BUILDING
A BETTER FUTURE

Natural Environment Topic Paper

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Havant
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Natural Environment Topic Paper

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1. Introduction

1.1. This topic paper sets out the policy approach to the natural environment in Havant Borough Council's Publication Building a Better Future Plan. The paper details the legislative background, strategic initiatives, and protected site, habitat and species measures that have shaped the policies within the Plan. The purpose of the paper is to explain how and why each policy has been drafted to reflect the wider legislative and policy context and strategic-level mitigation initiatives, and how when implemented the policies will ensure that the Borough's important natural environment is protected and enhanced as far as is possible within the scope of the Plan.

1.2. Each of the natural environment policies within the Plan is described, explaining the information that has been used to develop the policy.

1.3. The policies related to the natural environment presented in the Plan are:

- Policy 4: Infrastructure and Environmental Mitigation to Support Development
- Policy 5: Green and Blue Infrastructure
- Policy 20: Biodiversity Net Gain
- Policy 21: International and National Nature Conservation Sites
- Policy 22: The Local Ecological Network
- Policy 23: Recreation Disturbance on International Sites
- Policy 24: Water Quality Effects on International Sites
- Policy 25: Protected and Notable Species
- Policy 26: Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy Sites
- Policy 27: Flood Risk
- Policy 28: Drainage
- Policy 29: Development on the Coast
- Policy 31: Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland

1.4. The paper presents a series of topic areas and then shows how each is addressed through the Plan's suite of policies.

1.5. In January 2025 the Council published its Biodiversity Strategy. The 2025 Biodiversity Strategy is a fundamental review of biodiversity in Havant Borough, highlighting our exceptional natural environment, the many challenges it faces, and the many opportunities for promoting and enhancing biodiversity. The Strategy includes a set of actions that the Council is committed to delivering. These actions shape how the Council addresses the natural environment, both through its own actions and through its influence more widely. The natural environment policies within the Local Plan have been drafted in the context of the Biodiversity Strategy.

2. Havant's natural environment

2.1. Havant Borough is situated in the south-east corner of Hampshire between the cities of Portsmouth and Chichester. Despite being one of the most densely populated areas in England, the borough is hugely important in terms of biodiversity. The borough contains significant areas of countryside and coast, including nearly 50km of internationally important coastline, and lies adjacent to the South Downs National Park. Defining features include the surrounding Langstone and Chichester Harbours and coastline, the chalk streams and river valleys of the Ems, Westbourne, Hermitage and Lavant, and the pasture land and woodland heritage associated with the former Forest of Bere.

2.2. The complex landscape and social history of the borough has led to today's patchwork of natural, semi-natural and highly modified habitats. This patchwork of habitats forms an ecological network. made up of formally protected sites, habitats, and species as well as areas that are not afforded legal protection, but which nonetheless contribute to the natural heritage of the borough.

2.3. In summary, Havant's natural environment comprises the following elements:

- Protected sites – international, national, and local
- Priority habitats
- Protected and notable species
- Other habitats

International sites

2.4. The majority of the borough's coastline is part of the internationally designated Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to the importance of the marine and estuarine habitats present. Chichester and Langstone Harbours are both designated as Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar sites because of the significance of their wintering wader and wildfowl assemblages as well as breeding seabird populations. They contain extensive intertidal mudflats and sandflats with areas of seagrass beds, saltmarsh, shallow coastal waters, coastal lagoons, coastal grazing marsh, and shingle ridges and islands.

National sites

2.5. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are the finest sites for wildlife and natural features in England, supporting many characteristic, rare, and endangered species, habitats and natural features. The borough is home to four SSSIs which include the extensive Chichester Harbour SSSI and Langstone Harbour SSSI (components of the SPA, SAC and Ramsar designations). Sinah Common SSSI on the south-west coast of Hayling Island is designated for its complex of maritime and terrestrial habitats, including pioneer shingle vegetation and maritime shingle grassland, vegetated dunes, and saltmarsh. The site is also notified for its outstanding assemblage of nationally scarce plants. Warblington Meadow SSSI is designated for its unimproved grazing marsh adjoining Chichester Harbour and its gradation from freshwater marsh to old, reclaimed saltmarsh, and for its rich associated flora.

2.6. The borough also contains eight sites designated as Local Nature Reserves (LNR), and an additional 110 non-statutory Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs) which are locally important sites for biodiversity. SINCs represent a legacy of good management and rely upon continued stewardship by landowners (they are often in private ownership).

Priority Habitats

2.7. The term Priority Habitats means habitats listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006. Also called Habitats of Principal Importance, these are considered to be the most important habitat types in England and require explicit protection in law. Priority Habitats require specific conservation action, and all public bodies (including Local Planning Authorities) must consider these to help them meet their duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Priority Habitats lists are used to inform planning policy and decision-making.

Priority, Protected and Notable Species

2.8. As with Priority Habitats, certain species listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006 are known as Priority Species or Species of Principal Importance and require explicit protection in law and consideration in policy. Other species are afforded legal protection and are known as protected species. Other species are considered notable at the local scale. These are not explicitly protected through legislation or inclusion on the Priority Species list but are nevertheless considered to be 'notable' at the local level. For example, some relatively common species on a national scale may have the majority of their UK population within Hampshire, or indeed Havant Borough, and therefore there is a responsibility at the local level to protect these species.

Other Habitats

2.9. Also important are habitats within our rural, urban, and suburban areas such as road verges, gardens, allotments, churchyards, and public greenspaces. These habitats are usually not subject to formal protection but are important components of the local environment and often provide buffers to, or stepping-stones between, areas of designated habitat.

3. Legislative and policy background

3.1. This sections sets out UK's framework of national legislation and policy that has shaped the Council's approach to the natural environment as presented in the Plan. There are a number of key pieces of national legislation and policy that determine how the Council must approach the natural environment.

Environment Act 2021

3.2. The Environment Act 2021 strengthens the Biodiversity Duty (under The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006) for Local Authorities. Public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. They two key provisions are the mandatory requirement for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in the planning system, requiring development to deliver a 10% improvement in biodiversity value, and a statutory requirement for Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) to be produced by a responsible authority.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

3.3. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated in August 2026. The Building a Better Future Publication Plan was developed in a way which anticipated the August 2026 update through the NPPF's consultation in December 2025.

3.4. Chapter 19 of the NPPF addresses the natural environment, and its stated purpose is to "influence the design and location of new development to help drive nature's recovery and contribute to wider environmental outcomes, safeguarding our most important habitats, species and landscapes and recognising the centrality of natural capital to delivering sustainable growth".

3.5. The NPPF includes details of what is expected in respect of Local Plan policies, including that the following elements should be included within plans and decision-making:

- International, national and locally designated sites and areas of importance for their landscape, geological (including soil) or biodiversity value;
- Opportunities for the conservation, enhancement and recovery of landscapes, sensitive waterbodies, habitats and species of principal importance, including through habitat restoration, the use of nature-based solutions, and the creation and strengthening of ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- Limiting the scale and extent of development within protected landscapes, avoiding the use of higher quality agricultural land where land of poorer quality is available and avoiding and minimising harm to designated sites of importance for nature;
- Set out standards for green infrastructure provision, in a way which complements and/or incorporates those for recreational land;
- Consider the environmental qualities of land proposed for development, including habitats, landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside, and identify opportunities for those qualities to be conserved or enhanced;
- Take suitable opportunities to connect to and strengthen ecological networks that extend beyond the site, drawing on the measures proposed by Local Nature Recovery Strategies;

- Conserve and enhance existing natural features of visual, historic or nature conservation value (such as established trees and hedgerows) wherever possible; and use appropriate landscaping to help create a well-designed place and integrate the development into its surroundings;
- Use green infrastructure provided as part of the scheme and nature-based solutions to secure multiple benefits: such as for biodiversity; surface water and pollution management (including maintaining flow rates and water quality); climate change mitigation and adaptation, and recreation;
- Minimise impacts on biodiversity and include features for species which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs. Development proposals should incorporate integrated nest boxes (commonly known as swift bricks) into their construction unless there are compelling technical reasons which prevent their use, or would make them ineffective;

3.6. In addition, the NPPF includes decision-making guidance on how 'Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity' such as protected sites, habitats and species must be addressed in planning policy.

Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025

3.7. The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 sets out the UK Government's approach to delivering new housing and critical infrastructure. In respect to the natural environment, the Act introduces Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs). EDPs will identify and deliver strategic conservation measures that address specific environmental impacts of development on protected sites or species. EDPs will be funded through developer contributions, with funds made available for the implementation of each EDP. There are currently no EDPs in place within Hampshire or adjoining counties.

Habitats Regulations 2017

3.8. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 implement the European Union's Habitats Directive and Birds Directive into UK law. In practice, the Habitats Regulations provide the legal framework for the following internationally protected sites:

- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** – designated due to their international importance for birds.
- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** – designated in recognition of their international importance for other wildlife, predominantly vegetation communities but also e.g. bat species.
- **Ramsar Wetland Sites** – designated through the Ramsar Convention 1971, these are wetlands of international importance. Ramsar sites are treated the same as SPAs and SACs in terms of protection under the Habitats Regulations.

3.9. The Habitats Regulations also ensure that any plan or project (such as a local plan or a development proposal) must undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to demonstrate that the plan or project would not result in impacts to the habitats and species listed as 'qualifying features' of any internationally designated site.

3.10. In the context of the Publication Building a Better Future Plan, the Habitats Regulations is relevant where any policy or allocation has potential to result in adverse effects on any European site within a 10km radius of the borough.

3.11. The Plan itself has been subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment. The Plan HRA concludes through a combination of strategic mitigation and proposal-specific mitigation, adverse effects on European site integrity can be avoided in all instances.

Environmental Improvement Plan

3.12. The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) was published in December 2025 and comprises a reviewed and updated version of the previous 25 Year Environment Plan. It provides a delivery framework for the 25 Year Environment Plan, setting out what the UK will do to improve the environment within a generation. The EIP has statutory status.

3.13. Together with the Environment Act, the Environmental Improvement Plan form an ambitious framework for delivering large-scale nature recovery in England. It is clear that the UK Government's position on nature recovery is based around delivery at scale, and statutory bodies such as Natural England are encouraged to facilitate that delivery. Natural England's new Strategy - Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security – demonstrates a new approach that is about flexibility and delivery.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

3.14. Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a legal requirement stemming from the Environment Act 2021. Launched in December 2025 the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Hampshire provides a framework for nature recovery delivery across Hampshire. The LNRS is a spatial document that:

- Guides how nature recovery will take place in Hampshire and has a particularly important role in guiding how Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is delivered across the Strategy area.

- Sets out the priorities for achieving the best outcomes for nature recovery, while providing options and opportunities which will support the wider strategies of the County Council and partner authorities.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

3.15. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became mandatory for certain types of development in 2024, implemented through the Environment Act 2021. BNG is a significant change in the approach to addressing impacts from built development on the natural environment.

3.16. All planning permissions granted in England (with a few exemptions) have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain. It is measured using DEFRA's Biodiversity Metric and habitats need to be secured and managed for at least 30 years.

3.17. Although implemented through the Environment Act 2021, BNG is enacted through additional statutory instruments. BNG does not replace existing legislation, policies, or obligations related to the natural environment. It is an additional, new mechanism for measuring and addressing biodiversity impacts resulting from new development.

3.18. BNG is designed to deliver measurable improvements for biodiversity by enhancing or creating habitats in association with development. It has the potential to become a powerful mechanism for nature recovery.

Summary of legislative and policy influences

3.19. It is clear that the approach to delivering nature conservation and biodiversity action in the UK is undergoing a cultural shift. It is now recognised that the traditional reliance on formal nature reserves and other protected areas as a means to protect biodiversity has not been sufficient to prevent widespread declines in nature. This shift stems from the influential 2010 Lawton Review 'Making space for nature: a review of England's wildlife sites' and growing awareness of the current state of nature. The focus from government, statutory agencies and non-governmental organisations is now very much on nature recovery, meaning that opportunities for biodiversity protection and enhancement need to be widespread, innovative, bigger, better, and more joined up. There is also widespread recognition that nature recovery needs to be embedded into the UK's cities, towns and villages especially through a much more integrated approach to green and blue infrastructure that combines biodiversity, climate, flood management, and social value benefits.

3.20. The UK Government set out a new framework of environmental targets under the Environment Act 2021.This includes ambitious targets for nature recovery, with the objective to halt the decline in nature by 2030. The Environment Act embeds the need for strategic action for nature recovery. The two key developments arising from the Environment Act 2021 are BNG and the LNRS.

How has the Council responded?

3.21. In the context of this legislative and policy framework, the policies presented in the plan have been shaped by the legislative requirements and by the overarching 'themes' of nature protection as detailed in national policy guidance as well as the underlying cultural shift in nature recovery thinking.

3.22. Havant Borough is extremely constrained by natural environment designations, reflecting the presence of various sites, habitats, and species or international, national, and local significance within and around the Borough.

3.23. Detailed screening of all Plan policies and site allocations has informed the Plan at all stages of development. Ecological constraints – sites, habitats, species – and requirements in terms of ecological survey information are identified, and requirements for ecological mitigation are provided. Similarly, the Development Strategy also identifies the many significant ecological constraints within the Borough.

Havant Biodiversity Strategy 2025

3.24. The Council published its Biodiversity Strategy in January 2025. The Biodiversity Strategy – alongside the Council's Climate Strategy and Action Plan – is being used by the Council to shape its own actions and to help guide others in protecting biodiversity and encouraging nature recovery.

4. Strategic Mitigation Strategies covering Havant Borough

4.1. Havant Borough Council is an active partner in various strategic environmental mitigation measures designed to provide protection to various international protected sites and species. Local authorities across the Solent area have worked in partnership for many years in supporting strategic mitigation solutions for the following widespread issues:

- Recreational disturbance and the Bird Aware Solent Strategy
- Nutrient neutrality, addressed through the Solent Mitigation Partnership
- Impacts to functionally linked land and the Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy

4.2. The suite of natural environment policies has been developed to recognise the importance of protecting the borough's international designated sites and to ensure that critical cross-boundary strategic mitigation initiatives and strategies or strategic approaches prepared by those partnerships are embedded in policy. The Plan includes policies specifically addressing these strategic mitigation measures.

Bird Aware Solent

4.3. Bird Aware Solent[1] refers to the Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy (SRMS). This Solent-wide proactive strategy includes detailed mitigation measures to address the identified impacts arising from recreational disturbance on the interest features of the Solent's Special Protection Areas, namely populations of wintering and breeding coastal bird species.

4.4. The partnership has been active for over a decade at this point and providing mitigation for this purpose is a standard part of the development process. The approach to mitigation is set out in a dedicated strategy[2] prepared through the partnership. This is available in the evidence base as document NE01.

4.5. Mitigation measures comprise: a ranger team, communications, marketing and education initiatives, initiatives to encourage responsible dog walking, codes of conduct, site-specific visitor management and bird refuge projects and monitoring.

4.6. To fund the strategy, a financial based planning obligation is provided for each new dwelling situated within 5.6km of the Solent SPAs[3]. This levy then funds the mitigation measures. This is secured by a legal agreement attached to planning permissions.

4.7. The strategy is fully supported by Natural England (who are also an active member of the partnership) and is considered by them to provide sufficient mitigation to offset the bulk of recreational pressure from new development within the Borough. There may be situations

[1] birdaware.org/solent
[2] birdaware.org/solent/about-us/our-strategy/
[3] Portsmouth Harbour SPA, Chichester & Langstone Harbour SPA and Solent and Southampton Water SPA.

however where on-site mitigation, in addition to the strategy mitigation, is deemed necessary due to the scale or location of development, though this has not to date been necessary for any development in Havant Borough since the scheme's introduction in 2014.

Policy response

4.8. The Plan includes policies directly addressing impacts to international and national designated sites from recreational disturbance and other sources of adverse effect. The policy response includes the requirement to engage fully with strategic-level mitigation initiatives, as well as project-specific requirements to assess risk and incorporate avoidance, mitigation and compensation measures.

4.9. **Policy 23: Recreation Disturbance on International Sites** sets out the Council's expectations for development that would be likely to result in increased recreational disturbance. The policy states:

"Planning permission will be granted for new dwellings and/or overnight accommodation that avoids and/or mitigates the likely significant effect on the Solent SPA and Ramsar sites from recreational disturbance. This mitigation can be provided through either:

a) A financial contribution towards the delivery of the Bird Aware Solent Strategy; or
b) A developer-provided package of measures associated with the proposed development supported by evidence that it will avoid or mitigate any likely significant effect; or
c) A combination of measures in (a) and (b) above.

Where these measures cannot be provided development proposals will be refused, unless the applicant can show, subject to meeting the tests of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations, that there would not be a likely significant effect on the Solent SPA and Ramsar sites either alone or in combination with other plans or projects".

4.10. In practice, Policy 23 requires applicants to either provide a financial contribution towards Bird Aware Solent, in line with the current published mitigation fee schedule, or to provide a bespoke mitigation package that addresses in full the predicted adverse effects from recreational disturbance. In some instance it may be appropriate to provide a combination of these two elements.

4.11. The process for addressing the impacts of recreational disturbance on the Solent's Special Protection areas – the Bird Aware Solent scheme - is well-established and widely welcomed as a pragmatic innovation by developers, local planning authorities and Natural England. The financial obligations required through this process are addressed in the Local Plan Viability Assessment: Initial Viability Analysis for Affordable Housing Options – Stage 1, Appendix 1.

4.12. For all development proposals with potential for affecting an international site, it is expected that an appropriate level of assessment is provided to demonstrate how impacts will be avoided, mitigated or compensated. This assessment process is formalised in Policy 21: International and National Conservation Sites.

4.13. **Policy 21: International and National Nature Conservation Sites** provides an additional level of protection for the borough's important designated sites. This policy states:

"*Development must protect, conserve, and enhance the Borough's internationally and nationally designated sites, both individually and as a network. Planning permission will only be granted where:*

a) *Development avoids or mitigates harm to all internationally and nationally designated sites ; and*
b) *The applicant has identified and assessed the extent of any harm to the value of the designated sites through adequate and proportionate information; and*
c) *Any matters arising from an application are addressed through an avoidance or mitigation plan; and*
d) *Any necessary mitigation plan includes provision for ongoing management and maintenance; and*
e) *Impact assessments are demonstrably guided by the mitigation hierarchy of 'avoid-mitigate-compensate'*

International nature conservation sites

In addition to criteria a) to d) development which is likely to have an impact on an internationally designated sites will be subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment to determine the potential for a likely significant effect. Development which has a likely significant effect either alone or in combination with another plan or project will not be permitted unless it can demonstrate that either:

f) *The necessary avoidance or mitigation is secured so that there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of the designated site(s); or*
g) *There are no alternatives, but there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest in favour of permitting the development and compensatory provision is secured".*

Nutrient Neutrality

4.14. The water quality on our coast can be affected by excessive levels of nitrates which can come from a number of sources, including wastewater from new housing development. Declines in water quality impact protected marine and intertidal habitats and species.

4.15. In late 2018, the European Court of Justice determined a case related to considering water quality in Appropriate Assessments for development, known as the 'Dutch Case'. The judgement refined the definition of plans and projects and includes more operations with an impact on water quality within that definition. As a result, the only way that a new housing scheme could prevent a likely significant effect on the Solent European Sites in relation to water quality is for there to be no increase in nutrients into the harbour, i.e. for it to be 'nutrient neutral'.

4.16. Prior to the Dutch Case, there was existing uncertainty on the impact of proposed longer term development on the Solent European Sites through the PUSH Integrated Water Management Study[4]. This is due to the condition of the European Sites that new development would affect. The outcomes of the Dutch Case led to Natural England updating their advice on how to

[4] www.push.gov.uk/work/publications/research-reports/

consider water quality in Habitats Regulations Assessments on planning applications in April 2019.

4.17. The judgement and subsequent advice from Natural England meant that planning permissions could not be granted unless development is shown to be nutrient neutral in and of itself, or is able to provide off-site mitigation.

4.18. The majority of waters within Havant Borough are conveyed to the Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW) at Budd's Farm near Langstone where, during normal dry weather periods and after treatment, they are discharged into the Solent via the Eastney Long Sea Outfall (LSO). During periods of wet weather combined wastewater and rainfall run-off can be discharged, without robust treatment, directly into the Solent via Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO) in order to prevent flooding. The Emsworth area of the Borough discharges to Thornham WwTW just to the east of the Borough. Thornham WwTW discharges directly into Chichester Harbour.

4.19. Havant Borough Council identified Warblington Farm as a mitigation option for development which drains to both Budds Farm and Thornham WwTWs, to address the significant effect of development within the Borough on the Solent European Sites. Natural England agreed the suitability of Warblington Farm and have agreed with the findings of many HRAs on planning applications which use Warblington Farm. Havant Borough Council has also entered into an Inter Authority Agreement for Solent Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund Projects. Land has therefore been purchased in Stubbington within Fareham Borough Council's administrative area. The land is located within the East Hampshire River Catchment area and drains to the Solent via the River Meon.

4.20. There are a number of third party mitigation schemes available for development to use. The market for private sector mitigation has now flourished to the point where there is sufficient supply for the East Hampshire catchment for at least five years. Larger new developments in Havant Borough will therefore be expected to use third party mitigation schemes to ensure their development is nutrient neutral. Details of these schemes are published on the Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH)'s website[5]. Applicants may also wish to propose their own mitigation scheme. In such cases, applicants are encouraged to enter into early discussions with Natural England through the Discretionary Advice Service[6]. It will also be necessary to discuss the proposals with the Council as the competent authority. In all cases it will need to be established that there is a clear scientific link between the proposed development and the mitigation scheme to ensure the development in question is nutrient neutral. Any third-party mitigation scheme would also be required to provide supporting evidence to the Council as the competent authority for the proposed development to conclude that the mitigation principles set out in Natural England's guidance have been met. This will need to constitute robust information bespoke to the scheme in question which can be assessed as part of the AA for the planning application in question.

[5] https://www.push.gov.uk/work/mitigation-schemes-available-to-developers/
[6] https://www.push.gov.uk/natural-england-nutrient-calculator-and-guidance/

4.21. The Solent Mitigation Partnership on behalf of PfSH provide the supply and demand a model for nutrient mitigation in the Solent which has informed the HRA. Further updates to the supply and demand forecasting are expected.

Policy response

4.22. **Policy 24: Water Quality Effects on International Sites** is the key policy relating to the potential impacts of nutrient enrichment. This policy states:

"*Applications for new dwellings and/or net gain in overnight accommodation which would cause a likely significant effect on internationally designated sites will need to provide a nutrient budget. Planning permission will only be granted if a mitigation package is provided which will avoid an adverse effect on the internationally designated sites. This mitigation package can be provided through either:*

a) A financial contribution towards the Council's strategic mitigation package; or
b) A developer-provided package of measures associated with the proposed development supported by evidence that it will avoid or mitigate adverse effects on the Solent's internationally designated sites in perpetuity; or
c) A combination of measures in a. and b. above.

Where these measures cannot be provided development proposals will be refused, unless the applicant can show, subject to meeting the tests of the Habitats Regulations, that there would not be a likely significant effect on the Solent's internationally designated sites either alone or in combination with other plans or projects".

4.23. As with recreational disturbance, any development proposal with potential to result in nutrient impacts is required to provide bespoke assessment in accordance with Policy 21: International and National Conservation Sites.

Functionally Linked Land

4.24. It is possible for impacts to international sites to occur through impacts to land outside their boundaries. For some international sites – primarily those designated for their populations of overwintering bird species – the qualifying species are not restricted to the site's artificial boundaries and may spend significant time using land outside the designated site, primarily for feeding and roosting.

4.25. This non-designated land is deemed to be functionally linked land (FLL). The term functionally linked land refers to areas of land used by SPA/Ramsar bird species, but which lie outside the physical boundaries of the designated site. These habitats serve a function to the species (e.g. by providing feeding or resting opportunities) and are considered to be linked to the designated site(s) due to their potential for providing an important role in maintaining populations of the species at a favourable conservation status. FLL is mostly, but not exclusively, contiguous with the designated sites and comprises open farmland and recreational grasslands.

4.26. For bird species in particular, their high mobility presents difficulties in determining the extent of land necessary for the maintenance of populations at a favourable conservation status. Havant Borough, in common with other local authority areas in the wider Solent, contains large

areas of land outside designated sites which support SPA/Ramsar bird species seasonally (between late September and early April). To include these areas within the permanent boundaries of the designated sites would place unreasonable constraints on plans or projects which would otherwise be necessary e.g. land-use planning, agriculture. However, under the Habitats and Birds Directives functionally linked land is viewed as approximately analogous to the designated site and therefore impacts need to be considered in the same light. The Local Plan HRA has approached the issue of functionally linked land in this context, and this is also the expectation for site-level HRAs as detailed in Policy 26: Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy Sites.

The Solent Waders & Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS)

4.27. The Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy (SWBGS) is an initiative that aims to identify and protect the Solent-wide network of terrestrial sites used for feeding and resting by wintering bird species associated with the Solent Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites. Bird survey data are used to identify and categorise sites for their importance to wintering birds . Sites can vary in importance, from the most important Core Sites (which regularly support very large numbers of birds) through to Low Use Sites (which may only be used infrequently by low numbers).

4.28. In a planning context SWBGS sites are treated the same as internationally designated sites. Development proposals with the potential to impact SWBGS sites must carry out detailed assessment of those impacts before planning permission is granted. Where impacts are identified, avoidance and mitigation action must be taken. Impacts can take the form of direct loss of habitat, noise and visual disturbance (e.g. from development construction activity), or the effects of increased recreational pressure. These impacts can result in disturbance to birds, meaning that they must expend energy finding undisturbed places to feed and rest. In some cases, alternative habitat can be provided. Permanent refuge habitat for birds - where secure habitat is created and maintained - can be secured through the planning process, meaning that suitable habitat can be guaranteed every year.

4.29. Mitigation for impacts to functionally linked land is set out in the published Guidance on Mitigation and Off-setting Requirements (SWBGS Steering Group, 2018). This guidance is informed by current best practice, and all mitigation proposals are reviewed by the SWBGS Steering Group, which includes representatives from Natural England, local planning authorities, and other key expert stakeholders.

Policy response

4.30. **Policy 26: Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy Sites** sets out the Council's expectations for development proposals with the potential to impact functionally linked land and the SPA qualifying species it supports. The policy states:

"*Development proposals with the potential to impact Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy sites will only be granted planning permission where:*

a) Development proposals are assessed in accordance with the Habitats Regulations. Such proposals will need to provide evidence to inform a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) and must assess potential impacts alone and in combination with other plans or projects;

b) Impact assessments are informed by robust data, using existing SWBGS records and/or bespoke field surveys as required; and

c) *If demonstrated to be necessary to avoid an adverse effect, an avoidance and mitigation package in accordance with the Solent Wader and Brent Goose Strategy Guidance on Mitigation and Offsetting Requirements is provided and secured in perpetuity by legal agreement*".

5. Biodiversity Net Gain

5.1. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) became mandatory for certain types of development in 2024. BNG is a significant change in the approach to addressing impacts from built development on the natural environment.

5.2. The Environment Act 2021 makes BNG a mandatory requirement. All planning permissions granted in England (unless exempted) have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain. It is measured using DEFRA's Biodiversity Metric and habitats need to be secured and managed for at least 30 years.

5.3. BNG does not replace existing legislation, policies, or obligations related to the natural environment. It is an additional, new mechanism for measuring and addressing biodiversity impacts resulting from new development.

5.4. BNG is designed to deliver measurable improvements for biodiversity by enhancing or creating habitats in association with development. It has the potential to become a powerful mechanism for nature recovery and can be delivered as part of a multi-layered package of green and blue infrastructure providing biodiversity, climate, flooding and social benefits.

5.5. Biodiversity Net Gain is a fundamental shift in the way that biodiversity is addressed in the planning system. Local Planning Authorities have a legal duty to ensure that BNG measures are secured through planning conditions or legal agreements and that those are monitored and enforced. The Council will follow the statutory framework and guidance, with policy being consistent with these minimum requirements.

5.6. Mandatory BNG is secured at the planning application stage by a deemed condition that applies to all development by default. In that context, Local Planning Authorities do not necessarily have to include BNG policies within local plans. In common with other LPAs, the Council has chosen to include bespoke BNG policy within the Plan in order to set expectations for how BNG is delivered and to reiterate that BNG is a formal process with strict procedural requirements and, importantly, is additional to other requirements for protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

Policy response

5.7. The Council's approach to BNG is set out in **Policy 20: Biodiversity Net Gain**. In summary, the Council expects all eligible development to deliver a minimum of 10% BNG, in line with the national requirements. Policy 20 states:

"*Planning permission which is required to provide BNG under the Environment Act will be granted where:*

a) Development achieves a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) (or any higher percentage mandated by national policy/legislation) over the pre-development site score as measured by the latest version of the DEFRA Biodiversity Metric (or Small Sites Metric as appropriate) or any subsequent Biodiversity Metric;

b) Development proposals and BNG measures are guided by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire and the Local Ecological Network;
c) Strategic Significance for BNG is determined solely by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy
d) BNG habitats are secured and monitored for 30 years after the completion of the habitat enhancement or creation;
e) Proposals adhere to the BNG hierarchy and incorporate the following:

i. BNG is provided through habitats functionally linked to the wider habitat network creating coherent ecological networks;
ii. Off-site delivery should prioritise contributing to nearby habitat recovery and creation strategies as identified within the Local Nature Recovery Strategy or other appropriate and agreed strategies;
iii. Statutory Credits should be used only as a last resort, and where it is agreed by the Council that no suitable alternatives exist, in such cases, BNG can be delivered through the purchase of statutory credits; and

f) The receptor site for any biodiversity offsetting must be in a suitable location where local climactic conditions and existing habitats suit the type of offset habitat".

5.8. Alongside the procedural requirements for BNG, the supporting text of Policy 20 provides a clear expectation for BNG to be guided by sound ecological understanding and consideration of local conditions and conservation priorities. BNG within Havant Borough should be guided by the Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). The Council expects BNG to deliver tangible biodiversity benefits within the borough, resulting in the protection and enhancement of habitat types appropriate to the local ecological network and the Borough's rich and varied landscape.

5.9. Despite the explanatory text of Policy 20, the Council acknowledges that it has limited ability to dictate exactly where BNG is delivered. At the current time, a development applicant is not legally required to obtain BNG units within Havant Borough, but can obtain them on the open commercial market, potentially at any location within England. This is an inherent feature of the BNG process and, until such time as there are available habitat banks within the borough or nearby, applicants may need to purchase BNG units wherever they can. The Council continues to work with local authority partners via the Solent Mitigation Partnership to develop appropriate habitat bank sites.

6. Habitats and Species

6.1. Alongside the policy framework for strategic-level environmental mitigation sit policies that serve to protect and enhance the varied natural heritage of the borough.

6.2. Development facilitated by a local plan can lead to potential impacts on various natural features – particularly habitats and species – and therefore bespoke policies are required to ensure that planned development takes full account of these features and avoids or mitigates impacts as far as is reasonably possible. These policies describe the ecological features considered to be of particular value within the Plan area, set expectations for standards in ecological submissions, and expectations for the scope of any ecological compensation and enhancement measures. These policies also highlight the need for appropriate standards of ecological assessment for those habitats and species afforded specific legal protection.

6.3. The recent publication of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire has provided a new framework for biodiversity action across the county. The delivery phase of the LNRS is currently under development, but the published LNRS provides a geographic framework for where action is best targeted and includes specific measures for addressing the recovery of certain habitats and species. The Local Plan has been developed within the context of the LNRS, taking full account of national guidance on how local plans should take incorporate the LNRS framework. Through this close alignment with the LNRS, the Local Plan assists with the delivery of the habitat and species recovery measures within it.

Policy response

6.4. **Policy 22: The Local Ecological Network** and **Policy 25: Protected and Notable Species** together provide a robust mechanism for ensuring that the borough's range of habitats and species are given full consideration.

6.5. **Policy 22** requires consideration of what is termed the Local Ecological Network. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that ecological assessments in a planning context take into consideration the totality of ecological features within an area: Local Designated Sites, Irreplaceable Habitats, Priority Habitats and undesignated natural, semi-natural and modified habitats. This policy makes clear that consideration of ecological matters should go beyond what is the legally required minimum.

6.6. It is essential that development makes a positive contribution to the natural environment by protecting the Local Ecological Network in its fullest sense. This policy also highlights how an integrated approach to land use and management can deliver multi-layered benefits for nature, heritage, people and climate action, and therefore links well with Policy 5: Green and Blue Infrastructure.

6.7. Key requirements from **Policy 22** include:

"*Where impacts to the Local Ecological Network are likely, planning permission will be granted where*:

a) *Development proposals assess impacts to the Local Ecological Network, taking into account the role of local designated sites, Irreplaceable Habitats, Priority Habitats, non-designated ecological features, and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in supporting biodiversity; and*
b) *Impact assessments are demonstrably guided by the mitigation hierarchy; and*
c) *Development avoids the fragmentation of the Local Ecological Network, including across administrative boundaries; and*
d) *A mitigation, compensation and enhancement strategy is provided and approved and includes provision for ongoing management and maintenance".*

6.8. **Policy 22** also highlights the importance of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). It states that the LNRS should be used to guide ecological assessments and mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures. The LNRS is the guiding framework for nature recovery in Hampshire and includes details of the Local Ecological Network as well as specific opportunities for enhancing biodiversity.

6.9. **Policy 25** details the Council's requirement in respect to protected and notable species. Certain species are afforded strict legal protection whilst others are considered to be of conservation concern or otherwise notable at the local level. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that potential adverse effects on the full range of protected and notable species are fully considered. Guidance is provided on certain plant and animal species that are considered to be of particular conservation relevance within Havant Borough. **Policy 25** states:

"*Development must protect and conserve populations of protected and notable species and recognise that species distributions do not respect administrative boundaries. Where there is a reasonable likelihood of protected or notable species occurring and being harmed or negatively affected by development, planning permission will only be granted where:*

a) *An assessment of potential impacts to protected and notable species has been carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist using recognised appropriate assessment methods;*
b) *A mitigation, compensation and enhancement strategy is provided and approved; and*
c) *Impact assessments are demonstrably guided by the mitigation hierarchy of 'avoid-mitigate-compensate'.*

All development, including householder developments, must incorporate enhancement features for protected and notable species. Integral or externally-mounted features for cavity nesting bird species (to be integrated Swift bricks unless not practical due to nature of construction) and integral or externally-mounted bat roosting features (to be integrated bat bricks unless not practical due to nature of construction) must be included at a rate equivalent to at least one per each new dwelling or other type of residential unit, including extensions, of five metres height or greater. For commercial structures of five metres height or greater, one such feature must be included for every 50m^2 of floor space.

Bechstein's Bat

d) *In instances where Bechstein's Bat is likely to be found on site or within the predicted zone of influence of a development, or where development will impact woodland, wooded parkland, hedgerows, wetlands, or pasture within 3km of known Bechstein's Bat roosts,*

surveys appropriate to Bechstein's Bat must be used and undertaken by a suitably qualified person/s. If the presence of Bechstein's Bat is confirmed or suspected on site or within the predicted zone of influence of a development, applicants must implement:

i. *Assessment of the impacts on Bechstein's Bat breeding habitat (i.e. impacts to roost sites and/or habitat supporting roost sites);*
ii. *Assessment of the impacts to habitat used for foraging, commuting and social activities;*
iii. *The provision of appropriate buffers to woodlands, trees, hedgerows, and other flight corridors, considering the location of roosts*
iv. *and foraging/commuting habitats; and*
v. *The need for appropriate and proportionate mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures".*

6.10. The policy requirement for bird nesting features and bat roosting features in new development is a direct response to public and stakeholder consultation and echoes similar efforts nationwide to ensure that built development incorporates biodiversity enhancement features as standard, especially where this targets species of conservation concern. Such enhancement features are inexpensive, can be readily embedded within or matched to building fabric, and ensure that biodiversity is an integral part of the urban and suburban landscape.

6.11. The inclusion of specific policy wording for Bechstein's Bat reflects the importance of Havant Borough for this nationally rare and threatened species. This species is considered to be especially vulnerable to impacts from habitat loss and artificial lighting, and its presence can only usually be determined by specialist survey methods. This policy wording is designed to highlight the potential presence of this rare species in the borough and ensure that appropriate consideration is given to it in a development context.

Coastal Habitats

6.12. In recognition of the special character and recreational and ecological importance of much of the borough's coastline, two bespoke policies are presented that require consideration of potential impacts from development on coastal areas.

6.13. **Policy 29: Development on the Coast** requires consideration of the complexities of coastal development especially where located within the borough's Coastal Change Management Areas (CCMAs). The dynamic nature of coastal areas – particularly in the context of a changing climate – requires development to carefully consider strategic measures such as the North Solent Shoreline Management Plan and associated coastal management strategies. Policy 29 states:

"In undeveloped areas of the coast

a) *Development proposals will not be permitted, unless it can be demonstrated that the development specifically requires a coastal location, and*
b) *It meets the provisions of criterion c of this policy;*

In other areas of the coast

c) *Development will be permitted where it:*

i. Demonstrates a design which is sensitive to the coastal landscape and natural environment as well as historic built form;
ii. Protects existing public access to the waterfront and opportunities for water-based recreation and would not hinder the creation and maintenance of a continuous signed and managed route around the coast;
iii. Does not increase the number of moorings or berths, or intertidal structures such as jetties and slipways in Chichester Harbour or Langstone Harbour;
iv. Does not detrimentally affect navigational safety;
v. Has regard to the North Solent Shoreline Management Plan or any subsequent Coastal Strategies, and
vi. Is in line with the Marine Plan for the area.

Within the defined Coastal Change Management Areas (CCMAs):

d) Proposals for new development within the primary CCMA (as set out on the policies map) must demonstrate through a Coastal Change Vulnerability Assessment that the development:

vii. would not affect the natural balance and stability of the coast or exacerbate the rate of shoreline change to the extent that changes to the coast are increased nearby or elsewhere;
viii. would not impair the ability of communities and the natural environment to adapt sustainably to the impacts of a changing climate, including by not preventing the delivery of any coastal management measures identified as necessary in the Shoreline Management Plan and/or related Coastal Strategies or Investment and Adaptation Plans;
ix. will be safe from erosion for its planned lifetime without requiring new or improved coastal defences or there are costed plans to manage the impact of coastal change on it and the service it provides; and
x. provides wider community benefits that outweigh the risk associated with the predicted coastal change".

7. Green and Blue Infrastructure

7.1. Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as 'a network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity'.

7.2. In Havant Borough the existing network of GBI includes public parks, playing fields, trees and woodland, hedgerows, private gardens, rivers and streams, ponds and ditches, sustainable drainage systems, road verges, allotments, and the wider open countryside and coastline. This network is fundamental in providing multi-functional benefits to residents, visitors, biodiversity, climate action, and the economy.

7.3. There is abundant evidence[7] that access to GBI leads to positive health, wellbeing and developmental outcomes across all age groups. Improving access to multi-functional 'natural' places improves social equity especially for economically, socially, or physically disadvantaged groups. Providing access to diverse, nature-rich GBI within reach of local communities promotes social interaction, community cohesion, physical activity, play, educational opportunities, community food growing, and sustainable, safe travel.

7.4. Well-designed GBI delivers accessible, attractive, and nature-rich spaces that complement and enhance the character of local communities, create a sense of place, increase land and property values, increase accessibility, provide climate resilience, and encourage economic activity and investment.

7.5. In their Regulation 18 consultation response, Natural England suggested that the Plan would benefit from a bespoke Green and Blue Infrastructure Policy. NE stated: "*We recommend incorporating a specific core policy around green and blue infrastructure to set out more detailed expectations, with the overall expectation of no net loss as a minimum and striving for gain. Utilising tools such as the Urban Greening Factor Standard (particularly on brownfield sites) and the Environmental Benefits for Nature Tool to inform design and decision making would help to maximise the benefits of new developments for people and nature. We recommend Havant Borough Council review their existing policy suite and ensure that the Green Infrastructure Principles and GI Standards set out within the Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework are reflected within the local plan policies and/or supporting guidance"*.

Policy response

7.6. As a direct response to Natural England's comments **Policy 5: Green and Blue Infrastructure** has been presented in the Plan. Policy 5 states:

"*The Council will work with developers and other stakeholders to ensure that planned development in the Borough helps to deliver a strategic network of high-quality green and blue infrastructure, and that decisions relating to green and blue infrastructure:*

[7] GBI-Rapid-Evidence-Assessment.pdf; A rapid scoping review of health and wellbeing evidence for the Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards - NEER015

a) Are guided by the Natural England Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide;
b) Avoid the loss and fragmentation of existing green and blue infrastructure networks, including within the built environment;
c) Provide biodiverse, multi-functional green and blue infrastructure;
d) Maximise the multi-functionality and connectivity of green and blue infrastructure;
e) Use green and blue infrastructure to address climate change impacts;
f) Embed nature-based solutions in green and blue infrastructure provision;
g) Maximise opportunities for health and wellbeing benefits;
h) Maximise opportunities for residential amenity, social interaction and community cohesion".

7.7. The expectation for green and blue Infrastructure provision – as detailed in Policy 5 – is that it helps to deliver multi-functional spaces that meet the needs of biodiversity, climate action, recreation and general public amenity. The policy provides a clear indication that the Council expects imaginative, well-considered green and blue infrastructure to be at the heart of development planning and for it to deliver tangible benefits to local communities.

7.8. In addition to Policy 5, the Plan includes clear requirements and expectations for incorporating biodiversity into the management of flood risk and drainage.

7.9. **Policy 27: Flood Risk** sets expectations for the management of flood risk from development in coastal and inland situations. As well as requiring appropriate flood risk assessment, this policy includes requirements for the consideration of biodiversity and for the use of nature-based flood solutions. Policy 27 states:

a) "Planning permission in areas at risk of flooding now, or in the future taking into account climate change, will be granted where:

iii. Any proposed flood protection, resilience and resistance measures address the specific requirements of the site, and are appropriate to the character, residential amenity and biodiversity of the site and the area;
iv. Opportunities have been explored and incorporated into the design which reduce flood risk, particularly through nature-based solutions";

7.10. **Policy 28: Drainage** is chiefly concerned with ensuring that appropriate surface water management is provided by new development. The policy explains that Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) should included unless there is firm evidence to demonstrate unsuitability. The policy states:

"Planning permission will be granted where current and future drainage needs, including for the expected climate change scenario, have been fully considered and:

c) The drainage strategy incorporates SuDS, unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate, and is in line with the hierarchy of drainage options".

7.11. The policy explanatory text states:

"*On all development sites providing new buildings, applicants are expected to prioritise the use of SuDS to manage surface water drainage. On larger sites the starting point will be that these should be incorporated on the site. The inclusion of SuDS is an inherent part of the design process and should be integrated into a development layout as part of a high-quality green and blue water environment for the storage and conveyance of surface water in order to deliver multifunctional benefits for water quality, nature conservation and recreation*".

8. Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland

8.1. Havant Borough contains over 245 hectares of woodland habitat which includes significant areas of ancient woodland and replanted ancient woodland alongside woodlands of more recent origin. Many of the borough's woodlands are fragments of the medieval Forest of Bere, an extensive area of woodland, wood pasture, open heath, and grassland lying between the River Meon and the Hampshire/Sussex border.

8.2. Trees and woodlands not only provide havens for wildlife but also provide a wide range of interrelated benefits such as reducing soil erosion, minimising water run-off, reducing flood risk, absorbing noise, filtering air pollution, and moderating temperature. Trees and woodlands are also aesthetically pleasing elements in the landscape, providing pleasure for residents and visitors.

8.3. The Council is responsible for maintaining 185 hectares of woodland alongside over 10,000 trees. Much of this remaining woodland in the Borough is situated within a densely developed landscape and survives as isolated blocks or tree lines within areas of housing. These surviving fragments are impacted by recreational disturbance, noise and light pollution, nutrient enrichment and invasive plant species: their fragmented nature makes them more susceptible to these pressures than larger woodlands. Individual trees, especially within proximity to housing, can come under pressure and are a common source of complaint, including parking restrictions, loss of light, overhanging branches, and leaf fall.

8.4. The borough contains a complex network of hedgerows. some of these are of relatively modern origin but many are remnants of very old field boundary systems and may be many hundreds of years old. Whether in rural or more urban locations, hedgerows are critical features of the landscape providing feeding, resting and breeding sites for many different species and making connections between habitat patches.

8.5. Together, the borough's trees, hedgerows and woodlands are an invaluable natural resource that serve to protect and maintain biodiversity, provide places for residents to relax and enjoy nature, preserve our landscape heritage, and provide critical ecosystem services. The Council has recently published its Tree and woodland strategy 2022-20268 which sets out a strategy for the planning and management of the trees and woodland of the borough.

Policy response

8.6. **Policy 31: Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland** details the requirements for addressing potential impacts from development to these critical features. These requirement ensure that these essential habitats are considered in relation to the need for development, and where appropriate, are safeguarded. Policy 31 states:

"*Development affecting trees, hedgerows and woodlands will be permitted where:*

[8] Tree and woodland strategy.pdf

a) The design and layout of the site takes into consideration the relationship between the built development, existing trees, hedgerows and woodland and where possible integrates the development into its surroundings, adding visual interest and amenity;
b) The proposal adequately protects trees and hedgerows which are to be retained (including their root systems) prior to, during and after the construction process; and
c) The proposal does not result in the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees.

The Council will refuse planning permission for proposals that threaten the retention of important trees, hedgerows, and woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of development in that location clearly outweigh the impact of the proposal and replacement trees or planting to mitigate the impact of any loss are provided.

Provision of new trees are expected as part of development proposals for new homes and commercial floorspace. Planning permission will be granted where it:

d) Facilitates adaptation to climate change by providing shade, shelter and cooling through new tree planting;
e) Facilitates the provision of tree-lined streets and tree planting as an integral part of new development where appropriate; and
f) Includes proposals for the successful implementation, maintenance and management of landscape and tree planting schemes".

8.7. There are clear links with Policy 22: The Local Ecological Network which sets out the need for full consideration of the full range of habitats within the borough, and also Policy 25: Protected and Notable Species, which identifies the need to fully consider species that may occur within trees, hedgerows and woodland.

9. Habitat Compensation and Restoration Programme

9.1. The Habitat Compensation and Restoration Programme (HCRP) is the Government's approved mechanism for delivering strategic habitat compensation for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM), to ensure compliance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (commonly referred to as the Habitats Regulations). The HCRP is the delivery programme for creating the compensatory habitat required from Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs), which identified the amount of habitat required to address the adverse impacts on European sites from the SMP policies due to coastal squeeze and saline inundation impacts.

9.2. The HCRP is led by the Environment Agency, and in the Solent and South Downs area, Coastal Partners (hosted by Havant Borough Council) is working with the Environment Agency to deliver the programme.

9.3. The Solent and South Downs HCRP needs to create the following habitats to enable the delivery of future coastal risk management schemes:

- Saltmarsh and mudflats
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Freshwater habitats
- Saline lagoons

Existing and pipeline HCRP schemes

9.4. Several habitat compensation schemes have already been completed in the Solent and South Downs area. These include the following sites:

Lymington Water Level Management Scheme

9.5. Implemented in September 2010, this compensation scheme re-established tidal exchange in the Lymington River through the introduction of self-regulating tide gates at the Bridge Road crossing. The reedbed increased upstream and laterally as willow scrub died back and woodland retreated 5-20 metres inland. The reedbed cover increased from 40% in 2009 to 90% in 2014. Rank fen vegetation and nettles died off as a result of saline inundation. Invasive non-native species present in 2009 were largely removed from the reedbed by 2014. Overall, this compensation scheme created 21 hectares of tidal reedbeds upstream of the bridge.

Medmerry Managed Realignment Scheme

9.6. Completed in 2013, this compensation scheme created 183 hectares of new intertidal habitat comprising of 158 hectares of saltmarsh and 25 hectares of mudflat. At the time, it was the largest open coast managed realignment scheme in Europe. In addition to the intertidal habitats, there are also reedbeds and freshwater ponds and ditches that provide habitat for water voles and aquatic invertebrates. The site is managed as a nature reserve by the RSPB

and has already seen increasing populations of breeding and wintering wildfowl and wading birds – a highlight was a pair of black-winged stilts successfully breeding in 2014.

Manor House Farm

9.7. Manor House Farm is a 90-hectare site located in the lower Test Valley. The site was identified as a potential area to create 69 hectares of floodplain grazing marsh that, in time, with predicted sea level rise and increasing tidal influence, will evolve into coastal grazing marsh. The scheme will also create 17 hectares of freshwater habitats, including ponds, reedbeds, grassland and wet woodland. The Environment Agency purchased the site in March 2018, and the habitat creation scheme is being implemented and managed by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

Future HCRP schemes

9.8. The Environment Agency is currently progressing an intertidal habitat creation scheme at Marker Point on Thorney Island and is looking at options for the future management of Farlington Marshes at the northern end of Langstone Harbour, a substantial area of coastal grazing marsh and coastal habitats within the north of Langstone Harbour. The existing sea defences at Farlington are approaching the end of their functional life and it is expected that any long-term solution here will result in the loss of coastal grazing marsh and associated habitats. These habitats will need to be compensated elsewhere within the Solent and South Downs HCRP area. It is therefore essential that suitable strategic compensatory sites are identified and, where possible, safeguarded within the Plan.

9.9. The Council is working with Coastal Partners to investigate the potential for its own Warblington Farm site to provide sizeable coastal habitat creation as part of the wider HCRP scheme. Land at Warblington Farm and its surroundings has been identified for safeguarding through the Local Plan process.

9.10. In addition to these pipeline schemes, the Environment Agency and Coastal Partners are keen to hear from landowners who would like to explore habitat creation opportunities working in partnership with the HCRP. There are a variety of approaches and mechanisms for delivery of HCRP habitat creation sites, including site purchase, lease agreements, long term management agreements and/or conservation covenants. There is considerable opportunity within Havant Borough to deliver the compensatory habitats required by the HCRP, especially on land within and adjacent to Chichester and Langstone Harbours.

9.11. Timescales for habitat compensation projects are very long-term, entailing in perpetuity agreements (usually 100 years). The purpose of these long timescales is to ensure that the compensatory habitat benefits last for the duration of the Shoreline Management Plans and their impacts.

Policy response

9.12. **Policy 4: Infrastructure and Environmental Mitigation to Support Development** sets out the Council's approach to securing critical strategic environmental infrastructure. It states:

"*Infrastructure needed to enable development and/ or serve existing communities, will be supported. The Council will work with infrastructure providers and other partners to bring about the strategic infrastructure investment needed in the Borough to accommodate planned development, with a particular focus on:*

c) Delivering new coastal defences and other flood risk and erosion management schemes in areas at risk of tidal flooding;
f) Securing land for environmental mitigation to address the effects of development

In support of a) – j), land is safeguarded through this Plan, as shown on the Policies Map, for:

m) Flood & Coastal Erosion Risk Management Schemes

- *Langstone*
- *Broadmarsh Landfill Revetment*
- *Northney*

Environmental mitigation

- *Sites to provide habitat compensation, biodiversity net gain and nutrient neutrality*".

9.13. Land safeguarded for FCERM schemes and other environmental measures such as habitat compensation is shown in the Plan's Policies Map.

10. Conclusion

10.1. This document sets out the approach to the natural environment within the Building a Better Future Local Plan. The paper has detailed the legislative background, strategic initiatives, and protected site, habitat and species measures that have shaped the policies within the Plan.

10.2. Havant Borough contains many areas of high ecological value, and the Council fully acknowledges the intrinsic value of these features and the significant constraints this places on development across the Borough. Through long-established and continuing partnership working, the Council has led and supported innovative strategic measures to ensure that potential impacts to ecological features from development are mitigated. The Council is committed to ensuring that the Borough's important natural environment is protected and enhanced at the same time as ensuring that planned development can proceed.