Boakes Land Projects Ltd
22 Blackthorns
Lindfield
West Sussex

Planning Policy
Wealden District Council

Sent by e mail to: Nplans@Wealden.gov.uk

16 July 2023

Dear Sir/ Madam

Response to the Public Consultation on the Wadhurst Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2039 Submission Plan (2023)

These representations have been prepared in response to the Wadhurst Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 16 Consultation by Boakes Land Projects Limited.

Our comments are as follows:

Overview

We note that the Steering Group are not allocating sites for residential development (para 1.13) and that this will be reviewed after the adoption of the emerging Wealden Local Plan ("EWLP"). Given the prolonged and ongoing period with little progress being made with the emerging Local Plan (and WDC's uncertainty as to the housing numbers to be accommodated) we have some sympathy with this position. That said, the Wadhurst Neighbourhood Plan ("WNP") should be a realistic plan for accommodating the inevitable housing allocations whether pursuant to a review of the WNP or the EWLP. We consider that the WNP does not adequately anticipate future housing development and is pre-emptively restricting or preventing housing development coming forward on sites which are logical and sensible locations for new housing given the current levels of housing need (in the region of 1200 units per annum). Even if changes to the NPPF and the EWLP were to significantly change Wealden's housing delivery requirement, sites outside of the existing settlement Wadhurst boundary will still need to be identified to satisfy that need.

Appropriate sites for new housing are inevitably more limited in the north of the district largely due to the extent of the High Weald AONB and the low number of substantial settlements (Crowborough, Forest Row and Wadhurst). This relative scarcity of housing is reflected in higher house prices (see house price heat map at figure 4.3 in the WDC Direction of Travel document "DoT"). Higher house prices are a barometer of unmet housing need.The DoT states that, at that time, median house prices across Wealden were 11.55 times earnings and in para 2.11 makes the point that upward pressure in house prices is exacerbated in the north of the district due to the connectivity with London and Tunbridge Wells. The combined results of these factors are a shortage of market housing affordable to local households. Para 52 of the DoT makes the point that large scale development should normally be restricted in the AONB but, in Wealden, this is where affordability is most acute. There is also substantial employment in the north of the district (the DoT specifically refers to creative, culture and media employers in the Wadhurst area (par 7.3)). Economic activity in the northern Wealden Area must be supported by appropriate levels of new housing – prospective employees will go elsewhere if they cannot afford housing in the area.

We therefore recognise the particular constraints on development in the WNP area but, it is inevitable that there is a need for substantial new housing over the course of the plan period and it is precisely because the area is so constrained that every effort must be made to identify acceptable housing sites. It is in this context that we have assessed the draft WNP.

Comment on Specific Policies

Policy WAD1 Location of Development

Para A states that development will be supported within development boundaries -particularly on brownfield land (subject to compliance with the other plan policies). We accept this but we are concerned that para B concerning development outside of development boundaries is too restrictive. Whilst we appreciate the need for the WNP to align with the development plan generally, para B refers directly to WDC policy DC17. DC17 was adopted as part of the 1998 Local Plan and restricts development outside of settlement boundaries but these boundaries were defined in contemplation of a far lower housing requirement and it has long been accepted by WDC that this policy is now out of date. This reference should be deleted.

Green Gaps and Local Green Spaces – these proposed designations have been thoroughly discussed by respondents to the Reg 14 phase 2 consultation. We have nothing to add that has not already been expressed by other respondents.

Although it is accepted that it may be reasonable for the WNP not to allocate housing in this plan we think it would be reasonable, in anticipation of future development needs (whatever they may be) to reconsider the settlement boundary. Boakes Land Projects are promoting approximately 1 ha of land (part of SHELAA ref 694/330 Windmill House) adjacent to Baldock Road, just off Mayfield Lane. The site was a draft allocation (Policy RUGA 5) in the withdrawn Wealden Local Plan for up to 20 dwellings and the justification for allocating the site is just as valid now as it was then. The site abuts the settlement boundary on three side and the landowners' house, Windmill House, is on the fourth side. Although the site is in the AONB, as is the whole of Wadhurst, there are no long views to the open AONB country landscape or even into the conservation area and development would have no impact on Heritage assets. Wealden's landscape evidence base for the withdrawn local plan (2014,2016 and 2017) demonstrate that the site has landscape capacity to accept sympathetic residential development. The site has numerous protected trees which would enhance the proposed residential development. Given the relatively limited constraints on this site and its relationship with the existing settlement boundary, it would be appropriate to amend the settlement boundary to accommodate it. This is the site we are promoting and so have a more detailed knowledge of it than other sites but there may be other locations adjacent to the existing settlement boundary.

It is inevitable that housing allocations will be required in the Wadhurst area outside of the settlement boundaries. A previous iteration of the draft WNP sought to demonstrate how adequate residential development land could be provided by brownfield sites. Some of these sites were unsustainable sites remote from the settlement boundaries. Once pared back to sites within the settlement boundaries, by the evidence of the previous draft, this produces a handful of units on identifiable sites.

Limited brownfield opportunity within settlement boundaries is exacerbated by proposed Policy WAD10 para C Employment Retention, which places quite stringent (although understandable) constraints on changes of use from existing commercial premises. Clearly this will limit the opportunity for residential development within the settlement boundaries.

Policy WAD2 is titled "Meeting Local Housing Needs".

The policy meets the housing need in the sense of addressing the type of housing that is required rather than expressing a willingness to meet need in terms of housing numbers. Other than this we support this

policy (although we are not sure that the specific reference to the HAPPI principles and RPTI's Dementia and Town Planning would be compliant with the development plan).

WAD3: Design and Character of Development

We support the clear aim of WAD 3 that any new built form must protect and enhance the landscape and streetscapes and preserve the distinctive character of settlements. As a practical matter working through this quite lengthy prescriptive design policy which draws in the Wadhurst Design Code and the High Weald Housing Design Guide is unnecessarily complex. We have no issue with the HW Housing Design Guide but this is guidance, not policy. We would like to see WAD 3 simplified to remove reference to the HW Design Guide and overlap between the Design Code and WAD 3 eliminated in order to make this a more user friendly policy.

In para A, the expression "emulate the best of locally distinctive architecture" is ambiguous - it suggests a requirement to be similar or to copy the best existing built form. Despite the intention, this would lead to pastiche design and contradicts the following sentence that "Innovation in design will be supported". We consider that, overall, new built form should be "in keeping with" or "complimentary to" the distinctive and valued existing built form.

We are concerned that the paragraphs on Local Character, Roofs and Dormer Windows and Fenestration (and in WAD3 generally) do not recognise the role that modern materials can play in conjunction with traditional materials in producing innovative design wholly complimentary to the existing built environment.

WAD4: Sustainability and Design

Para A (iv) does not quite make sense and has omitted air source heat pumps which will be a mainstay of reaching Future Homes Standards for the foreseeable future. As drafted it says: "Incorporating on-site energy generation from renewable sources such as solar panels ground source heat pumps and energy generation etc".

We suggest: "Incorporating on-site energy generation from renewable sources including (but not limited to) solar panels and ground and air source heat pumps."

WAD8 Mitigating Traffic Congestion

Para 7.17 states that a Transport Assessment is required for all major development i.e., 10 units or over and a Transport Statement for smaller sites. We note that this has not been carried over to Policy WAD8, but the draft policy does stray into defining the scale, scope and level of detail of any required Transport Assessment or Transport Statement which is not an appropriate matter for the Neighbourhood Plan. The scale scope and level of detail in a Transport Report, Transport Statement or Transport Report will depend on the location, scale and nature of the particular proposed development.

Conclusion

We accept that the Steering Group is not allocating housing in the draft WNP but this should be a plan acknowledging that substantial further housing in Wadhurst area will be required over the plan period. The existing out of date settlement boundaries should have been reassessed and adjusted where they are currently inappropriate and/or there is landscape capacity to accept development. The example of the 1 ha site at Baldock Lane is an example of this. With regard to the design and character of development we support the overall design aims of policy WAD3 but consider these aims should be set out in a more concise policy with the detail being in the Design Code and the reference to the High Weald Deisn Guide being deleted.

We hope that these representations are clear and if any further clarification is required please contact the writer on the telephone numbers or email address below.

Yours faithfully

Simon Boakes BA(Hons) Solicitor

Director

Boakes Land Projects Ltd.

[redacted]

[redacted]

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P.S. Please note that we have said “Yes” to boxes 3 and 4 of the consultation form but these seem not to have saved.