IMPLICATIONS OF THE HABITATS REGULATIONS ASSESSMENT

OF THE

NORTH DORSET LOCAL PLAN 2011 TO 2026 PART 1

Contents

1. Purpose

1.1 A Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) has been undertaken alongside the preparation of the North Dorset Local Plan, at key points during its production. More detail on the HRA produced to support the Local Plan can be found in Section 1 of the HRA report. This section also contains an overview of the HRA process and an outline of the European protected sites within or in close proximity to North Dorset District. The final version of the HRA was reported on in a document produced on 12th November 2013.

1.2 This document sets out the extent of the European protected sites within or in close proximity to North Dorset. It then goes on to examine the implications of the final version of the HRA produced to support the pre-submission version of the Local Plan 2011 to 2026 Part 1 (the Local Plan).

Habitats Regulations Assessment

1.3 The term "Habitats Regulations Assessment" refers to an assessment of the potential impact of a plan on European wildlife sites. Under European and National legislation, European designated sites are afforded the highest level of protection amongst designated wildlife sites. Under this European and national legislation and as a "competent authority", North Dorset District Council is required to undertake, or commission a Habitats Regulations Assessment of the Local Plan.

1.4 The HRA is an iterative process where options for fulfilling the objectives of the Local Plan are considered and the potential implications of these on European protected sites are assessed. In assessing these implications, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the European sites and the potential for impacts arising from the Local Plan proposals.

1.5 Each of the European sites has a set of "interest features". These are important in assessing the implications of the Local Plan and in particular whether the Local Plan proposals would compromise any of these features.

The Local Plan

1.6 The Local Plan for North Dorset is split into two parts. The Local Plan 2011 to 2026 Part 1 (the Local Plan part 1) sets out the parameters for growth. This includes the location and quantum of both housing growth and employment growth and the infrastructure needed to support it.

1.7 The Local Plan Part 2 will be produced once Part 1 of the Local Plan has been adopted. Part 2 will allocate specific sites for development around the district.

1.8 At key stages in the preparation of the Local Plan, a habitats regulations assessment has been undertaken to assess the potential impacts on nearby internationally designated sites.

Neighbourhood Planning

1.9 The Local Plan provides the framework for development proposals and also for Neighbourhood Plans prepared by local communities. It is therefore important that Neighbourhood Plans have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Regulations. The Habitats Regulations Assessment prepared for the Local Plan is therefore important in informing the formation of Neighbourhood Plans especially in relation to the need for a full Habitats Regulations Assessment of a Neighbourhood Plan.

1.10 Under the Localism Act 2011, the District Council has a duty to ensure that a Neighbourhood Plan conforms with the requirements of European legislation including through the production of a Habitats Regulations Assessment and a Strategic Environmental Assessment. To fulfil this requirement, the Council will undertake a screening of the proposals within each Neighbourhood Plan to assess whether a Habitats Regulations Assessment and a Strategic Environmental Assessment are required.

2. European Protected Sites

2.1 Plants, animals and habitats which are rare in a European context are protected by the Habitats Regulations[1] which transpose European legislation into UK law. The relevant European legislation includes the "Birds Directive" and the "Habitats Directive".

- The Birds Directive[2] protects rare and vulnerable birds and their habitats and requires the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPA).
- The Habitats Directive[3] gave protection to plants, habitats and animals other than birds through the creation of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). It required the establishment of conservation management measures for the designated sites.

2.2 The sites designated under these two European Directives form a network of designated sites known as the Natura 2000 network. The aim of the network is to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most threatened and valuable habitats and species.

2.3 In addition to the SPA and SAC sites, the UK is a signatory to the international Ramsar Convention. This seeks to protect internationally important wetland habitats and it is UK policy to treat these as part of the suite of European designated sites, affording them the same level of protection.

European Sites within North Dorset

2.4 There are two European protected sites within North Dorset District. These are Rooksmoor SAC to the west of Sturminster Newton and Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC to the south of Shaftesbury. The HRA looked at these sites in detail and assessed their interest features and the conservation objectives against the proposals in the Local Plan.

Rooksmoor SAC

2.5 Rooksmoor SAC is split into two clusters of smaller sites as shown on Figure2.1. The first at Lydlinch Common covers approximately 30 hectares at the junction of the A3030/A357 whilst the second area covers approximately 32 hectares to the south at Rooksmoor Copse. The areas designated as a SAC form part of the larger Blackmore Vale Commons and Moors SSSI totalling approximately 296 hectares.

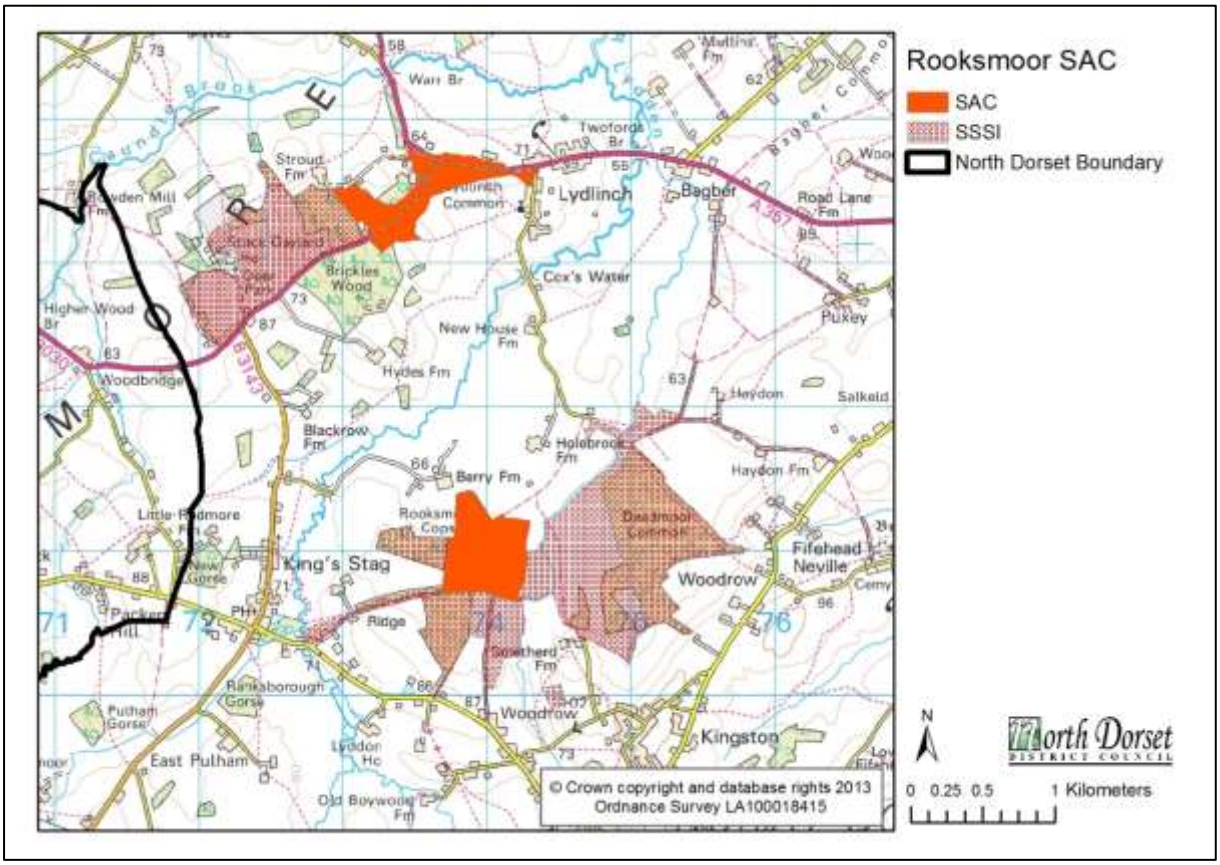
[1] The Conservation of Habitats and Species regulations 2010, known as the "Habitats Regulations"

[2] Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the conservation of wild birds updating the original version (Directive 79/409/EEC)

[3] Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora

The site supports an exceptionally large population of marsh fritillary butterfly (Euphydryas aurinia) and supports Molinia purple moor-grass meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey, silt-laden soils.

Figure 2.1: Rooksmoor SAC



Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC

2.6 The Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC site consists of approximately 260 hectares of species rich chalk grasslands on the scarp slope of the Dorset Downs to the south of Shaftesbury as shown in Figure 2.2. The area supports large populations of early gentian (Gentianella anglica) and is also selected for the presence of semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland. A slightly larger area, encompassing the whole of the SAC is also designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

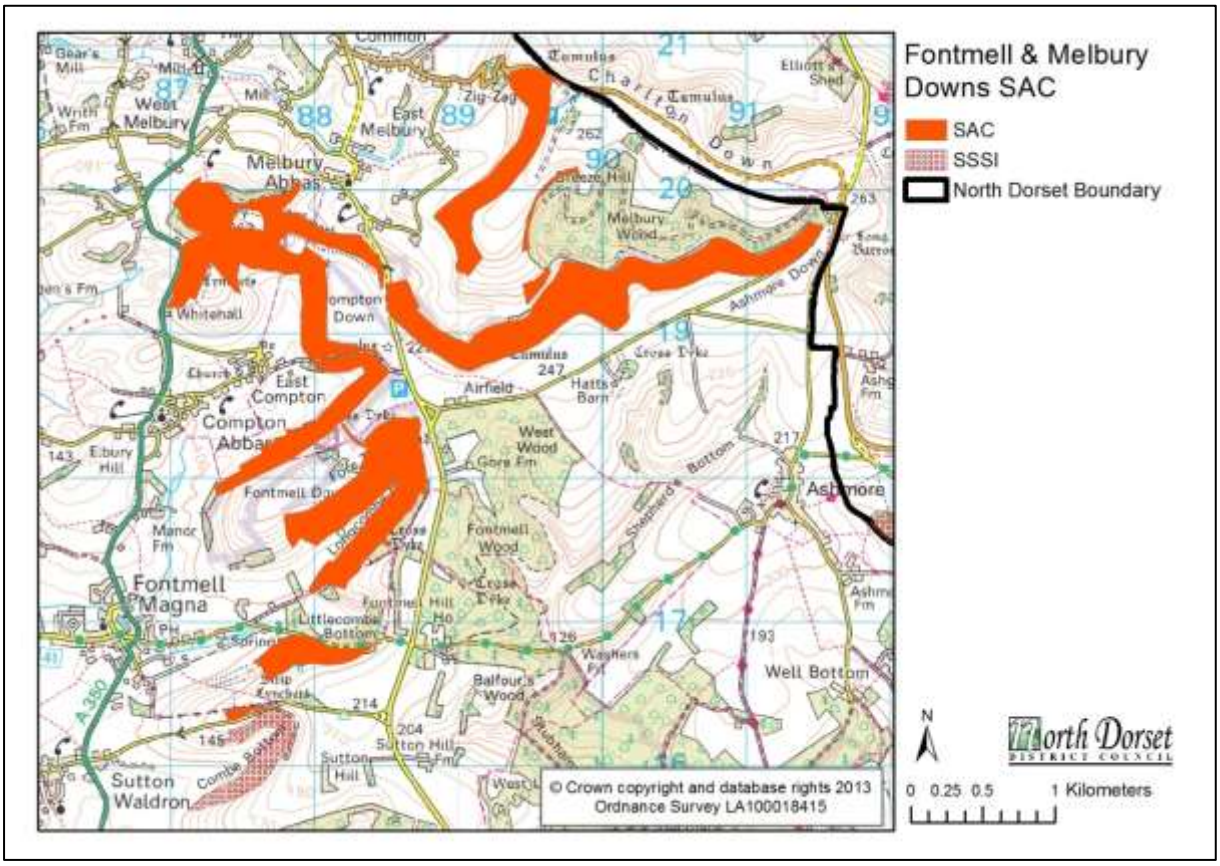
European Sites in Close Proximity to North Dorset

2.7 In addition to the two sites within North Dorset the HRA highlighted a number of sites within a reasonable distance (20km as shown in Figure 2.3) of the district where there is the potential for an impact arising from the Local Plan implementation. These sites were:

Holnest SAC

2.8 The site covers 55ha and is approximately 0.15 km west of the district near Glanvilles Wooton. The site is designated solely for the presence of Great Crested Newts and encompasses around 20 ponds and associated scrub, grassland, woodland and hedgerows. A large population of great crested newts is present with the woodland area providing ideal hibernation habitat.

Figure 2.2: Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC

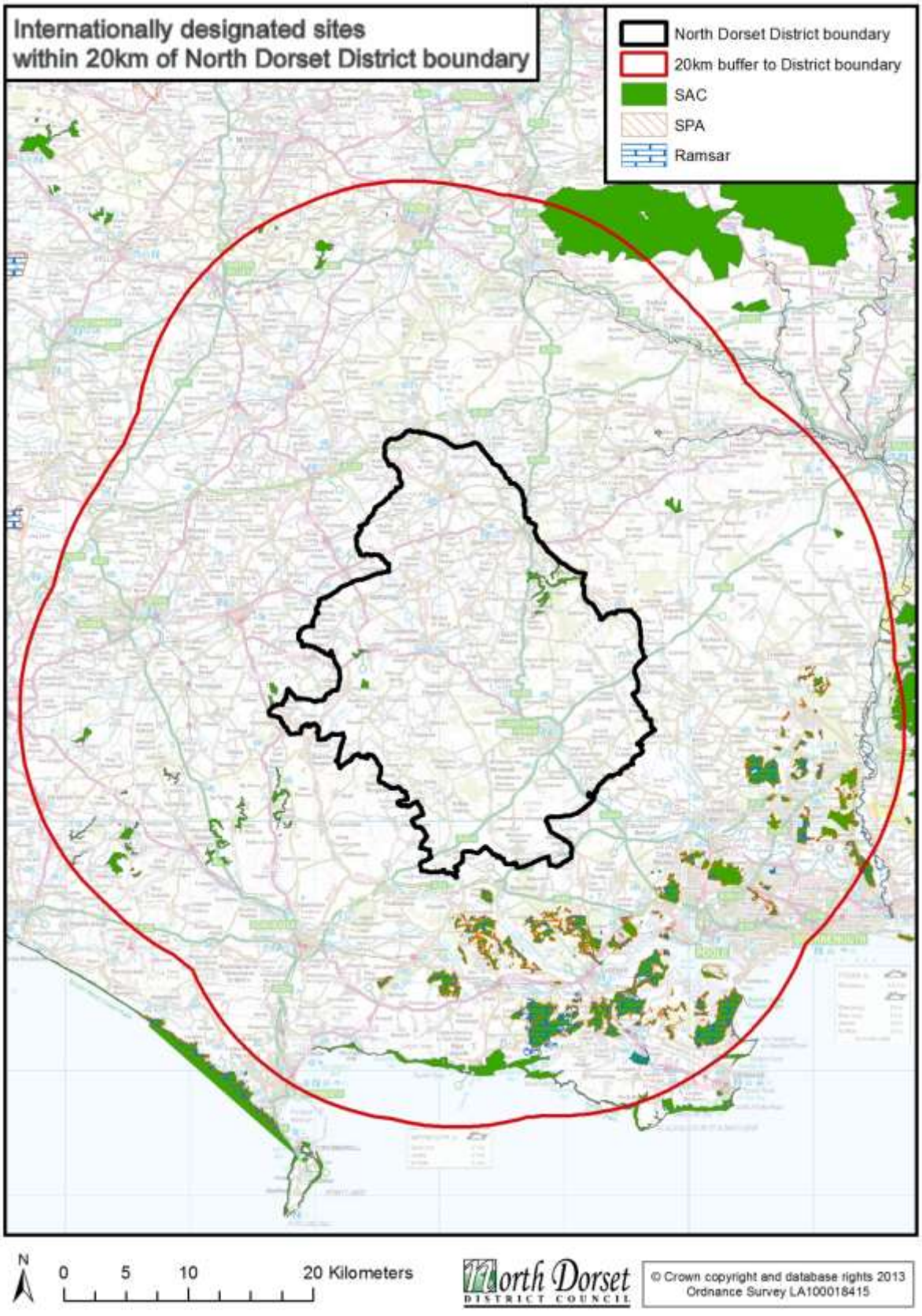


Dorset Heathlands SAC, SPA, Ramsar

2.9 Dorset Heathlands relates to a number of sites falling under the Dorset Heaths SAC, Dorset Heaths (Purbeck and Wareham) and Studland Dunes SAC, Dorset Heaths SPA and Dorset Heathlands Ramsar designations. The closest designated area to North Dorset is approximately 2.1 km to the south of the district boundary.

2.10 The Heathland sites are extensive, centred around Poole Harbour and stretch from Warmwell in the west to Cranborne in the north and Hengistbury Head in the east. The designated sites support a number of habitats ranging from dry heaths, wet lowland heathland and mires, coastal wetlands, floodplain fen, woodland, grassland and pools. Many species found in the area are strongly associated with or restricted to the heathlands.

Figure 2.3: Internationally designated sites within 20km of North Dorset District



Cerne and Sydling Downs SAC

2.11 The site covers an area of around 370ha of chalk grassland approximately 2.9 km to the west of the district, centred on the Cerne and Sydling valleys. The site consists of semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland on calcareous substrates and supports a population of Marsh Fritillary butterfly.

Poole Harbour SPA, Ramsar

2.12 Poole Harbour consists of nearly 4000ha of estuarine habitats approximately 6.7 km to the south east of the district. The unusual micro-tidal regime means that a significant body of water is retained throughout the tidal cycle resulting in the Harbour displaying many characteristics of a lagoon. There are extensive areas of mudflats and fringes of saltmarsh and reedbed. The Dorset Heathlands SPA adjoins pars of the Harbour. The rivers Piddle and Frome both flow into the Harbour.

Prescombe Down SAC

2.13 Prescombe Down SAC covers approximately 76ha of botanically rich downland 8.6km to the east of Shaftesbury. The site is designated for calcareous grassland, the presence of early gentian and the Marsh Fritillary butterfly.

West Dorset Alder Woods SAC

2.14 The West Dorset Alder Woods SAC consists of a number of sites totalling approximately 329ha. The sites are clustered together and approximately 8.6km west of the District boundary at Milbourne St Andrew. As the name suggests, the sites are designated for the mixed Ash – Alder woods characteristic of the winding valley woods developed along meandering streams. Marsh Fritillary butterfly is also found at the site.

River Avon SAC, Avon Valley SPA, Avon Valley Ramsar

2.15 The Avon is a lowland river system running through chalk and clay. It has a greater range of habitats and a more diverse flora and fauna than any other chalk river in Britain.

2.16 The SAC is located approximately 10.4 km to the east of Shaftesbury stretching from Warminster in the north, through Salisbury and on to Christchurch Harbour. However, the SPA and Ramsar designations primarily relate to the lower sections of the valley, some distance from North Dorset.

Chilmark Quarries SAC

2.17 Chilmark Quarries covers approximately 10.4ha of abandoned stone mines about 11.8km to the north east of the District boundary. The site is used by a range of bat species including Greater Horseshoe Bat, Barbastelle, Bechstein's bat and Lesser Horseshoe bat.

Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC

2.18 The Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC consists of cliffed coastline and associated calcareous grassland stretching around 40km. The coastal cliffs stretch from the Isle of Portland in the west along to Studland in the east with some areas approximately 14.3km from the North Dorset District boundary.

Bracket's Coppice SAC

2.19 Bracket's Coppice lies approximately 13.7km from North Dorset District's boundary and consists of two areas of oak and ash woodland, wooded stream valleys, grassland and fen meadow totalling around 55ha. The reason for the SAC designation includes the presence of Bechstein's bat.

Mendip Woodlands SAC

2.20 The Mendip Woodlands SAC is comprised of ash dominated woodland of slopes, screes and ravines, spread over five separate areas totalling around 254ha. The closest part of the SAC is approximately 14.9km to the north west of the district.

Salisbury Plain SAC, Salisbury Plain SPA

2.21 Salisbury Plain covers over 2000ha and is thought to be the largest surviving area of semi-natural dry grassland habitat within the EU. It is therefore the most important site within the UK for this habitat. The site lies approximately 16.5km to the north and east of North Dorset District boundary.

2.22 The Plain is the best remaining example in the UK of lowland juniper scrub on chalk. This juniper scrub is juxtaposed with extensive semi-natural dry grassland and chalk heath. The Plain also plays host to several varieties of nationally scarce orchids and Marsh Fritillary butterflies. In addition the SPA designation relates to the presence of Hen Harriers and Stone Curlews.

Great Yews SAC

2.23 Great Yews SAC is a 29ha site approximately 17.2km to the east of the District. It comprises a small area of yew woodland including about 300 old yew trees.

Mells Valley SAC

2.24 Mells Valley comprises of four individual areas of approximately 29ha in total. The main reason for the SAC designation is the presence of a large breeding population of Greater Horseshoe bats comprising about 12% of the UK population. The closest part of the site to North Dorset is approximately 17.3km to the north of the District.

The New Forest SAC, New Forest SPA, New Forest Ramsar

2.25 Covering more than 29600ha, the New Forest consists of areas designated as SPA and Ramsar sites at a distance greater than 20km from North Dorset District.

However, a relatively small area of the SAC designation lies approximately 18.9 km to the east of the District boundary.

2.26 The New Forest comprises a mosaic of habitats on nutrient poor soils. The major components are extensive wet and dry heaths with rich valley mires and associated wet and dry grasslands, ancient pasture woodlands and inclosure woodlands, a network of clean rivers and streams, and frequent permanent and temporary ponds. These habitats support a range of internationally and nationally important species.

Chesil and the Fleet SAC

2.27 Chesil Bank is a large 28km long shingle bar which encloses The Fleet. The Fleet is the largest saline lagoon in the country by far. Due to its particular features The Fleet is extremely rich in wildlife. The site is almost entirely at a distance of greater than 20km from the District however a small part does lie at approximately 19.9 km to the south west of the District boundary.

3. European Protected Species

3.1 In addition to protected sites, European legislation also protects certain species. The presence of one of these species of European importance is one of the factors taken into account in designating a SAC site however not all sites where a European important species is present will qualify as a SAC. When a site is identified as having a SAC qualifying feature, it is submitted to the European Commission and designated as a candidate SAC until it is formally adopted as a SAC.

3.2 Whilst the Habitats Regulations Assessment only deals with internationally designated sites, it is important to consider the impact of the Local Plan on species of European importance. The purpose of such a consideration is to contribute to the species being maintained in a favourable conservation status through the preservation of a network of landscape features especially those which act as linear or stepping stone features.

3.3 Of particular relevance to the Local Plan is the presence of a maternity colony of greater horseshoe bats at the Bryanston SSSI. Although greater horseshoe bats are a species of European importance, the Bryanston site is not designated as a SAC. The colony of bats at Bryanston also forages over surrounding areas of pasture and woodland and hence the surrounding countryside is important to maintaining their favourable status.

3.4 Proposals for growth around Blandford have the potential to harm the foraging areas for the bat colony and hence the protection and management to support the bat population should be considered as part of the proposals for any development site.

4. Policy Implications

4.1 As the internationally designated wildlife sites are afforded the highest level of protection, the results of the HRA have a significant impact on planning policies for the North Dorset area.

4.2 An Appropriate Assessment was undertaken to assess the potential impacts on the internationally designated sites against the specific characteristics of each site. The purpose of this assessment is to determine if adverse effects on the integrity of the site can be ruled out. Section 3 of the HRA report reports on the Appropriate Assessment of the Plan, giving more detail where uncertainties have been identified.

4.3 Alongside this report, Section 3 of the HRA helps to demonstrate how the Council have had full regard to its duties as set out in the Habitats Regulations. The findings suggest that in order to avoid significant impacts on the internationally designated wildlife sites, mitigation is required to support the approach being proposed in the Local Plan. This mitigation primarily relates to specific designated sites and proposes measures to be incorporated into policy and for inclusion in development sites.

Impacts of urbanisation on the Dorset Heaths

4.4 Specifically relating to:

- Dorset Heaths SAC
- Dorset Heaths (Purbeck & Wareham) & Studland Dunes SAC
- Dorset Heathlands SPA
- Dorset Heathlands Ramsar

Potential Impacts

4.5 The potential impacts of new residential development on the Dorset Heaths have been subject to a number of pieces of research, many of which have been referred to in the HRA. In summary the potential impacts include increased cat predation of wildlife, higher instances of wildfire, disturbances to ground nesting birds, increased nutrients from dog fouling and damage from increased footfall (trampling) on the heaths.

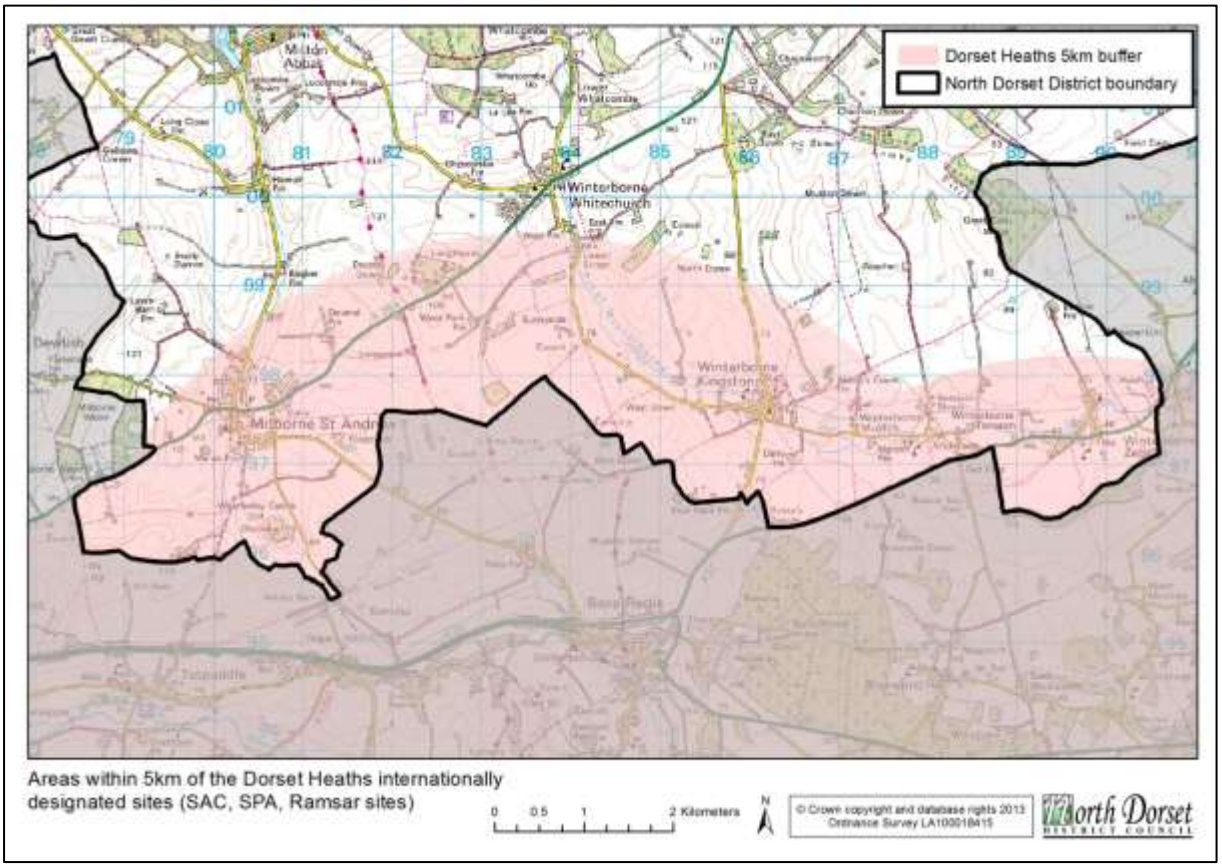
4.6 These impacts are most marked for developments within 400m of heathland sites. Natural England's advice is that residential developments within 400m of a designated heathland site, either alone or in combination with other developments, are likely to have a negative effect on the site.

4.7 In the area between 400m and up to 5km from a heathland site, the effect of residential development is less marked however it is still likely to be significant.

Natural England's advice is that avoidance or mitigation measures can be put in place as part of residential developments within this area, to enable development to go ahead.

4.8 The Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework is a joint initiative by the Local Authorities of Purbeck, Poole, Bournemouth, Christchurch and East Dorset. It uses developer contributions to fund measures to avoid or mitigate the impacts of development on the heathland sites. Measures to be funded through this approach include wardens, new access infrastructure, community work, the creation of new areas for recreation to draw people away from the heaths and the monitoring of impacts.

Figure 4.1 Areas within 5km of Dorset Heaths



Implications for the Local Plan

4.9 Parts of North Dorset District are within 5km of the internationally protected Dorset Heaths as shown in Figure 4.1. Any residential development within this area will need to contribute towards avoidance and mitigation measures to minimise the impact on the heathland sites. However, the level of development proposed within 5km of the heathland sites in the Local Plan is small and therefore any mitigation proposed would have to be part of a bigger scheme.

4.10 Although not promoted within the Local Plan, larger developments will have the ability to provide alternative accessible recreation space in close proximity to the development to draw people away from heathland sites. Such sites would need to be provided in perpetuity. Smaller developments will need to contribute towards management works being undertaken by the Urban Heaths Partnership, in line with that outlined in the Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework[4]. The current level[5] of contribution to be secured through a Section 106 planning obligation is £1524.00 per new house and £952.00 per new flat.

4.11 A recommendation in the HRA report was that consideration needs to be given to the implementation of measures to protect heathland sites. As the heathland sites are all outside of the District, it is difficult for North Dorset District to directly implement measures to mitigate the impact of residential development within the 5km zone. The Council will therefore use contributions collected from developments either to help fund measures being put in place by the Urban Heaths Partnership or to install strategic large scale recreation sites to act as alternatives to heathland recreation. The Council will also fulfil its obligations under the Duty to Cooperate in mitigating impacts on the Dorset Heaths by working closely with neighbouring authorities and other partners. Money collected has previously been spent on mitigation measures at Black Hill, Bere Regis.

4.12 The aim of mitigation is to ensure the long-term condition of heathland sites and to minimise the impact of residential development. To ensure that mitigation measures are effective, the condition of the heathland sites will need to be monitored to ensure there is no deterioration in condition. The Planning Framework established for the Dorset Heaths also contains a number of monitoring activities[6] which are used to assess the effectiveness of mitigation. The headline results from these monitoring measures and the level of contributions collected from the North Dorset area, will be reported in North Dorset District Council's Annual Monitoring Report.

Impacts of recreation on chalk grassland

4.13 Specifically relating to:

- Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC
- Cerne and Sydling Downs SAC
- Salisbury Plain SAC
- Salisbury Plain SPA

[4] The Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework – https://www.dorsetforyou.com/387392

[5] As set out in The Dorset Heathlands Planning Framework 2012-2014

[6] Interim Planning Framework Monitoring Annual Reports and Monitoring Strategy – https://www.dorsetforyou.com/407483

Potential Impacts

4.14 Chalk grassland sites are vulnerable to recreational uses with impacts including the trampling of features of interest, soil erosion and dog fouling. These impacts are particularly likely at main access areas, desire lines and on steep slopes.

4.15 Due to the distance to the nearby chalk grassland sites, the impact of recreation resulting from developments in North Dorset is likely to be minimal. The only exception to this is the potential impact on Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC and especially in relation to development at Shaftesbury.

4.16 Natural England's advice suggests that there will be no likely significant effect from recreation on the chalk grassland resulting from development in Shaftesbury. However, increased growth at Shaftesbury has the potential to result in an increase in recreation on the site. It will be important that monitoring and mitigation is agreed including management and access infrastructure.

Implications for the Local Plan

4.17 The Local Plan refers to the Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC and highlights the pressures that exist in relation to the site. Paragraph 4.73 of the Plan states that: *"The potential impacts on the designated site are likely to result from residential growth in Shaftesbury and the associated increase in recreational pressure. The site is however currently well managed with several measures in place to control recreational pressure and hence the threats to the site are effectively, mitigated through this management regime."*

4.18 The recommendation of the HRA was that this statement needs to be clarified or removed and that discussions should take place with the landowners/managers to ascertain what measures are in place to monitor impacts and react if any adverse effects are identified. This section was subsequently amended in the Local Plan prior to submission.

4.19 The HRA also highlighted that there is the potential for development at Shaftesbury to have an impact on the Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC. The primary route for harm was due to the potential for an increase in recreation on the Downs resulting from the increase in population due to residential growth. Impacts include dog fouling, trampling and erosion.

4.20 Discussions with the landowners has indicated that there has not been a noticeable increase in recreation at Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC. It was also reported, based on anecdotal evidence, that over summer 2014 visitor numbers have been less than usual. This is likely to be attributable to the closure of the road (the C13) at Melbury Abbas and the water pipeline works in the area, reducing ease of access to the site. It is likely that this drop in visitor numbers will return to previous levels once the road reopens.

4.21 Visitor numbers will need to be monitored to see what level of return results from the road reopening. If levels do rise significantly, mitigation will be required to minimise the impact. If adverse effects are noticed, it was suggested that further mitigation measures would need to be put in place. Mitigation measures could include:

- Path diversion including appropriate signage;
- Closure of car parking facilities;
- Enforcement of the need to pick up dog mess; and
- Provision of further greenspace on the edge of Shaftesbury to divert pressure away from the designated site.

4.22 As car parking facilities at the site are limited, the likely increase in visitor numbers may be limited. It may be possible to restrict further car parking and to divert footpaths where an issue is identified. In addition, the installation of dog waste bins at appropriate locations near the parking facilities would reduce the effect of dog fouling. These dog waste bins would require maintenance to ensure that they are useable. The main landowner at the site has identified locations where such dog waste bins could be placed.

4.23 Within the town, there are already substantial areas of green space which are open to the public including Castel Hill local nature reserve and other parts of the "slopes". These offer opportunities for dog walking and help to divert pressure from the designated SAC. However new development in the town will increase the need for such open space and hence new areas will have to be provided as part of the proposed development. This will be in accordance with the Green Infrastructure policy as recommended in the HRA.

4.24 Within Shaftesbury, the majority of the development assigned to the town over the plan period has already been granted consent. The main site is to the east of the town and was a former allocation from the 2003 Local Plan. This eastern site contains substantial areas of green space and therefore should help to minimise recreational pressure from this development.

4.25 The proposed Local Plan residential site at Littledown, Shaftesbury has suggested a scheme which would provide a viewpoint, dog walking and public open space alongside the development. This would divert pressure away from the Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC.

4.26 Although there are no formal visitor counts undertaken at Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC site, the landowner is aware of the issues related to recreation at the site and visits it on a regular basis. The Council's Annual Monitoring Report will be used to informally report on the landowners assessment of impacts on the site.

4.27 Correspondence with Natural England[7] has confirmed that, with mitigation being put in place alongside development at Shaftesbury the proposed housing growth *"can be discounted as being capable of having a likely significant effect"*. If an effect is noticed, measures can be put in place to reduce the impact on the site.

Impacts of recreational pressure on coastal/estuarine sites

4.28 Specifically relating to:

- Chesil and the Fleet SAC
- Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC
- Dorset Heaths (Purbeck & Wareham) & Studland Dunes SAC
- Chesil and the Fleet SPA
- Poole Harbour SPA
- Poole Harbour Ramsar

Potential Impacts

4.29 Increased population in North Dorset is likely to result in an increase in recreational uses of coastal sites. The main recreational uses associated with a family day out include walking and water based activities such as kite surfing, canoeing, sailing and jet skiing.

4.30 A previous iteration of the HRA indicated that adverse effects on Poole Harbour could not be ruled out. The main concern related to water sports and the impact of these activities on waterfowl that could be attributed to an increase in population in North Dorset. Since this impact was suggested, research has been undertaken into disturbance impacts in the Harbour. In addition, Poole Borough Council has started collecting money for mitigation of the impact.

4.31 The Dorset Heaths & Studland Dunes SAC is vulnerable to trampling damage resulting from the high visitor numbers. In addition, damage results from regular motorised litter patrols.

Implications for the Local Plan

4.32 In relation to Poole Harbour, recreational activities are likely to be for specialist activities such as watersports and bird watching. As such, due to the distance to the Harbour, it is unlikely to be regularly used by a large number of residents. Any increase in this use resulting from development in North Dorset is therefore likely to be small. This position has been confirmed through correspondence with Natural England[8].

[7] Email correspondence with Charles Routh of Natural England dated 17th April 2013

[8] Email correspondence with Charles Routh of Natural England dated 17th April 2013

4.33 Additional evidence drawn from The Solent have led Natural England to advise local authorities that development within 5.6km of the SPA boundary is likely to have a significant impact. The closest part of North Dorset to Poole Harbour is more than 6.5km away and hence Natural England's view is that there is not likely to be a significant effect resulting from development in North Dorset. The HRA therefore recommends no change to the Pre-submission version of the Local Plan.

4.34 In relation to the Studland Dunes, travel time to the area is significant and therefore the Dunes are most likely to attract only occasional visitors from North Dorset and within the context of the total number of visitors, it is considered that the impact of these will be insignificant. There is therefore no need to change the Pre-submission version of the Local Plan.

4.35 Other coastal sites are also unlikely to be subject to significant recreational pressure as a result of visitors from North Dorset due to their distance from the district.

Impacts of recreation on the New Forest

4.36 Specifically relating to:

- The New Forest SAC
- New Forest SPA
- New Forest Ramsar

Potential Impacts

4.37 Adverse effects on the integrity of the New Forest result from recreational pressure. It is estimated that there are over 13 million visitor days spent in the park per year made up of holiday makers staying within the park (12%), day trips from residents from within the park (14%) and day trips from residents outside the park (64%). The majority of these visitors to the park are walkers with the peak in visitor numbers occurring in the summer months, the most ecologically vulnerable period of the year.

Implications for the Local Plan

4.38 North Dorset, at its closest is approximately 19km from the New Forest although the actual distance travelled is much further. The HRA concluded that due to this distance, and the amount of high quality green space available in and around the District, it is unlikely that new residential developments in North Dorset will have a significant impact on the New Forest.

4.39 However, the pressure on the New Forest from other areas closer to it may result in increased recreational pressure with the cumulative impact being significant. This may necessitate the development of mitigation measures to reduce recreational pressure. As parts of North Dorset are within a reasonable distance of

the National Park, it may be that the District will need to be involved. Under the Duty to cooperate, it is proposed that the Council keep a "watching brief" on any activity that may take place in the future to mitigate the impact of development.

Impacts relating to water quality and water resources

4.40 Specifically relating to:

- The River Avon SAC
- Avon Valley SPA
- Avon Valley Ramsar
- Rooksmoor SAC
- Poole Harbour SPA
- Poole Harbour Ramsar

Potential Impacts

4.41 The water supply situation currently has some potential issues in relation to the internationally designated sites however Wessex Water (as the water supplier for North Dorset) and the Environment Agency are aware of these issues and measures are being considered for the future management of the resource.

4.42 There is the potential for water abstraction to affect European sites however the pathway for this is not fully understood. Potential risks include impacts on the River Avon Catchment and the Rooksmoor SAC resulting from abstraction in North Dorset.

4.43 In relation to water quality, the majority of the waste water treatment works serving North Dorset discharge directly into the Dorset Stour which in turn discharges into Christchurch Harbour. This is unlikely to have an impact on internationally designated sites. However there is the potential that parts of Shaftesbury are or could be in future served by waste water treatment works which discharge into the River Avon Catchment. In addition, a relatively small area around Milton Abbas and Milborne St Andrew in the south of the district, discharge into the River Piddle Catchment which in turn discharge into Poole Harbour.

4.44 With the aim of restoring Poole Harbour to a more favourable status, a "Strategy for Managing Nitrogen in the Poole Harbour Catchment" has been produced by the Environment Agency and Natural England[9]. The background to this report identifies both diffuse sources (such as those derived from agricultural practices) and point sources (such as outflows from Sewage Treatment Works) both of which have an impact on Nitrogen levels in the Harbour. The Strategy seeks to reduce diffuse

[9] Strategy for Managing Nitrogen in the Poole Harbour catchment to 2035, Environment Agency and Natural England, June 2013

pollution from agricultural practices and to secure increase in nitrogen pollution resulting from future development.

Implications for the Local Plan

4.45 With the exception of the impacts on Poole Harbour, the impacts identified above are considered to be unlikely to have a significant impact on European designated sites. To back up this conclusion, it was recommended that discussions are held with the Environment Agency and Wessex Water to assess the implications of water abstraction and discharge on each designated site.

4.46 Discussions with the Environment Agency in relation to water resources indicated that licences were granted permitting water abstraction up to a maximum level. The granting of such licences takes on board the available water resource and the impact on the water environment including internationally designated sites. If further abstraction is needed above the maximum permitted by the current licence, a new licence would be required.

4.47 A meeting was held with Wessex Water on 24th April 2014 and followed up with further correspondence. This correspondence indicated that the Wessex Water Grid Project currently being installed would build resilience into the network enabling reduced abstraction in the River Avon catchment by 25Ml/day. Wessex Water stated that "Over the next 25 years, due to growth in North Dorset or anywhere else, we are not expecting an increase in licences in the Hampshire Avon Catchment." It can therefore be concluded that there will be no further abstraction from the River Avon catchment over the plan period and therefore no significant impact on the Avon SAC/SPA/Ramsar.

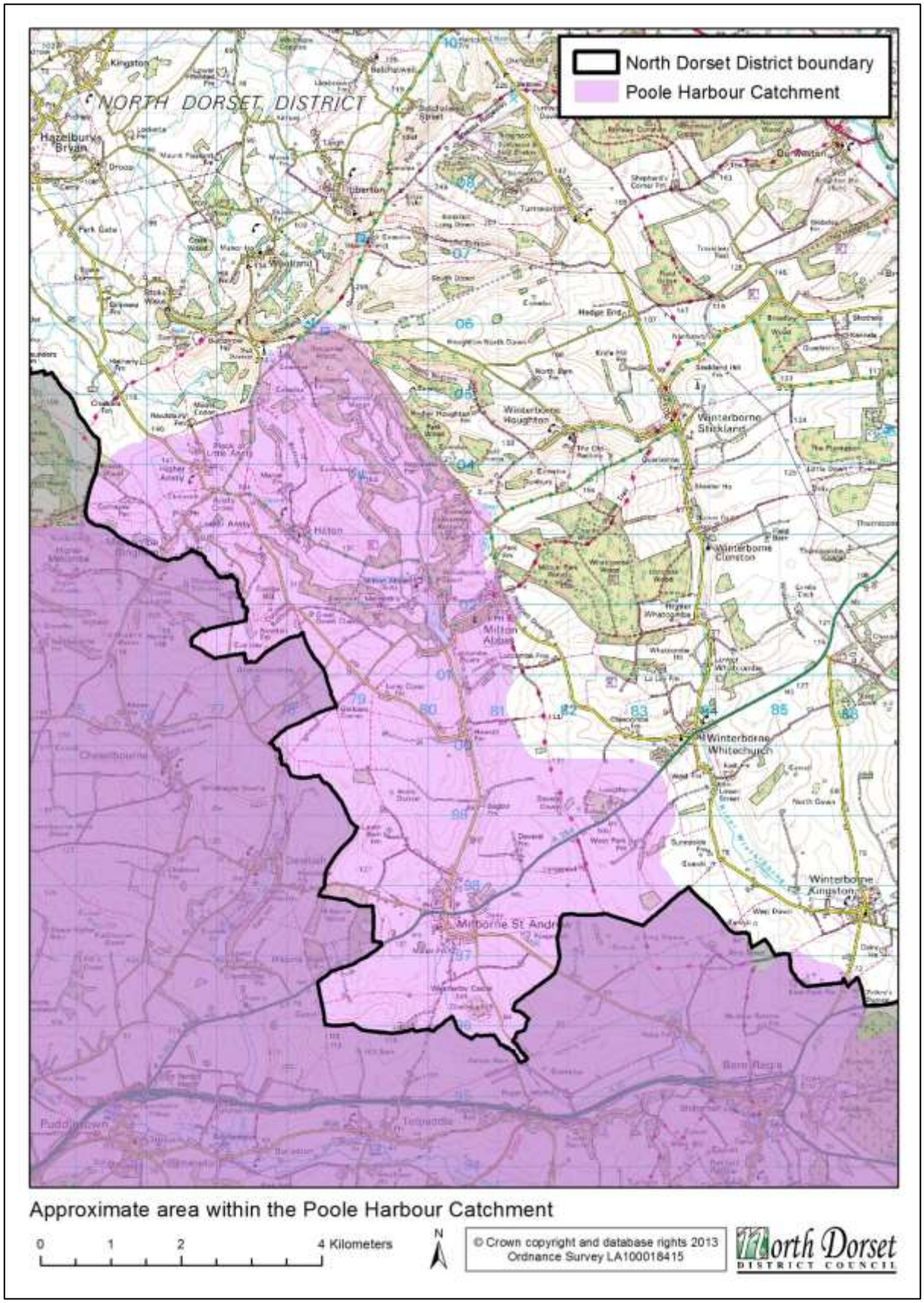
4.48 Similarly, none of the Sewage Treatment Works that take waste water from North Dorset feed into the Avon catchment with the Sewage Treatment Works that serve Shaftesbury discharging into the Stirchell Brook and on into The Stour. It can therefore be concluded that new development proposed in the District will have little or no impact on the Avon catchment relating to water quality or water resource issues.

4.49 Wessex Water indicated that they "have no active sources/abstractions" in the River Lydden catchment. It can therefore be assumed that there will be no significant impact on the Rooksmoor SAC related to water resource issues.

4.50 The Strategy for Managing Nitrogen in the Poole Harbour Catchment places a requirement on all residential developments within the Poole Harbour catchment to be nitrogen neutral. Parts of the south of North Dorset District, as shown in Figure 4.2 are within the Poole Harbour catchment and therefore residential development within this area are required to be nitrogen neutral in accordance with the Strategy as set out in Policy 4 of the Local Plan.

4.51 Although the main source of nitrogen within the Harbour catchment is agriculture, point sources such as sewage treatment works also account for a significant amount. Improvements to sewage treatment works may be required to allow further connections alternatively a compensatory reduction in diffuse pollution may be acceptable.

Figure 4.2: The Poole Harbour Catchment



4.52 Wessex Water is one of the partners to the Poole Harbour Catchment Initiative[10]. This initiative aims to "deliver an effective Catchment Plan that meets the needs of local people, businesses and wildlife as well as European Legislation" The initiative is also aligning itself with the objectives of the Strategy for Managing Nitrogen in Poole Harbour to 2035.

4.53 As part of the initiative, Wessex Water are improving sewage treatment works throughout the catchment with the aim of reducing nutrients with a view to maintaining the status quo allowing new development to come forward. Further measures to improve the nutrient level in the catchment are included in Wessex Water's current business plan.

4.54 The Strategy for Managing Nitrogen in Poole Harbour includes an action plan to prevent a further deterioration of the status of the Harbour. The aim is that future urban development within the Poole Harbour catchment should result in no net increase in overall nitrogen load. The approach includes:

- identifying whether and how much mitigation may be achieved by other aspects of strategic planning such as green infrastructure and alternative natural green space provision
- identifying the likely shortfall in nitrogen mitigation
- identify if larger developments could provide bespoke or strategic mitigation measures

4.55 Work is still on-going on this area however, early indications suggest that the amount of additional green space being provided to mitigate the impact of residential development on the Dorset Heaths would offset a large proportion of the impact on Poole Harbour resulting from residential developments. Any residual will require mitigation to enable development to take place in line with The Strategy. As further work on the implications of The Strategy takes place, North Dorset will secure measures to help achieve the aims of the Strategy.

4.56 The four Local Authorities within the Poole Harbour catchment are currently working in partnership to produce a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to put in place measures to mitigate the impact of population growth within the area. Work is ongoing on this and North Dorset is fully engaged with the process. The SPD will be subject to consultation in early 2015 and subsequently adopted. Once adopted the Supplementary Planning Document will put in place a mechanism for securing nitrogen neutral developments within the catchment. This can either be through direct mitigation or indirect mitigation.

[10] The Poole Harbour Catchment Initiative
http://www.wessexwater.co.uk/environment/threecol.aspx?id=7525&linkidentifier=id&itemid=7525

4.57 Direct mitigation is achieved through the upgrade of sewerage treatment works to remove a greater percentage of nitrogen. As previously mentioned, Wessex Water have a programme of upgrades within their current business plan.

4.58 Indirect mitigation offsets the nitrogen impact of a development by reducing the amount of nitrogen spread onto land through agricultural practices. This can be achieved by transferring land from nitrogen intensive agricultural uses (such as arable uses) to less nitrogen intensive uses (such as woodland and rough grazing). This shift needs to be secured in perpetuity and the Supplementary Planning Document proposes to seek a contribution from developments to secure the mitigation. Contributions to fund mitigation are proposed to be in the order of £850 per new dwelling.

Impacts on air quality as a result of growth

4.59 Specifically relating to:

- Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC
- Rooksmoor SAC

Potential Impacts

4.60 The available data for air pollution at both the Rooksmoor SAC and at Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC indicates that air pollution could potentially be a problem with both sites being vulnerable to increased traffic resulting from growth.

Implications for the Local Plan

4.61 To mitigate the impact of air pollution arising from growth, it was recommended that measures should be put in place to minimise future increases in air pollution resulting from increases in traffic within 200m of the site boundaries. In addition it was suggested that the Local Plan should incorporate measures to reduce traffic throughout the plan. The suggested measures included:

- Plan new development such that additional traffic is not generated between home and workplace by providing employment opportunities close to new and existing housing
- Set high standards for public open space provision within new developments so that new and existing residents can find opportunities for outdoor recreation activities without travelling by car
- Encourage the provision of adequate public transport links, particularly on those roads crossing or adjacent to the SACs (the SAC roads) and adopt measures to encourage greater use of public transport
- Discuss with the County Council as Transport Authority whether traffic control measures on the SAC roads, together with measures to restrict or discourage heavy vehicles would be possible.

4.62 Revision of the Local Plan has resulted in the inclusion of several measures to reduce traffic including revision of the spatial distribution of growth and through the inclusion of sustainable transport measures (such as public transport and cycle routes such as the North Dorset Trailway).

4.63 In addition to the revision of Local Plan policies, discussions with Natural England have resulted in some additional background work being undertaken on the Rooksmoor SAC to predict the likely change in pollution levels resulting from the growth proposed in the Local Plan. This information is included in Appendix A of this report. It concluded that *"The levels of growth proposed in the towns of Sturminster Newton and Stalbridge is unlikely to have a significant impact on the Rooksmoor SAC in particular the Lydlinch Common part of the site. Bearing in mind the assumptions made, the worst case scenario, the increase in Nitrogen and Sulphur deposition is likely to remain below 1%"*.

4.64 Natural England agreed with this conclusion and hence there is no need to amend the Local Plan to remove likely significant effects.

4.65 One outstanding recommendation for both Fontmell and Melbury Downs and Rooksmoor SACs is to monitor the impact of traffic growth on the SAC roads through traffic surveys. The SAC roads are those roads within 200m of the boundary of the SAC.

4.66 Dorset County Council as the Highways Authority, have indicated that there are fixed traffic survey points near to the two sites. Further traffic monitoring information is collected on an ad-hoc basis and this will enable more detailed information to be collected when the data becomes available. This information will be used as an estimate the impact of changes in air pollution at the sites.

4.67 Should air quality become an issue on either of the SAC roads, mitigation measures will need to be put in place. Such measures could include the signposting of alternative routes or the diversion of heavy good vehicles off of these SAC roads. Figure 4.3 shows the SAC roads at Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC and Figure 4.4 shows the SAC roads at Rooksmoor SAC. Figure 4.5 shows the traffic flows on the SAC roads.

Figure 4.3: Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC roads

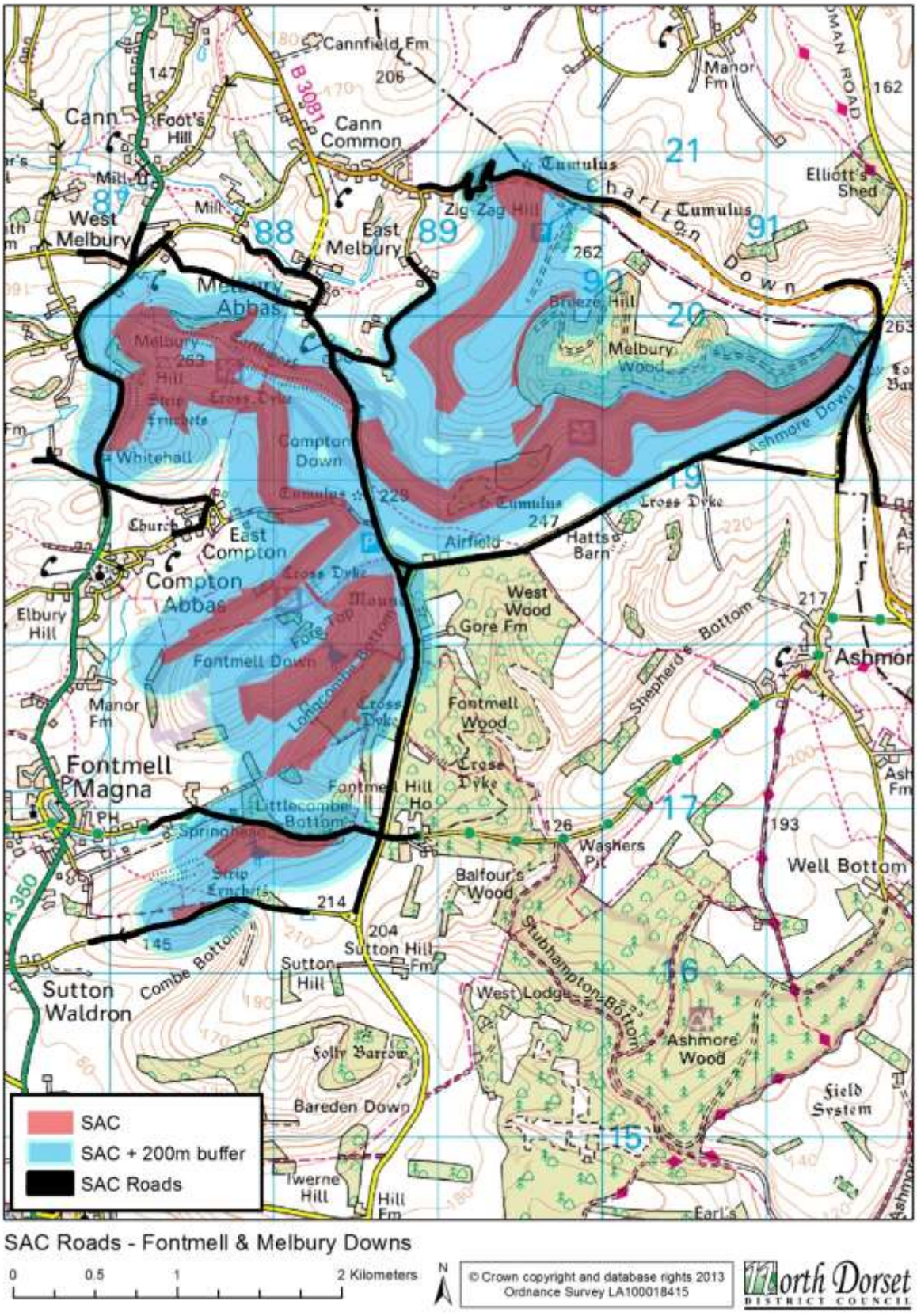


Figure 4.4: Rooksmoor SAC roads

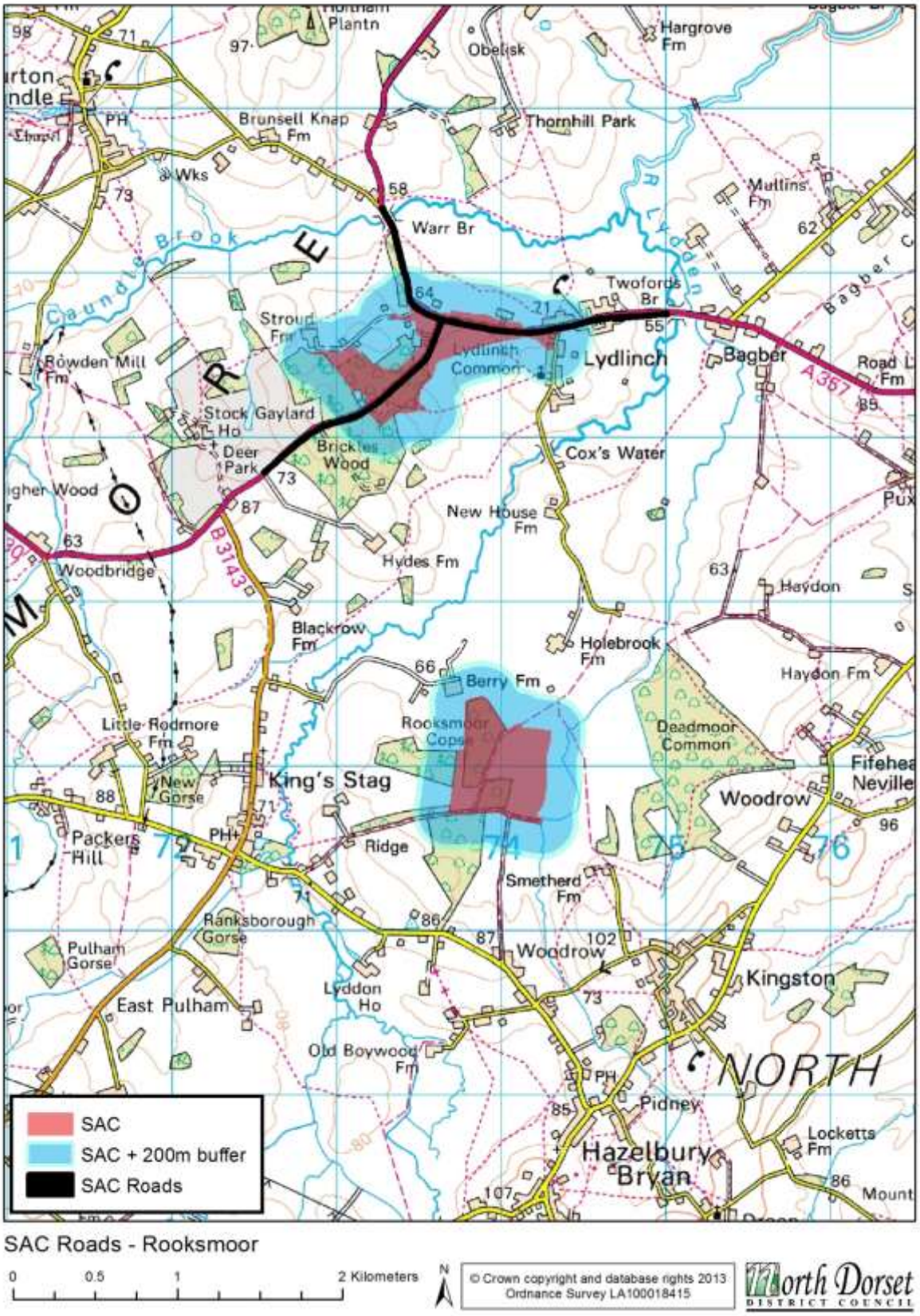


Figure4.5: Traffic Flows on the SAC roads

Monitoring Point	Annual Average Daily Traffic Flow (vehicle count)	
	2008	2013
Rooksmoor SAC – A357 North of Warr Bridge (DDC monitoring point ID 326)	3600	3400
Rooksmoor SAC – A357 West of Shillingstone (DCC monitoring point ID 333)	6600	6600
Rooksmoor SAC – A3030 North Wootton	4800	4900
Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC – Average of B3081 South of Shaftesbury & C13 Stourpaine (DCC monitoring point IDs 340 & 342)	6800	7000
Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC – A350 Iwerne Minster (DCC monitoring point ID 348)	3000	2700

Implications of traffic and roads at Rooksmoor SAC

4.68 Specifically relating to:

- the long-term management of the Rooksmoor SAC site

Potential Impacts

4.69 The Lydlinch Common part of the Rooksmoor SAC requires suitable grazing practices, controlling scrub encroachment and maintaining the site in a favourable condition.

4.70 Due to the busy roads through the site, it has been difficult to establish grazing on the site however in recent years, suitable fencing has been installed and grazing re-established. The fencing has been consented until 2025, after which a fresh application will be required if the fencing is to remain. Natural England have indicated that they are satisfied with the grazing regime on the site. Monitoring of the butterfly populations on the site will help to indicate if the grazing regime is being effective in maintaining the site.

Implications for the Local Plan

4.71 In March 2012, the two SSSI sites that covered the Rooksmoor SAC were extensively extended and joined into one single designation covering a total of 225.02ha. This new SSSI, the Blackmore Vale Commons and Moors SSSI, is split into two areas centred on the two parts of the SAC, one at Lydlinch Common and one at Rooksmoor Copse

4.72 The management of the Lydlinch Common part of the site has been secured until 2025. Over this period there will be a need to undertake monitoring of the status of the site and action undertaken if necessary. Although this is unlikely to have implications for the Local Plan, the Council will need to be aware of the site status and hence will report on report on the condition of the site in its Annual Monitoring Report.

4.73 Post 2025, a new management regime will need to be secured for the Lydlinch Common part of the site and again this will be something the Council needs to be aware of.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The Habitats Regulations Assessment that accompanied the Pre-submission Local Plan made several recommendations which have been built into the policies within the Local Plan.

5.2 The changes made to the Local Plan as set out in this report, are in response to the findings of the HRA. Where possible impacts on the European protected sites have been avoided through the Local Plan strategy. Where there is the potential for residual impacts to occur as a result of the Local Plan implementation, it is the Council's view that these will be effectively mitigated to ensure that there is no adverse effect on the European protected sites within and in close proximity to the District.

5.3 Consultation with Natural England, Neighbouring Local Authorities and other partners (such as Dorset Wildlife Trust) has led to approaches to the mitigation of residual impacts on the internationally designated sites being built into the Local Plan.

5.4 In their response to the Pre-submission Version of the Local Plan, Natural England agreed with all of the recommendations of the HRA in relation to the policies contained within it. The one exception to this appeared to be in relation to water issues where they recommended that evidence of no impact on internationally designated sites resulting from water resource and water quality issues had not been provided.

5.5 Subsequent to this, discussions have taken place with Wessex Water and The Environment Agency, as set out in Section 3 of this report. These discussions have concluded that there will be no significant effect on internationally designated sites due to water resource issues and as a result of the development proposed in the Local Plan.

5.6 In relation to water quality, the potential impact on Poole Harbour SPA/Ramsar resulting from development in the Poole Harbour catchment has been identified. The approach to development within this catchment is that it must be nitrogen neutral in accordance with The Strategy for Managing Nitrogen in Poole Harbour Catchment to 2035. Further work is ongoing amongst local authorities within the catchment in conjunction with the Environment Agency, Natural England and Wessex Water, to develop a coordinated approach to mitigate the impact on the Harbour. A Supplementary Planning Document is being prepared for consultation to put in a regime for managing the impact across the catchment.

5.7 In relation to the River Avon SAC, it can be concluded that there are no impacts resulting from development within North Dorset as no sewage treatment works serving settlements within the district discharge into the tributaries of the SAC.

5.8 For each of the European designated sites, there are a number of policies which help to mitigate the impact of development. Figure 5.1 sets out the main policies for mitigating the various impacts on these sites.

Monitoring arrangements

5.9 One further recommendation of the HRA was that monitoring arrangements were put in place to assess whether the mitigation measures were having the desired effect and whether there were any previously unidentified impacts resulting from the implementation of the Plan.

5.10 The Planning Framework established for the Dorset Heaths also contains a number of monitoring activities which are used to assess the effectiveness of mitigation. The headline results from these monitoring measures and the level of contributions collected will be reported in North Dorset District Council's Annual Monitoring Report.

5.11 The Monitoring of recreational impacts on Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC is difficult to achieve other than through the observations of the rangers that manage the site. Contact has been made with the main landowners who will report to the Council on an annual basis or when an effect is noticed.

5.12 The impact of development on Poole Harbour will be measured through the Supplementary Planning Document being put in place to manage this impact. Monitoring will include the amount of new development within the catchment and the mitigation measures put in place to offset the increase in nitrogen that will result.

5.13 Air pollution resulting from the traffic flows on the roads that travel through Fontmell & Melbury Downs SAC and Rooksmoor SAC, known as the SAC roads, will be monitored using data available from Dorset County Council. Should an increase be noticed in traffic flows, there may be a need for further mitigation to be put in place.

Figure 5.1: Relevant Policies for each Internationally Designated Site and Associated HRA Issue

Site	SAC	SPA	Ramsar	Relevant policies	Recreational pressure	Water resource	Water quality	Air quality	Traffic
Fontmell & Melbury Downs	✓			Policy 4 – Natural Environment Policy 15 – Green Infrastructure Policy 18 – Shaftesbury	✓			✓	
Rooksmoor	✓			Policy 4 – Natural Environment Policy 13 – Grey Infrastructure Policy 15 – Green Infrastructure Policy 19 – Sturminster Newton		✓		✓	✓
Dorset Heaths	✓	✓	✓	Policy 4 – Natural Environment Policy 15 – Green Infrastructure	✓				
Cerne & Sydling Downs	✓			No adverse effects likely	✓				
Salisbury Plain	✓	✓		No adverse effects likely	✓				
Chesil and the Fleet	✓	✓		No adverse effects likely	✓				
Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs	✓			No adverse effects likely	✓				

Site	SAC	SPA	Ramsar	Relevant policies	Recreational pressure	Water resource	Water quality	Air quality	Traffic
Poole Harbour		✓	✓	Policy 4 – Natural Environment	✓		✓		
The New Forest	✓	✓	✓	No adverse effects likely	✓				
The River Avon	✓	✓	✓	Policy 13 – Grey Infrastructure		✓	✓		

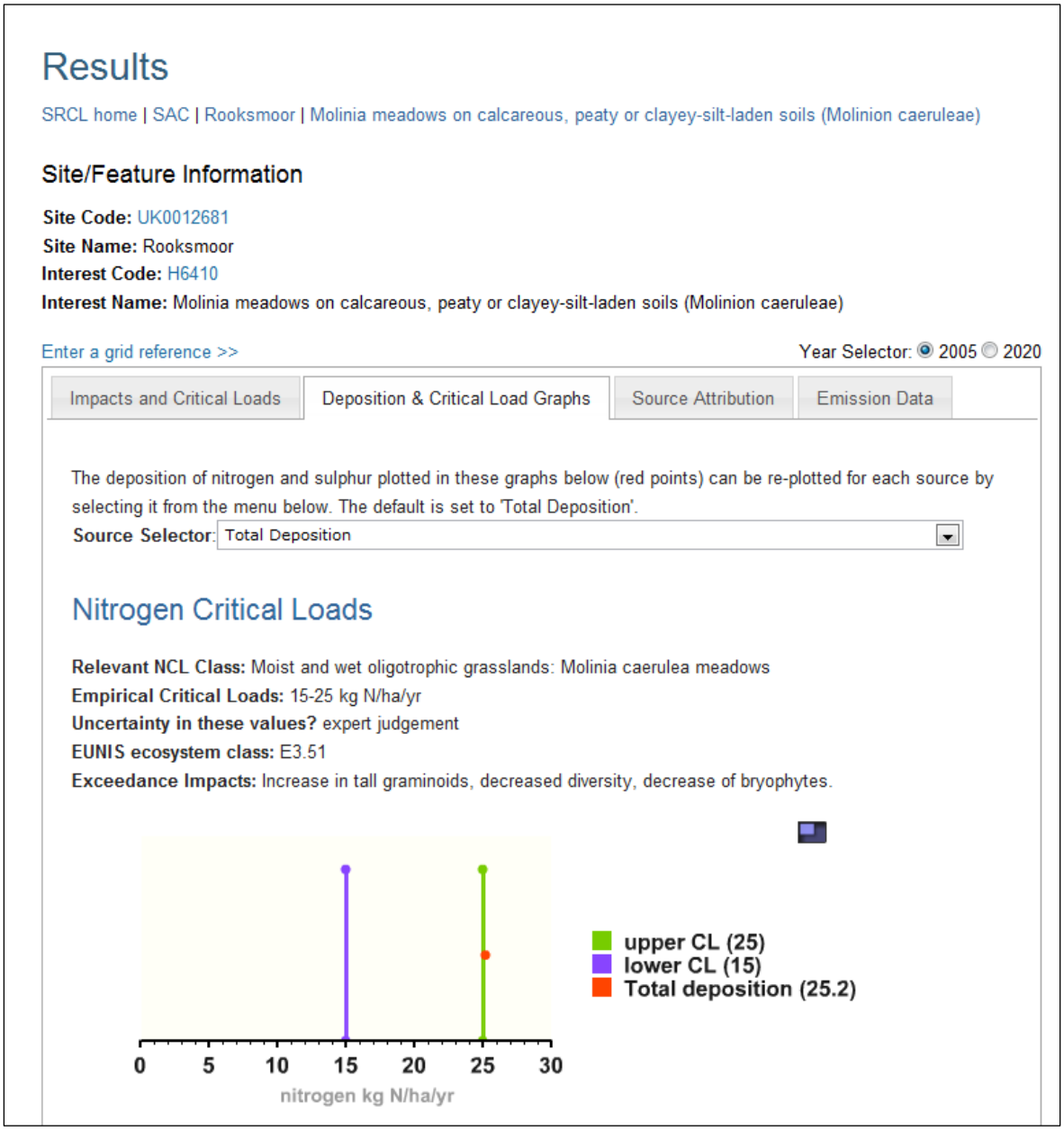
Appendix A: Air Pollution at Rooksmoor SAC

Rooksmoor SAC

A.1 Appendix A considers the potential for impacts on the Rooksmoor SAC due to increase in air pollution arising from growth in the local area.

A.2 Rooksmoor SAC lies to the west of Sturminster Newton. The main area of concern in relation to air pollution is the area known as Lydlinch Common. This area lies on the junction of the A357 with the A3030. On the A357 to the north lies the town of Stalbridge. The remaining settlements within the immediate area are relatively small or not functionally connected to the Lydlinch Common area.

Figure A1: Nitrogen Deposition Critical Load



Nitrogen Deposition

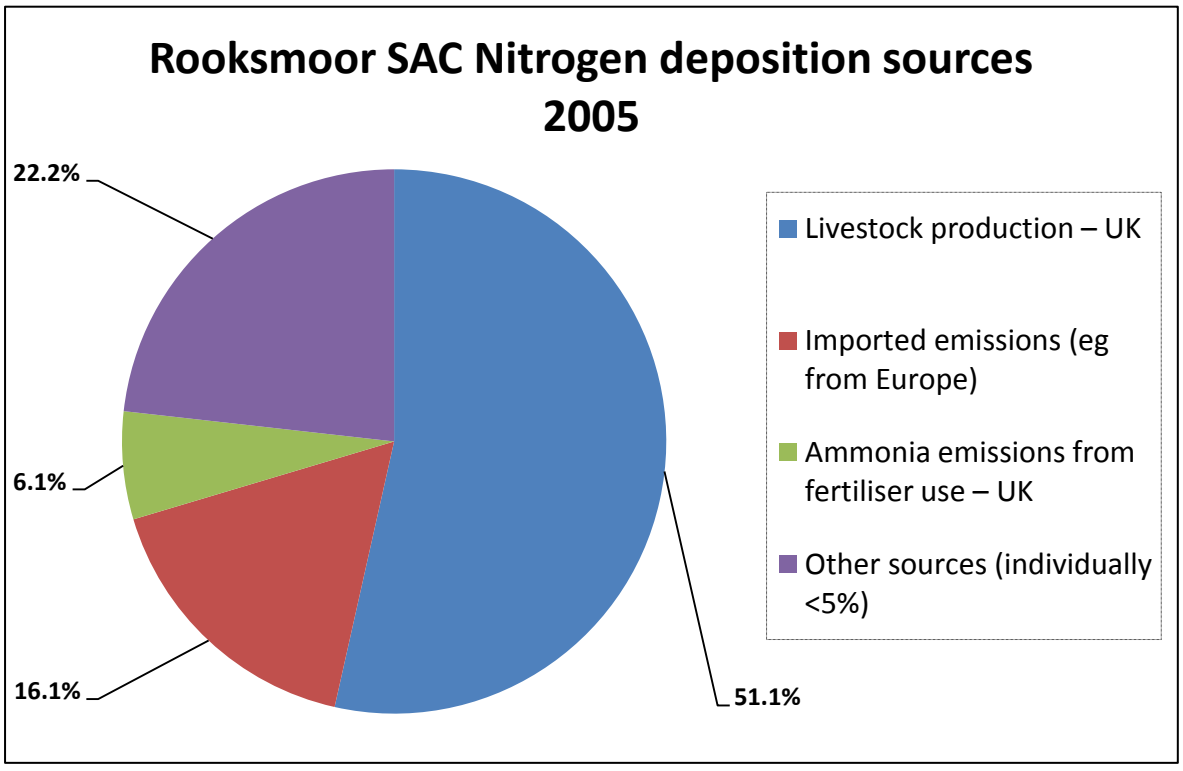
A.3 The lower Critical Load value for nitrogen deposition is 15kg N/ha/year.

A.4 The potential impact relates to eutrophication from deposition of oxides of nitrogen arising from a number of sources. The latest data (2005) indicates that the main source is from "Livestock Production". Within the "Other sources" category emissions from "Road Transport (England)" are responsible for 0.84kg N/ha/year, only 3.33% of the total deposition of 25.2kg N/ha/year [11].

A.5 Total nitrogen deposition is predicted to fall over the period to 2020 resulting in an estimated total deposition of 23.38kg N/ha/year. The contribution to this total from "Road Transport (England)" is 0.252kg N/ha/year which equates to 1.08%.

A.6 Over the period 2005 to 2020, total nitrogen deposition is predicted to fall by 7.2% and nitrogen deposition attributed to "Road Transport (England)" is predicted to fall by 70%.

Figure A2: Nitrogen Deposition Sources



A.7 Growth proposed in the Local Plan for the immediate area consists of approximately 385 dwellings in Sturminster Newton plus the development of North

[11] Source: APIS Site relevant Critical Loads and Source Attribution http://www.apis.ac.uk/srcl

Dorset Business Park. Using the base date of 2005, the percentage growth in dwelling numbers that has actually occurred or is proposed to occur in both Sturminster Newton and Stalbridge is 27.9%. This type of growth is most likely to have an impact on the road transport source of nitrogen deposition.

A.8 Applying this growth factor to the road transport deposition level results in a 0.93% increase in total nitrogen deposition for the 2005 base year. Relating this increase in nitrogen deposition to the Critical Load for the Rooksmoor Site results in a 1.56% increase over the Lower Critical Load value.

A.9 Taking into account the predicted downward trend in nitrogen deposition over the period to 2020, the increase resulting from the proposed growth in the Sturminster Newton and Stalbridge is 0.47% over the Lower Critical Load value.

Figure A3: Predicted change in Nitrogen Deposition

	2005	2020
Total Deposition (kg N/ha/year)	25.2	23.38
Attributed to Road Transport (England) (kg N/ha/year)	0.84	0.252
Proposed/actual levels of residential growth to 2026 (%)	27.9	27.9
Road Transport increase related to proposed growth (kg N/ha/year)	0.2345	0.0703
Increase relative to Total Deposition	0.93%	0.30%
Increase relative to Lower Critical Load	1.56%	0.47%

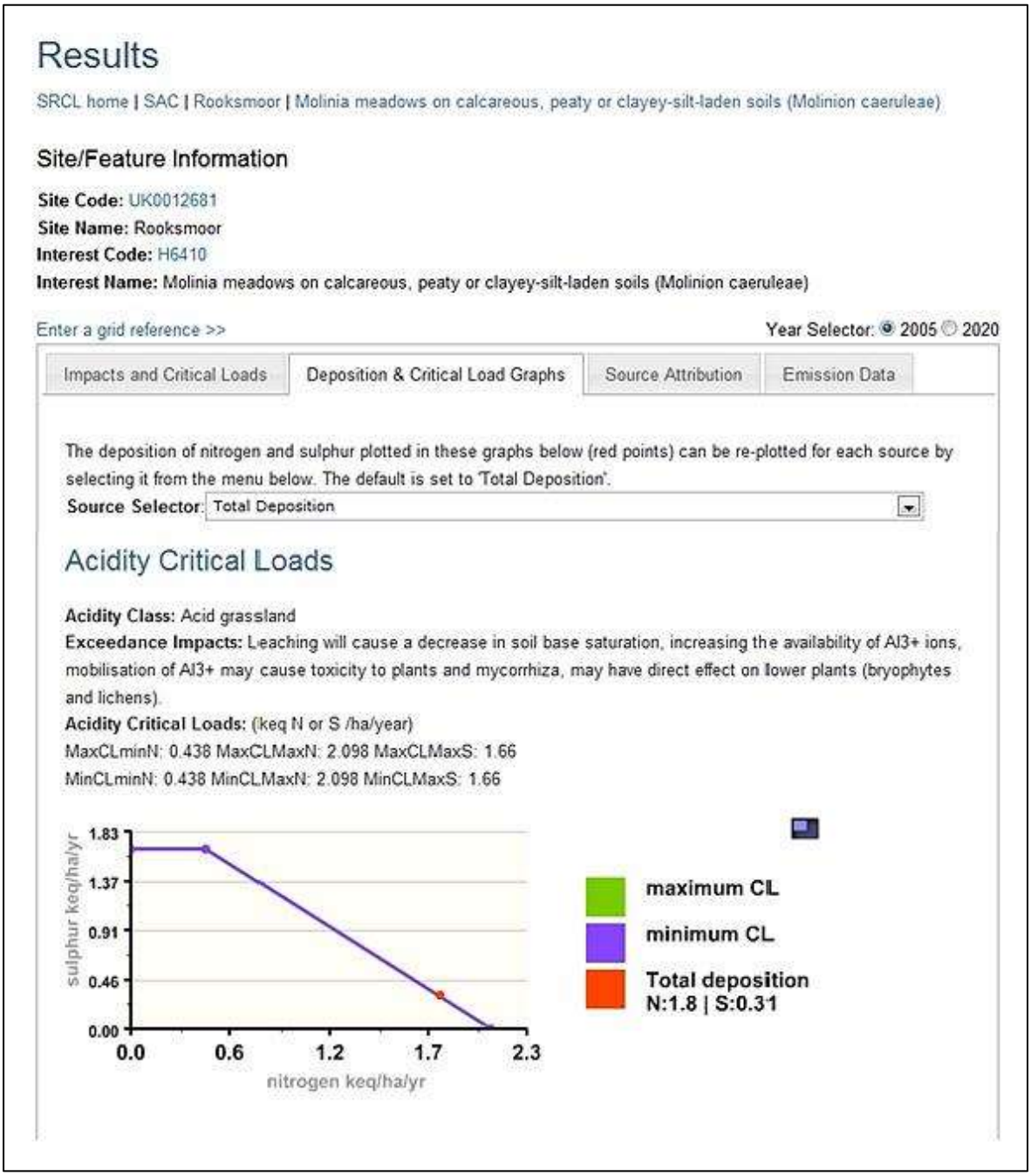
Acidity

A.10 The Minimum Critical Load value for sulphur deposition is 1.66keq/ha/year

A.11 The potential impact relates to increase in acidity of the soil as a result of the deposition of nitrogen and sulphur ions from air pollution. This comes from a number of sources with the latest data (2005) indicating that the main sources are “International Shipping” and “Imported Emissions”. Within the “Other sources” category emissions from “Road Transport (England)” are responsible for only 0.1% of the total deposition of 0.31keq/ha/year.

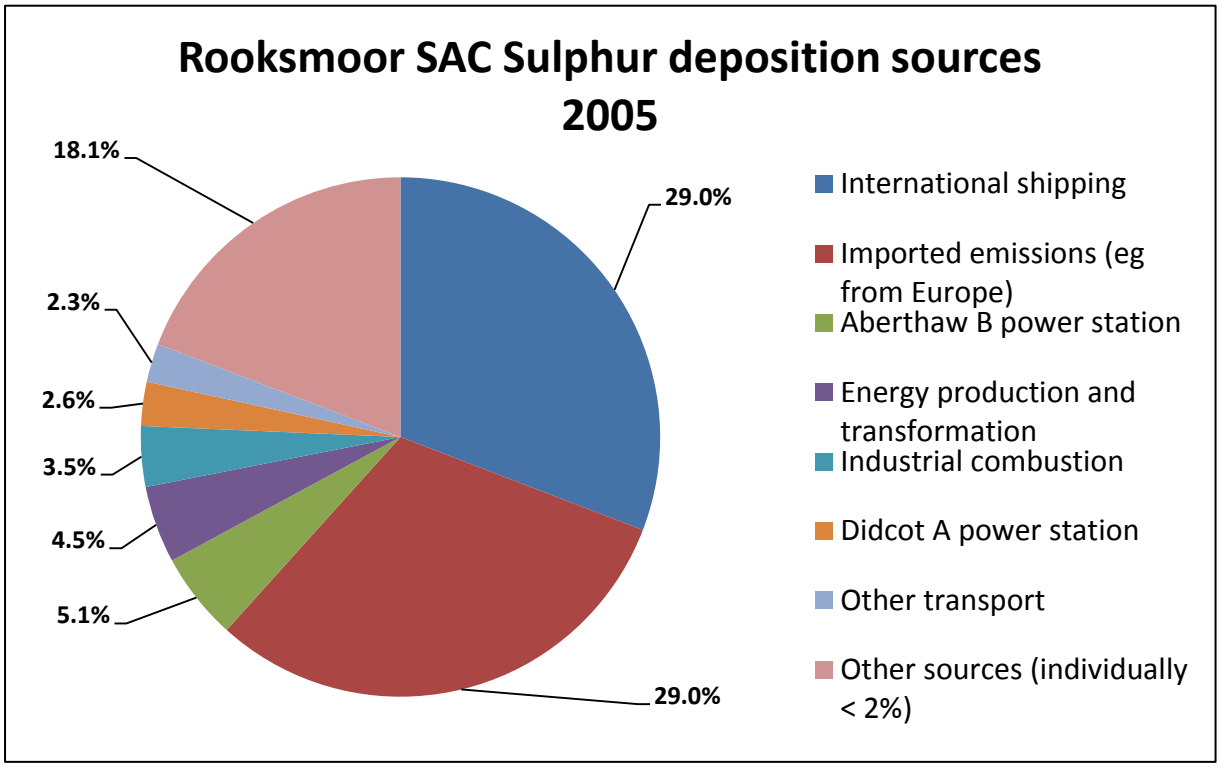
A.12 Total nitrogen and sulphur ion deposition is predicted to fall over the period to 2020 resulting in an estimated total deposition of 0.09keq/ha/year. The contribution to this total from “Road Transport (England)” is 0.0004keq/ha/year which equates to 0.44%.

Figure A4: Acidity Critical Load



A.13 Over the period 2005 to 2020, total sulphur deposition is predicted to fall by 71.0% whilst sulphur deposition attributed to “Road Transport (England)” is however predicted to remain constant.

Figure A5: Sulphur deposition sources



A.14 Applying the same growth factor used above to the road transport deposition level results in a 0.04% increase in total sulphur deposition relative to 2005 levels. Relating this increase in sulphur deposition to the Acidity Critical Load for the Rooksmoor Site results in a 0.01% increase over the Minimum Critical Load value. As there is no predicted downward trend in sulphur deposition from road transport, there is no change resulting from the proposed growth relative to the Minimum Critical Load value.

Figure A6: Predicted change in Sulphur deposition

	2005	2020
Total Deposition (keq/ha/year)	0.31	0.09
Attributed to Road Transport (England) (keq/ha/year)	0.0004	0.0004
Proposed/actual levels of residential growth to 2026 (%)	27.9	27.9
Road Transport increase related to proposed growth (keq/ha/year)	0.00011	0.00011
Increase relative to Total Deposition	0.04%	0.12%
Increase relative to Minimum Critical Load	0.01%	0.01%

Assumptions

A.15 A number of assumptions have been made to assess the impact of air pollutants on the Rooksmoor SAC. The assumptions enable a very rough estimate to be made.

- Assumption 1: It would be inappropriate to attribute long range pollutants sources nor those relating to industrial sites to the proposed growth as they are outside of the scope of the Local Plan.
- Assumption 2: Road Transport in England will be the main pollutant source for the Rooksmoor SAC that will be affected by the growth proposed in the Local Plan. This will result from traffic driving through the Lydlinch Common site.
- Assumption 3: The main centres that are likely to have an impact on the levels of traffic travelling through the Lydlinch Common site that are within the scope of the Local Plan are Sturminster Newton and Stalbridge.
- Assumption 4: Residential growth (increase in the number of dwellings within the area) is used as a proxy measure of total growth hence increases in employment uses have not been factored into the estimates.
- Assumption 5: The estimates made above assume that all of the pollution arising from Road Transport (England) is attributable to the two towns of Sturminster Newton and Stalbridge. It also assumes that the proportion of trips arising from the proposed growth travelling along the A357/A3030 corridor will remain the same but with the total number of trips increasing. This results in an overly cautious approach as many vehicle trips along the A357 and A3030 will arise outside of these towns and will be affected by growth outside of the immediate area.. This result of this is that the levels of pollution from traffic growth is greater than it is actually likely to be. Only detailed surveys of traffic along the routes will enable a more refined assessment to be made.
- Assumption 6: The levels of nitrogen and sulphur pollutants will decrease by 2020 in line with that predicted.

Conclusion

A.16 The levels of growth proposed in the towns of Sturminster Newton and Stalbridge is unlikely to have a significant impact on the Rooksmoor SAC in particular the Lydlinch Common part of the site. Bearing in mind the assumptions made, the worst case scenario, the increase in Nitrogen and Sulphur deposition is likely to remain below 1%.

Figure A7: Rooksmoor SAC