



Report to the Partnership for South Hampshire Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 20 September 2023

Report of: Graham Tuck, Chairman PfSH Planning Officers Group

Subject: PFSH SPATIAL POSITION STATEMENT – GREEN
INFRASTRUCTURE EVIDENCE

SUMMARY

This report sets out the results of the evidence commissioned under the Statement of Common Ground in relation to Green Belt/Green Infrastructure issues.

RECOMMENDATION

It is RECOMMENDED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:-

- a) NOTES the contents of this report;
- b) NOTES that Joint Committee will be asked to NOTE the content of the following reports and that they will be published on the PfSH website:
 - i) Part 1: Green Belt/Green Infrastructure Designation Study: Policy Options Review – May 2022, attached at Appendix 1; and
 - ii) Part 2: Strategic Green and Blue Infrastructure Opportunities in South Hampshire – July 2023, attached at Appendix 2; and
- c) consider any comments to be passed to the Joint Committee for consideration.

INTRODUCTION

1. The first iterations of the Statement of Common Ground included the workstream 'Green Infrastructure Needs and Consideration of Mechanisms on how to achieve Green Belt Designation'. This was subsequently updated in December 2022 to 'Green Infrastructure Needs and Protection of Landscape and Settlement Gaps'. The evidence to be gathered under this workstream is appended to this report and is now complete.

BACKGROUND

2. Land Use Consultants (LUC) were appointed to provide the evidence to support the workstream identified in the Statement of Common Ground as above. An interim report (Part 1: Green Belt/Green Infrastructure Designation Study: Policy Options Review – May 2022) was considered informally in June 2022.
3. The Planning Officers Group (POG) agreed the methodology for the final stage of the LUC work and agreed that it should focus on green and blue infrastructure (GBI) opportunities and omitted further work on landscape and gaps. Landscape and gaps elements can be taken forward through individual local plans but there will be no further sub-regional analysis beyond the content of the Part 1 report.
4. The work commenced in January this year and the draft report (Part 2 – Strategic Green and Blue Infrastructure Opportunities in South Hampshire) was considered by the POG prior to being finalised by LUC. Both the Part 1 and Part 2 reports are attached at Appendices 1 and 2 respectively.

FINDINGS

Part 1 report

5. The main findings of the Part 1 report are set out in an Executive Summary at the beginning of the report and can be summarised as follows:
 - Designations that focus on prohibiting development (e.g. Green Belt) are arguably less likely to be successful in achieving PfSH's ambitions than more proactive and positive policies (e.g. regional parks and green infrastructure networks) designed to improve the multiple benefits and functions of the countryside.
 - A Green Belt designation must be consistent with a plan's strategy for meeting the need for sustainable development, and where necessary safeguard land between the urban area and the green belt boundary to meet longer term needs well beyond the plan period. Therefore, the designation of a new Green Belt in South Hampshire could only be pursued effectively once the PfSH authorities have agreed to and robustly evidenced how they plan to accommodate the growth needs of the sub-region over the next 30 years, i.e. at least two plan periods of growth. Only then will it be possible to answer the necessary policy

tests for justifying a new Green Belt set out in national planning policy in full.

- Due to current uncertainties regarding the scale and location of future growth in South Hampshire, the absence of a forthcoming statutory Joint Plan covering the PfSH area and the associated complexities of trying to deliver a Green Belt through ten local plan processes, the consultants recommend that the PfSH authorities pursue an alternative approach.
- Therefore, the consultants' recommended approach is that the PfSH authorities pursue the scope and extent of an alternative mix of sub-regional designations at the current time including: green infrastructure opportunity areas and policies; landscape designations; areas of separation policies; country parks; and regional parks.

6. The consultants note that no new Green Belts have been designated in England in decades and after years of sustained housing under-provision across England the approval that the approach is sound would need to be made by an Inspector (appointed by and on behalf of the Secretary of State) when considering the soundness of a local plan. The consultants sought legal advice to inform their report and this is appended to the Part 1 report. It states,

'In conclusion therefore, I do not consider it likely that the introduction of new South Hampshire green belt will be found to be consistent with national planning policy and therefore that a development plan/plans that sought to introduce, through policy, a new green belt will be found sound.'

Since this advice was provided there has been no change to national planning policy. The recent (December 2022) consultation on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) did not include any proposed changes to national policy on the designation of a new green belt and, subject to confirmation of the final NPPF policy, the proposed changes are not likely to alter this conclusion.

Part 2 report

7. The Part 2 report has taken the findings of the Part 1 report and sought to provide more detailed analysis in respect of the opportunities afforded by Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) provision and includes the following:
- Identifying and mapping key strategic GBI opportunities as Broad Opportunity Zones and Strategic Opportunity Zones.
 - The Broad Opportunity Zones are based on: improved access to nature; nature recovery; nutrient mitigation; recreational impact mitigation for Habitats sites; and natural flood risk management.
 - The Strategic Opportunity Zones are based on an aggregation of overlapping Broad Opportunity Zones.
8. The report also contains discussion of potential next steps and in particular attention is drawn to:

- The ability to ‘stack’ certain public and private payments for ecosystem services on the same piece of land (including Biodiversity Net Gain and nutrient mitigation) alongside environmental land management funding.
- Strategic GBI could legitimately be supported via S106 developer contributions (where supported by policy) or by Community Infrastructure Levy where projects are providing strategic green infrastructure to support development.
- Grant funding opportunities should continue to be explored and the report can help inform the selection of suitable sites for funding.
- Discussion on the opportunities and benefits a Regional Park would provide.
- The potential opportunity to provide a Regional Park to the north of Southampton or at the Forest of Bere.
- Key next steps to utilise the report in the future.
- Key next steps towards developing a South Hampshire Regional Park.

9. The outcomes of the report will be reflected in in the content of the forthcoming Spatial Position Statement. Prior to the work commencing PfSH agreed that the priority outcomes should be as follows:

- Improved access to nature
- Nature recovery
- Nutrient mitigation
- Recreational impact mitigation for habitats sites; and
- Natural flood risk management.

The Spatial Position Statement will reference the broad opportunity zones and strategic opportunity zones at the sub-regional scale and individual Local Planning Authorities can use the evidence when considering the potential identification of appropriate land to allocate for multifunctional green infrastructure and/or environmental mitigation in local plans.

NEXT STEPS

10. The drafting of the Spatial Position Statement will take account of the evidence produced under the SoCG workstream, particularly the potential for a Regional Park, the Broad Opportunity Zones and Strategic Opportunity Zones.

11. Local Planning Authorities may wish to pursue landscape and or gap policies through their individual local plans. Authorities can discuss coordinated policies with neighbouring authorities, particularly where planning policy designations may cross administrative boundaries, but there will be no further comprehensive analysis or approach at the sub-regional level.

RECOMMENDATION

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Part 1: Green Belt/Green Infrastructure Designation Study: Policy Options Review – May 2022

Appendix 2 – Part 2: Strategic Green and Blue Infrastructure Opportunities in South Hampshire – July 2023

Background Papers:

None

Reference Papers:

None

Enquiries:

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