

FAREHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL: LAND SOUTH OF FUNTLEY ROAD, FUNTLEY
APPLICATION REF: P/20/1168/OA

LANDSCAPE CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Description of the Site and Immediate Setting

The land in question comprises approximately 6.09 hectares of predominantly pastoral land located directly to the south of Funtley Road (the 'Site').

The Site has a pronounced northerly aspect, with its northern boundary sitting at approximately 19m AOD and its southern boundary at approximately 30m AOD. The current openness of the Site means that the upper parts experience a high level of exposure to the surrounding landscape, as demonstrated by the photographs submitted with the Landscape and Visual Appraisal supporting the planning application.

The pastoral land is used for horse grazing, and carries the typical character of this land use, with individual paddocks divided by post and rail fencing, and access tracks between them. A main group of agricultural buildings are present in the eastern part of the Site, accessed from Funtley Road, and these structures surround a central yard. This group is surrounded by areas of tall broadleaved vegetation, and the section of this vegetation between the buildings and Funtley Road is designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. To the west of the group of buildings lies a surfaced equestrian exercise yard.

Two further agricultural buildings are also present in the Site. These comprise a timber stable block in the centre of the Site and a barn constructed with sheet materials close to the eastern Site boundary.

With the exception of the vegetation surrounding the main group of buildings, the Site is largely devoid of trees, permitting open views across the sloping pastoral land.

The Site is bounded to the west and north by mature hedgerows, which are gappy in places permitting inward views. The southern boundary does not appear to be delineated on the ground, whilst the eastern boundary is formed by the edge of a mature wood.

The immediate setting of the Site is largely defined by a triangle formed by three infrastructure routes: The M27 motorway to the south, the former 'Deviation Line' dismantled railway to the north-west (now supporting Public Bridleway 515) and an active railway line to the north-east.

To the south, the Site is separated from the M27 corridor by a continuation of rising pastoral land, up to a maximum elevation of approximately 55m AOD. The motorway is located within a cutting and a continuous belt of vegetation is present on the northern edge of its corridor. Several 'wedges' of woodland extend from the motorway corridor northwards towards the Site. Two individual residential dwellings are located at the southern end of Honey Lane, and a group of agricultural buildings is

located within the eastern part of this area, close to a bridge crossing the motorway and connecting with the town of Fareham, which lies beyond the motorway to the south.

It is notable that a significant proportion of the rising land to the south of the Site has been granted planning permission for use as a community park, under application Ref. P/18/0066/CU.

The Site is immediately bounded to the west by Honey Lane, which is a quiet rural lane providing access to a farmstead and two individual properties. Beyond this lies the heavily wooded and embanked corridor of the Deviation Line, a dismantled railway corridor that separates the Site from the predominantly rural Meon Valley further to the west.

The northern boundary of the Site is formed by Funtley Road, a minor public highway. Opposite the Site across the public highway lies areas of existing and under construction residential dwellings associated with the village of Funtley, beyond which is a triangle of rough grassland up to the point at which the Deviation Line and existing railway line intersect. Further beyond this intersection lies the village of Knowle, set within an open countryside context comprising mixed farmland.

Directly to the east of the Site lies an area of ancient replanted woodland named Great Beamond Coppice, which is also a locally designated Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. The main railway line lies immediately beyond this wood within a vegetated corridor, and beyond this is the remainder of the village of Funtley, a linear settlement arranged along Funtley Road. The setting of the village is currently open arable land, although much of this is subject to a resolution to grant planning permission for a new garden village, which will fundamentally alter the prevailing character.

Published Character of Wider Setting

Natural England's National Character Assessment places the Site and its wider landscape setting within the southern part of the South Hampshire Lowlands National Character Area (NCA). The M27 motorway broadly follows the boundary between this NCA and the South Coast Plain NCA, although the intervening topographical ridge prevents any significant relationship between the Site and this latter NCA.

The South Hampshire Lowlands NCA is broadly described as a low-lying plain between the chalk hills of the Hampshire and South Downs, and the coastal plain and Southampton Water. Its composition is noted as being approximately 30% urban, with the open countryside comprising predominantly pastoral farmland and woodland.

The key characteristics of this NCA are listed to be as follows, with those considered to be representative of the Site and its setting highlighted in bold text:

- Low-lying, undulating plain abutting the chalk downs to the north and the coastal plain and Southampton Water to the south. An underlying geology of open marine, estuarine and freshwater Tertiary gravels. Soils over much of the area are heavy and clayey with localised pockets of more freely draining soils on higher land.

- Fast-flowing chalk rivers in wide, open valleys with water meadows and riparian vegetation that provide valuable wildlife habitats for species such as breeding and overwintering birds, otter, water vole, Atlantic salmon, brown trout and the endangered, native white clawed crayfish.
- **Well-wooded farmed landscape (particularly to the east of Southampton), characterised by ancient woodland such as Botley Wood and West Walk, the remnants of the Royal Hunting Forest of Bere.**
- **Mixed agricultural landscape dominated by pasture with small pockets of horticulture and arable.**
- **An intimate and enclosed field pattern with many small and irregular fields generally bounded by mixed-species hedgerows or woodland.**
- **In parts, a very urban NCA dominated by the city and port of Southampton and other large towns such as Waterlooville and Havant. The more rural hinterland is characterised by small, loosely clustered or dispersed settlements, intermixed with isolated farmsteads.**
- **Fragmented by major transport links, including the M3 to London and the M27 to Portsmouth which cross the NCA.**

The Site and its setting are therefore considered to be strongly representative of the South Hampshire Lowlands NCA.

At county level, the Hampshire Integrated Character Assessment, undertaken in 2012, places the Site on the eastern edge of the Meon Valley (3e) Landscape Character Area, which is associated with the Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale Landscape Character Type. The Portsdown Hill Open Downs (8i) Landscape Character Area is located to the east, although the woodland presence within the landscape largely limits the relationship between the Site and this area, as does the Site's northerly aspect.

The key characteristics of the Meon Valley Landscape Character Area are stated to be as follows, with those considered to be representative of the Site and its setting highlighted in bold text:

- A fairly narrow major river valley with a relatively narrow valley floor, which passes through downland, lowland mosaic and coastal plain landscapes.
- Southern valley sides are indented by dry valleys and scarp faces in the downland section.
- **Increasing proportion of grazing and improved grassland land on the valley sides from the downland to the lowland landscapes.**
- **Woodland is common on the steeper slopes and is a particular feature where the Meon passes through the lowland mosaic and coastal plain landscapes.**
- Internationally significant coastal habitats in its lower reaches and other nationally valued woodland and chalk grassland sites.
- The canal and associated features between the Solent and Titchfield are thought to be the second oldest waterway in the country.

- **Major communication links follow close above the valley floor, e.g. A32, B3334 and the disused Meon Valley railway (now a recreational route).**
- **Extensive informal enclosure field patterns and significant water meadow (fairly simple layout) survive in the downs section while assarts and formal parliamentary enclosures dominate the lowland mosaic section.**
- Strong pattern of nucleated settlements within the valley at strategic river crossing points with relatively little 20th century expansion.

The Site and its setting are therefore considered to be moderately representative of the Meon Valley Landscape Character Area.

The key characteristics of the Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale Landscape Character Type are stated to be as follows, with those considered to be representative of the Site and its setting highlighted in bold text:

- Undulating predominantly clay soils with sandy gravelly outcrops.
- Clay soils low lying - seasonally wet and not particularly good agricultural grade.
- High biomass and moderately high heathland creation opportunity.
- Associated with small chalk fed streams.
- Large Ancient woodlands, blocky shaped woodland and thick hedgerows.
- **Proportion of grazing land slightly more than arable but less permanent pasture than most other Lowland Mosaic Types.**
- Low built up percentage compared with other Lowland Mosaic Types
- Significant association with common land and open access.
- Surprising sense of remoteness as often close to large centres of population.
- Rich in wildlife designations and BAP priority habitats particularly Ancient semi natural woodlands, hedgerows, neutral and acid grassland, heath associated habitats, freshwater associated and wet woodland.
- **High proportion of assarting.**
- Numerous cultural associations from the medieval period and Royal hunting forests, including deer parks and lodges and wood pasture. Little intensive exploitation pre Saxon period and less intensively post disafforestation than most lowland mosaic types.
- Few settlements and development.
- Particular association with Common Edge settlement type.
- Low density dispersed settlement pattern where this type occurs in North and South.
- Hampshire and South of New Forest National Park.

The Site and its setting are therefore considered to be slightly representative of the Lowland Mosaic Medium Scale Landscape Character Type.

At local level, the Fareham Landscape Character Assessment places the Site within the Meon Valley (6) Landscape Character Area, associated with the 'Mixed Farmland and Woodland: Small-Scale' Landscape Type. As with the county level assessment, the railway line divided the Meon Valley Landscape Character Area from the North Fareham Downs Landscape Character Area, although the primary association is with the former.

The Meon Valley Landscape Character Area is characterised as follows, with those characteristics considered to be representative of the Site and its setting highlighted in bold text:

- **A relatively gentle but distinctive valley landform, running through the Borough from Funtley in the north to the coast at Hill Head.**
- Distinct valley floor characterised by small-scale pasture and variable cover of trees (typically willow and alder) in the narrower, upper reaches and broadening into open floodplain pasture and complex of wetland communities to the south at Titchfield Haven, where the natural qualities of the valley and maritime influences are most strongly evident.
- Restricted vehicular access to the valley floor resulting in a generally quiet and intimate character in the northern and southern sections of the valley, making it attractive for quiet recreation and for wildlife.
- **A mosaic of open farmland (part of the wider coastal plain farmland), minor wooded valleys and smaller, enclosed pastures bordering the valley to the south of Titchfield, the latter helping to buffer the intrusion of adjacent urban development and fringe farmland to the east on the setting of Titchfield Haven.**
- A more fragmented character and stronger influences of urban development and roads within the central section of the valley, resulting in some damage to the integrity of the valley form and a more suburban character.
- Garden centre and horticultural activity around Titchfield Abbey which detract from the setting of the historic Abbey and associated buildings (a Conservation Area).
- **Dense mosaic of wooded farmland mainly to the north of the railway which provides an intimate, rural context for the river valley, but with localised intrusion of the M27 motorway bridge.**

The Site and its setting are therefore considered to be moderately representative of the Meon Valley Landscape Character Area.

A further local level landscape character assessment was undertaken in 2017 and this also placed the Site within the Meon Valley Landscape Character Area, with the same key characteristics, indicating a continuity of character over the intervening period.

Collectively, these assessments demonstrate that the Site is associated with the Meon Valley as opposed to the more open downland to the east, with the railway line noted in both local level

assessments as marking a 'sharp change in character'. This is also expressed in the association of the Site with a small-scale landscape type of mixed woodland and farmland.

It is also noted, however, that the central part of the Meon Valley, in which the Site is located, is the most disturbed by a range of urbanising influences such as the M27 motorway and settlements, which serves to reduce its overall sensitivity.

Recent Planning History

In 2018 an outline planning application (Ref. P/18/0067/OA) was submitted for the construction of up to 55 dwellings and associated uses on the northern part of the Site, replacing the existing structures, which are proposed to be demolished. A comprehensive Landscape and Visual Appraisal was submitted with this application demonstrating the evidence base that informed the emerging development design and the general acceptability of the development in landscape and visual terms.

This scheme was granted planning permission on 2nd September 2020. A Parameters Plan was approved as part of this permission, which shows a developable area in the northern part of the Site with its southern boundary sitting at approximately 25m AOD, surrounded by a landscape buffer. Wedges of open space are shown running through the built form between the northern and southern boundaries, indicating view corridors to the elevated ground to the south. Access is taken from Funtley Road using the existing access point and an east-west spine road is shown serving the developed area. A pedestrian and cycle route is shown passing through the easternmost green wedge, connecting Funtley Road in the north with Thames Drive in the south via the elevated open land to the south, the existing vehicular access bridge over the M27 and Public Footpath 91.

The Officer's Report for the application addressed the requirements of Policy DSP40, which relates to additional housing sites outside of the urban area boundary, particularly in absence of a 5-year housing supply. It commented that whilst the land within that application is within the countryside, it relates well to the existing built form on the northern side of Funtley Road, which is also located within the countryside in policy terms.

In terms of design and landscape requirements within Policy DSP40(iii), the Officer's Report commented that the land in question isn't located in a Strategic Gap, but is in a highly sensitive landscape given its association with the Meon Valley and its position forming the 'natural edge' of Funtley. It notes that the applicant has sought to minimise the harm of introducing development into this sensitive setting by an iterative design process and incorporating positive measures such as retention of the northern boundary hedgerow and setting back development from this feature, and incorporating 'green' or 'view' corridors to preserve the relationship with the elevated land to the south. The proposed density of approximately 22 dwellings per hectare was seen to be an appropriate response to the settlement edge location, and lower than the density of the existing housing to the north. It was therefore concluded that this scheme met the requirements of Policy DSP40(iii).

Current and Emerging Policy Context

The Adopted Local Plan includes Fareham Core Strategy, which was adopted in 2011, setting out the overall spatial strategy for the borough, and a number of core delivery policies to achieve this. The policies map for this strategy shows the whole Site to be in an area outside of defined settlement boundaries, and the western part of the Site to be within an area of 'Existing Open Space' associated with the Deviation Line.

The following Core Strategy policies are considered to be relevant in this instance:

- CS14 Development Outside Settlements
- CS21 Protection and Provision of Open Space

The Part 2 Local Plan, entitled 'Development Sites and Policies' was adopted in 2015, setting out the Council's approach to managing and delivering development identified in the Core Strategy. The following policies from this document are considered to be relevant in this instance:

- DSP6: New Residential Development Outside of the Defined Urban Settlement Boundaries

The Council is currently working on a new Local Plan, and a Publication Local Plan was launched for consultation in November 2020.

The draft Policies Map associated with the emerging Local Plan shows the northern part of the Site, which currently has residential planning permission (see above), as an allocation for housing development (covered by draft Policy HA10). The part of the Site outside of this allocation is shown as being located within an Area of Special Landscape Quality, a Strategic Gap and a Public Open Space Allocation.

The following draft policies within the emerging Local Plan therefore apply to the southern part of the Site, outside of the allocated area:

- Strategic Policy DS1: Development in the Countryside
- Strategic Policy DS2: Development in Strategic Gaps
- Strategic Policy DS3: Landscape
- Policy NE10: Protection and Provision of Open Space

Description of Proposed Development

The submitted planning application is an outline application for up to 125 dwellings and associated uses, with all matters except access held in reserve. Access is proposed via the existing Site entrance in its eastern part, in a similar manner to the consented scheme.

An Illustrative Masterplan has been submitted with the planning application. This shows a broadly similar layout to the consented application, but with development extending approximately 100m further to the south, with its southern boundary sitting approximately 10m above the consented development edge in the landscape. A central spine road serves the development and whilst two green corridors are shown through the scheme perpendicular to the prevailing contours, these are notably narrower than those in the consented scheme, representing straight corridors as opposed to wedges that present a wide opening to the surrounding landscape. It is also notable that the alignment of the corridors differ from the consented scheme, in which sight lines from the green wedges met at the point at which pedestrians would enter the Site from the M27 bridge crossing. The Illustrative Masterplan includes the provision of a Locally Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) on the southern edge of the development, although no design intentions are given for this feature and there is a risk of it drawing the eye as a starkly coloured feature.

In addition to the built development proposals, the application includes a new community park, presumably intended to supersede the one already consented in the southern part of the Site.

The applicant has submitted an 'LVA Addendum' in support of the planning application, prepared by a different author to that of the consented scheme, although the original LVA is appended to this document. This Addendum seeks to make the case that the Site is located within a discrete landscape (the aforementioned 'Funtley Triangle') that has been degraded over many years through the introduction of urban fringe uses such as residential development and equestrian activity.

The Addendum refers to a 'landscape-led' approach to the design of the proposed development, although it does not offer a clear explanation as to the difference between the two schemes other than referring to it occupying a 'slightly increased area', which in itself is a questionable statement given that the built area has increased by an estimated 50 per cent. Rather, the Addendum seeks to make a case that the proposed scheme is acceptable in its own right. In particular, a detailed analysis of why development further up the hill is acceptable is notably absent.

The Addendum references the finding of the previous LVA, although rather confusingly it appears to suggest that the short-term landscape effects of 125 dwellings over a greater site area would be 'Moderate adverse' when the assessed effect of the original, smaller scheme is 'Moderate-Major negative' with no explanation of this difference.

In terms of visual impacts, the Addendum generally agrees with the original LVA that visual receptors are largely restricted to the contained landscape in which the Site is located. There is a notable difference in results, however, in that the LVA Addendum implies that a greater volume of development extending higher uphill has the potential for long term benefits, in comparison to Minor negative effects arising from the smaller scheme in the original LVA.

Consideration of Landscape Implications

The Site is located within the open countryside, in an area that is associated with the Meon Valley, but separated from the main alignment of the valley by the wooded and embanked Deviation Line dismantled railway. This line, along with the main railway to the east and M27 to the south combine to locate the Site within a discrete pocket of landscape, which expresses the topographical character of a small tributary valley of the Meon.

The Site's position on the southern valley slopes mean that it is steeply sloping in comparison to much of the surrounding landscape, with a strong sense of exposure to the northern valley slopes, and elevated views across much of the Site area from the elevated southern entrance point to the Community Park.

The proposed development, in comparison to the previous consented scheme, will bring development significantly further up the hill, increasing this exposure, whilst also reducing the strength of the visual relationship between the upper and lower parts of the Site by narrowing the green corridors within the development. This is anticipated to result in a greater degree of harm than the previous scheme through a greater urbanisation of the prevailing landscape character, greater exposure to the surrounding landscape and reduced opportunities for mitigation. The Addendum LVA submitted in support of the proposed development does not offer a clear and evidence-based analysis of this greater harm, relying partially upon work that has been undertaken for the previous scheme but drawing contradictory conclusions of less harm or new benefit from a greater extent of development.

In policy terms, the adopted Local Plan shows the Site to be within the open countryside, and therefore Policy DSP40 applies, with criterion (iii) requiring development to '*minimise any adverse impact upon the Countryside*'. The currently consented scheme upon the Site has clearly done this, through an iterative design process with the Local Planning Authority, which has resulted in a development area located below the 25m contour and measures to ensure a positive relationship between the upper and lower parts of the valley, secured via a submitted Parameters Plan.

As noted above, the proposed development has sought to water down a number of the positive design measures embodied within the consented scheme whilst more than doubling the amount of housing within the Site, and therefore it is not considered to satisfy the requirements of Policy DSP40(iii) in the manner that the consented scheme has.

The emerging Fareham Local Plan places greater emphasis on the landscape value of the Site, with the draft policy map placing the southern parts of the Site (outside of the consented development area) within both an Area of Special Landscape Quality and a Strategic Gap, on account of its association with the Meon Valley, which forms the core of both designations.

The draft Strategic Policy DS2, which relates to Strategic Gaps, states that development proposals '*will not be permitted where they significantly affect the integrity of the gap and the physical and visual separation of settlements or the distinctive nature of settlement characters*'. The existing settlement of Funtley occupies a valley bottom location, with no existing development exceeding 20m AOD. Whilst the consented scheme, extending to 25m AOD and reflecting the development to the north of

Funtley Road is considered appropriate in terms of preserving the integrity of the Gap and the sense of separation, the proposed development at 35m AOD and extending significantly further south is considered to be inappropriate within the Meon Gap and would fail to meet the requirements of this policy.

The draft Strategic Policy DS3, which relates to the Area of Special Landscape Quality states that development proposals '*shall only be permitted in these areas where the landscape will be protected and enhanced*'. Based upon the analysis above, it is considered that the proposed development does not protect and enhance the local landscape, and that it would fail to satisfy the requirements of the draft Policy.

The placement of the Site in an area of local landscape designation within the emerging Local Plan is also considered to trigger paragraph 170(a) of the NPPF, which requires valued landscapes to be protected and enhanced in a manner commensurate with their identified quality in the development plan. Based upon the analysis above, it is considered that the proposed development would not protect and enhance its landscape setting.

Consideration of Visual Implications

The Addendum LVA submitted for the proposed development is correct in identifying that the Site is located within a relatively discrete visual environment contained by a combination of topography and vegetation. It identified the principal visual receptors as being the residents of the dwellings to the north of Funtley Road, the users of Funtley Road and the users of Public Bridleway 515, which follows the Deviation Line, but which is screened by vegetation for most of its length. Both the Addendum LVA and the original LVA that precedes it identify that significant adverse impacts are anticipated in the early years of the development, particularly upon the receptors associated with Funtley Road, but that the significance is likely to reduce with time.

Since the submission of the planning application, a permissive path has been established through the northern and southern part of the Site as part of the Section 106 agreement for development to the north of Funtley Road (Application Ref. P/17/1135/OA), and will be imminently opening to the public. The users of this route will therefore form an additional visual receptor, and they currently experience rural views with very little development towards the western slopes of the Meon Valley from this route as it passes through the south of the Site. The proposed development is anticipated to fundamentally urbanise this view in the long term, with its elevated position precluding effective mitigation, and therefore it is considered that users of this route would experience significant adverse impacts.

Conclusion

Based upon the above analysis, the proposed development would result in significant harm upon both the local landscape character and visual environment, and would fail to satisfy the requirements of Policy DSP40(iii) and paragraph 170 of the NPPF. It would also fail to satisfy the requirements of draft Strategic Policies DS1, DS2 and DS3 and Policy NE10 of the emerging Fareham Local Plan.

It is therefore recommended that the proposed development be refused planning permission.

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3rd March 2021