

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 10 SEPTEMBER 2020  
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING  
AND GOVERNANCE)

LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

**1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Local Plan process, including the recent examination hearing sessions, the updated Objective Assessment of Housing Need (OAN) and recent letters between the Inspector and Head of Planning.

**2 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That the Panel notes the updated Objective Assessment of Housing Need for the new plan period 2016-2036 is 715 dwellings per year, equivalent to 14,300 dwellings over the plan period.

**3 Explanation**

Examination hearing sessions

- 3.1 Examination virtual hearing sessions have taken place on 28 July for University of Herts representations, 29 July for northern village sites and 30 July for HS11 and Marshmoor with the remaining sites in the southern villages on 18 August for Brookmans Park sites, 19 August for Little Heath sites and 26 and 27 August for Cuffley sites.
- 3.2 There was also a taking-stock virtual hearing session on 27 August.

Objective Assessment of Housing Need (OAN)

- 3.3 For context, the objective assessment of housing need for Welwyn Hatfield is currently considered to be about 16,000 dwellings for both the original plan period 2013-2032 and the revised plan period 2016-2036. This compares with a target of 12,000 dwellings in the Submitted Local Plan and a target of just over 14,000 dwellings in the Proposed Changes to the Submitted Plan document that CPPP/Cabinet agreed for consultation in January 2020.
- 3.4 ONS published the new 2018-based population projections in March 2020 and the household projections in June 2020. It has been recognised by the Council, the inspector and other parties that these are an important piece of evidence to inform the objective assessment of housing need for the borough. In summary they indicate that Welwyn Hatfield had 46,991 households in 2016 and project that this will increase to 53,178 by 2036. This represents an increase of 6,187 households over the new plan period. By way of comparison the previous 2016-based household projections contained figures of 46,993 for 2016 and 57,631 for 2036, an increase of 10,638 households.

- 3.5 The Turley's Updated OAN uses the 2018-based population and household projections alongside other factors to recommend an updated objective assessment of housing need of 715-800 dwellings per year for the original plan period of 2013-2032. This equates to a requirement for 14,300-16,000 dwellings. For the revised plan period 2016-2036 the report places more justification on an OAN at the lower end of the range (715 dwellings per annum) as a result of the lower population projections in the later years. This equates to a requirement for 14,300 dwellings. A copy of the Turley OAN report is in Appendix 1.
- 3.6 Under the Government's current standard methodology for calculating housing requirements, Welwyn Hatfield's local housing need is 875 dwellings per year. This equates to a requirement for 15,750 dwellings over a plan period 2018-2036. This does not currently apply to the borough however as the Local Plan was submitted prior to this methodology being introduced and is being examined under the 2012 NPPF.
- 3.7 The Government is currently consulting on fundamental changes to the planning system via a *Planning for the Future* white paper. They are also consulting on proposed changes to the standard methodology for calculating housing need. This new methodology generates a requirement for 667 dwellings per year for Welwyn Hatfield.

#### Inspector

- 3.8 The inspector wrote to the Council on 2 July 2020 which queries the timetable for the submission and examination of additional residential sites. It reminds of the urgency of concluding the examination. A copy of this letter is in Appendix 2.
- 3.9 The inspector wrote to the Council on 13 July 2020 which identifies that the Government has published new household projections and invites the Council to consider whether they represent a meaningful change in the housing situation. A copy of this letter is in Appendix 3.
- 3.10 The Head of Planning responded to the inspector on 27 July 2020. It advises that committee meetings have not been able to take place to debate the results of the consultation or to consider new sites due to the coronavirus pandemic and the difficulties of hosting virtual meetings to debate complex matters. It states that the Council now understands that hearing sessions will take place on all outstanding submitted sites in July and August, that the inspector will write an interim report and that this will then be presented to councillors alongside the results of the public consultation, updated OAN evidence, any new site analysis work and updated sustainability appraisal work, for them to consider additional residential sites. It also advises that the Council has commissioned Turleys and Edge consultants to update our OAN evidence. A copy of this letter is in Appendix 4.
- 3.11 The inspector wrote to the Council on 13 August 2020. It states that the Council appears to have misunderstood the sentiment of his offer to write an interim report on the soundness of the plan. The purpose of the offer was to shorten the timescale rather than extend it. He requests a revised sustainability appraisal for remaining Regulation 19 submitted sites. He states that he considers some submitted sites to be unusually controversial and of questionable soundness in the context of the sustainability appraisal. He would like to begin this analysis

a.s.a.p. to help conclude an appropriate interim report. He states that it is critical to agree an end game for the examination. He requests a draft programme of necessary steps be prepared by the Council, to be debated at a taking-stock virtual hearing session on 27 August. A copy of this letter is in Appendix 5.

- 3.12 The Head of Planning responded to the inspector on 24 August 2020. The first letter responds to his overarching queries, including comments on the tests of soundness, sustainability appraisal and exceptional circumstances test. The second letter responds to his OAN query by asserting that there has been a meaningful change to the objective assessment of housing need. The third letter sets out a proposed timetable: which comprises receipt of the inspector's interim report in late September / early October; CPPP to consider additional sites in late October; Cabinet and Full Council to consider additional sites in November; hearing sessions in January 2021. A copy of these letters are in Appendices 6, 7 and 8.
- 3.13 At the taking stock session on 27 August 2020 the inspector stated that he would write an interim report for late September / early October and the Council confirmed that it would find suitable dates for CPPP and Cabinet meetings in October/November, leading up to Full Council on 23 November 2020. At these meetings officers will present all relevant Local Plan material, including the OAN Update, a summary of the consultation responses, the inspector's interim report, site update information and sustainability appraisal update information.
- 3.14 The Inspector has commenced consultation on the updated OAN evidence and further evidence on Birchall Garden Suburb and Symondshyde. He is also consulting on recent legal decisions relating to Local Plans and exceptional circumstances for the release of land in the Green Belt.
- 3.15 In addition to the potential for additional dwellings at Symondshyde the Inspector has also indicated that consideration should be given to increasing dwelling numbers at HS27 (Cuf1) and HS22 (BrP4). In both cases the dwelling numbers had been limited because of highway capacity issues which were challenged at the hearing sessions.

#### **4 Legal Implications**

- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report. Officers are seeking to ensure that all actions and decisions are taken in accordance with relevant planning legislation.

#### **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report. The cost of commissioning Turleys to update the OAN was funded from the planning policy budget.

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

- 6.1 There are no direct risk management implications associated with this report. Officers recognise that the objective assessment of housing need is important to ensure that we plan sufficient homes for the Local Plan to be found sound but not to exceed this need and release unneeded green belt land.

## **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.

## **9 Climate Change Implications**

9.1 There are no direct climate change implications associated with this report. Officers have previously acknowledged that there are climate change implications associated with the policies and sites identified in the Local Plan.

## **10 Human Resources Implications**

10.1 There are no human resource implications associated with this report. All work is being carried out by the planning policy team and other council departments.

## **11 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

11.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications associated with this report.

## **12 Communications and Engagement Implications**

12.1 There are no communication or engagement implications associated with this report. Officers seek to communicate news on the Local Plan via reports to this Panel, updates on planning webpages and regular newsletters to everyone registered on our Local Plan consultation database.

## **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, Priority 3 Our Housing and Priority 4 Our Economy.

## **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.

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Date	August 2020

### Appendices:

1. Turley OAN
2. Inspector letter 2 July
3. Inspector letter 13 July
4. Head of Planning letter 27 July
5. Inspector letter 13 Aug
6. Head of Planning letter 24 Aug

7. Head of Planning letter 24 Aug
8. Head of Planning letter 24 Aug