

The Welborne Plan – Public Examination

Statement of Winchester City Council (WP041)

Issue 3

Site, Setting, Allocations, Design Principles and Character Areas (WEL3-WEL8)

Question 3.1- Is the proposed boundary of Welborne appropriately justified?

3.6.1 The boundaries of Welborne that are of particular concern to Winchester City Council are the western and northern edges, which form the shared local authority boundary between Fareham Borough and Winchester City Councils. Through the evolution of the South East Plan, followed by the Fareham Core Strategy and the Winchester Core Strategy, it has been established that the built part of Welborne should be within Fareham Borough and that land within Winchester District should be retained as open land separating Welborne from nearby settlements.

3.6.2 The 'red line' boundary of Welborne in the Welborne Plan reflects the evolution of the Welborne proposal and is consistent with the Fareham and Winchester Core Strategies. The Winchester Core Strategy gives a commitment to work with Fareham to deliver Welborne and to retain land within Winchester District as open areas to separate Welborne from adjoining settlements (policy SH4). The boundary also reflects the fact that a plan produced by Fareham Borough cannot make formal proposals in a neighbouring authority.

3.6.3 There was potential for the originally-proposed Area Action Plan to include land within Winchester but, given the provisions of both Core Strategies, this was not felt by either authority to be necessary or desirable. Similarly, there has been recent discussion of whether the Winchester Local Plan Part 2 should make allocations of land for uses associated with Welborne. As land within Winchester District is proposed for SANGs and green connections, which are allowed within the terms of Winchester Core Strategy policy SH4, it was concluded that it was not necessary to include a site allocation within Winchester's Local Plan Part 2. Also, to include such an allocation could raise difficulties in terms of Winchester demonstrating deliverability when it may not have direct control over any Welborne planning applications.

3.6.4 Subject to its objections in relation to the secondary school location (see Issue 6), the City Council supports the approach of indicating SANGs, green connections, etc on the Strategic Framework Diagram. It therefore supports the proposed boundary and considers it is justified and consistent with other parts of the Development Plan for Fareham and Winchester.

Change sought - none

Question 3.6 - Will the identified settlement buffers be sufficient to ensure the satisfactory achievement of the Council's objective of maintaining settlement separation? Are the references to precise distances in policy WEL5 unduly prescriptive?

- 3.6.1 Winchester City Council considers that the extent of the proposed northern buffer is not supported by the evidence. In terms of whether the policy is unduly prescriptive, the City Council does not believe it is, on the contrary, it is important for the Plan to be clear about what its requirements are and their extent.
- 3.6.2 With regard to the extent of the buffer, the Plan refers to the width of the buffer (50 metres) in policy WEL5, with the explanatory text (paragraph 3.70) noting that there is an important ridge north of the 50 metre contour line. The LDA Landscape Study 2012 (Document EV18) causes some confusion as the map at Fig 2.1 (page 2) labels the northern-most part of the Welborne site as 'Zone 1A', whereas the description of the area in the accompanying text (pages 8-9) appears to refer to the northern-most land as 'Zone 1B (North)'. As the description of Zone 1B on pages 8-9 of Document EV18 is clearly referring to land north of the Knowle Road, including Blake's Copse, the Council's representations and this statement also refer to the northern-most area as Zone 1B.
- 3.6.3 The LDA Landscape Study identifies Zone 1B as an 'Area of Special Landscape Character' and identifies the ridgeline on the northern edge as a 'visual barrier' (Figure 3.1). However, the 50m contour, and hence the ridgeline, extends well within the Welborne area. The Location Plan at Fig 1.1 of the Landscape Study shows contour lines and the 50m contour runs roughly mid-way between Haytesbury Farm and the northern edge of Welborne (running roughly from the north-western corner of Blake's Copse to the south eastern corner of Fiddler's Green). As such, the ridgeline is not confined to the northern edge of the Welborne site, it extends into the site by typically about 200 metres. Therefore, a 50m buffer will not prevent development of housing on this particularly prominent and sensitive part of the area
- 3.6.4 As part of the evidence work for its Local Plan Part 1 – Joint Core Strategy, the City Council produced a 'Fareham Strategic Development Area (SDA) Site Assessment', which can be viewed at: <http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-base/site-assessments/fareham-sda/> This assessment was produced to test whether any of the built part of the SDA (as it was then) should be accommodated on land within Winchester District. Its conclusions are that this was not appropriate, see extract at Appendix A, and included the following statement:

- *There are prominent views to and from the SDA from public footpaths following the District boundary; to and from Knowle and longer distance views from footpaths both to the N and S on higher ground over 45.00m above sea level.*

3.6.5 Although the Assessment was obviously concerned with land within Winchester District, it assessed views from within Fareham Borough and identifies "*prominent views to and from the SDA*" relating to higher ground above 45m. If land above 45m were excluded from development this would affect most of the land north of Heytesbury Farm. It is, therefore, clear from both the LDA Landscape Study and the WCC Landscape Assessment that the 'buffer' in this part of the Welborne site is justified more by the need to avoid development on a sensitive and visually prominent part of the site, rather than as a 'settlement buffer'. There is clearly considerable land within Winchester District between Welborne and Wickham which is protected by the Winchester Local Plan gap policy and which will fulfil the 'buffer' role. Accordingly, the extent of the buffer should be determined by reference to the need to avoid development of visually sensitive parts of the site, and to fill a gap in the existing woodland, rather than being based on a standard 'settlement buffer' width of 50m used elsewhere on the site.

3.6.6 The evidence suggests that it is land between the 45m contour (Winchester Landscape Assessment) and the 50m contour (LDA Landscape Study) that needs to be protected from development, suggesting a 'buffer' width of 200-400m. This would also be consistent with the LDA Landscape Study recommendation: "*extend woodland planting along the ridge at the northern edge of the area to strengthen the woodland backdrop of the area, reinforce its enclosed character and close the gap to any potential views from the north*". Given that there is a gap in the wooded cover on the ridge in this location, the provision of a substantial area of woodland planting is needed to meet this recommendation. This would provide a backdrop to the development in views from the south and complete the wooded 'crown' to the ridge in views from the north.

3.6.7 The provision of such an area of woodland planting in this northern-most part of the site would also link Fiddler's Green/Dash Wood with Blake's Copse, providing a more continuous wooded area along the ridgeline. It would add to a wider woodland corridor, linking with woodland blocks to the east of the A32. This would be more robust in terms of providing accessible green infrastructure (a 'strategic green infrastructure corridor' is identified in this location on the Strategic Framework Diagram) and could contribute to the provision of SANGs on land within the development consortium's control.

3.6.8 Accordingly, the City Council concludes that the proposed 50m buffer is inadequate and fails to address the need identified in the evidence base. Therefore, the City Council seeks amendments to policy WEL5 and the Welborne Policies Map to require a substantially larger woodland buffer which would avoid development in the most visually sensitive areas and help to secure a substantial woodland block to screen views and link Fiddler's Green/Dash Wood and Blake's Copse. This would be justified by the evidence and would have benefits for biodiversity, landscape and informal recreation.

Change sought - Amend WEL5 text under the 'Wickham' heading to read: "Land within the Welborne Plan boundary comprising Blakes Copse, the rear of properties on Hoads Hill and the northernmost edge of the Welborne site (above the 50 metre contour line) is allocated as a minimum settlement buffer."

- Amend the Welborne Policies Map to show a 'Welborne Settlement Buffer' of at least 200 metres from the northern edge of the site.

APPENDIX A

EXTRACT FROM 'FAREHAM STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AREA (SDA) SITE ASSESSMENTS' - WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL 2011

Landscape Sensitivity Summary within Winchester District part of the study area.

The SDA study area comprises both protected and non-protected landscape features. The aims of the European Landscape Convention and government's place-making agenda recognise the value of all places, not simply protected areas of 'highest' quality. The local characteristics/features of the existing landscape, including those valued by the local community, are a significant factor when considering the impact of future development on the landscape and its wider contextual setting.

The appraisal establishes that the existing countryside within the Winchester District part of the study area, which includes the two areas by Knowle described as 'green buffers', is a landscape that is highly valued in terms of its key characteristics and opportunities, and is very sensitive to the impact of any major new development.

A summary of the special landscape qualities of the area include:

- Existing open land with a rural, mainly tranquil landscape character that protects the separate identities of the two individual settlements of Knowle and Wickham, and prevents coalescence with the SDA.
- The countryside that lies between Wickham in the north, Wickham Common to the east, Knowle village and the Meon valley in the west is a high quality landscape with its varied topography; intimate valley landform and landscape structure; narrow country lanes with established boundary vegetation and numerous small farmsteads, many still in active use.
- The very diverse landscape has high biodiversity value with its wide range of semi-natural habitats and numerous designated SINC's, including ancient woodland.
- The unspoilt nature of the area, sparse settlement pattern and sense of tranquillity evident throughout much of the area is considered sensitive to any large scale development and its supporting road infrastructure.
- The northern ridgeline with its wooded skyline and absence of man made landmarks is a key landscape feature.
- The ridgeline provides significant physical separation between Wickham and the SDA restricting middle and long distance views of the SDA to and from the north.

- The numerous woodlands and copses along the ridgeline serve as a main green corridor, more so where they link with mature trees and hedgerows along field and lane boundaries.
- Existing landscape characteristics provide potential for increased public accessibility into the countryside and between settlements where green corridors follow existing public rights of way. This will need to be balanced against the need to protect and enhance biodiversity with any improved access proposals planned and managed carefully to protect sensitive areas from over-use.
- In terms of unacceptable visual impact, the areas most sensitive to change are the ridgelines and higher ground around Knowle village overlooking the main area of proposed new development, in particular, panoramic views S and SE across the SDA to the coast.
- There are prominent views to and from the SDA from public footpaths following the District boundary; to and from Knowle and longer distance views from footpaths both to the N and S on higher ground over 45.00m above sea level.
- Restricted short views creating a remote feel within parts of the Meon valley, due mainly to existing woodland cover and limited public access. Although the tranquil wooded river valley provides the least intrusive views it is sensitive to disturbance from increased public access and habitat fragmentation. This will need to be taken into consideration when assessing opportunities to improve the footpath network either side of the District boundary and across the river valley.
- Existing fields immediately SE and NE of Knowle, bounded by significant mature oak trees and hedgerows protected by TPOs, create the perception of a settlement within a natural, wooded parkland setting. Because of their proximity to residential development, these areas, described as 'green buffers', are especially vulnerable to increased recreational pressure from new development. This may have a detrimental impact on the special qualities of the area, such as loss of feature specimen oaks and hedgerows, key characteristics of the area; over-use leading to degradation of landscape and natural features; conflicts of interest e.g. dog walking and childrens play; over formalisation of semi-natural areas to provide golf courses or edge of settlement recreational grounds and sports pitches with their associated requirement for suitable vehicular access, parking and building facilities; increasing access opportunities which introduce a greater likelihood of conflict through misuse e.g. fly tipping or trespassing on local farmland.

Retaining and managing these green buffers as a semi-natural landscape will help to retain and enhance existing character and local distinctiveness. It will also provide an appropriate landscape setting for Knowle village; 'natural' buffers and strengthening of green corridors may also play a role in helping to protect and improve biodiversity value.

- Natural and cultural landscape features and landmarks are key characteristics within the existing landscape; their protection safeguards local distinctiveness.

In conclusion, the recognised sensitivity of this area, its vulnerability to major new development and the need to protect the separate identity of existing settlements, avoiding coalescence with the SDA, would justify all of the SDA study area land within Winchester District being retained as green space, which should be properly managed to ensure the long term retention and enhancement of its existing rural landscape character and special qualities as identified in this appraisal.

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