

## **RSPB Statement to the Purbeck Core Strategy Development Plan Document Examination**

Mrs Jenny Neale  
Purbeck District Council  
Westport House  
Worgret Road  
Wareham  
Dorset BH20 4PP

18 April 2012

**Respondent Ref: 2529**

Dear Mrs Neale

**The Purbeck Core Strategy Development Plan Document Examination**  
**RSPB Statement Matter 11 Biodiversity and Geodiversity**

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As discussed on 17<sup>th</sup> April, please find attached a Statement from the RSPB to the Purbeck Core Strategy Development Plan Document Examination. Due to our case officer, Renny Henderson, breaking his collar bone, we are unable to submit a more comprehensive statement. Had we been in a position to do so however, it would have conformed with the submissions we made to the pre-submission Core Strategy, published in November 2010, and the proposed changes to the pre-submission Core Strategy, published in September 2011.

The one additional issue on which we felt there would be merit in informing the Inspector of our views is that of Dorset Green, Winfrith, since we note the participation of its proponents at the Examination, including at Matter 11 Biodiversity and Geodiversity. To that end, please find attached the RSPB's Statement to the Purbeck Core Strategy Development Plan Document Examination, which should be read in conjunction with our responses to the Core Strategy consultations.

As agreed, I will drop 3 hard copies of this response into your office before 10.30am tomorrow. I am very grateful for your flexibility on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Gavin Bloomfield  
Senior Conservation Officer

## RSPB Statement to the Purbeck Core Strategy Development Plan Document Examination

**Matter: 11, Biodiversity and Geodiversity**

**Respondent Name: RSPB**

**Respondent Ref: 2529**

### Issues

**11.1 How can it be certain that the proposed heathland mitigation measures (primarily the SANGs) would be sufficient and could be satisfactorily provided, bearing in mind that precise details about their form and means of implementation appear not to be known?**

**11.2 What is the role of the Joint Dorset Heathlands DPD and should there be greater reference to it?**

**11.3 Should a risk-based approach be taken towards non SPA habitats used by species listed in Annex 1 of the EC Birds Directive?**

**11.4 Is it sufficiently clear that developers should only provide heathland mitigation to meet the demands arising from their development?**

The RSPB has submitted responses to both the pre-submission Core Strategy, published in November 2010, and the proposed changes to the pre-submission Core Strategy, published in September 2011. We will not repeat any of the points raised in those responses.

However, we note that ZBV (Winfrith) Ltd, the proponents of a large mixed use proposed development outside Winfrith known as Dorset Green, are participating at the Examination, including at Matter 11. The RSPB has had some communication with Purbeck District Council and the proponents of Dorset Green over the proposed development there, and we felt it could be of interest to the Inspector if we submitted our current observations on the biodiversity implications of that proposal.

The RSPB has significant concerns with the proposed Dorset Green development, due to the risks it presents to the rare and vulnerable wildlife of the adjacent Dorset Heathlands Special Protection Area (SPA), Dorset Heathlands Ramsar site and Dorset Heaths Special Area of Conservation (SAC). I append to this Statement our response to Purbeck District Council's consultation on an Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report for Dorset Green Masterplan – Winfrith Technology Centre, which sets out our concerns with this proposal.

Subsequent to that consultation, we met up with the proponent to discuss a modified scheme, which included more public space into the main land parcel. We are not convinced that the introduced changes would adequately address the risk presented by the development – in particular 700 residential units - to the above listed designated wildlife sites.

We consider that the adoption of the Dorset Green proposed development as an allocation in the final Purbeck Local Plan would risk rendering the plan unsound on the basis of non-compliance with Regulation 61 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 - we do not believe that it would be possible to ascertain that the proposed development would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Dorset Heathlands SPA, Dorset Heathlands Ramsar site and Dorset Heaths SAC.

# RSPB Statement to the Purbeck Core Strategy Development Plan Document Examination

## Appendix 1

Ms Sylvia Leonard  
Principal Planning Officer  
Planning Service  
Purbeck District Council  
Westport House  
Worgret Road  
Wareham  
Dorset  
BH20 4PP

7 February 2012

By email only

Dear Ms Leonard,

### **Dorset Green Masterplan – Winfrith Technology Centre, EIA Scoping Report**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this consultation.

We understand that ZBV (Winfrith) Limited ('the applicant') and the Homes and Communities Agency has requested a formal Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Opinion from Purbeck District Council ('the Council') in connection with the Dorset Green Masterplan. The RSPB is pleased to provide its comments at this stage.

We would state at the outset that this proposal presents very significant environmental issues given its location, nature and scale in an area of exceptional nature conservation importance.

#### **The proposal**

In the limited time available, we have attempted to consider the voluminous information hosted on the Council's website in connection with the proposal.

We have considered the EIA Scoping Report Dorset Green Masterplan – Winfrith Technology Centre dated December 2011 ('the Scoping Report') prepared by Waterman Energy, Environment and Design Limited on behalf of the applicant. This states that:

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*“The proposals seek the mixed use development comprising: the phased demolition of a number of existing industrial and commercial buildings; creation of new ‘prestige’ business uses (including office space, research & development, light industrial space, SME starter units, general industrial uses and storage space), provision of new housing (including low cost/affordable housing to meet local needs); social and community infrastructure and open space (including playing fields and recreation areas) and a Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) site”.*

Figure 1 on page 2 of the Scoping Report identifies the Development Site location, which comprises two irregularly shaped separate land parcels lying west of Wool. The larger parcel lying to the north forms part of the former Winfrith Technology Centre, now known as the Dorset Green Technology Park, the smaller parcel lies to the south approximately 400m away.

We understand that the parcels amount to approximately 96 ha, the northern, largely developed site comprises 75 ha (known in the Scoping Report as the ‘Main Site’), with the farmland southern site (‘the SANGS site’), extending to 21 ha. The two parcels are separated by land not within the proposed application boundary or the applicant’s ownership.

### **Nature conservation issues and designated sites**

As is recognised by the applicant, the Development Site is located in an area of high environmental sensitivity. Indeed part of the Main Site includes heathland habitat which forms part of Winfrith Heath SSSI, itself a component part of the Dorset Heathlands Special Protection Area (SPA), Dorset Heathlands Ramsar site and Dorset Heaths Special Area of Conservation (SAC). These designated habitats extend beyond the Development Site, as is shown on the Site and Landscape Features Plan (RD\_1241\_026) appended to the Scoping Report. These national and international designations afford the habitats and their dependent species with a very high level of protection, which we return to later within the Planning policy observations section.

It should be noted that the River Win flows through the Development Site to join the River Frome, which is also designated as SSSI.

The Scoping Report also identifies features of value within the Development Site, some of which having been identified through targeted surveys. We have not had the opportunity to consider these surveys, but any subsequent Environmental Statement (ES) will need to comprehensively establish the baseline interest of the Development Site and a suitable buffer in order to be able to assess possible impacts of the construction and operation of the Development Site, both directly, indirectly, and in combination with other plans and projects.

Table 2 within the Scoping Report (page 8) includes the category ‘Ecology’ which indicates that ‘protected species or habitats’ are potential receptors within the Development Site. This is welcome, however, we would add that this is a rather narrow assessment, as the proposal, by virtue of its scale, has the potential to affect ecological receptors well beyond the physical boundary of the Development Site.

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### **Proposal details**

Section 3 of the Scoping Report (page 9) identifies “core objectives” for the Masterplan. These include:

- Comprehensive regeneration of the Dorset Green Technology Park site to secure its future as the prominent strategic employment site within Purbeck and Dorset
- To maximise the employment potential of the Main Site by creating a ‘prestige’ business park
- To provide new residential development
- To mitigate the potential impact of the proposed Development upon protected heathlands by providing a SANGS Site
- To investigate opportunities to establish an on-site educational facilities/opportunities
- To promote a sustainable transport strategy

The Scoping Report (page 10) also provides indications of the development’s scale.

On the Main Site:

- new/improved employment space, 70,000 sq m
- 700 residential units, comprising 2-4 bed houses and 1-3 bed apartments
- A hotel, 2,600 sq m
- A conference centre, 2,400 sq m
- Educational facilities, 16,530 sq m
- Student accommodation, 2,600 sq m
- Green Infrastructure

On the SANGS Site:

- New woodland planting
- Wetland and pond areas
- Enhancements to River Win
- Acid grassland
- Trees and hedges
- Footpaths both linking to the Main Site and internally to permit circulation
- A buffer zone to the designated heathlands

### **Planning policy observations**

The inclusion of a SANGS element to the Masterplan is welcome in principle. We consider it pertinent to mention at this point the Dorset Heathlands Interim Planning Framework (IPF)<sup>1</sup>, which is directly relevant to the proposal. It is evident that the applicant is aware of this

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<sup>1</sup> A public consultation is currently underway concerning converting the IPF to a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The consultation closes on 16 March 2012.

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framework, and of the considerations pertaining to the mitigating the effects of residential development on internationally designated heathlands.

We note that the Main Site includes some 10.75ha of internationally designated heathlands (SPA/SAC and Ramsar sites). No development is proposed on this area. Under the terms of the IPF residential development is normally prohibited within 400m of the boundary of the internationally designated habitats, which would effectively encompass the western part of the Main Site, where residential development is proposed. The remainder of the Main Site lies within the 400m - 5 km IPF zone, in which the IPF seeks bespoke mitigation solutions from larger proposals, including the use of SANGS. The entirety of the SANGS Site lies within 400m of internationally designated habitats.

A core issue for the ES to consider is the certainty with which the provision of the SANGS Site would mitigate potential direct and indirect impacts arising from the proposed development on the internationally designated heathlands. These impacts are associated with “urban effects” including recreational disturbance (especially people with dogs), cat predation, arson, invasive species etc<sup>2</sup>. The SANGS Site, in addition with any other measures provided to reduce or avoid risk of harm, would need to ensure no adverse effect on the internationally designated heathlands consequent on the development of the Main Site, which in our opinion is the relevant test, applicable by virtue of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Consideration would also need to be given to whether the SANGS Site itself would have an adverse effect on the internationally designated heathlands.

On the information provided to date, we consider that the Masterplan proposal, by virtue of its nature, scale and proximity, is likely to have a significant effect on the internationally designated heathlands, and hence should be subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) by virtue of Regulation 61. The information necessary to inform the HRA should be gathered and presented as part of the EIA process and it is Purbeck District Council as the ‘competent authority’ that would complete the HRA. The requirement to undertake an HRA is explicitly recognized by the applicant in the Scoping Report (page 36, section 5.11.3).

The RSPB recognises that the Council has in front of it an EIA scoping request, not a full planning application supported by an ES, and that much information remains to be gathered, analysed and presented before an HRA can be completed. Central to this is the significant task facing the applicant’s project team in demonstrating that the likely impacts of developing some 700 houses, 70,000 sq m of commercial floorspace, 16,530 sq m of educational floorspace and 5,000 sq m of leisure uses will not have an adverse effect on internationally designated heathlands.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: Underhill-Day, J.C. 2005. A literature review of urban effects on lowland heaths and their wildlife. English Nature Research Report No.623. English Nature, 2005 ( <http://www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/623.pdf>).

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No conclusion is currently possible, but we presently consider it highly unlikely that a SANGS in the current proposed location – i.e. remote from the Development Site - could successfully intercept or draw away residents/visitors generated by the proposal from accessing the designated heathlands. Robust evidence will need to be presented which can show, with certainty, that the SANGS site can mitigate the anticipated urban effects. We consider it more likely that residents and others would preferentially visit the established, attractive, and accessible open space of Winfrith Heath, particularly given its immediate proximity to the Development Site, compared with a new site which is separate to the development.

We are also concerned about impacts on other designated sites in the vicinity, away from Dorset Green, which might be anticipated to experience increased visitor rates emanating from this major proposal. The proposal also raises significant transport issues, which may have implications for designated sites by virtue of increased emissions or pressure for highway improvements.

### **Environmental Assessment**

We note the discussion in section 5.11 Ecology and Nature Conservation within the Scoping Report. Potential effects are presented in 5.11.2, the list within this section summarises the potential effects during construction and operation.

The Scoping Report suggests mitigation measures will be identified in the ES, with the proposed SANGS Site “off-setting” the potential direct and indirect effects on designated heathlands within/adjacent the Development Site. As stated above, this is a conclusion which will need to be robustly tested. At this stage the RSPB is unconvinced that the land currently identified as a potential SANGS would deliver the certainty necessary to avoid adverse effects on the internationally designated heathlands.

We would welcome a dialogue with the applicant over this proposal, concerning all of the matters discussed in this response. In the meantime, I hope you find these comments helpful, if you require any further information or clarification, please contact me.

Please keep us advised of the progression of this proposal.

Yours sincerely



Renny Henderson  
Conservation Officer

cc    Nick Squirrell            Natural England  
      Imogen Davenport      Dorset Wildlife Trust