

Executive Summary

E1 Introduction

E1.1 This document sets out the Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Consultation Draft District Plan for Mid Sussex. It draws on information previously published in other documents which form part of the overall HRA procedure for the District Plan, including research reports and earlier versions of the HRA.

E1.2 The outputs of the report include information in relation to:

- ▶ Chapter 2 discusses the methodology for assessment, and updates the findings of the screening stage;
- ▶ Chapter 3 defines relevant European sites, their qualifying features and conservation objectives;
- ▶ Chapter 4 discusses the characteristics of European sites including available information about the population and ecology of qualifying species, and descriptions of qualifying habitats;
- ▶ Chapter 5 presents available evidence regarding the mechanisms of atmospheric pollution impacts, and undertakes an assessment of these impacts in view of the sites' conservation objectives;
- ▶ Chapter 6 presents available evidence regarding the mechanisms of disturbance impacts, and undertakes an assessment of these impacts in view of the sites' conservation objectives;
- ▶ Chapter 7 presents a summary and concludes the document.

E2 Findings of the Screening Stage

E2.1 The District Plan's forerunner, the draft Core Strategy, underwent an HRA screening and scoping exercise in late 2007 and early 2008. This found that five designated areas were potentially at risk of effects from the Plan:

- ▶ Ashdown Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC);
- ▶ Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA);
- ▶ Castle Hill SAC;
- ▶ Lewes Downs SAC; and
- ▶ Mole Gap to Reigate Escarpment SAC.

- E2.2 Castle Hill, Lewes Downs and Mole Gap to Reigate Escarpment were screened out of the assessment, largely due to their distance from the district and the low likelihood of residents travelling along roads close to the sites. Natural England (2008) concurred with these findings in its screening opinion on the Core Strategy. Acknowledging that the plan is not necessary to the management of any European site, the screening exercise found likely significant effects on Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA as a result of disturbance and atmospheric pollution.
- E2.3 The updated screening assessment for the Consultation Draft District Plan found that the following proposed policies were likely to significantly affect Ashdown Forest SAC or SPA. They were taken forward for more detailed Appropriate Assessment.
- ▶ DP2 Sustainable Economic Development;
 - ▶ DP3 Town Centre Development;
 - ▶ DP5 Housing;
 - ▶ DP7 Strategic Allocation to the east of Burgess Hill at Kings Way;
 - ▶ DP8 Strategic Allocation to the north and north-west of Burgess Hill;
 - ▶ DP12 New Homes in the Countryside;
 - ▶ DP29 Rural Exception Sites; and
 - ▶ DP30 Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

E3 Conclusions of the Appropriate Assessment

- E3.1 Ashdown Forest is designated as an SAC for its European dry heaths and North Atlantic wet heaths with *E. tetralix*. Great crested newts are present in qualifying numbers but are not a primary reason for site selection. Predicted traffic growth as a result of development proposed by the District Plan is below the significance threshold set for European sites. As a result, it can be concluded that the District Plan will not result in adverse effects on the ecological integrity of the Ashdown Forest SAC.
- E3.2 Ashdown Forest is classified as an SPA for its breeding populations of Dartford warbler and nightjar, which are listed on Annex 1 of the Birds Directive. Breeding woodlark (also an Annex 1 species) are present in qualifying numbers. The Council is committed to delivering a strategic Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) at Ashplats Wood and East Court, East Grinstead, to avoid increases in recreational pressure resulting from planned residential developments within the District Plan. Additionally, the Council has adopted an interim Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) Strategy to mitigate the residual effects of visitors originating from within the district, and is committed to replacing this with a joint SAMM Strategy prepared in collaboration with the Ashdown Forest Conservators, Natural England and other affected authorities. It can be concluded that the District Plan will not result in adverse effects on the ecological integrity of the Ashdown Forest SPA.