

Tuesday 18 June 2024

Lewisham Council Opening Statement – Nick Fenwick

Good morning, Inspectors, and participants. As Chief Planner for the authority I welcome you to Catford – and to the start of the examination hearing sessions for the new Lewisham Local Plan. I trust that had a pleasant and safe journey here this morning. I hope that the venue, your breakout room, and the wider facilities here at the Council’s Civic Suite meet your requirements. Should you have any questions or issues relating to the venue please raise them, through Ian Kemp (the Programme Officer) – I would like to think that we could resolve them in a timely manner. My colleagues and I would like to make the next few here as comfortable and productive as possible.

Moving on from the introduction to our new Local Plan provided by Jennifer, our Chief Executive, I would like to share a few thoughts from a more technical point of view.

1. To begin with I’d like to say a little about how we have arrived here today and the engagement and collaborative working – with a wide variety of partners – that has underpinned our journey.

Fundamentally, collaboration has allowed us to build broad support for the new Local Plan. Critically, it has helped us overcome the challenge of selling the message of growth.

Place-making is about delivering successful places that have qualities that will endure. The work extends beyond the statutory requirements of the plan-making process. Over the next few weeks, you’ll hear from my colleagues. You will about how we work with our development industry and infrastructure partners to deliver the growth and investment on the ground – in order to secure and deliver good place-making through the development management process and beyond into physical implementation. You will also hear from our partners, who I hope will paint a positive picture of who we are and how we are positively working together to deliver an **Open Lewisham**.

You will appreciate that such close working isn’t always easy, and that we don’t always agree with each other on all matters of detail (which I am sure you will also hear about) – what I can assure of, is that our new Local Plan is broadly supported in terms of its objectives, spatial strategy, planning policies and site allocations. That has come about through hard work across and outside of the plan-making process; and is exemplified by a collective commitment to secure the best for the Borough. I would like to believe that this is reflected in the submission that you have before you.

I would highlight that there is little in the way fundamental objection, and practically no alternative objection sites. That is an unusual and opportune position for all of those involved in this process.

2. Moving on, I think that it is important to highlight that in submitting the new Local Plan, we have not shirked away from the challenge of accommodating and facilitating the new growth that Lewisham needs. With our colleagues and partners across the Capital and South East London (in particular) we have identified the scale of new growth needed to meet Lewisham’s and the Capitals needs. Importantly, we have looked very carefully to assess and determine how best our new growth can be accommodated. Over the examination will hear about the technical evidence that has informed that process. I think it is important to note that the new

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Local Plan has throughout been informed by appropriate and proportionate technical evidence; and that it is in part that technical evidence that has opened the opportunity for the Borough to accommodate its needs in full – whether that be in relation to delivering genuinely affordable homes, the new housing identified through the London Plan, or the shops and jobs that will be coming to places such as Deptford, New Cross, Lewisham, Catford, Bell Green and Sydenham.

We have not sought to avoid that responsibility – both in terms of our plan-making, but also as I have already mentioned in relation to on-going decision-taking. I can proudly say that we are seeking to meet our responsibilities in full – to do our share in meeting London’s needs and those of the wider nation. I suggest that there are few places in the South East that can justifiably make that claim.

Whilst the Council continues to meet its side of the bargain and maintain a steady supply of deliverable and developable sites through its plan-making and decision-taking – that multitude of site allocations and consents does not always translate into on-the-ground delivery, completions, and sales.

No doubt you will hear some of the reasons that may account for poor delivery on the ground, that is not something I wish to dwell on right here and now. What I do want to clearly say is that we remain committed to delivering the significant boost in housing delivery that we are being told to facilitate; and that over the next few weeks you will hear how we have left no stone unturned in our pursuit of resolving this matter. You will hear how demonstrably challenging real-world conditions are, not just for the Council as the consenting authority but for all of its partners involved in actual delivery. Nevertheless, we remain confident that we have submitted a Plan that continues to be positively prepared in respect of Lewisham’s specific needs.

3. Obviously, all of this new growth cannot be accommodated without a commensurate focus upon infrastructure investment. We understand that our residents and communities will expect us to ensure that the new homes and jobs coming to Lewisham will be matched with a proportionate investment in infrastructure – whether that be in education, health, open space, and transport provision. That is a reasonable expectation. As above, we are working with our partners to ensure that investment in the Borough’s infrastructure networks keeps pace with the delivery of growth. Whilst those processes sit outside of statutory plan-making requirements, we continue to bring them together through our responsibilities as the Community Infrastructure Levy charging and collecting authority, and as the lead preparing the Lewisham Infrastructure Plan.

It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves, at this point, that Lewisham as an urban Inner London borough, is undeniably different from most places in England. We cannot simply plan or deliver growth by master planning for a strategic urban extension; a new school or hospital; or supporting road networks. We literally don’t have space, in the conventional sense, for that sort of development. We really do have to approach plan-making and infrastructure planning in a smarter way. We genuinely have to optimise what we already have available.

That could not be truer than for our transport networks. Lewisham is already a highly accessible place – and that provides a gilt-edged opportunity for place-making. As many of

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you will know from experience, you don't a private motor vehicle to get around the Borough, or indeed to travel beyond its boundary. The new Local Plan seeks to build upon that basis and secure a future where residents and communities can genuinely make the choice to be car free. This will bring so many benefits, not just for physical place-making but also in response to climate change, but in terms of health and well-being; and financially – with the burden of car ownership being lifted. We are working with our partners – the Mayor, Transport for London, and Network Rail – to deliver those choices and opportunities. This is perhaps ultimately exemplified through the Bakerloo Line Extension, an investment of national importance, that will bring travel and economic benefits across the Capital, and critically will also set the Borough up for future plan-making – beyond the life of the new Local Plan. I would like to suggest that is a once in a generation opportunity that should not be missed.

In summary, **I commend the new Local Plan to the Inspectors**, and suggest that this is an opportunity to positively progress plan-making and facilitate decision-taking in a timely manner. By doing so, I hope that we can quickly secure an adopted Plan that gives the us all the confidence to deliver growth and investment on the ground; something that Lewisham and London needs to happen. As I have said that isn't an idle claim but a position that is supported by evidence and through the on-going collaboration with our partners and stakeholders. **We want to get on with it.**

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