

LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATIONS

CAMBRIDGE CITY and SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

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Mrs C Hunt
Planning Policy Manager
South Cambridgeshire District Council

Dear Caroline

Interim Finding in Respect of Policy NH/12 Local Green Space

Following the hearing session on 18 January 2017, which included the consideration of 48 of the 172 sites proposed for designation as Local Green Space (LGS) in accordance with Policy NH/12, the Inspector has now carried out a number of site visits as agreed at the hearing. The Inspector has commented as follows:

Policy NH/12 seeks to respond to the requirements of paragraphs 77 and 78 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework).

The paragraphs state that "The Local Green Space designation will not be appropriate for *most* (Inspector's italics) green areas or open space. The designation should only be used:

- where green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- where the green area is *demonstrably special* (Inspector's italics) to the local community and holds a *particular local significance* (Inspector's italics), for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of wildlife; and
- where the green area concerned is local in character and is not *an extensive tract of land* (Inspector's italics).

Local policy for managing development within a LGS should be consistent with policy for *Green Belts* (Inspector's italics)".

The Inspector's preliminary comments on each of the sites are set out below (in the order in which they were viewed):

LGS Site 016-The Rouses, Bassingbourn

The site is essentially a fairly large grassed field with an overhead power line running diagonally across it. It is located between two of the other proposed LGS designations (NH/12-017 and 018) and is contiguous with both, but is materially different in character to them. From my observations, there is nothing demonstrably special in

respect of this site which would merit the LGS designation, having regard to the criteria set out above.

LGS Site NH/12-070-Foxton

The site comprises a recreation ground and allotment which is well located within the village. The playing field clearly has a recreational value and is served by a pavilion. In my view this recreation area would meet the criteria above although the allotment by contrast would fall short of that objective.

LGS Site NH/12-055-Duxford

This site represents a small grass verge within a modest residential cul-de-sac, a feature which is common in many housing estates. It could not, to my mind, be regarded in any way as demonstrably special and therefore fails to satisfy the LGS criteria.

LGS Site NH/12-144-Butlers Green, Sawston

The site is a grassed area which separates a number of the dwellings facing onto Mill Lane from the highway. Whilst it has some merit in open space terms, I would have expected that consideration might have been given for possible designation as a Protected Village Amenity Area (PVAA) in the context of Policy NH/11 of the Plan rather than a LGS.

LGS Site NH/12-104-Meadows, Bancroft Lane, Little Abington

This is a fairly extensive area of land at Bancroft Farm used as animal pasture and is surrounded by residential development. This site is also referred to in a modification to the Plan as Policy H/1:k- 'Land at Bancroft Farm' in the context of an allocation for housing development. Whilst it would be inappropriate to make any comment at this stage of the examination in respect of the latter regard, I find nothing demonstrably special about the site which would warrant designation as a LGS.

LGS Site NH/12-074-Field between Cox's Drove, Cow Lane and land adjacent to Horse Pound, Fulbourn

This is a large parcel of land on the northern fringe of the village which appears largely unkempt and overgrown. I could see nothing demonstrably special that would enable this site to be designated as LGS.

In this regard, I therefore agree with the findings of the Inspector in regard to appeal decision APP/W0530/15/3139730 who commented that he did not consider the site as a valued landscape in Framework terms, or that it satisfies the criteria for LGS designation.

He also commented that LGS designations should not be applied to sites in sustainable locations, which are otherwise unconstrained and well suited for development of (in that case) new homes. He further stated that the guidance in the Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) [Reference ID 37-007-20140306] that LGS designations should not be used in a way that undermines this aim of plan making. I will refer to this consideration again below.

Sites NH/12-130 and 131-Land to the Rear of The Lane, Over

These two plots of land are contiguous and are separated by a narrow watercourse. The combined sites are surrounded on all sides by residential development, albeit there is a public right of way (PROW) along the south-east boundary of the sites. Both sites are overgrown and unkempt and are screened from the PROW by vegetation and fencing. From my observations, the sites are not demonstrably special and could not be considered as a valued landscape in any respect. They would not therefore warrant a LGS designation.

Site NH/12-057 Meadow Drift, Elsworth

The site is an allotment situated on the northern fringe of the village. It clearly serves a purpose within the village but could not, to my mind, be regarded as demonstrably special in LGS terms.

In light of the above, the Inspectors have given further consideration to the LGS designations as a whole. The Inspectors clearly recognise that it would not be appropriate or practical to visit all 172 sites. However, they have serious concerns that the Council's assessment of the proposed LGS designations has not been carried out with sufficient rigour nor focussed fully on the stringent criteria set out in the Framework which set a high bar given that LGS sites enjoy the same level of protection as Green Belt land.

The Inspectors are also concerned that, as part of assessment of all of the proposed LGS designations, the Council does not appear to have given consideration as to whether alternative designations in accordance with Policy NH/11: Protected Village Amenity Areas (PVAA) or Policy NH/13: Important Countryside Frontage would be more appropriate in terms of the protection to be afforded to the sites.

Notwithstanding the additional information (SC4/SCDC-Supplement 3) and the Cambourne Master Plan Report (May 1995) provided to the Inspectors as requested following the hearing, they are still of the view that the large contiguous tracts of land identified at Cambourne which virtually encircle the village (particularly NH/12-033 and 035) create a conflict with the 3rd bullet point of paragraph 77 of the Framework. Furthermore, the PPG [Reference ID 37-014-20140306] states that "blanket designation of open countryside adjacent to settlements will not be appropriate. In particular, designation should not be proposed as a 'back door' way to try to achieve what would amount to a new area of Green Belt by another name". As above, consideration could be given to possible designation of PVAA.

As a consequence of the above concerns, the Inspectors would now expect the Council to carry out a further more rigorous review of all of the LGS designations taking full account of the matters set out above and the PPG guidance.

I look forward to your response as soon as possible. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Kind regards

Gloria Alexander

Gloria Alexander
Programme Officer