

Wealden District (Incorporating Part of the South Downs National Park) Core Strategy

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Dear Mr Phillips,

I am writing to inform you of my decision following the Exploratory Meeting (EM) held on Wednesday 12 October 2011. I have decided to proceed with the Examination and will ask the Programme Officer to set in train the arrangements for hearings to take place in due course. In doing so I must emphasise that I have reached no conclusion on the soundness of the Core Strategy (CS), or on its legal compliance.

I have taken account of the Council's written response to the note setting out my concerns about the CS and the discussions that took place at the EM. The Council was clear that it wanted the Examination to proceed and was of the view that its evidence base was sufficiently robust to support the CS. I have considered the option of an initial hearing prior to the main programme into matters relating to the scale of housing provision, its distribution and the factors that have influenced it. However, these are likely to take up a significant part of hearing time in any event and, as such, there is no advantage in taking that approach.

I have also considered suspending the Examination for further work to be done by the Council. However, there has been only limited evidence presented by other parties in relation to the environmental factors on which the Council has primarily based its case for a scale of housing provision that is lower than that in the Regional Strategy. I conclude that the Examination would be best served by proceeding to the hearings so that the Council's evidence on these and the other factors concerning the scale of housing can be fully tested.

As I indicated at the EM I do not intend to hold a Pre-Hearing Meeting. The administrative matters that would be considered can be dealt with through the Programme Officer. As a first step therefore I shall be asking her to circulate for comment some draft Guidance Notes, a list of matters, issues and questions and a programme of hearings.

I should be grateful if a copy of this letter could be posted on the Examination website.

M J Moore

INSPECTOR