

Charnwood Borough Council Opening Statement – Cllr Bailey

I'm delighted to be here today at the first hearing session into the Charnwood Borough Council local plan. It is right that as the Lead Cabinet Member responsible for Planning I share with you my belief that the plan being examined is the right plan; at the right time - a plan that will deliver the Council's vision for Charnwood to 2037.

The local plan has been in preparation since 2016 and has been brought forward during a period when national planning policies have been subject to significant change and when the country has faced its greatest existential challenge since WW2. We have been responsive to those policy changes and we adapted the way we worked during the pandemic to ensure that our communities, stakeholders and partners remain engaged in the process. Consequently, I am pleased to say the plan has benefited from ongoing revision and extensive engagement and the plan before you represents many years of hard work by Councillors, partners, stakeholders and members of public. I genuinely believe it is the best strategy for Charnwood - it is positively prepared, responds to the challenges facing the Borough, meets our housing and employment needs and is based on robust evidence.

I say this in the knowledge that many people do not wish to see large scale building in our Borough. However, the fact is that there is a growing and urgent need for housing. It is our responsibility to positively plan for this housing need and to ensure that there are homes available for future generations who want to stay in the local area.

Some have said that we should be promoting a different strategy and different housing numbers. We have looked very carefully at our strategy and alternative strategies have been explored and housing numbers tested. We have also taken into account our role in supporting growth in the wider Leicestershire Housing Market Area. The Council is satisfied that the plan before you is the most appropriate strategy for Charnwood up to 2037 and is deliverable and consistent with national policy. Our evidence leads us to the conclusion that the development strategy is appropriate and is defensible and will provide for a positive planning framework for Charnwood and the wider housing market area and will significantly boost the supply of housing as required by the national planning policy framework.

The strategy we are putting forward is one of urban concentration and intensification with some distribution to smaller areas – linking new large scale and smaller planned developments to existing urban areas and service centres where there is easy access to services, facilities and employment. Evidence gathered over many years suggests that focusing new development in the largest settlements is more sustainable, reducing the impact on our environment and infrastructure. The approach we are taking has been heavily influenced by the capacity of existing infrastructure to support development, including our highways and education facilities, whilst seeking to protect the identity of settlements. It also recognises the scale and impact that unplanned growth has had particularly in smaller settlements in recent years.

The strategy takes account of the three sustainable urban extensions planned in our Core Strategy and that are now being delivered on site. These are at Garendon to the West of Loughborough, Broadnook to the North of Birstall and Thorpebury to the East of Thurmaston and North of Hamilton, on the edge of Leicester.

The plan also contains a strategy to support the ongoing regeneration of Loughborough town centre focusing on the reuse of previously developed and underused land and with assistance of initiatives like the Town Deal. It also provides an exciting blueprint for the growth of Loughborough's Science and Enterprise Park in partnership with Loughborough University. Already nationally significant, this proposal will see the Science and Enterprise Park mature and bring an expansion of employment to the town; not just in high tech knowledge-based research and development jobs but also in the industries that service and support them. The regeneration and growth of Shepshed is also supported while in the South of the Borough, we are seeking economic revival in the Watermead Regeneration Corridor while at the same time nurturing this unique park and waterfront.

The local plan also sets out our response to climate change and how we will protect and enhance our treasured rural landscapes, whether it is bringing public open access and restoration to the registered park and garden at Garendon, or through the use of various green wedges and designated 'areas of separation'. We are also being clear in our ambition to defend the identities of our villages and protect them from unplanned and unwanted growth in the future.

The local plan seeks to deliver on the Council's ambition to make Charnwood a stronger, more vibrant and a more prosperous place. Members are acutely aware of the legacy their decisions will leave for future generations. New development cannot be undone and the settlements and places we create in the next fifteen years will endure for the next century and beyond. The decision to submit the plan was therefore one of the most important that councillors have made in a generation. Their confidence in the strategy sends out a clear message: that Charnwood is open for business. We will work tirelessly with partners, communities and businesses to ensure that our Borough grows and prospers in a sustainable way, that we protect the things that make the borough so special while allowing and helping our communities to flourish. We expect to share responsibility for delivering our vision with partners, and with major investment and support coming from all sectors as we step into our future together.

I commend this plan to the Inspectorate