Dear Inspector,

Tandridge District Council - Our Local Plan:2033 (ID16)

We would firstly like to thank you for your correspondence, dated 11 December 2020, regarding your preliminary findings and conclusions (reference ID16). The Council is pleased to note your view that it has abided by its statutory legal requirements and has prepared a compliant Local Plan, including meeting its Duty to Co-Operate. The Council is also grateful for the acknowledgement made regarding its considerable efforts in preparing its Plan but notes your concerns around aspects of soundness. Unfortunately, for the reasons set out in this letter, we are unable to provide you at this time with a response on the two options you have set out at paragraph 63 (to continue with the plan or withdraw) but are seeking your assistance in enabling us to do so.

The information you have set out inevitably has generated much discussion for the Council and whilst you have made several observations regarding housing need, specific sites and gypsy and travellers etc; it is the matter around Junction 6 of the M25 where this correspondence is focussed.

Over the course of the examination there has been much debate regarding Junction 6 of the M25 and your preliminary findings continue to highlight issues surrounding the junction. As you are aware, the Council has made numerous efforts to assure you that issues at the Junction would be dealt with, including seeking significant Government funding through the HIF process (which was done at great cost to the authority). Unfortunately, despite our efforts and a submitted plan which accords with the wider government agenda to deliver housing, despite significant constraints, we were unsuccessful. We continue to advocate that there are other alternatives to mitigating issues at Junction 6, including through headroom on wider development allocations. However, we understand why you have raised the questions and concerns that you have.

ID16 clearly sets out the options before the Council and the routes available in terms of our plan-making, based on the information, evidence and debates which are before
you. As such, the Council would like to carry out some further work before providing you with a response in relation to those options. Your report at paragraphs 9 and 13, raises points on Junction 6, that leave the Council with no doubt that whichever of the options it pursues (to progress or withdraw), the issues around Junction 6 will need to be remedied. Therefore, the decision on how we progress is not a simple one and after years of preparing the plan, taking very difficult decisions and at significant cost, the Council would like to be able to properly consider the implications of pursuing each option.

The work we are intending to conduct does not just relate to informing our response to you in terms of the options set out in ID16, but also in completing the work around ID13. You make a number of references within ID13 regarding the capacity of the junction and the ability for it to take development in the shorter term. As you are aware, whilst we conducted transport modelling of the junction for the purposes of the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bid, this was done on a horizon basis where capacity at 2018 was tested along with full garden community build out at 2040. The high-level transport modelling we are now seeking to undertake would be able to look at the interim years so we can, with more certainty, understand if indeed development in the shorter term can be accommodated and look at possible interim solutions. Whilst the Council has continued to make progress with Highways England and Surrey County Council Highways regarding ID13, this additional modelling would further assist our discussions with Highways England and in clarifying the position around the NPPF definition of ‘severe’ and its relevance to the junction.

Timescales for the work would be approximately 3 months from the point of commencement and in recognition of the fact that the examination remains under your control, we will await your response to this letter before seeking to move forward. Equally, with local government finances as they are, we do not want to commit to work without assurance that you support it as a way of progressing things. The options you have placed before the Council have significant operational implications for the authority and generate uncertainty for our community and the development professionals with an interest in the Plan. An early response on our preferred way forward would be most appreciated and we hope you see the merit in what we are aiming to achieve.

Should you wish us to clarify anything further, please contact us at your earliest convenience. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely

Jackie King
Interim Chief executive