

Slough Borough Council

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

DATE: 29th November 2023

SUBJECT: Slough Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report 2022/2023

CHIEF OFFICER: Dan Ray

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WARD(s): All

APPENDICES: A - Draft Annual Monitoring Report 2022/23

1 Summary and recommendations

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Members about the results of the annual planning policy monitoring for 2022/23. This includes information on housing, employment, retail and environment.

Recommendation(s)

- 1.2 The Committee is requested to resolve that:
- a) The results of the Annual Monitoring Report 2022/23 be noted.
 - b) The Annual Monitoring Report 2022/23 be published on the Council's website.

2 Report

Introduction

- 2.1 Local Planning Authorities have a statutory obligation to produce and publish an annual planning monitoring report. While some content is statutory, other elements are a matter for individual councils to decide. It is important for monitoring the effectiveness of current local plan policies and informing the preparation and production of the new Local Plan.
- 2.2 Slough's Annual Monitoring report (AMR) provides information and statistics on housing, employment, retail and the natural and built environment. This AMR covers the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 with some updates where this is appropriate and are available. It includes progress of the implementation of the Local Development Scheme and planning policies included in the development plan documents.
- 2.3 The AMR will be published on the Council's website but as it is factual report it is not subject to consultation.

Housing

- 2.4 In 2022/23 there were 322 net housing completions in Slough. This figure is much less than the annual average over the last 4 years even though it includes continuing completions on the large Horlicks Quarter site. All of the 322 homes except 28 were built on sites of 10 or more homes. The 28 figure is lower than average over the past few years but there are over 104 homes under construction on small sites.
- 2.5 Of the total 325 gross completions 4 homes were created by conversion of existing homes and 97 (30%) were from a change of use. 3 homes were lost through conversion or demolition.
- 2.6 At the end of March 2023 there were 1,121 dwellings under construction including over 300 on the first phase of the Horlicks site. This is a bit less than each of the last 2 years but higher than average over the last 6 years. Excluding the Akzo Nobel site (which is unlikely to progress) there were 1,659 dwellings with planning consent but not yet started (including outline permissions). Over 700 of that figure is phase 2 of the Horlicks Quarter development which is expected to start in 2024.
- 2.7 The National Planning Policy Framework requires Local Planning Authorities to identify a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement or Local Housing Need (LHN) figure with an additional buffer to ensure choice and competition in the market for land.
- 2.8 The buffer for Slough is currently 20% instead of the normal 5% as the Housing Delivery Test result for Slough is below a critical threshold. At the 1st of April 2023 the 5 year housing land supply figure was 2.6 years. As a 5 year supply cannot be demonstrated the Council has to apply the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' when determining planning applications. As of January 2023, 38 per cent of all English planning authorities were unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, with the situation worse in the south east than other regions (www.planningresource.co.uk Feb 2023).
- 2.9 100% of the gross housing completions in 2022/23 were on previously developed sites (brownfield). This figure tends to fluctuate over the years depending upon which sites are coming forward, but last year's figure is broadly consistent with the last 5 years.
- 2.10 As required by Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), since 1 April 2016 the Council keeps a custom and self-build homes register, details of which are publicised on the website. The register holds information on individuals and associations of individuals

who are seeking to acquire serviced plots of land. The number of individuals on the self- build register at July 2023 is 248.

- 2.11 183 new build dwellings were in the affordable category in 2022/23. This is the largest number since 2015 and represents 57% of total net completions. Most were on the Horlicks Quarter development.
- 2.12 The results of monitoring for 2022/23 showed that 6% of housing completions were houses and 94% flats or maisonettes. This trend is likely to continue in the future. This reflects the effectiveness of the policy in the Core Strategy that seeks to firstly direct new development to the town centre and other urban areas, where flats are generally acceptable, and secondly ensuring that development in the suburban areas consists predominantly of family housing.

Employment

- 2.13 The monitoring shows that there was a net gain of 3,628 square metres of employment floor space in 2022/23. Most of the new floorspace (55,719 sqm) was data centre (36,054 sqm) or warehouse/general industry use (18,258 sqm). Space lost was mostly older industrial/commercial space along with some office space lost to residential use (6,572 sqm). These figures do not include closure of part of Queensmere retail shopping centre. Although there was a modest net gain of employment floorspace for 22/23 previous years showed a general trend of loss of employment space.
- 2.14 The Thames Valley and South-East Office Market Report (2023) produced by Lambert Smith Hampton shows that Slough has 6.5 years supply of offices and 8385 sqm of available space. The Slough office Market was one of the hardest hit in the South East due to the pandemic. Low levels of office take up since 2018 have yet to recover.
- 2.15 Slough Trading Estate continues to be doing well under SEGROs management. The estate continues to be a priority investment area. While it is prosperous as an employment land area, the number of office and manufacturing jobs is likely to continue to decrease. For example, more datacentres are being built but they have a different employment profile, and do not employ as many people as the businesses lost.
- 2.16 The Trading Estate still benefits from being a Simplified Planning Zone (SPZ). This helps existing and potential new occupiers plan for the future with more certainty by allowing certain types of development to take place without the need to apply for separate planning permission provided they meet specified conditions set out in the SPZ scheme. The Slough Trading Estate SPZ is due to expire in November 2024; and Cabinet approved negotiation of a replacement earlier in 2023. During 2022/23, six SPZ schemes were permitted, and two data centre developments were completed.

Retail

2.17 Slough has not had any major retail scheme completions in the last few years. The Annual retail survey of the town centre and district centres was undertaken in February 2023.

Slough Town Centre Retail

2.18 The results showed Slough Town Centre had a retail unit vacancy rate of 22%. The figure for Queensmere for 22/23, below, is higher than 21/22 as half of the centre was closed in January 2022. The retail vacancy rate does not reflect the quality of the retail offer. Many of the units in the shopping centres have no signage or permanent shop fit out and appear to be pop ups with temporary/short term lets. The nature of the offer appears to serve a local population with a lot of takeaways and small independent grocery shops.

- The Queensmere has 51% of units vacant.
- The Observatory has 26% of units vacant.
- The High Street has 9% of units vacant.

District Centres Retail

2.19 Retail vacancy surveys were conducted in Slough district centres at Langley, Farnham Road and Chalvey.

2.20 Chalvey had a retail vacancy rate of 11%, Langley and Farnham Road both 2%. These are low retail vacancy rates which show these centres are healthy and vibrant.

Appeal Decisions

2.21 Appeal decisions are regularly reported to Planning Committee. The AMR looks at whether there are any patterns in appeal decisions that can support future decision making. There were 41 appeals in Slough in the 12 months from April 2022 with 9 allowed by Inspectors.

2.22 There were 7 appeals on enforcement cases, with 6 upheld.

2.23 25 of the appeals were for householder or advertisement applications. Of the 9 allowed the key issues related to design, character of the area or amenity which tend to be site specific judgements.

2.24 There were 16 Appeals on strategic matters such as housing and employment. The upholding of decisions for Major Applications demonstrate the current Local Plan is working well and continues to be compliant with the NPPF. This is useful as it shows our specialist policies, such as those to protect family housing from conversion to flats, and refusing poor design continue to be justified.

Progress on Planning Policy and Slough Local Plan

2.25 The Council has completed its Regulation 18 phase of the Local Plan preparation and the next step will be gathering evidence in support of the Regulation 19 phase. The Levelling up and Regeneration Act received Royal Assent on 26th October 2023 and will come in to force on the 26th December. This sets out changes that affect the Local Plan process but they are dependent on secondary legislation that has no implementation date at present. Adopting a Local Plan is a lengthy process and requires significant financial and resource investment. At present the team are progressing with updating the Simplified Planning Zone (approved by Cabinet in February 2023) and in March '23 was awarded a Grant to implement the new Duty for 'Biodiversity Net Gain'. It has also begun liaison on how to resource health facilities via S106.

Duty to Cooperate

2.26 The Local Planning Authority (LPA) has a duty to engage actively and, on an ongoing basis, with specified partners on their Local Plans including adjoining Councils. Slough does this via responding to consultations, engaging with officers and Members as needed. These discussions are focused on significant strategic cross boundary matters such as employment, housing and flooding to support the evidence base in policy development.

2.27 In 22/23 regular meetings were held with Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Buckinghamshire Council to discuss cross boundary issues in particular the pressure for land to meet housing need in the sub-region. Members of Slough Borough Council and Buckinghamshire Council met in March '23 to demonstrate agreement to work towards a Statement of Common ground on each other's Plans.

2.28 RBWM and SBC worked together to finalise and publish The Wider Area Growth Study. That is an evidence base document that sets out where areas of land may be suitable for housing growth. Importantly these have not considered the local Planning policy constraints and opportunities that would need to be applied before the sites could be promoted or delivered, as this will be for each LPA to do.

Summary

2.29 The Council has a duty to publish monitoring information on the Local Plan. This report highlights key points and statistics from the draft AMR from April 2022 to March 2023. The AMR will be published on the Council's web site once approved by the Committee.

3 Implications of the Recommendation

Financial implications

There are no financial implications for this report.

Legal implications

There are no legal implications for this report.

Risk management implications

Minimal – The Council has a duty to publish monitoring information for the Local Plan but failure to do so does not incur any sanctions.

Environmental implications

There are no environmental implications for this report.

Equality implications

There are no equality implications for this report.