



1st July 2018

Dear Councillor,

Further to our first three letters, we have spent some time trying to decide what next to write to you about, following the publication, at last, of the draft Local Plan. It has not been easy, since there are so many flaws and contradictions in the plan and the way it has been put together.

Take, for example, the way that the draft plan talks of prioritising development in the most sustainable areas, such as the district's Tier 1 towns. This is absolutely correct - and good, sustainable plan making. But, in practice, it seems to have been ignored, as the example of the Oxted area, one of the two most urban ones in the district, demonstrates. Why?

No houses whatsoever are planned for either Oxted or Limpsfield and there are just two sites in Hurst Green. It is hard to discern a planning reason for such a blatant contradiction of the plan's own professed priorities. There is thus an inevitable suspicion that the reason is political – to counter the renewed threat that the Oxted and Limpsfield Residents Group (OLRG) will pose to the Oxted South, Oxted North & Tandridge and Limpfield seats at the next election.

We also considered reporting to you on the Secretary State's rejection of yet another garden village in the Surrey Green Belt, this one at Wisley, near Guildford. Like the one he recently rejected at Drake Park (as reported in one of our previous letters), this appeared a much more promising proposition than anything that TDC is planning, being much smaller, on brownfield land at a disused airport (with 30 per cent of it hard standing) as opposed to pristine green belt, and with existing good transport links. The decision sets the second discouraging precedent for TDC's plans within a month.

Officers and the council leadership will doubtless say that these two examples aren't relevant as they were schemes opposed by the local authorities in question, not promoted by them - as is the case here - and that they did were not in the context of the development of a local plan. But they cannot say the same of an even more recent decision, by an Inspector on plans from three local authorities in Essex to jointly promote three new settlements, who expressed his concern about a lack of certainty over the delivery of both infrastructure and affordable housing and told the parties to try much harder and do their homework properly.

This is very relevant to TDC's Local Plan since it notably lacks substance – let alone the detail and evidence to support it. Decisions on the garden community, apart from its broad location, are left to the Area Action Plan process which won't be completed for many years (inflicting significant blight in the meantime). We do not think for one minute that an Inspector will support TDC kicking the can down the road in this way.

This lack of substance in the Local Plan document makes it all the more serious that officers failed to publish all the accompanying documents on time, making your already extremely onerous task next to impossible. Since I know that you will want to make your own evaluations of the Plan, which will decide the fate of our district for decades to come - rather than simply do as you are told, or follow the party line – I have no doubt that you are as concerned about this as we are.

Another topic could be the extent of control over land south of the railway line at South Godstone. At the March Planning Policy committee it was said that enough land was known to be available in this area, despite a land selling scam some 15 years ago that broke the land up into multiple ownerships. Subsequent correspondence with Sarah Thomson under the Freedom of Information Act drew the response that “45 landowners had approached the council to confirm their land was available.” However, our research, undertaken through the Land Registry and via our lawyers, shows that this land is in fact comprised of some 360 different ownerships. There is no sign that much of this is available.



Or maybe we should highlight the way the results of the Garden Village consultation were reported earlier this year. If you read the officers' report on this you would believe that opinion was fairly evenly divided and the themes were balanced: yet no quantitative analysis was undertaken. Our own research reveals overwhelming opposition, which was confirmed by the May election results. We believe an Inspector will be very interested in this discrepancy.

Finally, how about the 'red line' proclaimed by the council leadership over the railway line at South Godstone? This lays down-that the service must be good enough to prevent residents from getting in their cars to drive to Oxted, Hurst Green or Lingfield stations, the one thing that might just conceivably help make the garden community a more sustainable option. Yet, all we are now guaranteed is station improvements - not a direct, fast and regular service to London. The red line will be breached. And we don't say this out of hope, but from knowledge gleaned from detailed research and conversations with industry experts.

We could go on, as there are many other weaknesses to the plan - but where would we stop? If you would like further detail on any of the matters we have referred to above, please do let us know and we will gladly share this.

A garden village is neither necessary nor wanted, and there is a better way Please consider very carefully whether you can support a flawed plan that seriously risks being thrown out by an Inspector, an action that would cost the council and its taxpayers hundreds of thousands of pounds of wasted money.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "David Hughes", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

David Hughes
For and on behalf of TLAG
info@TLAG.org.uk

P.S. We know that Taylor Wimpey have written to you to advance their own plan for Blindley Heath, and want to put on record that TLAG's research shows that this location is also wholly unsuitable for a garden village – and that we would fight it just as vigorously as the current proposals for South Godstone.