

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's Local Plan

Statement in accordance with LNP principles

April 2017

Principle 1: Recognise the value of the natural environment and the range of benefits and services it provides

The natural environment of Welwyn Hatfield is a key contributor to its character and distinctiveness. The borough has a diverse range of green infrastructure and environmental assets of local, regional and national importance. These include designated sites, woodlands, water courses and a comprehensive network of open space. In the towns, this open space network forms an integral part of the garden city and new town heritage.

A priority of the Welwyn Hatfield Business Plan 2015-8 is to maintain and improve our green spaces. The Council has reviewed the type and function of the borough's open spaces and the Local Plan reflects this evidence and the aim of the Business Plan. It acknowledges both the importance of the borough's natural environment and its value to the borough in terms of conservation, health and recreation. In the strategic and development management policies the Local Plan recognises the need to protect and enhance environment assets, integrate new open space and habitats into new developments and mitigate the loss of biodiversity.

The Plan also acknowledges and reflects the importance placed on green infrastructure by the NPPF and NPPG, both as a vital contributor healthy places and communities and as a way of combating the long-term negative effects of climate change.

The Sustainability Appraisal acknowledges the wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits offered by open spaces and green infrastructure.

Principle 2: Protect and enhance existing biodiversity assets

There are a range of international and national sites within and in close proximity to Welwyn Hatfield, including two SACs, a SPA and Ramsar site. There are a number of SSSIs, ancient woodland and protected species and habitats. A network of Local Nature Reserves, wildlife sites and urban open land are of local importance. These sites are all identified on the Policies Map.

These biodiversity assets have been protected and enhanced in a number of ways.

Local Plan policies

There are strategic, site specific and development management policies in the Local Plan to protect and enhance sites of nature conservation interest, habitats and species, including ecological and green infrastructure networks. Sites will be protected and enhanced commensurate with their status, significance and international, national and/ or local importance.

Policies implement the mitigation hierarchy to avoid, reduce, remediate and compensate for direct and indirect adverse impacts on ecology to make development acceptable. These issues should be demonstrated by applicants via the Sustainable Design Statement or if appropriate, depending on scale and nature of development, an ecological assessment.

Site selection

In accordance with the aim of the NPPF to give most protection to significant sites of nature conservation, the site selection process for the Local Plan has avoided and mitigated impact on environmental assets as follows:

- In the SHLAA /HELAA, development sites have been assessed as unsuitable if they are within a European or National conservation site, are designated as a Local Nature Reserve and/ or if they are allocated as a wildlife site.
- Proposed development sites adjacent to designated conservation sites, have been assessed and to address any potential ecological impacts an allowance for buffering the nature conservation site has been included when calculating site capacity.
- Areas of notable habitat(s) within development sites and the potential for protected species have also been taken into account. Where appropriate the development potential of the site has been reduced to facilitate the habitat or species' retention and protection.

Sustainability Appraisal/ HRA

The HRA assesses the potential impact of the Local Plan on habitats and species protected under the relevant legislation.

The Sustainability Appraisal addresses the impact of proposals on nature conservation. Development sites are accorded significant or minor effects if they are within certain distances of nature conservation sites.

Principle 3: Seek opportunities to improve habitat connectivity

The Local Plan acknowledges the importance of protecting and enhancing the borough's network of Green Infrastructure to provide a comprehensive network of linked spaces for the benefit of wildlife, biodiversity and the community.

Provision of new green infrastructure is a key principle in the Local Plan, particularly as part of the delivery of the strategic sites. Policies in the Local Plan sets out the intention to deliver an east to west green corridor across the borough, improving habitat connectivity and community access to open space. Proposals for the creation of the Green Corridor will be detailed in the emerging Green Corridor SPD and will be incorporated into the masterplanning of strategic sites.

Principle 4: Integrate biodiversity opportunities within new development

Policies within the Local Plan ensure that new development makes space for nature and protects and enhances the wider connectivity of habitats. Development will be required to protect and promote biodiversity through the design and layout of new development. For example, landscaping to promote biodiversity, the prioritisation of native species, habitat creation, replacement tree planting and the use of SUDs that promote biodiversity. Applicants will be required to submit a Sustainable Design Statement to explain how these principles will be implemented. Reference is given in the supporting text to guidance documents that can inform this process.

The provision of ecological assets and contributions to wider networks at the strategic sites will be taken forward through the masterplanning process.

Principle 5: Make decisions informed by the best available ecological information.

The Local Plan is informed by a wide range of evidence studies and data from various different sources.

The Assessment of Open Space, Outdoor Sport and Recreation, the Green Infrastructure Plans, Open Space Survey Update have informed the policies within the Local Plan.

The Plan also relies on data relating to Wildlife Sites which is held by the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre and is annually updated by the Local Wildlife Sites Partnership.

Consultation with key environmental bodies, such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and Hertfordshire County Council has taken place throughout the Local Plan process, informing policy development. Hertfordshire Ecology has been directly involved in the site selection process, providing comments on development sites to inform assessment of suitability. Ecological network mapping of various habitats was used to inform this site assessment.

Principle 6: Secure the long term management of existing and new habitats/ sites

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council is working towards the implementation of a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), alongside the Local Plan. The preliminary draft charging schedule is being published for consultation in May 2017 and will include contributions towards the provision and maintenance of public open space, allotments on allocated sites and a strategic green infrastructure corridor.

As part of this work, and to ensure the Plan can be delivered, an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) has been produced. The plan identifies projects, funding mechanisms and partners for the delivery of ecological improvements. The maintenance of new provision is key and the Plan identifies that as part of the green infrastructure process, a management and maintenance plan will be produced to ensure the longevity of the Green corridor.

The Local Plan sets out that the enhancement and provision of some new habitats/ sites will also be secured through developer contributions in accordance with an updated Planning Obligations SPD. As part of this process, working with partners, effective management schemes of these new open spaces will be put in place.