

DACORUM SITE ALLOCATIONS DPD

EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF  
DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL



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## **1. Context for the Site Allocations DPD**

- 1.1 The Dacorum Core Strategy DPD was adopted on the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013. The Site Allocations DPD is not a free standing Plan. Rather it is part of a suite of DPDs forming the Local Development Framework for Dacorum and is a 'daughter DPD' to the Adopted Core Strategy. Its job is therefore to flesh out the Adopted Core Strategy essentially by allocating land for development to enable the strategic policies for Dacorum contained in the Core Strategy to be implemented.
- 1.2 It is not the role of the Site Allocations DPD to revisit or otherwise change the strategic policies contained within the Core Strategy. For example, it is not the role of the Site Allocations DPD to revisit the question of Objectively Assessed Need for the Borough. That, and other strategic updates will be the role for a review of the Core Strategy. The Council committed itself to an early partial review of the Core Strategy at the time of the Adoption of the Core Strategy and the wording in the Core Strategy which was agreed with the Core Strategy Inspector makes it clear that that early partial review will follow after completion of the Site Allocations DPD. The Site Allocations DPD is needed at this stage to give clear guidance on where development is expected to take place to implement the existing Adopted Core Strategy. In the event the Council will proceed by way of a new single Local Plan rather than the early partial review envisaged at the time of the Core Strategy's adoption.
- 1.3 The principle of this approach, and early partial review, was found to be sound by the Core Strategy Inspector and upheld in the High Court when challenged.
- 1.4 Good progress has already been made on key elements of the evidence base for the new single Plan and the Council expects to publish Issue and Options consultation documents in Spring 2017 (see the Council's responses on matter 2).
- 1.5 Draft master plans for each of the the Local Allocations Policies have been prepared which will further guidance in articulating the planning requirements for individual developments. They have been drawn up following public consultation and with either the support or at least the input from land owners as appropriate. The Master Plans themselves therefore are not part of the Site Allocations DPD and are not before the Examination.

## **2. Legal requirements and the Duty To Cooperate**

- 2.1 The Council confirms that the Site Allocations DPD has been prepared in accordance with statutory procedures including the 2004 Act (as amended) and the 2012 Regulations together with all other procedural requirements.

2.2 So far as the Duty To Cooperate is concerned, the Council's position is set out in the DTC Statement which was submitted with the Site Allocations DPD. No objections have been raised by any adjoining LPAs on the fulfilment of the Duty to Cooperate and the submitted Plan has the support of Hertfordshire County Council in their capacity as Local Education Authority and Local Highway Authority. Issues raised by the Environment Agency do not relate to the Duty to Cooperate but rather to the overall level of development set by the Core Strategy. The position of the Environment Agency, Thames Water as the Utilities Company and Dacorum Borough Council is contained in a Statement of Common Ground.

### **3. Test of Soundness.**

3.1 Paragraph 182 of the NPPF states that it is the role of the Inspector at Examination to assess whether the Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Duty to Cooperate, legal and procedural requirements and whether it is 'sound'. There are four tests of soundness which, in short form, are that the Plan should be 'Positively Prepared' (based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring Authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development); 'Justified' (the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence); 'Effective' (deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundaries strategic priorities) and 'consistent with National Policy' (it should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies of the Framework).

3.2 The Council considers that all four tests of soundness are met by the Site Allocations DPD. The Council has set out a series of main modifications which it would like to make to the submitted Plan. These reflect consideration of responses to the Focused Changes Consultation and some of the changes which have emerged as a result of consideration of the Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions. The Council is willing to consider any further changes recommended by the Inspector as the Examination progresses and formally asks the Inspector to recommend any changes to the Plan considered necessary to make it sound.

### **4 General conformity with the NPPF**

4.1 The Core Strategy was assessed as being in general conformity with the NPPF and the Council considers that this daughter document, the Site Allocations DPD, is also in general conformity.

## **5. Constructive Approach to Plan Preparation**

- 5.1 The Council takes a constructive, pragmatic and flexible approach towards development. It is an approach which seeks to deliver the message that Dacorum is 'open for business'.
- 5.2 Having a Core Strategy which has been found to be sound has placed the Council in a strong position for the Site Allocations DPD. The Council has attracted commendation for its work on the Local Allocations Master Plans which have been used as an example of Good Practice by the Planning Advisory Service. As the Plan seeks to demonstrate the Council has sufficient sites allocated to meet the Core Strategy housing target but it does not have a further pool of Core Strategy/ NPPF compliant sites available to it which have not found their way into the Site Allocations DPD. All appropriate sites available to the Council have been allocated in the Site Allocations DPD.

## **6. Sustainability Appraisal**

- 6.1 The Council has treated the Sustainability Appraisal as an iterative independent process. Any main modifications recommended through this Examination process will of course also be subjected to sustainability appraisal.
- 6.2 The Council does not believe that there is a series of 'reasonable alternatives' for Site Allocation in the DPD. At a strategic level consideration of reasonable alternatives to the Adoptive Core Strategy was considered through the examination process of the Core Strategy and will be revisited in the Emerging Local Plan .

## **7. Consultation**

- 7.1 The Council's Consultation Process has been both extensive and comprehensive. The Council has a Statement of Community Involvement and I can confirm that the consultation process complies with that SCI.

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4<sup>th</sup> October 2016