

STATEMENT

WINCHESTER DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN PART 1: EXAMINATION
HEARING 7 NOVEMBER 2012

1. GOOD MORNING, MR CHAIRMAN. MY NAME IS DAVID GRIFFITHS AND I AM REPRESENTING THE COMMITTEE AND MEMBERS OF THE DENMEAD VILLAGE ASSOCIATION (DVA). I AM ALSO A MEMBER OF THE DENMEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP AND ITS ASSOCIATED NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM. MY PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND IS IN NAVAL ESTATE RATIONALISATION AND NAVAL LAW. I SHOULD LIKE TO MAKE IT CLEAR FROM THE OUTSET THAT THE DENMEAD VILLAGE ASSOCIATION SUPPORTS MUCH OF WHAT IS CONTAINED IN THE WINCHESTER DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN PART 1 AND THE DVA'S AIM IS TO CONTRIBUTE POSITIVELY TO THE DISTRICT PLANNING PROCESS IN THE YEARS AHEAD. FOR THE AVOIDANCE OF DOUBT, LET ME MAKE IT CLEAR THAT THE DVA IS NOT A NIMBY ORGANISATION.
2. THE DENMEAD VILLAGE ASSOCIATION WAS CREATED IN 1973 FOR THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF PROTECTING THE GEOGRAPHICAL GAP BETWEEN SUBURBAN WATERLOOVILLE AND THE RURAL VILLAGE OF DENMEAD FROM UNACCEPTABLE INDUSTRIAL AND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT. THE REASON FOR THAT STANCE WAS TO PROTECT THE "PRIDE OF PLACE" SPIRIT OF DENMEAD, ITS SPECIFIC IDENTITY, ITS HISTORY, CHARACTER AND SOUL. AS A QUID PRO QUO, THE DVA HAS NOT OBSTRUCTED MAJOR INFILL DEVELOPMENT ON GREEN SPACE WITHIN THE VILLAGE BOUNDARY, THE RESULT BEING THAT DENMEAD'S BUILT ESTATE HAS INCREASED BY SOME 50% IN

THE PAST 25 YEARS. DURING THAT PERIOD THE POPULATION HAS INCREASED FROM JUST OVER 4,000 TO APPROXIMATELY 6,600.

3. THE GREEN GAP BETWEEN WATERLOOVILLE AND DENMEAD HAS, HOWEVER, SHRUNK MARKEDLY IN RECENT YEARS BECAUSE OF THE MAJOR DEVELOPMENT OF OVER 2,000 DWELLINGS BEING BUILT TO THE WEST OF WATERLOOVILLE. HITHERTO THE GAP WAS ABOUT ONE-AND-A-HALF MILES; NOW IT IS BARELY HALF THAT – I.E., THREE QUARTERS OF A MILE. FURTHERMORE, THE STYLE OF DEVELOPMENT THAT IS CREEPING TOWARDS DENMEAD IS DISTINCTLY URBAN IN NATURE AND POSITIVELY UNATTRACTIVE IN PLACES. AS A RESULT, THE PEOPLE OF DENMEAD ARE ANXIOUS THAT THE NEW DISTRICT PLAN BEING EXAMINED BY YOU SHOULD CONTAIN STRONG, ROBUST POLICIES FOR THE PROTECTION OF GREEN GAPS TO PREVENT UNWELCOME RIBBON DEVELOPMENT AND UNDESIRABLE, CHARACTERLESS COALESCENCE.
4. THE DVA HAS CONSIDERED CAREFULLY THE EXTANT POLICY COVERING FORMAL GAPS – I.E., POLICY 15 CONTAINED IN THE PARTNERSHIP FOR SOUTH HAMPSHIRE'S DOCUMENT “ A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR GAPS” AND POLICY CP18 CONTAINED IN THE DRAFT WINCHESTER LOCAL PLAN PART 1. THE DVA HAS COME TO THE VIEW THAT THESE STATED POLICIES ARE NOT ROBUST ENOUGH AND ARE IN DANGER OF PROVING UNSOUND IF AND WHEN THEY ARE TESTED BY DEVELOPERS IN THE COURTS. THE DVA'S GREATEST DIFFICULTY IS WITH THE FOLLOWING TWO POLICY STATEMENTS:-

A) *“WITHIN THESE AREAS ONLY DEVELOPMENT THAT DOES NOT PHYSICALLY OR VISUALLY DIMINISH THE GAP WILL BE ALLOWED”*; AND

B) *IN DEFINING THE EXTENT OF THE GAP NO MORE LAND THAN IS NECESSARY TO PREVENT THE COALESCENCE OF SETTLEMENTS SHOULD BE INCLUDED HAVING REGARD TO MAINTAINING THEIR PHYSICAL AND VISUAL SEPARATION.*

5. TWO OBVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS CAN BE MADE FROM THESE TWO POLICY STATEMENTS:-

A) SOME FORM OF DEVELOPMENT WILL BE POSSIBLE IN THE DEFINED WATERLOOVILLE-DENMEAD GAP; AND

B) THE SIZE OF THE GAP WILL BE OPEN TO SERIOUS CHALLENGE DEPENDING ON THE VIEWS OF THOSE WITH A VESTED INTEREST.

THE DVA KNOWS FROM PAST EXPERIENCE THAT DEVELOPERS' LAWYERS WILL RECOGNIZE THAT SUCH IMPRECISE WORDING PROVIDES ROOM FOR MANOEUVRE AND WILL EXPEND LARGE AMOUNTS OF MONEY IN THE COURTS TO GET THEIR WAY. A RECENT DEVELOPMENT APPEAL CASE IN RESPECT OF A LARGE GREEN SPACE IN DENMEAD WAS WON BY A DEVELOPER PRACTICING SEMANTICS AND HAIR-SPLITTING TACTICS AT AN INQUIRY. THE DVA IS, THEREFORE, ANXIOUS THAT THE CITIZENS OF DENMEAD ARE NOT OUT-GUNNED IN FUTURE PURELY AS A RESULT OF LOOSE OR IMPRECISE WORDING IN DISTRICT-LEVEL POLICY DOCUMENTS

6. WHILE THE PROTECTION OF THE WATERLOOVILLE-DENMEAD GAP IS THE DVA'S MAIN CONCERN, IT IS ALSO VERY CONCERNED ABOUT THE POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT OF SENSITIVE GREEN SPACE TO THE NORTH, WEST AND SOUTH OF DENMEAD. ALTHOUGH WINCHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL SAY THAT GENERAL PROTECTIONS ARE IN PLACE FOR THE COUNTRYSIDE IN GENERAL, WE ARE UNSURE THAT THEY WILL BE SUFFICIENT TO WARD OFF INAPPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE GIVEN THE GOVERNMENT'S LIKELY RELIANCE ON HOUSE BUILDING TO BOLSTER THE ECONOMY.
7. THE DVA WOULD ALSO ASK YOU TO ACCEPT THAT LOCAL AUTHORITIES OFTEN LACK THE FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES TO FIGHT AGGRESSIVE DEVELOPERS IN THE COURTS DESPITE THE SOUNDNESS OF THEIR THINKING. THIS IS LIKELY TO BECOME AN INCREASING PROBLEM IN THE ON-GOING CLIMATE OF FINANCIAL STRINGENCY AND JOB CUTS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR. IT IS, THEREFORE, EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAT POLICY DOCUMENTS ARE MADE LESS OPEN TO LEGAL CHALLENGE.
8. THE DENMEAD VILLAGE ASSOCIATION WOULD ASK YOU TO NOTE THAT IT IS HEAVILY INVOLVED IN THE PRODUCTION OF A DENMEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN. A SECTION OF THAT PLAN WILL COVER THE DENMEAD GAP AND THE OTHER SENSITIVE GREEN SPACE AROUND THE VILLAGE. IT IS IMPORTANT, THEREFORE, THAT THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN CONTAINS ROBUST AND CLEARLY-UNDERSTOOD

POLICY ON GAPS SO THAT THE PEOPLE OF DENMEAD CAN HAVE FAITH IN THEIR PLAN.

9. THE DVA WOULD BE GRATEFUL IF YOU WOULD AGREE THAT THE POLICY WORDING REFERRED TO IN THE DRAFT WINCHESTER DISTRICT PLAN PART 1, POLICY CP18, IS TOO IMPRECISE TO BE RELIED UPON AND, THEREFORE, ASK WINCHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL TO:-

A) REWRITE ITS DRAFT POLICY IN RESPECT OF THE WATERLOOVILLE-DENMEAD GAP SO THAT ITS WORDING IS NOT OPEN TO CHALLENGE IN THE WAY THE DVA FEARS; AND

B) THE DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN PART 1 IS AMENDED TO INCLUDE A CLEAR AND ROBUST POLICY STATEMENT OUTLINING THE PROTECTIONS OF GREEN SPACE GAPS AROUND SETTLEMENTS CURRENTLY IN PLACE SO THAT IT MAY BE REFLECTED IN THE DENMEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN.