

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING & PARKING PANEL – 20 JUNE 2024
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR - PLANNING

HOUSING DELIVERY TEST ACTION PLAN (2024)

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Government published the 2022 housing delivery test results in December 2023, which relate to the three-year period 2019/20– 2021/22. When measured against the newly adopted requirement, the Council delivered 1,283 homes against the 1,971 homes required, resulting in a Housing Delivery Test result of 65%. This means that the Council is again required to prepare an updated Action Plan in order to assess the causes of under-delivery and identify actions to increase delivery in future years.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel recommends to Cabinet that the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan be approved for publication. 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 Explanation

- 3.1 The Housing Delivery Test (HDT) is an annual measure of the delivery of housing in a local authority area, which compares 'total net homes delivered' against the 'number of homes required' over a rolling three-year period. The government published the 2022 Housing Delivery Test results in December 2023, which relate to the three-year period 1st April 2019 – 31st March 2022. The published results showed that Welwyn Hatfield had delivered 57% of homes against its target for the three-year period. However, the number of homes required was calculated against the standard methodology. Welwyn Hatfield adopted its Local Plan on 12th October 2023 and therefore the new housing requirement figure can be used to re-calculate the housing delivery test result, in line with planning practice guidance.
- 3.2 When measured against the newly adopted requirement, the Housing Delivery Test result improves slightly to 65% (confirmed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities). The calculation includes adjustments made to the requirement to account for disruptions to housing delivery during the covid-19 pandemic. An 8-month period has been used in the calculation of the requirement for 2020/21 and an 11-month period for 2019/20.

Table 1: Welwyn Hatfield Housing Delivery Test 2022

Number of homes required			Total required	Number of homes delivered			Total delivered	HDT 2022 Measurement
2019/20	2020/21	2021/22		2019/20	2020/21	2021/22		
699	509	764	1,971	673	352	258	1,283	65%

3.3 This Housing Delivery Test result has three consequences:

- As delivery has fallen below 95% of the requirement, the Council needs to prepare an updated action plan to assess the causes of under-delivery and identify actions to increase delivery in future years.
- As delivery has fallen below 85% of the requirement, the Council should include a 20% buffer to its five-year housing land supply.
- As delivery has fallen below 75%, the Council is required to continue to apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development when determining planning applications.

3.4 Following the recent update to the NPPF in December 2023 - 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. Therefore, the requirement to add a 20% buffer to the five-year supply is not currently relevant for Welwyn Hatfield.

3.5 An updated Action Plan has been prepared and is included as an Appendix to this report. The Action Plan highlights that delays to the Local Plan examination have been a barrier to progressing delivery of housing in recent years. The recent adoption of the Local Plan now means that an increasing number of allocated sites are progressing through the planning system (many of which now already have planning permission, with some now completed).

3.6 However, despite the permissioned housing supply improving, it may be some time before this results in an improvement to the HDT result. This is because the housing delivery test is a retrospective rolling three-year calculation, in addition the lead-in time between planning permission being granted and completions on site is generally 2 to 3 years. Therefore, even with more housing sites being granted planning permission, the shortfall is expected to continue in the short to medium term.

3.7 The Action Plan also highlights that one of the main delays in time taken to grant planning permission for major sites is the lengthy negotiation of S106 legal agreements. The Council is currently preparing a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which should be a faster and more efficient process as negotiations are not on a case-by-case basis. It is noted that some larger sites will still require S106 agreements to be completed.

3.8 The Action Plan sets out a number of actions, some of which have been carried forward from the 2022 Housing Delivery Test Action Plan, in summary, they are:

- Determine applications for Local Plan housing site allocations as fast as reasonably possible.
- Where planning applications for Local Plan site allocations have not yet been received, write to landowners/developers inviting initial discussions and/or to understand any delays in sites coming forward.
- Progress implementation of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
- Amendments to the structure of the Development Management service to be more responsive to the progression of the largest and most significant planning applications.
- Apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development when determining planning applications for housing schemes.
- Continue to consider the necessity of planning conditions for housing permissions.
- Continue to discharge planning conditions for housing schemes as fast as reasonably possible.
- Continue to devise, submit and determine corporate applications for new housing.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 The preparation of a Housing Delivery Test Action Plan is in accordance with national planning legislation and paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 4.2 As well as helping to identify and assess causes of under delivery of housing over previous years, the Action Plan also helps to identify actions to increase delivery in future years which may be helpful to demonstrate that the Council is attempting to do so in respect of future planning decisions and appeals.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 The preparation of the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan has been met within existing budgets. The actions themselves are not considered to have direct financial implications.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 The publication of the Action Plan demonstrates the Council is seeking to tackle under delivery and identifying actions to improve delivery in the future, which will assist in respect of future planning decisions and appeals.

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

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

8 Procurement Implication(s)

8.1 There are no procurement implications associated with this report.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

9.1 There are no direct climate change implications associated with this report.

10 Link to Corporate Priorities

10.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's recently agreed corporate priority "Homes to be proud of".

11 Health and Wellbeing

11.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising as a result of publishing the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan.

12 Human Resources

12.1 There are no human resources implications arising as a result of publishing the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan.

13 Communications and Engagement

13.1 The Action Plan is required to be published on the Council website. There are no further communication and engagement implications arising as a result of publishing the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan.

14 Equality 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.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Housing Delivery Test Action Plan (2024)