

PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 18 January 2016
Report of: Head of Regeneration and Development
Title: Watford's Monitoring Report 2015

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 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 the local plan objectives are being achieved. As part of this work mandatory information is required to be included within AMRs in accordance with current planning regulations.
- 1.2 The AMR is required to be prepared and published at least once a year. 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 in the AMR where it is practical to do so, in order to provide as up to date a picture as possible.
- 1.3 The Executive Summary for the AMR 2015 supplies key information on the delivery of the Local Plan Part 2 and impacts being made on the Core Strategy key objectives; it forms Appendix 2 to this Cabinet Report; it is also available to download separately from the AMR 2015 on our website www.watford.gov.uk
- 1.4 Members' attention is drawn to Appendix 3, which is a new quick reference table providing a range of results on target led indicators and trends from the AMR 2015.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet notes the information provided by the AMR 2015.

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3.0 **DETAILED PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 Authorities' Monitoring Reports (AMRs) have an important purpose in the ongoing management of planning policy by identifying changing circumstances and providing the context against which to consider the need for any review of the planning policies in place at the time.
- 3.2 Each local authority is required to prepare and publish their AMR at least once a year. Watford's Monitoring Report has been delivered annually since the requirement for publication was originally enforced in 2005 and this latest Monitoring Report 2015 covers the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.
- 3.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 27 March 2012 and came into force with immediate effect, superseding previous planning guidance, and on the 6 April 2012 'The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012' were published, including Part 8, Section 34 which deals with the mandatory requirements of Authorities' Monitoring Reports in full. For instance, this also includes that local planning authorities should report information on net additional dwellings and net additional affordable dwellings.
- 3.4 Watford's Monitoring Report 2015 focuses on a set of indicators and monitoring mechanisms that were developed as the Local Plan Part 1 progressed, and included as the 'Monitoring Framework' within the Core Strategy. The indicators within the Monitoring Framework are currently under review as the Local Plan Part 2 policies are progressed.
- 3.5 There is no requirement for formal public consultation; the AMR 2015 has previously undergone internal consultation within the council and with Hertfordshire County Council; it also features in the Members' Bulletin for January 2016.
- 3.6 Some extracts follow from the **Executive Summary, available as Appendix 2 to the Cabinet Report (or pages 5-10 of the full AMR 2015)**
- 3.7 **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.

3.8 **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.

- 3.8.1 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.
- 3.8.2 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.
- 3.8.3 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.

3.9 **Enhance Watford's regional economic and transportation role**

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.

- 3.9.1 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 (but above the Hertfordshire average of 1.1% and lower only than Stevenage's 1.8%).
- 3.9.2 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.
- 3.9.3 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, most of which are changes of use to residential.

- 3.9.4 Latest figures on the count of active enterprises in Watford shows a mostly increasing trend, and business starts in Watford have increased significantly to 17.1% (750) of total active enterprises (4,390) recorded, up from 11.9% the previous year. 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.
- 3.9.5 At the end of October 2015, businesses voted to say yes to setting up a Watford Town Centre 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 co-ordinating voice to unite local businesses and communities.
- 3.10 Please note that these are only a few extracts from the Executive Summary, available as Appendix 2 to the Cabinet Report (or pages 5-10 of the full AMR 2015).
- 3.11 Members' attention is also drawn to Appendix 3, which is a new quick reference table providing a range of results on target led indicators and trends from the AMR 2015.

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial**

- 4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications contained in this report.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the legal implications are contained within the body of the report.

4.3 **Equalities**

There are no direct equalities impacts arising from this report. The application of existing policies will be covered by existing equalities assessments and the review and preparation of new policies will be subject to assessments at the appropriate time.

4.4 **Potential Risks**

We consider that there are no risks with this report as it is an item for information.

Appendix 1. Watford's Monitoring Report 2015.

Appendix 2. Executive Summary extracted from the AMR 2015.

Appendix 3. Reference table of target led results and trends from AMR 2015.

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report

File Reference:

P:\SP1.Corporate Democracy & External\SP1.2 Members\

SP1.2.2 Meetings & Reports\SP1.2.2.2 Cabinet Reports