



Phase 2

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Local Plan Examination in Public
Hearing Position Statement - Matter 3 Spatial Strategy

Submitted on Behalf of Rosconn Strategic Land Ltd

March 2022

Our Ref: C22026

Phase 2 PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT LIMITED

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Quality Assurance

Site Name: Land south of Benchley Road, Horsmonden

Client Name: Rosconn Strategic Land Ltd

Type of Report: Representations to the Examination in Public

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement has been prepared on behalf of our client, Rosconn Strategic Land Ltd who has a promotion agreement with the landowner on 3.6 ha of land to the south of Brenchley Road and west of Fromandez Drive, Horsmonden, Kent.
- 1.2 The site has been promoted through the emerging Local Plan process and is now identified as a draft allocation within the Tunbridge Wells Borough Submission Local Plan 2020-2038 (Submitted October 2021), hereafter referenced as "The Plan". The site is identified as Draft Policy AL/HO2 for residential development providing approximately 80-100 dwellings, a replacement village hall and associated parking.
- 1.3 In this submission, we respond specifically to Matter 3 Spatial Strategy and Distribution of Development (Policy STR1, STR3, STR9 and STR10) that covers the following:

Issue 1 – Spatial Strategy

Issue 2 – Distribution of Development

2. Response to the Inspector's Questions

Issue 1 – Spatial Strategy

Q1. Does the submission version Local Plan contain a settlement hierarchy in the same way as the adopted Core Strategy (2010) does?

- 2.1 The Core Strategy (CS) clearly identifies a three tier approach within the settlement hierarchy and splits the Borough into the following areas:
1. Main Urban Area Royal Tunbridge Wells; Southborough
 2. Small Rural Towns Cranbrook; Hawkhurst; Paddock Wood
 3. Villages - Benenden; Bidborough; Brenchley; Five Oak Green; Frittenden; Goudhurst; The Moor (Hawkhurst); Horsmonden; Iden Green; Kilndown; Lamberhurst; Langton Green; Matfield; Pembury; Sandhurst; Sissinghurst; Speldhurst
- 2.2 This hierarchy was then used to determine how development is quantitatively distributed to each settlement in relation to a %. The % split for the period 2006-2026 took into account the findings of the SHLAA in terms of the location of deliverable/developable sites; recent delivery rates; and of the intended future role of each settlement in accordance with the Spatial Strategy. The strategy restricted growth in villages and the rural areas and to within the "Limits to Built Development". The CS proposed 360 dwellings over a 20 year plan period which equated to 6% of the planned 360 dwellings. In reality, 17% took place during the period 2003-2008.
- 2.3 The CS followed previous guidance where the most sustainable spatial strategy was to focus most development in or adjoining existing settlements. This would take advantage of existing infrastructure and public transport services and provide finance and opportunity to be a catalyst for the improvement of the services for the benefit of both existing and future residents. Growth was apportioned on the basis of the size of the settlement and the existing level of services. Within villages, the growth strategy was restrictive and reflected the conventional approach to development at that time.
- 2.4 Section 5 of the Plan refers to Place Shaping Policies and does not set out the settlement hierarchy in the same manner as the CS. Paragraph 5.1 confirms the spatial strategy for the Borough is arranged by non-parished and parished areas, with a specific chapter covering Strategic Sites. Paragraph 5.2 suggests a hierarchy with the use of the wording "*The format used is intended to help provide clarity on the planning policy approach at the local level, for each parish (in parished areas); elsewhere, the main towns and the proposed strategic sites.*"

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- 2.5 In summary, there is an implied hierarchy, but the approach is different to the CS. This reflects the different spatial strategy approach to development in the Borough.
- 2.6 Point 3 of Policy STR1 refers to the growth of settlements, having regard to their role and function, constraints, and opportunities and refers to the strategic sites for growth but does not extend to other rural settlements. This policy should be extended to cover the rural settlements, or a new policy added that clearly identifies the importance of maximising development in sustainable rural settlements that are outside the Green Belt and the AONB. This should clearly identify settlements such as Horsmonden that will play an important role in meeting the housing need.

Q2. The Settlement Role and Function Study Updates scores settlements and groups them together between A and G. Is the methodology used robust and are the outcomes accurate?

- 2.7 The Council has acknowledged that the traditional approach for the distribution of growth has followed the settlement hierarchy. However, this does not bring into play other issues such as housing need, employment/economic factors, transport and infrastructure provision, landscape, historic and other environmental considerations such as flooding.
- 2.8 The evidence base for the Plan has therefore considered a broader assessment. The Settlement Role and Function Study (SRFSU) forms part of this and provides information about settlements in the Borough and their services and facilities. As well as providing an updated evidence base (July 2020) to help inform the settlement hierarchy, it also gives an indication of each settlement's level of sustainability and potential to accommodate further growth, including any smaller settlements that could become more sustainable as a result of any growth supporting additional services and infrastructure. The SRFSU identifies key services considered to be essential for a sustainable settlement followed by those considered to be less vital and important. 20 villages with existing build boundaries were assessed and there was also engagement with town and parish councils.
- 2.9 There have been four scoring systems considered within the SRFSU. These have been clearly explained along with the new weighted scoring method. Each settlement has then been scored against the list of criteria and the results used to group the settlements. This has led to the final revised settlement groupings identified in Table 6
- 2.10 We believe this represents a robust approach to methodology that considers a wide variety of issues that are vital to support sustainable development and meet the housing need identified with accurate results at that point in time.

Q3. What is the purpose of the Settlement Role and Function Study Update? How has it informed the Plan?

2.11 The Council has outlined the purpose of the SRFSU October 2021 as providing one of the pieces of evidence that informs the spatial strategy for the area. The evidence provides a more up to date approach to the roles of the settlements compared to simply categorising the settlements in order of size. The settlements are identified by grouping them in terms of their characteristics and focusing on the range of services and facilities they currently provide. This is considered to represent a more robust approach in relation to sustainability indicators and has led the Council to amend the settlement groupings. Table 6 of the SRFSU provides the final list and this has informed where growth may take place in settlements on the basis of the level of sustainability and appropriateness of these settlements to accommodate further growth in terms of overall sustainability.

2.12 We believe the SRFSU has provided an up to date assessment of the current position and appropriately informed the spatial approach to the Plan.

Q4. The Development Strategy in Policy STR1 supports the “...major, transformational expansion of Paddock Wood (including land at east Capel)...”. At a strategic level, what are the reasons for promoting significant new development at Paddock Wood? Is this justified?

2.13 No comment.

Q5. The Development Strategy also supports the “...creation of a new garden settlement: Tudeley Village...”. What were the reasons for pursuing a new, standalone settlement, rather than the expansion of existing towns and villages? Is this justified?

2.14 No comment.

Q6. Paragraph 4.45 of the submitted Plan states that Royal Tunbridge Wells is surrounded by the High Weald AONB, except for areas to the west and the north. What options has the Council therefore looked at for new development to the west and the north of the town? Why were they discounted in favour of a standalone new settlement (which also requires land to be removed from the Green Belt)?

2.15 No comment

Q7. The Development Strategy Topic Paper 6 refers to constraints to such as the Green Belt, the High Weald AONB and areas of flood risk. Which areas of the Borough are not constrained by flooding and/or the Green Belt and AONB? Why could housing needs not be met in these areas?

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- 2.16 The Council has clearly identified the significant constraints across the Borough with approximately 75% of the land Green Belt and within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), (AONB) with various parts overlapping. The Council is required to carefully balance the need to achieve a sustainable pattern of growth against these principal areas of constraint. The non-constrained areas within the Borough must therefore be considered for development and maximised to limit the extent of Green Belt release and encroachment into the AONB. The strategy for growth has acknowledged this in the expansion of Paddock Wood which only entails a limited release of Green Belt land.
- 2.17 Development in the wider rural area outside these areas of constraints have been identified by the Council. We fully support the SRFSU that identifies Horsmonden as one of the best performing rural settlements and, on this basis, allocates land for development. This would make a substantial and material contribution to housing in the area as stated in the SA and provide the opportunity to improve the sustainability credentials of the settlement.
- 2.18 We therefore support the Council's approach to allocating development sites in areas such as Horsmonden.

Q8. Could housing needs be met in a way that did not require land to be removed from the Green Belt and/or require development in the AONB?

- 2.19 The Sustainability Appraisal includes the assessment of alternative options for the spatial strategy and part of this considers not developing in the Green Belt or AONB. This concludes that with the level of development required, such a level of development would lead to a tremendous pressure on this area, including where it abuts or is close to the AONB boundary. We agree with the Council that such an approach would not be the most sustainable growth option.

Q9. Do policies relating to the Green Belt, the High Weald AONB and/or flood risk provide a strong reason for restricting the scale, type and distribution of development in Tunbridge Wells?

- 2.20 No comment.

Issue 2 – Distribution of Development

Q1. How was the distribution of development established? Has the Council sought to direct housing growth towards settlements based on their scoring in the Settlement Role and Function Study, or by another means?

2.21 The distribution of growth has been established from a variety of documents that informed the Plan, one of which is the SRFSU along with other planning constraints and sustainability matters.

Q2. When taking into account commitments and completions since the start of the Plan period, what proportion of new housing will be distributed to each group of settlements, as per the Settlement Role and Function Study?

2.22 No comment.

Q3. Is the strategy consistent with paragraph 105 of the Framework, which states that significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes?

2.23 The Borough is predominantly a rural area with significant parts designated of national significance including Green Belt and AONB. Paragraph 85 of the NPPF recognises that to meet local needs in rural areas sites may have to be found adjacent or beyond existing settlements and *“... in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.”*

2.24 The evidence base for the Plan has carefully considered the rural nature of the Borough and clearly identified rural settlements that are considered to be sustainable and identified sites that are physically and well related to the existing settlement. Horsmonden is a clear case of identifying a sustainable rural settlement through the evidence base supporting the Plan.

Q4. Having established the principle of significant growth at Paddock Wood (see Matter 3, Issue 1, Question 4 above), how did the Council determine the scale of additional housing proposed in the Plan?

2.25 No comment.

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?

2.26 The Council has carried out a thorough assessment at a strategic level in relation to whether a settlement is suitable to accommodate further growth. The Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment carried out in depth assessments. For Horsmonden Parish this included an assessment for the potential for a new settlement and a variety of other smaller

sites that were put forward for consideration. Each site is subject to a detailed assessment including potential housing yield and constraints. Those sites brought forward through the SA, have then be subject to further detailed analysis before allocations were made and identified on the Maps within the Plan.

2.27 We believe the overall approach has been vigorous and support the Council's broad approach.

Q6. What is the justification for distributing new housing development to settlements within the High Weald AONB? How did the AONB designation influence the scale, type and distribution of housing development?

2.28 No comment.

Q7. How have flooding constraints been taken into account in determining the spatial distribution of development? Is the Plan consistent with paragraph 161 of the Framework which states that all plans should apply a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development - taking into account all sources of flood risk and the current and future impacts of climate change – so as to avoid, where possible, flood risk to people and property.

2.29 The Council has identified the main areas of flooding within the Local Plan and provided detailed site assessments within the SA and site scoring systems. We support this approach.

Q8. Does the Plan identify any areas of safeguarded land, in between the urban area and the Green Belt in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching beyond the plan-period?

2.30 No comment.

Issue 3 – Limits to Built Development

Q1. How have the Limits to Built Development been defined? What are they based on and are they accurate?

2.31 We support the Council's definition of the Limits to Built Development (LBD) that is included within Appendix 4 of the Plan. This approach is taken forward in the Maps for the settlements. However, we object to the position the line has been drawn on the Map for the detailed reasons stated in our response to Question 4 below. We therefore seek the LBD is amended in relation to draft allocation and Policy AL/HO2 as requested.

Q2. Do the submission version policies maps adequately show the changes to the Limits to Built Development that would arise from the adoption of the Plan?

2.32 In respect of Horsmonden the built development limit for the settlement is shown on Inset Map 26. However, we object to the position the line has been drawn on the Map for the detailed reasons stated in our response to Question 4 below. We therefore seek the LBD is amended in relation to draft allocation and Policy AL/HO2 as requested.

Q3. Where new site allocations are concerned, the Limits to Built Development Topic Paper⁷ states that only the developable areas have been included. Landscape buffers, open space and outdoor recreation areas have been excluded from the Limits to Built Development. What is the justification for this?

2.33 We do not believe that appropriate justification has been provided for designating developable areas at this stage for the reasons provided Question 4 below.

Q4. When taking into account that the detailed design and layout of a site allocation will be determined at the planning application stage, will the approach to defining Limits to Built Development be effective?

2.34 In respect of the Inset Map 26 for Horsmonden, we are concerned at the use of red line that delineates the alteration to the limits for built development and the dark blue line that indicates the site allocation boundary. In addition, further designations are shown on the Map for allocation AL/HO2 that include community use and open space and landscape buffers. These designations are a result of high level assessments that are not informed by detailed technical reports. The lines drawn could frustrate good design and restrict the approach to development across the site. The red built development line is therefore not considered to be effective and should be extended to cover the entire site allocation. This is also pertinent as the open recreational buffer zones may involve operational works along with the potential for play areas etc. In the case of the community use designation, a low narrow zone may not be the most appropriate effective use of the land. Flexibility is therefore important to ensure the optimum use of the land.

Q5. What are the 'Provisional Limits to Built Development' as shown on the Submission Local Plan Inset Map Legend⁸? Which sites/areas do they relate to? Are they justified and effective?

2.35 No comment.

2.36 Q6. Where boundary changes are proposed as part of the submission version Local Plan, are they justified by appropriate evidence and analysis?

2.37 No comment.

Q7. What is the justification for removing heritage assets and recreation areas from the Limits to Built Developments? Is this consistent with the principles set out in Core Document 3.82,

which states that Limits to Built Development are policy lines drawn around the main built-up area of settlements?

2.38 No comment.

Q8. What is the justification for the removal of the settlement boundaries at Iden Green and Kilndown? Is this justified and is it consistent with the principles of Limits to Built Development which seek to draw lines around the main built-up areas of settlements?

2.39 No comment.

Q9. Is it clear to decision-makers, developers and local communities how planning applications will be considered for development proposals both within, and outside, Limits to Built Development?

2.40 The Council has defined the Limits to Built Development but as stated in our response to Question 4 above. the use of the red line for the built development and a separate line for an allocation is confusing.

Q10. Table 7 in the submission version Local Plan lists nine sites that are identified as part of the 'Rural Fringe'. What is the status of these sites and how will they be defined in the Plan? What is the justification for not including them within the Limits to Built Development?

2.41 No comment.

Issue 4 – Management of Development in the Green Belt

Q1. It is sufficiently clear to decision-makers, developers and local communities which settlements are 'washed-over' by Green Belt?

2.42 No comment.

Q2. Where new development is proposed in the Green Belt, is Policy STR9 justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy?

2.43 No comment.



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