

Summary

This report is the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Lichfield District Local Plan at Preferred Options stage. A plan level HRA considers the implications of a plan or project for European wildlife sites, in terms of any possible harm to the habitats and species that form an interest feature of the European sites in close proximity to the proposed plan. This HRA report draws on a range of background evidence, understanding of the European sites, and the mitigation strategies currently in place for Cannock Chase and the River Mease SACs.

All aspects of the emerging plan that influence sustainable development for the Lichfield District are checked for risks to European sites. Risks need to be identified in order to inform the screening for likely significant effects, which is an initial stage of assessment to establish whether there is any possibility of the implementation of the plan causing significant effects on any European site. Where the potential for significant effects is identified, or there are uncertainties, a more detailed appropriate assessment is made. This report has regard for relevant case law, including a European Court of Justice Judgment that highlights the need for appropriate use of avoidance and mitigation measures at the correct stage of HRA. This HRA includes an initial screening for likely significant effects, has highlighted the European sites at potential risk, and has recommended a number of themes for more detailed appropriate assessment.

The appropriate assessment, a detailed assessment of identified risks to European sites, has commenced but will be further refined as the plan progresses. The Appropriate Assessment considers potential risks to Cannock Chase SAC, Cannock Extension Canal SAC, the River Mease SAC, Pasturefields Salt Marsh SAC and Humber Estuary SAC/SPA/Ramsar site. The potential impact themes for appropriate assessment are: air quality changes from increased road traffic, recreation pressure, water quality and resources, and urbanisation effects in close proximity (fire risk, lighting, noise etc). The appropriate assessment includes consideration of preferred options for site allocations, and also highlights the importance of biodiversity net gain as an integral part of a holistic approach to nature conservation as part of the Local Plan.

The appropriate assessment is progressed after a screening of preferred options. Early assessment of risk at appropriate assessment ensures that the Lichfield Local Plan identifies mitigation needs that protect the European sites from any project level impacts. The HRA conclusion at this stage is that there are likely significant effects, and these are assessed within the appropriate assessment. Further iterations of HRA will be undertaken, and additional detail added to the appropriate assessment. It is however concluded that there are measures either in place or in progression, that give confidence that a conclusion of no adverse effects on European site integrity will be possible at the next stage of plan making, prior to submission for Examination.