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Mr N Pringle
Chief Executive
Herefordshire Council
Brockington
35 Hafod Road
HEREFORD HR1 1SH

Your Ref:

Our Ref: DP 530

Date: 2 March 2006

Dear Sir

HEREFORDSHIRE UNITARY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 1996-2011 INQUIRY INTO OBJECTIONS

1. I was appointed by the First Secretary of State to hold a public inquiry into objections to the above-mentioned Plan. The inquiry was held between 8 February 2005 and 24 June 2005 and sat on a total of 50 days. A pre-inquiry meeting was held on 24 November 2004. Before, during and after the inquiry I made a number of accompanied and unaccompanied visits to sites that were the subject of objections. My report into the objections is attached to this letter.

2. The Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan 1996-2011 followed the two-stage deposit process. The Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan Deposit Draft was placed on deposit between 31 October 2002 and 12 December 2002. The Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan Revised Deposit Draft was then prepared. This was placed on deposit between 13 May 2004 and 24 June 2004.

3. At the close of the inquiry, the position on representations was as follows:

• Number of representation received	5,220
• Number of supporting representations	1,399
• Number of objections	3,821
• Objections dealt with at the inquiry	462
• Objections dealt with by written representations / conditionally withdrawn	2,757
• Objections unconditionally withdrawn	602

4. Details of the representations received are set down in Document INQ 10. The totals are shown in Document INQ 11.

5. In considering all the objections, I have had regard to submissions made by or on behalf of the various objectors and the Council and to all other material considerations including, where appropriate, current Planning Policy Guidance notes, Planning Policy Statements and Circulars. I have also had regard to those



representations of support. I have not had regard to changes in planning circumstances subsequent to my closing the inquiry as I have not received representations thereon. The Council will need to take any such changes into account in its consideration of my recommendations.

6. Similarly, the Council will need to take into account any PPG, PPS, Circular or other Government advice published subsequent to the completion of my report. Unless otherwise stated, reference to Government policy as set out in the Circulars, PPGs or PPSs relates to the versions that were extant at the close of the inquiry.

7. Objections have been considered in the light of the case *Electricity Supply Nominees Ltd and others v Secretary of State for the Environment and Northavon District Council / Kingswood Borough Council*. In relation to many objections there was inadequate justification of the case for modification of the Plan.

8. For convenience, my report is divided into 18 sections. Sections 1 to 17 reflect the way that the Plan itself was organised. Section 18 contains my own appendices. These deal with the following matters:

- Appearances (Appendix 1);
- Documents (Appendix 2);
- Abbreviations (Appendix 3); and
- Summary of Selected Recommendations (Appendix 4).

9. I have utilised a skeleton report provided by the Council. I have made some changes where there were obvious anomalies. However, for convenience, I have generally followed the format of the skeleton report. I present a brief statement of the objections / issues together with my reasoning, conclusions and recommendations. With the support of the Council, a short reporting style has been adopted. I have considered the full range of issues raised in respect of each objection notwithstanding the fact that they are not all mentioned in my report. In addition, arguments relevant to any particular objection may be found in different parts of the report.

10. The Plan has been the subject of a limited number of proposed pre-inquiry changes. On 2 December 2004, 25 proposed changes were advertised. These attracted 39 objections. There has thus been an opportunity to comment on the pre-inquiry changes. I have been able to take those comments into account in writing my report.

11. The proposed pre-inquiry changes have been carefully considered. I have determined that the Plan should incorporate most of the proposed changes. *My report therefore relates to a Plan that, unless otherwise specified, would incorporate all the proposed pre-inquiry changes.* A number of other minor proposed changes, put forward by or agreed by the Council during the inquiry, are the subject of specific recommendations.

12. The Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan will replace within Herefordshire a number of development plans. These are the Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan; the Hereford and Worcester Minerals Local Plan; the Hereford Local Plan; the Malvern Hills District Local Plan; the Leominster District Local Plan; and the South Herefordshire Local Plan.

Main Issues

13. The Council's advocate, at the opening of the inquiry, highlighted a number of main issues. These are considered in turn below.

Housing Strategy

14. The housing strategy, in terms of both the levels and distribution of housing, was the subject of considerable debate. The Plan made provision for 11,700 houses in the period 1996-2011. However, I have determined that, in line with the Regional Spatial Strategy (Regional Planning Guidance for the West Midlands, RPG 11, June 2004), the housing requirement should be a maximum of 12,200 dwellings. There are implications in terms of provision of the "extra" 500 dwellings.

15. Part of the extra 500 dwellings would be made up from increased capacity at allocated sites. In addition, there are a number of previously developed sites, all but one in Hereford, which I consider to be suitable in principle for residential development. However, I have not recommended the allocation of these sites. To do so could delay adoption of the Plan. Bearing in mind the impending implementation of European legislation in relation to strategic environmental assessment, I do not consider that delayed adoption would be in the public interest.

16. With regard to the distribution of housing, the Council was proposing a three-tier location strategy. This would be based on Hereford and the market towns; the more sustainable main villages; and the remainder of the rural area principally by way of limited infill in named smaller settlements. I am generally supportive of this approach. However, in line with the Regional Spatial Strategy, I am recommending that Hereford should be separately identified as the first tier of the hierarchy and a sub-regional focus for development.

Housing Allocations at Bullinghope and Holmer

17. In the deposit draft version of the Plan, an allocation was made for 300 dwellings at Holmer. This allocation was the subject of considerable objection. Also the Council later perceived benefits in a development at Bullinghope associated with the Rotherwas Access Road. As a result, in the Revised Deposit Draft, the allocation was switched to Bullinghope.

18. I support the initial position of the Council. I find that the Holmer site is suitable for housing development of the scale envisaged. It is a relatively well contained site that is seen in an urban context. By comparison, the Bullinghope site is totally unsuitable. Development there would be a major incursion, physically separated from the built-up limits of the city and harmful to the rural character and appearance of the area. In addition, the employment and transport imperatives that influenced the Council are no longer material.

19. I have considered all the objections to the alternative sites as well as the representations of support. Relevant matters were before the inquiry. As such, I feel that it would be possible to allocate the Holmer site without recourse to a modifications inquiry. I have no hesitation in commending the Holmer site.

Housing and Employment Allocation at Ross-on-Wye

20. In terms of housing allocations at Ross-on-Wye, most of the debate was focused on the proposed site at Tanyard Lane. Some of the objections were a reflection of wider concerns, for example, relating to drainage and flooding to which a solution is now in prospect. Other objections did not concern the principle of allocation. I have concluded that the Council's proposals are soundly based.

21. With regard to future employment land, there was again a switch of allocations. Land at Overross, supported in the Deposit Draft Plan, was replaced in the revised deposit version by an allocation at Model Farm. I do not support this change. Development at Model Farm would be an incongruous development alien to the character and appearance of its settling and in a somewhat anomalous location detached from the built-up area of the town. I recommend the re-allocation of land at Overross.

Housing in the Rural Area

22. A substantial number of alternative sites in rural areas were put forward at the inquiry. However, I support the Council's strategy of only permitting limited development in certain main villages and named smaller settlement. An appropriate amount of housing provision was identified by the Council and alternative or additional sites are not needed. In addition, many of the suggested sites are in relatively unsustainable locations.

Employment at Kington

23. I do not support the allocation of land north of the B4355 at Kington even on a reduced basis. It is outside the built-up limits of the town and there is no willing owner. I consider that further investigation of possibilities at Hatton Gardens, and indeed at Hergest Camp, would pay dividends.

Edgar Street Grid

24. I am generally supportive of the Council's proposals for the Edgar Street Grid including the proposed relocation of the livestock market; plans for the Hereford United Football Club / Merton Meadow area; and concentration of shopping with a defined central shopping and commercial area. I have made some limited recommendations that I believe will assist the vitality and viability of the area.

Other Matters

25. Attention is drawn to the fact that my recommended modifications to the policies in the Plan may also necessitate consequential modifications to the supporting text and/or the Proposals Map. These consequential modifications are not necessarily noted in my report. The Council will need to identify any consequential modifications and incorporate them into the Plan during the final stages of the plan preparation process.

26. A complete set of the documents submitted in connection with the inquiry is held by the Council's Forward Planning Manager and may be inspected at the offices of the Council's Planning Services, Town Hall, 8 St Owen Street, Hereford, HR1 2PJ.

27. A copy of this letter has been sent for information to the Government Office for the West Midlands and to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

28. Finally, I would like to express my thanks for the help and co-operation that I received throughout the inquiry. Mr T Jones, advocate for the local planning authority, was unfailingly courteous and considerate; also all the officers of the Council. Throughout, I was assisted by the Programme Officer, Ms Jane Phillips and her assistant Ms Becky O'Reilly. To all of them I wish to express my sincere thanks for their good humoured support and unstinting hard work.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew S Freeman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Andrew S Freeman BSc(Hons) DipTP DipEM FRTPI FIHT MIEnvSc
INSPECTOR

cc: Government Office for the West Midlands
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London