

Local Plan Opening Statement

FINAL

Sir

This area today is unrecognisable from a few short decades ago, when it was dominated by mining. The successful re-invention has replaced the mining jobs with a range of new employment opportunities, capitalising on our location at the heart of the national motorway network in particular.

East Midlands Airport is the country's busiest freight airport, moving 300,000 tonnes every year to more than 80 destinations across the globe. Donington Park is a Formula 1 standard motorsport venue, and hosts the ground-breaking Formula E motorsport teams. As the District benefits from excellent road connections, including the M1 and A42, we are half an hour from Birmingham, Nottingham, and Leicester, providing our residents and businesses with access to all those great cities have to offer but also making the District an attractive place for new investment by businesses eager to take advantage of such a large catchment on the doorstep. There is strong demand for new homes, as well as jobs development, and our Planners have a forward thinking approach to secure those investments. As a direct result of this Council's approach to development investment, we can see for instance the Amazon distribution centre in Coalville is now open in double quick time, and every single one of our towns is benefitting from the provision of much-needed new homes to support shops, leisure and local businesses to thrive.

The North West Leicestershire Local Plan is the culmination of years of hard work, in order that the clear priorities of the Council can be delivered in an efficient and effective way. It is an integrated strategy, that will deliver genuinely sustainable growth across the District. It has been the subject of numerous rounds of informal scrutiny by Members, carried out in public through the Local Plan Advisory Committee, with the aim of garnering cross-party support.

This Council has set out clear priorities for the District, and this local plan will put those priorities into action. The objectives of this ambitious plan are five-fold:

Jobs and growth

We are unashamedly determined that jobs and growth will continue to be supported, this District is open for business and we walk the talk to support the development of new jobs. We continue to support the Roxhill Strategic Rail Freight Interchange proposal, which now has planning permission following the Public Inquiry. This is a significant development, that will provide more than 7,000 new jobs within the District. A fantastic scheme, that will pay for improvements to the M1 motorway, and provide a new bypass for Kegworth. Neither of these infrastructure improvements would have been able to happen without the Roxhill scheme. We have supported the development of the East Midlands Distribution Centre, which has been a huge

success. We continue to support Coalville's resurgence as an economic powerhouse, capitalising on its fantastic location and connections to the motorway network, and its wealth of talented people.

Uniqueness of Place

We are equally determined that being open for business will not result in the loss of the uniqueness that makes this a special place to live, work and thrive. We will maintain the local distinctiveness and identity of places, including protecting the Whitwick area of separation. It is vital that the people of Whitwick are able to feel like they have a place to belong, and their own identity. The same goes for Coalville itself. Elsewhere, the National Forest and the Charnwood Forest are essential parts of the District landscape which we will maintain and enhance. We remain absolutely committed to ensuring that people's lives are enhanced by growth, and that their identities and sense of place are not stifled by growth.

South-east Coalville

We remain committed to the development of the South East Coalville Sustainable Urban Extension. The showpiece of the local plan, this development will provide more than 3,000 new homes, and the infrastructure to support those new homes. More than £13 millions will be invested in the local highway network, two new schools will be built, and this will be a green place, with lots of trees and green spaces. It should be pointed out that this development already benefits from planning permission, which demonstrates this Council's commitment to sustainable development, in the wider public interest.

Regeneration of Coalville Town Centre

The regeneration of Coalville town centre, made possible and feasible by the development of the South East Coalville Sustainable Urban Extension, remains a key priority of the Council. To that end, we are delivering on our promise of a major scheme every year to stimulate regeneration. The former Pick n Shovel is now occupied, having been redeveloped to 14 flats in partnership with East Midlands Housing. Further implementation of the "four squares and streets" strategy that comprises the regeneration strategy that we developed with the Prince's Foundation continues apace, with the Hotel Street and High Street shopfront improvement programme. Well underway now, this programme restores shopfronts to their former glory, in partnership with the shop owners themselves. This is something that we are doing with people together, rather than doing it to people. Further initiatives are being worked up, and will be unveiled in due course. The development of South-East Coalville Sustainable Urban Extension together with other housing developments around Coalville provides a significant impetus that will support the regeneration of the Town Centre.

Infrastructure

We are securing more than £21 million of highway infrastructure investments along the A511 corridor alone, not to mention the other £60 million of other infrastructure that will be delivered by the new developments across the District. This ensures that existing residents and businesses are still able to access the services and support that are currently enjoyed within this prosperous District, because new development pays its own way.

The delivery of these five priorities will ensure that North West Leicestershire will remain the special place to live, work and thrive that it is today, with the high quality jobs, homes and services to support everyone who lives or works here. The priority that we have placed on the revival of Coalville, will see the town centre transformed, and the new Sustainable Urban Extension will deliver thousands of new, high quality homes. The people who will live in those homes will find the town centre to be an attractive place to shop, work and do leisure, and will support its renaissance

The process of preparing a local plan is not without its risks. Indeed, this plan has attracted some comment to the effect that it would have been preferable for us to wait for the HEDNA.

Of course it is accepted that the process would have been 'neater' if we had waited for the HEDNA, we believe that there are compelling reasons why we were not able to do so:

The Government has made it clear that it wishes for local plans to be put into place as a matter of urgency. This wish has led to a number of 'nudges', including the threat of withholding New Homes Bonus if local plans are not 'put in place by early 2017'. While precise definitions of 'put in place' and 'early 2017' have not been set out by Government, the risk to the District Council is in the order of £600,000. That represents a substantial proportion of the Council's day to day running costs, and is too high a risk to knowingly take.

In addition, further sanctions being considered by Government include direct intervention to put local plans in place for us. That would still have to be financed by the District Council, but any element of control would be lost. To knowingly allow that to happen, having been in the position of being able to meet the deadline and avoid the sanction, would have been irresponsible.

In recognition of the risks of proceeding with the local plan to where we are today, we sought independent advice from a range of experts, including the Minister of State for Housing and Planning himself. The unanimous view of these advisors was that we should press on with our Local Plan.

In that regard, our case is straightforward and robust:

- The JGC study has objectively considered the implications of the committed Roxhill scheme, on housing demand within the District
- We have identified sufficient sites to meet that need in full
- The HEDNA, even when the results are made publicly available, will not be the final answer to the question of the distribution of housing across and within Leicestershire
- Even if, when the answers are known, we are unable to fully accommodate the District's housing requirement in full within the local plan, Policy S1 as amended by MM1 has been agreed by the Leicestershire authorities to be a robust review trigger.

Questions have been raised about the timing, and I am sure we will investigate that in some detail. Whether the timings of Policy S1 are accepted or not, the fact remains that it provides a strong mechanism to ensure that we keep our promise to continue to work constructively, effectively, and on an ongoing basis with our HMA partners and others to ensure that the full objectively assessed need for Leicester and Leicestershire is accommodated within the HMA.

To conclude, to delay the plan now would put at risk the five key priorities that the plan will deliver, which are

- Jobs and growth, to meet the needs of residents and businesses for the next 15 years;
- Maintaining local identity by protecting the strategic gap between Coalville and Whitwick;
- Delivering the South East Coalville Sustainable Urban Extension, comprising as it will more than 3,000 new homes and a significant investment in infrastructure;
- Regenerating Coalville town centre, implementing the Prince's Foundation regeneration strategy; and
- Securing more than £21 million of infrastructure funding for the A511 corridor alone, to ensure that the growth that does happen is sustainable

I commend the North West Leicestershire Local Plan to you