

Sussex Wildlife Trust

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The following comments are made on behalf of the Sussex Wildlife Trust in relation to the **Hasting Local Plan – Development Management Plan Revised Proposed Submission Version April 2014**.

We wish to submit comments relating to the following two questions:

Question 1

'Dealing with each asset, how important to the Borough are its historic assets (e.g. Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) and its natural assets (e.g. Ancient Woodlands, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and other open land including public and private open space). Does the Plan accord them sufficient protection, in accordance with the Framework and the Planning Strategy?'

Question 2

'Should there be a separate policy concerning enabling development which could be applied in general rather than to just one particular example?'

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Taking Care of Sussex

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1. The Sussex Wildlife Trust questions the soundness of the Hastings Development Management Plan in relation to the Borough's natural assets. In particular whether the plan is consistent with national policy and sufficiently performs its environmental role of:
2. *'contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy'*, National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 7.
3. In the plan making section of the NPPF, paragraph 152 states that: *'Local Planning Authorities should seek opportunities to achieve each of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and net gains across all three...'*
4. The Sussex Wildlife Trust is concerned that the natural environment and natural assets needed to deliver sustainable housing in Hastings will be compromised from the allocations that are suggested in the local plan. This is because as the plan currently stands there are:
 - 3 allocations adjacent to SSSI (LRA6, LRA9, FB12)
 - 5 allocations in Local Wildlife Sites (LRA1, LRA8, GH3, FB7, FB14)
 - 15 allocations adjacent to Local Wildlife Sites (LRA4, LRA6, LRA7, LRA9, GH3, FB1, FB2, FB5, FB6, FB13, SH1, MBL3, HOV2, HOV6, HOV11)
 - 2 allocations in Ancient Woodland (LRA6, GH1)
 - 10 allocations adjacent to Ancient Woodland (LRA4, LRA6, LRA8, GH1, GH3, GH8, GH9, GH10, FB1, FB12)
 - 2 allocations adjacent to other Priority Habitats (LRA6, LRA9)
 - 5 allocations adjacent to Local Nature Reserves (LRA4, LRA6, LRA9, GH1, FB14)
5. The Sussex Wildlife Trust questions whether the allocations which are adjacent to and on existing sites designated for their biodiversity value sit in line with NPPF section 109,114, 117 and 165.
6. The Hastings Green Infrastructure Strategy 2012 clearly makes reference to the Natural Environment White Paper 2011: The Natural Choice; securing the value of Nature. As a result it recognises the role of planning to protect and improve the natural environment and facilitate coherent and resilient ecological networks that reflect the value of natural systems.
7. The Hasting Planning Strategy also clearly identifies that objective 3(c) involves *'identifying, protecting and improving a strategic Green Infrastructure Network of green spaces, cycle and pedestrian routes, water and other environmental features, recognising the unique character of its functions'*. Policy EN2 further states that *'By properly valuing nature and the benefits that arise from our natural environment and green spaces, we will establish and protect a green network comprising of open space and nature conservation areas, to conserve and enhance priority natural areas, and the connections between them'*.
8. We do not believe that the allocations within the Development Management Plan adhere to these. We have provided a visual demonstration of our concerns about the soundness of the plan Appendix 1 – Map of Hastings Borough's Green Infrastructure Network and Site Allocation Areas. This takes information used in the Hastings Green Infrastructure Network map, which was cited in the evidence base for the development management plan and overlays it with the proposed site allocations. The following are some of the issues highlighted by the map.

9. Allocation LRA8 (Land in Whitworth Road) clearly severs a green corridor which would otherwise link from Beauport Park Local Wildlife Site (LWS), on the outskirts of Hastings, down through Hollington Valley LWS. Rather than encroaching onto this site of high biodiversity value, the Hastings Development Management Plan should be working to link these sites as per paragraph 117 of the NPPF. This corridor could be further enhanced through green infrastructure provision, by linking Hollington Valley LWS with Ponds Wood LWS and then South Saxons LWS, which is already linked in the Hastings Green Infrastructure Strategy. Such an allocation shows little regard for the environmental role of Local Plans as set down in the NPPF.
10. Additionally, the plan promotes the continued squeeze of other sites that are part of the Green Infrastructure Network such as Marline Woods SSSI. This ancient woodland site and associated sensitive ghyll stream has already been encroached upon and is now set to face further pressure from LRA6 (Queensway North) and LRA9 (Marline Fields). There is clearly a conflict between these allocations and paragraph 118 of the NPPF which states:
 11. *'Proposed development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest likely to have an adverse effect on a SSSI (either individually or in combination with other developments) should not normally be permitted. Where an adverse effect on the site's notified special interest feature is likely, an exception should only be made where the benefits of the development, at this site, clearly outweigh both the impacts that is likely to have on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest and any broader impacts on the national network of SSSI.'*
 12. *'Planning permission should be refused for developments resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and the loss of aged or veteran trees found outside ancient woodland unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweighs the loss.'*
13. We note that since our original comments to the proposed submission were submitted, the council has added another document to their evidence base on the website entitled '*Potential impact of development on Combe Haven and Marline Woods SSSI*'. The Sussex Wildlife Trust was not made aware of this new evidence document and as a result has come to it rather late when formulating our written representations to the inspector.
14. The document relies on ecological work already undertaken as part of outline planning applications which suggest that the proposed developments on these allocations will not result in significant adverse impacts on the ecological integrity of Marline Valley SSSI. However the document still fails to address the impact of development on the ecological connectivity of the Borough's Green Infrastructure Network and the cumulative impact of all the allocations in the surrounding area. This is not consistent with national policy.
15. The Sussex Wildlife Trust acknowledges that the policies for the allocations in or adjacent to designated sites included requirements for ecological opportunities and constraint maps. However we feel that given the significant biodiversity designation of some of the sites and the apparent impacts on the Green Infrastructure Network from these allocations, this aspect of individual site policies should be more rigorously investigated prior to allocation. This would ensure that Hastings Borough Council are not risking their ability to deliver sufficient housing and employment land, should the impact of development of these sites prove too damaging to be mitigated for. Without further consideration of these sites, we do not believe that plan will be effective.
16. This would ensure the plan and future planning applications sit inline with paragraphs 110 and 118 of the NPPF:
 17. *'In preparing plans to meet development needs, the aim should be to minimise pollution and other adverse effects on the local and natural environment. Plans should allocate land with least environmental or amenity value where consistent with other policies in this Framework.'*
 18. *'When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying the following principles: if significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.'*

19. This would also work towards ensuring that the Hastings Development Management Plan fulfilled the statement in Section 2.15 of the 2012 Green Infrastructure Study that *'the plan will also provide design briefs for significant development sites, which will identify where enhancements to the Green Infrastructure Network will be sought, taking account of the results of this study'*. The design briefs found in Appendix A of Development Management Plan are currently extremely minimal and do not appear to highlight any true enhancements to the Green Infrastructure Network. Far more attention needs to be paid to these briefs before any sites are allocated.
20. We welcome and recognise that Hastings Borough Council has undertaken work to create a Green Infrastructure Strategy. However, it is vital that it is properly integrated in the plan making process and not simply seen as a tick in the evidence base document list. Further to this, the individual sensitivities of the sites mapped in the GI strategy document should not be overlooked when they are being considered as suitable areas to deliver accessible natural green space for suggested development allocations. We would expect to see much more detail of proposed enhancements to the Green Infrastructure Network in the strategy and followed through in the Development Management Plan.
21. The Trust strongly urges the inspector to look at the impact of the plan's site allocations on the delivery of natural capital. We are keen to see the plan looked at in its entirety to ensure it delivers an ecologically coherent network and that all development recognises the benefits of ecosystem services as per section 109 of the NPPF:
22. *'The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services.'*
23. The Sussex Wildlife Trust does not believe that the Development Management Plan affords sufficient protection to the Borough's natural assets. We feel Hastings Borough Council should look at some of their site allocations again in order to ensure that the plan is consistent with national policy, effective and therefore passes the test for soundness. There are a number of ways they may wish to approach this which could include:
- Removal of site allocations that negatively impact/impinge on the Green Infrastructure Network of the Borough, in particular those with existing conservation designation.
 - Looking at these sites as last resort, thus ensuring that sites that **do not** impact on sites of biodiversity value or the Green Infrastructure Network are developed first.
 - Improvement of the evidence base through further work on the Green Infrastructure Strategy to ensure that it is forward-thinking based on potential enhancements to the network rather than a retrofitting of green infrastructure to already allocated development sites.
 - Carrying out regular reviews of the sites within the Green Infrastructure Network, ensuring that planning applications brought forward on or adjacent to these sites are considering in the wider context of the Borough's biodiversity and are not limited to just the biodiversity assets of the site allocations.

Yours sincerely

Laura Brook
Conservation Officer