Re: 3/17/3610/Cou

Location:
Land East of Church Lane, West Parley (SANG for Core Strategy Policy Planning Site FWP6

Proposal:
Changing of use of land to a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and associated works

Response adopted by the council on the 21st February 2018 and following a public meeting open to residents to discuss the application on 20th February 2018.
Appendix 5 Guidelines for the establishment of Suitable Alternative Greenspace (SANGs)

Guidelines for the establishment of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs)

Introduction

5.1 ‘Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace’ (SANGs) is the name given to green space that is of a quality and type suitable to be used as mitigation for applications likely to affect the Dorset Heathlands European and internationally protected sites. The provision of SANGs is one of a range of mitigation measures, a number of which are detailed in the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework Supplementary Planning Document, which the south east Dorset Planning Authorities and Natural England consider offer an effective means of avoiding or mitigating harm from a number of urban effects.

5.2 Its role is to provide alternative green space to divert visitors away from the Dorset Heathlands Special Protection Area (SPA), the two Dorset Heath Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and the Dorset Heathlands Ramsar (collectively called the ‘Dorset Heathlands’ in these guidelines). SANGs are intended to provide mitigation for the likely impact of residential-type developments on the Dorset Heathlands by preventing an increase in visitor pressure. The effectiveness of a SANG as mitigation will depend upon its location and design. These must be such that the SANG is more attractive to visitors than the Dorset Heathlands.

5.3 This appendix describes the features that have been found to draw visitors to the Dorset Heathlands, which should be replicated in SANGs. It provides guidelines on:

- the type of site which should be identified as a SANG;
- measures that can be taken to enhance sites so that they may be used as a SANG.

5.4 These guidelines relate specifically to the means to provide mitigation for development of a residential nature within or close to 5km of the Dorset Heathlands. They do not address nor preclude the other functions of green space (e.g. provision of disabled access). Other functions may be provided within SANGs, as long as they do not conflict with the specific function of mitigating visitor impacts on the Dorset Heathlands.

5.5 SANGs may be created from:

- existing open space of SANG quality with no existing public access or limited public access, which for the purposes of mitigation could be made fully accessible to the public;
- existing open space that is already accessible but could be changed in character so that it is more attractive to the specific group of visitors who might otherwise visit the Dorset Heathlands;
- land in other uses that could be converted into SANGs.

5.6 The identification of SANGs should seek to avoid sites of high nature conservation value, which are likely to be damaged by increased visitor numbers. Such damage may arise, for example, from increased disturbance, erosion, input of nutrients from dog faeces, and increased incidence of fires. Where sites of high nature conservation value are considered as SANGs, the impact on their nature conservation value should be assessed and considered alongside relevant policy in the local plan.

The character of the Dorset Heathlands and its visitors

5.7 The Dorset Heathlands are made up of 42 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and consist of a mixture of open heathland and mire with some woodland habitats. The topography is varied with some prominent viewpoints. Many sites contain streams, ponds and small lakes. Some have open landscapes with few trees and others have scattered trees and areas of woodland. Most sites are freely accessible to the public, although in some areas access is restricted by army, or other operations.
5.8 Surveys have shown that about half of visitors to the Dorset Heathlands arrive by car and about half on foot. Where sites are close to urban development around Poole and Bournemouth, foot access tends to be most common. On rural sites in Purbeck and East Dorset, more visitors come by car. Some 75% of those who visited by car had come from 5.3km of the access point onto the heathlands. A very large proportion of the Dorset Heathland visitors are dog walkers, many of whom visit the particular site regularly (i.e. multiple visits per week) and spend less than an hour there, walking on average about 2.2km.

Guidelines for the quality of SANGs

5.9 The quality guidelines have been subdivided into different aspects of site fabric and structure. They have been compiled from a variety of sources but principally from visitor surveys carried out at heathland sites within the Dorset Heathlands and the Thames Basin Heaths.

5.10 The guidelines concentrate on the type of SANG designed principally to cater for heathland dog walkers. Other important heathland mitigation measures, for example facilities designed to attract motor cycle scramblers or BMX users away from heathlands, or facilities for adventurous play for children, are not covered specifically and will need to be considered case by case.

5.11 The principle criteria contained in the guidelines have also been put into a checklist format at the end of this appendix.

5.12 It is important to note that these guidelines only cover the quality of SANGs provision. There are a number of other matters that will need to be agreed with Natural England and the Council including: provision of in perpetuity management of the SANG; SANG capacity; other avoidance and mitigation measures as necessary.

Accessibility - reaching the SANG

5.13 Most visitors reach the Dorset Heathlands either by foot or by car and the same will apply for SANGs. Thus SANGs may be intended principally for the use of a local population living within a 400 metre catchment around the site; or they may be designed primarily to attract visitors who arrive by car (they may also have both functions).

5.14 SANG design needs to take into account the anticipated target group of visitors. For example, where large populations are close to the Dorset Heathlands the provision of SANGs may need to be attractive to visitors on foot.

5.15 If intended to attract visitors arriving by car, the availability of adequate car parking is essential. Car parks may be provided specifically for a SANG or a SANG may make use of existing car parks, but some existing car parks may have features incompatible with SANG use, such as car park charging. The amount and nature of parking provision should reflect the anticipated numbers and mode of arrival by visitors to the site and the catchment size of the SANG. It is important that there is easy access between the car park and the SANG, i.e. this is not impeded by, for example, a road crossing. Thus such SANGs should have a car park with direct access straight on to the SANG with the ability to take dogs safely from the car park to the SANG off the lead. Similarly, the nature of foot access between urban development and a SANG is important and green corridors reaching into the urban area can be an important part of facilitating access to the SANG.

5.16 Guidelines:

1. Sites must have adequate parking for visitors, unless the site is intended for local pedestrian use only, i.e. within easy walking distance (400m) of the developments linked to it. The amount of car parking space should be determined by the anticipated numbers using the site and arriving by car.
2. Car parks must be easily and safely accessible, be of an open nature and should be clearly sign posted.

3. There should be easy access between the car park or housing and the SANG with the facility to take dogs safely from the car park to the SANG off the lead.

4. Access points should have signs outlining the layout of the SANG and the routes available to visitors.

Paths, tracks and other SANGs infrastructure

5.17 SANGs should aim to supply a choice of circular walking routes that provide an attractive alternative to those routes on heathlands in the vicinity (i.e. those heaths that the SANG is designed to attract visitors away from).

5.18 Given the average length of walks on heathland, a circular walk of 2.3-2.5km in length is necessary unless there are particular reasons why a shorter walk is considered still appropriate. Where possible, a range of different length walks should be provided; a proportion of visitors walk up to 5km and beyond so walking routes longer than 2.5 km are valuable, either on-site or through the connection of sites along green corridors.

5.19 Paths do not have to be of any particular width, and both vehicular-sized tracks and narrow paths are acceptable to visitors, although narrow corridors where visitors/dogs may feel constrained should be avoided. The majority of visitors come alone and safety is one of their primary concerns. Paths should be routed so that they are perceived as safe by the visitors, with some routes being through relatively open (visible) terrain (with no trees or scrub, or well spaced mature trees, or wide rides with vegetation back from the path), especially those routes that are 1-3 km long.

5.20 A substantial number of visitors like to have surfaced but not tarmac paths, particularly where these blend in well with the landscape. This is not necessary for all paths but there should be some visitor-friendly, all weather routes built into the structure of a SANG, particularly those routes that are 1-3 km long. Boardwalks may help with access across wet areas but excessive use of boardwalks, as may be necessary on sites that are mostly wet or waterlogged such as flood plain and grazing marsh, is likely to detract from the site’s natural feel.

5.21 Other infrastructure specifically designed to make the SANGs attractive to dog walkers may also be desirable but must not detract from a site’s relatively wild and natural feel. Measures could include accessible water bodies for dogs to swim/drink; dog bins; fencing near roads/car-parks, etc. to ensure dog safety; clear messages regarding the need to ‘pick-up’; and large areas for dogs to be off lead safely.

5.22 Guidelines:

5. Paths must be easily used and well maintained but most should remain unsurfaced to avoid the site becoming too urban in feel. A majority of paths should be suitable for use in all weathers and all year around. Boardwalks may be required in wet sections.

6. All SANGs with car parks must have a circular walk that starts and finishes at the car park.

7. It should be possible to complete a circular walk of 2.3-2.5km around the SANGs, and for larger SANGs there should be a variety of circular walks.

8. SANGs must be designed so that visitors are not deterred by safety concerns.
Advertising - making people aware of the SANGs

5.23  The need for some advertising is self evident. Any advertising should make clear that the site is designed to cater specifically for dog walkers.

5.24  Guidelines:

9.  SANGs should be clearly sign-posted and advertised.

10. SANGs should have leaflets and/or websites advertising their location to potential visitors. It would be desirable for leaflets to be distributed to new homes in the area and be made available at entrance points and car parks.

Landscape and Vegetation

5.25  The open or semi-wooded and undulating nature of most of the Dorset Heathland sites gives them an air of relative wildness, even when there are significant numbers of visitors on site. SANGs must aim to reproduce this quality but do not have to contain heathland or heathy vegetation. Surveys in the Thames Basin heath area show that woodland or a semi-wooded landscape is a key feature that people who use the SPA there appreciate. Deciduous woodland is preferred to coniferous woodland. In these circumstances, a natural looking landscape with plenty of variation including both open and wooded areas is ideal for SANGs. There is clearly a balance to be struck between what is regarded as an exciting landscape and a safe one and so some element of choice between the two is desirable.

5.26  Hills do not put people off visiting a site, particularly where these are associated with good views, but steep hills are not appreciated. An undulating landscape is preferred to a flat one. Water features, particularly ponds and lakes, act as a focus for visitors for their visit, but are not essential. The long term management of the SANG habitats should be considered at an early stage. Grazing management is likely to be necessary, particularly for larger SANGs and those with grasslands.

5.27  A number of factors can detract from the essential natural looking landscape and SANGs that have an urban feel, for example where they are thin and narrow with long boundaries with urban development or roads, are unlikely to be effective.

5.28  Guidelines:

11. SANGs must be perceived as natural spaces without intrusive artificial structures, except in the immediate vicinity of car parks. Visually-sensitive way-markers and some benches are acceptable.

12. SANGs must aim to provide a variety of habitats for visitors to experience (e.g. some of: woodland, scrub, grassland, heathland, wetland, open water).

13. Access within the SANG must be largely unrestricted with plenty of space provided where it is possible for dogs to exercise freely and safely off lead.

14. SANGs must be free from unpleasant visual, auditory or olfactory intrusions (e.g. derelict buildings, intrusive adjoining buildings, dumped materials, loud intermittent or continuous noise from traffic, industry, sports grounds, sewage treatment works, waste disposal facilities).
New Neighbourhoods

Land to the East of New Road, West Parley

10.33 This is a flat featureless area of land bordered on three sides by urban development. It offers the opportunity to provide much needed new housing, traffic alleviation, community, retail and commercial services and facilities, as well as significant areas of publicly accessible Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace, alongside more formal open space. It creates a chance to provide a more welcoming village centre with an attractive sense of place.

10.34 The New Neighbourhood must provide traffic alleviation for the Crossroads and substantial areas of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace to attract people away from the protected heathland at Parley Common. This will include parkland to both the east and west of Church Lane as well as the south of the new housing extending to about 25 hectares (60 acres). Additionally, a more formal park is to be provided adjacent to an extension to the village centre which can provide a village square and additional shops and services.

Policy FWP6

East of New Road New Neighbourhood, West Parley

A New Neighbourhood is allocated to deliver about 320 homes, and additions to the village centre which could include a convenience foodstore of about 800 - 900 sq metres. To enable this the Green Belt boundary will be amended to exclude the land identified for new housing and new commercial and community uses.

Layout and design

- The New Neighbourhood will be set out according to the principles of the Masterplan Reports.
- A design code will be agreed by the Council, setting out the required standards.

Green Infrastructure

- A Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace strategy is to be implemented as part of the provision of the new housing as required by Policy ME2 and Appendix 5. This is to incorporate very significant areas of open space to the east of Church Lane, to the south of the allocated housing area and between the allocated development area and housing on Church Lane.
- A park is to be provided adjacent to the village centre.

Transport and access

- Vehicular access is to be provided via a new link road that will join Christchurch Road and New Road to the south of the existing urban area. This road is also to divert traffic from the Parley Crossroads.
- Vehicular access to the village centre extension is to come from the link road.
- Dedicated pedestrian and cycling links are to be provided throughout the housing area with connections into the existing networks to the north, east, west and south towards Bournemouth.
- Improvements to public transport services.

Phasing

- The link road must be fully operational prior to the opening of a convenience foodstore, or the occupation of 50% of the new homes.
Land to the West of New Road at Ridgeway, West Parley

10.35 A New Neighbourhood in this location offers the opportunity to provide much needed housing, significant areas of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces to attract people from nearby heaths and a link road to divert traffic away from Parley Crossroads. This area is more attractive in terms of landscape quality than land to the east of New Road. The site rises to the west towards the Dudsbury Hillfort and has a mature treed framework to the south and west which contains it from long distance views in these directions. To the east and north the land adjoins the urban area. It is important that the nature of development in this location respects the form of the land and landscaping is used to break up the built area.

10.36 The Hillfort is an ancient monument, so development must be kept clear from it and open space used to maintain its integrity.