

Opening Statement

On behalf of Braintree District Council I would like to welcome the Inspectors and all participants, virtually at least to Braintree, and to the Braintree Section 2 Local Plan Hearing Sessions.

My name is Emma Goodings and I am the Head of Planning and Economic Growth at Braintree. During the course of these hearing sessions, I will be joined by colleagues from the planning policy team including Alan Massow Principal Planning Policy officer, Kathy Carpenter, Gary Sung, Julie O'Hara and Alex Evans. We are also joined by Robert Williams, from Cornerstone Barristers. On specific matters we will have expert consultants available, including today where we are joined by Jonathan Pearson from LUC who undertook the Sustainability Appraisal and David Green also from LUC who undertook the Habitats Regulation Assessment. We will also have officers in attendance from Essex County Council Highways, if required.

Both Sections 1 and 2 of the Braintree District Local Plan were submitted for examination in October 2017. Section 1 was prepared in collaboration with Colchester Borough Council and Tendring District Council. It is concerned with strategic matters across the North Essex Authorities, including defining the spatial strategy for North Essex, and setting the housing and employment land requirements. Following a lengthy examination process undertaken Mr Roger Clews of the Planning Inspectorate, in December 2020 the Section 1 Plan was found to be legally compliant and, subject to main modifications, found to be sound. All the documents relating to that examination can be found on the Section 1 examination pages of the Council's website. The Council formally adopted the Local Plan Section 1 at a meeting of its Full Council in February 2021.

The Section 2 of the Local Plan is now the subject of this examination, and specifically these hearing sessions. Section 2 is specific to Braintree and contains all the allocations to meet the housing and employment requirements set out in the Section 1 Local Plan, as well as policies to be used in the determination of planning applications. Specifically Section 2 includes: the allocation of six strategic growth locations, 3 of which already benefit from planning permission, with 1 is awaiting determination; 8 employment allocations, either as stand-alone sites or as part of mixed-use allocations; and a range of policies split across three theme areas - A Prosperous District, Creating Better Places and the Natural Environment.

As you will all be aware, the Local Plan section 1 examination resulted in a number of modifications to the Local Plan, including most notably the removal of the areas of search for two Garden Communities which would have been partially located in Braintree District.

The impact of these amendments, as well as the changes in circumstances as a result of the passage of time since the submission of the Plan, have been considered by the Council in two topic papers which were published earlier this year. This subject is also addressed in the Council's hearing statements.

The Council has submitted a revised list of proposed modifications to the Local Plan Section 2 which is published as SDBDC008a in the evidence base. It will, of course, be for the inspectors to determine whether these proposed modifications– and any others – are necessary to make the plan sound.

In addition, the Council has entered into Statements of Common Ground with a range of parties, including statutory bodies such as Highways England, Natural England and the health service, neighbouring authorities, and promoters of the Strategic Growth Locations. In large part these identify agreement between the parties as to the content of the Plan, and any necessary modifications. Where this is disagreement, this will be explored as part of the hearing sessions.

The Council is confident that the Section 2 Plan is legally compliant and, with relatively limited modifications, meets the requirement of soundness. In particular, it provides the allocations and policies to implement the strategic policies in the already adopted Section 1 Plan, as well as providing up to date development management policies which are consistent with the NPPF.

The Council looks forward to working with the Inspectors and the participants over the next two weeks to consider the issues raised by the Local Plan Section 2, and to identify those modifications which are required for reasons of soundness.