

**Tunbridge Wells Borough Council  
Local Plan Examination**

**Matters, Issues and Questions for Stage 2  
Matters 3, 4 and 5**

**HEARING STATEMENT**

**SUBMITTED BY**

**THE KENT SME DEVELOPERS NETWORK**

**March 2022**

**TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION**

**MATTERS, ISSUES AND QUESTIONS FOR STAGE 2**

**March 2022**

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**i) Introduction**

- 1.1 This Hearing Statement has been prepared by the Kent SME Developers Network to respond to Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs) raised for Stage 2. This Statement focuses on matters raised by the Kent SME Developers Network expanding upon the response submitted to the Regulation 19 Consultation and specific questions posed in respect of Matters 3, 4 and 5 of the Inspector's Questions to the Examination.
- 1.2 This statement does not seek to repeat the representations made at the Regulation 19 stage but will draw reference to specific paragraphs / points in answering the relevant questions to the Examination. This response also draws upon the response submitted by the Network to the MIQs Stage 1.
- 1.3 The content of these representations is as follows:
- Response to Matter 3 Issue 2 - Distribution of Development
  - Response to Matter 4 Issue 1 – Principle of Green Belt Release
  - Response to Matter 5 Issue 1 – Site Selection Methodology

**ii) Response to Matter 3 Issue 2 - Distribution of Development*****Q5. Where new development is proposed in towns and villages, is the scale, type and distribution of housing development proportionate to their character, role and function?***

- 1.4 We do not consider that the Local Plan has reflected appropriately the opportunity that small sites can deliver in bringing forward development of a scale and nature that responds more appropriately to the character role of function of towns and villages.
- 1.5 The Council is seeking to deliver a significant quantum of development throughout the Borough and in locations that include AONB and Green Belt as well as other constraints (such as Heritage Assets). These more sensitive locations require both a scale, type, design and distribution that reflects these locations.
- 1.6 SMEs are well placed to deliver housing in these locations, which tend to more tuned in to responding to local design and character than larger schemes. The Council has not taken these factors into consideration in determining the typology of sites that can help meet housing needs in these locations. This is especially important given the weight that the NPPF now affords both SMEs and well designed schemes (paras 126 and 134) - which SMEs are often well placed to deliver.

**iii) Response to Matter 4 Issue 1 – Principle of Green Belt Release**

***Q5. Not all of Tunbridge Wells is within the Green Belt. Could the need for new housing and employment therefore be met by developing beyond the existing Green Belt boundary? If not, why not?***

- 1.7 It is evident the Council has not pursued all opportunities to develop outside the Green Belt. There are a number of SME sites that are located in non-Green Belt locations that have not been allocated. Indeed, a number of small sites were removed from the Regulation 18 Plan to the Regulation 19 Plan.
- 1.8 Furthermore, the Council has failed to identify 10% of its housing requirement on small sites, meaning the Council has not explored all options to avoid releasing land in the Green Belt. Whilst it is recognised that the scale of small sites may not negate the need to develop in the Green Belt, had sufficient small sites had been allocated, it would reduce the amount of Green Belt required to be released.
- 1.9 Section 3 of the Kent SME Reps sets out the shortfall of small sites, which could be addressed outside of the Green Belt.

**iv) Response to Matter 5 Issue 1 – Site Selection Methodology**

***Q7. Was the site selection process robust? Was an appropriate selection of potential sites assessed, and were appropriate criteria taken into account?***

- 1.10 No. the site selection criteria was not robust and did not pursue the correct methodology in selecting sites.
- 1.11 Paragraph 69 is clear that through the development plan or brownfield register, 10% of the housing requirement should be identified within the Development Plan. If it cannot be achieved, strong reasons must be given.
- 1.12 The Council has neither allocated sufficient land to meet this requirement nor set out any justification why this figure cannot be met.
- 1.13 Indeed, the requirements of paragraph 69 is straightforward. It clearly requires 10% of housing to be identified. Accordingly, land to meet this need should be addressed early in the site selection process. What this means is that in determining what supply of sites the Council is seeking to rely on to meet its needs, it should first understand its committed sites (extant supply), secondly understand any

outstanding allocations from previous Local Plans (assessing whether they can continue to be relied upon in the next plan period) and then the 10% requirement on small sites applied. Only after that process should the Council consider its remaining balance to allocate on additional sites over and above 1ha.

1.14 The Council has not done this.

1.15 The Council has not set out in its methodology how it has gone about its Site Selection criteria in the context of paragraph 69 and no evidence base is present which demonstrates:

- how small sites were considered,
- if any additional weighting was afforded to their size or
- if they are being promoted by an SME developer, which is fundamentally the purpose of Paragraph 69.

1.16 It is considered the Council has failed in complying with Paragraph 69 through its flawed site selection methodology which should be rectify.