

## **Rossendale Council's Opening Statement**

Firstly I would like to welcome the Inspector and all other parties to the Council Chamber in Bacup.

The Draft Rossendale Local Plan is a product of many years hard work by both Officers and the Members of Rossendale Council.

The Council believes that the Plan has been robustly prepared, is founded on firm evidence, and will be found sound.

The Local Plan has been informed throughout its preparation by a long, iterative process of sustainability appraisal that meets the relevant legal requirements. This appraisal has demonstrated how the plan has addressed relevant economic, social and environmental objectives. The purpose of the plan is to set out a positive framework for future development of the Borough over the next 15 years up to 2034.

As the Local Plan evolved and was refined it was subject to Regulation 18 consultation in 2017 and Regulation 19 consultation in 2018. We also undertook a number of public engagement sessions in facilitated workshops during both rounds of consultation. Key issues discussed at those workshops were the amount & distribution of development across the Borough.

Nearly 3,900 representations were made through the process. Each of which has been considered by the Council.

We have worked closely with our partner councils across the region, including Lancashire County Council & also with other bodies, including Natural England and the Environment Agency. It is pleasing to note that none of these bodies has any fundamental concerns about the Plan.

Rossendale has its own distinctive geography, characterised by its valley location and attractive countryside that presents particular challenges and opportunities. It is a relatively small borough with a population of a little over 70,000 people.

The physical character of the borough has its origins in small settlements being developed in the valley bottoms in close proximity to watercourses, which has in turn, increased the propensity of flood risk to homes & businesses and significant parts of the district suffered such problems during the Boxing Day floods of 2015.

Over time, Rossendale has experienced a decline in its traditional industries and the wages on offer locally are low compared to the national average & those to be found in nearby Manchester. This disparity of opportunity and wealth, relative to the Greater Manchester conurbation and the north west of England as a whole, has led to high levels of out-commuting from the Borough.

The west of the Borough is generally more prosperous, having reasonably good transport links to the remainder of Lancashire, Manchester and beyond. The east is characterised by a greater preponderance of smaller settlements, steep valleys & moorlands. It is generally less accessible by road and other forms of transport. It is also less affluent, and is subject to a range of other constraints, notably the tightly drawn Green Belt.

The main transportation routes are the A56 corridor on a north-south axis and the A681 which crosses the borough from west to east. Rossendale is the only Borough in Lancashire

without a railway service. Therefore there is a reliance on both the private car and also buses, as the latter are the only form of public transport.

These are the challenges that we have sought to tackle and these & many other considerations, have influenced the scale and distribution of development.

So, at its core, what does the plan propose?

The Plan contains both strategic and non-strategic policies. Strategically, the Spatial Strategy seeks to focus growth and investment in key service centres, on major sites, and well located brownfield sites, whilst protecting landscape, current built character and rural areas. The Council aims to deliver over 3,000 dwellings & provide for 27 hectares of employment land through the Local Plan. We have tried to strike a balance regarding the distribution of housing & employment land between different locations, in order that all parts of Rossendale may benefit from growth. The Plan seeks to make the best use of the most accessible, sustainable places including brownfield sites and also to minimise the incursion into the Green Belt. It also attempts in particular to avoid flood risk and responds to serious constraints on the viability of development in certain parts of the Borough.

The Local Plan is a positive vision of the future, one which will drive growth and prosperity, providing enough homes for local people, especially affordable housing, and jobs to go with them, whilst protecting Rosendale's striking and rich natural environment.

There are parties who consider we should have planned for more development and other parties that argue we are proposing too much development. Ultimately the Council has had to reach its own judgements about the scale & distribution of development based on the evidence before us. This will be discussed in detail during the Hearings; however, I will say at this stage that the requirement to demonstrate exceptional circumstances in order to justify the release of land from the Green Belt has been foremost in our minds.

Rosendale is a place of enterprise and talent. Accordingly, the Local Plan is facilitating the creation of modern, fit-for-purpose employment space, supported by enhanced infrastructure. We have continued to develop our narrative around infrastructure through the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which was published in 2018 and updated in 2019.

Drawing this statement to a conclusion, I have no doubt that there will be a robust discussion as we move through the various hearing sessions; however, the Council is clear that there has been effective and on-going joint working between strategic policy-making authorities and relevant bodies; the strategy has been positively prepared and is justified; and the policies are underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence and are consistent with relevant national policy.

The Council therefore looks forward to the adoption of its Local Plan and in future, implementing its policies and allocations.