

EXAMINATIONS OF THE BROMSGROVE DISTRICT PLAN (BDP) and  
BOROUGH OF REDDITCH LOCAL PLAN No. 4 (BORLP4)  
INSPECTOR'S NOTE TO BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND  
REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL – 10 April 2014

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### Hearings Programme

1. Thank you for your response (dated 4 April 2014) to my initial note of 26 March 2014. The stance outlined by the two Councils in respect of the objective assessment of housing needs is noted, along with the additional evidence now submitted. Without prejudice to the merits of the Councils' cases, it seems to me that this matter is best considered further at a hearing session – where evidence can be tested and the views of representors heard – rather than at an exploratory meeting. Given that the conclusions arising from such a session could potentially affect the progress of the remainder of the examinations, I propose that this is held in advance of the main body of hearings. In view of the joint nature of the evidence concerned, a joint session will be held.
2. As you will be aware, it is usual practice to consider the matter of compliance with the Duty to Co-operate (as set out in section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) at an early stage in the Local Plan examination process. I will therefore hold a second 'advance' hearing session to consider this matter: this will address both Local Plans. Although I recognise that the prescribed Duty to Co-operate bodies<sup>1</sup> have not raised concerns in respect of any failure by either Council to satisfy the Duty, objections have been made by other parties in the Duty's context – notably concerning the approach to meeting future housing needs arising from the main urban area. As this is an overarching matter with the potential to affect other aspects of the examinations, it is appropriate to consider this in more detail at the above-noted 'advance' session.
3. I will therefore hold two hearing sessions to address the above matters in advance of the main body of hearings in both examinations. These will take place on **16 and 17 June 2014** at Redditch Town Hall. Following these sessions, I will issue an Interim Conclusions paper in respect of the matters considered. Although it will be issued without prejudice to my final reports, the interim conclusions paper is likely to set the context for the remainder of the examination hearings.
4. I have prepared Guidance Notes setting out details about the examination process and I will issue a draft Matters, Issue and Questions paper and a draft Hearings Programme in due course: these will relate to the full scope of the two examinations. Dates for the remaining hearing sessions, which due to other commitments cannot take place before September 2014, will be finalised by the Programme Officer (PO).

### Other Potential Soundness Concerns Requiring Early Consideration

5. As already noted, I will be issuing a draft Matters, Issues and Questions paper in respect of both examinations. However, I have identified a number of particular potential soundness concerns upon which I would welcome early consideration. These matters are set out below: for the

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<sup>1</sup> As set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

avoidance of doubt, this is not an exhaustive list of the matters that I shall be raising during these examinations.

6. **Transport Evidence Base.** Both Councils will be aware of the concerns raised by the Highways Agency in respect of the implications of the impact of planned levels of growth on the Strategic Road Network during the later parts of both Plan periods. It is noted that further work may be underway to identify the likely infrastructure implications of such growth and the likely mechanisms for delivery of required infrastructure improvements. It would assist my consideration of this matter if such work could be completed before the main hearing sessions. Further guidance on how infrastructure requirements should be addressed in Local Plans is set out in the recently issued national Planning Policy Guidance (PPG).
7. **Provision for Gypsies and Travellers.** The Planning Policy for Traveller Sites March 2012 (PPTS) places requirements on Local Plans in respect of this matter. A robust evidence base should be prepared, including early and effective community engagement with both settled and Traveller communities (PPTS policy A). Pitch targets should be set and a supply of sites identified (PPTS policy B). It does not appear that either Local Plan fully accords with these requirements. I note that a new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment is in preparation. However, it is unclear why this was not completed prior to submitting the Local Plans – as with other evidence base documents. Although Redditch Borough Council proposes to prepare a separate Site Allocations plan in respect of this matter, this does not appear to be included in its Local Development Scheme (No. 5). Furthermore, as is set out in the PPG, the National Planning Policy Framework makes clear that the Government's preferred approach is for each local planning authority to prepare a single Local Plan for its area (or a joint document with neighbouring areas). It will be necessary for the Councils to demonstrate that the Local Plans accord with both the Framework and the PPTS in respect of their approach to Gypsies and Travellers.
8. **Flood Risk and Groundwater Protection.** The comments of the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water in respect of these matters are noted. Particular concerns relate to the protection of groundwater sources at the proposed Foxlydiate allocation (BDP policy RCB1.1) and to the approach to the consideration of flood risk – particularly in regard of some of Bromsgrove Town Centre sites (BDP policy BDP17), which are not supported by a Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Although further discussions have taken place with the agencies concerned, it appears that outstanding concerns remain. It would assist my consideration of these matters if, ideally, common ground could be reached before the main hearing sessions. In particular, it will be necessary to clarify whether any amendments to anticipated housing delivery levels from specific sites are likely to arise as a result of these issues (see also next point). Further guidance on how flood risk and water quality should be addressed in Local Plans is set out in the PPG.
9. **Housing Land Supply.** My Matters, Issues and Questions paper will include questions aimed at determining whether, in both examinations, an adequate supply of housing land can be demonstrated in respect of Local Plan housing targets and the Framework's five year housing land supply requirements. Realistic assumptions should be made about site delivery and double-counting should be avoided. Appropriate flexibility should be incorporated. In both Plans, I am concerned that there is little 'headroom'

should any of the underlying assumptions be over-optimistic. Indeed, Redditch Borough Council's suggested amendments to BORLP4, which propose a reduction in the site capacity of site 211, indicate a small shortfall from the 3,000 dwelling target for land within Redditch<sup>2</sup>. If a realistic housing land supply, consistent with national policy expectations, cannot be demonstrated in either Plan then this is likely to amount to a serious soundness concern.

10. In this context, it should be noted that the PPG states that local planning authorities should aim to deal with any undersupply within the first five years of the plan period where possible. It is suggested that each Council should prepare a specific topic paper on housing land supply, in the light of the questions in my forthcoming Matters, Issues and Questions paper, prior to the main hearing sessions later this year: if appropriate, this could also take into account the updated land supply position at April 2014.

### **Conclusion**

11. For the avoidance of doubt, the examinations will be based on the **Bromsgrove District Plan Proposed Submission Version** and the **Proposed Submission Borough of Redditch Local Plan No. 4**, both published for consultation in September 2013<sup>3</sup>. The pre-submission changes proposed by both Councils will also be considered, along with suggested changes from representors.
12. I look forward to hearing from both Councils about the matters raised in this note. If you have any queries, then please contact me via the PO.

Michael J Hetherington  
Inspector  
10 April 2014

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<sup>2</sup> Redditch BC document CD1.1, Appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> However, given that the submission version of BORLP4 (RBC document CD1.14) did not have any paragraph numbers, I will use the paragraph numbers assigned in the tracked changes version (Redditch BC document CD1.1) for reasons of clarity.