

DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL - LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION: RESPONSE TO INSPECTOR'S MATTERS, ISSUES AND QUESTIONS (MIQs)

MATTER 02 – HOUSING GROWTH AND RESIDENTIAL WINDFALL DEVELOPMENT

MATTER 03 – HOUSING ALLOCATIONS

MATTER 04 – MEETING HOUSING NEEDS

Client: Persimmon Homes

Prepared by: DHA Planning Ltd

Date: 18 October 2023

1.1 Purpose of this Statement

1.1.1 This Statement has been prepared by DHA Planning on behalf of Persimmon Homes in response to the Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs) ahead of the Dover Local Plan Examination.

1.1.2 The purpose of this Statement is to assist the Inspector in the context of the questioned outlined in matters (02), (03) and (04), with a specific emphasis on questions relating to the distribution of housing across the district and in particular the housing allocations for Deal as a higher tier settlement within the district.

2.1 Matter 02 – Housing Growth and Residential Windfall Development

Issue 2 – Settlement Hierarchy

***Question 5:** How did the Council differentiate between Deal (a District Centre) and Sandwich (a Rural Service Centre) in the settlement hierarchy?*

2.1.1 It is understood from DDC's Settlement Hierarchy and Confines Topic Paper (2022) that the sustainability credentials of neither Deal nor Sandwich were assessed in detail as part of the study, on the basis that along with Dover, the sustainability credentials of these settlements as upper-tier settlements are well-established.

2.1.2 Notwithstanding, there is clear differentiation between the three main settlements. Dover is clearly the principal settlement and the administrative centre for the district with the largest population (46,210 as of 2020) comprising 40% of the total district population. Deal comprises the second town with 26% of the total district population (30,824 as of 2020) and together with Dover, forms the urban focus for development in the district.

- 2.1.3 By contrast, Sandwich comprises a relatively small-market town (6,600 as of 2020) or 6% of the total population. By virtue of its geographical location, it naturally serves as the focus for the large wider rural area within Dover district which otherwise comprises predominantly rural villages and hamlets.
- 2.1.4 On this basis there is a clear step-change in the relative demand and capacity of Deal and Sandwich, with the former's strategic function as 'the second town' clear justification for its status above Sandwich within the hierarchy and close supporting relationship with Dover town. Our client firmly believes that it should logically follow that Deal's status is suitably reflected in the relative development commitments with the forthcoming development strategy.

Issue 3 – Housing Distribution

Question 2 - Paragraph 3.45 of the Local Plan states that Deal has seen high levels of windfall development over the past 10 years due to market demand which has resulted in a limited supply of suitable housing sites. How were factors such as market demand considered in making judgements about where to locate new development?

- 2.1.5 It is understood from the Dover Local Plan (submission version) that the housing distribution for the Plan period is primarily based upon the settlement hierarchy and influenced by site availability, environmental constraints and factors of delivery.
- 2.1.6 It is therefore unclear whether market signals have informed the strategy for housing distribution, however in assessing delivery, it would be reasonable to assume that in excess of 10 years of strong windfall development growth would signal both clear demand and a strong supply of available sites within the town. There is to our knowledge nothing to suggest that this trend will cease and, in our view, the historic trends substantiate the need for a clear Plan-led strategy for more ambitious growth within Deal, comprising committed sites within the Local Plan.
- 2.1.7 Our client continues to strongly refute the suggestion that Deal is constrained by an undersupply of suitable sites. To the contrary, available and suitable sites do exist, including that of our client's 'Land at Golf Road, Deal' with capacity for *circa*. 60 dwellings and which is being promoted by a national housebuilder fully committed to the site and with an excellent track record of delivery.

Question 3 – Table 12 in the Council's Housing Topic Paper states that, combined, almost 50% of all new housing will occur in Dover and at Whitfield. When considering the acknowledged viability challenges around Dover, and the strategic size and scale of the Whitfield Urban Expansion, is the distribution of development justified?

- 2.1.8 It is reiterated that our client is supportive of the premise of the growth strategy which in addition to delivering housing, serves to assist in delivering the ambitious strategic regeneration objectives of the forthcoming Plan.
- 2.1.9 Whilst this objective must be supported, it should not be to the detriment of settlements outside of Dover. Moreover, it must be emphasised that ambitious growth and regeneration strategies do not negate the need to ensure a sound growth strategy for the district as a whole and ensure that any future Plan is

capable of delivering the housing, affordable homes, employment and wider ecological, landscape and public benefits that are required.

- 2.1.10 The challenges associated with strategic growth suggest the need for built-in flexibility within the growth strategy. We suggest that this flexibility is best achieved through an appropriate uplift in housing delivery elsewhere within the settlement hierarchy.
- 2.1.11 It should logically follow that where large urban extensions are proposed, in this case comprising 50% of the district's entire housing need, this ambition should be reflected by a similar uplift in the supply of alternative sites elsewhere in the district. To this effect, it should first fall to the settlements immediate below in the settlement hierarchy, including Deal, to support the wider strategic ambitions of the local planning authority.
- 2.1.12 Our client is firmly of the view that the allocation of additional housing sites is necessary in settlements such as Deal, to ensure that the growth strategy put forward within the Dover District Local Plan (submission version) is 'sound'. The strategy must comprise an appropriate balance of small, medium and strategic-scale sites deliverable across the Plan period and include a pragmatic uplift capable of ensuring sufficient flexibility in delivering the district's needs and which reflects the inherent uncertainty that is associated with large-scale strategic growth.
- 2.1.13 We remain of the view that an uplift in reliable housing allocations within settlements such as Deal would give DDC confidence that it can consistently meet its market and affordable housing targets in full, throughout the life of the new Dover District Plan in the event that identified sources of housing do not come forward or fail to deliver as anticipated.

Question 4 - *What is the justification for the scale of development proposed at Deal, which will contribute around the same amount of housing growth as the smaller, Rural Service Centres of Sandwich and Aylesham?*

- 2.1.14 For the avoidance of doubt, the number of committed dwellings for Deal within for the forthcoming Plan period is 223. At present Deal represents 26% of the district population yet is identified to contribute just 2% of the district's housing growth.
- 2.1.15 The third-tier settlements of both Sandwich (227 dwellings) and Aylesham (649 dwellings) are allocated for greater housing, as is the fourth-tier local centre of Eythorne and Elvington (355 dwellings).
- 2.1.16 DDC cite a lack of available and suitable sites, with particular reference to environmental and flood risk constraints as reasoning for the limited growth potential for Deal. Yet, sites such as that of our client's 'Land at Golf Road, Deal' have been excluded from the Plan primarily on flood risk grounds, without further consideration or detailed evidence; without acknowledging the presence of high-quality 1 in 200 year flood defences and without any regard to the prevalence of recent residential developments permitted nearby (having passed the Sequential and Exception test with Environment Agency support on flood risk). Our client therefore continues to promote an available, highly sustainably located site within Deal with capacity for *circa* 60 dwellings that is capable of providing a residential

development which would be safe for its lifetime, owing to the high-quality flood defences and on-site mitigation measures.

- 2.1.17 On this evidence, we consider the growth capacity of Deal to have been unjustifiably constrained and the consequent omission of at least *circa* 60 units, in our view fails to make effective use of Dover's second tier settlement, fails to adequately support the strategic-scale of development at Whitfield in terms of ensuring a balanced and flexible growth strategy and will otherwise rely upon unplanned new homes to be delivered elsewhere in the district, in potentially less accessible and more sensitive locations.
- 2.1.18 By way of remedy, we strongly suggest that the growth strategy for Deal is reviewed, with suitable sites such as that of our client's included within the town's committed housing numbers to adequately address Deal's own development needs, without reliance upon windfall development and to provide a greater balance within the district strategy as a whole in the context of the Whitfield Urban Extension.

Issue 5 – Residential Windfall Development

Question 2 – *Policy SP4 permits new residential development within or immediately adjoining the boundary of defined settlements provided that, amongst other things, development is commensurate with the scale of the settlement it adjoins. Is this sufficiently clear enough to be effective?*

- 2.1.19 Policy SP4 is understood to have been prepared in recognition of the strong contribution made by windfall sites in the last 10 years and which account for near 45% of all completing dwellings within this period, of which 31% have been within Deal.
- 2.1.20 Policy SP4 is supported in principle and it is likely that our client's site could be brought forward under this policy during the course of the forthcoming Plan period. However, our client is concerned that the scale of windfall development anticipated fails to provide the degree of certainty that is required and is insufficient in providing the degree of flexibility within the growth strategy that is necessary in order to ensure a sound growth strategy.
- 2.1.21 Where available and suitable sites have been actively promoted, such as that of our client's in Deal, there is little to be gained from relying upon windfall development policies to secure their delivery. To the contrary, where sites are deliverable and capable of making a valuable contribution to the housing supply within a settlement such as Deal, that has been suggested by DDC to suffer a constrained supply of available sites, it must be preferable to secure the additional certainty of formal site allocations. Such an approach serves also to better consider the cumulative impacts of development and assist in developing a cohesive strategy for each settlement.
- 2.1.22 To be clear, the policy is in itself supported, however it should not function as an alternative to genuinely plan-led development delivered through the Local Plan where in our client's view, there remains an outstanding requirement to demonstrate a sound and balanced growth strategy.

3.1 Matter 03 – Housing Allocations

Issue 2 – Deal Housing Sites

Policy SAP16 – Deal Small Sites

Question 5 – Are the Deal small housing sites justified, effective and consistent with national planning policy?

- 3.1.1 The Deal small sites are anticipated to contribute 48 dwellings across four sites and account for near 25% of the total housing within Deal. Whilst the need for small sites is well-recognised and must be supported, smaller sites are insufficient to deliver the quantum of affordable housing, developer contributions and infrastructure improvements that are required and which are generally associated medium to large scale development.
- 3.1.2 Notwithstanding the need for additional housing sites of all sizes within Deal, the relatively large proportion of new homes to be delivered within Deal via small sites reflects the relative lack of large sites allocated. As evidenced by our client's site with capacity for 60 dwellings, this is not a result of a lack of options. It is our client's view that whilst a necessary component of the housing supply, small sites must supplement the presence of larger allocations, not replace them and plainly will be inadequate in balancing the scale of strategic growth otherwise proposed.

4.1 Matter 04 – Meeting Housing Needs

Issue 1 – Total Supply

Question 3 – Is the projected supply of housing justified and has sufficient land been identified to ensure that housing needs will be met, including an appropriate buffer to allow for changing circumstances on development sites?

- 4.1.1 DDC's total supply of housing within the Plan is understood to include a contingency buffer of 994 dwellings. The sources of such dwellings are not specified but it remains our client's view that a substantive oversupply of housing is required in order to balance the Council's growth strategy and ensure a pragmatic degree of flexibility in the event that strategic-scale growth does not deliver as anticipated.
- 4.1.2 Whilst policy SP4 will go some way in addressing any such shortfall by way of windfall development within or close to settlement confines, it would be insufficient in fully addressing the scale of the potential deficit.
- 4.1.3 It is our client's view that an oversupply of additional sites is required, primarily in upper-tier settlements such as Deal which are demonstrated to suffer a substantial disparity in committed housing compared to both their status within the hierarchy and the scale of market demand. Such additional sites will ensure a pool of sustainable, reliable sites that can come forward as part of a cohesive plan-led development strategy and deliver market and affordable housing growth should the housing trajectory not unfold as anticipated.

Issue 2 – Five Year Housing Land Supply

Question 7 - What flexibility does the Plan provide if some of the larger sites, such as the Whitfield Urban Extension, do not come forward in the timescales envisaged?

- 4.1.4 It is understood that DDC's 5 Year Housing Land Supply position includes a 10% buffer in accordance with paragraph 74b of the NPPF. It does not however include any further contingency in the event that sites do not deliver as intended.
- 4.1.5 It is our client's view that an oversupply of additional sites should be identified within upper-tier settlements such as Deal and included as an oversupply within DDC's growth strategy in order to ensure the soundness of the Plan.

5.1 Summary

- 5.1.1 This Statement has been prepared on behalf of our client Persimmon Homes in response to the Inspectors Matters, Issues and Questions ahead of the Dover Local Plan Examination.
- 5.1.2 We trust that our responses are clear and will assist the Inspector in the forthcoming examination of the Dover Local Plan. However, Persimmon Homes reserve the right to participate at the examination owing to concerns with respect to the distribution and subsequent lack of flexibility within the district's housing supply trajectory and the inconsistent scale of committed housing within Deal which in our view, fails to reflect either the upper-tier status of the settlement within the district settlement hierarchy or the scale of demand for housing within Deal which has been evident through the adopted Plan period.
- 5.1.3 Without prejudice to our client's support to the premise of the growth strategy, which primarily directs growth at higher order settlements, by way of remedy we would urge the Council to re-visit its growth strategy and proposed allocations to include a greater quantum of reliable committed development sources within Deal, by including suitable sites such as our client's Land at Golf Road to fully reflect its excellent sustainability credentials and provide a pragmatic oversupply of reliable, deliverable small and medium sites capable of delivery early in the Plan period and to appropriately support the wider strategic ambitions of the Plan.