

# Compton PC Local Plan Sub-Committee Report

## **Development Management Policies**

Guildford Borough Council submitted the local plan part 2 (the Development Management Policies) to the Secretary of State on 17 June 2022. The SOS has appointed David Reed as planning inspector to examine the Local Plan Part 2.

The Inspector will assess whether the plan:

- has been prepared under legal and procedural requirements and;
- meets the four tests of soundness set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 35)

The Inspector will consider:

- the evidence to support the plan
- any representations put forward by local people and other interested parties.

## **GRA meeting – May 24**

The Local Plan Sub-Committee chair, Karen Stevens, attended the GRA meeting on May 24 (via zoom). The meeting focused largely on the Wisley Airfield development and the North Street development. Meeting notes are attached (See Annex A). The members also discussed the implications of the A3 widening not going ahead for strategic sites such as Wisley and Blackwell Farm.

## **Solar Farm on Hog's Back**

The energy company SSE Energy Solution is proposing to build a solar farm on university owned land to the west of Blackwell Farm. Wanborough PC raised the following points:

1. The land is designated by the county as Area of Great Landscape Value and most of it is under agricultural land classification (ALC) Grade 2 by Natural England (i.e. DEFRA) making it Best and Most Versatile (BMV). This classification is offered significant protection under planning laws. Would a brownfield site be more suitable, particularly given the government's push for food security and retaining agricultural land for food production?
2. The university has a large footprint of car parks, buildings and brownfield space which could accommodate solar panels, including the possibility of innovative design such as raised panels to allow passage underneath, or a hybrid approach. Are options which would not require the use of farmland being discounted due to cost?
3. If the panels can't be installed on campus buildings and car parks, why position them on prime farmland a mile from campus where there is no development instead of adjacent to the university where they would be less out of place and result in less impact to the openness of the Green Belt?
4. SSE says the facility will be screened using trees and hedgerows. However, the site is on the lower slopes of the Hog's Back and overlooked from a range of vantage points, including from the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), land which is given the highest level of protection under the CROW Act. Given that the array will have to be open to the sky, exactly how visible will the panels be from the AONB?

5. How will the site be secured? Will it include intrusive fences and CCTV? Lighting? The area hosts a large population of deer, badger, foxes and other mammals and birds. Has a study been conducted on nature in the area and how any fencing and lighting will affect wildlife? If it is not secured, what are the risks to the infrastructure itself or to animals and local people?
6. Solar panels contain toxic substances which may include arsenic and heavy metals such as cadmium or lead. How has the risk of toxic leakage or contamination from the panels themselves been assessed?
7. The stated period from the start of construction to the plant coming online is 12 months. Where will the traffic route and what disruption is expected given that any roads to the site are single track lanes with few passing places?
8. What requirement is there for ongoing maintenance and inspection and what disruption will this cause, for example additional traffic? What chemicals will be used, for example for cleaning, and what is their toxicity?
9. What impact is expected to the soil during construction? If it is required to be cleared, will it be replaced, and if so how will it be stored?

Although the Local Plan Sub Committee is in favour of renewable energy, we do not believe that the slopes of the Hog's Back are a suitable location for a solar farm and would recommend that Compton PC objects to this proposal and any future planning application.

We would add the following points:

1. This land is of high landscape value, one section being sandwiched between a belt of ancient woodland (Wildfield Copse) and the woodland at Backside Common. From an environmental point of view, wildlife corridors should be left between belts of woodland.
2. The solar farm is adjacent to land that we hope will become future AONB, and there is a concern that the proximity of a solar farm might preclude this land from being considered for AONB status.
3. The land the University is proposing for this solar farm lies outside the 70 plus hectares it has already allocated for housing and constitutes yet further sprawl to the west of Guildford. Once the solar farm has been built, the land will be reclassified as "previously developed" or "brownfield", and there is a risk that in the future the University might argue that it is now suitable for yet more housing.