

Date: 13 September 2021
Our ref: 357485



London Borough of Enfield

Dear Sir or Madam,

Planning Consultation: Enfield Draft Local Plan- Reg 18.

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 22 June 2021 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.

1. The Plan's Vision and Strategy

Natural England advises that the Plan's vision and emerging development strategy should address impacts on and opportunities for the natural environment and set out the environmental ambition for the plan area. We welcome the suggestion that the Local Plan will contribute towards Enfield as 'A deeply green place', that highlights the need for improved biodiversity, and a response to the climate crisis through effective mitigation and adaptation, with the ambition for Enfield to be a carbon neutral Borough.

2. Protecting Natural Conservation Sites

We welcome policy SP BG2 which outlines the hierarchy of designated sites potentially affected by the plan and the protection they are given. Please find our specific comments on Epping Forest SAC below.

Currently, only Epping Forest SAC is named within the summary box for this policy, for clarity we would advise that Lee Valley SPA and Wormley Hoddesdonpark Woods SAC should also be named, to ensure that the final Local Plan gives great weight to the protection of habitat sites.

We welcome the strength of the policy in terms of development not being permitted where it would adversely affect the integrity of SPAs and SACs, unless it meets the requirements in the regulations. We would advise that a HRA screening is required for all sites with the Zone of Influence of a Habitat Site (SPAs and SACs) in order to comply with the Habitats Regulations. If Likely Significant Effect cannot be ruled out, an Appropriate Assessment detailing mitigation measures should be provided, as highlighted by the People over Wind case and subsequent judgement. The text in point 2 of the summary box could be clarified to better reflect this process. Natural England looks forward to working with Enfield on a specific borough wide approach to HRAs in the future.

2.1. Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Epping Forest SAC sits to the East of the London Borough of Enfield, and at its closest point is around 0.3km from the edge of the borough. Epping Forest is one of the last examples of large-scale wood pasture in lowland Britain and has retained features such as ancient and semi-ancient natural woodland, old grassland and scattered wetland. Epping Forest SAC is already subject to high levels of recreational pressures from impacts including walking, mountain biking and activities such as unmanaged fires, as

well as the increase in traffic on several roads which cut through the SAC. The site is therefore particularly sensitive to further increases to recreational pressure and traffic-related air pollution, which are both predicted to escalate due to planned development in the Authorities within the Zone of Influence of the SAC. The final Local Plan should give great weight to the protection of Epping Forest SAC.

Our comments relating to Epping Forest SAC are as follows:

- On the 6th March 2019 Natural England published [interim advice](#) detailing the emerging strategic approach on the Epping Forest SAC mitigation strategy. This outlines the avoidance and mitigation measures required for developments of different sizes and in different Zones of Influence (Zoi) of Epping Forest SAC.
- Following on from the previous bullet point, we note that currently the local plan only refers to developments of over 100 units in point 3 of SP BG2, this needs to better reflect the interim strategy in terms of the need for SAMM and SANG payments as appropriate.
- Developments in the 0-3km ZOI are required to contribute SAMM payments, and this should be made clearer. If this is only collected on major developments (>10 units) to also cover the mitigation costs of minor developments, then NE is happy to agree to this approach, but it should be written up in the supporting text and HRA.
- As you are aware the discussions around moving the interim strategy forward are ongoing. Currently the oversight group is hopeful that a governance agreement and breakdown of the SAMM tariff may be able to be brought before councils in January 2022 and we would advise that the policy may need to be amended as appropriate as these discussions develop.
- We advise the addition of a further point to this policy stating that appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures will be secured prior to occupation.
- We commend the list of measures highlighted in table 6.1 outlining a proposed mitigation strategy to offset the impacts of development on Epping Forest SAC. However, we would like to discuss these measures further to ensure that Natural England are able to agree that these are measures which would be suitable as avoidance and mitigation measures for Epping Forest SAC.

Paragraph 6.1.1 in 'Blue and green Enfield' highlights Enfield's many open spaces, including over 300ha of woodland and scrubland. Area like this provides strong potential opportunities for SANG, which we are aware forms a part of the mitigation put forward in table 6.1. Natural England have previously discussed the possibility of a site visit to Enfield to visit potential SANG opportunities within the borough, and this is an offer we would like to reiterate. We would like to work with Enfield Council to identify suitable mitigation options in the borough and are happy to continue these discussions. The Local Plan can be used as a vehicle to identify potential developer mitigation options around the borough. Having this sort of strategic approach to the avoidance and mitigation measures for Epping Forest SAC would help in the evidence base for the HRA to show that the quantum of housing proposed is deliverable. Currently, the identified avoidance and mitigation measures for Epping Forest SAC gives some level of risk to the deliverability of this Plan.

As mentioned above, the discussions around the emerging Epping Forest Strategic Solution are ongoing, and we would expect the London Borough of Enfield to sign up to the updated SAMM project once it has been agreed. The [East Hampshire Local Plan](#) provides good example wording that could be used to reflect the similar situation with Epping Forest SAC in paragraph 2 of SP22 'Internationally Designated Sites'. We would expect there to be a policy commitment to contributing towards mitigation measures set out in the Epping Forest mitigation strategy and the policy should also state that this should be in place by the time the Local Plan is adopted.

2.2. Habitats Regulations Assessment

With regards to the HRA, we understand that much of this work is ongoing, and largely agree with the conclusions of the current HRA with regards to the summary of the Appropriate Assessment given in Table 5.1. We note that this HRA quotes the 2017 Footprint Ecology Visitor Survey, referencing 1.24% of visits to the forest come from the London Borough of Enfield and we would advise that this should be updated to the 2% illustrated in the 2019 Visitor Survey.

Air Quality: The Local Plan indicates a housing delivery target of 25,000 homes by 2039. Whilst the contribution of this new development to air pollution impacts on the nearby designated sites is partially dependent on the chosen spatial development strategy, without effective cross-boundary cooperation with other Boroughs, it is unlikely that a Likely Significant Effect on the SAC can be ruled out. Natural England agree with the conclusions of the HRA that currently the effects of the plan on air quality remain uncertain and that further information is required. We are pleased to see that the air pollution and traffic data surveys have been commissioned by Enfield Council and would be happy to discuss these once completed.

Recreational Pressure on Epping Forest SAC: In terms of recreational pressure avoidance and mitigation measures, we agree with the recommendations made in the HRA, especially in paragraph 5.56 highlighting the importance of strategic SANG measures and the need for more detailed wording in policy BG2. For these reasons we agree with the conclusion given in paragraph 5.59 that it is not possible to conclude no adverse effects on the integrity of Epping Forest SAC as a result of recreational pressure at this stage.

3. Biodiversity Net Gain

There is a strong likelihood that mandatory net gain may come forward soon. We welcome the inclusion of policy SP BG3 (BNG, rewilding and offsetting), outlining that all developments must submit an action plan evidencing how the development will achieve a minimum of 10% net gain, preferably on site. Natural England has recently released the [Defra Biodiversity Metric 3.0](#). The new metric is accompanied with detailed guidance and a tool to apply the metric. Natural England encourages the incorporation of the [10 best practice principles](#) developed by CIRIA/CIEEM/IEMA for those delivering biodiversity net gain.

We note that Chingford Reservoirs have been identified in point 3 of the policy, and would highlight that these are notified as an SSSI, and any improvements would have to be made in line with the regulations for this designation, and without any impact to the site and species.

Where net gain cannot be provided on site, or feasibly as close to the development as possible, Natural England recommends that consideration is given to developing a suite of projects across the borough/area that development within the Borough can contribute to thereby ensuring the biodiversity within the Borough is protected and enhanced. For examples, partners that manage Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Importance for Natural Conservation or Sites of Metropolitan Importance could submit projects to the LPA to enhance the ecological value of these sites. These projects could be funded by development that requires offsite compensation or additional enhancements to achieve biodiversity net gain. This approach can be used by development with limited opportunities for biodiversity net gain on site.

The Plan should set out a strategic approach, planning positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity. There should be consideration of geodiversity conservation in terms of any geological sites and features in the wider environment. A strategic approach for networks of biodiversity should support a similar approach for green infrastructure. Plans should set out the approach to delivering net gains for biodiversity. Net gain for biodiversity should be considered for all aspects of the plan and development types, including transport proposals, housing and community infrastructure.

Natural England would like to draw your attention to **Annex A** which contains useful resources as well as advice and benefits of embedding BNG into the local plan.

4. Blue and Green Infrastructure (GI)

We welcome the inclusion of Blue and Green Infrastructure as its own policy (Policy BG1 and BG11). GI refers to the living network of green spaces, water and other environmental features in both urban and rural areas. It is often used in an urban context to provide multiple benefits including space for recreation, access to nature, flood storage and urban cooling to support climate change mitigation, food production, wildlife habitats and health & well-being improvements provided by trees, rights of way, parks, gardens, road verges, allotments, cemeteries, woodlands, rivers and wetlands.

A strategic approach for green infrastructure is required to ensure its protection and enhancement, as outlined in para 179 of the NPPF. Green Infrastructure should be incorporated into the plan as a strategic policy area, supported by appropriate detailed policies and proposals to ensure effective provision and delivery.

5. Climate change adaptation

We welcome consideration of Climate Change, as outlined in Section 4 of the Local Plan. The Local Plan should, in considering climate change adaptation, also recognise the role of the natural environment to deliver measures to reduce the effects of climate change, for example tree planting to moderate heat island effects. In addition, factors which may lead to exacerbate climate change (through more greenhouse gases) should be avoided (e.g. pollution, habitat fragmentation, loss of biodiversity) and the natural environment's resilience to change should be protected. Green Infrastructure and resilient ecological networks play an important role in aiding climate change adaptation.

A list of useful links of the consideration of climate change adaptation is provided at **Annex B**.

6. Sites of Least Environmental Value

In accordance with the paragraph 171 of NPPF, the plan should allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value. Natural England expects sufficient evidence to be provided, through the SA and HRA, to justify the site selection process and to ensure sites of least environmental value are selected, e.g. land allocations should avoid designated sites and landscapes and significant areas of best and most versatile agricultural land and should consider the direct and indirect effects of development, including on land outside designated boundaries and within the setting of protected landscapes.

7. Priority habitats, ecological networks and priority and/or legally protected species populations

The Local Plan should be underpinned by up to date environmental evidence. This should include an assessment of existing and potential components of local ecological networks. This assessment should inform the Sustainability Appraisal, ensure that land of least environment value is chosen for development, and that the mitigation hierarchy is followed and inform opportunities for enhancement as well as development requirements for particular sites.

Priority habitats and species are those listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006 and UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP). Further information is available here: [Habitats and species of principal importance in England](#). Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) identify the local action needed to deliver UK targets for habitats and species. They also identify targets for other habitats and species of local importance and can provide a useful blueprint for biodiversity enhancement in any particular area.

Protected species are those species protected under domestic or European law. Further information can be found here [Standing advice for protected species](#). Sites containing watercourses, old buildings, significant hedgerows and substantial trees are possible habitats for protected species.

Ecological networks are coherent systems of natural habitats organised across whole landscapes so as to maintain ecological functions. A key principle is to maintain connectivity - to enable free movement and dispersal of wildlife e.g. badger routes, river corridors for the migration of fish and staging posts for migratory birds. Local ecological networks will form a key part of the wider Nature Recovery Network proposed in the 25 Year Environment Plan. Where development is proposed, opportunities should be explored to contribute to the enhancement of ecological networks.

Planning positively for ecological networks will also contribute towards a strategic approach for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of green infrastructure, as identified in paragraph 179 of the NPPF.

Where a plan area contains irreplaceable habitats, such as ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees, there should be appropriate policies to ensure their protection. Natural England and the Forestry Commission have produced [standing advice](#) on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees.

For more information on sources of local plan evidence on the natural environment, please see the associated document, attached in the covering email for this Local Plan response. Natural England would welcome discussion with LBE on the emerging Local Plan and HRA.

Yours faithfully

Annex A – Biodiversity Net Gain

General advice and benefits of embedding biodiversity net gain

Biodiversity net gain is a key tool to help nature's recovery and is also fundamental to health and wellbeing as well as creating attractive and sustainable places to live and work in. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) highlights the role of '*policies and decision making to minimise impacts and provide net gains for biodiversity*' (para 170)

Planning Practice Guidance describes net gain as an '*approach to development that leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand*' and applies to both biodiversity net gain and wider environmental net gains. For biodiversity net gain, the [Biodiversity Metric 2.0](#), can be used to measure gains and losses to biodiversity resulting from development. We advise you to use this metric to implement development plan policies on biodiversity net gain. Any action, as a result of development, that creates or enhances habitat features can be measured using the metric and as a result count towards biodiversity net gain.

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, along with partners, has developed '[good practice principles](#)' for biodiversity net gain, which can assist plan-making authorities in gathering evidence and developing policy.

Resource	Link
UK Parliament Post: Net Gain	https://post.parliament.uk/research-briefings/post-pb-0034/
NE YouTube	An introduction to Biodiversity Net Gain
Biodiversity net gain: updating planning requirements	https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/biodiversity-net-gain-updating-planning-requirement
PPG	https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment#biodiversity-geodiversity-and-ecosystems
CIEEM	https://cieem.net/i-am/current-projects/biodiversity-net-gain/
	https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Biodiversity-Net-Gain-Principles.pdf
Biodiversity Metric (3.0)	The Biodiversity Metric 3.0 - JP039 (naturalengland.org.uk)
The Environment Bank	https://www.environmentbank.com/blog/the-environment-bill-and-biodiversity-net-gain-delivery-what-planning-authorities-need-to-know/

WSP – Biodiversity Net Gain	https://www.wsp.com/-/media/Insights/UK/Documents/Biodiversity-Net-Gain_WSP-Guide_web.pdf?la=en-GB&hash=FC7577318B01150687246A6D5C90F34CB6728120
Working for Biodiversity Net Gain	https://documents.hants.gov.uk/hampshire2050/evidence/theme-4-environment-and-quality-of-place/supporting-evidence-and-research-reports/Theme-4-Working-for-Biodiversity-Net-Gain-BBOP.pdf
Includes NE presentation	https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Biodiversity%20Net%20Gain%20Dec%202018.pdf
Wildlife Trust Briefing 2018	https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/Net%20gain%20final%20briefing%20for%20Wildlife%20Trusts.pdf
Redrow Homes & Wildlife Trust	https://www.redrow.co.uk/newsroom/national/2020/7/redrows-biodiversity-strategy-from-a-wildlife-trust-perspective
Natural England Blog	https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/tag/net-gain/
Insights into Nature & Biodiversity	https://www.ukgbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Insights-into-Nature-and-Biodiversity-Industry-trends-commitments-and-best-practice-examples.pdf
British Standard	https://standardsdevelopment.bsigroup.com/projects/2018-02413#/section

Annex B – Climate Change Adaptation

We have put together the following list of resources that can help to embed climate change adaptation into the Local Plan:

- The [Climate Change Adaptation Manual](#) provides extensive information on climate change adaptation for the natural environment. It includes the Landscape Scale Climate Change Assessment Method that can help people through an assessment of the impacts and vulnerabilities of their natural environment features and the adaptation they can plan. There are sections on habitats, species, green infrastructure, access and recreation and geology and geomorphology.
- The [Nature Networks Evidence Handbook](#) – again, a repository for our current evidence, tools and action regarding nature networks, it contains practical suggestions for designing and delivering a network and there is a practitioners version.
- A range of spatial data including - [National Biodiversity Climate Change Vulnerability](#)

[Assessment](#) (NBCCVA), National Habitat Network, [Species Risks and Opportunities](#) climate envelope modelling, etc. These datasets are included in the Landscape Scale Climate Change Assessment Method in the Climate Change Adaptation Manual, the Data and Tools chapter in the Nature Networks Evidence Handbook and NRN toolkit list. Furthermore, the fragmentation metric of the NBCCVA tool provides the Biodiversity and Connectivity Tool within the Biodiversity Metric of Net Gain.

- A range of introductory climate change webinars ([Natural England Climate Change webinars](#)) are available on our YouTube channel.

The following are planning and climate change documents which looked at climate change, species responses, ecological networks and spatial planning:

- Climate Change and Biodiversity Adaptation: The Role of the Spatial Planning System (NECR004) <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/41006?category=10003>
- Making space for wildlife in a changing climate (NE263) <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/47002?category=10003>
- Spatial planning for biodiversity in our changing climate (ENRR677) <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/63010?category=10003>