

12 October 2021

Council's Local Plan meeting put on hold

Urgent clarification sought following PM's speech

The council has cancelled its meetings of the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel, and a Special Council, originally scheduled for 20 October and 4 November respectively.

The committees were due to discuss the borough's Local Plan, the blueprint for sustainable growth in Welwyn Hatfield in the years ahead. However, urgent clarification is being sought by the council following the Prime Minister's speech at the Conservative Party Conference last week in which he referred to future homes not being built on "green fields".

The council's six Cabinet Members have written to Michael Gove, the new Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, asking what this means for future planning policy – and specifically the potential impact on the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan, which the government's appointed Planning Inspector has previously said should find sites for 15,200 homes.

Cllr Stephen Boulton, Executive Member for Planning and one of the signatories of the letter, said: "We have long expressed our resistance to over-development in the borough and made it clear that we feel a target of 15,200 homes for Welwyn Hatfield is too high. That is the expressed view of all political groups, and of our communities.

"We were intrigued by the Prime Minister's reference in his conference speech to not wanting to build on 'green fields', and we are now seeking the answer to two specific questions. Firstly, is there a possibility of further discussion on the target figure for new homes? And secondly, do the PM's comments suggest a change to planning policy in the near future?

"The timing is far from ideal, but at such a crucial stage of the development of our plan we feel it would be irresponsible for us not to take the opportunity to seek such clarification before we proceed."

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The council will reschedule the CPPP and Special Council meeting as soon as is practically possible following the response from the Secretary of State.

ENDS/PR/21/074