

## Examination of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2011 to 2029)

MF24 – Landscape impact of Basingstoke Golf Course (SS3.11) and Hounsome Fields (SS3.12), particularly how this issue was considered in the Sustainability Appraisal.

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 At the hearing session on 21 October, the South West Action Group (SWAG) raised concerns that the landscape impact of development at Basingstoke Golf Course and Hounsome Fields had not been properly considered in the Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal (SA). In particular, it was suggested that the council had not considered the implications of development extending to the south-west beyond the ridge line.
- 1.2 They also cited what they considered to be inconsistencies between the SA that the council had published at the time of submission (SA02, April 2014 - with Addendum SA01, August 2014) and the revised SA (PS/02/16) published in May 2015 after Hounsome Fields had been included in the Plan.
- 1.3 The Inspector therefore asked the council to prepare a statement to address these issues.

### **2. Sustainability Appraisal**

- 2.1 The Submission Local Plan is supported by a detailed and robust SA that informed the location and scale of the site allocations, and the relevant policies.
- 2.2 The SA includes a number of appendices. Appendix 14 assessed how each of the potential site allocations performed against the 20 agreed sustainability objectives. This included objective 5, which is, 'to protect and enhance the distinctiveness and quality of the local landscape, soils, geological and geomorphologic interests'.
- 2.3 A number of appraisal criteria were identified for each objective to guide the relevant assessments. For objective 5 these included, 'Will it protect areas of highest landscape value?' and 'Will it protect and enhance the borough's landscape character and diversity?'. The assessment, alongside other important parts of the Local Plan evidence base, including the Site Assessment (HO04), informed decisions regarding which sites should be allocated in the Plan, and identified relevant issues which would require mitigation, potentially through suitable criteria-based policies.
- 2.4 Appendix 18 of the SA separately assessed the impact of each of the policies in the Submission Local Plan, and how each would deliver the objectives of the SA. It is important to note that this assessment was distinct from that in

appendix 14, as it focused upon the impact of the policies themselves and their criteria, rather than the suitability of individual site allocations. There is not considered to be any inconsistencies between the two appendices.

- 2.5 When the council consulted upon proposed modifications to the Plan in May 2015, including the new allocation at Hounsome Fields, some amendments were made to the SA appendices. For clarity, these are shown as tracked changed in the new SA. As a new site-specific policy was required for Hounsome Fields (Policy SS3.12), a new assessment was added to Appendix 18 to assess the impact of that specific policy. The amendments were minor and it is considered that the council's approach to assessing the suitability of site allocations has been both consistent and robust.

### **3. How were landscape considerations taken into account?**

- 3.1 As set out above, the SA assesses how each of the potential housing development sites would impact upon the landscape. This builds upon the detailed Site Assessment work, which itself built upon relevant technical studies including the council's Landscape Capacity Study (ENV08). This latter document takes into account a sites' visual sensitivity, the sensitivity of the landscape and its landscape value to conclude on a sites' overall capacity for development. This assessment was undertaken in accordance with best practice which was outlined in The Countryside Agency's 'Landscape Character Assessment 2002' and the subsequent 'Topic Paper 6: Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity (2006)', as well as The Landscape Institute/IEMA 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment'.
- 3.2 The assessments of the Basingstoke Golf Course site both cross-reference to the findings of the Landscape Capacity Study, where the site is identified to have a 'medium landscape capacity', and as a result the site is given a neutral score in the SA assessment. Although the Landscape Capacity Study does not specifically reference the role of the ridgeline, it concludes that the sensitivity of this site is principally related to its enclosure and screening. As acknowledged by the Local Plan Inspector in 2005 (para 11 of the SWAG evidence), development has already crossed to the south facing slopes of the ridge within the Beggarwood housing area on this side of the A30, and more recently, planning permission has been given immediately to the north of the Golf Course site at Area N, which is also on the south-facing slopes.
- 3.3 Hounsome Fields is assessed in a similar manner. The assessment in the SA identifies that the Landscape Capacity Study gives the site a low capacity for development and the site is attributed a 'double negative' score in this regard. The impact assessment of the allocation in the SA is explicit about its relationship to the ridgeline and states that, 'The site is located on extensive sloping land to the south of a ridgeline that contains much of the urban development to the north'.

- 3.4 However, as previously set out, site selection is a balancing exercise, and when all matters were taken into account, it was still considered that the site offered the most opportunities for development when compared to the alternatives. As landscape had been highlighted as an issue requiring mitigation through the SA process, this was addressed through the inclusion of criteria d) and e) in Policy SS3.12.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 The Council considers that the SA has been transparent in its assessment of the two sites' potential impact upon the landscape and that there are no internal inconsistencies between the relevant appendices. The relevant assessments have not significantly changed since submission. Any differences between appendices reflects the purpose of the specific assessments, whether this is to identify the impact of potential housing development sites on social, economic and environmental issues, or assess the suitability of specific policies and the mitigation measures that they include.
- 4.2 Whilst it is recognised that negative impacts were identified in relation to Hounsome Fields for landscape impact, the SA provides a suitable framework for considering each of the opportunities and constraints associated with potential development sites, and enables a balanced judgement to be reached. It should also be recognised that the SA is only one of a number of evidence base documents that have been produced to determine the most suitable housing allocations for the borough and how these could be most effectively delivered. The council's evidence base has robustly assessed landscape character and this has informed the SA, the Plan's site allocations and policy wording. The site policies have been drafted in response to the outcomes of the evidence base, including the SA, and relevant criteria have been added as a result to address the relevant impacts.