

## **Carlisle City Council Opening Statement:**

In terms of context Carlisle is the regional capital of Cumbria and the economic capital of an area extending into south west Scotland encompassing approximately half a million people. Its nearest city neighbour is Newcastle 58 miles to the east with Lancaster 68 miles to the south and Glasgow 96 miles to the north.

The District itself has a population of approximately 108,000 which has grown only modestly over the past decade. The majority of this population, approximately 75,000 people, reside in the City with the remainder in the District's extensive rural area, which is home to a large number of small settlements. The larger and more influential of these are Brampton in the east, Longtown in the north and Dalston in the west.

Despite a rich and unique history, dating back to the Romans and beyond, Carlisle is now embarking, looking forward, on a new journey. This reflects that it has the assets and opportunities, and importantly the appetite and confidence, to put itself on the map not only as the capital of Cumbria but equally as the city of the Lake District, with genuine untapped potential. The Carlisle Story details the extent of these opportunities and is the springboard from which the City is pushing forward. The Story is proving hugely successful in terms of securing enhanced recognition for the City and its offer.

Whilst there is no doubting that Carlisle has always been a successful place, being home already for example to many international brands including McVities, Pirelli and Eddie Stobarts, and in 2012 having been voted Britain's happiest City, what sets the current ambition apart from that of recent decades is the genuine desire, aside from simply a need, to secure transformational growth and a real 'step change' in the City's performance.

The Carlisle District Local Plan has evolved in the context of this new ambition and seeks to play a pivotal role in helping to translate these ambitions into on the ground activity.

The Plan is one which has developed over time and one which has a strong, distinctive and importantly shared vision of the future – a vision which is strongly supported. Having originally commenced on a path towards a Core Strategy the opportunity was taken post the introduction of the Framework to instead expand its scope to include development

management policies and allocations. In these regards the Plan constitutes a more traditional and comprehensive Local Plan which upon adoption will replace in its entirety those saved policies from the 2008 adopted Carlisle Local Plan.

Importantly and appropriately however it goes beyond traditional land use plans to ensure it is positive with a broad and spatial focus – a great example of which is the inclusion of strategic heritage or health and wellbeing policies included at the outset of the Plan as key components of the overall strategy – fitting given that Carlisle is one of England’s recognised historic cities and a World Health Organisation Healthy City.

It is a Plan which has been founded on what is considered to constitute a robust and importantly proportionate evidence base. It has also been informed, along with much of its evidence, by extensive consultation, in excess of the minimum required by the governing regulations, with a clear audit trail to support this and with clear value having been added as a result. Similarly the Sustainability Appraisal and process of the Habitat Regulation Assessment have been influential in the evolution of the Plans policies and proposals. It is also a Plan like most these days that has had to contend with changing sands with regards to national policy and guidance.

Testament to matching Carlisle’s current ambitions the Plan seeks to pursue the most ambitious levels of housing growth done so to date, driven by demographic and economic requirements and a need to secure a step change in the level and make up of Carlisle’s population. Positively the Plan seeks to reverse previous policies which have made it difficult to justify housing in rural communities within the District, in doing so enabling these communities to respond to latent demands and share in the benefits of growth.

Aside from allocating land to immediately contribute to meeting housing needs across a range of locations, a key and positive element of the Plan sees the identification of a broad location at Carlisle South, the intention of which, aside from contributing to supply within the next fifteen years, importantly should act to ensure the continuity of supply in the longer term and therefore across successive plans.

In addition to providing what is considered to be an attractive offering to the development industry, the range of sites on offer across a variety of

locations should act to ensure that an appropriate mix of dwellings is delivered across the next fifteen years including more affordable homes.

Since a low in net housing completions in 13/14, which in any event represents the outcomes of the actions and permissions three/four years previously in the depths of the recession, delivery is on the up. On the ground activity is strong and the trajectory is on track. Key to maintaining this requires more developers here although the recent emergence of Taylor Wimpey is an encouraging sign that they can be attracted.

From an economic perspective the Plan seeks to, on the back of having arrested a decline in the working age population, bring more land into employment use, in doing so generating increased job opportunities, economic gain and ultimately enhanced prosperity. This is to be achieved by concentrating on realising residual opportunities within well-established employment locations such as Kingstown, Durranshill and Rosehill, although the need to improve the attractiveness of these locations is acknowledged. Transformational interventions, including with respect to enhancing site infrastructure, are however already underway with very encouraging investment signs which bode well for the future of this strategy.

The Plan also includes provision to complement these opportunities through the creation of new destinations including at Morton to the West of the City, with the majority of the City's offerings falling within the strategically important and Local Enterprise Partnership backed M6 Corridor.

Recent and significant investments including the £12 million redevelopment of Carlisle Airport, £1 million investment in high specification laboratories which is testament to the diversification of the University of Cumbria's main campus in the city, and confirmation of the Kingmoor Park Enterprise Zone represent tangible examples of how the right economic conditions are coming to fruition to ensure that future aspirations stand a strong degree of success.

With regards to the City Centre the Plan puts in place what is considered to be a positive framework to help grow its retail, leisure and cultural offer – essential not only to keep pace with the intended growth of the District but also to maintain the the sub-regional role it plays. The strategy for the City Centre is one which seeks to enhance its performance and ultimately increase its market-share, which is not however without its challenges. We

know based on evidence including the retail study that whilst the historic city centre is a key and unique asset in attracting people to visit Carlisle, that conversely it presents issues in terms of existing premises and floor-plates aligning with modern retailer expectations. The absence of significant investment to secure a step change in the Centres offering risks the performance of the City Centre declining and contrary to attracting new operators risks us losing existing ones. In response positive opportunities for intervention have been identified including the opportunity presented by the vacation of the Citadels and through the required expansion of the Primary Shopping Area to the north.

The Plan also responds to a need for flexibility within the City Centre and Primary Shopping Area recognising that retail and leisure now go hand in hand, with an evident need in the City for example to consider vitality and viability within its core beyond traditional retailing hours. Alongside provisions in the Plan, recent successes with regards to the creation of a new Art Centre within the City Centre, significantly refurbished and enhanced Tourist Information Centre offering and ongoing signage and public realm enhancements, again it can be seen that there is positive momentum to build on.

Aside from encouraging and enabling development the Plan recognises and seeks to put in place a framework to protect the many assets that collectively make Carlisle attractive in the first instance. These include the District's rich heritage which ranges from Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site through to locally listed assets for which we have two very positive pilots underway. From a biodiversity / geology perspective Carlisle has sites ranging from international through to local level and also sites of significant landscape value including the Solway Coast and the North Pennines Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In these regards the Plan is consistent with the objectives of the up to date management plans where they exist for these assets. It also seeks to ensure that new developments are of a high quality and importantly appropriately distinctive design.

We know that in order to achieve the Plans vision much hard and ongoing work is required. We know for example we need to promote Carlisle as up for growth, open for business and a great place to live, work and invest. We know we need to work hard to grow and diversify the development industry and those prepared to invest in the City. We know too that we need to continue ensuring we fight hard to secure merited national recognition for

Carlisle and with it access to the funding opportunities and support that will bolster local efforts. We know also the importance of infrastructure planning and the timely delivery of this to ensure opportunities to grow are not unnecessarily delayed. On all of these fronts this hard work has however commenced, is already bearing fruit and in this regard ensures a strong degree of momentum exists on which to move forward from.

In conclusion it is contended that the Plan, inclusive of the modifications before the examination, is 'sound' and beyond this the right strategy to shape how Carlisle will grow and develop over the next fifteen years if we are to succeed in securing the desired vision. Furthermore it is contended that the Plan has been prepared in accordance with the various legal requirements and as such is capable of progressing through examination to a positive outcome.