



Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Statement

Amberley Neighbourhood Development Plan

December 2016

I. Introduction

- I.1 The purpose of this screening statement is to provide a screening opinion as to whether there might be any potential likely significant effects on internationally important wildlife sites (also known as European sites) that may be affected by the Amberley Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), and therefore whether further Habitats Regulations Assessment work is required.

Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening

- I.2 Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) refers to the requirement for any plan or project to assess the potential implications for European sites. The need for HRA is set out within the EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EC which is transposed into British Law. Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive provides that:

“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [European] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.”

- I.3 The first stage of the HRA process involves an assessment or screening of whether the plan is likely to have a significant effect on one or more European sites either alone or in combination. This can include consideration of avoidance measures. The objective is to ‘screen out’ those plans and projects (or site allocations/policies) that can, without detailed appraisal, be said to be unlikely to result in significant adverse effects upon European sites.
- I.4 If screening determines that there is the potential for likely significant effects, further HRA work would be required in the form of an Appropriate Assessment which considers the impact on the integrity of the European site in more detail.
- I.5 This screening opinion statement has regard to the conservation objectives of the Arun Valley SPA, SAC and Ramsar. It also makes reference to other plans and projects (the emerging South Downs Local Plan and other Local Plans/Core Strategies as appropriate).

The Amberley Neighbourhood Development Plan

- I.6 The Amberley NDP includes general policies to guide development. It also includes allocations for a very small car park and a site to accommodate 6 dwellings; both of which are located adjacent to built form of Amberley village. It also makes provision for a new joint use school/community hall within the curtilage of the school.
- I.7 When adopted, NDPs will be used by the local planning authority to determine planning applications for the Neighbourhood Areas that they cover. As the parish falls within the South Downs National Park, the policies for the NDP, once adopted, will form the planning policy for that part of the National Park, in the Parish of Amberley.

Relevant European sites

- 1.8 The European wildlife site relevant to this neighbourhood development plan is the Arun Valley Special Protection Area (SPA)/Special Area of Conservation (SAC) /Ramsar site. Full details for the reason for designation, conservation objectives and key vulnerabilities are set out in Appendix I.

2. Impact pathway screening

- 2.1 The information used for this screening statement has been gathered from the HRA for the South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options, which was published in 2015, and as such, this screening report should be read in conjunction with it.
- 2.2 It should be noted that the South Downs Local Plan and its accompanying HRA has not been tested and accepted at Examination. Whilst this is the case, the Local Plan Preferred Options did recognise that some of the housing requirement quantum would be allocated through NDPs. It therefore set out the expected quantum of development for these various settlements. The expected level of development was taken into account in the Local Plan Preferred Options HRA. The Amberley NDP makes provision for the quantum of development as expected in the Local Plan Preferred Options; as such, it is considered that the evidence and findings of the Local Plan Preferred Options HRA can be used for the HRA screening of this NDP.
- 2.3 The HRA report for the Local Plan Preferred Options identified 5 potential impact pathways to the Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar: Recreational pressure, water quantity (abstraction), water quality (wastewater discharge), loss of supporting habitat, and urbanisation. In combination impacts were also considered. The main body of the HRA report for the Local Plan Preferred Options discussed these impact pathways in more detail and was able to conclude that there would be no likely significant effects as a result of the quantum of development proposed in Amberley.
- 2.4 It is noted that, in response to the Local Plan Preferred Options consultation on 2015, no objections were raised by the statutory bodies (Natural England, Environment Agency, and Historic England) regarding the conclusions of the HRA with respect to the Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar.
- 2.5 Table I below draws together the conclusions and includes references to the relevant paragraphs of the HRA report.

Table I – Summary of the screening outcome in the HRA Report of the South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options

Impact pathway	Summary of the screening outcome in the HRA Report for the South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options
Recreational disturbance of wintering waterfowl	Screened out. The quantum of development in the Amberley Neighbourhood Plan is for 6 dwellings. This is the same figure attributed to Amberley in the

Impact pathway		Summary of the screening outcome in the HRA Report for the South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options
		<p>South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options; and consequently is the figure used in the HRA of the Preferred Options Local Plan.</p> <p>The quantum of total new dwellings in the South Downs Local Plan Preferred Options within 5km of the SPA equates to approximately 45-50 new dwellings.</p> <p>Given that recreational pressure is not identified as a specific issue in the Site Improvement Plan such a small number of dwellings will not result in a material change in recreational activity at the site.</p> <p>The Local Plan for Arun (a district located within 1.5km of the SPA) does not identify any new housing within 5km of Arun Valley SAC, SPA and Ramsar site; the adopted Horsham District Planning Framework (the SPA being situated in Horsham district) does not identify any specific locations for housing within 5km of the designated site. As such, this impact pathway upon this site can be screened out, both alone and in combination.</p> <p>Reference: paragraph 4.10.7 of the Preferred Options HRA</p>
Hydrology	Water quantity (abstraction)	<p>Screened out.</p> <p>The appropriate assessment for the Southern Water Water Resource Management Plan considered future public water supply abstraction impacts on the Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar site. It concluded that no adverse effects on integrity of the SAC/SPA/Ramsar site would arise.</p> <p>Reference: paragraph 6.3.7 of the Preferred Options HRA</p>
	Water quality (wastewater discharge)	<p>Screened out.</p> <p>Although diffuse pollution from agricultural runoff is a significant issue that must be addressed, the principal pathway for a Local Plan to affect water quality in European sites is through increased discharge of treated sewage effluent.</p> <p>Provided new development can be accommodated within the existing consent headroom for the relevant wastewater treatment works, it is considered that the existing initiatives being implemented to ensure compliance of relevant Wastewater Treatment Works discharges and improve diffuse pollution, policies SD17 and SD16 within the SDNPA Local Plan and the small amount of development proposed within the catchment enable a conclusion that the South Downs National Park Local Plan will not result in a likely significant effect on the Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar site.</p> <p>(paragraph 6.3.16 of the Preferred Options HRA)</p>
Loss of supporting habitat		<p>Screened out.</p> <p>The Arun Valley SPA and Ramsar site is designated for its wintering population of Bewick's swan. It is widely accepted that Bewick's swans feed on suitable farmland up to 5km from the designated site. As such, suitable fields within 5km of the SPA could constitute important supporting habitat if they support a large enough</p>

Impact pathway	Summary of the screening outcome in the HRA Report for the South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options
	<p>percentage of the SPA population on a regular basis. Amberley is located adjacent to the designated site.</p> <p>Screened out due to Policy SD13: International Sites which requires development proposals which are within 5km of the Arun Valley SPA to undertake an appraisal as to whether the land is suitable for wintering Bewick swan, if they are important to the swan population, and if so, requires appropriate alternative habitat before development could proceed.</p> <p>Reference: paragraphs 7.2.19 and 7.2.20 of the Preferred Options HRA</p>
Urbanisation	<p>Screened out.</p> <p>Total number of dwellings in the vicinity are 26 dwellings (6 in Amberley and 20 in Coldwaltham). Such a small number of new dwellings are proposed in adjacent settlements, and as such, it is not considered that urbanisation is a strategic issue for this designated site.</p> <p>Reference: paragraph 8.2.2 of the Preferred Options HRA</p>
In combination	<p>Screened out.</p> <p>This potential impact pathway has been screened out through the each of the Arun & Adur and Horsham Core Strategies. These core strategies propose 25,000 houses. The SDNPA Local Plan proposes approximately 38 new houses within 7km which is a very small fraction of the total proposed. The HRA for Arun and Adur Core Strategies concluded no significant recreational impact would occur, and the HRA for Horsham scoped out recreational pressure as an impact pathway.</p> <p>Reference: paragraph 10.2.1 and 10.2.2 of the Preferred Options HRA</p>

- 2.6 With further regard to the potential loss of supporting habitat, it is noted (as set out in the table above) that farmland within 5km of the Arun Valley SPA/Ramsar could be used for feeding by the Bewick swan. The sites identified for allocation within the NDP are small, adjacent to existing development, and as such are fields which are not suitable for use by wintering populations. Therefore there it can be concluded that there are not likely to be significant effects upon the Arun Valley SPA/Ramsar.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Is the potential scale or magnitude of any effect likely to be significant?

- a) Alone? **No**
- b) In combination with other plans or projects? **No**

- 3.2 It is the conclusion of this screening statement that no likely significant effects with regard to the integrity of the Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar have been identified. As such the Amberley Neighbourhood Development Plan does not require progression to the next stage of Habitats Regulations Assessment.

Appendix I: Details of relevant European site

Background information on the Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar site extracted from Appendix A of the South Downs National Park Local Plan Habitats Regulation Assessment, prepared by AECOM, and published as part of the Preferred Options Local Plan consultation in 2015.

I Arun Valley SAC/ SPA/ Ramsar site

I.1 Introduction

Arun Valley SPA covers 528.62ha of West Sussex, with 95% of the site comprising of mesophile grassland, 2% inland water bodies, 2% bog, marshes, water fringed vegetation, fens and 1% broad leaved deciduous woodland. The site comprises of low-lying grazing marsh, largely on alluvial soils, but with an area of peat derived from a relict raised bog. Southern parts of the Arun Valley are fed by calcareous springs, while to the north, where the underlying geology is Greensand, where the water is more acidic. These water bodies support internationally important numbers of Berwick's swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*.

Arun Valley SPA consists of three SSSIs; Amberley Wild Brooks SSSI, Pulborough Brooks SSSI and Waltham Brooks SSSI. Together these sites comprise an area of wet meadows on the floodplain of the River Arun between Pulborough and Amberley.

The birds that winter on many SPAs (the Arun Valley being no exception) are not confined to the boundaries of the SPA, but in fact utilise areas of 'supporting habits' located outside of the boundaries and sometimes many kilometres distant.

I.2 Reasons for Designation

SAC criteria

The site was designated as being of European importance for the following interest feature:

- Ramshorn snail *Anisus vaticulus*, once a species covering over 15 sites in the south east of England, now only remains in a few select locations as a result a massive decline. Arun Valley is one of the few remaining site in the UK to support this particular species.

SPA criteria

This site qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting populations of European importance of the following species listed on Annex I of the Directive:

Over winter;

- Bewick's swan, 115 individuals representing at least 1.6% of the wintering population in Great Britain (5 year peak mean for 1992/93 to 1996/7).

Assemblage qualification: A wetland of international importance.

- The area qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by regularly supporting at least 20,000 waterfowl.

Over winter, the area regularly supports 27,241 individual waterfowl (5 year peak mean for 1992/93 to 1996/97) including: shoveler, teal, wigeon, Bewick's swan.

Ramsar criteria

The Arun Valley Ramsar site qualifies on three of the nine Ramsar criteria:

Table 1. Ramsar criteria and qualification

Ramsar criterion	Description of Criterion	River Arun and marshes
2	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.	The site supports seven wetland invertebrate species listed in the British Red Book and the endangered <i>Pseudamnicola confusa</i> (swollen spire snail). As well as four nationally rare and four nationally scarce plant species.
3	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.	Within the ditches intersecting the site there are all five British duckweed <i>Lemna</i> species, all five water-cress <i>Rorippa</i> species, and all three British water milfoils <i>Myriophyllum</i> species, all but one of the seven British water dropworts <i>Oenanthe</i> species, and two-thirds of the British pondweeds <i>Potamogeton</i> species.
5	A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.	<p>Species with peak counts in winter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13774 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003) <p>Species identified subsequent to designation for possible future consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern pintail , <i>Anas acuta</i>, NW Europe 641 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3) <p>Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eurasian wigeon , <i>Anas penelope</i>, NW Europe 4742 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3) • Eurasian teal , <i>Anas crecca</i>, NW Europe 2931 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3) • Northern shoveler , <i>Anas clypeata</i>, NW & C Europe 222 individuals, representing an average of 1.5% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3) • Ruff , <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>, Europe/W Africa 27 individuals, representing an

		average of 3.8% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3).
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The Arun Valley SPA and Ramsar and SAC site comprises of three SSSIs.

1.3 Historic Trends and Current Pressures

Amberley Wild Brooks SSSI

The Amberley Wild Brooks SSSI lies within the greensand natural area and covers approximately 322.6ha. The site supports an extensive area of alluvial grazing marsh, which is dissected by draining ditches supporting over 156 flowering plants. This part of the Arun Valley flood each year making it a haven for breeding birds. This site is managed by the RSPB but unlike many other RSPB reserves, recreational visitors are not encouraged because of the sensitivity of the site, and the site is not designed or promoted to attract visitors. Access within the site is severely restricted specifically in order to ensure that disturbance is not possible. Access is therefore restricted to the Wey South Path.

Over-wintering birds are of international importance, with a rich community of breeding birds and several uncommon invertebrate assemblages. These ditches support a range of rich flora which includes one nationally rare plant the cut grass *Leersia oryzoides* which is currently restricted to only ten UK locations. The marsh fern *Thelypteris thelypteroides* an uncommon plant is found within the fen. Where this fen is situated two rare snails (molluscs): *Anisus vorticulatus* and *Pseudamnicola confusa* can be found.

Pulborough Brooks SSSI

A large part of the site is now managed as an area of wet grassland principally for the benefit of breeding waders and internationally important assemblages of wintering wildfowl. Controlled flooding of this part of the valley during the winter attracts large flocks of nationally and internationally important numbers of Bewick's swan, wigeon, teal, pintail, shoveler and ruff. Other wintering species of note include white-fronted goose, golden plover, snipe and large flocks of lapwing.

Waltham Brook SSSI

Waltham Brook SSSI is situated the other side of the river to that of Amberley Wild Brooks SSSI. Like Amberley Wild Brooks the site lies within the greensand natural area and covers approximately 47.39ha. The site is comprised of alluvial grazing marsh which is dissected by draining ditches supporting a species-rich community of aquatic plants.

This part of the Arun Valley floods almost every winter, resulting in the site becoming a giant lake. This site is particularly important for wildfowl such as teal, shoveler, wigeon and pintail that take advantage of the sanctuary and feeding opportunities offered.

Condition Assessment

During the most recent condition assessment process, 98.05% of Amberley Wild Brooks SSSI was unfavourable but recovering, 100% of Pulborough Brooks SSSI were judged to be meeting PSA targets and in favourable condition, and Waltham Brook SSSI was assessed as being 100% unfavourable condition but recovering. The Arun Valley SPA, Ramsar and SAC were judged to be in favourable condition.

The following key environmental conditions were identified for the Arun Valley SPA/SAC/Ramsar:

- Appropriate ditch management including control of shade-inducing marginal vegetation.
- Good water quality
- Sympathetic management of lowland wet grassland/grazing marsh
- Control of fertilizers.
- Hydrology management (abstraction, river maintenance, ensuring continuation of winter floods).
- Absence of nutrient enrichment.