

Opening Statement from Calderdale Council

Firstly, I would like to place on record how pleased the Council is that it has proved possible to commence these hearings during this challenging and unprecedented time that we all find ourselves in.

Earlier this year the Council carried out a consultation on potential modifications to the Plan in the light of feedback from the Inspector after the stage 1 hearings. The approach that the Council has adopted will be discussed in depth over coming days. Without wishing to pre-empt this, I believe that the Council has responded appropriately to the Inspector's feedback and has used the period since the stage 1 hearings productively. The last 6 months have been very difficult for everyone; however, I'm very proud of the work that has been undertaken by and on behalf of the Council during the period.

Of course parties will express concern about the work that the Council has completed, and that will be an important line of discussion during the hearings; however, the Council is very clear that we believe that we have provided a level of information that is more than proportionate for current purposes. The Council is also very clear that whilst the evidence base has naturally moved forward with time, the Plan's strategy has remained clear and consistent throughout – contrary to statements made by some parties; we have neither changed our strategy nor attempted to pursue any objectives by stealth.

An important line of discussion will concern climate change and its relationship to economic growth. The Council's approach is predicated on the fact that no single administrative area exists in a closed system. Calderdale forms part of the Leeds City Region, which does in turn sit within the Northern Powerhouse of England. In this context placing a break on growth and development in Calderdale will not result in a net reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions. And for essentially the same reason, attempting to model the carbon emissions from Calderdale alone will tell you very little. The only way to ensure that Calderdale plays its part in responding to the climate emergency is through using the Local Plan to deliver sustainable and well-planned development - alongside and supporting other initiatives such as the carbon reduction pathways work that is being led at a City Region level.

The Government's *Planning for the Future* White Paper emphasises the fact that engagement in the planning system is not universal – in this respect, there is a pressing need to ensure that the planning system benefits everyone. There are significant areas of stubborn deprivation and poverty in Calderdale, and wide inequalities in the life chances of people living in the wealthiest and most deprived Wards. It is easy to treat economic growth as an abstract – modelled numbers with limited real-world relevance; however, the reality is that if we get this wrong the economy of Calderdale will ossify, and the gap between the comfortably off and everyone else will get wider. In the words of Calderdale's Director of Public Health - *wealth and health are two sides of the same coin*.

I make these comments in full knowledge of the uncertainties arising from the COVID pandemic. And in this sense I wish to make my position abundantly clear that the pandemic reinforces rather than undermines the need for development – certain things will change forever and we will have to adapt; however, we will not be in lockdown for the next 15 years. The pandemic has made it very clear that many people live in homes and work in places that simply aren't fit for purpose. So the Council's position is predicated on meeting these challenges head on rather than allowing us to

become a victim, or perhaps worse using it as pretext to support a general scepticism about the benefits of development.

Despite the many personal tragedies, the pandemic has underlined the attractiveness of living outside the big cities in areas such as Calderdale. I am certainly seeing a lot of interest from developers who are looking beyond the pandemic. And I would add that our Land Charges team have been very busy over the summer responding to property searches.

The pandemic also raises important issues about infrastructure, and the need in particular for more parity for digital infrastructure. The Council considers that this is such an important issue that we commissioned a study into the potential to lock-in in some of the positive behaviours that we observed at the height of the pandemic.

A consistent theme of objections throughout the preparation and Examination of the Plan has been around infrastructure. The Council has always been clear that it is simply not practical or appropriate to provide all of this information at the outset; but we have committed to an iterative process of developing our infrastructure plans. The evidence that the Council has now submitted to the Examination represents a big step forward in this regard.

Our recently published IDP 2020 is considerably shorter than the last two iterations. This is because we now have the information to focus down on precisely what infrastructure is required where and when; how much it will cost; and how it will be funded. Importantly the Council has ensured that the viability of our proposals has been fully tested.

Over the last couple of years Calderdale has been very near to the bottom of the performance league for the Government's Housing Delivery Test. I believe that this is in large part due to severe constraints on the supply side. Poor housing supply in combination with increasingly out of date development plan policies puts the Council in a position where it is essentially reactive in its approach to development, and as such we cannot deliver for our communities in the way that they would want us to.

It is with these observations in mind that the Council is keen to move forward and adopt its Local Plan so that we can shape Calderdale into the place that it has the potential to be.