

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCIL – 26 JULY 2022

Recommendation from the Special Cabinet on 25 July 2022:-

20.1	<p><u>Local Plan - Inspector's Letter and Proposed Modifications to the Plan (Forward Plan Reference FP1126)</u></p> <p>Report of the Assistant Director (Planning) on the Inspector's Letter and Proposed Modifications to the Local Plan. Members received a presentation which set out the Council's January 2022 Strategy and the Inspector's response; the housing requirement, housing supply, the recommendation from Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel and the risks.</p> <p>In January 2022, Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel considered options to meet the Full Objective Assessment for Housing Need (FOAHN) of 15,200. The panel proposed that the Council's strategy agreed in November 2020 be put forward for consideration by Cabinet and Council.</p> <p>The strategy had identified a supply of sites for 13,277 dwellings to meet what the Council considered should be the FOAHN OF 13,800.</p> <p>There were also changes to windfall allowance, updated completions and commitments and amendments to the strategy as a consequence of decisions made by the inspector, this resulted in a distribution of 13,279 dwellings.</p> <p>This had been presented to Council at a special meeting on 27 January 2022.</p> <p>The Council wrote a letter to the inspector setting out the strategy and noting that the availability and size of sites resulted in most of the development being delivered in the first ten years post adoption.</p> <p>The Inspector responded to the Council's letter and had advised that the Local Plan requirement of 15,200 was still appropriate. He had advised an approach based on identifying sites for the year period following adoption could be sound with a commitment to a review, to be undertaken in the context of housing need and national policy.</p> <p>The Inspector had now found HS24 in Little Heath and SDS6 in Symondshyde unsound. HS29 and HS30 in Cuffley were also not found sound. A fifth site, HS22 has previously been found sound and the Inspector confirmed that the site was still sound.</p>
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The inspector advised the Council that the plan can only move forward if the Council identified sufficient sites for the first ten years post adoption and carried out consultation on an agreed set of main modifications. The inspector also required sound evidence to demonstrate that the plan can deliver five years' worth of housing against the plan's housing requirement.

The Inspector had concluded that the housing requirement for the plan period 2016-36 was 15,200 dwellings with an average 760 dwellings per annum. A 20% buffer had to be provided to reflect under delivery resulting in a 10 year target of 7,938.

Completions during the plan period to 31 March 2022 equated to 2,731 dwellings, resulting in a residual requirement for 12,469 dwellings for the plan period, an average of 891 dwellings per annum.

The Inspector stated that the five years needed to start from April 2023 rather than 2022. Therefore it was necessary to estimate the number of completions for 2022/23 and this resulted an increase in the shortfall from 1,829 to 1,976 dwellings.

It was noted that at the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel meeting on 21 July 2022 members had rejected both recommendations in the report. Members agreed to recommend the proposed sites agreed at Special Council on 27 January 2022 and their updated dwelling numbers specifically as shown in table 3 of the report and Appendix A Table 1 of the report giving a total updated capacity of 12,775 with 8,517 in the first ten years.

It was noted that the plan had not increased the five year land supply or made full provision for the shortfall. The inspector had already rejected the 13,277 and 13,279 strategies and there was a strong likelihood that the plan will be found unsound.

Cabinet Members thanked officers for their continued hard work on the Council's Local Plan.

Members acknowledged the full debate at CPPP which informed the recommendations made, and agreed that it was for elected Councillors and their communities to take planning decisions which were in the best interest of the residents, businesses and communities of the borough.

Members stated that there were risks involved in whichever decision the Council took with regards to the Local Plan. It was noted that members were not anti-development in the borough.

Members noted it was down to local politicians to make a decision on what is best for the borough.

It was noted that it was a good decision that the numbers at the Wheat Quarter site had been reduced by about 600 and that it was also protecting its heritage in Welwyn Garden City. Members acknowledged that the Green Belt must be protected given the benefits it brings to the borough and the community.

**RESOLVED:
(unanimous)**

Cabinet recommended to Full Council the proposed sites agreed and recommended by the Special Council on 27 January 2022 and their updated dwelling numbers specifically as shown in table 3 of the report and Appendix A Table 1 of the report giving a total updated capacity of 12,775 with 8,517 in the first ten years.

The reports of the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel meeting can be viewed in full here:

<https://democracy.welhat.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=266&MIId=1498&Ver=4>