

Date: 22 January 2015  
Our ref: 140387  
Your ref: -



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Dear Mr Robins

### **Sites and Policies Plan: Part 1: Development Management Policies Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report**

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 22 December 2014 which was received by Natural England on the same date.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

The SEA Directive sets out the topics that a SA/SEA must cover in its assessment. Natural England is an identified consultation body for biodiversity including flora, fauna, human health, soil (including waste and contaminated land issues), water (water quality and resources), air, climatic factors (including strategic flood risks), material assets (including geological interests and infrastructure), cultural heritage and Landscape. We are the lead authority for biodiversity and landscape and identified as a source of information for soils, material assets and cultural heritage.

#### **General comments**

We have considered the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and are generally satisfied that it meets the requirements for EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and adequately covers the interests of the natural environment.

The baseline information and key issues that have been identified in the Scoping Report appear reasonably comprehensive for this stage of the assessment process and to demonstrate an understanding of the plan area in terms of its biodiversity, landscape and public access interests and the context in which the Sites and Policies Plan will be prepared, including with respect to relevant adopted and emerging national and local planning policy.

Natural England has a range of data sources that may also be useful in the production of the SA/SEA. Our datasets are now all downloadable and available on our website at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>

Other useful sources of data include:

- MAGIC (Defra's GIS package for environmental assets):  
<http://www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk/>



- Landscape Character Assessments for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Management Plans for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: <http://www.aonb.org.uk/wba/naaonb/naaonbpreview.nsf/Web%20Default%20Frameset?OpenFrameSet&Frame=Main&Src=%2Fwba%2Fnaaonb%2Fnaaonbpreview.nsf%2F%24LU.WebHomePage%2F%24first!OpenDocument%26AutoFramed>
- SSSI/European Sites condition assessments: <http://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/>
- National Character Areas: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/587130>

### Consultation questions:

- *Have all relevant plans, programmes and policies been referenced?*

In addition to those identified in Appendix A, the Council may wish to also consider the Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan; the Severn Estuary Shoreline Management Plan; and the North Somerset Biodiversity Action Plan. Natural England has also recently updated the National Character Area profiles, which include an opportunities section and may also be relevant. Updated profiles include: - 106: Severn and Avon Vales, 118: Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges, 141: Mendip Hills, and 142: Somerset Levels and Moors, which together cover the North Somerset District. Please see our website for full details.

- *Is any significant economic, social or environmental data missing or misrepresented?*

We are largely satisfied that the key environmental data has been identified and are not aware of any significant omissions or misrepresentations.

- *Are any judgments made concerning baseline information incorrect?*
- *Are there any additional sustainability issues within North Somerset that need to be considered in the development of the Sites and Policies Plan: Part 1?*

The judgements regarding baseline information appear reasonable and we are not aware of other significant sustainability issues.

- *Do you agree with the proposed Sustainability Appraisal Framework?*

The proposed SA Framework appears to cover the key issues with respect to the natural environment and natural resources, however we would encourage the council to consider including

- *Are the objectives and indicators set out appropriate?*

The proposed objectives and indicators appear relevant and reasonably comprehensive. However with respect to the landscape topic, we would not expect the *Total area of Mendip AONB (within North Somerset)* to change during the plan period, although there may be changes to landscape character within the AONB as a result of the Sites and Policies Plan and we would therefore encourage the council to consider an alternative indicator to better reflect this and measure this.

We would also encourage the council to consider including an objective for Green infrastructure, which we hope will feature strongly in the Sites and Policies Plan.

The Council may also wish to consider an objective related to ecosystem services, Natural England has produced a number of publications relating to ecosystem services which are available on line if you would like to investigate this further: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/38019>. Defra has also produced a range of guidance on this topic which is available on their website: <https://www.gov.uk/ecosystems-services>

- *Is the proposed methodology for the next stages of the Sustainability Appraisal correct?*

The proposed methodology for the next steps of the SA appears reasonable.

- *Are there any other comments you would like to make?*

We note the Council's reference to *Regulation 48 of the Habitats Regulations (transposing Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive)*. Please note, The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 came into force on 1st April 2010 (Statutory Instrument No 490. 2010) replacing the 1994 Regulations and all subsequent amendments, to provide a consolidated new piece of legislation. The old Regulations were commonly referred to as the "Habitats Regulations" and this abbreviation continues for the new 2010 Regulations. Subsequent amendments to the 2010 Regulations came into force on 16 August 2012.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact Amanda Grundy on 07900 608311. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to [consultations@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk).

We really value your feedback to help us improve the service we offer. We have attached a feedback form to this letter and welcome any comments you might have about our service.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Grundy  
Somerset, Avon & Wiltshire Team