

East Hampshire District Council
Large Development Sites Consultation

Response by Beech Parish Council – 23rd September 2019

Introduction

This document sets out the response of Beech Parish Council to EHDC’s Large Development Sites Consultation launched on 3rd September 2019.

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The comments are confined to those candidate sites that:

- (i) Impinge upon the parish of Beech; and/or
- (ii) relate to facilities in the local area that are commonly used by the residents of Beech (e.g. in nearby Alton).

Accordingly, this response deals only with the following candidate sites:

- Chawton Park, which abuts Beech Parish; and
- The four sites located in Four Marks & South Medstead.

In particular, Beech Parish Council’s view is that the Chawton Park site is completely unsuitable for development as urban housing.

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Chawton Park

Beech Parish Council considers Chawton Park to be unsuitable as a Large Development Site on the grounds set out below.

1: Do you have any comments on the proposed uses?

The land is good quality agricultural land. It is located west of Northfield Lane on rising ground, visible for long distances from the east and southeast (including from the South Downs National Park), in what is now a quiet rural valley head. The westward extension of Alton into this quiet, relatively isolated, pastoral gap between Chawton and Beech would transform unspoilt open countryside into an urban environment (with housing at a density of 37 per hectare), in a more extreme manner than for most, if not all, of the other candidate sites.

This development would put in train the progressive engulfing of Beech village by the Alton urban area, from the south as well as from the east. There would be almost continuous housing estate development along the southern boundary of Beech parish from the Lord Mayor Treloar development in the east to the boundaries of Old Park Farm in the west, a distance of about 2.6km. The northern boundary of the site (where it abuts Bushy Leaze Wood) is only about 400 metres from the nearest houses in Beech village, which is much closer than existing Alton housing at Whitedown Lane (c.700 metres from Beech village).

The site lies hard up against Chawton Park Wood to the south, and Bushy Leaze and Ackender Woods to the north. All three of these woodlands are Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and contain ancient woodland. Although they are already open for public access, the impact of their regular and intensive use by the residents of an additional 1,200 densely packed houses directly alongside must be considered potentially damaging and undesirable in terms of conservation of ancient woodland.

Development of this site would close off nearly all of the existing wildlife corridor between Ackender & Bushy Leaze Woods, to the north, and Chawton Park Wood, to the south. The importance of this wildlife corridor is identified in the emerging Beech Neighbourhood Plan.

We note that this site was put forward to the 2018 Land Availability Assessment. Due to the site's various characteristics and constraints, Northbrook Park and a site in Whitehill & Bordon were deemed by EHDC as better options for inclusion as large sites in the draft Local Plan published in Spring 2019. We see no reasons why that judgement should be overturned.

2: What infrastructure is required to support the proposal and when? This could be on or off-site provision.

The bulk of the site is about 3.5km from Alton town centre (the junction of High Street and Market Street), not 1.5km as stated in EHDC's assessment documents. Similarly the centre of the site is 2km (not 800m) from the nearest doctors' surgery (Chawton Park Surgery), and 2.5km (not 400m – 800m) from the nearest primary school (The Butts). Alton Sports Centre, well to the east of the site, is itself over 1.5km from Alton town centre. So the Stage 2 Assessment of this site is flawed, and distance from Alton town centre is definitely not an 'insignificant' factor as the assessment claims.

This site is roughly double the distance from Alton town centre than is the most remote current new development in the town (Cadnam's Farm). Notwithstanding any limited services built in this 'new village', the vast majority of services will be accessed in Alton, and practicality all journeys to Alton

will be by car, given the distance. Like other villages very close to Alton (e.g. Holybourne, Beech), Chawton Park would be primarily a car-dependant settlement, contrary to the developer's claims and irrespective of the number of footpaths, cycleways and bus routes put in place. Assuming 2,500 cars based in a 1,200 house development, the adverse consequences for traffic congestion and parking in Alton are obvious and significant.

Expecting road traffic to access this size of development via residential Chawton Park Road and narrow Northfield Lane would lead to unacceptable congestion in the immediate road network, down to and including the A339 Whitedown Lane. If this site were to be developed it would be essential beforehand to construct the proposed Alton Western Bypass, giving easy access from this development south to the A31 and A32 at the Chawton roundabout, and north to the A339 and B3349 via the junction of Basingstoke Road and Whitedown Lane.

Consideration could also be given to the scheme, mooted about 10 years ago, to extend the main railway line (from London Waterloo) west to a new Alton Parkway railway station, sited near the Northfield Lane railway bridge, designed to serve the west of Alton and the villages in a c.10 mile radius to the west and south. This rail extension would make rail commuting easier for local people in a wide area, taking traffic off the A31 in particular, and reduce traffic travelling through Alton to the existing railway station, about 4.5km away from this site.

It would seem untenable to have only a single access road, the extension of Chawton Park Road, into a development of this size, in the event of the closure of that road in an emergency. An additional western access road (towards Medstead/Beech) would be undesirable because (i) it would need to pass through historic parkland at Old Park Farm, or cut through Bushy Leaze Wood SINC; and (ii) additional traffic would be created through Beech as drivers from the western end of the development use Kings Hill as a rat run to the A339 – and Beech's roads are already considered hazardous due to a combination of their narrow, windy nature, vehicle speeds and the absence of footways.

We note that the developer's proposal does not address the need to retain or replace existing bridleways (as opposed to footpaths and cycle routes) crossing the site.

3: Do you know of any other constraints to developing the site? Please provide detail and evidence.

We understand that the capacity of the public sewer and sewage treatment system in Alton, into which this development would drain, is inadequate to handle further new developments of this size.

4: What opportunities and/or benefits do you think the proposal could bring. Please explain how.

None. It would be less integrated with Alton (in terms of proximity to the town centre and railway station, and the feasibility of walking to either) than the Neatham Down site.

5: What are the cross-boundary considerations and the potential implications? How can they be overcome?

None.

6: The site promoters consider their proposal to be deliverable within the Local Plan period up to 2036. Is there any reason that this is not achievable?

No.

All four sites in Four Marks and South Medstead:

- **Four Marks South**
- **Land South of Winchester Road, Four Marks**
- **South Medstead**
- **West of Lymington Bottom Road, South Medstead**

Beech Parish Council considers all of the four potential Large Development Sites in Four Marks and South Medstead to be undesirable on the following grounds.

1: Do you have any comments on the proposed uses?

No response.

2: What infrastructure is required to support the proposal and when? This could be on or off-site provision.

The incidence of car drivers 'rat running' through Beech, from the direction of Medstead and Four Marks to the A339 and B3349, has observably increased as new housing developments have been completed in Four Marks and South Medstead over the past 10 years or so. If one or even two further new developments of 800+ houses were to be sited in those areas, the incidence of rat running through Beech at inappropriately high speeds is likely to increase significantly. Beech's roads are already considered hazardous due to a combination of their narrow, windy nature, vehicle speeds and the absence of footways (as identified in the emerging Beech Neighbourhood Plan and its evidence base). At the very least, developer contributions would need to be earmarked to construct footways and appropriate traffic calming measures through Beech village.

3: Do you know of any other constraints to developing the site? Please provide detail and evidence.

4: What opportunities and/or benefits do you think the proposal could bring. Please explain how.

5: What are the cross-boundary considerations and the potential implications? How can they be overcome?

6: The site promoters consider their proposal to be deliverable within the Local Plan period up to 2036. Is there any reason that this is not achievable?

No response.