



77, Commercial Road, Paddock Wood, Kent, TN12 6DS Tel: 01892 831600  
gary.mickelborough@bloomfieldsltd.co.uk www.bloomfieldsltd.co.uk

Local Plan  
Planning Policy  
Planning Services  
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Civic Way  
Royal Tunbridge Wells  
Kent TN1 1RS

8<sup>th</sup> November 2019

**Comments on the Draft Local Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal (draft version) with respect to Land south of The Street Policy AL/CRS14**

Dear Sir / Madam,

This representation has been prepared on behalf of Fernham Homes in response to the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council ('TWBC') Draft Local Plan Consultation, which runs until 15th November 2019.

**Context**

The application site consists of an area of residential garden land to the rear of those properties which align the south side of The Street, and an adjacent field which has historically been used for sheep grazing. The site is subdivided into a series of paddocks by post and wire fencing. There is a narrow northern strip closest to the houses fronting onto The Street which is separated from the main part of the site to its south by a chain link fence. This area has itself been divided into a series of smaller plots by fencing, and there is a garden shed in the eastern part of this area. The larger southern area is in use for sheep grazing, and is divided into smaller paddocks by post and wire fencing, with a timber field shelter in its eastern part.

The topography of the site is gently undulating with a natural decline of around 1 metre from the northwest corner to the southeast corner of the site. There are no trees or any substantial planting within the interior of the site, which is well-defined by existing hedgerow boundary planting. The site falls immediately adjacent to the Limits to Built Development as defined by the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan of 2006.

As laid out within the Landscape and Visual Assessment (June 2017), the northern boundary runs along the rear garden boundaries of the houses to the north and is marked by low garden fences and hedges, with some trees and shrubs along the boundary line and also within the gardens to the north. There is a field gate roughly in the centre of this boundary, with access along a surfaced drive from The Street, and the trees and hedges are generally taller and provide a more effective screen to the site to the east of this gate.

There is also back-land residential development to the east of the site. The eastern boundary runs along the rear garden boundaries of the houses to the east of the site, both the row of cottages fronting onto the road and also the large detached property (Galleons Lap) accessed

via a side road off The Street to the south - there are also some properties to the east of this side road, behind the roadside properties. There is a tall, mixed hedge comprising mainly hazel and hawthorn along this boundary, with some lower sections and also some tall trees including oaks just beyond it and within the adjoining gardens.

The recreational fields also lie to the west. The southern part of the western boundary runs alongside the tennis courts, and is marked by a dense hazel and hawthorn hedge around 6m in height. To the north of the tennis courts there is a taller hedge of hawthorn and blackthorn with some tall oak and ash trees, and a field gate from the recreation ground roughly in the centre of this part of the boundary. The site therefore retains a sense of enclosure from the wider landscape to the west.

The southern boundary is marked by a post and wire fence, with the public footpath running just to the south of the fence line. To the south of the footpath is a dense hedgerow comprising holly and hazel with some tall oak trees at either end, which effectively encloses the site and demarcates it from the boundary of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

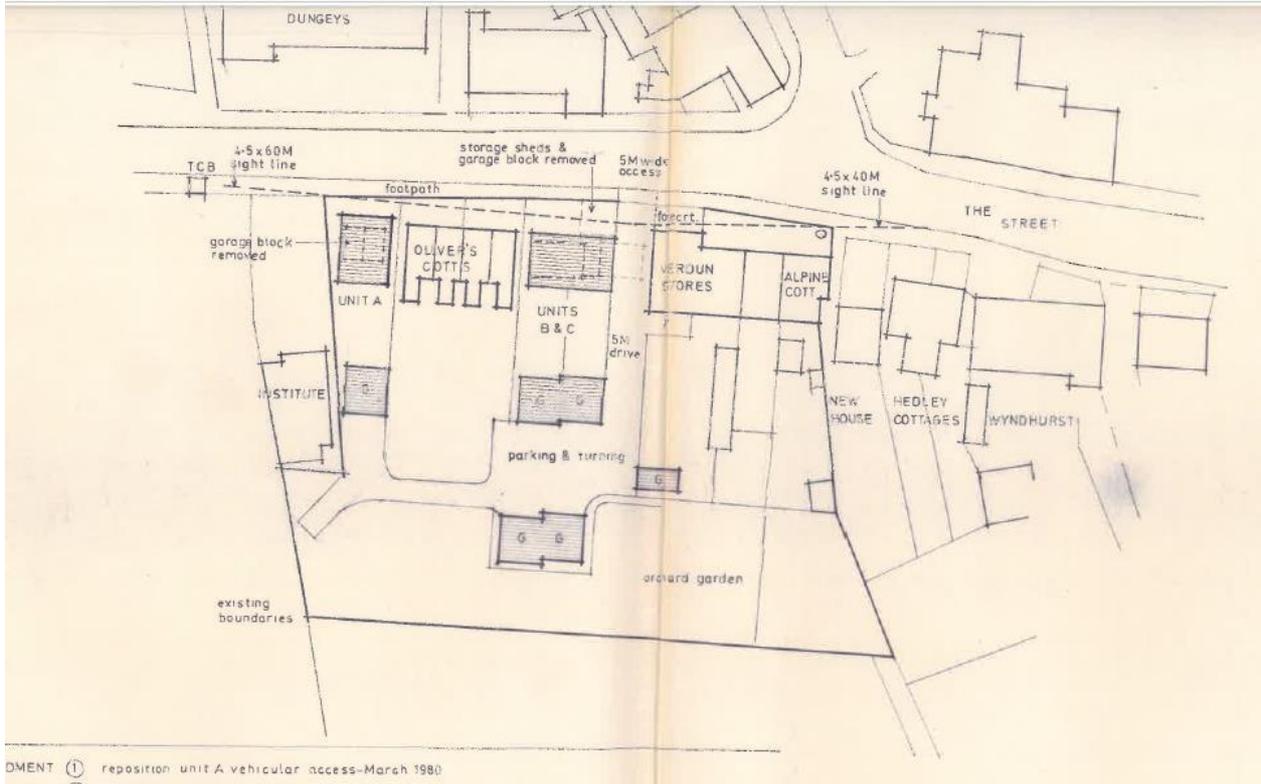
The site also extends to the north, to meet The Street along the line of the proposed access. Here there is a mixed species hedge (including some privet) around 4m in height between this part of the site and the St George's Institute (the village hall), and a garden boundary fence between the site and the property to the east, number 4 Oliver's Cottages.

## **Site History**

The site has historically been owned by the Bringloe family, which has been a part of the Sissinghurst community for a considerable number of years. The land which is currently occupied by the Sissinghurst Tennis Courts and the extension to the village hall, known as St George's Institute were both carried out on land that was previously 'gifted' to the community by the Bringloe family.

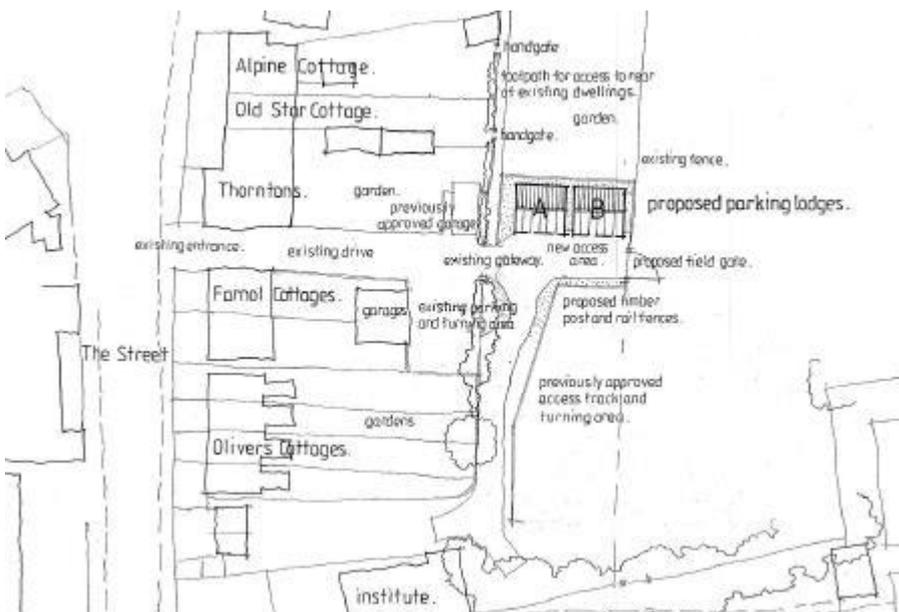
In 1979, a planning application for the construction of three dwellings with rear access and additional parking areas was permitted (under reference TW/79/00802/FUL). This was accompanied by an application for Listed Building Consent to demolish 3 storage sheds, 1 garage and a block of two garages (permitted under ref. TW/79/0804/Listed Building Consent). The planning application permitted in 1979 included not only the construction of three dwelling-houses but also the construction of five double garages and one single garage to the rear.

That scheme was implemented by virtue of the construction of the two properties now known as Farnol Cottages and two of the permitted garages were constructed in accordance with the approved plans. That permission is therefore extant following the construction of part of that scheme. This means that the single dwelling-house and garages which have not yet been constructed could now lawfully be constructed at any time. The current planning application would therefore supersede the implementation of that part of the previously approved scheme.



*Plan showing planning permission for housing and garaging granted in 1979*

A planning permission was also previously granted in February 2015 for the construction of two detached garages at a part of this site (under reference TW/14/504825/FUL). This current planning application would therefore supersede the implementation of that planning permission. It is also noteworthy that within the Council's report for that application it was acknowledged that the fore-mentioned planning permission (in 1979) for the construction of three dwelling and parking garages is extant.



*Plan showing planning permission for re-designed garaging granted in February 2015*

## **Sissinghurst**

The site is located very close to the centre of the village of Sissinghurst and so is within easy walking and cycling distance of a range of shops and community facilities. This includes a post office and newsagents, a primary school, the village hall, a public house, takeaway food premises, the adjacent recreation field and play equipment, and bus stops. These are all located within only a few hundred metres of the site.

It is noted by the Council's Planning Environmental Officer from within the Proof of Evidence relating to the recent appeal against the outline planning application for a residential development of up to 60 new homes at land off Common Road, Sissinghurst (under reference APP/M2270/W/15/3006768), that, within the LBD of Sissinghurst village, there are 176 dwellings and 405 residents. The Planning Inspector dealing with that appeal noted that "for a village of this scale it does have a reasonable range of facilities. It also has relatively good bus services which would be increased...and these offer good access to a wider network of public transport services including rail services from Staplehurst station".

Furthermore, the Inspector for that appeal noted that, "*Sissinghurst has a range of services and infrastructure, which include the primary school, a recreational ground, a village hall, two shops including a Post Office, a pub/restaurant, a hot food take-away, Rankins party catering and party venue and a church, which are all within reasonable walking distance of the appeal site. Cranbrook provides a wider range of local services and facilities including Cranbrook School, High Weald Academy, medical and dental facilities, a supermarket and shopping area. The No 5 bus service runs along Common Road adjacent to the site. It provides links to Maidstone, Staplehurst, Cranbrook, Hawkhurst and Sandhurst. There is a railway station at Staplehurst with regular services to London Charing Cross and Tunbridge Wells*" (see Paragraph 15).

Sissinghurst is located in between and approximately equal distance to Royal Tunbridge Wells, Maidstone and Ashford to the west, north and east respectively. Each of these towns is approximately 15 miles away by road, and bus services are available in each of these directions. The A229 lies approximately 0.2km north-west of Sissinghurst, with the main approaches to the village being from Common Road and Sissinghurst Road.

The village also has several historic interest features with numerous listed buildings in the area and a conservation area centred on the village. The busy A262 between Lamberhurst and Biddenden runs through the settlement and Conservation Area and therefore a high volume of traffic passes through the settlement.

## **Nearby planning applications**

There has been a number of relevant planning applications relating to land in and around Sissinghurst recently. Principally, this application follows a recently determined appeal in relation to a proposal for 60 residential units (which was changed from 65 units during the course of the appeal) at land off the nearby Common Road, Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Kent.

## **Common Road**

The appeal relating to that proposal for 60 houses at Common Road was allowed (under reference APP/M2270/W/15/3006768). This was on the basis that, in terms of the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development, the increased supply and choice of housing in an area given that there is not a Framework compliant supply of housing land, would be positive.

That application was supported by a social-economic impact assessment and it was considered that the contribution to the supply of housing should carry very considerable weight in favour of the proposal, and although identified as causing some harm to the landscape character and visual amenity of the area and loss of countryside, this harm is outweighed given the absence of a Framework compliant supply of housing land.

Despite being recognised as being at odds with the Council's adopted Core Strategy, it was considered that, *"given its location on the edge of the existing village within fairly close proximity to these services/facilities...the site is a reasonably sustainable location for the development"*.

With regard to sustainability, the Inspector considered that there are good facilities within Sissinghurst itself relative to its size, and other services not catered for within the village itself are provided locally within neighbouring settlements. The Inspector went on to highlight the bus service serving this area and the fact that this would be enhanced through contributions by the developer for a period of 3 years. The current proposal, while itself not of a scale to warrant any financial contribution, would benefit from the service improvements afforded by the Common Road scheme.

### **Cobnut Close**

A planning application for nine new dwellings was approved in May 2016 at land adjacent to Cobnut Close, Sissinghurst (under reference 15/505629). This scheme consists of two semi-detached three-bedroom properties, six detached four-bedroom properties, and one detached five-bedroom property with associated car parking and landscaping.

The summary of the Officer's Committee Report for this application confirms that "in the absence of a five year supply of housing, the housing supply policies (including those related to the Limits to Built Development (LBD) are "out-of-date". Paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that where relevant policies are out-of-date that permission for sustainable development should be granted unless specific policies in the NPPF indicate that development should be restricted (and all other material considerations are satisfied)".

The Council notes that the services at Sissinghurst "can be easily accessed from the site with a footway adjacent to Common Road. Other services such as medical care are provided within the neighbouring settlements of Cranbrook and Staplehurst which are approximately 1.7 miles and 4 miles away respectively. Whilst it is true that future residents are likely to travel by car to these other villages for some services, this is unlikely to cause significant harm at the scale of development proposed, or when taking the cumulative impact of 60 dwellings on the Common Road site into account". This is considered to be noteworthy given that the scale of that development (i.e. the number of residential units) is equal to the scale of this current proposed scheme.

With regards to the nine houses proposed in that case, the Council noted that significant weight can be attached to this in considering whether the proposal comprises sustainable development. The Council noted that, as the Cobnut Close site is as equally sustainable as the fore-mentioned Common Road appeal site and would be less visually intrusive, it should be supported. It is put forward that the same conclusions could be met with regard to the site rear of The Street.

### **School site**

Planning permission was granted in May 2014 for nine houses at the former Sissinghurst Primary School (under reference 13/00439). Whilst that site is located within the Limits to Built Development, it is noteworthy that this development required the widening of the pre-existing

access and the removal of a section of the wall at the front of the school, and this was considered acceptable from a conservation and highways perspective.

## **Fernham Homes**

Fernham Homes are a Kent based developer, with headquarters in nearby Tonbridge and a workforce predominantly from the local area.

Each Fernham Home is built to the highest standards with meticulous craftsmanship and combines the latest in product design and technology with a 10 year NHBC warranty.



The company directors are committed to respecting the environment, seamlessly blending each home with the surrounding area. The design ethos is to provide landscape led schemes that retain and enhance existing landscaping and boundary treatments, whilst providing small to large size family homes of a range of tenures for which there is the greatest need.

## **The Tunbridge Wells Draft Local Plan**

The TWBC Draft Local Plan (herein referred to as 'the plan') sets out the spatial vision, strategic objectives, and overarching development strategy for the borough. It details overarching place shaping policies for each parish and settlement, as well as site specific allocations to deliver the strategy and detailed policies to be applied to all new development.

As outlined by the plan, there is an overriding and growing housing need within the Borough. The Council's SHMA findings initially identified the future need to plan for some 648 new homes per year. This in turn has seen a further uplift as a result of the standard methodology for calculating housing need, which based on the most credible set of population projections suggests a further uplift to circa 680 new homes per year.

In addition to the need moving forward, the previous difficulties in keeping pace with delivery has resulted in a need to accommodate a significant number of dwellings in the short term with a deficit in five year supply.

Given the current development plan has seen documented difficulties in meeting the existing core strategy housing target, the need for new housing is compelling and indisputable and must be addressed by the new plan as a priority. The plan will set the agenda for development across the borough to 2036 and replace the current Development Plan, which comprises the Local Plan 2006 (saved policies), the Core Strategy 2010, and the Site Allocations Local Plan 2016.

This representation comments on the following elements of the plan:

- Vision and Strategic Objectives;
- Development Strategy and Strategic Policies; and
- Place Shaping Policies for the Parish of Cranbrook and Sissinghurst.

### ***Vision and Strategic Objectives***

The TWBC draft Local Plan is underpinned by a future vision up to 2036 and beyond. The vision is for Tunbridge Wells to be vibrant and prosperous and there is also an expectation that it will

have grown significantly. The Council aim for growth to be infrastructure-led and largely funded by new development. The key components of the vision are summarised below:

- The heart of Royal Tunbridge Wells and Southborough will be culturally rich, full of vitality, and will have the flexibility, robustness, and adaptability to cope with changes in the economy and other circumstances.
- Paddock Wood as a settlement will have developed considerably (including on land in eastern Capel parish) on the basis of garden settlement principles, using a comprehensive, master-planned approach.
- A new garden settlement will have been established at Tudeley Village, including homes, employment, and community facilities (which will continue to develop into the following years).
- High quality development at other settlements across the borough will have been realised, with the timely provision of relevant infrastructure
- Rural enterprise will have been supported, and the exceptional quality of the built and natural environments will have been protected and enhanced.

The plan stresses that all development will achieve high quality design, responding to the distinctive character of particular locations and in certain instances valued and protected landscapes. Further, the timely delivery of infrastructure will be central to the plan.

In order to implement this vision, the plan sets a number of strategic objectives.

- 1) To deliver the housing, economic, and other needs identified for the borough by the end of the plan period through well designed, sustainable, plan led, and high quality development;
- 2) To achieve the delivery of all forms of infrastructure to mitigate the impact of development and where possible to result in 'betterment';
- 3) To prioritise active travel, but where necessary to plan appropriately for use by private motor vehicle, in particular embracing new technology;
- 4) To boost significantly the supply of affordable housing, and to seek to redress the disparity between house prices and income in the borough;
- 5) To ensure that the borough is vibrant, culturally rich, and economically buoyant;
- 6) To protect the valued heritage, and built and natural environments of the borough, including the AONB and to achieve net gains for nature;
- 7) To release appropriate land from the Green Belt through a plan-led approach, and to increase public accessibility, and to protect the openness of remaining Green Belt land;
- 8) To tackle climate change and minimise the impact of development on communities, the economy, and the environment with carefully considered design and by embracing technology, such as renewable energy generation;
- 9) To establish garden settlements as a model for the future delivery of development in the borough;
- 10) To work with neighbourhood plan groups to ensure the formation of locally-led policies, with this reflected in decisions on planning applications.

### ***Development Strategy and Strategic Policies (Policy STR1)***

The purpose of the Development Strategy is to outline how much development will be provided to meet the needs of the borough and where that development will be located.

In terms of the amount of housing, paragraph 59 of the NPPF states that to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed. Further, to determine the number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing needs assessment conducted using the standard method in national planning guidance – unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach which also reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals.

The Council confirm that their housing need target for the plan period 2016-2036 is 13,560 dwellings (678 dwellings per annum), which is calculated using the Governments standard method and the 2014-based household projections.

In terms of the different supply components, the Council considers that the Local Plan must (as a minimum) include additional allocations to accommodate 7,593 homes. This figure was formulated taking into account; completions since April 2016 (1,552); extant planning permissions (3,127); outstanding site allocations (588) and a windfall allowance (700 dwellings). The Council have applied a 10% non-delivery rate to these figures to err on the side of caution and consider that the plan would exceed the minimum housing requirement if all of the supply components were achieved.

The general principle of proportionately spreading the benefits of growth is supported. Adopting a pattern of dispersed growth approach would allow a number of sites to be developed at the same time, serving different areas of the Borough and segments of the local housing market, which is preferable to saturation of the market in a single area.

Tunbridge Wells is a constrained Borough. There are a number of archaeological and heritage sites, including 45 Historic Parks and Gardens, 25 Conservation Areas and 11 Scheduled Ancient Monuments. In addition, there are approximately 3,000 Listed Buildings. The landscape of the High Weald AONB contains numerous historic landscape features, including field patterns, settlements and ancient woodland, whilst the borough also hosts a number of, or is close to, areas of ecological importance. These include:

- (1) Ancient Woodland (approximately 16% of the borough)
- (2) Circa 60 Local Wildlife Sites (approximately 11% of the borough)
- (3) Ten Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- (4) Five Local Nature Reserves (including one Community Woodland)
- (5) One Regionally Important Geological Site, at Scotney Castle Quarry.

The nearby Ashdown Forest is a designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA). Although not an environmental constraint, the Metropolitan Green Belt covers 22% of Tunbridge Wells Borough. Given these constraints, it is acknowledged that planning for housing requires the need to balance a number of core environmental and planning matters in order to reach a sensitive future development strategy.

Accordingly, the Council is encouraged to increase the number of medium-sized sites, particularly in sustainable settlements such as Sissinghurst where there is none or minimal impact upon key environmental landscape designations. Such sites could be delivered quickly, particularly as there will be limited intervention to infrastructure. Furthermore, it is essential that draft allocations such as AL/CRS14 are retained and encouraged given the advancement of planning applications emphasises the deliverability of the land.

## ***Place Shaping Policies***

The place shaping policies establish the spatial priorities for different areas in the Borough. For each area, there is an overarching policy that development should adhere to and details are provided for individual allocated sites that will deliver the quantum of development proposed. The site-specific allocations provide both strategic and development management guidance.

### ***Cranbrook and Sissinghurst Policy STR/CRS1***

This sets the proposed strategy for Cranbrook and Sissinghurst and states that approximately 100-115 new dwellings on five sites in Sissinghurst, including land subject to this representation, under allocation reference AL/CRS14.

This Policy says that it is expected that contributions will be required towards the following requirements, if necessary, to mitigate the impact of the development:

- a. Primary and secondary education;
- b. Health and medical facilities; the three existing medical practices to be combined into one practice. Provision of land and new premises to deliver one GP practice and associated services;
- c. New community centre
- d. The provision of buildings and spaces to provide cultural infrastructure;
- e. The provision of allotments, amenity/natural green space, parks, and recreation grounds, children's play space and youth play space to include improvements to the cricket pavilion, improvements to the Tomlin Ground (Cranbrook Rugby Club), including to the changing rooms and club house, improvements to pitches at King George Field in Sissinghurst, including converting adult pitches to junior pitches;
- f. Extending the Crane Valley public access route westwards and eastwards with consideration for biodiversity and ancient woodland
- g. A feasibility study to investigate the potential of creating pedestrian and cycle route between the settlements in the parish, building upon existing footways and Public Rights of Ways; to include contributions towards the proposed utility and leisure cycling routes within the Borough Cycling Strategy and the proposed Bedgebury to Sissinghurst cycle path route;
- h. A replacement of St George's Hall (Sissinghurst);
- i. Provision of electric vehicle charging points and car share facilities in accordance with Policy TP 2: Transport Design and Accessibility;
- j. Bus services, including contributions towards a feasibility study to investigate the potential of creating a Demand Responsive Bus service for the parish and beyond;
- k. Other mitigation measures identified through the pre-application process and planning application.

Having regard to these draft requirements, the general thrust of the Policy is supported. In particular, from discussions with the Parish Council and local community figures, it is particularly

important that this site can be used to deliver a replacement of the St George's Institute with a new community hall.

The provision of such a new community asset is sought to be achieved as part of any delivery of housing at this site and there is therefore an issue of viability that must be taken into account. Put simply, it will be viably impossible to expect any housing developer at this site to deliver both replacement of St George's Hall together with other contributions that might otherwise be required with respect to the provision of affordable housing.

#### **Land south of The Street Policy AL/CRS14**

This states that the land is allocated for a mixed use scheme, including residential development (C3) providing approximately 20 residential dwellings, and a replacement community hall.

Development on the site shall accord with the following requirements:

1. Vehicular access into the site to be informed by a highways assessment (see criterion 5 of Policy EN 1: Design and other development management criteria);
2. Provision of a pedestrian link to Public Right of Way WC104;
3. Development to have regard to the setting of the Sissinghurst Conservation Area and nearby listed buildings (see Policy EN 7: Heritage Assets);
4. Demonstration that the design of the scheme reflects the historic linear pattern of Sissinghurst village;
5. Provision of replacement village hall and associated parking (see Policy EN 1: Design and other development management criteria and Policy TP 3: Parking Standards);
6. Provision of on-site amenity/natural green space, and improvements to existing allotments, parks and recreation grounds, children's play space and youth play space in accordance with the requirements of Policy OSSR 2: Provision of publicly accessible open space and recreation

Having regard to these draft requirements, the general thrust of the Policy is supported, which largely reflects proposals that have been discussed with Officers as part of pre-application enquiries. Comments are provided below with respect to each of the Policy criteria;

1. Following the submission of an earlier planning application, previous access issues have been addressed by virtue of the inclusion of land to the west of the site, under the ownership of both the Parish Council and the St George's Institute. This means improved visibility splays can now be provided without reliance of third party land.
2. Indicative layouts have now been presented to Planning Officer's as part of recent pre-application discussions. These show that not only would a pedestrian link be maintained to the Public Right of Way to the rear of the site, but the proposed layout would be designed to be permeable allowing linkage to the right of way at several points.
3. Pre-application discussions have steered the design of indicative schemes and the potential impact upon views from the Conservation Area. In practice, it is the inevitable location of the replacement of the St George's Institute which will dominate any views

into the site from the Conservation Area. There are a number of Listed Buildings along The Street but Officers have indicated that the proposed development of this site would not be likely to impinge upon the setting of these buildings.

4. Any development is dependent on the location of the access to the site and the positioning of the replacement St George's Institute, which both act to influence the layout of the proposed development. Therefore, it may not be feasible, or indeed desirable, to provide a development which is wholly linear in its form. But there is no reason why a scheme could not be considered to reflect the historic linear pattern of development at the site to a sufficient degree, so it is respectfully suggested that the wording of this criteria is amended to read;

*"Demonstration that the design of the scheme reflects the historic linear pattern of Sissinghurst village **insofar as is practically possible when taking into account the benefits to be had by the provision of the replacement of the St George's Institute together with parking area**"*

5. Schemes for the delivery of housing at this site, together with a replacement St George's Institute and associated parking, are well advanced. Following pre-application discussions with Planning Officers, it is considered that this can be achieved in a manner consistent with Development Management criteria.
6. There is sufficient space on the site to deliver a development incorporating both housing and the replacement of the St George's Institute. It is noted that the minimum size of amenity natural green space considered acceptable as part of new development is 0.15 ha, which could be provided with provision for all other publicly accessible open space and recreation being provided for off-site. However, it is strongly submitted that the requirement for these off-site provisions must take into account the exceptional benefit to be provided at the site by the provision of the replacement of the St George's Institute and associated parking area. It is therefore suggested that the wording of this criteria is amended to read;

*"Provision of on-site amenity/natural green space, and improvements to existing allotments, parks and recreation grounds, children's play space and youth play space in accordance with the requirements of Policy OSSR 2: Provision of publicly accessible open space and recreation, **unless it is demonstrated that such provisions would not be viable when taking into account the benefits to be had by the provision of the replacement of the St George's Institute together with parking area**" (or similar).*

## Summary

Based on the current national and local planning context, it is considered that the site is suitable for formal allocation and it is important that such sites are retained within the Regulation 19 draft of the Local Plan. This representation responds to the content of the draft plan (and relevant supporting documents), reinforces why the site remains suitable and outlines how development could be delivered. Taking all of the above into account, the principle of the proposed allocation is supported. However, suggestions are respectfully made in relation to the specific criterion of the allocation policy, to ensure that the cumulative requirements are viable and can be balanced with then provision of a replacement St George's Institute.

It is trusted that the contents of this representation are clear and I hope the comments are useful in guiding the forthcoming stage of the plan making process.

Yours sincerely,



**Gary Mickelborough BSc (Hons) MA MRTPI**  
**Director**