

Tuesday 18 June 2024

Lewisham Council Opening Statement – Jennifer Daothong

Good morning, Inspectors, residents, other participants, and officers.

I’m really pleased to be able to wish you all a warm welcome to Catford for the start of our Local Plan hearing sessions on behalf of Lewisham Council.

The opening of the Hearing Sessions signals a key milestone in Lewisham’s plan-making process. When I joined the Council in 2021, we had just finalised work on the new Local Plan’s preparation, under Regulation 18. That feels like it was a long time ago and that a lot has happened to bring us here today. Unlike many other Local Authorities over the past year, we have pressed forward with our Local Plan.

During my time here in Lewisham, I have had the privilege and honour to oversee the further development of the new Local Plan through its subsequent preparation, publication, and submission. As the Inspectors will know, producing a Local Plan is a widely shared endeavour, and in producing this Plan the Council has engaged extensively with:

- local residents, amenity societies, businesses and communities;
- Infrastructure providers, developers and landowners
- Statutory agencies and the Mayor of London

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those in our communities who have participated in helping us to get to this point, and, if I may, in particular our fantastic planning colleagues past and present who have worked tirelessly to produce a new Local Plan that is resoundingly positive in its outlook and the product of deep local engagement.

Throughout, the Council has remained committed to securing a new, ambitious and inclusive Local Plan that delivers for all of its residents and communities. Contained within the Local Plan is a shared blueprint for:

- future opportunities,
- access to homes, jobs, education, open and natural spaces,
- and sustainable travel modes.

It is a statement of ambition that is already beginning to bear fruit, which is clearly evidenced by the positive changes taking place across the Borough.

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The new Local Plan is a key document in the Council’s arsenal being deployed to make Lewisham the place that its residents and communities deserve. Inspectors, I am certain that you will hear more about these achievements over the coming weeks.

We firmly believe what we have is robust and deliverable plan that responds positively in providing:

- new housing (particularly genuinely affordable homes);
- new shops and business opportunities;
- improved public open, green and natural spaces;

It takes ownership of climate change; promotes sustainable travel choices and reduced car usage; secures new buildings and places that are of high quality and reflect our rich heritage.

We are all acutely aware of the legacy our decisions will leave for future generations. New development cannot be easily undone, and place-making over the next fifteen years will need to endure for the next century and beyond.

The decision to submit the new Local Plan was therefore not taken lightly. I believe it particularly noteworthy that the decision to submit was unanimously supported by the Council’s elected Members at Full Council. Our confidence in the new Local Plan sends out a clear message: that Lewisham is ready for good, inclusive growth and successful place-making.

We will work tirelessly with communities, businesses and partners to ensure that our Borough grows and prospers in a sustainable way, that we protect the things that make the Borough so special while helping our communities to flourish. We expect to share responsibility for delivering our vision with partners, and with major investment and support coming from all sectors as we step into our future together.

It is my pleasure to commend our Local Plan to you.

Thank you.