

HRA screening report for the Holwell Neighbourhood Plan – July 2018

Introduction

This note provides an account of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Report for the Holwell Neighbourhood Plan.

The main purpose of this HRA screening exercise is to assess whether the Holwell Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant negative effect on a European Site¹, which are designated areas of exceptional ecological importance, and hence whether the subsequent steps of the HRA process (including Appropriate Assessment) are required. If it is concluded that there would be no likely significant effect on a European Site, then further assessment is deemed unnecessary. However, if it is found that project would have a likely significant effect on a European Site then further assessment is required through the subsequent stages of the HRA process.

Legislative background

EU Directive (92/43/EEC) on the Conservation of Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora ('the Habitats Directive') led to the establishment of a network of 'European sites', collectively known as Natura 2000, which are areas of exceptional importance with respect to rare, endangered or vulnerable natural habitats or species. European Sites consist of the following ecological designations:

- Special Protection Areas (SPAs): Classified under the EU Directive (79/409/EEC) on the Conservation of Wild Birds ('the Birds Directive'), with the objective of protecting and managing areas which are important for rare and vulnerable birds as they are important grounds for breeding, feeding, wintering or migration; and
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs): Classified under the Habitats Directive, these areas provide rare and vulnerable animals, plants and habitats with increased protection and management.

¹ For the purposes of this report, a 'European Site' includes Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Ramsar Sites, (including possible, potential and proposed sites)

The National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 176) states that the following sites should be afforded the same protection as European Sites:

- Potential Special Protection Areas (pSPA): Potential Special Protection Areas, are sites on which the Government has initiated public consultation on the scientific case for designation as a Special Protection Area;
- Possible Special Areas of Conservation (pSAC): Possible Special Areas of Conservation are sites on which Government has initiated public consultation on the scientific case for designation as a candidate Special Area of Conservation;
- Ramsar sites (and proposed Ramsar sites): Wetlands of international importance designated under the 1971 Ramsar Convention, and proposed Ramsar sites are sites on which Government has initiated public consultation on the scientific case for a Ramsar site; and
- Sites identified, or required, as compensatory measures for adverse effects on European sites and Ramsar sites: Sites which are included as compensation in schemes to mitigate adverse impacts upon European and Ramsar sites.

The requirement to undertake an assessment of plans or projects that are likely to have an effect upon European sites is given in Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

The Habitats Directive is transposed into UK law through the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 ('the Habitats Regulations'). Regulation 61 of the Habitats Regulations implements Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive by requiring the competent authority (in this case both West Dorset District Council) to complete an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan or project for the European site in view of the site's conservation objectives before deciding to undertake a plan or project which is likely to have a significant effect on a European site.

European Sites

This HRA screening considered the potential impacts of the proposed works upon the European Sites within 20km of the plan area. The majority of these sites were discounted from further consideration on the basis of the distance between the European Site and the Holwell NP area, and the scale of the proposals which are likely to come forward through the Holwell NP. However, it was necessary to give further consideration to the potential impacts upon the European Sites listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The European Sites which require further consideration in the HRA screening.

| Name of SAC | Approx. Area | Approx. Distance from NP area | Reason for designation |
|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Rooksmoor SAC | 62ha | 1450m to the east | Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (<i>Molinion caeruleae</i>) for which the area is considered to support a significant presence. Euphydrias (<i>Eurodryas</i> , <i>Hypodryas</i>) aurinia for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom. |
| Holnest SAC | 54ha | 745m to the west | Holnest encompasses around 20 ponds set in a matrix of terrestrial habitats, comprising areas of semi-improved grassland, scrub, associated semi-natural habitats and woodland bounded by fences and hedgerows. The ponds exhibit a range of sizes, profiles and origins, and include some recently-created ornamental ponds as well as traditional farm ponds. A large population of Great crested newts (<i>Triturus</i> |

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| | | | <i>cristatus</i>) is present, with over 200 individuals having been recorded at one pond in spring 2003. The woodland areas provide ideal hibernation habitat. |
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The potential impacts of the Holwell NP upon the integrity of these protected sites, in light of its qualifying features, conservation objectives and the key environmental conditions required to support site integrity, are considered in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The potential impacts of the proposed Holwell NP upon the integrity of the Rooksmoor SAC and Holnest SAC.

| European Site | Qualifying features (in bold) | Key environmental conditions to support site integrity | Possible impacts arising from the plan | Is there a risk of significant impacts? | Is there a risk of significant in-combination effects? |
|----------------------|---|--|---|--|---|
| Rooksmoor SAC | <p>1065 <u>Marsh fritillary butterfly</u> <i>Euphydryas</i> (<i>Eurodryas</i>, <i>Hypodryas</i>) <i>aurinia</i></p> <p>Representing marsh fritillary <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i> in the southern part of its range in England, Rooksmoor is an exceptionally large population within a cluster of sites in the Dorset stronghold. A large outlying population at Lydlinch has been included in this site as it is considered to be part of the metapopulation in this area.</p> | Increased traffic in the areas surrounding the Rooksmoor SAC may affect air quality, resulting in impacts upon the designated habitat. | The Holwell NP looks to bring forward up to six dwellings over the period up to 2031, at least 2km away from the Rooksmoor SAC, and therefore appreciable impacts upon air quality are considered unlikely. | No | No |
| | | The Rooksmoor SAC requires suitable grazing practices and controlled scrub encroachment to maintain the | The Holwell NP is unlikely to affect land management practices at the site. | No | No |

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| | | favourable condition of the site. | | | |
| Holnest SAC | <p>1166 Great crested newt <i>Triturus cristatus</i></p> <p>Holnest encompasses around 20 ponds set in a matrix of terrestrial habitats, comprising areas of semi-improved grassland, scrub, associated semi-natural habitats and woodland bounded by fences and hedgerows. The ponds exhibit a range of sizes, profiles and origins, and include some recently-created ornamental ponds as well as traditional farm ponds. A large population of S1166 Great crested newts <i>Triturus cristatus</i> is present, with over 200 individuals having been recorded at one pond in spring 2003. The woodland areas provide ideal hibernation habitat.</p> | Agricultural diversification and alternative uses of the land at the site could threaten breeding ponds, foraging areas and hibernation sites for the great crested newt. | The Holwell NP does not identify land for development or encourage agricultural diversification at the Holnest SAC, and therefore does not compromise the habitat of the great crested newt. | No | No |

Figure 2 concluded that the Holwell NP is unlikely to result in an adverse effect upon the integrity of a European Site. Therefore, there is no requirement to undertake any further stages of HRA, such as an Appropriate Assessment.

Natural England, the Government's advisors on ecological issues and the 'Appropriate Nature Conservation Body' according to Regulation 63(3) of the Habitats Regulations, concurs with the conclusion that the Holwell NP is unlikely to affect the integrity of a European Site.