

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

MF12 – Statement on Policy EM1 - Landscape, particularly with regards to flexibility and how the policy relates to the Plan’s objectives.

1.1 At the hearing session on 13 October, issues were raised regarding the suitability of certain aspects of draft Policy EM1-Landscape. The Inspector recommended that relevant parties forward suggested policy wording amendments to the council which would address the concerns they raised. As a result, the council has received two sets of suggested policy amendments, which are provided below. The council has also outlined its view on the suitability of the proposals made, particularly in light of national policy and guidance. Discussions with Natural Basingstoke remain on-going at the time of writing and their concerns will be considered in MF13.

1.2 Barton Willmore responded, on behalf of Segro, as follows:

Part of our representation for Policy EM1 – Landscape, was for it to be reviewed as the current wording does not reflect the supporting text (6.11), stating that the ‘requirements of Policy EM1 will be applied flexibly depending on the nature and scale of the proposals’.

This requirement for flexibility and assessing proposals on their scale and nature is welcomed, as the dated landscape character assessment (LCA) does not identify the capacity of an area to accommodate change, nor the positive strategies to accommodate development. Therefore, any development would unlikely be wholly sympathetic to the existing character or be able to demonstrate a positive relationship to intended strategies to development, as these are not stated within the LCA; which has not been prepared to on a strategy to meet objectively assessed development.

The wording of Policy EM1- Landscape could be amended to incorporate Para 6.11, as such:

“Policy EM1 – Landscape

The requirements of Policy EM1 shall be applied flexibly to ensure a proportionate approach depending on the nature and scale of proposals and their relationship to the landscape character and visual quality of the area concerned, identified via a proportionate assessment, which pays particular regard to:.....

1.3 The council have considered the revised wording proposed by Barton Willmore. and are of the view that this wording would weaken the policy, diluting the current requirement to demonstrate that development proposals are sympathetic to the character and visual quality of the area in which development is proposed. In addition, the proposed wording could result in

confusion and disagreement in relation to whether proposed development is of a sufficient scale to warrant having to respect the character and visual amenity of an area, and whether landscape assessment is required.

1.4 The policy currently advises of the need for appropriate assessment, and paragraph 6.11 of the supporting text states that the policy will be applied flexibly. On this basis it is considered that the policy is reasonable, sound and robust and that the changes are not required.

1.5 Mr Edward Dawson, representing CPRE, responded as follows:

'landscapes have a fundamental role to play in maintaining and enhancing the character of the borough. This should be stated plainly, in support of other Plan objectives. The existence of particular landscape qualities should seek to have a prevailing effect in development management decisions. This approach should be reflected and recognised in the policy and subtext'. The revisions are:

Insert after first sentence: 'The presence of particular landscape qualities may have an overriding effect in deciding the outcome of development proposals.'

Insert in second sentence after 'likely to be affected': 'either visually or physically'.

1.6 In terms of the first suggestion, the Plan, as currently written, recognises the importance of the borough's countryside as one of its key assets, and the need to conserve and, where possible, enhance the borough's landscape. However, the landscape impact of any proposal must be considered alongside other relevant issues in order to ensure that a balanced and appropriate judgment is reached. Relevant factors, and the weight that should be given to them, will vary from one proposal to another and the plan, as currently worded, enables appropriate weight to be given to the relevant issues. The inclusion of additional wording stating that 'landscape may have an overriding effect in deciding the outcome of development proposals' is considered unnecessary and unsuitable as the policy already affords significant weight to the landscape, whilst enabling an appropriate and balanced approach to be taken. If this wording was added here, it raises the question of whether this approach should also be taken to other policies.

1.7 In terms of the second suggestion, it is considered that the proposed wording would help to clarify the difference between impacts on visual amenity and landscape character. Whilst the word 'physically' is perhaps unhelpful in this context, this could suitably be replaced with the term 'landscape character' to retain the same meaning to the changes put forward. Therefore it is proposed that in light of the suggested wording that the policy is updated as follows:

'Development will be permitted only where it can be demonstrated, through an appropriate assessment, that the proposals are sympathetic to the character and visual quality of the area concerned. Development proposals must respect,

*enhance and not be detrimental to the character or visual amenity of the
landscape likely to be affected, paying particular regard to:*