

Ickleford Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2035

**A report to North Hertfordshire District Council on
the Ickleford Neighbourhood Development Plan**

**Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
BA (Hons) MA, DMS, MRTPI**

Director – Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited

Executive Summary

- 1 I was appointed by North Hertfordshire District Council in October 2023 to carry out the independent examination of the Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2 The examination was undertaken by way of written representations. I visited the neighbourhood area on 30 October 2023.
- 3 The Plan includes a variety of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. It includes policies to safeguard the built and historic environment and to promote the development of sustainable buildings. It also has policies on design and community facilities.
- 4 The Plan has been underpinned by community support and engagement. All sections of the community have been engaged in its preparation. It has been prepared in short order.
- 5 Subject to a series of recommended modifications set out in this report, I have concluded that the Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.
- 6 I recommend that the referendum should be held within the neighbourhood area.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
18 December 2023

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the Ickleford Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2035 ('the Plan').
- 1.2 The Plan was submitted to North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) by Ickleford Parish Council (IPC) in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan. The neighbourhood area was designated on 23 September 2014.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012, 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2023. The NPPF continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.
- 1.4 The role of an independent examiner is clearly defined in the legislation. I have been appointed to examine whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions and Convention Rights and other statutory requirements. It is not within my remit to examine or to propose an alternative plan, or a potentially more sustainable plan except where this arises because of my recommended modifications to ensure that the plan meets the basic conditions and the other relevant requirements.
- 1.5 A neighbourhood plan can be narrow or broad in scope and can include whatever range of policies it sees as appropriate to its designated neighbourhood area. The submitted Plan has been designed to be distinctive in general terms, and to be complementary to the development plan. It seeks to provide a context in which the neighbourhood area can maintain its character and appearance.
- 1.6 Within the context set out above, this report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the basic conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.
- 1.7 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case and that referendum results in a positive outcome the Plan would then be used to determine planning applications within the neighbourhood area and will sit as part of the wider development plan.

2 The Role of the Independent Examiner

- 2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.
- 2.2 I was appointed by NHDC, with the consent of IPC, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of both NHDC and IPC. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.
- 2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. In previous roles, I have over 40 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level and more recently as an independent examiner. I am a chartered town planner and have significant experience of undertaking other neighbourhood plan examinations and health checks. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral System.

Examination Outcomes

- 2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:
- (a) that the Plan as submitted should proceed to a referendum; or
 - (b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
 - (c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.
- 2.5 The outcome of the examination is set out in Section 8 of this report.

Other examination matters

- 2.6 In examining the Plan, I am required to check whether:
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
 - the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and
 - the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.
- 2.7 I have addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.6 of this report and am satisfied that they have been met.

3 Procedural Matters

- 3.1 In undertaking this examination I have considered the following documents:
- the submitted Plan.
 - the Basic Conditions Statement.
 - the Consultation Statement.
 - the SEA/HRA Screening report (March 2022).
 - the representations made to the Plan.
 - IPC's responses to the clarification note.
 - the Area Profile.
 - the Housing Needs Assessment.
 - the Design Guidelines and Codes.
 - the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 to 2031 (adopted November 2022).
 - the National Planning Policy Framework (September 2023).
 - Planning Practice Guidance.
 - relevant Ministerial Statements.
- 3.2 I visited the neighbourhood area on 30 October 2023. I looked at its overall character and appearance and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan in particular.
- 3.3 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations, I concluded that the Plan could be examined by way of written representations and that a hearing was not required.
- 3.4 The NPPF was updated in September 2023 and after the Plan was submitted (in June 2023). For the avoidance of doubt, I confirm that I have assessed the Plan against the 2023 version of the document.

4 Consultation

Consultation Process

- 4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such, the regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2012, IPC prepared a Consultation Statement. It is proportionate to the neighbourhood area and its policies
- 4.3 The Statement records the various activities that were held to engage the local community in a helpful tabular format. It also comments on the consultation processes that took place on the pre-submission version of the Plan (September to November 2022).
- 4.4 The Statement also provides the details of the way in which the Plan was refined because of this process. This analysis contributes significantly to the legibility of the relevant information and helps to describe how the Plan has progressed to the submission stage.
- 4.5 In the round I am satisfied that consultation has been an important element of the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation. From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I can see that the Plan has promoted an inclusive approach to seeking the opinions of all concerned throughout the process. NHDC has carried out its own assessment that the consultation process has complied with the requirements of the Regulations.

Consultation Responses Done

- 4.6 Consultation on the submitted plan was undertaken by NHDC. It ended on 27 June 2023. This exercise generated representations from the following organisations:
 - Natural England
 - Sport England
 - Anglian Water
 - North Hertfordshire District Council (Estates)
- 4.7 A representation was also received from a parishioner.
- 4.8 I have taken account of the representations in preparing this report. Where it is appropriate to do so, I refer to specific representations on a policy-by-policy basis.

5 The Neighbourhood Area and the Development Plan Context

The Neighbourhood Area

- 5.1 The neighbourhood area is the parish of Ickleford. Its population in 2011 was 1833 persons living in 844 households. Ickleford is a village and a civil parish in Hertfordshire, extending northwards towards Bedfordshire. It is located close to the outskirts of Hitchin along the bank of the River Hiz. It was designated as a neighbourhood area on 23 September 2014.
- 5.2 The village of Ickleford is located around Bedford Road, Turnpike Lane and Arlesey Road. It includes a range of commercial and community facilities. It is located on the historic Icknield Way.
- 5.3 As the Plan describes, most of the neighbourhood area consists relatively flat farmland. The village itself lies at the southern end of the parish, with the River Oughton at its southern boundary. This joins the River Hiz, which then runs north along the village's eastern edge through meadows and commons. These rivers are chalk streams, celebrated for their high biodiversity. A stretch of the East Coast Mainline runs to the east of the River Hiz, and beyond this the land rises up Wilbury Hill towards Letchworth. The fields of Hitchin Lavender lie on these slopes, and are crossed by some of the popular footpaths and bridleways in the parish. The A600 forms much of the parish boundary to the west.

Development Plan Context

- 5.4 The development plan for the neighbourhood area is well-developed and up-to-date. The North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 to 2031 was adopted in November 2022.
- 5.5 Policy SP2 establishes a settlement hierarchy and a related distribution of new development throughout the District. In this context, paragraph 13.162 of the Local Plan advises that Ickleford is identified as one of five villages where a specific amount of development has been allocated. Paragraph 13.164 comments that the three sites are allocated around the edge of the village (Policies IC1/IC2/IC3) and provide for an estimated 199 new homes. It also comments that 36 homes had been built or granted planning permission in the parish since 2011 before the Local Plan was adopted.
- 5.6 In addition to Policy SP2 and Policies IC1-3, the following policies in the Local Plan have been particularly important in underpinning the approach taken in the submitted Plan:
- SP5 Countryside and Green Belt
 - SP6 Sustainable Transport
 - SP8 Housing
 - SP9 Design and Sustainability
 - SP10 Healthy Communities
 - SP12 Green infrastructure, landscape, and biodiversity
 - SP13 Historic Environment

The Basic Conditions Statement helpfully relates the policies in the submitted Plan to these strategic policies.

- 5.7 The submitted Plan has been prepared within its up-to-date development plan context. In doing so, it has relied on up-to-date information and research that has underpinned existing planning policy documents. This is good practice and reflects key elements in Planning Practice Guidance on this matter.
- 5.8 I am satisfied that the submitted Plan seeks to add value to the different components of the development plan and to give a local dimension to the delivery of its policies. This is captured in the Basic Conditions Statement.

Visit to the neighbourhood area

- 5.9 I visited the neighbourhood area on 30 October 2023. I approached it from the north along the A600. This helped me to understand its position in the wider landscape in general and its accessibility to the road network in particular.
- 5.10 I looked initially at the village centre. I saw the importance of St Katharine's Church, the Old George PH, and the shop. I saw the way in which they were positioned in relation to the interconnecting green areas.
- 5.11 I also saw the interesting shelter and its relationship with important elements of the history of the Royal Family.
- 5.12 I then saw the importance of the School and the Village Hall. The central location of the School helped me to understand the background to Policy C3 of the Plan.
- 5.13 I took the opportunity to walk along Arlesey Road to the north of the village. I saw that the layout of the houses became more linear along the road itself.
- 5.14 I then looked at the area between Ickleford and Hitchin. I walked along the southern part of Arlesey Road as far as Bessemer Close (in Hitchin). I then walked back in the village and walked along the Bedford Road as far as the Burford Grange housing site (being developed by Cala Homes).
- 5.15 I left the neighbourhood area by driving to Hitchin to the south along the A600. This helped me to understand further its position in the wider landscape and its proximity to Hitchin.

6 The Neighbourhood Plan and the Basic Conditions

- 6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted neighbourhood plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped in the preparation of this section of the report. It is an informative and well-presented document.
- 6.2 As part of this process, I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:
- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
 - contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
 - be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan in the area;
 - be compatible with European Union (EU) obligations and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR); and
 - not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

I assess the Plan against the basic conditions under the following headings:

National Planning Policies and Guidance

- 6.3 For the purposes of this examination the key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF).
- 6.4 The NPPF sets out a range of land-use planning principles to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following are particularly relevant to the Ickleford Neighbourhood Development Plan:
- a plan-led system - in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and the North Hertfordshire Local Plan;
 - building a strong, competitive economy;
 - recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving local communities;
 - taking account of the different roles and characters of different areas;
 - highlighting the importance of high-quality design and good standards of amenity for all future occupants of land and buildings; and
 - conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.
- 6.5 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally, and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 13 of the NPPF indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.

- 6.6 In addition to the NPPF, I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy including Planning Practice Guidance and the recent ministerial statements.
- 6.7 Having considered all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance subject to the recommended modifications in this report. It sets out a positive vision for the future of the neighbourhood area. It includes policies to safeguard the built and historic environment and to promote the development of sustainable buildings. It also has policies on design and community facilities.
- 6.8 At a more practical level, the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraph 16d). This was reinforced with the publication of Planning Practice Guidance. Paragraph ID:41-041-20140306 indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. Policies should also be concise, precise, and supported by appropriate evidence.
- 6.9 As submitted the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. Most of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan fully accords with national policy.

Contributing to sustainable development

- 6.10 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the contribution that the submitted Plan makes to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social, and environmental. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. In the economic dimension, the Plan includes policies for residential development (Policy SD1) and for employment uses (Policy C4). In the social role, it includes policies on local housing needs (Policy SD2), community facilities (Policies C1 and C2) and the school (Policy C3). In the environmental dimension, the Plan positively seeks to protect its natural, built, and historic environment. It has policies on character and design (Policy SD3), maintaining separation (Policy WE1), and heritage assets (Policy HE1). This assessment overlaps with the details on this matter in the submitted Basic Conditions Statement.

General conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan

- 6.11 I have already commented in detail on the development plan context in North Hertfordshire in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of this report.
- 6.12 I consider that the submitted Plan delivers a local dimension to this strategic context and supplements the detail already included in the adopted development plan. Subject to the recommended modifications in this report, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 6.13 The Neighbourhood Plan (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 require a qualifying body either to submit an environmental report prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 or a statement of reasons why an environmental report is not required.
- 6.14 In order to comply with this requirement, NHDC undertook a screening exercise in March 2023 on the need or otherwise for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be prepared for the Plan. The report is thorough and well-constructed. It concludes that it is unlikely that significant environmental effects will arise from the implementation of the Plan and that SEA is not needed.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

- 6.15 NHDC also prepared a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan at the same time. The process concludes that the neighbourhood plan will not give rise to likely significant effects on European sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, and that Appropriate Assessment is not required.
- 6.16 Having reviewed the information provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that a proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various regulations. None of the statutory consultees have raised any concerns regarding either neighbourhood plan or to European obligations. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with this aspect of neighbourhood plan regulations.

Human Rights

- 6.17 In a similar fashion I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. There has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. On this basis, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

Summary

- 6.18 On the basis of my assessment of the Plan in this section of my report, I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications contained in this report.

7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 7.1 This section of the report comments on the policies in the Plan. It makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that the various policies have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.
- 7.2 The recommendations focus on the policies in the Plan given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended changes to the associated supporting text.
- 7.3 I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan is fit for purpose. It is distinctive and proportionate to the Plan area. The wider community and IPC have spent time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that they wish to be included in their Plan. This sits at the heart of the localism agenda.
- 7.4 The Plan has been designed to reflect Planning Practice Guidance (Section 41-004-20190509) which indicates that neighbourhood plans must address the development and use of land. It also includes a series of non-land use matters in Section 12.
- 7.5 I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted Plan. The Actions are addressed thereafter.
- 7.6 For clarity, this section of the report comments on all policies.
- 7.7 Where modifications are recommended to policies they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

The initial parts of the Plan (Sections 1 to 6)

- 7.8 The Plan is well-organised and presented. It makes an appropriate distinction between the policies and their supporting text. It includes a series of good maps.
- 7.9 The initial elements of the Plan set the scene for the policies. They are proportionate to the neighbourhood area and the subsequent policies. The Introduction sets the scene for the Plan. To ensure that the Plan meets the prescribed conditions, I recommend that details are included about the Plan period and the neighbourhood area.

At the end of paragraph 1.4 add: 'The neighbourhood area is shown on the Plan overleaf. The Plan period is 2022 to 2035.'

- 7.10 Section 2 provides information about the strategic and local planning policy context within which the plan has been prepared.
- 7.11 Section 3 describes the neighbourhood area to good effect. The interesting and comprehensive details help to set the scene for the eventual policies.
- 7.12 Section 4 about the way in which the community was engaged in the preparation of the Plan. It overlaps with the details in the Consultation Statement.

- 7.13 Section 5 sets out the vision and objectives for the Plan. It makes a strong functional relationship between the various issues. The Vision neatly summarises the approach taken as follows:

'Ickleford will thrive as a strong community retaining its own rural village identity and strong central hub, while maintaining excellent links with surrounding towns for employment and essential services. The needs of the village and parish population will be met, including local facilities, access to the countryside and sustainable transport, while protecting and enhancing the distinct natural and historical heritage in the Parish. Future development will be carried out sensitively to maintain the character of the village, with new housing that is built to high quality standards and meets local need.'

- 7.14 Section 6 comments about the concept of sustainable development and how it applies to the neighbourhood area.
- 7.15 The remainder of this section of the report addresses each policy in turn in the context set out in paragraphs 7.5 to 7.7 of this report.

General Format of the Policies and the Recommended Modifications

- 7.16 A key element of the policy is the way in which they are underpinned by the supporting text. In each case the policy is underpinned by information which explains the way in which the issue was identified during the Plan preparation process and appropriate details which explains the way in which the policy was developed and its relationship to the evidence base. This approach is best practice. It provides assurance to all concerned that the Plan has been properly prepared and has used appropriate evidence.
- 7.17 The recommended modifications are presented in one of two ways. The first describes the recommended modifications in relation to the submitted policy. The second recommends a replacement policy when this approach would be the most effective for NHDC and IPC to incorporate into a referendum version of the Plan. In both cases the outcome is a modified policy which will meet the basic conditions whilst retaining the general approach of the policy concerned as included in the submitted Plan.

Policy E1 Maintaining Separation

- 7.18 The Plan advises that Policy E1 seeks to bring to the attention of developers and NHDC that the area of Green Belt between Ickleford and Hitchin is particularly important for the separation of the two settlements, and if not designated as Green Belt, the Neighbourhood Plan would have designated this gap as a strategic gap.
- 7.19 The policy comments that the undeveloped gap within the designated Green Belt between Ickleford and Hitchin shall be maintained and that new development which would encroach visually and/or functionally on this gap should be refused unless it is in line with NPPF policy which allows very limited development under very special circumstances or development which is not deemed inappropriate.

7.20 I sought IPC's comments on the extent to which the policy would bring any added or local value to the application of national Green Belt policy (as set out in Section 13 of the NPPF 2023). In its response to the clarification note, IPC advised that:

'(whilst) it is acknowledged that paragraph 16 f) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that Plans should 'serve a clear purpose, avoiding unnecessary duplication of policies that apply to a particular area (including policies in this Framework, where relevant)', this policy does not actually duplicate policies that are elsewhere. The Neighbourhood Plan (NP) will be used by the Parish Council to comment on planning applications and will show residents how planning applications are likely to be received. Few of these people are likely to be familiar with Local Plan or NPPF policy and will not necessarily have the knowledge to interpret the relevant parts of those policies and assess planning applications against them to enable them to make informed comments on planning applications. As set out in the preceding paragraphs to Policy E1, this matter is a very important issue for residents of Ickleford who have witnessed the incremental changes in the gap between the settlements. Ickleford is very much a rural settlement and the gap between the two must be maintained to retain its separate identity. Green Belt designation through the previous Local Plan has not achieved the protection of this gap. The policy clearly specifies the location and the policy requirements, it does not duplicate policies elsewhere and the Parish Council request that it is retained in the NP.'

7.21 I have considered this matter very carefully. On the balance of the evidence, I am not satisfied that the submitted policy complements national and local policies on the Green Belt. I have reached this conclusion for the following related reasons:

- whilst the policy does not directly repeat Green Belt policy it uses similar language and its effect would be the same as Green Belt policy;
- one of the purposes of Green Belt policy (NPPF 138) is to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- the unfamiliarity of local people to Green Belt policy as highlighted in IPC's response to the clarification note is not in itself a justification for the policy; and
- there is no evidence submitted to support IPC's assertion that the Green Belt has been ineffective, and the Green Belt has been retained between Ickleford and Hitchin in the recently adopted Local Plan.

7.22 Nevertheless I acknowledge the importance of this matter to the local community and its concerns about the Plan not addressing the issue. On this basis I recommend that the policy is recast so that it comments more simply about the undeveloped gap between the two settlements. In this context it will complement national and local planning policies on the Green Belt. In doing so I have concluded that there is no need to identify the 'gap' in the Plan given that the Policy Map B of the Local Plan has already defined the boundary of the Green Belt in this part of North Hertfordshire.

7.23 I recommend consequential modifications to the supporting text which include:

- the unnecessary reference to specific planning applications (in paragraph 7.7);
- the relationship between the modified Policy E1 and Green Belt policies; and

- signposting the relevant policies map in the Local Plan which shows the extent of the Green Belt between Ickleford and Hitchin.

7.24 An indirect outcome of the recommended modifications to the supporting text is that it will help to resolve the local knowledge about the extent of the Green Belt as set out in IPC's response to the clarification note.

Replace the policy with:

'Development proposals should respect the undeveloped gap between Ickleford and Hitchin.'

Replace paragraphs 7.7 and 7.8 with:

'The gap between Ickleford and Hitchin forms an important part of the Green Belt in North Hertfordshire. National and local planning policies advise that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in 'very special circumstances'. It also sets out the exceptions where the construction of new buildings may be allowed, including for example, buildings for agriculture, replacements, or modest extensions to existing buildings, limited affordable housing for local community needs and redevelopment of previously developed land. The neighbourhood plan acknowledges this broad strategic context.

Policy E1 seeks to complement Green Belt policy. It highlights the importance of the continued separation of the settlements of Ickleford and Hitchin. The reference to the 'gap' in the policy is not geographically defined given that the Policy Map B of the Local Plan has already defined the boundary of the Green Belt in this part of North Hertfordshire.'

Policy E2 Protecting the Landscape

- 7.25 The policy comments that any proposals for development which will have an impact on the landscape should recognise and seek to protect and enhance the historic and natural landscape and local character of the Parish, including the delicate chalk rivers and their valleys, field ponds, mature trees, and hedgerows. It also advises that such features should be protected and, where appropriate, incorporated into any landscape design schemes and their long-term maintenance ensured.
- 7.26 The policy is underpinned by the North Herts Landscape Study (Character, Sensitivity and Capacity), (2011). It reviewed the landscape types across the district and undertook to divide the countryside into discrete and relatively homogenous units where physical, biological, historic, and cultural elements occur in repeating patterns and share certain aesthetic characteristics. In this assessment the Parish fell within two defined character areas: Pirton Lowlands (Area 218) and River Oughton and Purwell Valleys (Area 217). Descriptions of these character areas and some of the recommendations for their management from the Assessment are set out in the Plan.
- 7.27 In the round, I am satisfied that the policy has been developed in an informed way. Within this broad context, I recommend specific modifications to the wording used so that the policy will have the clarity required by the NPPF and NHDC will be able to

implement its provisions through the development management process. I recommend that the second part of the policy (on tree and hedge planting) acknowledges that such works may not need planning permission. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘Development proposals should protect and, where practicable, enhance the historic and natural landscape and local character of the Parish, including the delicate chalk rivers and their valleys, field ponds, mature trees, and hedgerows. Such features should be protected and, where appropriate, incorporated into landscape design schemes.

Insofar as planning permission is required, the planting of hedgerows and trees, and the enhancement of the existing vegetation and the chalk stream ecosystem will be supported.’

Policy E3 Rural Character

- 7.28 This policy seeks to retain the rural character of the parish. It is underpinned by extensive supporting text and the analysis of the village in the Ickleford Design Codes.
- 7.29 The policy comments that the rural character of the village and its surroundings should be respected through new development by ensuring that a series of criteria are met.
- 7.30 In general terms the policy takes an appropriate approach to this matter. I am satisfied that it has regard to Sections 12 and 15 of the NPPF. I recommend that the opening element of the policy is modified so that it can be applied on a proportionate basis. This accords with IPC’s response to the clarification note. I also recommend detailed modifications to the wording used in the first criteria. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the opening element of the policy with: ‘As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should respect the rural character of the village and its surroundings by ensuring that:’

In the opening element of the policy replace ‘proposals take advantage of’ with ‘they respond positively to’

Policy E4 Biodiversity

- 7.31 This is a comprehensive policy which addresses the following matters:
- new development will be required to protect and enhance existing natural features of sites, habitats and provide at least 10% net gain in biodiversity;
 - the provision of appropriate species-related measures will be required, including, for example, swift bricks, bat and owl boxes and the incorporation of appropriate native species into landscaping schemes; and

- opportunities to link new development with existing wildlife corridors and sustainable drainage solutions in new development to complement nature conservation objectives

- 7.32 The policy is underpinned by extensive supporting text, the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan 2006, the North Herts Landscape Study (Character, Sensitivity and Capacity), (2011) and the submitted Design Codes.
- 7.33 In the round I am satisfied that the policy has regard to Section 15 of the NPPF and is distinctive to the neighbourhood area. I recommend modifications to the structure of the policy so that its role in the development management process would be clearer. Its overall approach remains unaffected. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘Development should protect and enhance existing natural features of sites, habitats and provide at least 10% net gain in biodiversity.

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should:

- **provide proportionate species-related measures;**
- **incorporate appropriate native species into landscaping schemes; and**
- **establish links with existing wildlife corridors and delivered sustainable drainage solutions.’**

Policy HE1 Protecting and Enhancing Local Heritage Assets

- 7.34 The policy identifies three local heritage assets and applies a policy approach for their protection.
- 7.35 I looked closely at the assets during the visit. I am satisfied that they are fit for this purpose.
- 7.36 As submitted the policy does not have regard to paragraph 203 of the NPPF. I recommend that the policy is modified to remedy this issue. This approach is consistent with IPC’s response to the clarification note. I also recommend that the order of the policy is reversed so that the assets are listed before the policy itself. This will make the policy more readily understandable. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘The Plan identifies the following local heritage assets:

[List the three assets]

Development proposals directly or indirectly affecting the identified assets will be determined applying a balanced judgement having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.'

Policy SD1 Development within the Settlement Boundary

- 7.37 This is an important policy in the wider context of the Plan. The text advises that opportunities for new small scale housing development are likely to continue to arise in the village throughout the Plan period. The settlement boundary for the village is defined in the Local Plan and separates the village from the surrounding countryside.
- 7.38 The policy comments that within the settlement boundary development will be supported for infill development, small-scale employment uses, and community facilities in principle. The second part of the policy sets out detailed amenity matters which will apply to development proposals.
- 7.39 In the round I am satisfied that the first part of policy takes a positive approach to this matter. Nevertheless, I recommend a detailed modification to the wording used. I also recommend that the second part of the policy is relocated into the supporting text. It is more a list of material planning considerations rather than a land use policy. In any event the sentiments of maintaining amenity are already included in the first part of the policy. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

In the first part of the policy replace 'adverse' with 'unacceptable'

Delete the second part of the policy.

At the end of paragraph 9.6 add: 'Policy SD1 addresses this important matter. Development proposals should be designed and arranged so that they do not have unacceptable impacts on the amenity of the occupiers of neighbouring properties through loss of privacy, overshadowing, overbearing by a building or structure, car parking, the removal of mature vegetation or landscaping and additional traffic resulting from the development.'

Policy SD2 New Housing Development

- 7.40 This policy comments on the size/mix of houses. It is underpinned by AECOM Housing Needs Survey 2021.
- 7.41 The policy comments that on all developments of between three and ten dwellings and sites not required to provide affordable housing, including the allocated site IC1 in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan, the sizes of dwelling should be mixed, with at least 33% of smaller, (from 1-2 bedrooms) provided to enable younger people and older people wishing to downsize to access appropriate housing. It also advises that at least 33% should be 3 bedroomed dwellings unless there is local up to date evidence that larger dwellings are needed.
- 7.42 I sought advice from IPC about the mathematical elements of the policy and the extent to which it would apply to the allocated housing sites in the Local Plan. In its response to the clarification note IPC advised that:

'This policy is primarily intended to ensure that new housing sites deliver smaller units on the open market. Sites which are not required to provide affordable housing, either those below 10 units or on larger sites which for some reason are not required to provide affordable units (e.g. because of a viability justification) should still be providing a mix of dwellings with a bias towards smaller units (which is not the requirement in the Local Plan policy).'

The mathematical approach is tricky for smaller sites, which is why the wording includes 'at least', so for a site of 5 houses, it would be expected that 2 units would be 1-2 bedroomed and 2 would be 3 bedroomed with the remaining unit to be larger. For a site of 4 houses, 2 units would need to be 1-2 bedroomed with the remaining 2 units to be 3 bedroomed.

Allocations in the Local Plan are usually larger than 10 units and inevitably will provide affordable housing and a mix of sizes. Housing Allocation IC1 is unusually only 9 units which is the reason that it is mentioned in the policy.'

- 7.43 I have considered the details of the policy and IPC's response to the clarification note very carefully. The purpose of the policy is self-evident. However, as drafted, it is over-complicated and will be difficult to apply through the development management process. In addition, there is no information in the policy about its potential impact on the delivery and/or delivery of new housing. In addition, the effect of the policy is likely to fall in a disproportionate way on smaller sites.
- 7.44 In these circumstances I recommend that the policy is recast so that its focus is on ensuring that the mix of house types reflects the most up-to-date information available on local housing need and offers specific support to the development of smaller homes (1-3 bedrooms). This will allow developers to respond to the relevant information at the time that planning applications are submitted. The recommended supporting text and general nature of the policy will be less restrictive than that proposed in the submitted policy. In addition, the modified policy will not create any direct tensions with Policy SD3 of the Plan which seeks to deliver high quality designs. I also recommend consequential modifications to the supporting text.
- 7.45 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

'On developments of 3 – 10 dwellings and sites not required to provide affordable housing, the size and mix of dwellings should respond positively to the most up-to-date information available on local housing need.

Development proposals which include smaller homes (1-3 bedrooms) will be particularly supported.'

Replace the final sentence of paragraph 9.16 with:

'Policy SD2 seeks to address these issues. Its focus is on ensuring that the mix of house types reflects the most up-to-date information available on local housing needs

and offers specific support to the development of smaller homes (1-3 bedrooms). This will allow developers to respond to the relevant information at the time that planning applications are being prepared. In addition, this approach will be consistent with Policy SD3 of the Plan which seeks to deliver high quality designs.'

Policy SD3 High Quality Design

- 7.46 This is an important policy. It is underpinned by the Ickleford Design Codes. In the round, the policy and the Guides represent an excellent local response to Section 12 of the NPPF.
- 7.47 The policy comments that proposals for good quality new development (including new buildings and extensions to existing buildings) will be supported, where they are in accordance with the guidelines and design principles set out in the Ickleford Design Codes. It also sets out a series of specific requirements as relevant to the proposal concerned.
- 7.48 In general terms I am satisfied that the policy meets the basic conditions. However, I recommend that the detailed elements of the policy are applied on a proportionate basis. This acknowledges that not all the principles will apply to each proposal. I also recommend the deletion of the final bullet point (on electric vehicle charging). Whilst the matter is likely to be important during the Plan period it is now controlled nationally through Part S of the Building Regulations. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace 'All new development must (where relevant to the proposal):' with 'As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should:'

Delete the final bullet point.

Policy SD4 Provision of Energy Efficient Buildings

- 7.49 The policy seeks to provide a local response to the net zero carbon emissions agenda. In this context it sets out a comprehensive approach to energy efficiency. It includes elements on high levels of sustainable design for new buildings, retrofitting measures for heritage assets, and alterations to other existing buildings.
- 7.50 The policy takes a very positive approach to this matter in a non-prescriptive way. I recommend detailed modifications to the second and third parts of the policy so that they have the clarity required by the NPPF. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the second and third parts of the policy with:

'Proposals for the retrofitting of existing buildings including heritage properties, should reduce energy demand where practicable and, where appropriate, generate renewable energy whilst safeguarding their historic characteristics.'

Alterations to existing buildings should be designed in a way which reduces energy consumption and comply with sustainable design and construction standards.'

Policy SD5 Water Management

- 7.51 This policy sets out a detailed approach towards the management of water. The supporting text highlights relevant policies in the Local Plan and draws attention to the National Framework for Water Resources (2020).
- 7.52 The policy comments that all developments must be designed taking account of best practice in water efficiency, such as using water efficient fittings and appliances, water harvesting, grey water recycling, and providing water storage features. In addition, it advises that development should demonstrate that the estimated consumption of wholesome water per dwelling is calculated in accordance with the methodology in the water efficiency calculator and should not exceed 110 litres/person/day. Finally, it comments that conditions will be applied to planning permissions where relevant to ensure that this is achieved.
- 7.53 In general terms the policy takes an appropriate approach to this matter. Nevertheless, I recommend the following package of modifications to the policy to bring the clarity required by the NPPF and to allow it to be applied consistently through the development management process:
- the simplification of the wording used;
 - ensuring the second part of the policy can be applied in a proportionate way; and
 - the reposition of the element in the policy about planning conditions into the supporting text. Whilst the approach taken may be a natural outcome of the policy, the imposition of conditions on planning applications is a matter for NHDC (as the local planning authority) rather than for IPC to determine.
- 7.54 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

'Development proposals should respond positively to best practice on water efficiency, including using water efficient fittings and appliances, water harvesting, grey water recycling, and providing water storage features.

As appropriate to their scale, nature, and location, development proposals should demonstrate that the estimated consumption of wholesome water per dwelling is calculated in accordance with the methodology in the water efficiency calculator and should not exceed 110 litres/person/day.'

At the end of paragraph 9.38 add: 'Policy SD5 addresses these issues. The second part of the policy comments about water use and reflects the guidance in the National Framework for Water Resources (2020). Where appropriate, the District Council will apply conditions to planning permissions to ensure that this outcome is achieved.'

Policy C1 Community facilities

- 7.55 This is a wide-ranging policy on community facilities. It includes the following elements:
- offering support for new facilities;
 - offering support for proposals to improve existing facilities;
 - identifying important facilities; and
 - setting out a policy approach for proposals which would involve the loss of the important facilities.
- 7.56 The policy carefully acknowledges the importance of community facilities to the well-being of the parish. I am satisfied that the facilities listed in the third part of the policy are appropriate to be identified in this way.
- 7.57 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach to this matter. Nevertheless, to bring the clarity required by the NPPF I recommend the following modifications:
- detailed modifications to the wording used in the second part of the policy including an element which acknowledges that not all such proposals may need planning permission;
 - focusing the second part of the policy on physical works (which are land use in nature) rather than on commercial viability (which is largely financial in its nature);
 - ensuring that the third part of the policy specifically identifies the protection afforded to the listed facilities; and
 - make a closer and functional relationship between the third and fourth parts of the policy.
- 7.58 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the second part of the policy with:

‘Insofar as planning permission is required, proposals for the improvement, extension or partial replacement or redevelopment of buildings, structures and land use for community purposes will be supported where their design respects the character of the village and will not have an unacceptable impact on the amenities of residential properties in the immediate locality.’

Replace the opening element of the third part of the policy with: The Plan identifies the following key community facilities:

Replace the fourth part of the policy with:

‘Proposals for the conversion, demolition or change of use of the identified key community facilities to non-community uses will only be supported if it can be clearly demonstrated that:

- **the facility’s continued use is no longer viable, and evidence has been provided that the property has been actively marketed, commensurate with its use at an open market value for a period of at least 12 months; or**
- **an alternative or new facility is provided that is equivalent in use and scale to the facility which would be lost and that it is in an appropriate location.’**

Policy C2 Recreation and Green Spaces

- 7.59 This is a wide-ranging policy on recreation and green spaces. Paragraph 10.26 of the Plan highlights the range of such facilities in the neighbourhood area.
- 7.60 As submitted the policy has a slightly confusing format and structure. I recommend that the policy is recast to bring the clarity required by the NPPF and to allow it to be applied clearly and consistently through the development management process. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘The Plan identifies a series of important open spaces and recreational facilities

- **List the bullet points**

Development proposals which would reduce the quality or quantity of the identified facilities will only be supported where the existing facilities are re-provided to an equivalent or improved quality or quantity in an appropriate location.

Development proposals for the improvement of existing recreation areas and open spaces and the provision of additional facilities will be supported.’

Policy C3 Primary School

- 7.61 Paragraph 10.31 advises that the allocated housing site IC3 (Land at Bedford Road) in the Local Plan includes a reserve site for a new primary school should that be needed at some point in the future.
- 7.62 The policy seeks to consolidate the way in which the site would be developed beyond the information already included in the Local Plan.
- 7.63 In its response to the clarification note, IPC advised that:

‘This issue is very contentious with residents the large majority of whom would prefer the existing primary school to remain. They fear moving the school would have a significant detrimental impact on the character of the village. Its current location on the green in the heart of the village is felt to be intrinsic to village’s identity. Residents believe moving focus and footfall away from the centre would damage Ickleford’s sense of place and its integrity as a separate village outside of Hitchin. As the current school backs onto fields, extension of the existing school appears to be an unexplored option should new school places be needed.’

7.64 Plainly the matter has significant local importance. I saw the location of the existing School during the visit and its importance to the local community. The Local Plan provides the following background to the matter (paragraphs 13.167 to 13.170) as follows:

'Ickleford Primary is a 1FE school. However, it is located on a constrained site. The school premises lie partially within the conservation area and the original school building is listed. There is no capacity to expand within the current site but the advantages of keeping the school at the historic centre of the village are recognised in both functional and heritage terms.

As well as serving Ickleford, the school also admits pupils from northern Hitchin as well as outlying rural areas and settlements. The amount of development proposed for Ickleford may result in a need for additional primary school provision. However, it is not possible to say at this point exactly how or when this provision might be needed. The additional demand created by new development in Ickleford may be offset, either in whole or in part, by changes to school admission patterns outside of the village.

Site IC3 reserves sufficient land to provide a new primary school of up to 2FE should this prove necessary. This would allow for the relocation of the existing school and / or additional provision to meet requirements arising from new development if this is determined to be the most appropriate solution. The Council will work with the school, Hertfordshire County Council and other stakeholders as required to monitor the demand for school places. All options for the retention of the existing school in its current form, its expansion within or adjoining its existing site or splitting provision across the two sites will be fully explored before any decision is taken to relocate Ickleford Primary to the reserve site within IC3.

In considering this issue, regard will need to be given to the nature of the existing school's catchment, the relationship with other schools on the northern edges of Hitchin and the most desirable format(s) for delivering primary education in the village.

7.65 I have considered all the information very carefully. In this context, I have approached the policy taking account of the following matters:

- the delivery of education in the neighbourhood area is ultimately a matter for the County Council in its capacity as the local education authority;
- Policy IC3 of the Local Plan provides the opportunity to include a replacement school as part of the development of the overall housing site; and
- the supporting text in the Local Plan indicates that a decision has yet to be made on the long-term delivery of primary education in Ickleford.

7.66 In these circumstances I recommend that the submitted policy focuses on identifying the way in which a replacement school should be developed on the Bedford Road site if that option is eventually selected by HCC and NHDC. On this basis the criteria in the recast policy are site-specific only. There is no need for the neighbourhood plan to restate the issues which will need to be addressed by public bodies in determining how to deliver primary education in the parish. Equally the need for traffic assessments to be undertaken should the decision be made to relocate the School to the Bedford Road

site is already captured in Policy IC3 of the Local Plan and does not need to be repeated. I also recommend consequential modifications to the supporting text.

Replace the policy with:

‘The provision of primary education facilities, either through the expansion of the existing primary school or the construction of a new school, should be designed to facilitate the joint use of spaces and equipment by the school and by the wider community.’

Any proposed development of a new school on the Bedford Road housing allocation (as set out in Policy IC3 of the Local Plan) should meet the following criteria:

- **the building is located and designed as an integral part of the housing allocation;**
- **the design of the building reflects its location on the northern edge of the village;**
- **the building is well-connected to the wider village and the houses on the allocated site by pedestrian and cycle links; and**
- **it provides appropriate levels of car parking for teachers and other staff.**

Development proposals for a school should be informed by a detailed masterplan for the site showing its relationship to the development of the Bedford Road Housing allocation.’

Replace the final sentence of paragraph 10.34 with: ‘Accordingly, any transport assessment for the allocation site should address the cumulative impacts of new development in Stotfold and Henlow in Central Bedfordshire.’

Replace 10.37 with: ‘Policy C3 has been included in the Plan to shape the development of a potential replacement school on the Bedford Road site should that be the outcome of the current discussions about the delivery of education facilities in the neighbourhood area, following the assessment of this option against the alternative option of expanding/reconfiguring the existing school.’

After the first sentence in paragraph 10.38 add: ‘The final part of Policy C3 addresses this matter. The masterplan should incorporate details on the criteria in the second part of the policy and information about the phasing of the wider development of the Bedford Road site (including pedestrian access to the school whilst any residual housing development on the site is taking place).’

Policy C4 Supporting Local Employment

7.67 This is another wide-ranging policy. Includes the following elements:

- supporting new businesses or the diversification of existing businesses;
- offering support for proposals which would assist home-working; and
- the delivery of high-speed broadband.

7.68 In general terms I am satisfied that the policy has regard to Section 6 of the NPPF and meets the basic conditions, However I recommend a series of modifications to bring the clarity required by the NPPF:

- detailed revisions to the wording used in the first part of the policy;
- ensuring that the second part of the policy can be applied clearly and consistently through the development management process; and
- the deletion of the element of the policy on broadband as this matter is now addressed nationally in the Building Regulations.

7.69 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the economic dimension of sustainable development.

In the first part of the policy replace ‘encouraged’ with ‘supported’

In the first bullet point of the first part of the policy replace ‘adverse’ with ‘unacceptable’

Replace the second part of the policy with: ‘Proposals for extensions or the part change of use of dwellings to enable flexible or home working will be supported where they provide appropriate car-parking and do not unacceptably impact on the residential amenity of neighbouring properties.’

Delete the final part of the policy

Policy MTT1 Provision for pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders

7.70 As the title suggests, this is a wide-ranging policy. It seeks to ensure that new development proposals respond positively to the local pedestrian and cycle networks and provide direct connections wherever practicable. I saw the importance of the local networks during the visit.

7.71 In general terms the policy takes a very positive approach to this matter. However, I recommend that the policy is recast so that it concentrates on land use matters. There are four related component elements to this approach. The first is to acknowledge that new connections are not always practicable. The second is the application of the policy on a proportionate basis. Plainly larger proposals have greater potential to achieve the ambitions of the policy. The third is that important elements of the footpath network are controlled by highways rather than planning legislation. The fourth is that whilst the attractiveness and promotion of the wider network is well-developed locally, it is not directly a planning matter. I recommend that these various aspects on the use of the footpath network are repositioned into the supporting text.

7.72 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

‘Wherever practicable, development proposals should upgrade, enhance existing pedestrian routes, and connect into them. The development of new links

within the village, to neighbouring villages and to the wider countryside will be supported.

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should include measures that that keep traffic speeds low and improve the provision of footways and access for pedestrians and cyclists and horse riders. Any such new roads, junctions, footways, and traffic management measures should be designed to complement the rural character of the village and respond positively to local heritage.'

At the end of paragraph 11.11 add: 'The strategic principles of the Hertfordshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan should be adopted where development is being considered.'

At the end of paragraph 11.12 add: 'Policy MTT1 addresses these matters. It seeks to ensure that new development proposals take advantage of opportunities to enhance existing networks or to provide direct connections to such routes. Development should respond positively to the importance of the Discover Ickleford footpaths map (Annex 2), including the Icknield Way Path/Trail, the Hicca Way and the Hambridge Way in the local area.'

Policy MTT2 Car Parking

- 7.73 This is another wide-ranging policy. In this case its focus is on car parking. The residents' questionnaire highlighted challenges for parking within the village. This included parking issues at local facilities in the centre of the village such as at the shop, during school drop off and pick up times and around the recreation ground.
- 7.74 I recommend the deletion of the first part of the policy. It simply restates NHDC's car parking policy. I also recommend the deletion of the second part of the policy on electric vehicle charging points. This important matter is now controlled nationally by the Building Regulations.
- 7.75 I recommend that the two remaining parts of the policy are recast so that they have the clarity required by the NPPF. The intention of both parts of the policy remains unchanged. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

'Development proposals should not result in the loss of publicly accessible off-street car parking. Development proposals which would result in the loss of off-road parking spaces will only be supported where alternative provision is made which maintains the number of accessible parking spaces within the immediate vicinity of the site.'

Proposals for new development that provide additional off-road car parking spaces will be supported.'

Implementation and plan review

- 7.76 Sections 12.6 to 12.8 of the Plan give detailed attention to these matters. The recent adoption of the Local Plan provides a positive and up-to-date context within which to prepare a neighbourhood plan. Nevertheless, this part of the Plan positively addresses the need for the Plan to remain up-to-date and to respond to changes in national and local policies. In the round the approach taken is best practice,

Non land use matters

- 7.77 Sections 12.1-12.5 of the Plan comment about a series of non-land use matters. They have naturally arisen as the Plan has been prepared. They are properly addressed in a separate part of the Plan.

- 7.78 I am satisfied that the matters are distinctive to the parish. The following Actions are particularly noteworthy:

- traffic and transportation measures;
- the environment and green spaces; and
- making better use of existing community facilities.

Other Matters - General

- 7.79 This report has recommended a series of modifications both to the policies and to the supporting text in the submitted Plan. Where consequential changes to the text are required directly because of my recommended modifications to the policy concerned, I have highlighted them in this report. However other changes to the general text may be required elsewhere in the Plan because of the recommended modifications to the policies. Similarly, changes may be necessary to paragraph numbers in the Plan or to accommodate other administrative matters. It will be appropriate for NHDC and IPC to have the flexibility to make any necessary consequential changes to the general text. I recommend accordingly.

Modification of general text (where necessary) to achieve consistency with the modified policies and to accommodate any administrative and technical changes.

8 Summary and Conclusions

Summary

- 8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2035. It is distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community to safeguard the character and setting of the neighbourhood area and to designate local green spaces.
- 8.2 Following the independent examination of the Plan, I have concluded that the Ickleford Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.

Conclusion

- 8.3 On the basis of the findings in this report, I recommend to North Hertfordshire District Council that subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report that the Ickleford Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed to referendum.

Other Matters

- 8.4 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood area. In my view, the neighbourhood area is entirely appropriate for this purpose and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved on 23 September 2014.
- 8.5 I am grateful to everyone who has helped in any way to ensure that this examination has run in a smooth manner.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
18 December 2023