Briefing note from Piers Mason, Chief Planning Officer, Tandridge District Council

Why Tandridge Council has not retained the 0.2 ha minimum plot size requirement for Woldingham in its Local Plan Part 2

'I have drawn on the work done on the Woldingham Character Assessment and the answer the Council gave to Issue 5 identified for the DM DPD examination.

The extensive work undertaken to understand the character of Woldingham as set out in the Woldingham Character Appraisal makes it evident that the character of Woldingham is derived from more than a rigid plot size and that the range of issues from which the character is derived is more finely grained than can be reflected in a plot size limit. This is illustrated spatially particularly in figures 8 and 10 of the Appraisal.

At the time of developing the Woldingham Design Guidance it was considered that to retain a defined plot sizes of 0.2ha would be a retrograde step, in fact it was felt that the new approach was actually stronger because it could be applied anywhere where there is a consistent plot rhythm. The 0.2 ha rule could really only be applied in the old Gilford covenant areas and not in areas where the average plot size is already smaller than 0.2ha. There was also the issue of any areas where plots are larger than 0.2ha, so for example a group of three 0.4 ha plots could be subdivided into six 0.2ha plots. The new Design Guidance sought to avoid this potential problem.

Another point considered at the time was that on appeal where the 0.2 plot size had been an issue (particularly where the proposal is just under 0.2ha) it had been necessary to argue what harm to the character of the area would be done by the plot size as just to argue that there was a breach of a numerical rule had not been sufficient. This may seem strange given that when the 0.2ha minimum existed it was part of the adopted development plan but it must be remembered that policy does not act as an absolute. Any policy is required to be balanced and weighed with other policies and guidance, as well as any other material considerations. It is for this reason that a numerical ‘limit’ always had to be balanced and weighed against other matters, and those would in the majority of cases need to be an analysis of whether there is harm caused by the mathematical deficiency. The current policy framework allows this to happen without being inhibited by the potential that a scheme that derived some harm, in individual circumstances, may comply with a 0.2ha policy and therefore have that compliance weigh in its favour.

This approach was accepted by the Council’s Planning Policy Committee at the March 2011 meeting and this was reflected to the Inspector at the recent examination of the Council’s Development Management policies.

The Inspector was content with the approach. The Council's position at this examination sets out that this is not a strategic matter and that should the Neighbourhood Plan seek to introduce further guidance its soundness would be a matter for the appointed Examiner to consider.’

Piers Mason

6th January 2015