

**1, Allen House Park  
Hook Heath Road  
Woking  
Surrey  
GU22 0DB**

31 July 2015

Dear Sirs,

**RE: WOKING 2027 DPD CONSULTATION AND IN PARTICULAR TO SITE**

**REFERENCES:**

**GB10 (Land to the north east of Saunders Lane, between Saunders Lane and Hook Hill Lane, Mayford GU22 0NN); GB11 (Land to the north west of Saunders Lane, Mayford, GU22 0NN); GB14 (Land adjacent to Hook Hill Lane, Hook Heath, GU22 0PS)**

As a resident of Hook Heath I am writing to register my objection to the removal of areas GB10, GB11 and GB14 from the Green Belt and to proposals to build houses on parcels GB10 and GB11 post 2027. My reasons for objecting are:

**1) Urban sprawl will be increased**

The purpose of the Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl and to maintain the open spaces between individual towns and villages. The current proposals to build on so much of the open land that separates Hook Heath from Mayford and Mayford from Woking do just the opposite.

During the consultation on the Hook Heath Neighbourhood Plan, a significant number of Hook Heath residents commented that it was highly desirable to maintain the physical separation between Mayford village and Hook Heath. It is a matter of regret that the Neighbourhood Plan was only able to address development issues within the designated Neighbourhood Area rather than those in the areas adjacent to it. Nevertheless the sentiments expressed by Hook Heath residents are, I am sure, mirrored by our neighbours in Mayford.

**2) No exceptional circumstances demonstrated for 1200 houses**

National planning policy allows the release of land from the Green Belt only in exceptional circumstances. The Woking Core Strategy requires WBC to find sites in the Green Belt for 550 homes in the period 2022-2027, but WBC has gone further than required by identifying sites for an additional 1200 homes in the period 2027-2040.

While it may be sensible to look further ahead than the current core strategy, the exceptional circumstances rule still applies. WBC has not demonstrated any exceptional need for 1200 houses, or indeed any other number, in the Green Belt around Woking post 2027.

My understanding is that the 1200 figure is based on WBC's "working assumption" of an estimated 292 dwellings per annum over the period.

Officers have stated that WBC's overriding objective is to ensure that development does not undermine the character of the area and/ or the efficient use of land. Questioned at a recent meeting, the reply given by officers was that if development proposed by a developer was too high or too low, the Council **COULD** (my emphasis) choose to resist the proposal.

**3) No proximity to a Local Centre**

The Green Belt Review recommended these sites on the basis of proximity to a "Local Centre". However, other than a nearby Post Office and a gent's barbers, there is no supporting

infrastructure in the form of shops, doctors, dentists, medical facilities, or schools. Residents living in these major developments would be isolated unless they have a vehicle. The Green Belt Review by Peter Brett Associates claimed these sites were 'sustainable' on the basis of Google travel times – taken outside the rush hour and hence hopelessly optimistic. The green belt review was therefore flawed.

#### **4) The transport infrastructure will be overloaded**

Local transport infrastructure, particularly the Egley Road, is heavily congested during the morning and evening rush hours. The existing congestion along this road would be exacerbated.

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#### **5) The density of housing is not compatible with the surroundings**

The proposed housing densities of 30 dwellings per hectare (dph) on the Saunders Lane sites GB10 and GB11 are grossly excessive when compared to the average density of 5.5 dph in Hook Heath, and even less in the Fishers Hill Conservation Area. While I have no accurate figure for Mayford, an existing density of between 5.5 and 10 dph would not be an unreasonable estimate.

To facilitate the development of the land embraced by codes GB10 and GB11 - involving the construction of around 500 new homes - would effectively destroy the character of this semi-rural area. Statements within the draft document that development would not undermine the integrity of the rising ground of landscape importance (aka the Hook Heath escarpment) are disingenuous in the extreme.

#### **6) WBC's own strategy ignored.**

Woking Core Strategy policy CS24 requires that: All development proposals will provide a positive benefit in terms of landscape and townscape character, and local distinctiveness and will have regard to landscape character areas.

To protect local landscape and townscape character, development will be expected to:

- conserve, and where possible enhance existing character, especially key landscapes such as heathlands, escarpments and the canal/river network and settlement characteristics; maintain locally valued features, and enhance or restore deteriorating features.

These proposals ignore this requirement

#### **7) Removal of GB14 from the green belt**

The removal of GB14 from the green belt to create 'green infrastructure' is not necessary since no change of use is planned. It is in any case 'not an exceptional circumstance' which is required for land to be removed from the green belt.

#### **8) Are there other alternatives which might fall to be considered?**

I believe that there are.

Is there any reason why these areas of land at GB10 and GB11 should not retain their green belt status and be designated an area of publicly accessible open green space - in effect a **natural country park**?

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Government and independent reports have emphasised the huge value of open public spaces, specifically regarding dramatically improved well being of health, both mental and physical, as well as the huge community benefits and the monetary savings on the over-burdened NHS.

Classification of GB10 and GB11 as open **public green space** would seem a sensible alternative.

There is an acknowledged and significant lack of open **public green space** in south Woking. WBC has a perfect opportunity to preserve the areas adjacent to the escarpment and thereby safeguard access to this area of open green space for the borough's residents to enjoy for generations to come.

Meanwhile, WBC has stated that it follows a "brownfield first" policy and thus aligns itself with Government policy. However, the focus has been on reviewing the Green Belt, as required by the Inspector who examined the Core Strategy and it commissioned consultants to carry out the review. I am not aware of a parallel review of the existing and potential "**brownfield**" sites.

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Surely, it would be sensible for WBC to **commission a review of those brownfield sites** which are not currently available for consideration but, due to their natural lifecycle, are forecast to become available in the periods 2022-2027 and 2027-2040. This may well yield significant potential land to meet the anticipated shortfall in the short term and make a useful contribution to meet the indicative requirement for the longer term.

Are there other possibilities? Again, I believe that there are. The massive redevelopment project for Sheerwater is presently stalled pending the outcome of the recent review of the process which led to the decision to undertake this significant project. Presently, my understanding is that the plans involve a mixture of flats and dwellings of up to two and three storey height. Has consideration been given to building higher and thereby accommodating a larger number of dwellings?

I am also given to understand that there is an area of land adjacent to **Martyrs Lane**. All the land to the East of McLaren site, on the other side of the A320, should be considered for development if Green Belt land really is required for housing.

Some of this land is owned by McLaren and at one point it was given 'special circumstances' planning permission for commercial development by McLaren themselves (for a new Technology Centre that is now to be built within the existing McLaren site).

In this vicinity (further East/S East) there is also a good-sized site in private ownership that already has an area of 'hard-standing' from being used for barracks (or similar) during the Second World War.

The land to the East of Martyrs Lane might also be usefully considered, as there is already some development there (eg the waste site) and most of the land without development is neither particularly attractive nor serving any useful purpose by way of recreation (with the obvious exception of the land used for the golf course). Have these areas been evaluated for possible use for housing development? If not, then I respectfully suggest that they should be.

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In conclusion, I accept that WBC has a duty to plan for the future and to identify possible sites to accommodate the growing need for affordable and quality character long term housing within the borough. However, it does appear that the outline plans for the three areas which are the focus of this representation have been made with little sympathy for retaining the unique character of the area and in contradiction of the National Planning Policy Framework. WBC is urged to reconsider its draft proposals in respect of areas GB10, GB11 and GB14 and to explore the alternative suggestions made in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Peter J. Hill

Planning Policy Manager  
Woking Borough Council  
Civic Offices  
Gloucester Square  
Woking  
Surrey  
GU21 6YL