

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the Local Plan?

The Local Plan is an important document, which sets out planning policies for Welwyn Hatfield. It will establish a vision for the future of the borough to 2031 and decide where and when development should take place. The Local Plan will contain strategic policies including growth targets, site allocations and policies, which will guide planning applications. When it is adopted it will replace the District Plan 2005.

### 2. What is the purpose of this Local Plan consultation?

Together with the strategic policies set out in the Emerging Core Strategy, matters set out in this consultation will form the basis for the Local Plan. The consultation considers amongst other things proposals for the location of new sites for housing, employment, retail, open space and burial space.

As we have reviewed our evidence, particularly on how much growth we will need to accommodate in the borough and our approach to the distribution of growth, this consultation also sets out where major changes are needed to the strategic policies. It also identifies a list of policies for assessing planning applications.

### 3. How has the Local Plan Consultation document been prepared?

This document has been prepared following a review and update of our evidence, consideration of the responses to the Emerging Core Strategy and with regard to national policy and best practice guidance. The changes to the strategy and the proposals for development have been subject to sustainability appraisal.

### 4. What is a Sustainability Appraisal?

Sustainability Appraisal is a rigorous assessment of the environmental, social and economic impacts of the policy intentions and sites set out in this consultation document. The council is required to undertake Sustainability Appraisals of key planning policy documents.

### 5. What is the Infrastructure Delivery Plan?

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan looks at the level of infrastructure required to support growth to 2031. Infrastructure provision helps to create sustainable new developments and includes physical aspects of development as well as social and environmental aspects. Some examples of infrastructure requirements include schools, community facilities, roads, gas and electricity provision and open spaces.

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## 6. Why do we need more houses in the borough?

It is a national priority to increase the supply of housing. Welwyn Hatfield is an area where there is a huge demand for housing. House prices are high and many people find it difficult to get on the housing ladder. National planning policy requires local authorities to identify and try to meet the need for housing. Based on a detailed analysis of the demographic and economic evidence, our assessed need is that 12,500 new homes would be needed to meet the needs of future generations in the borough from 2011 to 2031. This is known as the Objective Assessment of Need.

## 7. Is the Objective Assessment of Need for 12,500 new homes, the housing target in the Local Plan?

No, a housing target is not necessarily the same as the Objective Assessment of Need. The target can be lower than the assessed need in circumstances where the adverse impacts of doing so would **significantly** and **demonstrably** outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework, or the framework indicates the development should be restricted.

National planning guidance outlines that assessing need is just the first stage in the process, and our housing target will need to reflect the realistic prospect of the delivery of sites and the significant constraint caused by the level of Green Belt in the borough. No decision has yet been taken about what the housing target will be. The council will consider responses to the consultation before it finalises its Local Plan for submission to the Inspectorate.

## 8. Why is it necessary to review the Green Belt?

Government policy advises that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances through the preparation of the Local Plan. We consider that there are exceptional circumstances for a review in Welwyn Hatfield because of the need for housing. Our evidence shows us that only 5,170 homes can be provided for without using land which is either safeguarded or in the Green Belt. We believe we need to get closer to our assessed need for housing so we will need to have some development within the Green Belt.

To inform this process the council has undertaken a Green Belt Review and site assessments have explored the impact on the purposes of the Green Belt. In addition to a site-by-site assessment, consideration is also given to the potential cumulative impact of sites on the purposes of the Green Belt.

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## 9. How have the housing sites been assessed?

Section 9 sets out the approach to the selection of sites. In addition to the assessment of sites on an individual basis we have also taken into account their cumulative impact. The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment has looked at sites on an individual basis. However consideration needs to be given to the spatial pattern of development that would emerge from combinations of sites. Some of these judgments involve a weighing up of the benefits and impacts and are finely balanced. The council has therefore categorized sites into the *Less Favourable*, *Finely Balanced* and *More Favourable*.

## 10. How do I comment on the Local Plan consultation?

The best way to read and comment on the consultation documents is online via the consultation portal. In order to comment you will need to register your details on the consultation portal. Once you have registered you will be given a password to ensure your access is secure and that no one else can comment using your name. Please be aware that this is a public consultation and once processed your comments can be viewed by others.

You will be able to make a comment directly to the part of the Local Plan consultation document you are interested in. You will also be able to comment on a particular section of the Sustainability Appraisal or Draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

If you are unable to comment online, you can also email: [localplan@welhat.gov.uk](mailto:localplan@welhat.gov.uk) or write to Planning Policy, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6AE. Paper response forms are available from the council.

Paper copies of the consultation documents can be viewed at the council offices, libraries or at one of our consultation events across the borough. If you have any queries, please ring the planning policy team on 01707 357000.

## 11. How do I make sure my comment is meaningful?

If you do not agree with a proposal in the consultation documents it is important that you explain why you do not support it. For example, it is not enough to simply say you do not want a site developed; to be most effective you need to support your argument with planning considerations. These could include environmental issues, the approach to the Green Belt, economic and social issues or infrastructure constraints which cannot be resolved.

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## **12. Why should I comment - hasn't the council already decided everything?**

No. We will be considering all the representations and the final plan will be produced and published for consultation at the end of 2015.

Other sites could come forward in response to the consultation which we need to consider.

## **13. What will happen to the response that I submit?**

If you submit your response online, it will be publicly available when it has been processed. This may not be until after the consultation has finished. Please note we cannot accept any racist or defamatory comments. Once the consultation is finished all responses will be summarised, reported to the Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel and published on the website. We will then consider all the representations.

## **14. What happens next?**

There will be one further round of consultation expected to be at the end of 2015 on the final proposals before the council submits its Local Plan for independent examination. After the Local Plan has been examined (expected to be mid 2016), and if it has been found sound, it should be formally adopted at the end of 2016.

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