

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 7TH FEBRUARY 2019
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE)

LOCAL PLAN – ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) serves a number of objectives, including - reporting upon the amount of development that has taken place in the borough during the year, assessing whether this development meets targets across a number of indicators, as well as setting out expectations for future development in the borough. In addition, it also reports on progress against the Local Development Scheme, which sets out when and how the council will produce new planning documents and polices and includes progress on the Council's efforts under 'duty to cooperate' with other public authorities.
- 1.2 The 2017/18 AMR covers the period from 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018. While the AMR may also refer to development and changes since the 31st March 2018, the 2018/19 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 Head of Planning be given delegated powers to agree any minor alterations to finalise the AMR following consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Planning.

3 Background

- 3.1 In line with the last two Annual Monitoring reports, the 2017/18 report monitors development progress in line with the monitoring framework set out in the Draft Local Plan. The monitoring indicators are largely identical allowing comparable analysis year-on-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 AMR is set out over nine chapters, themed by topic. 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, 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 key conclusions from the AMR are summarised on pages 4 and 5 of the report, the most notable of these include:

- The borough's population is estimated by the Office for National Statistics to have grown at a rate of 1.0% during the year to just over 122,000. While lower than in recent years, Welwyn Hatfield still recorded higher growth than the surrounding authorities.
- The Council's success at appeal weakened during the year with 35% of appeals being allowed. This compared with 19% in 2016/17, although is less than the 45% in 2015/16. This year was also slightly higher than the national average of 32%. Design policies D1 and D2, relating to the quality of design and character and parking provision were most frequently referred to by inspectors in their decision to allow an appeal.
- Retail vacancy rates generally remained steady across the borough although some centres saw minor increases. Vacancy was up slightly in Welwyn Garden City town centre at 4.3% from 3.5% in the previous year, while in Hatfield the number of vacant retail units in the town centre recorded a minor decline to 10.7% from 11.7% in 2016/17.
- During the year 315 net new housing units were completed. This included 238 C3 dwellings and 77 C2 residential care home dwelling equivalents. This was below projected delivery of 415 dwellings set out in the 2016/17 AMR and was largely due to lower than expected build rates on some of the larger sites. However, as construction has commenced at these sites, they are still anticipated to come forward in future years.
- A total of 44 new affordable homes were completed during the year, accounting for 18.5% of total new C3 dwelling completions. This was higher than the 16.1% recorded in the previous year, though slightly lower than average since the start of the plan period.
- In the previous two AMRs, the borough's five year housing land supply was measured against the Draft Local Plan target. However, at the stage 2 hearing sessions the inspector indicated the need for modifications to the Plan to increase the housing target. As a result this methodology is no longer considered to be appropriate and the 'local housing need' figure (introduced last July in the new NPPF) has been used this year.¹ The local housing need is calculated using the standard methodology which takes household growth projections over a ten-year period and applies an affordability adjustment.
- However, following the recent release of the 2016-based household projections, which resulted in lower growth for many local authorities, the government is reviewing the standard methodology and intends, in the short term, to revert back to the 2014-based household projections. Therefore, the five year land supply has been presented in this year's AMR using both the 2016-based and 2014-based household projections.

¹ Paragraph 73 of the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2018) states that: "local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than five years old".

- Under the 2016-based household projections the borough has a housing target of 740 dwellings per annum and a five year housing land supply of 3.63 years. Under the 2014-based household projections the housing target increases to 867 dwellings per annum and five year supply falls to 3.10 years. Whilst below the national 5-year requirement in both instances, until the Draft Local Plan advances further towards adoption and allocated sites are able to be included in the supply, the borough is unlikely to be able to meet this requirement. The supply of sites is made up of planning permissions already granted, as well as urban local plan sites included on the brownfield land register which are anticipated to deliver within 5 years (most of which have applications awaiting determination or resolution to grant). Expected delivery rates for these sites have been agreed with developers/land owners.
- The borough has continued to lose employment floorspace to other uses during the year, amounting to a net loss of 3,500m², of which 6,000m² 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 just over 30,000 m².
- These changes of use away from employment land have resulted in the Council accepting through the Local Plan examination that it may not be able to meet the target for jobs set in the draft plan. The implications of this are being explored through the examination process.
- In other measures of the borough's economy, the number of businesses recorded a small increase of 1.5%, while the number of claimants of job seekers allowance saw a minor 0.2% increase.
- The growth in the jobs figure for 2016 should be treated with caution. This indicates an increase of 10,000 jobs in the borough but it is understood that this relates to the fact that staff have been recorded as being based at the headquarters of a company located in Welwyn Hatfield whereas in fact large numbers are based elsewhere in the UK.

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.
- 7.2 There are risks associated with no longer having a five year land supply for housing and the weight that can be given to policies in both the existing and new Local Plan.
- 7.3 Paragraph 11d of the 2018 NPPF makes it clear that in such circumstances the policies in the existing Local Plan should be considered to be out of date and that the presumption in favour of sustainable development should apply. This means that permission should be granted unless the policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a clear reason for refusal or the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF as a whole.

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 at present. This is because it follows the submission of the Local Plan for examination.

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.

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.

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Appendices: Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council – Annual Monitoring Report 2017/18