

Opening Statement

As Head of Leicester's Planning Service I'm very pleased to welcome the Inspectors and participants to this first hearing session into the Leicester Local Plan.

The Plan sets out the Council's vision for the sustainable development of the City of Leicester to 2036. The plan has been in preparation since 2014, during a period of substantial change in national planning policies and the challenges presented by Covid 19. It has had a couple of false starts which were unravelled by changes in national policy, most recently by the 35% uplift. Despite that, it is the Council's view that the draft plan has undoubtedly benefited from ongoing revision and extensive engagement through four substantial consultation stages.

That time has also facilitated close co-operation with the Council's partner authorities in Leicestershire. Whilst there are many parties to whom the Council are grateful for their assistance in getting the plan to this stage – it would be wrong to let this moment pass without formally thanking all of the other Leicestershire authorities for all of their assistance over the last several years. Whilst there may be many reasons why the incoming Government is looking to revise the duty co-operate, it is with some pride that the Inspectors can be satisfied that the duty co-operate has actually worked in this County.

Importantly, the Plan represents many years of hard work to reconcile accommodation of housing and employment growth needs with the objective of robust protection and enhancement of the historic and natural environment of Leicester.

To the Romans Leicester was known as Ratae Corieltavorum, where an early fort was founded to guard the crossing of the Fosse Way and what is now the River Soar. The Romans were the first town planners in this City – indeed if you walk out of the Town Hall onto the straight line of Millstone Lane – you will be walking along the line of the southern wall of the Roman Fort; and were you to turn north onto High Street then you would be walking along the Via Decumana which ran through the heart of the Fort. In the last 2 millennia Leicester has been at the heart of the history of England. Simon de Montfort was the Earl of Leicester, Lady Jane Gray, who ruled the country for 9 days was born in its suburbs. Indeed, the last Plantagenet King was found under a Leicester car park and is now buried in the Cathedral. From the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution- when Leicester was renowned to shoe and clothe the world- through to the societal changes of the twentieth century leading to the vibrant cosmopolitan city of this century – Leicester has a proud history to build upon.

Present day Leicester is a city of significant character that has developed over those 2000 years, and long ago grew through its administrative boundary. The constrained capacity of the city

boundaries has been a major factor which has driven the City, County and District Councils to work in partnership to plan at a strategic level to maximise our role as Leicestershire's central city in the most sustainable way.

The Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan was approved in 2018 overseen by Lead members from across the City and County in the Members' Advisory Group. This exemplary partnership working secured the signing of the 2022 Statement of Common Ground (Document SCG/1) which commits partners to meet the substantial levels of City unmet need, including the unexpected challenge set us by the 35% Urban Uplift required by the previous Government.

The City Council is extremely grateful for the strong and sustained support of all our Council partners which has been a such a constant and critical factor which has allowed submission of this Plan evidenced through our comprehensive Submission documents and in particular our submitted Statement of Compliance with the Duty to Co-operate (November 2022, Document SD/12).

The Council long ago embraced sustainable development. It was one of the first authorities to declare and plan for a Climate Change Emergency and is already in the second iteration of its Climate Change Action Plan (Climate Ready Leicester Plan 2023 – 2028) The Local Plan builds on this and its strategy seeks to maximise development of Brownfield land by focussing growth on the Central Development Area as a strategic priority. Five further strategic sites will provide housing and employment land, together with supporting green infrastructure, biodiversity enhancement and necessary infrastructure.

The local plan also sets out our ambitious response to climate change and how we will protect and enhance our natural environment, as well as providing capacity and focus for continued economic growth and regeneration.

The site allocations put forward in the Plan will be critical to allow the Council's Development and Housing teams to continue their exemplary work delivering major schemes as master developer of strategic sites as well as providing direct and partnership delivery of affordable housing developments tailored to meet the acute and complex housing needs of the City's diverse communities.

Progression of the City's Plan is also critical to provide a central platform of certainty in respect of unmet need which will allow partners across the county to develop and progress their plans, whether under the current NPPF, or in the context of the new Government's plans in the recently concluded July 2024 NPPF consultation.

The Council comes into this process with a positive approach in the anticipation that engagement with partners over the next few weeks will lead to improvements to what the Council believes is the foundation of a sound plan.

Turning to some more prosaic procedural and logistical matters:

- 1) Following the update to the guidance on Planning for Traveller Sites, published alongside the last NPPF in December 2023, we have had to revise our evidence in respect of the needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities. Following recent receipt of this new evidence (Document EXAM 18), we propose a positive and pragmatic approach to allow delivery of the proposals set out in the Plan without delay, and to deal with the new requirements through the preparation of a Development Plan Document immediately following adoption of the Plan.

We still intend full consideration of the Submission Plan's provisions for the policy, needs and site allocations for traveller communities. In this regard, we would ask for a clarification of programme for participants in terms of how traveller matters will be heard across the Matter 3 Day 13 Session and earlier sessions dealing with strategic housing and employment matters and allocations.

- 2) I am pleased to confirm that officers would be happy to prepare and maintain a Schedule of Proposed Major and Minor Modifications/Errata to assist Inspectors through the progression of the Hearings.

I conclude by confirming our strong belief that the Plan is positively prepared, responding fully to the challenges facing the City. It is based on robust evidence supported by exemplary partnership working and co-operation which shows that our housing and employment needs will be met in full.

It is deliverable and fully consistent with all relevant national policy requirements and I am very pleased to commend this draft plan to the Inspectorate.