

2015/0427

Reg Date 13/05/2015

Chobham

**LOCATION:** CHOBHAM MEADOWS LAND BETWEEN STATION ROAD AND CHERTSEY ROAD, CHOBHAM, WOKING, GU24 8AN

**PROPOSAL:** Change of Use of Land from Agriculture to Site of Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and associated works.

**TYPE:** Full Planning Application

**APPLICANT:** Surrey Heath Borough Council

**OFFICER:** Duncan Carty

**RECOMMENDATION: GRANT subject to conditions**

## 1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This planning application relates to the change of use of agricultural land into a Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) with associated works. This publicly accessible open space would be provided for the recreational use (walking/dog walking) purposes. The application site falls within the Green Belt, just east and south of the settlement of Chobham lying between Chertsey Road and Station Road. The site falls predominantly within flood zone 3.
- 1.2 The application proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of its impact on the Green Belt, residential amenity, highway safety, drainage, flood risk and ecology. The application is recommended for approval.

## 2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The application site relates to agricultural land within the Green Belt, immediately to the south and east of the Green Belt settlement of Chobham. This 23.5 hectare site is relatively flat, with the River Bourne flowing through the site. There are a number of tree belts on the site, particularly between the field boundaries but also to the south east corner of the site. Residential properties in Chertsey Road, Barnfield and Green Lane lie to the north, properties in High Street, the car park and cricket ground to the west with agricultural land predominantly to the south and east. The site falls predominantly within flood zone 3 (as defined by the Environment Agency).
- 2.2 The application site falls within the Green Belt, just east and south of the settlement of Chobham and east of the Chobham Conservation Area, lying between Chertsey Road and Station Road with its principal accesses from High Street (via the public car park) and Cannon Crescent with a maintenance access from Chertsey Road. The east part of the site is a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and there are a number of public footpaths (9, 9a, 11, 11a and 12) which cross the site.

There is a line of trees adjacent to part of the north boundary (with residential properties in Barnfield and Green Lane) protected under a Tree Preservation Order (16/07).

### **3.0 RELEVANT HISTORY**

3.1 None relevant to this application.

### **4.0 THE PROPOSAL**

4.1 The current proposal is to change the use of the land from agricultural land to a Site of Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS). The site would change of the use of land to provide a publicly accessible open space which it is envisaged will be used by the general public principally for walking and dog-walking purposes. Associated development would be provided, such as improvements to the footpath connections across the site to provide a variety of circular walks, tree planting, some boundary fencing, interpretation boards and a new gated access onto the site for maintenance purposes (from the car park).

4.2 Whilst there is no parking to be provided for this proposal, a 96 car space car park lies adjacent to the application site.

4.3 The proposal would support the delivery of housing elsewhere in the Borough which would contribute (through CIL) to the upkeep and development of this land as a SANGS. The SANGS would be able to provide avoidance measures for major residential development within a 5 kilometre catchment of the site and in all locations within the Borough for minor residential development. This proposal supports the very pressing need to provide increased SANGS capacity to support the provision of residential development elsewhere in the Borough.

### **5.0 CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

5.1 County Highway Authority No comments received to date. Any comments will be reported at the meeting.

5.2 Environment Agency No comments received to date. Any comments will be reported at the meeting.

5.3 Arboricultural Officer No objections.

5.4 Natural England No comments received to date. Any comments will be reported at the meeting.

5.5 Surrey Wildlife Trust No comments received to date. Any comments will be reported at the meeting.

5.6 Archaeological Officer No objections.

5.7	County Footpaths Officer	No objections.
5.8	Conservation Adviser	No comments received to date. Any comments will be reported at the meeting.
5.9	Woking Borough Council	No comments received to date. Any comments will be reported at the meeting.
5.10	Chobham Parish Council	Raises concerns about the existing car park use and suggests this car park should be increased in size to accommodate demand.
5.11	Council's Drainage Engineer	No objections.

## 6.0 REPRESENTATION

At the time of preparation of this report two representations have been received in support, with one commenting that SANG land is needed around Chobham and this is a good option. One letter of objection has been received which raise the following issues:

- 6.1 Eroding of the natural rural character of the Meadows and yet another step towards the urbanisation of the conservation village [*See Paragraph 9.4*]
- 6.2 Speculation that the Rugby Club wish to expand and move to the Meadows and use as a recreational club, which would ruin the rural character [*Officer comment: This proposal would not allow such a move*]

## 7.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATION

- 7.1 The application site falls within the Green Belt and adjoins the Chobham Conservation Area. It is considered that the relevant policies are Policies CP11, CP13, CP14, DM9, DM11, DM14, DM16 and DM17 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012 and advice in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 7.2 The main considerations in the assessment of this application proposal are:
  - Principle of the development;
  - Whether the proposal meets the requirements of SANG provision;
  - Impact on the Green Belt, character (including the Chobham Conservation Area) and trees;
  - Impact on residential amenity;
  - Impact on highway safety and parking;

- Impact on ecology; and
- Impact on drainage and flood risk.

### **7.3 Principle of the development**

7.3.1 Policy CP13 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012 indicates that the Council will seek to strengthen the role of the green infrastructure network and encourage schemes which provide opportunities to increase the provision of green infrastructure. The provision of green infrastructure is particularly important in close proximity to sites of international ecological importance, such as the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. Policy DM16 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012 also encourages the provision of formal and informal recreation facilities including the provision of new green infrastructure.

7.3.2 The proposal would result in the loss of agricultural land. This site provides poor quality agricultural land, the use of which is limited by its location within an area of high flood risk (Zone 3).

7.3.3 It is therefore considered that the current proposal supports these policies and no objections are raised to the principle of the proposed development with the proposal complying with Policy CP13 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012.

### **7.4 Whether the proposal meets the requirements of SANG provision**

7.4.1 The proposal would provide a Site of Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) to support the delivery of housing across the Borough. There are a series of minimum requirements for land to be able to support such a proposal, which has been derived from the Delivery Framework and Natural England's guidance on the creation of SANGs. SANGs can be created from existing open space which is already accessible, such as the application site, but which could be changed in character so that it is more attractive for visitors to use for walking or dog walking purposes. A visitor survey has been undertaken and work started to ascertain the likely increased usage (i.e. the carrying capacity) of the proposed SANGS. This carrying capacity will provide a measure of the amount of housing in the future that could be supported by this SANGS proposal.

7.4.2 The essential requirements for SANGS provision (for proposed SANGs of 20 hectares or over) are set out in Appendix 2 of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance Strategy SPD 2012 which are chiefly:

- Adequate parking for visitors with car parks which are easily/safely accessible and signposted
- A circular walk of 2.3 - 2.5 kilometres around the SANGS
- A variety of habitats
- Unsurfaced footpaths which are easy to use and well maintained
- Space to allow dogs to exercise freely

There are other desirable requirements such as the land having a gently undulating topography and the provision of open water.

- 7.4.3 As previously indicated, there is a public car park adjoining the application site, which provides a level of parking to support this proposal. There are a series of public footpaths which are easily accessible and unsurfaced which cross the site. Some additional pathways are proposed so that the circular path route can be provided to meet the minimum length. The land is compartmentalised by a variety of trees lines/belts (formed from the old field boundaries) with the river flowing through the site and larger tree belts to add interest. There is much space to allow dogs to exercise freely. Signposting would be needed, as well as interpretation boards, and landscape works, including tree planting, to make the land more attractive for walkers/dog walkers. No comments have been received to date from Natural England and any formal comments received will be reported to the Committee. However, it is noted that the design and access statement provided to support this application has indicated that Natural England have agreed the proposal, in principle.
- 7.4.4 As such, and subject to the comments of Natural England, no objections are raised to the proposal on these grounds, with the proposal complying with Policy CP14 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012, Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan 2009 (as saved) and the NPPF as well as advice within the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance Strategy SPD 2012.

## **7.5 Impact on the Green Belt, character and trees**

- 7.5.1 The use of the land for outdoor recreation would be an appropriate use of land in the Green Belt. Paragraph 81 of the National Planning Policy Framework indicates that *"local planning authorities should plan positively...to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation"*. The current proposal would support this advice.
- 7.5.2 Paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework indicates that *"the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence."* The current proposal would provide improvement to existing pathways and some boundary stock fencing and landscaping (including tree planting) which it is considered would have a limited impact on the openness of the application site.
- 7.5.3 The application site would clearly retain its rural character. The site adjoins the Chobham Conservation Area and the proposed use would have a very limited impact on this Conservation Area. The proposal would not require the removal of any trees but some tree maintenance and planting would be expected. No objections are raised to the proposal by the Arboricultural Officer. It is considered that the proposed development would not have an adverse impact on the rural character of this part of the Green Belt and would be appropriate development, complying with Policies DM9 and DM17 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012 and the NPPF.

## **7.6 Impact on residential amenity**

- 7.6.1 The application site would be bounded by residential properties principally to the north west. The existing footpaths are relatively close to the boundaries with these properties, but most properties are relatively screened by trees or other vegetation in between. It is not considered that the use of the site would have a particular material impact on the residential amenity from noise or disturbance, noting the low level of activity from the proposed use that would occur on the site. In addition, it is not expected that any adverse loss of privacy would be envisaged from this proposal to these residential properties.
- 7.6.2 It is therefore considered that the current proposal would have no adverse impact on residential amenity and complies with Policy DM9 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012.

## **7.7 Impact on highway safety and parking**

- 7.7.1 The current proposal would not provide car parking for this development. However, there is a 96 space public car park adjoining the site which serves the Chobham village. The County Highway Authority have not commented to date. Subject to the comments of the County Highway Authority, no objections are raised to the proposal which therefore conforms with Policies CP11 and DM11 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012.

## **7.8 Impact on ecology**

- 7.8.1 The application has been supported by a habitat management plan which concludes that the site has very little biological interest but could be of interest to bats and, in the past, water voles. There does not appear to be badgers on site, but the site is used by deer and birds. Further surveys (of bats and birds) could assist but the proposed use (and works) would have a very limited impact on these species. The comments of the Surrey Wildlife Trust are awaited and any received comments will be reported to the Committee.
- 7.8.2 As such, subject to the comments of the Surrey Wildlife Trust, no objections are raised to the proposal on ecological grounds and the proposal conforms with Policy CP14 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012 and advice in the National Planning Policy Framework.

## **7.9 Impact on drainage and flooding**

- 7.9.1 The application site falls predominantly within Flood Zone 3 (high risk from flooding). The site is very large, with the only substantial development associated with the proposal being the provision or improvement of paths. The Flood Risk Assessment provided to support this application indicates that use of the land as a SANGS under this Council's ownership would enable ongoing maintenance of all drainage systems through the site, on which is natural floodplain, and this would support a flood alleviation scheme for the Chobham village centre with a funding award obtained from DEFRA for the design of such a scheme. Such work would lead to improvements in drainage and help reduce flood risk to the village centre.
- 7.9.2 The Council's Drainage Engineer is in support of these proposals. However, the

comments of the Environment Agency are awaited. Subject to the comments of the Environment Agency, it is not considered that the proposal would have any significant impact on local drainage or flood risk and complies with Policy DM10 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 2012 or advice in the National Planning Policy Framework.

## **8.0 CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 The current proposal is supported in terms of the provision of green infrastructure, such as SANGs, in the Borough and Green Belt policy. Also, no objections are raised to the proposal on residential amenity, highway safety and parking, ecology or drainage/flood risk grounds. The current application is therefore recommended for approval.

## **9.0 ARTICLE 2(3) DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE (AMENDMENT) ORDER 2012 WORKING IN A POSITIVE/PROACTIVE MANNER**

In assessing this application, officers have worked with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner consistent with the requirements of Paragraphs 186-187 of the NPPF. This included the following:-

- a) Provided or made available pre application advice to seek to resolve problems before the application was submitted and to foster the delivery of sustainable development.
- b) Provided feedback through the validation process including information on the website, to correct identified problems to ensure that the application was correct and could be registered.
- c) Have proactively communicated with the applicant through the process to advise progress, timescale or recommendation.

## **10.0 RECOMMENDATION**

GRANT, subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun within three years of the date of this permission.

Reason: To prevent an accumulation of unimplemented planning permissions and in accordance with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by Section 51(1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. No use shall take place until a management plan for the use of the site for SANGS and public open space is submitted to and approved by the Local

Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the retention of the visual amenities of the area and to meet the requirements for SANG provision and to comply with Policies DM9 and CP14 of the Surrey Heath Core Strategy and Development Management Policies 29012, Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan 2009 (as saved) and the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance Strategy SPD 2012.