

Maldon District Local Development Plan

OPENING STATEMENT BY MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Fiona Marshall – Chief Executive

Sir, I thank you for this opportunity to make a short opening statement on behalf of Maldon District Council.

I welcome you and the participants to this Examination Hearing, to what the Council hopes will be a productive two weeks that will move us towards the adoption of the Maldon Local Development Plan.

As you are aware, the Examination Hearing was initially opened in January 2015 and the Inspector reported that Policy H6 in relation to Travellers Provision was unsound, and by extension, the Plan as a whole was unsound.

Following this, the Council contacted Secretary of State to request that he intervene, to which he acknowledged the concerns raised by the Council and agreed to test whether the inspector has reached a proportionate and balanced view on the Plan as a whole, in light of national planning policy. He subsequently issued a direction that the Maldon Local Development Plan be submitted to him for approval.

Since then, the Council has sought to resolve the issues raised by the previous Inspector and today marks the resumption and the next step to the Plan's adoption.

We have published and consulted on a number of modifications, many of which stemmed from the initial hearing.

We have updated the Objectively Assessed Need to reflect the latest population estimates and although the need has been revised downwards, we have maintained our target for housing at 310 dwellings per annum, which provides headroom to achieve delivery of the sites identified in the plan, and also creates greater freedom for the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans.

Our Five Year Land Supply has been updated and crucially we have sought to resolve the key issue which led to the previous Inspector's conclusion that the Plan was unsound, the Gypsy and Traveller policy. In December the Council endorsed a new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and agreed to submit a revised policy for examination at these hearings.

We recognise that it is vital that the Council continues to take a planned approach towards housing delivery which will bring forward much needed infrastructure investment into our District. We have clearly demonstrated our commitment to delivery and worked with developers to bring forward planned sites for development. Applications for 8 of our strategic sites have now been approved by the Council.

The Council has continued to defend the District from what we regard as inappropriate development that sits outside of our draft plan. The number of appeals that we have had to contest is testament to this, but also to the uncertainty of not having an up to date plan.

The Council has not stood still and we remain thoroughly committed to working to adopting the Maldon Local Development Plan this year.

As we did when the previous Inspector raised concerns on our plan in April 2014, we have responded to the concerns raised in his letter to us in May 2015, and to the matters that you, Sir, have raised since your appointment in March 2016.

As part of our pre-Hearing Written Statements published before Christmas, we have brought data up to date and set out our response, with recommended modifications if necessary, to the Inspectors Matters, Issues and Questions to assist the Inspector during these hearings.

The Council is committed during these hearing sessions to seek to resolve issues, but without compromising in a way that undermines the special character of the District. Therefore, the Hearings over the next two weeks provide an opportunity for the Council to work with you and participants to find common ground so that we are able to demonstrate that the Local Development Plan is, as we believe, sound.