Dear Ms Glancy

RUNNYMEDE LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION, MATTER 5: POLICY SD10 – LONGROSS GARDEN VILLAGE (REPRESENTOR ID 1998)

This letter has been produced by Tom Hill QC and ShrimplinBrown on behalf of the Wentworth Residents Association (representor ID 1998) in relation to the examination into the Runnymede Borough Local Plan 2030. It responds to the Stage 2 Hearing Sessions, Matter 5, Policy SD10 – Longcross Garden Village (Longcross) and in particular the communication from Crest Nicholson dated 20 February 2019, sent to us on 25 February 2019, in relation to Longcross Studios on which the Inspector has invited comments.

It is necessary to begin by setting out a little background.

The Longcross or DERA site exists at the western extremity of Runnymede. It was formerly a tank factory and testing ground and was located some way from the nearest settlement of any size or scale. Some workers arrived by railway, alighted at a halt and entered directly into the secure site of the factory, which is still enclosed by a tall razor-wire topped fence. There was no public access by road to the rail halt and the pedestrian access is very circuitous and difficult to find. The “halt” sits in a dark and secluded cutting and is a very unattractive place to wait. There is no booking office, no waiting room nor other facilities. We understand that limited services stopped to align with workers’ shift times.

Thus, although new development at Longcross may seem, superficially, to have the benefit of a “ready-made” rail station, this is in truth very far from being the case, as we hope that the Inspector’s site inspection will have confirmed. Likewise, although Longcross sits alongside the M3, it has no direct or even nearby access to the motorway network. Moreover, the range of facilities required by settlement of any scale are simply not available locally. There is no nearby secondary school for example.

In short, Longcross starts off as an extremely unsustainable location at which to locate extensive new development. We consider that, directly contrary to longstanding government policy, the vast majority of associated trips are likely to depend upon the
private car for access UNLESS strenuous efforts are made to avoid this – by putting in place, at the earliest possible opportunity (when travel patterns to and from the site are being established) attractive and convenient public transport travel options.

The northern part of Longcross, known as DERA North, was granted planning permission on the basis that extensive improvements to facilitate rail travel would be put in place before the occupation of the first dwellings (see Planning Committee resolution to grant planning permission). However, the Council failed to see this through and the planning obligation was eventually “watered down” from that approved by the Planning Committee to allow the option of “on-demand” taxi links to Virginia Water. Although requested at the Examination, the Council has failed to provide details of the usage of this service, which we understand was limited in any event to one trip per household per day. So, to date, a substantial quantum of development has taken place at Longcross with nothing yet done to secure an attractive rail option for those travelling to and from the site – notwithstanding the proximity of the line and halt. This also applies to workers at the Film Studios.

The outline planning permission for the redevelopment of the commercial side of DERA North included a new station access and carpark on the site of the northernmost existing buildings. This part of the development has not progressed at all, the building is still in use and, no doubt, bringing in a substantial rental stream to its owners. There is nothing we can see obliging Crest or any other party to implement this part of the permission or to deliver attractive station facilities at Longcross.

This position risks being worsened many-fold if yet further development is endorsed by the Runnymede LP south of the M3 without an clear, cast iron and irrevocable requirement to deliver an attractive station facility and services at Longcross.

We are now told that Crest is able to recover from tenants/licensees any part of the Longcross Studios site so as to avoid conflict with the anticipated Longcross Village delivery programme, but we have not been provided with the redacted leases or licences. Our principal concern, however, is that any support for yet further development at Longcross MUST be caveated with a clear requirement to deliver a new station and services at the earliest possible stage. Happily, Crest have now told us that this would not be overly onerous requirement, as they can recover the land required as necessary.

Above all, there must be no assumption that the new station will come forward “in due course” alongside the commercial re-development at Longcross. There is simply no evidence whatsoever to support this happening and opportunities to redevelop this part of the site have been available – but not taken up – for over a decade now.

WRA is greatly fearful that the situation will simply be allowed to drift in relation to Longcross Station, leading to unnecessary and unsustainable trips by road to and through Virginia Water. The Inspector is urged to take appropriate action to avoid this outcome.
If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

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