



Gladman Developments Ltd

Maidstone Borough Local Plan Examination

Session 4 Environmental Constraints

Qn4.3 What if any development would Policy SP17 permit in the countryside which the previous Local Plan policies would not?

- 1 Gladman are concerned about the definitions and terms used within SP17, the policy is clearly one which seeks to limit development on the edge of settlement boundaries, unless a site is allocated through the Local Plan. Whilst we understand the need for a plan led approach as we have advocated in our Matter 5A statement the supply of land to meet housing needs provided within the proposed plan leaves little margin for error. In the event that one or more sites fail, and there is a need to therefore bring forward additional land, such proposals are likely to be contrary to SP17. Should the policy proceed forward into an adopted sound plan it may be necessary to further consider how the Council will define terms such as 'small scale' and 'local housing needs'. For example is meeting the FOAN for the district considered to be meeting local housing needs and how would 'small scale' development be defined? Small scale development in the context of a site on the urban boundary of Maidstone could be very different in context to small scale development on the edge of a small lower tier settlement. It is therefore unclear how such justifications for allowing edge of settlement development will consider whether or not a site constitutes sustainable development, as required by the Framework, rather than just a broad assessment of a site sitting outside of a settlement boundary and failing to meet the criteria of SP17.
- 2 Gladman further remain concerned about the continued inclusion of the Countryside being 'protected for its own sake', as we have alluded to in our previous representation such terminology is out dated in the context of the NPPF, and is driven from previous and now withdrawn national planning guidance. Its continued use in the explanatory text of policy SP17

sets a context for criterion (1) of the policy which could be construed or interpreted as being overly restrictive in the context of current national planning policy.

Qn4.13 Can the Council demonstrate that the use of brownfield land has been accorded priority over the allocation of greenfield sites?

- 3 Gladman are concerned about the phrasing expressed in the Inspectors question with regard the use of brownfield land. The NPPF is clear within the Core Planning principles set out in paragraph 17 and within chapter 11, paragraph 111, that both planning policies and decision making should encourage the effective use of land, by reusing previously development land, provided it is not of high environmental value. There is, respectfully, a significant difference between encouraging the use of brownfield land and according it priority over the development of greenfield sites. Such a consideration does not take into account wider issues with regard to the sustainability or deliverability of a site.
- 4 It is considered that the Council has encouraged the use of brownfield land through its desire to see a significant level of office to residential conversion and the reliance of the plan on the redevelopment of brownfield sites, such as the Invicta Barracks, which may actually not be properly classified as deliverable in accordance with footnote 12 of the NPPF. Therefore it may be that, in reality, the Council is striving to squeeze more housing and other development out of brownfield sites than is both practical and realistically deliverable.

Qn4.14 Can the Council demonstrate that the development of poorer quality agricultural land has been accorded priority over the development of higher quality land especially Grade 1, 2 and 3A?

- 5 Maidstone district, like the vast majority of Kent, sits within an area with extensive tracts of land which are classified as Grades 1, 2 and 3 in terms of agricultural quality. In referring to the Agricultural Land Classification map London and the South East (ALC007)¹ published by Natural England it is apparent that the main urban area of Maidstone is entirely surrounded by land in grades 1-3, with the vast majority being grade 2.
- 6 Therefore should the Council wish to further reduce the amount of Grade 2 land used for development, it would be necessary for further allocations to be made in and around the Rural

¹ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/141047?category=5954148537204736> Retrieved 05/09/16

Service Centres where the map referenced above demonstrates largely areas of Grade 3 land, note the map does not break this down into 3a and 3b.

- 7 It is the view of Gladman that the loss of higher quality agricultural land, for decision taking, is a factor to be determined in arriving at the overall sustainability of a site. It is apparent here that meeting the development needs of Maidstone will result in the loss of some agricultural land, this is unavoidable. The only option open to the Council would, as referenced above be to include further allocations at the Rural Service Centre level, and indeed there are site options for the Council should it wish to do this.