

BIRMINGHAM DEVELOPMENT PLAN

EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

SHORT OPENING STATEMENT

ON BEHALF OF

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

1. The City Council is grateful to the Inspector for affording it the opportunity to make a short opening statement to introduce its Development Plan (“BDP”) at this critical stage in its progress towards adoption.

2. On behalf of the City Council, I would also like to mention some of the key themes which it is considered will run through this Examination and which will inform the City Council’s responses to the questions which have been raised for consideration in the various sessions of the Examination.

THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM

3. Two hundred years ago, on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo, the town of Birmingham’s population stood at a little under 100,000. By 1914, a century on, Birmingham had become a city¹ and its population had multiplied by a factor of 5 to a little over half a million. In the last 100 years, the city’s population has doubled again to reach 1.074 million persons, although this growth has not been linear. This makes the City Council the largest (that is, most populous) local authority area in the UK and indeed in Europe.

4. The City has also grown spatially over the years and absorbed many smaller settlements. Its form is now characterised by urban development right up to its local authority boundaries, with the exception of limited areas of Green Belt land to the northeast wrapping around Sutton Coldfield (which was incorporated administratively within the city in 1974).

¹ In 1889

5. This rapidly expanding population has been accompanied by great economic growth. The city has a proud tradition of manufacturing (going back to the 18th century and Matthew Boulton, whose great achievements are commemorated on this campus at Aston) and this tradition is very much alive and thriving today, with many, major industrial employers based within the city and others in the process of relocating or consolidating their operations here.
6. Of course, this growth has not occurred in isolation but as part of the growth of the broader West Midlands. For many decades, Birmingham has planned for its future in collaboration with its partner West Midlands authorities, which have had a symbiotic relationship with the city – benefitting from its economic strength, helping to supply its workforce and also acting as a location for internal migration - to the extent that by the turn of the 21st century, clear demographic patterns had become established and recognised. Indeed, in recent regional planning “settlements”, a substantial majority of planned housing growth for Birmingham was allocated to West Midlands’ authorities beyond the city’s boundaries. This has happened in recognition of the increasingly obvious fact that the city has very limited opportunities for further spatial growth, both in absolute terms and because of the existence of designated Green Belt on the few remaining undeveloped tracts of land in northeast Birmingham, which also exhibit high landscape, visual and other qualities.

Planning for Future Growth

7. The City Council is now charged with charting the city’s next phase of growth, but in the absence of the regional planning structures which had overseen development in the West Midlands in recent decades. Inevitably, the new world post the Localism Act 2011 has presented challenges, but the city’s planning team, led by its Director of Planning and Regeneration, Waheed Nazir, and fully supported by the Members of the City Council, have risen to that challenge.

8. This has involved inter alia re-establishing a network of relationships with neighbouring authorities, ultimately leading to the establishment of the GBSLEP (Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership) and the commissioning - both individually and jointly - of studies to assess the future development needs of this broader West Midlands grouping and its constituent parts.

Housing

9. The most recent work undertaken has identified the need to provide between 89,000 and 115,900 dwellings in the period to 2031 to meet the likely needs arising from Birmingham alone. It is submitted that two aspects of these figures are particularly striking. First, the sheer scale of the numbers in relation to a single local authority. Second, the size of the range (27,000), itself far greater than the total housing requirements for most local authorities.
10. The figures, of course, derive from various attempts to peer 17 years into the future and to extrapolate highly complex growth patterns for an area which:
- i. already has a base population of well in excess of 1 million;
 - ii. has suffered inevitable dislocation of its "normal" migration patterns as a result of the severe economic recession (including a significant decrease in high outbound flows from the city to surrounding West Midlands authorities);
 - iii. is subject to high inbound flows of international migrants; and
 - iv. is subject to high levels of UPC (unattributable population change) when an attempt is made to reconcile the 2001 and 2011 Census figures.

11. Moreover, frustratingly, the DCLG's latest full set of projected Household Representation Rates (to cover the BDP plan period) based on the most up-to-date analysis of the data available to the Department is being finalised and is due to be published within the next 6 weeks. This data may not be available to the Examination, but it will be available to the GBSLEP as it seeks to plan for the future growth of its partner authorities.
12. In the meantime, it is necessary to observe that the total numbers of dwellings to be planned for are hugely sensitive to the final data set which is adopted for HRR, especially as this rate is applied to the whole population (not just the increment) in order to calculate a housing requirement. Accordingly, for a population the size of Birmingham's, a small change in the assumption made about household formation can lead to a dramatic change in the total number of households generated, particularly when projected over 17 years.
13. The City Council therefore urges caution, as the consequences of a mistake in the application of HRR - or otherwise in the selection of the most appropriate housing requirement figure - could be severe and long-lasting.
14. What is clear is that the City Council can already identify land for approximately 45,000 dwellings within its boundaries. Many of these sites involve opportunities for highly significant urban regeneration.
15. In addition, the City Council has been prepared to contemplate the release of a significant tranche of Green Belt land at Langley, East of Sutton Coldfield, to provide 6,000 houses, of which approximately 3,800 are expected to be completed in the plan period.
16. This release was not agreed without considerable soul searching on behalf of the City Council, given the scarcity of its Green Belt land and the value attached to Green Belt land by

residents of the City. Even this release was not proposed without a careful evaluation of the options, which concluded that Area C at Langley was the least objectionable release.

17. The other areas of Green Belt considered, adjoining Sutton Coldfield to the north and northeast, were rejected. However, in each case and in any event, the City Council was and is not persuaded that these areas could be brought forward in parallel with Langley. The following matters underpin this conclusion:

- i. the cumulative environmental damage would have been severe, leading to the near complete or total loss of the City's Green Belt resource at a stroke;
- ii. there was no evidence that the already stressed highways network could have withstood the simultaneous release of more than one substantial tranche of Green Belt land in Sutton;
- iii. the City Council was (and is) advised that the housing market would not be able to absorb so much of the same "product" in one go, such that the actual contribution to housing supply during the plan period from adjoining or closely connected green field sites is limited by "effective demand" for such a product; this in turn limits the ability and willingness of developers/housebuilders to construct houses speculatively for sale.
- iv. Additionally, there were and are real fears that too great a release of Green Belt land could dilute the critical emphasis on urban regeneration which lies at the heart of the BDP.

18. It is understood that this leaves a balance of required housing still to be found, although the precise scale of the shortfall will not be clarified until the DCLG HRR's are published and considered later this year. It is the intention of the GBSLEP imminently to commission a

further stage of the study already reported in order to explore the options for delivering the levels of growth identified both for the city and the broader GBSLEP area.

Employment

19. The other key facet of the city's planned growth is the maintenance of a readily available portfolio of employment land both to retain existing employers and to attract new employers, particularly footloose inward investment which might otherwise be lost to the region or even the UK.

20. The city has long had a policy of ensuring that a full range of employment sites remain available to the market - of a quantum which is likely to be required. Substantial land resources remain and are safeguarded by the BDP, but these are insufficient to provide for likely employment land needs for the plan period to 2031, especially when recent take up and HS2 land requirements are taken into account. The City Council therefore proposes the release of an 80 hectare site at Peddimore, which would be a further release from the Green Belt. Again, there are no other opportunities within the city's boundaries to deliver an allocation of this scale and nature.

Quality of Life and Sustainability

21. The other aspects of the plan are to a greater or lesser degree all intended to secure the highest possible quality of life for residents of the city, its workforce and its visitors – in the most sustainable way achievable².

²For example, by promoting district CHP schemes

22. Growth is also directed at the many and various districts of the city, including the city centre.

Whilst, the policy proposals may appear to be broadly expressed in some areas, this simply reflects the very substantial spatial extent of the city and the impossibility of providing prescriptively for such an extensive area in manageable format. AAPs have already been adopted or are (or will be) emerging at various locations across the city to provide more detailed guidance where appropriate.

Conclusions

23. In summary, the City Council believes that it has struck the right balance in the BDP between the requirement for planned growth and the maintenance of the highest possible quality of life for its existing and future population, its workforce and its visitors. Moreover, it has sought to do so in full consultation and cooperation with its neighbouring authorities.

24. It is encouraging that so many of these authorities have felt able to endorse publicly the cooperative endeavours which the City Council has made. Indeed, the City Council is heartened generally by the levels of support – explicit or implicit – which the BDP has received. It is not surprising to find at an examination such as this a group of objectors acting for landowner or developer interests and seeking to achieve the allocation of their clients' land for development. Whilst this is, of course, their opportunity to be heard, they do not have an equivalent responsibilities to the City Council in securing a plan which will strike the best balance between the need for growth and the need to protect and conserve the environment. The City Council believes that it has struck that balance in the most appropriate way and I commend the BDP to you on that basis.

Postscript

25. There were, of course, a number of proposed modifications submitted to the Secretary of State with the plan, seeking to address or clarify a number of matters raised in representations on the pre-submission draft BDP. Some further minor matters have emerged and are reported in our submissions on the various Matters to be considered at the Examination. We look forward in due course to discussing the best way to advance these.
26. May I say at this stage that the City Council's officers have worked tirelessly to ensure that the BDP is a sound document and to answer questions and queries which you and other parties may have. There is a large team behind me and part of my role at this Examination will be to act as a conduit to help find the appropriate person from amongst a large cast to help address any points which arise.

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21st October, 2014

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