WEALDEN CORE STRATEGY EXAMINATION

MATTER 2: SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY AND RURAL AREAS STRATEGY (WCS6)

STATEMENT OF MR ANDREW KITCHEN ON BEHALF OF MR J BARKER

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MATTER 2 – POLICY WCS6: Whether the settlement hierarchy and strategy for rural areas are soundly based.

a) Are the categories in the Core Strategy settlement hierarchy appropriate and justified?

The Core Strategy settlement hierarchy correctly incorporates larger towns in nearby districts as primary centres and secondary centres, reflecting the more rural nature of Wealden District and the influence upon its patterns of development from Tunbridge Wells/Tonbridge, Eastbourne, East Grinstead, Lewes and Haywards Heath. Given that settlements outside the district boundary occupy the first two categories of centres within the settlement hierarchy it is appropriate that another five categories of settlement are included within the hierarchy, albeit that the differences between the level of service provision within some of the tiers is very small.

Therefore, whilst we do not have any objections to the categories in the Core Strategy settlement hierarchy it is submitted that the strategy for the distribution of development in Wealden, given its relative rural nature, its significant housing needs, and the disparities across the area, should be more determined by these factors rather than the settlement hierarchy based on accessibility to services and employment.

These factors amount to the justification, having regard to paragraph 4.32 of PPS12 to the local circumstances that justify an approach to the distribution of development which has more regard to local needs and constraints than reflecting a rigid settlement hierarchy.

b) Does the evidence base support the position of individual settlements within the settlement hierarchy?

No evidence has been previously submitted in respect of this issue.

c) Is it appropriate for the Core Strategy to indicate the overall scale of new housing allocations in individual villages and, if so, is the level of provision justified and deliverable?

PPS12 places an emphasis on the deliverability of Core Strategies (Paragraph 4.45). Where it has been demonstrated with clear evidence that housing numbers are deliverable within individual villages it is considered that it would be appropriate to indicate the distribution of

development to certain villages. Wealden's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) assesses a number of sites within rural settlements, including 'neighbourhood centres'.

An example of this is Maresfield, where the SHLAA identifies over 10 hectares net of potentially suitable housing, meeting the definition of PPS3 paragraph 54, and which is also considered developable in PPS3 paragraph 56 terms. Having regard to Document BP11 it is apparent that capacity for up to 130 dwellings exists within the relevant waste water treatment works without the need for upgrade. It is not clear from the Appropriate Assessment accompanying the submission Core Strategy (Document BP9) the extent of additional development that could be accommodated around the Crowthorne, Uckfield, Maresfield areas without there being a significant effect on the Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA from an increase in atmospheric pollution associated with additional vehicle trips. However in relation to a recent planning application by David Wilson Homes at Maresfield (Local Authority reference 11/0366, see Appendix C) Natural England did not object to a scheme for 175 dwellings on these grounds. In addition, with this amount of land being promoted for development by the landowners involved, there is sufficient land available to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs) within Maresfield to mitigate the impact of any development there on the Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA in line with the recommendations of the appropriate assessment.

Indeed it is necessary to identify dwelling numbers of individual village settlements such as Maresfield where the provision of SANGS is required so this land can also be identified and allocated through the Site Allocations DPD process. Also in relation to Maresfield the approach of the Council allows the delivery of a one off, comprehensive scheme of a suitable size to contribute to local infrastructure, whilst also preventing infill or 'garden grabbing' development within the settlement later in the plan period which if the settlement had an identified boundary may be difficult to resist. Cumulatively with other similar schemes infill development may exceed the capacity of existing infrastructure but not contribute to the enhancement of it.

As such it is considered that the overall approach of Policy WCS6 to identifying amounts of development within individual settlements is appropriate and justified in the context of Maresfield, not withstanding our objections in respect of the overall amount of development directed towards rural areas by the submission Core Strategy.

In respect of the overall level of development directed towards Maresfield, it is submitted that there is potential to increase this from 50 dwellings up to around 150 dwellings, within the context of increased housing numbers across the District and rural areas generally as per our representations in respect of Policies WCS1, WCS2 and WCS6.

d) Has the approach to development boundaries in some villages been justified by the evidence base?

No evidence has been previously submitted in respect of this issue.