

## **Tamworth Borough Council Closing Statement**

Firstly, I would to, on behalf of the Council thank the Inspector for the way he has conducted the hearing sessions and the guidance he has provided both to the Council and all other interested parties.

I would also like to thank the Programme Officer Amanda Willis, for the way in which she has co-ordinated the hearings and their smooth running. Thanks also to the staff in customer services for their support with setting the room up each day and helping participants and members of the public,

Finally to all those who have participated in the hearing sessions and responded to the consultations, it was inevitable there would be disagreement on some issues but we feel that dialogue has been constructive in the pursuit of preparing a sound Plan for Tamworth.

Through the preparation of this Local Plan the Council is seeking to replace the old, Local Plan, adopted some 9 years ago in 2006 under a total different planning system than the one we operate in today. Work on this new Local Plan started shortly after the adoption of the old, but through significant changes to the planning system, it was not until early 2013 when those changes were better understood the Council 'kicked on' and sought to adopt a new Local Plan in the most expedient fashion/manner.

The Council knew the challenges it would face in preparing this Local Plan and have responded with a sound strategy, which is positive, sustainable and deliverable. We have worked collaboratively with stakeholders through the process and have revised the plan following consultation and proposed modifications to the submitted plan as early as possible in response to reasonable objections and changes in national guidance.

The Council understands the frustration of many participants with the post-regional planning system we are all faced with. However, this is the system we have to work with. The Council has assessed alternative options to meet the Borough needs through a methodical and evidence based approach.

We recognise that some of the employment and housing needs overspilling from Tamworth are yet to be 'nailed down' to specific sites, or specific broad locations in other local authorities. However, the examination of development plans for adjoining authorities considered this issue and those Inspectors determined the most appropriate way forward was to deal with the remaining unmet need following the examination of the Tamworth Local Plan. The Plans of North Warwickshire and Lichfield have taken important steps to meet half of this overall need already. The next steps for this unmet need should be through the preparation of review or allocation plans for North Warwickshire and Lichfield, those plans will go through the Local Plan process and will be subject to a Sustainability Appraisal. The process for SA is a legal requirement and therefore will have to take into consideration how any development may impact upon Tamworth, something which the respective adopted plans of North Warwickshire and Lichfield did.

The overarching strategy of the Plan is to create and sustain a thriving local economy and make Tamworth a more inspirational and competitive place to do business through and to create a safe environment in which local people can reach their full potential and live longer, healthier lives. It will do this by: delivering new housing, delivering a prosperous Tamworth and delivering a high quality environment.

The Local Plan's success will depend on effective implementation of its policies. In addition to the Council's statutory planning function, implementation will require working with a range of delivery partners, including Tamworth Strategic Partnership, developers, Registered Providers (of affordable housing), Staffordshire County Council and other key partners from the private, public and voluntary sector.

The Council considers it has submitted a sound and legally compliant Plan, a robust evidence base supports this and the discussions over the past two have examined the Plan and its evidence base in detail. To summarise the Council considers:

The overall spatial strategy to be sound and one that seeks to deliver the maximum amount of new development in sustainable locations within Tamworth.

The process which the Council has gone through to consider sites for new housing and employment development has been robust and fair and has led to as many sustainable and deliverable sites being allocated in the Plan.

With particular regard to the SUEs: one has consent; one is close to determination; and the remaining one has an application on the way. The Council has worked closely with the developers for each site, statutory bodies and considered detailed information to determine that each site is deliverable. The SUE delivery paper brings this information together and sets out a considered time table for delivery.

The discussion of key strategic planning matters with neighbouring authorities has led to firm outcomes which are being realised on the ground: the permission of 165 dwellings north of Tamworth in Lichfield District and a very healthy 5 year land supply in North Warwickshire which takes into consideration some of Tamworth's housing needs. The Council is confident that the three authorities will again deliver positive outcomes through the delivery of Lichfield and North Warwickshire's next set of Plans.

The approach we have taken to considering possible Green Belt release is sound and we are confident that we have already concluded a thorough analysis in a similar fashion to authorities such as Lichfield in our consideration of the Green Belt for possible release.

The Town Centre should be the principal location for town centre uses. The Gungate redevelopment is a committed scheme with planning permission for which the issues are understood and mitigation secured, permission was only gained in 2010 in the midst of the recession. Significant investment has already been made; such as clearing site. Major commercial schemes do take time to come forward and early indicators of town centre recovery discussed in hearings hold promise for attracting an anchor store. No alternative sites outside of town centre have been promoted and we do not know their impact; even if Ventura Park was to be redeveloped, we would be looking at the long term and a lot of uncertainty at this stage. Any increase in floorspace at the out of centre retail parks is likely to have an impact on the local and strategic highway networks – which has already undergone review and re-modelling to deal with high levels of congestion.

Taking into consideration the physical constraints and small administrative boundary the Plan needs to be flexible, to deal with unexpected circumstances and have sufficient contingency in place. Each policy is flexible in terms of its requirements on new development, in particular on viability grounds. A flexible and large supply of housing is allocated to ensure a large choice to the market so that it can respond to change quickly. Policies are also in place to consider development in alternative locations to the overall strategy; such as the consideration of alternative uses in strategic employment areas or allowing town centre uses to be developed out of Tamworth town centre.

The Council would like to progress to the ultimate conclusion of the Local Plan examination: the Inspectors final report in the most efficient and expedient manner possible. As stated earlier the Council's current development plan was prepared under the old planning system, with only a handful of saved policies remaining in place. The Council is therefore reliant upon this Plan to ensure sustainable development in Tamworth. Also the Council cannot progress with its CIL to adoption until this Local Plan is hopefully adopted. In addition to this the emerging Site Allocations DPD prepared by North Warwickshire and the review or Sites DPD by Lichfield are reliant upon this Local Plan setting a final quantum of 'over-spill' housing and employment land.

With that in mind, the Council would like to consult on any proposed main modifications as early as possible. Taking into consideration, a 6 week consultation period, time to understand and act upon responses, a final inspectors report which hopefully finds the Plan sound, the Council will then have to prepare a final published Local Plan and carry out the necessary procedures to ensure the Local Plan is adopted by its Members. In all this process to from consultation to adoption could take around 20 to 24 weeks, dependant on the consultation responses and the schedule of Full Council meetings.

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