



Inspector Mike Fox
c/o Local Plan Programme Officer
Basingstoke and Deane District Council
Civic Offices
London Road
Basingstoke RG21 4AH

Date: 27th November 2014
Ref: 29919/0300

Dear Sir

Examination of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan 2011 – 2029: Inspector's Initial Concerns

We take this opportunity to write to you in connection with your initial concerns about the soundness of the submitted Local Plan, in particular those relating to the Plan's provisions in respect of Basing View. As Development Partners to Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council for the regeneration of Basing View, we felt it would be appropriate to express our views on this matter in the hope that these will assist in your deliberations.

In December 2012, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (as principal landowner) and Muse Developments Limited entered into a formal Partnership Development Agreement, for a period of 15 years, to promote the regeneration of Basing View and attract new investment to the area.

The Development Partnership was formed with the overriding purpose of delivering the Council's regeneration objectives for Basing View, primarily to re-establish Basing View as the Borough's premier business location. The following main Partnership objectives have been identified to achieve this:

- i) stimulate investment and development activity
- ii) realise the advantages of Basing View and of Basingstoke as a forward thinking and attractive commercial location, to achieve a step change in demand
- iii) enhance the quality of the public realm, urban design and building stock

As the Inspector will ascertain from these objectives, the emphasis of the Partnership is on delivery, and with this in mind, Muse Developments is particularly keen to ensure that



in terms of detail and presentation (the “what”, “where” and “when”), the policy framework for Basing View in the draft Local Plan is justified by the evidence and effectiveness in delivering the Partnership’s regeneration objectives.

As Development Partner to the Council, the role of Muse Developments is to bring market knowledge and awareness and development expertise to the work of the Partnership to assist in the delivery of the Partnership’s objectives for Basing View. During the last two years, it has worked with the Council and key stakeholders to achieve a step change in the perception of Basing View by preparing a number of inter-connected frameworks and strategies to achieve the Partnership’s regeneration objectives, including:

- The Basing View Masterplan Framework
- Public Realm Strategy
- Transport Strategy and Framework Travel Plan
- Sustainability Strategy
- Branding Strategy
- Marketing Strategy
- Estate Management Strategy

Preparation of these frameworks and strategies has been founded upon a comprehensive analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats which provide the context for regeneration and this analysis has given Muse Developments considerable insight into the challenges which the Partnership faces in delivering its regeneration objectives.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the Partnership has made considerable progress “on the ground” during its short existence and has scored some notable achievements. Some of these are cited below.

The experience of preparing a delivery framework and of delivering development projects on the ground has taught Muse Developments that one of the main obstacles to successful delivery is the current, inflexible policy framework for Basing View comprising the saved employment policies of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2006), which seek to safeguard employment land and only allow non-employment uses exceptionally and where justified. Whilst it is understood that there is a need to have in place Local Plan policy to safeguard Basing View ‘s primary, strategic employment role, the saved policies are unduly rigid and in our view have played a major part in deterring necessary investment and the introduction of complementary uses essential to the revitalisation of the area.



Based on this experience, we consider that the formulation of the right Local Plan policies for Basing View is critical to the achievement of land use and regeneration objectives and should take account of the following:

1. The Local Plan has a 20 year life span, and the future of Basing View will evolve over that timeframe. Market conditions have and will continue to change and so the policy framework for Basing View has to retain a level of flexibility in order to react to changing conditions and be responsive to development opportunities as they arise.
2. Now and for the foreseeable future, market conditions make some uses, such as offices, extremely challenging to deliver. If the Local Plan framework is too rigid, as is currently the case, this will quell the propensity to deliver other uses, which evidence and experience suggest will act as a catalyst to improving the viability of offices. For example, the recent grant of planning permission of the John Lewis at Home / Waitrose store was made extremely difficult by the inflexibility of the saved employment policies, since it was necessary first to persuade the operator that these policies could be overcome and second to provide the necessary planning justification to allow an exemption to policy to be made.
3. The delivery of this store will undoubtedly raise the profile of Basing View and will significantly improve levels of activity, amenity and appearance, in an area which has suffered considerable decline owing to lack of investment, disparate ownership and short term asset management decisions. Our market research has revealed that office occupiers do like Basing View as a location, but dislike the current environment, especially the lack of on-site amenity. The delivery of the John Lewis at Home / Waitrose store has certainly helped to remedy the current perception, but this is only a beginning and it is our belief that the delivery of a range of complementary uses will provide office occupiers with an amenity and environment that meets modern expectations.
4. We are aware of a number of examples, whereby the restrictive nature of the saved employment policies has deterred future occupiers and investors and therefore a cycle of underinvestment and short term asset management decisions continues. Muse has spent the last 18 months working alongside BDBC to ensure that this cycle is broken and already changes are being made which will bring about this long term improvement.
5. The construction of the JLP / Waitrose store is due for completion at the end of next year and provides for improvements to the Eastrop roundabout and pedestrian access to the town centre from Basing View, which will commence next year. Network Rail has commenced its £50M training and operations centre project on the nearby Gresley Road triangle site which will include a new



footbridge over the railway line (now completed) linking it with the rest of Basing View and the wider area. Eni is currently investing in the refurbishment of Eni (formerly Snamprogetti) House with a view to recruiting new staff. A bespoke marketing suite, which we hope will act as a management suite in the future will be ready for use by the end of this year, providing existing and prospective occupiers a bespoke and interactive experience and thus allowing them to fully understand the plans for Basing View, Basingstoke as a whole and how this could work for their business.

6. This initial Partnership success, together with the emergence of a more flexible policy framework for Basing View, has given the Council the encouragement necessary to implement over £3M of public realm improvements at Basing View and, in combination, these indicate that investment in Basing View is gathering some momentum which requires policy flexibility to be maintained.
7. We are firmly of the opinion that a mix of uses will breathe new life into Basing View. In order to flourish, we are keen for Basing View to recapture a sense of place that is currently lacking, particularly post 5pm and at weekends. The mix of uses, in addition to public realm improvements, should therefore be governed by a set of broad land use principles, yet retain flexibility on the type and quantum of use. This ensures that opportunities such as the JLP / Waitrose store are not missed and stops Basing View from being stifled by stringent parameters that inhibit development and change.

For all these reasons, it would be inappropriate in our view for the emerging policies to include a level of detail and prescription regarding the location and amount of land uses which may impede, rather than encourage, such uses to come forward. It may however be helpful to include an indication of the approach to different parts of the wider site in terms of land use through the inclusion of an illustrative map in the explanatory text of the Local Plan itself.

Taking all of these factors into account, Muse Developments considers that a flexible approach to policy formulation is required which establishes broad land use principles in terms of the balance of uses which affirms the primary employment role of Basing View and sets out a permissive / flexible framework to allow the introduction of other specified uses which complement Basing View's combined role as a strategic employment location and extension to the town centre. In these regards, it is our view that the emerging Local Plan policies as currently drafted (Policy SS8, in combination with Policies EP1, EP2 and EP3) represent an appropriate policy framework which is justified by evidence and will be effective in delivering the land use and regeneration objectives for the area.



In conclusion, Muse Developments is committed to achieving the regeneration of Basing View, including long term employment growth, and is keen to ensure that the emerging Local Plan framework for Basing View is tailored accordingly. In particular, given the Partnership's emphasis on delivery, that it meets the NPPF tests of soundness in terms of being justified and effective. Basing View is not a "blank canvass" like a greenfield site, where circumstances are relatively straightforward and unchallenging and a high degree of certainty means that a high level of detail / prescription is merited. Rather, the circumstances surrounding the regeneration of Basing View are complex and uncertain which means that to include a level of policy detail which is not justified and effective is likely to be counter-productive over the long term.

For these reasons, the policy framework set out in the draft Local Plan is supported by us. In particular, we consider that the level of detail contained within the relevant policies (SS8, EP1, EP2 and EP3) is consistent with the requirement for Local Plans set out at Paragraph 157 of the NPPF, to "allocate sites, and provide detail on form, scale, access and quantum of development where appropriate"

We hope that these views will be helpful to you and we enclose a copy of the Development Partner's Business Plan and Marketing Strategy in the hope that these will be of further assistance.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Auger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and the last name "Auger" clearly distinguishable.

Michael Auger
Regional Director

