

Chew Valley Neighbourhood Plan Policy Options: HRA Screening

Background

Under Regulations 102-105 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (the Habitat Regulations) all strategic and local development plans must be assessed for their impacts upon a network of European wildlife sites (European Sites). These regulations transpose the requirements the EC Habitats Directives into to UK law and are designed to protect the integrity of European Sites. They require the assessment of impacts and avoidance of harm to the Conservation Objectives of European sites. The process is generally referred to as a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA).

The policy options being considered for the Chew Valley Neighbourhood Plan have been screened for possible issues and impacts for European site protection in the context of HRA. The CVNP area falls within the buffer zones of two European sites - Chew Valley Lake Special Protection Area (SPA) and the North Somerset & Mendips Bat Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Site Vulnerabilities

Chew Valley Lake –

Chew Valley Lake is a large artificial lake that provides an important wintering site for Shoveler duck. The following types of impact will need to be considered for this site:

- Damage to habitat through reduction of water levels
- Damage to habitat through changes to water quality
- Disturbance to birds
- Disruption/ fragmentation of flight lines

North Somerset & Mendips Bat Special Area of Conservation-

This site in south-west England is selected on the basis of the size of population represented (3% of the UK greater horseshoe bat Rhinolophus ferrumequinum population) and its good conservation of structure and function, having both maternity and hibernation sites. This site contains an exceptionally good range of the sites used by the population, comprising two maternity sites in lowland north Somerset and a variety of cave and mine hibernation sites in the Mendip Hills. Summer and winter roosts for Greater horseshoe Bats are usually less than 20-30 km apart. The bats are vulnerable to the loss of insect food supplies due to insecticide use, changing farming practices and the loss of broad-leaved tree-cover, and to the loss or disturbance of underground roost sites.

The limestone caves of the Mendips provide a range of important hibernation sites for lesser horseshoe bat Rhinolophus hipposideros as well. Summer and winter roosts are usually less than 5-10 km apart. These bats are vulnerable to the loss or disturbance of both summer and winter roost sites and the removal of linear habitat corridors.

Potential Issues

- Increased recreational pressures
- Increased noise and light pollution
- Traffic generated air pollution

- Increased urban-fringe pressures (domestic cats; noise; disturbance –potentially reducing agricultural viability)
- Reduced viability and potential loss of existing agricultural land use

Potential Effects

- Reduction of habitat quality and function close to some sites (including function as foraging grounds or access ways)
- Habitat loss close to some sites
- Habitat fragmentation

Screening

This initial screening to assess the likelihood of significant effects is based on the approach set out in The Habitat Regulations Assessment Handbook 2013.

POLICY	Screening category	Recommendation / issue
Policy HDE1	F	
Policy HDE2	F	
Policy HDE3	F	
Policy HDE4	F	
Policy HDE5	B	
Policy HDE6	F	
Policy HDE7	G	requires a study and controls funding
Policy HDE8	F	
Policy HDE9	F	
Policy HDE10	F	
Policy HDE11	D	
Policy HDE12	D	
Policy HDE13	D	
Policy HDE14	D	
Policy HDE15	D	
Policy BF1	F	
Policy BF2	F	
Policy BF3	possible I	subject to existing ecological function of site, consider clause to protect European sites
Policy BF4	possible I	subject to existing ecological function of site (eg bat roost), consider clause to protect European sites
Policy BF5	K	school site not significant to integrity European sites
Policy BF6	possible I	subject to existing ecological function of site, consider clause to protect European sites
Policy BF7	F	
Policy BF8	F/D	
Policy BF9	F	
Policy BF10	F	

Plan Aspirations

A1 - Aspiration for Chew Valley Lake Perimeter Footpath/Cycleway	POSSIBLE I	SUBJECT TO DETAILS
A2 - Aspiration for Business and Economy in the Chew Valley Area	possible I	subject to existing ecological function of site, consider clause to protect European sites
A3 - Aspiration for Better Public Transport	c	
A4 - Aspiration for Traffic Calming	c	
A5 - Aspiration for a Car Sharing Scheme	c	

Conclusions and recommendations

The majority of policies proposed do not raise significant concerns with respect to the Habitat Regulations. Policies BF3 and BF4 raise some concern as currently worded because they raise the possibility that sites could be developed that have some ecological value for the European Sites. However, this risk is small and could be overcome by adding a clause or additional wording to these policies to ensure any impacts to European sites are avoided.

The plan does include an aspiration to create a round lake path which, subject to details, could impact directly on the Chew Valley Lake SPA. Inclusion as a policy at this stage would be difficult, and would probably trigger a full Appropriate Assessment under the Habitat Regulations, and delay the wider plan.