

**Wycombe Local Plan Examination Hearings**  
**Wycombe District Council Opening Statement**

**16<sup>th</sup> July 2018**

I would like to welcome you, Inspector, and all the participants and observers in this room today and in the coming few weeks to this examination hearing at Wycombe District Council. As participants you represent a wide range of interests but you all have an interest in the future of this District.

Early on in preparing this plan we branded it The Big Challenge Plan due to the challenges in meeting our needs for development and infrastructure whilst protecting what is important in the District, and in particular the special character and environmental quality of the District. And yes, it has been a challenge! We were clear, right from the beginning, that the responsible approach was to deliver a 'fair share' of the housing that is needed nationally, not using the nationally recognised constraints of Green Belt and AONB as 'excuses' but as genuine constraints to be tested through the plan-making process of finding the right level for development for the District.

As Head of Planning and Sustainability, I have a strong belief in the value of collaborative planning and constructive dialogue. To this end, we have sought to engage in a meaningful way that goes beyond the legal requirement with the community and stakeholders to help shape the Plan. We did this both early on at issues and options stages, and through draft plans before asking our Cabinet and Council to agree the Plan in September and October last year for publication and submission for the examination that is now taking place. The consultation reports and responses in the evidence library testify to this extensive process. We have also sought to engage in an open way, sharing our thinking as we have gone along.

We know that we are not going to be able to make a plan that resolves all the complex issues to everyone's satisfaction. That would be an impossibility. But where we have been able to we have responded to the wide ranging views we have received, and this has helped shape the Plan, and made it a better plan. And I hope that those who disagree with the plan at least understand clearly why we have made the choices that we have made.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the plan in this way, and in particular the various residents groups who have dedicated much of their own time, and money, in engaging in the process.

A critical part of preparing the Plan has involved collaborating actively with surrounding authorities and appropriate agencies as part of the Duty to Cooperate. This has often involved difficult conversations and testing of positions to reach not just general outcomes but specific agreed positions. It has also involved significant joint working including jointly commissioned evidence and agreed common approaches.

Ultimately the process has resulted in an agreed level of growth and distribution of that growth across the housing market area amongst the local planning authorities

and the local enterprise partnership. This is reflected not just in the strategy of the Wycombe District Local Plan but also in the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan also currently at examination, and in the emerging proposals for the joint Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan.

The Wycombe Local Plan has a simple vision based on the existing long term vision set out in the Sustainable Communities Strategy for the District. It also has 8 objectives. These objectives recognise the key assets of the District but also recognise the role the Plan and the District has in delivering growth, especially housing growth. They also highlight the importance of delivering infrastructure at both a strategic and local level, and ultimately highlight the role that we have in addressing climate change. These objectives sit alongside the core planning principles in the NPPF, and together, I believe, contribute towards delivering sustainable development.

But ultimately this Plan is about making better places – that is why we set out objectives or principles for how we want to see different places in the District develop in the future. Wycombe District Council has a long standing reputation for delivering quality developments. That is why the Plan includes the detail that it does – criteria for how specific sites will be developed, detailed proposals for the proposed major expansion of Princes Risborough, and development management policies to shape day to day planning decisions.

This level of detail has also allowed us to ensure that the proposals in the plan are deliverable, both in terms of the housing and other development that will come forward, and in terms of the infrastructure requirements. Alongside the direct infrastructure provision, the CIL contributions that will be collected will allow us to further improve the District's infrastructure. We have been operating CIL Wycombe District since 2012.

The nature of the District and the scale of development needed means that difficult decisions have had to be made, and the Plan does not shy away from this. It sets out a step change in housing delivery in a District that despite the nationally recognised planning and environmental constraints. It makes difficult decisions about releasing land from the Green Belt where exceptional circumstances exist, and about proposing development of the right scale in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

I believe we have set a sound plan before you, but it is for you to test this through this examination process. I am sure you will find my officers helpful in dealing with any requests that you have, and I hope – to the extent that this is possible – that you enjoy your time here, at Wycombe.

Penelope Tollitt

Head of Planning and Sustainability

Wycombe District Council

16<sup>th</sup> July 2018