

Policy SPS5.5: Popham Garden Village: Object & Comment

CPRE Hampshire cannot support the creation of a new settlement of this size and scale in the open countryside, separated as it would be from the other urban areas in the borough and eroding the open landscape between Basingstoke and Winchester. Further, there are issues relating to sustainability and water which add to the unsuitability of this site for the number of dwellings and ancillary services proposed.

Sustainability

The relationship of the site to Micheldever station is unconvincing. Whilst the detail would emerge through a masterplan and so we don't yet know about accessibility arrangements between the development and the station, the physical and perceived separation between the two is significant. People using the station would need to go under the A303 and the underpass is relatively tight and complex to accommodate a high quality separate active travel route that would enable safe and attractive active travel between the new residential areas and the station. Whilst the developer would potentially propose a dedicated bus service, that has issues over longer term funding and real viability. That leads us to expect that the car would remain the dominant travel mode which would undermine the sustainability of the site and the council's climate change aspirations.

Water

Water is a finite, poor quality and declining resource in Southern England. As noted in para. 7.69 of the draft plan, the Basingstoke chalk aquifer is a principal aquifer and has been classified Poor both in its quantity and its chemical status due to ground water abstraction (status: suspected) and legacy agricultural use despite being a drinking water protected area. Notwithstanding the risk management referred to in par 7.69, CPRE Hampshire Water focus group thinks this is not a valid resource for water for the number of houses proposed.

Given the Poor status where would the drinking water to come from for the planned housing? Current average daily use is 146lpp. Total use for the development could be in the region of 175,000 lpd. Installed use may be lower but will inevitably be augmented after occupation. The aquifer characteristics in our view do not support this as a resource for the area. Any lowering of the aquifer through abstraction will lead to serious damage to local rivers. As it drains north to the Thames the Loddon will certainly be affected.

Even if cleaned to current standards for release (which we consider low) how will effluent be dealt with? We note in the 2024 update to the Water Cycle Study <https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/content/doclib/4116.pdf> that ***"The nearest wastewater treatment works does not currently have capacity to treat wastewater and is some distance from the site. This is not a showstopper to development and capacity can be increased. Where environmental constraints limit the capacity that can be provided at a wwtw, alternative solutions can be found. The developer is considering technical options and will need to engage further with the water company."***

It is extremely concerning that this site can be included in the local plan before understanding what these "technical options" are, their feasibility and having answers to

such fundamental questions as:

1. Is a main sewer planned?
2. If not, then a local WWTW will need to be either upgraded or renewed or a completely new one installed. Where will be the outfall as there are no surface rivers in the area? If treated sewage is to be discharged into ground – the soil is thin and it will quickly infiltrate into the chalk aquifer.
3. Will nitrate removal and phosphate removal systems be built into any such upgraded or new treatment works to protect the sensitive chalk aquifer and the nutrient-sensitive headwaters of the Test and Candover?
4. Given the site location on top of thin soil covering a chalk drinking water aquifer (which it is – even if not actually designated so), then SUDS should be both mandatory and high quality.

Before allocating this site for the number of houses proposed, the infrastructure upgrade plans of both Southern Water and South East Water need to be developed and presented so that this scheme and its inevitable water and environmental impact can be properly evaluated.

The covering of the area with solid access roads would of course both prevent infiltration to the aquifer and accelerate road pollutants to the watercourses. This area is in the surface catchment of the river Test headwaters and contributes to its flow. Increasing calls for its protection should be heeded.

The Test chalk body underlying the site also has poor overall status too but is not allocated Drinking Water status.

<https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/WaterBody/GB40701G501200>

The discernible upward trend should not be reduced by allowing infiltration of pollutants into the aquifer.

Our comments below on Policy ENV9 are also pertinent to this site.

Whilst we recognise that removal of a site of this size from the draft plan will result in pressures elsewhere in the borough, we would encourage efforts to this end and suggest this could be achieved by one or more of the following:-

- a) Seeking out more brownfield sites in line with our comments on Policy SPS1 regarding the brownfield first approach and presumption in favour of brownfield development.
- b) Seeking opportunities to increase densities in the regeneration areas referenced in SPS2 and Basingstoke Town Centre as referenced in SPS4
- c) Progressing negotiations with government for changes to the Standard Method so as to reduce the housing requirements to a more appropriate level for the borough as referenced in paras 4.5, 4.7 and 6.8.