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**Opening Statement prepared by Gloucestershire County Council | May 2019**

1. Good morning everyone.
2. My name is Robin Drake and I am a Chartered Town Planner employed by Gloucestershire County Council as the Principal Planning Officer within the Minerals & Waste Policy Team
3. I will introduce the rest of the team a little later, but to start with on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council, I would like to welcome you sir and Helen, our Programme Officer, to Gloucester and to these Examination Hearing Sessions. I would also like to welcome all of those who will be participating at the Examination and those attending in the public galley during the course of the proceedings.
4. Gloucestershire County Council is rightly proud of the County that it serves. Gloucestershire is an historic 'shire' which sits on the northern edge of the South West of England. It is recognised as a gateway into this part of the country. Broadly speaking Gloucestershire is distinctly rural in character with strong bucolic traditions. It is home to diverse environments sculpted by the interplay between the natural forces of the weather, geological and biological resources and evolving settlements that make up the county's communities. Gloucestershire is steeped in the nation's history with rich built environments, artefacts and remains that can be traced back to before Roman times.
5. In recognition of Gloucestershire's high environmental qualities, many parts of the county are afforded special protection: -
  - There are 8 internationally-designated sites including the Severn Estuary and Wye Valley;
  - Over half of Gloucestershire falls within one of three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
  - There are more than 120 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and 750 local Wildlife Sites;

- Around 160 Regionally Important Geological & Geomorphological Sites have been established and two national Geoparks – Cotswold Hills and Abberley & Malvern Hills;
  - There are also upwards of 500 scheduled monuments, nearly 13,000 listed buildings and close to 31,000 other locally-recorded archaeological sites.
6. Very few parts of Gloucestershire are unaffected in some way by one or more important designation. Consequently a key challenge for any future plans for the county, including for minerals, is to ensure its prized environmental assets are appropriately and effectively protected as much as possible from the risks of irreversibly damage and degradation.
7. Moving to the matter of future planning, it should come as little surprise that the County Council believes that the emerging Minerals Local Plan for Gloucestershire (2018 – 2032) will be a success and will achieve the necessary and appropriate balance between different and sometimes competing interests. Whilst the County Council is unquestionably committed to protecting the much-revered and respected local environments and securing the safety of those living, working and enjoying the County, it is also acutely aware of its important responsibilities to positively respond to and support opportunities to progress Gloucestershire both economically and socially. It is a growing and dynamic county
8. Minerals are a vital component in the construction, maintenance and improvement of: - homes, workplaces and the infrastructure that allows the people of Gloucestershire to move around, keep healthy, and stay safe. The growth ambitions for the county over the coming decades, as articulated through district local plans and the Strategic Economic Plan of the Local Enterprise Partnership - GFirst can only be achieved if adequate and steady supplies of minerals can be sustainably secured.
9. It is only right therefore that the local plan for minerals, which is far reaching and will have a long lasting influence, is guided by the principles of inclusivity, transparency and accountability. In practice this has meant the carrying out of widespread, ongoing and proactive engagement and collaboration with local communities, their representatives, local organisations and interest groups and businesses throughout the plan's

preparation in line with the Gloucestershire Statement of Community Involvement. The passing of the Minerals Local Plan for Gloucestershire through each key stage of plan-making has been supported by extensive and exhaustive consultation. The plan has also been prepared in cooperation with the Borough, City and District Councils of Gloucestershire, neighbouring county, unitary and district authorities and other mineral and waste planning authorities affected by or influential in the strategic direction and policy decisions set out in the Plan. This has ensured that where the plan could have an influence upon cross-boundary matters, effective cooperation has secured collective understanding and laid down solid foundations for the implementation stage for future successful collaborative working and joint solutions. The Council is confident it has met its statutory 'Duty to Co-operate' in preparing the Minerals Local Plan.

10. All good local plans must be founded on an evidence base that is proportionate, robust and relevant in ensuring it identifies the key issues, opportunities and solutions. The Minerals Local Plan is no exception to this. It has responded to the clear and ongoing requirement for minerals and the need for them to be provided in an increasingly sustainable manner. The successful completion of Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment processes through the evolution of the plan has shown how potential impacts have been systematically and properly taken into account.
11. As well as considering other local plans, the Minerals Local Plan has also been prepared in a manner that assures consistency with national planning policy. Under transitional arrangements applicable to the plan, this means the contents of the original National Planning Policy Framework (2012) and the relevant detailed advice set out in national Planning Practice Guidance.
12. Notwithstanding all of the fore-mentioned, the County Council nonetheless accepts that while the submitted Minerals Local Plan has undoubted support in a number of quarters, not everyone presently shares that view. This is self-evident from a review of the representations and statements that have been made by those who will be joining us at the Hearing Sessions and others who have chosen not to, or are not able to attend.
13. The County Council accordingly looks forward to a constructive discussion over the coming days about the Minerals Local Plan and those parts of it where changes have been considered by others, to be necessary. It is fully acknowledged however that the

examination is not the vehicle to achieve 'improvements' or 'greater degrees' of soundness. Although, the Council does seek to uphold a longstanding commitment to achieve the best possible plan that will serve the interests of Gloucestershire.

14. To that end, the County Council has remained open, proactive and dynamic in its approach by continuing to liaise with many representors, including those who intend to participate in the hearing sessions. It has also put forward for discussion at this Examination a series of draft, proposed modifications to the plan. This follows on from early draft possible modifications included in the supporting evidence when the plan was submitted in December 2018. The County Council wishes to confirm at this time, that the submission of modifications is not an attempt to rectify fundamental deficiencies in the plan's content or because it is not confident that the submitted plan is inherently 'sound'. Rather, the draft, proposed modifications respond to a number of issues raised and valid points brought forward by representors to make part of plan more explicitly consistent with national policy, to ensure effectiveness or to reflect the emergence of new information since the plan was submitted.
15. However, none of the suggested, draft, proposed modifications have been subject to wider public consultation or have undergone sustainability appraisal. The County Council will seek to address this matter at the post-hearing stage for any draft, proposed modifications, and indeed any others that may emerge out of discussions over the next few days, which are deemed to be appropriate.
16. I re-iterate that the County Council intends to participate in constructive debate and to avoid adversarial and combative acts of rebuttal of all criticism or alternative points of view. The County Council see's that its primary role is to: - explain and answer questions about the many processes and considerations that have led to where the plan has arrived, to comment on how the proposed policies would work in practice, and to offer a view on what further modifications (if any) might be required in order to achieve the desired outcome of an adopted, up-to-date and fit for purpose Minerals Local Plan for Gloucestershire.
17. All of those representing the County Council will therefore endeavour to assist you sir, and the wider Examination in good faith and to the very best of our abilities.

18. This leads me onto the introduction of the County Council's team who, along with myself, will be assisting over the next few days: -

- **Mr. Kevin Phillips** the County Council's Team Leader for Minerals & Waste Development Management and Policy;
- **Miss. Lorraine Brooks** a Planning Officer in the Minerals & Waste Policy team;
- **Mrs. Laura Burford** also a Planning Officer in the Minerals & Waste Policy team;
- **Mr. Gary Kennison** the County's Principal Ecologist;
- **Mr. Toby Catchpole** the County Council's Heritage Team Leader or the County Archaeologist – **Mr. Charles Parry**; and
- **Mr. Jason Betty** – a Senior Planning Officer in the Development Management team who will be on hand in respect of questions posed under Matter 5.

19. Also, on behalf of the County Council, Mr. Martin Evans will be available off site to assist with questions particularly concerning legal requirements and procedures. However, Mr. Evans is unlikely to be in attendance during the proceedings.

20. In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported the preparation of the Minerals Local Plan for Gloucestershire. A good deal of time, effort and resources have been given over by both officers and elected members of the County Council. This has been mirrored in many cases by those who have taken the trouble to provide comments, suggestions and feedback as the plan has taken shape. I would also like to extend my thanks to you, sir and to Helen the Programme Officer for your patience, guidance and assistance leading up to these Hearing Sessions.