

23 October 2024

By email

Planning Policy
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Kent
TN1 1RS

Dear Sir/Madam

TUNBRIDGE WELLS LOCAL PLAN

PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON NEW EVIDENCE BASE DOCUMENTS (STAGE 3 NEW EVIDENCE BASE DOCUMENTS)

These representations are submitted on behalf of Bellway Strategic Land to the Stage 3 public consultation on new evidence base documents in relation to the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan.

PS_107-Action-Note-for-Action-Point-30-regarding-the-Local-Plan-and-Five-Year-Housing-Land-Supply-Positions-June-2024 (TWLP/153)

This document envisages that 10,983 dwellings would be completed between 2020/21 – 2037/38, falling short of the cumulative housing requirement. The document explains that “Taking the mid-point of dwelling ranges, there is a shortfall of approximately 1,000 dwellings, equivalent to some 19.7% of the need from allocated sites and 8.9% of overall need to the end of the plan period.” It is evident that the overall shortfall has increased (by 5 percentage points).

The Council explains that it is confident that a 10-year housing land supply can be achieved post-adoption. Even on the basis of the trajectory at Appendix 1 of document TWLP/153, it is clear that cumulative completions are only ever marginally above the cumulative requirement.

Furthermore, we note that the TWBC acknowledges that this Plan should be subject to a review. The proposed transitional arrangements to the draft NPPF would necessitate a review anyway. It is therefore critical that any review undertaken by TWBC is not just to remedy the issues with this Plan, but to ensure that it provides sufficient housing and land for development in general.

PS_108 Action Note on Action Points 27 and 29 – Written statements from KCC Highways on Policy ALRTW 19 and Policy ALHA 8 (September 2024) (TWLP/150)

This document is relevant to Bellway’s previous submissions as it refers to the site proposed to be allocated under Policy AL/RTW19 on land to the north of Hawkenbury Stadium Hub.

The Pinnacle
20 Tudor Road
Reading
RG1 1NH

T [REDACTED] turley.co.uk

Paragraph 2.3 of this document explains that *“As part of the discussion at the Stage 3, 18 June 2024 hearing session, the Inspector noted it would be helpful for KCC Highways to confirm that the land use, type and scale of the overall development was considered when assessing the suitability for the road width. Accordingly, the Inspector asked for a written statement to confirm this along with whether KCC Highways is satisfied the impact on the local highway network can be mitigated and with the amended policy as set out in the Council’s Hearing Statement.”*

Policy AL/RTW19 proposes to allocate this site for a stadia hub. However, as Bellway’s written Statements to hearing sessions held earlier in 2024 demonstrated, it is necessary to look beyond the text of the draft Local Plan to establish the nature of the development actually envisaged at the site. In that regard, we note that the Business Case Report at Appendix 1 of TWLP_092 appears to identify the nature of the proposed facility at paragraph 1.15. What appears to be envisaged is a stadia pitch with floodlights, changing facilities and medical facilities, a club house to provide bar and catering facilities for up to 150 guests (standing) or 70 seated which might serve a range of events including business meetings through to ‘parties and weddings’, a board room/meeting room/coach education room, various new community facility aspects, including additional pitches and associated changing facilities. A plan, purporting to show how the scheme could be provided is shown on page 32 of the document.

At paragraph 4.76, the Business Case Report then states *“Based on a 3,000 spectator stadium at maximum occupancy, there would be a requirement for 200 parking spaces...”*. As far as we can tell, that is the only point at which document TWLP_092 (or any aspect of the evidence base) provides any indication of the stadium which the Council envisages.

Paragraph 2.4 of the latest document (TWLP/150) explains *“To summarise, the comments demonstrate KCC Highways is satisfied with the policy as amended in the Council’s Hearing Statement TWLP/121 and that KCC Highways have considered the land use, type and scale of the overall development when considering the suitability for the road width.”*

We note that paragraph 2.6 of document TWLP/150 explains how the policy would require a Transport Assessment and that this would be based on where TWFC is in the football league pyramid. In our view, this reinforces our client’s long-held concerns that the preparation of this Plan is not based on a full and proper analysis of what might be delivered here. If it is, as the Business Case Report envisaged, a 3,000 spectator stadium with a myriad of supporting / ancillary uses, that should be assessed. Equally, if that is the sort of facility that TWFC envisages to be necessary to fulfil its own ambitions, it is essential that the site allocated for its relocation is capable of accommodating those ambitions.

Appendix 1 of the document (TWLP/150) published as part of this consultation includes an email from the Transport & Development Planning Manager at the County Council which states *“I can confirm that KCC Highways have considered the land use, type and scale (i.e. up to a maximum 3,000 capacity stadium) of the overall development when considering the suitability of the access road and road width.”* Aside from that statement, there is no explanation or evidence to support that claim as far as we can see. This is clearly a complex and complicated allocation, particularly given the uncertainty associated with the allocation and what form of development is actually envisaged. If KCC has, as it claims to have done, assessed that form of development, it should demonstrate how, not simply say so.

Nevertheless, our client considers that that conclusion paints only part of the picture. There is no evidence in TWLP/150 that the impact of the development has been assessed in those terms and it effectively delays the assessment of impact to the application stage. The correspondence even goes as far as to state *“Trigger points will be agreed linked to if/when TWFC progresses through the leagues which would require a new Transport Assessment”*. By that point, we assume that the stadium would be in place, and those trigger points in place as the club progresses up the pyramid. By that point, additional impact associated with the Club’s rise would become,

to some extent, a moot point. This reinforces our view that if a new stadium is proposed to facilitate the relocation and growth of TWFC, there should be confidence, now, that the chosen location can facilitate that.

There is a broader issue arising in this respect. The Planning Practice Guidance includes the following text:

“What factors can be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt?”

Assessing the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, where it is relevant to do so, requires a judgment based on the circumstances of the case. By way of example, the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in making this assessment. These include, but are not limited to:

openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;

the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and

the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.

Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 64-001-20190722”

Bellway therefore maintain their long held concerns that the Local Plan and the associated evidence base does not properly assess the form and scale of development which is actually envisaged in this allocation.

If, despite our concerns expressed throughout the preparation of this Local Plan, this allocation is retained, the Site should be removed from the Green Belt.

Yours sincerely

David Murray-Cox

Director

