

**B&NES Core Strategy Examination**  
**248: RPS on behalf of Crest Strategic Projects and Key Properties**

**Issue 1: Is the planned district-wide scale of provision for jobs and homes justified and is there sufficient flexibility to reflect uncertainty in forecasting and changing circumstances?**

---

- 1) The comments below seek largely to review information and evidence produced since representations were submitted on the submission Core Strategy (CS) in January 2010.

**PPS3 Paragraph 33 Conformity**

- 2) Both the Stage 2 Report and Topic Paper 9 (TP9) acknowledge the relevance of the West of England SHMA (CD4/H11) and do not explicitly dispute the conclusions of this key evidence base document; Paragraph 6.7 of TP9 acknowledges that based on the evidence in the SHMA there is a 'well justified need for a substantial scale of affordable housing' including an existing backlog of approximately 2,800 homes.
- 3) The CS adopts an insular approach aimed at addressing housing demand arising from natural population growth within its administrative area and no regard is had to potential housing demand arising from population growth within the wider sub-region or indeed the migration from other parts of the country or beyond. This poorly informed approach will achieve little but negative consequences in the form of increased housing need and stagnation of the local and sub-regional economy. It is based on a restrictive position where there is a 'known supply' in the SHLAA of circa 11,200. The supply position forms only a part of PPS3 paragraph 33 consideration.
- 4) The pessimistic housing targets set out in the CS were derived without realistically assessing need. The targets seek to exclude in-migration into the District through restricting the provision of new housing. The Council's position has no regard to adopted and emerging national planning policy. The Council puts perceived environmental cost and public resistance ahead to the needs of a growing population.
- 5) The housing growth requirements identified in the Stage 2 Report and TP9 have not been formulated using the Government's 'latest published household projections'. Both of the above reports are based on the 2004-based population and household projections despite the 2006-based projections representing the most up-to-date statistics when the Council prepared these reports. The Council is using projections which have been superseded on two separate occasions. Nevertheless the SHMA is based on 2004 projections and evidently the Council is not addressing the issues raised in that document; the SHMA included assumptions for in-migration which necessitated higher than 2004 projections.
- 6) A CS cannot choose historic population and household projections to suit a strategy required by its Members. No doubt the Council will argue its stance is one advocated throughout the preparation of the RS, but that process began in 2006 and times have moved on. The 2004 projections do not account for migration associated with the accession of the Eastern and Central European Countries into the European Union and therefore underestimate potential population growth arising from in-migration. It is not robust to project population and household growth forward to 2026 without the inclusion of this consideration; certainly that stance has not been justified.
- 7) Whilst increasing housing stock is not the only solution to the country's affordability problems, it certainly forms a key part of the package. The CS must seek to ensure that housing supply is sufficient to meet demands of a growing population within (and adjacent to) the district,

**B&NES Core Strategy Examination**  
**248: RPS on behalf of Crest Strategic Projects and Key Properties**

changing household formation rates and future migration patterns, whilst also facilitating some flexibility to cater for unforeseen circumstances and to facilitate greater housing choice. The CS does not seek a step change in housing supply and instead only seeks to address natural population growth. This is despite the district forming part of the West of England LEP that seeks to encourage cross boundary movement in terms of people, skills and the economy.

**Draft NPPF**

- 8) RPS has consistently emphasised that the Council's approach to housing supply and affordability is inconsistent with the Government's ambitions; now it is the antithesis of what the Government is seeking to achieve.
- 9) RPS submitted comprehensive representations at the 'NPPF implications' stage of B&NES consultation in October 2011. One of the many pro-growth objectives of the NPPF is to *'plan for prosperity'* and paragraph 13 confirms that the government is *'committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth'*. This suggests the need for strategic plans to be proactive and flexible so as to facilitate the changing needs of business and a growing population.
- 10) The CS seeks to achieve the opposite to the NPPF provisions by seeking to provide for recessionary levels of economic growth across 15 years, constrain housing supply and provide little flexibility for alternative development options to come forward when required. This is reflected in TP9 which refers to *'controlling housing supply'*<sup>1</sup> and later stating that *'...it is reasonable to expect that... the future additional labour requirements of the economy should be almost entirely be sourced from people living in homes within the sub-region'*<sup>2</sup>. There can be no basis in evidence for this assumption.
- 11) The draft NPPF (paragraph 28) emphasises the importance of SHMAs; as set out above, the Council has prepared its CS in isolation from the findings and recommendations of its SHMA. B&NES has ignored the consequences of paragraphs 44-47 of the NPPF, turning its back on the prospect of sub-regional planning in the West of England. These requirements are enshrined in the development plan (regional policy) and to that end there is nothing new in the NPPF.
- 12) In the event that the Council fails to review its housing targets upwards, it is submitted that contingency locations must be identified to adhere to the requirements of PPS12 and paragraph 14 of the draft NPPF. B&NES cannot continue to ignore available development opportunities and must be mindful of the NPPF which outlines the appropriateness of reviewing Green Belt boundaries through the 'Local Plan' process (paragraph 138). Again, that is what RPG10 and PPG2 require. At the very least, as per the Bristol CS, negative consequences of low growth must be made explicit in the CS.

---

<sup>1</sup> TP9 paragraph 2.20

<sup>2</sup> TP9 paragraph 3.1

**B&NES Core Strategy Examination**  
**248: RPS on behalf of Crest Strategic Projects and Key Properties**

**Methodology for Assessing Housing “Need”**

- 13) It is submitted that both the Stage 2 Report and TP9 are not robust. The growth scenarios set out in TP9 only seek to cater for natural population growth and restrict migration through restricting supply. This is wholly inappropriate (both in a legal and a social context) as everyone is entitled to have access to a home and move to different parts of the country. The Treaty of Rome (as amended) removes barriers to the movement of workers and citizens of EU Member States; the provisions were extended in 2004 with the accession of the central and eastern European countries into the EU. The UK permits free movement of citizens EU citizens and therefore the proposals to ignore in-migration contravene national and international migration policy, and are done so at the expense of its existing population.

**RSS for the South West**

- 14) It is acknowledged that it is the Government’s intention to revoke Regional Strategies via the Localism Act, however the strategies remain extant until such time as relevant Strategic Environmental Appraisals of their proposed abolition is completed. Accordingly RPG10 (September 2001) still comprises part of the Statutory Development Plan and in accordance with the provisions 2004 Act and PPS12, Core Strategies must be in general conformity with it.
- 15) The Government is not seeking to restrict spatial planning or economic growth to functional/administrative boundaries. The Government’s promotion of LEPs acknowledges that sub-regional planning requirements do not simply disappear; it is notable that recent Government announcements have indicated the potential formalisation of the LEP role in the spatial planning context.
- 16) RPG10 establishes that there are four sub-regional capital centres in the South West including the Bristol Core City Region and identifies the requirement for coherent growth. RPG10 also requires the boundaries of Green Belts to be reviewed in order to facilitate the delivery of sustainable urban extensions.<sup>3</sup>
- 17) The Inspector’s conclusions on the limited policy weight that can be assigned to the emerging RSS are acknowledged. It should be noted that the Government has not proposed the revocation of the evidence base information that supported the content of Regional Strategies. Crucially, as suggested by the Inspector in his comments on the Bristol CS, the evidence base that supported the provisions within the Draft RSS represents a key consideration given that it was subject to extensive scrutiny as part of the Examination in Public. Moreover, it is important to have regard to the fact that in reality, the RSS did not depart from the core objectives in RPG10 and only sought to build on what was an established strategy for sustainable economic and housing growth.

**Economic Growth/Job Creation**

- 18) It is regrettable that the CS assessment of likely economic growth over the plan period is unduly pessimistic and fails to embrace the Government’s intentions and the proposals of the West of England LEP. The economic projections underpinning the CS are based upon national forecasts which are not appropriate to the local level without proper analysis of sub-

---

<sup>3</sup> RPG10, Policies SS5 and SS8

## **B&NES Core Strategy Examination**

### **248: RPS on behalf of Crest Strategic Projects and Key Properties**

regional growth; regional and district disparities in economic growth cannot be accounted for when using this approach. The West of England has been one of the strongest performing sub-regions during the recession and it is quite clear that business leaders through the LEP/Business West etc intend for it to remain so.

- 19) Within the CS, the level of economic growth and housing provision is based on the projected creation of 8,700 jobs over the plan period. This is extremely pessimistic having regard to the Council's evidence base:
- As set out in paragraph 4.3 of the Business Growth and Employment Land Study Update (CD4/E2) the annual average growth in the South West could average between 1.6-1.9% GVA over the plan period translating into jobs growth of between 8,700-11,200 jobs. The same report acknowledges that growth within the West of England area tracks above average growth rates in the South West, yet the B&NES CS still uses the minimum 8,700 jobs target to underpin its economic strategy and housing supply position.
  - Paragraph 4.6 of TP9 refers to the Smart Economic Growth Report (CD4/E15) as 'the Council's most refined piece of economic and employment forecasting'. This report predicts that the South West economy would grow by 2.01% over the plan period. Notwithstanding this, the Council still uses the 1.6% (8,700 jobs) growth target.
  - The West of England LEP bid which was supported by B&NES predicts approximately 3.4% cumulative economic growth by 2020 – far higher than what the CS provides for.
  - The Bristol CS is predicated on what is seen as a 'reasonable' growth rate of 2.3%.
- 20) The Ministerial Statement makes clear that Local Authorities preparing development plans should use the opportunity to be proactive in driving and supporting economic growth. In particular '*Authorities should work together to ensure that needs and opportunities that extend beyond or cannot be met within) their own boundaries are identified and accommodated in a sustainable way...*'. The Bristol City Inspector anticipated that there might be potential for B&NES and other adjoining LPAs to address the constraints Bristol faces in delivering its housing requirements. Despite the recognition of the functional relationship of the West of England region (through its support for the LEP bid), this has not been translated in the CS which advocates an insular approach to economic and housing growth and demonstrates of how the West of England authorities do not work together to address common issues and opportunities.
- 21) Policies BCS5 and BCS6 of the Bristol CS identifies the Hicks Gate site as a contingency site. At the very least, the B&NES CS should acknowledge the policy given that the site straddles the administrative boundaries of both LPAs, and that the development of the site would deliver a high quantum of housing without detrimentally impacting upon the openness of the Green Belt<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> See Statement of Common Ground

**B&NES Core Strategy Examination**  
**248: RPS on behalf of Crest Strategic Projects and Key Properties**

**Economic forecasting/West of England LEP**

- 22) It is submitted that it is sensible to use a similar growth figures as that proposed by the West of England LEP as commitment to a pro growth agenda. The higher growth projection would provide a sound basis upon which to base the CS having regard to the following:
- The CS covers a 15 year period. It is for the CS to facilitate economic recovery not constrain it; planning for a 15 year recession does just that. Planning can only facilitate growth, it can't make the market respond. It should not however exacerbate the problems through unreasonable constraint.
  - The Government is actively introducing stimuli aimed at enhancing economic growth and has placed the onus on Local Authorities to plan for prosperity, not mediocrity. It has been suggested by Ministers that further economic growth incentives involving business rates will be introduced in late December 2011.
  - The West of England LEP seeks to achieve the delivery of 95,000 jobs by 2030 with Bristol and Bath being the key foci for this growth. B&NES should be at the forefront of delivery.
- 23) It is clear that the Council, despite supporting the LEP bid is now distancing itself from this sub-regional initiative. Now that the government has approved the LEP bid, the CS needs to align with a programme for economic recovery.

**Cross Boundary Implications**

- 24) The CS has no regard to cross-boundary considerations nor does it acknowledge the role of B&NES within the West of England Region and as part of the Bristol city-region. The Inspector when examining the Bristol CS accepted that the City Council's constrained administrative boundaries prevent the delivery of sufficient housing to meet the City's requirements and consequently suggested that adjoining local authorities would be in a more sustainable position to assist in meeting Bristol's residual requirements. This is exemplified by the recommendation within the IR that a contingency site be identified for the purposes of delivering growth in the future if required. This CS fails to acknowledge this consideration which contradicts the requirements of RPG10 and 'duty to co-operate'. The existence of these cross-boundary pressures and need for cooperation have long been recognised in the City Region. RPG10, which still constitutes the formal Development Plan for the South West, requires in Policies SS5 and SS8 that the local authorities work together to achieve several key objectives, including Green Belt review to accommodate urban extensions.
- 25) The CS cannot seek to restrict in-migration of residents and workers from areas outside of the West of England sub-region without reducing the skill base of the local economy. This will distort housing demand and place greater strain on adjoining local authorities in catering for B&NES' displaced housing demand, in turn worsening the negative consequences of failing to provide. If the CS is to be declared sound, it needs to take into account and address needs arising from Bristol.

**B&NES Core Strategy Examination**  
**248: RPS on behalf of Crest Strategic Projects and Key Properties**

**Justification for 9% less than 12,100 homes**

- 26) There is no answer to justify why the Council is planning for less housing than what its own technical studies suggest will be the minimum required. Consequently the plan is not consistent with national policy nor is it justified. PPS3 and PPS12 require local authorities to determine levels of housing provision based on 'evidence'. There is an undeniable emphasis on housing targets being set in response to 'objective' evidence. This would suggest that the Council's housing target should be at least 12,100 even though even this figure is ultimately insufficient.
- 27) Although paragraph 6.4 of TP9 states that Council's reasons for not planning for 12,100 homes is set out in later in the paper, this is not properly explored; the Council is subjectively trying to justify this shortfall in contrast to the objective evidence available.
- 28) The consequences of under-providing for the projected levels of housing need within the district are clear. They are the same negative consequences identified in the SHMA and as rehearsed in Bristol CS<sup>5</sup>. It is clear that land with the potential to deliver the 9% shortfall of 1,100 homes needs to be identified within the CS. Indeed, TP9 notes the positive contribution that Green Belt sites could have in meeting housing needs.<sup>6</sup>
- 29) It is irresponsible and unsound for the Council to disregard the Local Plan housing shortfall of 850 homes on basis that those households '*will have found housing elsewhere within the sub-region or beyond.*' It is not robust for the Council to assume that people seeking a home in B&NES up to the 2006 simply moved elsewhere without any compelling evidence; clearly this is not backed up by evidence of need.

**CS Flexibility and Contingency**

- 30) A strategy of periodic review contrasts with guidance set out in paragraphs 4.13-4.14 of PPS12 which states that Core Strategies are required to provide certainty/flexibility and a 15 year framework within which investors, infrastructure providers and communities can operate. TP9 acknowledges that there are 'few strings' that can be pulled if a reaction is required.<sup>7</sup> The best offer is to seek a windfall allowance from 2012, which Officers should know is not an appropriate proposition.
- 31) There is no flexibility or contingency option within the CS. The justification in paragraphs of 6.28-36 of TP9 were written after Officers had reported to Council (CD5/24) that without contingency (or added flexibility) the CS would most probably be found unsound. To suggest that the development industry would manipulate delivery to generate a five year supply argument<sup>8</sup> lacks credibility and shows a lack of appreciation of how the market functions. Notably, the entire tenor of TP9 is to justify its housing requirement position based on a weak economic picture is compromised by the Council's justification of its five year supply position. The SHLAA notes that delivery is expected to 'pick up' and that in the next five years the

---

<sup>5</sup> BCC Core Strategy paragraph 4.5.17

<sup>6</sup> Paragraph 6.8, TP9

<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 6.34, TP9

<sup>8</sup> Paragraph 6.30, TP9

## **B&NES Core Strategy Examination 248: RPS on behalf of Crest Strategic Projects and Key Properties**

Council will be back on track with meeting the annualised requirement<sup>9</sup>; it cannot have it both ways.

- 32) The same issues were apparent during the Bristol CS examination where the Inspector deemed that the plan was insufficiently flexible to cater for change and recommended the incorporation of a contingency option in the form of the development at Hicks Gate.<sup>10</sup>
- 33) Clearly there is a desire to find this CS sound. Whilst it cannot be done so based on the current strategy, RPS offers the following route for consideration:
- The minimum requirement is for 12,100 homes that seeks to meet some of Bristol's needs within its administrative area; that strategy will need to be consulted upon. The solution to meeting that need is through delivery at Hicks Gate where a genuine comprehensive mixed use development can be created. A sustainability appraisal has already been carried out and its delivery would accord with the policies in the Bristol City CS.
  - Ultimately this target is insufficient and will still need to be subject to a review; those provisions will need to be clearly set out and will require a Green Belt review of all available options alongside a clear remit for higher economic growth. Such a strategy will at least ensure that the CS can be found sound and that an appropriate strategy for B&NES and Bristol is established.

---

<sup>9</sup> SHLAA paragraph 4.3

<sup>10</sup> BCC Core Strategy Policies BCS5 and BSC6