



Maidstone Local Plan Examination

Response to Employment Update

Prepared on behalf of

Gallagher Properties

February 2017

DHA/11108



1 Response to Employment Update

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 The Inspector has issued a limited consultation on an Employment Update paper issued by Maidstone Borough Council following the Inspector's Interim Findings Report. This response is prepared with and on behalf of Gallagher Properties Ltd further to their previous contributions to Hearing Session 8.

1.2 Response on behalf of Gallagher Properties

- 1.2.1 Allocating sites for employment development in a Local Plan is all very well, but allocations which aren't in the right place won't get developed. Businesses won't usually invest in new development on poorly located sites just because they are the only sites available. Instead, they will stick with a current compromise or relocate to another town, region or country where their requirements can be properly met. ADL is the perfect example of this, having relocated most of their operations to the Midlands having failed to get planning permission in Maidstone.
- 1.2.2 Quality (i.e. sites which give businesses the type of space they need in the right locations) is more important than apparent 'quantity' if the Council values deliverability.
- 1.2.3 The employment debate focusses on 'sheds' or 'offices', but misses a large market that Gallaghers have captured at Wrotham (Tonbridge & Malling District) – small and medium enterprises who do a mix of both (see attached brochure). At Wrotham, Gallagher's 42,000 sqft 15 unit development at Nepicar Park was fully sold prior to completion and achieved £180/sqft (which the market would have said was impossible) because the units met a need, were in the right location (close to a motorway junction) and had a high design quality. Maidstone's Local Plan makes no mention of this market.
- 1.2.4 There is a fundamental imbalance in the Local Plan between housing/population and employment. The Employment Update paper shows that the Council is relying on residents being required to travel elsewhere in order to find work. What kind of plan is that?
- 1.2.5 The Local Plan must realistically connect with commercial decision making, if the intention is to make a genuine difference not just be a box ticking exercise.
- 1.2.6 Gallagher Properties have a proven track record of delivering high quality employment schemes throughout Kent, most recently at the Scania facility at M20 Junction 6 in Maidstone. As a result, they know what the market wants and needs.
- 1.2.7 In our view, the Inspector is right to raise these queries about the employment strategy and Gallaghers insist that the Plan should be made better in this respect, to make it sound.

1.3 Conclusions

- 1.3.1 Nothing in the Employment Update paper properly addresses the concerns previously raised by Gallaghers that the current allocation strategy does not provide proper choice or assure

the deliverability of employment sites of the right type and in the locations sought by the market.

- 1.3.2 The proposal to increase office floorspace at Woodcut Farm does nothing to assist the proposal set out in the Council's *Economic Development Strategy* (described as "critical" to achieving the aims of the Strategy) requiring industrial and warehousing floorspace close to the motorway network. Increasing office floorspace at Woodcut Farm will only reduce the amount of floorspace available for industrial uses in that allocation. As set out in previous representations, allocating part of the Waterside Park site in addition would provide the market with a choice of development sites, increasing flexibility and ensuring delivery to address the clearly identified need for industrial and warehousing floorspace in this key motorway junction location.