

## **BRECKLAND LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION HEARINGS**

### **COUNCIL'S OPENING STATEMENT**

**Tuesday 17th April 2018**

Firstly, on behalf of Breckland Council I would like welcome the Inspector, Mr Jonathan Manning, and all those attending this public examination. I would also like to thank Charlotte Brennan, the Programme Officer, for her management of the Examination process so far.

The Breckland Local Plan is a key mechanism for the Council to deliver its priorities:

- Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive;
- Providing the right services, at the right time and the right way;
- Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth; and
- Enabling stronger, more independent communities.

Breckland is a special place to live with a strong sense of place. The Plan reflects Breckland's rural location in the heart of Norfolk; its rich natural and historic environment; and its thriving communities.

The Plan also recognises the challenges we face:

- rising house prices;
- an ageing population;
- the changing nature of retail and impact on the market towns;
- the peculiar rural nature of the district where such a substantial minority of the population lives outside of developed sustainable population centres;
- limited high skilled employment opportunities; and
- the impact of an increasing population on the natural environment including The Brecks and the Norfolk River Valleys.

The Local Plan builds on adopted policies in the Council's existing plans - the Core Strategy, the Site Specific Policies and proposals Development Plan Document and the Thetford Area Action Plan- previously found sound at examination. In many cases, the Local Plan continues the policy approaches already successfully being implemented, in others we have taken the

opportunity to amend policies to make them more effective and respond to emerging issues and changing circumstances.

The public examination of the Local Plan is the culmination of a process that has included extensive consultation and engagement over the last five years. During the preparation of this there have been:

- Three regulation 18 consultations;
- 29 meetings of the Local plan Working Group, some of which were carried out around the district;
- over 680 sites submitted for consideration;
- over 5000 Comments; and
- 32 public consultation events.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the preparation of the Breckland Local Plan, including those who responded to the various stages of consultation and engagement on the Plan. Their input is valued and has helped inform and improve the Plan.

The nature of planning means that the Local Plan cannot do what everyone wants and the Council will often be in the middle between those who think we are going too far and those who do not think we are going far enough. The Council considers that the Plan strikes an appropriate balance:

- between promoting sustainable growth and preserving what is valued in the District;
- between local and strategic matters; and
- between flexibility and certainty.

We also note that very few responses of the hundreds received during the preparation of the Local Plan raise fundamental issues about policy directions taken or raise significant soundness issues.

The Plan is supported by robust and proportionate evidence - on housing, employment, infrastructure and viability to name but a few. It has also undergone a sustainability appraisal to assess reasonable alternatives and consider the Plan's environmental, social and economic impacts.

We are therefore keen to adopt the Local Plan as soon as possible - in line with government aspirations - and to begin implementing its policies so that the District benefits from an up-to-date planning framework to:

- deliver sustainable growth and sustainable communities,
- ensure our smaller communities are sustained by allowing for proportionate growth throughout the plan period;
- tackle the problems the District faces; and
- protect the things that are most valued about Breckland and take opportunities to make them even better.

To conclude, the Council considers that the Local Plan provides a sound and positive strategy for achieving sustainable development and meeting Breckland's identified needs, and we therefore welcome this public examination.