Wokingham Borough Council CIL Examination
Opening Statement by Wokingham Borough Council

18th September 2014

Good morning. On behalf of Wokingham Borough Council, I would like to welcome the examiner, participants and members of the audience to this independent examination of our Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule. My name is Louise Strongitharm and I am the Service Manager for Economic Sustainability and the lead officer for CIL at the Council.

Wokingham is a prosperous Borough that is often regarded as one of the best places to live in the Country. People are attracted to the area by its excellent schools, thriving economy, low crime, good transport links and attractive natural environment. It is not surprising that there is strong demand for housing and a very buoyant housing market here.

The Council has at least a 5 year housing land supply and an up-to-date Local Plan, comprising of the Core Strategy (adopted in January 2010) and the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (adopted in February 2014). These set out an ambitious growth agenda to deliver the development necessary to sustain the area’s economic growth and ensure that the needs of all groups are met. By 2026, this will have included the provision of over 13,000 dwellings, of which approximately 10,000 will be on the four Strategic Development Location sites. These large predominantly greenfield sites require substantial infrastructure investment, which has started to take place. The progress made already in implementing the Core Strategy is testament to the Council’s commitment to securing the development needs of the Borough. The Council's approach to setting CIL reflects that same approach.

The Council has identified the infrastructure funding gap needed to be addressed, in part, by CIL in order to deliver the Local Plan objectives. It appointed consultants, GL Hearn, to carry out the viability testing to help establish a rate for CIL in Wokingham that the available evidence shows would help to close this gap without jeopardising the development envisaged by the Local Plan. This Examination must consider whether the Council has aimed to strike what - in its view - is an appropriate balance between closing this gap and the potential effects on the viability of development across the Borough. The Council's Examination Documents confirm that it has.

The proposed residential rates should not come as a surprise to anyone. They reflect the fact that the bulk of Wokingham Borough’s residential development will be on greenfield sites, which through our development plan have been released from the countryside and confirmed as suitable for development.

For the SDLs, the proposed CIL rates and residual Section 106 equate to between £22,000 and £27,000 per unit of Section 106 under current arrangements. These are well within the levels tested by Level6's in 2010 in their work to support the Core Strategy, which demonstrated viability of Section 106 infrastructure packages ranging from £27,000 to over £33,000 per unit. Furthermore, these conclusions have
been borne out on the early SDL planning consents, where Section 106 agreements have secured upwards of £28,000 per unit. These facts speak for themselves.

The Council believes that the submitted Charging Schedule and supporting evidence provides an appropriate base for the collection of the Community Infrastructure Levy in Wokingham. The Charging Schedule complies with the legal and procedural requirements of the Acts and Regulations. The Charging Schedule has evolved through the statutory stages of preparation with the effective involvement of the public and key stakeholders at all relevant stages. Detailed evidence of how we met these requirements is provided in the submitted Statement of Compliance.

The Council is firmly of the view that the proposed Charging Schedule provides a robust approach to the setting of the CIL and that the proposed rates do not threaten the delivery of development across the Borough as a whole. CIL has a key role in contributing towards the infrastructure necessary to support our growth agenda. The Council welcomes the independent examination of the Draft Charging Schedule in the confident expectation that it has satisfied the legal requirements for adoption of the Levy to which this examination is directed.