

## Application 18/01644/FUL

### Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) Screening Matrix and Appropriate Assessment Statement

**PLEASE NOTE: Undertaking the HRA process is the responsibility of the decision maker as the Competent Authority for the purpose of the Habitats Regulations. However, it is the responsibility of the applicant to provide the Competent Authority with the information that they require for this purpose.**

HRA completion date:	See Main Report
Application reference:	See Main Report
Application address:	See Main Report
Application description:	See Main Report
Lead Planning Officer:	See Main Report
Please note that all references in this assessment to the 'Habitats Regulations' refer to The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.	

#### Stage 1 - details of the plan or project

European site potentially impacted by planning application, plan or project:	Solent and Southampton Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site. Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Collectively known as the Solent SPAs.  New Forest SAC, SPA and Ramsar site.
Is the planning application directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site (if yes, Applicant should have provided details)?	No. The development consists of an increase in residential dwellings, which is neither connected to nor necessary to the management of any European site.

Are there any other projects or plans that together with the planning application being assessed could affect the site (Applicant to provide details to allow an 'in combination' effect to be assessed)?	<p>Yes. All new housing development within 5.6km of the Solent SPAs is considered to contribute towards an impact on site integrity as a result of increased recreational disturbance in combination with other development in the Solent area.</p> <p>Concerns have been raised by Natural England that residential development within Southampton, in combination with other development in the Solent area, could lead to an increase in recreational disturbance within the New Forest. This has the potential to adversely impact site integrity of the New Forest SPA, SAC and Ramsar site.</p> <p>The PUSH Spatial Position Statement (<a href="https://www.push.gov.uk/work/planning-and-infrastructure/push-position-statement/">https://www.push.gov.uk/work/planning-and-infrastructure/push-position-statement/</a>) sets out the scale and distribution of housebuilding which is being planned for across South Hampshire up to 2034.</p>
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## Stage 2 - HRA screening assessment

Screening under Regulation 63(1)(a) of the Habitats Regulations – The Applicant to provide evidence so that a judgement can be made as to whether there could be any potential significant impacts of the development on the integrity of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar.

### Solent SPAs

The proposed development is within 5.6km of the collectively known European designated areas Solent SPAs/Ramsar sites. In accordance with advice from Natural England and as detailed in the Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy, a net increase in housing development within 5.6km of the Solent SPAs is likely to result in impacts to the integrity of those sites through a consequent increase in recreational disturbance.

Development within the 5.6km zone will increase the human population at the coast and thus increase the level of recreation and disturbance of bird species. The impacts of recreational disturbance (both at the site-scale and in combination with other development in the Solent area) are analogous to impacts from direct habitat loss as recreation can cause important habitat to be unavailable for use (the habitat is functionally lost, either permanently or for a defined period). Birds can be displaced by human recreational activities (terrestrial and water-based) and use valuable resources in finding suitable areas in which to rest and feed undisturbed. Ultimately, the impacts of recreational disturbance can be such that they affect the status and distribution of key bird species and therefore act against the stated conservation objectives of the European sites.

### The New Forest

The New Forest National Park attracts a high number of visitors (13.3 million annually), and is notable in terms of its catchment, attracting a far higher proportion of tourists and non-local visitors than similar areas such as the Thames Basin and Dorset Heaths. Research undertaken by Footprint Ecology, Sharp, J., Lowen, J. and Liley, D. (2008) Changing patterns of visitor numbers within the New Forest National Park, with particular reference to the New Forest SPA. (Footprint Ecology.), indicates that 40% of visitors to the area are staying tourists, whilst 25% of visitors come from more than 5 miles (8km) away. The remaining 35% of visitors are local day visitors originating from within 5 miles (8km) of the boundary.

The report states that the estimated number of current annual visits to the New Forest is predicted to increase by 1.05 million annual visits by 2026 based on projections of housing development within 50km of the Forest, with around three quarters (764,000) of this total increase originating from within 10km of the boundary (which includes Southampton).

Residential development has the potential to indirectly alter the structure and function of the habitats of the New Forest SAC, SPA and Ramsar site breeding populations of nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler through disturbance from increased human and/or dog activity. The precise scale of the potential impact is currently uncertain however, the impacts of recreational disturbance can be such that they affect the breeding success of the designated bird species and therefore act against the stated conservation objectives of the European sites.

### **Stage 3 - Appropriate Assessment**

Appropriate Assessment under Regulation 63(1) - if there are any potential significant impacts, the applicant must provide evidence showing avoidance and/or mitigation measures to allow an Assessment to be made. The Applicant must also provide details which demonstrate any long term management, maintenance and funding of any solution.

#### **Solent SPAs**

The project being assessed would result in a net increase of dwellings within 5.6km of the Solent SPAs and in accordance with the findings of the Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy, a permanent significant effect on the Solent SPAs due to increase in recreational disturbance as a result of the new development, is likely. This is contrary to policy CS 22 - Promoting Biodiversity and Protecting Habitats, of the Southampton Core Strategy Partial Review, which states that,

*Within Southampton the Council will promote biodiversity through:*

*1. Ensuring development does not adversely affect the integrity of international designations, and the necessary mitigation measures are provided; or the development otherwise meets the Habitats Directive;*

In line with Policy CS22, in order to lawfully be permitted, the development will need to include a package of avoidance and mitigation measures.

Southampton City Council formally adopted the Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy (SRMP) in March 2018. The SRMP provides a strategic solution to ensure the requirements of the Habitats Regulations are met with regard to the in-combination effects of increased recreational pressure on the Solent SPAs arising from new residential development. This strategy represents a partnership approach to the issue which has been endorsed by Natural England.

Size of Unit	Scale of Mitigation per Unit
1 Bedroom	£337.00
2 Bedroom	£487.00
3 Bedroom	£637.00
4 Bedroom	£749.00
5 Bedroom	£880.00

As set out in the Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy, an appropriate scale of mitigation for this scheme would be:

Therefore, in order to deliver the an adequate level of mitigation the proposed development will need to provide a financial contribution, in accordance with the table above, to mitigate the likely impacts.

A legal agreement, agreed prior to the granting of planning permission, will be necessary to secure the mitigation package. Without the security of the mitigation being provided through a legal agreement, a significant effect would remain likely. Providing such a legal agreement is secured through the planning process, the proposed development will not affect the status and distribution of key bird species and therefore act against the stated conservation objectives of the European sites.

### **New Forest**

The project being assessed would result in a net increase in dwellings within easy travelling distance of the New Forest and a permanent significant effect on the New Forest SAC, SPA and Ramsar, due to an increase in recreational disturbance as a result of the new development, is likely. This is contrary to policy CS 22 - Promoting Biodiversity and Protecting Habitats, of the Southampton Core Strategy Partial Review, which states that,

*Within Southampton the Council will promote biodiversity through:*

- 1. Ensuring development does not adversely affect the integrity of international designations, and the necessary mitigation measures are provided; or the development otherwise meets the Habitats Directive;*

In line with Policy CS22, in order to lawfully be permitted, the development will need to include a package of avoidance and mitigation measures.

At present, there is no scheme of mitigation addressing impacts on the New Forest designated sites, although, work is underway to develop one. In the absence of an agreed scheme of mitigation, the City Council has undertaken to ring fence 5% of CIL contributions to fund footpath improvement works within suitable semi-natural sites within Southampton. These improved facilities will provide alternative dog walking areas for new residents.

The proposed development will generate a CIL contribution and the City Council will ring fence 5% of the overall sum, to fund improvements to footpaths within the greenways and other semi-natural greenspaces.

### **Stage 4 – Summary of the Appropriate Assessment (To be carried out by the Competent Authority (the local planning authority) in liaison with Natural England**

In conclusion, the application will have a likely significant effect in the absence of avoidance and mitigation measures on the above European and Internationally protected sites. The authority has concluded that the adverse effects arising from the proposal are wholly consistent with, and inclusive of the effects detailed in the Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy.

The authority's assessment is that the application coupled with the contribution towards the SRMS secured by way of legal agreement complies with this strategy and that it can therefore be concluded that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the designated sites identified above.

In the absence of an agreed mitigation scheme for impacts on the New Forest designated sites Southampton City Council has adopted a precautionary approach and ring fenced 5% of CIL contributions to provide alternative recreation routes within the city.

This represents the authority's Appropriate Assessment as Competent Authority in accordance with requirements under Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, Article 6 (3) of the Habitats Directive and having due regard to its duties under Section 40(1) of the NERC Act 2006 to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Consideration of the Ramsar site/s is a matter of government policy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2012.

Natural England Officer: Becky Aziz (email 20/08/2018)

Summary of Natural England's comments:

Where the necessary avoidance and mitigation measures are limited to collecting a funding contribution that is in line with an agreed strategic approach for the mitigation of impacts on European Sites then, provided no other adverse impacts are identified by your authority's appropriate assessment, your authority may be assured that Natural England agrees that the Appropriate Assessment can conclude that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the European Sites. In such cases Natural England will not require a Regulation 63 appropriate assessment consultation.