

Engagement Strategy

October 2026



East Herts Local Plan Engagement Strategy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Community engagement is a fundamental part of preparing the East Herts Local Plan. The Council wants residents, businesses, community organisations, developers, infrastructure providers and other stakeholders to have opportunities to help shape the future of the district.
- 1.2 The Local Plan will guide how East Herts grows and develops over the plan period, including the location of homes, employment, infrastructure and environmental protection. Effective engagement helps ensure that planning decisions are informed by local knowledge, evidence and community views.
- 1.3 This Engagement Strategy sets out who the Council will engage with, the methods that may be used and how engagement will be undertaken throughout the preparation of the Local Plan. The approach is informed by the Council's Listening Council Building Blocks, agreed in 2024, which promote meaningful, inclusive and transparent engagement with residents and stakeholders. It should be read alongside the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which sets out the Council's wider approach to consultation on planning matters.

2. Purpose of Engagement

- 2.1 The Council is committed to undertaking proportionate, meaningful and inclusive engagement throughout the preparation of the Local Plan.
- 2.2 The purpose of engagement is to:
 - Raise awareness of plan-making and opportunities to participate.
 - Gather local knowledge, views and evidence to help inform decision-making.
 - Ensure that communities, businesses and stakeholders have opportunities to influence the preparation of the Local Plan.
 - Understand the likely impacts of proposals on different communities and places.
 - Demonstrate how consultation responses have been considered in preparing the Plan.
 - Meet statutory requirements relating to plan preparation and consultation.

3. Principles of Engagement

3.1 The Council will seek to ensure that engagement activities are:

- **Inclusive** - Providing opportunities for a wide range of people, communities and organisations to participate.
- **Accessible** - Using a variety of engagement methods and formats to reduce barriers to participation wherever possible.
- **Transparent** - Clearly explaining the purpose of consultations and how responses will be used.
- **Proportionate** - Tailoring engagement methods to the scale, complexity and significance of the issues being considered.
- **Timely** - Undertaking engagement at an appropriate stage so that views can influence outcomes.
- **Responsive** - Reporting the outcomes of consultation and explaining how feedback has informed subsequent work.

4. Equality and Accessibility

4.1 The Council will seek to ensure that engagement activities are accessible to all sections of the community.

4.2 Particular efforts will be made, where appropriate, to engage groups that may traditionally be under-represented in planning consultations, including younger people, people with disabilities, minority communities and those who may experience barriers to participation.

4.3 The Council will seek opportunities to engage younger people in plan-making, including through schools and appropriate digital engagement methods.

5. Who will we Engage With

5.1 The Council wishes to engage with the people who live, work, invest in and visit East Herts, together with statutory consultees and organisations with an interest in the future development of the district.

5.2 The Council is legally required to consult a range of specific and general consultees, groups with specialist knowledge in certain areas or those that represent specific interest groups. Examples of these consultation bodies include:

- Hertfordshire County Council;
- Adjoining local authorities;
- Parish or town councils within or adjoining the district;
- Organisations that represent business interests in East Herts;
- Organisations that represent the interests of specific parts of the community;
- Infrastructure providers;
- National agencies or bodies.

5.3 The Council must also notify and consult such residents or other persons carrying out business as they consider appropriate. This includes those that have asked to be consulted.

5.4 The Council recognises that the views of the wider community are important and will engage with a range of groups and individuals. These may include the following:

- Residents' Associations and designated Neighbourhood Plan Groups;
- Social, economic and environmental organisations;
- Developers, agents and landowners.

5.5 The Council maintains a consultation database of individuals and organisations who have requested to be notified of planning policy consultations. New subscribers can be added to the Planning Newsletter and Database at any time: [Subscribe to the Planning Newsletter | East Herts District Council](#).

6. Consultation Methods

6.1 The Council will use a variety of methods to engage and consult with the community and stakeholders. The scope of the planning document and the availability of resources will influence how the Council consult on a case-by-case basis. In all circumstances, the Council will meet its statutory duty relating to consultation.

Method	Examples	How they may be used
Traditional written methods	Emails Letters Noticeboards Posters Advertisements in local press Website Surveys Site notices	• All information relating to consultations on planning policy documents supporting evidence and associated materials will be available on the Council's website, and, where possible, in pdf format so they can be downloaded. • Relevant parties will be notified of consultations and, where appropriate, kept updated on progress of proposals e.g. examination and adoption. This will be through email in the first instance and then letters where that is not the preferred method. • For proposals affecting a large number of people, we will provide the local press with consultation details in advance or within the first few days of its launch to ensure broad public awareness. • Written advertisements or site notices will be used in appropriate locations, dependent on the proposal/consultation. • Depending on the consultation, surveys may be made available online for people to respond.
Face to face	Public meetings Community forums Steering groups Focus groups Workshops, Drop-in sessions	• Meetings may be held with communities and stakeholders to discuss proposals in more detail. • Workshops or focus groups may be used to gather more specific views on proposals. • Community forums or steering groups may be used to gather different stakeholders to discuss matters relating to strategic sites or issues. • In some cases, drop-in sessions may be provided for the public to discuss issues with the Council.

Method	Examples	How they may be used
Social media	Facebook Instagram LinkedIn YouTube NextDoor	• The Council's social media accounts may be used to notify and signpost residents and stakeholders to consultation opportunities. • Local advertisements on social media may be used to help reach a larger demographic than traditional methods. • Explanatory videos may be used to help explain complex planning matters. • Council meetings or planning events such as hearing sessions may be webcast and available to view online.
Digital technology	AI GIS Online meetings Workshops	• Digital technology may be used to improve engagement and understanding of planning proposals. • Digital tools may be used to visualise proposals, support evidence gathering, analyse consultation responses and identify common themes. • AI tools may be used to assist with the management and analysis of consultation responses. Any use of such technology will be subject to appropriate officer oversight and will support, rather than replace, professional judgement and decision-making.

7. Feedback and Reporting

- 7.1 The Council recognises that effective engagement involves both listening and responding.
- 7.2 Following consultation exercises, the Council will publish summaries of the main issues raised and, where appropriate, explain how comments have informed the preparation of planning documents, evidence studies and subsequent stages of plan-making.

- 7.3 This approach will improve transparency and demonstrate how community feedback has been considered throughout the preparation of the Local Plan.

8, Engagement Through the Plan-Making Process

- 8.1 The preparation of the Local Plan will follow the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026. The Council will undertake engagement and consultation at key stages throughout the process and will prepare more detailed engagement strategies where appropriate.

Stage	Level of Participation	Actions
Stage 1: Plan Commencement, Scoping and Early Engagement	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	At the commencement of plan preparation, the Council will notify stakeholders and the wider community that work on the Local Plan has begun. The Council will undertake early engagement and a scoping consultation to identify the key issues, opportunities and challenges facing East Herts. Engagement may include residents, businesses, infrastructure providers, neighbouring authorities, parish and town councils, community organisations and statutory consultees. Feedback received at this stage will help shape the scope of the Local Plan, identify priorities for further evidence gathering and inform the preparation of the Plan. Gateway 1 The Council will undertake the required Gateway 1 assessment relating to readiness for Local Plan preparation.

Stage	Level of Participation	Actions
Stage 2: Consultation on Proposed Plan Content and Evidence	Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	The Council will consult on the emerging direction of the Local Plan, including proposed plan content and evidence. This stage will provide an opportunity for communities and stakeholders to comment on emerging proposals before a draft Local Plan is prepared. The Council will publish a summary of the consultation responses received and explain how these have informed the next stage of plan preparation. Gateway 2 An appointed person will provide observations and advice on the emerging Local Plan and supporting evidence. The Council will take account of any recommendations before progressing to the next stage of consultation.
Stage 3: Consultation on the Proposed Local Plan	Inform Consult Involve	The Council will publish the proposed Local Plan and undertake formal public consultation. This consultation will provide residents, businesses, stakeholders and statutory consultees with an opportunity to comment on the policies, site allocations, proposals and supporting evidence before the Plan is submitted for examination. The Council will publish a summary of the issues raised during consultation and explain how responses have been considered. Gateway 3

Stage	Level of Participation	Actions
		The proposed Local Plan will be subject to a Gateway 3 assessment to determine whether the prescribed requirements have been met prior to submission.
Stage 4: Submission and Independent Examination	Inform Consult	Following completion of the required gateway assessments, the Local Plan will be submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination. An independent Planning Inspector will assess whether the Plan has been prepared in accordance with legislative requirements. Individuals and organisations who have participated in previous consultation stages may have the opportunity to participate in examination hearings where appropriate. Details of the examination process and relevant documents will be published on the Council's website.
Stage 5: Adoption and Monitoring	Inform	Following receipt of the Inspector's recommendations and completion of any required modifications, the Council will formally adopt the Local Plan. Information relating to adoption and the final version of the Local Plan will be published on the Council's website and made available for public inspection. The Council will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Local Plan and will review policies where appropriate in response to changing circumstances and future legislative requirements.

9. Keeping the Approach Under Review

- 9.1 The Council may review and update this Engagement Strategy where necessary to reflect changes in legislation, national planning policy, technology, consultation practices or lessons learned during the plan-making process.
- 9.2 Any engagement strategy prepared for individual consultation stages will be consistent with the principles set out in this document and will seek to ensure that engagement remains proportionate, effective and accessible.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 Meaningful engagement is essential to preparing a Local Plan that reflects local priorities, is supported by robust evidence and helps deliver sustainable growth across East Herts.
- 10.2 This Engagement Strategy provides the framework through which the Council will work with residents, businesses, community organisations, infrastructure providers and other stakeholders to help shape the future of the district and ensure that views are considered throughout the plan-making process.