

10 May 2018



Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP  
Secretary of State  
Ministry for Housing, Communities and  
Local Government  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
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Dear Secretary of State

### **TGKP Response to consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework**

I am pleased to enclose the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership's (TGKP's) response to the consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework. TGKP is a public-private partnership promoting sustainable, economic-led regeneration and growth in North Kent. The delivery of high levels of new housing and employment lies at the core of our ambitions. An effective planning system, and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as part of that, is crucial to support and enable sustainable growth.

There is much in the draft NPPF which TGKP welcomes as steps in the right direction. These include: the framework's emphasis on the plan-led approach; improvements to the provisions on promoting sustainable transport; improved policies on protecting environmental and historical assets; the approach to retail development and town centres; promoting healthy and safe communities; measures to encourage more diversity in housing supply, particularly smaller building companies; and greater transparency concerning s.106 agreements, CIL, and viability assessments.

However, TGKP has very strong reservations about some fundamental aspects of the proposed changes. We would urge, most forcefully, that MHCLG reconsiders these proposals, which include:

- The Housing Delivery Test. The test is ill-conceived and should not, as a matter of principle, be taken any further until at least after the Letwin Review has published its final report and the Government has considered its recommendations.
- Reliance on the new methodology for calculating Objectively Assessed Need. As we have commented before, the new methodology is a blunt instrument generating perverse results. The levels of new housing suggested for North Kent represent an uplift which presents extreme challenges in terms of sites, infrastructure

requirements and sustainability impacts at a time when the development industry is not meeting the challenge of delivering existing numbers. A more flexible approach with local ownership should be considered.

- The definition of Affordable Housing. The proposed redefinition places too much emphasis on models of home ownership but makes no reference at all to social rented housing which is desperately needed as part of the tenure mix to respond to local needs.
- Permitted Development Rights. The present PDR regime is having significant, and possibly unforeseen, negative consequences for towns across North Kent. We strongly urge an independent review of all aspects of the existing regime and no further extension of PDRs without full consultation informed by the findings of an independent review.

Our detailed comments on the consultation questions are set out in the attached Annex. These reflect input from our partners, most of whom are submitting their own individual responses to the consultation. TGKP's response does not therefore attempt to address every matter covered in our partners' responses but focuses on those that reflect common concerns and significance in the context of the Partnership's objectives.

I hope the Ministry will consider our observations seriously and constructively. If there are matters where discussion might be helpful, or modified proposals that MHCLG would like to explore in collaboration with local areas, we would be pleased to explore these further with you.

Yours faithfully



**Matthew Norwell**  
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## CONSULTATION RESPONSE: DRAFT NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

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Are the views expressed on this consultation your own personal views or an official response from an organization you represent?

### Organisational Response

If you are responding on behalf of an organization, please select the option which best describes your organization.

### Other

If you selected other, please state the type of organization

**Public-private partnership promoting sustainable economic-led regeneration and growth in North Kent.**

Please provide the name of the organization (if applicable)

**Thames Gateway Kent Partnership**

## Chapter 1 Introduction

**Q1** Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 1?

We welcome in principle the renewed emphasis on the plan-led system; however many individual paragraphs in the draft NPPF serve to weaken that emphasis and we would urge the Government to review the text to ensure that specific policies do not undermine the plan-led approach.

It is unclear why the Government has not taken the opportunity to incorporate planning policy for Traveller Sites into the NPPF; it would make sense to do so since some of the key considerations that should inform decisions about Traveller Sites reference policies in the NPPF.

## Chapter 2 Achieving sustainable development

**Q2** Do you agree with the changes to the sustainable development objectives and the presumption in favour of sustainable development?

We are disappointed that although the draft NPPF places “sustainable development” at its heart, precisely what that means appears to have been weakened in a number of respects. The widely accepted definition in UN General Assembly Resolution 42/187 is relegated to a footnote, and the five principles set out in previous national sustainable development strategy and enshrined in the

current NPPF are conspicuous by their absence. In their place, the Government has placed even greater emphasis on delivery of housing at the levels determined by the formula it is imposing upon planning authorities. This not only distorts the interpretation of “sustainable development” but in the circumstances of many localities faced with exceptional increases in the numbers of houses they are expected to accommodate it is questionable whether such development would be sustainable.

The presumption in favour of sustainable development in paragraph 11 ought to make specific reference to having regard to the sustainable development objectives or principles, even as set out in paragraph 8. At present paragraph 11 is cast in such a way that, in particular, decision-taking is about permitting housing “and other development” unless the protection of important assets or significant adverse impacts are at stake. The formulation in paragraph 11 erodes the notion of sustainable development as a guiding principle.

**Q3** Do you agree that the core principles section should be deleted, given its content has been retained and moved to other appropriate parts of the Framework?

A number of Partners take the view that an early statement of key principles had some value, but accept the change provided those principles are expressed in the appropriate context elsewhere in the Framework.

**Q4** Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 2, including the approach to providing additional certainty for neighbourhood plans in some circumstances?

Paragraph 14b and paragraph 75 appear to be incompatible as different housing delivery requirements and interpretations of the Housing Delivery Test seem to be being applied. As stated elsewhere in this response, TGKP is fundamentally opposed to the Housing Delivery Test; but for paragraph 14 to work it needs to be consistent with other provisions in the Framework.

### **Chapter 3 Plan-making**

**Q5** Do you agree with the further changes proposed to the tests of soundness, and to the other changes of policy in this chapter that have not already been consulted on?

If we understand paragraph 17 correctly, a “Local Plan” prepared by a single authority may contain both strategic policies and local policies, and should make explicit which policies are “strategic policies”. But it is unclear what significance this differentiation has in either testing soundness at plan making stage beyond ensuring that local policies build upon and are consistent with strategic policies.

**Q6** Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 3?

As we noted in our response to “Planning for the right homes in the right places”, it is important to recognise that the Statement of Common Ground does not mean that a complete solution to neighbouring authorities’ requirements can necessarily be found through the statement of common ground and duty to cooperate process. The statement may therefore be as much about what cannot be done as what can. The statement of common ground is a procedural matter and should not form part of the tests of soundness themselves.

TGKP partners generally welcome the modified wording in paragraph 36(b) referring to “an appropriate strategy” rather than “the most appropriate strategy”: this is a sensible (and necessary) change.

## Chapter 4 Decision-making

**Q7** The revised draft Framework expects all viability assessments to be made publicly available. Are there any circumstances where this would be problematic?

In principle TGKP supports transparency in these matters, but there may be limited circumstances where it would be reasonable for specific details to be redacted or withheld.

**Q8** Would it be helpful for national planning guidance to go further and set out the circumstances in which viability assessment to accompany planning applications would be acceptable?

It might be helpful for national planning guidance to offer examples of such circumstances, but this should not be prescriptive. Ultimately it should be for developers to respond in full to identified site-specific issues and for local decision-makers to have a measure of discretion in assessing the information provided.

**Q9** What would be the benefits of going further and mandating the use of review mechanisms to capture increases in the value of a large or multi-phased development?

There is a general sense among Partners that if circumstances change and the marginality of a development improves, the financial gains should be shared with the local community to offset the pressures arising from the development.

TGKP also endorses the approach set out in the accompanying draft Planning Practice Guidance on viability assessment where, amongst other things, it emphasized that existing use value is not the price paid for the land and should disregard hope value.

**Q10** Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 4?

There has been extensive work carried out by all Councils in Kent on the “Planning Protocol – delivering growth in Kent & Medway”, and is a good example of joint working between planning authorities and the development industry. TGKP would commend this to MHCLG for the advice it offers in addressing discussions around viability and related matters.

## Chapter 5 Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes

**Q11** What are your views on the most appropriate combination of policy requirements to ensure that a suitable proportion of land for homes comes forward as small or medium sized sites?

Partners are generally concerned that the draft NPPF is too prescriptive, in particular in requiring at paragraph 69 that “at least 20% of sites identified for housing in their plans are of half a hectare or less”. Partners would favour a less prescriptive approach setting out a general requirement for local planning authorities to ensure their plans make provision for a range of sites, responding to local circumstances, to provide opportunities for small and medium-sized housebuilders to bring greater competition into the market and to increase the delivery of homes.

**Q12** Do you agree with the application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development where delivery is below 75% of the housing required from 2020?

It is accepted that it is good practice for local planning authorities to carry out an annual review of any barriers to housing delivery and produce a plan of suggested actions to help overcome these

barriers. TGKP and all its Partners are, however, strongly opposed to the Housing Delivery Test as set out in this draft NPPF.

The test is flawed, illogical and self-defeating. Local Planning Authorities do not determine the pace of housing delivery. Their responsibilities relate to establishing a robust planning framework and efficient administration and determination of planning applications. As has been pointed out by many respondents including ourselves on previous occasions, local planning authorities' leverage over delivery of housing beyond the granting of consent is extremely limited. The interim report published by the independent review being led by Sir Oliver Letwin recognizes the wide range of factors that impact upon housing build-out rates. Penalising authorities for factors that are outside their control is unreasonable and pointless, and a recipe for litigation and challenge.

On a point of process, it also seems premature and inappropriate to proceed with the intention to incorporate this test into the NPPF prior to the Government receiving, and deciding its response to, the final report and recommendations from the Letwin Review. Since that Review is not scheduled to deliver its final report until Budget 2018, which is after the proposed publication of the revised NPPF, it would be inappropriate and premature for the housing delivery test to be included in the NPPF. We strongly urge that this test including paragraph 75 and paragraph 211 in Annex 1 should be deleted.

**Q13** Do you agree with the new policy on exception sites for entry-level homes?

TGKP Partners have reservations about this policy as drafted: there is a need to clarify the relationship between paragraphs 72 and 79 and how the local need aspect will be secured in practice.

**Q14** Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 5?

TGKP commented at length in response to "Planning for the right homes in the right places" regarding the consequences of introducing its proposed new standard methodology for calculating Objectively Assessed Need. For local planning authorities in North Kent<sup>1</sup>, the average increase is +36% compared with +7% nationally; meanwhile, the proportion of the authorities' areas covered by restrictive designations averages 44% compared with 35% nationally. One of our Partners faces increased numbers up to the proposed cap of 40% above the existing plan adopted as recently as October 2017. This is before any consideration is given to accommodating need that cannot be met by neighbouring authorities, particularly from London. This indicates that even in a corridor which is ambitious for and delivering growth, the expectations of higher provision are extreme compared to the regional and national picture.

We would reiterate the conclusions we offered in our response to "Planning for the right homes in the right places":

"Our conclusion is that whilst we support the principle of a standardized assessment methodology, it risks becoming a blunt instrument which elevates the allocation of land for housing above all other considerations that make for sustainable communities, whilst doing little to address the structural imbalance between markets in the North, Midland and South of England. It could undermine intelligent planning that holistically reflects local circumstances, ambitions and constraints.

"Our partnership is seriously concerned that there is not capacity to accommodate this scale of additional growth in North Kent, above the ambitious levels already being pursued, without placing unacceptable pressures on infrastructure and the environment. We are uncertain that the development industry could, or would wish to, deliver this additional

<sup>1</sup> The Kent local authorities of Dartford, Gravesham, Maidstone and Swale and Medway Unitary Authority.

volume of new housebuilding in the area over the timescales envisaged. There are also issues of capacity and access to development finance in the housebuilding sector, together with consideration of market factors that influence the release of new homes, which the Government's current proposals do nothing to address."

TGKP Partners are therefore emphatically opposed to the new methodology and the expectations associated with it being enshrined in the revised NPPF (e.g. paragraphs 61 and 75). Whatever the hypothetical merits of a standardized methodology, agreement over appropriate levels of new housing is far more likely to be achieved by a locally-responsive methodology that has stakeholder ownership and is underpinned by a robust rationale, rather than central prescription.

By contrast, TGKP welcomes the emphasis in paragraph 63 that affordable housing provision should normally be on-site and that robust justification is required if provision is to be off-site or a financial contribution made in lieu.

A number of Partners are also concerned about the provisions in paragraph 64 allowing vacant buildings credit. Given that the implications of existing buildings on a brownfield site ought to be taken into account in any viability assessment, VBC is either unnecessary or likely to result in double-counting; and in either case, the result is reduced provision of affordable housing in the area in question. We suggest that provision for VBC should be removed.

Partners are concerned about the definition of affordable housing (see comments on the Glossary) and on the stricture in paragraph 65 that at least 10% of the homes on a major development should be available for "affordable home ownership". This is too prescriptive, and the whole approach taken towards affordable housing militates against provision of socially-rented housing, for which there is continued need and demand. It should not be for national policy to dictate the tenure split required to address local housing need.

## **Chapter 6 Building a strong, competitive economy**

**Q15** Do you agree with the policy changes on supporting business growth and productivity, including the approach to accommodating local business and community needs in rural areas?

TGKP generally welcomes this Chapter.

**Q16** Do you have any other comments on the text of chapter 6?

Promoting a strong economy and having policies and allocations to support employment uses are a critical function of local plans. Whilst we welcome the thrust of Chapter 6, its relative brevity compared to the expansiveness of the paragraphs relating to housing tells its own story. Planning for sustainable development must give balanced consideration to economic, social and environmental objectives. The positive intent of Chapter 6 is undermined, however by measures the Government has introduced elsewhere, notably the extension of permitted development rights for conversion of office, commercial and industrial buildings to residential. These PDRs have led to the closure of viable businesses and damaging losses of employment space. See further comments under "Go Further", below.

## **Chapter 7 Ensuring the vitality of town centres**

**Q17** Do you agree with the policy changes on planning for identified retail needs and considering planning applications for town centre uses?

TGKP supports the changes in this Chapter, notably the allowance in the sequential test so that out of centre sites should be considered only if suitable town centre or edge of centre sites are unavailable or not expected to become available within a reasonable period. The wording in the 'consultation proposals' is considered clearer than the proposed text in the draft NPPF and we suggest that might be substituted for what appears in paragraph 87.

**Q18** Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 7?

We would repeat the concern expressed in response to Q16 regarding the impact of permitted development rights. Some office to residential conversions have been beneficial for town centres, particularly where buildings were no longer fit-for-purpose or hard to let as offices. However, North Kent authorities have also seen loss of good quality office and commercial space in town centres under PDRs, resulting in businesses being forced to relocate (where possible) or close with job losses, and contributing still further to the chronic mismatch between supply and demand for suitable business accommodation. There have also been concerns about the poor quality of some conversions, which have necessitated enforcement action against building owners. We strongly urge the Government to commission an independent review of its policy on permitted development rights taking account of its impact on the business community. It would be better to have positive national and local policies setting out the principles to guide redevelopment and conversion of employment space rather than opening the door to sub-standard development through permitted development rights. See also comments under "Go Further", below.

One of TGKP's Partners, Dartford Borough Council, has raised a particular issue about the absence of any policies in the NPPF regarding the role of existing regional shopping centres. It is inevitable that such centres will evolve over time and it might be helpful for the NPPF to recognize this and for the Government to consult on provisions to help shape appropriate local policies.

## **Chapter 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities**

**Q19** Do you have any comments on the new policies in Chapter 8 that have not already been consulted on?

TGKP supports the policies in this Chapter.

**Q20** Do you have any other comments the text of Chapter 8?

No further comments.

## **Chapter 9 Promoting sustainable transport**

**Q21** Do you agree with the changes to the transport chapter that point to the way that all aspects of transport should be considered, both in planning for transport and assessing transport impacts?

Overall TGKP Partners welcome this Chapter as a step in the right direction.

**Q22** Do you agree with the policy change that recognises the importance of general aviation facilities?

Yes.



**Q23** Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 9?

TGKP Partners are concerned that, as set out in paragraph 109, only a 'severe' road safety (or broader highways impact) would be a reason to refuse a planning application. The approach seems to suggest that worsening of road safety or network performance would be an acceptable consequence of development, which should not be the case given that the thrust of the Chapter is to promote sustainable transport. It might be helpful if the degree of severity of cumulative impacts could be qualified or further explained in the Glossary.

## **Chapter 10 Supporting high quality communications**

**Q24** Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 10?

No comments.

## **Chapter 11 Making effective use of land**

**Q25** Do you agree with the proposed approaches to under-utilised land, reallocating land for other uses and making it easier to convert land which is in existing use?

The central principles behind this Chapter are supported, provided that these are secured through appropriate wording of national and local policies and proper assessment of planning applications, and not through application of permitted development rights which could result in inappropriate uses, detrimental impact on local areas and poor living standards in the dwelling units created. It is also critical that alternative uses of land are supported by sufficient infrastructure and affordable housing, neither of which can be secured where such redevelopment is carried out under permitted development rights.

**Q26** Do you agree with the proposed approach to employing minimum density standards where there is a shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs?

TGKP supports the principle that planning policies and allocations should seek to optimize the use of previously-developed land, particularly on well-situated sites in the most sustainable locations. The general view of TGKP Partners is not in favour of minimum density standards. Appropriate densities should be determined according to local circumstances having regard to high quality design, amenity and other relevant considerations.

**Q27** Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 11?

TGKP Partners are concerned that the draft NPPF is not currently taking the opportunity to remedy the policy inconsistency arising from decisions in the Courts that, outside of built-up areas, previously-developed "brownfield" land can include residential gardens. The draft NPPF should be amended to ensure that residential gardens (in any location) are not inadvertently promoted for inappropriate development. This could be accomplished by removal of the words "in built up areas" in the Glossary definition of previously developed land.

## **Chapter 12 Achieving well-designed places**

**Q28** Do you have any comments on the changes of policy in Chapter 12 that have not already been consulted on?

TGKP Partners generally support this Chapter, though we would like to see even stronger emphasis on the importance of good quality design and place-making. We should like to see this backed up by wider initiatives to promote good design and best practice, particularly across the housebuilding industry where reliance on pattern-book designs tends to be relatively unresponsive to local distinctiveness and resistant to innovation.

**Q29** Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 12?

No further comments.

### **Chapter 13 Protecting the Green Belt**

**Q30** Do you agree with the proposed changes to enable greater use of brownfield land for housing in the Green Belt, and to provide for the other forms of development that are 'not inappropriate' in the Green Belt?

TGKP Partners are concerned that the effect of the revisions could weaken Green Belt protections and, for example, applications for discounted market housing on residential gardens – see the response to Q27 above. The removal of the proviso on maintaining the openness of Green Belt in the case of infill development in villages could undermine the character of villages in the Green Belt.

**Q31** Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 13?

It is our view that the revised NPPF should not effectively make the approach to amending Green Belt boundaries to accommodate growth a "last resort". A more balanced approach is required where the promotion of sustainable patterns of development and their deliverability should be important considerations. A key test is surely whether remaining Green Belt land would continue to perform the five purposes following a boundary alteration: if the answer is yes, and the boundary alteration would enable growth to be accommodated more sustainably than the reasonable alternatives available, then policies should allow for this.

### **Chapter 14 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change**

**Q32** Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 14?

The revised draft NPPF somewhat weakens the link to the UK Climate Change Act 2008 by requiring plans to be made only "in the context of" the Act (footnote 39) rather than the existing "in line with".

The draft NPPF reflects double-standards in the treatment of onshore wind development compared with, for example, onshore oil and gas (including fracking). Onshore wind remains one of, if not the, most effective forms of renewable energy available. However, the Government has placed an additional hurdle in the path of onshore wind proposals by stipulating that these should "include consideration of the local community's views" (paragraph 153(c), and explicitly have their backing – footnote 40). Meanwhile, in chapter 17 minerals planning authorities are required to "recognize the benefits of on-shore oil and gas development, including unconventional hydrocarbons...and put in place policies to facilitate their exploration and extraction" (paragraph 204(a)) – without any comparable condition about consideration of the local community's views. We would like to see a

more level playing field; and in the interests of decarbonizing the energy supply we suggest that the NPPF should not place constraints on renewable energy proposals that it does not also impose on carbon-based energy sources.

**Q33** Does paragraph 149b need any further amendment to reflect the ambitions in the Clean Growth Strategy to reduce emissions from buildings?

The paragraph as drafted does not offer local planning authorities the flexibility to set more ambitious sustainability standards.

## **Chapter 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment**

**Q34** Do you agree with the approach to clarifying and strengthening protection for areas of particular environmental importance in the context of the 25 Year Environment Plan and national infrastructure requirements, including the level of protection for ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees?

This approach is supported.

**Q35** Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 15?

Paragraph 169 appears incomplete. It needs to set out the context, which is the preparation of plans and making of allocations to meet development needs. If the needs are not present or demonstrated, the requirement to allocate land is void. This should be clarified or amended.

The emphasis on air quality considerations is welcomed.

## **Chapter 16 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment**

**Q36** Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 16?

This is generally welcomed.

## **Chapter 17 Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals**

**Q37** Do you have any comments on the changes of policy in Chapter 17, or on any other aspects of the text of this chapter?

See comment in response to Q32 above.

**Q38** Do you think that planning policy on minerals would be better contained in a separate document?

Views on this point differ between authorities with minerals planning powers and those without. Whilst there may be some merit in putting policy in a separate document, it must be recognized that by taking minerals planning policies out of the NPPF it may make it harder for local planning authorities to take a balanced view of social, economic and environmental factors: minerals planning will have a bearing on all three objectives of sustainable development.

**Q39** Do you have any views on the utility of national and sub-national guidelines on future aggregates provision?

No comments.

**Q40** Do you agree with the proposed transitional arrangements?

As stated above, TGKP does not support the proposed Housing Delivery Test and we strongly urge that both the policy and timetable are put in abeyance until at least after publication of the final report of the Letwin Review and the Government has formulated its response.

**Q41** Do you think that any changes should be made to the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites as a result of the proposed changes to the Framework set out in this document? If so, what changes should be made?

There is a general feeling that the PPTS should be incorporated into the NPPF rather than stand as a separate document.

**Q42** Do you think that any changes should be made to the Planning Policy for Waste as a result of the proposed changes to the Framework set out in this document? If so, what changes should be made?

No comments.

## Glossary

**Q43** Do you have any comments on the glossary?

TGKP commented in response to last year's Housing White Paper on the definition of affordable housing and we would reiterate those points here:

“We are not persuaded that starter homes and discounted market sales should be classified as affordable housing and do not therefore agree with the proposal [to revise the definition of affordable housing]. The effect of this policy could see ‘affordable housing’ obligations being proposed that focus purely on home purchase models and fail to address the needs of lower income households for whom ownership is beyond their reach. There is a vast difference between households that might qualify for starter homes, with household incomes up to £80,000 – which would place them within the richest quartile of UK households – and those at or below average household income (currently £31,920). Whilst we welcome a menu of affordable housing options, and recognise the challenge that even relatively affluent households have in getting on the home ownership ladder, the solutions brought forward through developments and the way in which affordable housing obligations are met need to be genuinely matched to local needs and circumstances. Local planning authorities should be able to resist proposals where the ‘affordable housing’ component ignores the identified local housing needs of lower income households who cannot afford to buy.

“We do not therefore support the proposition that home ownership products should be treated as a component of affordable housing, but suggest that starter homes and discounted market sales should be sought in addition to products that genuinely serve the needs of lower income households.”

We acknowledge that the Government has taken some steps to ensure that affordable housing

remains affordable for subsequent occupiers. However, there is no explicit reference to social rented housing, and tying the definition to a range of current products and models could reduce flexibility to respond to new possibilities. It would be better if the definition set down clear principles leaving the tenure mix and types for local determination.

Definition of previously developed land: see response to Q27, remove “in built-up areas” from the reference to residential gardens.

## Going Further

Some of the most vehement feedback from Partners concerns the permitted development rights regime.

The draft NPPF has little to say on PDRs, other than to emphasise that exceptions to national PDRs (such as via Article 4 directions) should be limited. However, we are concerned that the Government appears blinkered to the negative impact the relaxation of PDRs is having. In particular, the permanent relaxation of the PDRs for office/commercial uses to residential is having very serious cumulative repercussions for authorities in North Kent:

- There is a chronic shortage and mismatch between supply and demand for employment space in Kent and Medway. In relation to office space, there is a marked deficit of medium-sized office space in the size range 10001-25000 square feet.
- Hundreds of thousands of square feet of commercial space have been lost to residential development – for instance, over 400,000 square feet in Maidstone alone. Not all of that has been redundant space. In quite a lot of cases business occupiers have been forced out as building owners, incentivised by higher returns per square foot on residential development over commercial uses, have decided to convert under PDRs. Displaced companies cannot necessarily find alternative suitable space within a reasonable area of search. This has resulted in company closures and job losses, to the detriment of the local economy as well as to the workforce concerned, and loss of business rates income.
- A number of office-to-residential conversions have been acquired by London Boroughs, in order to house people on their waiting lists or homeless households in temporary accommodation. This has placed a significant number of households a considerable distance from the community with which they had a local connection. Many of these have complex social needs, and therefore require support from local services; however, since premises created under PDRs do not bring with them any CIL or s.106 contributions towards infrastructure or services, including schools, healthcare and social services, recipient councils are having to shoulder unplanned burdens. The complex needs of some of these residents have also been accompanied by increases in anti-social behaviour, drug-dealing and crime which all have a negative impact on community cohesion.
- Authorities have expressed concern over the poor quality of some dwellings created through conversion of commercial premises to residential and in some cases have had to take enforcement action against building owners on grounds of safety and fitness for human habitation.

With these issues in mind, TGKP does not support any extension of permitted development rights and in particular we do not support PDRs for development in airspace above existing commercial and residential premises. We consider such proposals should go through the normal planning process. We also repeat our earlier comment urging the Government to conduct an independent review of permitted development rights, and consult on ways of addressing their negative impacts

whilst retaining the key benefits that they can offer.



**The Thames Gateway Kent Partnership is a public-private partnership, established since 2001, promoting sustainable economic-led growth and regeneration in North Kent.**

The top priorities in our *Plan for Growth 2014-20* are:

- Delivering growth in key locations
- Attracting and retaining investment
- Focusing on quality
- Supporting businesses – growth key industry sectors
- Supporting businesses – increasing innovation, enterprise and creativity
- Improving skills, qualifications and employability

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