



# Core Strategy 'Partial Early Review'

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### Core Strategy update:

#### 1. *What has the Inspector said about the Core Strategy?*

On 19<sup>th</sup> November the Council received a note from the Inspector setting out his preliminary findings on the Core Strategy. This explained that he did not consider that the Council had (a) identified the full objectively assessed needs for housing in the Borough; and (b) undertaken appropriate analysis to establish whether such a level could be provided, bearing in mind the Government's objective is to 'boost significantly the supply of housing.' The Inspector set out two specific concerns:

- the lack of a robust and comprehensive Green Belt review; and
- the limited emphasis that appears to have been given to the role that neighbouring local planning authorities could play in accommodating some of Dacorum's housing needs.

In the light of these concerns the Inspector suggested a range of options for the Council to consider. These comprised: committing to an early review of the Core Strategy; withdrawing the Core Strategy; or requesting that the Inspector complete the Examination on the basis of the submitted plan.

This latter option brings with it the significant risk that the Core Strategy would not be found 'sound' and therefore unable to be adopted by the Council. The Council has decided to choose the option of an early partial review and will be preparing some text to include within the Core Strategy to refer to this. This new text will be one of a number of 'main modifications' to the plan, which the Council will be consulting on in January 2013.

The Inspector's preliminary findings, and the Council's response, are both available at [www.dacorum.gov.uk/corestrategyexamination](http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/corestrategyexamination)

It is important to note that the Inspector has not told the Council to increase its housing target, or to include any of the additional sites that were being promoted by developers at the hearings. The Inspector also states that '*It may be that the Council would have reached similar conclusions as it has done in relation to the submitted Core Strategy, but without a more thorough analysis I cannot be certain that this would have been the case.*'

#### 2. *What happens next?*

The Council will prepare some additional wording through what is called a 'main modification' to the Core Strategy. This, and other main modifications that the Inspector has advised us to make, will be considered by the Council's independent Sustainability Consultants, before being published for public consultation in January 2013.

This consultation provides an opportunity for the public, developers and other interested parties to comment on the changes being proposed – including the text relating to the early partial review. As part of this consultation we will also take the opportunity to ask for feedback

on some of the smaller changes (called 'minor modifications') that the Council has put forward in order to help improve the plan. Once this consultation has closed, the comments received on the main modifications will be passed to the Planning Inspector.

He will consider these comments before finalising his formal Report on the Core Strategy. If this Report concludes that the main modifications are appropriate, then the Council can amend the Core Strategy to include these changes (and any other minor modifications it wishes to make) and then formally adopt the plan. We hope that this formal adoption will take place in Spring 2013. Once adopted the Core Strategy will form part of the statutory development plan for the area.

### **3. What does an 'early partial review' mean?**

There is no formal definition for the phrase 'early partial review' and the Inspector's preliminary letter does not provide any details. The Council understands it to mean that we will have to begin a review of our Core Strategy earlier than we would otherwise have planned. Technical work to help inform the review will begin in 2013 with the commissioning of a comprehensive review of the Green Belt (see question 6 below). The Core Strategy review will be partial as the Inspector has only raised 'soundness' concerns regarding one part of the strategy i.e. that relating to overall housing numbers.

The scope and broad timescales for the review will be considered further once the current Core Strategy has been adopted. At the very minimum the Council wishes to have the Site Allocations DPD in place before it begins the formal consultation stages. The Site Allocations DPD is the document that will deal with more detailed site matters and formally designate land for housing and other uses. The new timetable will need to be agreed by Councillors and set out in an updated version of the Council's Local Development Scheme. The LDS is the Council's formal 'project plan' for its Local Planning Framework.

#### **Implications of an early partial review:**

### **4. Does this mean that the Council's housing target will go up?**

Not necessarily. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published by central Government requires Councils to "*ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in this Framework.....*" (paragraph 47). The plan review process will therefore include the updating of technical evidence relating to the number of new households expected to form over the new plan period.

Household growth projections have the potential to go both up and down, depending upon trends in migration, birth rates etc. Even if the predicted number of new households increases, it does not mean that our target will need to go up. The NPPF acknowledges that it may be appropriate to restrict the level of development in some areas in recognition of planning designations, such as the Green Belt, and landscape designations, such as the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

If this is the case, then the Council will be expected to have discussed with adjoining Councils to see if they can provide some additional housing in their area(s) that will help meet Dacorum's housing needs. These discussions would take place in the context of the 'Duty to Co-operate' which is set out in the Localism Act. As referred to in response to question 1 above, it is important to note that the Inspector acknowledged that '*It may be that the Council would have reached similar conclusions as it has done in relation to the submitted Core Strategy, but without a more thorough analysis I cannot be certain that this would have been the case.*'

**5. Does this mean that more Green Belt land will be needed for housing?**

Even if the housing target within the new plan increases, it does not necessarily mean that more Green Belt land will need to be released for housing within Dacorum. As explained in answer to question 4 above, under the 'Duty to Co-Operate', the Council can discuss with adjoining Councils whether they can provide for some of Dacorum's housing needs within their area(s). These adjoining authorities will however need to be satisfied that Dacorum has thoroughly assessed all available sites within its own area. This will be done through a comprehensive Green Belt review.

**6. How will the comprehensive Green Belt review be carried out?**

This will be a new piece of technical work that the Council will commission from specialist consultants. We will be discussing whether this work should be jointly commissioned with any of our adjoining authorities, to ensure that all land options are assessed using the same methodology.

**7. How does this affect the existing Local Allocations and Strategic Sites identified in the Core Strategy?**

The need for an early partial review has no impact upon the Local Allocations (Green Belt releases for housing) or Strategic Sites identified in the current Core Strategy. The Inspector has not advised the Council to add to these sites, or to take any of the sites out of the plan. He has also not suggested that the Council makes any changes to its policies that set out how and when these sites will be brought forward for development.

The Council therefore intends to continue the process already begun i.e. agree the broad development requirements for each site within the Core Strategy and then define the precise site area and development requirements for each site through the Site Allocations DPD and masterplans that will accompany this document. It is at the Site Allocations stage that the precise land area to be released from the Green Belt will be agreed and detailed issues such as site access points, the broad layout of buildings and open space etc established. There will be opportunities for the public to comment on the Site Allocations DPD and inform the site masterplans during 2013.

**8. Is Dacorum at risk from developers trying to build on Green Belt sites not in the Core Strategy because of this?**

Once adopted, the Core Strategy will be part of the statutory development plan for the Borough. All planning decisions will be expected to comply with the requirements of this development plan. Speculative applications that do not accord with the development plan, and cannot be justified as an exception to policies within the development plans, will be refused by the Council.

**9. What is the point of talking to neighbouring Councils like St Albans and Aylesbury?**

The Inspector's preliminary note on the Core Strategy (19<sup>th</sup> November 2012) highlights the need for the Council to give greater consideration to the role that neighbouring local planning authorities could play in accommodating some of Dacorum's housing needs.

Whilst this will require discussions with a number of adjoining authorities, the Inspector clearly points to closer working with St Albans Council with regard to land between Hemel Hempstead and the M1 motorway, stating '.....I consider the Council should have attached greater weight to the role that this area could play in meeting the Borough's housing needs more fully.'

It is logical to also progress discussions with Aylesbury Vale Council, due to the role Aylesbury plays in meeting the needs of many living in the west of Dacorum; the fact that this area lies beyond the Green Belt and in recognition of its identification in the South East Regional Plan as a growth location.

#### **How to find out more and be involved:**

##### ***10. Will there be further public consultation and how can we be involved?***

Consultation on the 'main modifications' to the Core Strategy will begin in mid-January 2013 and run for 6 weeks. The term 'main modifications' refers to the changes that the Inspector has asked the Council to make to the Core Strategy in order for it to be 'sound.' Only plans that are found 'sound' can be adopted and used by the Council when making planning decisions. We will also take the opportunity to ask for public feedback on some of the smaller changes (called 'minor modifications') that the Council has put forward in order to help improve the plan before it is finally adopted by the Council.

This period of consultation will be limited to the modifications only, and will not provide an opportunity to introduce new issues or proposals, not to re-open matters that were addressed through the examination process.

If you would like to be added to the consultation database to ensure you are directly notified of future planning consultations, please pass your contact details (name, email and/or postal address) to the Strategic Planning and Regeneration team (see below for contact information)

##### ***11. How do I find out further information?***

For further information on the Core Strategy and other planning policy issues, please contact the Strategic Planning and Regeneration team on:

email: [strategic.planning@dacorum.gov.uk](mailto:strategic.planning@dacorum.gov.uk)

phone: 01442 228660