



**Hampshire &  
Isle of Wight  
Wildlife Trust**

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## **Consultation: Proposed Submission Winchester Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 consultation**

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust is an independent charity founded in 1961 and together with 46 others we are part of The Wildlife Trusts, the largest grass roots nature conservation federation in the UK with 900,000 members. Locally across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight we have over 28,000 members and we currently manage 5,000 hectares of land for wildlife, primarily nature reserves of local, national, and international importance.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft Winchester Local Plan. While we are pleased to see the environment as a key issue in the Local Plan, we consider that the Local Plan in its current form suffers from a lack of development of key policies; it does not represent current best practice in policy, clarity and ambition, as based on robust evidence, to put nature into recovery across the district. This risks the soundness and legal compliance of the plan, including ensuring sufficient support for achieving the legal targets set out in the Environment Act 2021, and alignment with key provisions of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

The Wildlife Trusts are calling for at least 30% of land and sea to be restored for nature and climate by 2030, in line with national and international commitments. We welcome the commitment to consider the impact on nature's recovery in all strategic plans, policy areas and decision-making processes in the Council's Nature Emergency Declaration of September 2023. In order to align with this ambition and with the UK's endorsement of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, we call on Winchester City Council to fully embed and reflect the 30x30 goal, and our legal target for nature's recovery by 2030 in its local plan, backed by mapping and sufficient, evidence-based policy mechanisms to ensure that the state of nature is turned around and wildlife starts to recover during this decade.

### **Strategic Policy CN1: Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change and Strategic Policy & D1: High Quality, Well Designed and Inclusive Places and Strategic Policy**

We strongly welcome the inclusion and content of the Council's core environmental and climate policies, **Strategic Policy CN1 and Strategic Policy D1**. These policies are crucial for ensuring the local plan aligns with the obligations of the Environment Act 2021 and Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. We strongly welcome the references within **Strategic Policy D1: High Quality, Well Designed and Inclusive Places** to the National Model Design Code and the reflection of the important role of natural green infrastructure in delivering well designed places. Likewise, we welcome this citation given the National Model Design Code's detailed guidelines and emphasis on climate resilient sustainable design.

Furthermore, we welcome the overarching provisions and topics included within **Strategic Policy CN1: Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change**, as these will be essential for ensuring the plan supports delivery of the Environment Act targets. However, we would recommend that **Strategic Policy CN1** is updated to reflect the Council's declaration of a nature emergency<sup>1</sup>. This would reflect the dual emergency declarations already made by the Council, and help ensure compliance with the obligations of both the Climate Change Act 2008 and Environment Act 2021 in tandem.

To ensure these core policies, and their associated legal obligations, are reflected throughout the local plan, subsequent policies must provide suitably detailed, robust, and effective means by which these goals can be both defined and realised, in line with the latest related evidence. Below we provide recommendations to ensure these policies, and their associated aims, are fully reflected, embedded, and can ultimately be delivered, through the local plan. Without such amendments, in line with the latest evidence, the plan risks failing to meet its statutory objectives, including aligning with related national planning policy and legislation.

### **Strategic Policy SP2: Spatial Strategy and Development Principles**

We welcome the reference to alignment with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in draft **Strategic Policy SP2: Spatial Strategy and Development Principles**. We particularly welcome the emphasis on support for enhancing environmental assets and addressing the impact of climate change, with reference to the implications for green infrastructure, flooding and the water environment. This will be critical for delivering our national goal to halt species decline and facilitate species recovery under the Environment Act 2021, and in line with the key conclusions of the Lawton review.<sup>2</sup>

To ensure this is given due and proper regard in relation to the obligations of the Environment Act 2021 and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023's requirement for LPAs "to take account of", local nature recovery priorities and measures in spatial planning<sup>3</sup>, we strongly recommend that the Council commits to the creation and maintenance of a functioning nature recovery network, as this is a key mechanism through which the biodiversity of the district can be protected and enhanced, and ensures this is fully reflected and embedded in the wording of **Strategic Policy SP2: Spatial Strategy and Development Principles**. The Nature Recovery Network, now embedded within national policy through the Environment Act, is the key national mechanism to deliver nature's recovery and must be clearly supported through the Local Plan, in order to support the delivery of local nature recovery priorities, the enhanced duty to conserve and enhance nature, and meet the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan targets.

Nature recovery network mapping is about taking a strategic spatial approach to the natural environment, identifying areas of existing value, and looking for opportunities to create connections with new habitats that will benefit people and wildlife. Without such spatial mapping, it will not be possible to identify where interventions are required to create a nature recovery network and thus deliver the Government's environmental policy ambition.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that the Council prepare and use the Nature Recovery Network, and Local Nature Recovery Strategy, as foundational tools for the Local Plan to:

1. Identify areas within the local plan area that are of special importance within the context of the Nature Recovery Network, including: existing habitats that are of highest value,

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<sup>1</sup> [Winchester City Council declares a Nature Emergency - Winchester City Council](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/making-space-for-nature-a-review-of-englands-wildlife-sites-published-today>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/55/pdfs/ukpga\\_20230055\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/55/pdfs/ukpga_20230055_en.pdf)

areas that buffer existing core habitat, and gaps within the existing ecological network that, if filled, would improve ecological connectivity and reduce fragmentation.

2. Assess, identify and prioritise opportunities for ecological enhancement through local land management plans and strategies.
3. Identify the best sites for development and those areas where development should be avoided. Sites of core importance to the Nature Recovery Network should be protected and development should not result in severance of ecological connectivity within the network.
4. Inform the design of any development in such a way that it makes a net contribution to the Nature Recovery Network.
5. Inform and target biodiversity net gain delivery and other nature-based solutions.
6. Inform the use of building standards that promote biodiverse developments within local plans (e.g. Building with Nature standards) to ensure that development targets action to most effectively contribute to restoring nature.
7. Send a clear market signal to developers of expectations for all future planning to contribute positively and meaningfully to nature's recovery.

The Nature Recovery Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategy should guide where development should not take place to avoid severance of the landscape and ecological corridors.

We recommend these changes to ensure a clearer, more-direct regard is given to local nature recovery priorities in planning (as required by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023). The current, more generic, wording of the policy is not sufficient to ensure adequate consideration of the LNRS is embedded in the Plan, and that the associated measures, priorities and spatial elements of the LNRS are fully, and duly, considered.

For more information on Nature Recovery Network, we recommend reading the South East Nature Partnerships' 'Principles of Nature recovery Networks across the South East of England' document, available here: <https://hantswightlnp.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/joint-south-east-nrn-principles-senp.pdf>

### **Strategic Policy SP3: Development in the Countryside**

We welcome **Strategic Policy SP3: Development in the Countryside** for its commitment that development proposed will “*not cause unacceptable harm to biodiversity and the water environment*”. Employing this holistic approach is valuable to both nature and local communities, to provide access to nature and open spaces, while supporting nature's recovery and working toward the achievement of legal Environment Act targets

To strengthen this commitment, we recommend that this policy is amended to align with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The LNRS should be used to identify where better access to nature is needed, so that development proposals can target the creation of greenspace accordingly. The strategy should also be used in identifying priority areas that mitigation funding should be directed towards.

This will help ensure compliance with the Environment Act 2021 and contribute to the achievement of the legal target to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030.

### **Strategic Policy CN1: Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change**

We welcome and support the goals and inclusion of **Strategy Policy CN1: Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change** which discusses important strategies to tackle overheating and water stress in the district as a result of the contemporary climate crisis.

Increasing tree cover will be vital for achieving the Council's ambition to reach a net gain in tree canopy cover, as outlined in the Winchester City Council Tree Strategy (2022)<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, urban tree coverage will be vital for delivering key ecosystem services, such as enhancing local climate resilience through helping to mitigate extreme heat. For the policy to deliver in line with the Council's vision and legal objectives, we recommend its ambition is increased in line with wider best practise, guidance and policies.

Seeking to maximise the ecosystem services delivered by trees and green infrastructure is essential for meeting legal air quality targets under the Environment Act, obligations and national policy direction to consider climate adaptation in planning and aligning with the key missions and associated obligations under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 - notably the missions to improve local health outcomes and pride of place.

Research, notably from Wycombe, has indicated a good level of ecosystem services is likely to be delivered at 25% canopy cover.<sup>5</sup> Testing shows that it should be possible for developments of around 35% (dependent upon development form). The CABI publication 'What makes an eco-town?' suggested canopy cover of at least 25% in residential areas in order to deliver the associated ecosystem service benefits.<sup>6</sup> We therefore recommend that **Strategy Policy CN1** is amended to follow best practice and require 25% tree canopy coverage.<sup>7</sup> Likewise the requirement to replace lost trees at a ratio of 1:1 should be increased to 1:2, in order to mitigate against net loss from sapling die off. Compliance with best practise guidance and assessment procedure, should also be integrated, including British Standard 5837:2012 Trees – in relation to design, demolition and construction (or subsequent revisions), with the use of buffers which exclude damaging activity or other suitable protective measures. The Council should require a tree survey and an Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) to be submitted. Where special techniques and tree protection methods will be necessary for successful implementation, details of them must also be included in the form of a Tree Protection Plan (TPP) and Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS).

Further supplementary planning documents and guidance should seek to maximise the multifunctional benefits of tree planting, including for nature recovery, drawing on relevant species and planting guidance.<sup>8</sup>

We welcome the inclusion of overheating within **Strategic Policy CN1: Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change** and the requirement for developers to submit an Energy and Carbon Statement to show the incorporation of thermal comfort in the design process. Likewise, we welcome referral to the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers publication 'Design Methodology for the Assessment of overheating risk in Homes' as guidance on overheating measures at the outset of the design. **Strategic Policy CN1** is successful recognising the cooling hierarchy, which recommends the use of green roofs and external shutters to mitigate overheating, with mechanical air conditioning as a last resort.

We recommend that this policy should be amended to specify that datasets must be used to ensure that all new development are designed for the climate they will experience over their

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<sup>4</sup> <https://democracy.winchester.gov.uk/documents/s23492/CAB3351%20App%201%20-%20Tree%20Strategy%202022.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.charteredforesters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Philip-Simpkin-Canopy-Cover-Targets-in-Planning-Policy-2016.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/fileadmin/uploads/dc/Documents/what-makes-an-eco-town.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://ukgbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-Nature-Recovery-and-Climate-Resilience-Playbook.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.barchampro.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Species-Selection-FINAL.pdf> ; <https://www.tdag.org.uk/our-guides.html>

design life and future climate scenarios, not just present conditions.<sup>9</sup> Part O of building regulations, referenced in the preamble, only requires current climate scenarios be used (in the dynamic method), meaning that buildings are not being properly assessed for their whole lifespan, whereas London's TM 49 weather data uses more up to date figures than TM 59.<sup>10</sup>

Most of England is already classified as seriously water stressed<sup>11</sup>, and as such, urgent action must be taken. We recommend that the Council amend the draft policy to 90 litres or less per person per day. We welcome the inclusion of rainwater recycling and greywater harvesting in **Strategic Policy CN1: Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change**, which can be used to help achieve these strict water efficiency standards, alongside other strategies such as the introduction of mandatory water butts.<sup>12</sup>

### **Policy CN4: Water Efficiency Standards in New Developments**

In addition, we are pleased to see the requirement for new developments to meet a water efficiency standard of 100 litres per person per day in **Policy CN4: Water Efficiency Standards in New Developments**. This water efficiency standard is in line with the Future Homes Hub review, which recommends a target of 100 litres per person per day by 2030, and 90 in water stressed areas.<sup>13</sup> The review recommends that this should be tightened to 90 as standard by 2035 and 80 litres per person per day in water stressed areas. The feasibility of building to these standards is evidenced in detail, building on previous research and evidence behind such specifications in the former Code for Sustainable Homes.<sup>14</sup>

### **Strategic Policy D1: High Quality, Well Designed and Inclusive Places**

Within **Strategic Policy D1: High Quality, Well Designed and Inclusive Places**, amendments should be made to include relevant citation to the recommendations of the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission<sup>15</sup>. Prioritizing beauty in new developments is important for maximising green infrastructure, as an essential component of well-designed places.

Beauty helps determine design quality and set a valuable quality-control framework, as derived from shared understandings including an appreciation for 'green' features.<sup>24</sup> Retaining and enhancing these green features within developments is essential to support nature's recovery, and to promote a positive view among existing residents of what beautiful and sustainable new development can look like. The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission identified that opposition to new development commonly links to concerns about

<sup>9</sup> <https://ukgbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-Nature-Recovery-and-Climate-Resilience-Playbook.pdf>  
see page 82

<sup>10</sup> <https://ukgbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/UKGBC-NAP-Scorecard-Final.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://database.waterwise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/J37880-Waterwise-Water-Efficiency-Strategy-Inners-Landscape-WEB.pdf> p.39

<sup>12</sup> [https://irp.cdn-website.com/bdbb2d99/files/uploaded/Water%20Ready\\_A%20report%20to%20inform%20HM%20Government-s%20roadmap%20for%20water%20efficient%20new%20homes.pdf](https://irp.cdn-website.com/bdbb2d99/files/uploaded/Water%20Ready_A%20report%20to%20inform%20HM%20Government-s%20roadmap%20for%20water%20efficient%20new%20homes.pdf); <https://ukgbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-Nature-Recovery-and-Climate-Resilience-Playbook.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> [https://irp.cdn-website.com/bdbb2d99/files/uploaded/Water%20Ready\\_A%20report%20to%20inform%20HM%20Government-s%20roadmap%20for%20water%20efficient%20new%20homes.pdf](https://irp.cdn-website.com/bdbb2d99/files/uploaded/Water%20Ready_A%20report%20to%20inform%20HM%20Government-s%20roadmap%20for%20water%20efficient%20new%20homes.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://database.waterwise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Advice-on-water-efficient-homes-for-England061118.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/living-with-beauty-report-of-the-building-better-building-beautiful-commission>

visual and environmental impacts. Beautiful developments, which enhance local green spaces and incorporate urban greening can alleviate uncertainty about new development.<sup>25</sup>

Beauty has represented a valuable additional emphasis on design quality in the planning process, and likewise an 'enabling' tool for community engagement in planning and plan making. Its removal risks potentially undermining public confidence and support for development, as well as associated engagement in the design process. Likewise, removal of this additional emphasis on quality, and the body of work that sits behind it through BBBBC, risks the loss of this key influence on design quality and plan making, with a valuable, central component being the emphasis on the role of green and blue infrastructure.

To ensure the Local Plan aligns with current best practise, we recommend the Council follow the examples set by other LPAs, and the Welsh Government's wording in *Planning Policy Wales*<sup>16</sup>, in strengthening the local plans policy requirements to specifically recommend that **all** proposals for green infrastructure will be expected to be designed with the Building with Nature standards, or an equivalent standard set by the Council.<sup>17</sup> This will ensure sufficient quality control, and help ensure all green infrastructure is delivering maximum benefits for the health and wellbeing of residents, and for our nature recovery targets.

### **Strategic Policy D2: Design Principles for Winchester Town**

We welcome the inclusion of green space enhancement and re-greening in **Strategic Policy D2: Design Principles for Winchester Town**. The policy outlines that development proposals must demonstrate how they will address *"the retention and opportunities for enhancement of existing green open spaces, and the improvement of the public realm including more public spaces, more natural features and tree planting, and the potential for more use of the high street"*.

We recommend that the Council raise their ambition regarding the enhancement of green spaces and urban greening in the district, following the declaration of a Nature Emergency in 2023. This policy should be amended to explicitly require new developments to address how they will incorporate value for nature's recovery within their plans, through the delivery of micro nature enhancements, applying a mandatory urban greening factor, the creation and enhancement of habitat and the careful management of natural resources.

### **Strategic Policy NE1: Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity and the Natural Environment in the district and Policy NE3 Open Space, Sport and Recreation**

We welcome the inclusion of policies intended to address recreational disturbance on areas with Statutory Designated Habitat Sites and encourage the provision of open space within new development. However, we are concerned that these do not go far enough to fully integrate relevant mitigation, alternative green space provision, management and monitoring best practise in line with the obligations of relevant policy and legislation.

We welcome **Policy NE3: Open Space, Sport and Recreation** for highlighting the presumption against loss of any open space unless suitable alternatives are provided. The Open

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-07/planning-policy-wales-edition-12.pdf> p139  
<https://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/newsblog1/2023/11/28/delivering-high-quality-green-infrastructure-in-wales-a-briefing-for-developers-planners-and-placemakers>

<sup>17</sup> [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c45e569c3c16a9eac56d244/t/60c8c0d9388d15329745f4d8/1623769306004/BwN+key+literature+%26+references+guide+v1.0\\_SJ\\_FEb21.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c45e569c3c16a9eac56d244/t/60c8c0d9388d15329745f4d8/1623769306004/BwN+key+literature+%26+references+guide+v1.0_SJ_FEb21.pdf)

Space Standard discussed in the pre-amble which is currently under review must align with Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards<sup>18</sup>.

We welcome relevant wording in **Strategic Policy NE1: Protecting and enhancing Biodiversity and the Natural Environment in the district**. *This specifies that “mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures are required to be delivered on-site, unless special circumstances dictate that off-site mitigation or compensation is more appropriate”.* We agree that mitigation, compensation and enhancement should be delivered on-site. To maximise the benefit of compensation strategies to nature, any mitigation funding should be directed towards LNRS identified priority sites.

In addition, the Local Plan should strengthen policy wording to only permit developments which do not provide onsite green infrastructure if they provide sustainable alternative green infrastructure provision of an equivalent standard in close proximity to the development. Within this section, the policy should include specific wording on the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) or relevant Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) projects and requirements.

To ensure a compliant and adequate level of protection for designated sites, the Council must include - and integrate fully - a more detailed policy for the provision of alternative greenspace that is both functional, and of a standard that provides viable habitat alternatives, drawing on SANG and SAMM guidance.

We recommend the Council mirror the effective policy wording of other authorities, such as Surrey Heath<sup>19</sup> and Guildford<sup>20</sup>, to ensure suitable alternative greenspace provision and strategic access management and monitoring mitigation. A failure to do so, given the direct implications of the Plan for protected areas, designated and non-designated sites, risks serious implications for both the soundness and legal compliance of the Plan with regards to the key environmental duties and considerations required.

To address this concerning deficiency, we recommend the following wording:

- (1) *Permission will only be granted for development proposals where it can be demonstrated that doing so would not give rise to adverse effects on the ecological integrity of a Special Protection Area (SPA), whether alone or in combination with other development. Where one or more adverse effects on the integrity of the SPA will arise, measures to avoid and mitigate these effects must be delivered and secured in perpetuity. These measures are unlikely to be acceptable unless agreed with Natural England.*
- (2) *The following principles apply:*
  - a) *There is an “exclusion zone” set at 400m linear distance from the SPA boundary. Permission will not be granted for development that results in a net increase in residential units within this zone. Proposals for other types of development within this zone must undertake Habitats Regulations Assessment to demonstrate that they will not harm the integrity of the SPA.*
  - b) *There is a “zone of influence” between 400m and 5km linear distance from the SPA boundary. Where net new residential development is proposed within the zone of*

<sup>18</sup> <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/GreenInfrastructure/downloads/Green%20Infrastructure%20Standards%20for%20England%20Summary%20v1.1.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.surreyheath.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/thames-basin-heaths-special-protection-area/sang-and-samm-mitigation>

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.guildford.gov.uk/newlocalplan/media/29891/The-Guildford-borough-Local-Plan-strategy-and-sites-2015-2034/pdf/Guildford Borough Local Plan \(2015-2034\) \(Web Version\) \(Reduced\).pdf](https://www.guildford.gov.uk/newlocalplan/media/29891/The-Guildford-borough-Local-Plan-strategy-and-sites-2015-2034/pdf/Guildford%20Borough%20Local%20Plan%20(2015-2034)%20(Web%20Version)%20(Reduced).pdf)

*influence, avoidance and mitigation measures must be delivered prior to occupation of new dwellings and in perpetuity. Measures must be based on a combination of 1) the provision, improvement and/or maintenance of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and 2) Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM). c) Residential development of over 50 net new dwellings that falls between five and seven kilometres from the SPA may be required to provide avoidance and mitigation measures. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with Natural England.*

*(3) The following principles apply to the provision of SANG:*

- a) A minimum of 8 hectares of SANG land (after discounting to account for current access and capacity) should be provided per 1,000 new occupants.*
- b) Developments must fall within the catchment of the SANG that provides avoidance, except developments of fewer than 10 net new residential units.*
- c) The Council will collect developer contributions towards avoidance and mitigation measures, including SANG (unless bespoke SANG is provided) and SAMM.*
- d) Developments may secure or provide bespoke SANG. Proposals for new SANGs are unlikely to be acceptable unless agreed by Natural England. Large developments may be required to provide bespoke SANG.*

*(4) Where further evidence demonstrates that the integrity of the SPA can be protected using different distance thresholds or with alternative measures (including standards of SANG provision different to those set out in this policy), the Council will agree these in consultation with Natural England.*

We welcome and support the inclusion of **Strategic Policy NE1: Protecting and enhancing Biodiversity and the Natural Environment in the district**. In particular, we strongly support the statement that “*development will only be permitted where it demonstrates that it will protect and enhance the natural environment and biodiversity*”. In line with this, development proposals should be evaluated in accordance with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, with enhancements linked to LNRS priority nature recovery projects. When determining areas within the Ecological Network, the LNRS should be used as a guide.

To reflect the District’s commitment to tackling the biodiversity crisis, **Strategic Policy NE1** should be amended to remove clause iv “*development which would result in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees, will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration and where a suitable compensation strategy exists*” which undermines protection for irreplaceable habitats. Irreplaceable habitats cannot be compensated for and are recognised for their high value and the significant amount of time they take to restore or replace. These habitats should be protected more rigorously under the Local Plan. Public benefit should not be used to override protections for these habitats, which provide valuable ecosystem services which are of significant public benefit in the context of a nature emergency.

Within the preamble for this policy, the use of micro nature enhancements such as hedgehog highways and swift bricks are specified as valuable measures to help the Local Plan align with both the NPPF and the council’s nature emergency declaration. However, within the policy wording, these micro nature enhancements are not mentioned.

Such measures have significant support from across the industry, notably through the Future Homes Hub ‘Homes for Nature’ commitment, which has seen 21 volume housebuilders, responsible for more than 90,000 homes a year, commit to install a bird nesting brick or box for every new home built, as well as hedgehog highways as standard for every new development taken through planning from September 2024. In addition, home builders are encouraged to incorporate additional features, such as bat roosts, insect bricks and

hibernacula. To reflect this wider industry support and mobilisation, we recommend that **Policy NE1** is strengthened to incorporate swift boxes, bee bricks and hedgehog highways as standard requirements, in order to support the development industry in what it is already committed to deliver, help fulfil the Council's nature recovery objectives, and align with its ecological emergency declaration.

#### **Policy NE4: Green and Blue Infrastructure**

Ambitious green infrastructure policy is a vital component, particularly in an urban setting, for achieving alignment with the Environment Act's targets, as well as achieving the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act's associated missions, including on public health and pride of place.

We welcome reference to green infrastructure in **Policy NE4: Green and Blue Infrastructure**, which states that the local planning authority will support development proposals that maintain, protect and enhance existing green infrastructure, while providing a measurable green infrastructure net gain.

We welcome reference to the national Urban Greening Factor (UGF) within the supporting text of **Policy NE4: Green and Blue Infrastructure**. We recommend that the Council should integrate a commitment to producing a mandatory Urban Greening Factor within policy wording, to support urban greening in Winchester through new development, in addition to Biodiversity Net Gain, where initial habitat baselines are low. We would recommend that the Council's related planning policy follows the model of the London plan urban greening factor, Policy G5.<sup>21</sup> However, given the significant and severe issues of green space and greenery deprivation, in order to address the scale of nature decline and deliver the relevant public health and pride of place outcomes needed, we recommend setting a higher target minimum score than 0.3 for commercial development and 0.4 for residential developments, as well as ensuring it encompasses all types and sizes of development within the city.

In order to fully comply with the associated policy directions and support the associated legal targets, we would like to see the Draft Local Plan adapt the green infrastructure policy to set high quality green infrastructure principles across the built footprints of new and existing areas. This would lead to the increased sustainability of developments, boost climate resilience and public wellbeing, as well as increase value, support a resilient economy and desire to live in the area. Therefore, we recommend that the local plan should incorporate reference to the Building with Nature accreditation in **Policy NE4: Green and Blue Infrastructure**.

The accreditation brings together existing guidance and good practice to recognise high-quality green infrastructure where wellbeing, biodiversity and water are core foundations. We recommend that **all** proposals for green infrastructure will be expected to be designed with the Building with Nature standards, or an equivalent standard set by the Council. This will ensure that all green infrastructure is delivering maximum benefits for the health and wellbeing of residents, and for nature's recovery.

#### **Policy NE5: Biodiversity**

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/planning/implementing-london-plan/london-plan-guidance/urban-greening-factor-ugf-guidance> ; <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/planning/london-plan/the-london-plan-2021-online/chapter-8-green-infrastructure#policy-g5-urban-greening-171016-title>

We welcome the inclusion of a mandatory 10% measurable net gain under **Policy NE5**, in accordance with the Environment Act (2021).

However, to ensure that Biodiversity Net Gain truly halts nature's decline and puts it into recovery, we encourage the Council to amend draft **Policy NE5: Biodiversity** and set a target for development to go above and beyond the Government's 10% minimum Biodiversity Net Gain, instead aiming for at least 20% Biodiversity Net Gain across all new development.

Failure to integrate a 20% target risks the Plan's effective alignment with the Environment Act's legal target to halt species decline by 2030, and the enhanced duty within the Act for local authorities to conserve and enhance nature across their functions.<sup>22</sup> The original 2018 Defra impact assessment for BNG highlighted that a 10% enhancement would likely be inhibited in practice by a number of factors, including habitat degradation between initial assessment and construction completion, pressures from occupation (such as light and sound pollution) and the possible loss of gains over decades. As such, the impact assessment described 10% as the 'lowest level of net gain that the department could confidently expect to deliver genuine net gain, or at least no net loss, of biodiversity and thereby meet its policy objectives.'<sup>23</sup> The 2023 State of Nature report has presented evidence of a 16% decline in the average abundance of terrestrial and freshwater species in the UK since 1970 (an earlier 2019 assessment had put the figure at 13%)<sup>24</sup>.

To be commensurate with the scale of the challenge, the Council's nature emergency declaration, and genuinely support progress towards the legal target to halt species decline in the UK by 2030 in the Environment Act 2021, it is imperative the Council follow other LPAs - including Guildford and Worthing<sup>25</sup> - and adopt a more widely applicable 20% minimum requirement.<sup>26</sup>

We recommend Kent County Council's assessment (<https://kentnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Viability-Assessment-of-Biodiversity-Net-Gain-in-Kent-June-2022.pdf>) of the potential effect of a 15% or 20% Biodiversity Net Gain target on the viability of residential-led development in Kent. In summary a shift from 10% to 15% or 20% Biodiversity Net Gain did not materially affect viability in the majority of instances when delivered onsite or offsite. The biggest cost in most cases is to get to the mandatory, minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. The increase to 15% or 20% Biodiversity Net Gain in most cases costs much less and is generally negligible and because the Biodiversity Net Gain costs are low when compared to other policy costs, in no cases are they likely to be what renders development unviable. In 2020 Defra reviewed five infrastructure projects and found that the costs for 20% BNG was around just 1% of the capital costs for all but one of these projects.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, concerning research cited by the Green Finance Institute has indicated that a worryingly low percentage of applications could be delivering Biodiversity Net Gain due to abuse of the exemptions.<sup>28</sup> Significant non-compliance and failure to deliver Biodiversity Net

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/pdfs/ukpga\\_20210030\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/pdfs/ukpga_20210030_en.pdf) [102]

<sup>23</sup> [https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use/net-gain/supporting\\_documents/181121%20%20Biodiversity%20Net%20Gain%20Consultation%20IA%20FINAL%20for%20publication.pdf](https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use/net-gain/supporting_documents/181121%20%20Biodiversity%20Net%20Gain%20Consultation%20IA%20FINAL%20for%20publication.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> [https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report\\_2023\\_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf](https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> [Biodiversity Net Gain progress report 7 Feb 2024.pdf \(wcl.org.uk\)](https://wcl.org.uk/Biodiversity_Net_Gain_progress_report_7_Feb_2024.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> [https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report\\_2023\\_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf](https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <https://randd.defra.gov.uk/ProjectDetails?ProjectID=20490&FromSearch=Y&Publisher=1&SearchText=NE0146&SortString=ProjectCode&SortOrder=Asc&Paging=10#Description>

<sup>28</sup> <https://legacy.greenfinanceinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/GFI-BNG-ROADMAP.pdf>

Gain represents a serious risk to the environmental credentials of the Local Plan and its compliance with the provisions of the Environment Act 2021. To address this abuse, we recommend that the Council follow the example of Guildford in its local plan policy, and insert wording to prevent the abuse of exemptions.<sup>29</sup>

As for green infrastructure as mitigation for new developments, the Council should recognise that meeting the Suitable Accessible Natural Greenspace (SANG) calculations is the minimum requirement and does not fully mitigate potential impacts to all sites of ecological importance. Developments near nature reserves increase the footfall, which third parties have to bear the cost of. These sites for wildlife, whether they are designated or not, will play a key role in the ecological network and upcoming LNRS. Therefore, when assessing the ecological impacts of new development, the Council must go beyond draft **Policy NE5: Biodiversity** and require a complete appraisal on impacts of both designated and non-designated wildlife sites (e.g. local nature reserves) and sufficient mitigation measures in line with accredited best practise guidance.

We would recommend that the draft **Policy NE5: Biodiversity** should consider recreational impacts and disturbance on both designated and non-designated wildlife sites, which is currently missing from the policy wording. A failure to fully consider non-designated sites risks environmental damage to key nature recovery sites, potentially conflicting with the priorities to be outlined in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

**Policy NE6: Flooding, Flood Risk and the Water Environment, Policy NE16: Water Neutrality Water Quality Effects on the Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Ramsar Sites of the Solent and the River Itchen and Policy NE17: Rivers, watercourses and their settings**

We welcome and strongly support the inclusion of nutrient neutrality in **Policy NE16: Water Neutrality Water Quality Effects on the Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Ramsar Sites of the Solent and the River Itchen**. We welcome the emphasis on the mitigation hierarchy, by first only granting permission where effects on nutrients can be excluded, and if that is not possible, opting for mitigation via nutrient neutrality. We also support the local delivery mechanisms outlined in this policy, with reference to the Local Nature Recovery Network.

However, in order to fully address the scale of the problem and support the Council's wider goals for putting nature into recovery, we would recommend that the policy goes further and integrates a strong preference for nitrate mitigation schemes that will deliver wider environmental benefits, especially for biodiversity. The “stacking” of nutrient and Biodiversity Net Gain benefits offers a valuable route to deliver this. The opportunities for the creation and improvement of habitats, as part of mitigation proposals, should be as identified through the Government’s forthcoming Nature Recovery Network and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust is well positioned to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain and mitigation for nitrates, prioritising significant added value. We are currently one of the only organisations delivering an established nitrates mitigation programme and provide other nature-based solutions services. We would be pleased to discuss these in more detail.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://intercom.help/joes-blooms/en/articles/9281447-lpa-guide-guildford>

No rivers are currently achieving good chemical status in England and only 14% of designated rivers are meeting 'good' ecological status.<sup>30</sup> Water quality remains a significant issue of concern locally, with the chemical status of the Itchen defined [as failing due to priority hazardous substances](#), with high pollution deriving from treated wastewater, storm water and privately owned sewage treatment works. In 2023, the Harestock wastewater treatment work owned by Southern Water spilled [10](#) times for a total of 109.44 hours, discharging into the River Itchen.

This is indicative of the current state of play with our water and drainage infrastructure that frequently fails, and which is unable to meet existing requirements or adhere to licensed conditions. Given the current lack of confidence in effective and timely investment in our critical water infrastructure, this plan must ensure that it does not add further to the acute pressures faced by the district's water environment.

We welcome key elements within **Policy NE6: Flooding, Flood Risk and the Water Environment** including the use of drainage to account for a changing climate and the use of SuDs in new developments. However, draft policies do not go far enough to achieve sufficient safeguards for water-based habitats and ecosystems.

We strongly recommend that **Policy NE17: Rivers, watercourses and their settings** is amended to provide more detail on the protection and enhancement of rivers that new developments must meet. This should include an initial emphasis on prohibiting new development that is within or adjacent to river corridors and their tributaries. Development in the riparian environment is not sustainable and contributes to the existing issues facing our river systems, further reducing their capacity to provide valuable ecosystem services. This will be an essential tool in combatting climate change.

A well-functioning floodplain and associated habitats are integral to the sustainable management of water resources, water quality, flooding and building in climate resilience, particularly in the face of climate change, extreme weather and sea level rise. Where development in a riparian setting is fundamentally unavoidable, we suggest the following additions to **Policy NE17**:

*vii. Include natural Buffers (minimum 20m) to prevent incidents of polluting run-off and protect biodiversity. As recommended by Natural England<sup>31</sup>, this buffer-zone should be increased to 50-100 metres across vulnerable habitats, including chalk streams.*

*viii. Marginal vegetation and the ecological value of the area including its role as an ecological network;*

*xi. Aquatic and riparian vegetation of the river environment;*

*x. The varying size and associated habitats within a corridor which, in order to avoid uncertainty, are defined as the habitats immediately surrounding the waterbody that contribute toward its character and ecology including but not exhaustively flood plains, water meadows, wet woodland, reedbeds, fens, mires, bankside vegetation and other smaller waterbodies within close proximity and/or sharing the same topography and geology.*

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-water-environment-indicator-b3-supporting-evidence/state-of-the-water-environment-indicator-b3-supporting-evidence>

<sup>31</sup> [Nature Networks Evidence Handbook - NERR081 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)

Our research has suggested buffer strips of 8 metres near rivers are not sufficient, and we recommend a minimum of 20 metres to prevent incidents of polluting run-off and protect biodiversity. As recommended by Natural England<sup>32</sup>, this buffer-zone should be increased to 50-100 metres across vulnerable habitats, including chalk streams like the River Itchen.

We welcome the inclusion of the Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy as a key point of reference in **Policy NE17: Rivers, watercourses and their settings**. It is crucial that the recommendations and key guidance within this strategy are properly and systematically reflected across the strategic allocations and sites within the plan. Particularly to ensure plans and measures are based on a spatial analysis of three years of up-to-date field survey data, and that the relevant mitigation best practice, as recommended within the Strategy, is followed.

### **Winchester Site Allocation Policy W2: Sir John Moore Barracks**

Proposed development at Sir John Moore Barracks must prioritise the retention, management and enhancement of the Flowerdown SINC, while following the mitigation hierarchy to avoid and mitigate the wider fragmentation of the Nature Recovery Network which may result from the regeneration.

We welcome clause x which states that proposals should “*consider the importance, retention and management of the Flowerdown Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) in perpetuity by including a management plan for the maintenance and monitoring of these habitats*”. The Local Plan must go further to clarify how the designated site will be protected and enhanced within the regeneration project, while addressing recreational pressures of development.

### **Winchester Site Allocation Policy W4: Land West of Courtenay Road**

Given that the Land West of Courtenay Road adjoins what is now a nature reserve, Barton Meadows, managed by the Trust, we consider that any development must contribute to the Nature Recovery Network and carefully manage access to Barton Meadows.

Barton Meadows Nature Reserve was established as mitigation for specific features displaced by the Kings Barton development. It is essential that further encroachment through development of land west of Courtenay Rd, does not undermine the planning conditions pertaining to mitigation at Barton Meadows or the ability of the Wildlife Trust to manage the nature reserve appropriately on behalf of Winchester City Council.

Barton Meadows is an important corridor for wildlife in Winchester. Its close proximity to Winnall Moors nature reserve creates a wider landscape in which wildlife can travel, contributing to the Nature Recovery Network. Therefore, we consider that this development must not undermine the network but instead create opportunities for its enhancement.

Furthermore, this development must have measures and infrastructure in place to keep people on the appropriate routes and zone access in and around Barton Meadows reserve. This will ensure that the development and increased recreational pressure doesn't undermine the management of the site.

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<sup>32</sup> [Nature Networks Evidence Handbook - NERR081 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://naturalengland.org.uk/nature-networks-evidence-handbook)

We also urge Winchester City Council to strategically allocate the farmland east of Worthy Rd between Winnall and Barton Meadows for Biodiversity Net Gain, given its importance in connecting the two reserves and the wider landscape and South Downs National Park.

### **Winchester Site Allocation Policy W5: Bushfield Camp**

Proposed regeneration at Bushfield Camp, if successful, would fail to safeguard Bushfield Camp SINC, with losses to priority habitats and species, the fragmentation of the Nature Recovery Network and unmitigated recreational impacts on the Itchen SSSI and St Catherine's Hill SSSI.

While we welcome the inclusion of policies to support a Habitats Regulations Assessment, to consider the potential effects on biodiversity both on-site and on the River Itchen – this policy must go further in its protection of existing on-site flora and fauna. Over the past half-century, Bushfield Camp has naturally rewilded from a brownfield site into a haven for diverse flora and fauna, including Cinnabar moth, Spotted Flycatcher, Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Small Heath, Linnet, and Red Kite, Bullfinch, Linnet, Song Thrush, Turtle Dove, Yellowhammer, among many others. Bushfield camp is fortunate to have some of Winchester's last remaining relic chalk grassland, a priority habitat which can hold immense biodiversity value but is disappearing fast both locally and nationally. It also holds other priority habitats including Lowland Meadows and Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, serving as a key link in the Nature Recovery Network, fostering connectivity within the broader landscape and the nearby designated sites.

This policy does not reflect the appropriate level of ambition to protect the site and surrounding protected areas. In particular, clause xv states *"Where it has been demonstrated that the proposals will have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of the River Itchen SAC it must be demonstrated, as part of the design process, that adequate measures in line with Policy NE1 and Policy D7, will be put in place to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects"*. This section must be amended to explicitly endorse usage of the mitigation hierarchy<sup>33</sup>, to prioritise the avoidance of any adverse effects on the River Itchen SAC first and foremost. This is essential in order to comply with the River Itchen SAC Site Code, which mandates the maintenance of the structure, function and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and species<sup>34</sup>. Policy NE1 which guides mitigation strategy commits to the prevention of net loss but must be modified to commit new developments to a mandatory net gain, going beyond minimum standards to achieve 15% or 20% net gain.

We welcome **Policy D7: Development Standards** and its commitment to ensuring that proposals comply with national statutory standards relating to environmental quality. We recommend that development standards are linked to the requirements for protecting and enhancing priority species as per the forthcoming LNRS.

The recent nature emergency declaration by Winchester City Council in September 2023 underscores the urgent need for nature's recovery locally, nationally and globally. Bushfield Camp, as a designated Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and a crucial component of the Nature Recovery Network, occupies a central role in realizing these objectives. The proposed development, with its potential loss of the SINC habitat and adverse impacts on the Nature Recovery Network, stands in direct contrast to the council's nature emergency declaration. These sites are designated locally for a reason: they are important for wildlife and must be protected.

<sup>33</sup> <https://ukgbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/UKGBC-The-Mitigation-Hierarchy-Factsheet-v0.5.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/4952120898093056>

## **Site Allocations and Recreational Disturbance and Impacts**

In planning for the housing needs of the district, the Council must be confident that the environment can accommodate the cumulative effects of development at this scale. Environmental limitations must be considered, such as the water and drainage infrastructure being overwhelmed as mentioned in the Nutrient Neutrality, Rivers and Water Quality sections above.

In addition to environmental limitations, the ecological map (and when in place the LNRS) should also be referred to when deciding site allocations so there are no conflicts between new developments and plans for landscape recovery needed to reach the Government's biodiversity targets.

The Council has the opportunity to deliver ambitious green infrastructure and creation and enhancement of nature which goes above and beyond the minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. Currently we feel there is a lack of ambition to deliver nature's recovery through the proposed strategic developments.

We hope that you will find our comments helpful and, if you have any questions or wish to discuss these matters further, please do not hesitate to contact us. I also ask that you keep the Trust informed of the progress and outcome of this plan.

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