

Harlow Council Local Development Scheme (New Local Plan Focus) – March 2025

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Harlow Council is required to prepare and maintain a Local Development Scheme (LDS) under section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). The LDS must provide information such as:
- the Development Plan Document(s), e.g. a Local Plan, to be prepared
 - the subject matter and geographical area of the DPD(s)
 - the timetable for the preparation and revision of the DPD(s)
- 1.2 The LDS must also be made available publicly and kept up-to-date, along with relevant monitoring, so that the local community and interested parties can keep track of progress.
- 1.3 The Harlow Local Development Plan (HLDP) was adopted in December 2020. The Council subsequently published an LDS in 2021, setting out a timetable for reviewing specific policies referred to by the HLDP Inspector as requiring early revisions, as well as a timetable for a potential Community Infrastructure Levy. The 2023 LDS set out a programme for a review of all policies in the HLDP in accordance with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and plan-making system at the time.
- 1.4 In December 2024 the government published a new NPPF and required Councils to submit a new LDS by 6 March 2025. This revised LDS focusses only on the new Local Plan, as required by government, and does not include details of other documents, such as Supplementary Planning Documents. The LDS will be revised at a later date where necessary to include these further details.
- 1.5 The new HLDP will be produced under the proposed new plan-making system, which requires a 30-month period for producing the Local Plan. This is reflected in this LDS and is explained in Section 2.
- 1.6 The new HLDP will include new and/or amended policies, as required, based on:
- the requirements of the new NPPF (December 2024), National Planning Practice Guidance, emerging National Development Management Policies (due to be consulted on in Spring 2025), and relevant guidance
 - consideration of new technical evidence that has regard to current and future socioeconomic and environmental conditions
 - consideration of town centre specific policies¹
 - the results of the monitoring of the effectiveness of existing HLDP policies
 - recommendations identified by the Inspector of the HLDP examination

¹ HLDP provided limited policy direction for the town centre, due to the intended production of a separate town centre Area Action Plan. This was later produced as a Supplementary Planning Document

2. Changes to the Plan-making System

2.1 The Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 provides primary legislation for implementing a new plan-making system, as mentioned above, which comprises the first major overhaul of the system in over 20 years. A government consultation [webpage](#)² provides draft details of this proposed system.

2.2 Secondary legislation to enable the new system to be implemented is yet to be published. It is expected this will happen later in 2025. Subsequent versions of this LDS will be amended based on the detail of that legislation, should it differ from the details proposed in the consultation document.

2.3 The proposed new plan-making system would require a new Local Plan to be produced under various stages, comprising:

- informal plan-making
- scoping and early participation
- plan visioning and strategy development
- evidence gathering and drafting the plan
- engagement, proposing changes, submission
- examination of the plan
- adoption of the plan

2.4 Within these stages are a number of milestones, including:

- giving notice of the formal start of the plan-making process, including early participation where consultees are notified and asked about matters that might shape the direction of the Local Plan
- three gateways, the first two of which are advisory and the third is mandatory (with Planning Inspectors providing assistance)
- two mandatory public consultations (in addition to the 'early participation' process)

2.5 Once notice of formal plan-making has been given, the Council would be required to produce the Local Plan (including consultations, submission, examination and adoption) within a 30-month timeframe. The examination, within this timeframe, would be required to have a maximum length of six months.

2.6 Following adoption of the Local Plan, it is expected that monitoring would take place and a return submitted to the government within four years of adoption. Work on an updated Local Plan would be expected to commence within five years of adoption.

2.7 The timetable for the production of the new Harlow Local Plan, which aligns with the proposed new plan-making system, can be found on the following page.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/plan-making-reforms-consultation-on-implementation/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-consultation-on-implementation-of-plan-making-reforms>

Development Plan Document	New Harlow Local Development Plan (“the new Local Plan”)
Subject matter	The new Local Plan will consider which policies may require updating, removing or replacing and whether new policies need to be introduced following a period of monitoring, consideration of national policy changes and technical evidence. As a result, a new spatial vision for the district and a framework for the future development of the area will be produced, addressing needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure, as well as a basis for conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment, mitigating and adapting to climate change, and achieving well-designed places.
Geographical area	The administrative area of Harlow District Council.

TIMETABLE

The plan-making stages, milestones activities and purposes detailed in the timetable below are based on information in the *Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: consultation on implementation of plan-making reforms* document, [published on the government website](#) in July 2023.

Plan-making stage and milestones		Activity	Purpose	Date
Informal plan-making	Preparatory work (ongoing production)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update evidence base Other preparatory work including a Call for Sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures the groundwork for the new Local Plan is established 	Jun 2024 – Dec 2025
	Give notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give four months’ notice of the start of plan-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows scoping and early participation stage to begin 	Jan 2026
Scoping and early participation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define what will be included in the Local Plan, and what is not within scope Establish support from Members Prepare Project Initiation Document (PID) using government template Prepare/review Local Plan Timetable Identify monitoring requirements Notify public and stakeholders Invite early participation on matters that might shape the direction of the Local Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures early participation from communities and stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PID: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sets out the context, trends & possibilities of Harlow defines the scope of the Local Plan identifies evidence required for Local Plan to be sound identifies relevant local issues sets out project 	Jan – May 2026

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully engage Councillors 	<p>management, governance, risks and resourcing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> outlines approach to community and stakeholder engagement 	
Plan visioning and strategy development	Gateway 1 (Advisory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start of the 30-month plan-making period Submit PID Consider legal & procedural requirements and soundness issues Involve Planning Inspector(s) if required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures the Local Plan preparation starts in the right direction Supports early diagnosis of any issues 	May – Jun 2026 (4 weeks, max. 6)
	Ongoing production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake visioning about Harlow's future Establish spatial options and topics to be covered in the Local Plan's policies Confirm further evidence requirements Continue engagement with Councillors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures readiness for next stages 	Jun – Oct 2026
	Mandatory Public Consultation (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with communities and stakeholders on Harlow's issues and how the Local Plan may address them Identify and test the spatial options and local priorities, including any arising from the early participation stage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First formal opportunity for communities and stakeholders to comment 	Oct – Dec 2026 (8 weeks)
Drafting the plan (and continued evidence gathering)	Ongoing production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide on appropriate strategy for the Local Plan, i.e. the spatial options and policies that will meet Harlow's vision aims and objectives Continue producing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures readiness for next stages 	Dec 2026 – Aug 2027

		<p>proportionate evidence, directly linked to the tests of soundness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue engagement with Councillors 		
	Gateway 2 (advisory)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early resolution of any soundness issues Involve Planning Inspector(s) and possibly technical specialists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures legal and procedural compliance Monitors and tracks progress 	Aug - Sep 2027 (4 weeks, max. 6)
Engagement, proposing changes, submission	Mandatory Public Consultation (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with communities and stakeholders who can comment on the draft submission-ready Local Plan Issues resolved with statutory consultees and stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resolving issues at this stage avoids need to consult again 	Oct – Nov 2027 (6 weeks)
	Prior to submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amend the Local Plan prior to submission Continue engagement with Councillors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures Local Plan is ready to submit 	Nov 2027 – Feb 2028
	Gateway 3 (Stop/Go)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check the Local Plan is ready to proceed to examination Involve Planning Inspector(s) Secretary of State appoints Inspector for the examination in public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures legal and procedural compliance Monitors and track progress Validates that key requirements have been met (“stop/go” check) 	Feb – Mar 2028 (4 weeks, max. 6)
	Submit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit the Local Plan for examination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows start of examination process 	Mar 2028
Examination	Examination in public and subsequent procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Inspector will produce matters, issues and questions Examination in public is held with hearing sessions Those making representations will have a “right to be heard” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures Local Plan is sound and legally compliant Ensures Local Plan is amended to take account of issues arising at the Examination 	Apr – Oct 2028

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out Main Modifications consultation 		
Finalisation and adoption of plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council makes any final changes to the Local Plan Council adopts the Local Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables the Local Plan to come into force and become a material consideration in the determining of planning applications 		Nov 2028
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor how Local Plan is performing Submit detailed monitoring return to government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures key objectives are met and policies are effective 		By Nov 2032
Local Plan update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures the Local Plan remains up-to-date and effective 		By Nov 2033