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Date: 7 February 2018

Dear Inspector

Examination of the Breckland Local Plan (2011 – 2036) – Issues with the Examination Database

I write in response to the concerns you have raised regarding the Council's Examination Database, as set out in the letter from the Programme Officer dated 5 February 2018.

The Council hold a Microsoft Access database which contains contact details of all those that made a representation at the Pre-submission stage. The database was separated into tabs according to which stage the respondent has asked to be notified of, and whether they had ticked a box stating that they wished to speak at the hearing sessions which they had recorded in their Pre-submission representation. This database is robust, contains the definitive list of contacts for the Programme Officer and only required the addition of contact details for those representations which were categorised as unduly made/late representations, which has now been actioned.

I must apologise on behalf of the Council for the errors in informing the public regarding the invitation to participate in the examination. I am informed that these errors occurred as, when meeting the request of the Programme Officer to have an excel spreadsheet containing one list of all those that made a comment at Pre-submission stage with a single tab (for the purposes of mail merge), there was a misunderstanding. Very regrettably, in their eagerness to help, a junior officer generated this list separately from the general local plan contact database (consisting of those who wished to be informed of key stages in the local plan).

To prevent errors from occurring in future, we have taken the following actions:

- A system has been put in place between the Planning Policy Team and the Programme Officer to ensure that all future requests for databases must be checked and authorised by a senior member of the team;
- The Microsoft Access database constitutes an accurate record of contact details for those that made a representation at Pre-submission stage, and therefore all future correspondence should be sent out using this single database i.e. it will not be split into further databases;
- Weekly meetings are to be held between senior members of the policy team, a representative for the Council and the Programme Officer to improve communication between all parties regarding the examination and provide a regular opportunity to discuss any issues that may be raised.

Missed notifications

When the excel spreadsheet extract was taken from the database, only those that ticked the box stating that they wish to attend the hearing sessions received the invitation to the hearing sessions. This leaves 127 consultees that should have been notified of the opportunity to submit further written statements who have not received any communication at this stage. For this, please accept my sincere apologies.

At this stage, the Council recommend that the Programme Officer notifies all those on the Microsoft Access database (the definitive list of those that made a representation at Pre-Submission stage and unduly made/late reps) to ensure that no consultee has been missed.

This approach has implications on the timescale for responses set at 19th March 2018, as two weeks have lapsed since the initial notification letters were sent out. If letters were issued by Monday 12th February 2018 recipients would have 5 weeks in order to respond by the current deadline. We therefore request your consideration of how to proceed at this stage.

I can further assure you that you have now been provided with copies of all representations made at Pre-submission stage, including those categorised as late/unduly made. Once again, I apologise for these errors and have taken action to ensure that these will not reoccur.

Yours sincerely

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