

**Examination of the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan**

Inspector: Matthew Birkinshaw BA(Hons) Msc MRTPI

Programme Officer: Charlotte Glancy

email: [bankssolutionsuk@gmail.com](mailto:bankssolutionsuk@gmail.com) Phone: 07519 628064

Carlos Hone MRTPI  
Head of Planning  
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Royal Tunbridge Wells  
TN1 1RS

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Dear Mr Hone,

1. I write further to the latest hearing session, which took place on 14 November 2024. During that session we discussed the additional work undertaken by the Council since the previous hearings in June and July.
2. We have discussed at length the need for an immediate review of the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan and the Council and participants have provided valuable input into what a revised policy might say. We have also debated the housing requirement and the Council has helpfully suggested changes to policies based on our discussions in Examination Document PS\_107.
3. As you are aware, the Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 008 Reference ID: 2a-008-20190220) advises that local housing needs may be relied upon for a period of 2 years from the time that a plan is submitted for examination. Due to the passage of time in this examination, we discussed updating the housing requirement based on the latest assessment of housing needs.
4. However, Examination Document PS\_107 shows that there would only be a marginal difference in the figures, from 678 homes per year in the submitted Plan, to 660 homes per year based on the latest calculations. Because the Plan would require an immediate review to find additional land for housing towards the end of the plan period, a position which is accepted by the Council, there are no soundness reasons for making what would be a relatively inconsequential change at this stage. Re-calculating the local housing need figure could also have implications for the evidence-base and plan period. Neither of which would be practical nor effective when the Council has committed to start a review of the Plan within 6 months of adoption.
5. The Council should therefore continue to prepare the recommended Main Modifications for consultation, but with the housing requirement and plan period as submitted and a commitment to an early review.

6. I appreciate that this represents a change in position from the previous hearing sessions and will require some alterations to the housing trajectory. However, as participants at the sessions have pointed out, it is important that the examination now progresses towards a conclusion, with Main Modifications that are clear, effective and needed for soundness. Adding a further layer of complexity and alteration, for such an inconsequential change in housing numbers, is not necessary at this present time.
7. I trust that the changes are self-explanatory and can be accommodated in the schedule of Main Modifications which are currently in preparation. For completeness, and for the avoidance of doubt, it would also assist the examination if the Council could update the projected 5-year housing land supply position based on the submitted housing requirement.
8. I have asked the Programme Officer to upload a copy of this letter to the examination website, but I am not seeking any further representations or comments from participants at this stage. However, should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

*Matthew Birkinshaw*

Inspector