

UPDATE ON PREPARATION OF THE SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK LOCAL PLAN

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) has announced that the draft Local Plan will be issued on 26th September 2017, and that a pre-submission consultation on this will then last for eight weeks until 20th November 2017. Following any modifications required as a result of comments received, it is expected that it will be submitted in February 2018 to the Minister who will appoint an Inspector to examine the Plan. Assuming that the Inspector is satisfied with the results of the examination with only minor comments, it is envisaged that the Plan will then be adopted in July 2018. If major issues arise as a result of the pre-submission consultation, the SDNPA may need to revise the Plan and reissue it for a further pre-submission consultation. Similarly if the Inspector identifies major concerns, the SDNPA will be required to revise the Plan to take these into account. In either of these circumstances the following stages of plan finalisation and adoption will be delayed.

KPC recognises the importance of these next phases of the plan preparation and consultation and is working with the Sussex Association of Local Councils (SALC) on procedural and technical matters to ensure that the parish council's submissions on the draft plan are made as effectively as possible.

We have received further clarification on the next phases of the consultation, and in particular that this will be in two stages, both of which the public are encouraged to participate in along with KPC.

The pre-submission consultation is focused on consideration of the planning merits and soundness of the plan proposals. The public will be invited to submit their comments to the park authority through their web site (<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/national-park-local-plan>). These should focus on:

1. Whether it has been prepared on the basis of a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements and is consistent with achieving sustainable development,
2. Whether it is the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, and whether it is based on proportionate evidence,
3. Whether it is deliverable over its 15 year period.

If the SDNPA decide that these comments do not necessitate any significant changes, the plan will be formally submitted to the Secretary of State, who will appoint an Inspector to examine the plan. The Inspector's job is to test whether the plan meets the "tests of soundness" set out in national planning policy

This process affords a further opportunity for those who have made comments at the pre-submission stage to put their case to the Inspector, either in writing or by appearing to discuss it at one of the examination hearings. These comments should address any concerns that the plan may not have been prepared in accordance with the Duty to Cooperate, legal and procedural requirements as set out in the Government's guidelines on local plan preparation.

Our discussions with SALC have also clarified for us that irrespective of the proposals in the final Plan, whether they be for a gypsy/traveller site or for housing development, the site should only be allocated for the planned purpose if the owners of the land in question are agreeable. Otherwise, there is likelihood that this particular aspect of the plan is not realistic and deliverable. It also remains the case that any specific proposals for new housing would need to go through the usual planning application process.

In the context of Kingston, KPC are clarifying with the relevant landowners their position on this. We have also requested ESCC Highways Department whether they have been consulted on the traffic implications of the additional housing proposals on Ashcombe Lane. At the time of writing we have been advised by the representative of the owners of Castelmer Fruit Farm that there has been agreement with the SDNPA to the inclusion of the plan for 10 to 12 houses and that it is likely that consent will be given by the landowners to such a housing development. The owners of the land identified for the single traveller/gypsy pitch have not at this time finalised their view on the proposal and we have yet to hear from the Highways Department.

Once the draft Local Plan has been published, KPC has been invited in early October to a workshop with the SDNPA on the plan proposals. After this, a village meeting will be held on 20 October, at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall, to describe the outcome of the workshop, to explain details of the plan and to invite comments. Any members of the public will be able to submit comments to the SDNPA at any time during the consultation period, and this meeting will be helpful for KPC in the preparation of their own response on behalf of the village.

In the meantime, KPC is investigating setting up an internet based discussion forum for villagers to exchange views and ideas on the plan proposals. Further details will be provided once this is successfully operating.