

Appendix A – Background information on the Local Plan

- 1.1 The Spelthorne Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State on 25 November 2022 for Examination, following over five years of preparation and public consultation. An inspector was appointed, Mr Jameson Bridgwater, who began examination of the Plan in January 2023. Hearing dates were scheduled over three weeks in May and June 2023. It should be noted that the Inspector is only considering the technical soundness of the Plan as submitted. 'All-out' local elections were held on 4 May 2023, which resulted in 22 out of 39 new councillors being elected. The first week of Local Plan hearings took place, commencing on 23 May and covering issues such as the overall strategy, legal compliance and the duty to cooperate. Before the next hearings could take place, an Extraordinary Council meeting was called on 6 June 2023 to consider the motion referred to above, which sought a pause to the remainder of the hearings. This then resulted in a review of the Council's decision as to whether Spelthorne's strategy is right for the Borough and if it delivers positive change for place.
- 1.2 The motion was agreed, and the Chief Executive wrote to the Inspector, Mr Bridgwater, the following day to formally request the pause in line with the motion. Mr Bridgwater replied on 8 June to agree, under the specific circumstances, to the pause in the hearings. A training schedule was proposed and agreed by the Group Leaders (minus the Conservatives) to take place in July. Alongside the training, Members of the Corporate Policy & Resources Committee agreed on 26 June 2023 to appoint a 'critical friend' to carry out an external review of the Local Plan. The full specification of the work was then agreed by Council on 19 July and Catriona Riddell Associates (CRA) were appointed. On conclusion of the training and review, an extraordinary Council meeting took place on 14 September 2023 as the three-month pause had come to an end and a decision was required for the future direction of the Local Plan. The options for consideration were:
1. Continue with the plan as drafted but introduce robust risk management measures to help address some of key risks identified in the review, or
 2. Seek a further pause in the Examination timetable until the proposed changes to the NPPF have been published (expected in the Autumn) before agreeing next steps, or
 3. Withdraw the Local Plan from examination and prepare a new Local Plan.

- 1.3 On the day of the meeting, a letter was received from the Housing and Planning Minister to direct the Council that it could not withdraw the Local Plan from Examination. This meant Option 3 was no longer available to Members and they could only decide on Options 1 or 2. Option 2 was amended by a Motion and subsequently agreed as follows:

Extend the pause in the Examination timetable until the proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework have been published (expected in the autumn) before determining the next steps and take immediate legal advice to confirm the validity of the minister's directive.

- 1.4 The Inspector agreed to this further pause until publication of the revised NPPF. It was subsequently published on 19 December 2023. In the meantime, the Council received legal advice on the validity of the Minister's directive and decided not pursue further action to challenge the decision and instead wrote to the Minister to seek a meeting which has so far been declined. All correspondence between the Council, the Inspector and the Minister can be found on the Examination website: News and Updates - Spelthorne Takes Shape (spelthornelocalplan.info)