

## SPELTHORNE LOCAL PLAN

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### OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF SPELTHORNE BOROUGH COUNCIL

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1. Sir, can I first add my own welcome to that of Mr Mouawad, to you and the other attendees, to the opening of the examination hearings into the Local Plan.
2. Of course, a deal of work has already gone on during the written part of the examination. The Council hopes that the answers contained in its hearing statements have assisted to narrow a number of the issues the examination is tasked with considering. The Council looks forward to continuing to assist your examination through the hearing sessions and afterwards.
3. A Spatial Portrait of Spelthorne is set out in Appendix A to the Local Plan. Spelthorne had a population of 99,000 (now 103,000 – census) and is home to over 7,500 businesses. It covers approximately 19.75 sq miles. Spelthorne is located where the continuous built-up area of London gives way to a more dispersed pattern of urban areas and villages. It benefits from good transport links to both London and the South East. The urban area of the Borough occupies 35% of the land. The balance of 65% is designated as Green Belt. This Green Belt land has an important strategy role in containing the outward spread of the capital and protecting the countryside from encroachment, as well as separating some of the existing settlements. Within the Green Belt are five major water supply reservoirs and a water treatment works at Ashford Common. Spelthorne adjoins the River Thames and is low lying. Spelthorne contains areas of national and international significance for nature conservation. Most of its major reservoirs form part of the South West London Waterbodies SPA, in recognition of their international significance as a habitat for two particular species of birds. In addition, Staines Moor forms a substantial SSSI.

4. Development plan preparation in such a constrained area is challenging. The Council has adopted an overarching strategy which meets this challenge, addressing the issues both general and particular that are identified in the Spatial Portrait. Following the various public consultations which have taken place since 2018, and which led to this stage, the strategy has been formed by listening to the local community. It is based on choice and balance: The choice to decide where development should take place, and the balance between meeting need against the adverse impacts of doing so. The Government intends that the planning system should be plan led. Having an up-to-date, evidence based Local Plan allows the Borough to take a proactive approach to planning for and managing growth in a way that most benefits its present and future residents, while protecting what is most important.
  
5. The overarching strategy of the Council seeks to meet its identified development needs in full, in a way consistent with Government guidance, whilst protecting strategically important Green Belt. To optimise density of new building in developed areas where character allows, while reducing some building heights and densities in the most sensitive areas of Staines. It will preserve publicly accessible open spaces in the urban area. Additional provision will be made for family homes and affordable housing, with appropriate levels of community facilities and other infrastructure. Lastly, but no less importantly, the Local Plan will respond to the climate emergency.
  
6. The Local Plan contains a suite of 24 policies to effectively bring forward and deliver those benefits. The policies include Strategic Policies setting out the needs of the Borough; Place Shaping Policies to ensure high standards of design in development and the protection of heritage assets; Spatial Policies to guide development in the settlements, protect the Green Belt, support the Colne Valley Regional Park; and to recognise the importance and opportunities provided by the River Thames.

7. Specific Housing Policies will provide a wide choice of homes to address a range of accommodation needs, including provision of Affordable Housing, Accessible Homes and Specialist Accommodation, as well as meeting the needs of the travelling community.
8. Specific Environmental Policies will make provision for high standards of Green Infrastructure and, in appropriate locations, Blue Infrastructure; they will enhance biodiversity, improving the natural environment of the Borough; managing flood risk, and supporting strategic flood relief measures including the River Thames Scheme; they will protect, maintain and enhance existing open spaces, securing appropriate on-site open space provision within new developments. In doing so, the Local Plan will provide high levels of protection to the Local Green Spaces it designates those spaces, having been identified following consultation with the community.
9. Policies supporting economic growth will maintain and intensify the use of the Borough's employment floorspace offer, protecting in particular the five designated Strategic Employment Areas. Local centres and shopping parades will be protected and supported, recognising their value to the communities they serve. The policies of the plan make provision for appropriate levels of infrastructure to support new development, and ensure that opportunities to facilitate sustainable and active modes of travel will be taken up.
10. Heathrow Airport lies immediately north of the Borough. Some 7% of Spelthorne's population (3,525 people) work at the airport. A concentration of airport supporting facilities is located in the north of the Borough. However, the current position in relation to expansion of the airport is uncertain. In those circumstances Policy SP7 provides a framework for supporting future expansion of the airport, if done in a sustainable and integrated way in accordance with the goals set out in that policy, in recognition of the potential economic benefits and

opportunities that an expanded airport could bring to Spelthorne, the wider South East, and the UK as a whole.

11. To take forward the policies of the Local Plan, Chapter 10 makes some 55 specific and detailed allocations of land to address the identified needs arising to 2037.
12. In doing all this the Local Plan is supported by a proportionate evidence base, and represents an appropriate strategy for the way forward to 2037.
13. Drawing these threads together, the Council considers that the submitted Plan is legally compliant and sound. It has struck an appropriate balance, in seeking to proactively and positively resolve the inevitable tensions in planning considerations that arise in highly constrained Boroughs. The Council commends the Plan to the Inspector, but welcomes any guidance in relation to modifications that he considers necessary in order for the Local Plan to be found sound, and capable of adoption.

WAYNE BEGLAN

CORNERSTONE BARRISTERS