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Planning Policy is a Division of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health Services

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Dear Mr Egerton,

Re: Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation

Thank you for your letter of 17 November offering your Council's comments on the Regulation 18 stage consultation towards a new local plan for Tonbridge and Malling. I am grateful to you for taking part in our consultation, although I also value the discussions we have had more informally in reaching this stage.

You will know that in bringing forward the current work on our local plan we do so on a basis of a secure planning background offered by our current Local Development Framework and a maintained five year supply of housing land, judged against our Objectively Assessed Need. Our planning work will continue to draw on a track record of a strategic approach to land allocation to ensure a pipeline of growth and, as far as we are able, to secure identified infrastructure improvements.

We will be very happy for a constructive dialogue to continue between our two Councils and other key agencies in order to prevent, as far as is possible, any significant unforeseen issues arising later in the plan making process.

We recognise that parts of the potential strategy (which incidentally are not 'proposals' at this stage) will inevitably have some impact on Maidstone in much the same way as the growth of west Maidstone has had on adjacent areas of Tonbridge and Malling. Similarly any development that ultimately comes forward will impact upon communities in Tonbridge and Malling. All these are clearly issues that need to be assessed and we will be keen to share analysis and conclusions on such matters as we move forward.

You especially note potential impact on the A26 and A20 routes, laying particular emphasis on the increase in traffic from Kings Hill. Of course, as a planned major site, Kings Hill has provided strategic improvements to the road network, motorway junctions and significant public transport improvements to accompany its development. A similar investment approach is now being successfully evidenced as the new community at Peter's Village on the east bank of the Medway comes forward. Taking that practice forward in our new local plan is one of the cornerstones of our Regulation 18 consultation document, 'The Way Forward'.

I understand the concern expressed about the potential for development at south Aylesford. However, I am left wondering if the essence of the approach outlined in our consultation document and reflected in our previous discussions at our Duty to Cooperate meetings has been overlooked in your comments. In your letter you refer to new infrastructure investment which, of course, actually forms the basis of our own approach as outlined at paragraph 5.9.6 of 'The Way Forward'. To remind you, the

intent here is to test strategic development proposals that might give rise to the level of road and other infrastructure investment that would address the inadequacies of the current situation as well as the potential development. That is an approach that we believe must be thoroughly examined for this area of our Borough and has potential benefits to the adjoining areas of Maidstone. We look forward to working on this aspect of the potential development strategy with you, in harness with the County Council as Highways Authority.

Lastly, I note your references to the need to prevent the coalescence of settlements and the opportunity to retain open space. Although the policy basis for 'strategic gaps' as we have known them no longer exists, I agree this will be an important factor should development in this vicinity prove appropriate and be supported. It is perhaps unfortunate that the pattern of development in Maidstone has proceeded up to the Borough boundary in many instances and along considerable lengths of Hermitage Lane. Nevertheless, I am sure my Council will wish to consider the provision of strategic open space should major development in this location be pursued. As you say the future planning should take account of the impact of development on communities rather than borough boundaries and that is a matter that we can now bring into sharper focus with the emergence of our local plan.

We look forward to an increasing dialogue with you over the coming months and indeed, as you will by now be aware, we have today arranged our next Duty to Cooperate meeting for 2pm on the 10th January here at the Council's offices at Kings Hill. I will circulate an agenda in due course, but this meeting will be an opportunity to reflect on this exchange and how we structure our work on the key issues that are identified here and also how development needs can be satisfactorily addressed between our boroughs.

For information, I have also attached a copy of a letter that I have prepared for the Maidstone Local Plan Hearing Inspector, which merely seeks to clarify a number of points relating to Tonbridge and Malling that I observed during some of the recent sessions. No doubt we will also wish to discuss the Hearing at our meeting in January

I hope this is of assistance,

Yours sincerely



Ian Bailey
Planning Policy Manager