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Dear Sir

**North Somerset Core Strategy
Examination of remitted policies
Inspector's Report in respect of Policy CS13: Housing requirement**

We have now received the Planning Inspector's report on the examination into policy CS13 of the North Somerset Core Strategy.

I have been asked to formally write to request that the Secretary of State uses his powers under section 21 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to intervene in the North Somerset Core Strategy examination of remitted policies to reconsider the Inspector's reasoning and conclusions in respect of Policy CS13 as set out in the Inspector's Report dated 11 March 2015. Specifically, we formally request that you review the Inspector's conclusions on the methodology for handling the backlog of housing.

As you will be aware, the Council adopted the Core Strategy in April 2012 but following a legal challenge, Policy CS13 was found to be unlawful on the grounds that the Inspector had failed to give adequate and intelligible reasons for his conclusion that the housing requirement of 14,000 dwellings made sufficient allowance for latent demand (ie demand unrelated to the creation of new jobs) and the policy was remitted back to the Planning Inspectorate for re-examination in March 2013. As the Judge concluded that the re-examination of CS13 may have implications for other policies, eight other policies were also remitted although these could still be accorded appropriate weight in decision making.

The Inspector appointed to undertake the examination of remitted policies employed a two stage process; commencing with an assessment of the housing requirement (CS13) followed by a consideration of whether this had any implications for the other remitted policies. The Inspector has now reported on the first stage of the process – the consideration of Policy CS13.



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The High Court judgment resulted in the Council, through no fault of its own, being left with a partially adopted plan. While the housing requirement and spatial distribution policies were remitted, other policies such as employment, the employment-led approach and affordable housing remain extant and adopted. In addition, the subsequent publication of the NPPF now meant that the housing requirement was being assessed in relation to a different policy context to the original plan.

The Council accepts that over time the policy context will change and that the NPPF now provides the starting point for the re-examination of CS13. Furthermore, the Council accepts that the housing requirement will need to be reviewed in 2018 to take account of the implications arising from the new SHMA for the housing market area and the proposed strategic development plan for the West of England (the Joint Strategic Planning Strategy).

The Council's concerns with the Inspector's Report primarily relate to two key areas; the pressure placed on the authority to increase the housing target to an unsustainable level, and the failure to enable the authority to address housing backlog over the remaining plan period as opposed to within the first five years.

Housing requirement

In order to ensure that the re-examination of the remitted policies did not result in the whole of the Core Strategy being found unsound, the Council has been challenged by the Inspector to increase the overall requirement. On the basis of new demographic forecasting by the Council's consultants (Edge Analytics) a revised figure of 17,130 dwellings was proposed by the Council. The Inspector subsequently indicated that the housing need should be in excess of 20,200 dwellings and include an additional element to reflect the employment-led objective. This resulted in the proposed target of 20,985 dwellings, a 50% increase over and above the original 14,000 dwellings.

The proposed increase in the housing number is challenging to deliver and will lead to unsustainable development pressures, including in the Green Belt.

As part of the plan making process the government approach is clear that the proposed housing target needs to be tested to establish whether there are environmental or policy constraints such as Green Belt which will impact on the overall final housing requirement. The North Somerset position is complicated as this relates to remitted policies, but the principle remains the same. North Somerset is a highly constrained area particularly in relation to Green Belt, AONB and areas susceptible to flooding, as well as other designations.

The Inspector's Report should be clearer that the housing target needs to be assessed in relation to acknowledged constraints in order to determine a realistic, sustainable and deliverable housing requirement.

Housing delivery

The Council provided robust evidence to enable the Inspector to conclude that the delivery of any housing backlog should be spread over the remaining plan period. This related to the fact that a significant proportion of the housing growth is being delivered at the new strategic site at Weston Villages phased over the plan period in step with infrastructure provision (strategic flood management and highways in particular), complies with the extant

employment-led approach to housing growth and the fact that the adopted plan in 2012 was addressing a very different target of 14,000 dwellings.

The South Gloucestershire Core Strategy (adopted December 2013) relates to the same housing market area and had the same issue of a non-NPPF compliant 2009 West of England SHMA. It also has a commitment to plan review in 2018 pending the new SHMA and JSPS process, and similar issues relating to the delivery of strategic sites. That Inspector concluded that South Gloucestershire should address backlog using the Liverpool methodology. It is important that local authorities working together to deliver strategic growth are treated in a consistent manner, but the North Somerset Inspector's Report has failed to provide a consistent approach across the housing market area.

Using the Liverpool methodology and a 5% buffer the Council calculates that it has a maximum 5.0 years supply based on a number of assumptions and if all permitted sites are developed. This equates to an annual five year supply requirement of 1,245 dwellings pa (which will increase each year that this target is not met). Given that over the plan period so far (2006-2014) there has been an average of 884 dwellings constructed each year, this is clearly a challenging position to address. The Council's position on five year supply would of course be rigorously assessed by the development industry at appeal.

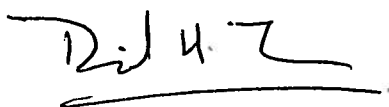
On the other hand, using the Sedgefield approach, the equivalent figure is at best 4.3 years, equivalent to 1,440 pa. This delivery rate equates to the highest level of completions ever recorded in North Somerset (1,474 in 2007/08) and significantly above current levels of housebuilding. We anticipate that the target for April 2015 will be in excess of 1,500 dwellings.

I therefore request that you review the Inspector's Report to make it clear that any housing backlog should be delivered over the remaining plan period (i.e. the Liverpool approach).

Given that the Core Strategy housing requirement is 'interim' pending review by the end of 2018, the Council is of the firm view that a Sedgefield methodology in effect gives a green light to green field village expansion proposals. This is because large scale sustainable strategic development options need to be considered across the housing market area through the duty to co-operate. In any case, even if sustainable sites were identified and allocated, the short term nature of the current Core Strategy means that these would not count towards five year supply. The development industry sees an opportunity to bring forward 'easy' green field village expansions instead of better, more sustainable locations contrary to both the objectives of the plan-led system, and the wishes of local communities.

The Inspector's conclusion on backlog must not result in an unintended consequence of encouraging less sustainable development proposals contrary to the plan-led system. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the contents of this letter with your senior advisors if this would be of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. J. H. Z', with a horizontal line underneath.

David Turner
Director of Development & Environment