

**NORTH DORSET LOCAL PLAN 2011 – 2026 PART 1**

**EXAMINATION**

**Inspector's requests and points arising during hearing sessions**

**Issue 8B: Gillingham SSA**

**Confirmation from Natural England as to the need for a Habitat  
Regulations Assessment of the Master Plan Framework**

**May 2015**

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# 1. Recommendations

1.1 The recommendation arising out of this note is that

- The Master Plan Framework for the Gillingham Southern Extension is not required to be the subject of a Habitat Regulations Assessment

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## 2. Introduction

- 2.1 At Hearing Session 8 (18<sup>th</sup> March 2015) concern was raised about the requirement within Policy 21 for the Gillingham Southern Extension Master Plan Framework (MPF) to be subject to a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA). The inspector requested that the Council produce a note clarifying the position, including a response from Natural England on the issue.

## 3. Background to the requirement

- 3.1 The HRA produced to support the production of the North Dorset Local Plan highlighted the potential impacts that growth within the district could have on internationally designated wildlife sites (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites). The HRA process takes a strategic look at the implications of growth on the network of internationally designated wildlife sites within the wider area rather than just considering the more localised ecological impacts. The Council has produced a paper (ECC005) which discussed the implications of the Local Plan for each of the identified potential impacts. It outlined the mitigation which would be put in place as a result of the Plan being adopted.
- 3.2 One of the recommendations included in the HRA was that the Gillingham MPF 'should be the subject of HRA and should seek to rule out LSE' (likely significant effects).
- 3.3 The HRA refers specifically to the scope of the green infrastructure plan for the Gillingham Southern Extension being widened to ensure it considers the impacts of the site on European protected sites. This includes through pathways such as the impacts on water resources, those resulting from water discharge and from recreation on sites, and not just those sites in close proximity to the development site.
- 3.4 As there are a number of internationally designated sites in reasonable proximity to the Gillingham Southern Extension site, the Council took the view that it would be prudent to consider the potential for an impact on these sites. For this reason the requirement for an HRA to support the MPF was included in Policy 21.
- 3.5 The inspector requested that the Council seek the view of Natural England whether an HRA is necessary to support the production of the MPF and to rule out likely significant effects on the internationally designated wildlife sites.

## 4. Response from Natural England

- 4.1 Discussions with Natural England have resulted in a review of the requirement for the MPF to be subject to HRA. Natural England suggested that as the Local Plan, including Policy 21, were subject to HRA, a further HRA for the MPF would not be

necessary. However, the suggestion was that ‘HRAs need not be onerous and provide a useful audit to demonstrate that HRA issues have been properly considered’.

- 4.2 The Natural England response also stated that they ‘do not foresee any significant HRA issues related to the Gillingham proposals’.

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The production of an HRA for the Gillingham Southern Extension MPF would provide a useful tool to ensuring that the proposals contained within fully consider the implications of the development on internationally designated wildlife sites. As Natural England suggested, the HRA does not need to be onerous but would enable the decision maker to understand any implications arising from the proposals. In addition it would clearly demonstrate to interested parties and local people that the wider ecological impact had been considered.
- 5.2 However, as the probability of the Gillingham Southern Extension having a likely significant effect on an internationally designated wildlife site is minimal, the Council is prepared to remove this as a requirement. The production of an HRA is considered to be desirable rather than essential to support the MPF.
- 5.3 The Gillingham Southern Extension policy will be amended to this effect, removing the requirement for the MPF to be the subject of an HRA.