

Policy D6: Gosport Strategic Open Spaces

POLICY D6: GOSPORT STRATEGIC OPEN SPACES

- 1. The Gosport Strategic Open Spaces (GSOS) comprises the Alver Valley, Browndown, Stokes Bay and Lee Beach and Clifflands. These key open spaces are the green heart of the Borough offering significant community, education, health and nature conservation benefits to residents of Gosport, Lee-on-the-Solent and visitors alike. The Gosport Strategic Open Spaces will be protected and enhanced to assist in achieving the Borough's aim of being a healthier place for all.**
- 2. The Alver Valley will continue to be promoted as a Country Park in line with the latest Alver Valley Country Park Strategy⁸⁷ offering community, education, health and nature conservation benefits, a range of informal recreational opportunities and limited associated commercial uses appropriate to its setting outside the urban area. Planning permission will be granted for suitable new or improved facilities or infrastructure improvements to support the enjoyment of the Alver Valley as a Country Park. Planned development proposals include visitor and education facilities, and complementary and ancillary uses suitable for the Country Park setting.**
- 3. Browndown, Stokes Bay and Lee Beach and Clifflands are highly valued designated environmental assets for the local community and will retain their role as accessible open space, throughout the plan period. In the case of Browndown it is recognised that MoD requirements take priority.**
- 4. The following sites are also included within the Gosport Strategic Open Space:**
 - a) the portion of Lee-On-The-Solent Golf Club located within the Borough; and**
 - b) the open space associated with the River Alver between Brune Way and Rowner Road.**
- 5. The Council will support the following proposals and work with partners where appropriate to assist with delivery:**
 - a) the completion of a dedicated off-road cycle and pedestrian route between Lifeboat Lane and Fort Road car park utilising land along the southern edge of the former Qinetiq Fort Road site;**

⁸⁷ www.gosport.gov.uk/avcpmanagement

- b) the extension of the Alver Way northwards through the Alver Valley and links northwards; and southwards through Browndown to the Battery West Car Park;**
 - c) improvements to the River Alver drainage network to reduce the impact of flooding events on country park visitors; and**
 - d) integration of existing playing fields (often referred to as the Polo Field) between Grange Road and Privett Road into the Alver Valley Country Park should the field be no longer required by HMS Sultan.**
- 6. Within Browndown and Stokes Bay, the following sites are identified for redevelopment and allocated in this Local Plan:**
 - a) Fort Gilkicker and Land south of Fort Road (Policy A2); and**
 - b) Browndown Camp (Policy A5).**
- 7. All development proposals within the Gosport Strategic Open Spaces should seek to address the following criteria:**
 - a) provision of new and/or enhanced walking and cycling links and public transport connections in accordance with Policy D12;**
 - b) delivering landscape-scale biodiversity enhancement in accordance with Policy D5;**
 - c) ensuring the coastal and rural landscapes are protected and enhanced through appropriate design in accordance with Policy D9;**
 - d) protecting and enhancing heritage assets and ensuring people have the opportunity to learn of its history in accordance with Policy D10;**
 - e) ensuring that development avoids and reduces the risks from flooding and impacts on coastal processes and that flood risk is not increased elsewhere as a result in accordance with Policy D7; and**
 - f) accord with relevant policies related to international, national and local nature conservation designations in accordance with Policy D5.**

EXPLANATION OF POLICY D6

Overview (Point 1 of Policy D6)

- 2.178 The Alver Valley, Browndown, Stokes Bay, and Lee Beach and Clifflands are by far the largest area of open space in the Borough and a significant

undeveloped gap between Gosport and Lee-on-the-Solent and form the Gosport Strategic Open Spaces (GSOS). It is the Borough's objective to retain, protect and enhance these precious assets for future generations as public open space with a range of recreational opportunities in locations compatible with the objectives of protecting wildlife and enhancing habitats.

Alver Valley Country Park (Point 2 of Policy D6)

2.179 The Alver Valley forms a significant undeveloped gap between Gosport and Lee-on-the-Solent. Part of the Alver Valley has been used for gravel extraction and subsequent restoration works have been completed. The Alver Valley encompasses a great diversity of habitats and landscapes including wetlands, woodlands and grasslands. It is an important corridor linking the open land to the north with the coast. Much of the Alver Valley is now accessible to the public and owned or controlled by the Council. The Alver Valley is identified by PfSH as being of sub-regional significance representing a strategic element of the South Hampshire Green Infrastructure Network. It has also been identified as a Suitable Accessible Natural Greenspace (SANG) and consequently is considered as one of a network of sites that can help deflect recreational pressure from sensitive habitats.

2.180 The Council adopted a strategy for the Alver Valley Country Park in April 2014⁸⁸. The strategy includes the following vision which Point 2 of Policy D4 seeks to support the delivery of:

The Alver Valley Country Park will be an interesting and exciting natural location for all the community incorporating a variety of recreational and educational activities for the whole community. It will be a place for having fun, exercising, exploring and socialising. More local residents and others in South Hampshire will be able to enjoy all the Country Park has to offer and utilise the enhanced facilities and services. The Country Park will be a well-managed, safe and desirable place to visit.

It will offer wildlife experiences and splendid views across the Solent, the Borough of Gosport and beyond. Habitats will continue to be managed and where possible enhanced; and the net increase of biodiversity will be integral to the establishment and ongoing management of the Country Park. Heritage assets will be managed, their significance understood and this will be communicated to visitors.

2.181 Visitor numbers to the Alver Valley have been increasing and there is significant potential to further increase the number of visitors. The Country Park will be important for providing a range of recreational opportunities to local residents and thereby reduce the need for residents to travel out of the Borough to access similar facilities and therefore reduce car trips and

⁸⁸ www.gosport.gov.uk/avcpmanagement

lengths of journeys. The Country Park will also promote healthy living which can potentially reduce certain health problems evident within the Borough.

2.182 Since the GBLP 2011-2029 was adopted in 2015 there have been a number of improvements delivered in the Country Park. These include:

- a new garden centre with a café, toilets, and other visitors facilities located at the Grange Farm Gateway;
- provision of two new car parks at the East and West Gateway with interpretation panels and attractive landscaping;
- the creation of new trails and routes including a spine route through the park for cyclists;
- the development of a major play area at the Western Gateway with a toilet block and food and drink facility;
- creation of a major BMX track with associated pump cycling track; and
- biodiversity enhancements.

2.183 In 2022, the Council purchased land within the Alver Valley Country Park which had been used by a gun club. The Council will be restoring the land and integrating it into the country park, this will include contamination remediation, biodiversity enhancements and access improvements.

2.184 The Council will support other appropriate visitor and educational facilities, and complementary and ancillary uses suitable for the Country Park setting in accordance with the latest Alver Valley Country Park Strategy. Such facilities can provide space for activities and events which increase footfall and encourage a wider range of visitors to the Park.

2.185 It is important that the proposed limited new buildings and car parking in the Alver Valley do not increase surface water run-off and that Sustainable Drainage Systems are incorporated where appropriate which can also assist with local biodiversity. Due to the site's history as a landfill site it will be necessary to undertake an assessment for each proposal in order to establish the nature and extent of contamination and ensure that proposals and associated drainage systems do not act as a pathway for pollutants. For example soakaways in areas of contamination would not be acceptable due to the risk to the water environment. Practicable and effective measures will be required to treat, contain or control contaminants to protect proposed users or prevent the spread of contamination to adjacent land or cause pollution to groundwater, the River Alver and the Solent.

Protecting Browndown, Stokes Bay and the Lee Beach and Clifflands (Point 3 of Policy D6)

Browndown

2.186 Browndown is a vegetated shingle beach with associated habitats to the south of the Alver Valley Country Park, adjacent to the coast at the eastern

end of Lee-on-the-Solent. It has had various uses over time including military training and farming. In 1987 the Browndown site was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

- 2.187 In 1990 Browndown was included in the MoD list of managed conservation areas. The area is still used by the armed services for training purposes including on-shore amphibious landings as well as emergency fuel handling. The ranges at Browndown are open to the public when not in use by the military for various day and night exercises.

Stokes Bay

- 2.188 The shoreline of Stokes Bay is a crescent-shaped, south-west facing shingle beach, running from Browndown Point at its north-west end to Gilkicker Point in the south east. Behind the beach is a low-lying open area that was formerly a tidal marsh. Stokes Bay is now characterised by a mixture of suburban and seaside development. It also retains evidence of an unusual variety of historically-significant coastal defences that were built between the late 16th and the mid-20th century such as Number 2 Battery which now accommodates the Diving Museum, Fort Gilkicker and Fort Monckton. It also retains a number of areas significant for wildlife including the Gilkicker Lagoon SAC.
- 2.189 The Council designated the Stokes Bay area as a Conservation Area in 2023 and produced the Stokes Bay Conservation Area Appraisal (July 2023)⁸⁹. The appraisal sets out that the number and scale of open spaces is a primary component of the area's special interest. Many of the spaces, along with the habitats and species within them, owe their survival and/or origin to the historical land uses of the area and in particular military uses. These open spaces include former parkland and gardens, a managed grassed golf course, natural grasslands, lagoon and shingle shoreline.

Lee-on-the-Solent Beach and Clifflands

- 2.190 Lee-on-the-Solent beach and clifflands is a long narrow area between the shoreline and the built-up promenade. The beach is a shingle bank and faces south-west over the Solent towards the Isle of Wight and the New Forest. Above the beach is the promenade which forms part of the Solent Way and King Charles III England Coast Path. The area plays an important role in maintaining an open character in Lee.

Additional areas within the GSOS (Point 4 of Policy D6)

- 2.191 Lee-on-the-Solent Golf Club is located north of the Alver Valley Country Park, partly in Gosport Borough and partly in Fareham Borough. The portion of the golf club within Gosport is included within the GSOS to provide

⁸⁹ www.gosport.gov.uk/conservation-area-appraisals

additional protection to this area as open space. The area is partly covered by a Site of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINC) designation.

- 2.192 North and east of the golf club is an L-shaped area of land that forms a partly open corridor between two tree belts. This area includes the River Alver. The area is covered by a Site of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINC) designation. The Council considers that this area has significant potential to provide an off-road pedestrian and cycle route between Brune Way and Rowner Road.

Proposed enhancements to the GSOS (Point 5 of Policy D6)

- 2.193 The Borough has four improvement projects it will seek to bring forward in the plan period with regard to the GSOS.

Land between Fort Road car park and Lifeboat Lane

- 2.194 The first project is to provide a dedicated off-road cycle and pedestrian route between the Fort Road car park and Lifeboat Lane. Land is safeguarded to enable the provision of this route in Policy A6.. Any redevelopment proposals on the former Qinetiq Fort Road site (see Policy A2) must also take account of this. The scheme is included in the Council's 'Living List' of Local Cycling and Walking projects which is linked to Hampshire County Council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan⁹⁰.

The Alver Way

- 2.195 The second project relates to the extension and enhancement of the Alver Way which links the Apple Dumpling Bridge within the Alver Valley to Stokes Bay. Where the opportunity arises it is proposed to extend the route northwards through the Country Park. The route would then extend northwards linking with green infrastructure improvements in the Fareham, Gosport, Lee-on-the-Solent and Stubbington Strategic Gap. Similarly there may be opportunities to extend the route south of Browndown Road on the west side of the river through Browndown itself to the shoreline and Stokes Bay.

Alver Valley Outfall

- 2.196 The third project is to improve drainage in the Alver Valley because of the extent of localised flood events caused by periodic blockages of the Alver outfall at Stokes Bay. This will be delivered through a beach management scheme and an enhanced management regime of removing shingle from the outfall.

⁹⁰ Gosport LCWIP: www.hants.gov.uk/transport/strategies/transportstrategies Gosport Borough Council Living List: www.gosport.gov.uk/GBLP2042

HMS Sultan Playing Fields

- 2.197 The fourth project is to integrate the playing fields at the southern end of HMS Sultan, if that site is released, within the Alver Valley. This would be a very long-term project and would likely necessitate improved pedestrian access across Grange Road and Privett Road. Proposals would be centred on continuing sports use on grass pitches and ensuring the core Brent Goose habitat is maintained. It is likely that further measures could be introduced to enhance biodiversity on the site.

Allocated sites (Point 6 of Policy D6)

- 2.198 All three sites are allocated for development in Policies A2 and A5 for the following uses.

Leisure and tourism

- 2.199 Browndown Camp is a former MoD site immediately south of the Alver Valley. It is considered to be an appropriate site for outdoor leisure use or non-permanent holiday accommodation (tents, touring caravans, motor-homes and self-catering cabins). Suitably-scaled ancillary facilities could also be acceptable. Further detail is set out in Policy A5.

Residential or Commercial Development

- 2.200 Fort Gilkicker is located at Stokes Bay overlooking the Solent. The fort has a particular landmark quality due to its unique architecture and physical dominance as a result of its height, scale and position. Fort Gilkicker is considered to be a suitable site for residential uses which retains and enhances the heritage assets. Further detail is set out in Policy A2.

Mixed-use – Residential, Access and Public Open Space

- 2.201 The former Qinetiq Test Centre is a brownfield site of approximately 9.0ha south of Fort Road. The site has been vacant since 2012 and has over 3,500 sqm of buildings across the central portion of the site which also includes a Scheduled Monument. The outer portions of the site are designated as open space in the current Local Plan. The Council considers that the central portion of the site is suitable for new housing, subject to the protection and enhancement of heritage assets. In conjunction with this housing a new off-road route should be provided. The residual area of open space should also be made publicly accessible and this will be secured through a suitable planning obligation. Further detail is set out in Policy A2.

Design and development considerations (Point 7a-f of Policy D6)

- 2.202 Point 7 links to more detailed policies in the Local Plan which aim to secure improved outcomes in terms of walking and cycling, public transport

connections, biodiversity enhancement, landscape improvement and high quality design, heritage assets, community facilities, flood risk and designated environmental sites.

- 2.203 It is clear that within the GSOS the design of new buildings and spaces, and routes within and between them are vitally important to encourage positive physical and mental health benefits as well as prevent accidents and encourage active lifestyles.

Plan 8: Gosport Strategic Open Spaces

