Tandridge District Local Plan Examination

Matter 3 – The Spatial Strategy

Examination Statement by Nexus
Planning on behalf of Taylor Wimpey
1. This statement has been prepared by Nexus Planning on behalf of Taylor Wimpey (“TW”).

2. TW controls some 122ha of land to the west of the A22 adjacent to Blindley Heath, which is available for a housing led development. TW has also actively promoted a Garden Community at Blindley Heath for 4,000 dwellings, the majority of which is available for development now.

3. TW is a member of the Tandridge Developer Forum (“TDF”) and therefore also relies upon separate representations made by the TDF.

**Issue:** Is the spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy as set out in Policies TLP01, TLP06, TLP07, TLP08 and TLP09 justified as the most appropriate strategy and is it based on robust evidence?

3.1 Have all realistic options for the distribution of development within the District been identified and considered robustly in the formulation of the Plan?

**Garden Community**

4. TW supports the principle of a new Garden Community in the southern / central part of the District.

5. The opening paragraph of Policy TLP01 outlines that in the short and medium term, development is directed towards the most sustainable settlements (Tier 1 and Tier 2) and in the longer term new homes will be delivered through the development of the Garden Community.

6. Paragraph 52 of the NPPF identifies that new settlements or larger scale extensions to towns and villages can sometimes provide the best way of achieving sustainable development. Furthermore, paragraph 55 identifies that in order to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities, for example where development in one village may support services in a village nearby.

7. As set out within our Regulation 19 representations to Policy TLP01, we have analysed the potential effect a Garden Community in the southern / central part of the District (such as Blindley Heath) could have in terms of helping to address a clear lack of housing choice and services within this part of the District.

8. At present, there is a notable north / south split with the southern part of the District having a greater proportion of more deprived areas (in terms of physical and financial accessibility to housing and local services). Following the delivery of a new Garden Community, the number of most deprived areas reduces from three to only one. More broadly, there is also a more even spread of ‘deprivation’ levels across the District. This more balanced spread demonstrates that a Garden Community(s) (or cluster of communities) in the central / southern part of the District would make a positive contribution towards rebalancing access to housing and services across the District as a whole. In fact, such a proposal would have far and wide reaching benefits for 46% of the District’s geographical area and 23% of existing households. These benefits could not be achieved through a solely dispersed approach to housing (due to the consequent reduction in infrastructure provision), or a Garden Community in another part of the District, for example Redhill.
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Aerodrome, which is located on the periphery of the District and would result in a substantial ‘watering-down’ of benefits to the District.

9. Accordingly, TW consider that the principle of locating a new Garden Community or Garden Communities in the central / southern part of the District to be a sound approach. However, for the reasons set out in other matter statements (namely Matter 6), TW consider that a broader area of search should be identified in order to facilitate the delivery of a number of strategic development locations or communities, rather than a single Garden Community.

Tier 3 Settlements

10. Notwithstanding the above, TW’s statements in respect of Matter 1 outline our concerns with the Council’s approach to Tier 3 settlements. Whilst it is noted that a new Garden Community is proposed at South Godstone, this is only expected to deliver 1,400 dwellings in the plan period (numbers which the TDF considered to unrealistic) and it would only provide limited geographic choice to those seeking new homes across the more rural parts of the District. This is particularly relevant having regard to the significant affordability issues facing the District.

11. Furthermore, and as detailed in our Regulation 19 representations to Policy TLP01, we are concerned that the level of growth currently proposed to the rural settlements is insufficient to:

- meet the housing needs of the District’s growing rural community population; rebalance the rural areas aging population demographic by retaining within and attracting in, young newly forming households;
- deliver a full range of housing types and sizes, but with an emphasis on small to medium-sized family homes, and homes (including specialist accommodation) suitable for elderly residents; and
- meaningfully respond to worsening rural housing affordability issues.

12. This approach is contrary to paragraph 54 of the Framework, which states that in rural areas local planning authorities should be “responsive to local circumstances and plan housing development to reflect local needs, particularly for affordable housing” and that “local planning authorities should in particular consider whether allowing some market housing would facilitate the provision of significant additional affordable housing to meet local needs.” It should be further noted that having regard to the Green Belt constraints that prevail in the District, if allocations are not made to Tier 3 settlements, future growth would be restricted to limited infilling in villages or limited affordable housing, in accordance with paragraph 89 of the NPPF.

13. The Council’s approach to growth at Tier 3 (and below) settlements appears to have been exclusively driven by the SA process and fails to account for other factors, including national planning policy. For example, the NPPF acknowledges that “opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary from urban to rural areas” (para 29). Furthermore, paragraph 34 states that “plans should ensure developments that generate significant movement are located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes can be maximised...”
but importantly that this “...needs to take account of policies set out elsewhere in this Framework, particularly in rural areas.”

14. Given the above, it is clear that the NPPF considers more limited forms of development i.e. not generating ‘significant movement’, would be appropriate in relatively less sustainable locations, particularly in rural areas such as Tandridge and certainly where a Council exhibits a demonstrable failure to meet OAN. The Council has failed to consider this aspect of national policy in determining its spatial strategy.

15. The NPPF is clear that policies contained within it should be taken as a whole, that its thrust is to “boost significantly the supply of housing” (paragraph 47) and to make “every effort” (paragraph 17) to meet identified needs of an area, which requires local planning authorities to “respond positively” (paragraph 17) to opportunities for growth. The Council has failed to make “every effort” to “boost significantly” the housing supply and has not responded positively to the opportunities presented. Accordingly, this aspect of Policy TLP01 is unsound. To rectify this, further consideration should be given to allocating growth at Tier 3 settlements.

3.2 Is the proposed distribution of housing and other development supported by the Sustainability Appraisal, and will it lead to the most appropriate pattern of housing growth?

16. No, the distribution of housing will not lead to the most appropriate pattern of housing growth. Please refer to our response to question 3.1 above and our Matter 1 statement in this regard.

3.3 Is the distribution of new homes between the Tiers of settlements and proposed garden community justified and how has it been established?

17. Our response to this question is largely addressed in our response to question 3.1.

18. TW support the scale of a Garden Community and consider that this broad level of growth is necessary to deliver meaningful benefits to the southern half of the District in terms of access to services and facilities and wider infrastructure improvements. Indeed, paragraph 52 of the NPPF identifies that the “supply of new homes can sometimes be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements...”.

19. Notwithstanding the above, we consider the Council’s decision not to allocate any growth to Tier 3 settlements is unjustified having regard to the negative consequences of the Council’s approach (see our response to question 3.1) and the requirements of the NPPF (namely paragraphs 29, 34 and 54). In properly acknowledging this, we consider that the Council could sustainably accommodate additional housing within the District and therefore better meet its OAN, in accordance with paragraphs 17 and 47 of the NPPF.
Furthermore, given the Tier 3 settlements are likely to accommodate more limited forms of growth, such sites are likely to be able to contribute to the Council’s five year housing supply, thus helping to address issues raised by the TDF in this regard.

**TLP08: Rural Settlements**

3.8 Is the Policy sufficiently clear and would it be effective in respect of Woldingham which is inset, in part, from the Green Belt?

21. It would appear that Policy TLP08 of the TDLP relates, in part, to the identification of settlement boundaries for Rural Settlements.

22. TW raised significant concerns at the Regulation 19 stage in respect of the Council’s approach to the insetting of villages. We are not clear whether the Inspector wishes to deal with this through the relevant policy as part of Matter 3 or the Green Belt session - Matter 4. Assuming the former, we comment as follows.

23. The Council’s Green Belt Assessment (Part 3): Exceptional Circumstances and Insetting 2018 (GB1) outlines that a number of villages are currently washed over by the Green Belt. Paragraph 86 of the Framework is relevant in this regard and states that:

> “If it is necessary to prevent development in a village primarily because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included in the Green Belt. If, however the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used, such as conservation area or normal development management policies, and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt.”

24. The Council’s Part 3 Green Belt Assessment includes a consideration of villages washed over by the Green Belt and Table 1 identifies a list of settlements that are appropriate for insetting. Blindley Heath is included within this list, which TW supports. The settlement is sizeable, with a population of more than 1,000 and includes a significant array of built form (both residential and commercial) some of which is fairly high density and demonstrably fails to exhibit an open character and therefore contribute to the openness of the Green Belt.

25. However, paragraph 2.14 of the Part 3 Green Belt Assessment then sets out that the Council has applied its own sustainability test against the currently washed over settlements that fail to comply with paragraph 86 of the NPPF. At paragraph 2.34 of GB1 the Council then concludes that having regard to its own sustainability test, it is only appropriate to inset Godstone from the Green Belt as:

> “Whilst other settlements similarly do not exhibit an open character, however in light of the work undertaken through the Settlement Hierarchy they do not offer sustainable locations for further development above and beyond that which can currently be secured; as such no other settlements are being recommended”
26. Given the above, it is clear that the Council accepts that a number of settlements, such as Blindley Heath, fail to contribute to the openness of the Green Belt and should therefore be inset, in accordance with paragraph 86 of the NPPF - an approach that TW would wholly support. However, the Council has then created an additional assessment criteria beyond that identified by national policy. The justification appearing to be:

i. that this follows a similar approach the Council has adopted in preparing earlier plans; and
ii. that insetting the villages listed in Table 1 of the Part 3 Green Belt Assessment would not offer sustainable locations for further development.

27. In respect of point ‘i’, earlier plans pre-date the NPPF and therefore these plans cannot be used a justification for an unsound approach.

28. In terms of point ‘ii’, this demonstrates a conflation of two issues. Paragraph 86 of the NPPF is expressly associated with the consideration of a single test – is it necessary to prevent development in a village because of the contribution its open character makes to the openness of the Green Belt? This interpretation is supported by the Inspector dealing with the Guildford Local Plan which has recently been found sound, where at paragraph 101, the Inspector states:

“In previous plans, all the villages except for Ash Green were washed over by the Green Belt, but the NPPF states that only those villages whose open character makes an important contribution to the openness of the Green Belt should be included within it.”

29. The Council in identifying that the village do not offer sustainable locations for growth is failing to acknowledge that insetting does not in itself permit any development and it would be for the development management process / future local plan process to consider the merits of development proposals. In such circumstances, sustainability would of course be a relevant factor, alongside other considerations, in accordance with national policy. The Council appear to acknowledge this, outlining at paragraph 2.36 of GB1 that:

“Whilst insetting would allow for a greater level of development, any such development would still be subject to planning policies. It is through these planning policies that the Council, as Local Planning Authority, would seek to ensure that only development appropriate to the character and appearance of that settlement is permitted.”

30. TW consider that following the correct application of paragraph 86 of the NPPF and consent insetting of villages, it is likely that alterations to the conclusions of the GB1 will be required in terms of the consideration of land adjacent to currently washed over villages. This is to ensure compliance with paragraph 85 of the NPPF i.e. that when defining new Green Belt boundaries local planning authorities should “not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open”, “satisfy themselves that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period” and “define boundaries clearly using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permeant.”
Having regard to these requirements, we consider that land controlled by TW at Blindley Heath could be released from the Green Belt and accommodate additional housing.

3.9 Are the criteria set out in A) consistent with Green Belt policy as set out in paragraph 89 of the Framework and are they justified?

32. Please see our response to question 3.8 in this Matter Statement.