



Folkestone & Hythe Core Strategy Review Examination Matters, Issues & Questions

RESPONSE FROM THE KENT DOWNS AONB UNIT RESPONDENT REF NO: 1032113

Matter 4 – District Spatial Strategy, place shaping and sustainable settlements

Issue:

Whether the District Spatial Strategy and the approach to place shaping and sustainable settlements are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Relevant policies – SS1, Table 4.4 and SS3

Questions:

1) Is the spatial distribution of development across the District justified and what factors influenced the District Spatial Strategy, for example physical and environmental constraints and the capacity to accommodate development?

The District Spatial Strategy proposes the majority of the District's future housing and employment land on predominantly greenfield sites within the sensitive rural North Downs area, with the provision of a new garden settlement and a significant expansion of the village of Sellindge. The Kent Downs AONB Unit considers the Spatial Strategy fails to have sufficient regard to the impact of the scale of development on the AONB and that it is unjustified to promote this level of development in the rural North Downs character area as

Enhancing landscapes and life in the Kent Downs

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the proposals would have a significant impact on the sensitive setting of the AONB, the scale of growth we do not consider is capable of being satisfactorily mitigated.

While the development proposed in the North Downs area is outside of the AONB boundary, it falls within the setting, by virtue of its proximity and inter-visibility and the scale of the proposals. The views out from the chalk scarp of the North Downs over its setting was a key reason for the designation of the AONB with the Kent Downs designated as a nationally outstanding landscape in part because of the views beyond it into its setting. This feature has remained critical to its value and to public enjoyment ever since and today is recognised as one of its special characteristics and qualities. Landscape Character Assessments for the area comprise the KCC Kent Landscape Assessment 2004, the Landscape Assessment of the Kent Downs, Countryside Commission 1995 and the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Character Update, (Draft) 2020. These documents, as well as Folkestone & Hythe's own High level Landscape Appraisal published in 2016 as part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy Review, all confirm the importance of views out over the North Downs area that would be impacted by the proposed strategic scale development from the higher elevations of the adjacent AONB. Full details of the importance of setting to the Kent Downs is provided in our Regulation 19 Consultation response.

It is worth noting that since the Regulation 19 consultation, the national PPG in respect of landscape has been updated and for the first time provides advice on how development within the setting of AONBs should be dealt with (Paragraph: 042 Reference ID: 8-042-20190721, Revision date: 21 07 2019). This confirms that '*Land within the setting of these areas often makes an important contribution to maintaining their natural beauty, and where poorly located or designed development can do significant harm. This is especially the case where long views from or to the designated landscape are identified as important, or where the landscape character of land within and adjoining the designated area is complementary*'.

As detailed in our response to the Regulation 19 Consultation, the AONB Unit strongly disagrees with the assessed level of landscape impact of the proposed Garden Settlement set out in the Growth Options Study and the assertion that the North Downs area has capacity to accommodate the scale of growth proposed, without significantly impacting on the setting of the Kent Downs AONB.

The Kent Downs AONB Unit also disagrees with many of the scores assigned in the Sustainability Appraisal Report in relation to the North Downs Character Area, and it is considered that the impacts of strategic scale development on SA Objective 3b, Landscape is significantly underestimated in respect of potential impacts on the Kent Downs AONB. Details of this are provided in the AONB Unit's Regulation 19 consultation response.

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, local authorities are required to prepare an AONB Management Plan which must "formulate the policies for the management of the AONB and for carrying out their functions in relation to it". The Kent Downs AONB Unit produces a Management Plan on behalf of the local authorities within the AONB. The Management Plan has been formally adopted by the local authorities in Kent in which the AONB occurs, including Folkestone & Hythe District Council. The national Planning Policy Guidance confirms that Management Plans 'may contain information which is relevant when preparing plan policies, or which is a material consideration when assessing planning applications' ([Paragraph: 040 Reference ID: 8-040-20190721](#)) The importance of setting is recognised in the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, with policy SD8 stating "proposals

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which negatively impact on the distinctive landform, landscape character, special characteristics and qualities, the setting and views to and from the AONB will be opposed unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated”.

Taking into account the importance of the land in the North Downs area that falls outside of the AONB boundary, as forming an important part of the setting to the Kent Downs AONB, as recognised throughout the history of the Kent Downs, the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan, the various Landscape Character Assessments covering the areas, as well as the Council’s own Landscape Appraisal and flaws in the assessments behind the justification for promoting the sites in the North Downs area, we consider that insufficient regard has been given to the environmental constraint of the adjacent AONB and as such the Strategy is not consistent with national planning policy, and in particular paragraphs 170, 171 and 172 of the NPPF that seek to protect and enhance valued landscapes, allocate land with the least environmental value and give great weight to conserving and enhancing AONBs.

2) What alternative options for the District Spatial Strategy were considered?

3) Why was the preferred approach chosen?

4) Is the settlement hierarchy set out in table 4.4 justified? What are the reasons for the distinction between the typologies of settlements and their respective roles?

5) What evidence is there to justify the identification of each settlement within the respective tiers of the settlement hierarchy?

6) Is the Core Strategy Review sufficiently clear in terms of the scale of development envisaged in different areas/settlements?

7) Is the approach to previously developed land in Policies SS1 and SS3 justified and consistent with national policy? How would it impact on deliverability and viability?

8) In other respects, is the approach in Policy SS1 justified, effective and

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consistent with national policy?

9) Are the criteria in Policy SS3 justified, effective and consistent with national policy, including in relation to heritage assets?

10) Are any main modifications to Policies SS1 and SS3 necessary for soundness?

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