

CABINET
25 July 2017

COUNCILLOR MARTIN TENNANT
ENVIRONMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY
PORTFOLIO HOLDER

COUNCILLOR MAURICE SHEEHAN
LEISURE AND YOUTH PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Key Decision: No

Report No COMM 1714
Report No PLN1720

Southwood Golf Course – Consultation on the option to create a major new parkland and deliver Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace.

Summary and Recommendations:

In order to continue to deliver the regeneration of the Borough's town centres, and meet housing needs, the new Local Plan for Rushmoor requires the identification of additional Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

SANG must be newly accessible areas of open space where the public can pursue informal recreational activities that are free of charge. The aim of SANG is to dissuade residents from using the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area with its protected plants and wildlife which falls within and just outside the Borough. Given the tightly constrained nature of the Borough, opportunities for identifying and delivering new SANG are limited.

There is however, potential to close the Southwood Golf Course and use it to provide up to 50 hectares of SANG. This would provide a major new parkland, protected in perpetuity for all the Borough's residents to enjoy and enable the delivery of around 2,500 new homes on other land (not on the golf course) in Rushmoor. It would also provide a number of financial benefits.

Consultation on the option to use Southwood Golf Course as a SANG is therefore an important step in determining the way forward in respect of the future role of the land as part of the delivery of the Borough's new Local Plan.

Cabinet would receive a further report on the results of the consultation and a recommendation on the future course of action.

Recommendation

Cabinet is recommended to approve the consultation process as set out in this report and to explore the potential closure of Southwood Golf Course and the conversion of the land to major parkland (SANG).

1. Introduction

- 1.1 One of the Council's key priorities is to help deliver the regeneration of the Borough's town centres, whilst at the same time providing much needed new housing to meet existing and future needs. The new Local Plan¹ is the framework that will guide the scale, type and location of such development in the Borough. However, to deliver the housing target in the Local Plan, mitigation² must be provided to offset the potential recreational impact on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area arising from new homes in the Borough.

2. Background

- 2.1 One element of the "mitigation" required to enable net new residential development in the Borough is the delivery of SANG which must be newly accessible areas of open space where the public can pursue informal recreational activities that are free of charge. The aim of SANG is to dissuade residents from using the heathland with its protected plants and wildlife which falls within and just outside the Borough.
- 2.2 The Council has already used up its own SANG at Southwood Woodland and Rowhill Nature Reserve, and is working with its neighbouring local authorities and other landowners to try to secure additional SANG capacity. However, this is proving difficult due to the predominantly urban nature of the Borough.
- 2.3 Natural England has indicated that if Southwood Golf Course (plan attached) were to be closed and used instead as parkland, this would provide enough SANG for around 2,500 new homes to be built on other land in the Borough. At the same time, it would deliver in perpetuity a major new parkland available to all the Borough's residents.

3. Details of the proposal

- 3.1 Natural England will require a proposal document and management plan to identify both the capital and revenue costs associated with looking after the Southwood Golf Course as a SANG. This will include a survey to identify current levels of informal use and a flood risk assessment. This will enable Natural England to determine how much of the current 50 hectares could be included as SANG. This would link to the adjoining Southwood Woodland, creating large public parkland to serve the immediate community of Southwood and the wider community of Rushmoor. The future use of the buildings on the Golf Course will also be considered as part of this project.

¹ The Draft Submission Rushmoor Local Plan is available to view at:
www.rushmoor.gov.uk/newlocalplan

² Further information on the requirements relating to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA is contained in Appendix 1 to this report.

- 3.2 The SANG would be used for, informal leisure activities such as walking dogs, cycling, fitness and nature trails, green gym, natural play structures, orienteering, community orchard, a small allotment garden and a local educational resource. The provision of some of these may affect the size of available SANG. It would also provide a local educational resource.
- 3.3 Conversion of the Golf Course into SANG would enable the delivery of around 2,500 new homes in Rushmoor by mitigating the potential recreational impact on the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area. These homes would not be built on the Golf Course, but would allow housing sites elsewhere in the Borough required by the new Local Plan, to come forward. The cost of developing and maintaining in perpetuity the SANG would be met through contributions from developers.
- 3.4 Southwood provides an 18 hole public golf course with clubhouse and is operated by a contractor on behalf of this Council. The tender is due for renewal in spring 2019. It provides both a sport and physical activity for its customers and at its peak attracted around 40,000 rounds of golf, making a profit of £200,000 pa. Given local competition, this has reduced significantly to around 25,000 rounds and now costs the Council £40,000 pa. There are no indications this would change with retendering in 2019.
- 3.5 The membership of the club has reduced to around 180 of which 120 are seniors, with under half living in Rushmoor. Overall, there are around 70 adult season ticket holders paying between £500 and £800 per year and 130 senior season ticket holders paying £400 per year.
- 3.6 There are a number of alternative golf courses in the local area, (The Army, Pine Ridge and Oak Park) which cater for pay and play and private members. The memberships range from £900 for a midweek and £1,000 for a weekend up to £1,000 midweek and £1,400 at a weekend. Some of these also have initial joining fees. The fees for turn up and play at Southwood and other local courses are attached (Appendix 2).
- 3.7 The Council will liaise with these local Golf Clubs to identify if there would be scope for any members of Southwood to relocate, along with the financial implications.

Alternative Options

- 3.8 As a constrained urban authority, options to create SANG are finite. The Council has already used both its main woodlands at Rowhill and Southwood for SANG. The Council is also working with neighbouring authorities to share the mitigation offered by new SANG sites in their areas, but opportunities are limited.
- 3.9 The Council could consider reducing the Southwood Golf Course from 18 holes to 9 holes but this would significantly reduce the amount of SANG available, and is unlikely to deliver a viable golf operation.

Consultation

- 3.10 It is proposed to carry out consultation during August and September 2017 to gauge the views of all stakeholders on the use of the Southwood Golf Course as a SANG. This would include local Councillors, the Golf Course operator, club members and other users, residents both adjacent and wider, conservation and leisure organisations along with statutory consultees.
- 3.11 We will use an online survey, which will be promoted through the web, social media, a local leaflet drop, press releases, static displays and meetings.
- 3.12 The key consultation messages would include:
- Conversion of Southwood Golf Course into a SANG would protect the land for public open space, and together with adjacent Southwood Woodland, and potential adjoining SANG in Hart, would create a large natural parkland area for residents to enjoy
 - This scheme would allow around 2,500 new homes to be built in Rushmoor, whilst protecting in perpetuity the Golf Course as parkland open for all residents to enjoy
 - The cost of setting up the SANG and maintaining it in perpetuity (at least 80 years) would be met by contributions from developers
 - Additional financial contributions will be collected from developers based on the value of the SANG (circa £6m)
 - Under current Government grant funding arrangements generation of New Homes Bonus could provide a significant sum (circa £10m) over a 4 year period, in excess of current projections.
 - Increased Council Tax collections, although there are inevitable costs to be incurred by the Council in relation to providing services to these new dwellings.
 - Potential revenue savings on the golf course (circa £40k pa)
 - The Golf Course attracts around 25,000 visits each year providing both sport and physical activity, which is enjoyed by local residents. In recent years, the level of use of the Golf Course has reduced significantly and it is now being subsidised by the Council. There are also a number of alternative golf courses in the local area, including pay and play courses and private members clubs.

4. Implications of decision

Legal Implications

- 4.1 If the Council chooses to close the Golf Course and use it for SANG we will need to terminate the existing golf course contract in 2019. The Council holds the Southwood Golf Course for leisure use and the provision of SANGs is a leisure use so there is no need to appropriate the land holding.
- 4.2 Other legal matters that will require attention relate to land ownership issues, including a strip of land on the site, which is in Hampshire County Council's ownership and would benefit from being included in the SANG. We may need to seek clarification on Public Rights of Way that cross the site particularly where these do not follow the official route. It will also be necessary to ensure that the SANG does not interfere with the clearance required for the oil pipeline that crosses the site.
- 4.3 Whilst a planning application will not be required to secure permission for change of use of land to public open space, it may be that some associated works, including access and parking, landscaping, walkways, bunding and boundary works to facilitate the SANG, are deemed operational development, and would therefore require planning permission. This may also apply when considering the future use of any buildings.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 4.4 The Council has previously converted both the Southwood Woodland and Rowhill Nature Reserve into SANG. The financial implications associated with the creation of a SANG at Southwood Golf Course will be clarified through the preparation of a "SANG" proposal document and management plan. The set up and maintenance costs will be covered through the collection of developer contributions associated with net new residential development in the Borough.
- 4.5 The closure of the Golf Course would provide a saving of £40k pa in relation to existing yearly operating costs, assuming the development commences as soon as the existing golf contract ends. As well as facilitating the delivery of new homes in the Borough, there are a number of associated financial benefits. These include around £6m from developers towards the value of the SANG. Under current Government grant funding arrangements generation of New Homes Bonus could provide a significant sum over a 4 year period, in excess of current projections.
- 4.6 The new homes would also provide for an increased Council Tax yield to the Council of around £350k per annum. There are inevitable costs to be incurred by the Council in relation to its provision of services to these new dwellings that would substantially absorb the additional income raised. However, with careful management of these costs the Council could

generate a favourable revenue financial outcome for the future in relation to this development.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 To continue delivering the regeneration of the Boroughs town centres and meet housing needs, the Council must identify additional SANG which is proving difficult. The closure of the Southwood Golf Course and its conversion to a major new parkland, available for all residents, provides an opportunity to deliver up to 50 hectares of SANG to enable around 2,500 new homes to be built elsewhere in the Borough. Consultation on this option will provide key stakeholders with an opportunity to give their views and enable a more informed decision on the way forward.

Background documents:

The new Local Plan and supporting documents can be viewed at:

www.rushmoor.gov.uk/newlocalplan

Further information on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area can be viewed at: www.rushmoor.gov.uk/spa

Contact details:

Report Authors:

Ashley Sharpe Ashley.sharpe@rushmoor.gov.uk/01252 398762

Louise Piper/louise.piper@rushmoor.gov.uk/01252 398410

Heads of Service:

Peter Amies/ peter.amies@rushmoor.gov.uk 01252 398750

Keith Holland/keith.holland@rushmoor.gov.uk/01252 398790

Southwood Golf Course Plan



Appendix 1: Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, and its implications for new development in Rushmoor

1. What is the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area?

- 1.1 The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area was designated in March 2005 under European Law. It is a network of heathland sites spanning eleven local authorities across Hampshire, Berkshire and Surrey. The Special Protection Area (SPA) provides a habitat for internationally important bird species, namely Woodlark, Nightjar and Dartford Warbler.
- 1.2 The Council must ensure that any development does not have an adverse effect on the SPA. In respect of residential development, if harm is deemed to arise from a net increase in houses, then the Council, as the competent authority, has a legal obligation not to approve the plan or project unless avoidance and mitigation measures are in place. Natural England considers that any increase in population within 5 kilometres of the SPA may have an impact on the level of recreational use taking place in the SPA, resulting in adverse effects that could be harmful to the habitat of the protected birds.
- 1.3 The whole of Rushmoor lies within 5 kilometres of the SPA and therefore any new net residential development requires the following to overcome these adverse effects;
 - The provision of SANG to attract people away from the SPA and hence reduce pressure on it;
 - Access management measures on, and monitoring of, the SPA to reduce the impact of people who visit the SPA (known as “Strategic Access Management and Monitoring” – SAMM)
- 1.4 Development plan policy requires SANG to be provided on the basis of at least 8ha per 1,000 population, with an average occupancy rate of 2.4 people per dwelling. SANG will be funded by developer contributions, or bespoke SANG solutions can be provided on-site by developers. SANG should be at least 2ha in size with;
 - SANG of 2 – 12ha having a catchment of 2km
 - SANG of 12 – 20ha having a catchment of 4km
 - SANG of 20+ha will having a catchment of 5km
- 1.5 Developments resulting in a net increase of less than 10 dwellings in Rushmoor do not need to be within a specified distance of SANG; however, they must still pay contributions to SANG and SAMM.
- 1.6 The capacity of the existing SANG in Rushmoor is nearing exhaustion and work has been ongoing to identify further SANG projects to enable the mitigation of net new residential development in the Borough.

2. Rushmoor Local Plan

- 2.1 As local planning authority, the Council should produce a Local Plan that sets out the future planning framework for its administrative area. The Rushmoor Local Plan sets out the long-term framework to guide future development in the Borough up to 2032, supported by detailed planning policies and site allocations required to deliver it.
- 2.2 With regard to the delivery of new homes, the obligation set out in the National Planning Policy Framework is that local authorities should establish housing need across the Housing Market Area (HMA) to which it belongs, and ensure that the component Local Plans together use all reasonable endeavours to meet that “objectively assessed” need within the HMA boundary. The total housing need across the HMA is 1,200 new dwellings per year over the Plan period, and of that, Rushmoor’s objectively assessed housing need is equivalent to about 436 dwellings per year, or 7,848 dwellings over the period 2014 / 2032.
- 2.3 Evidence suggests that there is adequate capacity to accommodate Rushmoor’s share of the HMA’s objectively assessed housing need within the Borough, with a small surplus of around 850 units over the Plan period. This is sufficient to allow some flexibility should some sites for any reason not be delivered as anticipated.
- 2.4 However, the delivery of Rushmoor’s share of the HMA’s objectively assessed housing need is dependent on the identification and delivery of sufficient land to mitigate the potential recreational impact arising from occupation of net new dwellings on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. The Council is making every effort to facilitate SANG to enable the delivery of the housing target set out in the new Local Plan.
- 2.5 The Council is in discussion with Hart to set up a formal arrangement to share the mitigation offered by new SANG sites in Hart District that have a catchment extending to include new housing sites in Rushmoor. Moreover, a new SANG with surplus capacity is anticipated as part of the housing allocation in the Draft Submission Rushmoor Local Plan for land at Blandford House and Malta Barracks in Aldershot. Even with this additional SANG capacity, it would not be sufficient to mitigate fully the net new residential development anticipated in the Draft Submission Rushmoor Local Plan. In assessing the Council’s landholdings, and their potential suitability as SANG, remaining options are extremely limited.
- 2.6 Were the Council not to identify and deliver suitable SANG to mitigate the impact of net new residential development, this would jeopardise the implementation of the spatial strategy set out in the new Local Plan. Without demonstrating to an Inspector at the Local Plan Examination that the Council is using all reasonable endeavours to deliver SANG, the outcome could potentially be that the Local Plan is found “unsound”.

Appendix 2

Golf Club Green Fees and Memberships	
Southwood GC	Adult midweek - £20
	Adult weekend - £25
	Senior - £15
	Season tickets – Adult 7 day £725 Adult 5 day £550
	Senior/Concession 5 day £385
Oak Park GC	Monday – Friday - £30
	Weekends - £35
Pine Ridge GC	Adult midweek - £29
	Adult weekend - £38
	Senior midweek - £21
	Senior weekend - £32
	Crown Golf memberships (Oak Park & Pine Ridge) 5 day membership - £899 7 day membership - £1133
Army GC	Midweek - £60
	Weekend play only with a member or arrangement
	Membership – Joining fee £500 + annual subscription £1365 = £1865
	No waiting list, no senior membership rates