

Extract from Bracknell Forest Borough Council Site Allocations Local Plan,  
Inspector's Report June 2013

**Policy SA7 – Land at Blue Mountain, Binfield**

103. The allocation proposed at Blue Mountain, Binfield has attracted a particularly substantial amount of local opposition. The site mainly comprises golf course land. Although containing some built structures (including golf course facilities and a driving range), it has – as was recognised by the previous CS inspector – an open character. It is separated from residential development to the south by a distributor road (Temple Way). The development now intended would amount to an urban extension into presently open land; as such, the site's existing character would be substantially changed.
104. It is apparent from the site's planning history, notably the protection afforded by an extant planning agreement<sup>64</sup>, that the present proposal represents a departure from the Council's previous approach to this land. Nevertheless, as already outlined, the SALP has been prepared in the context of the need to meet the CS housing requirement. Extensions to the urban area are not ruled out in principle. Such developments will inevitably change the character of the land involved. However, for the reasons set out above, I am satisfied that the site selection methodology is sufficiently robust to justify the principle of development in this broad location.
105. The CS Key Diagram identifies the area as a Local Gap. As explained by the previous CS Inspector<sup>65</sup>, this is intended to separate the two 'wings' of Binfield and to provide additional separation between both wings and the CS proposal (CS policy CS5) that is now being taken forward as SALP policy SA9 (land at Warfield). The purpose of the Local Gap is to ensure visual separation in order to maintain settlement identity and prevent coalescence.
106. In the present case, the SA7 site boundary would effectively straddle the full width of the Local Gap. However, it is intended that built development would be located towards the southern part of the site. Land to the north of the suggested educational buildings would remain open: although it is intended that this would be used partly as playing fields and partly as SANG/open space, such uses would be not dissimilar in character to the land's existing recreational nature. A clear visual separation would be maintained between the northern wing of Binfield and the northern edge of the urban extension.
107. While the relocated football ground (with associated practice pitches) is proposed to be sited to the west of the existing golf course buildings, the present golf driving range, with a clearly artificial landform and substantial fences, gives this part of the site a distinctly recreational character. The area of development would also be well set-back from the site's eastern boundary. Taking into account the adjoining land around Binfield Manor and the undeveloped western end of the policy SA9 allocation (see below), this would be sufficient to ensure a substantial degree of separation between Binfield and the development at Warfield (policy SA9). Further set-backs from this boundary would therefore be unnecessary.

<sup>64</sup> Document SAL116 – section 52 agreement dated 16 February 1990 relating to land at Park Farm/Jocks Lane, Bracknell. <sup>65</sup> Document SAL78 paragraphs 120-122.

108. Notwithstanding the above, the illustrative status of the concept plan does not provide sufficient certainty about the intended location of built development within the wider site allocation. However, as with the other urban extensions already discussed, a settlement boundary is now proposed. This change (contained in **MM42-MM44**) is needed for soundness reasons. In addition, the Council proposes to add a reference to maintaining separation in the wording of the policy: as with the preceding two sites, this should refer to a 'gap' rather than a 'buffer'.

109. The proposed allocation would result in the loss of the Blue Mountain Golf Course. The Council has commissioned a Golf Course Study<sup>66</sup> which concludes that the loss of the 18-hole course at Blue Mountain can on balance be justified in view of other facilities elsewhere in the catchment and their ability to absorb likely demand for golf over the next 15 years. While these findings are disputed by some local representors, I have no reason to depart from Sport England's assessment that the study shows that there is a sufficient supply of golf courses and driving ranges in and around Bracknell to meet demand.

110. However, I am unable to accept Sport England's view<sup>67</sup> that the SALP should require a planning agreement to be entered into to ensure that development initiatives undertaken at Blue Mountain are replicated at other facilities in the area: given that this would require action by other golf course providers, this would be unlikely to meet the tests required by the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 204) for planning obligations. I do not feel that failure to secure such provision is sufficient to outweigh the sporting advantages that would result from the site's allocation – notably the relocation of Bracknell Town Football Club and the provision of playing fields.

111. In particular, the football club's proposed relocation would enable the establishment of a single purpose-built community football facility including junior and practice pitches. This cannot be achieved at the club's current Larges Lane site. A site search exercise has been undertaken<sup>68</sup> that identifies the potential of the site at Blue Mountain. While formal approval for relocation would be required from the Football Association, I have seen no substantive reason why this could not be given. Relocation of the football club to this site would release a housing site in a central urban location (policy SA1).

112. Among policy SA7's infrastructure requirements are on-site primary and secondary schools, along with special educational needs places. Some local residents' groups object to the provision of a secondary school in this location. However, given the intended scale of development to the north of Bracknell, there is a clear and demonstrable need to provide additional school places in future years. The Council has undertaken a site search exercise accordingly. Although on the urban edge, the Blue Mountain site occupies a broadly central position between the developments at Amen Corner (North and South) and Warfield. It is also central to the relevant BFBC school places area. While a location near the Borough's boundary with Wokingham would offer the potential for school place sharing between local education authorities, there is no evidence that this would align with WBC's intentions. Cross-boundary educational infrastructure needs have been discussed between BFBC and WBC and are set out in an agreed statement of common ground between the two authorities<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> Document SAL109. <sup>67</sup> Statement of Common Ground between Sport England and BFBC, Document SAL101. <sup>68</sup> Appended to Document SAL110. <sup>69</sup> Document SAL102.

113. The Council proposes to amend policy SA7 to clarify that land for the educational facilities is required within the allocation as well as financial contributions. Given that the potential to site these facilities in this location was (as noted earlier in this report) a factor supporting the identification of Blue Mountain compared to other broad areas, this change (included in **MM42**) is needed for soundness reasons.