

## **GUILDFORD BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN**

## **FURTHER SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF SURYA HOTELS**

**RESPONDENT NO: 17340193**

## **EXAMINATION ISSUE: HOMES FOR ALL**

### **Background**

Surya Hotels representations in respect of the Submission Local Plan relate to Policy E6, which governs the retention of tourism & leisure facilities, including hotels. As such, the policy has a direct bearing on the supply of housing where this forms a suitable alternative or complementary use.

This position is directly recognised in the Inspector's initial Questions and Comments to the Council ( paras 5 &30 )where the soundness of the stringent safeguarding approach to hotels inherent in the policy is questioned in the light of the Borough's pressing housing need.

The Council have responded to the effect that the plan is considered to provide an appropriate mechanism for assessing the loss of hotels & currently propose no changes.

Whilst the Inspector's identified Matters & Issues do not explicitly address this theme it is necessarily bound up with housing questions which are raised.. Its continuing relevance to the Examination is thus apparent and this further submission is made to assist the Inspector and also to draw attention to a change in circumstances since the original representation was made , viz: the progression of the East Horsley Neighbourhood Plan (' EHNP').

### **Context**

Surya Hotels own and operate Thatchers Hotel in East Horsley, in the east of Guildford Borough. The hotel is one of 11 in the Company's portfolio.

The hotel was the subject of a dismissed planning appeal in February 2017, determined under the current Local plan Policy and reflecting circumstances at that time including green belt designation.

In the interim, the property has been included as a housing site in the EHNP which is post – examination and is proceeding to a referendum in the very near future ( 18th May 2018). As such it potentially carries significant weight.

Furthermore, subject to acceptance of the Council’s revised approach to the green belt in East Horsley, there will be significant additional flexibility in planning the future of the hotel and the site as a whole.

As matters presently stand no definitive decisions have been taken by Surya as to alternative proposals, although the scope for some housing is considered important.

### **The Neighbourhood Plan**

The Council’s Leisure and Tourism Topic Paper ( para 3.12) recognises the potential conflict between Policy E6 and the EHNP in respect of Thatcher’s hotel but dismisses the Neighbourhood document as carrying ‘very little weight’.

This is somewhat disingenuous since at the time of writing the Plan was under Examination and since then it has proceeded to the point of referendum.

The relevant Policy in the plan is EH-H6 , which is reproduced in full at Appendix 1 .

It should be noted that , following representations made by Surya and considered by the examiner , the allocation offers a significant degree of flexibility in terms of residential content ( with previous stipulations regarding number of units & specific housing mix having been removed) .

Clearly, however, it is significant that the policy is made subject to justification of the loss of the hotel facility in accordance with applicable adopted local plan policy.

Surya accept this criterion as a matter of general principle but are concerned that, without modification, new local plan policy may be so stringent as to frustrate ( via the application of S38(5) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act) clearly expressed local aspirations for housing on the site.

Contrary to Planning Practice Guidance ( Neighbourhood Planning para 009), there is no evidence of an attempt being made by the LPA to minimize this conflict.

### **Soundness**

It is considered that conflict with the Neighbourhood Plan goes directly to soundness. However consideration must also be given to the extent to which the evidence base justifies the rigid policy approach to Hotels in E6.

In this context , it can be noted that the Surrey Hotels Futures Report assesses supply from a general perspective and does not represent a detailed capacity assessment such that 'need' for bedroom space across the varying market sectors can be quantified. This is a significant failing in the context of a net increase in bedroom stock across the County as a whole in the 2005-2015 period (SHFR para 3.4.13).

Accordingly, the recommendation which is made to protect existing hotels regardless of their market position, location and role cannot be soundly based and a more considered approach is required to safeguarding, irrespective of the neighbourhood plan position.

In circumstances where adequate provision is made and other benefits would accrue facility replacement or viability testing cannot reasonably be a prerequisite of redevelopment.

### **Changes Sought**

Surya's original representations requested amendments from the perspective of both supply / capacity assessment & marketing. In reality the former is the key issue since the principal concern is the current requirement to provide a replacement facility as a key policy limb and the extent to which this can reasonably be justified as the starting point for assessment. There is also the need to factor in site specific issues, such as exist in the case of Thatchers.

Against this background, we believe that a reworded policy should incorporate the following text for para 3 et seq:

*The loss of existing visitor, leisure and cultural attractions, including arts and entertainment facilities, hotels and indoor sports venues, will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that:*

- *sufficient capacity exists or will be provided elsewhere within the relevant catchment or that:*

- *alternative needs identified through the neighbourhood plan process are a priority.*

*.Alternatively, robust evidence must be provided that demonstrates that the facility causes significant detriment to the amenity of the locality or that:*

- *there is no longer a need for the existing facility or an alternative leisure or visitor use;:and*
- *the existing use is unviable and its retention has been fully explored ( including active through marketing the facility for alternative leisure or visitor use for a continued period of at least 18 months).*

This revised wording is commended to the Inspector.

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### Appendix 1

East Horsley Neighbourhood Plan Referendum Version Policy Text: Thatcher's Hotel Site

**(Policy EH-H6)**

*Planning Permission will be granted for the development of 0.74 hectares of land at the Thatcher's Hotel site subject to the following criteria:*

- (a) The provision of mainly smaller dwellings with no more than 3 bedrooms( market and affordable) to be located within the existing settlement area; and*
- (b) The original front building, which is of Chown design, should be retained if at all possible and converted into apartments or other housing; and*
- (c) Mature tree screening from the A246 should be maintained; and*
- (d) The Lovelace boundary wall on southern and western boundaries adjacent to the A246 is a distinctive landmark feature and should be maintained; and*
- (e) A publicly-accessible footpath is encouraged to be provided allowing passage through or around the site from beside the petrol filling station to the pavement on the A246 Guildford Road close to the entrance of The Warren; and*
- (f) The loss of the hotel facility must be appropriately justified in the planning application in accordance with the applicable adopted local plan policy.*