

Examination of the Basingstoke and Deane Local Plan (2011 to 2029)

MF13 Statement of Common Ground between Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council and Natural Basingstoke regarding Local Plan Environmental Policies

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the Local Plan examination hearing session on 20 October 2015, the Inspector suggested Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council (the council) and Natural Basingstoke work together to prepare a Statement of Common Ground on environmental management policies in the Submission Local Plan, principally policies EM1 (Landscape), EM4 (Biodiversity, geodiversity and nature conservation) and EM5 (Green Infrastructure).
- 1.2 Natural Basingstoke are concerned that the Local Plan does not have a vision for a strategically planned environmental framework to reflect the positive approach as set out in the NPPF (paragraph 114) to set out a strategic approach in Local Plans, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure. In particular Natural Basingstoke highlight the following issues:
- Policies should require a net gain in biodiversity
 - Make reference to current biodiversity condition in the borough
 - Need to refer to partnership working with Local Nature Partnership (LNP) and Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)
 - Improve and clarify monitoring regime for biodiversity assets and include targets and indicators
 - Need to set aside wildlife corridors and undertake ecological network mapping that can influence site requirements prior to allocation.
 - Make reference to Biodiversity 2020 Indicators
 - Need to include more of the open space provision as natural open space and specify extent and location of habitat provision required at the site policy stage
 - Include reference to importance of habitats in considering landscape issues
 - The need for a default minimum 50m buffer for ancient woodland
 - Add reference to key habitats
 - Add new clauses to ensure communities do not lose access to uncommon species associated with their area and there would be no harm to habitats identified for connecting landscape features to maintain viable populations of flora and fauna, food to support viable populations
 - Include in glossary definitions of “significant harm”, “net gain”, “compensation”, priority habitat, priority species, ecological network.
 - Progress in planning for wildlife corridors, ecological networks and stepping stones, including those crossing administrative boundaries.
 - The Hampshire LNP is dormant.

1.3 This document suggests proposed changes to address some of the concerns of Natural Basingstoke. Where the council considers modifications proposed by Natural Basingstoke are not required the council justifies its position.

2. Partnership working

2.1 The council is committed to partnership working with Natural Basingstoke in order to conserve, enhance and develop biodiversity throughout the borough. Examples of the partnership working is as follows:

- Natural Basingstoke input to the development of plans that guide the management of parks throughout the borough
- Natural Basingstoke input into the development of projects as part of the Green Infrastructure Strategy action plan (e.g identification of Green Corridors, Local Nature Reserve process)
- The council support Natural Basingstoke in running work parties and training sessions; applying for funding and grants; and in attending group meetings
- The council provide financial support to Natural Basingstoke for Insurance provision, training, tools provision, administration, marketing and promotional materials
- Natural Basingstoke and the council have entered into a legal agreement giving Natural Basingstoke greater responsibility for green space management of Old Down to the south of Basingstoke
- A report is made by the council's Community Development Officer which indicates that quarterly over 2500 hours of conservation volunteer time is recognised and appreciated by the council.

3. The council's approach in the Submission Local Plan

3.1 Section 6 of the Local Plan sets out the approach to environmental management and recognises that the wider implementation of policy objectives are likely to be delivered through a range of council strategies, including the Green Infrastructure Strategy (ENV09) and Living Landscapes (ENV12).

3.2 Section 6 of the Local Plan includes policies EM1, EM4 and EM5. Each housing site allocation policy (SS3.1- SS3.12) includes biodiversity and green infrastructure criterion. Policy EM4 and the biodiversity criteria in policies SS3.1 to SS3.12 make specific reference to seeking net gain in biodiversity.

3.3 Policies in the submission Local Plan have been significantly amended in response to comments by Natural Basingstoke but also Natural England and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust during the various public consultation stages on the Local Plan.

3.4 The council's Duty to Cooperate Statement (CD08), at paragraphs 3.9-3.10 explains that the Local Nature Partnership (LNP) did not respond to the Local Plan consultations. The LNP is not currently resourced to respond to local plans as the LNP instead relies on its constituent partner organisations to continue doing this work as individual organisations (but not on behalf of the

LNP). The council is a partner of the LNP and has met with members of the Partnership (such as the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and Natural England) in their individual organisational capacity, both prior to and after the formation of the partnership to discuss issues principally relating to landscape, biodiversity and green infrastructure. The council will continue to work with the LNP and its partners.

- 3.5 The council consider that the supporting text of policies EM1, EM4 and EM5 already addresses many of the issues raised by Natural Basingstoke, such as regarding key habitats and species. The concept of ecological networks is included in the supporting text to policy EM4 at paragraph 6.24.
- 3.6 The council consider that policies within the plan will help to provide net gains for biodiversity that is consistent with the NPPF (paragraph 9 and 109) and the duties under Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (s40).
- 3.7 The monitoring strategy for biodiversity matters is to be largely delivered through the action plans outlined in the supporting text of the policy and through the council's partnerships with Natural England, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and notably the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre with whom the council has a Service Level Agreement for site surveying and data sharing. It should also be noted that the national indicators and targets arising from Biodiversity 2020 are still in development, it is planned to align the monitoring strategy with relevant indicators once this has been published. However, the council agree with Natural Basingstoke that there should be biodiversity indicators directly in the Local Plan and these are suggested in appendix 1.
- 3.8 A project arising from the Green Infrastructure Strategy to map ecological networks is in progress, and is being undertaken in consultation with Natural Basingstoke.
- 3.9 In considering applications against the landscape policy, due regard is given to habitats such as SSSIs and SINCs. However, in order to provide clarity in decision making, it is considered that policy EM4 should be the primary mechanism for considering habitats. An amendment to policy EM1 is suggested however, to refer to ecological networks.
- 3.10 The green space standards, defined in appendix 4 of the Submission Local Plan, set out the requirements for multi-functional green space (MFGS), and this includes accessible natural green space provision. In terms of the Natural Basingstoke request for more detail in relation to the strategic allocations, the council considers that the policy requirements address the need to plan for MFGS strategically, and the strategic requirements for elements such as the requirements of particular habitats, will be taken forward at the planning application stage.
- 3.11 The Local Plan glossary already includes definitions of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, Key Species, Stepping Stones, SINCs, SSSI, SPA etc. However, in response to Natural Basingstoke, additional definitions are

proposed to be added to the glossary for net gain, biodiversity, green infrastructure and ecological networks as requested. This additional definitions can be viewed in appendix 2.

4. Suggested changes

4.1 Following detailed discussions with Natural Basingstoke, the LPA suggests amendments to the policies and supporting text to address the following issues:

- To plan positively to create networks of Green Infrastructure (paragraph 6.1)
- Increase recognition of green infrastructure and partnerships within supporting text to policy EM1(paragraph 6.10-6.11)
- To better emphasise mechanisms to implement biodiversity enhancements (policy EM4.4)
- Amend to better reflect established approaches to biodiversity priorities (paragraph 6.21)
- Monitoring requirements for policy EM1, EM4 and EM5 (monitoring and implementation box)
- Additional definitions within the glossary.

4.2 It is therefore proposed to amend the Environmental Management section as set out in appendix 1 and additions to the glossary as shown in appendix 2.

5. Common and uncommon ground

Common Ground

5.1 The common ground agreed between the council and Natural Basingstoke is shown below:

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| <p>5.1a. Need to amend text to refer to creation of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure</p> <p>5.1b. Need to improve and clarify monitoring regime for biodiversity</p> <p>5.1c. Greater recognition placed on planning positively for Green Infrastructure networks</p> <p>5.1d. Include reference to importance of habitats in considering landscape issues</p> <p>5.1e. That additional definitions of biodiversity terms should be included within glossary</p> |
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Uncommon ground

5.2 The uncommon ground agreed between the council and Natural Basingstoke is shown below:

The comments made by Natural Basingstoke in this section have been summarised. A theme title has been suggested, and for each section the stance of each party is illustrated.

a. Woodland buffer standards

Natural Basingstoke consider there is a need for a default minimum 50m buffer for “irreplaceable ancient woodland”. Natural Basingstoke also believe the council can plan more positively for provisions for ancient woodland which is “irreplaceable habitat” (NPPF 118).

The council notes that a minimum 15m buffer is advocated by Natural England as set out in their Standing Advice for Ancient Woodland. The council's Landscape and Biodiversity SPD requires a minimum buffer of 20 metres. Wherever possible through negotiation, the council will seek standards above the minimum 20 metres buffer. Buffers can be designed to protect and augment the ancient woodland which they surround. Policy EM4 criterion 1e specifically protects irreplaceable habitats.

b. Characterisation of Borough Landscape/Environment

Natural Basingstoke consider the descriptions in paragraphs 6.2 to 6.8 do not present a realistic assessment of the true condition of the environment in the borough whether expressed in landscape/habitat or biodiversity terms.

The council is of the view that text suggested by Natural Basingstoke is inappropriate for this type of document, that the level of detail already provided within the Local Plan is adequate, and that the council's Living Landscape Strategy is the best mechanism to publish further detail of this type.

c. Terminology of policy EM1

The council has amended policy EM1 criterion e) to read “and their function as ecological habitats”. Natural Basingstoke consider this should be amended to “...and their function as priority habitats”.

The council's view is that Policy EM1 is a landscape policy and separate from the green infrastructure and biodiversity policies. Criterion e) covers landscape features that are essentially natural, and which provide ecological benefit in addition to landscape benefits. The council considers a more suitable phrase, which incorporates an additional change and which reflects that this is principally a landscape policy, is “ecological networks”.

The glossary in Appendix 2 includes a definition of “ecological networks”. The council considers that Policies EM1 and EM4 are consistent with PPS9 and NPPF.

d. Inclusion of biodiversity detail in housing allocation site policies (SS3.1-SS3.12)

Natural Basingstoke consider that the strategic allocation policies should include additional detail to include the location, function and extent of natural green space and connections into wildlife corridors.

It is the position of the council that the Local Plan is not the correct document for extensive biodiversity/green infrastructure targets and indicators and the current status of biodiversity across the borough. The Green Infrastructure Strategy and in particular the Living Landscape strategy and Landscape and Biodiversity SPD which are cross referenced within the Local Plan are where this detail can be found. These documents are reviewed on a regular basis and are annually reported upon.

e. Commitment to manage more Borough land for biodiversity

Natural Basingstoke considers that the council should make a commitment in the Local Plan to a quantified increase in its own land to be managed for biodiversity.

The council is of the view that this is not a matter for the Local Plan. The council has stated its commitment to improving biodiversity on its own land in the Living Landscapes and the Green Infrastructure Strategies.

f. Commitment to improve biodiversity and include measures in the Local Plan.

Natural Basingstoke considers that the Local Plan sets targets for such matters as housing and water quality, and that in addition the Local Plan should make a measurable commitment to biodiversity improvement. Natural Basingstoke also consider that the Local Plan should include an overall indicator and set a target for creating new natural green space from development.

The council is of the view that appropriate development proposals are required to provide or contribute towards green space requirements. Most green space proposals will incorporate land managed for natural features that provide biodiversity benefits. It should be noted that biodiversity mitigation and compensation requirements will be agreed over and above the green space standards and will frequently be on private land. The council does report on biodiversity mitigation, but such provision is opportunistic in terms of appropriate local habitats, and stated biodiversity targets per se would be aspirational.

g. Review housing site assessments in the light of ecological networks

Natural Basingstoke is concerned that the housing site assessment did not take account of the development of ecological networks.

The council is of the view that ecological networks are broad targets, designed to guide biodiversity mitigation and ecological management when proposals fall within any particular corridor type. Ecological corridors cannot be set-aside, but can guide development proposals and planning decision making as to appropriate biodiversity provision within an area.

h. Extent of Indicators/targets/Biodiversity detail within local plan

The council's position is that the Local Plan is not the correct document for extensive biodiversity/green infrastructure targets and indicators and the current status of biodiversity across the borough. The Green Infrastructure Strategy, the Living Landscape Strategy, and Landscape and Biodiversity

SPD are where this detail can be found. The strategies are reviewed on a regular basis and are reported upon annually. However the council has made amendments to policy EM4 implementation and monitoring requirements. These amendments would necessarily be resource effective and in the main utilise existing data from partners and Government sources.

Natural Basingstoke agrees that some indicators should be in the subsidiary documents, but would expect to see some statement of commitment to biodiversity improvements on council owned land within the Local plan.

j. Approach to multi-functional green space

The council takes the view that, where appropriate, development proposals are required to provide or contribute towards green space requirements. Most green space proposals will incorporate land managed for natural features that provide biodiversity benefits. However it should be noted that biodiversity mitigation and compensation requirements will be agreed over and above the green space standards and will frequently be on private land.

Natural Basingstoke consider an indicator reporting natural green space derived from planning permissions and delivered should be added to the policy EM1 implementation and monitoring box.

k. Net gain and NERC Act duties

The council has the aspiration to assist but does not have the mandate or resources to reverse declines in biodiversity throughout the wider countryside of the borough. The duty to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity (NERC Act 2006), and requirements to seek net-gain for biodiversity where possible (NPPF para 9 and 109), are taken very seriously by the council, however these duties and responsibilities are limited in scope to the proper exercise of the functions of the council. The council delivers these duties in various ways including through development management decisions, through the management of its own sites, and through the funding of partnership projects such as Pamber Forest, the Loddon and Eversley Heritage Area, and the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre.

Natural Basingstoke are of the view that the council should be actively monitoring and pursuing biodiversity improvements, and that the NERC Act duty is broader than that stated above.

Natural Basingstoke are pleased to see the proposed additional indicators in policy EM4

6. Environmental Management and Climate Change

Background

- 6.1 An overall ambition of the Local Plan is to plan positively to create, protect enhance and manage networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure ~~protect and enhance our existing environmental assets~~ whilst meeting the area's social and economic needs. The high quality built and natural environment contributes towards the quality of life and wellbeing of the borough's residents. Results of consultation completed both as part of the Local Plan preparation and through other relevant consultation clearly highlights the importance that local residents attach to protecting such assets and minimising the impact of change. The Local Plan aims to protect such assets while supporting proposals which seek to conserve, restore or enhance such environments, including the regeneration of some built up areas.
- 6.2 The Local Plan also aims to create successful places to live which are of high-quality design, accessible, useable, locally distinctive and of sustainable design and construction. Such places should improve the quality of life for our residents and contribute towards creating safer, healthy and more integrated communities. The Local Plan also aims to achieve a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions and minimise the impacts of climate change.

Policies within this chapter will set the framework for achieving the following objectives: A (sustainable growth), D (attractiveness to workers, residents and visitors), G (delivery of infrastructure), H (housing mix), I (regeneration), J (healthy lifestyles), K (sustainable energy use), L (high quality design), M (water and flooding), N (biodiversity), O (historic environment)

The Natural Environment

- 6.3 The countryside of the borough is one of its key assets, contributing significantly to the quality of life locally. The landscape of the borough is predominantly rural and agricultural, containing a diverse pattern of landscapes from rolling chalk downland, pastoral river valleys and historic parkland to lowland farmland and farms, villages and hamlets with a few larger settlements including Basingstoke. The north west of the borough (approximately 30% of the total area) contains 80 square miles of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which is recognised as a landscape of national importance.
- 6.4 The local countryside supports a wide range of habitats and species, such as significant areas of key habitats including those defined as being of principal importance (s41 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006). Habitats in the borough support key species including strong populations of a

[number of European Protected Species and Species of Principal Importance.](#) [This existing diversity is largely](#) owing to the differing geological influences and important river systems which run through the area. In particular this includes:

- the River Test – known internationally for trout and salmon fishing and designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- the River Loddon - a high quality chalk river which is in part an EU salmonid river containing Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats [of principal importance](#);

- 6.5 Other habitats include increasingly rare wetland habitats within the floodplains of the rivers mentioned above and a relatively high proportion of remaining ancient semi-natural woodland areas. The very rarest types of site are nationally designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) (of which there are 19 in the borough) and many others are locally designated as Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), a Hampshire-wide designation.
- 6.6 The borough has a good range of green infrastructure assets, ranging from Green Flag awarded parks in the heart of Basingstoke to an extensive network of public rights of way and publicly accessible countryside under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act. However, the types of green infrastructure and their benefits are not evenly distributed and the maximum benefits are not always realised due to inaccessibility, lack of awareness, poor linkages or under management. There are also pressures which could potentially affect such assets, including current trends in biodiversity loss and future growth. [The biodiversity characteristics and trends in biodiversity within the borough are investigated in greater depth within the Borough Living Landscapes Strategy.](#)
- 6.7 With two distinctive geological areas, the Thames Basin and Hampshire Downs, the north of the borough contrasts strongly with the south. The southern two thirds is dominated by chalk downland, a large proportion of which forms part of the Test and Itchen catchment. The northern part is influenced by deposits of clay and sand and is generally impermeable, except for the chalk in the River Loddon at Basingstoke. This northern area forms part of the River Thames catchment and contains a complex network of rivers and streams.
- 6.8 The countryside and the borough's green networks and open spaces provide a valuable resource for agriculture, biodiversity, water and pollution management and tourism and help to encourage a sense of well-being as a part of a healthy lifestyle. The policies of the Local Plan will ensure that there is the necessary local framework in place to maintain and enhance such assets.

[The council's Green Infrastructure Strategy sets out the approach to manage, protect and restore existing green infrastructure and to expand and reconnect green infrastructure where there is an identified deficit or where housing growth is planned and additional provision is needed. Living Landscapes sets out the natural environment strategy for the council to create:](#)

- A locally distinctive and attractive, countryside, with a character that reflects local geology, soils, material and traditions;
- A halt to the net loss of biodiversity and recovery of wildlife populations and habitats, where possible; and
- A reconnection of people with the natural environment, farming and other forms of rural land management.

In partnership with the Local Nature Partnership and key partners, the council will further develop these objectives through a range of measures including Biodiversity Priority Areas and developing ecological network mapping at a landscape scale. This work will inform green infrastructure planning through the development management process.

Policy EM1 – Landscape

Development will be permitted only where it can be demonstrated, through an appropriate assessment, that the proposals are sympathetic to the character and visual quality of the area concerned. Development proposals must respect, enhance and not be detrimental to the character or visual amenity of the landscape likely to be affected, paying particular regard to:

- a) The particular qualities identified within the council's landscape character assessment and any subsequent updates or relevant guidance;
- b) The visual amenity and scenic quality;
- c) The setting of a settlement, including important views to, across, within and out of settlements;
- d) The local character of buildings and settlements, including important open areas;
- e) Trees, ancient woodland, hedgerows, water features such as rivers and other landscape features and their function as ecological networks;
- f) Intrinsically dark landscapes;
- g) Historic landscapes, parks and gardens and features; and
- h) The character of the borough's rivers and tributaries, including the River Loddon and Test, which should be safeguarded.

Development proposals must also respect the sense of place, sense of tranquillity or remoteness, and the quiet enjoyment of the landscape from public rights of way. Development proposals will not be accepted unless they maintain the integrity of existing settlements and prevent their coalescence.

Where appropriate, proposals will be required to include a comprehensive landscaping scheme to ensure that the development would successfully integrate with the landscape and surroundings. The assessment of character and visual quality and the provision of a landscaping scheme should be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed.

Designation of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty reflects the national importance of that landscape and its setting. Development proposals in the AONB or its setting will also be determined in accordance with national planning policy and criteria set out in the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan.

- 6.9 The borough is largely rural in character and includes many locally distinctive, high quality landscapes which are greatly valued by both residents and visitors. It is important to conserve and, where possible, enhance the different landscape character areas of the borough, while accommodating the change needed to address social and economic objectives and meet the needs of communities. Attractive environments are essential to the borough's tourism industry and to the wider economic objectives as well as the health and wellbeing of its residents. There is the potential for development, leisure, recreation and tourism pressure to erode the character and nature of the landscape unless properly managed. It is also important to be aware of the broader implications of gradual change through the cumulative effects on character, particularly in terms of the impact on more small-scale or local features.
- 6.10 A comprehensive Landscape Assessment of the borough was undertaken in 2001; this document identified 20 distinct landscape character areas within the borough and summarises the key characteristics, qualities and issues associated with each area. The council has in place a strategy and action plan for dealing with landscape and biodiversity issues set out in the document Living Landscapes (2010). Other relevant documents include community produced Village Design Statements, Neighbourhood Plans and Orders, Countryside Design Summary and the North Wessex Downs Management Plan adopted by the local authorities within the AONB.
- 6.11 A proportionate approach shall be applied to development proposals so that the requirements of Policy EM1 will be applied flexibly depending on the nature and scale of the proposals. Where considered necessary by the LPA, as a result of the nature and scale of the proposal, a landscape assessment will be required to demonstrate compliance with the criteria of this policy.

Implementation and Monitoring

The policy will be implemented through:

- advice on and the determination of relevant planning applications; and
- working in partnership with Natural England, and North Wessex Downs AONB.

The policy will be monitored against:

- the objectives and action plans of the relevant strategies and plans set out in the supporting text of the policy.
- ~~working in partnership with Natural England and North Wessex Downs AONB.~~

Policy EM2 – Strategic Gaps

In order to prevent coalescence of built up areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, the generally open and undeveloped nature of the following gaps will be protected:

- Basingstoke - Oakley
- Basingstoke - Sherborne St John
- Basingstoke - Old Basing
- Basingstoke/Chineham - Bramley/Sherfield on Loddon
- Tadley-Baughurst

Development in gaps will only be permitted where:

- a) It would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation; and
- b) It would not compromise the integrity of the gap either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development; or
- c) it is proposed through a Neighbourhood Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order, including Community Right to Build Orders.

6.12 In parts of Basingstoke the towns and villages are located relatively close to one another and the land allocations within this plan will in some instances reduce the distance between settlements further. The gaps have not been defined to protect the countryside or landscape (Policy EM1), they are essentially a planning tool to prevent the coalescence of settlements and maintain the separate identity of settlements.

6.13 A clear gap between settlements helps maintain a sense of place for both residents of, and visitors to, the settlements on either side of the gaps. When travelling through a strategic gap (by all modes of transport) a traveller should have a clear sense of having left the first settlement, having travelled through an undeveloped area and then entered the second settlement.

6.14 Small scale development that is in keeping with the rural nature of the gaps will not be prevented, provided that it is appropriately sited and designed to minimise the impact on the openness of the gap and subject to other policies of this plan.

6.15 The precise boundaries for the gaps are set out in the Policies Maps. An assessment of the strategic gaps has been prepared to support the Local Plan.

Implementation and Monitoring

The policy will be implemented through:

- Advice on, and the determination of, relevant planning applications.

Policy EM3 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

New residential development which is likely to have a significant effect on the ecological integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) will be required to clearly demonstrate that any potential adverse effects are fully mitigated.

For all net additional residential development within a 5km straight line distance of the SPA, relevant mitigation measures will be required in line with the Thames Basin Heaths Delivery Framework. This will include the provision of, or contributions towards, Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS), and contributions towards Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM). Applications for large scale residential development (over 50 new dwellings) within 5-7km of the SPA will be assessed individually and, if needed, bespoke mitigation will be required in accordance with Natural England guidance.

- 6.16 The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) is recognised under the EC Birds Directive and includes areas of heathland across Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire, covering 11 different local authorities. The SPA has been identified as an internationally important breeding habitat for three rare species of bird populations (Dartford Warbler, Woodlark and Nightjar). This policy seeks to avoid the impact of recreation and urbanisation on the habitat through increased population within close proximity of the SPA.
- 6.17 Natural England's research suggests that increased population arising from housing developments at a distance of up to 5km away from the SPA can cause significant disturbance to the breeding success of these rare bird populations. Although the SPA does not fall within the borough, part of the 5km buffer zone covers the north east of the borough and this policy provides the framework for dealing with development proposals in this area. This does not exclude the requirement for other schemes (including non-residential development) likely to have a significant effect, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, to be subject to a Habitat Regulations Assessment.
- 6.18 The Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework (February 2009) sets out the Joint Strategic Partnership Board (JSPB)'s recommended approach and provides further guidance with respect to the provision of SPA-related avoidance measures. This includes the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGs) as an alternative recreational area to the SPA. Within the 5km buffer zone of the SPA, schemes will be assessed for the need to provide developer contributions towards Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGs), in agreement with Natural England and the JSPB. The council will work with neighbouring authorities, in particular Hart District Council, to identify appropriate SANGs to be funded by these developer contributions.

Implementation and Monitoring

The policy will be implemented through:

- advice on, and the determination of, relevant planning applications.

Policy EM4 – Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Conservation

1. Development proposals will only be permitted if significant harm to biodiversity and/ or geodiversity resulting from a development can be avoided or, if that is not possible, adequately mitigated and where it can be clearly demonstrated that:

- a) There will be no adverse impact on the conservation status of key species; and
- b) There will be no adverse impact on the integrity of designated and proposed European designated sites; and
- c) There will be no harm to nationally designated sites; and
- d) There will be no harm to locally designated sites including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) and Local Nature Reserves (LNRs); and
- e) There will be no loss or deterioration of a key habitat type, including irreplaceable habitats; and
- f) There will be no harm to the integrity of linkages between designated sites and key habitats.

The weight given to the protection of nature conservation interests will depend on the national or local significance and any designation or protection applying to the site, habitat or species concerned.

2. Where development proposals do not comply with the above they will only be permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that there is an overriding public need for the proposal which outweighs the need to safeguard biodiversity and/ or geodiversity and there is no satisfactory alternative with less or no harmful impacts. In such cases, as a last resort, compensatory measures will be secured to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and, where possible, provide a net gain.

3. Applications for development must include adequate and proportionate information to enable a proper assessment of the implications for biodiversity and geodiversity.

4. In order to secure opportunities for biodiversity improvement, relevant development proposals will be required to include proportionate measures to contribute, where possible, to a net gain in biodiversity, through creation, restoration, enhancement and management of habitats and features including measures that help to link key habitats. ~~This can be provided through:~~ Approaches to secure improvements could be achieved through:

- ~~a) On-site and/ or off-site provision linked to new development in accordance with the council's adopted green space standards; and be~~
- ~~b) Focussed on identified Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and Biodiversity Priority Areas as identified in the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy (and subsequent updates) where appropriate.~~

- a) A focus on identified Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and Biodiversity Priority Areas as identified in the councils Green Infrastructure Strategy (and subsequent updates) where appropriate; and through
- b) On-site and/ or off-site provision linked to new development in accordance with the council's adopted green space standards.

- 6.19 Pressures on local biodiversity resources range from global issues such as climate change to a lack of appropriate local management and pressures from development. Of the latter, in addition to land take issues, indirect impacts such as recreational pressure, increased pollution and water abstraction all need to be addressed in order to conserve, ~~and~~ sustain and re-create biodiversity for current and future generations.
- 6.20 The policy provides a framework for conserving and enhancing the borough's existing biodiversity assets while enabling opportunities to achieve a net gain in biodiversity. The council will work in partnership with the local community, developers, landowners, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and other organisations to conserve, restore and enhance the borough's biodiversity in accordance with the council's natural environment strategy Living Landscapes, the Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plans, South East Biodiversity Strategy and the government's biodiversity strategy Biodiversity 2020 (and any subsequent updates).
- 6.21 The council will be guided in this enabling approach by actively pursuing opportunities for biodiversity improvement within allocated sites and within the relevant Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) and Biodiversity Priority Areas (BPA), as defined in the borough's Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy. BOAs are large areas of landscape, selected across the southeast of England and represent areas where biodiversity improvements are likely to have the most beneficial results at a strategic scale. BOAs represent extensive tracts of land and they are not intended to represent a constraint to development or other land uses such as farming. BPAs are smaller specific areas deemed to represent the primary opportunities for habitat improvement and restoration in the borough and they include areas of degraded or former key habitat types, areas that serve as an important buffer around existing habitats and areas that have a high potential to create links between existing key habitats.
- 6.22 The council has set meaningful, time-bound targets for habitat creation and restoration within the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy, and where appropriate, will seek improvements to biodiversity through development proposals. The council will also seek habitat creation and management proposals which will expand existing habitats, or link them, either through direct physical connection or by providing 'stepping stone' features. Through this approach the council will seek to avoid a net loss in biodiversity and actively pursue opportunities to achieve a net gain in biodiversity across the borough.
- 6.23 Where it has been clearly demonstrated there is no satisfactory alternative to a development proposal including allocated sites where there could be harm to biodiversity interests, the risks will be mitigated as far as practicable through design, construction management and other measures. Where there is still likely to be a residual loss of biodiversity, compensation measures will be put in place through the creation of like-for-like habitats wherever possible, or features of biodiversity value or through practical conservation works to maintain populations. ~~where a species is affected~~

- 6.24 When considering mitigation and compensation measures, the council will favour approaches that best serve the interests of biodiversity conservation in the long-term. This will be through a combination of on-site provision, where there are opportunities to achieve this within areas of open space linked to new development (see the council's adopted green space standards), and/ or off site provision through developer contributions sought in accordance with the Planning Obligations SPD and Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). The GI Strategy will guide how developers' contributions will be used and to identify local needs for new habitat creation and enhance existing resources. This may result in consideration being given to compensating any residual impacts through activities elsewhere in the borough rather than through on-site activities or translocation schemes if success is likely to be higher and/or make a greater contribution to the conservation of the species or habitat type concerned. In determining the level of compensation to ensure no net loss of biodiversity, or where possible a net gain, factors including delivery risk and time lags between loss of habitat and the creation of similar quality habitat will be considered.
- 6.25 Separate policies on strategic development allocations set out the strategic expectations for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in respect of individual sites. Additional detail on the means of delivering these sites will be set out in SPDs, masterplans, and development briefs, which will involve consultation and engagement with local communities and interested parties.
- 6.26 The locations of nationally designated sites of importance for biodiversity and geodiversity (i.e SSSIs) are identified on the Policies Map. Locally designated sites (such as SINCs and LNRs) are identified within the council's Living Landscapes natural environment strategy. Priority areas for habitat creation and restoration are identified in the Green Infrastructure Strategy. Locally designated sites (SINCs) are designated, amended and /or deleted on an annual basis.
- 6.27 Key habitats, in the context of this policy, are those listed in the council's Living Landscapes natural environment strategy. Key species, is an umbrella term to cover legally protected species, Species of Principal Importance in England and Notable Species in Hampshire. Legally protected species mean those given statutory protection for nature conservation reasons. Specifically, this means those species given protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Species of Principal Importance in England are those listed under the provisions of Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Notable Species in Hampshire are listed in the Living Landscapes strategy. Special additional legal considerations apply in determining planning applications that affect European Protected Species (i.e. those protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010).
<http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/regeneration/environment/livinglandscapes.htm>
- 6.28 It should be noted that adverse effects on nature conservation interests are not necessarily limited to the proposal site. Adjacent land, including that outside the Local Plan boundary, must also be considered.

Implementation and Monitoring

The policy will be implemented through:

- advice on and the determination of relevant planning applications; and
- working in partnership with Natural England, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Nature Partnership and Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre.

The policy will be monitored against:

- ~~the objectives and action plans of the relevant strategies and action plans outlined in the supporting text of the policy.~~
- ~~working in partnership with Natural England, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Nature Partnership and Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre~~
- The condition and extent of SSSIs and extent of council-owned SINCs in the borough;
- Key semi-natural habitat lost to development
- Area of habitat creation/restoration associated with new development or on private land through council initiatives
- Increase in the area of council open spaces managed for biodiversity interest

This monitoring will be reported through an annual Living Landscape Update, incorporating outputs from the relevant strategies/action plans above and relevant indicators arising from Biodiversity 2020 (when available).

Policy EM5 – Green Infrastructure

Development proposals will only be permitted where they do not:

- a) Prejudice the delivery of the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy (and subsequent updates);
- b) Result in the fragmentation of the green infrastructure network by severing important corridors/links; or
- c) Result in undue pressure on the network which cannot be fully mitigated.

The council will support proposals which seek to improve links and remedy identified deficiencies in the green infrastructure network in accordance with the council's Green Infrastructure Strategy.

The council will seek to protect and enhance the quality and extent of public open space and public rights of way. Proposals for the redevelopment of public and private open spaces will not be permitted unless it can be clearly demonstrated that:

- d) Replacement areas will be at least equivalent in terms of quality, quantity and accessibility, and there will be no overall negative impact on the provision of green infrastructure; or
- e) A robust assessment clearly demonstrates that the space is surplus to local requirements and will not be needed in the-long term in accordance with the council's local standards; or
- f) The proposal is for alternative recreational provision which meets evidence of local need in such a way as to outweigh the loss.

Development proposals will be permitted where it can be clearly demonstrated that green infrastructure can be provided and phased to support the requirements of proposed development and be in accordance with the council's adopted green space standards. Green space and equipped play will normally be provided on-site.

Consideration will be given to an off-site financial contribution towards the enhancement of existing facilities, in addition to, or instead of, provision of new green space on site but only where:

- g) The quantity standard for the number of proposed dwellings does not result in a requirement for green space which meets the minimum size standard for a particular type; or
- h) It can be demonstrated that the needs of new residents can be met in this way without adversely impacting on the needs of existing residents.

- 6.29 Green infrastructure is a network of green spaces and other environmental features which provides a multi-functional green space resource. For the purposes of the Local Plan, 'multi-functional' green space can be defined as green space which acts as a focus for the community, contributes to community cohesion and development, landscape conservation, biodiversity conservation, visual amenity and tranquillity, environmental sustainability, active and passive recreation, and the local economy. Examples of multi-functional green space provision can include:

- playing fields
- parks and gardens
- areas used for informal recreation
- courtyards and amenity open space in residential developments including incidental areas of green space such as grass verges
- informal provision for children and young people
- allotments and community gardens
- cemeteries and churchyards
- accessible countryside and woodland (e.g. designated under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act)
- Public Rights of Way
- Local nature reserves
- green corridors, and
- river corridors.

6.30 The borough's GI Strategy identifies existing greenspace assets which collectively form a multi-functional system connected by footpaths, cycle ways and bridleways and by features which enable the movement of wildlife. The strategy defines where there are opportunities to improve the network at a strategic level, and how these improvements could potentially be funded and maintained over the lifetime of the Local Plan. These will be developed in more detail through a number of subsequent action plans.

6.31 The council will work in partnership with the local community, developers, landowners, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and other organisations to provide, protect, maintain and enhance the borough's network of high quality 'multi-functional' green space. Through this overall approach to green infrastructure the borough will aim to:

- provide, protect and maintain a range of existing green infrastructure assets, ranging from borough-wide to neighbourhood level provision
- provide opportunities for informal recreation and access to nature within appropriate distance thresholds set out in the council's standards
- provide high quality safe green routes for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders linking all accessible green spaces
- develop an integrated network comprising public and private open space, and public rights of way
- support biodiversity conservation through the management of existing accessible natural green space and through the restoration and creation of habitats
- contribute to the conservation and enhancement of local distinctiveness, landscape quality and character, visual amenity and the historic environment including archaeological sites
- mitigate and adapt to climate change through natural drainage, flood water storage, carbon capture, and pollution and microclimate control.

6.32 Basingstoke town is generally well provided for in the amount of green space available and most residents in the town have good access to at least one green space. However, many of these areas are of relatively low value and investment is required to improve their multi-functionality. There are, however, inequalities in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility of green spaces

across the borough with certain areas having a deficiency of open space. The council recognises the need to address the quantity of open space through provision of new green spaces to meet local need and also to address quality through the enhancement of low quality existing green spaces. The council will, from time to time, identify specific local areas of open space, which are afforded protection by this policy.

- 6.33 Proposals that would harm the overall green infrastructure network will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where the negative impact arising from the development can be wholly mitigated. In these circumstances the council will require measures including qualitative, quantitative and accessibility improvements to the overall network and for the residents affected by the development. Off-site provision provided as part of mitigation for the loss of green infrastructure will be expected to contain a similar habitat and have at least the same functional value.
- 6.34 The GI Strategy will define areas to guide and target countryside and management initiatives where biodiversity improvements are likely to have the most beneficial benefits at a landscape scale. These areas include BOAs that have been identified throughout the south east of England for this purpose, and include areas where there are local opportunities to achieve net gains in biodiversity. In addition, the strategy will identify smaller specific BPAs that are considered to represent the primary areas of priority and opportunity in which the council and its partners will actively pursue the restoration, enhancement and management of habitats as well as buffer and reconnect designated sites.
- 6.35 Where suitable, development proposals will be expected to contribute towards the improvement and enhancement of green infrastructure in accordance with the GI Strategy and associated standards. The council will support opportunities for remedying deficiencies in provision and potential to increase open space provision will be set out in the relevant development brief for the allocated sites. This will ensure that developers can incorporate green infrastructure into development proposals at an early stage.
- 6.36 The GI Strategy also identifies other opportunities for future green infrastructure improvements such as the creation of a country park. Currently there is no country park within the borough. The Manydown Country Park is identified in policy SS3.10 and defined on the Policies Map. Manydown Country Park will become a major green infrastructure asset of approximately 100 hectares serving Basingstoke town and the borough as a whole. It will be a multi-functional space for informal recreation, play, nature conservation, education and land management, with ancillary uses including visitor parking and facilities. A masterplan shall be prepared and approved in advance of implementation and it will be funded through CIL. Connections to surrounding areas, using existing public rights of way and new links via the Manydown development, should ensure safe and convenient accessibility by walking and cycling.
- 6.37 The Leisure and Recreation Needs Assessment (LRNA) (and subsequent updates) includes a comprehensive assessment of the quantity, quality and accessibility of the borough's open spaces. This has been used as a basis for developing locally-derived standards for new provision, in accordance with

guidance at a national level. The council's adopted green space, sport and recreation standards are set out in full in appendix 4. This includes an expected quantity standard which all new developments will normally provide, distance thresholds and minimum size thresholds for different green space types.

Implementation and Monitoring

The implementation of this policy will be through:

- Advice on and the determination of relevant planning applications development management decisions and
- The delivery of the objectives and action plans of the relevant council strategies specifically the Green Infrastructure Strategy ~~which identifies the borough's existing green space assets and identifies where there are opportunities to improve the network.~~
- Development proposals ~~will also be expected to contribute~~ing towards the improvement and enhancement of green infrastructure in accordance with the council's adopted local standards. Opportunities for remedying deficiencies in provision and potential to increase open space provision will ~~need to~~ be set out in the relevant masterplan or development brief for the allocated sites in order to ensure that developers can incorporate green infrastructure into development proposals at an early stage.
- Working in partnership with Natural England and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Nature Partnership.

The policy will be monitored against:

- ~~Relevant information, such as~~ The gains and losses of different types of green spaces (in ha) resulting from development management decisions ~~will be monitored through~~ via the annual monitoring process.
- ~~Monitoring will also take place regarding~~ The implementation and delivery of the Green Infrastructure Strategy and its Action Plan. ~~This includes a commitment to update the Leisure and Recreation Needs Assessment every 5 years.~~
- The delivery of provision secured through new development will ~~also~~ be actively monitored as appropriate, in line with timescales set out in legal agreements (gains in the amount of open space, amount of developer contributions collected, how monies used off-site etc.).

~~The policy will also be monitored through working in partnership with Natural England and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Nature Partnership.~~

Appendix 2: Additional or amended items for glossary

Net gain (biodiversity) - A sustained increase in the numbers or extent of a species or habitat in a targeted locality following a specified resource intervention.

Harm – Any impact, direct or indirect, that may have an adverse effect on a biodiversity interest.

Avoid – Ensuring that negative impacts do not occur as a result of planning decisions by, for example, locating development away from areas of ecological interest.

Mitigate – Measures to mitigate are ones taken which reduce negative impacts. Examples of mitigation measures include changes to project design, construction methods or the timing of work, or enhancing or restoring other interests or areas on a site so its overall ecological value is retained.

Compensate – Measures which are taken to make up for the loss or of, or permanent damage to, biodiversity. Where some harm to biodiversity is reduced through mitigation, compensation will represent the residual harm which cannot or may not be entirely mitigated. Compensation measures may be on or outside the development site.

Green infrastructure

Green infrastructure is a term used to refer to the living network of green spaces, water and other environmental features in both urban and rural areas. It is often used in an urban context to cover benefits provided by trees, parks, gardens, road verges, allotments, cemeteries, woodlands, rivers and wetlands.

Green infrastructure is also relevant in a rural context, where it might refer to the use of farmland, woodland, wetlands or other natural features to provide services such as flood protection, carbon storage or water purification. Green infrastructure maintains critical ecological links between town and country.

Biodiversity

Biological diversity means the variability among living organisms from all sources, including terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

Ecological networks

An ecological network comprises a suite of high quality sites which collectively contain the diversity and area of habitat that are needed to support species and which have ecological connections between them.