

## **RSS EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC SOUTH EAST**

### **STATEMENT BY CPRE (7124) FOR FIRST TECHNICAL MEETING ON DRAFT DELIVERY PLAN FOR THAMES BASIN HEATHS SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA**

**By email to [response@eipsoutheast.co.uk](mailto:response@eipsoutheast.co.uk)**

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1. CPRE welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Delivery Plan produced by English Nature. These are preliminary responses to the questions raised in the Background document. We would also like to take the opportunity offered by the Assessor to send further comments on the Delivery Plan in the light of the Peer Review by 10 November.

2. CPRE fully supports the approach initiated by English Nature to prepare a draft Delivery Plan to address strategically the planning issues that arise from the need to protect designated habitats. We also support the Appropriate Assessment now being prepared to screen for habitat designated areas where projects in combination with the South East Plan are likely to give rise to significant impacts. We note that had such work been done in the past expensive public inquiries such as that at Dibden Bay might not have been necessary. We agree and support that the processes, delivery plans and appropriate assessment should speed up the planning process and ensure that the countryside is better managed where there are special species sites.

3. Concerning the questions raised for the 22/23 November meetings; we have the following preliminary comments:

#### **1) How comprehensive is the evidence base for the Delivery Plan?**

The evidence base relies heavily on information from the Dorset Heaths. Since recreation impacts, especially dog walking are identified as a key issue, is it clear that these conditions also apply to the Dorset Heaths? Is it not also possible that at least some of the 15 LAs involved will have data on the recreational patterns in their areas including information to inform the validity of the 5km assumption?

#### **3) What impact is further housing development likely to have on the TBH SPA and how robust is the evidence that such impact would be significant?**

It would be reasonable to extrapolate from existing housing development and LPA knowledge of the current living and use patterns in these settlements. The expert assessment is to know at what level cumulative increases in people, dogs and cats materially change the habitat condition, i.e. are the coexistence levels understood and are the trigger points understood at which wildlife populations decline sharply: these are questions for experts, on which their judgment should be as clear as possible and not over precautionary, but available for review as more data is collected over time. We assume, that data to inform the Plan has been gathered from those substantial areas where there is no public access, i.e. the MOD land areas.

#### **4) Would all forms of residential development have a similar impact on the SPA or should the type of development be a consideration?**

It is quite common for landlords to specify ‘no pets’ in rented accommodation and such restrictions are common in residential accommodation. It is also relevant to consider the whether householders will have a larger or smaller impact: it could be expected that people wanting to live near an SPA, would want to enjoy the recreational access it offered. It follows that any specification restrictions should be reasonable and practical – otherwise they are likely to be flouted.

**5) Has the requirement to apply an ‘in-combination’ test been correctly interpreted and applied?**

‘In-combination’ is part of the test for significance and is different from cumulative effects.

**6), 7) and 8) on provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS)**

SANGS are a central part of the mitigation approach, and we would like to comment further on this after reading the peer review. It is not yet known how many hectares of mitigation land are anticipated in relation to each LA and where the SANGS will be most needed. It is not clear that the SANGS are acceptable to people as alternatives, and it may be that seasonal restrictions on access to the SPAs as happens quite commonly with SSSIs should be equally important.

**9) What mechanisms and timing could be used for the provision of green space?**

Under planning conditions it would be possible to suggest that development may commence, but no occupancy be permitted unless an appropriate area of mitigation land is confirmed. It would also be possible to work with local landowners and DEFRA to accelerate permissive access schemes under environmental stewardship where land is not owned.

**10), 11) and 12) Are the Zonal approach and standards and sizes appropriate?**

The evidence base for the 5 and 2km limits and 16/8ha of green space is highly important to an area with as much existing housing density and pressure as the TBH. We would like to comment further on these and other matters for 10 November.

**14) Managing access to the SPA**

We note that there are many technological ways now proposed to control the movement of dogs and cats and implanted chips now give easy identification possibilities. While some of these may be part of the solution we believe the plan must rely on practical ‘likely to be respected’ controls.

**16) What period should the Delivery Plan cover?**

We will comment further on 10 November, but 10 years to allow stability to the planning process and the ability to learn about the effectiveness of the measures should be considered with a review process to respond to unforeseen outcomes. There need to be mechanisms in the Delivery Plan to check the effectiveness of the measures and to make changes if the measures are not effective.

**30 October 2006**