

Stevenage Borough Council Response to Luton's Local Plan Scoping Consultation

Planning Policy Team

Luton Council

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23 July 2026

Dear Planning Policy Team,

Re: Luton Local Plan – Scoping Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Scoping Consultation for the emerging Luton Local Plan. Stevenage Borough Council welcomes early engagement and looks forward to continued cooperation as the plan progresses.

The Local Plan should recognise that Luton and Stevenage sit within a wider interconnected functional economic area within the A1(M)-M1-Cambridge-London corridor. Many of the key challenges facing Luton have direct implications for Stevenage, particularly around housing growth, infrastructure capacity, transport, decisions around further expansion and intensification of operations at Luton Airport and climate change. It is also important to note that following the decision by Government Stevenage will be forming part of a new Central Hertfordshire Unitary Authority, which will share a boundary with Luton. This will increase the importance of cooperation on Plan making, specifically on the matters set out in this letter. We consider it essential that the Local Plan addresses strategic cross-boundary matters from the outset. These are included below.

Main Challenges and Opportunities

1. Accommodating growth, housing need and affordability

Hertfordshire continues to face housing pressures, including affordability, market demand and a good mix of homes. These challenges do not stop at boundary lines and Stevenage is facing the same challenges. There is an opportunity to ensure these areas work together on matters such as commuting patterns, shared infrastructure and housing markets.

Stevenage Borough Council encourage Luton to ensure a robust and up to date housing need is available and any unmet need is identified and discussed early with neighbours. The new Local Plan should also consider cross boundary housing market dynamics.

2. Infrastructure, transport and connectivity:

Stevenage and Luton are linked by:

- The A505 corridor.
- East-west road connections between the A1(M) and M1.
- Thameslink rail services via Hitchin.
- Shared access to major employment centres including London, Luton Airport, Hatfield and the wider Golden Triangle economy.

These connections facilitate commuting between the two areas and allow employers to draw workers from a wider geography.

There is a major opportunity for the new Local Plan to align infrastructure planning with neighbouring authorities, including Stevenage, to ensure that growth is sustainable and deliverable.

Stevenage residents rely on infrastructure across district boundaries and vice versa. Luton experiences significant commuting flows to London, Cambridge, Stevenage and Hatfield. The A505 is particularly important as the strategic connection between Luton and Stevenage.

Growth in Luton could increase:

- Road congestion
- Rail demand
- Parking pressures
- Air quality impacts

We therefore support the inclusion of comprehensive transport modelling and request that:

- Transport evidence is developed jointly with SBC and has the ongoing involvement of Hertfordshire County Council and National Highways;
- Cumulative impacts of growth in both authorities are assessed and planned for;
- Opportunities for cross-boundary public transport improvements are explored.

This could include shared approaches to transport corridors, rail capacity and utilities planning. It will ensure growth in one area does not place unsustainable issues on another.

3. Sustainable Mobility

The plan period will require a need for:

- Active travel

- Public transport improvements
- Reduced car dependency

There are strong commuting flows between Stevenage and Luton which will need coordinated transport planning. This could be around rail stations, bus corridors, and cycling networks.

We would recommend that the plan should also look to:

- Improve east–west connectivity between Stevenage and Luton
- Support bus priority measures and integrated ticketing
- Expand active travel routes that connect across district boundaries

4. Economic Growth and Employment Land

Both areas have concentrations in:

- Advanced manufacturing;
- Engineering;
- Logistics;
- Life sciences/technology;
- Airport-related and business services employment.

Workers in these sectors are often mobile across authority boundaries and employment location.

There is an opportunity to strengthen this economic cluster by planning for complementary employment land, supporting innovation, and improving transport connectivity between key employment hubs. Economic growth will need to adapt to:

- Hybrid working
- Digitalisation
- Changing town centres
- Competition for investment
- Skills development

We therefore recommend that the new Local Plan should safeguard and where appropriate expand employment land that supports the local climate, as well promote skills development and labour mobility across the area.

5. Luton Airport

Stevenage recognises that London Luton Airport is a strategically important economic asset for Luton, the wider sub-region and the national economy. The airport is a major employer and supports a significant number of associated businesses and supply chain activities. The new Local Plan should therefore support the airport's continued contribution to economic growth, innovation, skills development and employment opportunities.

However, any future growth should be aligned with sustainable development principles and be supported by appropriate infrastructure, particularly public transport connectivity, workforce skills provision and measures to reduce carbon emissions. Growth proposals should be accompanied by robust assessment of environmental impacts, including climate change, air quality, noise and impacts on neighbouring authorities.

We would recommend the Plan to consider:

- Maximising high-quality employment opportunities for local residents;
- Supporting green aviation technologies, research and innovation initiatives;
- Strengthening sustainable transport links, including rail and bus connections serving the airport;
- Ensuring airport-related growth contributes positively to wider sub-regional economic objectives, and;
- Managing environmental impacts.

Future airport-related development should deliver clear economic benefits while remaining consistent with climate, environmental and infrastructure objectives.

6. Climate Change, Biodiversity, Green Belt and Green Infrastructure

Stevenage Borough Council strongly supports:

- Enhancement of green infrastructure networks.
- Delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Alignment with Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- Protection and enhancement of strategic ecological corridors.
- Climate resilience measures.

The Local Plan should recognise opportunities for environmental enhancement across authority boundaries and support collaborative approaches where appropriate.

7. Town Centres and High Streets

Stevenage's ongoing regeneration programme has sub-regional significance.

Changing retail patterns and the shift towards mixed-use centres affect both districts. Luton and Stevenage's town centre can benefit from:

- Coordinated regeneration strategies
- Shared cultural and economic initiatives
- Improved sustainable transport links between centres
- Ensure that town centre strategies in Luton complement Stevenage's regeneration programme and trajectory.

8. Ongoing Engagement

Stevenage Borough Council welcomes the publication of the Community Involvement Paper and Engagement Strategy and supports the intention to involve communities and stakeholders throughout the plan-making process. Early and meaningful engagement will help ensure the Local Plan is evidence-led and deliverable.

We would appreciate:

- Early and ongoing involvement in the development of spatial options that impact Stevenage
- Participation in relevant working groups
- Identification of opportunities for the two authorities to work together to shape any strategy for growth that impacts Stevenage, including but not limited to development of key evidence studies and consultation stages

We remain committed to constructive cooperation in line with national policy requirements.

Conclusion

We trust that these comments will assist in shaping the scope of the new Local Plan for Luton. Stevenage Borough Council looks forward to ongoing collaboration to ensure that strategic cross-boundary matters are addressed positively and effectively.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Planning Policy Team if you wish to discuss any matters further.

Yours sincerely,

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