

Executive Summary – extract from Watford’s Monitoring Report 2016

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 2016 covers the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. 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 new timetable for preparing the Local Plan Part 2 was agreed by the council on 16 March 2016 and came into effect on 1 April 2016. This timetable covers the period from 2016 to 2019 and during this period, we intend to progress the Local Plan Part 2 to adoption.
- Publication consultation of **Local Plan Part 2 Site Allocations and Development Management policies** ran from midday on 18 August 2016 for a period of just over six weeks until midday on 3 October 2016, together with consultation on a draft Watford Junction Development Brief and a Masterplanning Study for Croxley View/Ascot Road, Watford. It is intended that feedback on the Croxley View/Ascot Road Study will inform a more detailed brief for the area and that the draft Watford Junction Development Brief will be refined in light of the public’s and stakeholder’s representations.
- The comments received on the Local Plan are being considered and we are aiming for submission of the Local Plan Part 2 in spring 2017. **A Local Plan review** of our strategy will then be commenced to take account of the most up to date information on development needs in the area.
- A new Supplementary Planning Document **Skyline – Watford’s Approach to Taller Buildings** was approved by Cabinet on the 7th March 2016, and sets out the councils’ approach for determining applications for taller buildings in Watford, including setting out the design criteria for assessing taller buildings and what is expected to be submitted at application stage.

- An amended version of the **Residential Design Guide** was adopted by Watford Borough Council in August 2016 as a Supplementary Planning Document, replacing the previous 2014 version. The amendment was required to bring the internal space standards set out in the 2014 document in line with the nationally described standard issued by Government in March 2015. The changes were consulted on between 15th June and 15th July 2016 and approved on 23rd August 2016.
- A consultation was undertaken from 6 November until 4 December 2015 on four revised Character Appraisals on the Civic Core, Estcourt, Nascot and St Mary's Conservation Areas and these were adopted by the council in December 2015.

A family-friendly town centre

- As part of the ongoing Cassiobury Park restoration works, estimated to be completed in spring 2017, the Cha Café has been refurbished and **Watford's Grade II listed bandstand** has been restored and relocated to Cassiobury Park. The bandstand was restored by a team of experts and painted in the colours of the Capel family – a nod to the park's history as an estate for the Earls of Essex and re-opened in September 2016 on the spot on which it was originally built in 1912 in Cassiobury Park. It looks wonderful, has restored some of the historical character and is now available for arts, music and events in the park.
- Demolition of the former **Charter Place** shopping centre has taken place behind decorated hoardings, and the contractors have tried to cause the least disturbance as possible to local businesses and the public. The £200 million transformation to create around 16 shops, 10 restaurants, and a nine-screen IMAX cinema and leisure offer is continuing and is scheduled to be completed in 2018. In an effort to make the town centre more attractive, especially while the redevelopment works are underway, the Business Improvement District (BID) partnership's first major project was the abundance of red, white and blue flower displays along the Parade, High Street and Queens Road, themed to tie in with the Queen's birthday and the Olympics.
- Purple Flag is an accreditation process which recognizes excellence in the management of the evening and night time economy in town centres, similar to the Green Flag award for parks. Now led by the BID, Watford is proud to have achieved **Purple Flag status** once again, scoring 'above average' for a number of areas, including safety, car parking and pedestrian routes.

Sustainable neighbourhoods

- **The net figure of 245 housing completions for 2015-16** is more than the revised annual rate of 180 which was required last year to remain on target for 6,500 additional dwellings by 2031. Although 245 completions is slightly less than the current annual average target of 260 homes, this is compensated for by the scale of housing delivery in previous years. Watford has delivered a total of 3,860 new

homes between 2006/07 and 2015/16, an average of 386 per annum. However, the housing target will be revised as part of the Local Plan review, taking into account up to date evidence.

- Four developments completed under **permitted development rights** during 2015/16 which resulted in a total of 118 homes. This is the first year that we have seen a large proportion, 46.9% of the total net completions, resulting from permitted development termed as prior approvals. These prior approvals were mainly changes of use from offices on three sites in central Watford, with a change of use from retail on one site providing four homes in North Watford. All known prior approvals for residential development not yet implemented in Watford are included in the housing trajectory and currently amount to 129 homes, 2.5% of all 5,073 housing commitments at 31 March 2016 (and 7.3% of the 1,752 units with planning permission or prior approval).
- Watford is able to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply $(2,360/880)*100 = 268.2\%$. This is equivalent to **13.4 years supply**, which is well above the National Planning Policy Framework requirement of 105% and takes housing delivery in previous years into account to check we are on target to attain the minimum 6,500 additional dwellings by 2031. We also have a sufficient housing land supply to cover the annual average target of 260 homes for more than five years. $(2360/1300)*100 = 181.5\% = 9.1$ years supply.
- In 2015-16 there were **25 affordable dwelling completions, which were all affordable rented**. Whilst this does not fully meet our target mix for affordable dwellings, in terms of overall provision, the minimum policy requirement of affordable homes has been provided on all applicable sites. Between 35% and as much as 100% of the total residential units on each qualifying site has been achieved, increasing the stock of affordable homes. Since 2006/07, the start of Watford's Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy 2006–31, 1,176 affordable homes have been completed, an average of 118 affordable homes per annum.

Enhance Watford's regional economic and transportation role

- The **new link road** from Dalton Way to Watford General Hospital opened in November 2016, currently improving access to the hospital but it will also serve the future development associated with the Health Campus. The new road has been named Thomas Sawyer Way in honour of Captain Tom Sawyer, who lived in the locality close to the Campus scheme and was killed in Afghanistan at the age of 26, whilst serving in the Royal Artillery.
- Construction started in August 2016 on twelve new industrial units which will be known as Trade City Watford on the former carriage shed site at Wiggshall Road. Trade City Watford is the **first commercial zone of the Health Campus** that will start to deliver jobs and employment premises to attract new businesses to Watford. It is due to be completed in autumn 2017 and will be fully landscaped with a dedicated wildlife area to one side, adjacent to the River Colne. The units are expected to

provide an additional 180 jobs for the town and much needed high quality employment space. The Health Campus partners, (the council, West Hertfordshire Hospital NHS Trust and Kier Property) are keen to ensure employment opportunities, including traineeships and apprenticeships, are taken up by local people where possible.

- Watford's Core Strategy seeks a minimum of 7,000 additional jobs in the district between 2006 and 2031. The latest published data from the EEFM, (dated 11 August 2016) with a 2016 baseline, suggest job growth in Watford of 10,100 from 2006 to 2016 and imply **total job growth of 17,100 for the period 2006 to 2031**. It is considered that the redevelopment of Charter Place is generating 500 construction jobs leading to 1,125 new jobs in retail, catering and leisure and that the Watford Health Campus project will create around 1,000 jobs.
- Employment floorspace during 2015/16 saw a gross loss of 14,953 sq m and a gain of 4,391 sq m **resulting in a net loss of 10,562 sq m**. About 25% of the total gross loss of employment floorspace was due to changes within the B use classes, 30% was changes to education and the largest percentage, 41%, was changes to residential or mixed redevelopment containing residential.
- In terms of overall employment losses, 9,412 sq m (63%) was lost from office space with the remainder from various B class uses. **More than half of the office floorspace lost was under the prior approvals procedure associated with permitted development rights**. This is a large increase on the previous year, where most of the office floorspace lost had planning permission and prior approvals only accounted for around 450 sq m loss of office floorspace.
- 6,485 sq m of employment floorspace (mostly offices) has been redeveloped to residential or mixed use redevelopment, where the majority of the floorspace in mixed use redevelopments has been for residential use. 158 dwellings were completed during 2015/16 from this loss of employment floorspace, with 60% of the floorspace lost from offices under permitted development rights.

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

- With the opening of the new link road, Thomas Sawyer Way and construction progressing on the first commercial units, Watford Health Campus is starting to become a reality. This 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 over 750 homes and around 1,000 new jobs will be provided, along with local retail, leisure and play facilities and public open space.
- **There is a cumulative impact arising out of the Local Plan Part 2 site allocations that include the effects of new housing increasing demand for places in some primary school planning areas**. These include an additional 2.8FE demand in Watford

Central. The council has been actively engaging with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to ensure this demand is met. The sites proposed for primary school expansion/provision in the Local Plan Part 2 first consultation in 2013, were all delivered between September 2014 and June 2015: Lanchester Community Free School, Hempstead Road - an additional two-form entry school; Orchard School - the school has been expanded to a two-form entry primary school; Ascot Road Community Free School - a new two-form entry primary school.

- Estimates of CO₂ emissions from the Department of Energy and Climate Change can be used to track emission trends over time and measure local contributions to climate change. Latest data available shows that UK emissions decreased overall and in 398 out of the 406 local authorities from the previous year. **In Watford, per capita CO₂ emissions reduced from 5.2 to 4.2 and there has been a mostly reducing trend since 2006, in line with policy objectives.** The main drivers of the decrease in UK emissions were a decrease in the use of coal for electricity generation and a reduction in the use of natural gas for space heating – demand for heating was lower in 2014 as temperatures were on average 1.3 degrees Celsius warmer.
- **The total number of noise complaints per 1,000 population is a new indicator** included in our Monitoring Report from 2016. In Local Plan Part 2, Policy SD14 is proposed in order to avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life as a result of new development. There has been a fairly consistent reducing trend over the last six years. In 2010/11, there were 1,084 noise complaints equivalent to 12.6 per 1,000 population and in 2015/16, this has fallen to 724 noise complaints equivalent to 7.5 per 1,000 population.

Enhance Watford's environment, green infrastructure and heritage assets

- Waterfields Recreation Ground and North Watford Playing Fields have joined the six existing parks holding a **Green Flag award**. This brings the amount of open space managed to Green flag Award standard to 121.5 hectares, increasing from 37% to 39% of Watford's total open space managed (311.3 hectares) as at 31 March 2016.
- **Watford also won first prize in June 2016 for 'Best Parks Restoration/Development Project' at the Horticulture Week Custodian Awards**, covering the whole of the U.K. This was in respect of the achievements of the Watford Parks Improvement Programme 2013-15. This followed on from Cassiobury Park being named the 10th top park out of over 1500 in the 2015 'Keep Britain Tidy People's Choice awards.
- **River Quality is the second new indicator** being included in our Monitoring Report. In the Local Plan Part 2, Policy G17 is proposed for the protection and restoration of river corridors and watercourses. Within the UK, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) sets a target for all rivers to have a 'good' ecological status or potential by 2027. River quality is monitored on a county basis and the 2015 data for Hertfordshire shows a decrease in the number of water bodies at good and poor status and an increase in the number of water bodies at moderate status compared

to 2014. When the health of a water body is worse than the target of Good Ecological Status or Good Ecological Potential, we say that it is failing, and the reasons why are investigated.

- Watford Borough Council negotiates developers' contributions towards site specific infrastructure including affordable housing, open space and children's play space. **In 2015/16, the amount of Section 106 contributions administered by Watford Borough Council that was used to fund schemes was £610,531.44.** Major restoration works are ongoing in Cassiobury Park and substantial investment has been made in various schemes including the Colne River Project, new facilities at the Riverside Recreation Ground, and a new refurbished playground in Berry Avenue.
- The council is working proactively with Hertfordshire County Council to find a way of improving the condition of **Little Cassiobury and was awarded grant funding** from Historic England in June 2016 to undertake survey work and develop a Conservation and Management Plan for the building.

During 2015/16 there have continued to be strong growth pressures on Watford. Our planning policies and supplementary planning documents shape the town in a positive way supporting the delivery of new homes, employment growth and essential infrastructure improvements. Watford remains an attractive place to live, work and invest.

Growing land values and development costs continue to raise viability issues which will need careful management during the plan period to ensure that we attract high quality developments which meet our policy requirements and enhance the town over the coming years. However there have been many national changes to planning and housing legislation in recent years and these are being reflected in Local Plan Part 2: Sites and Development Management Policies which will be submitted for external examination in 2017.