WYCOMBE CORE STRATEGY – INSPECTOR’S REPORT: SUMMARY

- WDC has published the Inspector’s report into the Wycombe Development Framework Core Strategy – the document outlining the Council’s overall planning vision up to 2026
- The Inspector’s overall conclusion is that the Core Strategy is sound subject to changes which he puts forward. These changes are binding on the Council.
- Now that the document has been found sound, WDC can formally adopt the Core Strategy, start implementing its policies and move forward with its visionary proposals for the District.
- Wycombe is only the 7th District or Unitary Council in the South East region to secure a “sound” verdict on a Core Strategy since the new planning system was set up in 2004. Wycombe is now one of only 24 District/Unitary councils in England (out of more than 300) to secure a sound Core Strategy.

What the report says about key issues

- Overall:
  - The broad strategy of the document - a focus on developing previously-developed land with High Wycombe acting as a regional hub and principal focus for development - is approved.
  - At High Wycombe, the emphasis for development is to be on urban renaissance and the re-use of previously developed land.
  - Development at Marlow and Princes Risborough is to be on a smaller scale and of a character appropriate to their size.
  - Elsewhere, the emphasis is to be on protecting the rural character of the District.

- Housing
  - The District’s housing requirement is 8050 (402.5 per annum) over 2006-26 (based on targets in the South East Plan Panel Report plus a shortfall from the previous county structure plan housing provision).
  - There are sufficient housing sites on previously-developed land to not require the early release of any greenfield land.
  - The next planning document, the Site Allocations Document, is to identify and allocate sufficient specific sites for housing for the next 10 years, not including an allowance for windfall sites (sites coming forward which have not been identified for development), with an emphasis on previously-developed land, with reserve (greenfield) locations only if needed.
  - The delivery of housing is to be monitored continuously and the Site Allocations Document is to deliver any additional land releases as and when necessary.

- Safeguarded Land/Green Belt
  - Two sites - Grange & Widmer Farms, and Lane End Road – both of which were previously areas of safeguarded land for long-term development despite being in the Chilterns AONB, are placed into the Green Belt. This gives them very strong protection against inappropriate development.
  - Adams Park is taken out of the Green Belt to reflect its already built-up nature.
• Gomm Valley is not placed into the Green Belt. Along with Abbey Barn North and South, Terriers Farm and Slate Meadow, the site is retained as “reserve location for future development”.

• **Affordable Housing**
  o The threshold for affordable housing in the District’s rural areas (i.e. outside the 3 main towns) is lowered from 15 to 5 units.
  o The affordable housing target is increased from 30% to 40% for greenfield sites and former employment sites. The general ‘urban’ affordable housing policy would be 30% above 15 units.

• **High Wycombe Town Centre:**
  o WDC’s proposed policy 6(1) on High Wycombe Town Centre is deleted. This policy outlined the Council’s aspirations to improve the pedestrian environment, integrate the expanded town centre and secure changes to the road network. This includes re-routing the A40 Abbey Way Flyover so as to overcome its divisive effects.
  o The inspector stresses that the principle of the proposal is, however, “entirely supportable” and that ensuring the town centre is fully integrated is a “central” issue that should be resolved “as soon as possible”, particularly in the wake of Eden’s opening.
  o Whilst recognising the need for flexibility the inspector says the policy as it stands isn’t yet supported by enough evidence to show that the proposal can be achieved within a reasonable period, and the implementation mechanisms are not sufficiently clear.
  o Therefore more work needs to be done to ensure that there is a reasonable prospect of the changes being secured in a reasonable time, and this would need to be done through a future planning document.

• **Desborough, High Wycombe:**
  o Approach supported - the major changes set to happen in Desborough provide an opportunity to improve the area’s sense of place and distinctiveness.
  o Inspector calls for “a clear place-making and urban design framework” to which all developments should contribute.
  o This will need to be set out in the more detailed WDF documents to follow.

• **Hughenden Quarter, High Wycombe**
  o Support for WDC’s vision to restructure this area by regenerating key sites and providing a new green corridor.

• **M40 Gateway, High Wycombe:**
  o Support for the Council’s “appropriate spatial vision” for the area.
  o Need to secure all possible synergies between development of the Abbey Barn/Daws Hill areas and other sites near the motorway junction at Handy Cross.
  o Sports Centre site flagged as a “highly prominent site” and it is “vital to make the most of this landmark site”.

• **Princes Risborough:** “Unlikely that much, if any, greenfield land will need to be identified for release pre-2026.” Target of 480 dwellings over the 20 years of the plan for Princes Risborough specifically.

**Next Steps**
- **Examination:** The examination is now formally closed.
- **Publication of report:** The report was formally published on the Council’s website on 9th May and copies are also available for inspection at the Council offices in High Wycombe,
the area information centres at Marlow and Princes Risbrough, and at public libraries throughout the District.

- **When will the new policies be applied?** The policies/proposals in the Core Strategy, as recommended for change by the inspector, are a new material consideration to which *very substantial weight* should be applied, such that they outweigh the provisions of relevant Development Plan policies. This position applies to *any applications determined on or after the day that the Inspector’s Report is published*.

- **Training:** Over the next few months, we will hold training events to explain the Adopted Core Strategy. Further details to follow.

- **Adoption:** The intention is to adopt the document at the Council meeting on 12th June following consideration at the Council’s Cabinet on 9th June.

- **Site Allocations:** Following the adoption of the Core Strategy, attention will turn towards the Site Allocations Document, and it is likely that there will be further consultation on this in the autumn. The detailed programme will now be reviewed.

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