

Hertsmere Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation Document April 2026

Response by CPRE Hertfordshire

Headline concerns

1. The closing date of 29th May provides an inadequate period for a comprehensive response to the consultation document. The consultation website provided by Hertsmere Borough Council is not fit for purpose; it is unnecessarily complicated to access and there are significant difficulties in making a response.
2. This is not a credible Regulation 18 consultation as there is no draft policy wording. This does not follow best or even normal practice for public consultation of a draft Local Plan and may be challengeable at the Examination in Public.
3. It is stated that this will be the final opportunity to comment on the Local Plan content before moving to Regulation 19 where consultation is much more limited. This is unacceptable without specific policies.
4. The consultation document makes no reference to the record-breaking response to the previous complete Regulation 18 public consultation in November 2021 which led to the suspension of the Local Plan process. No account has been taken of the clear opposition by local communities previously with regard to the significance of designated protected land such as Green Belt.
5. There are no specific policies specific relating to the positive future for the Green Belt which is the largest designated land area. The consultation document seeks to allocate even more Green Belt land (over 1000 hectares) for development than the 2021 version.

6. The Council claims that it had no alternative but to accept central Government figures for future housing land but councils all over the country are fighting back and Hertsmere has a very strong case to argue for reduced requirements and should do so. In any case, with the Candidate Sites, Hertsmere has significantly over-provided potential sites and this is both unnecessary and damaging.
7. The case for including a new settlement at Bowman's Cross is not justified. Most of the allocation for housing is made outside the Local Plan period and there are serious concerns about deliverability.
8. The consultation document repeatedly confuses 'need' and 'requirement' using the terms interchangeably with regard to how much land the Local Plan should allocate for housing. This is misleading as it devalues the technical task of applying policy constraints to the allocation of land in the Local Plan as required by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
9. The supporting Green Belt Assessment by consultants Aecom indicates that virtually all of the existing Green Belt in the Borough can be reclassified as grey belt. This is ridiculous and could lead to the coalescence of major towns like Bushey and Radlett, and also Borehamwood and Potters Bar.

Presentation and consultation issues

The process set up by the Council for responses to this consultation is cumbersome and confusing and not fit for purpose. It is appropriate to establish a dedicated website portal but the organisation of the content is unnecessarily complex and will be difficult for members of the public to navigate.

Following the initial arrival at the website portal (<https://hertsmere.localplan.commonplace.is>) the respondent is faced with links to two survey requests:

- Introductory survey, and
- Spatial survey

This is a misleading and unnecessary stage which runs the risk of diverting members of the public towards responding when it would be preferable for them to progress immediately to the Regulation 18 Consultation tab document beyond the opening page which includes all the questions that the Council is asking.

The boxes for each chapter which appear further down the page are superfluous and responses for each page cannot be retrieved after confirmation of the respondent, which is required by the website.

CPRE Hertfordshire is responding to the questions embedded in the full Regulation 18 Consultation Document. We deplore the unnecessary complexity introduced by the website portal which is likely to discourage members of the public from responding.

Content of the Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation Document

CPRE Hertfordshire is responding to questions in the following sections and chapters in the consultation document, as follows:

- Introduction to the Emerging Local Plan and Plan-Making (Intro Q. 1)
- Hertsmere's Housing Target (Qs. 3/4/5/6/7)
- Vision, Strategic Objectives and Spatial Strategy (Chap 3 Qs. 19 - 26)
- Housing (Chap 6 Qs. 31/32)
- Economy and Culture (Chap 7 Qs. 33/34)
- Green and Blue Infrastructure (Chap 9 Qs. 39/40)
- Introduction - Hertsmere's Towns and Places (Chap 12 Qs. 45 – 52)
- Residential Candidate Sites (Chap 17 Qs. 53 - 67)
- Appendices (Chap 20 Qs. 71/75/77/79/81/82)

Introduction to the Emerging Local Plan and Plan-Making

Question(Q.) 1: Do you agree that Hertsmere needs an up-to-date local plan that provides a positive vision for the Borough's future that delivers growth and meets local needs?

Answer(A): Yes

Hertsmere's Housing Target

Q. 3: Do you agree that the correct place to start in identifying a housing requirement for the Borough is the standard method?

A: No

Q. 4: If you disagree, please set out why you consider Hertsmere should apply alternative approach to the standard method...etc

A: The standard method calculates housing need on the basis of an arbitrary percentage of the existing housing stock within a local planning authority. No account is taken of local conditions and circumstances and this is entirely inappropriate in a local authority where the large majority of the land is subject to statutory designation as Green Belt.

We refute entirely the assertion that “there is no evidence that Hertsmere experiences any exceptional circumstances that justify an alternative approach” (para. xxiv.) Hertsmere is exceptional in the proportion of its unbuilt area which is statutorily designated to be protected and thus requires an alternative approach to calculating housing land supply.

Q. 5: Do you agree that poor development performance in delivering new homes in a timely manner means that Hertsmere is subject to a 20% buffer on the five year housing land supply?

A: No

Q. 6: Do you agree that the Borough’s baseline housing target should be comprised of both the national standard method and an appropriate buffer on the five-year housing land supply?

Answer: No

Q. 7: If you disagree, please set out your alternative approach towards calculating and identifying the Borough’s housing target...etc

A: The calculation of housing land need should be based on rigorous analysis of population, household and migration trends, taking into account the specific conditions and circumstances of the area, including the presence of statutorily protected land.

PART 1 Delivering a Better Future for Hertsmere

Chapter 3: Vision, Strategic Objectives and Spatial Strategy

Q. 19: Do you agree with the approach taken in assessing Hertsmere’s Green Belt?

A: No

Q. 20: If you disagree, please set out how you believe this matter should be considered for it to be found sound...etc

A: Any alteration of Green Belt boundaries should be based on a rigorous analysis of the use and purposes of the Green Belt, preferably in cooperation with neighbouring planning authorities. It should not include any consideration of grey belt due to the lack of agreed criteria which leads to the wholesale loss of undeveloped open countryside.

Q.21: Do you agree with the approach being taken towards infrastructure networks and capacity?

A: No

Q. 22: If you disagree, please set out what actions need to be taken to ensure soundness...etc

A: The treatment of infrastructure is entirely inadequate in the light of the challenges posed by the excessive allocation of land for development in the future. The draft Local Plan identifies transport infrastructure solely and considers it a sound approach to provide evidence through statements of common ground, technical evidence and the infrastructure delivery plan. All these are unspecified without even an outline of their content provided. The spatial implications of infrastructure provision are very significant and for Hertsmere, the impacts of water supply and water-based waste disposal especially should be reflected in the Local Plan.

Q.23: Do you consider the proposed spatial strategy for Hertsmere an appropriate strategy that will deliver successful and sustainable place-making, planned for growth, meet the Borough's needs and necessary infrastructure during the plan period?

A: No

Q.24: Do you have an alternative strategy that could be appropriate for Hertsmere...etc

A: The key omission in the spatial strategy for Hertsmere is policy related to the form and function of the open countryside in the Borough, the greatest proportion of which is designated as protected. The countryside of Hertsmere is a key characteristic of the Borough area and its economic, social and environmental contributions are almost entirely ignored.

The role of the countryside is particularly important for sustainable place-making, economic activity and its contribution to health and well-being, and is regarded by this Local Plan as an expendable resource. As noted previously, the role of infrastructure is unspecified in spatial terms, leading to an unbalanced treatment of development outcomes.

In addition, there is inadequate emphasis on a 'brownfield first' development strategy and policies. This consultation identifies enough brownfield land to deliver 3,660 new dwellings. The current publicly available Hertsmere Brownfield Land Register shows brownfield land with the potential for a minimum of 768 new dwellings. This is a massive disparity and undermines confidence; perhaps there is actually the potential for 5,000 or 10,000 new homes on brownfield land in Hertsmere through the regeneration of village and town centres, but this is not sufficiently addressed. This is crucially important in light of the proposed allocation for development of over 1,000 hectares of greenfield land within the Green Belt.

Q. 25: Do you agree that the proposed spatial strategy could enable the two reasonable alternatives identified above?

A: No

Q.26: Are there any other reasonable alternatives that could arise during the delivery of the proposed spatial strategy?

A: This is a ludicrous question as multiple options may arise during the delivery of every development strategy, not limited in any way to the alternatives noted in the draft Local Plan. The absence of treatment of the major spatial element of open land compromises the spatial strategies proposed and options should include taking account of the significance of the countryside, and of the true brownfield redevelopment potential within each of Hertsmere's built up areas.

PART 2 Managing Development (Planning Policies)

Chapter 6: Housing

H1 Meeting Hertsmere's Housing Need, H2 Hertsmere's Urban Extensions, H4 Delivering Genuinely Affordable Housing, H10 New Homes in the Countryside/Green Belt

Q. 31: Do you agree with the content set out within policies H1 – 10 regarding the Council's proposed approach towards meeting Hertsmere's housing needs?

A: No

Q. 32: If you disagree If you disagree with any of the content, with reference to specific policies, please provide detailed comments or suitable alternatives...etc

A: Policy H1. No actual policy wording provided. The discussion under each policy heading amounts to no more than attempted justification for policy which does not exist. We have expressed above our objection to the use of the standard method for calculating housing need and it is not reasonable to expect the development industry to deliver consented schemes. Recent experience has indicated the inability and unwillingness of the development industry to implement planning consents and there are no effective sanctions available to local planning authorities to require performance.

Policy H2. No actual policy wording provided. The discussion relates to an 'approach' which lacks specificity and content. No technical evidence is indicated for the positions suggested and financial penalties are proposed which do not presently exist.

Policy H4. No actual policy wording provided. The discussion states that policy will define what is meant by genuinely affordable housing but fails to provide such definition, or indeed any further indication of how genuinely affordable housing may be achieved in the light of the circumstances and conditions in south Hertfordshire.

Policy H10. No actual policy wording provided. No distinction is provided between countryside and Green Belt and "judiciously monitor (their) timely delivery" relates to aspirations which are unenforceable and unrealistic.

Chapter 7: Economy & Culture

EC1 Meeting Hertsmere's Economic Needs, Employment Sites Designations

Q. 33: Do you agree with the content set out in policies EC1 – 10 regarding the Council's proposed approach towards securing economic and employment needs across the Borough?

A: No

Q.34: If you disagree with any of the content, with reference to specific policies, please provide detailed comments...etc

A: Policy EC1. No actual policy wording provided. The discussion lists floorspace requirements said to be supported by technical evidence but provides no evidence of the contribution of rural activities such as farming, recreation or leisure, nor of the spatial implications of such provision.

Policies EC5/6. No actual policy wording provided. It is stated that "sites will be identified on a Policies Map(sic)" but no Policies Map is provided. Large-scale land users such as film studios and data centres have massive implications for the open countryside and the surrounding communities and there is no treatment of such impacts.

Chapter 9: Green and Blue Infrastructure

GI1 Hertsmere's Green Infrastructure

Q.39: Do you agree with the content set out within policies GI1 – 10 regarding the Council's proposed approach

A: No

Q.40: If you disagree with any of the content, with reference to specific policies, please provide detailed answers or suitable alternatives...etc

A: Policy GI1. No actual policy wording provided. The reference to a 'place-based approach' is meaningless without an indication of the criteria to be applied to any analysis undertaken and without the "emerging Hertsmere Green Infrastructure Strategy'.

No reference is made to the recent Green Belt Review which indicates that the majority of the Green Belt may be identified as grey belt which could effectively remove protections which maintain green infrastructure throughout the Borough. It is not possible to respond meaningfully without details of proposed infrastructure.

Policy GI2. No actual policy wording provided. No reference is made to the internationally recognised habitats of the chalk streams which exist in Hertsmere. This is a serious omission of the Local Plan and devalues assertions of a positive response to unique waterways.

Policy GI4. No actual policy wording provided. We welcome the reference to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy and support the intention to incorporate legally required biodiversity gain into development proposals.

Policy GI6. No actual policy wording provided. The discussion is unclear and muddled with regard to what is proposed. We welcome the intention to avoid development on the best and most versatile agricultural land.

PART 3 Hertsmere's Towns and Places

Chapter 12 Introduction - Hertsmere's Towns and Places

Delivering the spatial strategy and meeting local needs

Part 3 of the document refers to the implications of policy for "Hertsmere's Towns and Places". No policy wording is provided and the discussion relates only to urban areas and settlements which is highly regrettable. The lack of reference to the open countryside which forms most of the Borough area is a serious omission.

Table 12.1 lists the urban centres which are discussed further but omits any indication of the proposed main town centre uses or their changing roles. Policy aspirations for the town centres are then dealt with in turn without reference to rural "Places" and we believe this means that the draft Local Plan will be unsound.

Q. 45: Do you agree with the Council's recommended approach towards the delivery of the spatial strategy within the Borehamwood Area?

A: In part.

Q.46: We support the continued development of Borehamwood as a principal town centre which offers opportunities for regeneration and the reuse and further development of previously developed vacant and underutilised sites. We do not support the expansion of the town into precious open green spaces which are protected and highly valued by local communities.

Q.47: Do you agree with the Council's recommended approach towards the delivery of the spatial strategy within the Potters Bar Area?

A: In part

Q.48: We support the continued development of Potters Bar as a principal town centre which offers opportunities for regeneration and the reuse and further development of previously developed vacant and underutilised sites. We do not support the expansion of the town into precious open green spaces which are protected and highly valued by local communities.

Q. 49: Do you agree with the Council's recommended approach towards the delivery of the spatial strategy within the Bushey area?

A: In part

Q.50: We support the continued development of Bushey as a principal town centre which offers opportunities for regeneration and the reuse and further development of previously developed vacant and underutilised sites. We do not support the expansion of the town into precious open green spaces which are protected and highly valued by local communities.

Q.51: Do you agree with the Council's recommended approach towards the delivery of the spatial strategy within the Radlett Area?

A: In part

Q.52: We support the continued development of Radlett as a principal town centre which offers opportunities for regeneration and the reuse and further development of previously developed vacant and underutilised sites. We do not support the expansion of the town into precious open green spaces which are protected and highly valued by local communities.

Chapter 17: Residential Candidate Sites

Qs. 53 - 66: Do you agree with the Council's recommended approach towards the delivery of the spatial strategy...etc

A: No. We do not support the identification of Candidate Sites in principle as this removes the responsibility of the Council to make specific recommendations within the Local Plan. The comprehensive listing of sites in excess of the requirements for housing land supply greatly increases uncertainty for the local communities affected.

We are concerned that the descriptions of Candidate Sites do not identify which are in the Green Belt. This is a serious omission and the actual description of Green Belt sites as 'edge of urban' is inadequate and could be misleading.

New Settlement Option 1

Q 65. Do you agree with the proposal to allocate land at Bowman's Cross for a new settlement that will deliver at least 4,000 new homes over its development lifespan; at least 500 of which will be delivered during the plan period?

A: No

New Settlement Option 2

Q: 66. Do you agree with the proposal to allocate land at Bowman's Cross for a new settlement that will deliver at least 7,500 new homes over its development lifespan; at least 500 of which will be delivered during the plan period?

A. No

New Settlement

Q: 67. Do you have any detail comments about the allocation of this site? Please justify your answer with appropriate and proportionate evidence.

A: The proposals for Bowman's Cross are not coherent and the case for the options is not made. It is neither necessary nor appropriate to propose such a large proportion of the provision outside the plan period and the criteria for a major rapid implementation are unclear and unrealistic.

Chapter 20: Appendices

Appendix 1 Abbreviations, Appendix 2 Glossary, Appendix 3 Strategic and non-strategic policies, Appendix 4 Replacement, deleted and new policies

Q.71: Do you agree that an appendix providing information on the abbreviations and acronyms used in the Local Plan is necessary to ensure soundness?

A: Yes

Q. 75: Do you agree that an appendix providing an explanation of the terminology to be used in the Local Plan is necessary to ensure soundness?

A: Yes

Q. 77: Do you agree that an appendix identifying and distinguishing strategic policies from other non-strategic policies is necessary to ensure soundness?

A: Yes

Q. 79: Do you agree that an appendix identifying replacement, deleted and new policies is necessary to ensure soundness?

A: Yes

Appendix 5: Housing Trajectory and Five-Year Housing Land Supply

Q.81: Do you agree that an appendix setting out at least a deliverable five-year housing supply, which meets housing need calculated through the standard method, at the point of adoption is necessary to ensure soundness?

A: In part.

Q.82: As previously noted, we do not believe that the present standard method is appropriate for the calculation of housing need in Hertsmere, and the Council should seek to provide for housing need by an alternative method which takes full account of local conditions and circumstances.

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