



Land to the North East of KGV Playing Fields, Cuffley

Habitat Regulation Assessment
Technical Note
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Lands Improvement

LAND TO THE NORTH EAST OF KING GEORGE V PLAYING FIELDS, CUFFLEY

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Client: Lands Improvement

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Consideration of potential effects of development at Land to the North East of King George V Playing Fields on the Wormley-Hoddesdonpark Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Northaw Great Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This assessment considers the potential effects of increased recreational pressure arising from the construction of 121 homes at Land to the North East of King George V Playing Fields, Cuffley on internationally and nationally designated areas in the vicinity of the site.
- 1.2 Consideration of internationally designated sites has been carried out in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations ('the Habitats Regulations') 2010 (as amended).
- 1.3 The scope and approach to this assessment was agreed following consultation with Phil Sturges of Natural England (email dated 16th January 2015 and subsequent conversation of 26th January 2015).

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 There are no internationally or nationally protected areas within or adjacent to the Land to the North East of King George V Playing Fields site. It is therefore highly unlikely that the proposed development of 121 homes at the site would have any direct impact on internationally or nationally designated areas.
- 2.2 The site does however lie within 5km of the Wormley-Hoddesdon Park Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is located approximately 2.5km to the north at its closest point. This SAC is designated under Annex 1 of the Habitats Regulations for its Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea* woodland, which occurs rarely in lowland Britain. The SAC area covers approximately 336ha and is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR).
- 2.3 One further SSSI is located within 5km of the site, namely Northaw Great Wood SSSI, which is located approximately 1.9km to the northwest and designated for its ancient

coppiced Hornbeam woodland. The northern extent of this area receives additional statutory protection as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

- 2.4 This assessment considers the potential for adverse effects of recreational pressure arising from the proposed development on the Wormley-Hoddesdonpark Woods SAC/SSSI and Northaw Great Wood SSSI, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

3 ASSESSMENT

3.1 Impact Risk Zones

- 3.1.1 The site is located on the boundary of two SSSI Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) as identified by Natural England on the 'Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside' (MAGIC) online database (<http://magic.defra.gov.uk>). IRZs are defined around all SSSIs with the purpose of indicating the sensitivities of the features for which the SSSI is designated and specifying the types of development which may have potential to cause adverse impacts on these features within varying distances from the SSSI boundary. Plans showing the position of the IRZs relevant to the proposed development follow this text.

- 3.1.2 The western part of the proposed development area (approximately 1.3ha) falls within the 1-2km IRZ for the nationally designated Northaw Great Wood SSSI which indicates that, among other types of development, residential developments of 100+ units have a risk of adversely impacting on this SSSI. The proposals include development of 121 units within the site, however only approximately 35 of these units would be located within the defined 1-2km IRZ from Northaw Great Wood SSSI and as such the scale of development falling within the IRZ would not be expected to require further consideration of its effects on the SSSI in its own right.

- 3.1.3 The eastern part of the site (approximately 3.5ha) falls within a 2-3km IRZ from the Northaw Great Wood SSSI and the whole site falls within a 2-3km zone from the internationally designated Wormley-Hoddesdonpark Woods SAC/SSSI. For these more distant IRZs Natural England do not identify potential risks to the either the SAC or SSSIs from residential development, effects instead only being anticipated from larger developments such as airports and quarries, and developments creating substantial air pollution such as incinerators and pig and poultry units.

- 3.1.4 Notwithstanding the above, further consideration of the potential effects of recreational pressure arising from the proposed development on these designated areas is given below. This specifically relates to:

- I. Accessibility of the designated sites relative to alternative green spaces; and
- II. Resilience of the designated sites to recreational use.

3.2 Access to the SAC/ SSSIs and alternative green space

- 3.2.1 Although the Wormley-Hoddesdonpark Woods SAC is located approximately 2.5km linear distance from the site, travel distance to the to the closest access point is approximately 4.7km both by car and on foot, and a 10km drive to the closest formal car park. A significant increase in recreational pressure on the SAC is therefore highly

unlikely to arise as a result of the proposed development either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

3.2.2 Travel distance to Northaw Great Wood SSSI is 2.6km by car and foot to the nearest access and 3.5km by car to the nearest formal car park. Based on these travel distances, and in view of the similar experiences offered by the woodland habitats of the two designated areas, it is considered likely that visitors from the proposed development would be more likely to visit Northaw Great Wood SSSI rather than the Wormley-Hoddesdonpark Woods SAC due to the shorter travel times involved.

3.2.3 Notwithstanding the above, alternative opportunities for informal recreation are located in the immediate vicinity of the site. These include:

- The Hertfordshire Way: A Public Right of Way is located along the southern boundary of the site and is immediately accessible from the site. The footpath forms part of the Hertfordshire Way long-distance walking route and links an extensive network of footpaths and bridleways around the surrounding countryside.
- The King George V playing fields is located to the immediate south of the site. These would provide a convenient and accessible area for informal recreation that residents of the proposed development could use for short walks and dog-walking.

3.2.4 Together with the areas of open space provided within the proposed development, these alternative opportunities for recreation are expected to provide more convenient and accessible alternatives to use of either of the aforementioned designated sites by residents of the proposed development. Use of local green spaces for informal recreation that are located outside of the SAC/ SSSIs could be promoted through information in the home buyers pack provided with the sale of each property.

3.3 Sensitivity of the SAC/ SSSIs

3.3.1 The woodland habitats for which the Northaw Great Wood SSSI and Wormley-Hoddesdonpark Woods SAC are designated are robust and generally do not exhibit high vulnerability to recreational pressure. This assertion is supported by the Site Condition Assessments for the Wormley-Hoddesdonpark Woods SSSI units (making up the SAC) which indicate that 94% are in 'favourable' condition. Within Northaw Great Wood SSSI the majority of units are listed as being in 'unfavourable-recovering' condition. Where further details are available the areas listed as being in unfavourable condition within both of the SSSIs are generally a result of management deficiencies rather than the effects of recreational pressure. This is with the exception of a small 1.2ha unit of the Wormley-Hoddesdonpark Woods SSSI located approximately 6.7km from the site which has suffered from illegal activity by off-road vehicles, however barriers have been installed to remedy the problem and the area is currently in an 'unfavourable – recovering' condition.

3.3.2 An extensive area of Northaw Great Wood SSSI comprises a country park which is managed for public access and it is likely that any visitors from the proposed development would use this point as a focus for any trip to the SSSI due to the availability of parking, visitor facilities and information. This area is managed to minimise visitor impacts on the SSSI and therefore the small number of additional visits

to this site expected by residents of the proposed development are unlikely to result in any substantial further effects on the integrity of the woodland habitats for which this popular area of the SSSI is designated.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Due to the distance of the Wormley-Hoddesdonpark Woods SAC (2.5km) and Northaw Great Wood SSSI (1.9km) from the site it is considered highly unlikely that the proposed development of 121 homes at the Land to the North East of King George V Playing Fields site would have any direct impact on these, or any other internationally or nationally designated areas.
- 4.2 Consideration has also been given to potential adverse effects on these designated areas arising from an increase in recreational pressure from the proposed development, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. It is concluded that any such adverse effects would not be expected to arise due to a combination of: (i) the distance of the designated areas from the site; (ii) the small scale of the proposed development; (iii) the availability of alternative areas for informal recreation in the vicinity of the site; and (iv) the relatively robust nature of the habitats for which these areas are designated.
- 4.3 It is therefore concluded that the proposed development of 121 homes would not result in an adverse effect on nationally or internationally protected areas, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This conclusion is supported by the site's location relative to the Impact Risk Zones for these designated areas as identified by Natural England.

AS 08/06/2015