



# The Planning Inspectorate

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The Chief Executive  
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Your Ref:

Our Ref: PINS/X2410/429/9

Date: 2 June 2000

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Dear Sir / Madam

## **BOROUGH OF CHARNWOOD LOCAL PLAN – REPORT ON OBJECTIONS**

1. I was appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to hold a public inquiry into objections to the deposit draft of the Borough of Charnwood Local Plan. Mr Stuart Bould ably assisted me in this task. Both his technical help and his friendship were much appreciated throughout the Inquiry and the long reporting period. I am most grateful to him for all his hard work. The inquiry was held between Thursday 5 March 1998 and Tuesday 17 November 1998. I attach my report, which contains my recommendations on the action which the Council should take in respect of all the objections, including objections to the Proposed Changes which the Council asked me to consider.
2. The Charnwood Local Plan, when adopted, will replace the Wreake Valley Local Plan (1985), the Shepshed Local Plan (1987), the Soar Valley Local Plan (1992) and the Loughborough Local Plan (1994). Thus for Charnwood, the development plan will be the adopted Local Plan together with the Leicestershire Structure Plan (January 1994) and the Leicestershire Minerals Local Plan (May 1995). To the extent that the following documents were used as supplementary planning guidance, they too will be replaced by the Charnwood Local Plan: the Loughborough Draft Local Plan (1973), the Hathern Plan (1973), the North Wolds Plan (1979), the Seagrave Village Plan (1980), the Wanlip Action Area Local Plan (1985), the Thurcaston Village Appraisal (1986) and the Hamilton Local Plan (1987).
3. The Plan was initially placed on deposit from 3 June 1996 to 9 August 1996, a period of almost ten weeks. The period for deposit of the draft Plan defined by statutory regulation is six weeks and, because the Council was cautioned that the almost ten week period it had afforded for representations and deposit was not in accordance with the material regulation, the Plan was subject to re-deposit for the statutory six weeks. All representations made during the first deposit period were carried forward, if the representors so wished. The re-deposit period of six weeks commenced on 18 October 1996. As re-deposited, the Plan drew a total of 22,692 duly made objections. Following consideration of these objections the Council published in September 1997 a Statement of Proposed Changes (CD/31 and CD/32) which were put on deposit for a six week period ending 24 October 1997. This attracted 36,456 counter objections.

4. During the inquiry the Council canvassed a number of further changes which resulted from consideration of the representations received in response to the Statement of Proposed Changes and the emergence of new or updated information. These further changes were compiled in a document entitled a Statement of Further Proposed Changes (CD/57). As a result of the Proposed Changes 205 objections were conditionally withdrawn and these are dealt with along with all of the other objections. In all 381 objections were totally withdrawn and are not dealt with in my report. Although not expressly referred to in my report, in making my recommendations I have had regard to the representations made in support of the Plan.
5. During the inquiry I held a Housing Round Table session to discuss matters of principle in relation to housing land supply. The outcome of these discussions informed the consideration of objections to the wording of individual policies and site specific objections. Both Mr Bould and myself visited all of the allocated and all of the omission sites.

## Main Issues

6. The main policy issues dealt with in my report are underpinned by the concept of sustainable development. I have supported this concept as it is a fundamental principle which underlines all current Government planning advice. The issue of sustainability provides the foundation for the Local Plan and its practical application is clearly evident throughout its strategy. Other main issues include the promotion of the conservation, improvement and enhancement of the area's existing built and natural assets; the identification of sufficient housing and employment land; the maintenance of a healthy and viable diversified urban and rural economy; the promotion of an integrated land use and transportation strategy; the promotion of recreation and tourism and the maintenance of the vitality and viability of established town, district and local centres. My main conclusions on these issues are as follows.

## Environment

- 6.1 I have recognised that the Local Plan seeks to give priority to a high quality environment and endorsed its approach in seeking to conserve, improve and enhance the area's existing built and natural assets. I have generally supported those policies which address these relevant planning issues. For example, I have expressed support for the need to safeguard open spaces of special character in settlements. Reflecting the Plan's approach, I have also agreed with the Council that a new policy is needed to deal with design issues in respect of all new developments. I have endorsed important policies concerned with the protection of flood plains, safeguarding against pollution and promoting the conservation of energy.

## Housing

- 6.2 On housing land I have concluded sufficient sites should be allocated to ensure that the overall housing provision of 8,350 dwellings is **built** during the Plan period. Whilst I acknowledge the points made by the Council in closing submissions, I found it necessary to propose additional housing allocations to the Council, intended to accommodate some 400 dwellings. The actual list of sites that was

used, as a basis for these 400 dwellings was the Council's Core Document CD/56 which set out the officers' priorities. I have supported the vast majority of the Council's proposed housing allocations including the largest sites at Hazel Road/Manor Road Loughborough and the land north of Harrowgate Drive, Wanlip. I have not supported the allocation at Swifts Close, Wymeswold.

## Employment and Business

6.3 The Plan seeks to identify sufficient employment land, through the retention of existing provisions and new allocations, consistent with the intentions of the Leicestershire Structure Plan. I have endorsed all the employment land allocations proposed by the Council, 5 of which are extensions to existing employment areas. Importantly, at Dishley Grange I have supported new Policies complementary to the employment allocation, concerned with the future use of Dishley Grange Farmstead and the relocation of a significant part of the Derby Road playing fields. I have endorsed also, the Council's policy for the Loughborough Science Park and the two proposed Regeneration Opportunity Sites. Additionally, the Policy for Safeguarding Employment Land (E/8) provides acceptable safeguards for employment sites while allowing the Council the opportunity to encourage redevelopment where an alternative use of sites might be more acceptable on environmental and other planning grounds.

## Rural Land and Economy

6.4 In general I have supported those policies concerned with areas of Green Wedge and other open land necessary to preserve the separate identity of settlements. I have endorsed those policies, which seek to protect the character and appearance of the countryside for its own sake, especially within Areas of Particularly Attractive Countryside (APAC) and Areas of Local Landscape Value (ALLV). If changes are to be made to the concept of these landscape designations, they would be better addressed by the Council after the review of the Structure Plan has been completed. Reflecting national advice, I have expressed support for those policies seeking to safeguard "best and most versatile" agricultural land, and those with the potential to encourage growth and diversification in the rural economy, including the promotion of the National Forest.

## Transportation

6.5 In general I have supported the land use policies and proposals of this Plan, which are closely related to future transportation requirements. Over the Plan period there will continue to be a need for new roads and highway improvements, but increasingly an emphasis will be placed on providing for better public transport, safer cycling and pedestrian routes. I have endorsed those policies where the intention is to achieve an effective transport network providing choice in the means of transport for people and goods in the Plan area with the aim of reducing reliance on private cars. I have supported policies in the Plan relating to the Park and Ride proposal (Policy TR/25) on land east of the A6 adjacent to the A46/A6 junction at Wanlip, and a Roadside Service Area (Policy TR/32) also adjacent to the junction, but on the west side of the A6.

## Shopping

6.6 In general I have supported policies which sustain and enhance the role of Loughborough as the principle centre within the Borough for shopping and allied services. I have endorsed policies which maintain the vitality and viability of established town and district centres throughout the Borough, with additional provision of shops and services to contemporary standards in areas of need.

## Recreation and Tourism

6.7 I have endorsed those policies which aim to protect urban recreation space, having regard to the community's long term requirements and ensuring, as far as is reasonably possible, that additional provision is made to reflect local needs, in particular those arising from new housing development. I have supported also those policies which encourage appropriate recreational developments in the countryside, including the National Forest.

Tourism can make a major contribution to the local economy. I have welcomed those policies which seek to develop and support tourist facilities and attractions in the Borough, including the encouragement of a network of linear routes for informal recreation and tourism, including in the river valleys. I have seen the policies in the Plan relating to development in the Watermead Country Park and the Wanlip Country Club site as being of particular importance.

## Format of the report

7. My report follows the order of the Plan. Throughout the report I have used acronyms for names of organisations and for other subjects which appear regularly in the text. A glossary of abbreviations is provided at the beginning of the report. My report is in "short" form with the cases being incorporated into my key issues and conclusions. To save space, and because the details will be known to the Council and the objectors concerned, I have not set out the Proposed Changes themselves in the text. Full details can be found in the Council's published reports and Inquiry Core Documents.
8. I have relied throughout on the Council's determination in its published reports of which representations are expressions of support, and which objections, and which of the latter are valid, or "duly made" in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Plan) Regulations 1991. These Regulations do not cover Proposed Changes, but the Council has followed essentially the same procedures for advertising proposals and for considering responses, as for the Deposit Draft Plan. However, the changes proposed at the Inquiry were not publicised in the same way as the previous rounds of changes, and all objectors may not have been aware of them. It might therefore be prudent to ensure that they be highlighted in some way when proposed modifications to the Plan are published.
9. There are a small number of factual and cartographic corrections that the Council has made to the Written Statement and the Proposals Map which have not arisen from an objection. Where I have not needed to address these I leave it to the Council's discretion to make these judgements on the merits of each. The Council is far better placed than I am to do so.

10. Unless otherwise stated, any reference in the report to Government policy as set out in Circulars or Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) relates to the versions which were extant at the close of the inquiry. All the evidence to the inquiry followed that principle. However, since then, a new PPG12 (Development Plans) and new PPG3 (Housing) have been issued. Importantly, the latter guidance introduces a new approach to planning for housing which will for most authorities mean that development plans will require an early review in respect of housing. As I read the guidance, it makes no provision for transitional arrangements. This clearly places Charnwood in a potentially difficult position, having regard to the stage its Local Plan has reached. In this respect I am mindful that, having regard to paragraph 6.32 of the new PPG12, the Plan has not yet gone through the modification procedure which could enable the Council with some confidence to adopt the Plan and then to start its early review.
11. Against this background, the Council has a difficult course to steer. Even so, in terms of the new PPG3, it can be argued that the Plan already embraces aspects of the guidance. For example, it has had regard to the potential for vacant and derelict land and buildings to meet housing land requirements, reflected during the inquiry through the Housing Round Table session and through the consideration given in evidence to national advice in Planning for the Communities of the Future. In a number of respects, the Plan can be seen as anticipating the sequential tests in PPG3, including the emphasis on sustainable patterns of development.
12. However, even if that degree of compliance with the PPG is accepted, I recognise that it can be argued that very few housing sites as currently proposed in the Plan would achieve the net density standards envisaged in the guidance. Having said that, having regard to the scope of the evidence I heard and the national and strategic guidance from which it was derived, I consider that it would be inappropriate at this stage for me to try to address new housing and plan related issues. They would be both difficult to reconcile and might not accord readily with the need for fairness to be shown to all those parties who contributed to the inquiry process.
13. Having in mind the now relatively short timescale to the end of the Plan period and notwithstanding the advice in PPG12 concerning the assimilation of late information the Council may conclude that its best course of action would be to seek to progress the Local Plan to an early adoption. An alternative option would be to try to address the effects of PPG3 at modification stage. These are matters for the Council to consider.
14. I attach to my report a full list of the following appendices:
  - (i) List of Inquiry Appearances
  - (ii) List of Inquiry Documents (including a list of Core Documents).
  - (iii) List of Objections to the Plan
  - (iv) List of Objections to the Proposed Changes
  - (v) List of Withdrawn Objections
  - (vi) List of Conditionally Withdrawn Objections

The Council kindly produced these appendices for me.

15. For members of the public and for the Council's assistance, I have produced a schedule of all my recommendations, which is submitted as a separate document from the report. The schedule is attached to this letter.

16. I wish to express my gratitude to all participants for their cooperation in ensuring the efficient running of the Inquiry. Bearing in mind the unusually high number of objections (the highest number I believe ever recorded by any Council in relation to a Local Plan in England) it is surprising that the Council's planners were not overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of the process. In my view they have coped remarkably well with apparently limited resources. Finally, I must thank the Council for providing me with an outstandingly efficient Programme Officer. Without Pat Chamberlain's unflagging drive and good humour all participants, myself and Stuart Bould included, would have found the Inquiry an even more arduous task.

Yours faithfully

Harold Stephens  
Inspector

***BOROUGH OF CHARNWOOD LOCAL PLAN  
GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE INSPECTORS'  
REPORT***

AAA	Archaeological Alert Areas (EV2)
ALS	Area of Local Separation
APAC	Area of Particularly Attractive Countryside
ASMR	Archaeological Sites and Monuments Record (EV2)
ALLV	Area of Local Landscape Value
BAD	Birstall Against Development
BPC	Birstall Parish Council
CALTRANS	Central Leicestershire Strategic Transport Study
CD	Core Document
City Council	Leicester City Council
CLPATS	Central Leicestershire Package Area Transport Strategy
CPO	Compulsory Purchase Order
CPRE	Council for the Protection of Rural England
DoT	Department of Transport (now DETR – Department of Transport, Environment and the Regions)
DRLSP	Draft Review of the Leicestershire Structure Plan
DSSC	Development Site Selection Criteria
EA	Environment Agency
EWE	Epinal Way Extension
FPC	Further Proposed Change
GDO	General Development Order
GO-EM	Government Office for the East Midlands
GPDO	General Permitted Development Order 1995
HBF	House Builders Federation
HRT	Housing Round Table session
HQES	High Quality Employment Site
LCC	Leicestershire County Council
LP	Local Plan
LSP	Leicestershire Structure Plan (including the Explanatory Memorandum)
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
NNR	National Nature Reserves
PC	Proposed Change
PCF	Planning for the Communities of the Future
PEA	Primary Employment Area
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
RIGS	Regionally Importantly Geological Sites (EV27)

RJ	Reasoned Justification
RPG	Regional Policy Guidance
SIMDO	Sustainability and Impact of Major Development Options
SPG	Supplementary Planning Guidance
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SVPS	Soar Valley Preservation Society
The Act	Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended
The Council	Charnwood Borough Council
TIA	Traffic Impact Assessment
TPO	Tree Preservation Order
TPP	Transport Policies and Programmes
Use Classes Order	Town & Country Planning (Use Classes Order) 1987 and subsequent amendments
WPM	Wanlip Parish Meeting