

## **Rugby Borough Council Local Plan Examination in Public**

### **Opening Statement**

**Tuesday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2018**

The Local Plan is a hugely important corporate priority to the Council and we recognise it is also important to our partners. We maintain that the plan will help promote sustainable growth and economic prosperity. However, we also realise that any local plan on this scale that proposes the creation of a new Main Rural Settlement and release of Green Belt, will have impacts that provoke significant objections from the affected local residents and communities.

Had there been a way of producing a plan that meets the tests of soundness without provoking these significant levels of objection we would have pursued this and so our decision have not been taken lightly.

The process has nevertheless been an iterative one. We chose to delay submission of the plan in order to extend the consultation on the Publication Draft Local Plan.

The additional consultation was on the same proposals as agreed by Council in July 2016 but sought to allow local communities longer to fully understand the proposals and make comment on their soundness. Meetings were also arranged with local groups who had made representations to the Publication consultation.

Rugby Borough has a relatively straightforward settlement hierarchy. There is one principal urban area, Rugby town, where two thirds of the Borough's 102,500 population reside. The remaining population reside in the rural area, in the collection of villages of varying sizes that surround the town.

As a result, Rugby town has historically been the primary focus for growth within the Borough. The majority of the larger villages - the Main Rural Settlements - are location in Green Belt, which covers 60% of the Borough. The Green Belt is predominately between Rugby town and Coventry City. The remaining area of the borough is countryside, and is more rural in nature, where the much smaller villages are located.

Rugby Borough Council has historically been forward thinking in plan making, looking to address growth through strategic planning head-on. This is demonstrated through local plans adopted by the Council over the years – 1990, 1997, 2006 and the current Core Strategy, adopted in 2011, which allocated both Eden Park and Houlton urban extensions. All directed development to the main urban area of Rugby town.

Despite this, we have not been able to maintain a housing land supply, despite positively approving applications. In the context of this, the publication of the NPPF, introduction of Duty to Cooperate and the emergence of greater housing need across the housing market area, it has become apparent that new markets need to be brought forward to support the focus of growth at Rugby town. These issues were discussed in the Development Strategy consultation in 2014.

The result is a Local Plan that now meets the objectively assessed housing need, employment land requirement, Duty to Cooperates, and provides for a five-year supply of housing sites. New housing markets are opened and rural housing is provided. In total, the Plan can provide considerable social and economic gains, whilst presenting opportunities in environmental areas such as biodiversity and strategic open space.

We consider that the plan is both aspirational but realistic and because of this, if adopted, it will ensure that planning decision making within Rugby is genuinely plan-led. At the same time we have sought to produce a plan that has the necessary flexibility to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to allow a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances. At all stages throughout the process our objective has been to produce a plan that will allow us to support sustainable development proposals in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

We appreciate that there will be discussions around the proposed modifications but subject to this, compliant and meets the tests of soundness. Moreover, the hearings form an important part of process and we look forward to answering questions and contributing to discussions at appropriate times.

To conclude, the Council considers that the Local Plan provides a sound and positive strategy for achieving sustainable development and meeting Rugby's identified needs, and we therefore welcome this public examination.