

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING & PARKING PANEL – 6 OCTOBER 2022
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PLACE)

HOUSING DELIVERY TEST ACTION PLAN

1 Executive Summary

1.1 The Government published the housing delivery test results on the 14th January 2022, covering the period 2018/19 – 2020/21. This confirmed that 1,486 homes had been built in Welwyn Hatfield during the three years, against a target of 2,245 homes (therefore meeting 66% of the requirement). This means that the Council is required to prepare an Action Plan in order to assess the causes of under-delivery and identify actions to increase delivery in future years. This is the third action plan the Council has produced, the last was published in March 2021.

2 Recommendation(s)

2.1 That the Panel recommends the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan and Interim Five Year Housing Land Supply update to Cabinet for publication on the Council's website.

3 Background

3.1 The Housing Delivery Test (HDT) is an annual measure of housing delivery which compares 'total net homes delivered' against the 'number of homes required'. As the Council does not have a recently adopted Local Plan, the number of homes required for Welwyn Hatfield is taken from the Government's local housing need figures, calculated using the Standard Methodology.

3.2 Guidance published in January 2022¹ set out the calculation for the 2021 Housing Delivery Test, which included an adjustment to the targets for the years 2019/20 and 2020/21 to account for potential delays to delivery resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. There was a reduction in the period for measuring total homes required; for 2020/21 the target was for an 8-month period rather than 12 months (resulting in a target of 583 rather than 875 dwellings), and for 2019/20 an 11 month period (resulting in a target of 795 rather than 868 dwellings).

¹ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, Jan 2022, Housing Delivery Test: 2021 measurement technical note

4 Explanation

4.1 During the period 2018/19 – 2020/21, the borough delivered 1,486 homes of the 2,245 homes required over these three years. Therefore the Council's Housing Delivery Test result for 2021 was 66%.

Table 1: Welwyn Hatfield Housing Delivery Test 2021

	Target (number of homes required)	Completions (net homes delivered)	% of target achieved
2018/19	867	462	53%
2019/20	795	673	85%
2020/21	583	351	60%
Total 2018-2021	2,245	1,486	66%

4.2 This result has three consequences:

- As supply is below 95% of the requirement, the Council again needs to prepare an action plan to assess the causes of under-delivery and identify actions to increase delivery in future years;
- As supply is below 85% (which the NPPF identifies as 'significant under-delivery of housing') the Council again needs to add a 20% buffer to its five year housing land supply, to improve the prospect of achieving the planned supply;
- As supply has fallen below 75%, the Council is required to continue to apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development when determining planning applications. The NPPF² states that the presumption in favour of sustainable development means: "granting planning permission unless (i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas of assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed or (ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole."

4.3 An updated Action Plan has been prepared and is included as an Appendix to this report. The Action Plan aims to highlight reasons for past under-delivery, as well as setting out ways to reduce the risk of further under-delivery in future years through setting out a number of actions. These actions have been carried forward from the previous Housing Delivery Test Action Plan, in summary, they are:

- Progress the adoption of the Local Plan;
- Continue to determine planning applications for housing schemes as fast as reasonably possible;
- Apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development when determining planning applications for housing schemes;

² Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, July 2021, paragraph 11 (d), National Planning Policy Framework

- Continue to consider the necessity of planning conditions for housing permissions;
- Continue to discharge planning conditions for housing schemes as fast as reasonably possible;
- Continue to prepare S106 agreements as fast as reasonably possible/Work with HCC to prepare S106 agreements involving contributions for their services as fast as reasonably possible;
- Continue to devise, submit and determine corporate applications for new housing;
- Work with Hertfordshire Growth Board to identify funding opportunities for accelerated housing delivery sites.

4.4 The Action Plan also includes an update to the Council's Five Year Housing Land Supply position. The update has been provided *as at* 1st April 2022 for the period 2022/23 to 2026/27 against a requirement of 888 dwellings per annum, as required by the standard methodology for 2022/23. A 20% buffer was also applied, which is required by the Housing Delivery Test when delivery falls below 85% of the requirement. The Council's updated Housing Land Supply is 2.63 years. This is marginally higher than when it was last published in the 2020/21 Annual Monitoring Report, at which point the Council had 2.46 years supply (*as at* 30/09/2021).

Implications

5 Legal Implication(s)

- 5.1 The preparation of a Housing Delivery Test Action Plan is in accordance with national planning legislation and paragraph 76 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 5.2 As well as helping to identify and assess causes of under delivery over previous years, the Action Plan also helps to identify actions to increase delivery in future years which may be helpful to demonstrate that the Council is attempting to do so in respect of future planning decisions and appeals.

6 Financial Implication(s)

- 6.1 The preparation of the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan has been met within existing budgets. The actions themselves are not considered to have direct financial implications as they have been carried forward from the previous Action Plan.

7 Risk Management Implications

- 7.1 The publication of the Action Plan demonstrates the Council is seeking to tackle under delivery and identifying actions to improve delivery in the future, which will assist in respect of future planning decisions and appeals.
- 7.2 There are risks associated with not having a five year housing land supply as this means that the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies,

and 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. However, it considered the Council will only have a 5 year housing land supply upon adoption of a new Local Plan.

8 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

8.1 There are no security and terrorism implications associated with this report.

9 Procurement Implication(s)

9.1 There are no procurement implications associated with this report.

10 Climate Change Implication(s)

10.1 There are no direct climate change implications associated with this report.

11 Link to Corporate Priorities

11.1 The production of the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan is linked to Priority 3 (meet the borough's housing needs).

12 Health and Wellbeing

12.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising as a result of publishing the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan.

13 Human Resources

13.1 There are no human resources implications arising as a result of publishing the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan.

14 Communications and Engagement

14.1 The Action Plan is required to be published on the Council website. There are no further communication and engagement implications arising as a result of publishing the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan.

16 Equality and Diversity

15.1 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.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Housing Delivery Test Action Plan