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Mr Paul Griffiths
c/o Andrea Copsey (by email only)
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Dear Mr Griffiths,

Basildon Borough Revised Publication Local Plan 2014 – 2034: Basildon Town Centre masterplan and Other Outstanding Matters for the Examination

We would like to set out our current position with the RPLP examination and our proposed way forward with regard to the ongoing Basildon town centre masterplan consultation.

A new Basildon town centre masterplan is currently being consulted on by the Council which sets out a new vision for the town centre and new capacity figures for residential and commercial uses. This exciting new vision for Basildon town centre sits well within the existing spatial development strategy of the RPLP by increasing the provision of housing in the town centre. However, given the significant need for homes in the area there remains the need for the release of all the Green belt sites already set out in the RPLP. Accordingly, the increase in the level of housing provision that is implied by the masterplan and its location in the Borough's principal urban area is entirely consistent with the Plan's spatial strategy.

In that context, we consider that the draft Basildon town centre master plan is currently best used as an addition to our evidence base for the RPLP, and it would be sensible for this emerging masterplan to be incorporated into the Local Plan. This will ensure that the RPLP has up to date policies for Basildon town centre and up to date housing and commercial capacity assumptions for the plan overall.

We therefore propose that the Basildon town centre masterplan be treated as part of the updated evidence on the town centre/urban capacity position for housing and other commercial uses in Basildon town centre. Subject to further work being completed on our housing trajectory, this could provide in the region of an additional 1,000 - 2,500 housing units to our overall supply during the plan period, which given the OAN shortfall currently in the RPLP will provide a useful addition to our housing supply and help achieve our overall OAN.

There will be a need to make a number of main modifications to the RPLP text and policies, especially for Chapter 6 Achieving Sustainable Development and Chapter 8 Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres. We will obviously need some time to do this and will aim to produce a Basildon town centre topic paper, which will include recommended modifications to the RPLP.

To update you further we continue to work on other areas relevant to the examination as follows:

1. Air quality issues including the consultant review and a council Topic Paper;
2. Transport issues around the A127/Pound Lane junction and allocations E6 and H12 including a number of technical reports;
3. Statements of Common Ground with the statutory authorities, landowners and developers of the strategic allocations, the County Council and other organisations.
4. Setting out our recommended modifications arising from these various discussions for the Inspector;
5. Progressing the Statement of Common Ground for Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet Neighbourhood Plan that will provide a minimum of 1,350 homes towards the RPLP housing target.
6. Progressing an update of our SEA/SA work on the RPLP with our consultants LUC.

We envisage that the completion of this work will require the majority of the summer period. We propose to manage the additional workload from the Basildon town centre topic paper in parallel with the existing ongoing work with the aim of not disrupting the examination process and maintaining the potential for hearings to take place in the Autumn of this year.

We would be grateful if you could indicate whether you are agreeable to proceeding on this basis. To help us focus and programme our work effectively and optimise the use of our resources, we would also be most grateful if you could set out a draft timetable for the Basildon RPLP examination going forward, including the MIQ's and hearings, even if that can only be indicative at this stage.

To help expedite matters we would be prepared to explore the hosting of virtual hearings if that would help proceedings at what remains a challenging time with the ongoing pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

P. Bylo

Philip Bylo
Planning Strategy and Implementation Manager