

East Devon Local Plan

Briefing Note – Letter from Mr Thickett – Dated 26 Sept 2013

The Examination of the East Devon Local Plan

The Examination of the East Devon Local Plan began in August 2013 when the plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

The District Council is now pleased to be able to advise that the appointed Inspector, Mr Thickett, has advised us in a letter that oral hearing sessions are scheduled to commence on Tuesday 11th February 2014. This brief paper should be read alongside the Inspector's letter dated 26 September 2013.

Inspector's consider all written submissions and also provide the opportunity for respondents to present verbal evidence at hearing sessions. For Planning Inspectorate guidance on the Examination process see:

http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/pins/dpd_procedure_guide.pdf

Mr Thickett is currently also examining the Leeds City Council Core Strategy and the East Hants and South Downs National Park Authority Joint Core Strategy (hearing sessions in October 2013) and also the North Warwickshire Local Plan (hearing sessions scheduled for January 2014). We appreciate the work and time demands placed on Planning Inspectors. For more information on Examination of these plans see:

<http://www.leeds.gov.uk/council/Pages/Core-Strategy---Examination.aspx>

http://www.northwarks.gov.uk/info/200297/forward_planning/872/local_plan_for_north_warwickshire/10

<http://www.easthants.gov.uk/ehdc/planningpolicy.nsf/webpages/Joint+Core+Strategy+Update>

Leading up to the hearing sessions Inspectors will look in detail at plans, the evidence behind them and comments received. In some cases Inspectors will organise meetings prior to the hearing sessions to consider key matters. For the East Devon plan we are in agreement with the Inspector that a Pre Hearing meeting is not necessary.

The Hearing Session Programme

At the hearing sessions an Inspector will consider matters that go to the core, and therefore soundness, of a plan. Inspectors have to be rigorous and thorough in their work. To help with preparing for the hearing sessions for the East Devon plan the Inspector has advised that a draft Programme will be issued on or before the 29th November 2013 and following this further statements from those involved will be sought by a 10th January 2014 deadline.

The Inspector has a Programme Officer to help him with his work and the Programme Officer, Miss Amanda Polley, will notify everyone that has commented on the plan of the stages and steps ahead and deadlines that will need to be met. The Programme Officer will also provide

administrative support to ensure the efficient running of the Examination and hearing sessions. Officers of the Council will prepare material ready for the January deadline and through the Inspector's Programme Officer this material will be published on the Council web site, as will all other Examination papers.

Issues that Could Be Addressed at Hearing Sessions

It is for the Inspector to set out the matters that he considers are appropriate for discussion at the hearing sessions and therefore are of greatest importance in determining if a plan is sound and informing any recommendations for changes to the plan that he may see as appropriate. Mr Thickett has started this process by helpfully setting out some of the issues that he sees as particularly relevant for the East Devon Local Plan and its Examination. These we expect will be discussed by participants at the hearing sessions and discussions will help inform the working of the Inspector when making his conclusions and recommendations. Key issues Mr Thickett has identified to date with initial observations include:

- **A presumption in favour of sustainable development** – the East Devon Local Plan sets out our thinking and approach to ensuring that development is sustainable and also includes a number of policies that explicitly plan for sustainable development schemes. Mr Thickett is concerned that we are not positive enough in establishing that our overall policy presumption is that if development proposals are sustainable they should be granted planning permission.
- **The Length of the Local Plan** – as the plan developed and evolved we produced it to align with the lifespan of what was the emerging (but is now the abandoned) South West Regional Spatial Strategy. Our local plan is intended to run to 2026, with early review planned, and to keep consistency with early drafts we decided to retain this end date. We recognised that the plan did not cover the Government's National Planning Policy Framework preferred time horizon of 15 years but we did regard an operational end date to 2026 to be appropriate. The plan does, as well, include reference to development that we expect to be built beyond 2026, for example at Cranbrook. We have therefore established longer term policy guidance for positive development in East Devon though do recognise the points raised by the Inspector.
- **Aims and Objectives of the Plan** – in putting the plan together we sought to establish overarching aims and objectives that could then inform more detailed strategy and policy choices. We considered it important that our plan had a structured logic though we do note the concerns raised by the inspector. As the Inspector has raised concerns about lack of clarity in aims and objectives we can expect, through the hearing sessions, that the Inspector will probe into this issue in greater detail and we can expect participants at the hearing sessions to also make valuable contributions. We felt that including material on Neighbourhood Plans would help set such plans within the context of our local plan, but we do appreciate the points the Inspector has raised.
- **Inclusion of superfluous material and detail** – in producing the plan we were keen to set the context for policies and in particular to explain some of the key background information that helped inform the plan. It is recognised that this type of supporting material was probably more applicable to plans produced under the planning framework of the previous government (when our local plan was started) and is less relevant under the current Government planning regime and the National Planning Policy Framework. Nonetheless this material was the subject of detailed debate through the considerable number of Local Plan Panel sessions and was felt to be beneficial and helpful to users of the plan and help set an identity for differing parts of the District. Concerns of the

Inspector about too much material are however noted and perhaps such material would sit better in a background document.

- **Consistency Between Policies** – in drawing up the local plan we saw it as important to establish a set of strategic policies that would provide key over-arching guidance and then below these to have more specific policies that would apply greater detail to their application. There is undoubtedly a challenge in ensuring that policies are always consistent with one-another and that repetition of matters does not occur. Having the experienced eye of an Inspector examining the plan provides a critique that we trust will help ensure that we ultimately end up with the best possible plan for East Devon.

Producing Topic Papers on Housing, Affordable Housing and Employment

We acknowledge the invitation to be able to produce topic papers on key subject matters to inform the hearing sessions and Examination. From reviews around the country of other authority's Examinations we recognise that it is common practice for inspector to request papers or further material. We trust that the papers we produce on these subject matters, and on any others that may be suggested by Mr Thickett, will help the smooth and efficient running of the hearing sessions and overall Examination. In producing these papers we will seek to draw on evidence already submitted to the Examination and update on factual matters such as where planning permissions have been granted or housing completions have occurred.

In respect to meeting shortfalls in past housing completions, for example, we will be able to report on the great successes at the new town of Cranbrook where over the first one and a half years of construction (to the year ending 2013) we expect to see the completion of around 500 new homes and build rates of 500 new homes per year thereafter. Early year build figures are considerably in excess of our previous intentionally conservative estimates.

Soundness of the Local Plan

We recognise that the critical point of the local plan Examination is to look at the soundness of the plan, and the point behind this is to ensure that planning policy is as good as it can be and is as fit for purpose as is possible. We need to ensure that East Devon has the right types of development in the right types of locations to meet current and future needs. Sound planning policy plays a critical role in this.

It is extremely beneficial to have an early insight from Mr Thickett into key issues that he identifies to be of relevance to our East Devon Local Plan and its soundness. We trust that through the Examination process we will be able to ensure that our final plan policy is a sound, robust and logical as is possible.

Matthew Dickins

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East Devon District Council