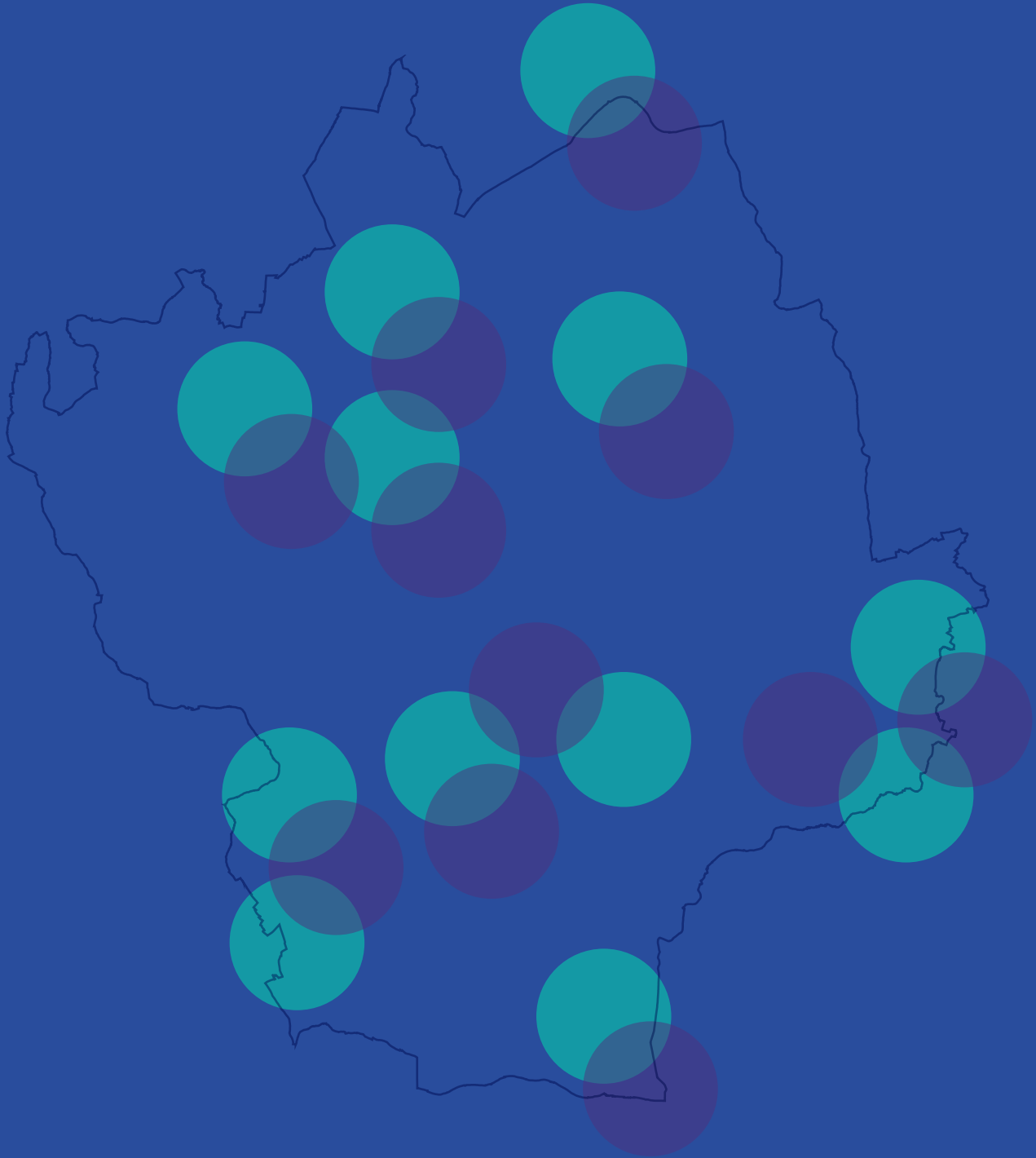


# North East Central Hertfordshire

*Vision 2050*

Draft  
February  
2024

PRIOR  
+PTNRS





# THE NEC HERTS SHARED VISION

The NEC Herts Vision has been prepared by the five authorities East Hertfordshire, North Hertfordshire, Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield and Broxbourne, along with the Hertfordshire County Council.

This document represents the outcome of a period of collaborative and participatory working to discuss and debate the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats that our region faces today – as well as the future.

Our shared vision provides a core building block for further joint and collaborative working and will be a point of common advocacy as the five authorities move through a process of looking at growth options to 2050. The Vision will help guide our discussions as we consider future directions that will help us all reach the desired futures we have set out, in the best way possible. Once a preferred growth option is agreed, our vision will provide a blueprint for the future of our sub-region, helping to inform Local Plans prepared by the constituent councils.

Our shared vision will remain a guide to support discussions about future growth, investment and strategic priorities that are to be shaped and encouraged across the region.





# CONTENTS

<b>01 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
WHY A SHARED VISION?	3
OUR AREA	5
HOW DID WE DEVELOP OUR VISION?	7
<b>02 FUTURE TRENDS</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>03 OUR VISION</b> .....	<b>15</b>
INTRODUCING OUR VISION	17
OUR VISION	19
Our Future for Place	22
Our Future for Environment	32
Our Future for Infrastructure	42
Our Future for Movement	52
Our Future for People	62
Our Future for Economy	72
<b>04 SHAPING OUR FUTURE</b> .....	<b>81</b>
<b>05 REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>85</b>

# 01 INTRODUCTION

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**Our towns and regions are growing and changing. We must act together to ensure our future is shaped not by chance and external forces, but through a clear vision that sets our path to a future we define for ourselves.**

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# WHY A SHARED VISION?



**90%**

of the UK's population is estimated to be living in urban areas by 2050.<sup>1</sup>



**6%**

of mortality rates in Hertfordshire are attributed to particulate air pollution, exceeding the national average of 5.5%.<sup>2</sup>



**8%**

of the population in Hertfordshire is projected to be aged 80 years and above in 2043.<sup>3</sup>

## PURPOSE

The five authorities East Hertfordshire, North Hertfordshire, Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield and Broxbourne, along with the Hertfordshire County Council have recognised the need to come together to author a shared vision that sets the path toward shaping our future. As we look toward 2050, we must work and act together to ensure our future is shaped not by chance and external forces, but through a clear vision that sets our path to a future we want for ourselves.

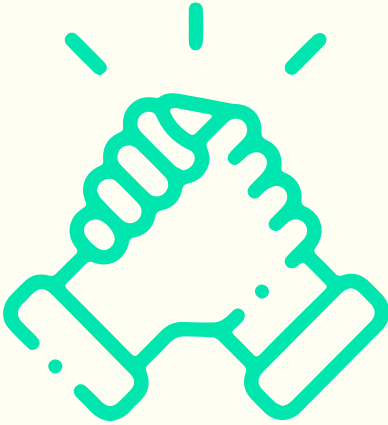
Our vision will guide planning and development in NEC Herts to be socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. It will encourage the right quantity and quality of growth by influencing and supporting future strategy, policy developments and investment decisions made by the five authorities and partners to enable more effective delivery of integrated interventions that will better serve the current and future needs of NEC Herts.

Our vision acknowledges our weaknesses and the threats posed by certain trends. It will help us prepare for and proactively address and respond to the anticipated changes impacting NEC Herts. Climate Change, an aging population, advancing technology, digitisation and urban growth are only a few trends that have already had significant impacts on NEC Herts, and will continue to impact us in the future. It is up to us to come together and decide how we navigate these trends, to best mitigate the negative impacts and to take advantage of the positive for everyone's benefit.

Our vision also celebrates the past that makes NEC Herts what it is today. Our area has much to be proud of - from our rare chalk streams and our global economies in the bio-science and film industries, to being home to the world's first Garden City and New Town, Letchworth and Stevenage. In looking to our past, our vision recognises these place qualities and assets to help build forward toward a justified ambition and future.

The resultant vision is one that articulates the ambitions and aspirations for our place, people, economy, and environment, aimed at improving the lives of our residents, communities, and businesses whilst paying homage to our past and present.





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The North East Central Hertfordshire Vision 2050 is a tool that supports current strategies and plans across the five authorities and Hertfordshire County Council, as well as relevant national strategies.

## AIMS OF THE SHARED VISION

This vision has sought to deliver upon the following core aims:

- + Create a clear shared vision that is a statement of the authorities realistic and deliverable aspirations for our place, people, infrastructure, environment, movement and economy.
- + Unite stakeholders from across the five authorities through a shared sense of direction
- + Guide future strategy and policy developments to enable more effective delivery of intergrated interventions that better serve the current and future needs of residents, communities and businesses.
- + Inform cross-boundary planning and strategic growth options that address climate change, environment, infrastructure, housing, and employment - issues that can only be addressed effectively by working together across administrative boundaries.
- + Allow improved planning for change to reduce duplication of effort across authorities and partners.
- + Articulate the intended character of NEC based on current trends and trajectory of key data, such as on demographics, economy, movement and environment.
- + Challenge how NEC responds to growth and change in the future.
- + Recognise the unique characteristics of NEC Herts that support distinction and encourage inward investment.

# OUR AREA



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## 10%

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of the world's rare chalk stream habitats are located in Hertfordshire.<sup>4</sup>

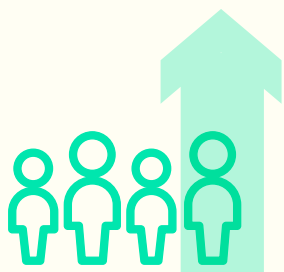


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## 4 x

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National Character Areas and 121 x designated Landscape Character Areas within NEC Herts.<sup>5</sup>



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## 627,513

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estimated NEC Herts population by 2043, up from 591,700 in 2021.<sup>6</sup>

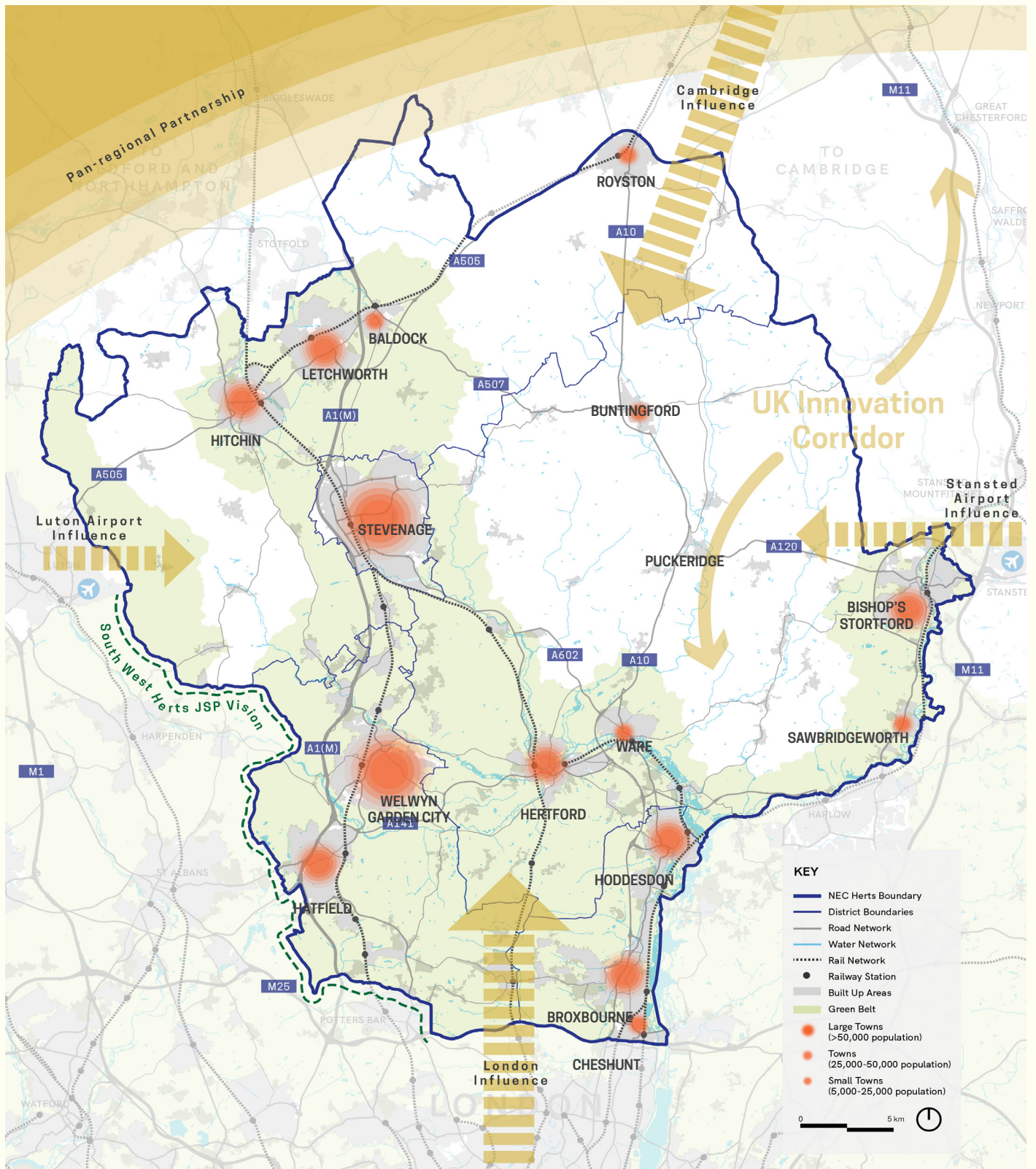
North East Central Hertfordshire is a geographically diverse, and economically important region. Straddling both urban and rural environments, the area stretches from the northern outskirts of London past large new towns, garden cities, historic towns and into areas of open countryside.

The most significant settlements include Stevenage, the largest town by population, Welwyn Garden City, Cheshunt, Hoddesdon, Bishop's Stortford, Hatfield, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Ware and Hertford. There are many more smaller towns and villages, with Royston a notably important service centre for the northern extent.

The area has been heavily shaped by both the Garden City movement and the twentieth Century generation of new towns. Letchworth and Welwyn are internationally important early and successful examples of Garden Cities. Hatfield and Stevenage are examples of large new towns built during the post-war period.

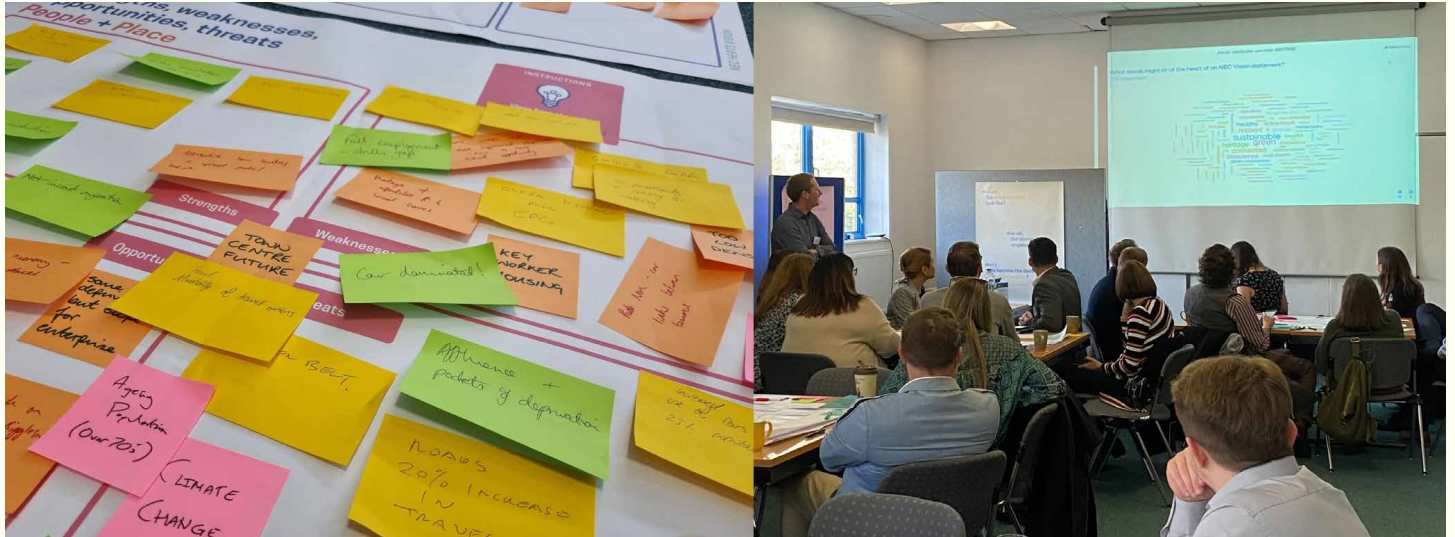
The area is also influenced greatly by its environs. To the south lies the London region, to which the area is well connected by north south rail and road, with regular commuter rail services. Nearby to the east lies the large new town of Harlow, Stansted Airport and the M11 London – Cambridge motorway and economic corridor. To the north, some of the study area is more influenced by the city of Cambridge and its nationally important economy than it is by London. To the north west, Bedford and Luton Airport and urban area influence towns like Hitchin.

The East Coast Mainline and A1(M) run roughly parallel north-south through the west of the area and connect a corridor of urban areas including Hatfield, Welwyn Garden City, Stevenage, Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Baldock. The M25 runs along the southern edge of the area providing radial connections to London and the South East. The M11 runs just to the immediate east of the study area between London and Cambridge, and also serves the town of Bishop's Stortford. There are further rail services aligned with the Lea Valley. In terms of other important but more internally focused road and rail connections, the dualled section of the A10 connects Cheshunt with Hertford and Ware. The A414 is a crucial east-west link in a region that tends to be better connected by north-south infrastructure. The A414 connects St Albans, Hatfield, Welwyn, Hertford, Ware, Hoddesdon and Harlow.



North East Central Hertfordshire Context

# HOW DID WE DEVELOP OUR VISION?



## A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Our vision was developed through an active, engaging and participative process consisting of three distinct periods of engagement, where we worked collaboratively to share thoughts, discuss themes, and brainstorm ideas. The engagement periods ran from September 2023 to December 2023 and consisted of:

- Engagement Period 1: 'NEC Herts: The Here + Now'
- Engagement Period 2: 'NEC Herts: Future Trends + Opportunities'
- Engagement Period 3: 'NEC Herts: The Draft Vision'

Tailored workshops with supportive materials and documents were carried out in each engagement period, with each workshop consisting of two sessions. Session 1 participants included key officers and elected members across the Councils. Session 2 participants included key stakeholders such as invited members of the community, key businesses, organisations and youth representatives.

The workshops were aimed at fostering active engagement through a range of activities, bringing us together to share joint exploration, validation and challenge. This has resulted in a shared vision that has been co-produced and authored by all involved.

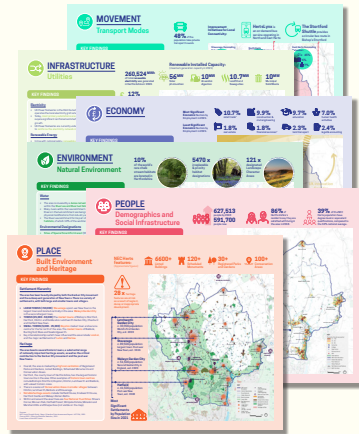
# Our journey begins here!



## Engagement Period 1: 'The Here + Now'

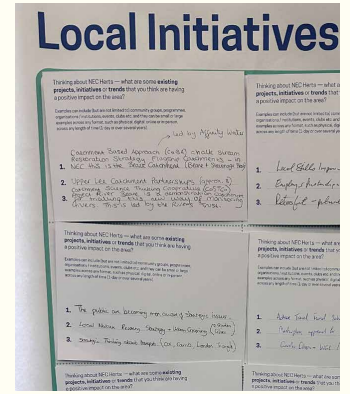
### Baseline Study

To gain an initial understanding of the wider NEC Herts area as it is today, information from Local Plans, GIS and census data was reviewed and synthesised into a series of thematic and graphic baseline posters, informing Workshop 1.



### Workshop 1: Sep 2023

To validate what we learned from the baseline study, we took part in a series of group activities to discuss thoughts and our lived experiences. Together, we identified the key strengths and weaknesses of NEC Herts, as well as the challenges and opportunities presented across varying perspectives and themes.



## Engagement Period 2: 'Future Trends + Opportunities'

### NEC Herts Futures Report

The Futures Report was produced to help us look forward and plan with confidence. It summarises global and national trends, motivating us to think about the big picture, placing those trends in the context of NEC Herts and providing insight across a range of topic areas.



### Workshop 2: Oct 2023

We further explored these insights in Workshop 2 where we discussed trends and their potential impact on NEC Herts. Future scenarios were imagined to address key issues identified, and we began looking into a more positive future and how it could be shaped.



## Engagement Period 3: 'The Draft Vision'

### Drafting the Vision

Bringing together our collective understanding of NEC Herts and the direction of travel we want for our future, we began drafting our vision. An interim workshop with Session 1 participants was held in November 2023, to ensure the continued co-production of the Vision.



### Workshop 3: Nov 2023

The draft vision was tested in the final workshop, where we collectively and individually reviewed the developing vision and provided concise feedback and thoughts on the structure, content, language, themes and graphics.

## Toward our final vision...



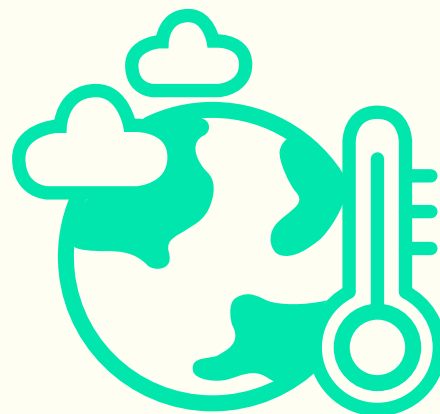
# 02 FUTURE TRENDS

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**NEC Herts is part of a wider picture that includes the region, the country, and the world. The trends and changes happening at these different levels will have a significant impact on NEC Herts as it progresses towards 2050. It is important to understand the challenges that lay ahead and the trends that will play a part in how we define our vision and shape our future.**

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# FUTURE TRENDS



In developing our shared vision, we recognise our weaknesses and acknowledge the potential threats posed by certain trends. By identifying these trends, we are forced to think big and be better prepared to proactively address and respond to the anticipated changes impacting NEC Herts.

## THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

In 2023, COP28 saw countries around the world unite in recognising the need to transition away from fossil fuels, the largest contributor to global warming and climate change.<sup>7</sup> Increased frequency of extreme weather events including flooding, drought, wildfires and heatwave are caused by climate change, and pose severe risks to people, communities, and properties, as well as our natural environments.

The UK has recently experienced record breaking temperatures of up to 40.3°C in July 2022,<sup>8</sup> as well as the wettest March in forty years, recording up to 104% more rainfall than average.<sup>9</sup> In NEC Herts, rising global temperatures and flash floods are contributing to nature loss, biodiversity decline, water scarcity and water pollution, threatening our precious chalk streams, habitats and wildlife. Our human population is also threatened, particularly elderly individuals who are more vulnerable to heat related conditions and illnesses, adding more pressure onto our healthcare system.<sup>10</sup>

In the face of the climate emergency, we must change the way we conduct, power, and govern our lives, societies, and economies, helping to meet our country's commitments to combat climate change and ensuring we can safeguard our environments and increase our own resilience in the future.



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# 6%

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projected population increase in NEC Herts by 2043, totalling 627,513 people compared with 591,700 in 2021.<sup>15</sup>



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# 23%

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of the population in Hertfordshire is projected to be aged 65+ years in 2043, with 8% projected to be aged 80+ years.<sup>16</sup>



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# 90%

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of the UK's population is estimated to be living in urban areas by 2050.<sup>17</sup>

## A CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC

Across the country, our populations are growing, ageing, and becoming more diverse. The UK population is projected to rise to 71 million people by 2045,<sup>11</sup> influenced by net migration as a result of global economic, social, and political factors.<sup>12</sup> In NEC Herts, the rate of population growth is higher than the national average and is driven by domestic inward migration influenced by good jobs, schools, outdoor spaces and proximity to economic centres such as London and Cambridge.

In Hertfordshire, the ageing population and life expectancy is increasing while the number of children is decreasing. Family sizes are getting smaller, more people are living alone and the number of households is projected to increase.<sup>13 14</sup>

As demographic patterns change, so will demands on the housing market and social infrastructure, particularly aged care, healthcare and accessible transport. To ensure a future that is inclusive for all, we must be prepared to meet the needs of our changing demographic.

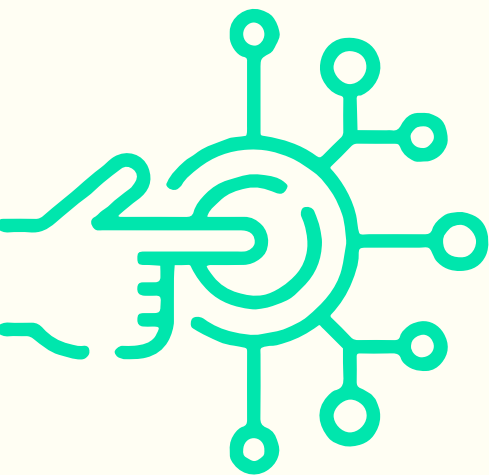
## URBAN GROWTH

In England, the urban population is growing faster than the rural population, with cities and towns expanding outward due to increased land and house prices in urban centres. Population growth in NEC Herts is placing pressures on our towns and settlements, as well as our areas of Green Belt, which take up to 40% of land and surrounds a number of settlements.

Outward expansion of settlements results in urban sprawl which usually consist of low-density car-dependent housing developments, far from jobs, shops, and hubs of social life. This unsustainable pattern of growth increases infrastructure costs and forces us to spend more time in our cars, leading to road congestion and increased air pollution. Urban sprawl also exacerbates the effects of climate change, with extensive areas of hard surfaces leading to increased rainwater run-off that contributes to flash flooding, putting additional pressures on our sewage infrastructure, while the urban heat island effect adds to the effects of heatwave.

It is vital that we guide good growth that addresses the negative impacts of urban sprawl with sustainable solutions that will ensure the resilience of our urban areas and continued wellbeing of our communities.

# FUTURE TRENDS



## ADVANCING TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITISATION

Technology and digitisation plays an integral role in our daily lives, from artificial intelligence and ‘smart homes’ to information sharing and innovative applications for the everyday, such as banking, food delivery and travel. Although this can make our lives easier, digitisation has increased our exposure to privacy data breaches, increasing disinformation and misinformation being shared, and global issues contributing to growing mental health issues,<sup>18</sup> while automation poses challenges for our workforce and traditional economies. In NEC Herts, the future of our high streets and town centres are being negatively impacted by the digitisation of commerce and the increased popularity of online shopping, leaving many empty retail units and reducing the need for less-skilled service industry jobs.<sup>19</sup>

Across the globe, green technologies are being developed to help combat climate change, including electric transport, waste-to-energy, and carbon capture and storage, and the pursuit of optimization and resilience has led to breakthroughs in areas like healthcare, transportation, communication, and education. NEC Herts’ strategic location alongside the UK Innovation Corridor and at the centre of the UK Golden Triangle puts us in a great position to harness the opportunities that are presented to us.<sup>20</sup>

As technology advances and as we move further into a digitised world, the challenge will be to ensure that the benefits are shared amongst all through supportive infrastructure, responsible digital practices and equitable access that empower individuals and communities.



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# 33%

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of Generation Z (those born between the late 1990s and early 2010s) are happy with their mental wellbeing, compared with 52% of the 'Baby Boomer' Generation (those born between 1940s and 1960s),<sup>24</sup> raising questions and broadening our collective understanding about what it means to be 'in good health'.

## CHANGING LIFESTYLES

The lasting impact of Covid-19 has transformed our lives, shaping how we work and live. The pandemic has led to a global increase in stress, anxiety, and depression, prompting a broader perspective on health that includes mental, emotional, and financial well-being.<sup>21</sup> This is worsened by the effects that digitisation and 'online life' are having on our mental health. Amidst busy and stressful lives, people are searching for simplicity and meaning. The desire for a simpler lifestyle has grown alongside societal advancement, leading to longer working hours and a focus on personal development. People are spending more time in their local areas and seek flexibility and choice as to how they balance their work and personal lives. In 2021, 37% of the NEC Herts working population worked from home, the beginning of a growing trend as a result of Covid-19.<sup>22</sup>

Economic challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis, inflation, and food and energy insecurity are also impacting lifestyles. While it is important for us to maintain our town centres and high streets as active hubs for retail, business and cultural enjoyment, people are changing the way they spend their time and money. Consumers want products and services that align with their values and support good causes, seeking meaningful impact from their choices.<sup>23</sup>

The future of NEC Herts must consider the needs of new ways of living and working, and the shifts in attitudes and behaviours reflecting changes in people's circumstances, aspirations, and wider societal transitions. Only then can we create a future that performs for us and helps us achieve our preferred work-life balance and good state of mental and physical wellbeing.

# 03 **OUR VISION**

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**Our shared vision is a future we desire. We will seek to achieve it from many different perspectives that are interlinked, working towards a brighter, more inclusive and resilient future for residents, communities and businesses.**

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# INTRODUCING OUR VISION

## ONE FUTURE

Our Vision is summarised into a single statement that encapsulates the construct and intent of the NEC Herts Vision. This is **our Future**, summarising what we, the five authorities of NEC Herts, stand for.

## SIX CHAPTERS

Our Future is explored across **six chapters** that enable us to focus on six thematic and cross-cutting themes: Place, Environment, Infrastructure, Movement, People and Economy.

## PERSPECTIVES OF OUR FUTURE

Within each thematic chapter we explore our Future from **24 perspectives**. These set out our ambitions from different aspects, breaking down our Future into concise statements with a heading that set clear pathways to help us realise our potential and meet our shared aspiration.

The six thematic chapters provide a structure for our vision, however, the themes interface with each other. While our future perspectives have substance as standalone aspirations, they are interconnected with each other, demonstrating a network of ambitions across the broad themes that allow us to view NEC Herts from all angles.

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY

Each future perspective is presented alongside **snapshots of today**. These summarise what we heard from stakeholders through various workshop activities, discussions and continual feedback. These explore both positive and negative aspects and are evidenced by data and trends.

## BIG IDEAS

Supporting our future perspectives are **Big Ideas**, inspiring us to think positively about how we might move forward, learning from other local, national or global examples that might not necessarily be within the same context but share a similar aspiration or goal. Big Ideas help us to think creatively while grounding our vision into something that we know can be achieved through innovative thinking and collaboration.

# 1 x Future

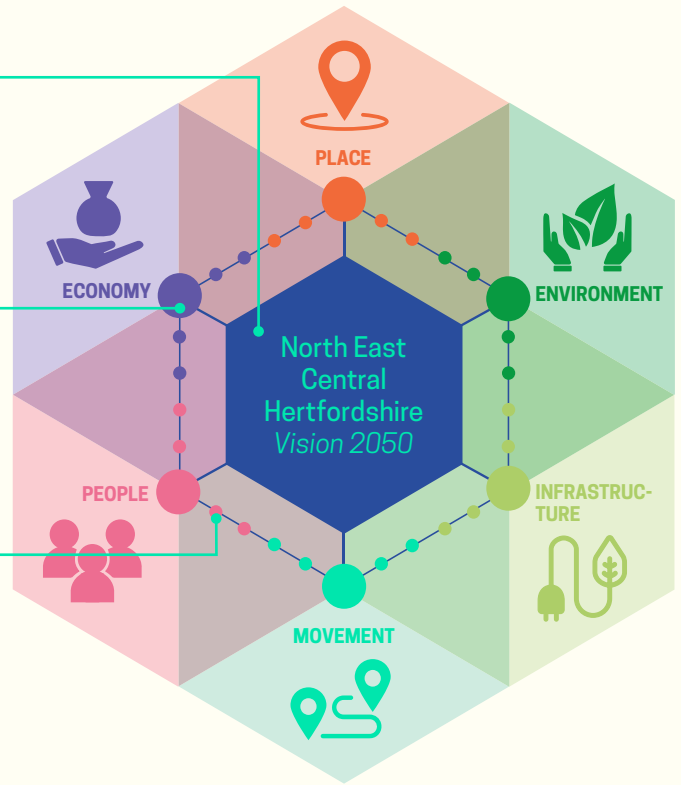
A single statement that encapsulates the construct and intent of the NEC Herts Vision.

# 6 x Chapters

Our Vision is viewed through the lenses of six cross-cutting themes.

# 24 x Perspectives

Within the six chapters, one future is described through 24 perspectives. These are our ambitions for 2050.



### OUR FUTURE FOR PEOPLE

17

#### LIVING BETTER, FEELING CONTENT

Healthy living will be embedded in our way of life, and we will support everybody in looking after their own physical and mental health. A holistic approach will be adopted, so that health and social services work hand-in-hand to enhance the way we embed wellbeing in designs and plans for our places and communities. We will be a place where it's easy to live well.

**BIG IDEAS**

**Big Data and AI: shaping the future of the NHS UK**

Technology is set to play an ever-increasing role in the NHS, as Integrated Care Systems (locally-based partnerships which plan and deliver NHS care) seek more innovative ways to increase efficiencies and use healthcare infrastructure more efficiently.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to improve diagnostic processes, by analysing vast amounts of patient data to assist healthcare professionals in making faster and more accurate diagnoses. In addition, health AI chatbots could relieve doctors of routine and time-consuming tasks, allowing them to concentrate on more critical aspects of patient care.<sup>79</sup>

Through the analysis of very large datasets (including patient, health and operations data), 'big data' analytics will allow for meaningful patterns and trends to be identified.<sup>80</sup> Benefits could include early disease detection, which will help to improve the health outcomes of patients and also reduce overall demand on healthcare services.

Image: Virtual healthcare appointments can reduce patient waiting lists (source: www.rhospiceforster.com)

NEC HERTS VISION 2050

### A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

**Supporting all our people to live healthily**

The majority of our residents consider themselves to be in good health, and this is reflected in our average life expectancy which is higher than the rest of the country.<sup>81</sup> We recognise that population health is complex, and that many external factors can contribute to our health, including genetic, environmental and social factors.

We know that many of our residents don't currently reach the daily and weekly recommended targets for physical exercise,<sup>82</sup> and that our busy lifestyles can be a weakness. However, we are lucky to benefit from excellent recreational green corridors such as the Cole Green Way, Alban Way, Lea Valley, as well as countless local parks, playing fields, sports pitches and accessible and free nature parks – all of which provide our residents with great opportunities to take part in physical activity, and we celebrate the work of programmes such as Healthy Hubs Hertfordshire in helping people to do this.<sup>83</sup>

As well as access to green infrastructure, living in places where we can access our daily basic needs within a short walking or cycling distance rather than a car journey is important for health.<sup>84</sup> Our area has proved to be a great place to work from home, because of the ease of access to the outdoors.

**Investing in our infrastructure and services**

Having access to high-quality health and social infrastructure is an important part of a healthy lifestyle for our residents, particularly as climate change and hotter weather is threatening public health.

We recognise the current national-scale challenges associated with delivering new healthcare infrastructure and services, and in NEC Herts there is a lack of health provision and hospital capacity is an issue in areas.

As our ageing population continues to put a strain on healthcare, we have leveraged at the local scale to deliver health improvements, for example, by securing developer contributions to develop new facilities, developing public health programmes and building on the great local working partnerships between our Integrated Care Boards, local authorities and other public sector organisations.

**84%** of residents consider themselves in good health or very good health.

Genus 2021, Office for National Statistics, 2021.

**34%** of adults across the area do not partake in 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023.

**8%** of the population is projected to be aged 80+ in Hertfordshire by 2043.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023

18

# OUR VISION

**1 x Future**

**6 x Chapters**

**24 x Perspectives**

## **Our Future:**

Our internationally renowned and pioneering Garden Cities, New Towns, Market Towns and villages have shaped how we live. We will continue to explore bold approaches to the resilient, sustainable and attractive growth of a place that knows the value of town and country.

Our enviable location between two globally influential cities of London and Cambridge provides an impactful economy with world-leading sectors. We will ensure our key businesses continue to thrive while encouraging a new age of entrepreneurial growth shaped by an innovative, diversified and green economy.

Our cherished natural environments of chalk streams, woodlands, parks and designed landscapes are places rich in biodiversity and steeped in history. But we will recognise the fragile nature of this ecosystem and harness its potential to help us to thrive.

Everyone in NEC Herts will benefit as we explore new frontiers for health, happiness, prosperity and opportunity at the heart of our focus, found in our vibrant, thriving and diverse communities.



1 x Future

6 x Chapters

24 x Perspectives

The diagram below represents our vision and its interconnectivity across the thematic chapters. At the centre is the headline for our Future. This branches outward into the six chapters, represented with a large node. Connecting the chapters are our future perspectives, represented by small nodes, each with a key heading.





# OUR FUTURE FOR *PLACE*

We will make our places known for their diversity and vibrancy, which offer a unique mix of historic rural landscapes, heritage assets, famous Garden Cities, New Towns and thriving market towns amongst a globally recognised economy in life sciences, film and advanced technologies.

We will exploit and balance the benefits of rural-urban living, and our town centres will be well-adapted and dynamic, with a focus on meeting the needs of local communities and supporting local business. New development will prioritise environmental sustainability and promote well-connected and healthy living.

We will continue to harness the benefits of our location near to the globally influential cities of London and Cambridge, and welcome increased numbers of visitors as part of a renewed recognition of what we can offer.

## **In 2050, we will be...**

- 1 Amplifying our diverse heritage and natural landscapes**
- 2 Interacting on vibrant high streets**
- 3 Acclaiming the benefits of rural-urban living**
- 4 Driving sustainable places by design**

## AMPLIFYING OUR DIVERSE HERITAGE AND NATURAL LANDSCAPES

We will celebrate and enhance our diverse heritage and attractive natural landscapes to the continued benefit of residents while drawing more visitors than ever before in our growing visitor economy. We will be known as a place where modern heritage, ancient historical sites and attractive landscapes come together to create a sense of character that is special to NEC Herts.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Horseriding and hikers on the Kent Downs (source: kentdowns.org.uk)

### **Sustainable tourism in a protected landscape Kent Downs, UK**

The Kent Downs National Landscape Authority has taken a strategic, case-study focused approach to support local businesses, charities and organisations to partake increasingly in sustainable tourism across Kent Downs.

Through the Kent Downs National Landscape & Visit Kent Experience Business Training Resources, the authority is providing free guidance to local partners to help them increase the sustainability of their products and services, while also attracting more visitors to the area.

The initiatives, such as the Kent and Medway Energy and Low Emissions Strategy, have identified ways that businesses can use less energy, while other support has included helping businesses to disperse more visitors, celebrate local produce, promote off-season visits, and reduce the strain on popular destinations to minimise the impact on delicate ecosystems.<sup>25</sup>

Many local businesses are already taking part in the initiatives, including hotels, B&Bs, restaurants, cafes and attractions.

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Conserving our special heritage

Our area is characterised by special built heritage and natural landscapes and is home to a high concentration of heritage features including listed buildings, scheduled monuments, conservation areas and registered parks and gardens.<sup>26</sup> Many of our small villages have a rural charm, and a string of conservation areas in villages near the Hitchin Gap, and between Letchworth, Baldock and Stevenage are good examples of this.

We have many historic town centres including Bishop's Stortford, Royston, Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock. Hertford, the county town of Hertfordshire, has the largest historic town centre in NEC Herts, and its celebrated historic castle attracts thousands of visitors every year, as does Hatfield House, Knebworth House and the Welwyn Roman Baths.<sup>27</sup>

Many heritage features across NEC Herts are at risk from neglect,<sup>28</sup> and we want to ensure that these special features are protected for generations to come. Heritage architecture that divides opinion is particularly vulnerable to neglect, including brutalist architecture in our new town centres, such as the Stevenage town centre clock and sculptures.

### Attractive landscapes and green infrastructure

NEC Herts has a diverse landscape character and topography ranging from the low valleys of the River Lea to the Chiltern Hills.<sup>29</sup> Particularly special to this area are the many chalk streams and riverscapes, known for their clear water which supports rich river ecosystems, though these ecosystems are threatened by climate change, pollution and over-abstraction.

We have excellent parks and gardens, including Hatfield House Deer Park, which is nationally famous as the childhood home of Elizabeth I, and we are proud that many of our residents live within easy access of green infrastructure and open space.

### Communicating our offer

We have many landscapes, historical sites and heritage features that make NEC Herts unique, and while many of our residents enjoy visiting these places, others don't yet know about them. There is more that we can do to help people realise the wealth of activities, attractions and places to visit on their doorstep. Much of our area might be relatively unknown as a tourist or visitor destination, but we believe that our convenient location on the doorstep of London, and our proximity to other key tourists destinations such as Cambridge, means we could attract many more visitors than we currently do and boost our local economy.



NEC Herts is marked by a high concentration of heritage features, including:



**6,600+**  
Listed Buildings



**120+**  
Scheduled Monuments



**100+**  
Conservation Areas

AECOM (2022) NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report

**121 x**  
Landscape Character Areas and

**4 x**  
National Character Areas exist within NEC Herts.

AECOM (2022) NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report

**100,000**  
visitors come to see Hertford's historic town centre and Hertford Castle each year.

East Herts District Council (2023) Hertford Castle Grounds Transformation

## INTERACTING ON VIBRANT HIGH STREETS

We will lead the narrative for our future high streets and town centres as they retain their status as important hubs for our residents and local businesses. Our town centres will respond to the needs of the local community, adapting to provide flexible and varied uses throughout different times of the day, such as start-up and SME premises, arts and culture, experiential retail and street markets. We will continue to value and encourage our local Business Improvement Districts and stakeholder groups in supporting our town centres through a period of change.

### BIG IDEAS

#### **Reviving a high street with a community-led market Coventry, West Midlands, UK**

The community-led Earlsdon Street Market was set up by local business owners and shopkeepers to support sole traders and smaller businesses within the neighbourhood of Coventry.

After noticing a decline in visitors in and around Earlsdon Street post-Covid, local business owners have collaborated to organise a regular street market that seeks to attract more people to visit the shopping street, as well as helping to support new businesses and sole traders to get off their feet. It is hoped that, over time, this

will help to strengthen the local economy in the area.

As a result of the market, shop and business owners on Earlsdon Street have reported increased footfall both on market days and outside of market days. Sole traders and small businesses in the area have been given the chance to build their customer base, and the market has been recognised as a proactive example of community led regeneration in the area.<sup>30</sup>



Image: Earlsdon Street Market  
(source: Coventry Rocks)

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Contributing to our sense of character

NEC Herts is home to a variety of different settlements types and sizes, and the character of our town centres reflects this. High streets and town centres are an important part of the places in which we live, work and play, and we celebrate the diverse and varied offer that they have.

Our new town centres, such as Stevenage, Britain's first post-war new town, have a distinct architectural character and modern heritage with pedestrianised shopping streets, while our older Garden City centres, including Welwyn Garden City and Letchworth Garden City, offer a wide range of shops and services which attract visitors from surrounding areas.

We are proud of our characterful market towns, such as Bishop's Stortford, Hertford, Hitchin, Royston, Baldock and Hoddesdon. Their town centres are known locally as enjoyable places to spend time, browse shops or meet for coffee. We celebrate their special features, such as Baldock's generously wide high street which hosts community events like Oktoberfest, and Hertford Castle, which attracts thousands of visitors to Hertford's historic town centre each year.<sup>31</sup>

### Our changing high streets

Like many places across the UK, our high streets and town centres are undergoing change. Competition against online retailers, the digitisation of banking services and other social trends such as working from home have reduced the amount of time and money we spend on our high streets.<sup>32</sup> Bike theft, antisocial behaviour and shoplifting are also threatening these places.

Despite this, we continue to value the experiences that our high streets and town centres offer. We are especially proud of our retail, hospitality and leisure outlets, particularly our SMEs, independent businesses and local BID's, that work hard to create unique experiences for our residents and visitors.

### Investing in the future

Stevenage is undergoing a major regeneration programme supported by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Towns Fund. The aim is to stimulate investment in Stevenage by supporting the town centre's night-time economy and driving greater footfall to retail and leisure facilities.<sup>33</sup> Projects include Event Island, a new community events space at the former Danestrete Bus Station site. In addition, Hatfield has recently completed its One Town Centre regeneration programme, with new homes, landscaping, and walking routes improving its historic town centre.<sup>34</sup>



**10 - 20%**  
decline in footfall on UK high streets and town centres compared to pre-Covid levels.

PwC (2023) Store openings and closures H1 2023

**£1 billion**  
regeneration investment has been planned for Stevenage town centre as part of the Stevenage Town Centre regeneration programme.

AECOM (2022) NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report

## ACCLAIMING THE BENEFITS OF RURAL— URBAN LIVING

We are proud of our history as pioneers of the world's first Garden Cities and New Towns, Letchworth Garden City, Welwyn Garden City, and Stevenage, which demonstrate the bold approaches which we have taken towards good growth. We will continue to be known as experts in town and country living and renowned for leading growth in the most appropriate and sustainable locations.

### BIG IDEAS

#### **Protecting green qualities through stewardship Letchworth Garden City, North Hertfordshire, UK**

Letchworth, the world's first Garden City, was designed to deliver homes and neighbourhoods in places which carefully integrate nature into the urban environment, allowing people to enjoy nature locally. The results are improved physical and mental health and increased social cohesion while enjoying the economic benefits of living in a city or town.<sup>35</sup>

Today, the special nature and character of Letchworth Garden City is protected through the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, which funds

investment programmes to enhance and protect the rural-urban character of Letchworth. Investments include green infrastructure programmes, such as the Garden City Greenway, and events, such as Letchworth's Outdoor Museum –an outdoor family event celebrating Letchworth's history.<sup>36</sup>

The stewardship model adopted on inception of Letchworth means that funding for the programmes is provided by the rental income generated by the foundation's property portfolio, meaning it is financially sustainable.



Images: Letchworth Garden City rural-urban life  
(source: Letchworth Garden City Heritage Fund)



## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Pioneers of good growth

We recognise and celebrate the fact that many settlements in NEC Herts are the result of a bold approach to growth in the 20th Century, and that many of the most popular places to live in NEC Herts were designed and delivered in last 150 years.

Letchworth Garden City was founded in response to the growing challenges presented by dense urban living in the 1800s, including lack of access to green space, poor health and cramped living conditions. Letchworth's founding were established to give people better access to green space, local jobs and access to community infrastructure – principles that are still important today and continue to guide the development of new communities across the UK and beyond.

Stevenage, one of the first English new towns built in the post-war period, was also pioneering and delivered new cycling infrastructure, homes for 60,000 people, and Britain's first fully pedestrianised town centre.

### Town and country living

We are proud of the way we balance town and country living in NEC Herts. We value the character of our historic market towns, new towns, garden cities, and the services they provide, while being able to make the most of the amazing countryside and health benefits of living near to the great outdoors. We have many

green open spaces to be proud of, including nationally significant landscapes such as the Chilterns AONB and the Lea Valley, which provide great opportunities for us to spend more time in nature.

### Maintaining the balance

The balance between the urban, the rural and open countryside is one of the characteristics that makes NEC Herts special, and we are passionate about protecting and maintaining it by supporting good growth in the most sustainable locations.

Many people in NEC Herts live in rural locations, and the character of these places forms an important part of our identity. We realise that their lower populations compared with the urban populations might mask rural disadvantage, which can often be overlooked as an 'urban' problem. Maintaining the balance must ensure that rural populations also benefit from town and country living, as much as the urban populations do.

Historically, NEC Herts has proven that the delivery of new settlements can be part of the broader picture of sustainable development, by planning for settlements which are large enough to support and deliver their own social and physical infrastructure, and supporting all residents to access high-quality community infrastructure, parks and open spaces, and countryside.



## 135,000

people were housed in post-war New Towns within NEC Herts between 1946 and 1982.

New Towns Act (1946); Stevenage.gov.uk (2022) Stevenage New Town

## 2.5 years

is the average number of years added to the life expectancy of a person living within walking distance of green open space.

Science (2023) Vol 9, Issue 26. Inequalities in urban greenness and epigenetic aging: Different associations by race and neighborhood socioeconomic status

## £75,000

of grant funding was awarded by the Letchworth Garden City Foundation in 2021 to support schemes including the Garden City Greenway and Great Outdoors campaign.

Letchworth Garden City (2021) Report & Accounts

## DRIVING SUSTAINABLE PLACES BY DESIGN

Our towns and villages will be healthy places for people and environmentally sustainable by design. We will promote good growth and resilience, accepting only high standards of placemaking in new development. We will create attractive, well-connected places, where people can meet their daily needs within a short walking or cycling distance, or go further afield by public transport. New development will be integrated with the enhancement of habitats, and will respect our historic and natural environment, including green infrastructure, rivers and waterways.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Traffic free streets encourage children to play outside in BedZED, Croydon (source: [www.euronews.com](http://www.euronews.com))

### **BedZED – sustainable living enabled by design Beddington, London Borough of Sutton, UK**

Completed in 2002, BedZED (Beddington Zero Emission Development) is recognised as one of the most ambitious attempts to achieve all-round sustainability in UK housing projects. The development consists of 100 homes, office spaces and community facilities, and features fully pedestrianised streets where neighbourly interactions occur easily and children can play outside safely.

A shared car club scheme allows residents access to a car when needed, reducing the number of parking spaces required on site.

Energy consumption is much lower than other developments of its size. Buildings are built to Passivhaus principles, and use no fossil fuels for heating. Buildings are also able to access energy from a biomass boiler that was installed in 2017.

The site was delivered via a collaboration between Peabody housing association and Bioregional (a climate change charity), and offers a variety of housing types and tenures.<sup>37</sup>

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Sustainable by design

We know that living in places which are well-designed can help us to lead more sustainable and healthy lifestyles. We're proud that many of our places are celebrated for their pioneering approaches to sustainability. We're good at designing new places and making them work well, for example, our Garden Cities are celebrated for the way they integrate nature into the urban environment, and our New Towns are praised for their integrated transport interchanges and cycling infrastructure.

While celebrating these wins, there is more we can do. Many rural areas of NEC Herts have a low population density and there is a large distance between villages. This can make it harder for people to make sustainable choices, like taking a journey on foot or by bicycle instead of using a car. But this doesn't need to be a barrier to sustainable lifestyles, and carefully, well-designed places can help everyone live more sustainable and healthy lives.

### Impact of built environment on climate change

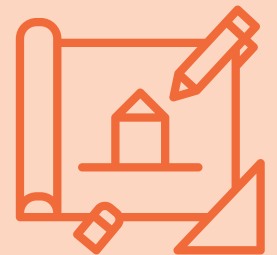
The built environment sector is the second biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in NEC Herts.<sup>38</sup> While we recognise the importance of delivering new homes, infrastructure, and jobs, and with housing developments being planned or in the pipeline, we want to reduce the carbon impact of our buildings, for example,

by reducing embodied carbon or exploring innovative ways to heat buildings. Over the coming decades, climate change will more drastically influence the way we design places, to be more resilient as we anticipate hotter and more unpredictable weather patterns.<sup>39</sup>

### Working with our partners to deliver great places

There are many examples of great design and placemaking in our area which make it a great place to live, including brilliant examples of medieval town centres, mid-20th Century architecture and the Arts & Crafts movement. By promoting good architecture and design, we want to see development that is sensitive to heritage surroundings and seeks to protect our environment, including green infrastructure, habitats and rivers.

We invite developers and investors to demonstrate real ambition for development proposals in our area, to ensure that we are able to deliver good growth across our region. The Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter is already helping to do this, by encouraging developers to commit to design and sustainability pledges that enable us to deliver new homes, jobs and infrastructure in a way that is sustainable for people and the planet.



**100,000**

new homes and

**100,000**

new jobs are planned to be delivered in Hertfordshire over the next 15 years.

Hertfordshire Growth Board (2023)  
Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter

**825 kt**

of GHG emissions was produced by the built environment sector in NEC Herts in 2020. It is the 2nd highest contributor to GHG emissions in the region.

Herts Insight (2023) Greenhouse Gas Profile for Hertfordshire

**10.9 kt**

of the total GHG emissions produced in 2020 were CO2 emissions that came from settlements.

Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, 2023



# OUR FUTURE FOR *ENVIRONMENT*

Recognising the indispensable value of our natural environments, habitats and species and as custodians of their future, we will ensure a legacy of thriving ecosystems for generations to come.

We will promote biodiversity, nurturing habitats in both rural and urban areas, and enhance our rare chalk streams, forests and wetlands, both natural and man-made, safeguarding these green and blue assets through reconnecting isolated habitats and restoring water quality.

By raising awareness and championing climate action, we will build the resilience of our communities in urban and rural areas, protecting against the effects of climate change.

## **In 2050, we will be...**

- 5** **Championing climate action**
- 6** **Promoting biodiversity**
- 7** **Flourishing green and blue ecosystems**
- 8** **Safeguarding nature from pollution and exploitation**

## CHAMPIONING CLIMATE ACTION

We will be leaders in our resilience and adaptation to climate change, harnessing opportunities presented in our growing green economy. We will commit to sustainable practices, infrastructure, and policies that embrace long-term behaviour change to adapt to climate change so that everyone is protected against the risk of long-term stresses and extreme weather events. With our communities, we will create adaptive solutions for our urban and rural environment which will provide valuable services towards natural flood management, rainwater absorption, cooling of urban areas and sustainable farming.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Intergrated green infrastructure at Eddington (source: Cambridge Eddington, 2024)

### **Climate resilience at scale Eddington, North West Cambridge, UK**

The East of England is the driest region in the UK and a declared area of drought. The new neighbourhood of Eddington was designed by planners at the University of Cambridge working with local community groups, and demonstrates a number of pioneering climate resilience aspects in water management which underpin the 3,000 homes scheme.

Eddington contains the largest water recycling facility in the UK which is integrated into the landscape and urban environment. Rainwater captured through

green infrastructure is recycled through cleansing lagoons and a designed floodplain. It is then supplied to homes for non-potable use. Up to 45% of rainwater is captured through the site-wide water management system, which also provides surface water attenuation and flood risk benefits.

The rainwater harvesting system proved to be robust in the 2019 drought period, with the added benefits of residents paying less for their water bills, as 27% is supplied from the rainwater harvesting system.<sup>40</sup>

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### A climate emergency

There is a declaration of climate change emergencies across NEC Herts, with four out of our five local authorities having declared a climate emergency.

The Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership has approved strategic action plans to help achieve our goal of Net Zero by 2030 by addressing water sustainability, biodiversity, carbon reduction, transport and behaviour change to drive climate action through the deployment of renewable energy and promoting sustainable choices.

### We have a flooding issue...

Hertfordshire has extensive river corridors and is prone to flooding. Climate change will increase the frequency and severity of these events, and flash flooding is already an issue in the area.<sup>41</sup> Parts of NEC Herts are more exposed to the impacts of flash flooding, such as higher density areas built in proximity to rivers. The picture is not equitable and some communities are at higher risk than others.

The Thames River Basin District Flood Risk Management Plan 2021 - 2027 covers the Middle Lee Rivers area and recognises that the floodplain in the upper area is a crucial asset to managing flood risk, while in the lower area an increase in flood storage will be needed. Despite this, current Local Plans don't give rivers enough of a buffer zone from development. This damages

river corridor connectivity and can lead to internal flooding, which will become worse with climate change. We have many channelised or straightened rivers that can't function naturally, which also leads to increased risk of flooding. We are concerned that new permitted development rights could contribute to more flash flooding, as authorities have less power to influence development.

### But we don't have much water

While our area is prone to flooding, we are also located in one of the driest regions in the country. Despite this, the region uses more water per capita compared with the national average.<sup>42</sup> This is further exacerbated by the impacts of climate change on water supply, making water a scarce resource.

### Protecting our green assets

Our area's extensive green assets, including forests, ancient woodlands and wetlands, can play a vital role in addressing climate change by acting as carbon sinks, creating cooling effects, and minimising the effects of extreme weather events caused by climate change.

In our urban areas, heatwaves and elevated night-time temperatures are being exacerbated by the urban heat island effect, caused by extensive areas of hard surfacing. Urban green and blue spaces are vital for helping to reduce temperatures in towns where most of the NEC Herts population live.



# 62.1 kt

of CO<sup>2</sup> was stored in NEC Herts forest land in 2020. This is the area's greatest carbon sink.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023



# 121

## properties

in Hertfordshire were reported to have been damaged by internal flooding in 2020, with a further 247 flooded externally.

Hemel Today, Deborah Price, 2021

# 557 reports

of flooding were made across Hertfordshire in the five days following Storm Henk in January 2024.

Severe Weather Hotspots, Hertfordshire County Council, 2024

## PROMOTING BIODIVERSITY

We will nurture our rich biodiversity and river systems, working with natural processes to create thriving habitats in our rural and urban areas, appreciating their contribution to our well-being. Through raising awareness, community engagement, addressing policy, and proactive conservation measures, we will work with partners to secure a protected and enriched future for all natural ecosystems.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Water vole (source: Sustainable St Albans, 2020)

### **Wilder St Albans St Albans, UK**

Wilder St Albans is a two-year partnership project between Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and St Albans City and District Council. The aim is to foster biodiversity in St Albans and protect species like the peregrines in St Albans Cathedral, kingfishers along the River Ver, mayflies around the River Lea, and lizards in Nomansland Common.

The partnership works with the local community and provides advice and training to support a chain of actions, including changing mowing regimes to increase flowers and establishing

more woodland through natural regeneration. The goal is to improve the District's position against the target of 30% of land and sea to be protected for nature's recovery by 2030.

One of their achievements was in 2021. In partnership with the Ver Valley Society, the initiative managed to reintroduce water voles to the River Ver, 34 years after they were last seen there.<sup>43</sup>



## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Rich habitats and biodiversity

We have a variety of biodiversity assets which are protected and we are bestowed with a range of habitats, from ancient woodlands, chalk streams, historic parklands and heathlands, to wetlands, meadows, river valleys and floodplain grasslands which support a rich ecological network.

In Hertfordshire there are over 1,800 Local Wildlife Sites which correlate with ancient woodland and river corridors. Most of these sites are in private ownership, and they don't have legal protection like Nature Reserves. As a result, only a minority of them are managed for biodiversity.<sup>44</sup>

In NEC Herts, our notable sites of international importance for biodiversity include Wormley-Hoddesdon Parks Wood, which is a designated Special Areas of Conservation, and the Lee Valley, which is a Special Protected Area.

### Our biodiversity is under threat

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world.<sup>45</sup> Habitat networks across the UK are being forced to adapt to climate change, and in our area some bird species are known to be changing their migratory journeys in response to rising temperatures.<sup>46</sup>

The habitats that exist in our area have developed over hundreds or thousands of years and are under threat from development, water scarcity, pollution and climate change. In our area, heathland

habitats are the most threatened habitats, and remaining patches are extremely fragmented.<sup>47</sup> Over-tourism of our valuable habitats could also place them under further pressure.

Nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are found throughout our area, with a large concentration in the south. Many are in 'unfavourable (recovering conditions)',<sup>48</sup> meaning that if current management measures are sustained, the site will recover over time.

### National priority

The UK Government is introducing Biodiversity Net Gain rules for new housing and development projects in England, aiming for a 10% net positive impact on local environments starting in February 2024. Introduced under the Environment Act, it will support conservation efforts and community development, with over £15 million allocated to assist Local Planning Authorities in implementation.

Biodiversity Net Gain will have a positive impact on reversing habitat loss and maintaining existing habitats. There will be opportunities in linking fragmented habitats through the development process, supported by Hertfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which is currently being developed by the Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Partnership and expected to be published in October 2025.<sup>49</sup>



**5,470**  
Irreplaceable and Priority  
Habitat designations,  
including ancient woodland,  
heathland, wetland and  
riverine habitats.

Natural England, Priority Habitats Inventory (England), 2023

**1,812**  
Local Wildlife Sites in  
Hertfordshire across 32,433  
acres of land, but only

**30%**  
are managed for biodiversity.

Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, 2018

## FLOURISHING GREEN AND BLUE ECOSYSTEMS

We will make sure that our natural assets, our woodlands, chalk streams, and areas of conservation are safeguarded and enriched. We will reconnect isolated habitats, creating corridors of connected green and blue ecosystems, and commit to restoring the water quality of our rivers and precious chalk streams by taking a Catchment Based Approach. By protecting our woodlands, wetlands, grasslands and soils as carbon capturing assets, we will drive our climate positive future.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Beane Marsh (source: Herts Wildlife Trust)

#### **Save Beane Marshes Hertford, East Hertfordshire, UK**

In the heart of Hertford, Beane Marsh is a wildlife habitat next to the rare Chalk River Beane. Save Beane Marshes is a campaign and fundraising initiative that started in 2019 by the local community to protect the Beane Marsh when it was put up for sale. The successful campaign led to the nature reserve becoming owned and managed by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to secure its ecological value.

The floodplain grassland of Beane Marsh sits within the Beane Valley and provides a rare and valuable habitat as well as a crucial connection by the river to other nature reserves such as Waterford Heath to the north and King's Meads to the south.

Work is being undertaken to further enhance the nature reserves natural value through a conservation grazing programme and a management plan for habitat monitoring and pond creation.<sup>50</sup>

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Extensive blue networks

Our area is covered by a dense network of river corridors which lie within the River Lea and River Ivel Catchment Areas. The River Lea catchment forms part of the globally rare chalk streams habitats, of which 10% in the world are located in Hertfordshire. These are a precious local environmental assets which we are proud to have, however, many rivers within the Lea catchment, including these chalk streams, are in 'poor' ecological condition and in a bad state.<sup>51</sup> People are unaware of their precious nature, especially when so many are concrete lined - they don't care about what they can't see.

Our waterways management needs to be improved. Banks of our rivers are often not natural and have been concreted over historically, which has increased the risk to people and nature due to high erosion rates and surface, groundwater and fluvial flooding. Invasive non-native species also threaten our rivers, as well as human activities such as encroachment, abstraction and pollution from rain water run-off. All rivers in NEC Herts have a failing Water Framework Directive status, largely due to the high density of people and human impact.

### Great green networks

We have great green networks and we must protect them. Our rich and diverse green assets make up our unique landscape, and provide us with many options for outdoor

recreation. Our open green spaces range from ancient woodlands, historic parklands and heathlands, to wetlands, meadows, river valleys and floodplain grasslands which support our rich ecological network. Part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) sits west of Hitchin, and there are more historic deer parks in NEC Herts than in any other county.

### Existing momentum

There are established and emerging strategies and visions on a local level aiming to safeguard and enhance our natural environment, for example, the draft Hertfordshire Green Infrastructure Strategy which is being developed by the Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Partnership, setting priorities for accessibility of green and blue infrastructure, woodland planting, chalk landscape restoration and restoring wildlife links.

Other strategies include the River Lea Catchment Partnerships, who are focusing on improving the quality of the River Lea catchment rivers and waterways, driven by the Catchment Based Approach.

There are also many community groups and volunteers who are invested in protecting our green and blue assets. People are very engaged in the local community and the environment, as well as the younger generation who are becoming increasingly aware of the issues.



**10%**  
of the world's rare chalk stream habitats are located in Hertfordshire

AECOM (2022) NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1  
Baseline Data Assessment Report



On average, residents in NEC Herts live within a

**5 minute walk**

from a park, public garden or playing field.

Throughout NEC Herts there exist Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protected Areas (SPAs) and Environmentally Historic Areas.



## SAFEGUARDING NATURE FROM POLLUTION AND EXPLOITATION

We will safeguard our nature, water, soil and air by minimising their pollution and exploitation. Collaborating closely with relevant bodies, addressing policy and stimulating behaviour change, we aspire to clean the air we breathe, protect our soil from contamination, nutrient loss and erosion, shield our water from pollution and over consumption, and protect our native species from invasive species. In building our future, we will also ensure the sustainable use of locally sourced minerals in the most appropriate locations.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Clean waterways with artificial intelligence & IoT (source: Siemens)

### **The Siemens Water (SIWA) Blockage Predictor Yorkshire, UK**

The University of Sheffield, Yorkshire Water and Siemens have worked in collaboration to install a network of sensors using artificial intelligence along a series of chalk streams in Yorkshire to continuously monitor their water levels, temperature, and water quality.

In future, predictive analytics and machine learning models could also be used to forecast streamflow changes and anticipate flood events before they happen.<sup>52</sup>

Using The Internet of Things and Big Data, sensors accurately pinpoint where blockages in combined sewer systems are presenting an overflow risk, so that these can be addressed before unnecessary pollution occurs.

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### The air we breathe

Our area is threatened by low air quality, which is impacting the healthiness of our town centres and around our schools. On average, Hertfordshire omits nearly one third more GHG emissions per km<sup>2</sup> than the average of England, and nearly double that of the East of England.<sup>53</sup> Transport and the built environment are the largest sources of CO<sup>2</sup> emission in NEC Herts, contributing to the higher than national average mortality rates attributed to particulate air pollution.<sup>54</sup>

We have long recognised that traffic congestion significantly impacts our air quality, particularly in historic towns and town centres. Our Local Authorities have demonstrated a commitment to tackling air pollution through Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA), including in the centre of Hertford, Sawbridgeworth, Bishops Stortford, as well as along the A10 through Broxbourne. There are also various schemes aimed at reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality through sustainable and active transport, such as Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan and NEC Herts' Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.

### Our water quality is at stake

Our water quality is also being threatened by pollution from rain water run-off from roads, agricultural lands and sewage overflow.

Increasing flash flood events exacerbated by climate change is leading to more sudden influx of pollutants into our rivers and streams, including oil, litter and chemicals.

NEC Herts is also suffering from water scarcity, which can further exacerbate water pollution by reducing water flows and concentrating pollutants, making them more potent. Stressed waterway ecosystems can struggle to self-purify, resulting in faster degradation of water quality.

Intensive and modern agriculture has resulted in water quality issues for the Lea catchment area and has degraded the condition of areas such as the East Anglian Chalk National Character Area. Rivers in the Ivel Catchment are being impacted by waste water and physical modifications from industry activity.

Untreated sewage spilling into our waterways during storm events is a persistent issue. However, through the Environment Act 2021, the UK Government has placed legally binding duties on water companies to reduce overflow discharge from 2020 levels by 25% by 2025.<sup>55</sup> In the Upper and Middle Lea Catchment, discharge has reduced from 13,415 hours of discharge in 2021 to 5,269 hours in 2022.<sup>56</sup>



## 919 kt

of CO<sup>2</sup> emissions produced in NEC Herts in 2021 came from the transport sector.

## 815 kt

came from the domestic sector. By sector, these are the two greatest contributors to CO<sup>2</sup> emissions in NEC Herts.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023



## 4.5 kt

 was the average CO<sup>2</sup> emissions per capita in NEC Herts in 2021, compared with the East of England's 1.6 kt of CO<sup>2</sup> emission per capita

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023

## 8 AQMA

and one Joint Air Quality Unit within NEC Herts.

List of Local Authorities with AQMA's UK Air Information Resource, 2023

There was a **21%** reduction in carbon emissions in NEC Herts between 2016 and 2020.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023



# OUR FUTURE FOR *INFRASTRUCTURE*

Through the delivery and improvements of carefully planned strategic infrastructure, we will set the foundations now for a climate positive future and unlock sustainable growth.

We will harness renewable energy, bidding farewell to fossil fuels and fostering self-sufficiency through resilient power networks.

We will place greater value on our resources and will commit to closing the resource loop through better consumption management and utilising waste as a resource through innovation.

Connectivity will thrive with ultrafast technology, enabling remote working and digital innovation.

## **In 2050, we will be...**

- 9** Maximising our resources and managing consumption
- 10** Prioritizing strategic infrastructure
- 11** Embracing digital futures
- 12** Harnessing the power of renewables

## MAXIMISING OUR RESOURCES AND MANAGING CONSUMPTION

Our resources will be better managed through innovative and holistic approaches to water consumption and energy efficiency in all of our buildings, old and new. Our waste managing systems will enable everyone to recover, recycle, compost, share, fix and reuse. We will optimise waste as a resource in our industries through different methods including waste-to-energy and repurposing waste, including aggregates, as material in construction, as well as the retention of our existing building stock. We will strive to close the resource loop between production and consumption, promoting the continual use, recycling, and repurposing of resources and buildings to extend their lifespan in our green economy.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Transforming social housing in Nottingham (source: Energiesprong UK)

### **Energiesprong ('energy leap')** **Netherlands, UK, Europe and beyond**

Energiesprong is an innovative approach to whole house retrofit, improving indoor comfort and drastically reducing resource consumption in the home. The model was piloted in the Netherlands, but has expanded across Europe and to the U.S.

Insulating 'energy pods' made up of wall and roof panels combined with solar panels, smart heating and ventilation help homes to achieve net zero energy. The pods are customised by laser measurement and manufactured offsite, allowing for quick installation, between 1-10 days.

The Energiesprong model can add value to national power networks by shifting energy produced during off-peak through the use of battery storage and exporting surplus energy back to the grid. The model uses future energy cost savings plus the cost for planned maintenance and repairs to pay for the retrofit.

Energiesprong UK is using the social housing sector as the launching market for the model, pushing forward required regulations and financing schemes so that the cost of living remains the same for residents.



## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Our resources are under pressure

Our area is facing multiple pressures from population increase, urban growth, drought, flooding and pollution into our waterways. These factors are leading to a higher demand for our precious resources, making their availability increasingly scarce. Hertfordshire uses 35 times the amount of resources that would be proportional to its size, 150% higher than the global average, which is not sustainable for the long term.<sup>57</sup>

### Our electricity consumption is growing

Most primary substations in NEC Herts are at or near capacity.<sup>58</sup> We are already using more energy than we can afford. Domestic and non-domestic electricity consumption is 11% more in Hertfordshire than the average in England,<sup>59</sup> with many of our households living in fuel poverty.<sup>60</sup> Adding to the pressure on electricity generation is the Future Homes Standard, which stipulates that from 2025 new homes will no longer be connected to gas networks and will be heated by electricity or through low carbon networks.<sup>61</sup>

### Over-demand for water

The majority of our water is sourced from groundwater supply. At the current rate of abstraction, a shortfall in available potable water is forecast for 2080.<sup>62</sup> This increasing deficit is driven by a mixture of climate change

reducing the available water in existing sources and increasing demand due to population increase. Water abstraction is also damaging our Chalk Streams and over abstraction to meet growing demand could result in long-term damage.

Many of the Local Plans have identified the re-use of greywater in new developments as a simple measure to help reduce our water consumption.

### Working on our waste management

Hertfordshire County Council's emerging new Minerals and Waste Local Plan is focused on moving solid waste away from disposal at landfill, and as such, there have been no further planning permissions of new sites for landfill. Draft policies promote the reuse of construction and demolition waste on-site, minimising waste by design, and the excavation of waste from historic landfills to be reused as building materials.<sup>63</sup>

Our sewerage infrastructure, on the other hand, is still facing pressures due to population growth and new development. Increasing amount of rainwater enters our sewer networks, overloading our treatment systems and causing pollution overspill into our waterways. This is affecting our water resource for drinking and play, and rivers are failing water quality targets.



## 12%

of households in NEC Herts in 2020 were living in fuel poverty.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023



## 52.4%

of household waste in Hertfordshire was sent for reuse, recycling, composting or anaerobic digestion in 2020-2021.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023



## 4,267 GWh

of gas was consumed in NEC Herts in 2021.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023



## 2,435 GWh

of electricity was consumed in NEC Herts in 2021.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023

**60%** of our water supply is from groundwater sources and

**40%** is taken from the River Thames or imported from neighbouring areas.

NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report. AECOM, 2022

## PRIORITIZING STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE

We will plan and work with partners to take advantage of the delivery and improvements of carefully planned transport, energy and social infrastructure to unlock growth in key areas, ensuring value for money and shared benefit for people and the environment. We will seize the opportunity to promote our green economy through this delivery, and to enhance the liveability of the area through our holistic approach to sustainable growth.

### BIG IDEAS

#### **Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Harlow, UK**



Image: Illustrative view of the Garden Town  
(source: Grimshaw)

The new Garden Town is planned to deliver 23,000 homes in new villages. The development strategy comprises of new major infrastructure to support the growth and to serve the existing community. One of the goals is for 50% of journeys originating in the Garden Town to be by public transport, cycling or walking, made possible by new Sustainable Transport Corridors. Strategic road infrastructure upgrades include new crossings over the River Stort and M11 junction upgrades. The proposed Herts Essex Rapid Transport that would run across Hertfordshire,

is planned to finish at one of the Garden Town's new communities. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan for the Garden Town envisages that the water, electricity and telecommunications networks and waste infrastructure will be reinforced, including new primary sub-stations and a Household Waste Recycling Centre. Significant provision of new primary and secondary schools and Early Years, community facilities, as well as the reinforcement of the Princess Alexandra Hospital are also planned.<sup>64</sup>

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Our strategic infrastructure is in need of reinforcement

Our populations are growing and while the demand for supporting infrastructure is increasing, our existing infrastructure is barely meeting current needs. Decades of growth have created deficits in existing infrastructure across Hertfordshire and in localised areas.<sup>65</sup>

UK Power Networks operates the local electricity grid network in our area and are undertaking a number of projects to reinforce the network, of which grid capacity is currently at its limits. As we transition to Net Zero and renewable energy, our electricity consumption will only increase further.

Our aging water infrastructure has leakages and bad connections, and we need better sewerage infrastructure that doesn't damage our river ecosystems, such as phosphate stripping. Although Anglian Water have proposed long-term management strategies for 7 out of the 10 existing water recycling catchments,<sup>66</sup> enforcing fines and management plans, which include increasing attenuation, do not address the root cause of issues.

We have good schools, colleges and hospitals, but they are just about coping now and their capacity is under pressure. As our aging population increases, there will be further pressures on our healthcare and other social services.

And if our reliance on cars continues along with population, housing and job growth, we will be experiencing higher-than-ever levels of traffic and congestion,<sup>67</sup> all of which is contributing to air pollution and impacting our quality of lives.

### Thinking strategically

We need to think more strategically when it comes to infrastructure and growth. Overcrowding small developments doesn't bring in money for new infrastructure and puts more strain on existing amenities, while accepting larger developments brings opportunities to improve infrastructure and amenities.

Where there is an investment of public funds, we need to ensure that value for money is an overarching concept. In meeting the housing demand and job targets, we should also be thinking about transport and movement, as well as supporting social infrastructure such as schools and healthcare, in order to facilitate sustainable growth.

On the other side of that, we recognise that planned transport projects can also be opportunities to unlock growth, such as HERT (Hertfordshire to Essex Rapid Transit), which will provide a much needed east-west transport link, connecting more people with jobs and services inside and outside of NEC Herts.



As of April 2022, there were

**18,770**  
planning permissions for new housing across NEC Herts.

NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report. AECOM, 2022

NEC Herts is party to England's **Economic Heartland Sub-national Transport Body Transport Strategy**, which contains a 5-point action plan for delivering **strategic transport infrastructure**.

NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report. AECOM, 2022



**HERT** (Hertfordshire to Essex Rapid Transit) is a planned transport infrastructure that can provide opportunities to unlock growth.

## EMBRACING DIGITAL FUTURES

We will enable the transition toward improved internet connectivity, with flexible and multi-provider services supported to allow our urban and rural areas to interact with the online world. Every business and resident will be able to reap the benefits of digitisation. Healthcare and education will become more accessible and versatile through virtual services and streamlined digital processes. Businesses will have the opportunity to evolve through the Internet of Things, smart manufacturing, virtual reality and beyond. Working remotely will be possible from anywhere within our area, supporting our changing lifestyles.

### BIG IDEAS

#### **Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) Essex and Hertfordshire, UK**

The Digital Innovation Zone was created jointly by the Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils, East Herts District Council, and the five local authorities of Harlow, Broxbourne, Uttlesford, and Epping Forest, as well as organisations from health, education, voluntary and private sectors. It aims to create a place that is ready to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital revolution, where the benefits of digital investments are harnessed, maximised and shared across all residents, businesses and borders.

The DIZ Digital Innovation Strategy guides the short and long-term work of the DIZ partnership, which includes developing strategic plans for the identification, delivery and enhancement of digital investment, applications and projects across all partner organisations. One example of their work is the DIZ Town Centres Special Interest Group, which is exploring what opportunities exist for digital technology and innovation, eg. place-making apps, to be a catalyst for the future prosperity of their high streets, supporting them to thrive in a changing environment.<sup>68</sup>



Image: Promoting digital innovation  
(source: Digital Innovation Zone)

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### How fast is fast?

We have generally good broadband, with more than 50,000 Superfast connections (24mbps and above) delivered across Hertfordshire from 2013 to 2021, enabling over 98.5% of residents and businesses to have a Superfast connection.<sup>69</sup>

However, there is room for improvement. The new generation of full-fibre Ultrafast digital infrastructure can offer us much faster speeds of over 300mbps. In this respect, NEC Herts and wider Hertfordshire is lagging behind, with only 5.4% average coverage for access to Full Fibre to the Premise (FFTP) and Gigabit Capable networks (1000mbps and above) in NEC Herts, and an 8% average across Hertfordshire. This is below the national average and less than other counties such as Kent, who averaged 18.5% coverage.<sup>70</sup>

### Digital equity

The vast majority of premises within our area have access to superfast broadband.<sup>71</sup> Despite this, some people in our area face digital poverty. This impacts their ability to fully interact with the online world for reasons that may include lack of devices, adequate connectivity or the knowledge to engage with the online world, as well as data poverty, which is when households cannot afford broadband connectivity.<sup>72</sup> As digitisation increasingly plays an integral role in our daily lives, it will be important to ensure that Ultrafast internet is available and accessible in our rural areas as well as our towns and urban areas, of which disparities in accessibility currently exist between authorities.

Post-pandemic, many workplaces have maintained a hybrid working model, which has allowed people to have a more flexible lifestyle. This necessitates fast connectivity from anywhere in our area to be an enabling factor for many people who have started working fully or partly from home.

And while technology and connectivity hold tremendous potential, it is accompanied also by the surge of cyber crime like online fraud and computer misuse, which are growing concerns in our area.



**97.4%**  
of premises within NEC Herts have access to Superfast broadband.

NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report. AECOM, 2022

NEC Herts has an average coverage of

**5.4%**  
for access to Gigabit Capable Networks, including Full Fibre to the Premise (FFTP) connections, ranging from 1.57% in Stevenage to 10.8% in East Herts.

Towards Digital Growth – draft framework and priorities for Hertfordshire. Hertfordshire LEP, 2021.



## HARNESSING THE POWER OF RENEWABLES

We will no longer rely on fossil fuels as we harness the sustainable energy resources abundant in our area. We are committed to a transition to local and more localised renewable energy, building on our existing capacity to become energy self-sufficient. We will bolster our energy supply through decentralized solutions and grid integration, and by investing in innovative technologies, we will adapt and reinforce our infrastructure, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to a resilient power network.

### BIG IDEAS

#### **Hertford Energy Now, community owned solar power East Hertfordshire, UK**

Hertford Energy Now is a non-profit organisation who established the first community-owned power generation project in East Hertfordshire. In 2014, 25 kilowatts of solar panels were installed at Mill Mead School in Hertford. In 2016 this was expanded to two more schools, Hunsdon JMI and Morgans Primary, with an additional 33 kilowatts.

The 92 solar panels on Mill Mead School are helping the school reduce its energy bills by generating its own electricity. In total, all three schools are

expected to make a savings of more than £40,000 over 20 years and could reduce the communities carbon emission by more than 500 tonnes.

The project was funded through a community share offer, where parents and residents became investors. The Feed-In Tariff, the Government's grant for small scale renewable energy generation, is being used to repay the investors over 20 year duration of the project. After this period, the solar panels can be gifted to the schools.<sup>73</sup>



Image: Morgans Primary School Solar Panels (source: Hertford Energy Now)

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### We need to shift away from fossil fuels

Hertfordshire creates 8.5m tonnes of carbon emissions per year,<sup>74</sup> and emits 3.1kt of CO<sub>2</sub> per square kilometre, 1.3kt more than England's average.<sup>75</sup> Recognising the significant contribution that fossil fuels have to these emissions, the need is pressing to reduce our reliance on this resource and find cleaner ways to power our communities.

### Embracing renewable energy

The Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy sets the target to become a net zero greenhouse gas county by 2050, which sees the de-carbonisation of the grid and the electrification of heat and transport as a path to Net Zero.<sup>76</sup>

In the switch to electric cars and heat pumps, there is a need to upgrade capacity on the electricity network to cope with future demands. Distributed renewable energy is likely to be a significant area of growth to support our network to 2050 as a diversified source of electricity generation.

A range of renewable energy projects already operate in our area, including solar PV, anaerobic digestion and landfill and sewage gas, with 20 renewable energy plants currently in operation and an additional 20 proposed or under construction.<sup>77</sup> However, this is still a small fraction of the total power generation needed, and there is a lack of green and locally sourced energy. At the present, large scale renewable energy projects within our area are limited, with the total installed renewable electricity capacity totalling 87MW across NEC Herts.

This underlines the need to accelerate renewable energy generation and create opportunities for more projects at the right locations which are respectful to their surrounding environment and communities.



Maximum generation of renewable installed capacity in NEC Herts in 2021:



**56MW**  
Solar photovoltaic



**10.7MW**  
Landfill and Sewage Gas



**10MW**  
Anaerobic digestion



**10MW**  
Municipal Solid Waste

NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report. AECOM, 2022



**260,524 MWh**  
of total renewable electricity was generated in Hertfordshire in 2020.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023





# OUR FUTURE FOR MOVEMENT

Our movement will be seamless, stress free and more sustainable as we experience a significant modal shift and fundamental changes to the transport network.

With careful planning of compact and mixed-use development around transport hubs, robust and interconnected public transport networks, improved green links and active travel infrastructure that make the most of our amazing walking and cycle routes, we will support a cultural shift resulting in less congested roads and vastly improved health and productivity amongst our residents.

We will embrace fossil-fuel free movement, where everybody will benefit from cleaner air and reduced pollution. Our streets will be green and safe places, creating a future that is inclusive and fun to get around.

## **In 2050, we will be...**

- 13** Greening our movement
- 14** Connecting the public transport network
- 15** Providing choice in the way we move
- 16** Improving accessibility

## GREENING OUR MOVEMENT

Everybody will benefit from our zero carbon and fully sustainable transport networks. We will no longer be reliant on fossil fuels for getting around, and all our modes of transport will be powered by greener energy. Our transport corridors will have multiple functions as opportunities to contribute to a joined-up green infrastructure that will reduce air pollution, relieve flooding, reduce the urban heat island effect and increase biodiversity.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Cargo bikes in London (source: Team London Bridge, 2022)

### **Transport for London Cargo Bike Action Plan London, UK**

TFL are promoting and enabling the growth of cargo bikes as London's leading option for last-mile freight services, contributing to the Mayor's Transport Strategy goal of making 80% of journeys in 2041 by walking, cycling and public transport.

The TFL Cargo Bike Action Plan contains 11 actions to support and promote cargo bike usage, ranging from utilising procurement as a policy lever to support cargo bike deliveries, to working with operators, BIDs and landowners to coordinate long-distance freight services, such as water-freight,

with cargo bikes. Other actions include increasing short-stay parking facilities for bikes and promoting cargo bikes as the preferred method of delivery through borough schemes.

The Action Plan also sets out to monitor movement to help project areas of future growth and demand for cargo bikes and for the identification of sites for micro-mobility hubs, and the development and publishing of safety standards that adopt best practice.

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Threat to our environment

Transport is the greatest contributor of GHG emissions in NEC Herts, responsible for the higher-than-national average mortality rate attributed to particulate air pollution.<sup>78</sup>

The air we breathe is threatened in our town centres and near schools. The failure to reduce car and combustion engine fleet will mean failure to meet Net Zero targets.

There is also a lack of reliable access to jobs through sustainable travel - many of us have to drive to work, causing high levels of traffic that impact negatively on our air quality. Run-off from the extensive road networks is also problematic for our rivers, especially on urban rivers like the Stevenage Brook, causing pollution in the form of micro-pollutants and micro plastics. And while we do have Air Quality Management Areas, their positive effect could be cancelled out due to increased car usage.

### Finding a solution

Sustainable transport has long been recognised as a way to help solve the problems we face with GHG emissions and climate change. There are several transport improvement schemes already in place to help promote sustainable transport in NEC Herts. The Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) is focused on carbon reduction and sustainable transport,

while the Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan (LTP4) defines nine objectives on improving sustainable transport in the County. The Hertfordshire Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) Action Plan focuses on the enhancement of AQMAs through sustainable travel.

NEC Herts is also party to England's Economic Heartland Sub-national Transport Body's (EEH STB) Transport Strategy, which contains a 5-point action plan for delivering strategic transport infrastructure.

Projects on the ground are also providing residents with sustainable travel options, such as the New River Path from Broxbourne to the M25 junction. It's a new 7km walking and cycling route that builds on existing green links.

Other green infrastructure, such as SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) are being supported through planning policy, however, the term 'green infrastructure' is broad and mis-used, for example, some green infrastructure doesn't support biodiversity, and there is generally a lack of understanding of what is a 'green corridor'.



Mortality rates attributed to particulate air pollution is

**6%** in Hertfordshire, higher than the national average of 5.5%.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023



**8** active Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) exist within the area.

UK Air, Air Information Resource. Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, 2023

## CONNECTING THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NETWORK

We will have an attractive public transport network that will be easy to use and a viable choice in getting around, whether it be to school, work or just being out and about. Through improvement of interconnectivity of our everyday transport infrastructure, journeys made across our bus and train networks will be joined-up, reliable and affordable, making movement by public transport in and around NEC Herts cohesive and accessible by all.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Concept image of the HERT  
(source: Hertfordshire Growth Board, 2023)

### **HERT - Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit Hertfordshire, UK**

The Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit (HERT) will be a new, sustainable passenger transport network aimed at providing an accessible, reliable and affordable east-west link in Hertfordshire, connecting Hemel Hempstead and Watford in the west to Gilston and Harlow in the east. The HERT will also connect with north-south rail lines to create new sustainable journey options across the whole of Hertfordshire and beyond.

With 100,000 new homes planned for Hertfordshire in the next 15 years, the aim of the HERT is to provide a more attractive

alternative for private car users and to replace unnecessary car journeys by connecting new homes to current and future jobs opportunities, helping to alleviate the already-congested roads.

It is anticipated that the HERT will be at the forefront of new mass rapid transit technologies, operating with zero-emission vehicles with a spacious and accessible design, and will stimulate economic growth by providing businesses with greater access to skilled people and vice-versa.

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Public transport connectivity

NEC Herts has strong north-south links connecting London to Cambridge and Bedford through higher capacity and higher speed road and rail network, with parts of London's TFL rail, bus and overground network accessible from Broxbourne. This has made our area an attractive place to live and commute from, however, public transport connectivity within NEC Herts, particularly east to west, is weak.

Poor public transport connectivity is partly due to the polycentric nature of our area, which is dependent on bus services for public transport. Urban bus services run in linear routes terminating in town centres, meaning passengers must change multiple times if travelling across town. Bus services between towns and settlements are infrequent or non-existent. Convenience is further impacted by limited bus services on evenings and weekends, and high fare prices affect accessibility.<sup>79</sup> We can't even reach the best park in Stevenage by public transport!

### The convenience of cars

In general, public transport in NEC Herts is unreliable, slow and unaffordable for many, which in turn means that we rely heavily on the convenience of cars to get around. This is having severe consequences on our environment as well as our quality of life, and will only get worse as the population increases, leading to increased car use.

Traffic congestion is a big problem for us, making commuting an issue and further impacting the reliability of our public transport system by causing bus services to run late. Additionally, traffic congestion and our continued car dependency is contributing to air pollution and impacting our health.

### Public transport improvement schemes

Post-Covid 19, bus service operators in NEC Herts are still reliant on government funding to continue running. The National strategy 'Bus Back Better' (2021) sets out an ambitious vision to improve bus services outside of London and to encourage passengers back on the bus.

As such, the Hertfordshire County Council is working through its Intalink Enhanced Partnership to deliver upon their Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), which aims to improve network frequencies and connectivity of the bus service across Hertfordshire, prioritising factors that can genuinely enhance the accessibility of public transportation, including addressing the 'last mile home', expanding concession fares to a wider age demographic, and prioritising bus lanes on roads to bypass congestion and improve punctuality and reliability.



**7%** of NEC Herts' households use public transport, while

**48%** of households use private vehicles to commute to work.

Census 2021. Office for National Statistics, 2021.



## PROVIDING CHOICE IN THE WAY WE MOVE

Our public transport networks will work hand-in-hand with a range of ‘last-mile-home’ options including active travel, e-bikes and e-scooters, and on-demand services to suit people of all ages. Strategically placed mobility hubs will join up these modes of transport, making seamless journeys possible right through to the last-mile-home. Our communities will embrace multiple modes of sustainable transport as viable options for routine journeys, with our cycling and walking infrastructure being safe, green, attractive, and conducive to healthier and happier lifestyles.

### BIG IDEAS

#### **HertsLynx Hertfordshire, UK**

Launched in 2021, HertsLynx is Hertfordshire County Council’s Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) service, providing a different kind of public transport option for residents in Hertfordshire.

The mini-bus service covers designated operating zones in East Herts, North Herts and Dacorum District Council, as well as links to fixed destinations in key hub towns including Stevenage, Letchworth, Hitchin, Baldock, Royston and Bishop’s Stortford, Hertford and Ware.

HertsLynx differs from traditional bus services as it doesn’t follow a set timetable or route. Instead, passengers can book the service through the HertsLynx app, selecting from a wide variety of pick-up and drop-off locations within the operating zones and key hubs. Bus fares are funded by the DfT’s Bus Fare Cap Grant, which ensures low fare prices until December 2024.

This initiative has improved local connectivity in the area, providing accessible and affordable public transport services to local residents.



Image: HertsLynx on-demand service (source: RouteOne, 2021)

# A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

## Limited choice

The convenience of cars in NEC Herts is made worse by the lack of viable alternative and more sustainable transport options available to us. Our movement corridors are car-dominated and traffic heavy, there is a lack of pavements and adequately lit paths for walking, and bike theft is a common occurrence. In general, walking and cycling feels unsafe in our area.

## Unequal provisions

In urban areas, provision of footpaths and cycle routes vary due to the spatial differences in historic towns versus newer planned towns. Historic towns have narrower footpaths compared with newer planned towns that have been designed to provide more space for pedestrians and cyclists. While the National Cycle Network runs through parts of our area, there are no other major inter-urban cycle routes in other parts, making the viability of cycling between towns unequal across NEC Herts. Cycling is also not an appealing option because of heavy vehicular traffic and busy roads that are difficult to cross, as well as cycle paths being intermittent and not continuous. Many rural train stations are also difficult to reach by bus, foot or bike, increasing the need for us to drive.

The unequal provision of safe and accessible sustainable travel options are contributing to our negative social mentality toward non-car travel.

## Active travel focused

The main strategy for sustainable travel in NEC Herts has so far been focused on active travel. Our area has some great long distance cycleways, and the canal footpaths and channels are good travel links.

Active travel strategies such as those contained within the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs), Hertfordshire County Council's Growth and Transport Plans, and the Sustainable Travel Towns programmes in Stevenage, Royston and Letchworth have been crucial in helping us to meet Net Zero targets, reduce air pollution and generally encourage active lifestyles amongst our residents. However, active travel initiatives are not inclusive of older and less mobile people, adding to the mobility challenges for the increasing ageing population.

Initiatives such as HertsLynx in North and East Herts and the Stortford Shuttle in Bishop's Stortford have provided a much needed accessible transport service to our residents, and have improved local connectivity in the areas that they operate.



On average,

**8%** of the NEC Herts population cycle or walk to work,

**7%** take public transport, and

**48%** take private transport to get to work.



Census 2021. Office for National Statistics, 2021

Stevenage has the highest percent of trips made by cycling at

**3.3%**

Census 2021. Office for National Statistics, 2021



**1,937 km** of accessible Public Right of Ways exist within NEC Herts.

**1,319 km** of these are footpaths.

Census 2021. Office for National Statistics, 2021

## IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY

Our need to travel far will be greatly reduced with careful planning of key development areas around transport hubs, increasing density and walkability. Our urban neighbourhoods will be compact and mixed-use, making it possible for everyone to access school, work or to run errands without the need to travel far. In improving the accessibility and inclusivity of our urban areas through the reduced need to travel, our quality of life will be vastly improved through cleaner air, less congested roads, safer streets and vibrant people focussed communities.

### BIG IDEAS

#### **Transit-Oriented Development in European Rural-Urban Regions, Europe**

Transit-Oriented Development in European Rural-Urban Regions (TOD-IS-RUR) is an EU-funded innovative Training Network focused on addressing the challenges of Transit Orientated Development (TOD) in rural settings with lower densities and populations.

The concepts of (TOD) have traditionally been applied to cities and larger urban settlements. In a rural and urban periphery context such as in NEC Herts, TOD can be difficult to achieve given the lower density of population and urbanisation.

The main objective of TOD-IS-RUR is to extend the concept of TOD to rural-urban regions in Europe. By adopting a context-based approach, TOD-IS-RUR aims to analyse and improve the interactions between mobility and urbanization in rural-urban regions while considering their social and environmental qualities, ultimately promoting sustainable and inclusive development in these areas.





## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Too low density

We love our open green space and the spatial qualities of town and country, but our area's low density and lower urbanisation means that many of us have to travel further to access our jobs, schools and services. In urban areas where accessibility could be improved due to higher densities, disjointed and slow public transport systems and unsafe cycling and walking provision are making cars the most convenient and safest option for our daily routine journeys. In some of our large settlements, railway stations are not located in town centres, such as in Hitchin (1 km distance), Hatfield (0.7 km distance) and Royston (0.5 km distance), impacting accessibility and transport connectivity for those less mobile and increasing the need to drive, even to get the train.

As a result, our movement corridors are car dominated, congestion is an issue and the high levels of traffic are impacting on our air quality and quality of life.

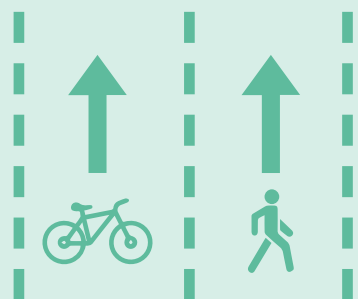
### Increasing density and accessibility where appropriate

Stevenage, Royston and Letchworth are the first three towns in NEC Herts to take part in the Sustainable Travel Towns Programme. The programme includes planning elements such as higher density housing, provision of local employment services and facilities, direct walking and cycling routes from new developments to existing facilities, and ensuring that new development is accessible by existing bus services. The programme also promotes a combination of measures to improve accessibility within urban areas, including shared mobility and bike hire schemes, improving bus and train services, consideration of multi-nodal interchanges, improving cycling and walking infrastructure, and enforcement of parking restrictions.



In Hertfordshire, **76%** of all trips less than 1 mile are made on foot, while only **1.9%** of all trips less than 3 miles are made on bike.

Census 2021. Office for National Statistics, 2021.



Being New Towns, Stevenage and Hatfield have an extensive network of isolated footways and cycle routes, compared with historic towns.

NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report. AECOM, 2022.



# OUR FUTURE FOR *PEOPLE*

We will take a holistic approach to health and wellbeing, promoting active lifestyles and mental health in equal measure.

We will build on the strength of our new and existing communities to combat loneliness, and further enhance social cohesion.

Work-life balance will continue to be valued, and whole life education opportunities will go beyond our great schools, guiding people towards rewarding careers in our strong economy.

Everyone will have access to affordable and environmentally leading housing choices, with social infrastructure and amenities always in close proximity.

## **In 2050, we will be...**

- 17** Living better, feeling content
- 18** Thriving in coherent communities
- 19** Delivering homes that meet our needs
- 20** Growing up skilled and fulfilled

## LIVING BETTER, FEELING CONTENT

Healthy living will be embedded in our way of life, and we will support everybody in looking after their own physical and mental health. A holistic approach will be adopted, so that health and social services work hand-in-hand to enhance the way we embed wellbeing in designs and plans for our places and communities. We will be a place where it's easy to live well.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Virtual healthcare appointments can reduce patient waiting lists (source: [www.nhsaccelerator.com](http://www.nhsaccelerator.com))

### Big Data and AI: shaping the future of the NHS UK

Technology is set to play an ever-increasing role in the NHS, as Integrated Care Systems (locally-based partnerships which plan and deliver NHS care) seek more innovative ways to increase efficiencies and use healthcare infrastructure more efficiently.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to improve diagnostic processes, by analysing vast amounts of patient data to assist healthcare professionals in making faster and more accurate diagnoses. In addition, health AI chatbots could relieve doctors of routine and time-

consuming tasks, allowing them to concentrate on more critical aspects of patient care.<sup>80</sup>

Through the analysis of very large datasets (including patient, health and operations data), 'big data' analytics will allow for meaningful patterns and trends to be identified.<sup>81</sup> Benefits could include early disease detection, which will help to improve the health outcomes of patients and also reduce overall demand on healthcare services.

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Supporting all our people to live healthily

The majority of our residents consider themselves to be in good health, and this is reflected in our average life expectancy which is higher than the rest of the country.<sup>82</sup> We recognise that population health is complex, and that many external factors can contribute to our health, including genetic, environmental and social factors.

We know that many of our residents don't currently reach the daily and weekly recommended targets for physical exercise,<sup>83</sup> and that our busy lifestyles can be a weakness. However, we are lucky to benefit from excellent recreational green corridors such as the Cole Green Way, Alban Way, Lea Valley, as well as countless local parks, playing fields, sports pitches and accessible and free nature parks – all of which provide our residents with great opportunities to take part in physical activity, and we celebrate the work of programmes such as Healthy Hubs Hertfordshire in helping people to do this.<sup>84</sup>

As well as access to green infrastructure, living in places where we can access our daily basic needs within a short walking or cycling distance rather than a car journey is important for health.<sup>85</sup> Our area has proved to be a great place to work from home, because of the ease of access to the outdoors.

### Investing in our infrastructure and services

Having access to high-quality health and social infrastructure is an important part of a healthy lifestyle for our residents, particularly as climate change and hotter weather is threatening public health.

We recognise the current national-scale challenges associated with delivering new healthcare infrastructure and services, and in NEC Herts there is a lack of health provision and hospital capacity is an issue in areas.

As our ageing population continues to put a strain on healthcare, we have leveraged at the local scale to deliver health improvements, for example, by securing developer contributions to develop new facilities, developing public health programmes and building on the great local working partnerships between our Integrated Care Boards, local authorities and other public sector organisations.



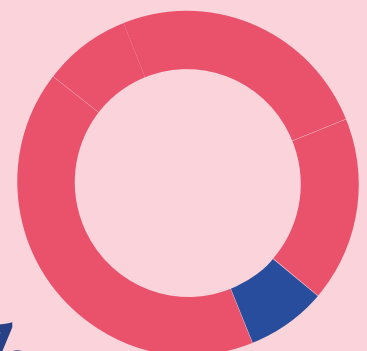
**84%**  
of residents consider themselves in good health or very good health.

Census 2021. Office for National Statistics, 2021.



**34%**  
of adults across the area do not partake in 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week.

Herts Insight. Hertfordshire County Council, 2023.



**8%**  
of the population is projected to be aged 80+ in Hertfordshire by 2043

Herts Insight. Hertfordshire County Council, 2023

## THRIVING IN COHERENT COMMUNITIES

We will continue to be proud of our strong community spirit, celebrating the way we make people feel connected, safe and supported. We will strengthen and build on our existing community assets and groups to further develop support networks, promoting mental health awareness and addressing loneliness, especially in vulnerable groups. By nurturing these community connections, we will build better social cohesion, increase interaction and further improve community security and safety.

### BIG IDEAS

#### Community funding through the East Herts Lottery East Hertfordshire, UK

The East Herts Lottery is a locally run and managed lottery which strengthens community networks in East Herts by raising money for important community causes, networks and organisations.

while also providing community groups with an additional stream of income at a time when other funding streams such as local authority funding are under renewed pressure.

Set up by East Herts Council in 2019, the lottery has generated over £120,000 in fundraising for more than 150 community groups including local charities, voluntary organisations and sports clubs. The lottery was set up as a way to fund local community projects in a fun and innovative way, which allows players to support the causes they care most about,

All East Herts based community groups, registered charities and not-for-profit organisations providing services can sign up to take part of the East Herts Lottery. Causes helped so far include the Herts and Essex Samaritans, East Herts Community Fund and Active East Herts.<sup>86</sup>



## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### A place with strong community ties

We have strong communities here, which was really shown through the initiatives delivered during Covid-19. We have a strong community feel and connectivity in our towns, and there is a sense of belonging in some settlements. Our sense of community seen across our area is something that we're proud of, and we recognise the important role that community links can play in building resilience. We have many community groups and volunteers, and our older populations in particular are engaged in local activities, such as neighbourhood planning, and are valuable assets for our communities.

Although our area experiences relatively low levels of deprivation and crime compared with other areas across England,<sup>87</sup> community links can be a lifeline for residents who are experiencing difficulties.

### Addressing loneliness and improving mental health

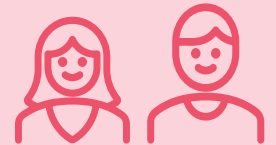
Being connected in communities can also help us to improve our mental health,<sup>88</sup> and there are many opportunities for people in NEC Herts to get involved in their community through hobbies, community work or volunteering – from mud-larking to yarnbombers, there's a community group or network here for everyone.

Local projects such as Minster House, a new state-of-the-art supported housing complex in Hatfield, are a great example of how public sector initiatives can reduce loneliness in older people and promote improved mental health.<sup>89</sup>

### Connected communities are safer communities

NEC Herts is a generally safe area, with lower than average rates for most types of crime.<sup>90</sup> Despite this, some isolated instances of crime do occur, particularly shoplifting and bike theft, and these are often symptoms of wider social problems. Antisocial behaviour and drug use is also something that we are wary of.

People who experience loneliness and older people are particularly vulnerable to the dangers of fraud, cyber crime and identity theft,<sup>91</sup> and wherever possible we want to reduce occurrence of this type of crime. An important way we can do this is by reducing social isolation, and supporting people to access advice and help, such as Citizens Advice Bureau and local authority services.



**86%** of Hertfordshire's residents say they are satisfied with living in the area in 2018.

Herts Insight. Hertfordshire County Council, 2023



Hertfordshire ranks

**135<sup>th</sup>** out of 151 on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, making it one of the least deprived upper tier authorities in England, with 1 being most deprived.

MHCLG (2019) English Indices of Multiple Deprivation

The average crime rate in NEC Herts in 2023 was

**64.9%** compared with 82.3% for England and 73.5% for East of England.

Herts Insight. Hertfordshire County Council, 2024

Antisocial Behaviour and Violence and Sexual Offences are the two highest rated types of crime in Hertfordshire in 2023.

Herts Insight. Hertfordshire County Council, 2024

## DELIVERING HOMES THAT MEET OUR NEEDS

Everybody will have access to good-quality homes with a variety of choice in adaptable housing types and tenures that are suitable and affordable for them. All new homes will be built to high environmental and design standards, while existing homeowners will be given the opportunity to retrofit and improve their homes. Homes will be in places where people want to live, where they are well connected to schools, jobs, healthcare and green and open spaces.

### BIG IDEAS

#### Meeting community needs at Lancaster Cohousing Halton, Lancashire, UK

Co-housing communities are increasing in popularity across the UK, and present a unique approach to housing development that offers a balance between individual home-ownership or renting and shared community living.<sup>92</sup>

At Lancaster Co-housing, residents share common facilities including playrooms, workshops and laundry, which helps to reduce overall living costs by optimising amenities. The co-housing was planned and delivered by the residents themselves, meaning the community was able to

prioritise affordability, ensuring that housing met the specific requirements of its members.

The scheme was delivered with an emphasis on fostering social interactions, and there is a strong resident support network – many residents engage in shared responsibilities such as childcare, maintenance and collaborative initiatives like car-sharing. Through sharing resources and sustainable practices, Lancaster Co-housing enables residents to live more affordably and sustainably, with an emphasis on community interactions.



Image: Community events at Lancaster Co-housing  
(source: [www.lancastercohousing.blogspot.com](http://www.lancastercohousing.blogspot.com))



# A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

## We need affordable homes

There is a pressure to fulfil housing targets set by the Government. As of April 2022, there were 18,770 planning permissions for new homes in NEC Herts,<sup>93</sup> and we have a good record of housing delivery compared with other areas of the country. However, developers and developer viability can have a negative impact on the number of affordable homes being built, and there is a shortage of affordable, social homes and housing for key workers.

Housing affordability is a significant issue in our area, and house prices are influenced by their proximity to London.<sup>94</sup> While acknowledging the various economic, social, and cultural benefits this proximity brings, we want to prevent our residents from being 'priced out' of the places we call home. The lack in affordable housing means that young people who grew up here might need to move elsewhere to afford a home.

## Choice and variety

We have a variety of different types of homes in NEC Herts, and we want to sustain a high-quality, affordable, and diverse mix of homes to ensure that we continue to be an attractive place for people to live. However, many of the housing estates and typologies currently being built aren't meeting the housing needs of our local people.

An important aspect of delivering the homes we need involves ensuring we have the right offer of different housing typologies and tenures to suit different needs and budgets. Current housing diversity in our area is mostly limited to family homes and is not catering to our younger workers, with terraced housing being the most common type of dwelling in NEC Herts.

## Homes to help us prosper

In NEC Herts there are areas of affluence and pockets of deprivation. Some areas have more ingrained deprivation, and factors of it are hard to break. Proximity to services, access to affordable housing and homelessness are three of the indicators of deprivation in areas of NEC Herts that are within 10% most deprived areas nationally.<sup>95</sup>

In addition, older houses have poor EPC ratings, which mean they are more expensive to run, worsened by the rising cost of living crisis.

Housing delivery needs to take into account the design and location to allow our residents to lead sustainable and connected lives, and we recognise that housing growth will impact on our hospitals, schools and GPs, which are already under stress. We are feeling a pressure to deliver new communities that will deliver the much needed housing and supportive social infrastructure, but also acknowledge that much can be done to improve our existing building stock to meet good living standards.



There was a

# 73%

average increase in house prices in NEC Herts between 2011 and 2021.



Aecom (2022) NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report

In 2021,

# 65%

of houses were owner occupied,

# 19%

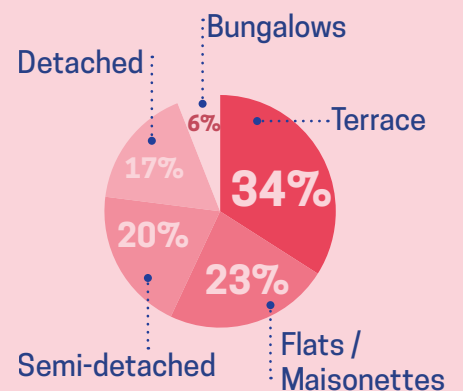
were socially rented, and

# 16%

were privately rented across NEC Herts.

Census 2021. Office for National Statistics, 2021

Proportion of housing typologies in NEC Herts in 2021:



Herts Insight. Hertfordshire County Council, 2023

## GROWING UP SKILLED AND FULFILLED

Every adult and child will be given the opportunity to meet their potential, prosper, and achieve a great quality of life. We will support our schools, colleges and training providers to become excellent in guiding our young adults into fulfilling rewarding careers in local and global sectors, and people will be given opportunities throughout the course of their career to learn, train and re-skill.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: 1-1 mentoring provides benefits for mentees & mentors (source: [www.onemillionmentors.org.uk](http://www.onemillionmentors.org.uk))

### Developing new skills through One Million Mentors UK (nationwide)

One Million Mentors is a UK-based charity that matches volunteer mentors to young adult mentees, in order to help young people grow the knowledge, networks, skills and confidence they need to succeed in work. The programme, which has been running since 2017, supports mentors and mentees to programme their meetings, and provides training and guidance to support partners through the mentorship process.

The charity seeks to reach mentees and young people with specific un-met needs, including limited access to social networks

and relationships that would help them to fulfil their potential. As well as practical advice, the mentoring programme also helps mentors and mentees develop soft skills including goal-setting, active listening and communication skills.

By supporting young people and backing their talents, the charity helps young people to improve their career chances, while strengthening local communities and allowing young people to grow their knowledge and network and access improved career chances throughout their life.<sup>96</sup>

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Supporting our young people to achieve their potential

Compared to the rest of the UK, we have good educational outcomes here in NEC Herts, and we are proud of our great schools and colleges. Our children's educational attainment is higher than the national average, and we recognise the consistent work of our young people, teachers, and parents in helping children to succeed.<sup>97</sup> Despite this, there are external factors which mean not every child has an equal opportunity at success, for example, socioeconomic factors. One component of deprivation that affects the most deprived areas in NEC Herts is 'barriers to education, skills and training',<sup>98</sup> and while we are known for our good schools and colleges, there is little post-school offer and lack of training and apprenticeships, although our good jobs and industries have some links into local skills providers.

### Learning for life

We want to make the most of our great schools and colleges, linking them with our universities and job opportunities. We have the knowledge and experience, and there are high quality jobs for local people with respected employers. However, many of these jobs are going to skilled people from other places, and there is a risk that AI and automation will take away other jobs, not just from our young people, but from our older populations. We need to prepare local people to have the right skills to benefit and match local job

opportunities, to gain transferable skills that will help build resilience and job security. 'Skilling up' throughout life will help our people to be flexible, agile and adaptable to new ways of working that we might see in future - for example, a shift towards new green technology and green jobs.

Our population is skilled, and more people in NEC Herts are educated to degree level or equivalent than the national average.<sup>99</sup> The strength of our Further Education and Higher Education can provide opportunities to build our skills infrastructure.

### Links to our local economy

We want to build on and formalise the partnerships that already exist between our educational institutions and industry, while placing renewed focus on helping people to develop skills that are linked to our local economy.

The benefits of this will be two-fold: both by helping people to enter and stay in the world of work by providing them with fantastic training that is linked to our brilliant local employers, and also by supporting our local businesses to build stronger, embedded links within our community. By strengthening these links, we can help to address the skills gap to ensure that our people have the right skills to benefit from the high-quality jobs on offer in our area.



# 3%

of 16-17 year olds in Hertfordshire are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), lower than the national average of 4.7%.

Herts Insight (2024) Education and Lifelong Learning



# 39%

of NEC Herts' population have degree level or equivalent qualifications, higher than the national average of 34%.

Herts Insight (2024) Education and Lifelong Learning

Hertfordshire ranks

# 123<sup>rd</sup>

out of 151 upper tier authorities across in England most deprived in 'Education, Skills and Training', with 1 being the most deprived

Herts Insight (2024) Education and Lifelong Learning



# OUR FUTURE FOR *ECONOMY*

We will have a thriving and diverse economy that will be recognised at a local and global scale. We will carefully harness the super growth prospects in our advancing technology and creative industries, boosting our position in the global economy while building local resilience through our supply chains, learning opportunities and improved access to jobs.

Our strength in being a place rich in heritage and nature will foster our visitor economy. Everyone here will have the right skills for new types of jobs, ensuring that our economy is inclusive and accessible. Partnerships with educators and businesses will create a connected economy that is innovative and supports local SMEs and social entrepreneurs. Our future is a growing economy that benefits everyone and will last for generations.

## **In 2050, we will be...**

- 21** Growing skills to expand opportunity
- 22** Advancing our green economy
- 23** Supporting our local businesses
- 24** Shining focus on our global status

## GROWING SKILLS TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITY

The labour market demand in NEC Herts will be met by our local people from all walks of life, who will have the right skills for the right jobs across all industries. Through public and private partnerships formed between educational institutions and businesses offering apprenticeships, outreach and training, we'll ensure an inclusive economy that benefits all people, with current and future job vacancies that can be filled by our younger and older generations.

### BIG IDEAS



**Toolkit:** a community wealth building energy transition



Image: Community Wealth Building Toolkit by CLES (source: CLES, 2021)

### Community Wealth Building in Lewes Lewes District, UK

Lewes District Council have embedded Community Wealth Building (CWB) with their ambition of meeting Net Zero and climate resilience at the heart of their Corporate Plan 2020-2024.

The concept of CWB was developed by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), who have been supporting Lewes District Council in meeting its five principles, including 'fair employment and just labour markets'. In Newhaven, the Council has introduced a pilot local labour policy for large planning applications to ensure

jobs and training opportunities on construction sites for local people.

Lewes DC has also partnered with Boutique Modern, a small local housing construction company. By mobilising council owned land and assets, economic opportunities in de-carbonising existing housing stock and building new council homes are creating new green jobs. Furthermore, collaboration with the local jobcentre plus and college group is connecting individuals struggling to find work with secure, full time and decent green jobs.

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Plenty of jobs but we are lacking the right skills

There are plenty of professional jobs in our area, but less jobs for the less skilled. This poses employment problems for people who are less skilled, and our area is experiencing a skills shortage. In 2020, less than half of the working age population had degree level qualifications and above,<sup>100</sup> while the majority of jobs available are senior level (ie. manager, director) or professional.<sup>101</sup> People feel that jobs in our innovative and creative industries, such as film and life sciences, are hard to get, especially entry level positions.

In key employment areas such as Stevenage, there is a lot of inward commuting. There are some great jobs in Stevenage, but not enough of them go to local people. And while employment rates are generally high across NEC Herts,<sup>102</sup> there is a disparity of access to skills, training and apprenticeships between areas, with Stevenage and Broxbourne, ranked the most deprived in that domain in NEC Herts in 2019.<sup>103</sup>

### Job trends

Between 2015 - 2020, professional, scientific and technical jobs were on the rise, with health and construction jobs following closely. On the other hand, employment in retail manufacturing, and information and communication were in decline, fuelling our fear that artificial intelligence and digitisation is threatening our jobs by automating services and production.



In 2021 there were

**337,000**

jobs in NEC Herts across a working age population of

**374,261.**

That's an average job density of nearly 0.9.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023

**54.1%** of jobs in NEC Herts are senior level (manager, director, professional).

**39%** of the working age population in NEC Herts have degree level qualifications and above.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023

The largest increase in jobs by sector between 2015-2020 was

**+9000**

jobs in Professional, Scientific and Technical,

**+7,250**

jobs in Health, and

**+5,250**

jobs in Construction.



NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report. AECOM, 2022.

## ADVANCING OUR GREEN ECONOMY

We will grow a major new green economy that will work hand-in-hand with our renewable infrastructure, sustainable housing delivery and green movement networks. It will be low carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive. Our innovative and holistic approaches to circularity, retrofitting, re-use and recycling will bring new types of business and jobs complemented by training opportunities, resulting in a more diverse and resilient economy that will be economically and environmentally better for us, our communities and our ecosystems.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Re-use, recycle and reduce waste (Sasha Pestano on Unsplash.com)

### Promoting a Circular Economy France

In 2020, France enacted its *Anti-waste Law*, which aims to eliminate waste and pollution from the design stage, shifting production and consumption from a traditional linear model to a circular economic model.

The Law encourages businesses, councils and citizens to adopt circular practices by introducing world-first measures, such as the ban on destroying unsold or surplus products, which must now be reused, donated or recycled.

A mandatory repairability index for electronic products like smartphones, laptops, washing machines, and TVs was also introduced, encouraging manufacturers to consider repairability during the design phase and educating consumers about repair options when purchasing devices.

Policies such as these have helped to promote societal change and have created new jobs in reuse networks.



## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### The impact of our construction sector

Our construction and civil engineering sector is one of the most significant economic sectors in our area when it comes to employment. However, this hasn't been very sustainable as our built environment is the second biggest contributor to GHG emissions in NEC Herts and was responsible for 825 kilo tonnes of emissions in 2020. This includes from construction activities, maintenance, retrofitting and demolition of buildings, but also from everyday activities such as heating our homes and offices.<sup>104</sup>

### The challenge for economic expansion

Finding space for sustainable economic growth and new business premises is also a challenge. Because there are few brownfield sites and our towns and settlements are surrounded by Green Belt, there is limited developable land availability for sustainable economic and housing growth within our existing built-up areas.<sup>105</sup> On top of that, rising land value in urban areas and the new 2021 permitted development rights allowing the conversion of commercial premises to residential properties are a threat to existing employment spaces, forcing growth into greenfield sites and further expanding our urban footprint.

### Our rural economies

A large portion of land in NEC Herts is allocated for agricultural use. We feel that farming practices and agricultural productivity in the UK is behind other countries, and practices are not always environmentally friendly or sustainable. Our agriculture industry contributes to less than 0.3% of jobs in NEC Herts, but our crop lands are the largest source of CO2 emissions.<sup>106 107</sup>

In addition to its low economic value in terms of employment, our monocrop agriculture has little environmental value and our intensive and modern farming practices are polluting our river catchments and has degraded the condition of our character areas, such as the East Anglian Chalk National Character Area.

### Turning tides

Despite some of our more established economies being not so sustainable, there has been a growth of up-cycling and reuse and refill shops in our towns, indicating that our residents want to be more sustainable and would support a shift toward a greener economy.



# 9.9%

of employment in NEC Herts was in construction & civil engineering in 2021.

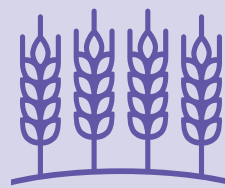
Census 2021, Office for National Statistics, 2021

The built environment is the second biggest contributor to GHG emissions in NEC Herts, with

# 825 kt

of emissions produced in 2020.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023



Crop land is the largest source of CO2 emissions in our area, emitting

# 15.3 kt

 in 2020, but the agriculture industry in NEC Herts represents the lowest source of employment at less than

# 0.3%

 of jobs.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023

## SUPPORTING OUR LOCAL BUSINESSES

We will build on our already thriving local economy and help our existing businesses grow and adapt. We will foster an environment for creative economic growth through our SME's and social entrepreneurs who will be supported and promoted through partnerships with schools and colleges, business mentorships, incubation centres and step-up facilities. Focus and priority will be given to our local supply chains, increasing the number of local jobs and job diversity in our area. We will harness our distinct heritage and attractive natural landscapes to draw more visitors than ever before in our growing visitor economy.

### BIG IDEAS

#### **Theobalds Enterprise Centre Broxbourne, UK**

The Theobalds Enterprise Centre is a flexible business space aimed at fostering SME growth, attracting new business, and generating local employment opportunities by providing tenants with fully managed workspaces, business support and state-of-the-art amenities. Workspaces include self-contained and co-working offices, studio spaces, conference rooms and training facilities, with amenities to work virtually.

Platinum WiredScore certification for its wired infrastructure and wireless network connectivity. Theobalds supports green and inclusive business growth through its BREEAM Very Good rated building, which is fitted with solar panels and EV charging points with ample bicycle parking complemented by shower and changing facilities within the building, and is within walking distance of Theobalds Grove train station.

Funded jointly by the Hertfordshire LEP and the Broxbourne Borough Council, the high-tech building has



Image: Theobalds Enterprise Centre lobby  
(source: Ashe Group, 2024)

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### Local businesses make us unique

We are proud of the independent businesses that make our town centres and market towns unique. We have farm shops, farmers markets and a good mix of local businesses and big retailers. In our rural areas, we have breweries, outdoor activities and sport, and our great nightlife in Hertford has resulted in a successful night-time economy.

### Growth of our SMEs

We have many small businesses. In 2022, there were 24,555 micro enterprises (0-9 employees) versus only 90 large enterprises (250+ employees). However, the long term growth and success of our small and medium-sized enterprises is a concern, and small businesses that are part of the big economy are vulnerable to current and future trends, as Covid-19 has shown us. Retail businesses have suffered, worsened by the increasing trend of online shopping, leaving our high street shops vacant.

### Competing with bigger and better entities

Small business owners are risking a lot when they invest in their own businesses. As the cost of living and running costs increase, it is more appealing for many to go work for a reputable employer in a well-paid and secure job instead, of which there are plenty in NEC Herts.

Our proximity to large centres such as London and Cambridge come with many economic benefits, but are also attracting away local talent and commerce from our local businesses. It's easy for people who live here to commute outside of NEC Herts for better paid jobs, which promotes employment elsewhere.



In 2022, there were

**24,555** micro enterprises (0-9 employees)

**2,029** small enterprises (10-49 employees)

**385** medium enterprises (50-249 employees), and

**90** large enterprises (250+ employees) in NEC Herts.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023

Only **37%** of NEC Herts businesses formed in 2016 survived at least five years.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023

Employment in the retail sector in NEC Herts declined by

**2,500** jobs between 2015 - 2020, indicating a decline in the industry.



NEC Herts Growth Study, Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report. AECOM, 2022

## SHINING FOCUS ON OUR GLOBAL STATUS

We will shine a light on our position and role within the global economy. Building on our robust and technologically advancing industries in film, life sciences and space, our area will be the most attractive place for further industry growth and expansion. Our ability to be agile and hold the right conversations with strong investment partners will drive continued national and international business investment.

### BIG IDEAS



Image: Birmingham, an area of investment in WMCA (source: West Midlands Growth Company, 2024)

### **West Midlands Growth Company West Midlands Combined Authority, UK**

To help promote their region's local, national and global economy, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) established the West Midlands Growth Company in 2017.

By working with LEPs, councils, growth hubs, universities, Chambers of Commerce and the private sector, the West Midlands Growth Company plays an important role in delivering the WMCA's Local Industrial Strategy, with a primary purpose of attracting investment, jobs, visitors and businesses to the West Midlands region.

Inward investment is a core focus of the Company, which has secured 181 Foreign Direct Investment projects in 2022-2023. The company supports business growth and investments by connecting foreign and local businesses, advising on locations and providing sector-specific market research, all while maximising the potential of the local economy. A toolkit is also available, with promotional material to help businesses promote the West Midlands region as an attractive investment opportunity.

## A SNAPSHOT OF TODAY...

### We are already world leading

NEC Herts is strategically located at the centre of the UK Golden Triangle and between two airports, Luton and Stansted. As well as being close to London (but not in London) and near to Cambridge, we are an attractive place to do business. Many international organisations and businesses already operate within our area, including world-leading companies in the science and technology sectors such as GSK, Airbus, MBDA, Eisai and Pharmaron, where the next era of medical treatment in cell and gene therapy is being developed.<sup>108</sup>

Our creative industries are also something to be proud of. Hertfordshire has a well-established TV and film industry and is home to many international firms including Warner Bros, Sky and BBC. A new addition, Sunset Studios, will be located in Broxbourne, providing up to an estimated 4,800 new jobs.<sup>109</sup> Since 2010, employment rates in the creative industries in Hertfordshire have far exceeded the national growth rate, with the University of Hertfordshire a key contributor to the industry, offering courses in animation, animatronics and digital media.<sup>110</sup>

Our area can really benefit from these global economies, and clustered businesses, such as at the Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst, a hub for science, innovation and technology, can create a trickle-down economy in our local area.

### Are we doing enough?

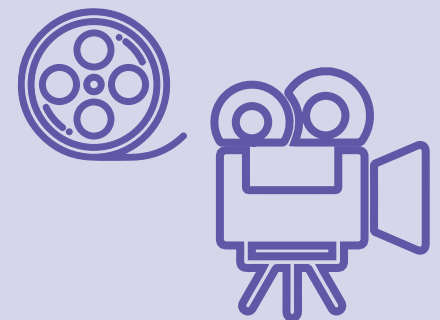
While we are a great place to do business, are we doing enough to promote this? Being close to London, Cambridge and Luton and Stansted airports can be a strength and weakness, as these are also great places to do business and are our competitors. Do we focus on our economic areas enough? How do we compare with Central Bedfordshire, Cambridge or Harlow? Investment needs certainty to come in, and we may need to do more to ensure the resilience and continuity of our global economy and current sectors, to reduce our vulnerability to overseas incentives while also meeting the needs of our local people and ensuring they too benefit in a meaningful way.

Planned infrastructure projects in and around NEC Herts, such as the HERT (Hertfordshire to Essex Rapid Transit), the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town project and the Luton Airport expansion will likely have economic impact on our area, as well as the developing South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan.<sup>111</sup>



In 2022, **4,725** enterprises out of 27,165 in NEC Herts were in the Professional, Scientific and Technical industry group, the highest out of all industry groups.

Herts Insight, Hertfordshire County Council, 2023



Since 2010, the number employers in the creative industries in Hertfordshire has grown by

**6.5%** per year, with employment rates growing by

**10.6%** annually, compared with the national growth rate of 4.5%.

Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal, Hertfordshire LEP, 2024.

# 04 SHAPING OUR FUTURE



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**Our shared vision will shape our future. It will remain our core guide towards the Place Futures we want to realise. It will be used to directly inform and test strategic growth options.**

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# OUR VISION INFORMING FUTURE GROWTH

Prior to embarking on the preparation of our shared vision, the North-East Central Hertfordshire Authorities, together with Hertfordshire County Council, jointly commissioned a cross-boundary Growth Study for the NEC Hertfordshire area.

The approach to the preparation of this study commenced with a Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment. This provided an important snapshot in time to contribute to a robust understanding of the sub region today, enhanced through a shared understanding across the authorities to ensure we began the visioning process from an informed perspective.

The vision has helped us collectively build upon the Growth Study work while using tools and techniques to think forward with greater confidence and certainty.

Engaging in positive debate that has encouraged shared dialogue with constructive check and challenge between key stakeholders has led us to define an ambitious view of the type of sub region we want to shape.

It is now intended that our shared vision is published for wider engagement before the process to embark on Stage 2 of the Growth study commences.

Aligned to the vision, this stage explores and test strategic growth options, identifying broad areas of search, potential future growth locations and associated growth options.





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