

THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL

# COUNCIL PLAN

2026-2029

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# FOREWORD

## The future begins here

Local government across the country stands at the threshold of immense change, and if all continues as we currently believe it will, this will be the final Council Plan of Three Rivers District Council. This document is therefore more significant than any that has preceded it. The Council Plan will set the tone, the course, the aims and objectives for the years ahead – ensuring this district is and will always be a great place to live, work and visit.

As leader I am determined that above all else we will remain focused on the needs and expectations of the people who live in, work in and visit the communities we serve – and in so doing will pass a great legacy onto the future of local government in Hertfordshire.

With that as the foundation, my focus is on delivering the goals set out in the pages that follow. I want to see a district made up of healthy, safe and thriving communities—one where people of all ages can access quality health and leisure facilities, where planning applications that promote healthier environments are supported, and where the council works closely with volunteer organisations to ensure the best results for vulnerable residents.

I also want to see a district that is green and sustainable—one that builds on our past achievements and maintains our position as a leading recycling authority. This means continuing to adapt to the impacts of climate change, strengthening our resilience, and ensuring we remain focused on boosting biodiversity and protecting key habitats.

In addition, I want to see a district that is prosperous and vibrant. A place where our culture, arts, and heritage are celebrated. Where inclusive communities flourish. A district in which everyone has equal access to council services and where investment in our high streets and shopping areas is encouraged and supported.



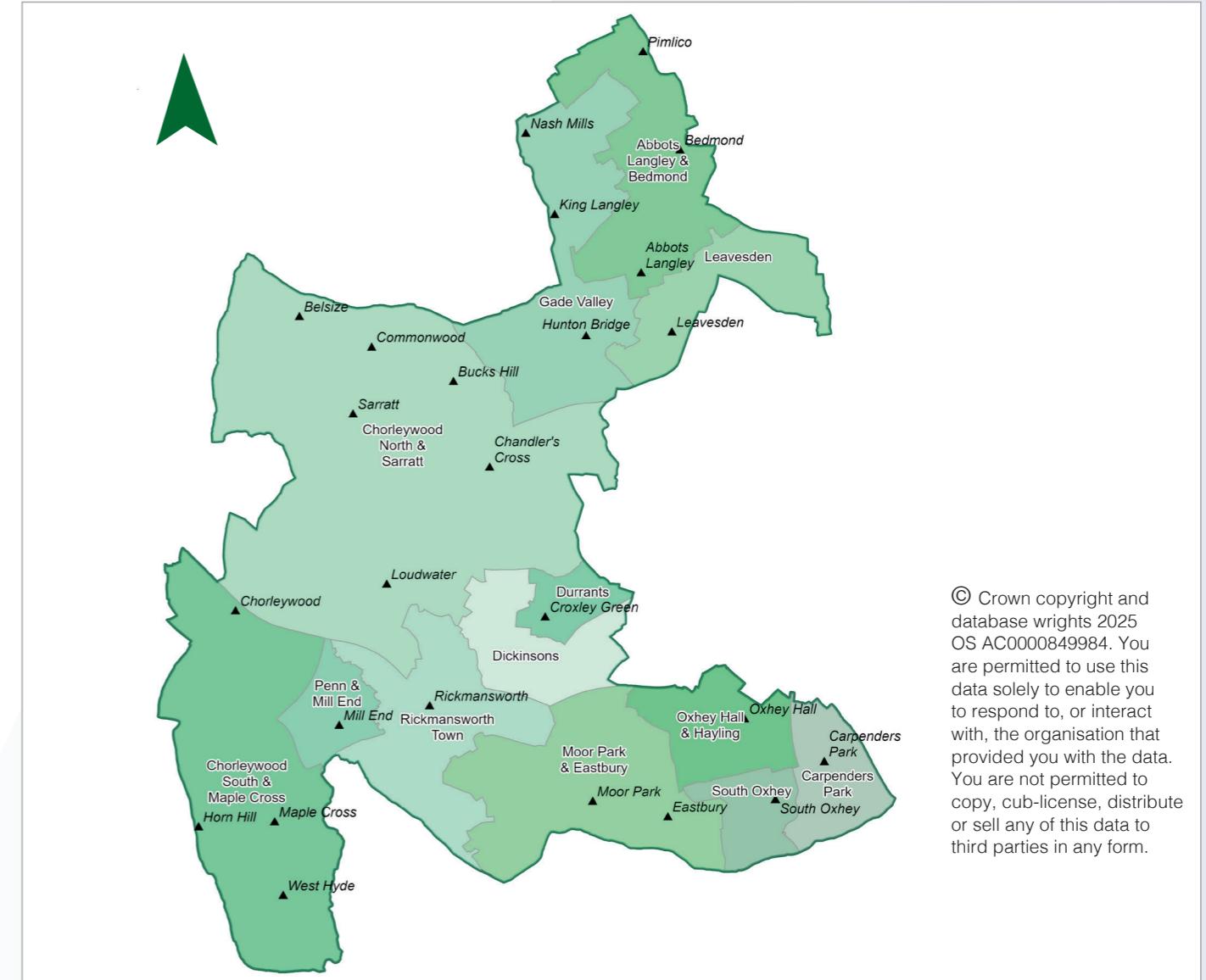
The council will shortly complete work on our much-anticipated Local Plan – the key document guides decisions on future development proposals for new homes and associated infrastructure and employment in Three Rivers. It will cut across all areas, determining potential employment and economic development and retail and leisure uses in the district. The Local Plan will encourage healthy places, protect the historic environment and of course plans for much needed housing, including affordable housing for the most vulnerable residents.

In this document you will read about a district which is led by a proud, respectful and passionate council – a council which will continue to be effective and well run. Our plans are ambitious, imaginative and driven by a desire to serve our communities. So, whilst we will soon be experiencing a new era in local government, I say let that new era begin in these pages – with the vision, aims and themes harmoniously working to make this district now and forever **a great place to live, work and visit**.

**Cllr Stephen Giles-Medhurst OBE**  
Leader, Three Rivers District Council



# OUR DISTRICT



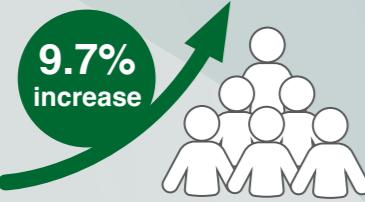
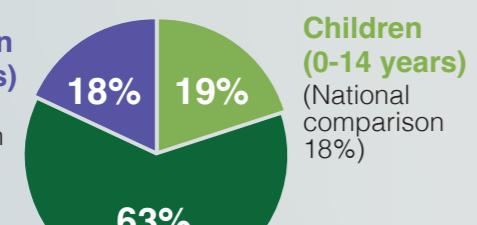
Three Rivers is a thriving and diverse district in south-west Hertfordshire, named after the rivers Chess, Gade and Colne that flow through it. With a population of just over 95,000, it offers an outstanding quality of life, combining attractive countryside and waterways with welcoming towns and villages. The district includes parts of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a rich network of parks and open spaces, and a proud heritage that shapes its distinctive character.

Its communities are the heart of what makes Three Rivers special. From Rickmansworth, Chorleywood and Croxley Green to Abbots Langley, South Oxhey and many smaller villages, each has its own identity and strong sense of local pride. Residents benefit from excellent schools, active community organisations, and a wide range of cultural, sporting and leisure opportunities. The district's location

provides outstanding transport connections into London and the wider region, while maintaining a close-knit community feel and abundant access to green space.

Three Rivers District Council is ambitious for its district and proud of its many strengths. The council is committed to being well run, financially responsible and responsive to the needs of its residents. Working together with communities, partners and businesses, the council will continue to build on what makes Three Rivers a great place to live, work and visit - ensuring that it remains prosperous, sustainable, safe and inclusive for generations to come.

# THE DISTRICT IN NUMBERS

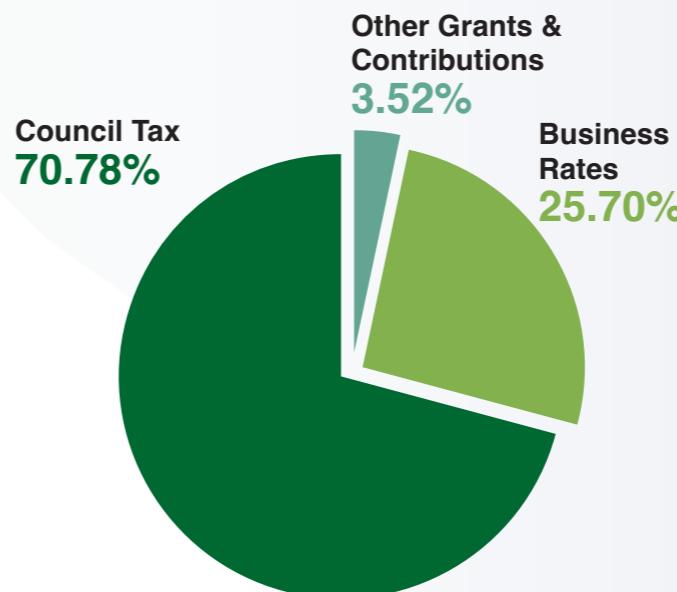
Population growth			
		What the data tells us	What it means for us
(2021 Census, ONS 2024)		The district has experienced steady growth, largely driven by natural change and inward migration from London and surrounding areas.	Ongoing population growth is expected to drive increased demand for housing across the district, including a greater need for affordable housing options. This growth is also likely to place additional pressure on health and leisure facilities, parks and open spaces, and sustainable transport options.
2011 population 87,300	2024 population 95,807		
Age profile		What the data tells us	What it means for us
(2021 Census)		The district's age structure broadly mirrors national averages, but the proportion of older people is projected to rise further.	The council must plan for an ageing population, ensuring access to appropriate housing, increasing access to health and leisure facilities and community spaces, while also continuing to provide these opportunities for younger families.
Ethnic diversity		What the data tells us	What it means for us
(2021 Census)		Whilst the figures tell us that Three Rivers is more diverse than the national picture, it is important to note that certain ethnicities are still underrepresented in the district when compared to national figures. We are also aware that there are likely 'hidden' communities within the district of those who do not feel comfortable to disclose their ethnicity.	We must ensure council services are delivered equitably, acknowledging the underrepresentation of certain ethnicities, while promoting inclusive communities and encouraging resident participation to help address potential inequalities.

Housing	What the data tells us	What it means for us
(ONS 2025)  Average house price: <b>£584,000</b>    National average houseprice: <b>£273,000</b>  Average private rent: <b>£1,793 per month</b>  National average rent: <b>£1,354</b>	House prices and rents in Three Rivers are significantly above national averages, reflecting strong demand linked to commuter access to London.	Housing affordability is a major issue. The council must continue to prioritise working with partners to deliver affordable housing, ensuring a mix of tenure and property types to reflect the changing characteristics of the people who live and work in the district.
Parks & Green Spaces	What the data tells us	What it means for us
(Natural England 2022)  <b>Over 30 parks and open spaces</b>  90% of residents live within a 10-minute walk of green space  National comparison: 66%  	Access to green space in Three Rivers is significantly better than the national average. Popular assets include Rickmansworth Aquadrome, Chorleywood Common, and Leavesden Country Park.	The district's green assets are a defining strength. Protecting, enhancing, and integrating these spaces into health, wellbeing, and climate strategies will remain a priority.
Health & Lifestyle	What the data tells us	What it means for us
(Fingertips 2024/25)  Adults who smoke: <b>10.6%</b> (national average: 13.1%) Adults obese: <b>22.9%</b> (national average: 26.5%) Children obese (Year 6): <b>17.2%</b> (national average: 20.3%) Physically active adults: <b>71.6%</b> (national average: 67.4%)  	Three Rivers generally has better health outcomes than the national picture, with lower obesity and smoking rates and higher physical activity levels.	The council should continue to invest in parks, open spaces and walking routes to raise physical activity levels. Increasing access to leisure facilities will also be important.
Business & Economy	What the data tells us	What it means for us
(ONS 2024/25)  Around <b>4,500</b> registered businesses    National employment rate: <b>75%</b> National unemployment rate: <b>5%</b>  Employment rate: <b>74.7%</b> Unemployment: <b>3.8%</b>	The local economy is strong, with lower levels of unemployment compared to the national average and a thriving base of small to medium size enterprises.	The council must continue to build its relationship with local businesses and work towards attracting and retaining economic investment in the district.



# OUR FINANCES

## WHERE OUR MONEY COMES FROM



## COUNCIL TAX BREAKDOWN

### For Three Rivers District Council services

The average band **D** pays per month

**Band D** **£17.20**

The council manage a portfolio of commercial property which **generates around £1.7 million** of rental income every year.

In addition, the council owns and manage **1,056 garages across the district** producing an average income of **over £1 million every year**.

The council also owns and manages a small portfolio of investment premises, which directly support the delivery of our services. These assets provide a average **yearly income of £2.6 million**.



Whilst exact funding figures have not been produced this is indicative for 2025/26.



# WHAT IS A COUNCIL PLAN

The Council Plan is our overarching strategy that shapes our priorities and actions. It sets out our goals for the district and ensures we focus our time and resources where they're needed. This is especially crucial in the face of external economic pressure and increasing demand. The Plan informs our service planning and guides the development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that will be aligned with our themes and aims. These KPIs will help us monitor progress throughout the lifetime of the Plan and ensure that the council remains accountable to our commitments. Performance of the council against these KPIs will be reviewed quarterly by the senior leadership of the council and our elected councilors.

## HOW THE PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The development of this plan has been informed by a broad and diverse range of insights, experiences, and evidence. We have built on the strong foundations and achievements of our previous Corporate Framework, taking forward what has worked well, while also identifying areas for improvement. This continuity has allowed us to develop a forward-looking plan that remains rooted in the progress we have already made, while being responsive to the changing needs of the district.

Listening to the voices of our communities has been central to this process. We reviewed feedback from our previous resident surveys, placing particular emphasis on our most recent survey, which received a record number of responses from our residents. Importantly, this has given us a clear, current, and detailed understanding of what matters most to local people. The insights we gained have helped

shape the priorities and focus areas of this plan in a way that reflects our communities' needs and aspirations.

We have drawn on a wide range of research and analysis, gathered by both the council and external researchers. This work has helped us understand wider social, economic, and environmental trends, as well as emerging challenges and opportunities that may impact our district moving forward. By considering both local data and broader evidence, we have been able to ensure that the plan is not only responsive to current concerns but also forward-thinking and resilient.

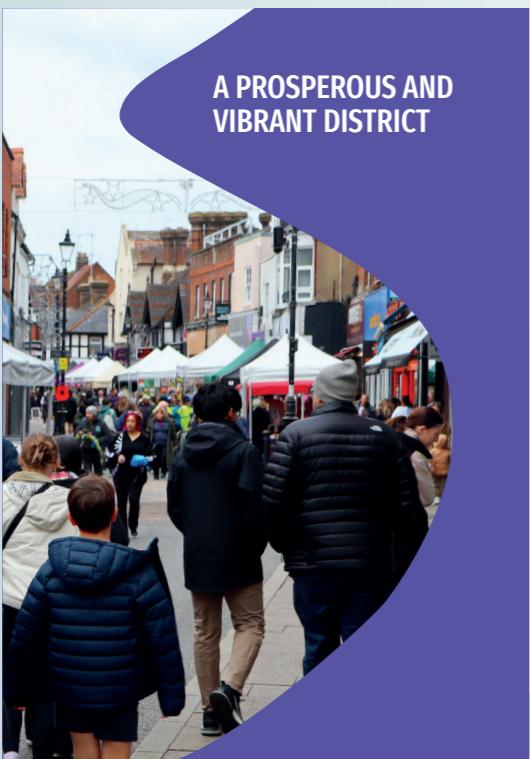
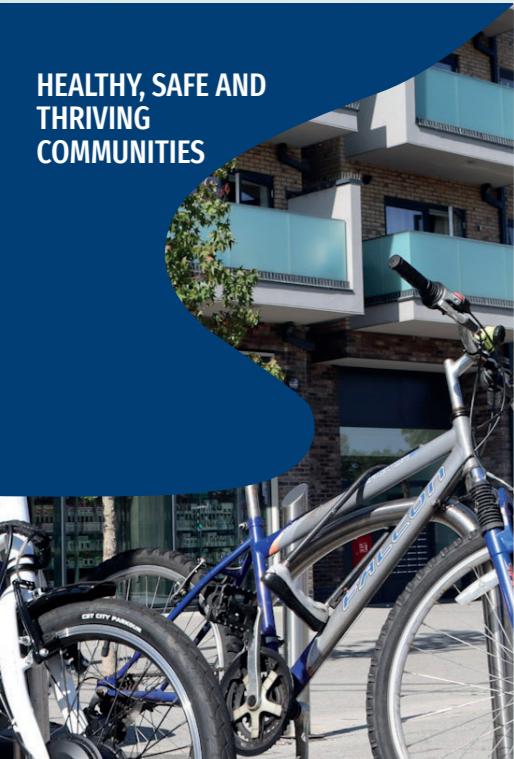
We engaged closely with our staff, who deliver vital services every day and have first-hand experience of what is working well and the needs of Three Rivers' communities. Their insights have been instrumental in identifying practical opportunities for innovation, better service delivery, and more joined-up working across the council. We have also worked in partnership with our elected councillors throughout the process, ensuring that the plan reflects both strategic priorities, our statutory obligations and the lived realities of the residents they represent.

Taken together, this collaborative and research-informed approach has helped shape a plan that is grounded in evidence, guided by experience, and shaped by local voices. It is a plan designed to deliver meaningful outcomes for our communities, to respond to the challenges we face, and to build on the progress we have already made as a council and as a district.

# OUR VISION – a great place to live, work, and visit

Our vision, themes, and aims form the foundation of the Three Rivers Council Plan. Together, they work in harmony to support our driving purpose to ensure this district will always be a great place to live, work, and visit.

## OUR THEMES



# OUR VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

The values and behaviours of Three Rivers District Council are central to how we work and interact - with each other and with our communities. They will underpin the delivery of this plan, shape the way we provide services, and guide how we recruit, train, and support our staff. These values reflect what you can expect from us as your council. Achieving our vision depends on a strong, shared set of values that shape our culture, drive our behaviours, and guide our actions.

## WE ARE PROUD

We are proud of who we are and the services we provide, proud to be here, proud to make a difference each and every day.

## WE ARE RESPECTFUL

We are all unique, we recognise and celebrate difference. We are open, approachable, we treat each and every person we meet with respect.

## WE ARE PASSIONATE

We want the very best for our place and our people. We work together, tirelessly with care and attention to get the job done. Passionate for our people, passionate for our place, passionate for a job well done.

## THREE RIVERS: OUR PLACE, OUR PEOPLE, OUR PURPOSE

## HEALTHY, SAFE AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES



### OUR AIMS

Improve access for all ages to health facilities, leisure services and community spaces

Work with developers and housing providers to help increase affordable housing within the district

Work with our partners in the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to maintain a low crime, low antisocial behaviour district

Support planning applications that aim to deliver thriving communities and a healthier environment

Work with the voluntary sector to support positive outcomes for vulnerable residents

Actively pursue grant opportunities to fund our major projects and services

Continue to prevent homelessness in the district

### OUR AIMS

Finalise a local plan that delivers on our statutory responsibilities and the priorities of our residents

Maintain our performance as a top recycling authority in England

Continue to invest in and improve our parks, open spaces and walking routes

Focus on restoring nature, boosting biodiversity, protecting trees and woodlands and key habitats

Work on adjusting to the impacts of climate change and continue progress on making Three Rivers a more climate resilient district

Encourage sustainable transport initiatives and greener vehicle options

Champion a greener and more sustainable council and district that strives to reduce our carbon footprint

### OUR AIMS

Attract and retain economic investment in the district

Continue to build and nourish the council's partnerships with local businesses

Encourage and facilitate external investment into our high streets and shopping areas

Celebrate and invest in local culture, art and heritage

Continue to encourage equal access to council services for all residents

Promote inclusive communities and resident participation

Collaborate with partners to advance shared economic, environmental, and community goals

### OUR AIMS

Ensure the delivery of good quality, efficient and effective services for our residents

Maintain a balanced and transparent budget that upholds the council's secure financial position

Set clear performance targets that are aligned with our Council Plan to ensure accountability and continuous improvement

Guarantee value for money in all council activities

Provide clear, timely, and innovative communication to keep residents informed, engaged and empowered

Explore the use of existing and developing technology to improve efficiency across the organisation

Continue to be responsible, conscientious and proactive landowners across the council's diverse estate

# HEALTHY, SAFE AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES



**Our plan sets out a clear commitment to supporting communities across Three Rivers where everyone feels safe, connected, and able to live well. We want to create places where residents of all ages can access the health services, leisure facilities, and community spaces they need to lead healthy and active lives.**

A key part of this is ensuring access to safe, secure, and affordable homes. In the UK, affordable housing refers to homes provided at a cost below the market rate - either for rent or sale - including social rent, affordable rent, and shared ownership. These homes are designed to meet the needs of people who cannot afford to buy or rent at full market prices, including key workers, young people, and lower-income households.

The council recognise that access to quality housing is a critical determinant of health. Poor or insecure housing can contribute to a wide range of physical and mental health issues, from respiratory illnesses linked to significant damp and mould within a property, to stress and anxiety caused by overcrowding or housing instability. Providing safe, secure and affordable homes means better health outcomes, allowing our residents to thrive, whilst reducing reliance on health and social care services.

We will continue to work closely with developers and housing providers in the district to increase the supply of this affordable housing across the district.

While increasing the availability of affordable housing, we also remain focused on preventing and relieving homelessness. Homelessness has a profound impact on health and wellbeing and people experiencing homelessness are significantly more likely to face poor mental health, chronic physical conditions, and reduced life expectancy. The prevention and relief of homelessness is not only a housing issue, but a critical part of improving health outcomes across our communities. Through early intervention and targeted, practical support, we will continue working hard to make sure no one facing these hardships are left without help.

The council are proud to be a key member of the Community Safety Partnership in Three Rivers and will continue to work alongside Hertfordshire Constabulary, local partners and support services to keep crime and antisocial behaviour low. Where issues do occur, we will take a victim-centred approach, offering support to our residents and communities until a fair and lasting resolution is found. A victim-centred approach will also be taken when supporting residents affected by domestic abuse. The council holds White Ribbon Accreditation and remains committed to helping victims through the actions set out in our White Ribbon Action Plan.

Our Planning Officers and elected councillors will continue to support planning applications that promote well-designed, inclusive communities and a healthier local environment. By collaborating with the voluntary and community sector, we are also working to support the most vulnerable members of our communities, making sure support is there when it is needed.

Finally, we will actively pursue external funding to support key projects and services - so we can continue investing in the wellbeing, safety, and resilience of our communities now, and in the years ahead.



## A GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

We are committed to creating a greener, more sustainable future for everyone who lives, works, and visits Three Rivers. The Three Rivers Council Plan strengthens this commitment by setting out clear actions to reduce emissions, protect nature, build resilience to climate change, and support sustainable economic growth. Since declaring a climate emergency in 2019, the council has led by example on local projects that reduce emissions, support biodiversity and help our communities adapt to the growing impacts of a changing climate.

Both mitigation and adaptation are crucial to the council's response to climate change locally. To ensure the council's action on climate change reflects the priorities and concerns of our diverse communities, we held our Community Conversations climate change consultation (facilitated by the public participation charity Involve) in Spring 2025. This consultation generated numerous recommendations for action from the participating residents. These have been embedded within this Council Plan and the council's Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan to help us work towards our ambitious target of Three Rivers being a net zero district by 2045.

Nature and green space are at the heart of the communities across Three Rivers. The district is home to a kaleidoscope of parks, open spaces and recreational areas, including two nationally recognised Green Flag sites: Rickmansworth Aquadrome and Leavesden Country Park. We are continuing to invest in these vital green spaces - including a major improvement project currently underway at Rickmansworth Aquadrome that will continue over the course of this plan, supported by more than £1.5million in externally secured funding. We plan to continue delivering targeted work through our Biodiversity Policy, Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and Tree Strategy to restore nature, protect habitats like chalk streams and woodlands, and create more biodiversity-friendly spaces across the district.

Three Rivers remains one of the top-performing recycling authorities in England, and we will continue to build on that success, while also

encouraging more sustainable lifestyles. We will invest in our parks, walking routes and open spaces to make them more accessible and appealing for everyone.

Our commitment to sustainability starts with improving our own operations. We are working to reduce the council's carbon footprint through energy efficiency upgrades to council buildings and investment in renewable energy solutions to which will provide long-term cost savings, energy security, and significant emissions reductions.

Outside of our own operations, the council will enable and inspire a greener district by supporting energy efficiency improvements to local homes and businesses through the provision of grants and expert advice, and delivering an active programme of forums, events and initiatives to promote sustainable living.

We are also supporting cleaner, greener ways to travel. This includes installing more EV charging points in council-owned car parks, upgrading facilities to support active travel, and working with partners on projects like the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to make sustainable transport easier, safer, and more attractive.

Whilst delivering the new homes we need in the district, the new Local Plan will play a central role in shaping a sustainable future for Three Rivers - working to secure homes with high standards of water and energy efficiency that are well adapted to a changing climate, while protecting and enhancing biodiversity. This work will be progressed over the course of the plan and will see the delivery of the new Local Plan in late 2026 or early 2027.

Through our strong network of partnerships, we are embedding sustainability into everything we do - from planning and infrastructure, to how we deliver everyday services. Together, we are building a greener, more sustainable and resilient Three Rivers for current and future generations.

# A PROSPEROUS AND VIBRANT DISTRICT



**Three Rivers is home to a diverse and growing economy, hosting several national and international headquarters, including the world-renowned Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden. The council are committed to ensuring the district remains an attractive place for businesses to invest, grow, and thrive - supported by excellent transport links, a skilled workforce, and a strong sense of community.**

Our high streets are vital to local life. They are not just centres for commerce but provide vital social and cultural hubs at the heart of our communities. While recent years have brought major challenges for retailers and service providers, we are determined to support the ongoing renewal of these much-loved spaces. We will continue working with local businesses, town and parish councils, and wider partners to breathe new life into our high streets - including exploring new markets, events, and initiatives that boost footfall and create vibrant, welcoming town centres.

We understand the challenges many local businesses face - from high housing costs in our district, to national skills shortages and rising energy bills. While many of these issues require action at a national level, we can support our local businesses by making Three Rivers a great place to live, work and visit - with high-quality leisure, culture, and recreational opportunities, a clean and green environment, and a council that works in partnership with the business community.

We remain committed to attracting and retaining investment and will continue to build strong relationships with local businesses. We will also work with transport authorities to improve the ways people move around the district, helping both residents and visitors access local shops, services, and employment opportunities more easily.

Through effective policies, we will continue to approve licences that support local enterprise and community activity. We will ensure that we collect any available Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding payable to the council efficiently and use

this funding to deliver improvements that benefit residents and strengthen our local economy.

Recognising the power of local culture to enrich communities and drive economic growth, we will continue to celebrate and invest in the arts, heritage and creative sectors across the district - supporting events and organisations that bring people together and enhance our shared sense of place.

The council is also focused on creating an inclusive, fair and welcoming district. Through our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, we are working to ensure all residents can access our services and participate in local life. We'll continue promoting inclusive communities, increasing participation, and collaborating with partners to deliver shared economic, environmental, and social goals.

Together, these efforts support our vision of a prosperous and vibrant Three Rivers - a place where businesses can flourish, culture is celebrated, and every resident can thrive.



## A WELL-RUN COUNCIL

**We operate in a landscape that poses significant and ongoing challenges - not only to the resilience of our district, but also to the ability of local government to plan effectively for the future. Uncertainty around national policy, financial pressures, and increasing demands on services all contribute to a complex landscape. Nevertheless, the council remains committed to strong and proactive leadership - supporting our residents, working closely with partners, and striving to sustain the prosperity of our district, its business sectors, and the communities that call Three Rivers home.**

Our elected members, senior leadership and officers are committed to being a high-performing, forward-thinking and financially responsible council that puts our residents first. Over the course of this plan, we will deliver high quality services efficiently, transparently and in a way that reflects the needs and priorities of our communities.

To do this, we have developed a strong and consistently reviewed customer experience strategy and continue to challenge ourselves to remain at the leading edge of service development. Our performance will be tracked against a comprehensive set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), that will be aligned to our updated themes contained within our plan. These will be reported quarterly to ensure transparency, accountability, and to drive continuous improvement and efficiency.

We will manage our finances responsibly and proactively, ensuring that our budget is aligned with our priorities and supports the best possible outcomes for our residents. Through robust forward planning and continued value for money initiatives - such as shared services with neighbouring councils - we will continue

to be cost effective while maintaining the high standards that underpin our commitment to our residents.

The council will invest in ICT and digital innovation, including the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence, governed by our recently adopted AI Policy, to support modern, responsive services that meet the evolving needs of residents.

Our Have Your Say platform and regular residents survey ensure that our communities are central to decision-making. We are also strengthening our emergency planning capabilities, improving environmental responsiveness and actively managing our property and investment portfolio to protect long-term income, support the direct delivery of services and deliver public value.

By aligning our operations as set out in this Council Plan, we continue to be a well-run council that is responsive, resilient, and ready for the future.

The council acknowledges that achieving our vision requires collaboration; success will come only through strong partnerships with our communities. Our leadership approach will evolve as needed to foster and champion shared responsibility, ensuring that shaping the future of our district becomes a collective effort.

# DELIVERY OF THE COUNCIL PLAN

The Three Rivers Council Plan sets out a clear vision for the future of the district, built around our core themes and aims. These run like a golden thread through all areas of the council's work, shaping and directing every service we provide.

Delivery of the plan will be achieved by aligning service delivery plans and team objectives with its themes and aims. The plans will guide every level of council activity, from high-level strategic decisions right through to the frontline services we provide.

From long-term planning through to day-to-day work of a district council, this plan will ensure all council activity is focused on delivering the services residents, organisations, businesses, and the wider communities require and rely on.

This plan will ensure the council continues to make Three Rivers **a great place to live, work and visit**.

## WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:



### HEALTHY, SAFE AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES

- Safer neighbourhoods
- Better access to services
- Support for those who need it
- Increased opportunities for physical activity and social connection



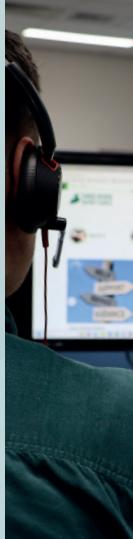
### GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE

- Cleaner Environment
- Greener spaces
- Less waste
- Sustainable transport options



### A PROSPEROUS AND VIBRANT DISTRICT

- Increased local opportunities
- Inclusive communities
- A place that celebrates its culture
- Welcoming high streets



### A WELL-RUN COUNCIL

- Responsible financial management
- Resident focused services
- Transparent and accountable decision making
- Skilled and responsive workforce