



**WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

EXAMINATION OF THE WOKING CORE STRATEGY

**Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions:
Matter 2: Natural Environment**

**Submission by Natural England
8th March 2012**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Natural England is responsible for ensuring that England's natural environment, including its land, flora and fauna, freshwater and marine environments, geology and soils are protected and improved. It also has a responsibility to help people enjoy, understand and access the natural environment. Natural England was established by the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. It was formed by the amalgamation of three founder bodies:
 - Countryside Agency, the landscape, access and recreation elements
 - English Nature
 - Rural Development Service, the environmental land management functions of Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
- 1.2. We received the powers of the founder bodies e.g. awarding grants; designating Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Sites of Special Scientific Interest; managing certain National Nature Reserves; overseeing access to open country and other recreation rights; and enforcing the associated regulations.
- 1.3. We confirm that unless we are instructed otherwise by the Inspector we do not intend to appear at this session on 21st March 2012.

Inspector's Matters, Issues and Questions

2. Matter 2: Does the CS take a justified and effective approach to issues relating to the Green Belt (GB) and the natural environment which is consistent with national planning policy?

- 2.1. This statement should be read in conjunction with Natural England's formal consultation response to the Core Strategy (CS) Publication Document dated 23 September 2011. It focuses on the two main matters raised in this response, namely the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and Policy CS8.

CS7 Biodiversity and CS8 Special Protection Areas (SPA)

Is the supporting Habitats Regulation Assessment adequate?

- 2.2. Following extensive discussions and further work carried out by the consultants between October and December 2011 Natural England is now satisfied that the December 2011 version of the HRA is adequate.

Does the CS take a robust and justified approach to biodiversity issues, particularly in relation to the Thames Basin Heath SPA? Is CS8 consistent with SEP NRM6? Will CS8 provide adequate policy direction with regard to the Thames Basin Heath SPA? Is there evidence that reasonable mitigation measures can be employed in the event residential development occurs? (Adequacy of SANG over the plan period)

- 2.3. Natural England is satisfied with the revised wording of Policy CS8 as proposed by the Council (WBC/12) in response to Matter 2 (Question 14). Provided this revised wording is incorporated as proposed we are satisfied that CS8 is consistent with SEP NRM6 and will provide adequate policy direction with regard to the Thames Basin Heath SPA.
- 2.4. We have provided our view on the adequacy of SANG over the plan period in our formal consultation response dated 23 September 2011. Natural England accepts that the proposed amount of new housing in the Borough (4,694 dwellings) cannot be sufficiently addressed by the current provision of SANG. We therefore advise that the caveat in CS10 relating to internationally designated conservation sites should be tightened up. This alteration is included in the document produced by the Council entitled 'Proposed changes to Core Strategy Publication Document' (December 2011) and will ensure that new residential development which represents a net increase in dwellings will not occur without appropriate mitigation measures.

- 2.5 The CS covers the period up to 2027 and during this time Natural England will continue to work with the Council to identify and agree further SANGs. The Council have recently approached us regarding a potential new SANG at Westfield Common.
- 2.6 The caveat approach has been tested during the EiP of the Surrey Heath CS, it was found to be sound and the CS was adopted on 1 February 2012.

Is Natural England content with the CS and specifically CS8?

- 2.7 Following the upcoming revocation of the SEP (and associated loss of NRM6), we are satisfied Policies CS8 and CS10 (both as revised) will ensure further residential development in the Borough is not likely to have a significant effect on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.