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Our Ref: PL010-642

Planning Policy Team
Rother District Council

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By email only:
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Dear Sir/Madam

ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL – LOCAL PLAN REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION 2024

**REPRESENTATIONS ON BEHALF OF MR & MRS HEDGES
LAND WEST OF ROYAL OAK CLOSE, BECKLEY**

On behalf of my client, Mr & Mrs Hedges, I write to make submissions to the Rother District Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation. My client has control over land west of Royal Oak Close, Beckley which has been assessed under the Council's Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) under reference BEC0025.

These representations relate in particular to the following parts of the Regulation 18 document, titled Rother Local Plan 2020-2040:

- Housing Need
- Preferred Spatial Development Options
- Relevant Draft Local Policies

A site plan outlining the land promoted for development is included at **Appendix 1**. The land put forward for consideration is edged in red.

Housing Need

The key objective to significantly boost the supply of housing remains a focus of planning policy at all levels. Paragraph 60 of the NPPF states that to support this aim it is important to ensure a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed.

In addition, paragraph 11b of the NPPF states:

'Strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless:

- the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area;*

or

- ii. *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.'*

The Regulation 18 consultation identifies the housing need in the district as 14,660 homes for over the twenty-year plan period 2020 to 2040. This figure was identified in the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA, 2024), and was derived using the Standard Method, as required by the NPPF and accompanying Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This amounts to 733 dwellings per annum. It is not clear from the Regulation 18 consultation whether this figure includes a 20% buffer to be applied as a result of under delivery as set out at paragraph 77 of the NPPF. If the 20% buffer has yet to be applied, housing requirement would increase to 879 dwellings per annum -17,580 dwellings over the plan period.

In any event, the Council have confirmed they do not in fact intend to meet their full housing need (as calculated by the standard method) for a number of reasons most notably the significant landscape and flooding constraints which exist across the district. We accept that footnote 7 of paragraph 11 of the 2023 NPPF allows for a reduction in housing delivery in areas restricted by certain designations, including National Landscape, of which a significant part of the Rother District falls within. However, we do not consider the lower housing figures offered in the Regulation 18 Consultation have been justified or that sufficient reason has been given for not meeting the higher housing need figure identified within the 'range' put forward by the LPA, as discussed below. It is acknowledged that the Council have stated that the final figures to be put forward for adoption will be 'minimum' figures. However, the history of under delivery of housing since the adoption of the Core Strategy is well documented (as set out paragraph 5.3 of the Regulation 18 Plan) which makes all the more pressing case for the Council to be taking a more radical approach to positively plan for a higher level of housing.

The Council have made a passing reference in the Regulation 18 plan to a couple of reasons as to why they cannot meet their housing need figure calculated using the standard methodology including:

- Landscape constraints
- Constraints resulting from areas lying within flood zones

Beyond a passing reference to environmental constraint, the Council has not set out in detail why they cannot meet their full identified housing need yet seem to acknowledge the need to plan for higher levels of growth by running an additional call for sites alongside the Regulation 18 consultation.

Our clients land at Beckley would not be constrained by the flooding constraints cited by the Council as reason to not meet full identified housing need being entirely within flood zone 1.

Whilst the land it is located within in the High Weald National Landscape (formerly AONB) area it is considered capable of accommodating some development without adverse effect on the natural beauty of the High Weald which underpins the designation of this area.

As demonstrated in the accompanying Landscape Statement prepared by ADAS Landscape found at **Appendix 2**, the site relates strongly to the adjacent residential development to the north, east and west on its northern extent and further residential properties east, west and south on its southern extent. A strong landscape strategy that builds upon the existing enclosure that the site is afforded would limit the spatial extent of any visibility of the development within the wider landscape of the High Weald National Landscape. Development on the site would not extend the influence of existing built form at Beckley, where residential development is strung out along the B2088.

Footpaths within the vicinity of the land provide access to a range of facilities within Beckley. Bus stops within walking distance of the site provide services to Rye which has a full array of day-to-day services including a train station providing services to London amongst other locations.

Paragraph 70 of the NPPF recognises that small scale developments can deliver housing at a faster rate. The land is owned outright by Mr & Mrs Hedges and so there are no third party ownership issues which might prevent or delay development. It is anticipated that a small-scale development here could be delivered at a relatively quick rate.

In accordance with the Government's objective of significantly boosting housing supply we contend the Council should pursue a higher growth strategy to fully meet the full identified housing need for the plan period. Adopting this approach will allow the Council to develop a long-term sustainable growth strategy which provides flexibility to adapt to changes in demand and allow for the inevitable cases where development does not come forward for some reason or under delivers. This is particularly the case given the history of under delivery in the district. It would also allow for a more consistent delivery rate, allowing for a wider range of smaller sites to be delivered while the infrastructure is put in place to serve larger developments.

Proposed Strategy: Overall Spatial Development Strategy

The Regulation 18 draft local plan identifies a number of spatial strategies across the district to respond to different circumstances, including some additional development within Staplecross.

We support the principle of employing a number of spatial strategies to provide the flexibility to respond to differing circumstances and as a village with some services and connectivity to higher tier settlements Beckley makes a logical focus for additional growth.

Vision for Rye & Eastern Settlements

The vision for Rye and the Eastern Settlements indicates that

The eastern cluster of settlements will be better connected by sustainable transport infrastructure, with Rye acting as a key transport hub, and local economies will continue to grow, respecting the historic development pattern of rural communities over time. The strengthened

connections to Rye as a sustainable market town, will allow for sensitive development in adjoining villages.

Our client's land at Beckley is located within one of the eastern settlements so in principle is in line with this aspect of the proposed policy. The land has the potential to deliver small-scale development which is respectful of the character of the High Weald National Landscape it lies within.

The existing settlement of Beckley is consolidated in the vicinity of the site, evidenced through the provision of village services such as Beckley Recreation Ground and Beckley Village Centre, either side of the B2088, approximately 90m west of the site. Delivery of residential development on the site will respect the existing layout of the settlement with development set behind existing boundary vegetation enabling it to assimilate into the rural character of the village.

Figure 25 of the Regulation 18 plan sets out the potential housing growth for settlements in Rye & Eastern Settlements. In respect of Beckley it is currently only identified for the growth of 32 additional houses. In light of our commentary earlier on in this letter about the need to plan for a higher level of housing growth it is considered that the capacity of Beckley to accommodate a higher level of housing growth should be considered. If the Council do decide to increase the level of housing growth at Beckley our client's land is considered to be appropriate site for accommodating additional growth.

Proposed Policy DEV3: Development Boundaries

Proposed Policy DEV3 states that '*Development boundaries define the area within sustainable settlements where development will be permitted, provided it is consistent with this Local Plan*'.

The explanatory text for this policy explains that settlements identified within Figure 38 (which includes Beckley) will have their development boundary reviewed as part of the next stage of the Local Plan process.

The development boundary of Beckley is currently set out in the Development and Site Allocations Plan (DaSA), as included in **Appendix 3** and currently abuts our client's land to the east, west and north. It is considered that our client's land make a logical extension to the development boundary for Beckley to allow for more housing growth. It is acknowledged that under the DaSA it was considered important to retain gaps in the development boundary along the main street of Beckley but given the new (and higher) housing need in the area we would contend that the justification for retaining gaps in the development boundary needs to be reviewed. Additionally, as highlighted in the accompanying Landscape statement the site bears a strong relationship with the existing residential development along the B2088 which forms the settlement of Beckley, with properties generally lining the route of the road. The site is enclosed on all sides by either existing residential properties or roads and is not connected to the wider undeveloped countryside. North of the site, existing residential properties line the B2088, such that it provides a sense of continuous development along the road albeit that the site is currently undeveloped. This point is further strengthened by the fact that the HELAA assessment itself identifies the site as "*centrally located in the village*".

Site Specific Considerations

The submitted land identified at **Appendix 1**, lies within Beckley which has been identified as a settlement capable of accommodating additional housing growth.

Beckley has been identified in the Regulation 18 Consultation as location for additional residential development under the preferred option which seeks to focus growth in a number of core areas. Subject to site specific considerations it is therefore in a location where the Council have shown support for further development in principle.

Our client has control over a land at Beckley as shown in the attached plan extending to some 0.86 hectares. It is currently accessed via a field gate on the southern boundary however there is scope to introduce a new access on the northern boundary which would provide access onto a road of a better standard and also provide connection to an existing pedestrian footpath.

The land is currently vacant agricultural land which is not subject to any ecological designations.

The land does lie within the High Weald National Landscape but as referred to above the site bears a strong relationship with the existing residential development along the B2088 which forms the settlement of Beckley, with properties generally lining the route of the road. The site is enclosed on all sides by either existing residential properties or roads and is not connected to the wider undeveloped countryside. North of the site, existing residential properties line the B2088, such that it provides a sense of continuous development along the road albeit that the site is currently undeveloped. A strong landscape strategy that builds upon the existing enclosure, would greatly limit the visibility of any fourth coming residential development within the wider High Weald National Landscape.

On the basis of a capacity of 24-45 dph dwellings per hectare (in accordance with proposed policy LWL1) the site would be capable of accommodating up to 20 dwellings as a minimum. However, taking account of the plot sizes surrounding the site and the need to set aside areas for biodiversity net gain it is considered that a lower level of dwellings would be more appropriate likely to be in the region of 10 dwellings.

As referred to above there is a footpath directly adjacent to the northern boundary of our client's land which provides pedestrian access to facilities within Beckley. Beckley has a number of facilities which are within walking distance of the site including a church, recreation grounds, village hall, public house and a primary school.

The site lies in Flood Zone 1 so is not at significant risk of flooding.

I trust that the enclosed information is clear and I look forward to receiving confirmation of receipt of this submission.

In the meantime, should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Christine Dadswell MRTPI