



Shoreham Airport proposed development masterplan

Broad overview of landscape and visual issues

Context

This short report has been commissioned by Adur District Council to provide an overview of the key landscape and visual issues that are relevant to the proposed development at Shoreham Airport. The analysis is based on the report submitted to Adur District Council by the developers in April 2013.¹

The assessment takes account of the findings of the strategic landscape assessment undertaken by Sheils Flynn in November 2012. This is a strategic assessment which provides a comparative analysis of the landscape and visual sensitivity of the Sompting and Lancing Gaps, along with a more detailed analysis of potential landscape and biodiversity issues and impacts that could arise as a result of development on six sites which were under consideration by Adur District Council as potential strategic allocations. Shoreham Airport was one of these potential allocation sites, although the site boundary used in the strategic landscape assessment report is different to that of the proposed development masterplan.

The current report is intended to provide a quick overview of key issues, rather than an in depth response.

Structure of the analysis

The report covers landscape and visual issues, drawing on the most relevant aspects of the landscape character assessment and the viewpoint analysis for the Technical Annex to the

report, before considering the development principles of the masterplan and opportunities to mitigate landscape and visual impacts.

The analysis follows the same methodology for judging landscape capacity and sensitivity as that used in the strategic landscape assessment,³ but in this case the judgement is being made about the capacity of the landscape to accommodate a specific development proposal, rather than an assessment of the overall landscape sensitivity of different landscape character areas (as in the strategic assessment report). In these circumstances, the Topic Paper suggests that the assessment should take account of three aspects:

- **landscape character sensitivity** - the degree to which the landscape is robust and able to accommodate change without adverse impacts on its character. This judgement examines the effects of development on the key physical features, as well as potential effects of development on aspects of landscape experience relating to scale, openness, diversity, form and pattern characteristics and judges whether that development of the kind described could be accommodated and whether the character of the landscape would be sustained, enhanced or diminished.
- **visual sensitivity** - the general visibility of the landscape and its ability to accommodate change without adverse impacts on character; and
- **landscape value** - the value attached to the landscape or to specific elements in it. This judgement takes account of the relative value or importance that stakeholders attach to different landscapes and their

Summary of landscape impacts of development on the Shoreham Airport site (extract from Table 6.1 in the November 2012 strategic landscape assessment)

From a landscape and visual perspective, this is an exceptionally sensitive site, which is the focus for gateway views to and along the Adur valley. The key component landscape element in these views is the natural curve of the River Adur which is seen against the contrasting open greenspace of the adjacent airfield. This simple composition also contributes to the landscape setting of four listed buildings and is the foreground to gateway views from a series of bridges across the Adur (the A27, the railway bridge and the Shoreham Tollbridge). The site is adjacent to the only public right of way which crosses the Lancing Gap and one which has additional value because it connects the urban areas of Lancing and Shoreham-by-Sea with nationally promoted routes within the SDNP (the Downs Link and subsequently the South Downs Way). Development along the River Adur would block views across the Lancing Gap, effectively disconnecting the towns of Lancing and Shoreham-by-Sea from their distinctive landscape setting.

¹ Supplementary Information: Shoreham Airport proposed Development Masterplan, Issue VI.1 28 February 2013, Albemarle (Shoreham) LLP

² Landscape and ecological surveys of key sites within the Adur District, Sheils Flynn, November 2012

³ Landscape Character Assessment Series: Topic Paper 6 - Techniques and Criteria for Judging Capacity and Sensitivity, The Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2005

reasons for valuing them, including policy designations, specific conservation interests, cultural associations and the quality and condition of the landscape.

Key aspects of the proposed development that are likely to have an impact on the landscape are:

- the presence of buildings and car parks within the open landscape - the airport is by no means a rural landscape, but its swathe of open greenspace creates a foil for the surrounding landscape features; and an important contribution to the strategic Lancing Gap. Any fragmentation of this greenspace or a reduction in its size will cause landscape impact
- road infrastructure and lighting

Landscape character sensitivity

The development site is within Lancing Gap Landscape Character Area (LCA) 3. The landscape character sensitivity of LCA 3 as a whole is rated as medium-high (ref p18 of the Technical Annex to the strategic landscape assessment report).

The development site forms part of the airport greenspace which is the core element within the landscape of LCA 3. It is a completely flat, open greenspace with a smooth, simple mown surface which is defined by the surrounding contrasting textured landscape edges of woodland at the foot of the Downs to the north and the sweeping natural curve of the River Adur and its mudflats to the east.

It makes a strong contribution to the impression of open, extensive greenspace in the Lancing Strategic Gap, enhancing the sense of separation between Shoreham and Lancing and providing a striking landscape setting for the lower stretches of the River Adur as it winds towards the sea.

The 'greenness', simple 'smoothness' and openness of the site are its most important landscape elements, particularly the way that they are set against the contrasting backdrop of the Downs to the north and the curve of the River Adur to the east. The simplicity and uniformity of the airport greenspace are key to this composition, which includes the curving, natural lines of the river and the Downs and the straight lines of the bridges - the A27, the Shoreham Tollbridge and in particular the railway to the south. These components, in combination, are highly vulnerable to change. Prominent local landmarks are Ricardo's buildings on the industrial estate in the NE corner of the airport, the 1930s Terminal Building at Shoreham Airport and the small dome of the WWII training dome, which is typically seen against the backdrop of tree belts along the A27.

The development proposals have responded to the strategic landscape assessment, recognising the inherent sensitivity of this landscape. The development masterplan is divided into two zones, with development areas set against the backdrop of existing vegetation. The use of green and brown roofs and cladding would also help to integrate the buildings within the wider landscape. However, the fundamental change to the 'greenness, smoothness and openness' of the airport greenspace will have a significant adverse impact on the landscape character sensitivity of the site.

Landscape value

Planning policy

The remaining areas of undeveloped land within Adur District outside the South Downs National Park (the Lancing Gap and the Sompting Gap) are protected by the Strategic Gap policy (AC4) in the adopted Local Plan⁴ which has a

presumption against development.

The policy aims to prevent coalescence of the settlements and to retain their separate identities and amenities. Only in 'compelling' circumstances, will development be permitted and in relation to uses such as agriculture and forestry or to meet a demand for recreation. The Local Plan policy also states that opportunities will be sought to conserve and enhance the value of the Strategic Gaps as open countryside.

Adur District Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan and is exploring all available options to meet the local demand for development within the relatively small area available. The Council aims to retain the principle of the Strategic Gaps as they are considered to be part of the character of the District.

The Shoreham Airport development proposals reduce the actual and perceived extent of the Lancing Gap, by extending development into parts of the northern and eastern fringes of the Lancing Gap, in areas that are also particularly visible and accessible to public view. In addition, the proposed new access road off the A27 will diminish the existing impression of an extensive, undeveloped zone of separation between the River Adur and the northern gateway entrance to Lancing along the northern edge of the Lancing Gap.

Heritage

The assessment should consider whether the development would affect the amenity of important cultural or historical elements or features of the landscape, including their settings. This small area has a concentration of such features. The 1930s Terminal building at Shoreham Airport is a Grade II* Listed Building; the adjacent Municipal Hangar is also listed and classified as Grade II. To the north east, Shoreham Tollbridge is a Grade II* listed building and St Nicholas' Church is listed as Grade I. In addition, the WWII dome trainer to the NW of the airfield and adjacent to the western zone of the development proposals is a Scheduled

⁴ Adur District Local Plan, Adopted April 2006

Ancient Monument.

A separate assessment of heritage issues which describes and defines the landscape setting of these five sites, as well as the wider setting of Lancing College Chapel (a Grade I listed building and a prominent local landmark) will be important in understanding the balance of environmental impacts that result from the development proposals at Shoreham Airport.

Biodiversity

The site is adjacent to the Adur Estuary SSSI which is nationally important for its mosaic of estuarine habitats, including saltmarsh and inter-tidal mudflats, and which may support wintering/wading birds. It should be recognised that the EA's forthcoming flood defence works will change the balance of habitats along this part of the Adur river corridor and any ecological impacts resulting from development proposals should be considered in the context of these changes. The proposed development has been set back from the river corridor; the width of the buffer zone will need to be agreed in consultation with statutory agencies and in conjunction with proposed flood mitigation works.

Local value

This is the most accessible part of the Lancing Gap - the only footpath through the centre of the Gap and one that links an urban area to the South Downs Way (via the Downs Link path). The footpath runs along the flood embankment of the River Adur, providing close range (high sensitivity) panoramic views across the open airport to the Downs and Lancing College Chapel to the historic Shoreham Tollbridge and across the Adur and right across the Lancing Gap to Lancing in the west (viewpoint 13). The site is a key part of this gateway landscape and its development can be expected to have a high impact on landscape amenity and, by implication, on local landscape value.

Visual sensitivity

The table on p47 of the Annex to the strategic landscape assessment summarises the visual sensitivity of the LCAs within the Lancing Gap. It highlights seven viewpoints that are relevant to LCA 3 and the analysis in this annex demonstrates that of these, the proposed Shoreham Airport development is likely to have impacts on viewpoints 9, 11, 12, 13 and 14.

The Supplementary Information report provides verified photomontages from three of these viewpoints, but ignores viewpoints 13 (from the footpath along the River Adur embankment) and viewpoint 14 (from the Shoreham Tollbridge). These two views are reproduced on the following pages for reference so that they can be considered alongside the analysis provided in the Supplementary Information report, but we suggest that the developer is asked to provide verified photomontages from these two publicly accessible, highly sensitive viewpoints so that the visual impacts of the development proposals can be understood and assessed with accuracy.

The flood embankment along this part of the River Adur is due to be raised and moved closer to Cecil Pashey Way as part of wider flood defence works by the Environment Agency. This change is likely to increase the visual impact of the proposed development as seen from the diverted footpath which will run along the crest of the new, higher embankment so the existing view from viewpoint 13 is very much a 'best case' scenario. Ideally, the new photomontage should be taken from the point that represents the eye level of a person walking along the new embankment path (ie higher and slightly further to the west than the existing viewpoint 13).

The strategic landscape assessment report sets out the rationale for giving the Shoreham Airport site a rating of high visual sensitivity. The annotated photographs from

viewpoints 13 and 14 and the following notes highlight issues to take into account in considering the potential visual impacts of these specific proposals on the Shoreham Airport site.

Viewpoints 9 and 11 (from Lancing Ring and Lancing College Chapel respectively) - as the photomontages show, the proposed development is well screened by existing foreground vegetation. However, the retention of this vegetation is beyond the control of the developer and may not always provide such a screen. In addition, the glow from lighting associated with the development proposals should also be taken into account.

Viewpoint 12 (from Mill Hill). The photomontage in the Supplementary Information report demonstrates that the proposed development will be highly visible in the view from Mill Hill. As the indicative development principles sketch (Figure 16f) on p58 of the strategic landscape assessment report shows, there is considered to be some limited scope for development in the north-east corner of the airport greenspace because this area could be locally screened in views from Mill Hill by existing and carefully sited new planting to the south of the Ricardo Technical Centre but, as the photomontage shows, the proposed development extends beyond the zone in which such screen planting is likely to be effective. The use of green and brown roofs will help to mitigate the visual impact, but will not remove it.

Viewpoint 13 (from the River Adur embankment). A new photomontage is required. The existing photograph is reproduced on p5, with annotations that raise relevant issues for further discussion when the photomontage is available.

Viewpoint 14 (from Shoreham Tollbridge). A new photomontage is required. The existing photograph is reproduced on p5, with annotations that raise relevant issues for further discussion when the photomontage is available.

In addition to these key viewpoints (which contributed

Simplicity and uniformity of airport greenspace landscape pattern is a foil to the mosaic of woodland and farmland on the slopes of the Downs

Dome trainer (SAM) - viewed against wooded backdrop at the foot of the Downs

Lancing College Chapel - striking iconic landmark on the edge of the Adur gap

Some scope for development tucked into this corner of the gap, provided screened by new planting, because this area is screened by existing vegetation (which could be supplemented by some new planting, while still maintaining the overall openness of the airport greenspace).



Viewpoint 13 - from the public footpath along the River Adur embankment, looking north towards Lancing College Chapel and the Adur gap through the South Downs

An extensive part of the Lancing Gap is visible from this viewpoint, which is highly accessible to residents within the urban areas of Shoreham and South Lancing, particularly as there is a car park at the Outdoor Activities Centre (just to the south of the viewpoint) and the potential to walk northwards along the embankment, across the Adur footbridge to Shoreham and out to the South Downs National Park along the 'Downs Link' long distance footpath

Viewpoint 13 has high sensitivity. It provides a close, clear view of the Lancing Strategic Gap from an exceptionally well used and accessible recreational route (leading to the National Park) on the edge of an urban area. The viewpoint is unique in that there are no other public rights of way within either of the two strategic gaps.

The Shoreham Airport buildings are on the far left of the photograph and the airfield is in the centre of the view. Lancing College Chapel is a focal landmark, drawing the eye towards the edge of the Adur valley as it cuts through the Downs. This is an exceptionally wide view - as the photograph on this page shows, the panorama includes the whole of the Adur valley and extends round to Shoreham, where it includes the slopes of Mill Hill as a backdrop to the town.

Line of airport buildings (along railway) provides linear backdrop to ground level views across this part of the Lancing Gap

Terminal building at Shoreham Airport is a Grade II* Listed Building; the adjacent Municipal Hangar is also listed and classified as Grade II.

Extensive smooth, open airport greenspace contrasts with textured pattern of River Adur corridor

Distant glimpses to pattern of landscape and edge of built development on eastern fringes of Lancing - provides a layered backdrop that heightens the impression of distance in this view across the Lancing Gap



Viewpoint 14 - from the pedestrian footbridge over the River Adur, which is a historic (Grade II* Listed) tollbridge, looking south west across the Lancing Gap to Shoreham Airport and (in the distance) Lancing

Viewpoint 14 has high sensitivity. It is from a listed structure on an exceptionally well used public right of way which connects to the South Downs Way via the Downs Link path along the Adur valley.

There is a clear view to the airport buildings and to part of the enclosed landscape in the SW fringes of the Lancing gap. The gable ends of the housing on the edge of Lancing is visible in the distance, demonstrating that the view extends (east-west) right across the Gap. Foreground vegetation obscures views to the northern part of the Gap.

to the strategic assessment of the visual sensitivity of the Lancing Gap in the Technical Annex to the strategic landscape assessment), the gateway views from the train (as it crosses the River Adur travelling west) and the A27 bridge over the Adur travelling west are important because in both cases they are sufficiently dramatic to provide a snapshot, memorable image of a very distinctive landscape composition, with a strong sense of place.

Overall the analysis of photos and viewpoints suggests that the development proposals are likely to be visually intrusive in a number of important and highly accessible views. However, a full analysis cannot be completed until the photomontages from viewpoints 13 and 14 are available.

Whilst the use of green and brown roofs and structural planting will provide some mitigation, the analysis so far suggests that these measures are unlikely to change the anticipated high impacts on visual sensitivity

Overall capacity to accommodate the airport development proposals

The following extract from the Natural England Topic Paper is helpful. It states (p12) - *Reaching conclusions about capacity means making a judgement about the amount of change of a particular type that can be accommodated without having unacceptable adverse effects on the character of the landscape, or the way that it is perceived, and without compromising the values attached to it. Capacity is all a question of the interaction between the sensitivity of the landscape, the type and amount of change, and the way that the landscape is valued.*

This brief analysis suggests that the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed Shoreham Airport development are likely to be high and that this landscape has low capacity to accommodate this type of development without adverse effects on the character of the landscape and the way that

it is perceived. Two additional and important pieces of information are currently missing from the analysis:

- an assessment of the landscape setting of designated historic buildings and the SAM that might be affected by the proposals; and
- verified photomontages of the development proposals from viewpoints 13 and 14 (if possible the precise location of photomontage from Viewpoint 13 should be adjusted to take account of the proposed height and location of the realigned footpath, which will be moved as a result of the EA's flood defence works in this area).

The predicted landscape and visual impacts of the development proposals are one part of the balance of factors to be taken into account in making a judgement about the acceptability of the development proposals on this site.
