

Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel
16 February 2023

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL held on Thursday 16 February 2023 at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors A. Hellyer (Chairman)
S. Boulton (Vice-Chairman)

S. Bonfante, J. Cragg, C. Juggins, G. Michaelides,
R. Platt, J. Quinton, D. Richardson, P. Shah,
C. Stanbury, K. Thorpe

OFFICIALS Assistant Director (Planning) (C. Carter)
PRESENT: Planning & Policy Implementation Manager (M. Wilson)
Senior Planning and Monitoring Officer (L. Palmer)
Planner to Senior Planner (C. Matthews)
Democratic Services Assistant (V. Mistry)

36. SUBSTITUTIONS

The following substitution of Committee Members had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rule:

Councillor C. Juggins for Councillor S. Thusu
Councillor J. Cragg for Councillor F. Wachuku

37. APOLOGIES

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors L. Musk, S. Thusu and F. Wachuku.

38. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2023 were approved as a correct record.

39. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillor S. Boulton declared a non-pecuniary interest in items on the agenda as appropriate by virtue of being a Member of Hertfordshire County Council.

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40. NORTHAW AND CUFFLEY NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN EXAMINER'S REPORT

Report of the Assistant Director (Planning) on the Examiner's Report of the Northaw and Cuffley Neighbourhood Plan.

Following the conclusion of the consultation on the submitted Northaw and Cuffley Neighbourhood Plan in September 2022, an Independent Examiner was appointed by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council with the consent of Northaw and Cuffley Parish Council to conduct an examination of the plan.

The purpose of the independent examination process is to ensure the plan meets a set of nationally prescribed basic conditions and to recommend if the plan should proceed to a referendum.

The Examiner submitted his report to Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council on the 27 January 2023. The Examiner has recommended modifications and, subject to these modifications, recommends the plan to proceed to referendum. These modifications have been made to several policies to ensure the Neighbourhood Plan would meet the basic conditions and other legal requirements, the two main modifications that the Examiner has recommended were the deletion of 2 housing site policies, specifically Policy S1 which is the Meadway and policy S2 East of Northaw Road East, these are allocated in the Welwyn Hatfield local plan as HS27 and HS28 respectively.

The reason for removing the sites from the Neighbourhood Plan is that it would be allocating a site in the Green Belt for residential purposes and it is established practice in the NPPF that release of the land from the Green Belt is a strategic matter rather than a neighbourhood planning matter. If the Welwyn Hatfield local Plan were to be adopted a future review of the Northaw and Cuffley Neighbourhood Plan could look to include these sites to provide any further policy guidance.

Other modifications recommended by the Examiner seek to provide clarification and to ensure that policies are aligned with national and local policy, including planning and hybrid matters. So the referendum, subject to the examiners, recommendations, will be the 4 May 2023 to coincide with the local elections. If the plan proceed to referendum, the question put to residents within the neighbourhood area will be as follows: "Do you want Welwyn Hatfield borough council to use the Northaw and Cuffley Neighbourhood Plan to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area".

The plan will require a majority vote, so at least 50% in favour of the plan to be able to move forward to be made by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council. There is no minimum or maximum turnout required and if the plan is made it will form part of the statutory development plan for the borough and will be used in the determination of planning applications. Like the examination, Welwyn Hatfield borough council are responsible and liable for conducting and holding a referendum, current provisions allow an application for these costs to be met. However, it is anticipated that these costs will be recoverable through grants

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received from the Department for levelling up housing and communities upon issuing a statement detailing the council's intention to send the Plan to referendum £20,000 can be claimed which can be offset against the cost of the examination and the referendum.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- Members wanted clarification on the relationship between the Northaw and Cuffley Neighbourhood Plan and the Local Plan. Officers stated that in order to meet the basic conditions the Neighbourhood plan needs to be in conformity with the local plan and the strategic policies within it, so it does not conflict with anything that is in the Neighbourhood Plan and sits alongside the Local Plan.
- Members asked, as the referendum is planned to be held on 4 May 2023 with the local elections, would people be voting on the referendum at the polling station like they would with the elections and how would this work. Officers stated residents that live within the neighbourhood area would receive a poll card and would go to the polling station as they would for the elections and they would simply have to answer 'yes' or 'no' to the question.
- Members asked how the referendum works in terms of voting and what constitutes a pass. Officers said anything above 51% would be a pass.
- Members queried the 51% required in terms of majority and asked if there was a minimum turnout. Officers said there is no minimum turnout. So, in theory, if only 10 people voted and 6 of them voted for and 4 voted against then it would pass.
- Members asked how this will that be a fair assessment. The chair stated it was on the same day as local elections so there should be a fairly good turnout of people voting.
- Members noted that a lot of villages and parishes were carrying out their own neighbourhood plans. It would be up to the people of Northaw and Cuffley to decide what they want, and this will give them the opportunity to do so.
- Members asked in future if the local plan is reviewed after adoption or if national planning rules change, would the neighbourhood plan also have to be adapted. Officers said the parish will always have an opportunity if they wish to update their plan to a different plan. Any changes will not mean that the plan is void or out of date. The plan has got a lot of development management policies that will guide forms of development in the borough.

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

That the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel recommended to Cabinet/ Full Council that:

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- i. subject to the modifications recommended in the examiner's report being agreed, the Northaw and Cuffley Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum; and,
- ii. should the Northaw and Cuffley Neighbourhood Plan receive a majority vote in favour at referendum, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council formally 'makes' the Northaw and Cuffley Plan, to enable it to form part of the Development Plan for the borough.

41. BROWNFIELD LAND REGISTER UPDATE 2023

Report of the Assistant Director (Planning) on the Brownfield Land Register Update 2023.

In 2017 the government introduced legislation which required planning authorities to prepare and maintain their Brownfield land register. The purpose of the register is to provide information on brownfield land in the borough, the council considered suitable for development. The report sets out the detail of sites included on this update to the brownfield land register. No sites have been promoted to the Council for inclusion since the last update, so the changes to sites are as a result of planning permissions which have been granted being added to the register and sites which have completed being removed. The updated brownfield register includes 46 sites with a total dwelling capacity of 3,724, which compares with the dwelling capacity of 3,676 in the last update to the register, in November 2021. The majority of sites on the brownfield register already have a form of Planning permission making up 77% of the total dwelling capacity, local plan allocations or sites identified through the Council's Housing and economic Land availability Assessment together account for 19% of the dwelling capacity.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- Members stated that in the Appendix which list of sites included, the final column is 'minimum net dwellings' and asked if the table should also show 'maximum net dwellings'. Officers stated that the full register does have a 'maximum net dwellings' although that column is optional.
- Members said it would be helpful to have figures on the state of construction in each of the sites as it does not inform us of what is happening. For example, the Hope and Anchor, 2 Station Road in Welham Green was permissioned a while ago and there is nothing happening there. It would be useful to know and ascertain who the good developers are as that might be useful in the future when the NPPF changes, and the council does not want developers sitting on a lot sites as this will affect building numbers. Officers said that they can add this in the future.

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

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That the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel recommended to Cabinet that the Brownfield Register be approved for publication, and that the Assistant Director (Planning) be given delegated authority to agree any minor alterations to finalise the Register, following consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, Planning, Estates and Development. If unanimously agreed by the Panel, for the decision to be taken by the executive member using their delegated powers under paragraph 18.1(b) of the Cabinet procedure rules.

42. LOCAL PLAN - ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2021/22

Report of the Assistant Director (Planning) on the Annual Monitoring Report 2021/22 and covers the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) monitors development that has taken place in the borough during the year and assesses whether this development meets targets across a number of indicators in relation to the Council's planning policies. The AMR covers a range of topics including housing, employment, the environment and infrastructure. The AMR also sets out expectations for future development in the borough.

In terms of retail, the AMR reports on the results from the latest retail vacancies study in Welwyn Garden City Town Centre. Vacant retail frontage length increased to 12.7% in 2022 from 9.9% in 2021, in the years prior to 2020 vacancy had fluctuated around 3 to 4%. In Hatfield Town Centre vacancy decreased to 13.3% from 21.7%. In the 2021 survey the decline in vacancy was largely due to one large unit being filled, which is the new Poundstretcher store. It is worth noting that part of the vacancy in Hatfield is due to the redeveloped 1 to 9 Town Centre.

In regards to housing completions, there were 258 net housing completions between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, which included 37 new affordable homes.

In regards to future supply, the AMR includes an update of the Council's Five Year, Housing Land supply position. As the new Local Plan is still under examination, the council turn to the default housing target position, which is derived from the standard methodology, which was 888 dwellings per annum. The Council's housing supply against this target remains below the five-year requirement at 3.2 years. However, it has improved slightly from the last published figure of 2.6 years.

In regards to the economy, the borough saw a net gain in employment floor space of 10,500square metres as a result of the completion of four industrial units at Coal Green Lane on the eastern edge of Welwyn Garden City. However, overall there has been a net loss in employment floorspace since the start of the plan period in 2016/17 of approximately 16,000 square metres.

The following points were raised and discussed:

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- Members thought the report was interesting and provided lots of information.
- It was noted that the estimated diabetes diagnosis rate for Welwyn Hatfield was lower whereas the best rate was 98.6%.
- It was noted the percentage of physically active adults is a bit lower than the best percentage. The borough is a university town which contains young adults, so expect the physically active adults would be higher than the national average. Officers stated that in terms of the indicator, the council were identifying it as part of the context for the borough as a whole.
- Members questioned the term affordable dwellings versus social rent versus council housing. In one of the paragraphs it states the number of affordable dwellings granted, and then says one of these was a high percentage, but that was because it was a housing association who have those properties for rent. Members asked if these were affordable housing rented properties or were they affordable housing to buy. Officers stated that they have a set of indicators and quite a lot of this is the same format that gets presented but take the point in terms of level of detail. Officers will look into what they can present and what level of detail it can be presented for the next version of the AMR.
- Members queried the shop frontage and its decline. Members would like in the future a single figure for the two town centres. For example, table 6, it looks like the borough has got massively higher rates which may be disguised by the number of units. It was noted the BID team do a fantastic job of making the town visible and do their best to encourage people to come into the town but members thought there needs to be a more strategic intervention. Officers stated they will go away and look at what they can do.
- Members noted that the population of the borough was increasing. Members stated that the council have to plan for this and have to think about infrastructure, facilities, affordability etc for the borough.
- Members noted the table at 7.21 showed new homes were within 30 minutes of public transport or walking distance, 98% within GP, 93% hospital, 97% in employment area and 93% in retail centre. Members stated that the council have to act to make sure the facilities are provided for the borough.
- Members asked if officers have a figure for what the lower quartile price was as it give some notion of how affordable homes were. Officers stated they do have the prices but did not have them at hand.
- Members said that it was rather unfortunate that there were only 292 gross completions during the year. In the previous paper the council saw the number of brownfield sites and the number of sites which have planning permission increase. If sites are built out, the borough would start to see this increase significantly. The council needs to encourage developers to start building.
- Members stated the increase between the census population between 2011 to 2021 saw 5 to 9 year olds increase over 1000, 10 to 14 year olds

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increase by 1000 which seems to indicate that the borough needs more facilities for primary and secondary education as the borough has not had development of new schools in years. The Chair stated that there are some new schools in the emerging local plan. Officers stated they work very closely with Hertfordshire County Council and their Growth and Infrastructure Unit who engage with Children's Services. As part of a local plan there is a strategy in terms of delivering sufficient school places and that does include the provision of new primary and secondary schools across the borough. Officers stated they liaise with County councillors on regular basis and they have provided comments as part of the main modifications consultations which closed on the 15 February 2023.

- Members asked if there are any services or data they should keep a close eye on such as housing or social issues. Officers said the report includes both contextual and Local Plan Policy Indicators, the Local Plan is the development plan for the borough and will help guide and influence development in the future.
- Members said the report gives an idea of how some national trends may affect the local borough and is a good resource for understanding those sorts of issues and local context.

RESOLVED:
(unanimous)

That the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel recommended to Cabinet that the AMR be approved for publication, and that the Assistant Director (Planning) be given delegated authority to agree any minor alterations to finalise the AMR, following consultation with the Executive Member for Environment, Planning, Estates and Development. If unanimously agreed by the Panel, for the decision to be taken by the executive member using their delegated powers under paragraph 18.1(b) of the Cabinet procedure rules.

Meeting ended at 8.09pm
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