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11<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1997.

Mr Alan White  
Chief Executive  
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Brighton Street  
WALLASEY  
Wirral  
Merseyside  
L44 8ED

Dear Sir

#### **REPORT ON OBJECTIONS TO THE WIRRAL UNITARY DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

1. I was appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment to hold a public inquiry into objections to the Deposit draft of the Wirral Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The inquiry was held between Tuesday 19 March and Thursday 26 September 1996 at the Town Hall, Brighton Street, Wallasey. I held a pre-inquiry meeting on 19 December 1995. There were 25 inquiry sitting days, and I undertook site inspections on a further 19 days. The inquiry was held in formal session on all its sitting days. I attach my report which contains my recommendations on the action the Council should take in respect of all the objections, including the counter-objections to published changes to the UDP which the Council asked me to consider.
2. The Pre-Deposit Consultation Draft of the UDP (Core Document (CD) 52) was published in on 10 June 1992. The Council's Report of Consultation Responses (July 1994, CD54) summarises both the representations made in respect of that draft and the approved responses of the Council. The UDP was placed on deposit on 5 October 1994 and the formal period for the receipt of representations expired on 16 November 1994. The Council published three sets of proposed changes (referred to by the Council as 'alterations') to the Deposit Version of the Local Plan, on 20 October 1995, 3 April 1996 and 26 June 1996. The periods prescribed for the receipt of representations to those changes expired on 30 November 1995, 15 May 1996 and 11 July 1996 respectively.
3. A schedule of the objections duly made during the 4 periods above mentioned is at Appendices C and D. 1,238 representations were made in response to the deposit version of the UDP. No late representations were accepted by the Council after the end of the official period for representation. 82 Counter-objections were made to the first published set of changes, 12 Counter-objections to the second set and no counter-objections to the third set. Of the total representations made, 349 supported various provisions of the Plan. These

representations are not expressly considered in my report. 51 objections were unconditionally withdrawn before or during the inquiry. I heard 99 Objections and Counter-objections at the inquiry, the remainder being the subject of written representations. The inquiry appearances, core documents and documentation relating to each appearance are detailed in Appendices A and B. A full set of all these documents may be found in the Inquiry Library.

4. The UDP deals with land use and future development in the Wirral Metropolitan Borough for the period ending in 2001. My report adopts with some modification the short form, and follows the order of topic chapters in the Deposit version of the Local Plan and which are comprehensively listed on the Contents pages 1-11. The report commences with the strategic policies which make up Part I of the Plan and then goes on to consider the detailed provisions in Part II. Within each Chapter of the report, objections to policies, proposals, tables and supporting text are generally dealt with in sections, in the order in which they appear in the UDP. The identity of the objectors, and objections under consideration is shown at the start of each section. The few abbreviations or acronyms not explained in the text are referred to at the end of the Contents Section.

5. Each formal recommendation appears in emboldened type. In each case the recommendation to modify the UDP (or not, as the case may be), refers to the Deposit Version of the Plan. Many recommendations are also in line with changes which the Council propose to make to the Plan in response to objections, and which have been published accordingly. In view of the large number of published changes to the Plan and to keep the report to a reasonable length I refer any such changes which feature in my recommendations by their reference number, rather than by reciting them in full. This is done on the basis of my understanding that both the Deposit Plan and the changes are readily available, or can be made so to all readers. I would be grateful if you could ensure that this objective is kept in mind when the report is published or extracts requested.

6. The recommendations involve changes to many of the policies and proposals in the Local Plan. However this is often because of conclusions I reach about Objections made to the detailed content of those provisions, rather than serious shortcomings in their approach or purpose. The Council are to be commended for the thorough approach adopted towards the drafting of the UDP and their willingness to put forward changes in the light of objections made.

### **Main Issues**

7. The main policy issues dealt with in my report concern the size of the UDP's housing requirement, the availability of housing land, the extent to which the approved Green Belt should be maintained to its present boundaries, whether the Green Belt should be extended up the M53 corridor and elsewhere, adjustments to some employment land provisions to cater for special industrial needs, and the extent to which provision should be made for shopping development by land allocations. My main conclusions on the issues are below.

### ***Housing Requirement***

8. I have concluded (page 35) that the UDP Housing Requirement as set out in Policy HSG1 should be increased from 9500 to 10500 dwellings, in order to provide more flexibility.

in responding to further deliberations about changing demographic conditions such as a predicted increase in the number of households in the Borough, and so far as is possible to satisfy demand. The Housing requirement was a major cause of dispute at the inquiry and in the written representations, and I anticipate that it will continue to be a key issue when the UDP is brought forward for review. I also conclude that some of the Council's predictions about the sources of the housing land supply, the yields of individual sites and assumptions about the rate of building should be modified, necessitating some housing allocations not included in the Deposit Plan (see paragraph 11 of this letter).

### ***Employment Land***

9. It was commonly acknowledged that the UDP makes substantial provision for future employment development needs. I recommend however a specific allocation at Dock Road South, Bromborough (page 78) in response to representations by Lubrizol Ltd, an established industrial undertaking in the area, that the UDP does not clearly indicate how that company's future special industrial needs might be accommodated.

### ***Green Belt***

10. The UDP proposes a substantial extension of the Merseyside Green Belt northwards up the M53 corridor to Bidston Station, further extending through Bidston Village and Bidston Hill. I have concluded that the principle of a Green Belt in the motorway corridor sufficient to perform the basic Green Belt function of separating the urban areas of East and West Wirral constitutes the special circumstances necessary to justify an extension to the Green Belt outside the context of a strategic review, and I recommend accordingly that land in the Corridor be added to the Green Belt (page 123). I conclude however that certain peripheral parts of the corridor at Noctorum and Moreton should be excluded from the Green Belt (see also paragraph 11 below). I also recommend that Bidston Hill and Bidston Village be not included in the Green Belt extension (page 127). I do not support the view of some objectors that other land, including Heswall Dales and Caldy Hill, should be incorporated into the Green Belt (pages 176 and 183).

### ***Housing Land***

11. To support an increased Housing Requirement of 10500 dwellings and in the light of my conclusion that some land designated is not essential to the Green Belt function of the M53 corridor, I recommend that two substantial sites, at the former Old Birkonians Rugby Ground, Noctorum and at Fender Farm, Moreton be allocated for housing purposes (pages 131 and 135). I also support the Council's housing allocation of land to the west of Manor Drive, Moreton (Proposal HS1/5), notwithstanding considerable local opposition (page 103).

### ***Retail Policy Framework***

12. Although no site-specific allocations of land for shopping purposes were made in the Deposit version of the UDP, the Council later published a change allocating land at Green Lane, Tranmere for non-food retail purposes, following their consideration of a report by Robert Tym and Partners about the need to make express provision for further non-food retail development in the Borough. I deal with objections to the initial lack of any specific retail

allocations in the UDP, together with objections to the proposed allocation of the land at Green Lane, on pages 312 to 322 of my report. However, I recommend that the Council review the decision to allocate this site in the light of the planning permission granted in November 1996 by the Secretary of State for non-food retail development there.

13. In the light of the Secretary of State's decision and the general evidence about current needs for further retail development I recommend that other sites put forward for allocation by objectors at Caldbeck Road, Bromborough and the Arrowpark TEC, Upton should not be allocated for retail development. The UDP contains provision (Policies SH9 and SH10) to enable any proposals for the retail development of those sites to be considered, in the light of the relevant criteria.

### General

14. I have taken account of recent revisions to national and regional policy guidance, including Planning Policy Guidance Notes 1, 6 and 7 and RPG13 *Regional Planning Guidance for the North West*, and source paragraphs are referred to as appropriate in my report. The Council will no doubt wish to have regard to any subsequent revisions to Government policy which may take place before the adoption of the UDP.

15. Finally, I wish to express my thanks to all participants for their co-operation in ensuring the efficient running of the Inquiry, and to the Council for providing such a suitable venue. I reserve special thanks to the Programme Officer Stephen Ramsden, whose considerable experience in that area of work and Boltonian sense of humour made my task, and in my perception that of the Council and all the objectors to the UDP, much easier. I also take away with me memories of the Borough with its varied landscape and character.

16. A copy of this letter is being sent to the Department of the Environment, for information.

Yours faithfully



R OGIER BA MRTPI  
Inspector