Local Plan Part 2 Hearings – Closing Statement

Thank you, Sir. Unlike my opening statement, I intend to be mercifully brief.

This is the conclusion of a thorough, at times lively but always good humoured series of Hearings. On behalf of the Council, I would like to thank you, Sir, and Mrs Schofield the Programme Officer, for the way you have conducted this Examination in Public. I know the small, but perfectly formed, planning policy team has found this process both enjoyable, and of more importance, of great value to the planning of the district.

The various participants in the Hearings have considered the implications and operation of the plan policies, designations and allocations in a thoughtful and thorough manner.

The Council has robustly demonstrated clear links between hard evidence base, good old fashioned logic and common sense, and the policies in the plan. The plan has a clear purpose, which is to take a positive and proactive approach to meet local development needs. We have explained how this plan fits together with the strategic part 1 plan, which is the 2014 Joint Core Strategy. In respect of housing, the Part 2 Plan sits in a context where the strategically defined need for the Rural Areas and for Brackley and Towcester has, or will be, met. The Part 2 Plan respects that context while allowing some development to come forward within and in some circumstances outside development confines, particularly when it can provide affordable housing. It is the case that strategic matters (which fall in the ambit of the Duty to Cooperate) must properly be considered and addressed by the Part 1 Plan review, however frustrating that may be for some development interests in particular. We have been clear and consistent on that point.

We remain convinced that the allocation of a range and choice of sites to meet local employment needs, together with criteria-based policies to guide other employment development proposals, is a robust approach, and is optimal in that it meets needs as close to their point of origin as possible.

We also remain convinced that the need to provide a suitable site to accommodate the football club is real and urgent. I was heartened to see the football association, principally in its capacity as a funding body, both extolling the virtues of the football club’s ambitious plans, and also confirming that it was eligible to bid to a number of funding pots. The agreement of the landowners of the two largest employment sites to the north of Towcester to this provision, both of access to the proposed site, and the land itself, is heartily welcomed by the Council. This is a priority for the whole community of Towcester, including the Council.

I am also just as sure today, as I was on Tuesday morning last week, that the plan we have prepared and that has been subject to thorough testing throughout the Hearings, meets all of the legal and other requirements of plan preparation. It strikes
an appropriate balance between meeting local needs through high quality development, and protecting the best of what we already have. This includes special landscape areas, listed buildings, parks and gardens, as well as wild nature.

It is fair to say that we have taken a positive and proactive approach to the plan’s preparation, and we have carried this approach forward into the Hearings themselves. We do have some homework to do, as a result, and I believe the modifications as well as the additional information that we have committed to make available to you, will ensure the implementation of the part 2 local plan will result in high quality new development that is appropriate in its context, and of which we can all be proud.

Thank you.