

Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan Main Modifications Consultation – Frequently Asked Questions



What is a Local Plan?

A Local Plan is a Borough-wide plan which identifies the vision and aspirations for the future of an area by introducing planning policies and allocations identifying the sites or areas which can be developed and those which should be protected. The Local Plan policies will be used to assess planning applications as they come forward, to ensure that new development is sustainable, well designed and provides for the future needs of the Borough. Once finalised and adopted, the Local Plan will become the statutory (legal) Development Plan for the Borough of Welwyn Hatfield.

Our Local Plan will help shape future development in Welwyn Hatfield up to 2036 and sets out the level and distribution of planned growth, including new homes and employment land. This includes the requirement to provide 15,200 new homes. The Local Plan will be subject to an early review as the growth figures used for housing and employment currently extend to 2033, meaning the review will consider additional sites to be allocated to meet the remaining requirement from year 11. The review will also provide an opportunity to examine the plan's performance to that date.

Why do we need a Local Plan?

Local Plans are an important part of the planning system. A local plan is necessary to create a robust planning framework which coordinates, supports and manages the future development of the Borough. Without a Local Plan, the Council loses the ability to secure and manage the future development of the Borough, often resulting in un-coordinated development and infrastructure.

What consultation on the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan has already taken place?

The Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan is now at an advanced stage in the plan-making process and consultations have been undertaken prior to Main Modifications. The first consultation to take place for the Local Plan was the Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission (DLPPS) and its supporting documents between 30th August 2016 and 24th October 2016, which received 3,022 representations in total across all documents.

A second consultation was held following a Call for Sites in 2019 in order to help meet the objectively assessed need for housing. A consultation document was created identifying all the sites on a settlement by settlement basis. This was consulted on between 7th May 2019 and 24th June 2019. A third consultation to consult on proposed changes to the submitted Draft Local Plan 2016 site allocations was held from 19th February 2020 to 1st May 2020.

The Council has collated all representations for all consultation events, recording which part of the Plan they were commenting on and other key information such as site reference or evidence base document referred to. These representations and the Council's response to some representations are available to view on the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council website.

What is the current consultation about?

The Planning Inspector has requested we make some changes to our draft Local Plan as part of the examination process. The proposed changes (known in planning terms as Main Modifications) are changes that have been identified by the Inspector as those necessary to make the Local Plan 'sound'. These include changes to some policies, additional site allocations as well as wording throughout submitted Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission 2016.

The focus of this consultation is on the new changes rather than the whole Local Plan document because we carried out a comprehensive consultation and engagement process before reaching this stage. The Planning Inspector will be considering comments on the proposed changes in relation to 'legal compliance' and 'soundness'.

Legal compliance relates to whether the Local Plan meets legal requirements including the duty to cooperate with relevant organisations. Soundness comprises 4 components:

- **Being positively prepared** – seeking to meet the area's, and potentially neighbouring areas', needs
- **Being justified** – being based on research having considered other reasonable alternatives
- **Being effective** – being able to be delivered over the plan period
- **Being consistent with national policy** – meeting the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework

If you submitted comments on previous versions of the Local Plan (during the Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 consultation stages), the Inspector will be aware of the comments and will have been considering them as part of the examination. Therefore, this consultation is inviting comments on the recent changes that have been made.

What are the Main Modifications?

The Council has published a schedule of Main Modifications which is a list of all proposed Main Modifications to the Plan, with each Main Modification having a specific reference number (e.g. MM1). There is also a Main Modifications Policies Maps document which shows 'before' and 'after' maps to help show the differences for specific site allocations. There are also supporting documents accompanying the Main Modifications.

What documents are being consulted on?

There are 5 documents in total which are open for representations:

Schedule of Main Modifications – The schedule of Main Modifications highlights the policy/paragraph/table number, with specific wording which has been removed from the Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission (strikethrough in black) and wording which has been altered or added in (underlined in red).

Main Modifications Policies Maps – The policies maps show maps originally included in the Draft Local Plan Proposed Submission (before) and the new maps to be introduced as a Main Modification (after). There is also text for each new map which describes which site allocations have been removed, added or altered.

Local Plan Housing Note (supporting document) – The Housing Note has been prepared to identify the housing supply and requirement calculations and an appropriate approach for Welwyn Hatfield.

Sustainability Appraisal (supporting document) – The Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is an updated document which identifies and appraises the social, economic and environmental effects of development to maximise the positive impacts.

Habitats Regulation Assessment (supporting document) – The Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) is an updated document required by law when preparing development plans (including Local Plans) according to the Habitats Regulations 2017 as amended. The purpose of a HRA is to ensure plans do not adversely affect wildlife sites.

What can be commented on?

This consultation specifically relates to the proposed Main Modifications to the Local Plan identified by the Inspector as those which are necessary to ensure the plan can be found ‘sound’ and is legally compliant. Therefore, comments can **only** be considered if they are made on changes contained in the Schedule of Main Modifications, Main Modifications Policies Maps and the Supporting Documents. The Inspector is unable to consider any comments made on parts of the Local Plan that have not been modified.

If the scope of the consultation is limited, then why should I bother responding?

The Planning Inspector and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council will review all the consultation responses. The Inspector will then write his final report on the Local Plan taking into account the consultation responses. He will set out if he considers the Local Plan to be sound and direct any further changes that he deems necessary to make the Local Plan sound. The plan will then be brought back to the council’s cross-party Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel, Cabinet, and full Council in mid 2023.

Who can comment?

The consultation is public and anybody can make a representation. The Council welcomes comments from residents and stakeholders on the proposed modifications and supporting documents. Please be aware that all representations are public and will be published for transparency. This is a requirement of the Local Plan process and the Council are obliged to publish representations, including names and addresses supplied.

How can I view the consultation documents?

Hard copies of the consultation documents listed above can be viewed at the office of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (The Campus, Welwyn Garden City), local libraries and local Town & Parish Council offices, during advertised hours.

You can also view the documents electronically on the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council website at <https://archive.welhat.gov.uk/local-plan/new/examination/documents> and on our Planning Consultation Portal at <https://welhat-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/>.

How and when can I comment on the Local Plan?

The public consultation runs from 4 January until 5pm on 15 February 2023. We want the consultation to be inclusive, accessible and useable, so there are a range of ways to find out more, get involved and provide comments. You can send comments in the following ways:

Online Consultation Portal: At <https://welhat-consult.objective.co.uk/portal/>. All documents are available for viewing and comments can be attached to any of the proposed modifications and/or to any supporting documents. Guidance on how to make an online representation is also available on each event on the Consultation Portal. You will need to create a login on our Planning Consultation Portal to be able to view the consultation and submit a representation.

Email: localplan@welhat.gov.uk

Post: Planning Policy, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6AE

To make comments on Main Modifications, please make a comment on the MM number or policy map and include a reference to identify which change you support or object. For ease of reference, Main Modifications are either underlined in red or scored out, and Policies Maps are labelled 'before' and 'after'. Supporting documents can be commented on by selecting the document you would like to make a comment on.

Please note that a separate response form will be required for each Main Modification you make comments on.

Can I make a representation on behalf of a group i.e. a community organisation or specific interest group?

Yes. You can specify which group you are making a representation on behalf of when you create a login. Once you have created a login, click the username at the top right of the page and click 'My Details' where you can provide your group's details as well as the position you hold in that group.

Can I make a representation after the deadline?

Unfortunately, responses received after this deadline cannot be considered.

Where can I find out more about the Local Plan and keep up to date with its progress?

The best way to keep updated about the Local Plan is to visit the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council website. All examination and submission documents have been uploaded and new documents/letters are uploaded regularly. Please visit <https://www.welhat.gov.uk/homepage/36/local-plan> to find out more.

You can also choose to keep updated on the status of your representation via our Planning Consultation Portal. In 'My Details' at the top right of the portal, you can choose to be notified when your submission status changes.

What happens next?

Following the consultation, the Council will forward all representations to the Planning Inspector for their consideration. Once the Inspector has considered the responses, including the evidence presented throughout the Examination, they will determine whether the Local Plan is 'sound' and produce a written report outlining final recommendations. Following receipt of the Inspector's report, the Council can move forward to adopt the Local Plan if it makes the Main Modifications that the Inspector recommends.

I need help or I have a question that has not been answered here. Who can I contact?

You can contact the Welwyn Hatfield Planning Policy team via email at planningpolicy@welhat.gov.uk or by calling 01707 357000.