

Council
27 January 2022

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL held on Thursday 27 January 2022 at 7.30 pm in the Roller City, Campus West, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6BX.

PRESENT: Councillors P.Hebden (Chairman)
B.Fitzsimon (Vice-Chairman)

D. Bell, J. Boulton, S. Boulton, J. Cragg, S. Elam, G. Ganney, G. Hayes, A. Hellyer, M. Holloway, C. Juggins, T. Kingsbury, J. Lake, R. Lass, F. Marsh, S. McNamara, G. Michaelides, L. Musk, N. Pace, R. Platt, J. Quinton, A. Rohale, D. Richardson, B. Sarson, P. Shah, J.P. Skoczylas, P. Smith, C. Stanbury, K. Thorpe, F. Thomson, S. Thusu, T. Travell, R. Trigg, S. Tunstall, F. Wachuku, J. Weston, and P. Zukowskyj

OFFICIALS Chief Executive (K. Ng)K.Ng, Chief Executive
PRESENT: M Martinus, Head of Law and Administration
C.Dale, Head of Planning
S.Tiley, Planning Policy and Implementation Manager
Head of Law and Administration (M. Martinus)
Head of Planning (C. Dale)
Planning Policy & Implementation Manager (S. Tiley)
Principal Governance Officer (J. Anthony)

36. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Birlson, J. Bond, L. Brandon, L. Chesterman, A. Dennis, S. Kasumu, J. Ranshaw, T. Jackson-Mynott and H. Quenet.

37. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and noted by the Mayor.

38. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillors S. Boulton, P. Hebden, T. Kingsbury, F. Thomson, S. Thusu and P. Zukowskyj declared non-pecuniary interests in items on the Agenda as appropriate as Members of Hertfordshire County Council.

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39. LOCAL PLAN - ADDITIONAL SITES AND MODIFICATIONS TO THE PLAN
(FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE FP1083)

Members received a presentation from the Planning Policy and Implementation Manager on the Local Plan.

Members were reminded of the key stages of the plan's preparation since 2009, including submission for Examination in May 2017, consultation on additional sites in 2019 and 2020, receipt of the Inspector's Interim report in October 2020 and additional sites submitted to the Examination in November 2020.

At several key stages the Inspector had advised the plan was unsound as there were insufficient sites to meet the identified housing need. The Inspector had invited the Council to identify further sites to make the plan sound. The Inspector had concluded that the Objectively Assessed Housing need could be reduced from 16,000 to 15,200 (760 dwellings per annum). Should this plan be found unsound a new plan would be required to be prepared in accordance with the Government's standard methodology which would require 875 dwellings per annum.

The Inspector has advised on the approach that should be taken to achieve a sound plan, including the importance of a 5-year housing land supply, a proportionate distribution, the need to increase the number of dwellings in several settlements and a proportionate delivery across the plan period. Local Planning Authorities are required to ensure that when allocating sites there are at least 10 years' worth of specific identified sites. It is possible for the last five years of the plan to be in the form of broad locations or an area of search.

Members noted that the Cabinet Planning and Planning Panel (CPPP) had considered the recommendations of officers at their meeting on 13 January 2022 and had unanimously rejected the officer recommendation. It was then proposed, and agreed, that the Council be recommended to revert to the additional dwellings submitted to the Inspector in November 2020.

The 2020 strategy of 13,277 was to meet, in the Council's view, a housing need of 13,800 dwellings. The strategy also sought the removal of several sites from the plan totalling 1,632 dwellings. However, since November 2020 there had been changes that had affected this calculation, including increases in the windfall allowance and completions. The 2020 calculation of 13,277 dwellings as a consequence should be increased to 13,702 to take into account these changes.

In November 2020 when the Council submitted additional sites to the Examination it also proposed the removal of several sites which included Symondshyde, Land west of Brookmans Park Railway Station, Land south of Hawkshead Road, Wells Farm, Northaw Road East, Land North of Northaw Road East and Barbaraville.

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Cabinet, at their meeting on 18 January 2022, noted that the numbers had increased from 13,277 to 13,702, and agreed that sites that have been found unsound by the examination should be removed as well as a site which would be unlikely to be found sound if it was not required to meet local need. Also, that following the Hearing Sessions, capacities at North east of Welwyn Garden City and South east of Welwyn Garden City should be revised. Cabinet agreed a strategy of 13,279 dwellings, an increase of two dwellings over the CPPP proposed 13,277.

Officers have considered how the proposed 13,279 performs against the requirement for a 5-year housing land supply and across the plan period. The majority of development would come forward by year 10 and is close to the ten-year target it would be required to meet the OAN of 760 dwellings per annum.

Officers advised that should Members go forward with the strategy of 13,279 there would be challenges. Sites can only be removed if not sound, with some sites requiring further justification to make this case.

Officers had advised Cabinet Parking and Planning Panel and Cabinet of the risks of this strategy. It did not meet the FOAHN for period to 2036 and the distribution did not conform to the Inspector's guidance on selecting sites or proportionate distribution. The Inspector had already rejected a strategy for 13,277. It is the officers' view that the strategy does not go far enough to address his concerns and there is a strong likelihood of the strategy being found unsound.

Members were informed that there would be implications if the plan was found unsound. The current Plan was out of date and had limited weight in decision making, and the Council had already lost appeals because of lack of five-year housing land supply and Housing Delivery Test. The Council would also not meet the Government target for an adopted plan by 2023. Going forward a new five-year housing land supply would be assessed using the current standard methodology of 875 dwellings per annum, and not on the 760 target. Not having an up-to-date plan would also likely to result in ad hoc development and impact on level of developer contributions.

The following points were raised and discussed:

Several Members felt the Inspector's approach was top-down, not driven by the local community and stated that government guidelines and policy was not working for local authorities.

Members stated that the majority of site removal in the Cabinet proposal was in Welwyn Garden City following CPPP and Cabinet, and it was confirmed that Symondshyde had been removed from the current proposed Local Plan.

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Some Members stated they would not vote to damage their community and felt the proposed 13,279 Plan was flawed and unbalanced. Members expressed there was not proportionate delivery of the Plan due to a high density of the development proposed on select sites notably in Welwyn Garden City. In addition, Members felt that Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield, and their surrounding green belt would be disproportionately overdeveloped, and the villages were not being included in the plan fairly despite the fact they already benefited from a certain level of infrastructure that led to the inspector suggesting that sites located here could be found to be sound.

Reference was made to the national target supported at national level by all three parties for 300,000 dwellings per annum and that Welwyn Hatfield's proportionate share of this was 13,032 which was in line with what was being proposed.

Members were aware that they faced a difficult decision. Development proposals would still need to go through the development management planning processes to be implemented. Members were concerned that the council would be inundated with appeals and would be subjected to planning by appeal whether or not they accepted the Inspector's dwelling numbers as these sites are so controversial.,

Some Members raised concerns over the lack of social housing and that any infrastructure would only be developed after the houses had been built. Members expressed concerns that the plan was not fit for future due to lack of infrastructure, green open space and the change of lifestyle habits.

Some Members stated that the process was a waste of time and money for council to propose a plan that was likely to be found unsound and the proposed plan would cause irreversible harm to the greenbelt and the Garden City ethos.

A number of Members noted that the proposed 13,279 strategy was close to the Inspector's target for the 10-year period and considered that this should be referred to in the response back to the Inspector. It was noted that the Eastleigh Local Plan had an approach for an early review of the plan to make up the shortfall in the later years.

Some Members were in support of the recommendations that arose from CPPP and Cabinet.

Following discussion, it was moved and seconded by Councillors S. Boulton and T. Kingsbury and

RESOLVED:
(25 FOR and 13 AGAINST)

- 1) Full Council agree the proposed dwelling numbers of 13,279 which can be formed from sites which the Inspector found sound.

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Meeting ended at 9.10 pm
JA