

**Castle Point Plan Examination – Opening Statement – Cllr Warren Gibson –
Initial Hearing 8 September 2026**

Good morning Inspectors, and welcome to Castle Point.

I'd also like to welcome today all those participating in the examination process.

I am Cllr Warren Gibson, the Deputy Leader of the Council, and I have led the Members' Plan Board through the development of the Castle Point Plan since November 2022 when this Administration agreed to prepare a new local plan.

When we set out to prepare the Castle Point Plan, we did so with the ambition of preparing a plan that was right for this Borough, the places within it and the people who live here.

Consultation and engagement with residents has therefore been at the forefront of the development of the Castle Point Plan.

In 2023 we engaged extensively with residents on what the plan should look like. Residents told us:

- They valued local green spaces, the local environment and the sense of community in the local area;
- They had concerns about infrastructure capacity, especially transport and health infrastructure; and
- They wanted to see local transport infrastructure and services improved.

In 2024 we undertook a full Issues and Options Consultation. Residents were very clear that these concerns remained and in locating new development we should look to intensify our urban areas and regenerate urban land including our employment areas.

This is, therefore, what the Castle Point Plan does. It protects what local people value, and identifies how we intend to deliver homes through the regeneration of our urban areas. In doing so, it delivers urban intensification and regeneration which supports the sustainability of services and public transport and encourages more walking and cycling.

The reports setting out our engagement activities and the outcomes are included in our evidence library, which is extensive.

We have fully investigated both what our development needs are and also the capacity of the environment and the infrastructure in Castle Point to accommodate those needs. We have considered alternative development strategies and the capacity of the Borough to accommodate growth.

Castle Point is a small borough of just 17 square miles. Canvey Island and parts of South Benfleet are constrained by flood risk, and there are extensive nature

conservation designations including internationally and nationally significant sites, rare grasslands and areas of ancient woodland.

Meanwhile the views to and from Hadleigh provide both the setting for the Hadleigh Castle Scheduled Monument and sweeping public views of Canvey Island, including historic grazing marshes to the west of the Island, and the wider Thames Estuary. These views are distinctive and contribute to the sense of place as people move through our area.

We have therefore looked to avoid development that would harm these important features.

The evidence has led to a strategy that enables us to bring forward intensification and regeneration of development in our urban areas. We have used a place based and urban design approach to identify levels of densification that will work in Castle Point. This will result in higher density developments coming forward on urban sites, and we are not afraid of that. This provides the most sustainable option and we have been approving these proposals through our development management processes.

We have also thought hard about what our approach to development means for infrastructure capacity, especially transport. You will see within the engagement results that transport capacity is a significant concern for residents. Our Transport Assessment meanwhile shows capacity issues on the local highway network, both now and in the future. By focusing development in central locations and where there is the scope to improve sustainable and active travel opportunities there is the potential to manage some of the transport issues facing residents now, and in future years. We have sought to avoid locations which would encourage car-centric activities that would further frustrate our residents.

I believe, along with the rest of the Council, that the plan we have prepared has been positively prepared through effective and extensive engagement with residents and stakeholders. It is justified by our extensive evidence base, and it is consistent with national planning policy, when national planning policy is read as a whole.

I would like to thank the Inspectors for your time in considering our plan, and the efforts you, and all the participants, will put into ensuring that it is the right plan for Castle Point.

I appreciate that this is just an initial hearing, and that the bulk of your work is yet to come. I hope that we will be able to proceed with the remainder of the examination in due course, and look forward to welcoming you back at a later date also.

END.