

**Examination of the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan**

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Rt Hon Greg Clark MP  
Member of Parliament for Tunbridge Wells  
House of Commons  
London  
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22 March 2023

Dear Mr Clark,

1. Thank you for your letter dated 27 February 2023 concerning the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan examination. In that letter you refer to the submission of a transport proposal to narrow the B2160 at the Kippings Cross roundabout. The following response is hopefully useful in clarifying the current position.
2. You are correct that, following the examination hearing sessions last summer, the Council submitted a *Local Plan Mitigation Option Analysis for the Kippings Cross Junction*<sup>1</sup>. This sought to assess the effects of narrowing the B2160 and diverting traffic from the Kippings Cross junction to the A228. As yet, there has been no formal public consultation on these proposals.
3. The reason for this is because, in my Initial Findings<sup>2</sup> (dated November 2022) I have raised several concerns with the strategic sites at Tudeley Village and Paddock Wood. At this stage, the exceptional circumstances required by national planning policy to amend the Green Belt boundary have not been demonstrated, and significant changes and/or the preparation of further information will be necessary before the Plan can be found sound. As set out in my Initial Findings, there are three broad options available to the Council in seeking to move the examination forward. They include 1) deleting the site at Tudeley Village, 2) modifying the Plan by making significant changes to overcome the issues identified or 3) seeking to justify the allocations through additional evidence. Depending on which option is pursued, there could be consequential and wide-ranging impacts on other aspects of the Plan, from the need for new infrastructure to the operation of the highway network.

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<sup>1</sup> Examination Document PS\_033

<sup>2</sup> Examination Document ID\_012

4. It is currently unclear how the Council proposes to overcome these soundness concerns. Work is ongoing and the latest indicative timescales suggest that the first tranche of work will be completed by the end of March. Officers are then scheduled to present their recommendations to the Council in June<sup>3</sup>.
5. The reason for not yet seeking views on the Kippings Cross work is because the analysis contained therein is based on a strategy which proposes over 6,000 houses across the two strategic sites, neither of which are sound at present. Fundamental changes may therefore be required to the Plan which could have significant implications for the highways network and the analysis carried out thus far. Formally consulting on the document following the hearings would have led to abortive and unnecessary work if substantive changes are needed to progress the Plan.
6. Going forward, the Council will need to present a series of suggested changes, substantiated by evidence, to demonstrate how the Plan can be modified in a way that makes it sound. Full public consultation will be carried out on this additional material, which is likely to include updated transport evidence and an updated Infrastructure Delivery Plan. I have already informed the Council that this will be tested at further public hearing sessions, which are likely to be held later in the year.
7. In conclusion therefore, it is not that the submission of the Kippings Cross proposal has avoided public examination, but rather the strategy it is based on may change, which may necessitate the preparation of further highways proposals. Alternatively, in the event the Council concludes that significant changes are not required, and believes that the sites can be justified by the submission of further information, then this additional material, along with the Kippings Cross proposal would also be subject to full public consultation and examination by myself through further hearings.
8. I trust that this summary is useful in clarifying the current position. Dates for the next round of public consultation and hearing sessions are yet to be finalised, but participants will be notified in due course. Information will also be published on the examination website. In the meantime, should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me via the Programme Officer.

Yours sincerely,

*Matthew Birkinshaw*

Inspector

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<sup>3</sup> Examination Document TWLP\_107