

Issue

Whether the proposed site allocations for education, a country park, a community hub and outdoor sport are justified, effective and consistent with national policy.

Policies DS12, DS13, DS14 and DS NEW4

Questions

Policy DS13 – Land for a country park

10) What is the justification for the proposed allocation?

Land south of Harbury Lane has previously been considered by local plan examiners to be a strong part of the open countryside with Harbury Lane as a sound boundary to any further development. It is the expectation of the electorate that it should remain so. Since 2011 when the new local plan consultations began significant change has been brought about that you are now considering that the electorate does not support. This is because it is considered as part of the Tach Brook Valley and that land between Harbury Lane and the Brook falls from about 67m AOD to 58m at the Brook. There are pleasant views across the valley with mainly gently undulating slopes of Grades 2 and 3a agricultural land that was in active production. It is punctuated with hedgerows and trees, coppices and small woodland areas.

As the slopes approach the Brook as it meanders along the valley, the gradients increase down to the edge of Brook which is in a 6 foot deep cutting about 15 feet wide. The Brook always flows fairly fast as it is fed by aquifers in the Chesterton area so is a significant feature in the landscape. From time flooding occurs overflowing the banks and on occasion blocks the Oakley Wood Road. The Brook flows through to Castle Park south of Warwick Castle through a lake and then joins the River Avon. It is a wildlife corridor with a heronry as it approaches Castle Park, some fallow deer and muntjacs, owls, buzzards and small mammals.

Developments now approved in order to meet government housing targets, were not compliant with the Local Plan that was adopted in 2007, hence the electorate's concerns. The Country park concept came from the District in an attempt to mitigate the effect of large developments on the north side of the valley.

After an imminent boundary change to include Heathcote Park and Lower Heathcote Farm within Bishops Tachbrook Parish, all the proposed Country Park will be in the Parish. Although the Country Park will be under the control of the District Council it is inevitable that much of the day to day concerns will involve the Parish Council so it is concerned to be involved with its development and care.

The Country Park also has a secondary function. WDC Local Plan Policy DS4(d) concerns limiting development on sites that would lead to coalescence of settlements, to ensure settlement identity is retained. Providing the Country Park is developed so it performs this function well and provides sufficient attention to landscaping to enhance the valued landscape that we have, the Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to become involved with its inception and use.

With the increased population from some 1505 new dwellings, recreational area close to the new development is essential.

What options were considered and why was this site chosen?

Options that have been considered have revolved around the shape of the land that the Country Park should occupy rather than alternative sites. It originally included land to the south adjacent to Oakley Wood Road, but in January 2016, without any consultation with the Parish Council, we found that this land had been taken out of the Park.

11) How does the proposed allocation relate to proposed housing sites in terms of phasing, funding etc.?

The site for the Country Park runs parallel with the Brook at the lowest point of the valley. The Lower Heathcote development originally contained a triangular playing field area, in the modifications to the draft local plan this was changed to an additional 100 houses, again without any notification or consultation with the Parish Council. Because most of the land in the Country Park is on the sloping banks of the Brook there is very little flat space for organised games and it was supposed that the triangular plot would be available for this purpose.

In addition we have referred in our Written Statement dated September 2016 (Page 17) to site H02, the Former Sewage Works. This is part of the proposed local Plan to provide for a further 215 dwellings. No planning permission commitment has yet been made.

In terms of the overall spatial strategy of the Plan, the Parish Council considers it to be a wrong location for housing, because the FOAN for Warwick District (8,054) has already been met by the 10,124 sites given planning permission so far and this site is in the wrong place and is too remote to serve any useful purpose to meet Coventry's unmet need.

The site is wrongly described as brownfield. It is a former Sewage works that consisted of a considerable number of below ground tanks that have long been disused. It was surrounded by open countryside when it was in use and since it ceased functioning, has reverted back to open countryside with no visible part of the works remaining.

It is a significant part of the north bank of the Tach Brook valley, the landscape assessment of which is of high sensitivity with long distant views to the south from the site and to the site from the south.

It has a substantial stand of mature native trees between it and Heathcote Park with hedgerows and bushes contributing to the quality landscape of the Tachbrook Valley and it is view of the Parish council that the site should be integrated with the Country Park to increase its variety of space and interest.

Using these 2 sites therefore seems to be unnecessary to meet the FOAN of both the District and the HMA. Their use for this purpose would also be not consistent with policies DS3(d), DS3 2nd (c), DS4 (f), SCO (i) & (j), BE1 (b) & (k), and HS6(e) & (f).

12) Is the proposal realistically viable and deliverable?

How will it be funded both in terms of initial and ongoing costs?

What is the timescale for the country park?

Now that the developments are taking place we are we are. The Parish council now wishes the Country Park to be successful and have commenced discussions with the District council on its development and provision.

Timescale for the park is important because it should be commenced in parallel with the developments so that as dwellings are completed the works to form the park are also ready to give the new population adequate recreational area.