



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

**Proposed Submission City Plan Part 2
Brighton & Hove Development Plan April
2020**

Hearing Session: 10 November 2021 (PM)

**Statement in Response to Matter 10:
Special Area Policy SA7- Benfield Valley**

**BY
BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**

List of Abbreviations

CPP1 - City Plan Part 1
CPP2 – City Plan Part 2
LGS – Local Green Space
LWS - Local Wildlife Site
NPPF - National Planning Policy Framework
PPG – Planning Practice Guidance
SDNP – South Downs National Park
SDNPA - South Downs National Park Authority

Q1. How would the identification of this area secure the long term and enduring positive management, maintenance and enhancement of the Benfield Valley and its relationship to the National Park and urban areas?

1. The Council's key planning objectives for Benfield Valley are set out in Policy SA7 and explained in more detail in the TP05 Benfield Valley Topic Paper. Benfield Valley is a strategically important green space in the west of the city which performs several different roles – an important green wedge linking the urban area to the South Downs National Park (SDNP), an important area of open space serving the leisure and recreational needs for surrounding local communities, and a Local Wildlife Site (LWS). It also includes significant heritage assets, in particular the listed Benfield Barn and its surrounding Conservation Area. The policy promotes a strategic approach to facilitate the positive and ongoing management and maintenance of its open spaces, wildlife habitats and heritage assets, whilst enhancing public access and connectivity to the adjoining urban areas and National Park. It also allows for some very limited residential development on two small sites within the valley.
2. As one of the largest remaining undeveloped areas south of the A27 Bypass, Benfield Valley has been the focus of developer interest with several large scale development proposals being promoted in response to CPP1 and subsequent CPP2 consultations (see TP05 paragraphs 3.4, 3.16-3.17, 3.23-3.25) including the outstanding Regulation 19 representation by Benfield Valley Investments (DP268). The work undertaken in the 2014 and 2015 Urban Fringe Assessments (ED21 and ED22) and the subsequent assessment by the County Landscape Architect and County Ecologist set out in Appendices 1 and 2 the Topic Paper has clearly identified the importance of retaining the majority of Benfield Valley as green space in order to maintain the visual, ecological and physical linkages from the National Park into the heart of the urban area. The Council strongly believes that large scale development proposals at Benfield Valley would result in unacceptable landscape and ecological impacts as well as diminishing the quality of the remaining open space. To secure the long term protection of Benfield Valley, the Council is proposing to designate the majority of the land as Local Green Space (LGS). This is explained and justified in the TP04 Local Green Space Topic Paper and in the Council's responses to Matter 16 (DM38).
3. A key objective of SA7 is to promote a positive and comprehensive planning approach to Benfield Valley focusing on enhancement and long term management as well as simply protection. The supporting statements by the County Landscape Architect and County Ecologist (Appendices 1 and 2 of TP05) identify a range of measures for mitigating any potential adverse effects of the proposed Policy H2 housing allocations, which offer potential for enhancements and better long term management of the green infrastructure. Paragraphs 4.42 – 4.46 and Appendix 1 of the ED24 UFA

Update 2021 also identify a range of measures to achieve ecological mitigation and enhancements, including biodiversity net gains.

4. Other important objectives of SA7 focus on improving the quality of the open space and its leisure/recreational value for the surrounding communities (Hangleton and Portslade) as well as enhancing linkages with the National Park to the north. A key element is to create improved public access including the north/south linear footpath/cycleway and the potential for creation of 'gateway' and interpretation facilities. The policy also promotes the sympathetic repair and re-use of Benfield Barn for non-intensive community and/or recreational uses which could function as a 'gateway' or interpretation facility for the Park.

Q2. Is the boundary of the Special Area policy appropriate? Is there any justification for amending the boundary?

5. Yes. The boundary of the strategic allocation is drawn to encompass the whole of Benfield Valley south of the A27 Bypass/National Park boundary to enable a holistic approach to future planning, land uses and management of the area. No comments or objections have been received in relation to the proposed SA boundary other than representations by Highways England (12) requesting confirmation that the Special Area does not encroach upon the A27 highway boundary. In response to Highways England's comments at the Regulation 18 stage, both the SA and LGS boundaries were amended to exclude land within the highway boundary of the A27 in the Proposed Submission version of CPP2.

Q3. What are the potential benefits and adverse impacts of allocating a part of the site for housing? Would this be compatible with the policy aims and its status as a LWS, and recognition as a green wedge? How would this impact on the proposed designation of the rest of Benfield Valley as a Local Green Space? How have the heritage, ecology, biodiversity, open space/ recreation, visual impact, landscape, traffic and air quality and the community use of the area been addressed in the proposed allocations? What would be the adverse impacts and how have they been taken into account? Could any adverse impacts be mitigated? (the detailed issues of the proposed allocations will be dealt with under H2 site allocation in the urban fringe)

6. The justification for allocating land for housing at Benfield Valley reflects the high level of unmet housing need in the city and the specific requirement identified at the CPP1 examination for CPP2 to identify land for housing on urban fringe sites. The two sites proposed for housing north and south of Hangleton Lane were identified as having potential to accommodate development following detailed analysis in the 2014 and 2015 Urban Fringe Assessments supplemented by a further ecological assessment in the UFA Update 2021. Further assessment of the site was also undertaken in 2017 by Council officers together with the County Landscape Architect and County Ecologist, details of which are presented

in TP05 at Paragraphs 3.18 - 3.21 and in the accompanying statements by the County Landscape Architect and County Ecologist at Appendices 1 and 2.

7. The Council recognises that the housing allocations may create potential conflict with the wider environmental and green infrastructure objectives in Policy SA7. For this reason, the UFA reports and Topic Paper emphasise the importance of achieving high quality sustainable design. A range of specific mitigation measures are detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 of TP05 and Paragraphs 4.42 – 4.46 and Appendix 1 of the UFA Update 2021. At the same time, it is recognised that there is potential for development to assist the wider vision and objectives in SA7 by providing for green infrastructure enhancements linked to development and across the wider site and by contributing to the longer term management of the remaining open space at Benfield Valley.
8. The Council's comments on the general compatibility of the proposed Policy H2 housing allocations in relation to LWS designations and green infrastructure are set out under Matter 7 (Questions 1 and 2). The impacts of the allocations on the Benfield Valley LWS have been considered in detail in the UFA Update 2021 (Paragraph 4.29), concluding that the proposed scale of housing development can potentially be accommodated without significant ecology impacts, subject to the specified avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures referred to above. The proposed allocations would maintain the physical and visual connectivity of Benfield Valley as a 'green wedge'. The County Ecologist's comments in TP05 and the conclusions of ED24 both highlight the importance of ensuring retention of a north-south 'wildlife corridor'. In addition, both Policies SA7 and H2 set out requirements for further detailed assessments to be carried out in support of any planning applications.
9. Section 4 of the TP05 summarises the Council's evidence relating to heritage, ecology, biodiversity, open space/ recreation, visual impact, landscape, traffic and air quality and the community use of the area. The Topic Paper explains how these considerations have informed the proposed allocations and responds to all concerns raised in the representations received in response to the Regulation 18 and 19 consultations.

Q4. What is the justification for residential densities to be higher than the surrounding residential areas and up to three storeys? Is it based on robust evidence? Was this based on a site specific LVIA as requested by Natural England? How has this been dealt with? How were the buffers around the development sites identified? Are they soundly based?

10. The justification for higher densities is based primarily on the assessment undertaken by the County Landscape Architect set out in Appendix 1 of TP05, which concluded that the proposed housing sites can support a higher density of development than had been initially recommended for

Benfield Valley in the 2014 and 2015 UFA studies, whilst occupying an equivalent development footprint. The physical and visual separation of the proposed developable areas would allow for a higher density development form without detracting from the character of the area. The visual containment provided by the surrounding trees and woodland would allow for buildings up to three storeys without having unacceptable impacts on the surrounding areas. The UFA 2015 assessment of Benfield Valley (ED22b) suggested that the loss of trees to accommodate the development would have an adverse impact and would open up views to the proposed development. However, in the County Landscape Architect's view, the existing tree belts have been neglected and would benefit from positive management. She considers that a high quality landscape-led development need not detract from the visual amenity of the valley or surrounding areas.

11. Paragraph 3.9 of the supporting text to SA7 requires that development proposals at Benfield Valley are supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (as referenced by Natural England in their Regulation 19 submission). To clarify this requirement, the following Main Modification is proposed:

MM ##	Supporting text to Policy SA7, paragraph 3.9, page 158	<p>SA7 Benfield Valley <i>Amend paragraph 3.9, first bullet point to read:</i></p> <p>A Landscape and Visual Character <u>Impact</u> Assessment¹³⁹ which will inform landscape led masterplans for development sites and associated</p> <p><small>¹³⁹ To be carried out in accordance with Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition (Landscape Institute and IEAM 2013).</small></p>	To clarify that a LVIA will be required to support development proposals.
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12. This will inform landscape led masterplans for development sites and associated management/maintenance plans. Paragraph 3.73 supporting Policy H2 also requires that development proposals for all urban fringe housing sites must be supported by a LVIA at the planning application stage. This requirement was strongly supported by the SDNPA in its Regulation 18 comments on the Draft CPP2.

13. The buffers around the development sites have been influenced by the requirement for visual screening in relation to views from within the National Park and the need to maintain the setting of the listed Benfield Barn. The County Landscape Architect's comments emphasise the importance of surrounding trees and woodland in providing containment, but also highlight the need for positive management of the existing tree belts (e.g alongside the A293 Hangleton Link Road) as well as the need for additional planting for screening.

14. A further significant factor is ecological considerations and the need to maintain effective wildlife corridors. In her supporting statement at Appendix 2 of TP05, the County Ecologist acknowledges that a higher number of housing units would increase the level of disturbance but considers that confining the housing development within a similar footprint to that identified in the 2014 and 2015 UFAs would minimise potential impacts on important habitats and maximise the retention of significant wildlife corridors and buffers. She considers that with positive management of the remainder of the site, and a review of its access, such impacts could be minimised.
15. The additional ecological assessment undertaken in ED24 also emphasises the importance of maintaining buffers both to provide mitigation and enhancement through Biodiversity Net Gain. Paragraph 4.31 of the UFA 2021 specifically refers to the need to maintain the corridor of woodland running north-south, whilst Paragraph 4.44 states that additional tree, hedgerow and/or scrub planting around the boundary of the potential development area may also help buffer the LWS from some disturbance (including lighting), whilst providing habitat and retaining ecological connectivity through the site as mitigation for the loss of habitat caused by development. The importance of retaining appropriate buffers and maintaining wildlife corridors are recognised and it is emphasised that the proposed development will need to be sensitively designed and should focus on areas of amenity and poor semi-improved grassland habitat, allowing for the retention of buffers and maintaining valuable woodland corridors within the site. Overall Paragraph 4.36 concludes that delivery of the proposed housing allocation can be achieved in principle, although it is likely to be challenging and will require exemplary scheme design and robust mitigation and enhancements to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain.
16. The Council considers that the scale and density of housing proposed at Benfield Valley is soundly based both in terms of its potential landscape and ecology impacts.

Q5. Is the detailed policy wording clear and effective, justified and consistent with national policy?

17. Yes, it is considered that the policy wording is clear and effective. SA7 is a strategic policy which sets out the Council's long term vision and aspirations for the protection, enhancement and positive management of the area. As such, it should be read in conjunction with other relevant CPP1 policies (e.g. Policy SA4, SA5, CP10 and CP12) and other CPP2 policies, in particular DM38 which provides for the long term protection of the majority of the valley as LGS, and H2 which sets out parameters for the scale, type and character of the proposed housing development.
18. The policy is considered justified in that it seeks to secure the protection, enhancement and long term management of Benfield Valley as strategic green infrastructure, whilst also allowing for limited housing development

in recognition of the very high level of housing need in the city and identified scope to reduce and mitigate potential landscape and ecology impacts (see Appendix 1 and 2 of TP05).

19. The policy is also considered consistent with national policy. The justification for allowing for limited housing development within a LWS is addressed in the Council's response to Matter 7 (Question 2) and the justification for the LGS designation is addressed in the Council's responses under Matter 16 (Policy DM38).