

LEISURE AND RECREATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT - APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Appropriate Assessment of plans is required by the European Habitats Directive¹ which has been transposed into English Law by a 2006 amendment to the 1994 Habitats Regulations. It is a process applied to plans that could affect European sites. Such sites are termed NATURA 2000 Sites and comprise Special Areas of Conservation, (SACs), Special Protection Areas for wild birds (SPAs) and RAMSAR sites and each has qualifying features of international importance.

The purpose of Appropriate Assessment is to ensure that the conservation objectives of a European site are protected as part of the plan making process. The Assessment needs to determine whether or not the proposal or policy in a development plan would adversely affect the integrity of a site, ie its qualifying features - the internationally important habitats and species for which it is designated.

Government guidance² identifies 3 stages to Appropriate Assessment:

- i) **Screening** – determining whether a plan is likely to have a significant effect, alone, or in combination with others, on a European site. Where there is doubt about the significance of the effects, the “precautionary principle” applies and further research should be undertaken. If significant effects are found, the plan must be subjected to the next stage.
- ii) **Appropriate Assessment** – determining whether, in light of the site’s nature conservation objectives, the plan would have, or risk having, an adverse impact. There must be a high level of uncertainty (ie no reasonable scientific doubt remains) that there are no adverse effects.
- iii) **Mitigation measures and alternative options**- where there is risk of, or are/is, adverse effects on the sites nature conservation objectives, alternatives should be considered. Where no alternatives exist/remain, any outstanding adverse effects should be mitigated.

This document concerns the first Screening stage of West Wiltshire District Council's **Leisure and Recreation Development Plan Document (DPD)**. The outcome of the screening exercise is that none of the preferred options, which have been translated into policies in this document, are likely to have a significant effect on the NATURA 2000 Sites in and around the District. Accordingly, no further work is required to complete a full Appropriate Assessment. The following pages and the Appendix describe the screening process and its outcome.

¹ Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora

² Planning for the Protection of European Sites (DCLG) 2006

SCREENING METHODOLOGY

The screening task has been undertaken in 3 phases:

- i) NATURA 2000 site analysis
- ii) Review of developing options to policy stage
- iii) Screening

i) NATURA 2000 site analysis

Information has been collected from a variety of sources including the Natural England and JNCC websites, the standard SAC and SPA data forms, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) component information and the Interim Screening Report regarding Appropriate Assessment of the draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

The name of each site, its area, the features for which it has been designated, its conservation objectives and its vulnerabilities have been identified and tabulated. The conservation objectives for each site are effectively the reasons for which the SAC/SPA is designated. All the conservation objectives relate to the maintenance of favourable condition, or, improvement of condition to "favourable" status where this is not the case.

Clearly, the vulnerability of a site to a particular change or activity depends on its attributes and qualifying features. To give some structure to the screening, the vulnerabilities of each SAC/SPA have been categorised according to a checklist adapted from the South West Regional Spatial Strategy's Interim Screening Report. This document uses a checklist with the following broad categories of potential impacts on NATURA 2000 Sites:

- Physical loss – eg removal of some attribute
- Physical damage – eg changes in land management practice or recreational pressure
- Non-physical disturbance – eg noise or visual presence of an activity
- Water course changes – eg water pollution, changes in ground and surface water levels
- Biological disturbance – eg introduction of non-native species

ii) Review of preferred options

A review of the developing options in the Leisure and Recreation DPD has been carried out; this Assessment focuses on the preferred options being taken forward. This has involved looking at each option to decide whether:

- it relates to a specific spatial area
- it would have no effect on a NATURA 2000 site
- it has a potential to effect NATURA 2000 site
- it would have a significant effect on a NATURA 2000 site

The analysis of each developing option for potential effect followed the checklist devised by David Tyldesley Associates for NE and used in the Interim Screening report for the RSS³.

Table1 Checklist for determining whether an option in the DPD is likely to have an effect on a NATURA 2000 Site

Effects of DPD Option/Policy on NATURA 2000 Site	Reasoning
No effect	a) The option itself will not lead to development as it relates to qualitative criteria for development or is not a land use planning policy b) The option makes provision for development, but its precise location will be determined in lower tier documents/policies c) No development could occur through this option alone, as it is be implemented through more detailed subordinate documents/policies and will be subject to further consideration of likely significant effect d) The option concerns development but will not affect a NATURA 2000 Site on account of its location e) The option is intended to protect the built, historic and natural environment, including biodiversity; enhancement measures are unlikely to have an adverse effect on a NATURA 2000 Site
Potential effect	f) The DPD/option directly or indirectly, steers development towards or encourages development in, an area which includes a European site or where development may affect a European site.
Likely significant effect	g) The option makes provision for development in location(s) which would likely have an effect on a European site and must be subject to Appropriate Assessment.

The analysis of developing options has been undertaken by the Wiltshire County Council's District ecologist and the District Council's Planning Officer in Planning Policy.

iii) Screening

An initial screening exercise has been carried out based on the review of developing options and having regard to other plans. Those options having a potential impact have been identified and related to the NATURA 2000 Sites affected.

³ Appropriate Assessment of the Draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy: Interim Screening Report (Land Use Consultants) Oct 2006

FINDINGS

i) The NATURA 2000 Sites

This initial screening process is effectively a sieve of European sites which could be affected by the Leisure and Recreation DPD. All of the SACs and the SPA on the list that are within the District also extend beyond its boundaries. In addition, there are 2 other SACs within 10km of the District's boundaries which have been put forward for screening. The name of each site, its location and area, its qualifying features and its vulnerabilities are identified in Table 2. There are no RAMSAR Sites.

Table 2 – NATURA 2000 Sites which could be affected by the Leisure and Recreation DPD

<p>SALISBURY PLAIN SAC</p> <p>Total 21,438.1 ha, mostly in Wiltshire, a little in Hampshire 5,900 of SAC within District boundary</p>	
<p>Qualifying Features:</p> <p>Habitat: Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands Habitat: Semi natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates – including important orchid sites (6210 and 6211) Species: Marsh fritillary butterfly</p>	<p>Vulnerabilities:</p> <p>Physical loss: - loss of semi natural grassland through grazing and burning Physical damage: - changes in land management practice affecting grassland such as ploughing, cutting of vegetation, changes in grazing regime - recreational activities – walking leading to erosion /trampling; ; use of vehicles – esp for "off-roading" - release of wild animals Non physical disturbance: - noise from/presence of recreational activities</p>
<p>SALISBURY PLAIN SPA</p> <p>Total 19,688.8 ha, mostly in Wiltshire, a little in Hampshire 5,900 of SPA within District boundary</p>	
<p>Qualifying Features:</p> <p>Species: Stone curlew Species: Hen harrier Species: Quail Species: Hobby</p>	<p>Vulnerabilities:</p> <p>Physical loss: - loss of semi natural grassland through grazing and burning Physical damage: - changes in land management practice affecting grassland which supports food sources/roosts/nests such as ploughing, cutting of vegetation, changes in grazing regime - recreational activities – walking leading to erosion /trampling; ; use of vehicles – esp for "off-roading" release of wild animals Non physical disturbance: - noise from/presence of recreational activities, including domestic animals</p>

SALISBURY RIVER AVON SAC	
Total 498.24 ha running through Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire Within District boundary: Part of River Wylve tributary of Salisbury Avon running from Longbridge Deverill to Stockton	
Qualifying Features: Habitat: River with floating vegetation often dominated by water crowfoot Species: Desmoulin's whorl snail Species: Sea lamprey Species: Brook lamprey Species: Atlantic salmon Species: Bullhead	Vulnerabilities: Physical damage: - road schemes (new roads/improvements); flood defence works; land drainage schemes; removal of woodland; recreational access to banks Water course changes: - changes in water quality – contamination from point source discharges/dust particulates - changes to water flow/temperature/turbidity from new development and associated works - changes in ground and surface water levels from new development flood defence works Biological disturbance: - introduction of non-native/invasive species - extraction of species/fishing activity
BATH AND BRADFORD ON AVON BATS SAC (WINSLEY MINES)	
Total 107.16 ha with parts in Avon and Wiltshire 1.52 ha within District Boundary- Winsley Mines	
Qualifying Features: Species: Greater Horseshoe Bat Species: Bechstein's Bat Also secondary species (not a primary qualifying species) Lesser Horseshoe Bat Assuming approx foraging distances from roosts: Bechstein -2km Greater Horseshoe - Lesser Horseshoe -	Vulnerabilities: Physical loss: - removal of vegetation (trees and shrub layer) near roosts - removal of hedges/woodlands along flight lines between roosting and foraging sites - destruction/major refurbishment of buildings (poss. roosts) Physical damage: - damage to secure entrance and modifications to caves - changes to tree/woodland management – cutting/felling of trees; changes in species composition - dumping/spreading/dischage of materials affecting access/ventilation light to roosts - burning/incinerating near roosts - exaction of soils and minerals from site - engineering works – cable/pipe laying; construction of tracks, walls, fences Non-physical disturbance: - recreational activities disturbing roosts

CHILMARK QUARRIES SAC	
Total: 10.41 ha within adjoining Salisbury District Approx 5 km from WWDC southern boundary	
Qualifying Features: Species: Greater Horeshoe Bat Species: Barbastelle Bat Species: Bechstein's Bat Also secondary species (not a primary qualifying species) Lesser Horseshoe Bat Assuming approx foraging distances from roosts: Greater Horeshoe Bat - Barbastelle Bat – 8km Bechstein's Bat – 2km & Lesser Horseshoe Bat -	Vulnerabilities: Physical loss: - removal of vegetation (trees and shrub layer) near roosts - removal of hedges/woodlands along flight lines between roosting and foraging sites - destruction/major refurbishment of buildings (poss. roosts) Physical damage: - changes to quarries area - changes to tree/woodland management – cutting/felling of trees; changes in species composition - dumping/spreading/discharge of materials affecting access/ventilation light to roosts - burying/incinerating near roosts - exaction of soils and minerals from site - engineering works – cable/pipe laying; construction of tracks, walls, fences Non-physical disturbance: - recreational activities disturbing roosts
MENDIP WOODLANDS SAC	
Total: 235.92 ha within adjoining Mendip District Approx 9 km from WWDC western boundary	
Qualifying features: <i>Tilio-Acerion</i> forests on limestone A cluster of 3 ash-dominated woods on carboniferous limestone	Vulnerabilities: Physical loss: - removal of vegetation (trees and shrub layer) Physical damage: - changes to tree/woodland management – cutting/felling of trees; thinning, coppicing, changes in species composition, modification of the stand or underwood - burying/incinerating on site - exaction of soils and minerals from site - engineering works – cable/pipe laying; drilling; construction of tracks, walls, fences - recreational activities – walking leading to erosion/trampling; ; use of vehicles – esp for "off-roading" - release of wild/domestic animals Biological disturbance: - introduction of non-native/invasive species

Although there are only 6 European sites relevant to this Assessment, there is considerable variation in size and in their nature conservation value. For example, the Salisbury Plain is extensive and is valued for its grassland habitats, orchids and a butterfly species, whereas the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC is relatively small, divided into

parcels and designated for its species alone. There is also an overlap between 2 designations: the Salisbury Plain SAC and SPA cover the same area in the District.

How the habitats and species of the NATURA 2000 sites will be affected by the developing options of the DPD depends upon:

- The vulnerability of the site's qualifying features and their sensitivity to external factors
- The current trends affecting the site and its current status
- The likely changes that will result from the implementation of the DPD – in combination with other plans and projects

ii) Review of the DPD's developing options and policies

a) The DPD

When complete, the Leisure and Recreation DPD will provide the spatial policy framework for the future provision of leisure and recreation open space in the District. It will also allocate a few additional sites for recreation, though the precise scale and extent of the activities and associated facilities thereon will be developed in subsequent documents. Given the subject matter of the document and the limited scale of possible development arising directly from it, certain significant adverse impacts are unlikely and difficult to foresee.

In developing the options, the Council has taken account of the District's physical, economic and social characteristics, the overall policy context and of the Leisure and Recreation Needs Assessment which provides the sports and recreation facilities "baseline".

The DPD is based on the principles of sustainable development and addresses the thematic issues which have identified through the work outlined above:

- Levels of provision
- Countryside access
- Greenspace management and maintenance
- Indoor sports provision
- Provision for young people
- Provision of outdoor sport
- Provision of water based recreation
- Tree cover
- Working with schools

b) Other plans and projects

The assessment of an option needs to take account of its impact in combination with other plans and projects and it is necessary to identify those plans/projects which are most relevant to the subject matter of the DPD. The most relevant general documents to this case are considered to be:

- Regional Planning Guidance for the South West (RPG 10)

This remains the statutory plan for the South West and it includes a chapter devoted to tourism, culture leisure and sport and gives direction for local authorities on the provision of open spaces, sports and recreation facilities and recommends maximising the use of highly managed areas such as country parks, national trails and sports grounds/centres. However, but it does not contain any specific spatial policies which allocate future leisure and recreation development.

- South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) (draft)

The emerging plan for the South West – but it has an urban focus with the main spatial reference to this District being the identification of Trowbridge as a Significant Settlement. In regional terms, West Wiltshire is essentially a rural area with a relatively modest level of future residential and commercial development. To a varying extents, the same applies to the surrounding districts of Kennet, Salisbury, Mendip and North Wiltshire with only Salisbury and Chippenham identified as Significant Settlements.

The Sustainability Appraisal for the RSS highlights trends which are relevant locally - above average population growth and continuing pressure on greenspaces and increasing traffic, noise and light pollution. It also highlights climate change and the increasing frequency of extreme events; river SACs are particularly vulnerable to drought and flooding. There is currently no AA available of the RSS but there is no evidence that its strategic policies will have an in-combination effect with the DPD on the European sites.

- Regional framework for sport document : Life's out there...be Active in the South West

Amongst other things, this document deals with delivering community sport and encouraging active living and has an outcome to raise public participation levels in sport and active recreation by 1% each year. As the District has a relatively high proportion of "inactive" residents and is taking forward this target, there is considerable potential for an increase in informal recreation and an intensification in the use of country parks and footpaths etc.

- Normally, any Local Development Documents within the District, but this DPD will be the first.

- DPDs of surrounding Districts

These documents – mainly emerging Core Strategies – have not been analysed in detail at this stage of the Assessment. It is possible that future development in Salisbury may affect the River Avon SAC, but in combination with this DPD, it is considered that any effects would not be significantly worse; certainly, this DPD would not "tip the balance". In the light of the scale of development proposed for Wiltshire and east Somerset in the future and its location, the likelihood of an in-combination effect with this DPD seems low.

- Wiltshire Local Transport Plan

A Codford/Heytesbury (A36) by pass proposal has failed a funding bid, however, the Highway Authority is considering further safety measures the works for which might impact on the River Avon SAC. Until the details are known it is not possible to comment on in combination effects.

Appendix 1 shows the results of the review of the preferred options and policies, aided by the checklist at Table 1, and includes a line to indicate any in-combination effects from other plans/trends and a summary of the nature of the potential effects. Comments are made in the Appendix regarding any doubt about effects following the application of the precautionary principle, and then the options concerned are discussed and analysed in Section iii below.

iii) Screening - Analysis and results

Appendix 1 shows that 9 preferred options have been identified, through the application of the precautionary principle, as having the potential to have an effect on a NATURA 2000 Site. Dealing with each in turn, the potential effect has been considered having regard to the habitat or species affected, its magnitude, scale, duration if not permanent (and the potential for recovery) and in the light of the policy wording which has emerged.

Option 13.0 - for LP1

The Draft Planning Policy LP1 deals with enhancement of existing facilities and there is a concern that enhancement activity could damage The River Avon and Winsley Mines SACs. However, as the enhancements and their locations are not specified and would probably be very localised; it is not possible to assess likely significant effect at this stage.

Option 1.2

This concerns options for a review of "spaces", which may result in enhancement or change of use and thus could have an adverse impact on the River Avon and Winsley Mines SACs. However, the DPD is a framework document and the impacts can only be properly judged as part of the review itself and thereafter, once decisions are made about particular spaces.

Option 2.4

This deals with Rights of Way improvements and there is a concern regarding public access damage to the Salisbury Plain SAC and SPA. However, the possibility of damage should be negated considerably the provision of properly managed and maintained routes and improved signage/ information boards. Furthermore, the designated area of Plain, because of its military use/ownership and mostly restricted public access, is unlikely to suffer any prolonged significant effects from intensive public use; access is usually of short duration and intermittent. Accordingly it is concluded that Rights of Way improvements option would not have a significant effect.

Option 8.5 (Policy CR2)

The concern here is the increased public access to the Bristol River Avon and its banks for water related activities in the vicinity of Barton Farm Country Park, Bradford on Avon. The impact of increased public access depends on the nature of the water sports and any

associated structures. Clearly, the duration of the activities would vary, but they would not be permanent. The Winsley Mines site is some 2km from the country park and it seems reasonable to assume that there would be little vegetation clearance and no new lighting close to roosts (the resulting policy refers to “habitat enhancement”). Thus, the focus of intensive water related activities would be too distant for possible significant effects.

NEW Option (Policy CR3)

The concern is the development of the greenspace network to include the extension of existing river walks which could impact on the River Avon SAC and the Winsley Mines SAC area. The policy wording which has emerged refers to “in an around urban areas”; this would include the towns of Warminster and Bradford on Avon. However, the greenspace access activities would be intermittent and though varying in duration, would be small scale in impact. For the reasons outlined the Option 8.5 par above, it is unlikely that the Winsley Mines area would be affected. The wording of the policy also includes a rider - that access will be secured and maintained “where appropriate”. This secures a check to ensure that new proposals will not be damaging. The impact of creating new walks, assuming that they are properly route marked and managed, is therefore not considered to be significant.

Options 6.8 and 6.11

The options relate to 2 sites: Woolmore Farm, south east of Melksham and Vivash Park, north east of Westbury. The concern in this case is that the development of land for outdoor sports provision and its attendant changes to vegetation will impact on the Winsley SAC bat species. It is understood that there is some evidence of the SAC species in Westbury though both the Vivash Park site and the Woolmore Farm site are well over 10 km distant from the SAC area. However, the options concern proposals for recreational development – primarily grass sports pitches – and the policy wording which has emerged permits development provided that it “protects and where possible enhances, wildlife habitats” Any proposals will be the subject of a planning application which should ensure the necessary information on species present is assessed.

Option 8.5 (Policy WR2)

The concern here is the increased public access to District’s river areas (Bristol River Avon and River Wylye) for all fishing, bathing, rowing and canoeing and the impact on the River Avon SAC and the Winsley Mines SAC area. The impact depends on the nature of the water sports and any associated structures. Clearly, the duration of the activities would vary, but they would not be permanent. Most important, the policy wording which has emerged encourages proposals “provided they do not adversely affect the water quality, or quantity, amenity, visual quality or value as a wildlife habitat” and should therefore secure a check on activities and eradicate any potential adverse effects. The Winsley Mines site is some 300m from the River Avon, but it seems reasonable to assume that there would be little vegetation clearance and no new lighting close to roosts.

New Option (Policy WR3)

This option deals with recreational and tourism development on the Kennet and Avon Canal and the concern is the impact on the Winsley Mines SAC area, which is about 300m from the waterway. The policy which has emerged is not site specific but it contains the rider that development will only be permitted provided it does not detract from the ecological value of the canal. The impact depends on the nature of the development but the rider should be sufficient to maintain the conservation objectives of the site, assuming that there would be no new lighting or vegetation clearance activity near the roosts.

This analysis indicates that the DPD would not generate any activity to interfere with the balance, distribution and density of the key species or disrupt those factors which help maintain favourable condition of the SACs / SPA that could be affected. The DPD is a framework document and most of the policies are not site specific; detailed plans will be the subject of a Supplementary Planning Document to be produced in the future.

The conclusion is that none of the options and the policies which have emerged will have a likely significant effect on any of the SACs/SPA included in this screening exercise.