
4. Current Planning and Transportation Policies

- 4.1. The Hampshire County Structure Plan, which became operative in January 1994, is based on a strategy of providing for the development of committed sites to 1996 and meeting the needs of the County's indigenous population from 1996 to 2001. The central aim of the Structure Plan is to:
- "allow development provision for housing and employment to meet local needs and sustain the economy of the County, balanced with the preservation of important environmental and conservation interests". The City Council fully endorses the Structure Plan's strategy and has reflected this in its Winchester District Local Plan, which is about to be adopted.*
- 4.2. The key objective of the Local Plan is, therefore, to selectively restrain development so as to achieve the conservation of the District. This means conserving the settlements and the countryside, the built and natural environments, as well as resources such as land and energy.
- 4.3. With particular regard to the countryside, the District Local Plan consistently carries forward those earlier policies contained in the Winchester Area Local Plan, where these were aimed at maintaining and enhancing the landscape quality and natural resources of the countryside and also the landscape setting of Winchester itself.
- 4.4. In general terms, the Plan's countryside proposals seek to restrict non-essential development, whilst providing scope to improve recreation and other opportunities for appreciating the District's attractive and varied rural areas.
- 4.5. The status of the area which includes Bushfield, is to be further enhanced by the Winchester-Compton Strategic Gap, contained in the County Structure Plan and defined by the District Local Plan. Such Gaps are intended to lay even greater emphasis on the need to maintain the individual identity of settlements and, in this particular locality, the Gap is designed to preserve that area of undeveloped countryside which currently separates Winchester and Compton. Thus, according to the terms of the proposed policy, "development which would undermine the appearance or function of a Strategic Gap will not normally be permitted."
- 4.6. In addition to recognising the Strategic Gap's importance to this area, the WDLP identifies the Bushfield site as being potentially suitable for the provision of facilities for sports and informal recreation, to serve the general needs of Winchester. Exploring such potential has been one of the purposes of this Study.
- 4.7. The Local Plan also carries forward and re-affirms the overall importance of the wider area in environmental, ecological and landscape terms, through the designation of the valley floor of the River Itchen as an Area of Special Landscape Quality (See Plan 8).
- 4.8. As with the Strategic Gap, such a designation should be taken in conjunction with the well-established East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Itchen flood plain SSSI and the Winchester Conservation Area designations, all of which serve to underline the very highest quality attained by Winchester's natural and historic surroundings (See Plan 9).
- 4.9. The Local Plan puts forward an overall transport policy for Winchester which aims to improve the quality of life in and around the City, whilst sustaining the local economy in more environmentally sensitive ways. Part of that policy is the development of a properly integrated park-and-ride scheme. In fact, an initial scheme is now operating from two purpose-built car parks at Bar End. To build on that, the Local Plan fully acknowledges the need for additional sites to be identified on the main radial routes into the town.

- 4.10. In order to expand and properly consolidate such a scheme, a suitable site may need to be found on the southern/south-western approaches to the City. However, difficulties associated with access, land acquisition and environmental impacts have already narrowed down the range of possible options. Indeed, the Plan itself recognises that it may not be possible to find suitable sites within the built-up area of the town. Thus, the Plan's Proposal could allow for:

'Sites to be developed in areas subject to countryside policies, provided a strong justification for the provision is put forward, sufficient to outweigh other objections. Nevertheless, particular account will need to be taken of the special landscape setting of Winchester and the need to avoid undue intrusion into it. For this reason it is not likely that suitable sites will be identified in the Conservation Area, the defined Area of Special Landscape Quality or the East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Where park-and-ride car parks need to be located in the countryside, the facilities provided should be limited to those essential for the successful operation of the scheme.' (Explanatory Text: Paragraph 11.102).

- 4.11. Hampshire County Council is in the process of reviewing the Hampshire County Structure Plan. Whilst it is clear that the development requirements of the County Structure Plan Review will be considerable, especially for housing, the Review also promotes a policy aimed at conserving the special character and setting of Winchester. In reviewing the Winchester District Local Plan the City Council will undertake a study of the town's environmental capacity to accommodate various long term development options.

5. Future Uses of the Bushfield Site

- 5.1. As has been explained the Bushfield area presents a complex mixture of limitations and opportunities.
- 5.2. It is significant that this elevated and prominent site has been successfully protected against the attentions of the military authorities and others, who have sought to "round-off" this corner of Winchester. The fact that the site has reached the stage where nature is, for the moment at least, re-asserting itself at a location which is only a short stroll away from some of the most intensively populated parts of the City is noteworthy, not least in terms of ecology, habitat and nature conservation.
- 5.3. That Bushfield exhibits a great sense of openness and has overcome past attempts to develop it illustrate, perhaps, the site's importance. This, coupled with the authorised public use of the Ridge, the actual benefits to local people brought about by the informal use of paths in and around the Camp, the importance of the site as a counter-point to the housing development at Badger Farm and the contribution made both to the particular setting of St Cross and the wider landscape which surrounds it, all tend to suggest that Bushfield occupies a distinctive, unusual and important location in the overall context of the City.
- 5.4. Leaving aside the area to the north of Whiteshute Lane, which is inalienably committed to its role as public open space, there are other parts of the site which, because of their topography/visibility, ecology, archaeology and/or essential value to the setting of St Cross, are totally unsuited to built development in any significant form.
- 5.5. However, in terms of visibility and the other constraints, there are parts of the overall site which:
- (a) Are not readily visible in any inward view of the site from beyond its boundaries and;
 - (b) Are not subject to the highest level of some of the constraints outlined above.
- 5.6. Plan 10. illustrates the general distinction between the more and less sensitive sub-areas and their distribution within the overall site.
- 5.7. It is essential to stress, however, that even within those areas which are less visible and less sensitive, in an overall sense, the scope for any form of built development is limited. This is partly due to the site's restricted capacity to physically absorb or enfold new buildings and partly due to all those necessary restraints imposed by the sort of well-founded and staunchly defended countryside policies, which have progressively and consistently evolved over many years.
- 5.8. Nevertheless, there are landowning and land-management interests, which are ongoing and relatively specific and where an element of hope-value for future development possibilities may feature in the overall equation. In the case of the Church Commissioners, no attempt has been made to obscure the fact that they have and, doubtless, will continue to maintain, a primarily commercial attitude towards their land holding. In the case of Hampshire County Council, where its land is currently farmed by a tenant as part of an established holding, its position may be more ambivalent. Nevertheless, the area's agricultural value to both the Church Commissioners and the County Council, as well as their respective tenants, should not be entirely dismissed.
- 5.9. It is, therefore, necessary to consider future uses of the site. Apart from addressing the dereliction of the Camp site, these might replace or, under some circumstances combine with, continuing farming activity on certain parts of the site.

6. Landscaping

- 6.1. Taking proper account of existing tree features and other vegetation within the Study area, together with the recent planting carried out by the Church Commissioners, it is nevertheless important to consider and act upon the landscape contribution made by the Bushfield area in a clear and comprehensive way.
- 6.2. In general terms, the conservation of the City's wider landscape setting is considered to be as important for the future character of Winchester as the conservation of the landscape within the town itself. It is important, therefore, that any further planting at Bushfield should not be thought of simply in terms of "screening" but should be more consciously directed towards sustaining a particular overall character or silhouette for the Study area. To achieve this could bring considerable benefits, not only for the principal aspects of the site itself but as a further enhancement of the setting of Winchester.
- 6.3. This could also help to offset the visual impact brought about by the recent construction of the M3 link and its side roads to the east and south-east. Seen from Bushfield Camp such elements present immature and unattractive middle-distance features, especially when viewed against the rolling chalk downland which forms the western tip of the East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 6.4. In terms of maintaining and, wherever possible, strengthening the landscape framework of the town as a whole, it is considered that the Study area, and in particular its lower and middle reaches, does represent an unusual and important opportunity for the planting and subsequent natural development of a significant number of trees.
- 6.5. In addition to the great value which is inherent in the Study area's sense of openness, it is important to ensure that the capacity of Bushfield to make long-term contributions to the scale and composition of the wider landscape character is fully and properly exploited. A single example of this might be the reinforcement of existing planting which frames Whiteshute Lane. The result of such planting would create a bolder feature in the broad panorama, especially in views from the north and east and, furthermore, could enable this element to be more closely integrated with the principal beech tree feature at the crest of the Camp area.
- 6.6. Co-ordinated tree planting beside the Badger Farm Road frontage could also contribute to the formation of a new "gateway" to Winchester. Avenue features are already established as attractive and characteristic elements which line most of the radial routes leading into Winchester. Such an introductory feature here could have the added benefit of helping to ameliorate the effects of the road construction referred to above.

7. Built Development

- 7.1. Much attention has been paid to the relationship between Bushfield and elements of Winchester's built environment, both close to and further from this site. There is, however, no doubt that the entire study area stands quite clearly beyond what has long been recognised, at all levels of government, as the sharply defined, built-up edge of Winchester. It must, therefore, be regarded as having a countryside status, with all the necessary restrictions which that implies.
- 7.2. For the countryside policy and other reasons described in this report, there is not felt to be any scope, on any part of the Bushfield site, whereby built development of a residential, industrial, warehousing or general business nature would be acceptable. Indeed, any such significant development would register as a quite distinct enclave, completely detached from the existing settlement area.
- 7.3. Development having that effect would be quite alien to the character and quality of the site and would, in reality, set a dangerous precedent for other potential development on Badger Farm Road and in the area of the new link road to the M3. A precedent of that kind would also have potentially harmful consequences for other sites similarly located just beyond the City's policy boundary.

Recreation

- 7.4. Looked at in recreational terms, it is clear that all or part of the entire site would lend itself to some combination of formal and informal recreation.
- 7.5. The site has much to commend it in that respect:-
 - (a) Recreational uses would generally accord with planning policies for the countryside;
 - (b) Viable recreational uses would help to ensure the future of the entire site and not just the flanking Ridge area. This would greatly strengthen the countryside edge to Badger Farm and the City's urban boundary;
 - (c) Primarily as a result of the topographical characteristics described elsewhere in this document, Winchester now has very little flat land suitable for the establishment of playing pitches and, in particular, those of a standard which might be able to meet generally accepted requirements for competitive use.
 - (d) The site is well served by the road network although not, as yet, by public transport. However, that should not cloud the fact that, locationally, the site is well placed to serve the recreational needs of much of the southern part of the City, in a way which is particularly accessible to pedestrians and cyclists and, therefore, potentially sustainable for the future. Such an objective is now taking on increasing importance and is fully supported through current Government guidance;
 - (e) A recreational facility here would complement the River Park facility, evening-out certain aspects of recreational demand and thereby creating a better balance of provision;
 - (f) It should be borne in mind that established sports pitch facilities already exist at the Camp. By the same token, the flat and still very sound parade square, together with other level areas of the Camp to the south of the beech tree feature, could be used to provide additional pitch facilities, if that is what was required;
 - (g) Outdoor recreational activity could conform to the constraints imposed on the site by the limitations described above. Although any formal recreation would require access, internal circulation, parking, some user facilities and possibly a degree of outside lighting, those relatively discreet parts of the former Army Camp and the

contours of the land in their vicinity could be used to good effect;

- (h) With the constraints of planning policy, and with the landscape and the historic setting of the site given proper priority, there is no doubt that the slopes from the ridge-line beech trees down to St Cross and the railway line are not developable in any conventional sense. However, given their topography, the particular needs of St Cross Hospital, vis-a-vis its setting, and the ecological and archaeological potential which is clearly present, it is equally plain that informal recreation could be ideally suited to these parts of the overall site.

7.6. If such informal recreation was to take the shape of a chalk downland "Country Park", this could not only provide an excellent facility of its type, but could be designed in such a way as to integrate with, and benefit from, its downland ecology and inherent archaeological interest. Interpretation facilities might be used to add further visitor enjoyment and an understanding of the Itchen Valley and its history. The site would provide an ideal point from which to view many areas of interest.

7.7. Leisure facilities of the sort described could also provide a chance to link with the current upgrading of that section of the river valley which, until recently, was so devalued by the former bypass and its traffic burden. With the transfer of traffic onto the new length of Motorway, it is very likely that interest in the Itchen Navigation, St Catherine's Hill and, to a limited extent, Plague Pits Valley will steadily return. The physical alteration and downgrading of Five Bridges Road to a footpath/cyclepath/bridleway, as part of the motorway's associated landscaping and reinstatement works, together with the City Council-owned railway viaduct could, in time, provide useful connections between the two sides of the valley. Such links could also be brought into play in providing an enjoyable and attractive way of uniting the South Downs Way and the Clarendon Way, long distance paths.

Park and Ride

7.8. Given the City Council's declared interest in identifying suitable additional Park and Ride sites, it is important to consider any potential which may exist at Bushfield. From an operational point of view, this site is sufficiently near to the southern radials into Winchester to justify close examination.

7.9. Many of the comments made in regard to recreational use are equally applicable to Park and Ride:-

- (a) Access into the site via the old Camp entrance would be quite acceptable by modern highway standards. The only significant improvement likely to be needed would be a "protected" right turn, alongside the present opening;
- (b) As with formal recreation and its "infrastructure", there are parts of the former Camp and its environs on the west side where sizeable areas of surface car parking could be obscured in public views into the site. Although the natural aspect and existing tree cover are in places favourable, there is no obvious reason why careful design and, if necessary, additional planting might not be used to effectively conceal such a use within part of the site;
- (c) The entrance to the Camp site on Badger Farm Road situated, as it is, close to the road to Compton/Otterbourne, the link road to the Motorway itself and also St Cross Road, would provide a potentially suitable location to intercept traffic otherwise coming into and leaving Winchester on the main southern approaches to the City;
- (d) The presence of an organised car park might also benefit the use and servicing of any recreational facility on other areas of the overall site. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that Park and Ride facilities at Bushfield would only be suitable in combination with other uses, where these could provide levels of activity sufficient to avoid an unwelcoming and insecure atmosphere. The latter might be the case if Park and Ride was an isolated activity.

- (e) The relatively detached nature of the site could emphasise the external impact of any fixed lighting, as well as moving vehicle lights, after dusk. However, the normal "halo" of artificial light above and around Badger Farm and Olivers Battery would make the presence of any stray light from Bushfield rather less obvious. As with (b), above, additional planting could be used to ameliorate any such effect.