

Report to: Council
Date of meeting: 17 October 2022
Report of: Spatial Planning Manager
Title: Watford Local Plan

1.0 Summary

1.1 The Watford Local Plan is a statutory planning document to guide decision-making when considering development proposals in the borough. It sets out the growth strategy to 2038, includes planning policies used to determine planning applications and identifies development sites that will enable growth needed in the borough.

1.2 The Watford Local Plan was subject to an Examination in Public which commenced on 6 August 2021. This began with the submission of the Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate and concluded on 20 September 2022 when the Council received the Inspector’s final report. The public hearing sessions into the Council’s Local Plan took place between 18 January 2022 and 9 February 2022.

1.3 Following consultation on the ‘Main Modifications’ arising from the hearing sessions, the Inspectors report concludes that, subject to the main modifications being made, the Watford Local Plan is sound and provides an appropriate basis for guiding development in the borough using up to date planning policies.

1.4 Once adopted, the new Watford Local Plan, including the planning policies and site allocations within it, will supersede Watford’s Local Plan Part 1 - Core Strategy 2006-31 (adopted January 2013) and saved policies in the Watford District Plan 2000 (adopted December 2003).

2.0 Risks

2.1

| Nature of risk | Consequence | Suggested Control Measures | Response | Risk Rating |
|------------------|---|---|----------|-------------|
| Plan not adopted | Out of date planning policies. Reliance on national planning policies reducing the weight given to local circumstances when | Adopt the Local Plan. Continued engagement with members and officers. | Treat | 6 (2 x 3) |

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|----------|-----------|
| | <p>determining planning applications. Increase of planning appeals. Uncoordinated and poorly designed development sites coming forward. Further officer time and financial resources required detracting from other work in the Service Plan.</p> | | | |
| Change to national planning guidance | Local Plan policies not implemented as effectively as intended. | Respond to any relevant consultation released by the Government on proposed changes. Depending on the significance of any change, consider review of the Local Plan, or affected parts of. | Treat | 6 (2 x 3) |
| Alignment with SW Herts Joint Strategic Plan | Uncertainty could delay the Joint Strategic Plan and setting out growth needs in the borough with a local strategy as to how this will be achieved. | Adopt the Local Plan. Continued engagement with members and officers. | Treat | 1 (1 x 1) |
| Legal challenge within six weeks of adoption | Potential delay to Local Plan adoption. | Ensure all legal processes are followed. | Tolerate | 3 (1x3) |

3.0 Recommendations

3.1 That, Council:

- a) Adopt the Watford Local Plan as attached as appendix A in accordance with S23(3) of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (as amended);
- b) That delegated authority be given to the Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Partnerships and Planning to undertake revisions to formatting of the Local Plan.

Contact Officer:

For further information on this report please contact:

Jack Green

Telephone: 01923 278093

Email: jack.green@watford.gov.uk

Report approved by:

Ben Martin, Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy

4.0 Detailed Proposal

4.1 Background – Preparation of the Local Plan

- 4.2 The Local Plan sets out the strategy to support growth in Watford. This includes the scale of growth that needs to be planned for in the borough, where this should be located and how this is expected to be delivered.
- 4.2 Supported by an [evidence base](#) of studies and strategies, the Local Plan set outs the planning policies that will be used to determine planning applications and identifies site allocations where development is to take place. The Local Plan is supplemented by the Policies Map (attached at appendix B) which shows the spatial coverage of policies in the Local Plan that are more specific than being borough-wide. Note, the Policies Map is a PDF document, however, online, it is available as an interactive map where information layers can be ‘turned on and off’ to make it easier to use.
- 4.3 The Government requires Local Plans to be kept up to date and reviewed every five years. Since the Core Strategy was adopted in 2013, national planning guidance has changed significantly and alongside this Watford has been subject to increasing development pressure reflective of its proximity to London and excellent transport connections to the city. The effect of this was demonstrated by the withdrawal of Watford Local Plan Part 2 (Site Allocations and Development Management Policies) in 2017 which was intended to support the Core Strategy.
- 4.4 During the preparation of the Local Plan, several stages of public consultation were undertaken. Each stage was compliant with the Council’s [Statement of Community Involvement](#).

- 4.5 The first step towards preparing a new Local Plan was to identify the planning issues facing the borough. In September 2018, the Council consulted on Issues and Options that should be addressed in the new Local Plan (Regulation 18). Approximately 420 people responded to the consultation survey and provided about 8,430 survey responses and comments.
- 4.6 The first draft Local Plan was consulted upon in September 2019 for six weeks (Regulation 18). The consultation utilised a variety of consultation methods which reflected the more in-depth and detailed nature of the consultation document. 842 responses were received from 223 respondents.
- 4.7 The Council published the final draft Local Plan (Regulation 19). This is a formal stage and final opportunity for stakeholders and members of the public to support or challenge the content of the draft Local Plan. This consultation took place in January 2021 for six weeks. 438 comments were received from 82 respondents.

4.8 **Background – Submission for Examination in Public**

- 4.9 On 19 July 2021, Council approved the draft Watford Local Plan to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination in Public. Planning Inspector Mr William Fieldhouse was appointed by the then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, to examine the Local Plan. Details of the Examination and documentation associated with it can be viewed on the Council's Watford Local Plan webpage watfordlocalplan.co.uk. Important milestones during the Examination include:

- Submission: 6th August 2021
- Examination hearings: 18 January to 9 February 2022
- Proposed Main Modifications proposed by the Council in response to questions from the Inspector, representations & discussion at the hearings put forward on 30 May 2022
- Consultation on the Main Modifications (Minor Modifications also made available for comment): 9 June 2022 to 21 July 2022
- Inspectors final report (attached at Appendix C), including a recommendation for the Council to adopt the Local Plan subject to the proposed modifications set out in the appendix to the report being included, was received closing the Examination in Public on 20 September 2022

4.10 **Inspectors Report and Main Modifications**

- 4.11 The Inspector's report concludes that the Watford Local Plan provides an appropriate basis for the planning of the Borough, provided that a number of main modifications are made to make it sound. For a Local Plan to be sound it is required to be: positively prepared; justified; effective; and, consistent with national policy (these definitions are set out on page 12 of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#), 2021).
- 4.12 The Main Modifications to the submitted Local Plan (as agreed by Council on 11 July 2021) are set out in full in Appendix C but the main points can be summarised as follows:
- Amend the plan period from 2018-2036 to 2021-2038.
 - Change the minimum housing requirement from 793 homes per year to 784 homes per year (13,328 between 2021 and 2038) and exclude an annual buffer.

- Clarification that at least 158 homes per year will come forward as windfall development, in addition to a total of 11,112 on existing commitments and site allocations, if the minimum housing requirement is to be met.
- Changes to policy CDA2.1 and relevant allocation requirements to achieve sustainable development and transformation of the Watford Gateway Strategic Development Area.
- Amendments to policies CDA2.2, VT5.1 and VT5.2 and relevant allocation requirements to achieve sustainable development and promote the vitality and viability of Watford town centre.
- Changes to policy CDA2.3 and relevant allocation requirements to achieve sustainable development and transformation of the Colne Valley Strategic Development Area including through the preparation of a masterplan supplementary planning document for Lower High Street.
- Amendments to policies HO3.5 and HO3.10 to meet the housing needs of the elderly and those with special needs.
- Changes to policy HO3.11 to secure the provision of shared private outdoor amenity space in new apartment blocks.
- Clarification of employment provision in the Local Plan and this relates to strategic requirements across SW Herts.
- Removal of Reach Printing Services Limited from a designated industrial area.
- Amendments to various policies to set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the Borough's historic environment.
- Environmental requirements such energy efficiency to be no higher than national guidance or legislation.
- Clarification of the requirements for site allocations.
- A number of other modifications to ensure that the plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

4.13 Relationship between the new Local Plan and the Core Strategy

- 4.14 The new Local Plan will supersede the Core Strategy 2006-2031, adopted in 2013, and the saved policies in the Watford District Plan 2000. This will be effective immediately upon adopting the new Local Plan and issuing the Adoption Statement which follows. The Adoption Statement is a formal notification that Watford Borough Council has adopted the new Local Plan.
- 4.15 From the date of adoption, policies in the new adopted Local Plan will be used to determine planning applications and planning appeals. Policies in the Core Strategy will no longer have weight in this regard.
- 4.16 The new Local Plan will form a part of the statutory development plan for the Borough, alongside the Hertfordshire Minerals Local Plan, Hertfordshire Waste Local Plan and any future adopted neighbourhood plans.

4.17 Post-adoption of the Local Plan

4.18 The Local Plan and Policies Map will be published on the Council website alongside the Adoption Statement (attached as Appendix E) and Sustainability Appraisal Report. The Local Plan Examination pages will also continue to be available on the Council's website.

4.19 Following adoption there is a six week period during which any person who is aggrieved by the adoption of the Watford Local Plan may make an application to the High Court under Section 113 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 on the grounds that:

- the document is not within the appropriate power; and/or
- a procedural requirement has not been complied with.

4.20 Implementation of the Local Plan will be monitored and reported on as part of the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR). The monitoring framework is set out in the appendices to the Local Plan.

5.0 Implications

5.1 Financial

5.2 The cost of preparing the Local Plan is covered within the Place Shaping budget. Further expenditure on the Local Plan document after adoption will be minimal. Post-adoption implementation will require financial support, however, this will be identified through other defined projects and will be subject to a business case and budgetary approval.

5.3 Adoption of the Local Plan will place Watford Borough Council in stronger position to attract economic investment because of the certainty it provides and the overall growth strategy set out. New development will generate funds through the Community Infrastructure Levy and indirectly can be used to support funding bids to aid economic development and unlock development sites.

5.4 Legal Issues

5.5 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that as stated in the body of the report once adopted by Council the Plan is subject to a six week challenge period. Failure to formally adopt the Plan as recommended will be as stated in the risks section of this report.

5.6 Equalities/Human Rights

5.7 An Equalities Impact Analysis (attached as Appendix D) was undertaken in the early stages of preparation of the Local Plan and reviewed/updated as necessary as the Local Plan progressed a copy of it can be viewed here (or attach as a further appendix).

5.8 Staffing

5.9 Following adoption of the Local Plan officer time will be required to monitor its implementation, maintain the Policies Map and facilitate updates to the Local Plan webpage as required. Implementation of the Local Plan will require the input from all officers and will contribute towards the delivery of objectives set out in the Council Plan.

5.10 Accommodation

5.11 N/A

5.12 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

5.13 The Local Plan includes policies on design intended to deliver high quality places for people to use. An element of this relates to creating an environment that increases the sense of safety and inclusiveness.

5.14 Sustainability

5.15 The Local Plan sets out an approach to growth that is underpinned by sustainability. This is reflected in planning policy requirements.

5.16 As the Local Plan was prepared, it was subject to a Sustainability Appraisal. This considered different elements of sustainability as they relate to planning: economic, environmental and social. These were applied to policies and site allocations to understand how they perform individually and cumulatively (the whole as a whole).

5.17 In addition to the policies and site allocations in the Local Plan, alternative growth options and policy options were tested to establish the most appropriate approach to development in Watford.

5.18 The Local Plan was subjected to a Habitats Regulations Assessment. This considers how the Local Plan could impact upon protected European sites. The assessment concluded there would be no significant impact on any protected sites in the area.

6.0 Appendices

6.1 Appendix A: Watford Local Plan

6.2 Appendix B: Local Plan Policies Map

6.3 Appendix C: Inspector's Report

6.4 Appendix D: Equality Impact Analysis

6.5 Appendix E: Adoption Statement

6.6 Background Papers

- 6.7 Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)
- 6.8 Sustainability Appraisal (SA)
- 6.9 Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)