

12.0 Natural Environment

Introduction

- 12.1 The Borough contains a wealth of natural features comprising both wildlife habitats and features of geological importance. Many of these have been designated as being of importance in an international, national and/or local context and are therefore afforded special protection. The Borough Council, however, also has a responsibility towards protecting and enhancing undesignated habitats and features, all of which contribute to the overall natural environment.
- 12.2 Guildford is rich in wildlife habitats, which include heathland, downland and some areas of open water of international importance. It is a relatively heavily wooded area and contains ancient woodlands that are nationally important. There are in addition many smaller but still locally important features such as ponds, streams, hedges, commons, green lanes and copses.
- 12.3 Despite the wealth of natural habitats there have been significant losses over the years, largely through urban development and intensive agriculture. Current pressures on the remaining habitats are considerable, not only from development pressures but also from changes due to the decline of traditional management practices and from pressure for recreation in the countryside.
- 12.4 The Borough Council recognises the value of the natural environment for its own sake and acknowledges the increasing importance placed on it by the community.
- 12.5 One of the main aims of the Plan is the protection and enhancement of the Borough's natural environment.

Objectives

12.6 The objectives for this Chapter are:

1. To maintain and enhance the biodiversity within the Borough;
2. To identify sites of nature conservation value and to balance the needs for development with their protection; and
3. Protect important plant and animal species.

Supporting Measures

12.7 A number of supporting measures will be taken which support the policies including the following:

1. Management of the Council's own land in a manner which is sympathetic to nature conservation;
2. Use of Tree Preservation Orders to protect the Borough's wide and varied tree stock of high amenity value;
3. Liaison with landowners and seek opportunities for the creation of nature reserves and new wildlife habitats both in rural and urban areas;
4. Close working with English Nature and Surrey Wildlife Trust to ensure that habitats in the Borough are protected and enhanced and produce and implement a Biodiversity Action Plan;
5. Have regard to the issues and objectives identified in English Nature's newly identified natural areas i.e. The Wealden Grassland, London Basin and North Downs;
6. The Council supports the Surrey Biodiversity Initiative and the Biodiversity Action Plan that will not only identify the priority habitats (and species in due course) but will also highlight targets and actions for each.

**Policy NE1
POTENTIAL SPECIAL PROTECTION
AREAS (pSPA) AND
CANDIDATE SPECIAL AREAS OF
CONSERVATION (cSAC)**

Planning permission will not be granted for proposals which are likely to destroy or have an adverse effect directly or indirectly on the nature conservation value of potential Special Protection Areas (pSPA) and candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSAC), as shown on the Proposals Map.

- 12.8 Potential Special Protection Areas and Candidate Special Areas of Conservation are internationally important sites of nature conservation value and therefore are to be given the highest degree of protection. pSPA and cSAC notations affect land which is also covered by Sites of Special Scientific Interest designations. English Nature will be consulted on all applications affecting pSPA and cSAC's and reference will be made to the provisions of the habitat regulations 1994 and the specific guidance in PPG9 Annex C. Development proposals which would prejudice the nature conservation interest of these sites will not be permitted.

**Policy NE2
SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC
INTEREST**

Development which would harm Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as identified on the Proposals Map will not be permitted unless the reasons for development clearly outweigh the intrinsic value of the site itself and the national policy to safeguard the nature conservation value of such sites.

- 12.9 There are sixteen Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the Borough which are nationally important sites of nature conservation value. Development proposals that affect them will be critically scrutinised and strictly controlled. English Nature will be consulted on all planning applications affecting SSSIs and

reference will be made to the specific guidance in PPG9 Nature Conservation. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of its functions, to take further the conservation and enhancement of SSSI's.

**Policy NE3
LOCAL AND NON-STATUTORY SITES**

Planning permission will not be granted for proposals which are likely to materially harm the Nature Conservation Interest, directly or indirectly, local or non-statutory sites, including Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and Regionally Important Geological / Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) as identified on the Proposals Map, unless clear justification is provided that the reasons for the development outweigh the value of the site in its local or regional context.

- 12.10 Surrey Wildlife Trust undertook a comprehensive appraisal of the conservation character and quality of the Borough in 1996. As a result approximately 80 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) have been identified by the Surrey Nature Conservation Liaison Group. These are non-statutory sites of county or regional nature conservation value. They contain flora and fauna of county or regional value and include a variety of sites such as ancient semi-natural woodlands, unimproved grasslands, marshland, downland ponds and features of geological interest.
- 12.11 The Borough also contains Local Nature Reserves (LNR) at Riverside Park, Guildford; Lakeside Park, Ash Vale; Fox Corner, Pirbright and part of Hackhurst Down. LNRs are sites of nature conservation value owned, leased or managed by agreement by Local Authorities usually for educational purposes.

12.12 Regionally Important Geological / Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) are geological or geomorphological sites, excluding SSSIs, that are worth protecting for their educational, scientific, historic or aesthetic importance. There are nine RIGS sites in the Borough that are designated by the Surrey RIGS Group.

12.13 Surrey Wildlife Trust will be consulted on all applications affecting SNCI's, and LNR's. Surrey RIG Group will be consulted on all applications affecting RIG's.

12.14 Where development is proposed affecting designated sites the Council will take into account whether any harmful effects to the nature conservation interest of the site can be satisfactorily overcome by the imposition of appropriate conditions, entering into planning agreements or other means, including the provision of a replacement habitat.

Policy NE4 SPECIES PROTECTION

Planning permission will not be granted for any development that would be liable to cause any demonstrable harm to a species of animal or plant or its habitat, protected under British law unless conditions are attached requiring the developer to take steps to secure their protection.

12.15 Certain plant and animal species are protected under a variety of national and international laws and obligations, including the Badgers Act 1992, Wildlife and Countryside Act 1991 and EC Habitat Directive 92/43 EEC. It is an offence to harm a protected species or intentionally damage its habitat.

12.16 Where development is permitted that may have an adverse effect on those species, the Council will impose conditions and/or enter into planning agreements to:

1. Facilitate the survival of members of the species;
2. Reduce disturbance to a minimum; and

3. Provide adequate alternative habitats to sustain at least the current levels of population.

Trees and Woodland

Policy NE5 DEVELOPMENT AFFECTING TREES, HEDGES AND WOODLANDS

Development will not be permitted if it would damage or destroy trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order or in a conservation area unless the removal would:

1. Be in the interests of good arboricultural practice; or
2. The need for the development outweighs the amenity value of the protected trees.

If the removal of any trees is permitted as part of a development, a condition may require that an equivalent number (or more) of new locally native trees be planted either on or near the site.

12.17 Where trees, hedgerows or woodlands of high amenity value are under threat of felling or unsympathetic treatment, the Borough Council will use Tree Preservation Orders to take immediate effect as a measure of protection and to maintain the quality of the environment. Applications to fell protected trees or to carry out unnecessary or insensitive work will, therefore, normally be resisted.

12.18 Where trees form an important feature on a development site, the Council will expect:

1. Planning applications to be accompanied by a tree survey in accordance with the appropriate British Standards, plotting positions and crown spreads accurately and identifying species. Plans for new developments should allow for the retention of trees and be supported by a landscaping scheme including tree planting;

2. Developers to take steps to protect trees during site clearance and building operations

12.19 The Council has produced a leaflet concerning the preservation of trees and woodlands, tree planting, retention and protection.

**Policy NE6
UNDESIGNATED FEATURES OF
NATURE CONSERVATION INTEREST**

In considering proposals for development on undesignated sites where there is found to be a significant wildlife interest, the council will seek to preserve and enhance the features of ecological value.

12.20 There are many sites and features within the Borough that are of importance to the conservation of the area's wildlife but are not designated for their nature conservation value. They include ponds, ditches, hedgerows, woods and groups of trees that may not contain rare species, but provide refuges and sometimes wildlife corridors, particularly within the urban areas. Where development is proposed on sites where these features are to be found, the Council will seek to preserve and where possible enhance the features of most value, permitting development where the nature conservation interest is not harmed, or where by specific measures or by management any harm could be minimised. The Surrey Wildlife Trust will be consulted in such cases.