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SOUTHERN GAS NETWORKS

SGN GAS GOVERNOR, LAND NORTH OF NAPIER ROAD, READING, RG1 8AB

OPEN SPACE ASSESSMENT

MAY 2018

your earth our world



Wardell Armstrong

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SOUTHERN GAS NETWORKS

SGN GAS GOVERNOR, LAND NORTH OF NAPIER ROAD, READING

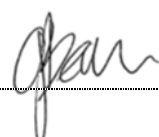
OPEN SPACE ASSESSMENT

APRIL 2018

PREPARED & APPROVED BY:

Chris Bean

Technical Director

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.2	Site and Surroundings	1
2	THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	3
3	OPEN SPACE POLICY	4
3.2	National Planning Policy Framework	4
3.3	Reading Open Spaces Strategy	4
3.4	Reading Open Spaces Strategy Update Note - January 2018.....	5
3.5	Reading Borough Local Development Framework Adopted January 2008 With Alteration Adopted 27th January 2015.....	6
3.6	Reading Central Area RCAAP 2009 to 2026 Action Plan.....	6
3.7	Sites and Detailed Policies Document Adopted October 2012 with alteration adopted 27th January 2015.....	7
3.8	New Local Plan.....	8
3.9	Open Space Policy Summary	9
4	ASSESSMENT AND JUSTIFICATION	10
4.2	What is the quantum of “loss” of open space.....	10
4.3	Accessibility to Open Space	10
4.4	What is the qualitative loss of open space.....	11
4.5	What improvements are being proposed to compensate for loss.....	11
4.6	Other very special circumstances.....	11
5	CONCLUSIONS.....	13

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

The Mobilane Green Screen

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 This open space assessment has been prepared on behalf of SGN in relation to a planning application for a proposed construction of a Gas Governor at the Land north of Napier Road, Reading, RG1 8AB.
- 1.1.2 The proposed development is located within a designated open space and this report considers the existing planning policies relating to open space at a National level and within the Reading Borough Council Development Plan documents; the extent of any loss of open space; any improvements that are proposed to the remaining open space and, where relevant, whether these and any other material considerations are of a sufficient standard to outweigh the loss of the open space.

1.2 Site and Surroundings

- 1.2.1 Photographs of the condition and use of the site are provided below. The site consists of an area of scrub and grassland at the southeast corner of Kings Meadow, south of the River Thames and north of Napier Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 8AB. The site is located north of Napier Road within King's Meadow Park and Luscinia View is located to the east of the site.
- 1.2.2 It is some 0.0036 hectares in area and consists mainly of multi-stemmed crack willow along with bramble and some dogwood.
- 1.2.3 Immediately after the proposed access route heads west from a tarmac path just east of the site there is a narrow band of short amenity grass after which there was an area of stinging nettle, with some docks and cleavers, along with the occasional small hawthorn bush.
- 1.2.4 Close to the proposed access route on the edge of the site there is a mature willow tree along with another mature willow growing on the northern edge of the area of shrubs & trees, and on the western side of this area a semi mature poplar tree with limbs overhanging / close to the proposed site footprint.
- 1.2.5 There is a band of short amenity grass a few metres in width on the west side of the proposed site footprint, beyond which the boundary of Kings Meadow with Napier Road was demarked with a narrow band of trees and shrubs including a number of mature willow trees. To the north and west of the site the habitat consisted of short mown amenity grass sports fields.



Figure 1 Photographs of site condition

2 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1.1 The proposed development is the building of a Gas Governor. The proposal is for the construction of a gas governor, which is required to maintain public gas supply. The location of the site is shown within an area of land in the south east corner of Kings Meadow, adjacent to Napier Road.
- 2.1.2 The proposed Gas Governor Kiosk will house a Gas Governor which will reduce the pressure of the gas within the network so that it is at an appropriate level to serve development within the area. The location of this Gas Governor is dictated by the requirement to connect to the underground Gas Mains pipe system.
- 2.1.3 The development will be fully bunded to provide protection for the services, with a new development area of 36 m². This does not include easements and the existing access.

3 OPEN SPACE POLICY

3.1.1 Relevant policies and guidance relating to open / green space are contained within the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 and are summarised below.

3.2 National Planning Policy Framework

3.2.1 Paragraph 73 of the NPPF highlights the important role that access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make to the health and well-being of communities.

3.2.2 Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required.

3.2.3 Para 74. States;

“Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- *an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements*
- *the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location*
- *the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.”*

3.2.4 Para 76. Refers to “Local Green Space” stating:

“By designating land as Local Green Space local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances.

Local policy for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with policy for Green Belts (para.78).”

3.3 Reading Open Spaces Strategy

3.3.1 The Reading Open Spaces Strategy, was carried out in accordance with the provisions of PPG17 and published in 2006. It is therefore somewhat dated, but makes a number

of recommendations relevant to the planning for open space in conjunction with future development in the Borough, including:

- *“Protection of existing open spaces and replacement of open spaces when development takes up existing open spaces;*
- *Improved cleanliness and maintenance;*
- *Improved and safe access to open spaces;*
- *Protection and enhancement of the biodiversity of open spaces; and*
- *Safe routes to parks.”*

3.4 Reading Open Spaces Strategy Update Note - January 2018

3.4.1 The Reading Open Space Update note was produced as an update to the position reported in the original 2007 Open Spaces Strategy and based on the updated policy context.

Amount of Open Space

3.4.2 The update note reports that there has been an increase in unrestricted open space over the last ten years (unrestricted open space being open space without restrictions on public access).

3.4.3 There has been a significant loss of areas previously mapped as public open space with limited access. However, it should be noted that a large proportion of this loss, including almost 13 ha at Battle Hospital, actually constituted brownfield land, with Battle Hospital itself having been demolished shortly before the OSS was carried out, so is not a genuine loss of open space as such.

Access to open space

3.4.4 The note maps access to recreational public open space from different parts of the Borough in terms of 400m (equating to 5 minutes' walk) and 600m catchments

3.4.5 It shows that since 2007 some of the gaps in inner west Reading and south Reading have been closed and that when 600m buffers are considered, much more of the Borough is covered, with virtually the entire residential area (99%) of the Borough within 600m of recreational public open space. the coverage in 2017.

Quality

3.4.6 Some existing parks and open spaces are reported as being of poor quality, however there is no up to date qualitative assessment of spaces contained within the 2018

update and therefore no greater detail of any scope for improvement of individual spaces.

3.5 Reading Borough Local Development Framework Adopted January 2008 With Alteration Adopted 27th January 2015

3.5.1 Policy CS28: Loss of Open Space provides the policy basis for assessing applications where loss of open space is proposed, stating;

“Development proposals that will result in the loss of open space or jeopardise its use or enjoyment by the public will not be permitted. In exceptional circumstances, development may be permitted where it is clearly demonstrated that replacement open space, to a similar standard, can be provided at an accessible location close by, or that improvements to recreational facilities on remaining open space can be provided to a level sufficient to outweigh the loss of the open space. The quality of existing open space should not be eroded by insensitive development on adjoining land.”

3.5.2 The supporting text to the policy states;

“Exceptionally, where a development proposal involves losing open space, appropriate replacement space should be provided where it is easily accessible to the people most affected by the lost space. Alternatively, compensating improvements could be made to existing open space in the area. However, this should not be the case where the existing location of the open space is key to preserving the setting of Reading, as is the case in the Kennet and Thameside Meadows. They will be identified as Strategic Open Spaces, and the boundaries will be defined in the Site Specific Allocations document.”

3.5.3 Policy CS30: Access to Open Space stresses the importance of access to open space;

“In areas with relatively poor access to open space facilities (possibly as a result of severance lines), new development should make provision for, or contribute to, improvements to road and other crossings to improve access to green space and/or facilitate the creation or linking of safe off-road routes to parks.”

3.6 Reading Central Area RCAAP 2009 to 2026 Action Plan.

3.6.1 RC14: PUBLIC REALM provides protection for specific open spaces:

“The following important areas of public open space will be protected from development:

- *RC14d Kings Meadow & Coal Woodland.*

3.6.2 It states that;

“Proposals that would result in the loss of any of these areas of open space, or jeopardise their use or enjoyment by the public will not be permitted. Proposals adjacent to these areas will ensure that access to the spaces is maintained and, where appropriate, enhanced.”

3.7 Sites and Detailed Policies Document Adopted October 2012 with alteration adopted 27th January 2015.

3.7.1 Policy DM17: GREEN NETWORK

“The identified Green Network comprises Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Areas of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats and designated open space plus both existing and potential Green Links, all of which are shown on the Proposals Map. It also includes Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, shown in Figure 4. These Green Links shall be maintained, protected, consolidated, extended and enhanced.

New development shall demonstrate how the location and type of open space, landscaping and water features provided within a scheme have been arranged such that they maintain or link into the existing Green Network and contribute to its consolidation. Such features should be designed to maximise the opportunities for enhancing this network. All new development should maximise opportunities to create new assets and links into areas where opportunities are as yet unidentified on the Proposals Map.”

3.7.2 Policy CS37: Major Landscape Features and Strategic Open Space is also relevant in terms of the important visual amenity of the space as a whole;

“Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would detract from the character or appearance of areas designated as a Major Landscape Feature. The designated areas are:

- *The Thames Valley;*
- *The Kennet and Holy Brook Meadows;*
- *The West Reading wooded ridgeline;*
- *The East Reading wooded ridgeline; and*

- *The North Reading dry valleys.”*

3.8 New Local Plan

- 3.8.1 The Local Authority are currently preparing a new Local Plan, which will replace the current development plans (the Core Strategy, Reading Central Area Action Plan and Sites and Detailed Policies Document) with a new plan setting out how Reading will develop up to 2036.
- 3.8.2 The Local Plan and Proposals Map were submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 29th March 2018.
- 3.8.3 As part of the growth within the Borough, a significant proportion of development will be provided in Reading within the plan period will be within the central area. This will include around 7,600 homes (around 49% of the total planned for), 71,000 sq. m of offices (around 63% of the total planned for) and up to 27,000 sq. m of retail and related uses (virtually all the total planned for).
- 3.8.4 In relation to Open Space policy the following emerging policies are relevant;
- 3.8.5 EN7: LOCAL GREEN SPACE AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACE, now reflects the NPPF in designating both Local Green Space and Public Open Space, stating;

“The following Local Green Spaces (LGS) and Public Open Space (POS), as shown on the Proposals Map, will be protected from development. Proposals that would result in the loss of any of these areas of open space, erode their quality through insensitive adjacent development or jeopardise their use or enjoyment by the public, will not be permitted.”

EN7Cd Kings Meadow and the Coal Woodland LGS 16.17

- 3.8.6 In total the Local Green Space and Public Open Space protected by Policy EN7 is some
- 3.8.7 Policy EN13: MAJOR LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND AREAS OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY states;

“Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would detract from the character or appearance of a Major Landscape Feature. The following areas, as shown on the Proposals Map, are defined as Major Landscape Features:

- *The Thames Valley;*
- *The Kennet and Holy Brook Meadows;*
- *The West Reading wooded ridgeline;*

- *The East Reading wooded ridgeline; and*
- *The North Reading dry valleys and Chilterns Escarpment.”*

3.9 Open Space Policy Summary

- 3.9.1 The emerging Local plan policy maintains a general presumption against loss of open space other than in exceptional circumstances (policy CS28 of the Core Strategy, proposed to be replaced by EN8 of the new Local Plan), and still lists a number of sites which are subject to specific protection over and above that general presumption (policy SA16 of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document, proposed to be replaced by EN7 of the new Local Plan).
- 3.9.2 The main change in planning policy emerging through the new Local Plan is the introduction of the concept of Local Green Space within the NPPF. Local Green Space is a definition that should be used for local communities to identify green spaces of particular significance.
- 3.9.3 The emerging Local Plan, in paragraph EN7, identifies a number of important spaces in Reading as Local Green Space (LGS) (in line with the NPPF), including Kings Meadow, of which the site forms part.
- 3.9.4 These have been proposed based on an assessment against the three criteria above and informed by consultation with local communities. The remainder of the most important open spaces remain protected as Public Open Space.

4 ASSESSMENT AND JUSTIFICATION

4.1.1 Any application within or adjacent to an area of open space should be accompanied by an Open space assessment. For developments such as this, that would result in the loss of open space, even where relatively minor, given the policy presumption that seeks to protect existing areas of open space, need to demonstrate that replacement open space to a similar standard can be provided close by or that improvements can be made to the remaining open space of a sufficient standard to outweigh the loss of the open space.

4.1.2 Emerging Policy, whilst not tested through examination stage, proposes to allocate the area as a whole as Local Green Space where a similar level of protection would exist.

4.2 What is the quantum of “loss” of open space

4.2.1 The proposed kiosk and associated enclosure fencing will be located within a dense area of vegetation in the south-eastern corner of King’s Meadow. The development itself comprises a limited loss of open space amount to some 36 sq. m in area.

4.2.2 Kings Meadow itself represents an area of some 16.17ha and so this “loss” amounts to 0.06% of the area of the Open Space

4.2.3 In terms of Borough wide provision, there is some 358.9ha of open space in total. In the context of the Borough wide open space, the loss amounts to some 0.0025% of the total Borough wide open space.

4.3 Accessibility to Open Space

4.3.1 The emerging Local plan policy maintains a general presumption against loss of open space other than in exceptional circumstances (policy CS28 of the Core Strategy, proposed to be replaced by EN8 of the new Local Plan), and still lists a number of sites which are subject to specific protection over and above that general presumption. As illustrated above, in the context of the Kings Meadow site itself and the Borough wide provision, the loss is minor in nature. Moreover the updated open spaces note confirms that in terms of accessibility to open spaces, when 600m buffers are considered, there is almost Borough wide coverage with virtually the entire residential area of the Borough within 600m of recreational public open space

4.4 What is the qualitative loss of open space

- 4.4.1 In assessing the impact of the loss of open space, it is necessary to consider the qualitative loss of space. In this case, as described within this report, the site itself consists mainly of multi-stemmed crack willow along with bramble and some dogwood. It is not, in the main an area of recreational benefit, its main attributes being its contribution to the overall character and openness of the park itself.
- 4.4.2 The area of land is not however generally a well maintained part of the park and within the context of the site as a whole does not provide significant opportunities for public access.

4.5 What improvements are being proposed to compensate for loss

- 4.5.1 As identified within the policy review section of this report, there is no clear assessment of the quality of the open space and any scope for improvement identified within the Councils Open Spaces Strategy 2018 as may be required under Policy CS28.
- 4.5.2 Post development, an area of willow trees equal to the area of multi-stemmed willow that would be lost will be planted around the perimeter of the 'wooded' area on the amenity grassland surrounding it.
- 4.5.3 This would replace the habitat that would be lost and act as a visual barrier helping to screen the new gas governor once established.
- 4.5.4 The proposed kiosk will also be enclosed by a Mobilane Green Screen (see Appendix 1).
- 4.5.5 It is therefore considered that such improvements along with the overall management of the area of the site will accord with adopted policies CS28 which requires that in exceptional circumstances *improvements to recreational facilities on the remaining open space can be provided to a level sufficient to outweigh the loss of the open space.*

4.6 Other very special circumstances

- 4.6.1 It is also noted that there may be other material considerations that may outweigh the somewhat restrictive policies, and notwithstanding the improvements proposed to the space, this application could be considered in light of other policies and pressures for development within the area.
- 4.6.2 Policy DM3: INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING notes the priority that will be afforded to proposals for essential infrastructure to enable growth to be achieved, stating;

“Proposals for development will make appropriate provision for the following infrastructure, services, resources and amenities. Such provision will be secured through planning obligations and/or the Community Infrastructure Levy as relevant.

Where relevant a high priority will also be given to the appropriate provision of the following:

- *Energy infrastructure, including decentralised energy projects*

Policy DM3 will need to be read in conjunction with the Council’s Infrastructure Delivery Plan as well as taking account of relevant strategies, plans and best practice.”

- 4.6.3 This policy is also followed through in the emerging Local Plan Policy CC9: SECURING INFRASTRUCTURE. The Gas governor is essential infrastructure, required to maintain public gas supply and meet the needs of increased housing and development within the area and represents a further material consideration in this case.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1.1 This open space assessment has considered the impact of a proposal for the construction of a gas governor, which is required to maintain public gas supply. The site is within an area of land in the south east corner of Kings Meadow, adjacent to Napier Road, a protected open space and proposed Local Green Space” in the new Local Plan.
- 5.1.2 There would be some limited loss of open space, but within the context of Kings Meadow itself this represents a loss of 0.06% of the area of the Open Space
- 5.1.3 In terms of Borough wide provision, there is some 358.9ha of open space in total. In the context of the Borough wide open space, the loss amounts to some 0.0025% of the total Borough wide open space.
- 5.1.4 Accessibility to open spaces within the Borough is generally good as identified within the most recent Open Space Note January 2018. Given the limited scale of loss and generally good accessibility it is considered.
- 5.1.5 Post development, an area of willow trees equal to the area of multi-stemmed willow that would be lost will be planted around the perimeter of the ‘wooded’ area on the amenity grassland surrounding it.
- 5.1.6 This would replace the habitat that would be lost and act as a visual barrier helping to screen the new gas governor once established.
- 5.1.7 The Gas governor is essential infrastructure, required to maintain public gas supply and meet the needs of increased housing and development within the area and represents a further material consideration in this case.

Appendix 1

The Mobilane Green Screen

THE Mobilane GREEN SCREEN



Skeleton screen



Pre-planted



Delivered product

- The Hedera green screen is grown on a 5mm galvanized steel secure framework
- Mesh dimensions are 100 x 250mm
- The varieties we have chosen are either Hedera Helix Woerner or Hedera Hibernica
- Providing 65 Ivy shoots, typically 13 plants in each 1.2 meter run. Grown and trained around the framework (hand wound, not pinned)
- Provides instant security
- Grown in a bio degradable pot containing all the nutrients the plants need to establish
- Fully grown when installed
- Heights available are: 1.0mtr | 1.8mtr | 2.2mtr or 3.0mtrs high, all are 1.2 long
- Further height is achievable by attaching blank extension panels
- Each screen weighs approximately 35kg's
- Installed on either timber or powder coated steel posts
- Available all year round
- Maximises space available
- Provides a green eco-friendly environment, improving our day to day air quality
- Environmentally sound, cost effective alternative to traditional type of perimeter solutions
- Minimal maintenance, requires trimming just twice per year
- Will thicken out to around 200mm when fully grown

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