Statement of Mr John S Martin to Mr R Hollox, appointed Inspector to the ROTHERHAM LDF CORE STRATEGY (CS) HEARINGS, October – November 2013.

I am a Rotherham resident of over 25 years standing, and I worked in the Borough from 1974 to 2003. I am now a retired Chartered Surveyor. As all 7 matters are inextricably linked, I apologise in advance if some representations are duplicated (in whole or in part) in some of my other now submitted statements. I duly submitted representations (on Rotherham Borough Council’s then final draft Core Strategy) on 6th August 2012 and in accordance therewith accordingly submit my further written representations to these hearings as follows:

1. Whilst I have no grounds for concluding that the CS as a whole is not legally sound nor consistent with national policy, nor even positively prepared, it is my view that the CS as so prepared is neither sufficiently justified, clear nor is it likely to be fully effective in delivering what the Borough needs for its future well-being.

2. It is noted that these CS hearings do not allow for any discussion of the merits or otherwise of including any individual proposed development site in the Sites and Policies Document. Nevertheless any specific comments made within these statements relate to the area of Rotherham close to where I live (S60 4BZ) unless otherwise stated.

3. The plan period should be 2015 to 2030 (with a further 5 year period for the “safe guarded land” aspect (because we are already coming to the end of 2013 and once the CS is approved the Sites and Policies part has still got to be finalised which presumably will take the best part of 2014 to sort out).

4. Not all of the 17 specific objectives (as set out in RSD1/1 pages 25-32 are realistic, achievable or deliverable eg 1, 2, 3 and 4 (see later).

5. No doubt a certain amount of liaison with neighbouring Councils has occurred of late (eg with Sheffield CC re Waverley), but in overall terms Rotherham has lost out to Sheffield in terms of it being asked to provide some of their housing for those workers who travel to Sheffield (ie the target of 12,750 homes is too high – see also later paragraphs).

6. There is far too much reliance on seeking to develop green belt land in order to satisfy the stated perceived targets in certain parts of Rotherham, and indeed too much reliance on leaving any alteration of Green Belt boundaries
(Page 2) to the Sites and Policies DPD. Whilst I understand that development of some such land is inevitable, this should be restricted to a matter of last resort, and in any event should not include huge swaths of countryside, valuable agricultural land or areas of High Landscape Value. Rotherham’s plan should aim to keep and build on its “plus points” to raise the threshold of the whole of the Borough, not downgrade its better assets to the lowest common denominator by building on them. Therefore, in any revision of the Green Belt boundaries, areas of already acknowledged High Landscape Value should be exempt.

7. The Plan shouldn’t succumb to “builder pressure” who have no interest in the Community and only want to make money. They only want to move onto the clean green field land whereas we still have areas of past developed land to sort out eg Town Centre, Eastwood Trading Estate and Maltby Colliery. Please don’t sacrifice our countryside by destroying our open spaces unnecessarily – previously developed brownfield sites should be reused first. The issue of unmet housing demand within the Plan period is being used to justify a massive over-provision of Green Belt deletions. This not only opens up the whole Plan to developers cherry picking the most profitable sites, but also undermines the argument that a Green Belt review could usefully generate a sustainable settlement pattern for the future. The cards are stacked in favour of developers whereas we need a democratic planning system that gives local people a stronger voice. In my view, Rotherham MBC is attaching too much weight to the NPPF compared to local evidence, and bowing to combined pressure from developers and Central Government to front-load the Plan with easily developable housing sites.

8. The plan has not been positively prepared enough in terms of perceived residential need. There needs to be more flexibility to the targets proposed in terms of “windfalls”, under used property (including non-residential) especially in the town centre (eg Pubs), vacant property (including non-residential), brownfield sites and in the provision of high class smaller accommodation for the elderly and single persons (eg more apartments especially in the town centre and “gated community” type developments). In short the 12,750 new homes is still too high (catering too much for asylum seekers, immigrants, migrant workers and workers from other Local Authority areas nearby).

9. The large area of land at Thorpe Hesley (zoned for many years as residential) should be re-confirmed as such (not re-designated as white land) and developed out accordingly (locationaly very good as very close to M1 junction, and Sheffield North) instead of allocating 26% of all the housing allocation in the Urban Area (excluding Bassingthorpe) in the rest of the said Urban Area as drafted, as some of this said land is in the Green Belt and of High Landscape Value.

10. I agree with Policy CS2 that Bassingthorpe and Dinnington should be the 2 main hubs for growth (plus Rotherham’s Town Centre of course). The town centre particularly needs regenerating to bring it back to life and this will not
happen if people are put on the outskirts of town as they will then travel to Meadowhell, Nottingham, Sheffield, Doncaster and Leeds all the more and therefore the town centre will become more and more of a ghost town. Therefore, the Urban Area as a whole (as defined in the Settlement hierarchy (RSD/1 pages 41-57)) is too widely drawn and to include some suburbs of Rotherham “for convenience”. It would be more common sense to concentrate on the Town Centre (together with Bassingthorpe, Dinnington and Thorpe Hesley) and leave the suburbs alone (as otherwise these suburbs will become too merged together as to lose their individual identities). An example of this is the “merger” of Whiston and Wickersley.

11. As a whole, house prices in Rotherham are below the national average. Rotherham needs to aspire to higher prices rather than flood the market with more of the same and continue to be known as a cheap place to live. The CS needs to raise the bar, and provide a limited number of the right house types in the right areas – if prices are low then there can’t be a shortage, (in overall terms). This is just the basic economics principle of supply and demand. Notwithstanding, I agree that there is a shortage of affordable housing, and agree that on any new development, this needs to be at least 25%. Such affordable housing however should be concentrated to the Town Centre and the 2 main hubs as mentioned above first. In short, Rotherham needs affordable homes and they must be sensitively located. The problem will not be solved by building £250,000+ houses in the Green Belt.

12. Using travel to work information as a criteria for allocating development to various communities is not reliable enough – as a case in point Brecks and Listerdale are more akin to Wickersley than the Urban Centre. The Rotherham to Maltby bus corridor obviously connects all communities/suburbs en route via the A631, but school catchment areas put Brecks and Listerdale in with Wickersley not the Urban Area.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and trust that these comments will be helpful in approving a final Core Strategy for Rotherham.

Signed ...................... John S Martin, MRICS (Retired).