

South Downs National Park Authority - Local Plan Examination

Further Position Statement by Bayard's Fields Community Group

Matter 10 – Individual Settlements

Introduction

Bayards Fields is a site of high landscape value and heritage importance to the Steyning community, and has been designated in the Horsham District Council (HDC) Local Plan as potentially vulnerable and in need of further protection.

The Fields are within the South Downs National Park and were a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty before coming under the protection of the National Park in 2011.

The Fields are part of a network of fields belonging to the Wiston Estate that extend around Steyning and westwards to and beyond Wiston House. They have been farmed, mainly as arable fields, for centuries.

The site is outside the Steyning Built-up Boundary and has formed the historic northern boundary of the town since the fifteenth Century. Bayards Fields are in an elevated and prominent position and form important views from within and around the town.

Further Statement

In 2014 Steyning Parish Council began work on a joint Neighbourhood Plan (NP) with the adjoining parishes of Wiston, Ashurst and Bramber (SWAB). Subsequently, due to Horsham District Council's concerns about NPs in their area work was halted on the SWAB NP and in July 2017 Wiston, Ashurst and Bramber Parish Councils withdrew from the joint NP.

Bayards Fields were identified as a possible housing site in the draft SWAB NP but this was not endorsed in a public referendum. Many Steyning residents consider the South Downs around the town to be vital to the town's unique character. They are opposed to building in the National Park around the town and are particularly opposed to building in Bayards Fields. The landscape and heritage characteristics of the Fields appear to have been overlooked in the draft SWAB NP therefore a Local Green Space (LGS) application highlighting the full value of the Fields was submitted to the SDNPA in October 2017 to be considered for inclusion in the draft SDNPA Local Plan. There was no Steyning NP (SNP) at that time through which to submit the LGS application and the SDNPA was the only route available.

In May 2018 Steyning Parish Council applied to Horsham District Council to designate Steyning as a Neighbourhood Plan area and the SDNPA decided that LGS applications in areas where a NP is being prepared should be referred to the local NP Steering Group. Therefore, having considered the Bayard's Fields LGS application in September 2018 the application was passed to the Steyning Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

The new Steyning NP is at a very early stage and the initial programme shows a date of March 2020 for the Referendum – therefore the LGS application for Bayards Fields cannot be considered for inclusion via the SNP until then. If a planning application is submitted in the meantime the LGS application can no longer be considered. Considering how long ago the LGS application was submitted this does not appear to be a very fair or transparent process.

Conclusion

Given the considerable time between the submission of the LGS application to the SDNPA (October 2017) and the Referendum stage for the Steyning Neighbourhood Plan (March 2020) the Inspector is requested to allow the Bayard's Fields LGS application to be considered through the SDNPA Local Plan and not delayed until it can be considered for the Steyning Neighbourhood Plan.

Signed

Stephen Fuggles on behalf of the Bayard's Fields Community Group

November 2018