

Watford Housing Strategy

CONTEXTS – COUNTY AND LONDON

Watford is located in the south west of the county of Hertfordshire, close to the boundary with the north London boroughs of Hillingdon, Harrow and Barnet. Policy and demographic developments within both the county of Hertfordshire and London have an impact on housing supply and demand in Watford.

The County of Hertfordshire

As a district authority, certain activities in Watford are determined or influenced by Hertfordshire County Council, other Hertfordshire-wide organisations, and various sub-county local authority groupings.

Health and Well-being of people in Hertfordshire – Developing a health and well-being strategy for 2012-2015- The Health and Well-being Board for Hertfordshire has identified the following priorities for its strategy between 2012 and 2015:

- Priority 1: Tackling Obesity
- Priority 2: Reducing smoking
- Priority 3: Managing long-term conditions to reduce the use of emergency care
- Priority 4: Supporting family carers
- Priority 5: Promoting good mental health including helping people live well with dementia
- Priority 6: Helping families facing multiple problems to thrive
- Priority 7: Reducing the harm caused by drugs and alcohol
- Priority 8: Fulfilling lives for people with a learning disability

In addition, Hertfordshire County Council Health and Community Services Plan for 2012-2015 contains the following housing-related commitments:

- Re-ablement and Recovery
 - Make new accommodation schemes such as Flexicare/Extra Care housing and supported living widely available around the county.
- Personalisation
 - Improve our care services and support to people who have dementia and their families.
 - Reduce the number of older people and people with learning disabilities living in residential care homes.

The Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Growth Strategy – The growth strategy for Hertfordshire has been published and sets out ambitions to make the county the leading economy within the “golden triangle” of London, Oxford and Cambridge.

Hertfordshire’s economy consists of 1.1 million employees, 50,000 businesses and £26 billion GVA. However, the growth strategy identified the increasingly lack of affordable housing in the county as a barrier to growth, particularly for those who work locally.

The Local Enterprise Partnership has identified the following priorities:

- Priority 1: Enterprise and innovation in the heart of the Golden Triangle.
- Priority 2: Harnessing our relationships with London.
- Priority 3: Re-invigorating vibrant town centres for the 21st century, including advancing a new vision of town centres.

Hertfordshire Infrastructure Planning Partnership – A county-wide approach is being taken to examine infrastructure needs within Hertfordshire as these involve the statutory responsibilities of a number of organisations and cross-district boundaries.

The Duty to Co-operate – Hertfordshire local authorities are examining how cross-boundary working on planning and housing could work in practice.

The Hertfordshire Child Poverty Action Plan 2014-2015 - Hertfordshire County Council has convened a working group to produce a Hertfordshire child and poverty action plan. The action plan for 2014-2015 contains the following housing-related targets:-

- Explore mechanisms for assisting families experiencing fuel poverty.
- Explore methods of communication with homeless households living in temporary accommodation in order to provide assistance and promote new schemes and services.
- Promote sources of help and advice for people living in poorer housing conditions, especially those in the private rented sector.
- Continue to provide new affordable housing with two, three and four bedrooms which are suitable for households with children.

Hertfordshire Thriving Families – A new Thriving Families service has been established in Hertfordshire. It will be integral to Hertfordshire’s Thriving Families programme. The objective for Hertfordshire Thriving Families is to enable families to tackle barriers that stop them from thriving and provide support that sustains this progress for generations to come.

Housing-related support – Hertfordshire County Council commissions housing relating support services, both accommodation-based and service-based, for vulnerable people throughout Hertfordshire. As well as assessing the need for services, Hertfordshire County Council also monitors the quality of these services. In mid 2014 housing-related support was awarded to housing and support providers in Watford who provide accommodation and assistance to the following client groups:

- Older people
- People with mental health issues
- Single homeless people
- People with learning disabilities
- Young people aged 16-25 years.
- Women escaping domestic violence

The Strategic Partnership Accommodation Board – This Board acts as the main governance and strategic partnership forum in Hertfordshire for the development of services for children aged 16 and 17 who are homeless or may present as homeless. The Board will agree the priorities and strategic direction regarding improving preventative services and accommodation and support related services aimed at:-

- Preventing children becoming homeless
- Meeting the needs of homeless children
- Preventing children becoming looked after
- Providing a range of accommodation for care leavers.

The Better Care Fund – the Better Care Fund was announced by the Government in the June 2013 spending round to encourage a transformation in integrated health and social care. The Better Care Fund creates a local single pooled budget to incentivise the National Health Service and local government to work more closely together, placing well-being at the focus of health and care services. This includes funding for Disabled Facilities Grants.

The connections with London

Although Watford does not share a border with a London borough and is not within the political remit of the Greater London Authority, its economic, social and demographic links with London are close and are likely to increase. In July 2014 the Office for National Statistics published an estimate the Watford's population had increased by 2.2% between mid 2012 and mid 2013, consisting of a net growth of 2,004 persons. It was estimated that 53.0% of the growth (1,062 persons) consisted of in-migration from other boroughs within the United Kingdom, while 38.7% (776 persons) came from excess births over deaths and 8.2% (165 persons) came from the net increase in persons arriving from overseas. Information from the Office for National Statistics on population estimates for mid 2012 to mid 2013 suggests that a notable proportion of the in-migration from other boroughs was due to London residents moving to Watford. (please see chapter 8, section 1 on Population Growth).

Links between Watford and the London boroughs are influenced and characterised by the following:

- Watford's excellent railway links with London. The journey between Watford Junction and London Euston is scheduled to take approximately twenty minutes.
- The urban character of a large number of Watford's residential areas. This can replicate the character of residential areas in London and is mostly in contrast to the surrounding low-density Hertfordshire areas. In addition, Watford's small size and good internal transport links make most of the residential areas well connected with facilities such as shops, schools and places of worship.
- Watford has a range of leisure and cultural facilities to serve a wide range of needs and aspirations. The town also has one of the few thriving night-time economies in south west Hertfordshire; estate agents report that this makes the town attractive to residents of north and west London.
- Watford's housing is relatively affordable in comparison with the surrounding London boroughs and neighbouring Hertfordshire areas. This has a number of impacts:
 - The lower rents lead to households moving out of London boroughs to find more affordable housing in Watford.
 - The placing, by London local authorities, of homeless families in the private rented sector.
 - The migration of families from London who wish to find comparatively affordable family-sized homes and to access excellent schools in and around the town.
 - Watford has a much larger range of smaller housing options, such as shared houses, bedsits and one bedroom flats, than its neighbouring local authorities. This makes Watford an attractive destination for single person households who are seeking more affordable accommodation.

Possible future developments:

- The new Metropolitan line may make Watford a more attractive place to live for City workers who will now have excellent transport links with their place of employment. The new Health Campus and Charter Place shopping centre could be additional incentives to move to the town.
- There may be increased investment in residential accommodation in Watford, and thus a further expansion of the private rented sector.

The London Plan was introduced in July 2011, replacing the previous spatial strategy of 2009. Further revisions of this plan will be monitored to assess their impact upon Watford.