

Examination of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan

Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions for Stage 2

Matter 7 Residential Site Allocations

Issue 1 Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough

Statement on behalf of 42 Leisure Ltd in response to AL/RTW10 – Montacute Gardens Q37 and Q38

42 Leisure Ltd has a long-standing commitment to helping Tunbridge Wells fulfil its great potential. The Company was established with the purpose of delivering high quality development and area regeneration which will ensure the town centre remains prosperous and vibrant whilst protecting and enhancing its unique character and heritage- making it the destination of choice with a stronger visitor economy and cultural offer.

42 Leisure previously prepared a comprehensive vision for the area incorporating Montacute Gardens, Union House and the surface car park (formerly referred to by the Council as the Eridge Road Area of Change). This underpinned the allocation of Site AL/RTW 4 (split into AL/RTW4A (Eridge Road/Union House) and AL/RTW4B (Montacute Gardens) in the adopted Local Plan for mixed use development as part of a comprehensive strategy to regenerate and revitalise the southern part of the Town Centre. Following the redevelopment of Union House, Montacute Gardens is critical to achieving the objectives for the wider regeneration of this part of the town centre and for the reasons set out in previous representations, the site should be viewed in this strategic context - not in isolation and should be included within an extended Town Centre Boundary.

42 Leisure Ltd has submitted representations at each stage of the Local Plan process including the Pre-Submission Local Plan (COMMENT ID: PSLP_1723). It supports the allocation of land at Montacute Gardens under Policy AL/RTW10 and remains fully committed to working with the Council and other landowners in advancing the development of this key site.

42 Leisure Limited and the principal owners of Nos. 5, 6, 7 and 8 Montacute Gardens are continuing their discussions with the intention of the site allocation being brought forward and an appropriate form of development being achieved which would be in accordance with the principles set out in the Draft Local Plan. It is anticipated that those discussions will accelerate over the next few months. As the discussions continue to be on a without prejudice basis, it is not possible to provide further details at this stage but 42 Leisure Ltd will continue to work closely with the local planning authority and other key stakeholders and to keep officers updated on progress.

Having reviewed the issues and questions raised by the Inspector, 42 Leisure Ltd would like to submit the following additional comments to supplement our previously submitted representations.

Q37. How has the scale of proposed development been determined and is it achievable given the identified constraints in Policy AL/RWT10?

The site is allocated in the Submission Local Plan for 30 units (including the nine already granted planning permission under planning consent reference 20/00191/FULL). This is an indicative figure which has been determined by the local planning authority taking into account site constraints notably those relating to heritage and ecology.

42 Leisure believe this is a realistic figure given the size of the site which extends to 0.86 ha, the extent of the existing built footprint and existing low density of development and its sustainable town centre location and close proximity to services and transport. It is also noted that the site is within the Limits to Built Development and whilst located within the Conservation Area, the existing villas are not listed. Previous work on the Grand Landmark Vision for the Eridge Road Area of Change has shown that this scale of development can be achieved whilst taking into account site constraints and enhancing the character of this part of the town centre. This work is to be updated to take into account the development of the Union House site and to reflect ongoing discussions with the other principal landowners.

The scale of proposed development has been established in the Site Allocations Local Plan (Adopted July 2016) which allocates the land at Montacute Gardens (Policy AL/RTW4B) for approximately 30 residential units as part of a mixed use scheme.

Q38. Can the scale of development be achieved on site whilst ensuring that future proposals preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the conservation area? How has this been assessed as part of the site allocation process?

The land at Montacute Gardens is underutilised and poorly integrated with the Pantiles and wider town centre. Development within this area offers the potential to act as a catalyst for the rejuvenation of the Pantiles and the wider area. The redevelopment of the Union House site has started this process but on its own, will not deliver the full potential for revitalisation and enhancement of this part of the town centre. Significantly, the development of the Union House site was required to take into account the future development opportunities on the Montacute Gardens site and to create an enhanced pedestrian link between the Pantiles and Montacute Gardens along Linden Close. The future development of land at Montacute Gardens and enhancement of the existing properties will assist in realising these benefits.

The character of the surrounding area and site constraints have been assessed by the local planning authority as part of the site allocation process. This assessment has focussed on the developable parts of the site, taking into account constraints such as site access, the character of the Conservation Area and designated TPOs. However, it is also important to stress the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach and avoiding piecemeal development which would undermine the placemaking objectives and vision for the town centre.

42 Leisure Ltd is committed to a design led approach which would optimise the development potential of the site whilst respecting and enhancing the character of the Conservation Area and existing heritage assets. This will require the preparation of a masterplan for the site which will provide the framework for future development and deliver public realm improvements and enhance the pedestrian route between Linden Park Road and the Pantiles in accordance with Policy AL/RTW10. Any development proposals must be considered within the context of an overall masterplan and vision for the site which promotes high quality development well integrated with the wider area and which delivers high quality design and attractive streets and public spaces which respect the character and heritage of Royal Tunbridge Wells.

In its representations on the Pre-Submission Local Plan, 42 Leisure Ltd has suggested some amendments to the wording of Policy AL/RTW10 which would add greater weight to the need for an overall masterplan and vision for this key site to ensure the character and appearance of the conservation area is enhanced.

42 Leisure remains fully committed to working with the other principal landowners, the local planning authority and key stakeholders to bring forward a sensitive development which will enhance the character and setting of the Conservation Area and create an enhanced southern gateway to the town centre.

Joanna Chambers BA BTP MRTPI
Director
Changing Cities Ltd