

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET HOUSING AND PLANNING PANEL – 12 JANUARY 2017
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LOCAL PLAN – ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) has a number of purposes – it acts as a record of the how the borough’s population and places are performing and how much development is taking place, assesses how that meets the Council’s targets, and sets out projections and expectations for future development and changes in the borough’s population. It also sets out progress against the Local Development Scheme, which sets out when and how the Council will produce new planning documents and policies, and reports on the Council’s efforts under the ‘duty to cooperate’ with other public authorities.
- 1.2 The 2015/16 AMR reports on the period from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. Whilst for completeness this AMR also often refers to further development and changes which have taken place in the 8 months since March 2016, it will be for the 2016/17 AMR to report on these in detail.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel recommends to Cabinet that the AMR be approved for publication, and that the Head of Planning be given delegated powers to agree any minor alterations to finalise the AMR following consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, Housing and Community.

3 Background

- 3.1 Whilst the Local Plan will not be adopted for another year, now that it has been published in draft form it has been considered worthwhile to begin monitoring using the same list of indicators set out within its Implementation and Monitoring Chapter. All of the content of the AMR’s previous indicators continue to be monitored, although in a small number of cases indicators have been merged or split out into several. There are then 18 new indicators. Appendix 1 within the document sets out how the AMR’s indicators compare to those used previously, as well as which specifically monitor against policies and targets within the Draft Local Plan and which are more contextual indicators. This is also listed against the indicator itself.
- 3.2 The main content of the AMR is set out across 9 chapters, themed by topic. Chapter 1 is contextual and sets out key information about the borough and its people. Chapters 2 covers the Council’s forward ‘plan-making’ duties, whilst 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 allocated in the Draft Local Plan.

4 Explanation

4.1 The main headlines from each chapter of the AMR are summarised on pages 3 and 4 of the document. The most noteworthy amongst these are:

- The borough's population is estimated by the Office for National Statistics to have once again risen significantly during the year, to 119,000. If correct this would indicate that something quite significant is happening to the population of the borough, although it is possible that overestimations of local population growth by ONS seen prior to the 2011 Census are taking place once again;
- There has been a significant fall in the number of planning applications being appealed during the year;
- Vacancy rates within the borough's retail centres have fallen slightly and remain very low – and during the monitoring year the vacancy rate in Welwyn Garden City was almost zero;
- During the year, 408 new homes have been completed. This is the highest level for a number of years and now exceeds the previous 2012 Emerging Core Strategy housing target, and although it is slightly below the new Local Plan target of 498 homes per annum this was known at the time the Draft Local Plan was published;
- 116 new affordable homes were brought to the market during the year. At 36% of gross completions this is also the highest level for a number of years, partly boosted by the Council's Affordable Housing Programme;
- The borough now has a 5.03 year supply of housing land. Whilst this is only slightly in excess of the 5 year requirement, the housing target was only recently set as part of the publication of the Draft Local Plan, and with the intention that a 5 year supply would be achieved once the Local Plan is adopted.
- The borough has continued to lose employment premises to other uses, with an overall loss of 10,600m² during the year of which 9,000m² was offices. Further significant losses of offices are expected as a result of schemes for office-to-residential conversions notified to the Council (a change which no longer requires planning permission), amounting to at least 21,000m².
- Given that these losses of employment floorspace were known at the time of preparing the Local Plan, it is still expected that the target increase of 116,000m² of employment floorspace needed to meet the forecast growth in jobs by 2032 can be achieved.
- The borough's economy continues to perform well, with the Office for National Statistics estimating increases in the number of businesses (+6.7%) and number of jobs (+1,000) and falls in the number of claimants of Job Seekers Allowance (to 1.2%) during the year.

4.2 The AMR also reports in detail on the preparation of the Draft Local Plan and the wider Local Plan process through to adoption in 2017. It sets out the new evidence studies which have been produced during the year, the new evidence currently being produced and which will be reported on next year, and details the means by which the Council has engaged with the public and neighbouring authorities.

Implications

5 Legal Implication(s)

- 5.1 The Council has a statutory requirement under the Town and Country Planning Regulations 2012 to publish an 'authority monitoring report' every year. 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.

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 an important 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 this year. This is because it directly follows the finalisation of the Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission document, and very little has changed (for example on the deliverability of development on housing sites) since that time.

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.

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22 December 2016

Appendices: Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council – Annual Monitoring Report 2015/16