

Executive Summary

Authorities' Monitoring Reports ('AMRs') are required to outline the progress made on the local plan timetable and assess the effectiveness of planning policies against various targets and indicators to see whether local planning authorities are achieving local plan objectives.

The AMR must be prepared and published at least once a year in accordance with planning regulations, and Watford's Monitoring Report has been delivered annually since such regulations came into force in 2005.

Watford's Monitoring Report 2015 covers the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. Additional information that has subsequently become known with regard to more recent developments is supplied within the commentary where it is practical to do so, in order to provide as up to date a picture as possible.

Key results on the delivery of the Local Plan Part 2 and impacts being made on the Core Strategy key objectives are supplied here in the Executive Summary.

Planning Policy Delivery

- A second consultation on the Local Plan Part 2 took place 17 December 2014 to 4 February 2015; a further focussed consultation on proposals for a primary school on land off Bedford Street was undertaken from 24 June to 22 July 2015. Following these consultations, changes are being made to some policies, and additional evidence is being commissioned to support the plan prior to publication. Some additional policies are proposed which are subject to consultation from December 2015 to February 2016, ahead of publication stage. This means that the original publication, submission and adoption dates are delayed and a revision to the LDS will be required.
- After being found sound by an independent Examiner, the council adopted the Watford Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule on the 19 November 2014, for implementation from the 1 April 2015. Planning applications determined on or after the 1 April 2015 may therefore be subject to CIL.
- The conservation area Character Appraisal document for Oxhey was adopted by the council in July 2014, following designation as a conservation area in 2013. The council has committed to updating the Character Appraisals for the conservation areas every five years and four draft revised Character Appraisals on the Civic Core, Estcourt, Nascot and St Mary's Conservation Areas have been produced. A four week consultation was undertaken from 6 November until 4 December 2015.

A family-friendly town centre

- Major improvement works were carried out to the town centre and completed in the summer of 2014. These included new street furniture, lighting, trees and paving, with enhancements to the pond and a new events space, which has succeeded in hosting all kinds of events such as the Imagine festivals, the Big Skate – the outdoor ice rink, the Big Beach and the Big Screen. The Parade is also hosting a German Christmas market for the first time in 2015.
- Works are taking place on a major improvement project at Cassiobury Park, with completion estimated spring 2017. Plans include: a revamped pools facility; a new sustainable park hub building, which will include catering facilities, park management office, changing facilities, toilets, visitor centre and education/community room; improving the Cha café tea pavilion and providing an on site park manager, community park ranger and education officer.
- The project to transform Charter Place project in Watford town centre began in November 2015. In addition to about 16 shops and 10 restaurants, a nine-screen IMAX cinema and leisure offer will be created. Part of the scheme includes a public square that will host a diverse events programme, such as street art and music shows.

Sustainable neighbourhoods

- **The net figure of 246 housing completions for 2014-15 is slightly less** than the annual average target of 260 additional homes but this is more than compensated for by delivery in previous years. Watford has delivered a total of 3,615 new homes between 2006/07 and 2014/15, an average of 402 per annum.
- A small number of housing completions, 11 homes over 3 sites, resulted from permitted development termed as prior approvals, equating to 4.5% of the total net completions. These prior approvals were changes of use from offices. A larger impact of the revised permitted development rights is expected in later years; all known permitted development for residential use not yet implemented in Watford is included in the housing trajectory and currently amount to 175 homes, 4.2% of the total housing commitments of 4,141 units at 31 March 2015.
- Watford can demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply of 199%, which is almost twice the National Planning Policy Framework requirement of 105%. The number of projected completions between 2016/17-2020/21 has been identified as 1,791 (x) and the five year supply is **$(1,791/900)*100=199\%$** ; this takes previous delivery into account in order to check if we are on target to reach the minimum 6,500 additional dwellings by 2031. We also have a sufficient supply to cover the annual average target of 260 homes ($260*5=1300$) for more than five years.

- There were 79 affordable dwelling completions in total during 2014/15, forming part of developments where the number of affordable homes achieved varied between 30% and 100% of the total residential units on each site; all conformed to the policy that applied at the time of permission.
- 90.8% of all homes completed this year were on previously developed land, above our local target of 80%.
- The council is guided in granting planning permission by recommendations from the Environment Agency (EA), including advice on flood risk and water quality. There was one initial objection received on the grounds of flood risk but the scheme was subsequently amended and received positive comments from the Environment Agency at a later stage.
- 100% of employment development took place on previously developed land, exceeding the Core Strategy target of 90%. No greenfield land has been used for any employment development in the district during the period monitored since 2006/07.

Enhance Watford's regional economic and transportation role

- The planning permission incorporating both outline and detailed elements for the mixed-use Watford Health Campus was issued by the council on the 6 January 2015. Work has started on the building of the new road to improve access to Watford Hospital and the surrounding areas. Additionally, works started on the Charter Place project in November 2015, which will ultimately create a 1.4 million sq.ft. single retail and leisure destination.
- Watford's Core Strategy seeks a minimum of 7,000 additional jobs in the district between 2006-2031. The latest published data from the EEFM, (dated 8 January 2015) suggest a scale of job growth in Watford of 10,200 from 2006 to 2015; the EEFM projections imply total job growth of 18,100 for the period 2006 to 2031. It is considered that the redevelopment of Charter Place should create about 1,900 new jobs and that the Watford Health Campus project should create a further 1,000 jobs.
- Unemployment rates across most of the county have been steadily decreasing since 2011, dropping more markedly since 2013. Watford's claimant count has decreased by 45.3% between July 2013 and 2015 to 919, a proportion of 1.5%, the lowest it has been since pre-recession in 2008.

- There were minimal gains to employment floorspace in the B use classes during 2014/15. A net loss of 10,620 sq.m. of employment floorspace has occurred during the past year, with over 91% of the reduction in office space. Most of the loss of office floorspace was due to 3 changes of use in situations where exceptions to policy were considered justified - to a hotel in Clarendon Road, where it would support the wider business function, and to a gym and health facility in premises which had been vacant for some time. In response to the higher employment projections and the preparation of up to date evidence on the need for employment space in future, we expect to seek additional office space to replace such losses and provide for expected increases in the demand for office space. This need is a material consideration in determining planning applications now, and is being addressed through the emerging policies and allocations in Local Plan Part 2.
- Most of the office redevelopment overall had planning permission rather than taking place under the prior approvals procedure associated with permitted development rights, which only accounted for around 450 sq.m. loss of office floorspace. However, a larger impact of the revised permitted development rights is expected in later years from the prior approvals not yet implemented. Just over half of the total proposed (with planning permission, not yet implemented) gross loss of employment floorspace of almost 34,200 sq.m. is to office floorspace, nearly 17,500 sq.m. The majority of the proposed gross loss to office floorspace, 55%, is due to the revised permitted development rights which came into effect in May 2013, termed as prior approvals, most of which are changes of use to residential.
- Latest figures on the count of active enterprises in Watford show a mostly increasing trend, and business starts in Watford have increased significantly to 17.1% (750) of total active enterprises (4390) recorded, up from 11.9% the previous year and the number of business closures decreased to 10.8% (475) of active enterprises (2013 figures). This indicates greater confidence in and a healthier economy, which is reflected in figures nationally. However, the high percentage of business starts in Watford indicates that business activity is particularly buoyant here.
- At the end of October 2015, businesses voted to say yes to setting up a Business Improvement District (BID). A BID is a business-led partnership which enables coordinated investment in the management and marketing of a commercial area. It is set to deliver around £3 million of investment in a range of exciting town centre projects over the next five years and provide a coordinating voice to unite its businesses and communities.
- Final funding approval on the Metropolitan Line Extension (formerly known as the Croxley Rail Link) was agreed by the Government in March 2015. Preliminary works on the scheme will continue and it's expected that construction work will start during 2016.

Enhance Watford's regional health, recreational, educational, cultural and social role

- The sites proposed for primary school expansion/provision in the Local Plan Part 2 first consultation in 2013, have all been delivered: Lanchester Community Free School, Hempstead Road - an additional two-form entry school, opened in September 2014; Orchard School - the school has been expanded to a two-form entry primary school - a new 2 storey extension to the school was opened in March 2015; Ascot Road Community Free School - a new two-form entry primary school opened in September 2014 in the Lanchester Building, Hempstead Road and moved into the new purpose built site in Ascot Road in June 2015. Ascot Road is part of Special Policy Area 6: Western Gateway. The council will continue to work with landowners and developers of the Ascot Road site in order to deliver further employment opportunities and other aspirations of Policy SPA 6.
- Watford Health Campus is a major regeneration project to improve the area surrounding Watford Hospital and to provide an opportunity for hospital improvements on the site. Over the next 15-20 years about 750 homes, local retail, leisure and play facilities and public open space will be provided. The approved S106 planning agreement will provide monies for education provision, new and better bus services, local traffic calming, road improvement and junction works; it also requires 35% affordable housing on site.
- Carbon Dioxide emissions reduced in 2013 and there has been a mostly reducing trend in emissions in Watford since 2006, in line with policy objectives. There was an increase in emissions in 2012 but this was the same in 92% of local authorities across the country, due to the colder year.
- The council monitors air quality at several locations across the borough. On Rickmansworth Road site, close to the Town Hall, continuous 'real-time' monitoring of nitrogen dioxide and PM₁₀ particulates is undertaken. NO₂ concentrations have remained fairly constant and the annual mean objective of 40 g/m³ has not been exceeded during this time at this site.

Enhance Watford's environment, green infrastructure and heritage assets

- The amount of open space managed to Green flag Award standard has increased to 115.67 hectares in 2015, which represents 37% of Watford's total open space managed (311.31 hectares). Watford now has six award-winning parks, with Green Flags awarded in 2015 to St. Mary's Churchyard and Callowland Recreation Ground for the first time, following on from the addition of Oxhey Park in 2014. It is the seventh consecutive year that Woodside Playing Fields and Cheslyn Gardens have been awarded the Green Flag and the ninth year for Cassiobury Park. Cassiobury Park has also been named the 10th top park out of over 1500 in the 'Keep Britain Tidy People's Choice Awards'.

- The council successfully bid for external funding from the Heritage Lottery Funding/BIG Lottery funding for Cassiobury Park; grants totalling £5million have been received, alongside WBC funding of up to £2 million, using monies collected from S106 planning agreements. The project includes reintroducing the historic and Grade II listed bandstand from outside the Town Hall, so it can be brought back into more use for arts, music and events in the park and the restoration of the historic 18th century Lime Avenue.
- The importance of open space and the Green Belt to Watford's predominantly urban environment is recognised and protected by Core Strategy Policy GI1: Green Infrastructure and GI2: Green Belt and additional saved policies from the Watford District Plan 2000. The Green Belt currently measures 407 hectares, equating to 19% of Watford's total area, and remains unchanged from last year.
- Watford Borough Council negotiates developers' contributions towards site specific infrastructure including affordable housing, open space and children's play space. In 2014/15, the amount of Section 106 contributions administered by Watford Borough Council that was used to fund schemes was £1,321,572. There is a programme of works using S106 funds and a large number of improvements have been implemented across the town, including the Colne River Project, Cherry Tree Allotments, Oxhey Park, Cassiobury Park and other local parks, play areas, recreation grounds and open spaces.