

Inspector's response to request from Icen Projects Ltd to suspend the Core Strategy Examination.

General points.

Paragraph 9.21 of The Inspectorate's Procedure Guidance states that: *As a general principle, suspension goes against the wider policy objective of speeding up the plan process and developing evidence to inform choices made during plan making.*

The general principle is that local planning authorities should submit a plan which they believe to be sound. As you know, I asked the Council to respond to your request for suspension, and they have replied that they remain of the view that the Core Strategy is sound and are content that the issues of soundness you raise should be considered through the examination process.

Much of the text of Counsel's opinion that you have supplied deals with the reasons why you consider the plan to be unsound. I do not consider it would be appropriate for me to take a view on the points you raise at this stage, as to do so could be seen to pre-empt the examination. There is, however, one matter that I will respond to at this stage regarding the timing of the examination and possible adoption of the Core Strategy. You will be aware from the Inspectorate's Procedure Guidance that the usual timeframe from submission to delivery of the final report is 29 weeks. As the Rochford CS was submitted for examination on 15 January, the 29 weeks would run until early August. The start of hearings has been delayed slightly beyond the usual week 14 to avoid the expected date of the General Election, and I also expect the hearing session on affordable housing to take place after May. Nonetheless, I would not expect these factors to result in such a lengthy delay to the delivery of my final report that the Council would not be able to adopt the Core Strategy (if I find it sound, or that it can be made sound with changes) during 2010.

In considering your request I have also borne in mind that whilst the Government Office has made representations on the Core Strategy, they have not identified any issues which have led them to advise that the Core Strategy should be withdrawn.

In all the circumstances, I consider that the examination should continue and I will consider your representations along with all others submitted. For the avoidance of doubt, this response should not be interpreted as an indication that I have already reached a view on the soundness of the Core Strategy.