

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council - Replacement LDP Examination in Public Opening Statement

My name is John Raine, Group Leader for the Council's Planning Policy team that is responsible for preparing and reviewing the Local Development Plan.

I will be accompanied at hearing sessions by my colleagues Craig Watkins, Natasha Lade, David James as necessary. In addition, specialist advisors may also sit alongside the Council to answer any technical questions.

The Council's existing adopted Local Development Plan, covering the period 2006 – 2021, was adopted on 25th May 2011. The existing plan has been subject to annual monitoring that assesses the extent to which the Plan's strategy and policies have been delivered.

In accordance with the LDP Regulations, a review of the adopted LDP commenced on 25th May 2015, four years following its adoption. A "Review Report" was then produced that considered the monitoring data collected and extent of changes required to the adopted LDP.

Whilst the LDP has been successful in a number of key areas, certain aspects of the Plan were identified as not progressing towards their originally stated objectives. In summary this included:

- The supply of housing land;
- The number of dwellings being built, particularly general market dwellings;
- The amount of new employment floorspace being built;
- The percentage of LDP land allocations permitted and delivered; and
- The vacancy rate of retail premises in Merthyr Tydfil Town Centre.

One of the key matters identified was that allocations were not coming forward at the rate originally anticipated under the "Enhanced Growth Strategy" of the existing LDP (to deliver 253 dwellings per year).

In response, the Council has considered a range of growth and spatial strategy options. Three growth options were shortlisted for detailed consideration – a high growth option (or continuation of existing growth strategy), a mid-growth option (for sustainable population growth – the preferred strategy) and a low growth option (based on principal population projections).

Three spatial strategy options were considered based on the range of candidate sites promoted – an urban extension to Merthyr Tydfil and smaller sites option, a dispersal of small sites option and the Hoover Strategic Regeneration Area and smaller sites option - the preferred strategy.

The Replacement LDP has been informed by the development of local Wellbeing Strategies and a review of local, regional and national plans, policies and programmes. The Replacement LDP has also been informed by preparation of an up-to-date evidence base and a review of the other topic areas identified in the review report in light of that evidence.

The Council considers that the strategy being proposed in the Replacement LDP is the most appropriate option as it provides for the realistic and sustainable growth of the County Borough over

the plan period to 2031. In this respect, the Council considers the Plan balances the level of growth with the need to protect the natural and historic environment assets of the County Borough.

The Strategy proposed aims to take advantage of the positive developments that have taken place in the County Borough over the past ten to fifteen years, and capitalises on the opportunity to redevelop the former Hoover Factory site into new community with excellent connectivity to the wider Capital City Region.

Preparation of the Replacement LDP has been informed through early stakeholder engagement that has taken place at the pre deposit stages through the use of wellbeing strategy workshops and LDP working groups. Formal public consultation has also been undertaken at the Preferred Strategy, Deposit Plan and Submission stages in line with the approved LDP Delivery Agreement.

Finally, the Council has prepared statements for each hearing session that responds to the matters raised by the Inspector.

Where appropriate these summarise the justification and supporting evidence that demonstrate the Replacement LDP satisfies the Tests of Soundness. Where considered necessary "Proposed Matters Arising Changes" have been suggested by the Council in order to address any soundness issues, for example, changes in national policy since submission of the Plan.