

## **Christchurch and East Dorset Councils Core Strategy Examination – opening statement on behalf of the Councils**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present a brief opening statement ahead of the Examination into Christchurch and East Dorset Councils' Core Strategy. My name is Judith Plumley, I am Head of Community and Economy for Christchurch and East Dorset Councils and on behalf of both Councils, I would like to welcome you to the Core Strategy Examination Hearings and to extend our welcome to all those who will be participating during the next few weeks.

The two Councils have been working on the production of their Core Strategies for several years but in 2005 we took the, then innovative, decision to work in partnership to produce a single joint Core Strategy thereby combining resources and expertise and reducing costs to the taxpayers and the Planning Inspectorate. In fact many of the planning policy issues are common to both councils and the preparation of a joint Core Strategy has allowed the two Councils to consider the wider issues affecting them both as key players in the wider South East Dorset conurbation. During the intervening years the two Councils have decided to enter into a wider partnership with a shared management team and integrated services although the two councils retain their individual sovereignty.

The joint Core Strategy has been developed during a time of change for planning with the removal of the Regional Spatial Strategy and the introduction of the NPPF and we believe that we have been able to respond to the changes and incorporate the requirements of new legislation during the process.

Preparation of the Core Strategy has been given a high priority as a means of delivering the strategic aims for the Partnership area. The Partnership sees growth in the local economy as our top priority and this includes the development of appropriate housing to help meet the needs of our economy in the future. The Councils take a positive view of the future; they are working with partners to increase job opportunities and improved infrastructure through the City Deal and, on the wider front, are continuing to work with local communities to improve overall quality of life, including bringing new development sites forward to increase the availability of affordable and market housing.

A lot of local people have been involved in developing the Core Strategy and I would like to thank those who have taken time to engage in consultations and give us their feedback – it really has helped to shape our thinking. We have carried out additional stages of consultation to those required by statute and have offered a number of different opportunities for local people to engage with the process including open days, exhibitions, focus groups, workshops, presentations, on-line and written representations. We have received over 26,000 responses to our formal consultation events. Our officers and those from other statutory bodies have worked well together

and you will see that we have a number of Statements of Common Ground. We believe we are in a good position with strong support for our Core Strategy from statutory agencies such as Natural England, the Environment Agency, English Heritage and Dorset County Council; the landowners and developers involved in the proposed New Neighbourhoods, major employers such as Manchester Airports Group and many of the town and parish councils. This, together with our close co-operation on joint evidence gathering and document production with other neighbouring authorities and our own two Councils willingness to work together to solve cross boundary issues, demonstrates our conformity with the Duty to Cooperate.

The joint Core Strategy sets out the strategic vision, objectives and policies for the period 2013 to 2028. The document outlines certainty for the development industry and stakeholders regarding the future growth of the area and allows the two Councils to plan with confidence.

We recognise that change and development are emotive issues and that local people will have strong views about developments which impact on their area. Both Councils, however, also accept their responsibility to provide sufficient housing and employment land for the area to grow and thrive in the future. The adoption of the Core Strategy will be our primary opportunity for many years to provide new and affordable housing in sufficient numbers to meet our wider vision of thriving, sustainable communities and we have taken the difficult decision to amend slightly the green belt boundaries to enable the development which is needed to sustain our local communities.

The Core Strategy is all about delivery and enabling Christchurch and East Dorset to meet their growth and development needs; in particular the need for housing development to enable us to deliver both new homes and also to retain young people in the area for employment in the future. The identification of sites for housing growth has not been easy; the ability to deliver is constrained by the high quality environment in which we live and work with more than 68% of the whole area covered by landscape and nature conservation designations i.e. AONB, AGLV, SSSI, SNCI etc. A further 11.5% is urban/villages and there are also significant areas of floodplain in the plan area. Our options for significant future development have, therefore, been limited but are based on a thorough assessment of sustainability issues and an understanding of the many sensitivities involved.

To conclude, the Councils consider that the Core Strategy sets the strategic vision, objectives and policies for the period 2013 – 2028. It has been formulated with genuine and meaningful engagement, is based on the presumption in favour of sustainable development and takes a genuine spatial approach, which demonstrates an integration of plan and place making disciplines.

The Councils have prepared what we believe is a sound joint Core Strategy, supported by a requisite evidence base. Fundamentally, we want a sound plan that is best for Christchurch and East Dorset. With this in mind, we have formally invited the Inspector to propose modifications to the Core Strategy if they are considered to be necessary to make the plan sound.

I would like to thank the Planning Policy Teams for the significant amount of work they have put in to get us to this point and our Councillors for their support throughout the process; I look forward to a successful examination and adoption of this important Core Strategy.

Thank you.