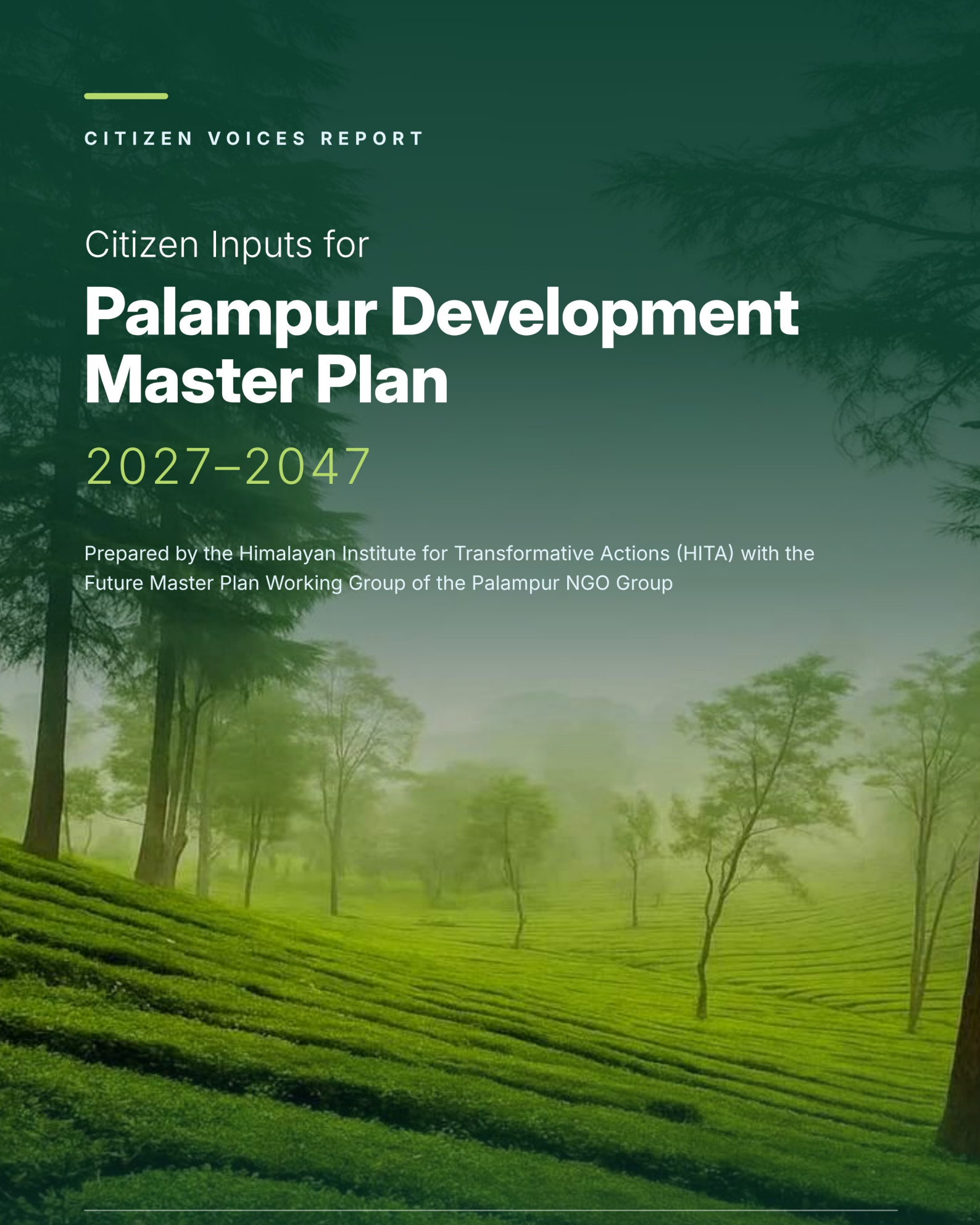
CITIZEN VOICES REPORT

Citizen Inputs for

Palampur Development Master Plan

2027–2047

Prepared by the Himalayan Institute for Transformative Actions (HITA) with the Future Master Plan Working Group of the Palampur NGO Group



Palampur, Himachal Pradesh
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Himalayan Institute for Transformative Actions

About this report

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Preface

Why this Citizen Voices Report? Any plan is an intent to implement. And for a plan to be of the people, it has to be by the people so that it is truly for the people and their environment! While the twenty-year Master Plan for a town like Palampur is done by state government, it is important that it builds on citizens' vision, expectations and needs.

Our current local government planning system in Himachal, especially for the larger municipal bodies like Palampur, is still very top-down. Even with the best of intentions, planners sitting in Shimla, planning through expert organisations that are not rooted in the realities and context of that town, and involving limited local stakeholders at too late a stage of planning, will not lead to a Development Master Plan that truly represents the aspirations and hopes of the residents for their next two decades. Such a plan can only catch and try to interpret the symptoms of current problems, not the real causes and the problems that lie under the surface.

The Himalayan Institute for Transformative Actions (HITA) does not believe that such a planning process can lead to a plan that will truly shape and change the future of an area. We have come from three decades of experience in decentralised and community-driven planning, and as members of the Palampur NGO Group found many dedicated social workers and retired experts who believed the same. And so started the journey by establishing the Future Master Plan Working Group in early October 2026. It was strengthened by HITA getting three excellent Masters in Management students from S. P. Jain Institute of Management and Research (SPJIMR), Mumbai, for the month of October 2026.

We decided to collect citizens' perspectives on what ails the Palampur municipal area and what should shape its future. When presented to the leadership of the Municipality in early October, we got a very good buy-in and interest, as the leadership saw this making their upcoming plan more citizen-centric and future ready. Our local MLA Mr. Ashish Butail also evinced keen interest in such a planning process. And so started a one-month odyssey of voluntary, non-funded efforts by so many people to take their future in their own hands.

The need to include and work with the rural buffer areas around Palampur Municipality, given the organic connections and cause-and-effect relationships between upland and lowland areas became clear. Process also leveraged the key role of departments responsible for water, sewerage, tourism, forests, revenue, electricity, public works etc. We therefore began involving these departments and received valuable cooperation and inputs from them, as well as from multiple civil-society organisations that represented citizen voices and interests. This document is defined by the limited expertise of our team, the short one-month duration of work, the lack of data and its specificity to Palampur, constraints that we daily faced.

We share this report as an input into the larger Master Planning process underway for Palampur - and its people, animals and natural resources. This report does not seek to provide technical expertise and solutions to problems and opportunities, but seeks to shape how they are understood and prioritised so that they can be planned and budgeted for in the Master Plan properly and fully. We remain committed to a future-ready planning and the implementation of a citizen-centered development process for Palampur, and would like other Himalayan towns to undertake such efforts too - to take control of, and shape their own future, with the help of departments and their technical and financial resources.

None of Himachal's towns score anywhere in the best-kept town categories in India. Time for Palampur to be the Champion of Himachal and show how we can do this, together!

Rajeev Ahal,
Convener, Future Master Plan Working Group
And Executive Director, HITA

Palampur, 4th November 2026

Executive summary

Palampur is at an important stage in its development. Its identity as a tea town, educational and research centre, and gateway to the Dhauladhar range gives it considerable potential. However, expanding construction, increasing tourism activity, pressure on natural resources and gaps in civic infrastructure are creating challenges for the town. The expansion of the Municipal Corporation from 7 to 15 wards in 2020 has also increased the area and population to be served, while infrastructure and municipal capacity have not kept pace.

The previous Development Plan covered the period 2001–2021. Although it provided a framework for land use and development, several of its provisions were not effectively implemented. The preparation of the new Master Plan for 2027–2047 offers an opportunity to address these gaps and give Palampur a clear direction for the next twenty years.

This document has been prepared as a citizen-led voluntary initiative by the Future Master Plan Working Group of the NGO Group, Palampur, with technical support from the Himalayan Institute for Transformative Actions (HITA) and contributions from SPJIMR. It brings together observations, available data, stakeholder consultations and recommendations for consideration by the Town and Country Planning Department and other concerned authorities.

> **The central recommendation is that Palampur's future development should balance economic opportunities, the needs of residents and protection of its natural environment.** The town should not grow at the cost of the very features that make it distinctive.

Palampur in numbers

Blue: town and people · Green: environment · Dark green: municipal finance

31.58 km² Municipal Corporation area	**15 wards** since the 2020 merger of old town and settlements	**40,385** population, Census 2011 (latest official figure)	**2,343 mm** mean annual rainfall 1974–2006 station data
223 springs mapped in the Palampur Forest Division	**₹23.4 crore** grants rolled over at the end of 2025–26	**2,800-3,500** Largest number of registered MSMEs in the state are in Palampur block	**3,281 sq. m** legacy waste dump footprint, 2026

Source: figures as reported in this document (Census 2011, Singh et al. 2009, Forest Department, PMC grant statement 2026, satellite assessment 2026)

Seven findings shape the citizen recommendations



Key findings at a glance; each is set out in full below

Key findings and recommendations

1. A shared vision for Palampur

The town has important natural, institutional and economic advantages, but faces pressures on traffic, water supply, drainage, waste, unplanned construction and public space. Citizens ask for reliable basic services, safer roads, affordable housing, protected green spaces and a greater say in planning. The new Master Plan should be people-centred and should plan together with the surrounding Gram Panchayats and forests, because water, roads, waste and tourism extend beyond municipal boundaries.

2. Building a stronger local economy

The economy should build on Kangra tea, agriculture, tourism, education, research and healthcare, while limiting the conversion of tea gardens and farmland to construction. The report recommends natural and regenerative farming, stronger farmer networks, local processing and branding, and year-round nature, wellness, tea and institutional tourism around Saurabh Van Vihar, CSIR-IHBT, CSK HPKV and the Dhauladhar trails. Palampur should not become over-dependent on tourism: research, agri-technology, food processing, small business, remote work and youth entrepreneurship need support so that young people can find work locally.

3. Planned land use and better spatial development

The Master Plan should clearly allocate residential, commercial, institutional, agricultural and recreational land, and protect tea gardens, productive farmland, forests and natural drainage corridors. The report asks for public release of the updated GIS planning maps, stronger development controls and building regulations suited to Palampur's terrain and seismic risk. For traffic, it recommends assessing a bypass or ring road (also raised by the Hoteliers Association), peripheral parking, and pedestrian-friendly market streets with continuous footpaths and safe crossings. New development should come with roads, drainage, water and amenities, not after them.

4. Improving civic services and everyday infrastructure

Water supply remains vulnerable to monsoon disruption at the Neugal Khad intake. The report recommends completing the proposed intake and storage works, strengthening distribution, protecting springs and recharge areas, and reviewing the Bohal spring arrangement. Drainage and sewerage need improvement to address waterlogging and untreated wastewater. On solid waste, the growing legacy dump and the non-functional Material Recovery Facility and composting plant need urgent action, with better source segregation, collection and processing capacity. Parks, toilets, bus stops, streetlights and community spaces should be distributed more evenly across all 15 wards, and stray cattle and monkeys managed in a coordinated and humane way.

5. Protecting forests, water systems and the natural landscape

Forests, tea gardens, springs, streams, khads and kuhls are essential to Palampur's water security and character, but face forest degradation, fires, a decline in native oak, encroachment on drainage channels and land conversion. The report recommends protecting tea gardens through the land-use framework, restricting development along khads and water bodies, mapping and restoring springs, kuhls and recharge areas, and preparing a Neugal River Basin Plan that extends upstream to Menjha and includes Awa Khad. The next Forest Working Plan should be aligned with the Master Plan, and Saurabh Kalia Eco Park should have its own management plan.

6. Strengthening institutional coordination and implementation

Planning, water, forest, road, tourism and revenue agencies, and the surrounding Gram Panchayats, do not yet work within a common framework. The report recommends a joint coordination mechanism, alignment of urban and forest planning, shared GIS data, clarity on land ownership and permissions, and a pipeline of costed, approved projects with clear owners. Grant money often remains unspent at the end of financial year and is rolled over and this shows a need for enhancing technical capacity of PMC. It also proposes city-twinning and learning partnerships with other towns.

7. Conclusions and Way forward

The recommendations in this document are intended to provide inputs to the ongoing Master Plan preparation process, rather than serve as a substitute for statutory planning or detailed project reports. For effective implementation, each priority should have a clearly identified responsible agency, an indicative timeline, a funding arrangement and measurable outcomes. Progress should be reviewed periodically, with opportunities for citizens to remain informed and involved.

The governance mechanisms for regular, effective coordination requires meeting of all mentioned stakeholders every quarter. The one in Nov/Dec can be the one where activities for upcoming year are selected, agreed and recommended into various budget planning processes. Another one in April after budget allocations can plan to implement different departmental and PMC plans in convergence.

Palampur has the opportunity to grow without losing its character. Its future should be shaped by strong local livelihoods, reliable public services, well-planned development and the protection of its natural assets.

The next Master Plan should provide the framework to bring these priorities together and make Palampur a healthier, more prosperous and sustainable town for future generations.

Chapter 1: Towards a better Palampur

Key messages

- Palampur is a tea, education and research town and a gateway to the Dhauladhar. The 2020 Municipal Corporation has widened the area and population to be served.
- The 2001–2021 Development Plan was only partly implemented, and the new Master Plan for 2027–2047 is still awaited.
- Citizens expect reliable services, safe public spaces, protection of the environment and responsive local governance.
- Citizen input should shape the plan from the start, not be invited as comment at the end.

1.1 About Palampur

Palampur is a hill town in Kangra district, Himachal Pradesh, located on the lower slopes of the Dhauladhar range. Its landscape is characterised by tea gardens, terraced agricultural land, forested slopes, traditional irrigation channels (kuhls) and the Neugal River. The town serves as an educational, healthcare, administrative and commercial centre for surrounding settlements and a gateway to nature, cultural and adventure tourism in the wider Kangra region.

Palampur's identity is closely linked to its tea industry, natural landscape and educational and research institutions. These include Chaudhary Sarwan Kumar Himachal Pradesh Krishi Vishvavidyalaya, the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) and the CSIR–Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (IHBT). The town also has healthcare institutions, schools, colleges, markets, hotels and administrative offices that serve its residents and surrounding settlements.

Area and population

The Palampur Municipal Corporation (PMC) covers an area of 31.58 km² and had a Census 2011 population of 40,385 across 15 wards (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011; Urban Development Department, Himachal Pradesh, n.d.). The previous PMC Master Plan projected a population of approximately 69,368–70,000 for 2021. These are the last available projections and should not be treated as current population figures. The wider Palampur tehsil is a substantially larger geographical unit, covering 429.29 km² with a Census 2011 population of 189,276. These figures should be distinguished from those of the Municipal Corporation.

While Himachal Pradesh recorded a population growth rate of 12.94% during 2001–2011, Palampur continues to experience development and infrastructure pressures. Urbanisation and migration, including the movement of service workers such as plumbers, masons, electricians, shop staff and construction labourers, contribute to changing local requirements.

1.2 Physical and environmental context

1.2.1 Rainfall and climate

Palampur has a humid, monsoon-influenced mid-hill climate, with warm summers, cool winters and substantial seasonal rainfall. An analysis of 33 years of Palampur station data (1974–2006) reported mean annual rainfall of approximately 2,343 mm (Singh et al., 2009). This is a historical average, not a current annual climate normal.

Climate projections indicate potential changes in temperature and rainfall patterns. CSTEP's 2022 district-level assessment, comparing 2021–2050 with 1990–2019, projects an increase of approximately 0.6–0.9°C in summer maximum temperatures and 0.7–0.9°C in winter minimum temperatures in Kangra district. It also projects changes in high- and very-high-intensity rainfall events, varying by emissions scenario. These projections apply to the district and are not precise forecasts for Palampur town.

The Jal Shakti Department has highlighted the impact of heavy monsoon flows in Neugal Khad, which increase turbidity, carry sand into the water supply system and damage pipelines, resulting in supply interruptions. Proposals for a permanent intake and buffer storage have been discussed to reduce these disruptions.

The Forest Department has mapped 223 springs across the Palampur Forest Division as part of its Working Plan exercise. However, the records require verification against older survey sheets and field observations before changes in spring availability can be established.

1.2.2 Geology, terrain and seismic context

Palampur lies in the tectonically active Himalayan region. Its terrain includes steep slopes, weathered rock, colluvial and alluvial deposits, and stream-cut landscapes. These conditions create varying foundation and slope-stability requirements across short distances.

Local geology, slope, soil depth, groundwater, landslide susceptibility and stream buffers are important considerations when assessing development suitability.

Earthquake risk is a material planning consideration in Kangra and the wider western Himalaya. Palampur lies in Seismic Zone 6 under the current BIS seismic zoning. The Himachal Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority publishes seismic-zonation and probabilistic seismic-hazard maps (State Disaster Management Authority, Himachal Pradesh, 2017).

1.2.3 Palampur as an institutional and regional hub

Palampur is an important educational and research centre in Himachal Pradesh. Alongside its agricultural, veterinary and Himalayan research institutions, the town has schools, colleges, private universities, training centres and vocational institutions.

Its healthcare infrastructure includes the Zonal Hospital, Vivekananda Trust Hospital, Kaya-Kalp Centre for wellness and several private multispecialty clinics. Palampur also provides administrative and commercial services to surrounding settlements through its markets, businesses, hotels, restaurants and government offices. The Sub-Divisional Head Office, Tehsil Office and Municipal Corporation further reinforce its regional role.

1.3 Development planning in Palampur



Figure 1.1: *Office of the Municipal Corporation, Palampur. Source: to be confirmed*

Evolution of development planning

Preparation of Urban Master Plans (referred to legally as Development Plans) is mandatory under the Himachal Pradesh Town and Country Planning Act, 1977. Rather than every individual municipality creating its own plan independently, the state's Town and Country Planning (TCP) Department officially declares an urban area (or an urban area merged with rural fringes) as a "Planning Area" or "Special Area". We feel that this is a top-down process for a Himalayan reality. Given the huge difference in context, problems and opportunities between towns as varied as Manali, Shimla, Solan and Palampur, a stronger and more devolved role and powers for planning should be given to the towns themselves. Once notified under the 1977 Act, the state is legally bound to freeze existing land use, prepare an official Sector/Development Plan, and mandate

municipal bodies to enforce these spatial regulations for all construction approvals. The Development Plans are then periodically updated, at stages that are not defined or known.

Palampur's structured development planning began on 1 May 1986, when Himachal Pradesh designated 26 revenue settlements as one Planning Area. Following land-use restrictions and boundary changes to manage outward growth, the 2001 Development Plan was prepared for the 2001–2021 period. Its draft notice appeared in the government gazette on 10 June 2002.

Supported by the Norwegian Government agency NORAD, the plan incorporated sustainable mountain development, public participation and community mapping. Norwegian experts helped develop building safety provisions suited to Palampur's wet-temperate conditions, including a 10-metre building-height limit to protect tea gardens and reduce soil erosion. Local officials received planning and implementation training, with technical support from Norway's Agricultural University and GNDU's School of Planning and Architecture.

In 2020, the Municipal Council was upgraded to a Municipal Corporation by merging the existing municipal area with 14 surrounding Gram Panchayats. The new Master Plan for Palampur (2027–2047) is currently under development by the Town and Country Planning Department and is still awaited despite a lapsing period of almost five years.

In September 2023, the Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister announced plans for a Master Plan and tourism blueprint for Palampur, reiterating the commitment in March 2024. However, progress on the long-term statutory planning process has faced delays.

Forty years of planning, and the new plan is still awaited

Milestones in Palampur's development planning, as set out in this report (not to scale)



Source: section 1.3 of this report

1.4 Citizen expectations and the vision for Palampur

Citizen expectations for Palampur's development centre on reliable civic services, functional infrastructure, safe public spaces, environmental protection and responsive local governance.

1.4.1 Citizen expectations

Table 1.1: Citizen expectations by area

Area	Citizen expectations
Core services	Reliable clean water, effective sewage management, regular waste collection, well-maintained roads, bridges, streetlights and drainage.
Public amenities	Clean public spaces, accessible healthcare facilities, parks, playgrounds, public toilets, bus stops and adequate parking.
Safety and quality of life	Rapid fire and emergency response, affordable housing, basic sanitation for low-income communities, and protection of trees and green spaces.
Governance and participation	Transparent complaint-reporting systems, active ward committees, neighbourhood forums, efficient project delivery and stronger local leadership.
Inclusive development	Mechanisms to involve communities from rural areas within the Municipal Corporation and ensure that development addresses their needs.

Citizens also envision Palampur as a clean, welcoming town that offers a good quality of life for residents and attracts high-value tourism.

1.4.2 Guiding principles

The Master Plan should provide a common framework for land-use decisions, infrastructure investment, economic development and the management of Palampur's natural and cultural assets. The following principles provide direction for this approach:



Guiding principles, section 1.4.2

1. Climate-resilient and risk-informed growth. Direct development away from high-risk slopes, drainage corridors and other hazard-prone areas. Incorporate climate projections, extreme-rainfall preparedness, seismic safety and disaster-response access into planning decisions.

2. Protection of natural infrastructure. Recognise forests, tea landscapes, agricultural land, streams, springs, recharge areas, tree cover and open spaces as assets that support water security, slope stability, cooling, biodiversity and recreation. Avoid unnecessary loss and fragmentation.

3. People-first and inclusive planning. Prioritise reliable basic services, safe streets and accessible public spaces for residents of all ages and abilities. Include women, children, older people, persons with disabilities, low-income households, informal workers, students and surrounding panchayats in consultation and planning.

4. Sustainable livelihoods and locally retained value. Strengthen local enterprises in tea, agriculture, education, healthcare, hospitality, culture and nature-based tourism. Support local employment and value chains while considering carrying capacity, waste management, water use and ecological safeguards.

5. Evidence-led and accountable delivery. Base planning decisions on updated GIS information, population and service baselines, public consultation and documented risk assessments. Major proposals should identify responsible agencies, land status, funding, maintenance costs, timelines and measurable results.

1.5 Citizen participation in the Master Plan process

1.5.1 Why this Citizen Voices Report

Palampur is currently plagued by traffic jams, poor drainage, lack of functional sewerage, poorly managed and narrow roads, stray cattle and monkey menace, littering and open garbage sites, a huge legacy waste landfill that continues to grow, reducing drinking water supply, water quality issues and limited parking facilities. Construction is unabated and haphazard.

This is a completely voluntary, citizen-driven effort to provide direction and inputs for the Palampur Master Plan (2027–2047) development underway, to ensure that this plan becomes an instrument to drive and achieve the future ‘prosperous and sustainable Palampur’. This Citizen Voices Report proposes a holistic developmental approach in two ways:

- **Integrate the perspectives from three stand-alone planning processes for Palampur:** the Palampur Municipal Master Plan (building beyond the last one from 2001–2021); the Palampur Forest Division Working Plan; and stand-alone plans of key departments which play a crucial role in the overall development design and journey of an area such as Palampur, especially Jal Shakti Vibhag (formerly Irrigation and Public Health, IPH), Public Works Department (PWD), Tourism and Forest Department.
- **Bring together the synergetic aspects needed to build such a future:** business planning (economic growth pathways); zoning and spatial planning (allocate different areas for focused development); environmental planning (ensuring conservation, biodiversity and sustainability of the natural capital); social and cultural well-being (build on Palampur’s legacy and heritage, and build in social and cultural aspects for a higher happiness index).

The initiative is led by the Future Master Plan Working Group of the NGO Group, a federation of eight local NGOs in Palampur, with technical support from the Himalayan Institute for Transformative Actions (HITA). The S. P. Jain Institute of Management and Research (SPJIMR), Mumbai, supported the exercise by providing three management interns.

The report draws on focused discussions with government departments, ward representatives, citizens, NGOs, businesses and sectoral stakeholders. The NGO forum meeting on 9 October 2026 highlighted the need for citizen involvement. Subsequent discussions with the Municipal Corporation on 12 October 2026 highlighted the importance of local inputs and inter-departmental coordination in the ongoing planning process. The report and its recommendations are to be presented to the Palampur Municipal Corporation (PMC) and key departments on 4 November 2026 for discussion and finalisation.

1.6 Recommended actions

1. Palampur's economy, water supply and ecology depend on surrounding areas. The town serves as a market, healthcare and education centre for nearby settlements, while its springs, forests and catchments extend beyond municipal limits. Therefore all development master planning processes in in Palampur and rest of Himachal should follow a converged and holistic planning process as developed in this report.
2. The stage at which citizen-centric inputs are taken needs to be looked at. It should be right at the start, to engage and advocate direction, rather than later to merely comment. For Palampur, an indicative roadmap can be as set out in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Indicative roadmap for citizen-centric planning

Period	Priority actions	Proposed leads	Evidence of completion
0–3 months	Set up a joint working group; confirm planning boundaries and the status of the TCP process; obtain the previous Master Plan, new Forest Working Plan draft and ADB project documents; prepare a baseline and data-request list.	MC + TCP + Forest Department + NGO Group	Terms of reference; document register; data-gap log
3–12 months	Complete priority audits covering water and springs, waste and sewage, traffic and parking, and land use. Conduct ward and stakeholder consultations, shortlist quick wins and prepare concept notes/DPRs. Set up a working group on municipal finance and explore opportunities for better utilisation.	Relevant line departments, panchayats, technical support, MC, TCP and NGO Group	Validated baselines; public consultation summary; ranked project pipeline; terms of reference
Year 2–3	Implement approved pilots; integrate agreed land-use and service recommendations into statutory planning; secure multi-year funding and operations and maintenance provisions.	Statutory agencies and funding partners	Projects commissioned; service and ecological indicators reported
Year 4–5	Scale proven pilots; refresh the investment plan; evaluate outcomes and update the rolling five-year programme.	Steering group and independent/technical reviewers	Mid-term review; revised capital plan; annual public scorecard

3. The following areas require attention in the new planning exercise:
    1. **Population and planning boundary:** Confirm the PMC and TCP planning boundaries and prepare updated population projections. Census 2011 figures should be treated as a historical baseline, with future Census and ward-level data used as they become available.
    2. **Land-use allocation:** Compare earlier proposals with current land use, development patterns, infrastructure capacity and environmental priorities.
    3. **Agricultural land and open spaces:** Verify changes in agricultural land, tea gardens, tree cover, parks and open spaces. Identify areas requiring conservation and opportunities to improve public access.
    4. **Transport and infrastructure:** Review the implementation of earlier road, bypass and parking proposals. Reassess traffic, freight movement, parking, pedestrian access and connectivity across the old municipal core and merged areas.
    5. **Natural drainage and water security:** Map khads, kuhls, springs, recharge areas and stormwater routes. Coordinate proposals with water-supply and drainage agencies.
    6. **Risk and resilience:** Use authoritative hazard maps and site-specific assessments for slope stability, landslides, intense rainfall and seismic safety.

7. **Regional and plan integration:** Link municipal planning with surrounding settlements and panchayats, particularly in waste management, roads, water supply, tourism and development. Relevant elements of the Forest Working Plan and departmental plans should be integrated.
8. **Implementation and accountability:** Identify the responsible agency, land ownership, permissions, funding, coordination arrangements, maintenance requirements, timelines and measurable outcomes for major proposals.
9. **Economic data:** Data on youth employment, MSME registrations, bank credit, district GDP, tourist accommodation and climate projections are published by MoSPI, the Directorate of Economics & Statistics, the District Industries Centre and other agencies only at block, tehsil, district or state level. This data should be collected or collated for PMC level.

4. The exact BIS seismic-zone designation and design parameters applicable to each parcel must be confirmed against the current BIS code, official map and site conditions by the competent authority or a qualified engineer. A general town-level label is not a substitute for code-compliant structural design or geotechnical investigation. Building regulations must require compliance with the seismic design parameters applicable to the site. The reference to “Zone 6” should be verified against the current BIS classification before publication.
5. The following should be the focus of citizen consultations in the master planning process:
    1. Organise ward-level discussions with councillors, residents' groups, businesses, farmers, youth and other stakeholders.
    2. Submit specific, mappable evidence to the Municipal Corporation and TCP, including locations, photographs, maps, affected groups and required improvements.
    3. Make accessible minutes of ward meetings, draft maps and opportunities for residents to provide feedback in person and online, and show how these have been incorporated into the plan.
    4. Develop practical proposals for land use, building regulations, roads, parking, water, sewerage, drainage, public spaces, emergency access, affordable housing and environmental protection.
    5. Support a public-facing portal or document repository containing key reports, maps, consultation updates and contact information.

Chapter 2: Palampur’s strategy for holistic regeneration

Key messages

- The vision is a prosperous, ecologically regenerative and socially inclusive mountain economy that is locally owned.
- Tea, agriculture, education, research and tourism are the base. Tourism should add value without becoming the main engine.
- The Corporation's constraint seems to be capacity support to spend, not a shortage of money.
- Six flagship pilots turn the vision into practice, each with an owner, a funding route and a target.

2.1 Strategic overview

Palampur stands at a turning point. Its economy has long rested on tea, agriculture and nationally important academic, research, health and commercial institutions. The universities bring research, skilled jobs and steady demand for local services. Kangra Tea, a Geographical Indication–tagged product, is central to the town’s identity and provides livelihoods for local residents. It is also Kangra district’s designated One District One Product (ODOP) in Himachal Pradesh.

This base is now under strain. Only about half of Kangra’s tea area is still actively cultivated, and tea gardens and farmland are being lost to construction. At the same time, tourism is growing. Palampur draws visitors looking for nature, quiet and wellness, which gives it the chance to build a year-round visitor economy unlike that of Shimla or Manali.

The town has also grown since the Municipal Corporation was formed in December 2020 with 15 wards[1]. It now serves a larger area and population. Its infrastructure, staff and own revenue have not kept pace, and it still relies heavily on grants.

This chapter sets out an economic direction built on public value: protecting tea and farm landscapes, growing high-value tourism within carrying capacity, using local institutions to drive innovation and enterprise, and strengthening the Municipal Corporation so it can plan for growth and deliver on it.

This report focuses on the Palampur Municipal Corporation area. However, much of the official data required for planning is not published at the PMC level. Where municipal-level information is unavailable, the report uses the nearest reliable geographical unit: Palampur tehsil or block, Palampur Forest Division, Kangra district or Himachal Pradesh.

2.2 Vision: Palampur 2047, Regenerative prosperity

Palampur should aim to become India's leading demonstration town for regenerative mountain development, where economic prosperity, ecological health, community well-being and human potential reinforce one another. That is a more meaningful goal than becoming just another tourism destination, education hub or wellness centre.

Growth has usually been measured through construction, investment, tourist arrivals and new infrastructure. These matter, but they do not show whether people are living better lives, whether young people see a future in their hometown, whether communities are getting stronger or whether the natural environment is being protected for the next generation. Palampur's greatest assets are its people, its natural environment, its tea gardens and farming traditions, its education and research institutions, its cultural heritage and its relationship with the Dhauladhar mountains.

The vision for Palampur 2047 is therefore a prosperous, ecologically regenerative and socially inclusive mountain economy that is locally owned. It should create meaningful livelihoods, nurture local enterprise,

[1] *Note: the 15 wards are 1 Lohna, 2 Palampur Upper, 3 Palampur Khas, 4 Aima, 5 Suggar, 6 Ghuggar Khildu, 7 Bindraban, 8 Khalet, 9 Chowki, 10 Maranda, 11 Rajpur, 12 Ghughar Tanda, 13 Tanda, 14 Banuri and 15 Holta.*

value local knowledge, strengthen communities and improve quality of life for every resident. It brings together three complementary ideas:

- **Prosperous Palampur:** local livelihoods, entrepreneurship, future-ready education, innovation and economic opportunity spread across the town and its villages.
- **Sustainable Palampur:** regenerative agriculture, ecological stewardship, traditional wisdom, circular resource systems and responsibility to future generations.
- **Great Quality of Life Palampur:** health, belonging, purpose, agency, dignity, community participation and the chance for every person to realise their potential.

Getting there means moving beyond sector-by-sector development to an integrated approach in which agriculture, tourism, education, innovation, health, ecology and community well-being support one another. Palampur can become a living laboratory for mountain development, showing how traditional wisdom and modern science, local enterprise and global knowledge, and economic opportunity and ecological responsibility can work together.

The plan should also avoid making Palampur's future overly dependent on tourism. The most resilient mountain economy is one where people can earn a dignified living through education, knowledge work, agriculture, entrepreneurship, care services, innovation and creative enterprise, with tourism adding value rather than becoming the main economic engine.

The final measure of success should not be how much Palampur grows, but how well its people and natural environment thrive together. Figure 2.1 shows how the emphasis of this chapter shifts as a result.

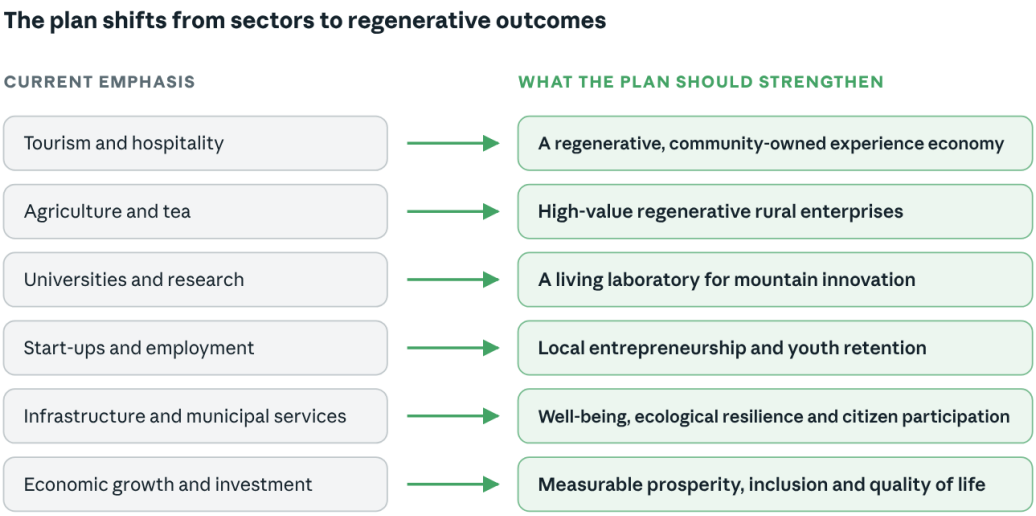

Figure 2.1: *How the emphasis of the plan shifts (Table 2.1 of the source report)*

2.3 Context analysis

2.3.1 Financing of PMC

The major expenditure areas of the Municipality are directed toward town welfare measures, construction of parking facilities, waste management (such as solar-based treatment plants), administrative salaries and routine municipal maintenance. A small amount goes to development projects dedicated to upgrading local roads, public infrastructure and sanitation.

Summary of sources received and managed by the Municipal Corporation

Grant-in-aid: key insights. Municipal Corporation Palampur, FY 2023–24 to 2025–26, amounts in ₹ crore.

Indicator	Value
Rolled over at end of 2025–26	**₹23.4 crore**
Received in 3 years	**₹66.5 crore**
Spent in 3 years	**₹58.2 crore**

Indicator	Value
Central share of receipts, 2025–26	**74%**
Percentage of available funds spent in 2025–26	**51%**

Source: Data provided by Palampur Municipal Corporation, 2026.

- A cushion of rolled over funds remains to complete sanctioned and new innovative activities.
- Receipts are volatile, and the funding mix has moved sharply from State to Central grants.

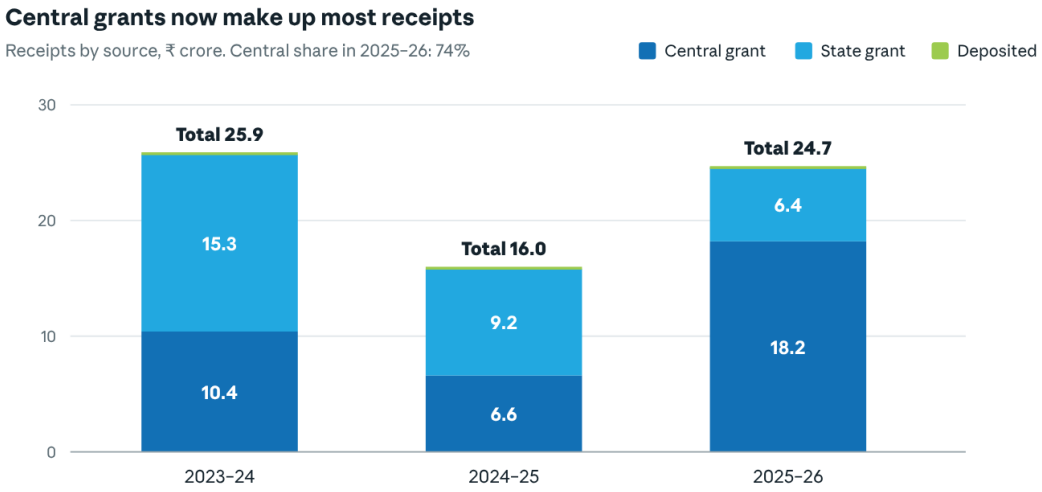

Figure 2.2: *Receipts by source, ₹ crore. Source: Municipal Corporation Palampur (2026), grant-in-aid statement for FY 2023–24 to 2025–26*

2.3.2 Palampur within the Kangra district economy

Palampur's economy is quite different from the industrial belt of southern Himachal Pradesh (Baddi, Nalagarh, Paonta Sahib). It rests on environmental and institutional assets rather than factories, and is built on four pillars: plantation agriculture and speciality agro-products; experiential, eco and adventure tourism; the knowledge and research ecosystem; and public sector employment, defence services and remittances. Each is covered in section 2.4.

At district level, Kangra is one of the state's largest rural consumer markets and a hub for small unincorporated enterprises. District GDP breaks down broadly as shown in Figure 2.3.

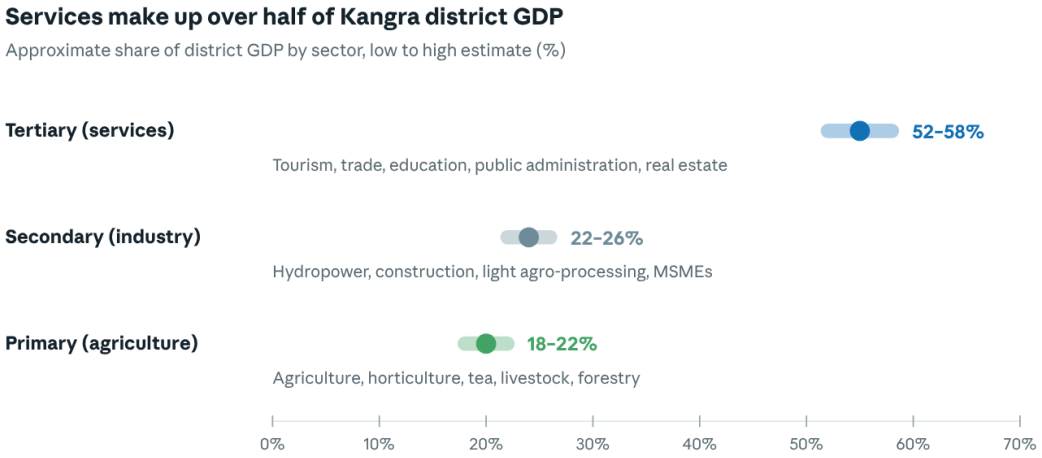

Figure 2.3: *Sector shares of Kangra district GDP (approximate ranges, as reported in this document)*

Key district dynamics

- **Services lead:** driven by the administrative hubs of Dharamshala and Palampur, tourism, healthcare and education.
- **Limited industry:** unlike Solan or Sirmaur, Kangra has no large industrial parks because of its terrain, ecological zoning and environmental rules.

- **Agriculture employs more than it earns:** it employs over half of the district's rural workforce but contributes only about a fifth of district GDP, which points to low value addition in traditional farming.

2.3.3 Baselines still needed: people, livelihoods, ecology and well-being

The financial and district figures above describe the economy, but not whether people are doing better. The Master Plan should set four further baselines so that progress can be measured from 2027:

- **Youth migration:** how many young people (15 to 29) leave Palampur each year for study or work, where they go, why, and how many come back.
- **Household livelihoods:** main and secondary income sources by ward, including farming, tea, tourism, public service, pensions, remittances and informal work, and how seasonal these incomes are.
- **Ecological asset valuation:** the economic value of what forests, springs, khads, kuhls, tea gardens and farmland provide, such as drinking water, slope stability, flood control, cooling and the landscape that draws visitors. This makes the cost of losing them visible when planning decisions are taken.
- **Well-being:** a short, repeatable resident survey covering health, safety, access to nature and public spaces, social connection, sense of belonging and satisfaction with civic services, with results split by ward, gender, age and income.

These baselines can be collected with CSK HPKV, CSIR-IHBT, local colleges and ward committees, and repeated every two to three years.

2.4 Economic and livelihood dimensions

2.4.1 Tea, agriculture and the rural economy

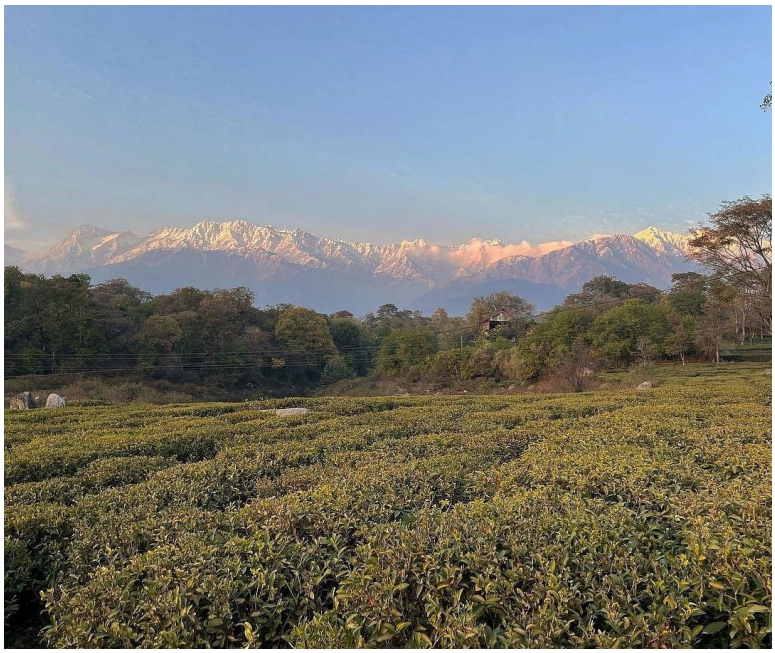

Figure 2.4: *Tea gardens below the Dhauladhar range, Palampur. Source: to be confirmed*

Tea is a defining element of Palampur's economic identity and landscape. Tea estates and factories operate across the area, with ownership divided between private owners and public institutions. The tea sector contributes to local employment through cultivation, plucking, processing, packing, transport and marketing. Tea gardens also form part of the landscape experienced by visitors, linking agricultural production with the town's tourism identity. The old Development Plan's proposed land-use allocation included 129.69 hectares of tea gardens and 943.93 hectares of agricultural land within the 2,570-hectare planning area (Town and Country Planning Department, Himachal Pradesh, 2002). These figures describe the plan's proposed 2021 land-use pattern, not a current land-cover survey.

Palampur is often called the tea capital of north-west India. The wider Kangra tea belt, spanning Palampur, Baijnath, Dharamshala and Jogindernagar, has about 5,900 active tea growers and gardens. Beyond tea,

good water availability and a favourable temperate climate support high-value horticulture, including vegetables, floriculture, medicinal and aromatic plants, and organic farming.

Regenerative agriculture, producer networks and local value addition. The next step is to move tea and farming from raw produce to high-value regenerative rural enterprises. This means supporting regenerative and natural farming that rebuilds soil health, protects water and cuts chemical inputs; building farmer-producer organisations (FPOs) and tea grower networks so that small growers can buy inputs, process, brand and sell together; and keeping more value local through small-scale processing, speciality tea, packaging, farm-gate retail and links to tea and farm tourism. CSK HPKV's Natural Farming Centre and CSIR-IHBT's work on aromatic and medicinal crops give Palampur a strong base for this.

2.4.2 Tourism and visitor-facing businesses



Figure 2.5: *Tourists at Saurabh Van, Palampur*

Palampur attracts a relatively niche segment of visitors, with its greenery, tea gardens, open spaces and natural setting forming an important part of its appeal. Discussions with the Tourism Department highlighted the potential for year-round tourism centred on nature, relaxation and wellness, rather than relying primarily on snow-based or activity-led tourism models associated with destinations such as Shimla and Manali. This creates a distinct basis for the local visitor economy, which includes accommodation, restaurants, transport, shopping and visits to tea estates and natural attractions. The discussions also highlighted the need to involve land-owning and service departments early when considering tourism sites and infrastructure, potential tourism zones, and agro-tourism and farm experiences in tea gardens and agricultural areas, with formal arrangements such as MoUs potentially needed with institutions or landholders. Accommodation data, including registered hotels, homestays and room counts, is aggregated at district level and should be filtered for Palampur. No numerical tourism carrying-capacity threshold or agreed method has yet been developed for hill towns, and no such studies have been completed.

The visitor economy appears to be expanding. The Tourism Department representative reported growth in land transactions, construction, registered homestays, hotels and restaurants, with further development and visitor pressure anticipated in some surrounding areas. However, the extent to which this growth translates into longer visitor stays, greater local employment or higher earnings for small businesses is not yet established through comprehensive local data.

An AirROI dataset covering 24 active short-term rental listings between May 2024 and April 2025 reported average annual revenue of ₹4,74,339 per active listing, an average daily rate of ₹6,158 and occupancy of 22.1% (AirROI, 2025). These figures provide an indication of activity within the platform-tracked short-term rental market but should not be treated as representative of all accommodation businesses in Palampur. Data on registered hotels, homestays and room capacity across the area may help establish a more complete picture, subject to the availability and sharing of district-level records.

Wider platform listings give a fuller, if unverified, picture. Major travel platforms list roughly 260 to 300 or more hotels and resorts in and around Palampur, including 16 five-star hotels, 71 four-star hotels, 182 three-star

hotels and 23 resorts. Over 500 homestay and private villa listings are available across Palampur and nearby tea estates on platforms such as MakeMyTrip and Holidify. These are platform listings, not registered figures.

Palampur also benefits from nearby attractions that widen its visitor base:

- **Adventure:** Bir Billing (paragliding) and trekking trails across the Dhauladhar range support a service ecosystem of hospitality, transport and local guiding. Bir Billing sees about 8,000 to 10,000 tourists a day in peak season (mid-September to November) and supports 200 to 400 hotels, guest houses and hostels, around 300 cafés and about 300 registered local pilots.
- **Spiritual and religious:** The presence of H.H. the Dalai Lama in Dharamshala draws foreign and Buddhist visitors. Hindu pilgrimage sites include the Jakhni Mata, Chamunda Devi, Birni Devi and Bundla Mata temples and the Baijnath Shiva temple. Tashi Jong Monastery, the Norbulingka Institute's Losel Doll Museum and the Dorzong Monastic Institute near Gopalpur, in the Dhauladhar foothills, also draw a steady stream of visitors.
- **Art and craft:** The Sobha Singh Art Gallery and Museum, the Andretta Pottery and Craft Society in Andretta, and tea tasting at Wah Tea Estate are attracting a growing number of Gen Z visitors.
- **Wellness:** Yoga, nature cure and holistic wellness retreats such as Kayakalp at Holta, The Mirage Andretta, Osho Himalayas Wellness Resort at Gopalpur, and Himalayan Yoga Journey by MyTribe in Palampur.

The key issue is therefore not simply whether tourism is growing, but whether the local visitor economy is generating sustained year-round activity and how its expansion is interacting with land use, transport, natural assets and public infrastructure.

From visitor volume to visitor value. The aim should not be more visitors, but more value from each visit, with a fair share of it staying in the community and within the limits the landscape can carry. In practice this means favouring longer, lower-impact stays over day-trip volume; growing a regenerative, community-owned experience economy of locally run homestays, guided walks, farm and tea experiences, crafts and food; setting carrying-capacity limits for sensitive sites, trails and water sources before promoting them; and tracking local share of visitor spend, length of stay and ecological pressure rather than tourist arrivals alone.

2.4.3 Small businesses, services and emerging activity

Palampur's commercial base includes retail markets, local shops, food outlets, accommodation providers and small-scale manufacturing. Secondary businesses include steel-related businesses and real-estate activity in the wider area. The town's educational, agricultural and research institutions form part of its wider economic ecosystem and contribute to its role as a service centre for surrounding settlements. These activities sit alongside tea and agriculture rather than replacing their significance in the area's identity.

A significant share of household income comes from government jobs, military and paramilitary service, and pensions. Nearly 48,000 to 50,000 registered ex-servicemen and over 14,000 military widows live across Palampur town and its surrounding rural and panchayat areas. Holta Cantonment (Palampur Military Station) and the SSB K9 Training Centre have about 1,500 to 3,000 active personnel at any time, including army units, administrative staff, medical staff at MH Palampur and paramilitary personnel. Ex-servicemen and civil service households drive the local consumer economy, real estate and retail banking.

2.4.4 Youth unemployment, MSMEs and entrepreneurship

Youth unemployment. Neither MoSPI nor the Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Himachal Pradesh publishes a youth (15 to 29) unemployment rate for Palampur Municipality or Tehsil, so the local picture has to be pieced together from district surveys, state PLFS figures (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2023) and employment exchange registrations. Surveys of educated youth in Kangra suggest that 24.1% to 31.3% lack steady, non-farm formal work, with graduates in general arts, science and commerce hit hardest (Salaria & Tewari, 2025). Young women fare worse than young men, as local white-collar jobs outside teaching and government are scarce. The shortage of well-paid local jobs pushes educated young people out to Chandigarh, Mohali, the NCR and abroad. The problem is structural: a mismatch between general degrees and the few formal jobs available locally, not a lack of enterprise.

MSME base. Kangra leads Himachal Pradesh in MSME registrations. Palampur block has about 2,800 to 3,500 active Udyam-registered units, over 95% of them micro-enterprises (Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, 2024). These include homestays, tea boutiques, food processing, organic farming, cafés, consultancy, transport and coaching. There are very few small and almost no medium enterprises. Unlike Baddi or Parwanoo, Palampur has no factory clusters. Its enterprise base is micro-scale, young and growing fast, with a recent rise in youth self-employment linked to tourism (The Tribune, 2024). It is best described as

a hill-town knowledge and agro-tourism economy, with agro-processing, eco-tourism, bio-resource technology and traditional handicrafts as its core sectors (The Tribune, 2024).

Financing. MSME lending is moving away from collateral-heavy bank loans towards credit guarantees, priority-sector lending and digital credit. PNB, SBI, UCO Bank and Himachal Pradesh Gramin Bank together account for over 75% of MSME credit in Palampur sub-division (State Level Bankers' Committee, Himachal Pradesh, 2024). The main routes in use are:

- **Mukhya Mantri Swavalamban Yojana (MMSY):** for first-generation entrepreneurs aged 18 to 45; 25% to 35% capital subsidy on loans up to ₹60 lakh, plus 5% interest subvention for three years.
- **Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP):** margin money subsidy of 15% to 35%, used by micro-units in food processing, handlooms and rural eco-tourism.
- **PM-MUDRA (PMMY):** Shishu (up to ₹50,000) and Kishore (₹50,000 to ₹5 lakh) loans make up most of the volume.
- **Incubator-linked funding:** ventures from CSIR-IHBT and CSK HPKV draw on innovation funds, NABARD rural credit, seed funding and CGTMSE guarantee cover.
- **Green tourism lending:** loans for solar-equipped homestays, organic farm-stays and adventure sports infrastructure have grown at double digits year on year.

What is driving micro-entrepreneurship?

1. **Incubation:** CSK HPKV's Agri-Business Incubator runs two cohorts a year of Him Aarambh (pre-seed, up to ₹5 lakh) and Him Utkarsh (seed, up to ₹25 lakh). About 90 to 100 agripreneurs are oriented each year, of whom 20 to 25 reach funding. Over 1,500 people have been trained in entrepreneurship programmes in the last three years, including 200 farm women under PMFME. CSIR-IHBT has trained about 1,000 to 1,200 people from Kangra, with a focus on aromatic crops such as wild marigold, damask rose, lemongrass, stevia and heeng. The 200 farm women were trained at the Incubation Centre of the College of Community Science from the Panchrukhi, Palampur and Baijnath blocks. CSK HPKV extension reports also record 539 farmers trained at the Natural Farming Centre and 1,100 students and faculty reached through agripreneurship awareness. CSIR-IHBT's start-up exhibition on 28 May 2026 showcased high-altitude food, perfumes and wellness formulations (CSIR-Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology, 2026; CSK Himachal Pradesh Krishi Vishvavidyalaya, 2026). However, the actual number of functional enterprises is not known.
2. **Tea revival:** of the four cooperative tea factories set up between 1964 and 1983, only Palampur's is still cooperative; the rest are leased to private firms. Newer players such as Wah Tea Estate, Himalayan Brew and Dharamshala Tea Company combine factory tours with tea tourism. Wah Tea Estate covers 182 hectares and produces orthodox, green and specialty tea.
3. **Homestays:** the state homestay scheme has turned residential clusters in Bundla, Maranda and Bir into micro-businesses. Sustainable start-ups such as Make My Hut are cited as eco-start-up examples (The Tribune, 2024).
4. **State support:** HP Startup Policy, MMSY, RAMP cluster support and platforms such as Hunar Haat for women entrepreneurs.
5. **Remote workers:** since COVID-19 the Dharamshala-Palampur belt has drawn remote workers, some of whom go on to start cafés and organic stores. Vision documents propose eco-friendly co-working spaces and innovation incubators with CSIR-IHBT and the agri-universities (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 2022).
6. **Organic and wellness demand:** Bir Billing, organic farms and Ayurveda create a ready market for organic tea, honey, herbal soaps and pine-needle products.
7. **Constraints on MSMEs:** Palampur suits low-capex micro-enterprise (food processing, specialty tea, nurseries, mushrooms, homestays, aroma oils, eco-construction), but units face clear limits:
    - **Land:** strict environmental zoning and no contiguous industrial plots.
    - **Logistics:** terrain and seasonal disruption raise freight costs both ways.
    - **Seasonal cash flow:** homestays, tea estates and tour operators have uneven income, and standard term loans do not cover off-season gaps.
    - **Scale and branding:** many units stay at household level, with weak market linkages, limited sales channels and little access to venture capital. The persistent gap is market linkage and branding, which the CSK HPKV incubator and CSIR-IHBT aim to address.

2.4.5 Palampur as an academic, research and wellness hub of the future

The Master Plan needs an updated and mapped inventory (numbers, types and spatial distribution) of campuses, schools, hospitals, research institutions, clinics, emergency services, public offices, and bus and transport facilities, with their service catchments. The inventory should distinguish facilities within the Municipal Corporation from those in adjoining settlements and the wider planning area. This would help identify academic zones of Palampur and plan provision of further land to grow these hubs, with the logistical and civic amenities this sector needs. The plans to activate helicopter services from the plains, with the heliport at CSK HPKV, offer the opportunity to develop medical and wellness tourism and to make Palampur the ‘conventions capital’ of Himachal.

Alongside CSK HPKV and CSIR-IHBT, Palampur has Sri Sai University, local nursing and degree colleges, and 142 registered schools, including Government Senior Secondary Schools, St. Paul's, DAV Public School and Kendriya Vidyalaya Holta Camp. Together they anchor a growing micro-economy built on higher education, research grants, agri-tech innovation and services for students and faculty.

Mountain Futures Living Lab and regenerative wellness. Palampur's institutions, communities and the town itself can become a shared setting for practical experiments in regenerative agriculture, water security, low-carbon buildings, waste management and community well-being, and wellness should serve residents as well as visitors. Both are set out as flagship initiatives in section 2.5.

An integrated learning ecosystem. Palampur's schools, colleges, universities, ITIs and nursing and training institutes should work as one learning ecosystem rather than as separate campuses. This would link classroom learning with field projects in the Living Lab, offer shared vocational and apprenticeship pathways, open campus facilities and expertise to residents, and bring local knowledge holders into teaching through the Mountain Wisdom and Heritage Initiative.

2.4.6 From economic drivers to municipal readiness

Palampur's economy rests on a strong and distinctive base: education and research institutions, tea, agriculture, nature-based tourism, retail and local services, and public administration. CSK Himachal Pradesh Krishi Vishvavidyalaya and CSIR–IHBT anchor a knowledge economy that few hill towns have. Tea gives Palampur both a livelihood and an identity. The town also serves as the market, health and education centre for the surrounding settlements.

The question for the next twenty years is not only which sectors will grow. It is whether the Municipal Corporation will be able to support that growth. A larger town, more visitors and new enterprises will all place demands on infrastructure, people, systems and finances. If the Corporation is not ready, growth will add to existing problems instead of improving quality of life. These challenges need to be addressed for Palampur's economic potential to be realised.

2.4.7 Infrastructure: catching up and keeping pace

- **Water reliability:** Monsoon floods in Neugal Khad can cut supply for 7 to 10 days. Springs are drying up, and groundwater recharge is falling as more surfaces are paved.
- **Infrastructure built around people and resources:** Future investment should prioritise walkability, universal accessibility for people of all ages and abilities, water security through spring and catchment protection, and decentralised resource systems such as neighbourhood composting, rainwater harvesting, rooftop solar and local wastewater treatment, rather than relying only on large centralised facilities.

2.4.8 Manpower and skills: a thin bench

- **Technical capacity gaps:** Planning, GIS mapping, engineering, project preparation and monitoring all need skills the Corporation does not yet have in-house. Limited GIS capacity was also raised by the Forest Department.
- **Future needs:** Running modern services (waste processing, metered water, digital complaint systems, dashboards) will need trained operators, data handlers and project managers, not just field staff.

2.4.9 Organisational: many owners, little convergence

- **Weak voice in planning:** At the 12 October 2026 meeting, the Corporation reported that the new Master Plan development was outsourced to a consultancy organization and they only provided the data that was asked for.

- **Rural–urban transition:** Newly added wards bring residents who are used to panchayat governance. They need to be brought into urban services, ward committees and consultation.
- **Little room for citizens:** There is no standing forum where residents, ward committees and the surrounding panchayats can take part in planning decisions and track delivery. A participatory coordination mechanism should bring citizens and panchayats to the same table as the line departments, with regular public meetings and a published record of decisions.

2.4.10 Economic and financial: money available, capacity to spend it lacking

- **Heavy reliance on grants:** Over 2023–24 to 2025–26, the Corporation's own revenue (property tax, rents, fees, water charges, parking) made up only about 16% of total receipts. The rest came from Central and State grants.
- **Spending funds:** grant money often remains unspent at the end of financial year and is rolled over and this shows a need for enhancing technical capacity of PMC.

2.4.11 Where Palampur wants to be

Palampur can become a model mountain town: a knowledge and tea economy with year-round nature and wellness tourism, backed by a capable and financially stable Municipal Corporation. To get there, the Corporation will need to:

- Build a core team with planning, engineering, GIS, finance and data skills, supported by partnerships with CSK HPKV, CSIR–IHBT and technical institutions.
- Grow its own revenue through better property tax coverage, user charges and fees, so that services do not depend on grants alone.
- Turn unspent grants into delivered projects through a ready pipeline of costed, approved proposals.
- Set up a standing coordination platform with line departments and panchayats, with shared data and joint targets.
- Plan infrastructure ahead of growth, not behind it, so that new housing, businesses and visitors arrive in areas that are already served.

2.4.12 Emerging economic trends

- **Agri-biotech and bio-economy:** A shift from raw tea processing to high-value bio-resources, herbal extracts, essential oils and functional foods, led by CSIR-IHBT technology transfer.
- **Premium, low-impact tourism:** Growth in boutique wellness resorts, workation hubs, homestays and digital nomad infrastructure rather than high-density mass tourism.
- **Urban expansion and connectivity:** The larger Municipal Corporation area, NH-154 widening and better rail and air links are likely to raise land values and grow commercial services.
- **Informal and gig economy:** Kangra has a dominant share of Himachal's informal and small unincorporated enterprises, and this is likely to grow in personal services, logistics and eco-services.

2.5 Recommended actions

1. Business model, financing and value creation

> This is a public-value business plan: the “return” is measured in reliable services, avoided environmental damage, resilient water systems, local livelihoods and better use of public funds. Revenue-generating tourism can contribute, but essential municipal services should not depend on optimistic tourism income.

Table 2.3: Funding sources and required diligence

Source	Potential use	Required diligence
State / central schemes	Core urban services, resilience, public space, sanitation and eligible environment works	Map schemes, eligibility, convergence rules and matching-fund requirements
Municipal own-source revenue	Operations, maintenance, small public-realm improvements and service reliability	Review property/permit/user-charge collection and ring-fence maintenance where lawful
ADB-supported project	Potential infrastructure investments; meeting notes cite an overall amount of ₹600 crore, but amounts for Palampur are unverified	Obtain project report, component list, financing terms, procurement plan, safeguards and consultation record

Source	Potential use	Required diligence
Departmental budgets	Forestry, springsheds, tourism, roads, water and disaster preparedness	Create a cross-department project register and identify overlaps/gaps
Private / community capital	Homestays, guides, local experiences, responsible hospitality, waste/value-chain pilots where viable	Use transparent concessions/partnerships; safeguard access, ecology and community benefit
CSR / philanthropy / technical assistance	Baseline studies, GIS, biodiversity documentation, training and pilots	Use for clearly scoped public-benefit work; do not substitute for statutory agency obligations

Suggested financial planning

The perspective to use for developing economic and budgeting allocations for the Master Plan:

Assumption	Planning rule
Planning horizon	20 years (2027–2047), with a 5-year funded action plan and annual rolling pipeline
Portfolio structure	(i) capital projects, (ii) recurring O&M, (iii) studies/pilots; avoid mixing one-time grant receipts with recurring service costs
Project prioritisation	Score each proposal on public health/service gap, ecological risk reduction, beneficiaries, readiness, lifecycle affordability and equity
ADB reference	₹600 crore is treated only as a reported figure from meeting notes; no allocation or availability is assumed in this plan
Tourism case	No visitor, revenue or job forecast is asserted until a baseline is collected; pilots should test demand and carrying capacity before scale-up
Contingency	Each capital estimate should include a project-specific contingency, escalation and O&M provision after a DPR-level estimate is prepared

Strengthening municipal revenue collection and cost recovery

- Ensure timely and regular collection of water charges by Jal Shakti through improved billing, monitoring and recovery mechanisms.
- Strengthen the collection of monthly garbage collection user charges from households and commercial establishments.
- Link revenue collection with reliable delivery and maintenance of essential municipal services.
    - **Pet registration charges:** introduce or strengthen fees for registering domestic pets within Municipal Corporation limits.
    - **Pet sterilisation charges:** establish appropriate charges for pet sterilisation services, with provisions for subsidised services where necessary.
    - **Pet vaccination charges:** introduce charges for pet vaccination services, particularly for services provided through municipal veterinary facilities.

2. Tourism value chain



Figure 2.6: *Tourism value chain (Table 2.4 of the source report)*

> **Commercial test:** measure booking conversion, average length of stay, visitor satisfaction, local share of spend, safety incidents and ecological pressure. Stop or redesign any pilot where conservation thresholds are exceeded.

Project appraisal gate

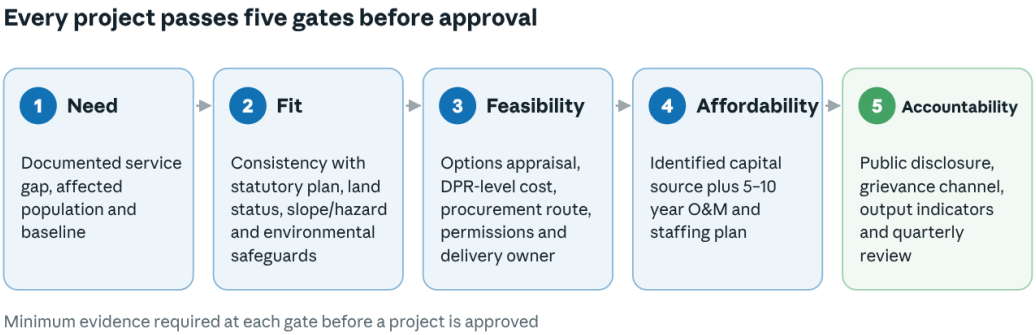

Figure 2.7: *Project appraisal gate*

Decide the first 3–5 priority studies or pilots only after baseline, safeguards, costing and O&M review.

Concrete recommendations to develop this sector:

1. Most tourists and hospitality sector people lament the lack of things to do in Palampur that give tourists reasons to come, extend their stay and return for repeat visits.
2. Saurabh Van Vihar is an excellent tourist experience space but needs to be properly developed with a futuristic master plan for planning, resourcing, developing and maintaining a nature-cum-tech park.
3. Other tourist packages worth developing are guided tours of the Nature Awareness Centre at Holta, CSIR-IHBT, and CSK HPKV with its various farms.
4. Wellness packages through Kaya Kalp and other medical tourism packages with hospitals.
5. Well-planned, easy and moderate one-day excursions and 2–3 day treks in identified areas of the Dhauladhars by local start-ups.
6. Develop a coordinated network of nature-based and place-based visitor experiences so that Palampur becomes more than a transit stop. Packages could connect the town's tea gardens, farms, forests, river and stream corridors, heritage sites, research and educational institutions, wellness facilities and Dhauladhar trails, with carefully designed half-day, full-day and multi-day options. Each package should have clear visitor information, safe access, trained local guides, interpretation, waste-management arrangements and ecological safeguards. Activities and routes must be identified through consultation and site-level assessment, particularly in sensitive forest and river areas.
7. Support local enterprises, youth groups, homestays, guides, transport providers, farmers, artisans and food businesses to design and deliver these experiences. A local experience network or marketplace could help bundle services, improve discoverability and enable bookings, while setting standards for safety, service quality, fair local participation and environmental responsibility. Track whether packages increase length of stay, local spending and repeat visits, rather than relying only on tourist arrival numbers.

3. Tackling youth unemployment, lack of industry and low investment

Palampur's fragile ecology and mountain terrain make heavy manufacturing unsuitable. Growth needs to come from environmentally compatible, high-value, light-footprint industries.

Clean tech and light bio-industries

- **Agri-tech and herbal processing hubs:** small bio-processing clusters for essential oil extraction, tea polyphenol extraction, tissue culture and packaging of aromatic plants.
- **Food processing and speciality packaging:** cold chains and small processing units for local produce (citrus, tea, kiwi, wild honey, organic vegetables), using HP CM Startup Scheme incentives.

A knowledge economy built on local institutions

- **Incubation and university-industry links:** dedicated incubator space where graduating students can commercialise patents, bio-fertilisers and sustainable agri-products from CSIR-IHBT and CSK HPKV research.
- **IT/ITeS and remote work hubs:** state-funded co-working spaces and "workation parks" with high-speed fibre internet and stable power, to attract tech start-ups, remote workers and creative freelancers.

Tourism diversification and skills

- **Youth apprenticeships:** vocational certification for high-value tourism roles such as adventure sports safety, hospitality management, eco-tour guiding and outdoor equipment maintenance.
- **Community homestay and experience networks:** soft loans and technical help for rural youth to turn ancestral properties into heritage or wellness homestays rather than selling land to outside buyers.

4. Policy levers to unlock investment

Table 2.5: Policy levers to unlock investment

Intervention area	Strategic action
Land policy and eco-zones	Designate non-polluting industry zones for IT, biotech and research start-ups to simplify land-use permissions under Section 118 restrictions.
Incentive packaging	Use state start-up grants (sustenance allowances, patent filing reimbursements, industrial plot concessions) to lower entry barriers for young local entrepreneurs.
Public-private partnerships (PPP)	Invite private investment in eco-wellness centres, ropeways and specialty tea tourism through structured PPP models.

5. Closing the gaps for youth and micro-enterprises

The Master Plan should go beyond spatial planning and treat youth employment as a core goal. The MSME ecosystem, while micro-dominated, is institutionally dense and increasingly well supported financially. Bridging the frictions of branding, seasonal liquidity and land collateral is critical to retaining educated youth locally:

1. **Youth labour market observatory:** the Directorate of Economics and Statistics (DES), Himachal Pradesh, to publish annual block-level data on youth (15 to 29) employment, disaggregated by gender and education.
2. **Gender-responsive enterprise pathways:** expand Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) and Hunar Haat cohorts with childcare support, digital marketing training and links to white-collar work beyond teaching.
3. **Palampur collective brand under Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP):** common branding and packaging for Kangra tea, honey and bio-resource products, with GI support and ONDC/e-commerce onboarding, led by the Agribusiness Incubator (ABI), CSK HPKV and CSIR-IHBT. RAMP is a World Bank-assisted Central Sector Scheme intended to improve the overall competitiveness, credit access and market reach of MSMEs.
4. **Seasonal working-capital product:** cash-flow based overdrafts and off-season moratoriums for homestays and tourism businesses, backed by the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE).
5. **Section 118 facilitation cell:** a single window at the District Industries Centre, Kangra, to speed up lease-based collateral and joint-venture structures for non-Himachali technical co-founders.
6. **Tea-tourism circuit:** formal factory tour, tasting and stay packages linking Wah Tea Estate, the Palampur Cooperative and Bir Billing to lift off-season demand.
7. **Incubation-to-scale pipeline:** link Him Aarambh and Him Utkarsh graduates to PMEGP (Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme) and MMSY (Mukhyamantri Yuva Swaratgar Yojana / Mukhyamantri Swarojgar Yojana) loans and market mentoring, to move beyond 20 to 25 funded ventures a year.

6. Flagship initiatives

The six initiatives below turn the vision in section 2.2 into practical programmes. Each should start as a pilot, be tested against a baseline and be scaled up only if it works.

Palampur Mountain Futures Living Lab

Create a collaborative platform bringing together CSIR-IHBT, CSK HPKV, local educational institutions, entrepreneurs, communities, government and civil society. The town and its surrounding villages become the setting for practical experiments in regenerative agriculture, water security, low-carbon buildings, waste management, nature-based livelihoods and community well-being.

First steps: identify three demonstration villages or neighbourhoods, agree a shared baseline and invite institutions to develop practical solutions to five locally identified problems.

Regenerative wellness for residents and visitors

Broaden the current focus on medical tourism, yoga and retreats so that wellness becomes part of daily life in Palampur: walking and cycling infrastructure, access to nature, preventive health, healthier food, community spaces, social connection and programmes for older residents.

First steps: develop a voluntary Palampur Regenerative Wellness Standard for participating hotels, homestays, retreats and clinics, covering environmental practices, local sourcing, fair employment and community contribution.

Youth Enterprise and Livelihoods Mission

Current incubation support mostly reaches university graduates and technology entrepreneurs. A Palampur Youth Enterprise Fellowship would support 25 to 50 young people a year to build enterprises in regenerative farming, local food processing, eco-tourism, repair services, crafts, digital services, sustainable construction and elder care.

Support offered: practical training, mentoring, apprenticeships, market access and small milestone-based seed grants.

Mountain Wisdom and Heritage Initiative

Document and sustain local knowledge of agriculture, water, forests, medicinal plants, traditional architecture, food, crafts and community institutions. Create paid opportunities for elders, artisans, farmers and other knowledge holders to teach younger generations and visitors.

Safeguards: the programme should be community-led, with consent, attribution and protection against inappropriate commercial use of traditional knowledge.

A Decade of Responsible Citizenship in Schools

Establish a ten-year school-level programme to build a culture of responsible citizenship among children and young people. The programme should connect classroom learning with practical activities on local history and heritage, waste reduction, water conservation, biodiversity, public spaces, road safety, disaster preparedness and respectful community behaviour. Schools could develop student-led environment and civic action clubs, ward-level projects and annual community activities, with progress reviewed over time rather than treated as a one-off awareness campaign.

Invest in teachers as the programme’s principal leaders. Provide recurring training, locally relevant teaching resources, exposure visits and partnerships with civil-society organisations, environmental practitioners and public agencies. Teachers should be supported to guide student projects and engage parents and communities. The programme should be developed with the Education Department and schools, with clear ownership, funding and periodic evaluation.

Zero-waste demonstration wards

Move beyond treatment facilities. Start with two or three wards where household segregation, decentralised composting, dry-waste collection, repair and reuse, and transparent reporting are tested together. Partner with schools, resident groups, hotels and local businesses, offer incentives for compliance, and provide dignified employment and protective equipment for waste workers.

Target: 90% household-level source segregation in the pilot wards within 24 months, subject to a baseline and adequate collection services.

Water Commons and Springshed Restoration Programme

Treat Palampur's springs, streams and khads as foundational economic assets. Map critical springs and recharge areas, identify communities protecting upstream catchments, and set up transparent payment-for-ecosystem-services arrangements where legally and financially feasible, starting with a review of the lapsed Bohal Spring arrangement. Combine community stewardship with scientific monitoring, rainwater harvesting, permeable surfaces and nature-based drainage.

7. Implementation framework: owners, funding, targets and phases

> Every recommended action in this chapter needs a named owner, a funding route, a measurable target, a monitoring arrangement and a phase. Table 2.6 sets these out for the flagship initiatives, and Figure 2.8 shows their phases over five years. Owners and targets are proposals for discussion and should be

confirmed with the agencies concerned through the coordination mechanism recommended in section 6.3.

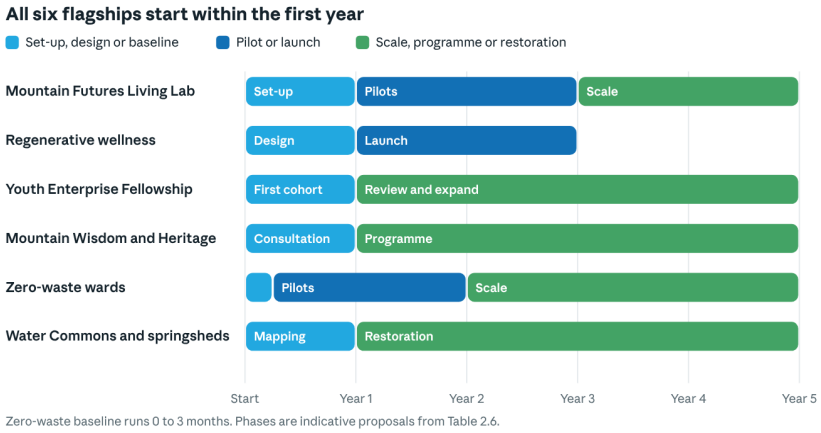

Figure 2.8: *Indicative phases of the six flagship initiatives, from Table 2.6*

Table 2.6: Implementation framework for the flagship initiatives

Initiative	Proposed owner and partners	Funding pathway	Target (indicative)	Phase
Mountain Futures Living Lab	**Lead:** PMC with CSIR-IHBT and CSK HPKV. **Partners:** colleges, NGO Group, panchayats	Research funds of CSIR and the university, CSR, state schemes, technical assistance	3 demonstration sites and 5 problems agreed in year 1; first tested solutions by year 2	Set-up: 0 to 12 months. Pilots: years 2 to 3. Scale: years 4 to 5
Regenerative wellness	**Lead:** Tourism Department with PMC. **Partners:** hospitality associations, Health Department, wellness centres	Tourism and health schemes, municipal budget for walking routes and public spaces, private investment	Wellness Standard drafted in year 1; first participating establishments in year 2	Design: 0 to 12 months. Launch: years 2 to 3
Youth Enterprise Fellowship	**Lead:** District Industries Centre with CSK HPKV incubator and CSIR-IHBT. **Partners:** banks, ITIs, NGO Group	MMSY, PMEGP, PM-MUDRA, NABARD, CSR for seed grants	25 to 50 fellows a year; share of enterprises still trading after 2 years	First cohort: year 1. Review and expand: years 2 to 5
Mountain Wisdom and Heritage	**Lead:** NGO Group with the Language, Art and Culture Department. **Partners:** CSK HPKV, CSIR-IHBT, schools, panchayats	Culture schemes, CSR, philanthropy, visitor fees	Number of knowledge holders documented and paid sessions held, set after baseline	Consultation: 0 to 12 months. Programme: years 2 to 5
Zero-waste wards	**Lead:** PMC. **Partners:** schools, resident groups, hotels, traders, Project Hilldaari, CSIR-IHBT	Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0, municipal own revenue, CSR	90% household source segregation in pilot wards within 24 months	Baseline: 0 to 3 months. Pilots: months 3 to 24. Scale: years 3 to 5
Water Commons and springsheds	**Lead:** Jal Shakti Department with Forest Department and PMC. **Partners:** Van Vikas Samitis, panchayats, CSK HPKV	Jal Shakti and forest budgets, AMRUT 2.0, PES payments where lawful, CSR	Critical springs mapped and Bohal arrangement reviewed in year 1; recharge works in priority catchments	Mapping: 0 to 12 months. Restoration: years 2 to 5

8. Monitoring

Progress should be reported publicly once a year through the dashboard proposed in Chapter 7, which includes prosperity and well-being indicators alongside service and economic ones.

Chapter 3: Spatial development and infrastructure

Key messages

- The 2001 Plan was normative rather than regulatory. Current land use should be remapped before new development capacity is allocated.
- Tea gardens, farmland, forests and khad corridors need protection, with hill-town building rules suited to Seismic Zone 6.
- Congestion in the old core calls for pedestrian priority, peripheral parking and an assessed ring road.
- The 2024 GIS mapping of Palampur should be made public.

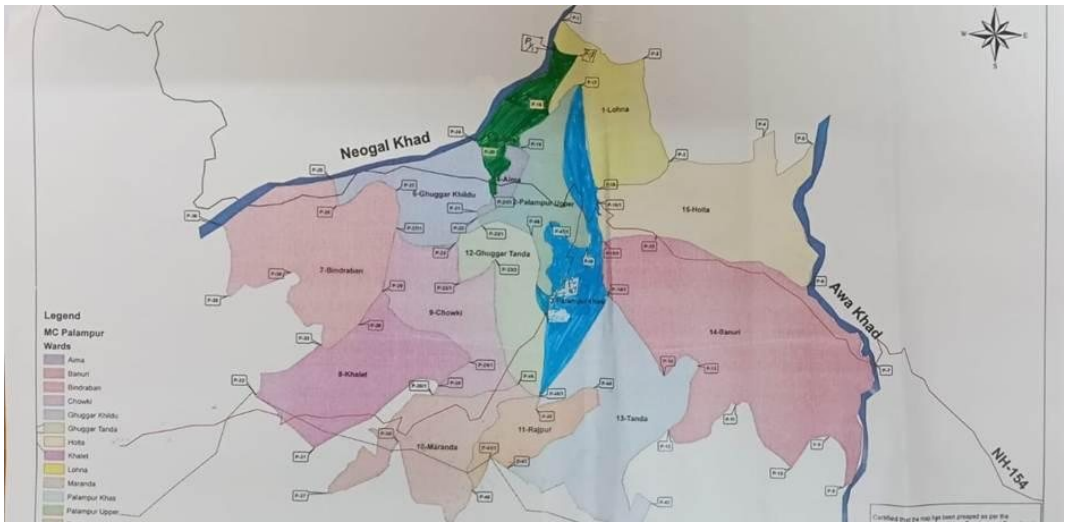

Figure 3.1: *Spatial map of Palampur. Source: Municipal Corporation, Palampur*

3.1 Strategic overview

Palampur's spatial structure brings together a compact urban centre, adjoining settlements, tea gardens, agricultural land, forested slopes and natural drainage corridors. Municipal expansion increased the area and population to be served by urban systems, while the earlier development plan assigned substantial land to agriculture and public facilities alongside residential growth. Water-supply planning illustrates the practical implications of this change: the scheme discussed by the Irrigation and Public Health/Jal Shakti Department considers a move from a rural service norm of 55 litres per capita per day (LPCD) to an urban norm of 135 LPCD, and includes design provisions intended to reduce disruption during high monsoon flows. These are scheme design parameters, not confirmation that all proposed works have been completed. The town's spatial development is closely connected to the management of surrounding land and the extension of services across the expanded municipal area.

Spatial planning should therefore prioritise not only infrastructure and economic efficiency, but also ecological regeneration, community well-being, climate resilience and the preservation of Palampur's distinctive mountain identity. The objective is not simply to provide better roads, buildings and utilities, but to create a town where people can live healthier, happier and more meaningful lives.

A people-centred approach should guide decisions on land use, mobility and services. The 15-minute neighbourhood can serve as a planning principle: everyday needs such as basic retail, education, healthcare, recreation, public transport and community facilities should be accessible through safe walking, cycling or short journeys, wherever local topography and settlement patterns permit.

3.2 Context analysis

3.2.1 Municipal expansion and settlement pattern

Palampur's administrative and spatial footprint changed significantly when the Municipal Corporation was formed through the inclusion of adjoining settlements. The 15-ward municipal area brought together the earlier urban core and surrounding areas including Lohna, Aima, Suggar, Ghuggar, Bindraban, Khalet, Chowki, Maranda, Rajpur, Tanda, Banuri and Holta. Census-based figures used in municipal water-supply planning place the combined 2011 population of the 15 wards at 40,385. This is a historical population baseline for the merged area, not a current population count. Tourism Department discussions identified the Bundla side, Banuri side and areas around the university and other institutions as places experiencing or potentially experiencing growth; the exact locations require verification. The representative also raised concerns about road conditions and connectivity in areas added from surrounding panchayats, particularly as construction and visitor activity expand. The old Development Plan's population projections for 2011 and 2021 are forecasts, not actual counts, and should not be used as current population figures.

3.2.2 Land use and development pattern

The old Development Plan proposed a mixed land-use pattern for the Palampur Planning Area (Town and Country Planning Department, Himachal Pradesh, 2002), balancing residential, commercial, tourism, industrial, public and semi-public uses with agriculture, forests, tea gardens, parks, transport and water bodies. Of the planned 2,570 hectares, agriculture accounted for 943.93 hectares, residential use for 700 hectares and public and semi-public facilities for 559.36 hectares. The plan also allocated 100 hectares to transport, 21 hectares to parks and open spaces, and smaller areas to commercial activity, tourism, industry, forests and water bodies. This planned distribution shows the importance assigned to agricultural land and public facilities alongside urban expansion. It represents the proposed land-use pattern for 2021 rather than confirmation of present land use or implementation. Current land use and the status of individual proposals should be verified through updated mapping and departmental records. There is complete disregard of TCP rules that require adherence to setback requirements (clear open spaces at the front, rear and sides of approximately 1.5 to 3 metres).

3.2.3 Education, research and institutional presence

Palampur has a significant concentration of educational and research institutions, including Chaudhary Sarwan Kumar Himachal Pradesh Agricultural University and the CSIR–Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology. These institutions contribute to the town's regional identity and create links with agriculture, scientific research and professional expertise. Their presence distinguishes Palampur from a settlement whose economy is based only on tourism or local commerce.

3.2.4 Water supply, drainage and natural corridors

The Jal Shakti Department discussion noted that Neugal Khad and Awa Khad are water sources in different phases of the scheme, and that a permanent intake and buffer storage have been proposed to reduce interruptions during high monsoon flows. These are design provisions; the current implementation status should be confirmed with the Department. The Forest Department reported 223 springs mapped across the Palampur Forest Division during a Working Plan exercise. This is a division-wide figure, not a count of springs within the Municipal Corporation. The Forest Working Plan covering 2010–11 to 2024–25 has ended, so the status and contents of the successor plan should be confirmed. For spatial planning, the practical priority is to map natural drainage routes, khads, kuhls, springs and recharge areas, and prevent development from obstructing their flow. Garbage disposal in kuhls and khads needs to be stopped. Diversion or construction into or over kuhls also needs to be discouraged. Construction along Maul Khad has also been reported alongside sewage flowing into the water, making protection of the khad and prevention of untreated discharge a priority.

3.2.5 Urbanisation and slum emergence

According to official data from the Census of India (Palampur City Population Census), there is no officially reported or recognised slum population within the municipal limits of Palampur, Himachal Pradesh. While official municipal slum data does not list a formal slum population, reports on urban growth have pointed out that surrounding panchayat areas experienced rapid, unplanned growth outside the core municipal boundaries. Haphazard growth of 3–4 storey buildings, with narrow zig-zag lanes, poor sanitary conditions, unhygienic drains, polluted streets and cramped houses, has created hyper-congestion within a 500 m radius around Subhash Chowk and the Old Bazaar.

Over 35,000 people lived outside municipal limits in the panchayats of Ghuggar, Aima, Bindravan and Lohana, which were neglected. Panchayat areas adjoining the town are described as fast turning into a big slum with potholed roads, overflowing drains and contaminated water. The reasons for the emergence of slum-like conditions outside the municipal limit are:

- **No resources for garbage:** heaps of garbage can be seen in every nook and corner at Ghuggar, SSB Chowk, Aima, Bundla and Chokki Khalet.
- **Mushrooming of unauthorised colonies:** unplanned and haphazard construction of housing colonies in panchayat areas lacks basic amenities such as street lights, roads, sewerage and drinking water.
- **Resistance to inclusion:** people resisted inclusion in the MC due to fear of taxation, while the state failed to include them.

3.2.6 Zonation as per growth needs (commercial, residential, conservation)

Under the 2021 zoning regulations, mixed land use was contemplated, with selective land-use change for hazardous uses with permission. There is a stipulation for a minimum 3.0 m path, setbacks, FAR controls, and NOCs from PWD for highway-abutting plots, the Electricity Board and others.

The development plan should prevent the emergence of slum-like settlements and ensure access to safe, affordable housing for economically weaker sections. Low-cost housing may be considered as a viable alternative.

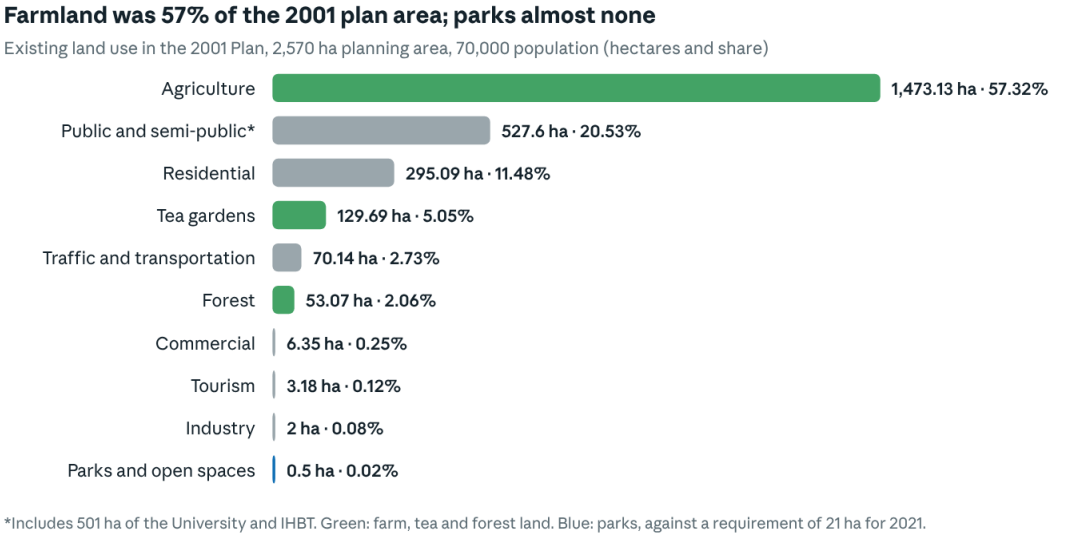

Figure 3.2: *Existing land use structure in the 2001 Plan (Table 3.1 of the source report)*

From documents consulted, it is clear that the current zoning is not effective for commercial, residential and economic growth or for environmental conservation needs. The 2001 plan is outdated, not implemented and ecologically blind.

Commercial

Commercial intensity is concentrated in the main bazaar in a linear fashion, as high as 21%, spreading along NH-154 (earlier NH-20) at Maranda and Vanghiar. 69.9% of shops are under 25 sq. m, and 94.94% of parking is on footpaths and streets. The proposed 1.00 ha modern shopping centre outside the hub never materialised. Wholesale warehousing, a grain mandi and regulated markets were not developed. The result: ribbon development, traffic congestion and paid parking on pedestrian paths.

The main bazaar should be developed as a pedestrian-priority or fully pedestrianised zone, modelled on Mall Road in Shimla and Dalhousie. Vehicular traffic should be restricted, with appropriate provisions for peripheral parking, public transport, emergency access and last-mile connectivity to improve pedestrian safety, reduce congestion and enhance the overall visitor experience. A pilot has been proposed but it needs consultation and buy-in for successful implementation.

Residential

The plan proposed low density (100 persons per hectare), but actual built-up intensity is scattered and expensive to service: 60.21% of the area has 0% intensity and 26.89% has 0–8%. Housing Board colonies at Bindravan and near the Agriculture University are the only organised housing. 65% of houses were built in the last 30 years, and 70% are in poor condition. Illegal colonies were flagged by RERA in 2024, with developers selling plots without TCP approval. Demand for second homes and tourism rentals is converting residential property to commercial homestays without change-of-use permission.

Environment and conservation

This is the biggest gap in conventional planning so far.

- Palampur was envisaged in the 2001 Plan as a tea town with 57% agriculture, 5% tea gardens, 2% forest, water bodies and khads. The plan said tea garden land shall remain as such. In reality, Bundla Tea Estate was converted to resorts, with roads only 4–5 m wide.
- Depleting green cover, including forests, and development in prime locations, the old bazaar around the Dharamshala SH–NH junction, Maranda and ribbon development are vital environmental concerns. Parks cover only 0.50 ha against a requirement of 21 ha for 2021.
- The plan itself noted climate warming, less snowfall, flash floods and cloudbursts in 2001. Non-implementation of Section 16C has led to zig-zag khasra sub-divisions playing havoc, and construction on steep slopes along khads.
- No buffer zoning for Neugal Khad, Maul Khad or Bundla has been envisaged so far.
- Tea gardens need a special eco-tourism and conservation approach, not a generic agriculture or plantation zone.
- The overall assessment of the 2001 plan shows that zoning was normative, not regulatory: the zoning classifications largely served as guidelines rather than being effectively enforced through development approvals and regulatory checks.
- The TCP Department added 76 more mohallas under the Act in 2023, but without staff, and violations continued.
- Section 83 violations: HPSEBL and Jal Shakti gave connections without TCP approval. The 2005 plan horizon ended in 2021.

3.3 Recommended actions

1. Land use planning

1. Audit old proposals as completed, partly completed, not implemented, superseded or unverifiable.
2. Remap current land use before allocating new development capacity. The old plan’s residential expansion and agricultural-land reduction are historical proposals, not current conditions.
3. Assess suitable growth beyond the existing market core to distribute activity, subject to land suitability, access and service capacity.
4. Use neighbourhood-level planning: pair new housing and commercial areas with services, open space, walking access, parking and drainage.
5. Make implementation realistic: identify land, responsible agency, funding source, timeline and measurable output for each major proposal; assess land pooling and reconstitution where appropriate.
6. Utilize the GIS mapping of Palampur done in 2024 by the Town and Country Planning Department. In 2024, an RFP was issued for GIS-based Master Plans for Class II towns under AMRUT 2.0 in Himachal Pradesh, for preparation of Development Plans for Mandi, Solan, Palampur, Chamba and others. The results of the RFP have not yet been published. The GIS diagnostic for Palampur, based on TCP terms of reference, is expected to quantify land-use change since the 2005 plan; map constructions on slopes above 30% and within 5 m of nallahs and khads; map solid waste dumping in Maul Khad and Neugal Khad; quantify the parking deficit; and mark deodar forest patches, tea gardens and water bodies as non-developable.
7. Notify a Tea Garden Conservation Zone with transferable development rights, and ban conversion except for eco-tourism.

8. Adopt separate hill-town regulations: a maximum height of 10 m (3 storeys) because of seismic and freeze-thaw conditions already noted in the plan, and strict ridge versus valley zoning.
9. Decongest the old core by pedestrianisation and peripheral parking lots at NH entry points.
10. Formalise mixed use, but make parking, drainage and sewerage linkages mandatory before approval, and link the RERA, TCP and MC databases.
11. Implement cluster-level parks, and kuhl and khad protection and pedestrian walk corridors.
12. Make ecological sensitivity and environmental carrying capacity explicit criteria for zoning and development permissions. Identify no-build and restricted-development areas around khads, kuhls, springs, steep slopes, forests, tea gardens and other sensitive landscapes, supported by clear monitoring, compliance checks and enforcement.
13. Move beyond protection alone and identify priority areas for ecological restoration, including degraded land, urban forests, biodiversity links between forest patches, restoration of traditional water systems and nature-based measures for stormwater management and slope stabilisation.
14. Coordinate spatial zoning with the economic vision set out in Chapter 2. Identify suitable locations and infrastructure needs for knowledge-based enterprises, research and innovation, regenerative agriculture, community wellness, cultural activities and sustainable tourism, while ensuring compatibility with ecological limits and local character.

2. Better spatial planning

1. Map congestion hotspots and assess whether a bypass or alternative connectivity can reduce pressure on the central market.
2. Prepare a parking inventory distinguishing existing facilities, ongoing works and proposals.
3. Identify feasible stretches for footpaths, crossings and pedestrian-priority spaces, acknowledging land and funding constraints.
4. Review natural drainage paths and construction along their edges; coordinate across PWD, Jal Shakti and the MC.
5. Map road sections vulnerable to landslides and recurring damage; document drainage and slope-protection needs.
6. Consider secondary centres and distributed development to reduce concentration in the town centre, subject to land, services and environmental checks.
7. Request PWD traffic counts, road inventory, accident data, project status, right-of-way information and the planned investment list.
8. Adopt a mobility hierarchy that prioritises walking, cycling and public transport before private vehicles. Identify pedestrian-priority market streets, safe routes to schools and institutions, continuous footpaths and crossings, and cycling links on stretches where gradients and road conditions make cycling feasible.
9. Assess the feasibility of reliable, low-emission public transport, including electric feeder services connecting neighbourhoods, institutions, markets and peripheral parking areas. Plan peripheral parking and last-mile connections together, rather than expanding parking within the congested core.
10. Develop a town-centre access and circulation plan that balances pedestrianisation with deliveries, public transport, emergency access, accessibility for persons with disabilities and the needs of residents and businesses.
11. Explore the feasibility of developing a peripheral ring road around Palampur to divert through-traffic, particularly heavy and commercial vehicles, away from the congested town centre. This could improve traffic circulation, reduce congestion along key market stretches, and enhance accessibility to tourism establishments and surrounding settlements. The proposed alignment should be assessed in coordination with the PWD, TCP Department and Municipal Corporation, taking into account terrain, environmental sensitivity, existing settlements and future urban expansion.

Actions on the planning process, coordination, data sharing and citizen consultation are set out in section 1.6 and in Chapter 6 (section 6.3).

Chapter 4: Citizen services and utility sectors

Key messages

- Water, drainage, sewerage and waste services must be planned for the whole 15-ward area, not only the old core.
- The Neugal Khad intake is vulnerable in the monsoon, and the legacy waste dump has grown to about 3,281 sq. m.
- Stray cattle, dogs and monkeys need coordinated, humane and data-driven management.
- Mature trees and green spaces should be protected when roads, parking and facilities are planned.

4.1 Strategic overview

Palampur's municipal services must serve an expanded 15-ward area comprising the earlier urban centre and adjoining settlements. The Municipal Corporation has limited manpower, while service delivery is distributed across municipal departments, contractors and government departments. For example, the Municipal Corporation manages services such as waste management directly or through contractors, whereas drinking-water supply is handled by the Jal Shakti Department. These arrangements operate alongside individual departmental plans and budgets covering the wider Palampur Sub-Division.

At the same time, Palampur faces constraints arising from its terrain, limited road space, seasonal rainfall and visitor-related demand. These pressures are visible in challenges associated with water-supply continuity, traffic congestion and parking, pedestrian access, drainage, wastewater management, solid waste management and the maintenance of public spaces. Increasing energy and water consumption, the gradual loss of green cover and the conversion of agricultural land into built-up surfaces add to the pressures on the town's environment and infrastructure.

The Master Plan must therefore connect future development with the capacity of essential services and the ecological systems that support them. Housing, commercial activity, public facilities and tourism infrastructure depend on reliable water supply, safe mobility, effective waste and wastewater management, accessible public spaces and functioning natural drainage systems. Protecting green spaces, old-growth trees, agricultural land, forest buffers and the traditional kuhl network should be considered alongside infrastructure provision. Improving these systems is central to Palampur's functioning as both a municipal centre and a service hub for surrounding settlements.

4.2 Context analysis

4.2.1 Municipal service area

The service requirements of the expanded area of the new Municipality extend beyond the central market and established urban core. Water supply, road connectivity, drainage, waste collection and access to public facilities must serve residential neighbourhoods, peripheral settlements and the town centre. The enlarged boundary also means that the Corporation's responsibilities intersect with a more varied landscape of agricultural plots, forest patches, agroforestry areas, water channels and settlement edges. Changes in land use and the management of these adjoining areas have implications for both municipal service delivery and the ecosystem services on which the town depends.

The Master Plan should consequently treat essential services as part of the wider municipal network rather than as isolated facilities serving individual development sites. Planning across the expanded area should recognise the relationship between settlements, infrastructure, agricultural land, forest buffers and natural drainage systems.

4.2.2 Water supply and water quality

The Jal Shakti Department's water-supply scheme describes a proposed increase in supply norms from 55 litres per capita per day under the earlier rural standard to 135 litres per capita per day under the urban standard. It identifies Neugal Khad as the source for one phase of the proposed upgrade and Awa Khad for another. The scheme also provides for a permanent intake structure and buffer storage to reduce interruptions associated with high monsoon flows.

Water-supply continuity is particularly important in Palampur because heavy flows in Neugal Khad can increase turbidity, introduce sand into the supply system and damage intake and pipeline infrastructure. These conditions can disrupt system operation during the monsoon. The proposed intake and storage measures address this operational challenge by seeking to improve the reliability of supply under seasonal conditions. Existing water-storage infrastructure, including local storage tanks in the Bundla area, also requires attention to the condition of filters and associated infrastructure.

A tap-water sample collected at Aima on 13 October 2026 and tested by the Jal Shakti Department's Water Testing Laboratory was reported on 15 October 2026. The report recorded turbidity of 1.00 NTU and a pH of 6.58. The reported results for the listed parameters were within the stated acceptable limits where results and comparison limits were provided. These results represent the sampled water at the stated location and time and should not be taken as a comprehensive assessment of water quality across the municipal area.

Water-supply planning must account for the expanded municipal service area, the transition from rural to urban supply standards and the operational risks associated with monsoon conditions. It must also consider increasing demand from households, institutions, commercial establishments and visitors. Catchments, springs, recharge areas and adjoining forest and agroforestry ecosystems influence water availability and should be considered as part of a broader approach to water security.

4.2.3 Roads, traffic and parking



Figure 4.1: *Main Market Road. Source: The Tribune, October 2026*

Palampur's roads serve residents, educational and research institutions, markets, public facilities and visitors travelling to destinations in the surrounding region. However, the town's built-up areas and limited road space constrain further widening. Improvements to the existing network have largely been undertaken within available space, while additional widening is difficult where land is unavailable and existing properties cannot readily be removed.

Congestion around the main market and on the approach towards Guggar places pressure on the town's central road network. Parking is a related concern. Facilities and works have been reported near the bus stand, West End and the old vegetable market, while a smaller parking facility near the lower Mini Secretariat/Matoshri area has been reported to be in use. The ADB-supported urban infrastructure initiative also includes parking near the old vegetable market, alongside other proposed improvements to roads and streets.

A bypass or alternative route has been discussed as a way to divert traffic from the town centre. Such connectivity could help distribute traffic beyond the central market, while improvements to parking and public-transport connections could reduce pressure on the existing road network. However, creating additional parking and road infrastructure can also affect green spaces and mature trees if land requirements are not assessed carefully.

Pedestrian movement is constrained by limited roadside space and existing development. Continuous footpaths are difficult to provide in some areas, and the shortage of places for sitting, walking and gathering affects the quality of the public realm. A connected network of pedestrian trails and tracks linking neighbourhoods with the core town could provide alternatives to short vehicle trips where terrain, safety and accessibility permit. These constraints make it important to consider pedestrians, public transport, parking, traffic management and the protection of existing green spaces together rather than relying on road widening alone.

4.2.4 Drainage, sewerage and wastewater

Palampur's sloping terrain supports drainage in many locations, but construction along natural drainage paths can restrict water flow and concentrate runoff downstream. Drainage capacity is therefore closely linked to the pattern of development and the continuity of drains, culverts, natural streams and khads. The traditional kuhl network is also an important part of the local water landscape and is being heavily polluted and encroached.

A sewerage system is under construction, but the public has no idea which wards are being covered and by when. The concern is that it may only cover the more urban, central wards and not the other areas of PMC.

4.2.5 Solid waste management



Figure 4.2: *Palampur garbage dumping site. Source: People's Archive of Rural India*

The expansion from seven to 15 wards has increased the volume of waste handled by the municipal system. Near-total door-to-door collection provides an important foundation, but limited processing capacity and inadequate source segregation constrain the system's ability to manage the full volume generated. The town's hill terrain also limits the availability of suitable land and increases transport and processing costs.

Our estimate of waste generated in Palampur is in sharp contrast to that of the H.P. State Pollution Control Board and municipal data, which reckon approximately 3.70–4.5 tonnes of municipal solid waste per day. During the peak tourist season, particularly from May to September, daily generation can rise to around 5–6 tonnes. Since specific official numbers are not available, we estimate it based on projections using the official data on waste generated in Dharamshala, estimated at 0.25 kg per capita per day (Sharma et al., 2019). Since the latest Census figures are not available, we use a projected population of 70,000 to 120,000 for Palampur. Assuming per capita waste generation of 0.25 kg, the town generates 17.5 to 30 tonnes of waste every day. Organic and biodegradable waste makes up the largest share (55% to 75%), followed by paper (13% to 25%) and plastics (5% to 10%). Reported municipal processing capacity is approximately 1–2 tonnes per day, leaving a substantial gap between waste generation and processing capacity.

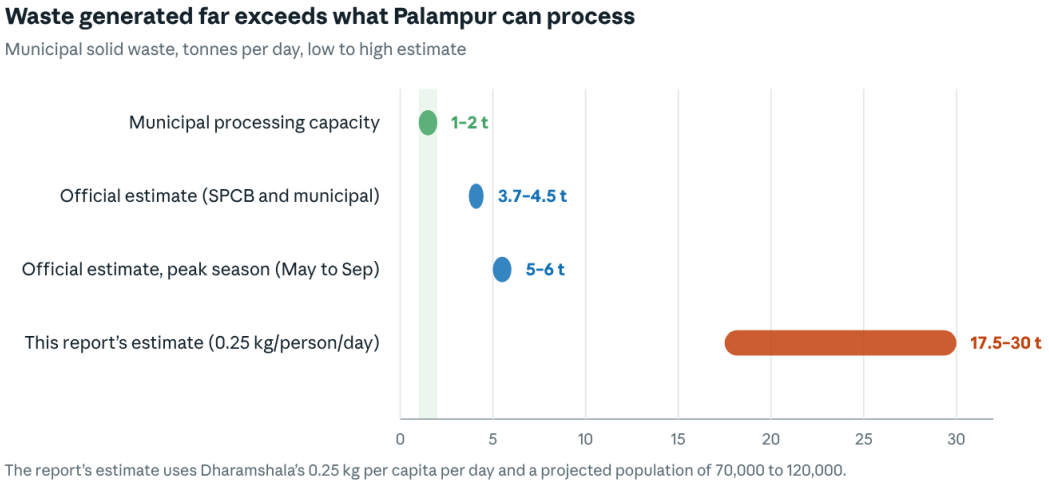

Figure 4.3: *Waste generation and processing capacity, tonnes per day, as reported in section 4.2.5*

Palampur's current solid waste management system faces significant operational challenges. Although the Municipal Corporation segregates and collects waste, the collected garbage is reportedly being sent to the existing dumpsite. The Material Recovery Facility (MRF), installed for segregating different waste streams, and the organic waste composting facility are currently non-functional, preventing the recovery and sale of recyclable materials and the production of compost. While plastic waste is reportedly transported to cement plants for co-processing, this has not been sufficient to arrest the accumulation of waste at the dumpsite. The situation is further aggravated by foul odour and leachate seepage, raising concerns about potential contamination of the surrounding land, the nearby kuhl and the Neugal River.

Note: "Kuhal" (more commonly spelled kuhl or kul) refers to a centuries-old, traditional, community-managed gravity-flow irrigation system found in Palampur and across the wider Kangra Valley.

Satellite-based assessment indicates that the dumpsite has expanded considerably since 2021, reaching a confirmed footprint of approximately 3,281 sq. m (0.328 hectares) in 2026. A pilot initiative involving PWEPF, Dhauladhar Healing Centre and the Municipal Corporation is exploring the conversion of legacy waste into commercially usable products, with an estimated processing capacity of 50 tonnes annually.

Formal municipal waste figures do not capture waste dumped in neighbouring forest areas, discarded into kuhls and other water channels, or burned in household backyards. These practices create localised pollution and environmental risks that are not fully reflected in municipal collection and processing data. Waste dumping near Neugal Khad has raised concerns about leachate and plastic pollution. The location of waste collection and treatment facilities close to a river or khad therefore requires particular attention to containment, runoff and potential contamination.

4.2.6 Stray animals and human-wildlife conflicts

The presence of stray and free-roaming animals within the Municipal Corporation (MC) area and its periphery has emerged as a significant civic, agricultural and public-safety concern in Palampur. The issue involves not only stray cattle but also the growing population of community dogs and monkeys. Addressing it requires a coordinated approach that balances public safety, animal welfare, agricultural livelihoods and the effective management of public spaces.

Stray cattle: causes and impacts

Changes in agricultural practices, mechanisation, the declining economic viability of indigenous bullocks and the preference for high-yielding crossbred cows have contributed to the abandonment of non-milking and male cattle. Prolonged infertility and the inability of some animals to conceive or resume milk production can further increase the financial burden on small and marginal farmers. Seasonal shortages of green fodder may also lead some owners to allow their cattle to roam for extended periods.



Figure 4.4: *Stray cattle menace. Source: The Tribune, 7 July 2026*

Each free-roaming animal problem needs its own response

	Stray cattle	Community dogs	Monkeys
CAUSE	Abandoned non-milking and male cattle; fodder shortages; animals from outside MC limits	About 800 dogs in the MC area, growing about 10% a year (to be validated)	Easy access to food; last sterilisation campaign before COVID-19
IMPACT	Road accidents on NH-154 and markets; crop damage in fringe farms	Public health and rabies risk; feeding and waste practices	Rising human–monkey conflict in homes, markets and public spaces
RESPONSE	Fertility camps, ₹1,200 a month support, community sanctuaries, tagging and CCTV	Animal Birth Control covering at least 80%, vaccination, ward-wise monitoring	Renewed sterilisation with Forest Department, no public feeding, better waste handling

Figure 4.5: *Causes, impacts and responses for free-roaming animals, summarised from section 4.2.6*

Another concern raised by local stakeholders is the possible movement of cattle into Palampur from areas outside the Municipal Corporation limits. In the absence of adequate surveillance at major entry points, identifying the origin and movement of such animals becomes difficult. The expansion of municipal boundaries has also brought a larger rural and peri-urban area under the Corporation's jurisdiction, making the management of free-roaming cattle more complex.

Cattle along arterial roads, the NH-154 corridor, market areas and narrow town lanes create traffic hazards, increase the risk of accidents and obstruct pedestrian and vehicular movement. In peripheral agricultural areas, animals entering cultivated fields damage standing crops, forcing farmers to invest in fencing or risk losing seasonal produce. The issue therefore affects both urban mobility and the viability of agriculture within the municipal fringe.

Past efforts to relocate cattle to gaushalas have faced constraints, particularly limited capacity and the recurring costs of housing and maintaining animals. Relocation alone may not provide a sustainable solution unless animal ownership, abandonment and the underlying reasons for cattle being left to roam are also addressed.

Measures for stray cattle management. The following interventions may be considered:

- **Animal health and reproductive support:** The Animal Husbandry Department should organise regular infertility and reproductive health camps to diagnose and treat reproductive disorders wherever possible. Artificial insemination programmes should also be strengthened to improve reproductive outcomes and support planned breeding practices.

- **Incentives for farmers:** The existing government assistance of ₹1,200 per month per animal maintained in a gaushala could be reviewed to assess the feasibility of extending similar financial support directly to eligible farmers who retain non-lactating or infertile cattle. Such assistance may be considered subject to animal identification, ownership verification and prescribed eligibility conditions, and could continue until the animal becomes pregnant or an alternative arrangement is made.
- **Community-managed cattle sanctuaries:** Given the high capital and recurring costs associated with conventional gaushalas, the feasibility of establishing community-managed cattle sanctuaries on suitable forest or community land may be explored, subject to applicable legal and environmental clearances. Such facilities would require adequate fencing, temporary shelters, drinking water, fodder arrangements and veterinary care.
- **Animal identification and movement monitoring:** A systematic animal identification and registration mechanism should be considered to establish ownership and trace the origin of free-roaming cattle. Surveillance at major entry points, including the feasibility of CCTV coverage, could help monitor animal movement and discourage abandonment.
- **Strengthening enforcement:** The Municipal Corporation, in coordination with the Animal Husbandry Department and local panchayats, should develop mechanisms to identify owners who abandon cattle and ensure that animal welfare and public-safety requirements are addressed.

Community dogs: population management and public health

The community dog population is another area requiring sustained attention. Stakeholder inputs indicate an estimated population of approximately 800 community dogs within the MC area, with an annual increase reportedly around 10%. These figures require validation through a systematic population survey, but they indicate the need for a structured and sustained intervention.

- The Animal Birth Control (ABC) programme should be strengthened, with a target of covering at least 80% of the dog population, as suggested by stakeholders. This would require regular sterilisation, anti-rabies vaccination, systematic identification and ward-wise monitoring. Reliable population estimates should be established and periodically updated to assess coverage, identify gaps and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.
- The Municipal Corporation should coordinate with veterinary authorities and animal-welfare organisations to ensure adequate implementation capacity, follow-up care and humane treatment. Public awareness on responsible feeding, waste disposal and safe interaction with community dogs should complement these measures.

Monkey population and human–wildlife conflict

The increasing presence of monkeys in residential, commercial and public areas has also been raised as a concern. Although reliable population data may not currently be available, the reported increase in human–monkey interactions warrants assessment and timely intervention.

Stakeholder inputs indicate that the last sterilisation campaign may have been conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. The current status and effectiveness of earlier interventions should be verified with the Forest Department. A renewed and sustained population-management programme, including scientifically monitored sterilisation wherever appropriate and legally permissible, should be considered in coordination with the Forest Department and other competent authorities.

This should be supported by measures to discourage public feeding, improve solid-waste management and prevent easy access to food in residential and commercial areas. Public awareness and appropriate response mechanisms are also important to reduce human–monkey conflict while ensuring the welfare of animals.

Institutional coordination and long-term management

The management of stray cattle, community dogs and monkeys cannot be addressed by the Municipal Corporation in isolation. It requires coordinated action involving the Municipal Corporation, Animal Husbandry Department, Forest Department, local farmers, gaushala operators, NGOs, veterinary professionals and community representatives.

The Master Plan should recognise free-roaming animal management as part of urban governance, public health, road safety and environmental management. A coordinated strategy should include:

- Baseline surveys and periodic population assessments for cattle, community dogs and monkeys.
- Ward-wise identification of locations experiencing frequent animal-related incidents, traffic obstruction, crop damage or human–animal conflict.

- Clear institutional responsibilities for animal identification, sterilisation, vaccination, veterinary care, relocation and monitoring.
- Adequate and sustainable funding for animal-care facilities and preventive interventions.
- Community awareness programmes addressing abandonment, responsible animal ownership, feeding practices and waste management.
- Periodic monitoring of outcomes, including reductions in road incidents, crop damage and human–animal conflict.

Planning implications

The growing presence of free-roaming animals is not merely a matter of nuisance or animal control. It reflects wider changes in agricultural practices, livestock economics, urban expansion, waste management and institutional capacity. Palampur therefore requires a humane, data-driven and long-term management framework that addresses the causes of animal abandonment and population growth rather than relying solely on relocation or short-term interventions. Such an approach is essential to protect public safety, support agricultural livelihoods, safeguard animal welfare and improve the overall quality of life within the Municipal Corporation area and its surrounding settlements.

4.2.7 Public facilities and civic amenities



Figure 4.6: *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle (RRR) Centre, Palampur. Source: The Tribune, April 2025*

Palampur's role as a regional service centre brings together educational and research institutions, health facilities, markets, public offices and other civic amenities. Their accessibility is important not only for municipal residents but also for people travelling from surrounding settlements.

Public spaces also support everyday social life. Seating areas, parks, playgrounds, community grounds, public toilets and safe walking routes enable residents to access amenities and gather within their neighbourhoods. Limited roadside space and the shortage of places for sitting, walking and gathering make the quality and distribution of these facilities important planning considerations.

Green spaces contribute to the town's environmental quality and liveability. However, the gradual removal of mature trees and the conversion of open areas to parking or other construction can reduce shade and diminish the continuity of urban green cover. The replacement of old-growth trees is not immediate: newly planted trees take time to provide comparable canopy, habitat and microclimatic benefits. The loss of vegetation, combined with the conversion of agricultural and open land into concrete or tarmac surfaces, may increase local heat and alter the town's established microclimate.

Pedestrian routes should connect residential areas with markets, schools, colleges, health facilities, bus stops, parks and public offices. Accessible crossings, ramps, lighting and resting places are particularly important for children, older people and people with limited mobility. A connected network of trails and tracks could improve

access to the town centre without requiring every journey to be made by car, where safe and practical routes can be provided.

Public facilities and pedestrian infrastructure should be considered together so that essential services are accessible and public spaces contribute to the everyday usability of the town. The location and design of new facilities should also account for existing trees, green spaces, agricultural land and the wider ecological setting.

4.2.8 Green cover, agricultural land and ecological buffers

Palampur's identity and environmental quality are closely associated with its trees, tea gardens, agricultural plots, forested slopes and surrounding Himalayan landscape. The expanded municipal area includes a broader and more diverse buffer adjoining its boundaries. Forests, agroforestry systems and agricultural land within this wider setting provide ecosystem services that influence water regulation, soil stability, biodiversity and local climatic conditions.

These changes also interact with growing demand for water, energy, transport and municipal services. As built-up areas expand, the loss of permeable and vegetated surfaces can affect stormwater infiltration and increase runoff. Changes to forest buffers and agroforestry areas may also affect the ecosystem services on which the town and adjoining settlements depend.

The condition of green spaces, old trees, agricultural plots and forest buffers should therefore be considered alongside the allocation of land for development. The future management of parks, eco-parks and bio-parks, as well as the protection of natural vegetation around the municipal boundary, is relevant to maintaining Palampur's environmental character. The specific extent, condition and rate of change of these areas require systematic mapping and monitoring.

4.2.9 Substance abuse in Palampur

- Himachal Pradesh is facing an escalating drug crisis that is endangering the health, safety and future of its youth, disrupting family structures and eroding the social fabric. The intersection of unemployment, lack of constructive local engagement and substance abuse has occasionally manifested in law-and-order issues.
- Perhaps the most critical and widely discussed challenge facing the youth in Palampur and surrounding rural areas is the rising tide of drug addiction. Law enforcement agencies have noted that drug traffickers have aggressively spread their tentacles into the Palampur region. Anti-social elements have established local networks to target school and college students.
- The state has witnessed an alarming rise in the use of heroin ("chitta"), synthetic drugs, cannabis and opium. Increasing overdose deaths, injecting drug use, arrests under the NDPS Act and widespread stigma are further compounded by poor access to rehabilitation services. Recent reports highlight that the situation is becoming particularly worse in rural areas of the Palampur Sub-Division, where monitoring is more difficult.

4.3 Recommended actions

Services and civic amenities

The Master Plan should consider the following recommendations for each service area.

Table 4.1: Master Plan direction by service area

Service / amenity	Master Plan direction
Stormwater drainage and waterlogging	Inventory drains, culverts, natural khads and flow paths; identify bottlenecks and locations where construction restricts drainage. Keep drainage corridors functional and integrate maintenance with road and utility works.
Footpaths, crossings and universal access	Create continuous and safe pedestrian routes linking homes, markets, schools, colleges, health facilities, bus stops, parks and public offices. Include accessible crossings, ramps, lighting, resting places and safe routes for children and older people.
Health, education and emergency services	Map schools, colleges, primary and secondary health facilities, ambulance/fire response, police services and their catchments. Identify underserved neighbourhoods, safe access routes and sites needed for future facilities.
Parks, playgrounds and public spaces	Inventory parks, playgrounds, community grounds, seating areas, public toilets and accessible open space. Improve distribution across wards and protect existing green spaces and view corridors.

Service / amenity	Master Plan direction
Street lighting, safety and public realm	Prioritise lighting and safe design around transit stops, markets, institutional areas, walking routes and public spaces. Use community feedback and incident data to identify priority locations.
Digital and citizen-facing municipal services	Provide clear channels to report service failures, track complaints, publish project status and communicate disruptions. Use a shared service register and ward-level dashboards to improve transparency and accountability.

Specific recommendations

1. Water supply and water security

1. Map household and institutional water-supply coverage, supply hours, water quality, seasonal shortages, storage and network losses across the municipal area.
2. Plan water-supply capacity in line with urban service standards, projected population growth, institutional requirements and seasonal visitor demand.
3. Prioritise the proposed intake, storage and distribution-network improvements needed to reduce disruptions during high monsoon flows.
4. Assess and refurbish filters and associated infrastructure at local water-storage facilities, including those in the Bundla area, where required.
5. Coordinate with the Jal Shakti and Forest departments to account for the condition of catchments, springs, recharge areas and adjoining forest and agroforestry ecosystems in water-security planning.

2. Roads, traffic, parking and pedestrian infrastructure

1. Assess road condition, congestion, junctions, bus stops, parking supply, loading areas and emergency access to identify priority improvements.
2. Assess bypass and alternative-connectivity options to reduce pressure on the central market and distribute traffic more effectively.
3. Improve parking provision through appropriately located facilities and connections to public transport, taking account of land and space constraints and avoiding unnecessary loss of mature trees and green spaces.
4. Identify feasible stretches for continuous footpaths, accessible crossings, ramps, lighting and resting places linking residential areas with markets, institutions and public facilities.
5. Identify accident-prone locations and prioritise corrective measures to improve road safety for motorists, pedestrians and other road users.
6. Incorporate drainage and slope-protection measures into road improvement works, particularly along stretches affected by recurring damage or landslide incidents.
7. Assess the feasibility of pedestrian-priority streets and traffic-restricted areas to improve walkability and create more usable public spaces.
8. Identify opportunities to develop a connected network of safe pedestrian trails and tracks linking neighbourhoods and surrounding settlements with the core town, reducing dependence on vehicles for suitable short journeys.
9. Assess the feasibility of a regular, affordable and accessible local public-transport service using small, eco-friendly 4–6 seater vehicles. The service could connect residential wards and peripheral settlements with the main market, bus stand, hospitals, educational and research institutions and other key public facilities. Routes, frequency, fares, vehicle technology, accessibility and operating arrangements should be planned in consultation with residents and relevant transport authorities, with attention to financial viability, road conditions and passenger safety.

3. Drainage, sewerage and wastewater

1. Maintain the continuity and functioning of drains, culverts, natural khads and other drainage paths, preventing construction and infrastructure works from obstructing water flow.
2. Map the existing kuhl network, assess its condition and identify opportunities to restore and maintain its functioning. Prevent encroachment and the entry of solid waste and untreated wastewater into these channels.
3. Integrate drainage maintenance with road and utility works to reduce waterlogging and recurring infrastructure damage.
4. Expand sewerage and sanitation planning in line with population growth and seasonal visitor demand.

5. Assess liquid-waste generation and disposal practices at marriage halls, car-washing centres, automobile workshops, commercial establishments and settlements along nalahs and rivulets.
6. Plan safe wastewater and faecal-sludge management, including appropriate treatment and disposal, to prevent untreated discharge into streams and other natural water systems.
7. Incorporate drainage and slope-stabilisation measures into infrastructure improvements to reduce disruption during heavy rainfall.

4. Solid waste management

1. Expand waste-processing capacity to address the gap between daily waste generation and current processing capacity, including peak-season demand.
2. Assess and develop a centralised Material Recovery Facility alongside decentralised composting and existing waste-processing arrangements.
3. Strengthen source segregation and reliable door-to-door collection, covering residential areas, commercial establishments and visitor-facing businesses.
4. Identify and address waste dumping and burning outside formal collection systems, including in neighbouring forest areas, household backyards, kuhls and other water channels.
5. Improve the handling of residual waste and prevent open dumping and disposal into rivers, khads and kuhls.
6. Assess the long-term suitability of the existing waste collection and treatment site near Neugal Khad. Where relocation is feasible, plan a phased transition to a more suitable site away from the riverbank. If relocation is not feasible in the near term, assess the need for appropriate containment, boundary protection, drainage controls and bio-remediation measures to reduce the risk of pollution.
7. Undertake scientific remediation of the legacy waste dumpsite, which has expanded to a confirmed footprint of approximately 3,281 sq. m (0.328 hectares) as of 2026. Prevent further expansion through clearly demarcated site boundaries and regulated disposal, and provide green buffers around existing and proposed waste-processing and disposal facilities.
8. Strengthen resource recovery through composting, recycling and appropriate co-processing arrangements for non-recyclable waste.
9. Build on existing initiatives, including Project Hilldaari, CSIR–IHBT collaboration and the Aima Panchayat collection model, to support waste-management approaches suited to mountain terrain.
10. Provide appropriate arrangements for construction and demolition waste, including safe reuse and disposal.
11. Pilot zero-waste demonstration wards, as set out in section 2.5, combining household segregation, decentralised composting, dry-waste collection, repair and reuse, dignified work and protective equipment for waste workers, and public reporting.

5. Stray cattle and public safety

1. Develop a coordinated stray-cattle management system for the expanded municipal area, recognising the limits of gaushala capacity and the recurring costs of shelter-based management.
2. Introduce identification and registration measures for cattle, where feasible, to help establish ownership and support accountability when animals are abandoned or allowed to roam.
3. Establish a process to trace owners of cattle found roaming on roads or damaging crops, issue warnings and apply fines in accordance with applicable rules where owners fail to comply.
4. Communicate cattle-management rules and penalties through a sustained public-awareness programme, alongside outreach on animal welfare and responsible ownership.
5. Assess the capacity and operating requirements of existing gaushalas and other cattle-care facilities before relying on relocation as the principal response.
6. Address the effects of stray cattle on traffic safety, pedestrian movement and crop damage in peripheral agricultural areas.
7. Assess reported concerns relating to stray dogs and monkeys, identify affected locations and determine appropriate responses in coordination with relevant authorities and animal-welfare requirements.

6. Green cover, agricultural land and public spaces

1. Map existing parks, public green spaces, mature trees, tree-lined streets, agricultural plots, tea gardens, forest patches and ecological buffers within and around the municipal area.
2. Identify and protect important green spaces and mature trees when planning new construction, parking facilities, road improvements and public infrastructure.
3. Establish appropriate procedures for assessing the loss of trees and green spaces arising from development proposals, including feasible alternatives to removal and suitable replacement planting where removal is unavoidable.
4. Plan long-term tree replacement and maintenance, recognising that newly planted trees take time to provide the canopy and ecological functions of mature trees.
5. Assess the conversion of agricultural land and open areas to built-up or paved uses and consider the implications for local climate, drainage, landscape character and agricultural livelihoods when allocating land for future development.
6. Identify opportunities to create additional neighbourhood parks, shaded public spaces, walking routes and recreational areas, prioritising locations where access to such amenities is limited.
7. Prepare a management approach for existing and proposed eco-parks and bio-parks, including maintenance responsibilities, protection of natural vegetation, visitor management and environmental education.
8. Consider the ecological buffer adjoining the municipal boundary as part of wider land-use planning, recognising the role of forests and agroforestry systems in providing ecosystem services.
9. Encourage schools, colleges, universities and research institutions to participate in environmental awareness, tree care, waste reduction and climate-resilience initiatives.
10. Track changes in green cover, tree loss, agricultural land conversion and built-up surfaces over time to inform future planning decisions.

7. Substance abuse

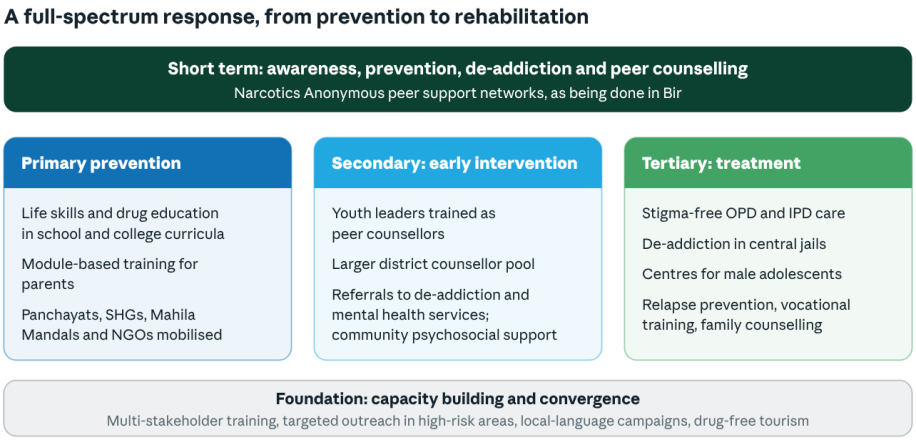

Figure 4.7: *The substance-abuse response at a glance, summarised from recommendation 7*

Short-term

Provide a full-spectrum response and support:

1. Awareness and education
2. Prevention
3. De-addiction
4. Counselling through Narcotics Anonymous peer support networks (as being done in Bir)

Primary prevention

1. **School and college-based programmes:** integrate structured life skills and drug education into curricula (avoiding one-time sessions). Adopt peer-led and mentor-teacher models.

2. **Parental engagement:** regular module-based training for parents to recognise risks and support children.
3. **Community mobilisation:** engage Panchayati Raj Institutions, women's Self Help Groups, Mahila Mandals and NGOs for awareness and early risk identification.

Secondary prevention (early intervention)

1. **Peer counsellors:** train youth leaders to identify and refer at-risk peers.
2. **Professional counselling:** expand district-level counsellor pools.
3. **Strengthen referrals:** link communities to de-addiction and mental health services.
4. **Psychosocial support:** establish community-based mental health initiatives.

Capacity building and convergence

Implement a multi-stakeholder training plan to ensure all key actors are equipped to contribute to drug demand reduction:

1. Training for MLAs, policy makers, PRI and ULB representatives, school principals and youth leaders.
2. Specialised modules for JJB members, DCPUs, CWC staff and child protection teams.
3. Inter-departmental training for:
   - Health (including doctors, nurses, counsellors, health educators and Community Health Officers)
   - Education (teachers, peer leaders)
   - Women and Child Development, Labour, Transport, Excise, Panchayati Raj Institutions, DYSSO
4. Mobilisation of peer leaders via Youth Clubs, National Service Scheme/National Cadet Corps and Red Ribbon Clubs.
5. Women-led initiatives such as Mothers Against Addiction (MAA) through Mahila Mandals.
6. Institutional integration with the Himachal Institute of Public Administration (HIPA), SCERT and PRTIs for curriculum-based training.
7. Establishment of District/Sub-Division Drug Demand Reduction Committees.

Medium-term: tertiary prevention (treatment and rehabilitation)

1. **Expand treatment services:** upgrade OPD/IPD facilities, ensuring stigma-free access.
2. **Jail-based interventions:** launch de-addiction programmes in central jails.
3. **Child-specific facilities:** establish dedicated centres for male adolescents.
4. **Reintegration support:** relapse prevention, vocational training and family counselling.
5. **Workforce training:** upskill medical officers and counsellors in addiction medicine.

Targeted interventions

1. Risk profiling and mapping of high-, medium- and low-burden areas.
2. Focused outreach in high-risk geographies (border blocks, tribal belts, urban slums).
3. Tailored interventions for migrants, street children and marginalised groups.

Special focus interventions

1. **Local-language digital campaigns:** WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and community-radio based IEC content.
2. **Migrant and transit area outreach:** information desks and mobile counselling units at key congregation areas, worksites and slums.
3. **Drug-free tourism campaign:** sensitisation of tourism stakeholders and visitors via posters, kiosks and awareness material.

Chapter 5: Environment and natural systems

Key messages

- Forests, springs, khads and kuhls form one connected landscape that extends beyond municipal limits.
- Ban Oak density has fallen while Chir pine has risen, so native-species regeneration is a priority.
- A Neugal River Basin Plan extending upstream to Menjha, and revival of payment for ecosystem services, are recommended.
- The Master Plan and the next Forest Working Plan should be aligned.

5.1 Strategic overview

Palampur's environmental systems extend beyond the built-up area. Forests, springs, streams, agricultural land and tea gardens form a connected landscape that supports local livelihoods, the town's visual character, biodiversity and water security. Forest management and spring mapping are organised at the Forest Division level, while municipal services and development controls operate within urban boundaries. The Bohal Spring Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) initiative from almost a decade back provides an example of linking source protection with drinking-water security. Environmental conditions in and around Palampur are therefore closely connected to land management, water services and coordination across administrative boundaries.

While Palampur is affected by the management and use of natural resources by upstream stakeholders, its own use and abuse of these resources within its precincts affects the many villages and areas downstream. For integrated planning and management of these interconnected natural systems, two planning zones should be considered:

- **Palampur Municipal Corporation (PMC) area:** This area contains internal sub-zones and environmental hotspots that need to be mapped. While PMC has primary responsibility for municipal planning, common and forested lands, the Neugal River, khads and kuhls require technical support from the Forest Department (FD) and other relevant agencies. Coordination is also required within the core municipal area for the management of old-growth trees and existing green spaces.
- **Buffer zone:** The forest areas surrounding PMC are primarily managed by the FD through its Working Plans. However, these areas also require coordination with the PMC on littering, waste management, tourism development and land-use pressures. As rural Gram Panchayats fall within this wider zone, planning should be undertaken jointly with them. Agricultural land, agroforestry systems and forest buffers should be recognised as part of this landscape rather than treated as vacant land available for conversion.

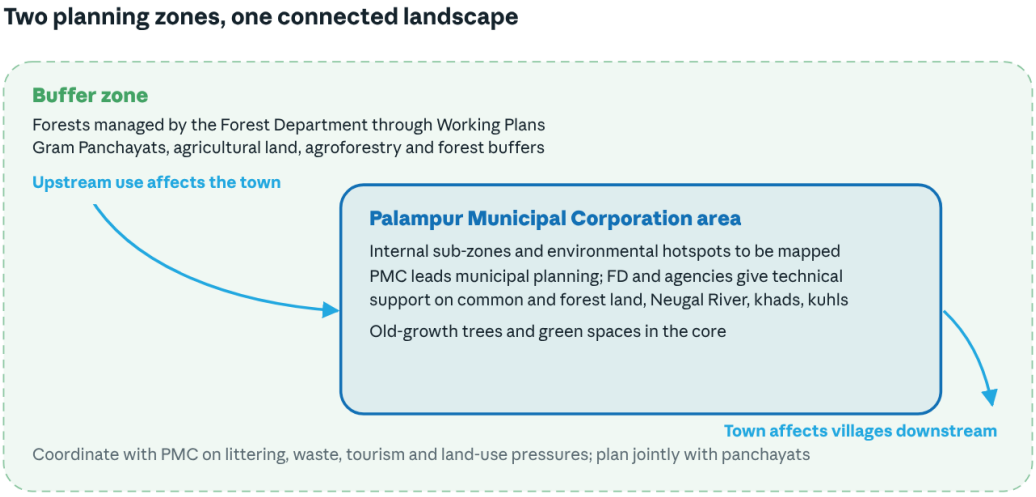

Figure 5.1: *The two planning zones proposed in section 5.1*

The Master Plan should establish a coordinated approach across these zones, linking forest conservation, water-source protection, agricultural landscape management, biodiversity and nature-based tourism. The next Forest Working Plan provides an opportunity to translate these shared priorities into specific management prescriptions, annual actions and agreed responsibilities.

5.2 Context analysis

Palampur lies within a landscape of forests, tea gardens, agricultural land, streams and the Dhauladhar mountain setting. The Revised Working Plan for the Forests of Palampur Forest Division, Volume I, provides a framework for managing the wider Forest Division through designated working circles and management prescriptions. Its planning period, 2010–11 to 2024–25, has ended and provides a historical basis for understanding forest management.

Research on temporal changes in tree-species composition covers 190 forest compartments across the Droh, Baijnath and Palampur ranges, covering a total area of 2,861.25 hectares. It examines changes in forest composition across different forest categories, including delimited and undelimited protected forests, unclassed forests and cooperative society forests. These categories and management arrangements extend beyond the Municipal Corporation boundary.

The findings underline the importance of considering both forest conditions and the wider landscape when preparing Palampur's Master Plan. The Forest Working Plan and the tree-species study provide complementary evidence: the former documents management approaches, while the latter examines changes in tree composition. Neither should be treated as a complete assessment of present-day conditions across all forests within and around PMC. The implementation status and outcomes of the prescriptions in the previous Working Plan also need to be established before determining which measures should be continued, revised or replaced.

5.2.1 Forests and biodiversity

Forest cover and changes in tree species composition



Figure 5.2: *Mixed forest on the slopes around Palampur. Source: to be confirmed*

The tree-species study identifies Chir (*Pinus roxburghii*) and Ban Oak (*Quercus leucotrichophora*) as important species in the respective Chir and Ban Oak Working Circles. Its findings show an increase in Chir density from 215 to 285 individuals per hectare across the assessment periods. In contrast, Ban Oak density declined from 93 to 55 individuals per hectare between the assessment periods 1981–82/1995–96 and 2010–11/2024–25.

The study examines 17 compartments covering 465.07 hectares in the Baijnath range for its Ban Oak assessment, including forests around Andretta, Bhagpur and Kandbari. It associates the decline with heavy lopping for fodder, hacking for fuel, grazing, fire and other forms of damage. It also notes that, on warmer aspects and ridges, Chir may replace degraded Ban Oak forests.

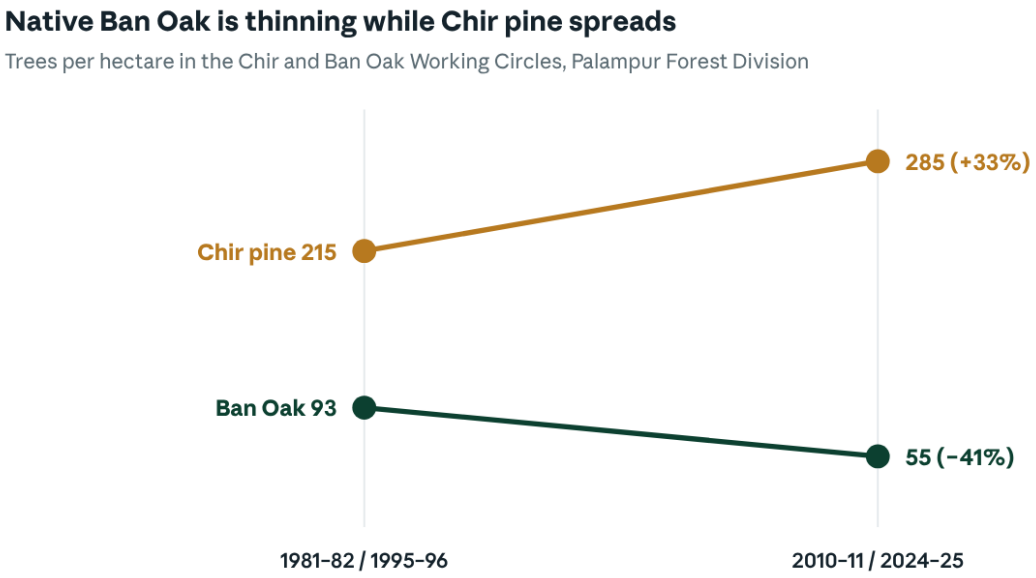

Figure 5.3: *Change in tree density. Source: Bharti et al. (2019), tree-species study of Palampur Forest Division*

These findings highlight the importance of species-specific management, regeneration and protection. The increase in Chir density should not be interpreted as an improvement in overall forest health, particularly where it is associated with the decline of native broadleaved species. The next Forest Working Plan should therefore examine the feasibility of gradually converting suitable conifer-dominated Chir pine forests into mixed forests with native species, based on site conditions and ecological suitability. Such conversion would need to be planned over the long term, with appropriate regeneration and protection measures.

The results relate to the areas and periods assessed and should not be generalised to every forest in Palampur. Updated inventories and field assessments are required to establish present-day conditions and identify locations where restoration is appropriate.

Forest degradation, fires and regeneration

The previous Working Plan emphasised forest protection, regeneration and the prevention of degradation. Forest fires, particularly in Chir pine forests, remain an important management concern. Other issues at the forest–urban interface include waste in forest areas, encroachment and human–wildlife encounters. Open grazing in forest areas also hinders natural regeneration, especially of native broadleaved species. This can indirectly contribute to the dominance of Chir pine, which is less affected by open grazing and may have an advantage in areas where other species are degraded.

Forest inventory, species composition, growing stock and regeneration need to be reassessed to identify areas requiring intervention. The review should distinguish between activities proposed, activities actually undertaken and outcomes achieved. This will provide a basis for revising management prescriptions and identifying gaps in implementation.

Green spaces and ecological corridors

Forested areas, common lands, river corridors and other natural spaces form part of Palampur's wider ecological landscape. Development around the municipal boundary can place pressure on these areas, particularly where land ownership and forest classification differ. Within the municipal area, old-growth trees, tree-lined streets and existing green spaces also require attention as development and infrastructure improvements place pressure on available land.

PMC and the FD should coordinate on the protection and management of existing green areas, including old-growth trees within the core municipal area. Opportunities to support greening on suitable government land should also be identified. Environmental planning should consider the relationship between built-up areas and the surrounding landscape rather than treating forest protection as an issue confined to formally designated forest land.



Figure 5.4: *Forested hills and settlements at the edge of Palampur. Source: to be confirmed*

Ecological corridors connecting forest patches, river systems and other natural areas should be considered in land-use planning. Their continuity is important for maintaining habitat connectivity and reducing fragmentation caused by development.

5.2.2 Water systems and environmental health

Springs, streams and groundwater recharge

Springs, streams, khads and kuhls are important elements of Palampur's natural systems. The municipal water-supply scheme identifies Neugal Khad as an important water source, while the Bohal Spring initiative links the protection of an upstream source with the town's drinking-water needs.

During the October 2026 assessment, the Forest Department reported that 223 springs had been mapped across the Forest Division using GIS coordinates. Historical survey sheets from the 1970s and 1980s may help identify springs that have dried up. Further work on recharge zones and micro-watersheds is also important for understanding the relationship between forest condition and water availability.

Kuhls and traditional water systems

Palampur's kuhl network is an important, centuries-old traditional water system that supports domestic and irrigation needs across the town and adjoining areas (further reading on the kuhls of Palampur). These channels connect communities and agricultural land with local water sources and form part of the wider natural drainage and water-management system.

Littering, solid-waste disposal, untreated wastewater and physical obstruction are affecting the water quantity and quality of kuhls. Concretisation and construction along their routes is also disrupting their continuity. These channels serve users downstream, some, like the Mian Kripal Chand Kuhal, irrigating fields more than 20 km away, so their condition has huge implications.

The management of kuhls requires attention to both physical maintenance and community awareness. From being fully community managed, the kuhls have become the responsibility of the Jal Shakti Department, and this has added to the problems. The kuhls have been concretised and turned into wastewater disposal systems in urban parts of Palampur, disrespected and misused by the communities living alongside.



Figure 5.5: *A concretised kuhl channel. Source: to be confirmed*

Water pollution, concretisation and drainage

Environmental pressures on water systems arise from development and activities across the wider landscape. Concretisation can reduce infiltration and increase direct runoff towards streams, while litter and waste can affect the environmental quality of natural water systems. Waste in forest areas and concerns around the Neugal Khad corridor also underline the need to consider the environmental effects of land use and visitor activity. Activities along the Neugal and Awa Khad corridors are affecting water quality, aquatic habitats and downstream users.



Figure 5.6: *Waste being dumped near a water course. Source: to be confirmed*

Restoration of natural water systems

The planning process should identify important springs, streams, khads, kuhls and their recharge areas for protection and restoration. Historical records, existing spring maps and field verification can help establish priorities. Forest management should also account for the role of vegetation in protecting slopes, conserving moisture, maintaining soil stability and supporting the ecological conditions that sustain streams and rivers.

5.2.3 Development pressures and ecological protection

Urban expansion and habitat fragmentation

Development pressures extend beyond the municipal boundary into surrounding forested and buffer areas. Locations around Bundla, Bindiyaravasini Temple and Banuri have been identified as areas where development and forest-related concerns intersect. Differences between official land classification and the visible character of land can also complicate planning and protection.

Agriculture, agroforestry and nature-based farming in the buffer zone

Agricultural land, tea gardens and agroforestry systems contribute to Palampur's landscape character, livelihoods and ecological functioning. However, agricultural plots in the buffer and outer areas of PMC face pressure from conversion to residential, commercial and other non-agricultural uses. Such changes can fragment the agricultural landscape and reduce vegetated and permeable surfaces.

Planning for the buffer zone should recognise agriculture as an important land use and livelihood, rather than treating agricultural plots as vacant land awaiting development. Agroforestry and nature-based farming practices should be promoted where suitable, with an emphasis on maintaining tree cover, soil health and ecological connectivity.

Saurabh Kalia Eco Park and nature-based tourism

Saurabh Kalia Eco Park is an important local attraction and requires a dedicated planning and management approach. Its potential extends beyond recreation and tourism: it can also contribute to environmental awareness, biodiversity conservation and the protection of the Neugal River basin.

The Eco Park should also be considered in relation to the wider Neugal River basin. Its management could support conservation awareness and encourage responsible visitor behaviour, while avoiding activities that place additional pressure on the river, vegetation and surrounding habitats.

Integration with forest and land-use planning

The Master Plan and Forest Working Plan should be aligned so that development decisions and forest-management measures support shared environmental priorities. The new Forest Working Plan under preparation provides an opportunity to incorporate mutually agreed actions from the Master Plan, potentially through an annexure.

The Forest Department's role in managing the wider landscape should be complemented by greater community participation. Local communities, Gram Panchayats, farmers, educational institutions and civil-society organisations can contribute to forest protection, regeneration, monitoring and responsible tourism. Such approaches will require agreed roles, capacity building and suitable funding rather than relying only on existing departmental project budgets.

5.3 Recommended actions

1. Strengthen forest management and biodiversity conservation

1. Align the Palampur Master Plan with the upcoming Forest Working Plan and incorporate mutually agreed actions into it as an annexure.
2. Assess the feasibility of gradually converting suitable Chir pine-dominated forests into mixed forests with native species, based on site conditions.
3. Undertake updated forest inventories to assess tree composition, growing stock and natural regeneration.
4. Identify degraded forest areas and prioritise native species regeneration and protection.
5. Address forest degradation caused by fires, open grazing, lopping and fuelwood extraction.
6. Strengthen forest fire prevention, monitoring and coordination between the Forest Department, PMC and local communities.

2. Protect green spaces and ecological corridors

1. Identify and map existing green spaces, common lands, old-growth trees and environmentally sensitive areas within PMC.

2. Identify suitable government land for additional tree planting and urban greening.
3. Protect ecological corridors connecting forest patches, river systems and other natural areas.
4. Coordinate with surrounding Gram Panchayats to manage forest and common lands in the buffer zone.
5. Prevent development that leads to fragmentation of forests and other natural habitats.

3. Protect springs and water sources

1. Integrate springshed mapping with forest management and water-resource planning.
2. Compare historical spring records with current GIS mapping to identify springs that have dried up or require restoration.
3. Undertake field verification of mapped springs and identify priority locations for protection.
4. Share existing GIS information and aquifer studies between relevant departments.
5. Identify and protect recharge zones and micro-watersheds that contribute to water availability.
6. Include Awa Khad in the wider assessment of water-source protection and ecological management.
7. Explore Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) approaches, building on the Bohal initiative, to support communities and villages that protect important water-recharge areas, in coordination with PMC, the Forest Department and relevant local institutions.

4. Restore and protect traditional kuhls

1. Map the traditional kuhl network and identify sections affected by physical obstruction, concretisation and construction.
2. Prevent littering, solid-waste disposal and untreated wastewater from entering kuhls.
3. Strengthen monitoring and enforcement against dumping, encroachment and activities that obstruct or pollute the channels.
4. Promote community awareness and participation in the protection of traditional water systems.
5. Coordinate with the Jal Shakti Department and local communities to improve the management of kuhls.

5. Improve water quality and river-corridor management

1. Prepare a dedicated Neugal River Basin Plan covering the river through Palampur and extending upstream at least to Menjha.
2. Assess land use, forest conditions, water quality, waste disposal, extraction activities, biodiversity and tourism-related pressures along the river corridor.
3. Identify vulnerable locations along the Neugal and Awa Khad corridors and prioritise measures to protect water quality and aquatic habitats.
4. Integrate drainage planning, waste management and land-use controls to reduce pollution and runoff into natural water systems.
5. Protect natural drainage channels and prevent construction or activities that disrupt their continuity.

6. Manage development pressures in the buffer zone

1. Map environmentally sensitive areas, forested land, common land and locations where development may affect natural systems.
2. Coordinate with the Forest Department and surrounding Gram Panchayats to manage development pressures across administrative boundaries.
3. Prevent the conversion of forest land in the buffer zone, in accordance with applicable forest and environmental regulations.
4. Recognise agricultural land, tea gardens and agroforestry systems as important land uses and livelihoods.
5. Promote agroforestry and nature-based farming to maintain tree cover, soil health and ecological connectivity.

6. Examine mechanisms to discourage the conversion of productive agricultural land, including the proposed 10% ceiling on conversion of a farmer's agricultural holding, subject to legal and feasibility assessment.

7. Develop Saurabh Kalia Eco Park

1. Identify suitable nature-based tourism and recreational activities while protecting the ecological character of the site.
2. Identify areas requiring protection and establish suitable limits for visitor activities.
3. Provide for visitor movement, waste management, interpretation facilities and maintenance responsibilities.
4. Integrate Eco Park planning with the wider Neugal River Basin Plan.

8. Strengthen institutional coordination and community participation

1. Establish a coordinated planning approach between PMC, the Forest Department, Jal Shakti Department and surrounding Gram Panchayats.
2. Share existing GIS data and environmental information to support common planning and monitoring.
3. Define departmental responsibilities for forest protection, springshed management, fire response, waste management and green-space protection.
4. Involve local communities, farmers, educational institutions and civil-society organisations in forest protection, regeneration and environmental monitoring.
5. Provide capacity building and suitable funding to support community participation and implementation.

Chapter 6: Institutional and governance dimensions

Key messages

- Land use, forests, water, roads and tourism are managed by different agencies with overlapping responsibilities.
- A joint coordination mechanism, shared GIS data and clarity on land ownership and permissions are the first steps.
- City-twinning and learning partnerships, including with Indore and Chandigarh, can speed up learning.

6.1 Strategic overview

Palampur's development depends on coordination between institutions responsible for urban planning, forest management, water supply, roads, tourism and rural development. These responsibilities extend across different administrative boundaries, while the town's development challenges often connect multiple sectors.

The old Development Plan for Palampur and the Forest Working Plan for Palampur Forest Division provide separate planning frameworks for land use and forest management. Water-supply arrangements and the Bohal Spring initiative further demonstrate the connection between municipal services and the surrounding landscape. Effective implementation of the Master Plan will require these planning processes to work together, supported by clear responsibilities, shared information and institutional cooperation.

6.2 Context analysis

The Municipal Corporation, Forest Department, Town and Country Planning authorities, Jal Shakti Department, Tourism Department, revenue authorities and rural local bodies have responsibilities that intersect in land use, tourism, water security, waste management, forest protection and public infrastructure.

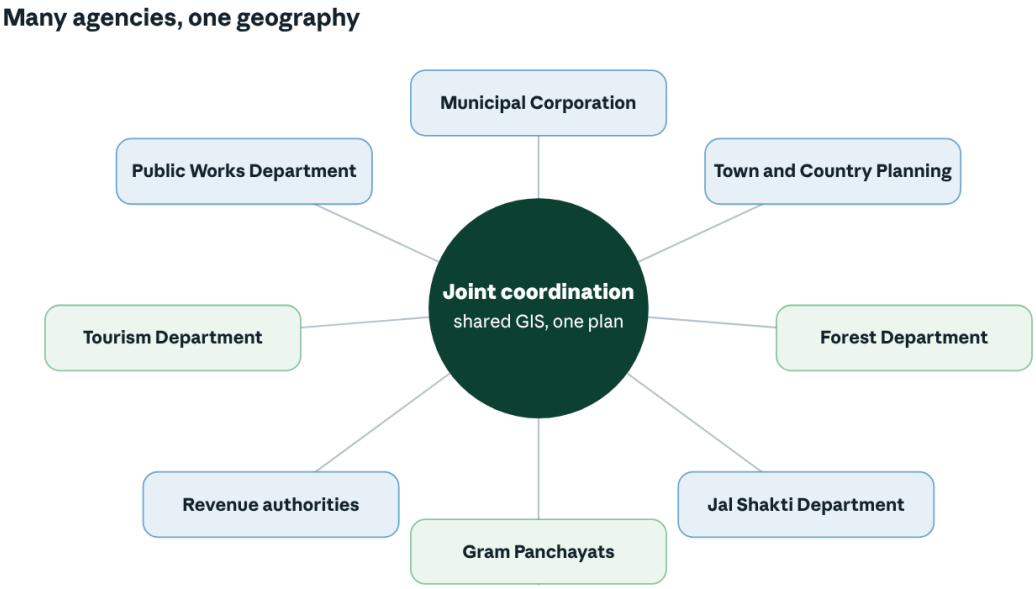

Figure 6.1: *Agencies whose responsibilities intersect in Palampur, sections 6.2 and 6.3. Citizens, NGOs and research institutions join through the same mechanism.*

6.2.1 Multiple partners, one geography: for the people they serve

Different jurisdictions, responsibilities and resources can complicate coordination. Proposed tourism infrastructure, for example, requires consideration of land ownership, legal status, access, permissions and stakeholder consent. Revenue authorities play an important role in distinguishing private, government and forest land. Projects on land belonging to other agencies may require No Objection Certificates (NOCs), while pathways crossing private land may require consent or appropriate legal arrangements.

Technical capacity is another consideration. The Forest Department reported limited regular GIS support at the divisional level, although GIS information is important for forest management, springshed mapping and spatial planning.

These factors indicate that implementation depends not only on identifying suitable projects, but also on establishing clear institutional responsibilities, sharing information and resolving land and permission-related constraints before projects are taken forward.

The key governance considerations are:

- **Overlapping responsibilities:** land use, forest protection, water security and tourism require cooperation across departments and local bodies.
- **Different administrative boundaries:** municipal, rural and forest jurisdictions do not always align with the geographical extent of development and environmental concerns.
- **Land and permission constraints:** ownership, land classification, access and approvals influence the feasibility of proposed interventions.
- **Technical and information needs:** shared GIS information and accessible planning records can support coordinated decision-making.
- **Implementation capacity:** clear responsibilities, resources and monitoring arrangements are necessary to translate plans into action.

6.2.2 Learning together: city twinning

City twinning, or sister-city relationships, connects municipalities to support mutual learning and cooperation. Such partnerships can involve local governments alongside educational institutions, research organisations, cultural bodies and non-profit organisations.

For Palampur, city twinning could provide opportunities to learn from towns with comparable mountain settings, agricultural identities, tourism economies and environmental management requirements.

Key benefits

- **Knowledge transfer:** exchange approaches to urban planning, waste management, green infrastructure and climate resilience.
- **Trade and investment:** explore links between tourism, local industries and niche markets.
- **Cultural and academic exchange:** develop partnerships between schools, universities, research institutions and cultural organisations.
- **Sustainable development:** learn from approaches to conservation, disaster management and environmentally sensitive development.
- **Civic infrastructure:** experience in mountain-town waste management, sewerage and flood management.

Proposed twinning criteria for Palampur

The report proposes five criteria for selecting potential partner cities:

1. **Topography:** alpine or sub-alpine terrain.
2. **Agriculture:** niche agro-industries, such as viticulture or herbal and botanical cultivation, that offer parallels with Palampur's tea industry.
3. **Tourism and adventure:** eco-tourism, mountain trekking and aero-sports.
4. **Research base:** biotechnology and agricultural research facilities comparable to CSIR–Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology and CSK HPKV.
5. **Civic infrastructure:** experience in mountain-town waste management, sewerage and flood management.

Finding a single city that meets all five criteria may be difficult. The report therefore also identifies opportunities to learn from Indian cities, particularly Chandigarh and Indore, while adapting their approaches to Palampur's hilly terrain, ecologically sensitive setting and municipal resources.

Indore offers lessons in solid waste management, including source segregation, localised processing and partnerships with non-governmental organisations. Chandigarh offers potential lessons in building regulation,

green belts and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. Neither city's model can be transferred directly; approaches must be adapted to Palampur's local conditions.

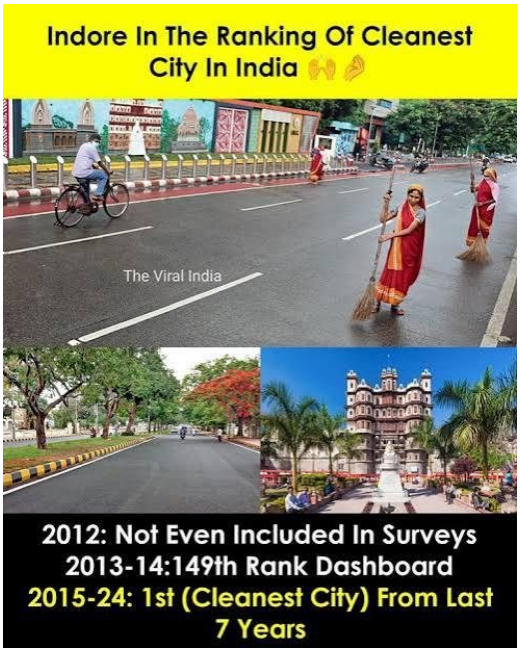

Figure 6.2: *Indore's rise in the national cleanliness rankings. Source: to be confirmed*

6.3 Recommended actions

The following recommendations build on the governance issues and opportunities identified.

1. Strengthen coordination between planning authorities

Establish a formal and structured coordination mechanism between the Municipal Corporation (MC), Town and Country Planning (TCP) authorities, the Forest Department, Jal Shakti Department, PWD, Tourism Department, revenue authorities and surrounding Gram Panchayats. Use this mechanism to jointly plan, align existing plans, discuss overlapping responsibilities and resolve implementation and budget constraints.

2. Align urban and forest planning

Coordinate the Master Plan with the new Forest Working Plan and other relevant departmental plans. Confirm the status and preparation timeline of the successor plan, then identify mutually agreed environmental actions that could be incorporated where procedurally appropriate, so that development and conservation priorities support each other.

3. Improve shared information and GIS capacity

Develop a shared repository of relevant planning documents, land information, GIS layers, forest records and springshed information. Improve access to technical support for mapping and spatial analysis to help institutions make decisions using consistent information.

4. Clarify land ownership and project permissions

Before proposing site-specific infrastructure, establish land ownership, legal classification, access arrangements and the permissions required. Identify the responsible agency and obtain the necessary approvals or stakeholder consent before treating a proposal as implementation-ready.

5. Strengthen water-governance partnerships

Improve coordination between PMC, the Jal Shakti Department, the Forest Department and communities protecting important water sources. Review the implementation of the Bohal Spring Payment for Ecosystem Services initiative and explore suitable arrangements for supporting communities that protect recharge areas.

6. Improve institutional implementation and monitoring

Translate planning priorities into actionable programmes with defined responsibilities, budgets, timelines and measurable indicators. Establish periodic reviews to track implementation and identify delays arising from coordination, permissions, funding or technical constraints.

7. Explore city twinning and institutional partnerships

Identify suitable partner cities based on Palampur's mountain setting, tea and agricultural economy, research institutions, tourism potential and civic infrastructure needs. Explore both international twinning opportunities and focused learning partnerships with Indian cities such as Indore and Chandigarh. Select specific areas of exchange and adapt lessons to Palampur's context rather than replicating another city's model.

8. Confirm the TCP planning process and route for citizen inputs

Obtain written clarification from TCP on the planning-area boundary, current stage of work, expected deliverables, consultation schedule and procedure for receiving citizen and stakeholder submissions. Share the citizen-input document with the appropriate planning authority and consultant, and maintain a record of the issues submitted and the responses received.

9. Encourage research and educational institutions to contribute to Palampur's development

Invite institutions such as CSIR–Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (IHBT), CSK Himachal Pradesh Krishi Vishvavidyalaya (HPKV), universities, colleges and other research organisations to take a more active role in the town's development as part of their institutional and social commitment. Areas of collaboration could include applied research, environmental monitoring, local enterprise development, skill-building, school and community outreach, responsible tourism and technical support to the Municipal Corporation and local organisations. The nature of each institution's contribution should be discussed and agreed with it, keeping its mandate, expertise and available resources in view.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and way forward

Palampur stands at a turning point, not because it lacks money, ideas or institutions, but because its future depends on whether three historically separate planning processes finally work together: the Municipal Master Plan, the Forest Division Working Plan, and the stand-alone plans of Jal Shakti, PWD, Tourism and Revenue. It also depends on whether citizens are treated as co-authors of the plan, rather than being invited to respond only at the final stage.

Prepared through one month of voluntary effort, this Citizen Inputs Report sets out three non-negotiable principles for the 2027–2047 plan:

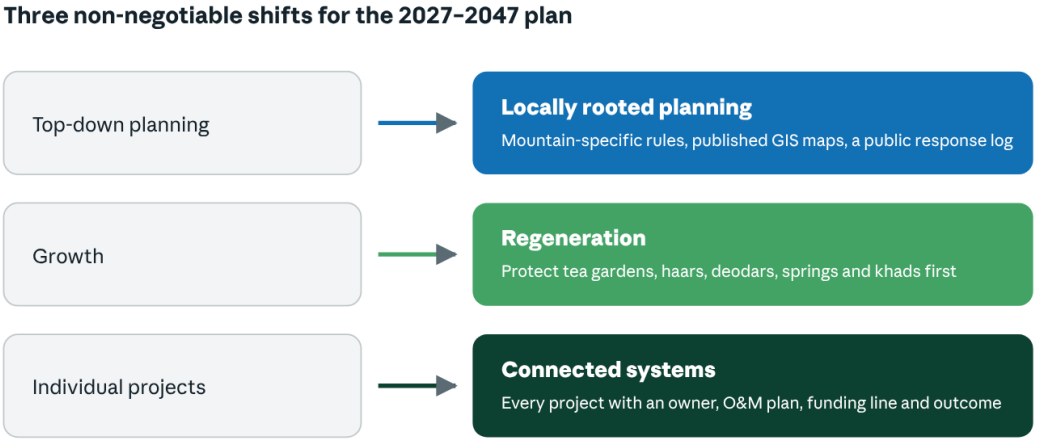

Figure 7.1: *The three principles for the 2027–2047 plan*

1. **From top-down planning to locally rooted planning:** A Himalayan town cannot be planned like a city on the plains. Zone 6 seismicity, 2,343 mm of annual rainfall, tea-garden ecology, kuhls and khads all call for mountain-specific development control regulations, ridge-and-valley zoning, and on-the-ground verification of every land-use allocation. The TCP Department should publish the 2024 GIS mapping, confirm the planning-area boundary and consultation schedule, explain how citizens can formally submit their input, and maintain a public response log.
2. **From growth to regeneration:** Success should not be measured by tourist arrivals, investment volumes or the amount of concrete poured. Palampur's citizens have called for a prosperous town that supports local livelihoods; a sustainable town that safeguards soil, water and forests for future generations; and a high quality of life grounded in health, belonging and agency. That means protecting what gives Palampur its value (tea gardens, agricultural haars, old-growth deodars, springs, Neugal and Awa Khad) before promoting development that may consume it.
3. **From individual projects to connected systems:** Parking lots, roads and treatment plants cannot deliver lasting results if kuhls are encroached upon, springsheds are paved over and departments work in silos. Every capital project in the Master Plan should therefore include an operations and maintenance plan, a named owner, a dedicated funding line and a measurable service outcome. The rolled over amounts are not a funding failure; it is a call to strengthen project-preparation, GIS, engineering and financial-management capacity within PMC.

> The recommendations in this report are presented as directions for testing, not as final detailed project reports. The proposed 10% limit on agricultural conversion, the Tea Garden Conservation Zone, the pedestrianised core, the ring road idea, relocation of waste facilities from Neugal's banks, community cattle sanctuaries and revival of PES all require legal review, consultation with Gram Panchayats and farmers, and site-specific feasibility assessments.

Citizens are asking for a plan that treats water as a commons, not merely a supply scheme; forests as infrastructure, not land awaiting conversion; young people as entrepreneurs, not simply as an unemployment challenge; waste as a resource, not just a collection target; and culture and traditional knowledge as economic assets, not nostalgia.

The priority actions below follow from the recommendations in Chapters 1 to 6. Owners and timing are indicative proposals for discussion with the agencies concerned.

Table 7.1: Priority actions, owners and timing

#	Priority action	Proposed lead	Indicative timing	Evidence of completion
1	Publish the 2024 GIS mapping of Palampur and confirm the planning boundary and consultation schedule	TCP Department	0–3 months	Maps public; written confirmation of the consultation route
2	Set up a joint working group and coordination mechanism	PMC, TCP, Forest, Jal Shakti, PWD and NGO Group	0–3 months	Terms of reference; document register; data-gap log
3	Complete priority audits: water and springs, waste and sewage, traffic and parking, land use	Line departments, panchayats, PMC, TCP, technical support	3–12 months	Validated baselines; ranked project pipeline
4	Prepare a Neugal River Basin Plan upstream to Menjha, including Awa Khad	PMC with Forest Department and Jal Shakti	Start in year 1	Scope agreed; basin assessment under way
5	Notify a Tea Garden Conservation Zone and no-build corridors along khads, kuhls and springs	TCP Department with PMC	After legal review and consultation	Draft notification published for comment
6	Make the Material Recovery Facility and composting plant operational; contain and remediate the legacy waste dump	PMC, with Project Hilldaari and CSIR-IHBT	Baseline 0–3 months; pilots to month 24	Facilities functioning; dump footprint stable
7	Build a pipeline of costed, approved projects and strengthen PMC planning, GIS, engineering and finance capacity	PMC with CSK HPKV and CSIR-IHBT	Year 1	Pipeline approved; grants spending improved
8	Align the Master Plan with the next Forest Working Plan	TCP and Forest Department	As the Working Plan is drafted	Agreed actions annexed to the Working Plan
9	Publish an annual public scorecard using the dashboard below	Steering group	Annually	Scorecard released each year

We suggest a simple dashboard to monitor key holistic outcomes.

Table 7.2: Dashboard to monitor holistic outcomes

Outcome	Suggested indicators	Review frequency
Water security	Source-wise quantity and quality; seasonal spring flows; Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) payment/status; service interruptions	Quarterly
Land and ecology	Land-use change; tree survival; encroachment in sensitive areas; forest-fire incidents	Half-yearly / seasonal
Urban services	Waste collected and processed; litter hotspots; sewage coverage and treatment; drainage complaints	Monthly / quarterly
Mobility	Peak-hour travel time; parking occupancy; pedestrian safety issues; public transport access	Quarterly
Inclusive local economy	Local guides trained and active; local tourism spending proxy; average visitor stay; local enterprise participation	Half-yearly
Delivery and finance	Projects by stage; budget versus actual expenditure; procurement progress; operations and maintenance provisions; grievances resolved	Quarterly
Prosperity and well-being	Youth leaving and returning; household income sources; resident well-being survey; value of ecological assets	Annual

If carried forward in this spirit, Palampur can achieve what few Indian hill towns have managed: grow without losing its soul. It can become a living laboratory where traditional wisdom and modern science contribute to a locally owned mountain economy.

We submit this report to the Palampur Municipal Corporation, TCP Department and key departments and agencies at state and national level as an open-access public good. The Future Master Plan Working Group remains committed to supporting the statutory process through evidence, facilitation and monitoring.

Annexure 1: Agencies and consultative process

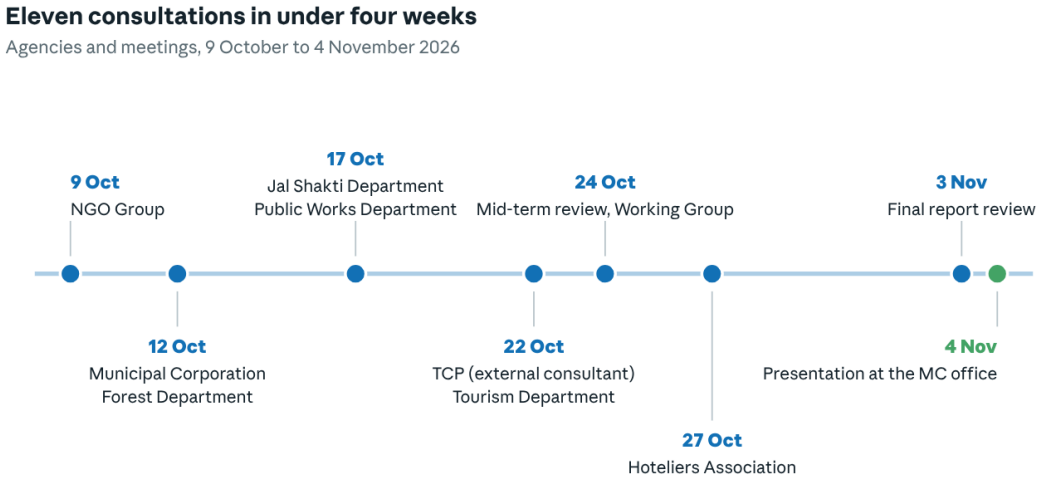

Figure A.1: *Consultation timeline, from the table below*

S. No.	Agency	Date of meeting
1	NGO Group	9 October 2026
2	Municipal Corporation, Palampur (Mayor, Municipal Commissioner, Deputy Mayor and other representatives)	12 October 2026
3	Forest Department, Palampur	12 October 2026
4	Jal Shakti Department, Palampur	17 October 2026
5	Public Works Department (PWD), Palampur, represented by the Executive Engineer	17 October 2026
6	Town and Country Planning (TCP), through its external consultant	22 October 2026
7	Tourism Department, Palampur	22 October 2026
8	Future Master Plan Working Group meeting: mid-term progress presentation and stakeholder feedback	24 October 2026
9	Hoteliers Association, Palampur	27 October 2026
10	Final report review meeting of the Future Master Plan Working Group	3 November 2026
11	Presentation and finalisation of the report at the Municipal Corporation office	4 November 2026

Annexure 2: References

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