



Sussex
Wildlife Trust

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Worthing Draft Local Plan Consultation – Regulation 19

The Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT) recognises the importance of a plan led system as opposed to a developer led process and supports Worthing Borough Council's (WBC) desire to produce a cohesive Local Plan. Therefore we hope that our comments are used constructively to make certain that this draft plan properly plans for the natural capital needed within the Borough and ensures that any development is truly sustainable. We note that the published Regulation 19 submission plan has made some bold changes to the Regulation 18 consultation draft and we are pleased to see Climate Change been recognised more significantly in this iteration of the plan.

Where we are proposing a change to policy or the supporting text, recommended additions are highlighted in **bold** and deletions are ~~struck through~~.

Vision and strategic objectives

Sussex Wildlife Trust is pleased to see that our recommendations to reference Natural Capital within V3 have been reflected in the revised wording. Further to this the inclusion of V6 is welcomed as it shows WBC acknowledging the importance of delivering Biodiversity Net Gain through the Local Plan in line with paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019).

Sussex Wildlife Trust are supportive of the amendments made to SO15 and SO16, as per our Regulation 18 comments.

It is encouraging to see this part of the plan discuss the importance of climate change and the role this Local Plan can play. Noting section 2.19 and 2.20, we encourage WBC to consider the role of the natural environment and natural process more explicitly in the requirements of the Sustainability Statements. SWT therefore propose an additional bullet point to address the impacts on the natural environment:

- **Demonstrate that the development will protect and enhance the Borough's natural capital and biodiversity assets**

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SP2 Climate Change

We support the inclusion of this policy within the draft submission local plan. However, SWT suggests that the policy would benefit from a bullet point that relates to ensuring development/allocations do not compromise a nature recovery network. We recognise the aspirations of the Environment Act are emerging but given the time scale for the local plan we feel it would be progressive and in line with the NPPF currents in section 149 and 150.

SWT propose the following bullet point:

k) Development must not compromise land that is required to deliver towards a nature recovery network.

Spatial Strategy

Section 3.7 references the evidence bases for the local plan, under which is listed environmental constraints. We are aware that WBC is an ambitious Local Authority for the environment, therefore we ask the council to consider the importance of evidence bases that deliver environmental aspirations to help inform the local plans for the future. We can see there are calls for sites development, but recognising the need to create a network of sites that can help biodiversity connect and function in the face of a changing climate, should be key to the production of a local plan if it is to address the aspirations of the NPPF (2019) section 174a. Therefore as evidence bases are update and added to, we ask the council to consider a call for site to help deliver a Nature Recovery Network, which is clear aspiration of the DEFRA 25 Year Plan and the emerging Environment Act.

Policy SS1 Spatial Strategy

SWT is encouraged to see this policy reflect the importance of the natural environment in bullet point (diii). Given that the plan has seen a clear shift to reflect the impact of climate change, the need to ensure our natural environment and the connection and function needed for it to adapt must be at the heart of any future sustainable development in Worthing.

Policy SS2 Housing allocations

SWT note that the allocations will have impacts on greenfield sites and locally designated sites. We do have concerns about impacts on part of Titnore and Gorrington Woods LWS complex due to housing allocations A2 (100 dwellings at Caravan Club, Titnore Lane), A6 (120 dwellings at Fulbeck Avenue) and especially A13 (60 dwellings Titnore Lane). These concerns are covered in more detail below.

SWT agree with the submission plans conclusion that because of the extent of the already built up area within Worthing, and the need to preserve gaps between settlements in Arun DC to the west and Adur DC to the east, it is not practical for WDC to deliver anywhere near its target of 14,160 new dwellings. The plan to deliver 3672 dwellings (26% of target) still seems to us a challenging one, and one that has the potential to have some adverse impacts on biodiversity.

Policy SS3 Town Centre

SWT are concerned that the policy relating to the town centre fails to adequately express the importance of biodiversity in this area both for social interaction and as a mechanism to address climate change and biodiversity loss as per section 174 b of the NPPF (2019).

We therefore proposed the following additional bullet point to policy SS3.

- **Identify and deliver opportunities to integrate biodiversity within the town centre realm to address climate adaptation and ecological connectivity alongside wider benefits for people and wildlife.**

Policy SS4 Countryside and Undeveloped Coast

SWT supports the policy recognising the need to protect these assets and welcome the amendments incorporated from SWT regulation 18 response. The coastal strip of Worthing provides big opportunities for coastal bird species and internationally important vegetated shingle. Identifying the need to protect these areas and the supporting habitat is imperative to address biodiversity loss locally and ensure that the Borough can provide a resilient land and seascape in the face of climate change.

Policy SS5 Local Green Gaps

As stated in our regulation 18 response we are supportive of the inclusion of a green gap policy which seeks to protect these areas. We acknowledge that WBC have taken account of our proposed amendments to this policy. Since the time of the regulation 18 consultation WBC have taken important steps to address the climate and ecological emergency. We ask as a result of these changes and the emerging policy in relation to these aspects if the Green Gap policy should be bolder, to recognise the role these green gaps can play in nature's recovery as set out in the DEFRA 25 year plan.

Therefore the council should state that this policy is now actively in place to **resist development** in these locations. SWT believes taking this step would be the correct thing to do to ensure cohesion with the Local Green Space Policy SS6. Local Green Space will be afforded the same protection to manage development in a consistent way to Green Belt designations. Although we have not made suggested amendments to the policy wording we would be happy to discuss this with the WBC.

Policy SS6 Local Green Spaces

SWT are pleased to see the value of these sites recognised within the local plan process. The sites offer multiple benefits for people and biodiversity and these will become ever more important in a changing climate. Since the regulation 18 consultation, locations such as Goring Gap have now been recognised as LWS. We can see that the council has made a clear commitment to delivering a Green Infrastructure Strategy in policy DM19. These locations will be clear core areas for green and blue infrastructure and can act as sites to aspire to create green connections from and too. Therefore we support a policy that will seek to actively ensure that these sites are protected for their multiple benefits

With this in mind SWT encourage the council to ensure the policy is clear when it comes to the protection afforded to the Local Green Spaces. The NPPF states in section 100 that *Policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent with those for Green Belts*. However we are concerned that this is not really clear within the policy and especially when some of the Local Green Spaces also sit within the Local Green Gap Policy which feels more development focused. Therefore we suggest that policy is much clearer that development will be resisted in the LGS.

We would be happy to discuss the policy with WBC.

Site Allocations

Overarching comments

We suggest to WBC that there is greater consistency with the policies regarding the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The Biodiversity Policy (DM18) highlights that some of the allocations; brownfield and major development will be encouraged to deliver 20% BNG. We therefore ask for reasons of clarity, to identify within the allocation policies, which allocations WBC consider this a requirement. We also feel that clarity on BNG for all the allocations will help highlight the importance of this for each development, as at the moment some allocations reference it while others do not.

A1 Beeches Avenue

In the Regulation 18 consultation this site was put forward as an omission site and excluded from allocation due to impacts on biodiversity. SWT is therefore concerned to see this site proceed to the Regulation 19 consultation as an allocation. We seek clarity on what evidence has been brought forward that has seen this biodiversity reasoning dismissed.

A2 Caravan Club Titnore Lane

We have concerns about this allocation especially when it is considered in conjunction with other allocations within this plan. Our thoughts turn to the potential cumulative impact on the Titnore and Gorrington Woods Local Wildlife Site (LWS) complex. This pressure may come from the development and take a variety of forms for example recreational pressure or pressure from domestic pets (predation). When this allocation is considered in combination with A6 and A13 we are concerned it will lead to unacceptable impacts on the Ancient Woodland and be in direct conflict with the Biodiversity Policy DM18. Therefore we suggest that this allocation is not consistent with national policy; paragraph 174 of the NPPF (2019).

We do not feel that the council have taken sufficient steps to address this cumulative impact in the policy wording. If the council are minded to progress with this allocation we encourage the council to consider a masterplan for the potential sites in this area, so that cumulative impact are considered and avoided.

The woodland directly to the north of the revised Caravan site is ancient woodland and is part of a wider complex of ancient woodland and woodland pasture/parkland priority habitat. The site description for this allocation talks about the caravan club using the north of the site, we are unclear whether the caravan operations will be the same capacity in a smaller area, and if so ask if the impact on the woodland has been considered? For example will a buffer to the ancient woodland be required as part of a new lease?

A3 Centenary House

This site was previously considered an area of change in the Regulation 18 but has progressed to recognised allocation. We do not feel that the development requirement section uses its potential to recognise the role this site could have in enhancing Green Infrastructure. SWT encourage WBC to consider the potential to deliver high quality green infrastructure and net gains through development on these sites development requirements as per section 175 (d) and 150(a) of the NPPF (2019).

We therefore proposed the inclusion of the following wording for all the above allocations

Deliver Biodiversity Net Gains in keeping with the location, size and scale of development as stipulate in policy DM18

Deliver Green Infrastructure that provides creative and connected opportunities to join to the Borough wide green infrastructure network.

Allocations: A4 Civic Centre Stoke Abbott Road, A7 Grafton, A8 HMRC Offices, Barrington Road, A9 Lyndhurst Road, A10 Martlets Way, A11 Stagecoach, Marine Parade, A12 Teville Gate, A14 Union Place.

We are pleased to see WBC considering brownfield sites and encourage to WBC to be alive to the value brownfield sites can hold for biodiversity if development does not come forward quickly. Therefore we would hope that the council make an informed judgement about the ecological information needed at the time of application if it is not stipulated in the policy wording.

We note that these brownfield allocations have the opportunity to considerably contribute to Green Infrastructure of the Borough. They can provide access and opportunities for biodiversity in more urbanised settings. As a result of this clear potential SWT are disappointed the allocation requirements does not stipulate the need to integrate biodiversity within the development (175 (d) NPPF 2019). This should be made clear especially for those sites which should be looking to deliver a 20% uplift. We encourage the WBC to ensure these polices make clear that the site must showcase opportunities to integrate biodiversity and deliver high quality green infrastructure as per 171, 175 (d) and 150(a) of the NPPF (2019)

As stated above we do not expect unnecessary repetition within polices but we do feel that there needs to be consistency and clarity. We therefore proposed the inclusion of the following wording for all the above allocations

Deliver Biodiversity Net Gains in keeping with the location, size and scale of development as stipulate in policy DM18

Deliver Green Infrastructure that provides creative and connected opportunities to join to the Borough wide green infrastructure network.

A5 Decoy Farm

With this allocation we note that the indicative capacity states a minimum for the commercial space, this term has not been used in the other allocations and we seek clarity on its use here.

We are pleased to see the policy wording has been amended to acknowledge the need for the Teville stream to be adequately protected. However, we are greatly concerned that the requirement to deliver net gains as stipulated in the Regulation 18 Consultation has been removed and replaced with bullet point (k) *maximise biodiversity value on site through wildlife friendly landscape planting and design (SUDs etc) and compensate for residual habitat loss through of-site solutions.*

We are concerned that this is not consistent with national policy and ask that policy wording is amended to make clear the need to deliver net gains for biodiversity. We also take this opportunity to remind WBC of the first stage of the mitigation hierarchy that stipulates avoid loss. It feels as though this policy wording has skipped this point and the opportunity to use good design to avoid loss. We emphasise that any mitigation or compensation required for development is separate to Biodiversity Net Gain.

SWT making the following amendments to bullet point

(k) Site design will avoid loss to ~~maximise biodiversity value on site through wildlife friendly landscape planting and design (SUDs etc) and~~ where this cannot be avoided mitigation will be identified and as a last resort compensate for habitat loss ~~through of-site solutions~~ will be identified prior to the loss of habitat.

(k) Deliver *biodiversity net gain through wildlife friendly landscape planting and design (SUDs etc) and where it is not possible to deliver net gain onsite an off-site strategic solutions will be delivered.*

A6 Fulbeck Avenue

Sussex Wildlife Trust do not support the development of a Greenfield site which could have significant impacts on a Local Wildlife Site. As highlighted above in our comments for allocation A2 the prospect on cumulative impacts on the ancient woodland with A2 and A13 do not appear to have been addressed.

SWT recognise the land currently has permission and sits next to another area that has been developed. Our records show that the site does have priority habitat of deciduous woodland upon it and it is clearly functionally linked with the adjacent LWS. As stated in our comments for (A2) we would encourage the council to consider a masterplan for the potential sites in this area, so that if the sites progress the cumulative impact on the LWS are avoided.

As stated previously we are unclear to the weight the site requirement section holds. While we acknowledge amendments to the policy have been made, we are concerned that bullet point G, could be far more appropriate in acknowledging the cumulative impacts of the three allocations (A2, A6 & A13) on the LWS. We do not feel that the bullet point currently provides sufficient clarity on what information would be required to ensure impacts are avoided on the LWS. Therefore we suggest that this allocation is not consistent with national policy; paragraph 174 of the NPPF (2019).

A13 Titnore Lane

SWT object to the allocation of this greenfield site. This site was previously considered an omission site within the Regulation 18 consultation and we supported WBC view that it was not suitable for development due to impacts on a LWS, ancient woodland and the supporting complex. SWT is therefore concerned to see this site progress to an allocation in this submission version of the plan.

This site contains part of Titnore Woods LWS. The site has a strip of ancient woodland, which is part of this LWS, running along the centre of the site. Further to this the allocation is surrounded by ancient woodland bordering the site along its northern, eastern and southern boundaries.

We believe the allocation and development of this site would inevitably result in deterioration of the ancient woodland contrary to national policy. We are concerned that the site would increase recreational pressure and believe that the condition of the immediately adjoining ancient woodland and LWS that surrounds the site and runs through the middle of the site, would inevitably be seriously degraded over time, due to recreational disturbance, litter and use by pets such as cats and dogs. This would be contrary to policy DM18 within the submission plan.

Further to this as stated previously we are also concerned about the cumulative impacts on the Titnore and Goring Woods LWS complex when this allocation is consider in combination with A2 & A6. The NPPF (2019) is clear in section 174 about the importance of local plans protecting locally designated sites. This allocation should be removed from the submission Local Plan as it is not consistent with national policy; paragraph 174 of the NPPF (2019).

A15 Upper Brighton Road

We do not support the allocation of this strategically placed Local Green Gap. The allocation will narrow the existing undeveloped gap and we suggest that it would be more beneficial for the site to progressing as part of the Local Green Gap and to resist its development.

SWT acknowledge that the policy for this allocation has been amended from the regulation18 consultation to enhance habitat for wildlife. However the site does hold a winterbourne chalk stream which is a priority habitat and irreplaceable in nature. While the bullet points of the policy do state that the waterbodies will be enhanced. We are concerned that the impact of development and diffuse pollution will be detrimental to the habitat and those that it supports further downstream.

Development Management Policies

DM15 - 5 - SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT & ACTIVE TRAVEL

We would like to raise one specific comment in relation to this policy. Bullet point vii states that

vii) support improvements to the road network including the A259 and A27 and, as identified in the Worthing Local Plan Transport Study, provide appropriate mitigation measures to address capacity issues at a number of key junctions and road safety impacts on identified road links.

As stated in our regulation 18 comments we remain concerned that the local plan policy is making a clear statement of support for these proposals when the detail of such improvements is unclear. We do not believe this is an evidence based position and therefore is not justified.

DM18 - BIODIVERSITY

We encourage WBC to make amendments to section 5.259, it currently states:

Biodiversity net gain delivers measurable improvements for biodiversity by creating or enhancing habitats after avoiding or mitigating harm as far as possible.

SWT recommends the amendment below to be clear that Biodiversity Net Gain is in addition to mitigation and compensation.

*Biodiversity net gain delivers measurable improvements for biodiversity by creating or enhancing habitats after avoiding or mitigating harm as far as possible **and is in addition to any compensation identified.***

SWT are encourage by the amendments that WBC have made to this policy and we particularly support the drive to be more ambitious and deliver a 20% net gain for biodiversity. While we support delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on site, for reasons of clarity we would suggest that the policy wording under bullet point (h) provides direction that where is it is not possible to deliver onsite net gains there will be a requirement to deliver them off site. We would also encourage WBC to ensure they formulate a strategic approach to this off site net gain to ensure that benefits to biodiversity are maximised and that connectivity and function are enhanced. This could be developed through emerging work such as the green infrastructure strategy and Nature Recovery Network.

We also ask the council to consider carefully the calculation for biodiversity net gain on the urban brownfield allocations. It is possible that because the starting point for the existing biodiversity units on some brownfields allocations is low (i.e limited habitat), even a calculation of 20% uplift from a limited starting point also has the potentially to be limited in terms of delivery. The opportunities to deliver for biodiversity

on these allocations could be great and should be pursued. In relation to this we ask WBC to see our comments below related to the Urban Green Factor.

DM19 - GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

We are pleased to see the inclusion of this policy and that there is a clear distinction from the biodiversity policy. Green Infrastructure can have multiple benefits and can be delivered by a wide range of resources from open space such as sports facilities, allotments and grass verges through to LWS, chalk streams and vegetated shingle beaches. The council are making a clear commitment within policy to delivering an updated Green Infrastructure Strategy, we ask WBC to ensure that the water environment has a clear and intergraded place within this strategy. We support this action and although there is not a clear date for its completion we support an approach that recognises differing scale for green infrastructure and enables the effective delivery of this policy.

Given that a number of allocations proposed are in urban locations and are of great potential for green infrastructure, we ask the council to consider the use of an Urban Green Factor¹. We're aware that it has been used in locations such as the London Local Plan and is an emerging approach in the recently published Hastings Local Plan.

We hope our recommendations are adopted to ensure that the policies within the Worthing Local Plan are as robust and effective as possible. SWT would be happy to discuss any of the above points with WBC.

We do wish to attend the Examination in Public to ensure our views are given due consideration in light of any contrary comments that are received.

Yours sincerely,

Laura Brook
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Sussex Wildlife Trust

¹ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/urban_greening_factor_for_london_final_report.pdf