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# Guildford Development Management Policies Examination

Response to Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions  
submitted on behalf of Martin Grant Homes  
(ID: 8944737)

**Matter 3:  
Policy P6/P7: Biodiversity in New Developments**

October 2022

**Guildford Development Management Policies Examination**

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**Matter 3:**

**Policy P6/P7: Biodiversity in New Developments**

**Barton Willmore, now Stantec on behalf of  
Martin Grant Homes (ID: 8944737)**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Barton Willmore, now Stantec is instructed by Martin Grant Homes (MGH) to submit this hearing statement in response to the Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions. This statement expands upon the representations submitted on behalf of MGH at the earlier stages of the Local Plan: Development Management Policies' preparation.
- 1.2 As background, MGH owns (freehold) the Gosden Hill strategic site allocated for residential mixed-use development in Policy A25 of the adopted Guildford Borough Local Plan: Strategy and Sites (April 2019).
- 1.3 MGH and its consultant team continues to proactively engage with the Council and other consultees to develop MGH's emerging masterplan for the site.
- 1.4 This statement supplements the representation submitted at Regulation 19 consultation stage in February 2022 and responds to the outputs of ongoing discussions with the Council and the output of MGH's own technical work.

## **RESPONSE TO MATTER 3: Policy P6/P7: Biodiversity in New Developments**

**Main Question: Whether Policy P6/P7: Biodiversity in New Developments is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with both national policy and the LPSS.**

### **Supplementary Questions:**

#### **Q3.1 Is the requirement for a 20% increase in biodiversity justified in the case of Guildford?**

- 1.1 No. We support the Council in seeking to deliver an improvement in biodiversity, however in order to be effective the policy needs to be realistic and not impose requirements which could adversely affect the deliverability of much needed development in the Borough.
- 1.2 In this context, we do not accept that the Council's position that the Borough is sufficiently unique to justify a requirement greater than the proposed national standard of 10% (i.e., the proposed 20%) within local planning policy.
- 1.3 The work which has been used to support Policy P6/P7 is at a high level and not specific to Guildford.
- 1.4 Insufficient evidence is provided to validate the comment in paragraph 4.44 that 'Surrey has suffered a severe biodiversity decline which is significantly worse than the country as a whole' nor to demonstrate why imposing a higher requirement than envisaged in the Environment Act 'provides greater certainty that a genuine net gain will be achieved' as paragraph 4.44 alleges.
- 1.5 Indeed, it is noted that the position statement prepared by Surrey Nature Partnership which the Council seek to rely on in justifying the proposed requirement (document reference GBC-LPDMP-SD-010) includes quotes taken from Defra's Impact Assessment that '[10%] is the lowest level of net gain that [Defra] could confidently expect to deliver genuine net gain, or at least no net loss, of biodiversity' and 'a level of net gain at or above 10% is necessary to give reasonable confidence in halting biodiversity losses'; this does not demonstrate that the 20% requirement is needed, rather it confirms that Defra consider that 10% net gain could be confidently expected to deliver genuine net gain.

- 1.6 Moreover, no evidence has been published to demonstrate that a 20% net gain is viably deliverable, particularly on strategic greenfield sites.
- 1.7 The policy as drafted is therefore not justified and has the potential to compromise the delivery of necessary development. It is therefore not sound. Policy P6/P7 should instead require a 10% net gain, in accordance with national requirements, unless any alternative nationally prescribed standard is created in future. Reference to a 20% biodiversity net gain should therefore be deleted.
- 1.8 If the Council considers necessary, the policy could encourage and support a higher level of net gain, however this should not be a requirement.

**Q3.2 What would be the implications of a 20% increase on development viability? Would there be any unintended consequences?**

- 1.9 The imposition of a requirement for 20% net gain has the potential to adversely affect development viability. We do not consider that the viability implications of the proposed requirement have been fully considered to date with further work necessary to consider the implications for individual sites.
- 1.10 In this regard, there is potential for unintended consequences. Specifically, we are concerned that there may be circumstances where imposing this requirement, together with all other policy requirements, leads to the viability of development being impacted due to the additional land and works necessary to achieve a 20% net gain. In such circumstances there is potential for unintended consequences including other policy requirements not being met, such as the delivery of the total quantum of affordable housing sought, in order for development schemes to be sufficiently viable to proceed. This would undoubtedly adversely affect the delivery of the Council's strategy as a whole.

**Q3.3 If viability is an issue on a site, how does biodiversity feature amongst other priorities?**

- 1.11 This is a matter for the Council to address. However, it should have been evidenced through the Plan.
- 1.12 Aside from viability, there is also the risk that it leads to an additional land take, impacting on the ability of sites to meet requirements for development.

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