

Planning Brief: Falmer Released Land

1. Status of this Planning Brief

- 1.1 This planning brief has been prepared as a tool to assist the council in securing its strategic objectives in respect of land that formerly formed part of Falmer High School, now deemed surplus to requirements for secondary education in the area.
- 1.2 Although the Planning Brief is a material planning consideration it cannot be afforded full statutory weight as it has not undergone full statutory consultation. However, the Brief complies with relevant Local Plan policies and national planning guidance and is a material planning consideration to which Members should give some weight in the determination of a planning application relating to the site.

2. Background

- 2.1 The site comprises the remaining (southern) building of the former Falmer High School, together with surrounding land, now deemed surplus to requirements due to the adjacent and recently completed Academy. The site is currently home to The Bridge Community Education Centre, which is seeking to remain in the area and which has submitted a business case to the council for replacement accommodation.
- 2.2 Through a now lapsed agreement between the council and Brighton & Hove Albion FC, 1000 car parking spaces were to have been provided on the High School playing field for the Amex Community Stadium on event days, in order to comply with planning requirements concerning total off site car parking in close proximity to the stadium. The closure of the High School and its replacement by the Academy has meant that parking on the playing fields is no longer an option. However, it is anticipated that in disposing of the site the council (as current landowner) will be seeking a development package that will provide both for replacement facilities for The Bridge, as well as car parking facilities to service the Amex Community Stadium on event days.

- 2.3 Although a degree of temporary car parking has been provided close to the stadium through agreements between the football club and other landowners, the need for additional local car parking to meet the full requirements of the planning permission remains and is heightened by the submission of a planning application in January 2012 to increase the spectator capacity of the stadium. Primarily in response to concerns raised with the council's Cabinet Member for Transport & Public Realm by local residents about the effects of event-day parking on streets in the Moulsecoomb and Coldean areas, the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive of B&HAFC jointly agreed to the preparation of an independent study of the current and future use, and impacts, of different forms of transport used by supporters to reach the Amex Community Stadium at Falmer.
- 2.4 In considering the wide range of transport issues, parking has been a key issue. The report has considered on-street problems, and the use and availability of parking both on-site (e.g. Bennett's Field) and off-site (e.g. University of Sussex and the Falmer Released Land). Consideration of the released land is important, given the original allocation of 1,000 spaces on the former Falmer High School Playing Fields as part of the original planning permission. In its overall conclusions and recommendations, the independent report has indicated that the case for the use of the released land for up to 800 spaces could be supported, and that this could form part of a wider package of proposals that would help to enable effective and efficient transport options for supporters to access the Amex Stadium both now and in the future.
- 2.5 In the light of the above, a planning brief has been prepared in order to:
- assist the council in its strategic objectives of securing a new home for The Bridge Community Education Centre and the recognised need additional car parking for the Amex Community Stadium;
 - help guide future development proposals by highlighting and applying the council's planning policies at a site specific level.

3. Site Context

- 3.1 The site area is on the north-east edge of Brighton close to the junction of the A27 bypass and the A270 Lewes Road. The Brighton to Lewes railway runs through the area and separates the existing school site from Woollards Field and Lewes Road. The area is within the defined 'Built-Up Area' in the Brighton & Hove Local Plan. However, given the site's proximity to the South Downs National Park and Stanmer Conservation Area, consideration should be given to its environmentally sensitive location.
- 3.2 The site, of approximately 2.25 ha, is owned by Brighton & Hove City Council and is flanked by ancient woodland to the south which is designated a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). Woollards Field, on the northern side of the railway line which forms the north boundary of the site, is allocated for employment use under Policy EM2 of the Brighton & Hove Local Plan. Part of the Woollards Field site has received planning permission for a new county records office (The Keep) for East Sussex and Brighton & Hove (under construction at the time of writing – January 2012). The University of Brighton campus and Virgin Active Health Club are located on the eastern boundary of the Academy site.

4. Planning Policy Context

Land Use

- 4.1 A sensitively designed scheme should be capable of accommodating the 800 car parking spaces required for event days at the stadium, in a tiered arrangement below a mixed use development.
- 4.2 The site contains a building that formed part of the former secondary school and is currently partially rented to The Bridge Community Education Centre. School buildings fall within the consideration of Local Plan policy HO20, which resists development proposals that would result in the loss of community facilities (including schools). Exceptions may apply, however, including instances where the community use is incorporated, or replaced within a new development. Whilst in this instance the former Falmer High School has been replaced with the Brighton Aldridge Community Academy, given the established community use of the released land, any proposals for community use will be supported in principle.
- 4.3 Other than the provision of car parking spaces and community uses, the site would be suitable for uses associated with either of the Universities' growth aspirations and the area's Academic Corridor status, such as student accommodation, teaching and learning space, business enterprise and start-up business units. Other educational uses (for example complementary to or in association with the adjacent Academy) would also be acceptable in principle.
- 4.4 Previous studies have identified land in this area of the city as being potentially suitable for Park + Ride, given the close proximity to the A27 Trunk Road. Although the council is currently reviewing its Park + Ride policy-options in the context of consultation to assist in the development of the new City Plan, the potential to make the most efficient use of this level of parking to assist in delivering the city's transport objectives remains a possibility (although clearly it could not fulfil such a role when it was being used in association with the stadium). The use of the site as a car park would be subject to satisfactory access arrangements. Safe access to and from the site on match and event days should be a primary consideration in the design of the parking spaces and the management of movement to and from them by stewards.

Design and Conservation Issues

- 4.5 Any development would need to be designed to take into account its potential visual impact on views from the South Downs National Park and Stanmer Conservation Area. With regard to the latter factor, development proposals should take on board policy HE6 which states that **“proposals within or affecting the setting of a conservation area should preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the area”**. Proposals should pay particular attention to paragraph 8.21 of the adopted Local Plan which refers directly to Conservation Area studies and their relevance to development affecting a Conservation Area.
- 4.6 Likewise, development proposals need to ensure the preservation of the ancient woodland on its southern and eastern periphery (a site of nature conservation importance (SNCI)). In accordance with recent legislation and Policy QD1 of the adopted Local Plan, a design statement will be required and it is likely that a landscape impact assessment will be necessary as a part of a wider Environmental Impact Assessment for the proposed development. The design statement should address the criteria contained in policies QD2 and QD4 of the adopted Local Plan.
- 4.7 Policy QD3 states that “new development will be required to make efficient and effective use of a site, including sites comprising derelict or vacant land and buildings. To secure the efficient and effective use of a site, proposals will be expected to incorporate an intensity of development appropriate to: the locality and/or prevailing townscape; the needs of the community, the nature of the development and proposed uses”. The selection of building materials and screening of the development will also be important considerations in the design of any future scheme for the site.

Other Policy Considerations

4.8 Notwithstanding the likely role the site is likely to play in helping meet the car parking needs of the Amex Community Stadium, it is essential that any development being proposed for the site is carefully managed in terms of the travel and transport demands generated by the scheme. New development should not encourage unnecessary car journeys but should actively promote more sustainable alternatives such as public transport, walking or cycling. At the earliest stage, the following factors should be considered:

- how the occupiers of the site will travel to and from the site;
- how visitors will reach the premises;
- how freight to and from the site will be managed; and
- what the impact of these new activities will be on their neighbours.

These issues will need to be addressed at the planning application stage through the submission of a Transport Assessment and a Travel Plan that aims to minimise the impact of the scheme by reducing traffic generation.

4.9 Redevelopment of the site should not result in any significant increase in traffic through the Stanmer Conservation Area, other residential streets or lead to on-street parking in surrounding streets. Off-site highways works may be required to mitigate any adverse impacts resulting from the development. Such works should be sympathetic to the character of the adjacent Conservation Area.

5. Environmental Sustainability

5.1 Due to the sensitive location of the site, any planning application coming forward is likely to require a formal Environmental Statement under the terms of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations. The Environmental Statement in particular should seek to minimise impacts on the environment, propose mitigation measures when impacts are unavoidable and consider alternatives including that of doing nothing.

5.2 In line with council planning policy, any proposed development would have to pay regard to the guidance in the council's Sustainable

Building Design **SPD 08** which promotes the use of renewable energy and greater energy efficiency within new developments. The SPG should be read in conjunction with policies SU2, SU13 and SU14, to ensure compliance with Local Plan policies. For further practical ideas on how waste can be reduced, re-used and recycled, the developer should read the council's **SPD03 on Construction and Demolition Waste**.

6 Useful Contacts

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7 List of Relevant Planning Guidance and Other Documents

Planning:

Adopted Local Plan (July 2005)

SPGBH 4: Parking Standards (Adopted September 2000, under review)

SPD 08 Sustainable Building Design

SPD 11 Nature Conservation and Development

SPD 03 Construction and Demolition Waste

Other:

Brighton & Hove Local Transport Plan

Brighton & Hove Sustainable Community Strategy

Brighton & Hove Economic Strategy

Brighton & Hove Community Development Strategy

