

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 16TH FEBRUARY 2023
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR - PLANNING

LOCAL PLAN – ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2021/22

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) monitors development that has taken place in the borough during the year and assesses whether this development meets targets across a number of indicators in relation to the Council's planning policies. The AMR covers a range of topics including housing, employment, the environment and infrastructure. The AMR also sets out expectations for future development in the borough.
- 1.2 The 2021/22 AMR covers the period from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. While the AMR may also refer to development and changes since the 31st March 2022, the 2022/23 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 for Environment, Planning, Estates and Development. 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 2021/22 AMR reports on development progress set out in the Draft 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 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 indicators and conclusions from the AMR are summarised on pages 4 and 5 of the report, the most notable of these include:
 - The 2021 Census results show that the population of Welwyn Hatfield was 119,900 persons at the time of the Census in March 2021. This was an increase of 8.5% compared with the last Census in 2011, when the

population of Welwyn Hatfield was 110,535 persons. This increase was higher than for England, which saw a 6.6% increase, as well as countywide growth for Hertfordshire (+7.4%).

- The proportion of planning appeals allowed increased in 2021/22 at 32%, compared with 19% in 2020/21. This was also higher than the national average of 25%.
- In Welwyn Garden City Town Centre, vacant retail frontage length increased to 12.7% in 2022 from 9.9% in 2021. In the years prior to 2020, vacancy had fluctuated around 3-4%. In Hatfield Town Centre vacancy decreased to 13.3% from 21.7% in the 2021 survey. The decline in vacancy was largely due to one larger unit being filled (the new Poundstretcher store). Part of the vacancy in Hatfield is due to the redevelopment at 1-9 Town Centre.
- There were 292 gross housing completions and 34 losses during the year, resulting in a net total of 258 new homes completed in 2021/22.
- Of these 258 net completions, 37 were affordable homes (14.3%). Of the sites that delivered completions in 2021/22, 5 sites were for above the 10+ dwelling threshold to provide affordable housing. Two of these sites have already - or will - deliver the level of affordable housing required, whilst one site will provide affordable offsite. However, there were two sites which completed which did not deliver any affordable housing; one of which was granted through the prior approval process which does not allow the Council to secure affordable housing, while the other was due to viability.
- The number of affordable dwellings that were granted planning permission during the year was high at 217 of the 401 dwellings granted (54%). This was largely due to the fact that the applicant for one of the developments granted permission was a Housing Association, therefore all 128 dwellings will be affordable housing.
- The majority (71%) of homes completed during the year were flats, while houses made up the remaining 29% of completions. Flats have accounted for a higher proportion of completions in recent years, partly due to the nature of developments coming forward - within town centre locations and conversions.
- National Planning Practice Guidance states that the 'number of homes required' for the calculation of the five-year housing land supply is the housing requirement in Local Plans. However, as the borough's new Local Plan is still under examination and the most recent adopted housing requirement figure is more than five years old, the minimum annual local housing need figure should be used. The minimum annual local housing need is calculated using the Standard Methodology – under which the housing need figure for Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council for 2022/23 is 888 dwellings per annum (which is slightly higher than the 878 required in 2021/22. As the Council has only delivered 66% of the housing target over the last three years (as measured by the Housing Delivery Test) a 20% buffer is again required to be added to the five-year requirement. Against the standard methodology of 888 dwellings, the Council has a housing land supply of 3.2 years. Whilst this is below the national 5-year requirement, until

the Draft Local Plan is adopted, the borough is unlikely to be able to meet this requirement. The last update to the five-year housing land supply was published in the Housing Delivery Test Action Plan when the Council had 2.63 years supply.

- The borough saw a net gain in employment floorspace this year (+10,502m²), as a result of the completion of four industrial units (B8 use) at Cole Green Lane, on the eastern edge of Welwyn Garden City. However, overall there has been a net loss in employment floorspace since the start of the plan period in 2016/17 of -16,190m².
- Data from the ONS for the number of claimants of Job Seekers Allowance/Universal Credit shows that the rate of claimants in Welwyn Hatfield has been steadily declining since peaking at 4.7% between Feb-Apr 2021. At the end of the monitoring year in March 2022, the rate of claimants was 2.8%, still above the rate recorded prior to the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 (of 1.9%).
- There was one new Local Wildlife Site designated by the Wildlife Trust in 2021/22, the River Mimram (Codicote Bottom to Pumping Station). The 0.27ha site is included under the designation of flowing water (rivers and streams), which was a new criteria for 2021. The total area of Wildlife Sites in the borough was recorded at 1,664.46ha in 2021.

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 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 not having a five-year land supply for housing and the weight that can be given to policies in both the existing and Draft Local Plan.
- 7.3 Paragraph 11d of the July 2021 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 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 both existing and emerging Council policies, it has limited policy implications.

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.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Annual Monitoring Report 2021/22