

CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

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date: 15th October 2012
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Dear Mr Hirst

Examination of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy

Further to your submission of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD), I have now reviewed the document and much of the supporting material. From this, and without prejudice to the progress and outcome of the examination, I have a number of questions, comments and concerns that I wish to raise at this stage.

My main initial misgiving is that the Core Strategy may not go sufficiently far in terms of setting a robust framework for the delivery of new housing, economic and retail development, and renewable and low carbon energy development in the borough. I provide below a general overview of my reservations. Enclosed with this letter is a note which gives greater detail.

A significant portion of the evidence base is not particularly recent, particularly the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (2008), the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2009), and the Employment Land and Retail Study (2008). While I note that more recent reports effectively update some elements of these, it appears that these updates are not fully comprehensive. Consequently, I am concerned that some key aspects of the plan are based on evidence which may now prove unreliable.

The plan's spatial approach to the delivery of new housing and economic development is not sufficiently clear. It is, at best, difficult to ascertain where and when the level of residential and economic development is planned to be delivered, and by what means. That the Core Strategy does not appear to comprehensively set out the settlements anticipated to receive some level of growth, and those intended to receive little or no growth, hinders the attempt to understand the strategy. The degree to which viability considerations have been addressed is also unclear and, on the face of it, may not be adequately robust. These are critical issues, and it is imperative that the Core Strategy provides a strong steer to guide the preparation of the Housing and Economic Development DPD. Overall, I am concerned that the Core Strategy may not provide sufficient clarity for it to be effective and proactive in addressing the borough's housing and business needs.

A rather passive approach appears to have been taken in relation to retail development and renewable and low carbon energy development. There is a risk that the Core Strategy fails to satisfactorily address the problems identified in the evidence base in relation to the borough's town centres, particularly Clitheroe. It is also possible that it

does not provide the positive strategy expected to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources.

You will appreciate that the initial concerns I have raised relate to fundamental matters at the heart of the plan. It is because of this, and with the aim of avoiding any unnecessary expense in mind, that I have written to draw your attention to these issues now. I should point out that these do not necessarily represent the only concerns that I may identify, and I reserve my position for the time being.

I would now ask you to give full consideration to the content of this letter and enclosed note. To progress matters expediently, I would be grateful if you would provide a response, including any suggestions you may have regarding the way forward, at the earliest opportunity or within two weeks of the date of this letter. If a longer period is likely to be necessary, please do not hesitate to contact me via my Programme Officer.

I trust that you find this letter to be helpful. I have written it in the spirit of assistance and to ensure that the examination is as efficient as possible.

Yours sincerely

Simon Berkeley

Inspector

Colin Hirst
Head of Regeneration and Housing
Ribble Valley Borough Council

By email only