

Maldon District Local Development Plan
Inspector: Simon Berkeley BA MA MRTPI

To:
The Council
All other participants

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Dear Sir/Madam,

Examination of the Maldon District Local Development Plan

I am the Inspector appointed to continue the examination of the Maldon District Local Development Plan. I have written this letter to the Council and all other participants to explain some matters and to clarify the way forward.

In line with the Secretary of State's letter to the Council dated 6 March, I have been asked to consider all of the currently available written evidence and the audio recordings of the initial hearings. The examination will therefore proceed taking all of this evidence into account.

There may, however, prove to be a need for me to explore further some of the questions debated at the previous hearings, particularly where new evidence has been produced. I will set out the remaining matters and issues to be considered through the examination in due course.

Notwithstanding the circumstances of this examination, I will from this point be following the 'normal' procedures which will by now be familiar to most participants. The way forward will involve an initial written exchange with the Council – indeed, I have today written to the Council separately – followed in due course by further hearing sessions. Adding to the familiarity, Mrs Andrea Copsey has been re-appointed as the Programme Officer for the examination, and her contact details (at the head of this letter) remain as before.

Taking matters forward, my letter to the Council asks for updates and clarifications in relation to a number of issues. That letter is available to read on the examination page of the Council's website. Once I have the information requested, I will then be in a position to determine precisely how to advance the examination.

The final decision on the Local Development Plan now rests with the Secretary of State rather than with the Council. Once I have undertaken the necessary scrutiny of the plan and the evidence supporting it, I will prepare a report to the Secretary of State setting out my recommendations. Whether to accept those recommendations or not will then be a matter for the Secretary of State and, as I have said, whether or not to approve the plan will be for him to decide.

I am acutely aware and fully appreciate that the passage of time since the previous hearings will have been frustrating to many. I intend to now progress the examination with the greatest expediency possible. In terms of timescales, much will depend on what the Council has done since the previous hearings, especially in relation to new evidence produced (for example, the evidence about Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs, employment and retail) and the Council's proposals for main modifications to the plan. Details about such matters are among the points I raise in my separate letter to the Council. I anticipate that the Council's response will provide me with the clarity I need to provide a firm timetable. I will set that out as soon as I am able.

One final point to note is that I will not be issuing interim findings or any sort of interim conclusions on the housing evidence considered through hearings thus far. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, housing is among the subjects about which I am seeking an update and some clarifications from the Council. Secondly, the plan's housing provision is closely entwined with its policies for economic development, which have not as yet been examined. As a consequence of both points, I am not presently able to reach firm and final conclusions in relation to housing matters.

I trust that this letter explains the present position in relation to the examination, and helps to clarify the way forward.

Yours sincerely

Simon Berkeley

Inspector