

FULL TABLES FOR HABITAT REGULATIONS SCREENING ASSESSMENT

Introduction

1. The Sustainability Appraisal of the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan (November 2024) incorporated the requirement for Habitat Regulations Screening Assessment, and objective 8 against which all updated policies and new sites were assessed was specific to this requirement as follows:

Avoid contributing towards a likely significant effect, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, that could lead to an adverse effect on the integrity of internationally-designated wildlife sites.

2. The Sustainability Appraisal contained Appendix 4, which summarised the results of the Habitat Regulations Screening Assessment. However, as recognised in a representation by Bracknell Forest Council, this version of the Sustainability Appraisal did not contain the full tables assessing each policy or site against each designated wildlife site, an equivalent of which had been included in the Sustainability Appraisal at Regulation 18 stage (and much of which remains consistent with that assessment).
3. Therefore, for completeness, the full tables are contained within this document. In all but a small number of cases no impacts are shown, which is unsurprising given the distance of Reading from designated sites and the relatively minor transport implications as highlighted in the Transport Modelling. Potential increases in road traffic were among the most likely impacts on designated sites through effects such as poorer air quality, noise, disturbance and vibration, but with traffic impacts outside Reading expected to be limited, this is also unlikely to result in significant impacts on designated wildlife sites.

Understanding the tables

4. Each option assessed in the Sustainability Appraisal is considered (using the option reference from the SA) against a range of individual types of effect on the eight internationally designated wildlife sites closest to Reading.
5. The following abbreviations are used for types of effect:
 - Nd & v – Noise, disturbance and vibration
 - Ap & q – Air pollution and quality
 - Wp & q – Water pollution and quality
 - Wf – Water flows
 - Cc – Climate change
 - Hl & d – Habitat loss and degradation
 - Le – Landscape effects
 - L - Lighting

6. The following abbreviations are used for sites:
- AR – Aston Rowant SAC
 - CB – Chilterns Beechwoods SAC
 - HW – Hartslock Wood SAC
 - KLF – Kennet & Lambourn Floodplain SAC
 - LW – Little Wittenham SAC
 - RL – River Lambourn SAC
 - TBH – Thames Basin Heaths SPA
 - WFG – Windsor Forest and Great Park SAC
7. Where the assessment is 'N' (in green) there would be no significant effect on the site. Where the assessment is 'Y' (in pink) a potential significant effect has been identified. Where the assessment is an asterisk (in amber) the potential for an effect has been identified that merits further explanation below.

Identified significant or potential effects

8. Only one option has been identified as having a significant effect on any site. This is TR2(ii), which is to not update policy TR2 to include the most up to date list of major transport projects. This option would fail to adequately secure sustainable transport upgrades across Reading and would ultimately likely lead to increases in car journeys, which would impact those sites closest to Reading and which lie adjacent to main roads that lead to Reading, i.e. Thames Basin Heaths, Hartslock Wood and Chilterns Beechwoods. As the Pre-Submission Draft does update the policy, and does not proceed with option TR2(ii), a fuller assessment of these significant effects has not been carried out.
9. Two other options were identified at Regulation 18 stage as having potential adverse (non-significant) effects on the same sites, again through traffic generation. These were policy options EM1(i) and RL2(i) where levels of development for employment and retail and leisure uses respectively are set out, and which form the policy option contained in the plan. At Regulation 18 stage, these levels were not known, which is why this was considered an uncertain effect. At Pre-Submission stage we now know the levels that are planned for.
10. In the case of RL2, no specific growth is planned for as there is no positive need for development, so this should not result in any increases in traffic levels close to designated sites.
11. In the case of EM1, the level of growth represents a fairly modest increase over the levels in the adopted Local Plan. The highest level of the range for offices is the level of development already lower than the level in existing extant planning permissions, so the Local Plan would not result in an increase over commitments. The level of growth for industrial and warehouse uses is largely delivered in a small number of sites (most notably those in policy SR1), which have been part of the Transport Modelling which has not shown likely significant transport increases outside Reading's boundaries.

12. Therefore, no significant effects are likely for either of these policy options. The Pre-Submission Draft Sustainability Appraisal has, in error, some conflicting text for these two options, with the specific option being recorded as having an uncertain effect (seemingly due to this not having been changed from the Regulation 18 version) but no effects recorded under the Habitat Regulations Assessment heading. However, it is still helpful to record the potential for a detrimental effect on designated sites because it underlines the need for this to be further tested at application stage for any large-scale developments for employment or retail and leisure and for appropriate mitigation to be applied.

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