

Wealden Local Plan Update – 12 October 2017

Following the Wealden Local Plan update issued on 6 September this note provides further information on progress with the plan as previously promised.

As highlighted in the 6th September update one of the key elements required to enable the plan to progress is the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) and any Appropriate Assessments required as part of that for Ashdown Forest, Pevensey Levels and Lewes Downs. The draft reports on air quality for these areas require review by Natural England together with their input on the requirements, if any, for Appropriate Assessments in relation to these sites.

Natural England have indicated that they should be in a position to provide draft comments back to us on these aspects by the end of December. In the meantime, it is our intention to publish the air quality work that has been undertaken in relation to Ashdown Forest, Pevensey Levels and Lewes Downs and we aim to do that by early November. In publishing these reports all stakeholders will have access to the most recent evidence that Wealden District Council has undertaken to inform its Habitats Regulations Assessment for the draft Wealden Local Plan.

Once we have the views of Natural England on the air quality, ecology and appropriate assessment requirements for these sites we will further develop the HRA for the draft Wealden Local Plan. Timescales for this and the subsequent progression to full Council for approval to proceed with the Representation stage will obviously depend on the timing and content of the input from Natural England. However, it is our intention to aim for a full Council in March 2018 to seek approval to proceed to the Representation stage if we possibly can.

The need to have a comprehensive and complete evidence base including a robust HRA and overall plan is paramount. Failure to have this in place before proceeding with the plan will be counter productive and ultimately lead to a longer process with less predictable outcomes.

The Council will continue to update landowners, agents, developers and builders on a regular basis through the Agents Panel, Developers East Sussex, the House Builders Federation and the newly formed Ashdown Forest Stakeholder Forum. In addition Town and Parishes and neighbouring Councils will continue to be kept informed through the Parish Planning Panel, the Ashdown Forest Officer Group and other means.

Ongoing regular updates will continue to be provided as further information becomes available.

Nigel Hannam
Director Planning Policy and Economic Development
12 October 2017