

Examination of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Note Requested by the Inspector

**Local Plan Examination Note for
Inspector in response to Action Point 3
regarding Brenchley in the Settlement
Role and Function Study**

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 During the Hearing Sessions on the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan, the Inspector asked the Council to prepare a number of Notes on “Action Points”, essentially to clarify its position on certain matters that were discussed.
- 1.2 Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council’s [Hearing Statement for Matter 3, Issue 1](#) queries the scoring for Brenchley Village, particularly in relation to convenience stores and its subsequent position in the settlement groupings in the Council’s Settlement Role and Function Study [see pages 22 and 24 of [CD 3.133](#)]. This was further discussed at the hearing session for Matter 3, Issue 1 on 26 May 2022.
- 1.3 The Inspector asked the Council to consider whether a correction should be made to the Role and Function Study 2021 in respect of the scoring for Brenchley and, hence, its position in the settlement hierarchy. (This is Action Point 3.)

2.0 Brenchley and Matfield Parish Council’s challenge to the Role and Function Study

- 2.1 The main issues relating to the Parish Council’s challenge to the Settlement Role and Function Study as set out in their [Hearing Statement for Matter 3, Issue 1](#) are that:
- The convenience shop which forms part of the Post Office is small and should not be included in the scoring
 - Terry’s Butchers has now closed and should not be included in the scoring
 - The convenience store referred to in the Role and Function Study might perhaps in the past have been “Bournes” convenience shop, however, this closed a long time ago, in 2003
 - As a result, the score for Brenchley should be 31, not 35, which should put the village in settlement Group E with Lamberhurst and Speldhurst, which score 33, instead of settlement Group D with Goudhurst, Benenden and Horsmonden [see pages 22 and 24 of the Study [CD 3.133](#)].

3.0 The Council's response

3.1 In terms of the scoring for a Post Office, where it is combined with a convenience store, paragraph 3.26 on page 13 of the 2017 Study [[CD.327](#)] and paragraph 3.23 on page 18 of the 2021 Study [[CD 3.133](#)] states:

“Where a convenience store is combined with a post office, separate scoring is given to each of these as a key service. A part-time post office is taken to be one that is included in a convenience store but has limited hours (for example, operates several days a week or is located in a village hall and again operates two-three times a week) and is given lower scoring. One point is given to each additional convenience or comparison shop within the settlement.”

- 3.2 For clarity, the combined Post Office and Store was in operation at the time of preparing both the 2017 Study and the 2021 Study and is still in operation today. Therefore, in line with the stated methodology, a score of 3 is given for the Post Office and a further score of 3 for the convenience store in both the 2017 and 2021 Studies. (This had not previously been questioned by the Parish Council).
- 3.3 Given that the methodology set out in the Settlement Role and Function Study has been consulted upon and consistently applied to a number of settlements with a combined Post Office and Store across the borough, such as Benenden (see page 28 of [CD 3.133](#)) and Five Oak Green (see page 37 of [CD 3.133](#)), it is not considered appropriate to depart from this for Brenchley.
- 3.4 Again, for clarity, the “Bournes” shop referred to in the Parish Council's hearing statement above is not included in either the 2017 or 2021 Role and Function Study.
- 3.5 It should also be noted that Terry's Butchers was still open at the time of seeking verification from the Parish Council in June 2020 for the latest Study. Therefore, a score of 1 was applied. However, the Parish Council advises in its hearing statement that it subsequently closed in July 2020.
- 3.6 While it is accepted that the butchers' shop has subsequently closed, if the scoring were recalculated to take account of this, it would reduce the total score for Brenchley by 1 point to 34 (see pages 20 to 22 of [CD 3.133](#)). Critically, this would not change Brenchley's grouping and it would remain in Group D (see page 24 of [CD 3.133](#)).

- 3.7 In addition, as set out at paragraph 1.9 of the 2021 Study, it is important to note that both versions of the Study are based on a snapshot in time (i.e. as at June 2020), and it is recognised that current services and facilities available in the surveyed settlements may be subject to change in the future.¹
- 3.8 Therefore, the Council believes that, based on the collation of information of services and facilities in June 2020 and when applying the scoring system as set out on pages 16 to 21 of the 2021 Study, the scoring for Brenchley is correct.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 In light of the above and given that the scoring was accurate at the time of the Study (June 2020), it is considered that the scoring for and the position of Brenchley in the settlement groupings table is correct as set out in the Settlement Role and Function 2021 and does not need correcting. It is also noted that its position in the hierarchy has not changed more recently.

¹ Further to a related discussion about making reference to the Settlement Role and Function Study's settlement groupings' table (page 24 of [CD 3.133](#)) in the supporting text to Strategic Policy STR1, the Council will propose a modification which also highlights that the groupings were established at a position in time and are liable to subsequent change.