

Part A

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: Monday, 27 November 2023

Report author: Planning Policy Officer

Title: Authority Monitoring Report 2022/2023

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) presents a range of information, data and analysis that can be used to assess the effectiveness of individual planning policies, and highlight whether the wider Local Plan objectives are being met.
- 1.2 This AMR (Appendix A) covers the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, which is known as the 'monitoring year'. This is the second AMR which has reported on policies in the new Watford Local Plan.
- 1.3 Given that it is still very early in the plan period, identifying comparisons and trends is difficult for most indicators at this stage. Most of the applications referenced in this report and contributing to the data that has been recorded this year, were approved prior to the adoption of the new Watford Local Plan and therefore new policies were not being given full weight in decision making.
- 1.4 The effectiveness of the Local Plan will become clearer as more applications are granted and delivered exclusively against policies in the Local Plan post October 2022.
- 1.5 An executive summary is included at the front of the AMR (Appendix 1) which summarises the data recorded this year and indicates whether targets have been met and whether trends are up or down over the plan period. This summary should be read in conjunction with the analysis in the report to add context to these results.

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)
The AMR can highlight instances of planning	Criticism from media and the public regarding planning	Providing explanatory to text to clarify findings and potential	Treat	2x2=4

policies not performing as intended	<p>decisions and current trends.</p> <p>Implementation of ineffective planning policies resulting in planning decisions that do not effectively contribute to the objectives in the Watford Local Plan</p> <p>In the long-term, highlights the need for a review of the Local Plan</p>	implications within the AMR and providing corporate and Member briefings as necessary outlining future actions that may be required.		
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3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet agree to publish the Authority Monitoring Report 2022/2023 as included in Appendix 1 on our website.

Further information:

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Report approved by:

Jack Green, Spatial Planning Manager

4.0 Detailed proposal

- 4.1 The Localism Act (2011) requires Local Planning Authorities to publish monitoring information at least annually. This is usually done through an Authority Monitoring Report (AMR).
- 4.2 The Watford Local Plan (2021-2038), adopted in October 2022, includes a monitoring framework (Appendix A in the Watford Local Plan) setting out how the Council will monitor policies within the Plan, and what the specific target for each indicator is where appropriate. The Plan was adopted midway through this current monitoring year.
- 4.3 There is no set structure or prescribed content for an AMR but there are several elements set out in regulations as minimum requirements that an AMR must include. These are listed below:
- A Local Development Scheme setting out a timetable for Local Plan production;

- The borough's performance against the housing delivery targets in the development plan;
- Any Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments the authority has received;
- Details of any Duty to Co-operate issues and meetings that have arisen or been undertaken.

- 4.4 As the Local Plan was adopted in the last twelve months there is not a detailed Local Development Scheme provided in the AMR, however a review within five years is recommended in national guidance and so will need to be considered in future years.
- 4.5 Monitoring of planning policies enables the Council to establish if the Local Plan, either as a whole, or in part, is effective. The longer the Plan has been implemented the clearer this becomes. Should monitoring demonstrate a policy or policies are ineffective, particularly in the context of national guidance this may indicate that part of the Plan is 'out of date'.
- 4.6 The AMR is not intended as a 'state of the Council' report and should not be read as such. It is specifically monitoring the impacts of new development in the borough and provides an important evidence base that will help to inform Council and planning decisions across the Plan period, as well as informing a future review of the Local Plan.
- 4.7 The Planning Policy team has made every effort to collect and include as much data as possible but there are some gaps where it has not been possible to source data this year. The team has sought to put in place a methodology that should enable the data to be collected and reported on in subsequent years.
- 4.8 At the end of most indicators, a three-part summary analysis is provided. These include an overview of what has happened in the last monitoring year; how it compares to past trends leading up to the current monitoring year; and the implications for the Local Plan moving forward.
- 4.9 The below lists some of the key headline data from this year's AMR. More information and context on some of this data is provided in paragraphs 4.10-4.15 below and analysis of all the data is provided in Appendix 1:
- 778 net residential completions compared to 754 completions last year. The annual target is 784 residential completions. 778 completions represent the largest single year of completions in the borough since the AMR was first published in 2006/2007 and is an uplift of 24 units on the number delivered in 2021-2022, which also represented a record level of completions at the time.
 - 45% of completions were within the Core Development Area
 - 93% of new residential development on Previously Developed Land compared to a target of 80%. This follows long term trends but is still positive to report.
 - 98% of new residential units were flats, apartments, maisonettes or studios with the remaining 2% being houses.
 - 6% of new residential units were 3+ bedrooms (family-sized) compared to the new Local Plan target of 20%.

- 94 net affordable dwellings completed. Comprising: 52% affordable rent; 32% social rent; 16% intermediate/shared-ownership. This equates to 14% of all residential completions by habitable room compared to a target of 35%.
- Loss of 14,481sqm of net additional employment floorspace.
- Despite a reported loss of employment floorspace there is currently over 53,000sqm of employment floorspace proposed on granted applications which may be delivered over the coming years.
- 1,005sqm net additional Main Town Centre uses in the Town Centre.
- Town Centre vacancy rate of 8.9% compared to 11.8% in 2019. This is better than national trends.
- £2.8 million collected through CIL contributions and £2 million collected through s106 contributions. The s106 contributions were largely towards affordable housing with smaller contributions towards street trees and controlled parking zones.
- 2,016 additional electric vehicle spaces delivered, most of which were delivered as part of a cross boundary application at Warner Bros studios.

4.10 There are some indicators marked as red in the executive summary in Appendix 1. Those in red are those where the results this year are trending downwards from last year. Some of these indicators are referred to in the bullet point list above.

4.11 The number of homes completed is high compared to historic delivery figures but close to the housing requirements set out in the Local Plan. Assuming the Housing Delivery Test figures are published by the Government in January 2024, this is expected to put the Council in a stronger position to determine planning applications and manage growth.

4.12 Where in the borough delivery takes place will vary year on year. For example last year recorded substantial delivery within the Watford Gateway SDA whereas this year, delivery has been more prominent in the Colne Valley SDA. This will continue to vary over the plan period and will depend on the delivery of specific sites. It would be expected however that the proportion of development will increase within the Core Development Area as the Local Plan site allocations start to come forward.

4.13 Only 2% of dwellings delivered being houses is largely a reflection of Watford's urban geography and is broadly reflective of historic trends. However, it is important to recognise that there will be opportunities to deliver more traditional types of homes (e.g. detached and semi-detached) as they come forward as windfall sites (i.e. sites not allocated in the Local Plan).

4.14 The provision of family sized units (3+ bedrooms) is a key element of meeting the housing needs of the borough. This will largely be dictated by the market and a challenge for the Local Plan going forward will be whether this policy target is effective in increasing this proportion. The requirement for 20% is unlikely to have a significant impact on this for several years until permissions granted post Local Plan adoption are being delivered.

- 4.15 The lower delivery of affordable housing delivered this year is mainly a reflection of permissions granted prior to Local Plan adoption. In recent years, large developments like Riverwell have increased the delivery of affordable housing overall and last year's particularly high affordable housing delivery reflected the fact that several large schemes came forward at once causing a deviation from historic trends. This year's delivery is more reflective of, and in fact slightly higher than, historic trends, and the increased proportion of social rent units is positive.
- 4.16 The recorded loss of employment floorspace was primarily the result of two applications, one a redevelopment of an industrial unit, which was demolished over the monitoring year but will be rebuilt to provide a slightly lower amount of employment floorspace than was on the site before. The other was a development at Cherry Tree Road (Mothercare site) which is changing use to residential under permitted development rights.

5 Implications

5.1 Financial

- 5.1.1 Chief Finance Officer comments that there are no financial implications arising from this report. The CIL and Section 106 contributions collected are held in the Council's Capital Contributions Reserve until allocated to schemes through the Capital Programme.

5.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)

- 5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the council is under a statutory duty to produce the Annual Monitoring Report.

5.3 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

- 5.3.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under s149, it is considered that there are no equalities or human rights issues associated with this report.
- 5.3.2 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.

5.4 Staffing

- 5.4.1 The AMR has been, and will continue to be, produced within the existing resources in the planning policy team.

5.5 Accommodation

- 5.5.1 N/A

5.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 N/A

5.7 **Sustainability**

5.7.1 N/A

Appendices

Appendix 1: Authority Monitoring Report 2022-2023

Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.