



The countryside charity
Sussex

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Horsham District Local Plan 2023-40 Consultation (Regulation 19)

CPRE Sussex response to:

STRATEGIC POLICY 17: GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND BIODIVERSITY

1. Strategic Policy 17: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity:10 states that 'An appropriate buffer around woodland will be required, this will be at least 15m around Ancient Woodland or greater in accordance with good practice, and consideration should be given to the potential for protected species, such as bats, and impacts on hydrology. Around ancient and veteran trees a minimum buffer zone of at least 15 times larger than the diameter of the tree, or 5 metres from the edge of the tree's canopy whichever is the larger, will be required'.

1.1 CPRE Sussex asks that this policy be reinforced with the stipulation that regard should be given to the Natural England and Forestry Commission Guidance: Ancient Woodland, ancient trees, and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions (published 14 January 2022).

1.2 This Guidance was cited and given considerable weight by the Planning Inspector who decided and dismissed the Appeal, Appeal reference: APP/C1435/W/23/3321978 Land at Downlands Farm, Uckfield TN22 3PU; decision date: 6 February 2024.

1.3 For example, paragraph 23 states that in respect of Ancient Woodland, whilst 'the 15m is set as a recommended minimum, the guidance goes on to say that the size of the Buffer Zone will depend on the scale and type of development and the character of the area. It recommends that Buffer Zones are planted as woodland or a mix of scrub, grassland, heathland and wetland. It also advises that larger Buffer Zones may be needed where the surrounding area is less densely wooded or close to residential areas. In this regard, although it is not recommended that access to Buffer Zones is prohibited, they are intended to ensure not only that RPAs to individual trees are protected, but also that other potential impacts, such as noise, air or light pollution, which may impact on species which live within Ancient Woodland are avoided'.

2. We also ask that the policy stipulate that ecological appraisals submitted in support of planning applications comply with Natural England's Standing Advice: 'Guidance Wild birds: advice for making planning decisions when there are wild birds on or near a proposed development site'.

2.1 This stipulates that LPAs should ask for a survey if the proposed site is likely to affect breeding birds, wintering birds, barn owls and other birds in Schedule 1 of the

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Wildlife and Countryside Act, birds listed in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and Red and Amber List Birds of Conservation Concern.

2.2 To comply, 'ecological appraisals' would need to be informed by on-site four-seasons bird surveys and recording. This needs to be a policy requirement because ecological appraisals submitted in support of applications are rarely informed by on-site bird surveys. This omission precludes meaningful impact assessments.

3. We recommend that Strategic Policy 17:4 be reinforced by adding: 'Pollution of river catchments by stormwater outflows and spillage from wastewater and sewage infrastructure will be prevented by the timely provision of infrastructure that does not spill or discharge raw or partially treated sewage into water courses and river catchments'.

4. We propose that the Strategic Policy in respect Green Infrastructure (GI) and Local Nature Recovery Network (LNRN) be reinforced by including the following as a policy requirement:

- i. Development proposals which reduce, block or harm the functions of GI and/or LNRN should be refused.
- ii. GI networks and LNRN are afforded the highest protection from existing or identified potential threats.
- iii. Development proposals should maximise the opportunity to maintain and extend GI links to form a multi-functional network of open space, providing opportunities for walking and cycling.
- iv. Cross-boundary matters relating to GI and LNRN should be considered at the early stage of an application.
- v. Major development proposals will be required to provide new and/or create links to GI as well take into consideration the use of SuDS and methods that incorporate blue infrastructure into development designs to reduce surface water run-off and improve the visual amenity of the development.
- vi. Natural England's Accessible Natural Green Space Standard recommendations and the Woodland Trust's Woodland Access Standard should be used to assess a development proposals location in relation to existing accessible natural green space and woodland. And that applications should secure benefits for biodiversity as part of their on-site landscaping schemes, including green roofs and green walls, where soft landscaping at ground level is limited.

5. Strategic Policy 17: Green Infrastructure:1 and 6 (and also HDLP paragraphs 6.34, 6.41 and 8.44 refer to the 'Local Nature Recovery Strategy'. This is, presumably, the West Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which is a work in progress, with an expectation that it will be published in the summer of 2025.

6. Apparently, the National Recover Network cited in the policy has yet to be published.

Dr R F Smith

Trustee CPRE Sussex