

## **LPPU EXAMINATION HEARINGS**

### **B&NES COUNCIL OPENING STATEMENT**

**21<sup>st</sup> June 2022**

The Council formally commenced preparation of the Local Plan Partial Update in April 2020 and submitted the Plan in December 2021 for Examination. The Local Plan Partial Update (LPPU) represents the outcome of reviewing and partially updating the adopted Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan, which together comprise the B&NES Local Plan.

The government is clear in its commitment to a plan-led system and that Local Planning Authorities should keep up to date their planning policy framework. In the circumstances within which B&NES Council finds itself, the LPPU is considered to be the most appropriate solution in ensuring its policy framework is kept up to date.

In adopting the Core Strategy in 2014 the Council committed to reviewing it within five years, co-ordinated alongside the review of the other West of England authorities' Core Strategies, primarily to address the important strategic cross boundary matter of identifying and quantifying any unmet housing need arising in Bristol and setting out an appropriate strategy for responding to it. In addressing this issue (as well as other sub-regional strategic matters) the four West of England UAs embarked on preparing a Joint Spatial Plan (JSP). The JSP was prepared and submitted for examination in 2018. Following part of the examination it was subsequently withdrawn in 2020. Alongside preparation of the JSP, B&NES embarked on preparing a new full Local Plan (2016-2036) and had reached the Regulations 18 consultation stage. However, following withdrawal of the JSP work on the Local Plan (2016-2036) was stopped.

Upon withdrawal of the JSP and following the creation of WECA, preparation of a Mayoral Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) as required by the WECA Order has started. The SDS will provide a strategic planning framework for the WECA area Unitary Authorities Local Plans (including B&NES). The SDS will be the vehicle by which key strategic issues (including quantifying and responding to any unmet housing need in Bristol) will be addressed and Local Plans will respond to and deliver the SDS. All three UAs, including B&NES, have undertaken or scheduled the preparation of new Local Plans linked to the SDS. Work has already informally started on the new Local Plan in B&NES and will be formally launched later this year.

B&NES is strongly committed to the plan-led approach and its track record shows that it has not avoided responding robustly to difficult issues through its Local Plans. Within this context and in order to ensure an up to date policy framework is in place by 2023 the Council has prepared the LPPU. The purpose, remit and scope of the LPPU is set by the context and the Council's commitment to prepare a full new Local Plan to deliver and generally conform with the SDS. As such the LPPU does not alter the adopted Local Plan's strategic objectives, spatial strategy, housing & job growth requirements or the plan-period. Its primary purposes are to replenish housing supply to deliver the Core Strategy housing requirement in a plan-led manner; update policies to deliver key Council priorities (including the climate and ecological emergencies); and update policies for clarity and to ensure they are consistent with current national policy. The LPPU is as such an important stepping-stone to ensuring an up-to date planning policy framework, needed due to the delay to the preparation of a full local plan caused by issues at the sub-regional level. It is a positive response to the Government's objective of keeping Local Plans up to date.

The Council and other participants have made the Inspector aware that the WECA Metro Mayor has recently written to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities advising him that he has halted work on the SDS. The current halting of work on the SDS does not remove the

legal requirement to prepare and publish it, albeit it does impact on the timing. Whilst a response is awaited from the Secretary of State the programme for the next steps in publishing the SDS cannot be confirmed nor the precise implications for the UAs Local Plans preparation. In the Council's view this does not undermine the justification for preparing and adopting the LPPU. If anything, this strengthens the justification for the LPPU as it will establish an up to date policy framework in B&NES more quickly in line with national requirements and does not undermine the full review of the Local Plan.

Given the recent WECA Mayor's letter to the Secretary of State the Council has prepared a short supplementary note on the matter and the implications for the LPPU. If it is helpful to the Inspector the Council can publish it on the examination website later today.

In summary the Council remains firmly of the view that the LPPU is justified and is the most appropriate means to having an up to date policy framework as required by government. The LPPU is supported by a proportionate and appropriate evidence base and in preparing it the Council has met the relevant legislative requirements, including undertaking Sustainability Appraisal and applying and meeting the Duty to Co-operate proportionate to the Plan's purpose, remit and scope. The Council submitted for examination what it considers to be a sound plan, and the Council confirms that it has requested the Inspector to recommend any modifications he feels are necessary for soundness.