

LOCAL PLAN SUB-COMMITTEE – 13 OCTOBER 2022

PART I – NOT DELEGATED

5. LOCAL PLAN: CHANGES TO PREFERRED POLICY OPTIONS FOLLOWING REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION (DCES)

1 Summary

This report proposes changes to some of the preferred policy options contained in the Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 Part 1: Preferred Policy Options document in response to changes to national planning policy and comments received to the Regulation 18 consultation.

2 Details

2.1 The Regulation 18 Part 1 Preferred Policy Options was approved for consultation by Full Council on 25 May 2021. The consultation ran from 11 June – 20 August 2021.

2.2 The policy changes in this report are proposed in response to changes to national planning policy and representations received to the Regulation 18 consultation.

2.3 Any proposed changes to the wording of the policies in the appendices are in red text. Any text proposed to be removed is struck through. The remaining wording remains the same as approved by the Council prior to the Regulation 18 Part 1 Preferred Policy Options Document going out to consultation.

2.4 In March 2022, the key policy changes proposed in response to changes to national planning policy, the Environmental Act (November 2021) and representations received to the Regulation 18 consultation were reported to the Local Plan Sub Committee. A further two policies were considered at the Local Plan Sub Committee in July, 5 policies were considered in August and a further 5 policies at the 5 September Local Plan Sub Committee.

2.5 This report proposes updates to a further 6 policies:

- Residential Design and Layout
- Housing Mix
- Employment and Economic Development
- Retail and Leisure
- Sustainable Transport and Travel
- Parking

2.6 A final review of remaining policies is currently being undertaken. There have been minor delays to this process due to officer resources being allocated to work on the Council's proposed Article 4 Directions as agreed at the 18 August Local Plan Sub Committee and Policy & Resources Committee. Any further policy updates will be reported to the 9 November Local Plan Sub-Committee.

Residential Design and Layout

- 2.7 Overall, there was support for the Residential Design and Layout policy with the majority of respondents in favour of the inclusion of the nationally described space standards. Statutory Consultees requested amendments to ensure the policy is in accordance with the National Design Guide as per the NPPF.
- 2.8 The Internal Space Standards and Amenity Standards have been separated out into two sections for clarity. The Home Builders Federation raised the question as to whether there is a need for the nationally described space standards to be applied within the District. It is officers' opinion that these standards provide an appropriate minimum standard.
- 2.9 Hertfordshire County Council Recommended the section of the policy regarding Accessible and Adaptable dwellings be moved to the Housing Mix Policy. Upon reflection officers agree that it would sit better within the Housing Mix Policy, and as such it has been removed from the Residential Design and Layout Policy. Please see The Housing Mix section of this report below regarding further changes to the Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings section.
- 2.10 It should be noted that the detailed design standards appendix is still being updated and will be reported to the November Local Plan Sub Committee. This work is not expected to affect the policy itself.
- 2.11 The revised Residential Design and Layout Policy is in Appendix 1 and representations received relating to the proposed policy are in Appendix 2 to this report.

Housing Mix

- 2.12 Comments made regarding the proposed policy were broadly supportive, with a few changes recommended by statutory consultees. A criterion has been added requiring developments for specialist and support housing of over 50 dwellings to have regard to the design principles set out in the County Council's Adult Care Service document.
- 2.13 The section on Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings has been moved from the Design and Layout Policy to the Housing Mix Policy. This section has been updated to bring it in line with the recommendations in the Local Housing Needs Assessment and national policy and guidance.
- 2.14 Watford Borough Council's response pointed out that the policy did not set a requirement for self-build plots on strategic sites as recommended by the Local Housing Needs Assessment. This section has been updated based on demand from the Council's Self-Build Register.
- 2.15 A number of consultees questioned whether the 18-month period for marketing self-build plots was appropriate. This has been amended to require the self-build plots to be marketed for 12 months before potentially being built out by the developer.
- 2.16 The revised Housing Mix Policy is in Appendix 3 and representations received relating to the proposed policy are in Appendix 4 to this report.

Employment and Economic Development

- 2.17 Statutory consultees were supportive of the policy, with HCC Growth and Infrastructure Unit welcoming the safeguarding of industrial land to meet future industrial, storage and distribution needs within the SW Herts area.
- 2.18 Dacorum Borough Council did suggest that the 2019 SW Herts Economic Study figures be treated with caution given the relaxation of planning controls and the consequences of the pandemic, which saw vacancies in offices/ industrial land. This was supported by several representations querying the need for more employment land given the renewed emphasis on remote working and that employment figures did not take account of the pandemic. However, the Economic Study is the Council's most up to date evidence regarding the demand for employment land. An update to the study will be commissioned in preparation for the Regulation 19 version of the Local Plan.
- 2.19 Chorleywood Parish Council highlighted a number of amendments which have been taken into account in the updated redrafted Employment Policy.
- 2.20 St Albans City Council advised they would be willing to meet the shortfall in employment land within Three Rivers, with Watford Borough Council supporting the safeguarding of industrial land given the shortfall of employment in Watford.
- 2.21 The general public also reiterated their support for the protection of employment land, the importance of providing jobs for residents and safeguarding land and premises in employment use to meet local business needs, to deter further green belt losses.
- 2.22 The policy has been updated to better reflect national legislation and policy especially the changes to town centre uses through changes to the Use Class Order.
- 2.23 The revised Employment and Economic Development Policy is in Appendix 5 and representations received relating to the proposed policy are in Appendix 6 to this report.

Retail and Leisure

- 2.24 Watford Borough Council, Chorleywood and Abbots Langley Parish Councils support the town centre first approach set out in the policy.
- 2.25 The majority of the general public were supportive of the policy and continued investment in town centres to help local businesses following the pandemic. Others cited the decline of town centres, greater online shopping and questioned the need for additional retail and leisure floorspace. The SW Herts Retail and Leisure Study (2018) is the Council's most up to date evidence regarding need for retail and leisure floorspace. An update to the study could be commissioned in preparation for the Regulation 19 stage of Local Plan preparation.
- 2.26 The myriad of responses centred on improvements to the public realm of shopping areas, the continued pedestrianisation of Rickmansworth town centre, and concerns about market rents, business rates, the proliferation of takeaways, the loss of car parks and community facilities from the high street. Many supported free car parking in shopping areas. Not all of these issues can be addressed through planning policy.
- 2.27 Some disagreed with the policy and asked for alternative options but there are no viable alternatives to the policy. If we do not protect the retail hierarchy, residents will be forced to access their local shopping, entertainment and other services within neighbouring Watford. This will reduce spend in the local area and lead to a further decline in our town centres.

- 2.28 The policy has been rewritten to be more concise and take into consideration changes to the Use Classes Order.
- 2.29 The revised Retail and Leisure Policy is in Appendix 7 and representations received relating to the proposed policy are in Appendix 8 to this report.

Sustainable Transport and Travel

- 2.30 Updates on the Sustainable Transport and Travel Policy primarily relate to strengthening the policy and bringing clarity particularly around the core planning principle of actively managing patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, cycling and walking. There were a number of overlapping but useful comments from across the board.
- 2.31 Policy criterion (1) has been expanded to ensure new development is well connected to existing infrastructure following a response from Chorleywood Residents Association. The additional text makes it explicit that development maximising the use of public transport to the fullest possible use will be supported.
- 2.32 Criteria 4 (d) and (e) have been amended to bring clarity on bus stops and high quality infrastructure and taxi ranks in central locations based on Hertfordshire County Council's response.
- 2.33 Inclusion of towpaths and the requirement to have prior discussion with Canal and River Trust have been inserted in the policy criterion 3 which is also expanded in a new explanatory paragraph. Likewise, Hertfordshire County Council have asked for referencing a number of guidance documents, which is incorporated in paragraph 12.20 and 12.22.
- 2.34 Continuing in the spirit of bringing clarity, the explanatory note includes new text to recognise differential contributions fossil-fuel vehicles and electric vehicles have on the environment. This addition expands on the 'motor vehicle' referenced in criterion 4. These updates are consistent with the NPPF's core planning principle of ensuring sustainable transport.

Parking

- 2.35 Some minor wording changes have been made at the recommendation of statutory consultees, to both the Policy and the associated Car Parking Standards. The Standards have had some explanatory text added at the beginning, and an additional point regarding car parking space dimensions is now included in the policy.
- 2.36 A range of views were provided by residents with some supporting the policy, some wishing a lower level of parking provision and others supporting a higher level of parking provision.
- 2.37 The revised Parking Policy is in Appendix 11 with the corresponding Parking Standards in Appendix 12 and representations received relating to the proposed policy are in Appendix 13 to this report.

3 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

- 3.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets.

4 Financial, Legal, Equal Opportunities, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, Communications & Website, Risk Management and Health & Safety Implications

4.1 None specific.

5 Recommendation

5.1 That the Local Plan Sub Committee note the contents of this report, and recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee the following policy updates:

- Residential Design and Layout (Appendix 1)
- Housing Mix (Appendix 3)
- Employment and Economic Development (Appendix 5)
- Retail and Leisure (Appendix 7)
- Sustainable Transport and Travel (Appendix 9)
- Parking (Appendix 11)

Background Papers

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

Planning Practice Guidance (2022)

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011)

Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended)

Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended)

South West Hertfordshire Local Housing Needs Assessment (2020)

South West Herts Economic Study (2019)

South West Hertfordshire Retail & Leisure Study (2018)

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Residential Design and Layout Policy

Appendix 2 Representations received on Residential Design and Layout Policy

Appendix 3 Housing Mix Policy

Appendix 4 Representations received on Housing Mix Policy

Appendix 5 Employment and Economic Development Policy

Appendix 6 Representations received on Employment and Economic Development Policy

Appendix 7 Retail and Leisure Policy

Appendix 8 Representations received on Retail and Leisure Policy

Appendix 9 Renewable and Sustainable Transport and Travel Policy

Appendix 10 Representations received on Sustainable Transport and Travel Policy

Appendix 11 Parking Policy

Appendix 12 Parking Standards

Appendix 13 Representations received on Parking Policy and Standards