

*PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 1st December 2014
Report of: Head of Regeneration and Development
Title: Local Plan Part 2 (LP2) – second consultation draft

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 Local Plan Part 1 – the Core Strategy was adopted in January 2013. The Core Strategy sets out the vision, objectives and spatial strategy for Watford to 2031 and forms the strategic planning context.

1.2 Part 2 of the Local Plan will replace and update the remaining Watford District Plan 2000 policies and site allocations, to support the delivery of the Core Strategy vision and objectives by:

1) identifying sites and areas for specific purposes; and

2) providing environmental criteria, against which development proposals and planning applications can be judged.

1.3 The draft consultation is being brought to Cabinet so that it can be considered alongside the Economic Development Strategy and the Housing Strategy.

1.4 An earlier draft of the policies was discussed by members of the Planning Policy Advisory Group on 1st October, and changes have been made as a result.

1.5 Cabinet is asked to endorse the draft plan as the basis for consultation.

1.5 An independent Environmental Report, which meets the requirements for Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment, will also be published for consultation.

1.6 A further statutory consultation stage will be required before the Plan is submitted for examination.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That members agree that the draft Local Plan Part 2 progress to consultation.

2.2 That delegated authority be given to the Head of Regeneration and Development to

make any necessary editorial changes/corrections prior to consultation.

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Report approved by: Jane Custance, Head of Regeneration and Development.

3.0 **DETAILED PROPOSAL**

3.1 The Council first asked stakeholders for views on what Local Plan Part 2 should cover, back in November 2012, and followed this up by publishing draft policies and a list of potential sites for consultation during November and December 2013.

3.2 Since then we have also been working on keeping our evidence base up to date.

3.3 The draft Plan, set out at Appendix A, incorporates the development management and sites policies into a single document, and takes account of comments received, additional evidence and new information. The related maps are contained in a separate map book, at Appendix B.

3.4 A summary of the key issues by topic is set out below:

3.5 **Special Policy Areas and Mixed Use Allocations:**

Policies setting out the development expected in the Special Policy Areas (SPAs) at Watford Junction, the Health Campus, Lower High Street, the Dome Roundabout, Western Gateway and the Town Centre are already adopted in the Core Strategy. LP2 does not set out new proposals for these areas but defines the precise boundaries to be shown on the Policies Map.

3.6 Smaller mixed use allocations are proposed within the SPAs at: the Gas Holder site, a former petrol station at the Dome roundabout, and a site including North Watford library and clinics (which would need to be re-provided as part of any redevelopment). Mixed uses are also proposed at The Brow and The Gossamers – which would involve redeveloping shopping parades with housing above, to re - provide and provide additional housing.

3.7 **Sustainable Development**

This chapter sets out the required standards for sustainable design (a minimum Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 for all new homes, with Level 5 within the SPAs) and supports renewable energy and the provision of decentralised energy networks.

3.8 Policies also bring forward and update policies from the current District Plan which set out issues to be considered when determining planning applications in relation to:

drainage and flood risk; the protection of river corridors, canals and watercourses; water consumption; water quality/pollution; waste; unstable, contaminated and potentially contaminated land; air quality; noise and lighting.

- 3.9 In recognition of concerns about the potential conflict between additional residential development and both existing businesses and planned events in the town centre, we will be consulting on whether anything needs to be added to the noise policy to ensure that both business interests and residential amenity are protected, without preventing residential use in the town centre. The current policy already requires that mitigation is provided where noisy locations cannot be avoided. A suggestion is to add particular reference to the night time economy in the policy and also to consider defining a specific area of the town centre where these issues particularly arise - and where a greater degree of mitigation may be necessary than elsewhere in the borough to achieve the same satisfactory internal noise level.

3.10 **Town and Local Centres**

This section defines the town's primary and secondary shopping frontages and, like the current District Plan, sets percentage levels limiting non-retail uses within these and the town centre, and in district centres.

- 3.11 Restaurant hubs are identified around the entrance to Charter Place/ northern end of Market Street, and around the northern end of King Street and the facing entrance to town centre. These areas would be excluded from the percentage calculation, and restaurant uses would be supported.

- 3.12 A new policy seeks to prevent the clustering of betting and money shops in the town centre and North Watford District Centre – this will be possible if the government implements proposed changes to the Use Classes Order which will mean such uses will require planning permission (which they do not at present).

- 3.13 This section also includes policies identifying character areas in the town centre, protecting community facilities, and protecting residential amenity when considering applications for restaurants, pubs or take-aways.

- 3.14 Potential retail led mixed use development sites are identified at Sainsbury/Iceland/Oceana; Former TJ Hughes site; BT Telephone Exchange and surrounding area; Church St Car Park (which would include replacement parking) and Charter Place (the latter to reflect the scheme already going ahead). Additional work is required to assess the deliverability and timescales of these sites before submission and examination.

3.15 **Housing**

This chapter sets out policies to protect family housing and set out when conversions may be appropriate, as well as the considerations relating to applications for HMOs, hostels, guest houses and self contained flats within HMOs (which seek to prevent concentrations of such uses). There are also policies to protect gardens from inappropriate development, and to retain affordable housing, and older persons housing.

- 3.16 The plan identifies sites for at least 2,487 new homes (including expected housing delivery in the Special Policy Areas and other mixed use sites), which, taking account of existing completions and commitments, should allow sufficient choice and flexibility to meet the minimum 6,500 homes target set in the Core Strategy.
- 3.17 A Gypsy and Traveller site is identified next to the current site at Tolpits Lane. The principle of this location has been subject to examination and is set out in the adopted Core Strategy.

3.18 **Economic Development and Employment**

The Core Strategy set a minimum target of an additional 7,000 jobs between 2006 and 2031. The evidence available for the Core Strategy showed that this level of growth could be accommodated without additional employment allocations. A change in approach is proposed in light of the recent Economic Development and Growth Assessment (EDGA) which shows a much higher likely requirement for employment space.

- 3.19 A key finding, in terms of the Local Plan, is the importance of protecting employment land from redevelopment for other uses. The EDGA presents a number of different growth forecasts and scenarios, but even that based on providing employment consistent with the growth in labour supply expected from 260 homes per year (as the minimum required by the Core Strategy) is expected to require almost an additional 165,000 sqm of office floorspace, and just over 21,000 sqm of industrial space.
- 3.20 A policy statement has been prepared which sets out current and emerging policy, alongside the latest evidence, to assist us in retaining Clarendon Road as a key office location. This is attached for information at Appendix C.
- 3.21 Policies now offer additional protection to unallocated employment sites, and step back from the previous proposal to release Sandown Road from employment use. The BT Depot at Reeds Crescent, a longstanding housing allocation which has not come forward for redevelopment, is proposed to be designated instead for employment. Additional employment related policies relate to Leavesden Studios Operations (at the Island/Ashridge Roundabout site) to reflect a similar policy recently adopted by Three Rivers in relation to this site which straddles the boundary, and to Woodside Leisure Park, which is flagged up as a potential employment location, should it become available in future.

3.22 **Education**

The Core Strategy identified a need for schools at The Health Campus, Watford Junction and at Ascot Road. In the first consultation on LP2, we also consulted on allocations at Lanchester House and adjacent to Orchard School (for expansion). Lanchester, Orchard and Ascot Road are either already built or have planning permission so do not need to be allocated for development. Only one allocation is therefore proposed – a site at Bedford Street, which could be linked to the Watford Junction SPA. The Health Campus SPA boundary has been drawn to include Laurence Haines school which could be expanded to provide the additional requirement for the Health Campus.

3.23 **Transport**

The transport chapter sets out car and cycle parking standards. For residential parking, a maximum requirement is to be retained in the controlled parking zones, but a minimum standard is to be reintroduced elsewhere in the borough. Support is given to the introduction of car clubs. Provision of electric vehicle charging points will be required.

3.24 **Infrastructure**

The Core Strategy sets out policy relating to the delivery of infrastructure. In response to feedback on the first LP2 consultation, a policy has been added to cover applications for mobile phone masts, which is no longer sufficiently covered by national policy.

3.25 **Design and Heritage**

This section contains 2 policies – one relating to the design of shopfronts and advertisements, and one relating to the protection of the historic environment, including listed buildings, locally listed buildings, conservation areas, registered parks and gardens and archaeology. These largely take forward and clarify policies in the Watford District Plan 2000.

3.26 **Green Infrastructure, Sport and Recreation**

This section sets out policies on trees, woodlands and hedgerows, open space and play space in residential areas, and cemetery provision. The first consultation on Local Plan 2 also proposed sites for the Sports Hubs referred to in the Core Strategy. This raised concern about potential conflict with Green Belt policy (although it was always the case that Green Belt policy would still apply where relevant), and on further consideration it is thought unnecessary to allocate these sites through the planning process. They are instead being addressed through the Sports Facilities Strategy.

3.27 We previously consulted on a potential cemetery site on council owned land at Paddock Road in Hertsmere (which would need to be allocated in their Local Plan rather than our own). This raised concerns, primarily relating to access through existing allotments, and 2 additional sites have now been identified within Watford Borough. All 3 sites are presented as options in the coming consultation - not all may be taken forward. The additional options are to extend the existing North Watford cemetery, and/or to identify an additional site at Russell Lane. All 3 options would be for woodland burials.

3.28 Sites to be removed from or added to the Green Belt are also identified in this section – the proposals are intended to address minor boundary anomalies, in line with the approach set out in the Core Strategy, and have already been subject to consultation. The most significant amendment in terms of scale is the Island Site/Ashridge Roundabout, related to Leavesden Studios, which is released in order to maintain a logical and consistent Green Belt boundary with that agreed at the Three Rivers Local Plan examination.

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications contained in this report.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no direct legal implications in this report. The LP2 will need to be consulted on and then go through an examination in public before being formally adopted by Council.

4.3 **Equalities**

4.3.1 A full equalities impact assessment was undertaken for the Core Strategy. Local Plan 2 supports delivery of the Core Strategy. A screening assessment was undertaken at the time of the last consultation on LP2 to assess whether there were any additional potential impacts. The assessment found that most policies either had a neutral effect or were not relevant (i.e. that whether a person had one of the protected characteristics or not had no relevance to the impact of the policy). No significant impacts were identified, either positive or negative, which would require further assessment. Policy adjustments for this consultation are not expected to change this assessment, which will be reviewed ahead of the pre-submission consultation.

4.4 **Potential Risks**

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
Significant new issues or changes in government policy/ evidence could lead to a need to a significant change of policy and delay to submission	2	3	6

4.5 **Staffing**

4.5.1 Staffing is in place to manage the consultation.

4.6 **Accommodation**

4.6.1 No accommodation impacts.

4.7 **Community Safety**

4.7.1 Policies in the Local Plan are designed to improve community safety – no specific impact.

4.8 **Sustainability**

4.8.1 The plan policies are intended to ensure development within Watford is delivered in a sustainable way and that high standards of sustainability are met.

4.8.2 An independent Environmental Report which meets the Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment requirements has been prepared and will also be published for consultation. Any recommendations will be considered before the plan is prepared for submission.

Appendices

- A. Local Plan Part 2 – second consultation – policies
- B. Local Plan Part 2 – second consultation – map book
- C. Clarendon Road Policy Position Statement

Background Papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.

File Reference

- *LP00. Local Plan Part 2.*