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Dear Ms Kelly

**TELFORD AND WREKIN LOCAL PLAN
INSPECTOR'S PROPOSED MAIN MODIFICATIONS**

I refer to the Schedule of Proposed Main Modifications to the Local Plan that the Inspector issued for public comment from 31 July 2017.

The Southwater Event Group (SEG) have considered the proposed modifications as far as they relate to those issues that affect their interests in the Town Centre and in the context of the Inspector's conclusion that the Plan, as it stands, is not 'sound' and legally compliant and the modifications proposed are necessary in order for it to be so.

SEG appreciate that it is the Inspector's remit to ensure the Plan is 'sound' and legally compliant rather than, necessarily, to 'improve' it. They appreciate also that they may comment, now, only upon the modifications the Inspector has suggested. The comments below reflect this appreciation.

As background to their comments, very briefly, SEG believed the Plan to be 'unsound' because it failed, in their view, to comply with para. 23 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which says that (amongst other things),

"Planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the plan period. In drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should;

- *recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality;*

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- *promote competitive town centres that provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer and which reflect the individuality of town centres;*
- *allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development needed in town centres."*

The policies set out in the Publication Version of the Plan that affect the Town Centre fail, in their view, to create the conditions whereby the Town Centre can maintain vitality and viability, a competitive environment, or conditions that would help it become the heart of the community. Further, they fail to create the conditions to fulfil Aim 1 of the Plan which indicates that the Town Centre will be the sub-regional centre for the borough, or the expressed role of the Town Centre as a sub-regional shopping centre in Policy EC5.

These are, in SEG's view, fundamental problems and significant revision to the Plan is necessary to remedy the failings.

The Inspector will recall that SEG were supportive of the Council's general approach of,

- i. concentrating town centre uses within a defined town centre area,
- ii. regarding the Town Centre as the heart of the Telford community, and
- iii. having the ambition for the Town Centre to develop as a sub-regional shopping centre.

SEG were, however, not convinced that the Policies that were intended to deliver town centre facilities, in particular retail activity, would indeed deliver those facilities in a manner that would create a retail facility of sub-regional appeal. SEG were hoping for a far less restrictive regime within the defined town centre that would create the conditions for the development of the centre as the heart of the community and as a regional shopping attraction. The present rigid approach by the Council does not appear to SEG to support the Council's stated intentions for the Town Centre or promote it as a diverse or competitive Centre, or one that reflects any real individuality, as suggested in the NPPF.

There is a clear emphasis in the NPPF on creating competitiveness in town centres. Telford Town Centre is very different from traditional town centres which have developed over many years and have multiple land ownerships, in that it has very limited land ownership in its Primary Shopping Area, and that clearly affects the shopping offer and thus the customer shopping experience. There is, for instance, a distinct lack of independent shops in Telford Centre, both in the Shopping Centre and the restaurant/cafe/drinking establishment are in the Southwater redevelopment area, and that is a direct result of the landowners in the Primary Shopping Area holding a monopoly position. It has the appearance and provides the shopping experience of an out of centre retail park.

It appears to SEG that the rigid land use pattern that being promoted for the town centre in the Plan is in conflict with the above stated aims of the NPPF, and will result in less competition, higher land prices and rents and a less diverse and vibrant town centre than Telford ought, and probably needs, to enjoy. The current land use arrangement appears to be geared more to protecting particular commercial interests in the identified Primary Shopping Area, than allowing any sort of natural growth. The NPPF does not indicate anywhere that retail facilities should be limited to the Primary Shopping Area only, and indeed the term 'Primary' implies there will be other retail areas.

So, on that basis, SEG regarded the Plan as being unsound. They have considered the Inspector's Proposed Main Modifications to see if they would have the effect of correcting the failures they had identified, sufficient for the Plan to be regarded as complying with the NPPF guidance and the stated aims and objectives of the Plan.



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SEG have noted the tests of soundness of a Plan set out in para. 182 of the NPPF, which are that,

- o It has been positively prepared.
- o It has been justified.
- o It will be effective.
- o It is consistent with national policy.

MM19 on Page 43. SEG welcome the modification proposed for **Policy EC1** which would allow main town centre uses (other than retail) in that area of the identified as part of the Town Centre which is included in the Central Strategic Employment Area. This change is logical and will give greater flexibility within the town centre. Nevertheless, it is difficult to understand why, in a developing town centre, retail activity should be restrained in that area, especially as it already contains retail outlets. There has been no justification for the restriction on retail development within the Town Centre but outside the PSA. There is no encouragement for a more diverse offer in the Town Centre.

MM29 on Page 57. SEG are concerned about the proposed additions to **Policy EC8**. The first proposed addition relates the Policy to Policies EC1 and EC5, indicating that these policies provide for support for retail development in Telford Town Centre that are located outside or on the edge of the Primary Shopping Area ONLY where suitable sites cannot be identified through a sequential test. Policies EC1 and EC5 are essentially restrictive policies that prevent retail development in the Strategic Employment Areas and outside the PSA, but do not support retail development where suitable sites cannot be identified within the PSA. The modification could be more accurately worded.

The modification to Policy EC8 goes on to suggest that the Council will only support proposals for retail development outside or on the edge of the PSA where suitable sites cannot be identified through a sequential test (presumably a test of available sites within the PSA). Further, it provides that an impact assessment will also be required for such development proposals. Both of these elements are in conflict with the provisions of para. 24 of the NPPF which refers to sequential tests being required outside existing centres and para. 26 which indicates impact assessments as being required outside town centres, not PSA's.

The proposed modifications to Policy EC8 are, then, not in accordance with the NPPF.

In SEG's view the main modifications proposed by the Inspector,

- i. will not produce a town centre that will reflect NPPF guidance.
- ii. will not create the competitive atmosphere that the Government is clearly intent on providing.
- iii. will not provide shopping facilities or environment that will make the Town Centre the heart of the community, will have continuing vitality, or produce a centre of Sub-Regional attraction.

In SEG's view, the, the proposed modifications,

- o Do not change the general approach of the Plan from its negative, restrictive policies on retail development in the Town Centre. They do not change the perception that the Plan has not been positively prepared.
- o Do not indicate the difference in the manner in which the policies concerned would make the Plan operate differently, and cannot therefore be said to be justified.
- o Do not indicate how they are likely to change the effectiveness of the Plan.
- o Do not make the Plan consistent with National policy.

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The proposed modifications, then, will fail to make the fundamental changes to the policies contained in the Publication Version of the Local Plan that are needed to help it succeed in meeting the Aims and objectives set out in the Plan, and the guidance set out in the NPPF. They will, therefore, fail to make the Plan 'sound.'

Yours sincerely



Keith Greetham
Chairman, Southwater Event Group

