

Examination of the Tunbridge Wells
Borough Local Plan

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

**Post Hearing Stage 3 -
Revised wording for
Policy STR 1 - The
Development Strategy**

Date: September 2024



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Policy STR 1 - supporting text

- 4.49 Following the submission of the Local Plan for Examination and the subsequent hearing sessions held in 2022, the Inspector issued his initial findings in November 2022.
- 4.50 The inclusion of a new settlement at Tudeley Village in the Submission Local Plan and expansion of Paddock Wood arose largely from the combination of the difficulties in identifying sufficient suitable sites in the borough to meet its local housing need, coupled with a recognition, as highlighted in the NPPF (paragraph 74), that the supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns.
- 4.51 Central to proposing a new settlement at Tudeley Village was that it is reasonably close to Tonbridge, Paddock Wood and Royal Tunbridge Wells, would be of a size large enough to provide and support various facilities on the site, including retail, education, employment, health, and leisure, and capable of being planned in a coordinated, master-planned way, with a distinctive identity. Also, critically, it was located beyond the High Weald National Landscape area.
- 4.52 The site is located within the Green Belt, where national policy requires “exceptional circumstances” for such a proposal. The Inspector’s initial findings (November 2022) found that the “exceptional circumstances” test had not been met. While acknowledging that “the principle of seeking to help meet housing needs through a high-quality, mixed-use new settlement is a reasonable and positive approach to take”, the Inspector found that there remained significant and fundamental unanswered questions regarding the accessibility of the site by sustainable modes of transport, the ability to successfully mitigate against serious impacts on the highway network, the suitability and deliverability of the Five Oak Green bypass and the ability of the site to deliver housing at the rate and scale envisaged by the Plan.
- 4.53 The Inspector considered that the matters raised went to the heart of whether the site, and strategy for, Tudeley Village was justified and effective, ultimately finding that exceptional circumstances had not been demonstrated to justify removing the

site from the Green Belt, especially given that the development was assessed as resulting in 'High' harm to it.

- 4.54 It is noted that the Inspector did not conclude that the proposal for a new settlement at Tudeley Village was inevitably unsound; rather, that due to a number of uncertainties the exceptional circumstances test had not been met.
- 4.55 The Council subsequently considered that there would need to be a wide range of further studies to provide the information that the Inspector required to find the Tudeley Village allocation sound in all respects. As such, in order to have the plan found sound and adopted the revised development strategy in the Local Plan now excludes Tudeley Village.
- 4.56 Along with the removal of Tudeley Village from the plan the Council reduced growth at Paddock Wood, including land at east Capel, due to revised higher risk Flood Zones and consequential impact on the extent of developable land at Paddock Wood and land at east Capel. This means that changes to the Development Strategy in response to the initial findings of the Inspector now result in a 10-year rather than a 15-year Housing Land Supply position (meaning the Local Plan no longer meets the 15 year growth needs in full). As such the Council is committed to a partial, early review of the Plan to seek ways of meeting unmet housing need in the later part of the Plan period. All other policies included in the Plan remain applicable for the entire plan period 2020-2038.
- 4.57 The findings in respect of Tudeley Village set out above mean that in carrying out the early review of the Local Plan, the Council will identify and assess reasonable options for meeting unmet housing needs, and without prejudice to any decisions made about a future development strategy to meet this unmet need, will consider, all reasonable sites put forward through a 'Call for Sites' and other land identified by the Council to be assessed as part of the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) process.

Policy STR 1 - The Development Strategy

Policy STR 1 - The Development Strategy

The broad development strategy for Tunbridge Wells borough over the period 2020-2038, as shown indicatively on the Key Diagram (Figure 5), is to ensure that a minimum of 11,880 dwellings and 14 hectares of employment (Use Classes B and E) land are developed, together with supporting infrastructure and services. The strategy of this plan provides for a housing supply for the first 10 years of the plan period with employment and other development including necessary supporting infrastructure, but with a requirement for an early focussed review of the plan to supply housing and other requisite development and supporting infrastructure for the final 5 years of the plan period.

To achieve this, the Local Plan:

1. Promotes the effective use of urban and previously developed (“brownfield”) land, having due regard to relevant Plan policies;
2. Looks to focus new development within the Limits to Built Development of settlements, as defined on the Policies Map, where proposals accord with other relevant policies of this Plan;
3. Provides for the growth of settlements, having regard to their role and function, constraints and opportunities, together with major, transformational expansion of Paddock Wood (including land at east Capel), following garden settlement principles and providing flood risk solutions; and
4. Includes a buffer to allow for potential delays or non-delivery of sites;
5. Provides for a prestigious new business park to the north of North Farm/Kingstanding Way, Royal Tunbridge Wells, well connected to the improved A21;
6. Provides a framework for the preparation of a holistic Area Plan for Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre;
7. Provides for some reductions in the area of the Green Belt, notably for land in east Capel (adjacent to Paddock Wood and around Royal Tunbridge Wells and Pembury, where exceptional circumstances warrant release of land from the Green Belt and where an effective long-term Green Belt is maintained);
8. Limits development within the High Weald National Landscape to that which can be accommodated whilst still conserving its key characteristics, this being mostly small-

scale, only promoting larger proposals where exceptional circumstances are demonstrated;

9. Normally limits development in the countryside (being defined as that outside the Limits to Built Development) to that which accords with specific policies of this Plan and/or that for which a rural location is fully demonstrated to be necessary.

Early Partial Review of the Local Plan

Following adoption of the Local Plan, the Council will publish an update to its Local Development Scheme (LDS). This shall set out a timetable for a partial early review of the Local Plan, which shall commence within six months of adoption of the Local Plan. The LDS shall provide an indicative timescale for submission of an updated Local Plan for Examination, to take place no later than 30 months from commencement of the early review of the Local Plan. The Council shall then undertake the early review which shall include investigation of ways of meeting identified unmet housing needs until the end of the plan period (2038).

The early review shall be conducted with the objective of securing sustainable development to:

- (1) meeting the Council's unmet objectively assessed housing need for the period post adoption of the Local Plan to the end of the plan period (2038), including unmet housing needs for Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Show People, and
- (2) provide other requisite development (including such employment development as may be necessary) and supporting infrastructure to meet the needs of the population for the whole of the plan period and beyond.

Policy STR 1 - supporting text – Main Modification version

- 4.49 Following the submission of the Local Plan for Examination and the subsequent hearing sessions held in 2022, the Inspector issued his initial findings in November 2022.
- 4.50 The inclusion of a new settlement at Tudeley Village in the Submission Local Plan and expansion of Paddock Wood arose largely from the combination of the difficulties in identifying sufficient suitable sites in the borough to meet its local housing need, coupled with a recognition, as highlighted in the NPPF (paragraph 74), that the supply of large numbers of new homes can often be best achieved through planning for larger scale development, such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns.
- 4.51 Central to proposing a new settlement at Tudeley Village was that it is reasonably close to Tonbridge, Paddock Wood and Royal Tunbridge Wells, would be of a size large enough to provide and support various facilities on the site, including retail, education, employment, health, and leisure, and capable of being planned in a coordinated, master-planned way, with a distinctive identity. Also, critically, it was located beyond the High Weald National Landscape area.
- 4.52 The site is located within the Green Belt, where national policy requires “exceptional circumstances” for such a proposal. The Inspector’s initial findings (November 2022) found that the “exceptional circumstances” test had not been met. While acknowledging that “the principle of seeking to help meet housing needs through a high-quality, mixed-use new settlement is a reasonable and positive approach to take”, the Inspector found that there remained significant and fundamental unanswered questions regarding the accessibility of the site by sustainable modes of transport, the ability to successfully mitigate against serious impacts on the highway network, the suitability and deliverability of the Five Oak Green bypass and the ability of the site to deliver housing at the rate and scale envisaged by the Plan.
- 4.53 The Inspector considered that the matters raised went to the heart of whether the site, and strategy for, Tudeley Village was justified and effective, ultimately finding that exceptional circumstances had not been demonstrated to justify removing the site from the Green Belt, especially given that the development was assessed as resulting in ‘High’ harm to it.
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4.57 The findings in respect of Tudeley Village set out above mean that in carrying out the early review of the Local Plan, the Council will identify and assess reasonable options for meeting unmet housing needs, and without prejudice to any decisions made about a future development strategy to meet this unmet need, will consider, all reasonable sites put forward through a 'Call for Sites' and other land identified by the Council to be assessed as part of the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) process.

Policy STR 1 - The Development Strategy – Main Modifications Version

Policy STR 1 - The Development Strategy

The broad development strategy for Tunbridge Wells borough over the period 2020-2038, as shown indicatively on the Key Diagram (Figure 5), is to ensure that a minimum of ~~12,204~~ **11,880** dwellings and 14 hectares of employment (Use Classes B and E) land are developed, together with supporting infrastructure and services. The strategy of this plan provides for a housing supply for the first 10 years of the plan period with employment and other development including necessary supporting infrastructure, but with a requirement for an early focussed review of the plan to supply housing and other requisite development and supporting infrastructure for the final 5 years of the plan period.

To achieve this, the Local Plan:

1. Promotes the effective use of urban and previously developed (“brownfield”) land, having due regard to relevant Plan policies;
2. Looks to focus new development within the Limits to Built Development of settlements, as defined on the Policies Map, where proposals accord with other relevant policies of this Plan;
3. Provides for the growth of settlements, having regard to their role and function, constraints and opportunities, together with the ~~development of two strategic sites, namely: a~~ major, transformational expansion of Paddock Wood (including land at east Capel), following garden settlement principles and providing flood risk solutions; and ~~b. the creation of a new garden settlement – Tudeley Village between Paddock Wood and Tonbridge;~~
4. Includes ~~a~~ buffer to allow ~~ance~~ for potential delays or non-delivery of sites;
5. Provides for a prestigious new business park to the north of North Farm/Kingstanding Way, Royal Tunbridge Wells, well connected to the improved A21;
6. Provides a framework for the preparation of a holistic Area Plan for Royal Tunbridge Wells Town Centre;
7. Provides for some reductions in the area of the Green Belt, notably for land in east Capel (adjacent to Paddock Wood) ~~the strategic sites~~ and around Royal Tunbridge Wells and Pembury, where exceptional circumstances warrant this release of land from the Green Belt and where an effective long-term Green Belt is maintained;

8. Limits development within the High Weald [National Landscape Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty](#) to that which can be accommodated whilst still conserving its key characteristics, this being mostly small-scale, only promoting larger proposals where exceptional circumstances are demonstrated;
9. Normally limits development in the countryside (being defined as that outside the Limits to Built Development) to that which accords with specific policies of this Plan and/or that for which a rural location is fully demonstrated to be necessary.

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