



REPRESENTATION ON BEHALF OF RIVERDALE LAND

Re: MS-12 Post Hearings Site Selection Methodology Review Mid Sussex District Plan 2021–2040 Examination – March 2026

Introduction

This representation is submitted on behalf of Riverdale Land in response to MS-12. Riverdale welcomes the Council's engagement with the Inspector's oral directions, including the commitment to re-appraise all sites irrespective of the stage at which they were previously rejected. However, Riverdale submits that in two critical respects the methodology does not go far enough to implement those directions.

Positive Planning: The Need for a Structured Framework

The Inspector directed that site selection must integrate a positive approach to planning, articulating and weighing the benefits of sites within the planning balance rather than being purely constraints-led. The methodology responds at a high level, stating that the re-appraisal will balance negative impacts with benefits in line with NPPF paragraph 11b and will consider how sites "*individually or collectively*" contribute to wider benefits. However, it lacks a structured framework for assessing collective benefits in practice, providing no structured basis for assessing how sites contribute to collective benefits at a settlement level.

This is a material omission. Collective benefits can arise in a range of circumstances; for example, where development provides the critical mass needed to support new or improved local services; where additional allocations improve the viability and delivery certainty of committed infrastructure, where sites collectively improve connectivity and sustainable travel patterns; or where the aggregate scale of development justifies investment in facilities that no single site could sustain alone. The methodology should include an express criterion requiring assessment of how sites contribute to such benefits at a settlement level. Without this, the Stage 2(c) assessment and the subsequent in-combination testing at Stage 3 (as discussed further below) risk treating infrastructure and service provision solely as constraints rather than as benefits to be optimised through positive planning.

By way of example, the Regulation 18 Plan directed that opportunities to improve connectivity of proposed allocations "*should be investigated*." That investigation was never undertaken, and the reference was removed at Regulation 19 without explanation. A



structured collective benefits framework would require such matters to be addressed as part of the re-appraisal.

The Spatial Strategy: Avoiding a Cascade in Practice

The need for a positive planning framework is compounded by a second structural concern. The Inspector directed that Principles 3 and 4 of the spatial strategy must carry equal weight and not be applied as a cascade. The methodology responds at Stage 2(c) by committing to re-appraise sites by '*equal reference*' to both Principles.

Riverdale welcomes this but submits that the methodology's retained sequential staging creates a risk that the cascade is replicated in practice: if Stage 2(a) operates as a preliminary filter that screens out sites in locations not currently considered sustainable, before the Principle 4 assessment is engaged, then the equal weighting commitment at Stage 2(c) is materially undermined. In effect, the pool of sites reaching the stage at which Principle 4 is assessed will have already been narrowed by a filter that privileges Principle 3 considerations.

The consequences of this are compounded by the agreed procedural framework: the Inspector has agreed that a 'long list' may be produced prior to Sustainability Appraisal and in-combination testing at Stage 3. A site excluded at Stage 2(a) will therefore not only miss the equal weighting assessment at Stage 2(c) but will be excluded from the entire evidence base that informs the Council's final allocation decisions.

To guard against this, Riverdale suggests reformulating the Stage 2(a) re-appraisal test to encompass not only whether external circumstances have changed the sustainability of the location, but also whether the site itself, or a collection of sites in the locality, could improve the sustainability of the settlement through development.

Conclusion

Riverdale respectfully submits that the methodology requires two principal refinements: (1) an express criterion for assessing how sites individually or collectively contribute to positive planning benefits at a settlement level, including resolution of outstanding matters such as the DPSC3 connectivity investigation directed at Regulation 18; and (2) embedding Principle 4 considerations within Stage 2(a) so that the spatial strategy carries genuine equal weight at every stage and no site is excluded before its Principle 4 contribution is assessed.