

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING AND
GOVERNANCE)

LOCAL PLAN – ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) has a number of purposes – it acts as a record of the how the borough’s population and places are performing and how much development is taking place, assesses how that meets the Council’s targets, and sets out projections and expectations for future development and changes in the borough’s population. It also sets out progress against the Local Development Scheme, which sets out when and how the Council will produce new planning documents and policies, and reports on the Council’s efforts under the ‘duty to cooperate’ with other public authorities.
- 1.2 The 2016/17 AMR reports on the period from 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017. Whilst for completeness this AMR also often refers to further development and changes which have taken place in the 7 months since March 2017, it will be for the 2017/18 AMR to report on these in 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 Head of Planning be given delegated powers to agree any minor alterations to finalise the AMR following consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, Housing and Community.

3 Background

- 3.1 The previous (2015/16) AMR begun to monitor the borough’s development progress in line with the monitoring framework set out in the Draft Local Plan. The 2016/17 AMR incorporates the same set of monitoring indicators, and is largely identical in format – this allows consistent analysis across each year. The AMR is intended to provide a purely factual account of development progress, and in some cases its findings will have implications for the determination of planning applications and for the ongoing examination of the Local Plan.
- 3.2 The main content of the AMR is set out across 9 chapters, themed by topic. Chapter 1 is contextual and sets out key information about the borough and its people. Chapters 2 covers the Council’s forward ‘plan-making’ duties, whilst Chapter 3 examines the effectiveness of the current District Plan. 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 proposed for allocation in the Local Plan.

4 Explanation

- 4.1 The main headlines from each chapter of the AMR are summarised on pages 4 and 5 of the document. The most noteworthy amongst these are:
- The borough's population is estimated by the Office for National Statistics to have once again risen significantly during the year, to 122,000. However, it may be necessary to treat this estimate with a degree of caution, especially given its mismatch with levels of housebuilding and the fact that the ONS has over-estimated population growth in Welwyn Hatfield in the past;
 - The Council has experienced an exceptionally high level of success where decisions on planning applications have been appealed, with only 19% of appeals being allowed during the year against a national average of 33%;
 - Vacancy rates within the borough's retail centres have remained largely steady – indeed within White Lion Square and Town Centre in Hatfield, vacancy has fallen significantly;
 - During the year, 509 new homes have been completed. This is the highest level for a number of years and now exceeds the Local Plan target of 498 homes per annum until 2022 – however, many of these were flats and the need for medium-size properties is not being met as effectively; Should the target be changed as a consequence of the Local Plan examination then this will need to be revisited;
 - 93 new affordable homes were brought to the market during the year. At 25% of gross completions this is slightly below the levels in the past two years, but it is expected that completions through the Council's Affordable Housing Programme and Section 106 negotiations will significantly boost this level next year;
 - The borough now has a 5.85 year supply of housing land, a significant increase from the 5.03 year supply in 2015/16 and comfortably in excess of the national 5-year requirement;
 - The borough has continued to lose employment premises to other uses, with an overall loss of 12,400m² during the year of which 17,300m² was offices (there were net gains of other employment uses). Further significant losses of offices are expected as a result of schemes for office-to-residential conversions notified to the Council (a change which no longer requires planning permission), amounting to at least 48,000m² in total;
 - Whilst partly responsible for the boost to the borough's housing land supply, these changes of use away from employment land – over which the Council generally has no control – have resulted in the Council accepting through the Local Plan examination that it may not be able to meet its established economic needs. The implications of this are being explored through the examination process;
 - However, on other measures the borough's economy appears to still be performing relatively well, with the Office for National Statistics estimating increases in the number of businesses (+5.0%) and falls in the number of claimants of Job Seekers Allowance (to 1.1%) during the year.

- 4.2 The AMR also reports in detail on the preparation and subsequent submission for examination of the Local Plan, and the wider Local Plan process through to adoption. It sets out the new evidence studies which have been produced during the year, reports on the consultation undertaken in Autumn 2016, and details the means by which the Council has engaged with the public and neighbouring authorities.

Implications

5 Legal Implication(s)

- 5.1 The Council has a statutory requirement under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 to publish an 'authority monitoring report' every year. 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.

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 an important 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 both existing and emerging Council policies, it has limited policy implications this year. This is because it directly follows the submission of the Local Plan for examination, and very little has changed (for example on the deliverability of development on housing sites) since that time.

12 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 12.1 The findings of the AMR are linked to all five of the Council's corporate priorities, but with particular links to Priority 2 (protect and enhance the environment), Priority 3 (meet the borough's housing needs) and Priority 4 (help build a strong local economy)

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.

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21 November 2017

Appendices: Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council – Annual Monitoring Report 2016/17