



10<sup>th</sup> June 2018

Dear Councillor,

For our third briefing we have been researching the Secretary of State's recent decision to turn down an appeal against a refusal of planning permission for a garden village in the Surrey Green Belt in Elmbridge - a ruling that sets an ominous precedent for the council leadership's plans for Tandridge.

The proposal, for up to 1024 homes at Drake Park, Walton-on-Thames, was much more promising than the one planned for South Godstone – or those for Blindley Heath and Redhill aerodrome, for that matter – as it was on much less attractive land, having less drawbacks, and offering more benefits. But both the planning inspector and the new Secretary of State James Brokenshire, still ruled it was unacceptable in the Green Belt.

Besides proposing only a quarter as many houses as are planned for a Tandridge Garden Village, Drake Park – put forward by Bonnar Allan, who are also behind the southern South Godstone bid – would have taken just 59.6 hectares of scrubby, largely inaccessible land in an urban area near a sewage works recently used for sand and gravel extraction. This is exactly the kind of lower quality land that advocates of developing in the Green Belt say should be targeted, rather than the beautiful open countryside that characterises our district.

In the Bonnar Allan proposal half the site would remain as open land and there would be a new park which Mr Brokenshire accepted would have provided “a social benefit”. The applicants argued that it would have improved the Green Belt. By contrast, Tandridge's proposal would devastate an unspoiled area that already provides significant amenity value, which would be lost.

At least 35% of the homes would have been affordable in what is England's ninth most expensive local authority for housing, something that Mr Brokenshire agreed would be “an appropriate and realistic response” to local needs.

Unlike the proposed Tandridge sites, it was within walking distance of a station **with regular direct trains to central London**. Unlike here, too, five primary and two secondary schools within 1.5 miles were expected to have capacity for more pupils. If they didn't, the developer has said it would build a new school, as well as an already planned medical centre, dentist's surgery, pharmacy and offices.

It was located in one of the two “most sustainable” parts of Elmbridge already “providing a broad range of uses and services”. The South Godstone site, by contrast, is in one of the least sustainable parts of Tandridge.

In yet more contrasts to the possible Tandridge garden village sites at South Godstone, it faced no significant flood risk and posed no threat to wildlife. And, though it would have increased traffic congestion, this would not be on anything like the scale that a garden village would inflict on the A22.

Perhaps most significant of all, Mr Brokenshire accepted that, without the scheme, Elmbridge would have only half the land it needs for new housing and it could not meet its 5 year land supply.

But, despite all this, he still concluded that all these *“benefits do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt”* which – like the land between Tandridge Lane and the A22, Ray Lane and the railway line - has been shown to serve its purposes. He concluded that *“the introduction of a large amount of urban development into this largely undeveloped site would amount to inappropriate development.”*



Of course, the Drake Park garden village was opposed by the local council, while TDC is promoting the South Godstone one. But here, as there, local people strongly oppose it, as last month's election showed. Cllr Fisher was right to ascribe the loss of seats to resistance to the Local Plan.

And this is no isolated case. In Essex a planning inspector has just refused another appeal for permission for housing in the Green Belt at Waltham Abbey that would have replaced derelict greenhouses, shrinking the built footprint by 80 per cent, in a local authority area even shorter of building land than Elmbridge. Again, the harm to the green belt was the overriding factor.

If such relatively harmless schemes get turned down, what hope of approval can there be for a massive, precedent-setting, countryside-devastating, congestion-causing, wildlife-devastating, farm-destroying, flood-prone garden village in an unsustainable area devoid of good public transport? By persisting with this plan Tandridge District risks not just such grandiose plans, but its entire Local Plan.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David Hughes  
For and on behalf of TLAG  
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P. S. All this, and more, detail can be found in the Secretary of State's Decision and the Inspectors report at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recovered-appeal-land-east-of-weylands-house-and-molesey-road-and-south-of-fieldcommon-lane-walton-on-thames-surrey-ref-3172429-24-may-2018>