

Executive Summary - extracted from AMR 2014

Authorities' Monitoring Reports ('AMRs') must be prepared and published at least once a year in accordance with planning regulations, and an AMR has been delivered annually since such regulations came into force in 2005.

The AMR outlines the progress made on the local plan timetable and assesses the effectiveness of planning policies against various targets and indicators to see whether we are achieving local plan objectives. Watford's Monitoring Report 2014 covers the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

Planning Policy Delivery

- The Community Infrastructure Charging Schedule (CIL) was found sound by an inspector in August 2014, and will come into effect on 1st April 2015. This followed consultation in 2013 and again during February/March 2014, after which the Draft Charging Schedule was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in April 2014.
- The second consultation on the Local Plan Part 2 is running from 17th December 2014 to 4th February 2015; this contains policies for considering applications for planning permission and identifies specific sites for development and the type of development that would be appropriate. An initial consultation took place from the 4th November 2013 for six weeks – responses made and new evidence were taken into account.

Housing

- 398 homes were built in 2013/14. Watford has delivered 3,369 new homes since 2006, an average of 421 per annum, ahead of the minimum 6,500 housing target set in the Core Strategy for the period 2006-31, which equates to an average of 260 dwellings per annum.
- Watford can demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply of 152.2%, which is above the National Planning Policy Framework requirement of 105%.
- There were 82 affordable dwelling completions in total during 2013/14, forming part of developments across six sites. The number of affordable homes achieved varied between 30% and 100% of the total residential units on each site; all conformed to the policy that applied at the time of permission.
- 91% of all homes completed this year were on previously developed land, above our local target of 80%.

Business Development and Employment

- Watford's Core Strategy seeks a minimum of 7,000 additional jobs in the district between 2006-2031. About 270 jobs were created in the area with the opening of Morrisons supermarket in November 2013 and the proposals to redevelop Charter Place should create about 1,100 new jobs across the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors and up to 500 temporary construction jobs. The East of England Forecasting Model (EEFM) 2013 suggests that the scale of job growth in Watford is 3,600 jobs for the period 2006 to 2014.
- There was an unusual high net loss of 26,161 sq.m. employment floorspace during 2013/14 within the traditional employment type B use classes. Just over 50% of the loss was due to the demolition of the former Royal Mail Depot at Ascot Road, where there is the new Morrisons supermarket and a primary school is under construction. This development was identified in the Core Strategy as part of the Western Gateway Special Policy Area.
- 100% of employment development took place on previously developed land, exceeding the Core Strategy target of 90%. No greenfield land has been used for any employment development in the district during the period monitored since 2006/07.

Sustainable Development

- There has been a reducing trend in Carbon Dioxide emissions overall in Watford for the period 2005-2011 in line with policy objectives, although there has been an increase between 2011 and 2012. However, emissions have increased in 403 out of 406 local authorities across the UK. The main drivers of the increase in UK emissions in 2012 were an increase in residential gas use due to 2012 being a colder year than 2011, and increased coal for electricity generation.
- The Council monitors air quality at several locations across the borough. On Rickmansworth Road close to the Town Hall, continuous 'real-time' monitoring of nitrogen dioxide and PM₁₀ particulates is undertaken. NO₂ concentrations have remained fairly constant and the annual mean objective of 40 g/m³ has not been exceeded during this time at the Town Hall monitoring station.
- The council is guided in granting planning permission by recommendations from the Environment Agency, including advice on flood risk and water quality. No planning applications have been granted planning permission against Environment Agency advice.

Green Infrastructure

- Four of Watford's parks have received Green Flag awards this year, with the addition of Oxhey Park, for the first time; our aim to maintain the total amount of open space managed by WBC to Green Flag Award standard has therefore been exceeded. It is the sixth consecutive year that Woodside Playing Fields and Cheslyn Gardens have been awarded the Green Flag and the eighth year for Cassiobury Park.
- The importance of open space and the Green Belt to Watford's predominantly urban environment is recognised and protected by Core Strategy Policy GI1: Green Infrastructure and GI2: Green Belt and additional saved policies from the Watford District Plan 2000; the Green Belt currently measures 407 hectares, equating to 19% of Watford's total area, and remains unchanged from last year.
- Our bid for external funding to the Heritage Lottery Funding/BIG lottery funding for Cassiobury Park has been successful with the Stage 2 bid approved in June 2014. Works will take place over the following 2 years and completion is estimated at the end of summer 2016; the council is actively improving the wildlife value of all the sites it manages, co-ordinating with a broad partnership of local organisations.

Urban Design and Built Heritage

- The Watford Streetscape Guide 2013 was adopted by the council in July 2013, following public consultation during November/December 2012. The aim of the Streetscape Guide is to assist and provide guidance for those involved in the design and implementation of public realm works in Watford's town centre, to ensure that a high quality consistent and coordinated public realm is implemented in Watford's town centre.
- The scores for the 'Building for Life' assessments average at 9 this year, slightly less than last year's 9.5 but an improvement on the average of the scores seen in 2012 which was 8.8 and in line with our objective of increasing the quality of design.
- A revised version of the Residential Design Guide was adopted by the council on the 23rd July 2014, replacing the previous 2008 version; this followed public consultation during November/December 2013.
- Oxhey was designated a conservation area in the spring of 2013; a draft character appraisal document was published for consultation between 7th February and 21st March 2014 and then revised following some suggestions received. The final version was adopted by the council in July 2014. The Conservation Areas Management Plan was adopted by Watford Borough Council Cabinet on 8th July 2013.

Transport and Projects and Infrastructure Delivery

- Planning permission to redevelop Charter Place and refurbish Intu Watford (formerly the Harlequin), was granted on the 5 February 2014. The proposal is for a £100 million development to include new retail space, a cinema and leisure complex, a new restaurant hub, a covered 'niche' market area and public realm improvements. Construction is expected to begin in 2015, with completion due in 2017. On the 10th October 2014, the existing traditional market was moved to a new home in the centre of the town, accessible from the High Street near the flyover and from Beechen Grove, near Clarendon Road. It has been created from shipping containers and is spread over 2 floors, making a unique and attractive space.
- Significant progress has been made over the last few years in delivering the Health Campus. The planning application for the infrastructure works required for the new access road was approved by Watford Borough Council in December 2013. Ecological and other preparatory works for the road have started, with construction expected to commence in March 2015. The planning permission incorporating both outline and detailed elements for the mixed-use Watford Health Campus was issued by the council on the 6 January 2015, following completion of a S106 planning obligation.
- Progress continues with the Croxley Rail Link; preparatory works have been taking place along the length of the route in order to finalise the engineering designs and final funding approval from the Department for Transport is expected in March 2015. Construction is due to start in spring/summer 2015, with the current target date for trains to be running by spring/summer 2018.
- Initiatives taken to improve sustainable transport include the continued resurfacing of the Grand Union Canal towpath, with a total 8 miles now completed; a new electric car re-charge point has been installed at Timberlake car park on Radlett Road; new bus shelters and new cycle parking were added at various locations around the Town Centre.
- It has been identified that there is a need for up to 4 additional primary schools (or 10 to 11 form entry classes) by 2031. A 2 form entry school opened in September 2014 at Lanchester House, Hempstead Road; a new school building is under construction at Ascot Road although the first form entries for the new school opened in September 2014 and have been temporarily housed in the Lanchester building, until the new school building is finished, due summer 2015. Additional provision is proposed in the Local Plan Part 2.