

New Forest National Park Local Plan Review

Position Statement on the impacts of development on the New Forest's internationally designated nature conservation sites

- 1.1 As part of the process of producing a Local Plan for the New Forest National Park, the Authority is legally required to consider the potential impacts of the proposed development in the Local Plan on the internationally designated nature conservation sites (Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites). More than half of the National Park is covered by these designations.
- 1.2 The Authority conducted a public consultation on a draft Local Plan in the autumn of 2016. This set out the proposed level of housing and other development in the National Park for a 20 year Plan period.
- 1.3 The Authority commissioned Land Use Consultants to provide an initial assessment of the potential impacts of the level and location of the proposed development in this draft Local Plan on the designated sites. The purpose of this 'HRA Discussion Document' was to provide the Authority with advice on the likely impacts of the proposed development in the draft Local Plan, and to inform a full Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the Submission Local Plan, which will be published for a final round of public consultation later this year and then submitted for public Examination in March 2018. The Discussion Document has been shared with Natural England to enable it to provide comments and advice.
- 1.4 The main conclusions of the HRA Discussion Document relating to recreational and 'urban edge' impacts on the New Forest designated sites were:

Recreational Impacts

- Prior to mitigation, likely significant effects in-combination cannot be ruled out for any residential development or visitor accommodation within the New Forest National Park. All of the 700 dwellings and visitor accommodation proposed in the draft Local Plan are assumed to contribute to recreation pressure on the New Forest SAC and SPA.
- On the assumption that LUC recommendations are adopted and that the planned review of the projects to be included within NFNPA's mitigation scheme are agreed with Natural England, then it is concluded that reliance can be placed on the NFNPA's scheme to adequately mitigate potential recreation pressure from development within the New Forest National Park and that likely significant effects due to recreation pressure can be ruled out.

'Urban Edge' Impacts

- It is assumed that the potential for likely significant effects exists where residential development takes place within 400 metres of New Forest SPA.

In contrast to recreation effects, urban edge effects only act in combination with other residential development within 400m of New Forest SPA.

- Overall 'windfall' residential development in the draft Local Plan is proposed to average 20 dwellings per annum. Therefore, individual 'windfall' development proposals are likely to be substantially smaller, with Local Plan allocations used to bring forward larger scale developments. With this small scale of 'windfall' development and the generic protection afforded by draft Local Plan Policy 4, it is judged that windfall developments would not be of a sufficient scale to give rise to urban edge effects that would be significant for New Forest SPA as a whole, either individually or in combination with the remaining small scale windfall residential development within 400 m of the New Forest SPA. This is broadly consistent with the approach to 'Urbanisation' effects in the HRA of the adopted Core Strategy.
- LUC consider that it is not possible to rule out the potential for urban edge effects (such as cat predation or fly-tipping) from the residential allocations within 400 m of New Forest SPA by reliance on the NFNPA's current Habitat Mitigation Scheme.
- To allow likely significant urban edge effects to be ruled out, LUC recommends that measures to avoid or adequately mitigate the urban edge effects should be included in the Local Plan allocations policies and included in the measures in the updated NPA Mitigation Scheme.

1.5 The conclusions of LUC's Discussion Document were discussed during a meeting with Natural England on 27 April 2017. Natural England supports the conclusions about the recreational impacts from development outlined above. It also supports LUC's view that the scale and dispersion of windfall development proposed in the Local Plan would not be sufficient to affect the integrity of the New Forest SPA and SAC.

1.6 Natural England consider that an appropriate assessment would be required for each of the proposed 'allocation sites' within 400 metres of the New Forest SPA to determine whether the urban edge effects could be ruled out or mitigated. It was noted that it had not been possible to mitigate these urban edge effects in the Dorset Heaths and Thames Basin Heaths.

The Authority's proposed Local Plan approach to the impacts of development on the New Forest designated sites.

1.7 Following the discussions with Natural England, and the advice from LUC, the Authority has decided to adopt the following approach to the impacts of development proposed in the Local Plan:

- Developer contributions will be sought for the NPA's mitigation scheme from residential and visitor accommodation throughout the National Park to mitigate their recreational impacts.

- It will be assumed that development of 'windfall' residential and visitor accommodation in the Local Plan will have a significant in combination recreational impact on the New Forest SPA/SAC, but their urban edge impacts will not be sufficiently significant to affect the integrity of the New Forest SPA/SAC. The former will be mitigated through the NPA's updated mitigation scheme.
- The Authority will not propose any open market housing 'allocations' within 400 metres of the New Forest SPA unless the developer produces sufficient evidence for an appropriate assessment of the proposed housing allocation's implications for the SPA that would allow the Authority to ascertain that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA.
- The Authority will, however, consider residential or visitor accommodation that is able to ensure (in perpetuity) that it will not have cats and will not result in fly-tipping. In particular, the Authority will consider whether elderly care homes, nursing homes, or some form of affordable housing that can achieve this requirement can be used in an 'allocation' within 400 metres of the SPA and included in the Local Plan.

5th May 2017