

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

Hearing Statement by Mr PETER AVGHERINOS on Matter 13 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 identifying the need to provide a significant additional Green Open surface for the borough's growing main urban settlement of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Matter 13 – Landscape, Local Green Space and Open Space, etc.

Issue 5 – Local Green Space

Question 1

I am surprised there is no reference to the Green Belt in the strategy for Landscape, etc, Policy STR8. Although the Green Belt is a special aspect of Landscape Conservation, with its own separate legislation, and so is given a specific Strategy of its own for its special purposes, Policy STR9. Nevertheless, it should still meet relevant overarching requirements in Policy STR8.

The Inspector's question 1 refers to the Green Belt under STR8 when asking about the designation of Local Green Space.

Royal Tunbridge Wells has grown considerably since its main Parks and Commons were established and continues to grow. Sensibly, future developments will be at higher densities than in the past, particularly in the Town Centre. The growing population will need more recreation space for its health and fitness, preferably within Active Travel range of the main housing areas. An extended new green space will be needed that encourages families to explore, both walking and using bikes and scooters, etc. as well as giving plenty of space for multiple ball games, and the like. Lovely though the existing Parks are, somewhere with a much greater feel of openness is now needed in or adjacent to the Town. At present for that feel residents travel to Bewl Water, Benenden and the like, involving a motor vehicle, often a large one to carry family bikes.

I, and others, have asked the Council to investigate whether a Country Park could be established for this purpose. Such a Country Park would in effect be Local Green Space in terms of the PPG.

Question 2.

A suitable site for Country Park has been identified in the lands to the west of Reynolds Lane and to the south of Speldhurst Road. The area is predominantly in the ownership of Caenwood Estates and lies within the existing Green Belt. However, a portion (AL/RTW5) will lose this protection if the Local Plan is approved without change.

The area is constrained for vehicle access by its reliance on Speldhurst Road to connect to the A26 corridor. However, other accesses are available especially on an Active Travel basis.

The proponents of the Country Park are asking for a delay in the re-designation of any this area in the Local Plan until the next Plan Review, due in five years or so. Site AL/RTW5 could be safeguarded during this period to ensure it remained available to meet the Council's 15-year housing target if its development proved unavoidable.

Meanwhile the Landowners, the Council planners and the interested public would investigate whether the Country Park (Green Space) was a viable proposition for this area. Funding through development contributions from the re-designation of sufficient lands for housing to satisfy the landowner(s) is seen as the key to making the scheme work.

Issue 6 – Retention and Provision of Open Space

Question 1

A new designation of land as Open Space should be made to create a Country Park west of Reynolds Lane under Policies OSRR1 and 2, should agreement on establishing the Park be reached. Meanwhile, site AL/RTW5 should remain within the Green Belt until its development to meet the Council's housing target is shown to be unavoidable.