

PURBECK CORE STRATEGY

HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT OF THE CORE STRATEGY

Between 2007 and 2011 Purbeck District Council commissioned Footprint Ecology and David Tyldesley and Associates to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the emerging policies and proposals of the Purbeck Core Strategy under what is now regulation 102 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

The most recent report on the HRA was dated 30th August 2011¹. This report would normally have concluded the HRA process prior to any changes resulting from the examination of the plan.

A summary of the conclusions of the HRA report is reproduced for convenience as an annex to this statement.

The Government issued the National Planning Policy Framework for England in March 2012. This led to a series of detailed amendments being required to ensure alignment of the Core Strategy with the NPPF, both in terms of policy and terminology.

It will be evident from the HRA process, and the modifications to the plan, that development in Purbeck has the potential to affect a number of European sites in a variety of ways and that the wording of the Core Strategy is, in places, critical to compliance with the Habitats Regulations.

We have therefore assessed the main modifications to the plan to be published for consultation in June 2012.

We are satisfied that the main modifications will not lead to any effects on a European Site which have not already been assessed in the 2011 report. It is our opinion, therefore, that the 2011 report cited in the footnote below can be relied upon as a sound assessment under the Habitats Regulations.

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15th June 2012.

¹ Liley D. & Tyldesley, D. (eds) Habitats Regulations Assessment of Purbeck Core Strategy; Proposed Changes to Pre-Submission Footprint Ecology / David Tyldesley & Associates

ANNEX

Summary of the 2011 HRA report

This report is an assessment of Purbeck's Core Strategy (Proposed Changes to Pre-Submission, dated September 2011), in accordance with the Habitats Regulations 2010. Feedback from the Core Strategy Pre-Submission identified a number of potential improvements to the Core Strategy, and Purbeck District Council therefore took the opportunity to make proposed changes and re-consult, prior to finally submitting the Core Strategy for Examination.

Purbeck District supports one of the most special and heavily protected environments in the country. Even in the context of SW England it is exceptional. Some 21% of the area of the District is of international importance for nature conservation, including the whole of the Dorset Heaths (Purbeck & Wareham) and Studland Dunes SAC. The largest part by district of the Dorset Heath SAC/Dorset Heathlands SPA and Ramsar site and similarly the largest part of Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar site, and the majority of the Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC fall within Purbeck District.

The aim of this assessment has been to identify any areas where there are likely significant effects to the Natura 2000 sites and assess these in detail. The assessment process has been continuous throughout the development of the Core Strategy. As with every previous stage, a full check for likely significant effects at this 'proposed changes to pre-submission' stage is set out.

When the assessment commenced, a check for likelihood of significant effects highlighted the following potential issues, and subsequently the assessment has proceeded to consider those issues in detail within the more detailed appropriate assessment part of this report:

- Impacts of new housing and recreational pressure on the Dorset Heaths (the Dorset Heaths SAC, Dorset Heaths (Purbeck & Wareham) and Studland Dunes SAC, Dorset Heathlands SPA, Dorset Heathlands Ramsar).
- Increased recreational pressure on Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar from shore-based and water based activities likely to increase as a result of new housing.
- Increased recreational pressure to coastal sites as a result of enhanced transport links and housing (Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC, St Alban's to Durlston Head SAC).
- Increased recreational pressure to the New Forest (New Forest SPA/SAC/Ramsar) as a result of increased population and enhanced transport links within Purbeck.
- Water issues, including abstraction and water quality, affecting Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar and Dorset Heaths SAC, Dorset Heaths (Purbeck & Wareham) and Studland Dunes SAC, Dorset Heathlands SPA, Dorset Heathlands Ramsar).
- Fragmentation and pressure on heathland sites (Dorset Heaths SAC, Dorset Heathlands SPA/Ramsar) as a result of employment allocation (Holton Heath).
- Air quality issues as a result of increased traffic (Dorset Heaths SAC, Dorset Heaths (Purbeck & Wareham) and Studland Dunes SAC, Dorset Heathlands SPA/Ramsar and Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar).

As the Core Strategy has progressed, our assessment of the development proposals has shown that, without mitigation measures, adverse effects would be likely as a result of the Core Strategy alone, either as single elements or as a combination of elements within the plan for each of these issues (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). However, mitigation measures, which would eliminate these effects, have been developed alongside the progression of the plan, and now, at this Proposed Changes to Pre-Submission stage, the mitigation measures are considered to be adequately integrated into the plan, providing a robust mechanism to ensure that development will not adversely affect the European sites.

Measures include those where specific mitigation has been identified, those where mitigation is considered to be capable of implementation but further work is required to establish the detailed nature of the mitigation, and cases where a precautionary approach with regard to policies and allocations has been applied, particularly where reliant upon other bodies to progress the necessary measures.

The Core Strategy will need to be subject to a final 'appropriate assessment' under the provisions of Regulation 102 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, before it is adopted, so that before the plan is given effect in terms of the Regulations, the reliance on the mitigation to be delivered by the Heathland DPD and a Nutrient Management Plan (to mitigate impacts on water quality in Poole Harbour) can be examined with up-to-date information.

In addition to the requirement to properly assess new plans and projects, there are obligations on Member States to avoid deterioration of habitats and significant disturbance of species on European sites. It seems clear that some measures under the European Directives that place this duty on Member States will be needed to tackle existing pressures and problems, including habitat deterioration and disturbance on the designated sites.