

South Downs National Park Public Inquiry

Part 2: Boundaries

Benfield Valley - North

(Section P, Map 34)

Proof of Evidence

by

Society of Sussex Downsmen

on behalf of



November 2003

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The South Downs Campaign (SDC) submits the following proof of evidence for the boundary of the proposed South Downs National Park within Section P, Map 34 of the Countryside Agency proposed boundary maps.
- 1.2 The SDC is a network of organisations working for the best possible South Downs National Park, representing over 80 national, regional and local groups and organisations¹.
- 1.3 The Society of Sussex Downsmen was founded in 1923 with the object of preserving the beauty and amenities of the South Downs for the public benefit. It is a private company limited by guarantee (no. 319437) and a registered charity (no. 230329). It currently has some 2700 members.
- 1.4 This proof of evidence is part of a series of proofs of evidence to be submitted to the Public Inquiry by the SDC and should be read in the context of the SDC's written proofs of evidence 'SDC 'In Principle' Support for the South Downs National Park'² and 'SDC Boundary Process'³.

2 Detailed Boundary - Section P, Map 34: Benfield Valley - North

2.1 Description of the Area and its Boundary

- 2.1.1 The boundary is described using regularly spaced Ordnance Survey six figure Grid References (GR) to assist with relating the written description of the boundary and coincides with the map in Appendix A⁴.
- 2.1.2 The area is in the form of a wedge at the northern end of the Benfield Valley. It is bounded on the west by the A27 Hangleton link road between GR TQ 262068 and GR TQ 260075, on the north by the A27, at this point in a deep cutting between GR TQ 260075 and TQ 263076, to the east by the built up area of Hangleton between GR TQ 263076 and GR TQ 263070 and to the south by Hangleton Lane between GR TQ 263070 and GR TQ 262068.
- 2.1.3 The northern third of this area was included in the draft boundary but deleted after public consultation. The reason given for this was that the area was more urban in character than the Downs to the north⁵.

2.2 Justification Against Criteria – Natural Beauty and Landscape Quality

- 2.2.1 The northern third of the area is within the Sussex Downs Area of Natural Beauty (AONB) and is thus nationally recognised as a high quality landscape meriting

¹ SDC Biography – Inquiry Document No: 3275/1/1

² SDC 'In Principle' Support for the South Downs National Park – Inquiry Document No: 3275/2/1

³ SDC Boundary Process – Inquiry Document No: 3275/3/1

⁴ Appendix A - Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2

⁵ A South Downs National Park: Consultation with Local Authorities Report (CA 111) - May 2002, page 72 - Inquiry Document No: CD 027

protection. It forms approximately half of a golf course. The remainder of the area is designated within the Brighton and Hove Local Plan – Second Deposit Draft 2001 (BHLP) as ‘countryside’ and thus a ‘non-renewable natural resource which should be afforded protection.’⁶ It comprises the remainder of the golf course, which is an area of semi-natural scrubland. The SDC considers this area is of comparable quality to the area within the AONB.

- 2.2.2 The northern Benfield Valley is a relatively large area, south of the A27 with a distinctive downland character. Although part of the area is occupied by a golf course it is predominately an attractive mix of rough grassland, scrub and woodland which is visually prominent from its highest point adjacent to the bypass.
- 2.2.3 Although separated from the main dip slope of the Downs by the A27 bypass, the area when viewed from the north flows visually without an unsightly break from the main dip slope into the Benfield Valley. The A27 main road is hidden from view in a deep cutting. The area thus reads visually as part of the wider Downland. It is also well screened from the Hangleton link road and by a belt of scrub from the built up area to the east.
- 2.2.4 The whole area is a designated Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). The area is rich in biodiversity and embraces a wide range of habitats and is shown as such on the BHLP⁷. The area is proposed as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in the BHLP⁸.
- 2.2.5 The area supports a wide variety of fauna and flora. Observations of the Benfield Wildlife and Conservation Group include sightings of 50 bird species, 24 types of butterfly and 7 mammal species⁹.
- 2.2.6 The rectangle of land at the north-western corner of the area is designated on the BHLP as an Archeologically Sensitive Area with a boundary which closely follows that of the medieval manor of Benfield¹⁰. The manor was built in 1611 and survived until 1841¹¹.
- 2.2.7 Benfield Barn, adjacent to the area is an existing traditional 18th century flint structure and a Grade 11 listed building. It is all that remains of the former Benfield Valley farm and lies adjacent to the area. Policy NC10 of BHLP states inter alia that ‘Benfield Barn is ideally located to be a centre for social and community activities and as the basis of a ‘stepping off’ point for the Downs’. The barn and its immediate surroundings are a conservation area – Benfield Barn (designated 1989)¹².

⁶ Appendix B – Policy NC6 – Extract from Brighton & Hove Local Plan Second Deposit Draft (CD 096) - Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2

⁷ Appendix B – Policy NC4, site 9 – Extract from Brighton & Hove Local Plan Second Deposit Draft (CD 096) - Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2

⁸ Appendix B – Policy NC3 – Extract from Brighton & Hove Local Plan Second Deposit Draft (CD 096) - Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2

⁹ Appendix C – Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2

¹⁰ Appendix D – Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2

¹¹ Appendix B – Policy HE12 – Extract from Brighton & Hove Local Plan Second Deposit Draft (CD 096) - Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2

¹² Appendix B – Policy NC10 – Extract from Brighton & Hove Local Plan Second Deposit Draft (CD 096) - Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2

2.2.8 The landscape value of the area is well summarised in Policy NC9 of BHL¹³.

2.3 Justification Against Criteria – Opportunities for Open-Air Recreation

2.3.1 Public access to the area is excellent. A public footpath and a public bridleway run from south to north through the area. This leads to a safe, direct bridge crossing of the A27 and a footpath and bridleway northwards on to the main dip slope of the Downs which links with a well used long distance path, the Monarch's Way. Additional public access is available via a permissive public path from the Hangleton Estate to the east. Unchallenged 'de facto' public access is available over the entire area and is very popular with and much used by local residents.

2.3.2 The area serves as an important green wedge into the urban area and an important 'green lung' to the south of the A27. The whole area is part of the indicative Greenway network (a concept devised by the Countryside Agency as "*off road routes connecting people to facilities and open spaces*")¹⁴.

2.3.3 The recreational value of the area is well summarised in Policy NC9 of BHL which states, inter alia, that if use of part of the area as a golf course should cease that "*it is important that it is retained, in its entirety, as an open space.*"¹⁵

2.3.4 The SDC considers that the liberally available access, the archaeological and wildlife interest and the easy access on to the Downs to the north combine to create an undoubtedly superior recreational experience, enhanced by the close proximity to a large centre of population and good public transport links.

3 Additional Consideration

3.1 The northern third of the area is within the Sussex Downs AONB. If not included within the National Park, it will remain as an AONB remnant which is very likely to lose this status and protection when the AONB Revocation Order is considered at the public inquiry. This land would therefore be at higher risk of built development with a potentially detrimental effect on the landscape setting of the National Park.

4 Recommendation

4.1 The SDC considers this area meets the Countryside Agency's criteria and approach for defining National Park boundaries and requests that the Inspector recommends to the Secretary of State that the boundary be amended to include Benfield Valley (north) in the South Downs National Park.

¹³ Appendix B - Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2

¹⁴ Appendix B – Policy QD19 – Extract from Brighton & Hove Local Plan Second Deposit Draft (CD 096) - Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2

¹⁵ Appendix B – Policy NC9 – Extract from Brighton & Hove Local Plan Second Deposit Draft (CD 096) - Inquiry Document No: 3275/6/2