

Steyning Neighbourhood Plan

Examiner's Note

Water Neutrality

Context

The examination has now reached an advanced stage.

I am working on the preparation of the report following the receipt of the Parish Council's response to the clarification note. I also need to take account of a recent Natural England Position Statement

Details

Whilst the examination has been taking place, Natural England has published a Position Statement for Applications within the Sussex North Water Supply Zone (September 2021). It comments that the Sussex North Water Supply Zone includes supplies from a groundwater abstraction which cannot, with certainty, conclude no adverse effect on the integrity of:

- the Arun Valley Special Area Conservation (SAC);
- the Arun Valley Special Protection Area (SPA); and
- the Arun Valley Ramsar Site.

As it cannot be concluded that the existing abstraction within Sussex North Water Supply Zone is not having an impact on the Arun Valley site, the Position Statement advises that developments within this Zone must not add to this impact.

The Position Statement also advises that recent court case cases require plans and projects affecting sites where an existing adverse effect is known (that is where the site is failing its conservation objectives) to demonstrate certainty that they will not contribute further to the existing adverse effect or go through to the latter stages of the Regulations. As such, developments within Sussex North must not add to this impact and one way of achieving this is to demonstrate water neutrality.

Impact on the Examination

The neighbourhood plan is directly affected by the Statement. It also raises issues which were not considered as the Plan was being prepared. In these circumstances, Horsham District Council has commissioned an updated Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) of the Plan. It is available elsewhere on the Steyning Neighbourhood Plan page of the Council's website.

Consultation on the updated HRA page is currently taking place with Natural England.

If necessary, I will prepare a further Note once Natural England's comments on the updated HRA have been received.

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Independent Examiner

Steyning Neighbourhood Development Plan

29 November 2021