

Joint Statement from Oxford City Council, Natural England (NE) and Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)

INTRODUCTION

This Joint Statement has been prepared to jointly put forward proposed changes which Oxford City Council, Natural England (NE), and Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) have agreed would overcome remaining concerns on the Council's Submitted Core Strategy, in particular the Northern Gateway Policy CS6.

BACKGROUND

The Council and the Environmental Bodies have worked together constructively throughout the Core Strategy process, including the Habitats Regulation Assessment.

The Council has endeavoured to respond positively to the recommendations of the Habitat Regulations Assessment. However, the Northern Gateway Policy CS6 as currently worded does not provide certainty that adverse impacts on the integrity of the Oxford Meadows SAC will be avoided. The Inspector may recall that the environmental bodies previously submitted proposed changes to the policy, supported by the Council, to ensure that the integrity of the Oxford Meadows SAC would be protected from adverse hydrological or air pollution impacts. The omission of these changes from the Council's combined changes was an unfortunate oversight.

However, since the changes were suggested, the Council's combined changes have confirmed an element of residential development at the Northern Gateway. This has generated concern, as its impact has not been fully considered by the Habitats Regulations Assessment. In order to be found compliant with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, we suggest that the need for assessment of the affect of recreational pressure arising from proposed development (in addition to the concerns about air pollution and hydrology raised previously) at the Northern Gateway is included within the Northern Gateway policy.

The Council has recognised that the concerns of the environmental bodies are valid and the following wording is jointly suggested in order to ensure that the plan is compliant with the Habitats Regulations and can therefore legally be adopted if found sound.

The following policy text has been agreed with the City Council, to be included near the top of page 44 of the Core Strategy which states that the Northern Gateway AAP

will 'develop measures to avoid and mitigate the potential impact of development on Oxford Meadows SAC:

'The Council will require the Area Action Plan to be supported by a full hydrological risk appraisal to demonstrate that there will be no change in the hydrological regime of Oxford Meadows SAC, in terms of water quantity or quality. This will form part of an Appropriate Assessment which will be undertaken for the Area Action Plan to meet the requirements of the Habitats Regulations. The current groundwater recharge will be maintained, including the incorporation of sustainable urban drainage systems, such as porous surfacing, grassy swales and infiltration trenches.

The Area Action Plan must also be supported by more detailed air quality modelling and analysis to show that there will not be any localised adverse effects on the integrity of the SAC resultant from construction or increased road trips on roads within 200m of European sites.

The Area Action Plan must also be supported by an assessment to show that there will not be any effect on the integrity of the SAC from recreational pressure arising from the development.

If the results of these further assessments show that part of the Strategy cannot be delivered without adverse impacts on Oxford Meadows SAC, which cannot be fully mitigated, then the plan will only make provision for level and location of development for which it can be concluded that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC, even if this level is below that in the strategic allocation'.