

**Southampton City Council Local Development Framework
Core Strategy Examination: Commencing 7th July 2009
Opening Statement of Southampton City Council**

1. Introduction

I am Paul Nichols, Head of Planning and Sustainability with Southampton City Council. I shall introduce other members of the Council's team, and their various roles, at the end of this statement.

The Core Strategy lies at the heart of the city's new style development plan – as required by the latest planning legislation. It sets out our development strategy for the period to 2026.

I won't attempt to deal with the process for preparing the Core Strategy in this statement, as that would take too long. We are more than happy to deal with any questions on how we got to this point, during the Examination or elsewhere, from any interested parties.

In this brief opening statement, I prefer to concentrate on how important this strategy is to our residents and businesses – and to everyone that visits the city for work or pleasure.

2. Future Prosperity

First and foremost, the Core Strategy helps to secure the **future prosperity of the city**. Particularly at this time, that has to be our primary concern. Some of our major employers are under threat, we have long-standing issues of deprivation to address and too many of our residents struggle to afford decent housing.

That is why we are so committed to the delivery of the SE Plan's vision for urban **South Hampshire**, as developed by the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire. We are a founder member of that Partnership. Successive Council Leaders and our Chief Executive have, from the outset, led this initiative from the front. Our motivation lies in securing future growth, ensuring that the economy of South Hampshire can punch above its weight in future. Within the city and the wider sub-region, there is cross party sign up to this agenda. We are members of a remarkable sub-regional partnership that is a national exemplar in many respects.

So, unlike many authorities around the country, we do not feel that the regional plan 'imposes' difficult targets on us. We, as a partnership, crafted our own sub-regional strategy to form part of the SE Plan and we are fully committed to the delivery of it.

Hence our stretching targets for economic growth, infrastructure investment and an appropriate measure of housing growth to support that.

How will this **economic growth** be achieved?

The future health of the port remains vital to our city-region economy and is also important to the wider SE and nationally. It is the hub of the UK's cruise industry and a major European container port. Future investment and business growth will be critical. We are making provision for the necessary infrastructure to enable the port to continue to thrive, along with future growth in linked logistics and marine employment sectors.

Our role as a regional centre for commerce, retail and leisure is also central. We are planning for sustained and major growth in all these categories, as described in the SE Plan. This defines Southampton city centre as a focus for significant new office, retail, hotel and leisure development. The Core Strategy provides a strategic site, the major development quarter (MDQ), to be located next to the West Quay shopping centre. The strategy also sets the framework for our continuing city renaissance programme, which will include the regeneration of a number of major city centre sites. These include the Central Station, the Royal Pier Waterfront, the Watermark West Quay development and Southampton's Cultural Quarter. The recent successful IKEA opening, in the teeth of the recession, demonstrates our potential to attract sustained investment in this sector. The strategy also recognises and supports the role of Southampton's other centres in providing shops and services for their local communities.

Our universities and hospitals are nationally recognised as institutions of excellence, with their own bold development plans. These offer vital regional and, in some cases, national services. But they are also huge players in our city-region economy. They offer further spin-off potential – exemplified in the forthcoming move of Lloyds to the University of Southampton campus - and they are continuing to invest and grow through the recession. We are working alongside these institutions to help them achieve their plans, for example in one of the recently announced national pilots for Local Development Orders.

We know that a lack of modern employment facilities, in the right places, has been a constraint on growth in the past. So the Strategy makes provision for growth in employment in all relevant sectors over the period. This includes provision for over 300,000 square metres of new office space, mostly in the city centre, major expansion of our shopping and leisure offer, and almost 100,000 square metres of new industrial and warehousing facilities.

3. Sense of place

Southampton city centre suffered terrible damage during WW2, followed by rapid redevelopment in the postwar years. Some commercial schemes of the 60's and 70's are now ripe for redevelopment – others will become so in the life of this plan. Alongside significant heritage assets and superb city parks, there is a recognised shortfall in the design quality of parts of our city centre and a dispersed and fragmented city centre offer. There is very little active, accessible waterfront in the city.

The Core Strategy sets the framework for a more detailed action plan which will help to create a distinctive sense of place, drawing on and linking to the city's heritage, parks and waterfront.

Specific initiatives include the public realm investments along the 'North-South Spine' and the creation of a cultural quarter in Northern Above Bar, incorporating a new civic square. A city centre masterplan and public realm investment programme will be developed further as part of the City Centre Area Action Plan – work will start on this as soon as this examination closes.

4. Living in the city

The pattern of **housing growth** and future housing need is closely linked to our growth strategy. We need to attract investment to the city. As well as developing the skills of our own residents, we will need to pull in a measure of new talent to support our future growth. Our commitment to deliver over 16,000 new homes over the period to 2026 will meet this requirement, as well as the growing housing demands of our own resident population. And we have an excellent track record for the delivery of new homes in this city.

But they need to be the **right kind of homes**, in the right kind of residential environments. Yes, we need good quality city apartments. And these have come thick and fast in recent years. But we also need to attract and retain families and have appropriate housing for our rapidly aging resident population. These need to be well designed homes in well managed neighbourhoods, where both local character and heritage are respected. The city needs to see a step change in this area. This strategy will help us to achieve that, with a new approach to family housing, the reinforcement of urban conservation in our mature suburbs and underpinning of our residential design and lifetime homes standards.

And we need more **affordable homes**. We know that we need to work creatively to deliver the right range of affordable housing options across the city. This strategy takes a major step forward to increase the quantum of affordable housing provision in the city through new build. But it also paves the way for delivery of the Council's estates regeneration strategy. This is a particularly exciting programme to secure long term, large scale investment in improvements and new accommodation within our major public housing estates, including Thornhill, Millbrook, Redbridge and a number of other locations in the city.

Last, but by no means least, we need **low carbon homes**. The Core Strategy sets the bar much higher in this area – as is necessary if we are to achieve national targets and our own aspirations. This is underpinned by the work of our own, growing sustainability team, who are successfully attracting funding to deliver retrofit projects, energy efficiency, CHP and renewable energy programmes throughout the city. But at the moment the team are hampered by a weak policy position that leaves us dependent on the level of commitment to sustainability standards of individual developers. In this area,

as in so many others, we urgently need to see the Core Strategy adopted in order to raise our game.

Our assessment shows that the city can deliver the required 5, 10 and 15 year supply of homes as required, with some 5,400 new homes to be built in the city centre. We will provide for homes of mixed sizes and tenures, including additional affordable homes, and create the family homes that the city needs.

5. Education and skills

The city is investing in **educational improvements** on an unprecedented scale – across all tiers of the school system and within the higher education sector. This is a vital component for our future prosperity. Current plans include two new Academies at Lordshill and Mayfield, the first phase of our major Building Schools for the Future programme and continued investment at the two Universities.

Sustained investment in education and skills is central to the broader well-being of the city. Schools are an important factor in the creation of family-friendly neighbourhoods, which are a scarce commodity for us. And the demographic tide is turning, with growing numbers of young children in some parts of the city. In addition to catering for future growth, the geographical pattern of educational need in the city is changing. The Core Strategy sets the broad framework to accommodate this wholesale investment in improved education across the city.

6. Climate Change

As a coastal city, we are acutely aware of the challenges posed by climate change. Significant impacts are predicted on water resources, sea levels, the coastline and natural environment. Addressing these impacts is a key theme that runs through the Strategy.

Dealing with flood risk is an important area of concern. We have now moved beyond the requirements for the Core Strategy by embarking on an additional programme to develop more detailed flood risk plans for the city centre. We have also established a Joint Flood Risk Management Board, with partners, to ensure that we are tackling the full range of recommendations in the Pitt report.

Other important aspects of the Strategy relating to climate change deal with: focusing major development in areas accessible by public transport, reducing carbon emissions, conserving water resources, improving air quality management and improving recycling and waste management.

7. Infrastructure

The Core Strategy makes provision for future investment in several key areas of infrastructure, including: **travel and transport, leisure space, flood protection** and **energy**.

Travel and transport: including road, rail, park and ride and active travel. The Core Strategy makes provision for sustainable travel developments to underpin the success of the city as an economic, cultural and social driver for the region. Future growth will be supported by: improved road access on main arterial routes (particularly from the east); improved public transport priority; a redeveloped and enhanced central railway station; improved freight access to the Port (road and rail) and initiatives to encourage a change towards more sustainable transport including more walking and cycling.

Leisure space: The city's central parks, Southampton Common and our long-established network of greenways throughout the city are a huge asset. The Core Strategy looks to invest further in the development and management of this network of green and open spaces throughout the city, with a particular emphasis on the quality and integrity of waterfront routes and spaces and the public realm in the city centre. This is part of a wider Green Infrastructure Strategy at PUSH level, which will include the creation of a Country Park at Lords Wood.

Flood protection: In terms of flood risk management, we recognise the need to put in place a major investment programme to protect the integrity of the city centre and other vulnerable areas in the coming decades. This represents a potential constraint on our future development plans and the Council is investing now in the necessary studies to ensure that appropriate mitigation measures such as land raising and the provision of safe means of escape are in place where appropriate. This will form part of a wider implementation plan to secure the long term future of the city centre as a whole.

Energy: As a national leader in combined heat and power (CHP), with the country's largest city centre scheme, we are anxious to continue our investment in this area. Rapid expansion in the use of CHP forms an integral part of our energy strategy, alongside the progressive enhancement in energy standards for all new development, investment in our city council estate to improve energy performance and the introduction of renewable energy and retrofit programmes.

And these major infrastructure delivery programmes will be planned in an integrated way; there are many areas of overlap and synergy between them.

8. Summary

In summary, the Core Strategy has taken into account:

- detailed evidence on housing need, employment, retailing, transport, flood risk and other matters;
- the appraisal of the sustainability of alternative courses of action;
- the full range of existing plans and strategies affecting the City; and
- relevant national and regional planning policy.

The Southampton Local Strategic Partnership has concluded that the Core Strategy is broadly consistent with their ambitions for the City and will help to deliver the Community Strategy vision, aims and objectives.

The SE England Partnership Board (SEERA's successor) has confirmed that the Core Strategy is in general conformity with the South East Plan.

The Government Office for the South East, whilst wishing to ensure that the Core Strategy can deliver the amount of housing required, does not question the soundness of the overall Core Strategy.

The Homes and Communities Agency supports the Council's approach to securing affordable housing and is actively involved in the delivery of a number of our major strategic schemes.

For all the above reasons, the Council considers that its Core Strategy provides a sound basis for the spatial planning of this City up to 2026. Our strategy can be trusted to provide a solid basis upon which to move forward. The Council - and all those affected by this strategy - will see the City prosper and quality of life improve whilst providing a sustainable future for this area.

9. The Council's Team

The preparation and production of the core strategy has been led by **Helen Pearce**, the Spatial Planning Manager. She is unable to join us for the examination, but I would like to recognise her invaluable contribution. She has been assisted by a wide range of key officers from the Council and our partners. In closing, I would like to briefly introduce the Council's team here today. I will lead the presentation of the City Council's contribution, supported by members of the Planning Policy Team:

- **Debbie Mobbs**, Senior Principal Planning Officer (Housing/Climate Change/Biodiversity)
- **Graham Tuck**, Regional and Strategic Planning Co-ordinator, (City Centre/ Retail/Infrastructure/Employment)
- **Dawn Heppell**, Principal Planning Officer (Vision/Strategy/Sustainability/Health/Education/Open Space/Implementation)
- **Alan Heys**, Principal Planning Officer (Housing)
- **Jagdeep Birk and Andrew Herring**, Planning Policy Officers
- **Fiona Riley**, Trainee Planning Officer

Further Council officers will be introduced as they attend.

Thank-you for your attention.

Paul Nichols, Head of Planning and Sustainability
Southampton City Council, Tuesday, 7th July 2009