

Bradford Local Plan

Core Strategy Examination

Opening Statement

Date: 4 March 2015

Venue: Victoria Hall, Saltaire

Introduction

- 1.1 On behalf of Bradford Metropolitan District Council and in my role as Chief Planning Officer, I would like to welcome all participants to this Independent Examination into the Council's Core Strategy. I am very grateful to be given this opportunity to say a few words to explain the scope and purpose of the plan and to outline the positive role it will have in supporting the key outcomes for the District including :
- supporting long term regeneration and providing for a resilient sustainable economy which is fair and promotes wealth and prosperity across the district
 - improving good health, wellbeing and quality of life for the Districts communities; in particular by providing a framework to deliver the homes both the right type and the right quality as well as the jobs we need – but in a managed and sustainable way,
 - Ensuring that Bradford becomes a more attractive district supported by good connectivity and infrastructure, and
 - Ensuring that there is a framework for safeguarding and enhancing the rich natural environment and heritage of the District.
- 1.2 It is not an understatement to say that the challenges facing the district are of a wholly different magnitude to those of previous Local Plans. The scale of growth and change needed if the district is to deliver homes, jobs, and services for a rapidly growing population reflects a significant step change from the past 10- 20 years. It is a significant ask of not only the council, but developers and communities, and one which we all need to get right. This scale of growth also needs to be delivered sensitively and with appropriate and timely infrastructure in order to ensure sustainable development. In response to these challenges, the Council in the Core Strategy has set out an ambitious but at the same time robust and achievable plan. It is committed to ensuring the district has an up to date plan which allows its communities shape the right solutions to the challenges of accommodating future growth in the most sustainable way possible.

Strategic and Corporate Context

- 2.1 Bradford District is a large (370 sq km (143 sq miles)) and complex area with diverse communities. It forms one of the five districts within the West Yorkshire conurbation and plays a major role in the Leeds City Region (LCR) and beyond due to its size of population, and economy, its proximity to other key centres, transport links and connectivity as well as its significant countryside and tourism offer.
- 2.2 It is characterised by a mixture of urban and rural areas with distinctive character and attractive landscapes. The nature and topography of Bradford means most of the industrial and residential development is in the south of the district and along the valley bottoms, with the majority of the population living in the urban centres of Bradford and within the freestanding settlements of Keighley, Bingley and Shipley, in Airedale, and Ilkley, in Wharfedale. While the urban areas are quite densely developed, two-thirds of the District is rural with moorland and attractive valleys surrounding and penetrating into the urban areas. The District has a rich cultural and historic legacy which provides both opportunities but also big challenges.

- 2.3 Bradford has a population of over half a million making it the fourth largest metropolitan district in England (only Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield are larger). Although there was a small decline in population in the late 1990s, Bradford has grown steadily since 2000 and is expected to continue growing for the foreseeable future with ONS forecasts showing a further significant rise in the population to 2030. The projected growth includes a significant proportion in the 60-plus age group, in common with national trends which also show a shift to a greater proportion of older people in the population. At the same time, over a quarter of the projected growth predicted will be amongst children and young people. This means that Bradford will continue to have a relatively young population and a growing number of working age people.
- 2.4 Bradford has the third largest economy in Yorkshire and the Humber behind Leeds and Sheffield. Bradford contributes £8.2bn to the UK economy (the 11th largest economy in the UK). The district also has the 2nd largest population of working age people in Leeds City Region (308,500) behind Leeds. Bradford is critical to the long term economic success of the Leeds City Region and its significant ambitions as set out in the Strategic Economic Plan and Growth Deal.
- 2.5 The District's Community Strategy sets out three key transformational priorities:
- Regenerating our City Centre and driving economic growth across the district;
 - Raising our educational attainment and supporting our children and young people to reach their full potential; and
 - Developing our skills base to equip people with skills for work.
- 2.6 These priorities are critical to achieving the sustainable wellbeing of the district, as part of the long-term solutions which build the social and economic capacity of our communities.
- 2.7 However, it is also recognised that the district will not deliver the transformational priorities, and in turn the longer term outcomes, if it does not begin to address the following challenges in the short term:
- Ensuring that there is sufficient housing supply and quality of housing to meet the district's needs; and
 - Tackling poverty, deprivation and the negative consequences of inequality.
- 2.8 The planning service has a key role to play in delivering these outcomes and to support our priorities in particular supporting the provision of housing and jobs.
- 2.9 In taking forward these priorities, the Council has been proactive in working with a wide range of partners and the community on a range of initiatives and in the preparation of the Core Strategy. These include
- stimulating the housing market (and council house building),
 - providing and facilitating the provision of affordable housing,
 - taking positive initiatives to regenerate brownfield land and
 - tackling 'empty' homes, to make best use of the existing housing stock.

- 2.10 The Council is committed to ensuring it has a robust and up to date Local Plan in line with NPPF. To this end it revised and updated its Local Development Scheme in 2014. This commits the council to a set of Development Plan Documents reflecting and building on the significant progress to date on the Core Strategy and the two Area Action Plans supporting key regeneration priorities in the City Centre and Canal Road Corridor as well as the Waste Management Development Plan Document. It considers that it is imperative that the Core Strategy is progressed in order to provide a clear and up to date strategic framework for planning decisions in particular setting the scale and distribution of development. The Council consider that to move to a single Local Plan would delay this and lose the momentum and significant work already undertaken to get the Core Strategy to submission stage. The Council is committed to moving forward with its site allocations as quickly as possible, whilst recognising that progress depends on the outcome of this examination.
- 2.11 As an up to date Local Plan is being put in place the Council will continue to, help secure investment in the City and support development through its constructive approach to development management, which includes continued high performance on planning applications together with a proactive and flexible planning regime. We have an on going commitment to service improvement and a number of key changes have taken place to ensure our decision making process is robust, timely and accountable.

The Core Strategy

- 3.1 As emphasised already, the Council attaches great importance to the Core Strategy and having an up to date plan in place. We believe this is essential if we are to properly plan for a significant level of growth and ensure that development is directed to the most appropriate and sustainable locations. Our ambitions fit very well with the core principles of the NPPF (paragraph 17). Our plan is fully aligned with the City Region's Strategic Economic Plan.
- 3.2 In planning to meet the need for new homes and jobs and allocating land we want to focus growth in sustainable locations, making fullest use of opportunities for travel by bus, cycle or on foot. We want where possible to see the development of brown field sites while fully accepting the need for new development also in green field locations.
- 3.3 We want to protect the countryside and maintain a strong and robust green belt but at the same time we recognise that the needs of the district's growing population will require some well managed well directed change green belt change. We also recognise the need to plan for the impact of climate change and the need for development to be supported by adequate infrastructure. Fundamentally through the plan we want to accommodate growth whilst protecting those elements that make Bradford such an attractive place to live, work and visit, including its varied settlement pattern and the distinctiveness of communities both urban and rural.
- 3.4 We recognise the diverse role and nature individual communities. While the housing proposals the Core Strategy show significant growth is required to meet the Districts needs to 2030 this is not growth at any price. As the NNPF (paragraph 150) recognises it has to be about delivering sustainable development that reflects the vision and aspirations of local communities.

- 3.5 The Core Strategy seeks to concentrate the majority of new development in and around the main urban area and the larger settlements. These are the most sustainable locations, with the best access to facilities and employment and the best public transport services. They are also the areas where the needs for new homes and jobs are most acute. This is entirely consistent with national policy and with the now revoked Regional Strategy- , which has a strong settlement and urban regeneration focus.
- 3.6 The Council understands and agrees with government policy that plans should seek to significantly boost the supply of new housing, to meet objectively assessed need and to support the economic recovery.. However, many communities have concerns over the scale of the housing proposed and whether it can be accommodated in a sustainable manner and whether it is in fact deliverable. In contrast the development sector is suggesting higher need should be planned for.
- 3.7 The overall Core Strategy requirement to build 42,100 dwellings by 2030 requires a rate of delivery that exceeds anything previously achieved sustained over a 15 year period, with an average rate considerably in excess of the single best performance in the period preceding the recession (2156 net, 2007/8). The Council is therefore conscious that this is a very ambitious target. It is however a target based on robust and objective evidence. The target is challenging but deliverable.
- 3.8 We are acutely aware of the concerns of many communities about the delivery of supporting infrastructure and the impact on the green belt and other green space including important land in the urban areas. We understand and in many respects share those concerns. That is why we believe it is right to ensure that the plan provides for a justified level of new development and also that the plan has the policy tools in place to manage the required development and growth in a sustainable way. The Council is already working to support the regeneration of significant brownfield sites in particular its own land holdings for example the Joint venture Company set up for Canal Road Corridor which is already delivering housing.
- 3.9 While it is important that the focus is on growth it is equally important that the plan is read as a whole and the approach recognises the key challenges faced by the district in particular the topographical, environmental and heritage/cultural considerations.
- 3.10 The Core Strategy has been prepared during an unprecedented period of change. This includes a global economic downturn, economic restructuring, reforms to the planning system and significant reductions in public sector funding. For the plan to reach Examination stage, is a major achievement for a city the size and complexity of Bradford. The plan has been subject to many consultation phases, events and on going engagement activity that have taken place around the District during its preparation, which began in 2005. The Council has worked hard to resolve as many objections as possible prior to examination. It is important, that the overall strategy and policy framework is considered as a whole and that the commitment to sustainable development is recognised as immediate and practical, as well as a longer term aspiration.

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Conclusion

- 4.1 In conclusion, for the reasons outlined, I welcome this Examination in moving the 'local plan' process forward in Bradford. The Council believes it has submitted a sound Development Plan Document which meets all the statutory requirements in its preparation. It also believes that the submitted DPD proposes the most appropriate strategy and actions for the District and will deliver what it sets out to achieve, consistent with the spatial vision and objectives and national guidance. Officers (and representatives of the Council) have prepared statements and other material to support this position. I am confident they will be able to amplify on anything in that material and respond to any relevant questions throughout the course of these public hearing sessions of the Examination.

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