

Paddock Wood Neighbourhood Development Plan

Examiner's Clarification Note

This Note sets out my initial comments on the submitted Plan. It also sets out areas where it would be helpful to have some further clarification.

For the avoidance of any doubt matters of clarification are entirely normal at this early stage of the examination process.

Initial Comments

The Plan provides a clear vision for the neighbourhood area. It addresses a range of issues which relate closely to its character and appearance. The presentation and layout of the Plan is very good. The Plan is supported by excellent photographs and maps.

Chapters 1-4 provide a very clear framework for the Plan. The relationship between the vision and the objectives is very impressive and Chapters 3 and 4 provide a very clear spatial context for the detailed policies in the Plan.

Points for Clarification and observations

I have read the submitted documents and the representations made to the Plan. I have also visited the neighbourhood area. I am now able to raise issues for clarification with the Town Council.

The comments made on the points in this Note will be used to assist in the preparation of my report and in recommending any modifications to the Plan to ensure that it meets the basic conditions. I set out specific clarification points and observations for the Town Council below in the order in which the policies concerned appear in the submitted Plan.

General

Several policies in the Plan have sought to add value to policies in the emerging Local Plan. As the Town Council will be aware the Planning Inspector has now issued his preliminary findings on the Local Plan.

Does the Town Council have any comments on this matter?

Town Centre Policies

Policies TC1-5 provide a very comprehensive package of measures to shape the future vitality and viability of the town centre. They balance sensitive economic growth with a sympathetic approach towards local character and circumstances. The policies are supported by the projects and aspirations, the case studies, and the design principles.

Policy TC3

I saw the importance of the railway station in the town.

The policy reads well. For clarity am I correct to assume that individual development proposals will not need to comply with all the criteria in the policy?

Policy TC4

As submitted the policy reads as an ambition rather than as a policy. In specific terms which organisations are expected to provide the bridges?

Policy GI2

The policy acknowledges its overlap with the master planning process for each of the development sites.

How has the Town Council assessed this matter? Does it anticipate that the general nature of the policy will feed into the master planning process?

Policy GI4

This policy reads well.

The sixth criterion reads as supporting text rather than policy. In these circumstances I am minded to recommend that it is repositioned into the supporting text. Does the Town Council have any comments on this proposition?

Policy GI5

The policy has been well-considered and is underpinned by Appendix A

I am minded to recommend that the policy itself takes on the matter-of-fact approach in the NPPF on local green spaces. Does the Town Council have any comments on this proposition?

Policy GI6

This policy also reads well

Its third part reads as supporting text rather than as policy. In these circumstances I am minded to recommend that it is repositioned into the supporting text. Does the Town Council have any comments on this proposition?

Policy HD1

This is another well-considered policy. It is a good local response to Section 12 of the NPPF. The connection with the submitted Design Code and Guidelines is clear.

Its third part reads as supporting text rather than as policy. In these circumstances I am minded to recommend that it is repositioned into the supporting text. Does the Town Council have any comments on this proposition?

Plainly the policy will impact on individual schemes in different ways. Is it intended to apply to the development of the strategic sites in the neighbourhood area identified in the Local Plan? If so, how will any potential conflict between the Design Guidelines/Code on the one hand and the emerging Local Plan policies and master plans on the other hand be addressed?

Policy HD2

This is an excellent locally-distinctive policy.

The second part of the policy seems unnecessary given the contents of paragraph 7.31. The third part reads as supporting text rather than as policy. In these circumstances I am minded to recommend that these parts of the policy are repositioned/amalgamated into the supporting text. Does the Town Council have any comments on this proposition?

Policy HD3

Plainly the national position on low-carbon dwellings is fluid and likely to change further within the Plan period. Nevertheless, to what extent has the Town Council assessed the extent to which the policy has regards to national policy and would be commercially viable?

Policies SR1/SR2

Plainly there is an element of disagreement between the Town Council and the Borough Council on the location of the recreation facilities. How will this be resolved in order to bring the clarity required by the NPPF for development plan policies?

Could Policy SR2 work effectively without a direct reference to the Town Council's preferred site?

Projects and Aspirations

The identified projects are commendably distinctive to the town. They will complement the land use policies and the wider approach in the Plan.

Matters for clarification from the Borough Council

Please can I have an indicative timetable for the Borough Council's response to the Inspector's preliminary findings on the emerging Local Plan and the next stages in the plan-preparation process

Representations

Does the Town Council wish to comment on any of the representations made to the Plan?

In their different but overlapping ways the representations from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Crest Nicholson and Redrow Homes/Persimmon Homes address the general question raised earlier in this note about the way in which the emerging neighbourhood plan relates to the adopted Local Plan and to the emerging Local Plan. The various organisations raise detailed comments about Policies TC4, HD1, HI1, HI3, HI4-6.

It would be helpful if the Town Council would respond to the various comments.

Protocol for responses

I would be grateful for responses to the matters raised in this Note by 6 February 2023.

Please let me know if this timetable may be challenging to achieve. It is intended to maintain the momentum of the examination.

If certain responses are available before others, I would be happy to receive the information on a piecemeal basis. Irrespective of how the information is assembled please could it all come to me directly from Borough Council. In addition, please can all responses make direct reference to the policy or the matter concerned.

Andrew Ashcroft

Independent Examiner

Paddock Wood Neighbourhood Development Plan.

3 January 2023