

Proposal - Construction of a 70-bed care home (Use Class C2), with associated parking, landscaping, access, drainage, and other associated works following demolition of existing structures.

Landscape Officer: Tim Dyer

Summary:

- The area along Bishopstoke Road including the application site is highlighted as “the most vulnerable” part of the gap, with the priority for enhancements being to reduce urbanising influences.
 - The proposed development would have an unacceptable urbanising effect on the Countryside (Eastleigh Borough Local Plan Policy S5) and the Settlement Gap (Eastleigh Borough Local Plan Policy S6).
 - The proposed development would physically and visually reduce the Eastleigh, Bishopstoke Settlement Gap which is again contrary to Policy S6.
 - Landscape objection to the proposed development
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Landscape Context;

The proposed development site is outside the urban edge, being covered by the Local Plan policy map as Countryside and within the Settlement Gap.

The boundaries to the application site have varied in their management. To the north and west the boundary is defined by a hedge which was last cut back in 2023 and has since been left to grow. To the east trees and scrub associated with the Barton River and to the south no defined boundary just the continuation of the grass field.

The topography within the site has only slight variation with a low bank between Bishopstoke Road, Chickenhall Lane and the ground within the application site. To the east the application site slopes towards the River Barton although this is outside the red line boundary.

Views of the ground within the application site are limited in summer by deciduous vegetation, largely restricted to the existing gateway and the view along the Barton River. The visibility increases with height and during the winter. The river bank tree planting for example is clearly visible across Bishopstoke Recreation Ground to the north, from the Hub to the east and from the Itchen Way to the south east, from Chickenhall Lane to the south and west, and from Bishopstoke Road. In winter the taller elements around the site are further exposed being more prominent from the summer locations and visible from further afield.

Impact on the Settlement Gap (Policy S6)- The policy has a high threshold for what makes an acceptable development in the gap including both physical and visual impact. There is no argument that the development impacts the gap the discussion is about the type and degree of impact.

Extensive evidence within the background work for the Local Plan has been used to review the settlement gap boundaries, ensuring that only land that functions and is necessary is defined as a settlement gap. They are listed below;

Settlement Gap Policy Review (2017)
Eastleigh Borough Settlement Gap Study (2020)

Landscape Architecture Comments

F/24/98678 – Land East of Chickenhall Lane, Eastleigh, SO50 6AF

The proposal site falls within Area F Eastleigh, Bishopstoke Settlement Gap – It sits in the narrowest part of the gap and is identified as providing the following functions;

The area helps preserve the open nature of the gap

The area helps maintain the sense of separation between settlements

The area plays an important role in defining the settlement character

The area play an import role in separation of settlements at risk of coalescence

The land is necessary in preventing the coalescence of settlements

"Mange development along Bishopstoke Road to encourage greater sense of arrival / leaving between two settlements" (2020)

Referring to the relevant sub areas;

"F6 - F8 - These three areas, including Bishopstoke Playing Fields, are the only open land between the edge of Eastleigh (railway corridor) and Bishopstoke and must be protected from development to avoid the coalescence of these settlements. They are critical for the separation in physical and perceptual terms.

F9 - The Itchen Valley contributes to the open nature of the Gap and is necessary to provide separation between the residential edge of Bishopstoke and much larger scale industrial development within the railway corridor on the edge of Eastleigh."

2020 Study conclusions

"The central part of the Gap associated with Bishopstoke Road provides limited perception of settlement separation and is the most vulnerable part of the Gap. Future landscape enhancements should be prioritised in this area to avoid the coalescence of these settlements including the reduction of urbanising influences to the highway and adjacent uses including Bishopstoke Playing Fields and the associated floodlights, car parking needs.

Gap Conclusion

Successive studies have identified the proposal site as providing gap functions which are necessary and valuable for maintaining the separation of Eastleigh and Bishopstoke. The 2020 study specifically identifies the Bishopstoke Road including the proposed site as "the most vulnerable part of the Gap"

The proposed development would impact upon the functions the site provides, that support the settlement gap.

The proposed development would;

Physically reduce the gap at its narrowest point.

Reduce the visual separation of Eastleigh and Bishopstoke.

Extend urbanising effects beyond the defined urban edge and into the countryside

The urbanising effect of the development can be reduced through mitigation measures like, minimising the built form, controlling lighting and increasing planting. However the mitigation measures themselves can impact upon the function of the gap (planting to screen for example restricted the openness of the gap) and the policy is very clear that development must conform to both parts A and B

Impact on the Countryside (Policy S5) –

Landscape Architecture Comments

F/24/98678 – Land East of Chickenhall Lane, Eastleigh, SO50 6AF

The applicant has submitted a Landscape and Visual Statement which does not seek to quantify the level of landscape or visual impact but rather a narrative to guide development. The document does seek to identify some viewpoints and define a position on the Settlement Gap however it is not a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and it is not transparent in defining what is an opinion vs conclusions from a defined, verifiable methodology. Given the sensitivity of the site and the policy background I would expect a definition of the level of impact (preferably an LVIA) and a landscape led approach to design

The methods of mitigating the impacts of the development also seems confused with the principle to introduce more appropriate development to enhance the sense of arrival, conflicting with maintaining and strengthening the boundary planting to mitigate, soften and screen the proposals. The red line boundary and the footprint of the building also does not allow space to integrate the edge of the development with the countryside. It is an abrupt transition without room for planting to match the scale of the building.

What is clear is that the landscape and visual impact is relatively contained, within 1km of the proposed site. However that landscape is valued and appreciated. That has been articulated in the Landscape Character Assessments, the nature conservation and heritage designations, in public access including the National Trail, the Itchen Way. Local winter views are a particular concern with mostly native deciduous planting around this area, the proposed development (especially massing and lighting) will have a greater impact when no leaves are there. This is difficult to mitigate because for example creating an evergreen screen would also be uncharacteristic and stand out in its own way as not belonging.

The resilience of the existing planting around the application site is difficult to rely on, changes to ownership or simply management practice changes the way the proposed development is mitigated. The Highway Authority have highlighted that an area along the northern boundary and western boundary is likely to be required for junction improvement works. The loss of the overgrown hedge with earthworks would dramatically alter the summer outlook of the application site. It is current featured in a photomontage and the landscape viewpoints. The Highway Authority would not be looking at integrating the proposed development into the countryside but would need to look at the highway design as the priority and would seek to minimise capital cost of expansive landscape scheme and its ongoing maintenance. Also the bankside planting along the Barton River has already experienced significant recent clearance, with the loss of large and prominent trees being removed. The remaining trees are outside the red line boundary and not controlled by this application leaving them vulnerable but leaving the proposed development reliant on it as mitigation and without space to implements its own.

Amended plans DD679L01 Rev G and 3765-HIA-01-00-DR-A-0102

The introduction of an area of “Proposed native coppice / shrub mix planting to enhance boundary vegetation / landscape buffers / wildlife corridors” is beneficial in principle when considering the potential highway improvement proposals from HCC. The applicant could then retain management of the mitigation feature. In reality this mix would not be near carparking and I suspect would need to be outside of services easements. This would affect how useful it would be in this location.

It does not alter my overall view on the development proposals as set out above.