

## **Forest Heath District Council**

### **Opening Statement**

**Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

Firstly, on behalf of Forest Heath District Council I would like to welcome back the Inspector, Christa 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.

I am Marie Smith, Service Manager for Planning Strategy for Forest Heath District Council. I am responsible for managing the preparation of the Site Allocations Local Plan. I will introduce other members of the Council's team, and their various roles, at the end of this statement.

I hope that you will find the arrangements for the hearings this week to be conducive for the examination of this local plan document.

The Site Allocations Local Plan identifies sites for housing, employment, retail and greenspace to ensure that enough land is available in appropriate locations to meet the growth targets set out in the Core Strategy.

The Allocations document is consistent with policies in the Core Strategy, allocating 7036 homes in accordance with the emerging SIR of Policy CS7: Overall Housing Provision and Distribution which requires a minimum of 6,800 homes to meet the Districts Objectively Assessed Need. The Plan also allocates 18.6ha of employment land in accordance with Policy CS6 (Sustainable Economic and Tourism Development) which requires a minimum of 16ha of employment land.

This Site Allocation Plan has been prepared and consulted upon in tandem with the Forest Heath Single Issue Review. The hearings took place two weeks ago.

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 the allocations and policies within the Plan. 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.

The Site Allocations Local Plan positively allocates land to meet the development needs of the District to meet the needs for homes, jobs and facilities, in a way compatible with the specific context and constraints of Forest Heath.

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.

This Plan together with the SIR will provide the much needed certainty to meet the housing need, employment, retail and infrastructure needs in Forest Heath and delivering this need in the right places.

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.

To conclude, the Council considers that the document, with the consequent suggested modifications previously submitted, fully meet 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 consider 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**

I bring with me the team who will be present during the examination. 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

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.

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.

The individuals will be introduced at the beginning of each session.