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HDC | Internal Consultation | Strategic Planning

LANDSCAPE

Date: 03/11/2017

App Ref: **N/A**

Case Officer: Norman Kwan

Storrington Sullington and Washington Neighbourhood Plan

Assessment on the capacity of the Ravenscroft Allotment Site to accommodate 70 new dwellings as provisionally drafted on Policy 2 (iv) of the Pre Submission Neighbourhood Plan.

Draft Policy on the SSWNP:

Policy 2 (iv)

Ravenscroft Allotment Site, Storrington

Land west of Ravenscroft, Storrington as shown on the policies map, is allocated as a comprehensive scheme for housing and allotments. Proposals will be permitted where:

- a) Some 70 dwellings will be provided within the identified residential area as shown on the policies map;**
- b) The existing allotments are relocated to the area shown on the policies map prior to the commencement of development;**
- c) Access is achieved off Ravenscroft;**
- d) Existing landscaped boundaries around the site are retained and enhanced along with the creation of new landscape buffers along the southern boundary of the site and to have full regard to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of the adjoining South Downs National Park; and**
- e) The scale, massing and appearance of the development are of a high standard of design and layout which relates sympathetically to the locality and enhances the appearance of the site.**

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Summary of current Planning Policy

Policy that is relevant to the site, both at national and district level, advocate high quality design and the need to recognise and respond to local character and conserve, protect and enhance protected landscapes, habitats and species and conserve and enhance biodiversity.

The HDPF, states that development will be supported where it protects, conserves and enhances the key features and characteristics of the landscape character area in which development is located, retains the development pattern of the area, protects the pattern of woodlands and fields and the landform of the area

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (2014-2019) recognizes that development outside of the SDNP can affect its setting, and that poor or inappropriate design, as well as badly scaled development, could increase the sense of urbanisation in the countryside such as the erosion of tranquillity or the impact on dark night skies by increased light pollution.

Landscape Character Guidance:

❖ **Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment**

At District level, the site falls within D1 Amberley to Steyning Farmlands Area of the Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment.

Key Characteristics relevant to the site and surrounding area include:

- Rolling landscape of the low ridges of the upper greensand, and the narrow vale of gault clay
- Overlooked by the chalk escarpment to the south
- Varied patchwork of arable and pasture farmland, with fields of irregular shapes and sizes

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Overall Character

These rolling farmlands are dominated by the enclosing presence of the chalk scarp immediately to the south. The complex geology of Lower Chalk, Upper Greensand and Gault clay, is reflected in changes in the agricultural landscapes over short distances. Large open arable fields occur closest to the base of the escarpment with relatively few hedgerows. Small hedged pasture fields and small woodlands are characteristic on the gault clay, with narrow strips of streamside woodland a feature.

Overall, the area has a strong rural undeveloped character, although there is localised noise and visual intrusion from the A283 and A24 trunk roads, and some visual intrusion on the edge of Storrington.

Historic Features

- Irregular field boundaries, some more recent straight field boundaries.
- Historic farmsteads and manor houses.

Biodiversity

- Strong hedgerow network in parts, fragmented where there is more intensive arable farmland.
- Linear streamside woodlands on the greensand and blocks of woodland/small copses on gault clay.
- Small areas of unimproved grassland.

Key Issues

- Past and continuing loss of hedgerows in arable farmland.
- Decline in condition of hedgerow oaks.
- Some visual intrusion from urban edges of Storrington.
- Potential development pressures on the edge of Storrington and Steyning.

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Landscape Condition

Overall condition is declining, due to the loss of hedgerows in areas of arable farmland.

Sensitivity to Change

Overall sensitivity to change is high due to the openness and prominence of the greensand ridge at the foot of the scarp, and due to the vulnerability of small scale historic field patterns in the gault clay vale.

Key sensitivities are to

- High density and large scale built development.
- Cumulative impact of small scale incremental change, including minor road improvements.

Planning and Land Management Guidelines

- Conserve the rural undeveloped character. Large scale housing and industrial development or cumulative small scale change could substantially damage its character, e.g. through loss of historic field pattern, hedgerows and woodland.
- Ensure any appropriate new development responds to the historic settlement pattern of the area and traditional local materials and design.
- Conserve and restore the existing hedgerows network. Priorities for restoration of hedgerows are within areas of arable farmland.
- Encourage the planting of new small woods, copses in the narrow gault clay vale, as well as the edges of Storrington and Steyning.

The Horsham District Character Assessment also includes a section that covers **Settlement Character and Guidelines**. Storrington is discussed at section 5.8 Storrington, Sullington and Heath Common.

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Key Characteristics include:

- Heavily indented settlement edges with woodlands, heathland, and small hedgerowed fields making a distinctive contribution to the setting.
- Built development is widely visible from South Downs, but is considerably softened by woodland and mature trees.
- Extensive low residential areas with informal layouts and large plot sizes and a random pattern of dwelling sizes.

The Overall Character is described as:

The village of Storrington has a small historic core of cottages, and small town houses occupying slightly elevated ground above the River Stor. The busy High Street is dominated visually and aurally by traffic, whereas the narrow lane of Church Street has much more peaceful character. There is a mixed local vernacular of brick, flint and sandstone. To the east and the north, there are 20th Century housing estates of mixed architectural styles with a variable pattern.

The site sits in Area 1 of the ***Character of the Landscape Setting Areas:***

- Rolling farmland at footslopes of the Downs
- Small to medium scale field pattern of pasture fields
- Thick hedgerows and many hedgerow trees
- Linear streamside woodland

The ***Sensitivity of the Landscape Setting Area to Urban Extensions*** is considered **high** due to the *many* intrinsic landscape qualities, *very important* contribution to distinctive settlement setting, *high* visual prominence and *moderate* intervisibility.

Planning and Landscape Enhancement Guidelines:

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- Conserve and enhance the well treed character of the area
 - Enhance key approaches through new street planting where appropriate
 - Conserve and manage the village road in Storrington
 - Seek opportunities to enhance the visual and ecological character of open spaces, particularly school playing fields and recreation grounds, through encouraging more diverse margins and additional planting appropriate to underlying landscape character.

❖ **Horsham District Landscape Capacity Study**

The Horsham District Landscape Capacity Study was carried out in 2014 as an evidence base for the Horsham District Planning Framework. The levels of landscape sensitivity and capacity identified as part of the study are generalised statements across each area, and that further analysis needs to be carried out in relation to specific applications with significant landscape and visual effects, or where there are cumulative impacts of several developments.

The site falls within Zone 5: Storrington and West Chiltington under the Landscape Character area 63: Land South of Storrington and is a small part of a bigger area. The assessment summarises the area as No/Low overall landscape capacity for medium scale or large scale housing.

Medium scale housing development is described as *“developments of approximately 100-500 dwellings associated with urban extensions to Category 1 settlements. It is assumed that this development would comprise mainly two storey developments of no more than 8.5m in height, at an average of 35-40 dwellings per hectare. (...)*

Although for the purpose of this assessment only up to 70 dwellings is to be considered, the capacity study is nonetheless of relevance, taking into consideration the specific factors that give this area a

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high-landscape character sensitivity and moderate-high visual sensitivity. The combined Landscape sensitivity is considered high and Landscape Value, moderate-high.

The definition of No/Low landscape capacity is that *“The area is unable or only has a very limited potential to be able to accommodate the specified type and scale of development without unacceptable adverse landscape and visual effects or compromising the values attached to it, taking account of any appropriate mitigation”*

The site relevant sections of the assessment for the Landscape Character Area 63 are reproduced below:

Landscape Character Sensitivity

- *This area has a gently to moderately undulating landform (...) and including a slight ridge formed by the Upper Greensand sandstone formation close to the edge of Storrington*
- *A very variable field pattern of small, medium and large fields associated with the individual parcels of land that make up this area*
- *There is a strong network of hedgerows and hedgerows trees and some small copses*
- *The landscape is mostly in good condition with only very localised urban influence from a small industrial estate in Chantry Lane (...)*
- *Many attractive views of the South Downs escarpment (...)*
- *The area provides a complex, soft indented edge to Storrington and is important to the attractive character of its historic core*

Landscape Value

- *Mostly moderate-high tranquillity reflecting proximity to the natural qualities of the Downs and only very localised urban/busily trafficked road influence*
- *Ecological interest of hedgerows and small copses (...)*

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- *Historic interest of a number of historic properties including listed buildings*
 - *Most of the area lies immediately adjacent to the South Downs National Park*
 - *Amenity value of public footpaths and bridleways*

Visual Sensitivity

The area has a varied visual sensitivity to development, reflecting some parts that are fairly enclosed by trees and hedgerows and adjacent landform, other parts that are much less screened by vegetation and are more prominent on rising ground/slight ridgeline with high intervisibility with the South Downs.

Whilst the study does not distinguish between the different land parcels that form the study area, the site on its own merit, represents most of the parameters highlighted on the landscape character sensitivity and value of the Character Area 63 in which the site falls and therefore is considered **high** landscape character sensitivity and **moderate-high** landscape value.

❖ **South Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment**

The site falls within character area I: Scarps Footslopes Landscape Character Area I3: Arun to Adur Scarp Footslopes 2005 (updated 2011)

This document has been briefly reviewed but in the particular circumstances of this proposal, it is not considered to add any significantly new material of direct relevance to the site and its assessment.

❖ **Draft Conservation Area Appraisal**

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Conservation Area – Landscape Setting:

The character of the conservation area is influenced by the landscape and development that surrounds it. Where the conservation area abuts the surrounding countryside, the character of this landscape fringe has been defined below. These fringe areas have been identified through consideration of the variation in characteristics of the land adjacent to the conservation areas.

The site falls within Landscape fringe 2 of the Storrington Conservation Area Appraisal and is identified as being of medium sensitivity to change associated with development.

The landscape fringe is described as follows:

- The conservation area edge is well integrated by vegetated property boundaries and field trees;
- Built form within the conservation area does not stand out, although modern development is more conspicuous to the east;
- Low-lying, gently sloping topography of the South Downs footslopes, which rises gradually to the south;
- Skylines are generally vegetated, and defined by the escarpment to the south;
- Small scale landscape associated with the immediate fringe of the conservation area;
- Medium scale landscape extends farther south across the footslopes, where field boundary vegetation opens up;
- A relatively simple character associated with the transition from the hard development edge to the open pasture land;
- Moderate level of tranquillity and recreational value;
- Generally enclosed visual character along this fringe;
- Views begin to open up to the south, looking towards the slopes of the South Downs;
- Glimpses of the abbey through security fencing along the edge of the footpath.

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Summary of Landscape Character

The suite of landscape character studies referenced above is considered to present a representative summary of the general wider landscape context of the site. In particular, they indicate that the site lies in an area recognised to be of potentially high sensitivity to the adverse effects of incremental change.

The studies indicate that the site lies in an area recognised as being attractive countryside, albeit that has already suffered some decline, and that the existing rural setting and spatial structure of settlements are sensitive to the adverse effects of inappropriate development. The specific landform, physical and perceptual qualities of the site and the local context are discussed in the sections below.

Site Description and Appraisal:

A site visit was carried out in October, under some showers and light fog weather conditions. The site as defined on proposal put forward in the pre-submission neighbourhood plan has been viewed from publicly accessible footpaths only including the elevated paths from the South Downs National Park. These have been assessed through a set of photographs taken on a previous site visit in close proximity to this study area.

The Ravenscroft Allotment site (pre submission proposal) is situated on the lower slopes of the South Downs, adjacent but outside of the settlement of Storrington and South Downs National Park (SDNP) boundaries with the exception of the proposed allotment area which falls within the SDNP boundary.

The study area comprises of a northern field (currently the allotment site), a middle field, and the southern fields which include two small fields and a small part of a fifth one with fragmented boundaries but clearly defined on old maps as far back as c.1898. The middle field and the three smaller fields have now particularly fragmented southern boundaries but nonetheless still reflect the old field pattern and one of the key characteristics of the landscape of the area *of varied patchwork of arable and pasture farmland, with fields of irregular shapes and sizes* described below.

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The **northern field** is currently used as the community allotments site and rectangular in shape. It abuts the settlement boundary and development along most of the northern part of the western boundary, the northern and eastern boundaries and an open field to the south. The boundaries are well defined with mature trees and hedgerow along part of the western side, with the exception where it abuts the new development as this has been significantly reduced and includes some close board fence. The northern boundary also includes timber close board fence. The eastern boundary is marked by mature ash and oak trees and a maintained native hedgerow. The southern boundary is formed by trees and overgrown hedger/scrub.

The field landform is mainly flat, sloping gently towards south and there is a land drain running parallel along the western and northern boundaries. Views of this field are available from the public highway at Ravenscroft and glimpses through the public footpath ROW 2685. There are also a number of properties directly overlooking the field and which are sensitive receptors to change in views and visual amenity. From the top of the escarpment, this site is visible but due to the nature of the allotment use, sitting in lower ground, the existing boundary hedgerows and trees, it sits discretely within the context of Storrington and reads as part of the transitional landscape between settlement and open countryside. Attractive views are also most likely to be obtained outwards from the site towards the SDNP ridge line of Chantry Hill prominent in the foreground and forming an important landscape/visual backdrop of value.

The **middle field** is relatively square in shape, and comprise of overgrown pasture land. The field sits adjacent but outside of the settlement boundary along its eastern boundary and this boundary is defined by a high mesh security fence and overgrown hedgerow and scrub. Its southern boundary sits adjacent to the open countryside, also forms the boundary of the SDNP and is visually fragmented and defined by the two trees in the south east corner. The western boundary is formed by dense tree and hedgerow cover and is adjacent to the grounds of St Josephs Abbey, Grade II listed.

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The northern boundary is adjacent to the northern field (allotments) as described above. The ground gently slopes away from the southern boundary towards the northern boundary. Views of this field are available from the ROW 2685 which runs along the western boundary towards south-west into the sloping open countryside of the Downs. The north section of the boundary (closer to Ravenscroft) offer opens views of the field through a section of the fence where the hedgerow has been removed and thereafter filtered views through the overgrowth. Due to the intervening vegetation, there were no views of this field from medium distance views along this path (within the SDNP) however some glimpses may be available in winter months when the screening effect of the boundaries is reduced.

Glimpses of the field are available from the parking court of the private road, Orchard gardens. Along the eastern boundary there are a number of properties which directly overlook the field and which are sensitive receptors to change in views and visual amenity as are some of the flats at Orchard Gardens that also overlook the field. Also a very sensitive receptor to change in views and visual amenity is the heritage asset St Josephs Abbey.

There are no views of the field from the public highway.

Very attractive characteristic views are most likely to be obtained outwards from across the field. Views are of the wider wooded, open grassland and unspoilt countryside to the south, with the SDNP ridge line of Chantry Hill prominent in the foreground and forming an important landscape/visual backdrop of value.

From the distant views from the South Downs Way, the field is visually prominent and significantly contributes to the setting of Storrington and the SDNP. Notwithstanding the low intervisibility between the two, the field also positively contributes to the setting of the conservation area. Although subject to some urban influence, the field retains many natural and tranquil qualities as a result of the presence

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of the attractive views towards the Downs, the presence of old field boundaries and mature trees and landform.

The historic presence of the field in its unchanged boundary shape (current shape present from records c.1898) shows how long-established the settlement edge is and the importance of the field to the setting and its function as a rural buffer where the urban edge of Storrington is close to the National Park boundary.

In conclusion, whilst some existing residential properties are partially visible along sections of the eastern boundary and some glimpses may be allowed towards the north western corner, as well as the security fence along the eastern boundary, the overall impression gained of the site is that it sits in a semi-rural location but retains a predominantly rural, attractive character. This is due to the combination of existing mature vegetation of mainly native species, pastoral land use and the low density of existing development on three sides, one of which is the allotments which are set down relative to the higher level of the site. As a result, and despite a lack of obvious maintenance and management, the site and the main boundary vegetation features are in good condition, largely lacking visually intrusive urban influences. The allocation of this field for development would negatively harm and erode the landscape character of the area including the setting of the SDNP, the settlement setting and to a lesser extent the setting of the conservation area, and visual amenity including when appreciated from the elevated views of the Downs.

The **southern field** comprises a combination of a small irregular shaped field, a small rectangular field and a triangular like shape part of a third irregular shaped field to form a square shaped allocation for the relocation of the allotments. This is one of the key character characteristics of the landscape found in this area, the varied patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland with fields of irregular shapes and sizes, and of high landscape sensitivity to change. The field is within the SDNP boundary and therefore has special protection. The western boundary abuts Greyfriars Lane and intermittent views are available

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through the intervening vegetation, more open views available through gaps in the overgrowth and field gates. This field sits in higher ground in relation to the lane making it more exposed to view and sensitive to change. The lane itself is narrow, heavily treed and vegetated and very rural in character. There are no defined public rights of way crossing the field although Greyfriars Lane due to its nature is well used for walkers and connects into various public footpaths that link into the escarpment to the south.

From the top of the South Downs escarpment it is considered that the proposed allotments will 'read' as an awkward, intrusive projection of semi-urban development with all its paraphernalia into the undeveloped rural landscape significantly intruding upon the rural landscape character and breath-taking views of the South Downs.

Recommendation:

Based on the appraisal above, and taking a view on the capacity of the land for development, the study area could potentially accommodate small scale development within the northern field (existing allotment site) where development will be partially contained by the existing hedgerow and assisted by the gentle sloping away of the topography. This boundary would need to be strengthened, not only to help mitigate and soften the development but also to contribute to the existing lightly wooded nature of the edge of settlement. The existing allotment site sits in lower ground than the adjacent field and therefore less prominent from the higher view.

Any development on the middle field is much less screened by existing vegetation and much more prominent on rising ground with high intervisibility between the South Downs, having a negative effect on the setting of the SDNP. Development on this site would significantly change the overall rural

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character of this field by expanding the urban conurbation of Storrington and encroaching towards the SDNP. This would damage the special and sensitive setting of the SDNP.

Furthermore, settlement characteristics, such as indented settlement edges with small hedgerow fields, that make a distinctive contribution to the setting, would be lost. Development on this field would also negatively affect the setting of the conservation area and the rural landscape fringe it currently enjoys. There are a range of residential dwellings from where occupants would have varying degrees of exposure to the visual effects of the proposal of 70 dwellings. These include some direct views as well as oblique views and views from upper storeys. These views are not considered in detail but it is clear that there would be material changes to the outlook of several properties, including the heritage asset St Josephs Hall, in some cases reducing the rural amenity currently enjoyed.

Re-locating the allotments to this middle field, would be less harmful than a housing development, but would nevertheless cause harm to the setting of the National Park and also cause the loss to the indented settlement characteristic when appreciated with the Downs. The level of harm would be subject to the successful mitigation measures put in place.

The relocation of the allotment site to the southern boundary and within the boundary of the SDNP is considered wholly inappropriate as this will significantly harm the character, field pattern, rural nature and visual amenity of the SDNP, setting of the conservation area and settlement setting.

Panoramic views of these fields are available from the public rights of way on the escarpment and from the open access land, all extensively used throughout the year by walkers. Due to the overlooking nature of these viewpoints the effects could not be mitigated.

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In terms of the effects of the allotment on the Special Qualities of the SDNP it is considered there will be indirect, adverse effects at the local level on tranquil and unspoilt places and on inspirational places and breath taking views.

A further option (Submission Draft proposal) was made available for my consideration and this includes a smaller development area limited to the existing allotment site and the relocation of the allotments proposed on the adjacent field. This is more in line with the conclusions reached above and provided that the scheme put forward takes into consideration it's sensitive location, the landscape and visual harm arising could be offset against the other planning considerations.

Ines Watson

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