

North Hertfordshire District Council Local Plan Examination

Opening Statement - 13 November 2017

Mr Inspector, on behalf of the Council I would like to formally welcome you to North Hertfordshire and thank you for giving our draft Local Plan your expert consideration.

Over several years we have been actively and constructively engaging with our residents, members, neighbours and other stakeholders to prepare a Local Plan, which we believe will meet the District's need for homes, jobs, services and infrastructure in the most sustainable manner. The Plan is ambitious in its provision in seeking to meet our full identified housing and employment needs. It is over 20 years since we identified any places that can build the homes and provide the jobs we need.

Through the process of evidence gathering, preparation, appraisal and on-going consultation, we have identified the challenges that the Plan should address. This Plan provides the necessary policy guidance to ensure delivery of development in the most suitable and sustainable locations that are well integrated into existing settlements, respect the local distinctiveness of our towns and villages, and seek to protect and enhance the natural and historic environment where possible. The Council has ensured that its strategy is underpinned by an up to date and robust evidence base.

To maximise the effectiveness of policies on strategic matters we have positively engaged in the Duty to Co-operate with our neighbouring authorities and other public bodies. These ongoing relationships will result in the delivery of significant amounts of homes and employment opportunities, across our shared housing and functional economic market areas with our neighbours both within the plan period and beyond.

Our vision is that North Hertfordshire is an attractive and vibrant place where people want to live, work and spend their leisure time. The Council's vision for the District has been evolved with our partners and the public.

Through this Local Plan new development will help to maintain and enhance the vibrancy of existing settlements and contribute to the creation of sustainable communities. New homes and jobs will have been provided for present and future generations through well designed, high quality developments that make a positive contribution to the local area. A range and mix of types of homes will have been delivered and there will be a substantial increase in

affordable housing both to own and to rent. Many communities will have embraced neighbourhood planning to deliver their local objectives.

North Hertfordshire will have a robust and prosperous local economy with a greater mix of skilled jobs, focused on locations that best support the District's growing population. The vitality and viability of our town centres will be safeguarded in a way that takes account of their distinctive role. Local businesses, services and facilities in urban and rural areas will be supported and enhanced.

Essential new and improved infrastructure will have been delivered through partnership working with service providers, government bodies, the Local Enterprise Partnerships and developers. The quality of our towns and villages should be improved, by focusing on more sustainable transport options and improving accessibility.

The rich heritage and biodiversity of the District will have been protected and enhanced where possible. New green infrastructure will have been incorporated into development providing increased resilience to changing climates, improving ecological connectivity and new spaces for sport and recreation thereby providing greater opportunities for local communities.

None of this can be achieved, however, without taking some difficult decisions, including the decision to take land out of the Green Belt. As in many authorities, the question of how best to meet our future development needs has generated significant debate in the local community. Throughout the preparation of the Local Plan, the District's residents, Parish Councils and interest groups have consistently engaged with the process and provided thorough and informative responses. A number of these have been used to improve the policies of the Plan as it has progressed. You will hear from many of these individuals and groups during the course of this examination and I would like to thank them for providing us with their views and representing their local communities. However the Council is satisfied that the draft Plan as submitted successfully reconciles often competing issues to deliver sustainable development. We are confident that the draft Plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

We welcome the opportunity offered by the Examination to demonstrate the Plan's soundness and, in particular, to demonstrate that it represents the most appropriate, deliverable strategy for our District.