

SDNPA LOCAL PLAN – CONSULTATION RESPONSE FROM SHEET PARISH COUNCIL

Sheet Parish Council has formally reviewed and considered the Local Plan and in particular, those proposals that directly affect their community, which we believe we are able to make the most useful and informed comment on. We have founded our assessment on whether the proposals are sound and coherent. In particular, we have considered whether the proposals are in accordance with the purposes and duties of a National Park Authority.

We consider the proposal in para 9.194 to allocate land in Pulens Lane, Sheet for a major housing development to be fundamentally unsound. This is an area beyond existing settlement boundaries, and a strategic housing allocation under the terms of strategic policy SD25 can only be permitted where it complies with relevant policies in the Local Plan.

Our first major concern is that this is a site that follows the bank of the River Rother. Section 1.10 of the Plan confirms that the first purpose of a National Park is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area and a proposal to build on this rare and exceptional riverine habitat subverts this purpose. The woodland around is a SINC (site of importance for nature conservation) and we consider the meadow to be of equal importance and biodiversity. The example of the pollution and degradation of Tilmore Brook (a nearby tributary of the Rother), indicates the damage that building on this site would involve. We are further concerned that the allocation proposal acknowledges that the site is at risk of surface water flooding with several isolated low points at risk, as well as the site access road. Groundwater emergence is most likely in the floodplain. The policy suggests that the presence of flood embankments could prevent the drainage of groundwater flooding from affected areas, without commenting on the environmental impact of such structures. Pollution from the development would quickly seep into the river in the forms of garden chemicals/fertilizers to automotive fluids. The sand river bank would quickly be eroded by children and dogs (look at the examples along the river at Rotherfields). This, at a time when the SDNP is trying to encourage wildlife to return to rivers like the Rother, a case in point being the Meon where water voles have been re-introduced. Otters have been recorded by SDNP Rangers just up-stream at Stodham Park, and there is a high probability that they visit this area as well. In short, the site serves as an invaluable buffer between existing residential development and the River Rother which, with its river banks and adjoining wetlands, is of significant local landscape and nature conservation importance.

We therefore conclude that the proposal is unsound as it conflicts with the third objective of the Local plan to conserve and enhance large areas of high-quality and well-managed habitat to form a network supporting wildlife throughout the landscape. (Para 2.2)

Our second major concern is that the National Park has a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the National Park. This proposal suggests that a further 32 dwellings seek access to the broader community by means of Pulens Lane. The development is too far from the facilities of Petersfield and the broader area to reasonably suggest that motor vehicles will not be used for this. It should also be viewed as a cumulative problem, as

the Petersfield Local plan also proposes a housing development of over 80 dwellings voiding onto Pulens Lane.

Pulens Lane is already dangerously overloaded with traffic, with problems with speeding, numerous residential exits, some on blind corners, poor or absent footpaths, and a heavy load of pedestrian traffic. The road currently has no marked pedestrian crossings and no forms of traffic calming measures. The presence of schools nearby accentuates the problems. In particular, the junction of Pulens Lane and the London Road is already the scene of protracted congestion at peak periods of the day, and the junction of Durford Road and Heath Road (within the Petersfield boundary), where there has been several accidents over the past couple of years. The road is also a major link between the A3 to the B2146 traveling to the Hartings and onward to Chichester.

We further observe that this proposal takes no account of the further stresses development places on the community infrastructure beyond the road system. This should be viewed in the context of large scale housing allocations proposed for Petersfield, over 700 units in total including notably the 80 plus units on 'Penns Field' referred to above.

One of the proud qualities of the National Park is that the SDNP promote 'Distinctive Towns and Villages with real pride in their area' [Shaping the future of your South Downs National Park 2014–2019]. The very nature of this development would further blur the demarcation between Petersfield and Sheet, demeaning the sense of belonging to a distinct village and community.

We therefore conclude that the proposal is unsound as it conflicts with the eighth objective of the Local plan to protect and provide for the social and economic wellbeing of National Park communities supporting local facilities. (Para 2.2)

Finally, we should point out that this site has previously been subjected to an independent Inspectors report, when EHDC attempted to schedule it for housing in their Local Plan. The Inspector rejected this proposal in 1995, and the grounds for the rejection, being environmental degradation and traffic concerns, have grown more pressing in the years since then.