



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

26 February 2024

Planning Policy
Planning Services
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Town Hall
Tunbridge Wells
TN1 1RS

I reiterate my comments made to the Inspector in my letter of 4th June 2021, which still stand and which I attach.

In addition, I would emphasise the following 3 important points which apply across the Borough:

1. 15 months have elapsed since the receipt of the Inspector's letter of November 2022. Given such a long period of time, I would have expected the Council to have used this time to address the question of where housing will be provided given the proposed deletion of the Tudeley Garden Village.

The failure to do so will mean that the medium-term housing requirement for the Borough will not be demonstrated to have been met, requiring a new call for sites and a revised local plan to be prepared.

The consequence of this is renewed uncertainty for every town and village in the Borough as previously-submitted sites - which may well include Tudeley - and new sites will be put forward for development. These will not be determined until a further examination – possibly by a different Inspector and possibly under a different national administration.

2. The principle of 'i before e' – infrastructure before expansion – has been departed from in this plan. Examples of this include the removal of the proposed Sports Hub at Paddock Wood – despite further substantial new housing at Paddock Wood and elsewhere in the Borough. Similarly, the proposed new Colts Hill bypass – which is long overdue anyway – is not to be provided before, or even at the same time as, the expansion of

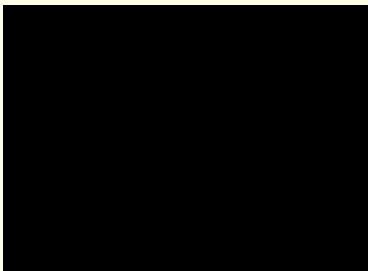


housing. Similar, more explicit requirements should have been made for school places, doctors' surgery capacity and flood relief *before* development begins.

3. I am very concerned that local neighbourhoods have not been adequately involved in the preparation of this revised plan. Many of the parishes have adopted Neighbourhood Development Plans, which should be respected as the basis of the plan – including infrastructure – in their areas. Many hours of time have gone into the preparation of these plans – which I was proud to have brought in nationally as a Minister – and there is a missed opportunity to have had a more bottom-up process given the time that has elapsed since the Inspector's report.

My great fear is that as a result of not making good use of the 15 months that have elapsed since the Inspector's letter of November that the Borough - and every settlement within it - is placed in immediate jeopardy of further applications as a plan which provides protection from speculative development and provides necessary infrastructure and which builds on neighbourhood plans has not being drawn up, but rather an interim, holding document.

Yours faithfully



Rt Hon Greg Clark MP