

Part A

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 30 November 2020

Report author: Interim Head of Planning and Building Control

Title: Watford Final Draft Local Plan Publication for Regulation 19 Consultation

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval for the final draft Watford Local Plan to be published for Regulation 19 Consultation, which is the next statutory stage towards its adoption in early 2022.

2.0 Risks

2.1

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Change in Government Guidance	Some policies will require significant rework and changes are not adequately discussed with stakeholders.	Progress timetable to reduce risk of further changes being proposed that could affect fundamentals of the draft Plan.	Tolerate	2x 2 =4
Risk that Local Plan is not widely supported by communities or politically.	Local Plan despite being adopted does not 'buy-in' residents and stakeholders to Watford's continued successful growth	Ensure there is a strong communication plan including social media and outreach to different communities and age groups. Note that there has been strong engagement with members at Planning Advisory Meetings.	Treat	3x3=9
Risk that the evidence base becomes outdated as new data becomes available	Delay to the Local Plan while evidence based work is updated.	Good project management and progressing the Plan in good time to reduce the risk of government guidance changing.	Treat	2x2=4
Failure to agree critical infrastructure strategy with key stakeholders	Delay to the Local Plan and increased potential for the Local Plan to be challenged at examination.	Work commissioned to better understand infrastructure requirements. On-going	Treat	3x3=9

		engagement with infrastructure providers.		
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3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 Cabinet approves that the Watford final draft Watford Local Plan, content set out at Appendix A and proposed graphic design included at Appendix B, be published for Regulation 19 consultation.
- 3.2 Cabinet delegates authority to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development to approve any minor amendments required including following feedback from the Sustainability Appraisal and a peer review prior to publication.

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Report approved by: Ben Martin, Interim Head of Planning and Building Control

4.0 Detailed proposal

- 4.1 The Local Plan is a plan for the future development of the local area, drawn up by the Local Planning Authority. It sets out the policy framework for how land is used and guides development so it comes forward in a way that is planned for delivering homes, jobs and infrastructure for current and future generations.
- 4.2 The Local Plan is a ‘statutory’ or legally required document that forms part of the Council’s strategy to deliver sustainable development and tackle climate change. It will guide new development so that it comes forward in a coordinated manner, making the best and most appropriate use of land to meet the needs of the community and local area. This Local Plan covers the period from 2018 to 2036. Preparation of the final draft Local Plan has been informed by an evidence base that includes background studies prepared alongside this work.
- 4.3 The Local Plan sets out the growth strategy for the borough to 2036 and covers themes related to sustainable development including economic, environmental and social issues. The Plan includes planning policies used to determine planning applications and identifies sites allocated for development. The Plan consists of 13 chapters outlined in the table below.

Chapter 1: A Spatial Strategy for Watford	Introduces the Local Plan and sets out the Council’s approach to growth.
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Chapter 2: Core Development Area	This chapter sets out the development principles in the three areas where most growth is projected (Watford Gateway includes the Watford Junction and Clarendon Road area), Town Centre, Colne Valley.
Chapter 3: Homes for a Growing Community	This chapter makes provision for 14, 274 new homes (793 homes per year) and contains housing policies relating to affordable housing, specialist housing, conversions and building standards.
Chapter 4: A Strong Economy	This chapter outlines policies that support economic investment and protects existing employment areas.
Chapter 5: A Vibrant Town	This chapter focuses on how the Town Centre will be supported, ensuring it remains an attractive and vibrant visitor location by adapting to meet future demands.
Chapter 6: An Attractive Town	This chapter provides design guidance to ensure that development is designed to the highest quality. The section guides building heights for new development.
Chapter 7: The Historic Environment	The focus of this chapter is to seek to protect Watford's heritage and encourage applicants to consider how heritage can be an opportunity for new development.
Chapter 8: A Climate Emergency	Supports the Council's climate emergency declaration and requires higher sustainability standards to be achieved by new development. The chapter seeks to manage the environmental impact of new development.
Chapter 9: Conserving and Enhancing the Environment	This chapter introduces policies that focus on improving the environment, that enhance green infrastructure and biodiversity, seek to mitigate flood risk (including risks associated with climate change) and provide new open space where required.
Chapter 10: Infrastructure	This chapter provides a framework to deliver new infrastructure on-site and through developer contributions.
Chapter 11: A Sustainable Travel Town	This chapter has a strong emphasis on public transport, walking and cycling that will contribute towards addressing traffic issues in the borough and minimise the impacts of new development on the transport network. Includes policies on transport infrastructure, safeguarding transport routes, car parking and electric vehicles.
Chapter 12: A Healthy Community	A theme throughout the document, this chapter encourages development proposals to consider how they will support community health and create living environments that are good for physical and mental wellbeing.

Chapter 13: Site Allocations and New Development	This chapter introduces the 57 sites allocated for development including housing and mixed uses. This provides the basis for housing and employment growth in the borough to 2036.
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4.4 As the Local Plan is being prepared it goes through several stages from its inception, pulling together evidence to support decision making, through to the adoption of the Local Plan at which point the policies can be applied to effectively manage change in the town. The consultation to date has involved members of the public, the development industry, infrastructure organisations and other stakeholders that have an interest in the area. The table below sets out the stages of the Local Plan.

Collect evidence
Issues and Options stage with public consultation (Sept-Oct 2018)
First draft Local Plan stages with public consultation (Sept-Nov 2019)
Final draft Local Plan stage with public consultation (Jan-Feb 2021)
Submission to the Local Plan to the Secretary of State for examination (Summer 2021)
Examination of the draft Local Plan by an independent Planning Inspector (Autumn 2021)
Adoption of Local Plan (Early 2022)

4.5 Within the Issues and Options 2018 stage - September to October 2018 the Council consulted on what the community thought were the key planning issues affecting the borough and how they might be addressed as part of the new Local Plan. Key issues that were raised were:

- The impact of growth (including future infrastructure provision and parking)
- Climate change and pollution
- Affordable housing
- Taller buildings and achieving good design
- Providing improved sustainable travel options

4.6 During the first draft Local Plan 2019 consultation from October to November 2019 the Council consulted on the first draft Watford Local Plan. Key issues that were raised were:

- The impact of growth (including future infrastructure provision and parking)
- The potential impacts of proposed development sites
- Taller buildings and high density development
- Affordable housing

- 4.7 Final draft Local Plan 2021 - The final draft Local Plan is the current version of the Plan, which the Council intends to submit to the Planning Inspectorate for examination by an independent Planning Inspector to ensure the Plan is consistent with national policy and guidance. Following examination it will be adopted by the local authority, subject to any amendments arising through the Examination process. The final draft Local Plan consultation is a requirement under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 4.8 The Council will consider comments made in response to the consultation and can propose changes to the final draft Local Plan to the Planning Inspector, but cannot amend the Plan itself. Proposed changes to the final draft Local Plan will be submitted alongside the Plan for the Planning Inspector to decide what changes are appropriate.
- 4.9 This report requests approval from Cabinet to publish the final draft Local Plan for public consultation for a period of 6 weeks. The final draft Local Plan and result of the public consultation will be brought back to Cabinet following completion and assessment of the consultation responses, prior to seeking the approval of Council to submit the Plan for examination in public.
- 4.10 At each stage of the Local Plan process a Sustainability Appraisal is carried out, to assess the social, environmental and economic effects of a plan from the outset. In doing so it has helped ensure that the Local Plan contributes to achieving sustainable development in Watford. A Sustainability Appraisal has been instructed for the final draft Local Plan, for which we are waiting results. If there are any critical recommendations from this assessment, it is proposed that these will be taken into account in the final draft Local Plan prior to publishing for public consultation in January 2020. The draft Local Plan will continue to be reviewed for language and clarity. Therefore, it is requested that approval to confirm minor amendments is delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Development.
- 4.11 This final draft Local Plan has been prepared to reflect the timetable set out in the Local Development Scheme, adopted by Council in October 2020.
- 4.12 Ward members have been engaged throughout the development of the final draft Local Plan through the Planning Policy Advisory Group (PPAG), an all member grouping and all policies have been discussed and reviewed by the Planning Steering Group (PSG), members chosen by the Cabinet.
- 4.13 A consultation strategy has been prepared in collaboration with the internal Communications team. The consultation will be supported with a leaflet distributed to households across the borough, posters to raise awareness through the town, and using social media to publicise the issues and opportunities facing the borough.

Members of the public, organisations and other stakeholders will be able to respond to the consultation online or in writing during the 6 week consultation period.

5.0 **Implications**

5.1 **Financial**

5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments there is a budget for publicity and engagement for publication, examination and adoption. A budget to cover the other costs associated with the adoption of the local plan e.g. the Planning Inspectorate fee has been included in the 2021/2022 budget.

5.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that Planning documents (both statutory and non-statutory) have a clearly defined process for their adoption and revocation which has been followed to date. The Local Plan must be prepared in accordance with the Planning and compulsory purchase Act 2004 and Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

5.3 **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**

5.3.1 Under s149 (1) of the Equality Act the council must have due regard, in the exercise of its functions, to the need to –

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them
- foster good relations between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them.

5.3.2 As this is a new Local Plan for Watford, an equalities impact analysis has been undertaken. The analysis is attached as appendix C to this report cabinet is asked to review it before agreeing the recommendation.

5.4 **Data Protection Impact Assessment**

5.4.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

5.5 **Staffing**

5.5.1 The team currently has the staff resources available to deliver the final draft Local Plan as set out in the timetable in the Local Development Scheme.

5.6 **Sustainability**

5.6.1 Progressing the Local Plan will help the council to determine planning applications to help achieve sustainable development. The Local Plan documents themselves will be subject to separate sustainability appraisals.

Appendices

Appendix A – Final draft Local Plan (text only)

Appendix B – Example design and graphics for final draft Local Plan – cover sheet, example chapter and proposed leaflet

Appendix C – Equalities Impact Assessment

Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.