

Examination of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan – Stage 2 - May to July 2022

Hearing Statement by Mr PETER AVGHERINOS on Matter 12 of the Inspector's "Matters, Issues and Questions for Stage 2 – Revised".

I have made earlier representations in the Local Plan consultation process at Stages 18 and 19, including expressing concerns about transport congestion and pollution along the A26 corridor of St Johns Road and London Road in Tunbridge Wells. Issues that will be significantly aggravated by the Local Plan if approved.

Matter 12 – Transport Infrastructure

Issue 1 – Effects of Local Plan Growth

Question 1

Transport issues are clearly addressed thoroughly throughout the plan, but with a major emphasis on ticking all the NPPF boxes and being politically correct. I worry about the central roles accorded to Active Travel, LTN's and development contributions. Also some very important work is still incomplete.

Active Travel is necessarily discriminatory – against the old and the young (and any-one with them), the infirm and disabled, deaf and blind, and so on. Correctly the Plan emphasises the need for public (or similar) transport to continue to serve those who are necessarily not active. However, the substance of the proposals does not look much changed from the present situation.

At peak times current services may work, but the economics is not there to provide a regular continuous service. I live near a major route (the A26 corridor), quite well served during the day but dire after 8:30pm, especially when service cancellations are made. A two-legged journey is totally impractical, so one drives. Once one has a car then using it becomes the norm. Road pricing might be an answer but there is no mention of this in the Plan.

If people are to be made more active, as they should be, then they need off-road opportunities to gain strength and confidence in a recreational setting.

At the session on Housing Need, the developers present, to a man or woman, lined up to demand more house building to make housing more affordable. Saving the Green Belt was not for them an issue. When increasing housing density was raised as a means of maximising land use to house more of those in need on the available land at a lower price., they fell silent, although in public transport terms this would clearly also be better.

Now the Council touts the merits of Development Contributions as a means of funding Active Travel schemes - Cycle Routes and so on. Although, that may sound worthy, when applied to sites with high percentages of affordable housing it is a direct charge on those the Council should be trying to help, who may well not be significant beneficiaries. Affordable housing should not be surcharged for the benefit of the town's transport infrastructure, housing for the needy needs to be kept as affordable as possible.

Question 3 and 4

The "Sensitivity test model outputs" report of the Plan (para 3.3.4) states that for the A26 corridor the traffic solutions will be "demand management rather than physical changes as there is no land available ... ". (This route is in the AQMA.)

After looking carefully through the documents currently available, I can find no evidence that the proposed LCWIP along the A26 corridor in Tunbridge Wells has been fully prepared and model tested, or any reliable costs established. The preliminary scheme implemented at the start of lock-down was a total disaster, despite the very much reduced traffic flows at that time, and soon disappeared. The new schemes shown are more robust, but at the same time much more rigid and inflexible. Their construction would have major impact on all activities along the corridor – work, commerce, education, recreation, etc. over a prolonged period. As I have said several times previously in other submissions, any works along this key corridor result in major delays into and out of Tunbridge Wells.. It should be noted that the 5-year housing delivery schedule in the Plan involves nearly 20 sites along this stretch of road.

I consider the transport planning for the A26 corridor in Tunbridge Wells is currently inadequate as a basis for making decisions on housing allocations in the adjacent area, specifically site AL/RTW5.