

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

DATE: 25th September 2024

SUBJECT: Slough Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report 2023/2024

CHIEF OFFICER: Dan Ray

CONTACT OFFICER: Pippa Hopkins, Group Manager

WARD(s): All

APPENDICES: Draft Annual Monitoring Report 2023/24

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 2023/24. This includes information on housing, employment, retail and natural and built environment.

Recommendation(s)

- 1.2 The Committee is requested to resolve that:
- a) The results of the Annual Monitoring Report 2023/24 be noted.
 - b) The Annual Monitoring Report 2023/24 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 a 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. It also includes a summary of the appeal decisions and, if any, implications for the Slough's current planning policy framework. This AMR covers the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, with additional updates where this is appropriate and they are available.
- 2.3 The AMR will be published on the Council's website, as it is factual report it is not subject to consultation.

Housing

- 2.4 In 2023/24 there were 827 net housing completions in Slough. That's quite high compared to the recent average but it compensates for the very low figure of 322 the previous year.
- 2.5 Of the total 835 gross completions, 8 homes were created by conversion of existing homes, and 230 (28%) were from a change of use. 8 homes were lost through conversion or demolition. The change of use % is high primarily because of completion of the Horlicks Factory building and 163 Bath Road.
- 2.6 There was a total of 2410 gross commitments at the end of March 2024 made up of 748 dwellings under construction and 1662 had consent but were not started. The figure is about a third lower than the average over the last few years.
- 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 considered as below a critical threshold. At the 1st of April 2024 the 5 year housing land supply figure was 2.2 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 (known as the Tilted Balance).
- 2.9 100% of the gross housing completions in 2023/24 were on previously developed sites (brownfield). This figure can fluctuate over the years depending upon which sites are coming forward, but in recent years it's been 100% or close to it.
- 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 Council 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 October 2023 is 257. There are no serviced plots available to meet this demand.
- 2.11 63 new build dwellings were in the affordable housing category in 2023/24.
- 2.12 The results of monitoring for 2023/24 showed that 9% of housing completions were houses and 91% 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.

2.13 In relation to the Core Strategy housing target there is a shortfall of just under 600 as at 31/3/24. Looking ahead over the next 17 years the estimate of future housing supply is below the current calculation of housing need by at least 5,000 homes. As housing need calculations change yearly and as do estimates of supply the size of the shortfall may change. As part of the new Local Plan a new in depth study of housing supply options and potential will be undertaken.

Employment

2.14 The monitoring shows that there was no significant change in net employment floor space in 2023/24. The largest gross gain was a data centre. And completion of the Horlicks main building for residential use results in a technical loss of former employment space.

2.15 The Thames Valley and South-East Office Market Report (2024) produced by Lambert Smith Hampton shows that Slough has 5.9 years supply of offices and 1,000 sq. ft of available space.

2.16 Slough was among the best-performing South East markets in 2023, with take-up being in line with the annual trend and the strongest year since 2018.

2.17 Slough Trading Estate continues to do well under SEGROs management and remains 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 data centres are being built but they have a different employment profile, and do not employ as many people on site as the businesses lost.

2.18 The Trading Estate benefits from having a Simplified Planning Zone (SPZ). This helps existing and potential new occupiers plan for the future with more certainty by allowing construction of new buildings to take place without the need to apply for separate planning permission, provided they meet specified conditions and fall within agreed use classes and zones set out in the SPZ scheme.

2.19 The current SPZ is due to expire in November 2024. Cabinet approved the principle of a replacement earlier in 2023. This new SPZ will help the trading estate adapt to the changes in business and the increase in demand for digital technology by allowing for data centres, and taller buildings, including for warehousing and research and development. (As of September 2024 a deposit draft of the new SPZ was consulted on from 8th July to 19th August 2024, with an intention to report to Cabinet in October 2024).

2.20 During 2023/24, two SPZ schemes were completed. This included three interlinked data centres and change of use of a training use to a mixed business/industrial/storage use building.

Retail

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

in February 2024. The monitoring of retail parks began in 2023 in response to the offer they provide for the town's residents.

2.22 The retail offer changed in Slough Town Centre in recent years as multinationals have moved out in line with national trends (e.g. Wilkinson's). However it continues to operate well as a large district centre than a regional centre. There has been a decrease in the number of chain stores and increase in the number of independent stores.

Slough Town Centre Retail

2.23 The results showed Slough Town Centre had a retail unit vacancy rate of 11%. 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 11% of units vacant.
- The Observatory has 16% of units vacant.
- The High Street has 10% of units vacant.

District Centres Retail

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

2.25 Chalvey had a retail vacancy rate of 11%, Langley 2% and Farnham Road 0%. These are low retail vacancy rates which show these centres are healthy and vibrant and supporting the local community. Chalvey and the Farnham Road both benefit from independent supermarkets.

Retail Parks

2.26 Outside the town and district centre retail areas there are 40 retail stores (excluding small food and beverage outlets). 18 of these are within either the large Bath Road (Cippenham) or Slough (Twinches Lane) Retail Parks. None of these stores are included in the High Street and district centre retail vacancy studies but they contribute to the general retail offer and economic activity in Slough.

2.27 Overall the vacancy rate of 10% has doubled to 20% since the middle of the pandemic period (Table 6 below). However this is primarily the result of the western half of Bath Rd retail park (Bath Rd north side Cippenham) having gradually become vacant, excepting a frontage food and beverage unit. Segro acquired the retail park (circa 11.4 acres and 10 units) in 2022 for £120 million from Roya London Asset Management. -. Slough retail park at Twinches Lane has seen few if any long term vacancies in recent years.

Appeal Decisions

- 2.28 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 29 appeals in Slough in the 12 months from April 2023 with 20 dismissed and 8 allowed by Inspector. 1 was part granted and part dismissed. 5 out of the 29 appeals were enforcement cases, with 5 notices upheld.
- 2.29 21 of the appeals were for householder or advertisement applications. Of the 8 allowed the key issues related to design, character of the area or amenity which tend to be site specific judgements.
- 2.30 There were 8 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 Slough Local Plan

Slough Local Plan

- 2.31 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 Plan making process is being reviewed by the Government at present, and this, with the approval for funding to progress, has caused a delay in progressing to Reg 19. The Council continues to monitor this and the Planning Department are in contact with the Planning Inspectorate and MHCLG as required. Some project work that can feed into the new Local Plan continues.

Cross boundary engagement on significant issues.

- 2.32 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.
- 2.33 In 23/24 regular meetings were held with Buckinghamshire Council to discuss cross boundary issues in particular the pressure for land to meet housing need in the sub-region. Slough has engaged formally and informally with other Local Authorities Local Plans/neighbourhood plans including Winsor and Maidenhead, Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire, Hillingdon and Wokingham.

Planning Policy and the Corporate Plan 2023-2027

2.34 The Policy team are also guided by the Corporate Plan purpose “Closing the healthy life expectancy gap, by focusing on children” through implementing the three strategic priorities:

- A borough for children and young people to thrive
- A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives
- A cleaner, healthier and more prosperous Slough

This has included work progressing the following

- an addendum to the Developers Guide which focuses on S106 contributions for primary health care.
- updating the Simplified Planning Zone;
- implementing the new Duty for ‘Biodiversity Net Gain.

2.35 Planning Policy are also working with the Public Health team’s Healthy weight in Slough project through policy options that help deliver Priority no. 1 “A borough for children and young people to thrive” through, “Tackling high rates of child obesity” in the implementation of the current and new Local Plan.

Summary

2.36 The Council has a duty to publish monitoring information on the Local Plan. This report highlights key points and statistics from the AMR from April 2023 to March 2024. That includes 827 new homes, 100% development on previously developed land, a 2.2 year housing land supply, progressing to replace the current Simplified Planning Zone, research with Public Health towards securing contributions for GP premises, and implementing the new Biodiversity net gain duty. The AMR will be published on the Council’s website 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.