



Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Statement
East Meon Neighbourhood Development Plan

January 2017

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 East Meon 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 relevant European sites. It also makes reference to other plans and projects (the emerging South Downs Local Plan and other Local Plans/Core Strategies as appropriate).

The East Meon Neighbourhood Development Plan

- I.6 The East Meon NDP includes general policies to guide development. It also includes local green space designations and allocations for a maximum of 17 dwellings.
- 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 East Meon.

Relevant European sites

- 1.8 The European wildlife site relevant to this neighbourhood development plan is Butser Hill Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- 1.9 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 would be allocated through NDPs. It therefore set out the expected housing figure for these various settlements, and this figure was taken into account in the Local Plan Preferred options HRA. The East Meon NDP makes provision for a slightly greater number of dwellings than set out in the Local Plan Preferred Options – an addition of two dwellings to the 15 dwellings assessed in the HRA of the Preferred Options. This increase is very small and is not considered to be significant, especially in the context of the amount of development proposed in the wider area, and as such the evidence and findings of the Local Plan Preferred Options HRA provide an important basis for the HRA screening of this NDP.
- 2.3 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 relevant conclusions of the HRA, with respect to Butser Hill SAC and the proposed quantum of development in East Meon.
- 2.4 Table I below draws together the conclusions and includes references to the relevant paragraphs of the HRA report, and additional commentary relating to the East Meon NDP into an HRA Screening Matrix.

Table I – HRA Screening Matrix

Impact pathway	Summary/extract of the screening outcome in the HRA Report for the South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options	Comment
Butser Hill SAC		
Recreational pressure	<p>Screened out.</p> <p>‘There is theoretical potential for likely significant effects on these sites by trampling, which in turn causes soil compaction and erosion. Walkers with dogs contribute to pressure on sites through nutrient enrichment via dog fouling and also have potential to cause greater disturbance to fauna as dogs are less likely to keep to marked footpaths and move more erratically. Cycling, motorcycle scrambling and off-road vehicle use can cause serious erosion, as well as disturbance to sensitive species. Whether these issues are matters of concern for species European sites depends on the circumstances on that site, including existing pressure, presence of antisocial behaviour, existing site management and factors such as topography and suitability of footpaths.’</p> <p>‘Part of Butser Hill SAC lies within the Queen Elizabeth Country Park, run by Hampshire County Council and the Hampshire Wildlife Trust. Butser Hill does have footpaths and public rights of way crossing it and has been subject to organised recreational events numerous times in the past (such as ‘Butserfest’ and various country fairs). This implies that while calcareous grassland can be damaged by repeated excessive recreational trampling over long periods of time, the grasslands of Butser Hill SAC are not considered to be particularly vulnerable to well-managed recreational pressure and activity, even when relatively large events are held. This was the conclusion of the HRA of the East Hampshire Local Plan; Joint Core Strategy HRA, with which Natural England concurred.’</p>	<p>Screened out.</p> <p>It is noted that a maximum of 17 dwellings is proposed in the East Meon Neighbourhood Development Plan. This is an increase of 2 dwellings, from the 15 dwellings assessed in the Preferred Options HRA.</p> <p>This increase is very small and is not considered to be significant, especially in the context of the scale of development proposed in the wider area and the conclusions of the East Hampshire Joint Core Strategy HRA regarding current activity and successful management of the site.</p>

Impact pathway	Summary/extract of the screening outcome in the HRA Report for the South Downs Local Plan: Preferred Options	Comment
	<p>'It can be concluded that no likely significant effects will result upon the calcareous grassland 4.6.7 European sites as a result of increased recreational pressure resulting from the SDNPA Local Plan.'</p> <p>Reference: paragraph 4.6.1, 4.6.4, and 4.6.7 of the Preferred Options HRA</p>	
In-combination		
In-combination	<p>Screened out.</p> <p>'It should be noted that the preceding chapters have effectively already considered effects 'in combination' with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Hampshire District Local Plan: Joint Core Strategy – This was a Joint Core Strategy between East Hampshire district and the South Downs National Park Authority. As such impacts between these authorities were considered 'in combination as an inherent part of the process. In addition, the accompanying HRA has its own 'in combination' assessment which explore impacts with other surrounding authorities affecting European sites in East Hampshire (Wealden Heaths Phase 2 SPA, Woolmer Forest SAC, East Hampshire Hangers SAC, Shortheath Common SAC, Butser Hill SAC, and River Itchen SAC). As such, impacts on European sites in East Hampshire have already been fully assessed and have informed the conclusion of this HRA report.' <p>Reference: paragraph 10.1.3 of the Preferred Options HRA</p> 	<p>Screened out.</p> <p>As above – the increase from 15 to a maximum of 17 dwellings proposed in the East Meon NDP is not considered to be significant and the conclusions of the Preferred Options HRA remain applicable.</p>

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 there are not likely to be significant effects arising from the proposals in the East Meon Neighbourhood Plan with regard to the integrity of the Butser Hill SAC. As such the East Meon 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 each of the relevant European Sites is set out below and was 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.

2 Butser Hill SAC

2.1 Introduction

Butser Hill is a 238.66ha chalk massif with a discontinuous cap of clay-with-flints. The massif has been eroded to leave a

series of deep combes in which the modern spring-line is about 1km from the combe-head. The combes on the south-east

flank support dense yew *Taxus baccata* woods and the remaining slopes of the hill are sheep-grazed chalk grassland. The

calcareous yew woods are outstanding examples of a habitat with a very small representation in Britain. The series of

vegetation types represented in the SSSI (chalk grassland, mixed scrub and yew wood) were the subject of a series of

pioneer ecological studies.

2.2 Reasons for Designation

Butser Hill qualifies as a SAC for its habitats. The site contains the Habitats Directive Annex I habitats of:

- Semi –natural dry grassland and scrub and facies on calcareous substrate (*Festuco Brometalia*) and an important orchid site. The site contains the richest diversity lichen flora of any chalk grassland site in England. Also supports the distinctive *Scapanietum aspera* or southern hepatic mat association of leafy liverworts and mosses on north-facing chalk slopes. This association is very rare in the UK and Butser Hill supports the largest known example.
- Yew-dominated woodland

2.3 Historic Trends and Current Pressures

The site has traditionally been vulnerable to the effects of surrounding agriculture (i.e. spray drift causing eutrophication).

Most of the SAC is in favourable condition (92.13%), and landowners, supported by English Woodland Grant Schemes

have been removing inappropriate conifers and clearing excessive scrub.

The environmental vulnerabilities of the Butser Hill SAC are:

- Minimal air pollution (nitrogen deposition may cause reduction in diversity, sulphur deposition can cause acidification).
- Absence of direct fertilisation.
- No spray-drift (i.e. eutrophication) from surrounding intensive arable land.