

Forest Heath Council's Opening Statement

Firstly, on behalf of Forest Heath District Council I would like to welcome the Inspectors, Simon Berkley and Crista Masters, and all those attending this public examination.

I would also like to thank Annette Feeney, the Programme Officer, for her management of the examination process so far.

The Forest Heath Single Issue Review of Policy CS7: Overall Housing Provision and Distribution will secure the successful completion of the Forest Heath Core Strategy.

The Forest Heath Core Strategy was adopted in 2010, and was subject to a successful high court challenge. Following the challenge a number of significant changes and challenges have taken place in planning policy and legislation at a national and local level. This led to the Council reviewing not only the quashed parts of the Core Strategy (the housing distribution) but also the overall housing need resulting in a full review of Policy CS7.

This Single Issue Review has been prepared and consulted upon in tandem with the Forest Heath Site Allocations Local Plan, with the Site Allocations Local Plan hearings commencing on the 17th October.

These two Local Plan documents will provide Forest Heath with a complete and up to date Local Plan read alongside the adopted Core Strategy and the Joint Development Management Policies Local Plan Document adopted in February 2015.

To prepare the Plan the Council has undertaken three major consultations over several years. These have explored the key planning issues facing the District and how to address them. We have received a large amount of feedback which has been extremely valuable and has helped refine and shape our spatial distribution. We would like to thank all those involved for their contributions.

The Forest Heath District presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges. The District is positioned between three major growth centres – Cambridge, Norwich and Ipswich. The largest and most sustainable town of Newmarket is home to the international home of horse racing, while the middle of the District is home to two major United States Air Force bases – RAF Mildenhall and Lakenheath. The North of the district is home to the Stone Curlew, Wood Lark and Night Jar, with large areas of land designated as Special Protection Area which completely surrounds the town of Brandon.

In the last few years while preparing the Plan, a lack of a 5 year land supply and an out of date complete Plan has led to a number of speculative developments having gained planning permission. The Council now maintains a 6.7 year land supply and with the adoption of this SIR – the Council will have an adopted Overall Housing Requirement and spatial distribution which will provide the basis for proper planning of the District over the next few years.

The Plan will be kept under Review and given policy changes expected from the White Paper, the Council has made a commitment to undertake a review of the Local Plan jointly with St Edmundsbury Borough Council early next year. This will be programmed into a new Local Development Scheme in due course.

This Single Issue Review will provide the much needed certainty to meet the housing need in Forest Heath and delivering this need in the right places.

Forest Heath District Council is presenting an objectively assessed need of 6,800 homes. The spatial distribution, plans for these homes in a manner compatible with the specific context, constraint and opportunities, local circumstances and character in Forest Heath and the extant policies in the adopted 2010 Core Strategy.

The Plan is supported by an up to date robust and proportionate evidence base – on housing, infrastructure and viability to name a few. It has also undergone a sustainability appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment to assess all reasonable alternatives and consider the Plan's social, economic and environmental impacts.

To conclude, the Council considers that the document, with the consequent suggested modifications previously submitted, fully meets the tests of soundness set out in paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as it is:

- Positively prepared;
- Justified, having been based on a thorough analysis of the issues that the area faces and the realistic alternative strategies to address these;
- Based on a comprehensive, up-to-date and relevant evidence base;
- Effective, because it is deliverable and informed by joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities; and
- Consistent with national policy in that it will enable delivery of sustainable development in line with the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Council also considers that the document fully meets the legal requirements for preparing a local plan and, for these reasons, that the document can, with the suggested modifications, be found sound. If without prejudice you consider further main modifications are required we would invite you to indicate accordingly.

Marie Smith

Service Manager – Strategic Planning

Team Introductions

I am Marie Smith, Service Manager for Planning Strategy for Forest Heath District Council. I am responsible for managing the preparation of the Single Issue Review of Core Strategy Policy CS7.

Turning to the Councils team that will be present during the hearings. As well as myself, the Council will be represented by a lead on each matter.

Other officers that will be present are:

Ann-Marie Howell, Principal Planning Officer, Planning Policy

Boyd Nicholas, Principal Planning Officer, Planning Policy

Samantha Robertson, Senior Planning Officer, Planning Policy

Jaki Fisher, Ecology and Landscape Officer

Jackie Ward, a Planning Consultant with considerable experience that has been brought in to assist particularly with duty to cooperate and the IDP

Jon Crane, a principal planner from Essex County Council who has been brought in to assist with this project, with a particular focus on Sustainability Appraisal.

In addition, the Council will be calling on various consultants throughout the hearings who have helped with the preparation of key parts of the evidence base. They will be introduced at the start of each session.

Lastly, David Whipps is instructed to work on behalf of the Local Authority as our legal representative.