RESPONSE ON BEHALF OF COMMERCIAL ESTATES GROUP TO INSPECTOR’S REQUEST RELEVANT TO WHETHER THE CORE STRATEGY REFLECTS THE PRESCRIPTION IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF) AND, IF NOT, WHETHER THE INCLUSION OF THE ‘MODEL POLICY’ INCLUDED ON THE PLANNING PORTAL WOULD BE AN APPROPRIATE WAY OF SECURING CONSISTENCY WITH NATIONAL POLICY?

The Government’s final National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 27 March 2012 and in response to the Inspector’s specific request on 3 April 2012, we have reviewed whether the inclusion of the presumption in favour of sustainable development ‘model policy’ from the Planning Portal website would be an appropriate way of securing consistency with national policy. As would be expected and as is necessary, we have also reviewed the extent to which the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy and proposed ‘Main Modifications’ align with the NPPF policies when taken as a whole and therefore satisfies the ‘tests of soundness’ as set out within paragraph 182 of the Framework.

In determining the most appropriate basis on which to proceed, the Inspector will need to consider views on the extent to which the Core Strategy and proposed ‘Main Modifications’ align with the NPPF alongside the views of other interested parties. We would therefore wish to be involved in any future hearing sessions relating to the NPPF.

With regard to the specific issue raised by the Inspector (having a local plan which follows the approach of the presumption in favour of sustainable development), we consider that the inclusion of the ‘model policy’ would make a positive contribution towards achieving this and we would therefore support it. However it is important to note that the inclusion of this model policy will not, on its own, achieve compliance with the NPPF. In particular we note the following areas where the Core Strategy does not follow the guidance set out in the NPPF:

Local Application of the Presumption

The NPPF states that the presumption in favour of sustainable development is at the heart of the planning system – a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking. Paragraph 15 states that local plans should reflect the presumption, something that the ‘model policy’ referred to
above does to a certain degree. However the NPPF also, importantly, asks local plan policies to guide how the presumption should be applied locally. Paragraph 15 states:

“All plans should be based upon and reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development, with clear policies that will guide how the presumption should be applied locally.”

As the Core Strategy production process took place predominantly between 2008 and 2011 i.e. well before the NPPF or the draft NPPF, it accordingly has not been prepared to reflect the positive approach to planning which the presumption in favour of sustainable development requires. Furthermore, and for the same reason, the policies within the Core Strategy, when taken as a whole, do not adequately set out what constitutes sustainable development locally within South Oxfordshire.

Meeting Objectively Assessed Needs and Demand

Paragraph 47 of the NPPF states:

“To boost significantly the supply of housing, local planning authorities should:
- use their evidence base to ensure that the Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market areas, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in this Framework, including identifying key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period.”

At no part of the Core Strategy process has the District Council assessed the objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, which of course includes a number of other local authority areas such as Oxford, Vale of White Horse, Cherwell, High Wycombe and Reading and then seek to meet them in full. The level of housing proposed is that set out in the South East Plan which of course itself acknowledges at paragraph 7.7 that the level of housing proposed is not sufficient to meet the housing needs of the region and that an early review of the plan is required. Furthermore, the SHMA identifies clearly that on their own, the affordable housing needs for South Oxfordshire are 1,363 dwellings per annum.