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21st October 2025

SI/OR/20-145
BY EMAIL

Dear Sir/Madam,

**REPRESENTATION TO THE CANTERBURY DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN REGULATION 18
FOCUSED CONSULTATION IN RESPECT OF LAND AT MERTON PARK, CANTERBURY (DRAFT
ALLOCATION POLICY N1)**

Iceni Projects, on behalf of Quinn Estates, welcomes the opportunity to submit representations to the Canterbury District Local Plan (Focused Regulation 18 Consultation). Quinn Estates is one of the leading and most prominent developers in Canterbury, with strong ambitions to deliver a sustainable urban extension at Land at Merton Park, Canterbury.

Quinn Estates continues to support the inclusion of Merton Park as an allocation (Policy N1) within the focused consultation, as per the previous Regulation 18 iteration in 2024. The site is deliverable and development can come forward quickly to contribute to Canterbury's housing needs. Quinn Estates is keen to continue engagement with planning officers as the draft Local Plan progresses to discuss key matters and ensure they are evidenced so that the requirements of the allocation can be demonstrated and achieved. In particular, it is acknowledged that there is a wide range of criteria for the site and therefore the ability to deliver these and phase them appropriately will need to be tested.

Quinn Estates is continuing to undertake ongoing detailed work to review the emerging policy requirements and the wider evidence base relating to viability, noting the updated policy requirements in this focused consultation. They will work closely with Canterbury City Council (CCC) ahead of the Regulation 19 stage to ensure the emerging allocation is deliverable and robust and that the societal benefits that the development can potentially deliver can be maximised.

Representations have been made through every previous stage of consultation on the emerging Local Plan and supported by a suite of technical information including on matters relating to masterplanning, air quality, trees, drainage, ecology and transport. These should be considered as still relevant.

Subsequently these representations are supported by:

- Land Use Plan prepared by Milton Studio (ref: 2937-315A);
- Land Use Plan prepared by Milton Studio (ref: 2937-316A);
- Canterbury Local Plan Evidence Vol 1 – Sustainable Transport Strategy (ref: 22-022-015 Rev C); and
- Canterbury Local Plan Evidence Vol 2 – Traffic Impact Assessment (ref: 22-022-016 Rev A).

It is noted that the allocation policy has been amended following the removal of Land to the North of Hollow Lane (previously allocated and referred to as Policy C7). The link road, A2 slip roads, park and ride, and hospital safeguarding requirements have been removed from the allocation, while Merton Park now includes a slightly reduced residential quantum, and increased sports hub provision. Quinn Estates believes that Merton Park can come forward as a high quality new community to meet increasing housing needs and secure sustainable development and the emerging evidence base supports this.

Quinn envisage working closely with CCC and other key stakeholders following this Focused Regulation 18 consultation ahead of the submission version of the Plan being finalised.

a. Housing need and plan period

It is noted within Section 2 of the Focused Regulation 18 Local Plan that, including all housing land supply components, the draft local plan provides 25,354 dwellings against the need for 23,085 dwellings, providing a margin of 9.8% across the draft Local Plan. Quinn Estates supports the Council in this regard, noting that the draft Local Plan accords with the up-to-date Standard Method figure of 1,215 dwellings per annum (dpa). This accords with NPPF paragraph 62. The Council should ensure that they are satisfied that sites identified to meet this need are deliverable and developable and as noted above Quinn Estates is able to support this in relation to Merton Park.

Quinn Estates support the inclusion of the revised plan period up to 2042/43 to be in accordance with the minimum 15-year period as required by the NPPF (Paragraph 22), with an expected adoption of Winter 2027. Given previous delays with the Local Plan process, we would expect this to be updated in the event of any further delay to the Local Plan process.

b. Policy N1 (Land at Merton Park)

Draft Policy N1 details the criteria for which development of Land at Merton Park will be granted planning permission. This includes details of the development mix (including housing mix and approximate site areas of non-residential uses and open space), design and layout, landscape and green infrastructure, access and transportation and phasing and delivery. This is supported by a concept masterplan of how this could be delivered on the site.

The Allocation

Quinn Estates supports the inclusion of Land at Merton Park for mixed use development as part of Canterbury's growth ambitions up to 2042/43.

As identified in the previous representations, the development will generate a number of significant and unique economic, social and environmental benefits to help the District realise its strategic objectives. The site will provide approximately 1,930 new dwellings, which will make a significant contribution to the Council's housing requirements, including affordable housing, older persons housing, accessible housing, and self and custom-built housing. Further benefits (not exhaustive) include the sports hub, including the enhanced rugby club facilities and a new football stadium for Canterbury City FC, a new community hub with commercial and business space, and a new primary school. The site will deliver sustainable development in accordance with the spatial strategy, which prioritises development within Canterbury.

A revised masterplan (Land Use Plan and Land Budget Plan) has been prepared to support this representation, which supports this allocation. While supportive, the plans demonstrate that further work is required to refine the allocation, and Quinn Estates are willing to work with the Council to undertake this work.

Furthermore, a large amount of highways work has been undertaken since the previous representations in consultation with CCC & KCC, notably around access principles, traffic assessments and sustainable strategies, all of which have shaped the emerging policy and confirmed its allocation as sound.

Quantum of development and land use

The updated allocation has reduced the total residential figures to 1,930, from 2,250 in the previous consultation. The Merton Park boundary has also been amended with the removal of the Ridlands site from the allocation (Policy SP3, Site 10 Adopted Local Plan 2017).

While a density of 35dph by the Council is proposed within the SLAA, Policy N1 recognises that this includes the community hub. Outside of this, a density of approximately 45dph is proposed. In order to achieve a density of 45dph, this will need areas of higher and lower density across the site, and it is noted that flexibility is included within the policy wording to allow for areas of greater and lower density.

In addition to this, in order to achieve the 1,930 dwellings proposed by the Council at an average of 45dph, some other aspects of the policies will need to be reconciled. To support this representation we have undertaken updated masterplanning (see submitted land use plans) to consider the revised allocation requirements within the site boundaries. Specifically, in respect of the business space provision within Policy N1 (minimum 4,000m²), Quinn Estates wish to raise concern on this part of the allocation. In the Revised Regulation 18 Consultation (2024), the aim of policy is clear on its focus towards 'town centres', namely set out within Policy DS10 – Town Centres and Community Facilities. The current sizeable provision is contrary to the aims and objectives of Policy DS10 and the NPPF (Paragraph 90), and the Council should therefore consider a lower business space provision. Quinn Estates are willing to engage with the Council on this matter. Paragraph 36 of the NPPF is clear that plans need to be deliverable, and Quinn Estates want to work with the Council to develop and refine the allocation to ensure that it is fully deliverable over the plan period.

Quinn Estates wish to reiterate points from previous representations in relations to parcels R07 and R13 that should be allocated for residential development rather than open space under Policy N1. While it is noted that these areas are shown as open space due to the Regionally Significant Geological Site (RIGS, Coopers Pit), the Ecologia survey confirms that parts of the site can accommodate development without harming geological features, and retaining the remaining area as open space would safeguard the cliff exposures. The masterplan and policy should therefore be amended to reflect this balanced approach.

Infrastructure and Phasing

As highlighted in this and previous representations made by Quinn Estates, it is necessary to test and evolve as required the draft allocation policy to ensure that all of the detailed criteria, as well as the impact of whole Plan development management policies, will work in practice and thus illustrate that the Plan is deliverable (Paragraph 36 – NPPF). In particular, this will include further consideration of matters relating to open space, housing mix and biodiversity net gain. There are a number of key infrastructure requirements identified which will have space, cost and phasing implications attached to them. Quinn Estates would support continued engagement with officers to support the evidence on this to ensure that the final wording of Policy N1 is appropriately worded to ensure the allocation is deliverable.

It is recognised that the new allocation has removed some of the infrastructure requirements for the site, including the slip roads to the A2, link road, hospital funding and the park and ride, albeit the provision for the sports hub has been increased. Whilst Quinn Estates supports this in isolation, as part of the wider SWC SDA it is recognised that there could be further changes if the Land North of Hollow Lane is re-introduced back into the Local Plan. Quinn Estates is willing and able to continue further discussions with the Council.

With the confirmation that the fourth slip is delivered at Wincheap, this removes the need for new slips at Merton Park. Similarly, it largely precludes them being able to be at Merton Park, in addition to the four slips at Wincheap. In addition to increasing deliverability of the site, meaning Merton Park can contribute at an earlier period to Canterbury's housing supply, it also allows focus to be placed on delivery sustainable travel interventions elsewhere in Canterbury, supportive of the wider transport strategy.

While noting that some of the infrastructure requirements have currently been removed, an updated Infrastructure Delivery Plan has not been prepared to update the previous draft (October 2022). This will need to be revised, and Quinn Estates would be keen to play an active and participatory role in its evolution as it progresses to ensure that these key components of the policy are viable and deliverable. Quinn Estates is keen to understand how the provision of additional sports facilities will be funded, given the lack of evidence base in relation to this.

It is noted that Part 5 a of Policy N1 requires the delivery of on-site Wastewater Treatment Works to be delivered '*at the earliest stage possible*', amended from the original position at the last iteration of the draft Local Plan as prior to the delivery of any dwellings. Quinn Estates will continue to engage with the Council and its own consultants to confirm at what stage this will be viable or technically feasible. Quinn Estates considers that whilst the identification of land to deliver an on-site WWTW is supported as a potential way of making the future development Nutrient Neutral, given the changing landscape regarding Nutrient Neutrality the Policy should be amended to provide flexibility for the delivery of a suitable solution, thus ensuring that all parts of the allocation remain deliverable and optimising the best use of land in the most sustainable and strategic locations. This would be in line with the general thrust of Paragraph 86 of the NPPF which requires policies to be flexible to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan.

Comments are also reiterated in respect of the education provision. The Education Review prepared by EFM as part of the previous representation looked at the current and future capacity of schools to that could serve Merton Park and concluded that the provision of a 2FE primary school, favoured by the Department for Education, at Merton Park would be an appropriate mitigation solution and would provide a good balance of provision across the area. Quinn Estates maintain this position, in particularly noting the reduced allocation numbers, albeit without prejudice to the fact that a 2FE would still be suitable for a larger quantum of residential development.

Given the strategic nature of the scheme there will be longer timeframes for delivery and therefore a flexible approach needs to be incorporated to allow for changing demands or needs over this period. This is in line with paragraph 86 of the NPPF to ensure that planning policies are flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and enable rapid responses to changes in economic circumstances, and therefore consistent with national policy and meets the criteria for being sound (Paragraph 36 – NPPF).

It is therefore considered necessary that suitable caveats are included within Policy N1 to acknowledge this, and detailed comments in respect of the policy were provided during the previous representations for this site. This is particularly important in light of issues such as nutrient neutrality, whereby mitigation is necessary as part of the Habitat Regulations Assessment and a number of solutions will be required which will need to be viability tested. Specifically, section (5) of the Policy relating to phasing and delivery sets out certain time triggers for the delivery of key elements of the scheme. However, it is not clear what evidence has been used to determine many of these and if this aligns with finance and occupation triggers that make these timings viable.

In respect of a timeline, Quinn Estates envisages the following approximate phasing approach:

Application	Approval	Discharging conditions and Reserved Matters	Resolve WWTW requirements	Start on Site	First Occupations	Build out
Autumn 2026	Autumn/Winter 2027	December 2028	2028	2029	2030/1	200 per year (full build out by 2040)

Development mix

Whilst the overall balance of the different uses is supported, the precise nature of the amounts of these uses within the policy could present further challenges down the line when a planning application is

forthcoming that needs to accord with this but that further detailed work has determined cannot allow for all elements to be achieved. The wide range of different uses and infrastructure required for the site also goes hand in hand with a large number of unknowns that will not be known until a later stage for example the level of financial contributions for schools and the fluctuating cost of building materials. Similarly, the draft Policy requires compliance with Policy DS2 which specifies a specific housing mix for all development proposals, which might not be appropriate for the entire site. We therefore advise that greater flexibility is built into the policy, in accordance with national policy.

With regard to the affordable housing mix, this is set to be in line with draft Policy DS1, which requires this provision to be split between 66% affordable or social rent, 25% First Homes and 9% other home ownership models. The standard housing mix requirements do not reflect the unique characteristics and vision for Merton Park. Policy N1 should therefore incorporate site-specific criteria with sufficient flexibility to respond to market demand and viability, subject to agreement with CCC officers.

Transport

As noted, detailed transport work has been undertaken prior to this consultation, including providing information related to access principles, traffic assessments and sustainable strategies, confirmed Merton Park's allocation as sound. Quinn Estates will always look to work with the Council to support in the preparation of an evidence-base.

To support this representation, C&A have prepared further transport and highways evidence. This is in two parts:

- Volume 1 updates the Sustainable Transport Strategy in the context of the latest NPPF and the updated requirements for Policy N1 – Merton Park.
- Volume 2 updates the Traffic Impact Assessment taking into account Policy N1, the Hollow Lane site (Policy C7) and Policy N3 - relocation of Park and Ride.

Biodiversity Net Gain and Tree Cover

Quinn Estates is committed to achieving biodiversity enhancements and tree cover at Merton Park and recognise it as a key part of maximising environmental objectives and establishing and protecting habitats. Following previous representations on the matter, it is recognised and appreciated that the updated Policy N1 has removed the specific reference to achieving 20% BNG in accordance with Policy DS21, and amended to '*Incorporate opportunities for landscape and biodiversity enhancements identified within the Local Character Area H4: Nackington Farmlands set out in Canterbury Landscape Character and Biodiversity Appraisal*' (3b).

While this change is noted, we suggest it would be advisable to explicitly identify variation and exemption from Policy DS21 where justified on a site specific basis, either within Policy N1, or within Policy DS21. Quinn Estates is therefore keen to engage with officers to further discuss this and how it can most effectively be delivered. This should consider whether a qualitative approach to biodiversity gains to maximise opportunities for a range of species should dovetail with the quantitative measure of the biodiversity metric for the site and whether setting site specific parameters for both within the policy criteria could achieve the best outcome for nature and wildlife.

Notwithstanding the above, Quinn Estates wish to reiterate comments made in their previous representation in relation to development management policies and Policy DS21, that the increase to a 20% BNG improvement is not justified. The PPG is clear that "*To justify such policies they will need to be evidenced including as to local need for a higher percentage, local opportunities for a higher percentage and any impacts on viability for development*" (PPG reference ID: 74-006-20240214). This has not been demonstrated. Quinn Estates would therefore welcome further discussion with the Council on how these objectives can be realised and considers more flexibility could be built into the policy to allow this to be a firm target but not an absolute requirement in cases where site constraints or viability will not allow, in the event that 20% BNG is taken forward.

Heritage

It is noted that since the previous consultation, comments have been received from Historic England in respect of the allocation. Quinn Estates have been engaging with CCC as a result and have provided information to refine the allocation requirements on this basis.

c. Wider South West Canterbury allocation

As noted, the SWC SDA has been updated to remove Policy C7 (Land to the North of Hollow Lane) as an allocation, which was located to the west of the site and previously included for circa 800 dwellings. The removal of this site has meant considerable changes to the wider development area, in addition to site specific requirements for Policy N1. Quinn Estates note that Policy C7 benefits from the Merton Park allocation through connections towards the centre of Canterbury, whilst inclusion of the site would be of benefit to the wider SWC SDA by improving permeability. Policy C7 also accords with the spatial strategy in focusing development towards Canterbury.

The land identified under Policy N1 & former Policy C7 is being brought forward by two local established housebuilders, both renowned for delivering high quality developments. It can be expected that the high development standards associated with both groups will deliver an attractive extension to the city, both in visual terms, but also for future residents to live. Criteria 2a) for Policy N1 is clear that the design and layout should coordinate with proposals for neighbouring sites, and it is noted that in the previous draft Local Plan (2024), both Policy C6 (now N1) and Policy C7 had regard to a masterplan that demonstrates co-ordination with proposals for neighbouring sites.

It is clearly important that there should be joint working between the landowners of the allocation parcels and the promoters of the site to ensure good quality place making, connectivity and delivery of infrastructure. Quinn Estates support this, and notably continue to work alongside Pentland Homes in regards to the Policy C7 site, and maintain a good working relationship such that delivery of the SDA can be provided in a co-ordinated and timely manner.

It is acknowledged that both CCC and Kent County Council (KCC) have landholdings in relation to SWC SDA and therefore in light of this it will be necessary to establish an appropriate mechanism to ensure that multiple land ownership is not a barrier to delivery. Joint working between the respective landowners and site promoters will be essential to ensure the delivery of high-quality placemaking, including well-connected neighbourhoods, coordinated infrastructure provision, cohesive design standards, and an integrated public realm that creates a genuine sense of place and community for future residents.

d. Summary and Conclusions

Quinn Estates strongly support the inclusion of Merton Park as an allocation for mixed use development and as part of the SWC SDA within Canterbury's emerging Local Plan.

The site will deliver a sustainable development in a location that accords with the spatial strategy. The development will generate a number of significant and unique economic, social and environmental benefits to help the District realise its strategic objectives. Quinn Estates is committed to working closely with CCC, other landowners and consultees to ensure the policies for South West Canterbury enable the delivery of sustainable development of the highest quality, and refine the policy such that it can be considered sound in accordance with Paragraph 36 of the NPPF.

Viability is an important aspect of the evidence base at this point particularly given the commitment to identify and maximise the societal benefits the development can potentially deliver and as highlighted BNP Paribas are already undertaking work to assess the viability position of the Plan to support this. While it is noted that some of the infrastructure requirements have been removed as part of this most recent iteration of the draft Local Plan, these may still change and Quinn Estates therefore remain agile to any changes. Quinn Estates is keen to engage with the Council on this matter.

Should the Council wish to discuss any or all of the issues raised in these representations, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Oliver Ricketts
Senior Planner