

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 15TH FEBRUARY 2024
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR - PLANNING

LOCAL PLAN – ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2022/23

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) monitors the progress and effectiveness of the strategic policies set out in the Local Plan. The AMR sets out development that has taken place in the borough during the year and over the plan period to date, and assesses whether this development meets targets across a number of Local Plan indicators. The AMR covers a range of topics including housing, employment, the environment and infrastructure.
- 1.2 The 2022/23 AMR covers the period from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. While the AMR may also refer to development and changes since the 31st March 2023, the 2023/24 AMR will report on these in more detail.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel recommends 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, Planning. 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.

3 Background

- 3.1 In line with previous Annual Monitoring reports, the 2022/23 AMR reports on development progress set out in the Local Plan monitoring framework. The AMR is set out over nine chapters. Chapter 1 is contextual and sets out key information about the borough and its people. Chapter 2 covers the Council's forward 'plan-making' duties, while Chapter 3 examines the effectiveness of policies for dealing with planning applications. Chapters 4-8 cover the amount and quality of new development being built in the borough and how the borough's population and places are performing, whilst Chapter 9 deals with specific major and mixed-use development sites allocated in the newly adopted Local Plan.

4 Explanation

- 4.1 The key indicators and conclusions from the AMR are summarised on pages 4 and 5 of the report, the most notable of these include:
- The ONS mid-year population estimates for 2022 show the population of Welwyn Hatfield to be 120,213 persons. This was an increase of 0.4% compared with mid-2021, when the population of Welwyn Hatfield was

119,747 persons. This compared with average growth of 0.3% for Hertfordshire.

- The proportion of appeals allowed increased this year at 40%, compared with 32% in 2021/22. This was also higher than the national average of 29%.
- There were 487 net new homes completed in 2022/23, 74% of these completions were at sites allocated in the newly adopted Local Plan. Over the 7 years since the start of the plan period, 3,218 dwellings have completed against a target of 5,320 dwellings. Housing completions are expected to increase from around 2026 as more Local Plan allocations begin to come forward following the recent adoption of the plan.
- The majority (80%) of homes completed during the year were flats. Flats have accounted for a high proportion of completions in recent years, partly due to the nature of developments coming forward - within town centre locations and conversions.
- A total of 261 new affordable homes were completed, equivalent to 59% of total new C3 dwelling completions. This included 90 social rent, 107 affordable rent and 64 shared ownership homes. The Local Plan estimates that over the entire plan period 20% of new homes delivered will be affordable. Delivery of affordable homes for the plan period to date (2016-23) is currently in line with this at 20.6%.
- The Council's Affordable Housing Policy SP7 sets out a requirement that affordable housing should be sought on proposals for 10 or more dwellings at a proportion of 25%-35% depending on location. In 2022/23, six of the seven sites for 10+ dwellings which were granted permission met or exceeded the Local Plan requirement (Policy SP7) for affordable housing provision. The site which did not meet the requirement was granted at appeal and will only provide 10% affordable housing due to viability. In total, 166 affordable dwellings were granted planning permission during the year, which includes 25 affordable dwellings at smaller Council owned sites.
- The recent update to the NPPF (December 2023) means that; as the Council has an adopted Local Plan which is less than five years old, and that plan identified a housing supply of over five years at the point the examination concluded, the Council is not currently required to provide an annual update on its five-year housing land supply. As a result, no update on this has been included in the 2022/23 AMR.
- The 2022 Housing Delivery Test was recently published by the Department for Levelling Up Homes and Communities (DLUHC) in December 2023, which set out that Welwyn Hatfield had delivered 57% of homes against the standard methodology requirement for the three-year period 2019/20 - 2021/22. Against the newly adopted requirement, the result for the same period would be 65%. This means that the Council will need to produce an updated Housing Delivery Test Action Plan and apply presumption in favour of sustainable development when determining planning applications.
- The borough saw a significant net gain in employment floorspace this year. This was as a result of a number of sites completing, including a plot at

Hatfield Business Park. Although this was for a car franchise (sui generis use), there were associated business uses at the site which resulted in gains in Eg(i), B2 and B8 floorspace. Two further sites completed in 2022/23 in Welwyn Garden City at Black Fan Road and Bridgefields which resulted in considerable gains in B1 and B8 employment floorspace. These gains were partially offset by the loss of office floorspace at 29 Broadwater Road which is being redeveloped to residential, the demolition of which was recorded this year. Overall, there was still a significant gain in employment floorspace during the year of +22,417m².

- The rate of JSA/UC claimants within Welwyn Hatfield has been steadily declining since peaking at 4.7% between Feb-Apr 2021. In March 2023, the rate of claimants was 2.5%, still above the rate recorded prior to the covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 (of 1.9%).
- Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register now shows three listed structures in the borough at risk. The Grade II* Paine Bridge at Brocket Hall in Lemsford, which has been listed as at risk for some time, is now graded as Priority A, meaning it is at risk of further deterioration. No solution has yet been agreed, although discussions to determine the scope of the repair works are ongoing. Two further heritage assets at Brocket Hall – the Temple and the gates, lodges and screen wall at the South-East entrance have also now been added to the heritage assets at risk register, both also at risk of further rapid deterioration or loss, with no solution yet agreed.

Implications

5 Legal Implication(s)

- 5.1 The Council has a statutory requirement under section 35 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) to publish an 'authority monitoring report' every year. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, prescribe the information which must be included in the report. This is required to contain information on various measures, including how the Council has complied with the statutory Duty to Cooperate and the borough's current housing land supply position.

6 Financial Implication(s)

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising as a direct result of producing the AMR.

7 Risk Management Implications

- 7.1 The AMR forms part of the Council's evidence base and is an important record of development progress within the borough. There are no risk implications in publishing the AMR, indeed there would be risks in not publishing it as the Council would be less able to robustly defend unsuitable planning applications.
- 7.2 There are risks associated with a Housing Delivery Test result of lower than 75% and the weight that can be given to policies in the Local Plan.

8 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

- 8.1 There are no security and terrorism implications as a direct result of producing the AMR.

9 Procurement Implication(s)

9.1 There are no procurement implications arising as a direct result of producing the AMR.

10 Climate Change Implication(s)

10.1 The AMR has a role in monitoring the environmental impacts of development on the borough, including in terms of climate change.

11 Policy Implication(s)

11.1 Whilst the AMR reports directly on Council policies, it has limited policy implications.

12 Link to Corporate Priorities

12.1 The findings of the AMR are linked to all the Council's recently agreed Corporate Priorities, with a particular focus on "Homes to be proud of", by seeking high quality homes for all and planning for future homes in the right places.

13 Equality and Diversity

13.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been carried out, as the AMR does not include any proposals in its own right.

14 Health and Wellbeing

14.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising as a result of publishing the AMR.

15 Human Resources

15.1 There are no human resources implications arising as a result of publishing the AMR.

16 Communications and Engagement

16.1 There are no communications and engagement implications arising as a result of publishing the AMR.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Annual Monitoring Report 2022/23