

NATURE CONSERVATION

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NATURE CONSERVATION

Links to Sustainable Development

- 8.01 Central Government guidance in Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 (PPG1) contains a commitment to sustainable development, stating that *“the sum total of decisions in the planning field as elsewhere, should not deny future generations the best of today’s environment”*.
- 8.02 The Local Plan is an opportunity to identify and protect those aspects of the natural environment which are of most importance to quality of life now and in the future.
- 8.03 In both the natural and built environments there exist some irreplaceable benefits or assets such as the historic buildings, unspoilt ancient woodlands and wildlife habitats in Hastings and St Leonards. These could not possibly be relocated or recreated, and their loss could not be compensated for – therefore it is important that these be identified and protected through planning policies.
- 8.04 Some of the most important and valuable wildlife habitats in Hastings are the Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) at Marline Valley, Combe Haven Valley and the coastal area of the Country Park. These are internationally and nationally important in terms of the habitats and wildlife species they support, and the Local Plan will seek to protect and safeguard this natural heritage.
- 8.05 Protecting such sites of outstanding value is important, but the overall value of the natural environment to future generations would quickly disappear if these sites were retained in isolation. It would be like one generation inheriting the overall housing stock

and passing on only the stately homes to the next generation. Hastings has a rich network of greenspaces and wildlife habitats including ponds, streams, meadows, railway embankments, seashore, gills and woodlands. This stock of natural assets is important in making the Borough an attractive place to live and work, giving character to local areas and providing a valuable recreation and education resource.

8.06 The aim of the new policies in the Plan is to maintain and enhance, as far as possible, this overall network.

A New Approach to Nature Conservation

8.07 In order to achieve a sustainable nature conservation resource, new policies have been introduced in three key areas:-

- The particular protection of statutorily designated sites (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserves) and other sites which are of special importance within the Borough.
- The protection of the rest of the nature conservation resource.
- Enhancement of the environment through development.

The Nature Conservation Strategy

8.08 The Borough Council has prepared a Nature Conservation Strategy which appraises the nature conservation resource of the Borough, and includes detailed policies which the Council will seek to implement in order to effectively protect and manage this resource.

8.09 Relevant land use policies from the Nature Conservation Strategy are included in this Plan.

Key Issues

8.10 The Council is committed to sustainable development and conserving the diversity of wildlife and habitats, and will seek to:-

- (i) Protect all sites of special importance for wildlife and nature conservation in the Borough;
- (ii) Maintain a green network of wildlife habitats, informal nature areas and wildlife corridors;
- (iii) Ensure that new developments cause minimal damage to wildlife and their habitats;
- (iv) Ensure that potential new benefits for biodiversity are recognised and encouraged;
- (v) Protect the remaining areas of woodland;
- (vi) Manage Council-owned land in a manner which is sympathetic to biodiversity;
- (vii) Develop a Local Biodiversity Action Plan setting achievable targets and focusing resources to conserve and enhance local biodiversity;
- (viii) Ensure the local biodiversity resource is understood and fully taken account of in all planning decisions;
- (ix) Ensure that the Borough's wildlife resources are regularly surveyed, kept up to date and able to fully inform the development process.

Planning for Biodiversity

- 8.11 Biodiversity means all the species, communities, habitats and ecosystems in the living natural environment and all public bodies are committed to implementing the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) to support these systems.
- 8.12 Within Sussex, a local BAP is being developed to which local authorities are significant contributors and the Borough Council is committed to the production of a local Biodiversity Action Plan for the Borough. This will translate the UK strategy into an achievable plan to conserve and enhance biodiversity locally.
- 8.13 It is envisaged that a target-led plan will allow the Council to regularly monitor, assess and re-evaluate priorities in the light of a more thorough understanding of the local natural environment. It is also recognised that a better understanding of the existing biological resource of the Borough and the way development may affect biodiversity will lead to better informed planning decisions. The development of a local Biodiversity Action Plan will therefore be based on a comprehensive and up to date audit of all ecosystems within the Borough, including species of national and international importance.

Prime Biodiversity Areas

- 8.14 Prime biodiversity areas (PBAs) are defined by the UK Steering Group for Biodiversity as “areas where particular concentrations of high priority habitat occur” – which in Hastings are located to the west of the town in the Marline and Combe Haven Valleys.
- 8.15 Although not a formal designation, PBAs are a valuable tool to help focus and target resources on the most important range of habitats in the Borough, where the greatest benefits to biodiversity could readily be achieved and the dangers of habitat fragmentation avoided.

Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation

8.16 Hastings Cliffs has been designated a candidate Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the European Union (EU) Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (the 'Habitats Directive'). This designation recognises that the site has international importance as an example of "vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic coast". A particularly important feature are the steep sided gill streams where the stable, moist micro-climate favours the growth of some of the rarest ferns and bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) found in Britain and which represent a relic flora from the Atlantic period 5,000 years ago.

8.17 In accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 9 'Nature Conservation', development proposals likely to have significant effects on this internationally important habitat will be subject to the most rigorous examination. Development or land use change will not be permitted unless it is necessary for imperative reasons of human health or public safety or for benefits of primary importance for the environment.

POLICY NC1

Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation

The Hastings Cliffs candidate Special Area of Conservation (SAC) will be safeguarded and protected. Proposals for development not connected with or necessary to the management of the SAC and which are likely to have significant effects on the site (either individually or in combination with other plans or projects) will be subject to the most rigorous examination. Where such developments would affect the integrity of the site they will not be permitted unless:-

- (a) There is no alternative solution; and
- (b) There are imperative reasons of over-riding public interest for the development or land use change.

Where development is permitted, the Council may attach planning conditions and/or may seek to enter into legal agreement(s) to ensure the continuing protection and enhancement of the nature conservation interest and to provide appropriate compensatory measures and/or site management.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

8.18 These are areas of national importance for nature conservation and represent irreplaceable natural assets in the Borough. There are three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Borough:-

- (i) Hastings Cliffs to Pett Beach SSSI (300 hectares)

This represents the largest SSSI in the Borough. The SSSI mainly comprises the area covered by the Hastings Cliffs SAC,

but also includes the East Hill Cliffs above Rock-a Nore and the upper part of Ecclesbourne Glen. The eastern part extends outside the Borough into neighbouring Rother District. The SSSI includes a unique collection of ecological habitats and includes spectacular geological exposures along the cliff line east of Rock-a-Nore. The SSSI covers a large part of the Country Park.

(ii) Combe Haven SSSI (156 hectares)

Part of the Combe Haven SSSI is located within the south-western outskirts of the Borough. It comprises extensive areas of wet alluvial meadows and reedbeds, particularly important for wetland wildlife, and remains one of the largest unimproved tracts of this habitat type in the country.

(iii) Marline Valley Woods SSSI (55 hectares)

An important area of ancient woodland and unimproved grassland in the north west of the Borough. The scientific interest of this site falls into 3 main categories:-

- (i) The flora associated with the stream system is one of the “Atlantic” type, typical of Wealden gills and is particularly rich;
- (ii) The pedunculate oak-hornbeam woodland type that dominates the woods;
- (iii) The species rich unimproved grassland, a nationally declining habitat.

POLICY NC2

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) will be safeguarded and protected. Proposals for development within SSSIs, or likely to have an adverse effect on them directly or indirectly, will be subject to special scrutiny and will not be permitted unless:-

- (a) The need for development outweighs the national importance of the site for nature conservation and/or geological interest;**

- (b) It is not possible to meet the need for the development on an alternative site; and
- (c) Any harm to the nature conservation and/or geological interest of the site is kept to a minimum.

Where development is permitted, the Council may attach planning conditions and/or may seek to enter into legal agreement(s) to ensure the continuing protection and enhancement of the nature conservation and/or geological interest and to provide appropriate compensatory measures and/or site management

Local Nature Reserves

8.19 There are currently 4 designated Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) in Hastings Borough. Local Nature Reserves are important in that they protect wildlife habitats and the natural heritage, but they also have a broader community role:-

- To forge partnerships between the local authority, local nature conservation organisations and local people.
- To provide an ideal environment for children to learn about nature.
- To increase people's awareness and enjoyment of wild plants and animals.

(i) Marline Valley LNR (43 hectares)

This covers, to a large extent, the same areas as part of the Marline Valley SSSI to the east of the Marline stream. The reserve is owned by the Borough Council. Sussex Wildlife Trust are responsible for management work, which has included re-introduction of coppicing in the woodland areas, and annual mowing of the meadows.

(ii) Filsham Reedbeds LNR (18 hectares)

The largest and most important reedbed in East Sussex. The reserve is owned by the Borough Council. Sussex Wildlife Trust are responsible for management work, which includes reed cutting, dredging and control of water levels in the reedbed area.

(iii) St Helens Wood LNR (38.8 hectares)

This is the only sizeable tract of natural countryside remaining within the town. The Reserve is owned by St Helens Park Preservation Society, and managed by the Society in consultation with the Borough Council and Hastings Urban Wildlife Group. The woodlands, meadows and stream valleys are an important resource in the surrounding urban area.

(iv) Old Roar Gill (8.6 hectares)

Old Roar Gill Local Nature Reserve is a deeply cut, narrow valley running along the upper reaches of Alexandra Park. It is wholly owned by Hastings Borough Council and forms one of a series of gill stream habitats around the Borough. Uniquely the magnificent gill is situated in the very midst of the urban environment.

Gills in South East England are very precious habitats. They have often had continuous tree-cover preserving a damp, shady microclimate for hundreds or thousands of years. They also have some of the best exposures of inland sandrock anywhere in the world. These water-retentive sandstone outcrops are essential for a remarkable range of rare ferns,

mosses and liverworts and the insects and other creatures that live among them.

Old Roar Gill has a rich diversity of woodland flowering plants, especially in Spring : bluebells, red campions, yellow archangel, lady's smock, primroses, violets and scarcer species such as toothwort.

8.20 These areas are a unique and irreplaceable natural resource and warrant the highest level of protection.

POLICY NC3

Local Nature Reserves

Areas designated or proposed as Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) will be safeguarded and protected. Proposals for development within Local Nature Reserves, or likely to have an adverse effect on them directly or indirectly, will not be permitted unless:-

- (a) the need for development outweighs the importance of the site for nature conservation; and**
- (b) any harm to the nature conservation interest of the site is kept to a minimum.**

Where development is permitted, the Council may attach planning conditions and/or may seek to enter into legal agreement(s) to ensure the continuing protection and enhancement of the nature conservation interest and to provide compensatory measures and/or site management.

8.21 As part of the proposals for housing development at Hoads Wood, the Borough Council has agreed the transfer of an area of ancient woodland to form an extension to the Marline Valley Local Nature Reserve. In the long-term, the Borough Council seeks to secure the extension of the Marline Valley Local Nature Reserve to land west of the Marline Stream. Development proposals affecting these areas and any other areas proposed as extensions to existing LNRs will be subject to Policy NC3.

POLICY NC4

Extension to the Marline Valley LNR

Land at Marline Valley and Hoads Wood is allocated as an extension to the existing Local Nature Reserve.

8.22 The Borough Council is committed to creating additional Local Nature Reserves as a means of protecting and managing important sites of nature conservation value for the benefit of the community. In addition to Old Roar Gill, which was formally declared an LNR in 2002, the Council is currently advancing plans for LNRs on 5 further sites – Church Wood & Robsack Wood, Summerfields Wood, Hastings Country Park/Fairlight Place Farm, Ponds Wood, and South Saxons Wetlands. The boundaries of these sites are shown on the Proposals Map. Development proposals affecting these LNR allocations will be subject to Policy NC3.

8.23 Further LNRs may be created during the Plan period as resources allow.

POLICY NC5

Local Nature Reserve Allocations

The following sites are allocated as Local Nature Reserves:–

- (a) Church Wood & Robsack Wood;**
- (b) Summerfields Wood;**
- (c) Hastings Country Park/Fairlight Place Farm;**
- (d) Ponds Wood;**
- (e) South Saxons Wetlands.**

Sites of Nature Conservation Importance

8.24 A Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) is a non-statutory designation applying to a site of Borough-wide importance. The designation seeks to provide recognition of the wildlife value of

these sites to the local community and, where possible, to prevent significant damage arising from development.

8.25 SNCIs may be defined as:-

“Semi-natural habitat which contributes to the overall natural resource and green network of the Borough, through species and/or habitat importance and fulfils an important passive, informal, recreation and/or education role for residents and visitors, therefore contributing to an enhanced quality of the environment and quality of life within the Borough.”

Source: Nature Conservation Strategy 1996

8.26 The Borough Council recognises the importance of an integrated network of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance which contribute to the quality of the environment of Hastings and St Leonards and the quality of life of all its residents.

8.27 A schedule of proposed SNCIs is shown below. These sites are identified on the Local Plan Proposals Map.

No	Site Name	Map ref	Area (in ha)	Habitat Description
1	Old Filsham Golf Course	TQ 783100	9.98	Semi improved meadow and scrub
2	Broomgrove	TQ 827108	10.67	Mature scrub complex
3	Clive Vale	TQ 836105	5.71	Wooded stream valley
4	Augustus Way Pond	TQ 792125	0.21	Open water with marginal vegetation
5	Bulverhythe Shingle Beach and Cliffs	TQ 775084	11.27	Maritime cliffs and shingle beach
6	Castle Hill	TQ 822095	3.55	Rough grassland, scrub and coastal rock outcrop
7	Caves Road Cliffs	TQ 792088	3.02	Colonised cliff
8	Cemetery	TQ 827125	2.51	Semi natural woodland

9	Church Wood	TQ 785113	27.57	Semi natural woodland and meadow complex
10	Lower Cornwallis Allotments	TQ 815102	2.14	Mixed use allotment
11	East Hill	TQ 828097	5.08	Bracken / gorse rocky outcrop
12	Gorringe Stream	TQ 773087	1.05	Reeded stream
13	Helenswood Meadows and Pond	TQ 806129	0.53	Open water and meadow
14	High St. Wall All Saints St. Wall	TQ 825098 TQ 827097	250m	Vegetated walls
15	Hollington Valley	TQ 793125	270m	Semi natural woodland with associated stream and meadows
16	Ledsham Close	TQ 798123	13.93	Managed grass verge
17	Ochiltree Woods	TQ 823116	0.15	Semi natural woodland
18	Old Roar Ghyll / Coronation Wood	TQ 804115	3.38	Ancient semi natural woodland
19	Ponds Wood	TQ 792105	7.87	Semi natural woodland with associated stream and meadows
20	Rock-a-Nore Shingle Beach	TQ 827094	21.80	Shingle beach
21	Wainwright Close	TQ 778114	2.11	Grassland / scrub / pond
22	Wishing Tree	TQ 780105	0.50	Semi improved meadow, open water and semi natural woodland
23	Water Tower	TQ 773084	20.88	Semi improved grassland
24	South Saxons	TQ 785090	0.72	Reedbed and carr

25	Glyne Gap	TQ 767085	3.96	Marshy grassland and reedbed
26	Shornden Meadow	TQ 802105	5.55	Semi improved meadow
27	Holmhurst St Mary	TQ 803127	0.55	Semi natural woodland and meadow complex
28	West St Leonards Railway Embankments	TQ 788090	8.53	Railside marginal habitat
29	Summerfields Woods	TQ 809097	4.11	Semi natural woodland
30	Shornden Woodland	TQ 806105	7.31	Semi natural woodland edge
			0.87	

8.28 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance represent valuable wildlife areas within the built environment. They contribute to the green network of wildlife sites and a quality natural environment in the Borough.

8.29 Most of the SNCIs within Hastings Borough have been identified by the Borough Ecologist utilising the criteria contained within the approved definition of an SNCI within the Nature Conservation Strategy. The list represents a continuing process of assessment and monitoring of the natural resource of the Borough. The list has been adjudged and approved by a panel of ecologists, in order to present a level of consistency and objectivity over site selection, and to ensure these sites have a county-wide significance and consistency.

POLICY NC6

Sites of Nature Conservation Importance

Development proposals within or adjacent to Sites of Nature Conservation Importance will not be permitted unless there is a local need which outweighs any harm to the nature conservation interest. The Council may attach conditions to any planning

permission and/or may seek to enter into agreement(s) to minimise the harm and/or secure the protection, enhancement and management of the nature conservation interest.

- 8.30 This policy recognises that nature is not static. Due to natural processes the types of plant and animal to be found on any site may change over time and all SNCIs will be reviewed as an ongoing process. The nature conservation value of an SNCI may decline, or the value of a site not currently designated as an SNCI may increase; each site will be considered on its own merits in relation to this policy, if and when development is proposed.
- 8.31 A number of SNCIs overlap with or are adjacent to land which is allocated for development in this Plan. In such cases, the Borough Council will require that any development proposal is accompanied by a detailed ecological survey, which will be used as a basis for establishing the balance to be achieved between development and nature conservation interests. The Council will generally apply planning conditions and/or seek legal agreement(s) with the developer to ensure that any harmful effects are mitigated or compensated for.

Species Protection

- 8.32 Some plants and animals are specially protected by law. Although they are not necessarily rare in all parts of the country, they are all under threat in some way – often as a direct result of human activity. For example, Hastings has a large badger population and the Council is concerned to protect setts and foraging grounds where these may be affected by development.
- 8.33 Planning decisions likely to affect protected or other rare species should be fully informed by expert survey and advice. If protected species may be seriously affected by a development, planning permission should be refused because the harm is a material planning consideration and other legislation may be rendered

ineffective to prevent harm to the species if development is allowed to proceed. In other cases, potential harm may be avoided by the use of appropriate planning conditions or agreements.

- 8.34 Therefore, development proposals that may have an adverse effect on protected species and/or their habitats will be determined in the light of the requirements of the appropriate legislation. The Borough Council may consider the use of planning conditions and obligations which seek to:-
- (i) facilitate the survival of individual members of a protected species;
 - (ii) reduce disturbance to a satisfactory minimum;
 - (iii) provide adequate alternative habitats to sustain at least the current level of population.

Protecting the Green Network

- 8.35 The Borough Council recognises that the most appropriate manner in which to regard its nature conservation resource is to view it as a holistic interdependent system of habitats and green spaces, some of which stretch outside the Borough. This resource can be seen as the green network of different habitats and areas of land, water and landscape features which provide conditions suitable for wildlife to flourish.
- 8.36 By continually defining, monitoring and safeguarding a 'green network', the Borough Council seeks not only to protect a strategic natural resource for wildlife, but to protect a quality natural environment with easy access for all residents and visitors to the Borough to enjoy.
- 8.37 It is generally accepted that nature sites have a greater biological viability when they form part of a larger network system. This facilitates the general movement of plant, animal and bird communities and reduces the vulnerability of sites or communities

which may become island-like open spaces, and therefore prone to deterioration or unsympathetic development.

- 8.38 The green network itself includes all the important and recognised wildlife sites. This includes the Hastings Cliffs SAC, SSSIs, LNRs, SNCIs, woodlands, rivers, coastal areas, ponds and informal nature areas and wildlife corridors – and is shown in the Nature Conservation Strategy.
- 8.39 It is inevitable that parts of the green network will be lost to development. Indeed, the Hastings Local Plan identifies and allocates areas for specific development. Whilst these allocations fulfil a statutory obligation, it is recognised that many of these sites may possess or develop an intrinsic nature conservation interest. It is therefore important to integrate this nature conservation interest with potential development plans for these sites and recognise opportunities for strengthening the green network to protect the overall integrity of the natural environment.
- 8.40 Wildlife corridors, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance are shown on the Local Plan Proposals Map.

POLICY NC7

The Green Network

A Green Network is indicated on the Proposals Map. Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would sever or intrude into it, or otherwise cause harm to its nature or purpose.

Designing and Managing Land for Nature Conservation

- 8.41 As the major land owner within the Borough, the Borough Council recognises that it can have a positive effect on the conservation value of land by establishing design and management principles

and practices which are sympathetic to the needs of wildlife and nature conservation. These principles extend throughout the Borough to both designated nature areas (such as the SSSIs and Hastings Country Park) and the more informal areas which provide a passive recreation experience for local communities.

- 8.42 The Borough Council will ensure that its working practices include design principles and management operations which promote and enhance the nature conservation value of its land holdings and will promote the adoption of similar principles by other land managers and designers.
- 8.43 Furthermore, the Borough Council will develop and implement management plans to enhance the nature conservation value of land in its ownership or over which it has influence.
- 8.44 The Borough Council will encourage voluntary and community groups/projects to play an active role in the management of both recognised important wildlife sites and informal local wildlife sites.

Public Access to Areas of Nature Conservation Interest

- 8.45 Borough Council recognises the need for public access to areas of nature conservation interest for enjoyment, amenity, recreation and education. It believes that access to and appropriate use of areas with wildlife interest promotes a caring attitude towards nature and wildlife which is essential in order to protect these areas from vandalism and misuse.
- 8.46 The provision of appropriate public access to areas of nature conservation interest will be supported, especially by means other than the private car. The Borough Council will provide information on wildlife and nature conservation and will promote a greater awareness, understanding and enjoyment of areas of wildlife interest.
- 8.47 This does not apply to all areas of nature conservation interest. In some areas, public access may be deemed inappropriate due to

wildlife or habitat sensitivity; in others it may conflict with the interests of landowners or land users.

8.48 The Council will support the provision of interpretive/information centres in areas of nature conservation interest, subject to:-

(i) there being no significant adverse environmental impact from such developments;

(ii) the availability of funds to construct and manage the centres.

Planning Applications and Nature Conservation

8.49 It is neither desirable nor realistic to seek to prevent development in every single case where it may affect the nature conservation resource.

8.50 Planning Policy Guidance Note 9 'Nature Conservation' states:-

"... local planning authorities should not refuse permission if development can be subject to conditions that will prevent damaging impacts on wildlife habitats or important physical features, or if other material factors are sufficient to override nature conservation considerations."

8.51 As a general principle, the Borough Council will seek to ensure that development does not lead to a net loss of biodiversity and will protect important habitats and species from inappropriate and harmful development. Where losses cannot be avoided, the Council will seek to ensure that they are kept to a minimum and full compensation is provided.

8.52 The Council will also encourage well-planned development which contributes towards a net gain in biodiversity and, where appropriate, will seek opportunities to enhance the local environment from both a nature conservation and amenity perspective. This will apply particularly where development will

affect designated nature conservation sites and the 'green network'.

- 8.53 The following policy will be used to ensure that development proposals take full account of any nature conservation impacts. Where necessary, the Borough Council will apply planning conditions and/or seek to enter into legal agreements to achieve necessary measures. The Council may provide further advice through Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) in due course, if resources allow.

POLICY NC8

General Planning Requirements

Development proposals will be required to minimise damage to wildlife and habitats. Wherever possible, development should:-

- (a) Retain features of biodiversity importance such as woodland, trees, hedgerows, wetland habitats, herb rich grassland, watercourses, geological features and other natural features or habitats and protect them during construction;**
- (b) Avoid fragmenting habitats and isolating species;**
- (c) Where the loss of existing wildlife habitats or geological features is unavoidable, keep the loss to a minimum and provide compensation through the creation of replacement habitats or other appropriate measures;**
- (d) Incorporate, wherever appropriate, creative conservation measures which contribute to a net gain in biodiversity such as the development of new wildlife habitats;**
- (e) Incorporate the greatest possible proportion of appropriate native vegetation in any landscaping or planting scheme, except where special requirements of purpose or location dictate otherwise;**

- (f) Incorporate the maximum possible area of permeable ground surface and take such steps as are necessary to regulate surface water flows from impermeable surfaces in the interests of nature conservation;
- (g) Seek to incorporate wildlife habitats in the design of built structures; and
- (h) Positively address adjacent or proximate nature conservation interests.

These measures will be achieved through the use of planning conditions or Section 106 agreements where appropriate.

8.54 Planning decisions affecting the nature conservation resource of the Borough must be based on accurate and up-to-date information. The following policy aims to ensure that developers are aware of the type of information which should accompany planning applications likely to affect nature conservation interests.

8.55 It is generally beneficial for applicants to consult with the Borough Council prior to the submission of any planning application, so that any potential nature conservation issues requiring further work can be highlighted at an early stage.

8.56 Where the Council requires an ecological assessment to be submitted in support of a planning application, this will be expected to provide sufficient information on all relevant aspects necessary to determine the potential impact of the proposed development on the nature conservation resource of the site and the surrounding area. Such information should fully address any potential impacts of the development both during construction and after the development is completed and occupied. Ecological assessments will be expected to meet the Council's requirements with respect to the following information.

- Details of relevant international, national and local policies relating to the protected habitats and species found on and adjacent to the proposed development site.

- An assessment of the national and local priority biodiversity habitats and species found on and adjacent to the proposed development site, including details of the range and requirements of any protected species. Particular attention should be paid to the survey of European protected species, such as bats and great crested newts, as well as species protected under domestic legislation such as badgers. Surveys should be undertaken at the appropriate time(s) of year by acknowledged ecologists or experts in the relevant area of study.
- Details of how the proposed development will aim to protect existing habitats and species.
- Details of how the proposed development will seek to mitigate against harmful effects on habitats and species.
- Details of how the proposed development will seek to compensate for any harmful effects on habitats and species.
- Details of how the proposed development will seek to retain and enhance natural features both within and, where appropriate, adjacent to the proposed development site.
- Details of any proposals for the long-term monitoring and management of habitats and species, including any proposed agreements to protect and enhance the nature conservation resource both within and adjacent to the proposed development.
- Definition of 'buffer areas' designed to protect adjacent areas of ancient and preserved woodland and other designated or important wildlife habitats.

POLICY NC9

Information to Accompany Planning Applications

When considering planning applications, the Borough Council will require the submission of the information set out below where this is necessary to assess the impact of proposed developments on habitats, wildlife, landscape and the Green Network:-

- (a) An ecological assessment providing sufficient information to meet the Council's requirements and detailing the nature conservation resource of the area affected by the application, the potential impact of the development proposed, and any suggested measures to protect existing habitats or species and/or measures to mitigate and/or compensate for any harmful impacts on them;
- (b) An accurate survey of all existing trees, hedges and shrubs including those affected by the proposed development;
- (c) Proposed changes to ground levels and drainage, existing or proposed services;
- (d) Proposed protection measures for existing vegetation, single or groups of trees, ponds, or any other habitats from the effect of the development or construction operations;
- (e) Landscape schemes and re-instatement proposals giving full details of planting species, species mix, plant specifications and densities;
- (f) Where appropriate, a full maintenance plan for any reinstatement or landscape works;
- (g) Where proposals affect existing or adjacent woodland, the identification and preservation of a suitable and viable woodland edge.

Ancient Woodland

8.57 Ancient woodland is defined as an area which has had a continuous woodland cover since at least AD 1600. As such, the

ecological associations between plants, animals, birds and insects which have adapted over hundreds of years are very fragile and subject to irreversible damage when disturbed. Ancient woodlands are, therefore, recognised as one of the most valuable and important habitat types in Britain today. Ancient woodland comprises an irreplaceable asset of great importance to nature conservation which, once destroyed, can never be recreated. As a result, many of the plants, insects and other organisms which are found in ancient woodlands are virtually confined to this habitat and found in no other woodland habitat.

8.58 English Nature have compiled an Ancient Woodland Inventory of all ancient semi-natural woodlands in Britain. St Helens, Marline, Old Roar, Churchwood, Robsack, Fairlight Glen, Gillsmans, Ponds, Willows, Rectory, Dogkennel, Redgeland, Park and part of Hoads Woods all appear on the national inventory, and are protected under Policy NC10. The existing housing allocations at Hoadswood North and Hollington Park School which partly overlap ancient woodland have been retained, in view of the important contribution they make to meeting the housing provision figures, but agreement has been reached with the developers in each case providing for the retention of part of the land as a local nature reserve. The Borough Council will consult the Forestry Commission on all planning applications affecting ancient woodland.

POLICY NC10

Ancient Woodland

Planning permission will not be granted for development that would adversely affect an area of ancient woodland shown on the Proposals Map. The layout of any development encroaching into, or close to, such woodland must take account of the designation and be designed so as to minimise the impact upon it. The Council may impose conditions on any planning permission and/or seek to enter into legal agreement(s) to secure the protection, enhancement and management of ancient woodland affected, directly or indirectly, by development proposals.

Preserved Woodland

8.59 To prevent damage to existing trees that may overhang, or where root systems extend beneath, a development site, the construction of any new building should maintain an adequate protection zone from the boundary of any preserved woodland area identified on the Proposals Map.

A protection zone of 20 metres would avoid damage to trees by compaction of the ground nearby, pollution, spillage of fuel, scorching, or severance of roots by trenching. It would avoid requests from households for lopping and felling in the interests of safety, light and leaf control. It would reduce harmful alterations to micro-elements and the water table. The provision of large gardens in the dwellings near to the woodland would avoid woodland degradation and dumping by householders.

POLICY NC11

Preserved Woodland

Planning permission will not be granted for development within 20 metres of the boundary of any existing preserved woodland of more than 0.4 ha (1 acre) in area unless it includes adequate protection for the trees. If necessary, conditions will be imposed on the planning permission(s) to ensure that protection.

St Helens Wood

8.60 St Helens Wood is the only sizeable tract of natural countryside remaining within the built-up area. As such it is of outstanding amenity value to the town as a whole and, more particularly, to the surrounding residential area.

- 8.61 The area is of particular significance because of its high forest conditions and lack of fragmentation. This is combined with a high proportion of standard trees, an interesting ground flora and a wooded stream valley.
- 8.62 The St Helens Wood area is intact because of the limited amount of development which has been undertaken on the periphery of and within the area. This could be eroded and the ecological balance disturbed if development is permitted in certain areas.

POLICY NC12

St Helens Wood – Protection

There shall be no further development within St Helens Wood as defined on the Proposals Map. Where residential development is proposed on the periphery, the density and form of development should reflect both the need to retain as many trees as possible on the fringes of the Wood and the preservation of the visual quality of the valley.