

Winchester City Council Local Plan Examination

Council's Opening Statement

- Firstly, on behalf of Winchester City Council I would like to welcome the Inspector, R Barrett, who has been appointed to hold an independent examination of the Winchester District Local Plan, and all those attending this public examination.
- I would also like to thank Jill Taylor, the Programme Officer, for her management of the examination process so far.
- The Winchester City Council Local Plan 2040 is a positive and effective strategy that will secure the successful delivery of sustainable communities, facilitate economic growth and reduce inequalities, making the district a place where people wish to live, work, stay and visit.
- This Local Plan is being examined under the transitional arrangements in the NPPF and the 2023 NPPF. We fully accept that the government has set new housing requirements and developers/site promoters will be putting forward the case at this examination that we should be planning for the higher housing numbers now, in this Plan. However, we are committed to doing this in a new Local Plan, but we want to proceed with adopting this Local Plan 2040 and then start work on the next Local Plan. It may be suggested that this is to “kick the can down the road” but nothing could be further from the truth. We need an effective Plan now, whilst we proceed at pace with our Review to respond to the demands of the new housing numbers. The alternative is the disruption of a period of “planning by appeal”. No doubt some at this Examination would welcome that, but it would not be good planning.

- With that said, adoption of the Local Plan 2040 will secure substantial new housing allocations and maintain a high level of provision until a new Local Plan is developed. It will provide substantial help to other authorities in meeting their needs. All this will help to ensure a Plan-led approach and a healthy housing land supply situation, providing a stable planning and decision-making environment while the new Local Plan is prepared.
- Since the adoption of the Joint Core Strategy in 2013 and the Development Management and Site Allocations Local Plan in 2017, there have been and continue to be a number of significant changes to national planning policy and legislation.
- This Local Plan 2040 will represent a significant change from our previous plans as it has been designed to address a number of key challenges.
- The biggest challenge we face is climate change. Our area has an above average carbon footprint. This plan addresses this challenge head-on. To support our goal for the district to be carbon neutral by 2030, it sets amongst the highest standards possible for environmental design for homes and for commercial development – designed to cut carbon and cut bills.
- We also face a challenge of affordability. This plan takes a new approach to affordable housing targets, based on extensive viability testing – replacing an ‘expectation’ that was too often missed, with a minimum requirement.
- We face the challenge of protecting our district’s chalk streams and rivers and, alongside our neighbours, the Solent, from increases in phosphorus and nitrogen nutrient pollution. We will continue to innovate to tackle this alongside Government, the Partnership for South Hampshire and local landowners and have an agreed Nutrient budget for the Local Plan.

- Finally, we face the challenge of protecting our natural environment. Our city, towns and villages are surrounded by beautiful green spaces and countryside. This local plan prioritises the use of previously developed land and phases some greenfield development post 2030.
- The Local Plan responds positively to these issues seeking opportunities to meet the development needs of the district and planning to meet Standard Method for homes whilst also including an unmet housing need allowance for our neighbours.
- The preparation of the Local Plan has been shaped by ongoing consultation and engagement involving local people, businesses, community groups and external stakeholders and has won two RTPI awards. This has involved 4 separate stages of public consultations that took place in 2018, 2021, 2022 and 2024.
- Alongside the preparation of the Local Plan a sustainability appraisal, under the umbrella of an Integrated Impact Assessment, has been undertaken to assess reasonable alternatives and consider the Plan's overall environmental, social and economic impacts. A Habitats Regulations Assessment has also been undertaken and has informed the preparation of the Local Plan.
- Officers from the City Council and the Cabinet Member for Place and the Local Plan have participated in two Planning Inspectorate Advisory meetings which have resulted in the publication of a series of Local Plan Topic Papers on a number of key issues.
- Officers have worked in a collaborative and constructive way with key stakeholders and Statement of Common Grounds have been agreed with all our neighboring Local

Planning Authorities and a number of statutory agencies – there are no outstanding areas of dispute between the neighboring Local Planning Authorities and the statutory agencies.

- Throughout the journey of preparing this Local Plan the unmet need and supply has been changing (in terms of planning permission granted, local plan positions and the work of PfSH so it is only snapshot in time).
- No other LPA in Hampshire (apart from Fareham) have recently adopted Local Plans – it is not simply the case that Winchester is the only place that can accommodate unmet housing need but we are stepping up and playing our role.
- The Plan also identifies and prioritises a number of opportunities for exciting brownfield regeneration projects in Winchester Town. The Council has a major role to play in delivering this change and is committed to effective partnership working with a range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations to deliver these key regeneration aspirations.
- As part of the examination process the Inspector will read and hear everyone's views on the Local Plan. The Council considers that the Plan takes a balanced approach in allocating the right sites for development, promoting sustainable growth, recognising what is valued in the district, as well as striking the right balance to create flexibility and certainty.
- The Council is keen to adopt the Local Plan 2040 and to begin implementing its policies so that it benefits from an up-to-date planning framework which will ensure that we have a robust Local Plan that can deal with the assessment of current and future planning applications and decisions are taken in accordance with a Plan-led system.

- Finally, an updated Local Development Scheme has been agreed at a Cabinet meeting on the 12 February 2025 which sets out the timetable for the adoption of the Local Plan 2040 and for the next Local Plan that will follow shortly after this which reinforces our commitment to meeting the higher housing requirements.
- To conclude, the Council considers that the Local Plan 2040 provides a sound and positive strategy for achieving sustainable development and meeting the district's identified needs. We therefore welcome this public examination.

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