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Shaun Field
Chief Executive
Bedford Borough Council
Town Hall
St Paul's Square
Bedford
MK40 1SJ

Your Ref:

Our Ref: PINS/W0205/429/5

Date: 16 July 2008

Dear Mr Field,

Bedford Borough Council Town Centre Area Action Plan Development Plan Document

1 As you know, I have been appointed by the Secretary of State to carry out an independent examination of Bedford Borough Council's Town Centre Area Action Plan Development Plan Document, which was submitted to the Secretary of State on 4 July 2006, pursuant to section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the 2004 Act).

2 I held a Pre Examination Meeting on 22 June 2007 to discuss the procedural and administrative arrangements for the hearing sessions of the Examination of both the Council's Core Strategy and Rural Issues Plan and the Town Centre Area Action Plan. I conducted the Examination of the Area Action Plan by way of written exchange and by a series of hearings. Agendas for the hearing sessions were distributed by the Programme Officer on 29 January 2008. The hearing sessions were held at the Council's offices at the Town Hall, St Paul's Square, Bedford MK40 1SJ on 22, 23 and 24 April 2008.

3 The purpose of the independent examination is set out in section 20(5) of the 2004 Act. This falls into two parts: firstly, whether the submitted DPD has been prepared in accordance with certain statutory requirements under s19 & s24(1) of the 2004 Act and the associated regulations (*The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004; SI.2004 No. 2204*) [CD N2]; and secondly, whether the DPD is sound. In making an assessment of soundness, I have focused on the nine tests set out in paragraph 4.24 of Planning Policy Statement (PPS)12 *Local Development Frameworks* [CD N20]. I have also used the Planning Inspectorate's *Guide to the Process of Assessing the Soundness of Development Plan Documents* (PINS; December 2005) as the framework for assessing the soundness of the Core Strategy.

4 With this letter is a copy of my report on the submitted Area Action Plan



which contains my recommendations and the reasons for them as required by section 20(7) of the 2004 Act. In coming to my conclusions on the soundness of the Area Action Plan, I have considered all the representations made during the 6-week period following submission, in accordance with Regulation 29 of the 2004 Regulations, together with representations made on post-submission amendments which were proposed by your Council. These informed the identification of the Matters & Issues for Examination. During the course of the Examination and as a result of the discussions at the hearing sessions, the Council suggested a number of further minor changes to the text of the submitted Area Action Plan. I have also considered these proposed changes as part of my assessment of the soundness of the Area Action Plan. I have taken account of the subsequent written statements and oral contributions made during the course of the Examination. However, my primary task is to consider whether the document is sound. It is not a requirement of the 2004 Act that I consider or report on "objections", and consequently, my report does not list individual representations or respond to all the points made.

5 In reaching my conclusion on the submitted document I have found it necessary to recommend a number of changes. Some of the changes to which I refer were proposed by your Council whilst others arose from discussions during the Hearing sessions of the Examination. You are, of course, aware that national guidance states that changes to a document should not be made prior to the Examination. However, I am satisfied that the changes which I recommend are either relatively minor, bring the DPD's provisions up-to-date, give greater clarity to the manner in which the DPD will be operated or provide greater certainty as to the way in which the planning process for the town centre will move forward. In these circumstances, my overall conclusion is that, with the amendments recommended in my report, the Town Centre Area Action Plan satisfies the requirements of s20(5)(a) & (b) of the 2004 Act and the associated Regulations. It satisfies the tests of soundness set out in PPS12 and is, therefore, **sound**.

6 During the Examination, I was assisted by my Programme Officer, Mrs Yvonne Parker, whom I thank for her hard work and patience which ensured that the Examination process, particularly the hearing sessions, ran smoothly. All the statements, representations, documents and other material submitted during the course of the Examination, including at the hearing sessions, are contained in the Examination library. These include the Core Documents, which contain the Council's "core evidence base" for the Area Action Plan.

7 I also wish to express my thanks to Mr Bird, Mr Bailey and the Council's officer team and all those attending the hearing sessions for the pragmatic and professional manner they adopted during the hearings and throughout the Examination. I hope that my conclusions and recommendations in the accompanying report will enable the Council to adopt the Area Action Plan in an efficient manner.

Yours sincerely

Roland Punshon

Inspector