

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 1 AUGUST 2019  
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING  
AND GOVERNANCE)

WELWYN HATFIELD LOCAL PLAN TIMETABLE

**1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan has been submitted and is currently undergoing public examination by an independent inspector. The inspector has indicated that the plan does not currently meet the objectively assessed need for housing.
- 1.2 The Council has therefore carried out a further call-for-sites exercise and published those sites for public consultation, before deciding whether to select new sites any for inclusion in the Local Plan.
- 1.3 The timetable agreed in March 2019 was that the results and recommendations of this process would be presented to councillors in September 2019 and the further hearing sessions would take place in November/December 2019. The unexpected receipt of 10,000+ representations to the public consultation in addition to site analysis work and updating evidence has unfortunately created too much work to be achieved in this time.

**2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Panel notes: the unexpected workload generated by 140+ sites promoted as part of the call-for-sites exercise; the unexpected workload generated by 10,000+ representations received as part of the public consultation on these sites; and the issues raised by examination inspectors in recent letters to North Herts and St Albans councils regarding their Local Plans.
- 2.2 That the Panel accepts that it would be negligent to receive incomplete information in September and that all of the above issues necessitate an extension of the Local Plan timetable to allow sufficient time to fully understand the views of residents, site analysis and new evidence.
- 2.3 That the Head of Planning and Planning Policy & Implementation Manager contact the Programme Officer to explain the situation and seek the views of the Examination Inspector, with the intent of identifying a new timetable, and then report back to this Panel.

**3 Explanation**

- 3.1 This Panel received a report in March 2019 which recommended a way forward and timetable to progress the Local Plan, based on the fact that 140+ sites were promoted as part of the call-for-sites exercise, which far exceeded expectations. Paragraph 3.6 set out all of the work that needed to achieve this, including new evidence, analysing sites, reviewing consultation responses and scenario testing.

- 3.2 The Panel agreed that public consultation on sites would take place after local elections in May 2019 and that the presentation of results and recommendations would be scheduled for September 2019 and examination hearing sessions in December 2019. This was based on a request from the examination inspector that the Council look to proceed with the Local Plan as quickly as possible. It was also acknowledged in the March 2019 report that there are a number of dependencies and unknowns which could result in slippage.
- 3.3 The Council has received about 10,200 representations to the public consultation on the promoted sites. In some cases these are relatively short statements and others are long, complex submissions with associated technical evidence. All of them need to be read, summarised, redacted where necessary and uploaded to the online portal. At the time of writing in late July 2019 it has taken about two months to work through about 4,000 representations. The Planning Policy team is therefore employing additional agency staff to speed up this process, but it will nevertheless take about two more months to complete the task. As a result it is not possible to present a full summary of the issues raised by residents and others to councillors in September 2019. It is more realistic that this could be achieved by November 2019. The planning system emphasises the importance of public consultation in order for a plan to be found sound and it is important that councillors understand what communities think about each promoted site as part of the site selection process.
- 3.4 The examination inspector for the North Herts Local Plan has recently written to that Council to advise that further hearing sessions are necessary in light of new evidence presented to him as part of the Main Modifications consultation stage, including fundamental issues such as the Objective Assessment of Need for Housing and green belt evidence.
- 3.5 The examination inspectors for the St Albans Local Plan have recently written to that Council to more fully understand the evidence gathering that has taken place to justify a green belt review and the assessment of individual sites.
- 3.6 Officers consider that they have already been through this process by virtue of our examination inspector asking the Council to commission a Stage 3 Green Belt Review and the recent review of the Objective Assessment of Need for Housing and plan period in light of the Government's 2016 household and population projections, which was presented to this Panel in July 2019. These letters nevertheless emphasises the continued importance of evidence to justify any decisions.

#### **4 Legal Implications**

- 4.1 The work to be carried out will be done in accordance with national legislation and guidance concerning the preparation of local plans.

#### **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The financial implications associated with this report will be borne by the planning policy team budget and money ring-fenced for the cost of the public examination.

#### **6 Risk Management Implications**

- 6.1 The Council received 140+ promoted sites as part of the call-for-sites exercise and 10,000+ representations to the call-for-sites public consultation. Despite

best efforts it is not going to be possible to update evidence, analyse all of the sites and summarise all of the representations in sufficient time to present results and recommendations to councillors in September 2019. It is more realistic that this could be achieved by November 2019.

- 6.2 The risk management implications of presenting incomplete evidence is that councillors do not have a full understanding of the issues in order to identify additional sites for submission to the examination inspector.
- 6.3 The risk management implications of spending longer on this stage of work is how the examination inspector wants to deal with the extension of time and the rescheduling of hearing sessions. This is something that the Head of Planning and Planning Policy & Implementation Manager will discuss with the programme officer.

## **7 Security and Terrorism Implications**

- 7.1 There are no security or terrorism implications associated with this report.

## **8 Procurement Implications**

- 8.1 There are no procurement implications associated with this report. The planning policy team has sufficient budget to commission any required evidence.

## **9 Climate Change Implications**

- 9.1 There are no climate change implications associated with this report. Wider matters related to climate change will be considered as part of the individual and cumulative analysis of sites and the wording of planning policies.

## **10 Human Resources Implications**

- 10.1 The Planning Policy team has taken on a number of agency staff to help work through the 140+ promoted sites and 10,000+ representations that have been received in response to the call-for-sites public consultation. At the time of writing in late July the team has summarised and upload about 4,000 of these.

## **11 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 11.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications associated with this report. Wider matters relating to health and wellbeing will be considered as part of the individual and cumulative analysis of sites and the wording of planning policies.

## **12 Communications and Engagement Implications**

- 12.1 The Planning Policy team will send a Local Plan e.newsletter to all statutory bodies and everyone in the public examination process setting out any new timetable for the preparation of the Local Plan and will also use other communication tools such as press releases and social media to advise of any changes to the timetable.

## **13 Link to Corporate Priorities**

- 13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Business Plan 2018-2021 and particularly Priority 2 Our Environment to enhance our green spaces, Priority 3

Our Housing to plan for current and future needs and provide more affordable homes and Priority 4 Our Economy to promote investment and regeneration, revitalise our neighbourhood and town centres and support sustainable economic growth.

## **14 Equalities and Diversity**

14.1 An EqIA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

Name of author	Colin Haigh
Title	Head of Planning
Date	July 2019

Background Papers:

“Local Plan – Next Steps” report to CPPP 7 March 2019

<http://democracy.welhat.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=266&MId=879&Ver=4>

Examination inspector letter to North Herts District Council 9 July 2019

<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/ED166%20Inspector%20letter%20to%20the%20Council%209%20July%202019.pdf>

Examination inspector letter to St Albans City & District Council 2 July 2019

[https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/Images/ED23%20%20SACDC%20Inspectors'%20letter%20to%20Council%202%20July%202019\\_tcm15-67653.pdf](https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/Images/ED23%20%20SACDC%20Inspectors'%20letter%20to%20Council%202%20July%202019_tcm15-67653.pdf)