



Local Plan for Lancaster District Independent Examination Hearing Sessions

Opening Statement by Lancaster City Council

Hearing Day 1 Tuesday 9th April 2019

Firstly, on behalf of Lancaster City Council I would like to welcome the Inspector, Mr Richard McCoy, the Programme Officer, Kim Russell, and all those attending this Examination to assist Mr McCoy, or to observe proceedings, to Morecambe Town Hall on this opening day of the local plan hearing sessions.

Lancaster City Council, the Local Planning Authority, is well aware that the purpose of the Examination is to allow an independent Inspector, appointed on behalf of the government, to determine whether or not the preparation of the submitted Local Plan documents has complied with the legal requirements for preparation, the Duty to Cooperate, and whether or not the policies of the Local Plan meet the test of soundness.

To introduce the plan to the hearing sessions I would like to provide some background about the aims and objectives of the Local Plan and how the plan addresses these in the context of many challenges.

The Council believes that it has prepared a sound plan that presents a strategic approach to meeting development needs with policies that can achieve an appropriate balance of addressing the evidenced needs of the community and the economy whilst protecting, conserving and enhancing the environment.

The City Council has robustly sought to deliver on its responsibilities for forward planning, as advised and expected by the National Planning Policy Framework of March 2012. Importantly, the Council has accepted the direction set by paragraph 14 of the NPPF that “local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area”; and, at paragraph 157, that: “Crucially, Local Plans should plan positively for the development and infrastructure required in the area to meet the objectives, principles and policies of this Framework”.

A key message for this Local Plan is provided in paragraph 7 of the NPPF: the planning system must perform a number of roles: economic, social and environmental. However, these roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent. The NPPF states that economic growth can secure higher social and environmental standards, and well-designed buildings and places can improve the lives of people and communities. Therefore, to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system. The planning system should play an active role in guiding development to sustainable solutions.

It is in this context that the Council is firmly of the view that the Local Plan that it has submitted provides an appropriate balance of making provision for; clear local economic potential, the housing needs of a changing and growing population, and, an environment, both in terms of built and natural heritage that is highly valued for its quality and diversity. Lancaster District contains; a part of the Yorkshire Dales National Park; significant parts of

two Areas of Outstanding National Beauty; a Ramsar Site, and, three special areas of conservation area amongst many designated sites of natural conservation interest. The district has 1,336 Listed Buildings, 24 at Grade I. For comparison at a regional level the City of Liverpool's stock of heritage assets is not dissimilar with 1,531 Listed Buildings, 28 at Grade I. The City is rightly proud of its extraordinary built environment.

The preparation of any Local Plan is a complex and involved process. The combination of the need to respond to significant local economic opportunity, the completion of significant infrastructure during the plan making process, in the form of the construction of the Bay Gateway and the closure and repair of the City's vital Greyhound Bridge, and the introduction of a new national approach to planning by the NPPF in 2012, revised in July 2018, has brought further significant challenges to the process.

Two Development Plan Documents were submitted to the government in May 2018. Part Two, is a review of the Development Management policies that were adopted by the Council in December 2014. Part One presents the Council's Strategic Policies and Land Allocations. Preparation of both documents began around 2010, with the intention that they would complement the Core Strategy, adopted in 2008, in accordance with the 2004 forward planning system.

The Council had prepared drafts of both a Development Management DPD and a Land Allocations DPD by 2012. However, the publication of the NPPF gave a clear direction that local planning authorities should identify their own development needs and then plan to meet these needs rather than relying on development requirements prescribed by Regional Plans. This change meant that the City Council, like other Local Planning Authorities, needed to take the time required to determine its own Objectively Assessed Needs before proceeding with a new strategic plan. The Council undertook this evidence work promptly, and was advised by its consultants of an OAN recommendation in 2013. That initial recommendation was updated in October 2015, to take account of both the 2012-based household population projections and the conclusions of the 2014 Review of the Employment Land Position for Lancaster District.

It is the 2014 Review of the Employment Land Position for Lancaster District and the 2015 Lancaster Independent Housing Requirements Study that are key informants of development requirements during the plan period.

The Local Plan describes an ambitious Spatial Vision for Lancaster District that sets an aspiration to welcome and retain investment, residents, students, and talented employees to achieve a well-educated, well-employed, well-housed population that is in long-term balance with the needs of a growing local economy with much more potential. To achieve this aim the Local Plan describes five key objectives:

- The delivery of a thriving local economy that fosters investment and growth and supports the opportunities to deliver the economic potential of the district. The district is strongly characterised by the presence of Lancaster University, and the University of Cumbria, and the opportunity for knowledge-led growth.
- The provision of a sufficient supply, quality and mix of housing to meet the changing needs of the population whilst supporting growth and investment.
- The protection and enhancement of the natural, historic and built environment of the district.
- The provision of infrastructure needed to support development and the creation of sustainable communities.
- The delivery of a safe and sustainable transport network that improves both connection within and out of the district whilst reducing the need to travel and encouraging more sustainable forms of transport. This will be delivered by focussing development at locations accessible by a variety of modes of transport, particularly public transport, walking and cycling.

The Strategic Policies and Land Allocations DPD is the first development plan document to allocate land for development since the Council adopted the Lancaster District Local Plan in 2004. The 2004 Local Plan and the 2008 Core Strategy are now in need of replacement to ensure that new development allocations are brought forward through a planned approach.

A planned approach can deliver sufficient opportunity, and, as importantly, opportunity in locations chosen because they present appropriate locations for achieving sustainable development: allocations that allow a growing community a realistic opportunity to travel using trains, buses, cycling and walking. The only alternative to not progressing through this planned approach, which requires making difficult pro-active decisions, is to be prepared to concede to development that is promoted on the basis of market demand and land availability. Such an approach could likely result in much less satisfactory development outcomes, realise fewer community benefits and consolidate and increase levels of travel by less sustainable modes.

Though impacted by the 2008 recession, Lancaster City Council has nonetheless had a good record in delivering on development needs: in 2014/15, 473 new homes were completed, in 2015/16 the figure was 483, 2016/17 saw an historic peak delivery of 628 new homes, and, in 2017/18, a further 523 new homes were completed. The City Council has delivered on the promises of its 2008 Core Strategy: urban concentration and a brownfield first approach. Delivery has very largely been achieved on previously

developed land, typically annually between 66% and 70% for many years. Of the current housing commitment 67% is on previously developed land. However, previously developed land is itself a finite resource and having overcome very significant brownfield challenges such as the redevelopment of Luneside East on Lancaster's Quayside and the conversion of the listed former Lancaster Moor Hospital buildings the Local Plan has had no choice but to look to replenish its stock of future development opportunities by including greenfield land as part of its allocations, for the first time since 2004.

Planning for significant development in an environmentally sensitive district with a geography that is focussed on a coastal conurbation and a historic city both of which have a constrained transport network brings many constraints and challenges: including highway capacity. Lancaster City Council has worked closely and iteratively with Lancashire County Council to explore and develop approaches to movement and transport. In October 2016 Lancashire County Council adopted the Lancaster District Highways and Transport Masterplan. The masterplan describes prospective solutions to travel that will enable the accommodation of growth by enhancing the opportunity for the increased use of more sustainable travel modes. The City Council has continued to work closely with the Local Transport Authority on the preparation of a bid for capital funding towards the realisation of new infrastructure through the timely opportunity presented by the government's competitive Housing Infrastructure Fund.

Through extensive consultations in autumn 2014, summer 2015 and spring 2017, the Council explored via engagement with stakeholders and local communities, a range of initial strategic approaches through to draft development allocations. The Council has been prepared to make challenging, difficult decisions to identify suitable and achievable development opportunities. Of the three Strategic Allocations two are on land that is presently within the North Lancashire Green Belt and a third is on land that has previously been protected by a local landscape designation. In addition to these three Strategic Allocations the local plan also identifies a Broad Location for Growth in south Lancaster. Within this Broad Location for Growth the Council intends to bring forward one of England's first new wave of 14 Garden Villages, at Bailrigg. This proposal has the endorsement and support of Homes England.

In short; the district's economic opportunities are significant, development needs are great, the district's environment is exceptional, and an opportunity for supporting the achievement of new transport infrastructure is present, whilst many existing residents naturally wish to conserve the environment that they value. It is in this context that Lancaster City Council has prepared a local plan that it believes offers a most appropriate *balance* of realising sufficient development to delivery on opportunity whilst conserving the environment for the benefit of future generations and facilitating measures to address the challenge of growing movement demand.

The Council considers that the Local Plan has been soundly prepared and provides an appropriate framework for the management of sustainable development of the district outside of that part within the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The Council welcomes the Examination and the prospect of advancing its development plan documents to adoption.

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