1. Introduction

1.1 In December last year Fareham Borough Council published the Fareham Core Strategy Pre-Submission Draft for representations prior to submission to the Secretary of State for independent examination. The consultation period runs until 31 January 2011.

1.2 No part of the borough lies within the South Downs National Park, nor does the boundary adjoin the National Park. The borough and the National Park are 700m apart at their closest point, at Rookesbury Park, near Wickham. Nevertheless, the Borough Council has consulted the National Park Authority on the Draft Core Strategy and, in accordance with the procedure for reporting matters to the Committee agreed by the Planning Committee at its inaugural meeting in June last year, the consultation is being reported to the Committee.

1.3 In addition, the Draft Core Strategy contains a proposal which has implications for the National Park. This report explains that proposal and its implications for the National Park and recommends comments to be made thereon.

2. Background

2.1 The South East Plan (published in March 2009) apportioned 80,000 dwellings during the Plan period (2006-2026) to the South Hampshire sub-region (which lies outside but adjacent to the South Downs National Park). The South Hampshire Sub-Regional Strategy focuses development up to 2016 primarily on sites allocated in adopted development plans, on brownfield sites within existing urban areas and urban extensions. However, after 2016, whilst the Plan suggests that this focus will continue, the policy for the sub-region also provides for greenfield development concentrated in two strategic development areas (SDAs) in the sub-region. One of these is for 6,000 dwellings to the north and north-east of Hedge End, near Southampton, and the other is for 10,000 dwellings within Fareham Borough north of the M27 (Policy SH2). In addition, Policy SH3 identifies 121,000 sq.m of employment development on greenfield land in the Fareham SDA.

2.2 The ‘area of search’ for the SDA comprised a total of 491.35 hectares. Approximately 414 hectares were located within the boundaries of Fareham Borough, with the remainder located in Winchester City. The boundaries broadly followed the M27 to the south, a line to the east of Funtley and Knowle in the west, Heytesbury Farm and Crockerhill in the north, and to North Fareham Farm in the east. The area of search also included Fareham Common to the south of the M27 and a tongue of land east from North Fareham Farm which runs parallel to the motorway eastwards to an area just beyond Boarhunt Road.

2.3 The area of search rises steadily from approximately 12m AOD along the M27 to approximately 55m AOD along the northern boundary of the site. The eastern end of the
tongue of land also rises to 55m and forms the western end of Portsdown Hill. The area is illustrated on the plan attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

2.4 A number of studies have been undertaken, in particular on capacity and access options regarding the M27 motorway and on options for the realignment of the A32 including the landscape impacts of the options. Community consultation events were undertaken in 2009 and 2010. As a result of a Capacity Testing Study of the options considered at these events last year, the area of the proposed SDA has been reduced to 457 ha and the number of dwellings proposed for the SDA reduced to between 6,500 and 7,500 dwellings.

2.5 In October last year a strategic masterplan report was published. This sets out three options for the masterplan of the SDA, developed through the direction and visioning of the community at the 2009 and 2010 workshops and refined through a more detailed technical understanding of the site constraints (movement and access, noise, landscape sensitivity, existing settlements, infrastructure and district boundaries). All three options use a composite of the spatial options produced in the 2009 workshops and include:

- residential neighbourhoods (including schools and other facilities) to the west and immediately to the east of the A32;
- employment land to the immediately to the north of the M27 between the A32 and junction 11;
- green buffers to development around Knowle and Funtley and no development on protected land at the northern end of the site and to the south of the M27;
- new link road east of the A32, connecting to junction 11 of the M27; and
- potential for a new rail halt at Knowle.

2.6 To help progress the North of Fareham SDA through the planning process, an Area Action Plan (AAP) is being developed for the SDA (an AAP is a Development Plan Document in a Local Development Framework focused on a specific location or an area subject to change). The AAP will set out detailed objectives, community and infrastructure provisions and phasing of land uses.

2.7 In December last year Fareham Borough Council launched a consultation on its Proposed Submission Draft Core Strategy. It is anticipated that the Core Strategy submission draft will be submitted to the Secretary of State early this year and adopted in 2012. The AAP is also anticipated to commence early this year and will develop the Core Strategy policy approach alongside a more detailed masterplan during the course of 2011. The Borough Council aims to adopted the AAP in 2013.

3. The Draft Core Strategy

3.1 Strategic Objective SO8 of the draft Core Strategy is ‘To deliver a new settlement (Eco-town) to the north of Fareham, creating 6,500 – 7,500 homes, up to 90,750 sq.m employment floorspace, a new district centre and other supporting retail and community provision’.

3.2 Policy CS13 states that permission will be granted for this Strategic Development Area following the adoption of the AAP and the preparation of a comprehensive masterplan for the development, unless the level of housing proposed cannot be delivered without adversely affecting the integrity of protected European conservation sites.

3.3 The policy sets out a number of high level principles, including:

- the provision of Green Infrastructure to meet the needs of additional residents;
- to contribute to Biodiversity Action Plan targets to achieve a net gain for biodiversity and to ensure that any potential adverse effects on nationally and internationally protected sites identified through the Sustainability Appraisal/Habitats Regulations Assessment work are avoided;
- the incorporation of green buffers into the layout; and
- the provision of employment floorspace at junction 11 of the M27 after 2021.
4. Assessment

Principle of the proposed SDA

4.1 The proposal for a Strategic Development Area north of Fareham is to be found in the South East Plan. The Coalition Government has, of course, stated its intention to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies. However, 80,000 dwellings is the figure put forward by the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire to the Examination of the South East Plan as the figure required to support economic growth in the sub-region.

4.2 Therefore, although the South East Plan is likely to be abolished, the PUSH local authorities, which include Fareham Borough Council, may well continue to plan for this level of growth. If that is the case, then this housing must be accommodated somewhere, and some of it will be to the south of the South Downs National Park, with the attendant traffic, recreation pressure and other implications for the National Park.

4.3 This level of housing and, significantly, the proposed SDA north of Fareham (including both its proposed housing and employment land allocations), have already been scrutinised through the Examination of the South East Plan and found to be acceptable in principle. It would therefore be difficult to argue that the draft Fareham Core Strategy is unsound on the basis of this proposal, particularly as the level of housing has been significantly reduced from the 10,000 originally considered and the extent of employment land reduced from 121,000 to 90,750 sq.m.

Specific impacts of the proposed SDA

4.4 The area of land proposed for the SDA forms part of the North Fareham Downs area identified in the Fareham Borough Landscape Character Assessment. The essential characteristics of this area include 'distinctive rolling landform, typical of chalk downland', 'a distinctively rural, agrarian character with scattered farmsteads and rural lanes but few other buildings or urban fringe influences aside from the immediate M27 motorway corridor and intrusive pylons and transmission lines', and 'visual containment to the north by the strong woodland structure of the Forest of Bere character area'. (Appendix 2 is an aerial photograph of the area).

4.5 In late 2008 a landscape capacity study for a broad area of search for the SDA highlighted that the area to the east of the A32 is the most sensitive in landscape terms, reflecting the topography and presence of Portsdown Hill to the east of the SDA. The strategic masterplan report notes that 'the main part of the site west of the A32 is predominantly open, with only limited internal tree lines and hedgerows to interrupt the view. This combined with the gently sloping topography from north to south, affords panoramic views across the motorway and to the northern edge of Fareham. The western and northern boundaries of the site are generally well contained by a combination of vegetation and topography, meaning views from the adjacent settlements of Knowle and Wickham are restricted. There is however a gap in the woodland along the site’s northern boundary, which allows views into the site from Wickham and the wider countryside and potentially from the South Downs AONB [sic] and National Park'.

4.6 The strategic masterplan also explains 'At the northern part of the site sits the 50m contour ridge line. There is the perception that development should not go higher that this elevation as it may then become visible from the South Downs and Meon Valley as well as other nearby settlements such as Wickham. In principle this seems a sensible approach, though it would need to be validated with an appropriate visual impact assessment'.

4.7 The draft Core Strategy has been subject to sustainability appraisal (SA). For Policy CS13, the SA states 'Whilst the policy seeks to introduce green buffers to prevent coalescence with surrounding settlements, conserve and enhance the existing landscape features on site, promote high quality and sensitive design and implement a green infrastructure strategy to limit landscape effects, the new settlement is likely to have inevitable effects on landscape quality in the area, particularly to the north of the M27. This has the potential to have implications for views from the nearby South Downs National Park'.

4.8 The SA also notes that the development of the North of Fareham SDA has the potential to contribute to wider pressures on air quality and traffic congestion in the Borough and lead to increased greenhouse gas emissions from transport. The SA also considers that the
development of the SDA has the potential to have impacts on biodiversity assets in the area, including through the loss of habitats, additional strains on water resources, air pollution and disturbance from recreation.

4.9 There is therefore, a concern that the proposed development would be visible, at least in part, from viewpoints in the South Downs National Park. Of course, simply being visible does not necessarily mean that the development would have an unacceptable adverse impact on character, but in some cases (e.g. the proposed development at The Honey Farm at Polegate) proposed development can have an unacceptable impact on the setting of the National Park and its character and amenity.

4.10 In this instance, the proposed SDA would be approximately 1.1km from the National Park boundary at its closest point on the B2177 (see Appendix 3). However, views of the SDA from this point are blocked by existing development, vegetation and topography. There are views towards the site from higher ground further to the north-west, e.g. from the Wayfarer’s Walk near Hambledon, approximately 8 km from the SDA., but it is still partially hidden by vegetation and topography and, at this distance, the site is difficult to discern. The potentially most visible area from this elevated viewpoint would be the north-eastern edge of the proposed employment development, the highest point of the employment land allocation, particularly if there were to be high buildings here or insensitive lighting.

4.11 However, the impact of development in the proposed SDA on the South Downs National Park could be mitigated satisfactorily by not building higher than 50m AOD (subject to a detailed visual impact assessment as suggested in the strategic masterplan), enhanced buffer planting to the north and sensitive lighting proposals.

4.12 The site of the proposed SDA does form part of the wider Forest of Bere, which covers an area of approximately 100 sq miles to the south of the South Downs between Eastleigh in the west and the Hampshire/West Sussex border in the east. The Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH), adopted in June 2010, describes this area as forming a buffer to the South Downs National Park (from the urban areas to the south of the Forest). The Strategy considers, from a strategic GI perspective, that the area ‘should seek to emulate some of the sensitivity associated with land management adjacent to protected landscapes’.

4.13 As well as resulting in the loss of part of this buffer, the proposed development would lead to increased traffic, mostly heading southwards to the M27 and Fareham, but some inevitably coming north towards the National Park. In addition, such an increase in population would lead to additional recreational pressure on the South Downs, although the Panel that conducted the Examination of the South East Plan dismissed concerns about the impact of recreational pressure from the proposed 80,000 dwellings for the sub-region on European protected sites and the South Downs National Park.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Given the independent examination of the proposed SDA and its acceptance by the Panel of Inspectors and Secretary of State, it would therefore be difficult to argue that the draft Fareham Core Strategy is unsound on the basis of the proposed SDA, particularly as the level of housing has been significantly reduced from the 10,000 originally considered.

5.2 As regards the implications for the South Downs, the visual impact could be mitigated by not building higher than 50m AOD (subject to a detailed visual impact assessment as suggested in the strategic masterplan), enhanced buffer planting to the north and sensitive lighting proposals. The impacts of traffic and recreation pressure can be reduced by good public transport infrastructure and recreational facilities as part of the development and wider green infrastructure.

5.3 It is therefore concluded that the National Park Authority should not challenge the soundness of the Draft Core Strategy, but comment on the need to incorporate measures within in the actual development to reduce and mitigate the potential impacts on the South Downs National Park, which should be set out in the detailed masterplan.
6. Resource implications
6.1 Staff time.

7. Risk management
7.1 The main risk identified with the Fareham Borough Council Proposed Core Strategy is that the proposed SDA north of Fareham will have adverse impacts on the South Downs National Park. However, with careful mitigation measures, this impact can be reduced to an acceptable level.

8. Human rights, equalities, health and safety
8.1 There are not considered to be any human rights, equalities, or health and safety issues arising from this report.

9 External Consultees
9.1 None

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Appendices
1: Location of the North of Fareham SDA
2: Aerial photograph
3. Diagram showing relationship of site to SDNP boundary
4. Recommend comments

SDNPA Consultees Senior Solicitor.
Agenda Item 7 Appendix 1: Location of the North of Fareham SDA
Agenda Item 7 Appendix 2:
Aerial photograph of proposed SDA
Agenda Item 7 Appendix 3: Diagram showing location of proposed SDA in relation to the SDNP boundary
The National Park Authority thanks the Borough Council for the invitation to comment on the Proposed Submission Draft of the Fareham Core Strategy.

The only matter of concern to the Authority is proposal under Policy CS13 for a new Strategic Development Area on land to the north of Fareham. The Authority notes that both the Strategic Masterplan and the Sustainability Appraisal of the Core Strategy identify the potential for views of the proposed development from the South Downs National Park, and the Authority confirms that such views are possible and, particularly in respect of the proposed employment development, potentially adverse without mitigation.

The National Park Authority therefore expects the detailed masterplan to identify measures to mitigate the impact of the proposed development as seen from the South Downs National Park including a restriction on building higher than 50m AOD (unless otherwise indicated by a detailed visual impact assessment as suggested in the strategic masterplan, including from viewpoints in the National Park), enhanced buffer planting to the north and sensitive lighting proposals, and these measures to be incorporated into the detailed proposals.

The proposed development should also include further measures to reduce the potential impact on the South Downs National Park, including measures to encourage modes of transport other than the private car; and recreational facilities within the development or close by.