

**Report to** Sustainable development panel

29 January 2014

**Item**

**5**

**Report of** Head of planning service

**Subject** Joint Core Strategy Annual Monitoring Report 2012-13

---

### **Purpose**

To inform members of the content of the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) for 2012-13. This consists of the Greater Norwich report monitoring progress of the Joint Core Strategy (JCS) and a Norwich appendix monitoring local plan policies not covered by the JCS indicators.

### **Recommendation**

That members note the content of the Joint Core Strategy Annual Monitoring Report 2012-13.

### **Corporate and service priorities**

The report helps to meet the corporate priority A prosperous city and the service plan priority to deliver the Local Plan for Norwich

### **Financial implications**

There are no direct financial implications.

Ward/s: All wards

Cabinet member: Councillor Stonard – Environment and transport

### **Contact officers**

Mike Burrell, Planning Policy Team Leader

01603 212525

Sarah Ashurst, Planning Officer

01603 212500

### **Background documents**

None

# Report

## Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to inform members of the content of the JCS AMR. The AMR covers the period from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013. The document is available at the following link:

<http://www.gndp.org.uk/our-work/joint-core-strategy/monitoring/>

2. It is a long standing requirement for local planning authorities to produce an AMR. Prior to the Localism Act this had to be submitted to the Secretary of State by December of each year. Submission is no longer required but the monitoring of the plan still is.
3. This AMR includes the following sections:
  - The Joint Core Strategy (JCS) annual monitoring report, including an update to the Sustainability Appraisal baseline information and covering the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP) area;
  - Appendix A: Greater Norwich area Five year supply of housing assessment;
  - Appendix B: Duty to Cooperate Topic Paper;
  - Appendix C: Update on Sustainability Appraisal Baseline;
  - Appendix D: Broadland District Council AMR;
  - Appendix E: Norwich City Council AMR, and;
  - Appendix F: South Norfolk District Council Local Development Scheme update.
4. The remainder of this report provides a brief commentary on the findings of the JCS AMR and on the Norwich Appendix. In compiling the AMR and this report, officers have noted that some indicators are out of date in that data is no longer published against them, or they are no longer fit for purpose. The potential for a review of all indicators will be discussed at the Greater Norwich level and any recommendations reported to SDP as necessary in the future.

## The Joint Core Strategy Annual Monitoring Report

5. The framework for the monitoring report was set through the JCS and its Sustainability Appraisal which has its own monitoring targets.
6. Since the adoption of the JCS, the government has cut the production of some data which has resulted in some gaps in the monitoring data in the AMR. Where possible proxy indicators have been used, and to provide clarity for members, a note is added to highlight which indicators this affects.

7. The AMR for the JCS sets the baseline for future monitoring and provides a useful indication of how the GNDP area is currently performing in terms of the overall planning objectives.
8. There are many targets in the JCS's monitoring framework that are currently being met or where clear improvements have been made since last year:
  - Affordable housing completions have fallen on last year but still remain above targets in both Broadland and Norwich. South Norfolk has had a 3% reduction in affordable housing completions;
  - Housing completions by bedroom number have remained broadly at last year's levels and therefore meeting the proportions set out in the Sub-Regional Housing Market Assessment;
  - The percentage of new and converted dwellings being provided on previously developed land remains well above target across the greater Norwich area;
  - Employment rates have increased;
  - Business registration rates have increased;
  - The percentage of 16-18 year olds not in employment, training or higher education has fallen to levels similar to 2010/11, indicating youth unemployment is falling.
  - The proportion of the working population qualified to NVQ level 4 or higher has risen to their highest levels since monitoring began in 2008/09;
  - Carbon dioxide emissions have reduced substantially over the plan period to date;
  - The percentage of conservation areas with appraisals has increased in both Broadland and South Norfolk. Norwich City adopted the Bowthorpe Conservation Area Appraisal in October 2013 and so will count toward figures in the next AMR;
  - The proportion of county wildlife sites in positive conservation management has risen across the whole area and consistently risen on 2008/09 levels;
  - The proportion of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in favourable condition or unfavourable recovering condition has improved;
  - No listed buildings were demolished in the monitoring period;
  - The number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads has declined;
  - No permissions have been granted contrary to the advice of the Environment Agency. Where objections have been received these have been overcome by revisions to development proposals or through the imposition of conditions on permissions granted, and;

- Household waste recycling and composting continues to remain at 2011/12 levels in Norwich with a small reduction in both Broadland and South Norfolk on 2011/12 rates.
9. There are a number of indicators where targets are not being met currently. Many of these indicators have been adversely affected by the global economic downturn:
- Net housing completions continue to be below target with a significant reduction from last year in the Broadland part of the Norwich Policy Area (NPA). This is partly due to the lack of an adopted plan following the remittal of part of the JCS;
  - No further Gypsy and Traveller sites have been provided, although all 3 councils are working towards addressing this point in their emerging site allocations development plan documents where appropriate;
  - There has been a significant loss of office space within the city centre (- 3271sqm). Further trends in permissions granted highlight the potential for a further 6192.45sqm to be converted from office uses (if all schemes are implemented). Some permissions granted have already been implemented, for example, the conversion of Westlegate Tower to residential and retail uses, of 60 St Faiths Lane to an apart-hotel and of 102 Prince of Wales Road to student accommodation. In addition, the new permitted development rights allowing the conversion of offices to residential uses without the need for planning permission have given rise to some prior approval notices being granted, namely at Merchants Court, St Georges Street and Britannia House, Prince of Wales Road, which will lead to a loss of an additional 3046sqm of office space. This trend is of concern. Since the employment evidence base for the JCS pre dates the recession, consideration is required as to whether additional evidence is needed on employment trends in Greater Norwich. Depending on the findings of such evidence, there may also need to be a policy response to address this issue;
  - Norwich's national retail ranking has dropped from 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>. This is partly due to changes in the scoring system used for retail ranking now including supermarkets in city centres and partly as a result of other cities throughout the country receiving significant inward investment;
  - There has been a small loss of retail floorspace in the city centre continuing the trend from last year. This can be explained by the change in policy in the JCS adopted in 2011 encouraging other city centre functions such as early evening economy uses. The JCS allows for 20,000 square metres of additional comparison retail space in the area to 2016. The Site Allocations and Development Management plans seek to focus such development in the city centre through retail allocations in Barn Road Car Park, St Stephen's Street and Westlegate and through intensification of retail uses in the centre. To date, no planning applications have been received for these sites. However approximately 500 square metres of retail and restaurant space is being provided at Westlegate Tower and the development will create an enhanced link to improve pedestrian access between Castle Mall/Timberhill and St. Stephens/Chapelfield. In the light of the relatively permissive policies in the National Planning Policy Framework and in the absence of large scale

available sites for city centre retail development, this could make the area vulnerable to applications for out of town comparison retail development. Due to the rapidly changing nature of the retailing market, the JCS requires a refreshed analysis of retail requirements subsequent to 2016.

10. Shop vacancy has fallen in 4 of the major towns across the GNDP area: Hareleston, Loddon, Long Stratton and Wymondham. However, vacancy is up in Aylsham, Diss and in the city centre. In the city centre, the vacancy rate of 13.6% reflects all *units*. If considering *floorspace* vacancy levels are at 7.1%, the lowest since 2009. Excluding floorspace which is vacant but currently being refurbished for new occupation, this figure falls further to 6.2%. These two figures when taken together imply that larger units are doing well in the primary area but that smaller units are suffering. However, there are strong indicators from the market that vacancy is currently reducing. Many units are under refurbishment for new occupiers, for example, on St Stephens Street several smaller units are being merged to make way for a Sainsbury's local store.
11. Building for Life 12 (BfL12) was published in 2012 and replaces Building for Life. JCS policy 2 requires Building for Life (or any successor) to be used to inform members of the urban design merits of housing schemes. It has been used in Norwich both to assist in the assessment of housing planning applications and to assess completed housing developments. BfL 12 is based on the National Planning Policy Framework and the Government's commitment to build more homes. BfL12 introduced a new scoring system and reduces the number of criteria against which an assessment is made. Rather than a numerical score, a red/amber/green traffic light system is used. A target of "no reds" in completed schemes has been set as the indicator in the JCS AMR.
12. At the time of printing the AMR as appended to this report the figures for Norwich were unavailable. Assessments have since been done for completed housing developments. Six of the ten schemes assessed have scored no reds against all criteria:
  - Orchard Street,
  - The Great Hospital,
  - Warrenwood Court,
  - Watling Court,
  - 75-81 Pottergate and;
  - Northumberland Street.

The 4 remaining sites where reds *have* been scored are:

- Wentworth Green (Former Civil Service Sports Ground);
- Emms Court;
- 212-214 Thorpe Road, and;
- Spring Grove Services, Oak Street.

13. On the latter two sites (Thorpe Road and Oak Street) the council's officers are proactively engaging with the developers to address the areas in which reds have been scored: at both sites the landscaping condition has not been complied with. Whilst the score for the site will not be altered, improvements can be made to the developed scheme to address the areas of concern.
14. On the remaining 2 sites scoring reds (Wentworth Green and Emms Court) it is not considered that the 'red' areas can be addressed to improve the development. In the case of Wentworth Green it was the layout and orientation of buildings which scored a red, and in the case of Emms Court where an unauthorised gate has been erected thereby cutting off connections with the surrounding environment, legal advice has noted that it is not possible for enforcement action to be taken.
15. There are other indicators for which data is not available at the time of writing this report. Members will be updated verbally where possible at the time of the meeting.

### **Norwich City Council Appendix (Appendix D)**

16. The JCS AMR replaces many aspects of the previous annual monitoring reports produced by Norwich City Council.
17. The Norwich appendix to the JCS AMR monitors the remaining City of Norwich Replacement Local Plan (adopted November 2004) policies not covered in the JCS AMR.
18. Key findings from the Norwich AMR show:

#### **Employment:**

- Targets for new small businesses were missed by 1 permission this monitoring period (5 required, 4 achieved). Very little employment land was permitted for non-employment uses.

#### **Office Floorspace:**

- As referenced above, there has been a significant loss of business (B1a) office floorspace in the monitoring period. Norfolk House on Exchange Street has been converted to a technical college (-2225sqm), St Crispin's House, Duke Street has had a change of use to financial and professional services (A2) offices (-290sqm) and Aldwych House, 57 Bethel Street has been converted to storage (-707.42sqm). The remainder has been lost through smaller scale proposals.
- There are also significant trends in permissions granted which may result in further losses in office accommodation. Some of these permissions have been implemented but are not complete in this monitoring period: for example, Westlegate Tower conversion to residential and retail uses (-1407sqm); conversion of 60 St Faiths Lane to an apart-hotel (-2782sqm); and the conversion of 102 Prince of Wales Road to student accommodation (-1335sqm).

- Furthermore, the government announced changes to the permitted development rights for offices to allow for conversion to residential without the need for full planning permission in October 2013. An office survey has been conducted to gauge the likely implications of these changes for Norwich. In general it appears that relatively few office owners intend to take up this opportunity. If those who have indicated they are considering a change of use follow this intention up, this will lead to a further loss of 8,500sqm of office floorspace (approx 3% of total office floorspace in the city centre).
- The AMR has shown that there have been losses in the city centre but gains in office space in the Norwich Research Park and in other out of town locations. Whilst the JCS envisaged growth in the city centre as well as the north east and the NRP, growth is at present only occurring in the out of town locations. Therefore, as set out in the JCS section of this report, there may be a need for additional evidence and a policy response at the Greater Norwich level on the issue of continued loss of office floorspace in the city centre and ongoing out of town office development.

### **Retailing:**

- Retail floorspace has not increased in line with JCS targets. However, other uses such as cafes and restaurants continue to grow and support the vitality and vibrancy of the city centre in accordance with JCS policy 11. As a result 7 frontage groups are below their specified percentage of A1 retail frontage length. The increase in diversity of city centre uses is very much in line with national trends. It is both welcome and necessary to enable the city centre to compete as an attractive location for shoppers in an era of increasing online retailing.
- The position of the city in the national retail tables has dropped to 13<sup>th</sup> from 9<sup>th</sup>. This can be accounted for as a result of changes in the scoring system used by Venuescore which now takes into consideration sectors such as convenience and food service provision and inward investment. Norwich does not have a large city centre supermarket unlike 9 of the 10 centres in the top 10. Whilst investment in the city has been high in recent years, it is currently lower than that in all other cities in the top 10 where significant investment is still being made.
- The vacancy rates reported in the AMR appear more negative than those reported in the City Council's Retail Monitor. It should be noted that the 13.6% reported in the AMR represents the vacancy rate across all shop *units* within the primary area. When considering available vacant floorspace (i.e. that which is being marketed, but not including floorspace currently under renovation) this figure drops to 6.2%. It appears that larger units in the primary area are functioning well but smaller units are suffering.
- In the secondary area, smaller units are flourishing. Vacancy as a proportion of all units is at 5.9%, almost as good as 2007 pre-recession rates (5.7%) and vacancy as a proportion of available floorspace is now at 3.3%, the lowest it has been since 2007.

- Vacancy levels in district centres have fallen, as has the number of non-retail units. In Local centres vacancy has risen but numbers of non-retail units have dropped. This suggests that non-retail uses rather than shops are in decline in local centres.

### **Housing:**

- Housing completions (377 completed dwellings in this monitoring period) are up on last year (288), but still down on required levels to achieve plan targets (477 dwellings per annum).
- Densities are still at an appropriate level for an urban area, with 58% of all permissions achieving a density of 40 dwellings per hectare or more. However, average density has dropped from 78 dwellings per hectare to just 39.8 dwellings per hectare. This continues the trend away from flatted development that has been seen in recent years. It reflects the fact that a significant proportion of completions in the monitoring year were on small infill sites in suburban locations. Larger suburban developments such as Wentworth Green in Eaton, which provides a significant amount of open space, were also developed in this year.
- Affordable housing completions are down on last year (although last year's high levels can be attributed to development of the Council's garage sites), but still up on the preceding 2 years. This may be partly the result of the low threshold requirement for providing some affordable housing in the JCS (the requirement is triggered at 5 dwellings) acting as a disincentive to private small scale housing development. Last year's AMR highlighted that there had been limited affordable housing delivery on small scale private housing developments. This trend appears to have continued. Detailed work is planned to provide firm evidence on this issue. Once this evidence is gathered, a review of our approach to affordable housing policy will be undertaken through an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document. Any subsequent recommendations will be reported to SD Panel as necessary.
- More positively, early suggestions signal that 2013/14 will see a rise in housing completions.
- A recent planning appeal (APP/G2625/A/13/2195084) has upheld that 5 year land supply should be calculated over the Norwich Policy Area (NPA) rather than for Norwich itself. As a result, there is currently a housing land supply of only 4.4 years. Therefore policies relating to housing land supply in the existing local plan are considered to be 'out-of-date' in accordance with paragraph 49 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and proposals for housing development will have to be considered in the context of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. More detail on the current 5 year housing land supply position and its implications is in appendix A of the JCS AMR.

### **Environment:**

- No permissions have been granted contrary to saved local plan policy NE1 (Protection of Environmental Assets). However, as stated above, this housing



supply restrictive policy is now considered to be 'out-of-date' as a 5 year housing land supply cannot currently be demonstrated.

- There have been significant telecommunications applications in the monitoring period. Four telecommunications masts have been approved and a further 31 applications for the installation of equipment cabinets to upgrade broadband connections have been approved. The Council has worked closely with telecommunications operators to achieve the best outcomes possible for both parties.
- The numbers of listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments on the Buildings at Risk register has fallen to below 2008/09 levels. Four buildings have been removed from the list and one added:
  - **Removals:** Bridge over Castle Moat, 1B Icehouse Lane, 77-79 Barrack Street, and 211 & 213 King Street
  - **Additions:** Weaver's House, Mountergate.
- Recycling levels continue to rise with nearly 40% of waste being recycled and a further 8.5% being composted.

### **Transport:**

- There have been significant improvements made to the cycle network:
  - Works at Opie Street have enabled two-way cycle traffic;
  - Works between Watson Grove and the Dolphin Path have widened the orange pedalway to enable cyclists and pedestrians to share the surface. Nearby, a new crossing has been put in at Heigham Street.
  - Funding from the Big Lottery and Sustrans has resulted in a new route linking Open Academy to Sewell Park College.
  - Most of the Norwich cycle network has been way-marked and a Norwich cycle map produced
- Significantly, Norwich City was successful in bidding for funding from the Cycle City Ambition Grant and received £3.7 million from the Department for Transport to help fund cycle projects across the city. A further £1.8 million funding has been secured through local transport plan funds.
- Bus rapid Transit improvements have been made along Dereham Road at the junctions with Barn Road and Old Palace Road.
- Permission has been obtained, but is currently subject to a Judicial Review, for a bus lane up Grapes Hill, two way traffic for buses along Chapelfield North and the removal of general traffic from St Stephens Street.

### **Conclusions**

19. In compiling the AMR and this report, officers note that some indicators are out of date in that data is no longer published against them, or they are no longer fit for purpose. The potential for a review of all indicators will be discussed at the

Greater Norwich level and any recommendations reported to SDP as necessary in the future.

20. The full JCS AMR for 2012/13 is available at <http://www.gndp.org.uk/content/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/12/GNDPAMR201213FINALV3.pdf> . The link is included for members to note the content and make comment. The AMR was published in late 2013.