribution to reducing crime. Despite the county's affluence and the fact that most enjoy a good quality of life, this is not the case for some of the most vulnerable people. Disparities in wealth - the gap between the so-called 'haves' and the 'have nots' - is an important issue and we need to ensure everyone feels they can share in our prosperity. It is vital that local communities, especially the vulnerable, can influence and feel able to affect decision making in their local area. Everyone has a part to play in developing cohesive communities, including voluntary and community groups, which support a sense of local character and pride in our places, underpinned by diverse cultural activity.

Between now and 2021 we want to:

- Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in our neighbourhoods and town centres
- Reduce the fear of crime
- Develop cohesive communities
- Enable and support a vibrant voluntary and community sector and a range of diverse cultural activities which meets the needs of local people
- Encourage communities and individuals to have a greater voice and participate in local decision making

Children and Young People

Most Hertfordshire children do well at school – high standards and continuing improvement draw people to the county as a place to raise their families. Our young people benefit from a secure path into adulthood - we have the second highest proportion of young people in education, employment or training in the country.

However despite this high quality environment there is still a significant gap between the outcomes for vulnerable children and young people and others in the county. At school, boys achieve less than girls at GCSE and children from some Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, those with disabilities and those in care achieve less than other children. The same groups of children and young people are also less likely to easily find employment.



We want to dramatically improve outcomes for vulnerable groups, and to motivate and inspire all children and young people to participate fully in society and enjoy the benefits of living in Hertfordshire. In particular, we will focus our services around children and parents rather than professional boundaries, and provide early support to prevent problems escalating.

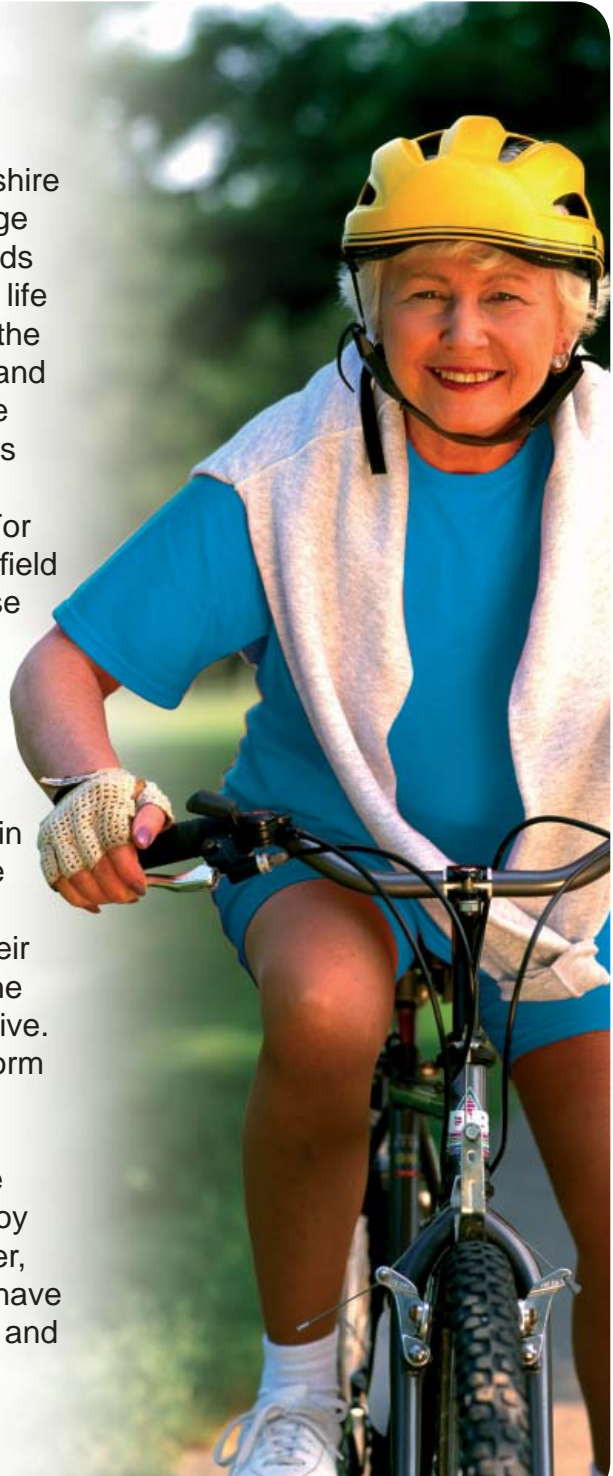
Between now and 2021 we want to:

- Narrow the gaps between vulnerable children and all children in Hertfordshire and improve outcomes for all
- Ensure children and young people in Hertfordshire remain safe in an ever-changing world
- Ensure children and young people are ready to succeed as they move into primary school, secondary school, further study and work
- Provide high quality information and support to parents
- Ensure all children and young people have access to high quality facilities and positive activities to develop personal and social skills and to promote wellbeing and reduce behaviour that puts them at risk
- Ensure children and young people achieve a healthy weight
- Eradicate child poverty
- Significantly reduce the number of young offenders and young victims of crime

An Ageing Population

Life expectancy in Hertfordshire is above the national average (testament the high standards of living and good quality of life in the county) and by 2025 the number of people aged 75 and over is expected to increase from 82,000 to 116,000. This increase will not be evenly spread across the county. For instance, while Welwyn Hatfield can expect to see a 20% rise in the number of over-75s, East Herts and North Herts can expect increases of around 60%.

Older people and their role in our communities need to be recognised and valued, ensuring they can shape their own lives and help shape the communities in which they live. Older people are not a uniform group and so targeted approaches are necessary. Older people must have the opportunity to work and enjoy lifelong learning, to volunteer, to be physically active and have access to and enjoy leisure and cultural pursuits.



Key to addressing the challenges of an ageing population is encouraging people approaching or over 50 to make lifestyle changes that will increase their healthy life expectancy before they reach 75.

New levels of service provision will be required and communities will need to adapt to their changing demographics, not least in supporting the high number of people over 75 living alone. Of these almost 60% have a limiting long-term illness and it is predicted that the number of older people who have dementia will rise by 15-25% over the coming decade. Older people will need to be supported in their homes, utilising technological advances that support independence. They should be able to remain independent in their communities with access to the care when they need it. The role of carers is therefore vital and needs to be properly valued.

Between now and 2021 we want to:

- Focus on the prevention of illnesses
- Help older people maintain their independence
- Ensure older people have opportunities to be active members of our communities

Health and Wellbeing

The health of Hertfordshire residents is generally good with people benefiting from good quality health care and relatively long life expectancy. However we need to address health inequalities and what some call “the postcode lottery”.

Life expectancy in Dacorum and East Hertfordshire is higher than in Stevenage and there is a staggering 6.2 year gap in the life expectancy between the healthiest and least healthy wards in St Albans.

Health and wellbeing in the future will depend on what we do now to help people adopt lifestyles that keep them fit and well. Seven out of ten premature deaths are caused by cancer, stroke and heart disease, and an estimated 2,000 lives per year could be saved if we could curtail these. Smoking rates vary from around 10-15% (generally in the more affluent areas) to parts of the county where more than 30% of the adult population smoke. Smoking is the single greatest cause of premature illness and early death, killing at least 1,580 people per year. This impact is felt most in areas such as Broxbourne, Stevenage and Three Rivers.

Approximately one in five children starting school in Hertfordshire is overweight or obese. The highest rate for girls is in Hertsmere and Watford. If current trends continue, at least one third of adults, one fifth of boys and one third of girls will be obese by 2021. Encouraging people to be active is an important way of preventing illness in later life, and although the numbers of people in St. Albans and East Hertfordshire participating in regular exercise is high, this is not the case in Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield and Broxbourne (where activity levels are amongst the lowest in the country).



Between now and 2021 we want to:

- Improve the health and wellbeing of all our residents in the 20% most deprived wards
- Reduce the difference in mortality rate between deprived and non-deprived areas
- Improve life chances and access to healthcare for all, especially those in areas of deprivation and those with learning disabilities

Housing, Affordable Housing and Quality Neighbourhoods



Hertfordshire is an attractive place to live and work but the particularly high house prices make it difficult to encourage 'key workers' to settle in the county. Almost one in five firms say difficulty attracting staff to the region hinders growth, and poor affordability makes it harder for young people to access the housing market. People are therefore forced to commute long distances to work in Hertfordshire, or move away entirely. It is not just age that is a factor in affordability problems. The average house is less affordable for women than men and interviews with migrant workers confirm that rental prices are a key concern for many living in Hertfordshire. Organisations must work together to reduce the risk of the most vulnerable people becoming homeless.

While 83,200 new houses will be built by 2021, simply increasing supply is not enough. Public sector organisations and their partners have a vital role to play in delivering innovative solutions to housing affordability and neighbourhood design and to ensuring new housing is designed in a way that is safe and supports community cohesion and today's lifestyles. This will be especially challenging in the context of a softening housing market, and evidence of new housing developments being put on hold.

Between now and 2021 we want to:

- Work together to understand housing needs and market demands in the county
- Ensure we have an appropriate mix of housing to support needs and demands, especially relating to:
 - o Key workers
 - o Other key occupational groups
 - o Migrant workers
 - o Preventing homelessness
- Ensure a minimum of 35% of new housing is affordable housing and is sensibly integrated with private (i.e. full cost) housing

Transport and Access

Good transport links within and through the county are essential to Hertfordshire's economy. There are several major transport routes through the county, with more than four million car journeys and over 70,000 people commuting into London everyday. By 2011 it is predicted that around 124,500 people will be commuting into and 167,600 out of Hertfordshire.

Hertfordshire is well connected, but traffic flows are 35% higher than the national average. Congestion is seen by local people as one of the biggest issues facing Hertfordshire and something that is worsening. Indeed the volume of traffic on our roads is predicted to increase even further between now and 2021.



Car ownership is high (with East Herts, Three Rivers and St. Albans among the highest in the country). As a consequence our residents travel 65% further by car than the UK average and two thirds of people use it as their main mode of travel to work, creating exceptionally busy roads during rush hour. Moreover, 44% of journeys to work and 40% of all trips by Hertfordshire residents are less than three miles in length. Given that Hertfordshire's transport network is based largely on routes in and out of London, moving across the county can be problematic, with east-to-west travel in particular need of improvement.

Between now and 2021 we want to:

- Reduce the need to travel by car and encourage use of alternatives methods of transport
- Improve access to services, including education and health, across the county
- Bring about a step change in the provision, quality and use of public transport in Hertfordshire
- Improve the reliability of journey times and improve East to West travel
- Improve access to the countryside, open spaces and cultural activities for recreation and health
- Ensure effective long term management and maintenance of the transport network
- Improve road safety

Sustaining Hertfordshire's Unique Character and Quality of Life



When we ask people what makes Hertfordshire special, the unique blend of over 25 distinct villages and towns, open space and our rural landscape come high on the list. Proximity to London, the strong economy, high standards of public services, shopping, leisure and cultural opportunities are also cited. It not only makes Hertfordshire a great place for families and a great location for business but helps build community cohesion. However, that character and uniqueness is potentially under threat from changes in society and significant growth that could see increasing urbanisation.

A key challenge for the future is safeguarding and strengthening the elements of Hertfordshire we value most in the face of increasing pressure for change. In 2021 Hertfordshire should be a place where people can embrace residential and commercial developments while valuing the historic character, rural landscape and sense of place. This will ensure Hertfordshire remains an attractive place for everyone, especially families, to live, visit, learn and work.

Between now and 2021 we want to:

- Avoid merging communities by protecting our greenbelt wherever possible, and enhancing our urban fringes and open spaces
- Support land management, particularly the historic built and natural landscape, and local agriculture, which protects our biodiversity, wildlife, and natural resources
- Enhance the quality and distinctiveness of our town centres and their range of local facilities, and ensure our villages remain vibrant
- Improve the efficiency, standard and connectivity of public services in Hertfordshire
- Secure more investment and funding into Hertfordshire for our public services

Promoting Sustainable Development



By 2021 a minimum of 83,200 new homes and 68,000 new jobs must be created in Hertfordshire under the East of England Plan. This will put immense pressure on our transport infrastructure and local services such as schools, hospitals and leisure facilities. It also threatens our environment and the availability of natural resources such as water.

We need to take action to develop a more sustainable approach to future development, how we live and our use of resources to make a meaningful contribution to the global challenge of climate change.

Already Hertfordshire uses 35 times more resources than the county's size warrants - 150% higher than the global average. We create 8.5m tonnes of carbon emissions and 538,000 tonnes of household waste a year. The rising cost of waste disposal, the scarcity of waste disposal sites, and statutory carbon reduction targets present key challenges for the future.

Between now and 2021 we want to:

- Ensure sustainability principles are central to future planning and decision making in Hertfordshire
- Ensure the development of properly planned sustainable communities with the necessary social, economic, environmental and transportation infrastructure in place
- Meet all national and EU targets relating to waste and recycling, minimising waste volumes and ensuring the provision of a range of waste processing facilities to deal with the county's waste locally
- Meet Government targets for reducing Hertfordshire's carbon emissions