

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 16TH JANUARY 2025
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR - PLANNING

LOCAL PLAN – ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2023/24

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 2023/24 AMR covers the period from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. While the AMR may also refer to development and changes since the 31st March 2024, the 2024/25 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 2023/24 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 Local Plan.

4 Explanation

- 4.1 The key indicators and conclusions from the AMR are summarised on pages 4 and 5 of the report, and include:
- The ONS mid-year population estimates for 2023 show the population of Welwyn Hatfield to be 121,749 persons. This was an increase of 1.1% over the year since mid-2022 and compared with average growth of 0.9% for Hertfordshire.

- In 2023/24, 51 planning appeal decisions were received. The proportion of planning appeals that were allowed was 18%, which was much lower than the 40% allowed in 2022/23 and less than the national average of 28% for 2023/24.
- During the year there were 359 net new housing units completed, including 324 C3 dwellings and 35 C2 care home dwelling equivalents.
- These completions included 150 new affordable homes, including 102 social rent, 46 affordable rent and 2 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 (2016-24) is currently slightly above this at 22%.
- 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 2023/24, only two sites for 10+ dwellings were granted permission during the year. One of which met the Local Plan requirement (Policy SP7) for affordable housing provision, whilst the other site secured a commuted sum towards affordable housing provision instead. In total, 12 affordable dwellings were granted planning permission during the year. However, there were 759 affordable homes in the housing supply with planning permission (at 1st April 2024).
- ONS figures for 2023 show that median house prices in Welwyn Hatfield (£435,000) were 10.88 times the median income for those working in the borough (£39,994). Median earnings saw an increase of 3.4%, while median house prices increased by 0.7% this meant that overall affordability saw a slight improvement compared with 2022 (from a ratio of 11.16).
- The recently revised (December 2024) National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires local planning authorities to identify and update annually a 5-year supply of specific deliverable sites even if their adopted plan is less than five years old. A five-year housing land supply update has therefore been included in the AMR and sets out that the borough has a deliverable housing land supply of 2.5 years against the adopted Local Plan requirement of 760 dwellings per annum. Delays and slower than anticipated progress at some of the larger strategic sites means that the supply is lower than previously projected and below the national 5-year requirement. However, an increasing number of allocated sites are now coming forward following the adoption of the Local Plan.
- There was a small net gain in employment floorspace this year (+1,162m²) and overall, since the start of the plan period in 2016, there has been a net gain in employment floorspace of +7,389 m².
- Herts Environmental Records Centre reported three new Local Wildlife Sites designated in the borough following surveys undertaken in 2023 and 2024. All three sites were at the River Mimram and are included under the designation of flowing water (rivers and streams) and together total 1.68 ha.

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 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 not having a five year supply of housing sites and 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 result of producing the AMR.

9 Procurement Implication(s)

- 9.1 There are no procurement implications arising as a 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 subject of this report is linked to several of the Council's Corporate Priorities. The AMR reports on homes delivered throughout the year, the borough's economy and environmental assets. Therefore, it is linked to Corporate Priorities "Homes to be proud of", "Enable an economy that delivers for everyone" and "Action on climate change".

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 2023/24