

Salisbury District Council

**Salisbury District Core Strategy Preferred
Options 2006-2026:**

**Habitats Regulations Assessment
Screening and Interim Report**

August 2008

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I.0 INTRODUCTION

Background

- I.1 Salisbury District Council is undertaking a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of its emerging Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD). The assessment will focus on the possible effects of the plan on designated sites of international nature conservation importance within and close to the district. Initial work was commenced by Council officers in consultation with Natural England, and in July 2008 the Council appointed Nicholas Pearson Associates to progress the HRA. This is the Interim Report of the HRA of the Preferred Options stage of the Core Strategy, including a report of the Screening stage and initial work on the Appropriate Assessment stage.
- I.2 In order to attempt to tackle the decline in European biodiversity, important sites for nature conservation in England are afforded international protection. The Habitats Directive¹ and the Birds Directive² established a network of European protected sites. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated under the Birds Directive in order to protect rare, vulnerable and migratory birds. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are designated under the Habitats Directive and promote the protection of flora, fauna and habitats.
- I.3 Ramsar sites cover important wetlands and were designated under the Ramsar Convention 1971 due to their importance to waterbirds. Within the UK, many Ramsar sites are also SPAs. Government policy states that the Ramsar sites are afforded the same protection as SPAs and SACs for the purpose of considering development proposals that may affect them³. These sites combine to create a Europe-wide 'Natura 2000' (N2K) network of European sites and provide a refuge for wildlife.

Requirement for Habitats Regulation Assessment

- I.4 The requirement for Habitats Regulation Assessment to be undertaken for land use plans in the UK results from the ruling by the European Court of Justice in October 2005 that the

¹ Council Directive 79/409/EEC of April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds

² Council Directive 92/43/EEC of May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna

³ ODPM, 2005, Planning Policy Statement 9: Biological and Geological Conservation; and ODPM Circular 06/2005: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory Obligations and their impact within the Planning System

UK's transposition⁴ of the Habitats Directive failed to correctly implement the Directive as the regulations only required HRA for projects, and not plans or programmes. Subsequently, the regulations have been revised⁵ and now require that proposed Regional Spatial Strategies and Development Plan Documents within the Local Development Framework are subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment.

- I.5 The HRA is required in order to assess whether the implementation of the plan or project would either, individually, or in combination with other plans or policies, have a significant effect on one or more Natura 2000 sites.
- I.6 The first stage of the HRA is 'screening', in which the implications of the plan or its policies are tested in respect of the sites 'qualifying features', using the precautionary principle, in order to identify whether the plan and its policies are likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site.
- I.7 Where the screening stage identifies that the plan or any of its policies are likely to have a significant effect, it must be subject to an 'Appropriate Assessment'. Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, this assessment must determine whether those likely significant effects will or could result in an adverse effect on the integrity of the N2K site/s concerned. Where negative effects are identified, alternatives to the plan policies, and mitigation measures, should be considered to avoid such effects.
- I.8 Under Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, if it is impossible to avoid likely adverse effects on the integrity of N2K sites, the plan-making body must demonstrate that there are Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI) to continue with the plan.
- I.9 The aim of the HRA process for the Salisbury District Core Strategy should therefore be to avoid any adverse effects on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites arising from the implementation of the Core Strategy.

⁴ through the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) Regulations 2004

⁵ through the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c) (Amendment) Regulations 2007

Salisbury Local Development Framework

- I.10 Before 2004, development plans consisted of Structure Plans, produced by the County Council (or Unitary Authority), and a Local Plan, produced by the District Council (or Unitary Authority). The Structure Plan provided the strategic tier of the development plan and identified broad land use policies and strategic locations of development for an area, stopping short of identifying site specific allocations of land. The Local Plan provided the comprehensive policies for the control of development along with site specific land use allocations. In 2004, the plan-led system was changed with the abolition of Structure Plans and Local Plans. These were replaced by the Local Development Framework (LDF) and a new Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).
- I.11 The South West RSS sets the out the spatial vision for the region over a 20 year period and under the new planning system all LDF documents must be within accordance with it. As mentioned above, both the RSS and the LDF are subject to HRA. Salisbury district falls within the South West region and the HRA for the Draft South West RSS was undertaken by consultants on behalf of the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA) and subject to formal consultation in February 2007. The Examination in Public of the draft South West RSS was held in April – July 2007. Subsequently, the Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes to the South West RSS, and its accompanying HRA Report, have been issued for formal consultation during July – October 2008 (http://gosw.limehouse.co.uk/portal/regional_strategies/drss), and have informed this report.
- I.12 Whereas the Local Plan was made up of a written statement and a proposals map, the LDF is made up of a number of Document Plan Documents (DPDs). The main documents within the LDF system include:
- **The Core Strategy:** This document contains the strategic overview of development patterns in the district, including identification of strategic housing and employment sites for the first five years of the Strategy, as well as the key objectives which the Council will seek to achieve through its detailed policy documents.
 - **District Wide Policies:** This will comprise a group of five topic-based documents concerned with key areas such as the environment, economy and design.
 - **Area Specific Policies:** These documents will address the identification of specific sites or detailed policies which are applicable to a defined area of the district. One

document is likely to relate specifically to Salisbury, where issues such as the historic environment, community development and transportation can be more clearly addressed.

- **Supplementary Planning Documents:** These documents will be prepared through a less formal process. They will focus on adding detail to policies in either the Core Strategy, District Wide Policies or Area Specific Policies.

I.13 The Core Strategy is the first document to be produced in the Salisbury District Council Local Development Framework, and will guide the other DPDs which together form the LDF. The Council consulted on the Issues and Options Stage of the Core Strategy up to October 2007, and undertaken formal public consultation on the Core Strategy Preferred Options document (February 2008) up to April 2008.

I.14 The Council is now conducting a second round of public consultation on the Core Strategy Preferred Options (with policies unchanged) in the form of a revised 'Our Place in the Future' magazine, between September and October 2008
(<http://www.salisbury.gov.uk/planning/forward-planning/local-development-framework/preferred-options.htm>).

HRA of the Core Strategy

I.15 The HRA of the Core Strategy is the responsibility of the 'Competent Authority', Salisbury District Council. As the HRA requires ecological expertise in order to make judgements about the implications for sites' integrity, the Council has worked from the outset with the District Ecologist and Natural England in order to obtain baseline information and agree the process for assessment.

I.16 The Council initially prepared an Interim Appropriate Assessment Statement (July 2007) for the Issues and Options Stage of the Core Strategy. In light of the need for the Preferred Options to undergo HRA, the Council commenced the 'screening' stage of the HRA in consultation with Natural England in May/June 2008. In July 2008, the Council appointed Nicholas Pearson Associates to progress the HRA of its policies and proposals within the Core Strategy Preferred Options through to finalisation of the strategy.

1.17 Also in July 2008, a Steering Group was formed to guide the HRA work through to finalisation and enable informal consultation with key stakeholders. The group's inaugural meeting on 31 July 2008 provided useful discussions of the initial screening work undertaken by the Council and NPA, and subsequent inputs that have assisted the preparation of this report. The group will meet throughout the rest of the HRA work, and includes representatives of:

- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Wiltshire County Council: Policy Planner and County Ecologist
- Salisbury District Council: Senior Planning Officer, Planning Officer and District Ecologist
- Nicholas Pearson Associates

1.18 This is the Interim Report of the HRA of the Core Strategy Preferred Options (February 2008), including of the Screening stage and initial work on the Appropriate Assessment stage. Section 2 of the report below sets out the methodology for the assessment. Sections 3 and 4 set out the findings of the Screening and initial part of the Appropriate Assessment stage.

1.19 Further work will need to be undertaken for the full Draft HRA (due November 2008) for the next, Submission Stage, of the Core Strategy. This will ensure that the findings of the HRA are used to inform the final policies of the Core Strategy by fully considering options for mitigation and alternatives in the formulation of the Core Strategy Submission Stage. It will also take account of the responses arising from the consultation on the Preferred Options, and address any uncertainties remaining in this assessment (identified in section 4 below) through further detailed assessments and liaison with relevant stakeholders.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 The methodology used for this HRA has been drawn from the draft guidance commissioned by Natural England⁶. As shown in Table I, the HRA involves three stages. This section of the report outlines the approach used in each stage of the HRA.

⁶ David Tyldesley and Associates, 2007. Draft Guidance: The Assessment of Regional Spatial Strategies and Sub-Regional Strategies under the Provisions of the Habitats Regulations. For English Nature. March.

Table 1: The Habitats Regulation Assessment Process

Stage 1	
Site Selection Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify Natura 2000 sites within and adjoining the Core Strategy area and acquire, examine and understand the conservation objectives for each feature of the site. Consider the changes that policies and proposals in the plan may cause. Assess whether any elements of the plan are likely to have a significant effect on any interest feature of each N2K site, either indirectly, directly, alone or in combination with other projects and plans. If no significant are likely to occur as a result of implementation, the plan (or certain policies and proposals within it) can be published with no further reference to the Habitat Regulations, i.e. 'screened out' from stage 2. If there are likely significant effects arising from elements of the plan on certain N2K sites, or it is uncertain whether such effects will be significant, progress to stage 2.
Stage 2	
Site Appropriate Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake an assessment of the implications of the plan (those policies and proposals within it identified in stage 1 as requiring AA) for each N2K site likely to be affected, in light of their conservation objectives. Consider how the plan in combination with other plans or projects will interact and affect the site when implemented. Consider the effect of the plan on the integrity of the site could be mitigated and consider alternatives or develop mitigation measures. If it can be demonstrated that the plan will not have an adverse effect on the European sites, the plan can be adopted. If the plan is still likely to have an adverse impact on the site(s) progress to stage 3.
Stage 3	
Assessment where no alternatives exist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The competent authority must demonstrate that the plan includes policies which are the least damaging. The competent authority must establish if there are '<i>imperative reasons of overriding public interest</i>' (IROPI) to proceed with the plan or policy. Identify and agree compensation measures and how this will be monitored.

Stage 1: Screening

Site selection:

2.2 The first step in the screening process is to identify the N2K and Ramsar sites which need to be considered within the HRA. Since the Core Strategy currently relates to the entire administrative area of Salisbury District⁷, all N2K and Ramsar sites that fall within district boundary are included. These are:

- River Avon SAC
- Salisbury Plain SAC, SPA

⁷ Subject to the awaited Core Strategy for the New Forest National Park Authority, which when prepared will cover a small part of the south eastern part of Salisbury District.

- Porton Down SPA
- New Forest SAC, SPA and Ramsar site
- Prescombe Down SAC
- Chilmark Quarries SAC
- Great Yews SAC

2.3 It should be noted that Ramsar, SAC and SPA sites are designated under different legislation for different reasons. As such, each type of site has different qualifying features but it is often the case that one site could benefit from a combination of designations. Examples of this are the New Forest which enjoys Ramsar, SPA and SAC designations, and the Porton Down SPA whose area is also included within the Salisbury Plain SAC.

2.4 In line with the draft Natural England (formerly English Nature) guidance⁶ a 10 km buffer was placed around the district boundary in order to identify designated sites which are outside of the district but could potentially be affected by the Core Strategy. These are:

- Avon Valley SPA, Ramsar site
- Dorset Heaths SAC
- Dorset Heathlands SPA, Ramsar site
- Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC
- Mells Valley SAC
- Mendip Woodlands SAC
- Montisfont Bats SAC
- Solent Maritime SAC
- Solent & Southampton Water SPA, Ramsar site

2.5 **Figure I** shows the location of the N2K and Ramsar sites in relation to the district boundary and the 10km buffer.

Understanding the sites:

2.6 Having identified all the relevant designated sites, it is necessary to understand and catalogue each site's conservation interests. This information has been collated in tabular form and is shown in two tables (IA and IB) located in **Appendix I**. Table IA shows the details of the SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites which fall within the District boundary while Table IB shows

those sites which lie outside of the district. The tables provide information on the qualifying interests (reasons why the site has been designated), and factors which maintain the site integrity. Information on the favourable conditions required for each of the qualifying interests of each site has been provided by Natural England (where available) and is included separately in **Appendix 2**.

Review of the Core Strategy:

- 2.7 Having identified the sites for consideration and gained an understanding of their particular circumstances, a review of the current Core Strategy Preferred Options and its policies (referred to as ‘preferred options’) was undertaken. **Appendix 3** provides a breakdown of all the preferred options contained within the current Core Strategy.
- 2.8 The preferred options were assessed in order to determine whether each option individually or in combination with other options, plans or projects, would have a significant impact on N2K and Ramsar sites. In light of available guidance, significant effects are considered to be those which may reasonably be predicted as a likely (i.e. not merely a fanciful possibility) consequence of the Core Strategy that may undermine the conservation objectives of the features for which the site/s have been designated, excluding trivial or inconsequential effects. Where there is doubt about the significance of the effects, the ‘precautionary principle’ applies and further research should be undertaken at the next stage.
- 2.9 This stage of the assessment is summarised in **Appendix 4**. In the first instance each of the options were compared against the list of potential types of impacts shown in **Table 2** below, which were adapted from a list contained within the Draft SW RSS Appropriate Assessment Scoping Report. This comparison was designed to assess what significant impact a particular option could have. In order to assist in this, the decision about the effect of an option was justified against the reasons contained within **Table 3** below. These reasons have been adapted from the table contained within appendix A of the draft Natural England guidance.
- 2.10 Consideration has been given to the potential effects of the Core Strategy Preferred Options in combination with other plans and projects. This has involved an initial review of the likely effects of other plans and projects on N2K sites and of the likely cumulative effects

of these with the Core Strategy. The list of documents to be reviewed for this purpose has been prepared by the Council in consultation with Natural England. Due to time constraints during preparation of this report, a selection of key documents have been reviewed at this stage, including:

- South West RSS: Secretary of State's Proposed Changes, and HRA Report, July 2008; and previous Draft RSS, HRA Report and evidence base for Examination in Public, 2006/07
- Wiltshire County Council and Swindon Borough Council, Minerals and Waste Core Strategies Submission Reports: Habitats Regulations Assessment Report, February 2008
- Test Valley Borough Core Strategy: Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Report, February 2008
- New Forest District Council Core Strategy Preferred Options: Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening Statement , October 2007
- North Dorset District Council: Screening for Appropriate Assessment of Forthcoming Local Development Documents, January 2007

2.11 **Appendix 5** summarises the issues arising from the review of the above to date for N2K sites within the district, and identifies current vulnerabilities known for each site that are relevant in the consideration of the potential effects that may arise in combination with the preferred options within the Core Strategy. Due to the precautionary approach to screening undertaken, it is considered unlikely that further review of the likely effects of other plans and projects in combination with the Core Strategy Preferred Options would result in additional preferred options being 'screened in' to the next stage of assessment. However, the screening stage will be kept under review during the further consideration of other plans and projects during the Appropriate Assessment stage, should additional significant effects be identified which require any preferred options to be screened into the assessment.

Table 2: Types of impacts and operations which potentially affect N2K sites

BROAD CATEGORIES, AND EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON NATURA 2000 SITES	EXAMPLES OF OPERATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPACTS
<p>Physical loss</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal (including offsite effects, e.g. foraging habitats) • Smothering • Habitat degradation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development (e.g. housing, employment, infrastructure, tourism,) • Infilling e.g. of mines, water bodies) • Alterations or works to disused quarries • Structural alterations to buildings (bat roosts) • Afforestation • Tipping • Cessation of or inappropriate management for nature conservation
<p>Physical Damage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sedimentation / siltng • Prevention of natural processes • Habitat degradation • Erosion • Trampling • Fragmentation • Severance / barrier effect • Edge effects • Fire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood defences • Port activity • Mineral extraction • Recreation (e.g. motor cycling, cycling, walking, horse riding, water sports, caving) • Development (e.g. infrastructure, tourism, adjacent housing etc) • Vandalism • Arson • Cessation of or inappropriate management for nature conservation.
<p>Non-physical disturbance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise • Visual presence • Human presence • Light pollution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development (e.g. housing, industrial) • Recreation (e.g. dog walking, water sports) • Industrial activity • Mineral extraction • Navigation • Vehicular traffic • Artificial lighting (e.g. street lighting)
<p>Water table / availability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drying • Flooding /stormwater • Water level stability • Changes in coastal water levels • Water flow (e.g. reduction in velocity of surface water) • Barrier effect (on migratory species) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water abstractions • Drainage interception (e.g. reservoir, dam, infrastructure and other development). • Increased discharge (e.g. drainage, run-off).
<p>Toxic contamination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water pollution • Soil contamination • Air pollution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agrochemical application and runoff • Navigation • Oil / chemical spills • Tipping • Domestic waste • Vehicular traffic • Industrial waste /emissions
<p>Non toxic contamination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrient enrichment (e.g. of soils and water) • Algal blooms • Changes in salinity • Changes in thermal regime • Changes in turbidity • Air pollution (dust) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural runoff • Sewage discharge • Water abstraction • Industrial activity • Flood defences • Construction

BROAD CATEGORIES, AND EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON NATURA 2000 SITES	EXAMPLES OF OPERATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPACTS
<p>Biological Disturbance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct mortality • Out-competition by non-native species • Selective extraction of species • Introduction of disease • Rapid population fluctuations • Natural succession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development (e.g. housing areas with domestic and public gardens) • Predation by domestic pets • Introduction of non-native species (e.g. from gardens) • Fishing • Hunting • Agriculture • Changes in management practices (e.g. grazing regimes, access controls, cutting / clearing)

Table 3: Reasons for policies having significant or no effects

Reason why policy will have no effect on a European site.
1. The policy will not itself lead to development (e.g. it relates to design or other qualitative criteria for development, or it is not a land use planning policy)
2. The policy makes provision for a quantum / type of development (and may or may not indicate one or more broad locations) but the location of the development is to be selected following consideration of options in lower tier plans – another DPD.
3. No development could occur through this policy alone, because it is implemented through sub-ordinate police which are more detailed and therefore more appropriate to assess for their effects on European Site and associated sensitive areas.
4. Concentration of development in urban areas will not affect European Site and will help to steer development and land use change away from European Site and associated sensitive areas.
5. The policy will help to steer development away from European Site and associated sensitive areas, e.g. not developing in areas of flood risk or areas otherwise likely to be affected by climate change.
6. The policy is intended to protect the natural environment, including biodiversity.
7. The policy is intended to conserve or enhance the natural, built or historic environment, and enhancement measures will not be likely to have any effect on a European site.
Reason why policy could have a potential effect.
8. The Core Strategy steers a quantum or type of development towards, or encourages development in, an area that includes a European Site or an area where development may indirectly affect a European Site.
Reason why policy would be likely to have a significant effect.
9. The policy makes provision for a quantum or kind of development that in the location(s) proposed would be likely to have a significant effect on a European site. The proposal must be subject to Appropriate Assessment to establish, in light of the site' conservation objectives, whether it can be ascertained that the proposal would not adversely affect the integrity of the site.

2.12 The results of this assessment for each preferred option are summarised in Appendix 4A. This divides each of the options of the current Core Strategy into one of five categories (adapted from the draft Natural England guidance and shown in **Table 4** below. The assessment was initially undertaken by Council officers in consultation with Natural England,

and has been reviewed and revised by Nicholas Pearson Associates and subject to consultation with the Steering Group (see paragraph I.17) in July/August 2008.

Table 4: Approach to identify which preferred options may impact on N2K sites

Dark Green	Policy will have a neutral or positive effect
Light Green	Policy will have no adverse effect at this level, but will be assessed for adverse effects in lower tier plans or sub-ordinate policies
Yellow	Policy may potentially have a district-wide adverse impact
Amber	Policy may potentially have a location specific adverse effect
Red	Policy is likely to have a significant location specific adverse effect

2.13 Of the options identified in **Appendix 4A**, those which scored yellow, amber or red are those which move forward to stage 2 of the HRA and will undergo the ‘appropriate assessment’.

2.14 **Appendix 4B** discusses the reasons for each preferred option being screened in to the appropriate assessment, and identifies the types of potential significant effect, and the N2K site/s of concern, in each case. The results of the screening stage and the start of the appropriate assessment are discussed in Section 3 of this report.

3.0 SCREENING

3.1 Appendix 4A summarises the Core Strategy’s preferred options which are considered, in their current form, likely to give rise to significant effects on SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites in and around Salisbury District, given the need to apply the precautionary principle and considering the potential for effects in combination with other relevant plans and projects.

3.2 Appendix 4A identifies some 22 preferred options (including all scenarios) that need to undergo the appropriate assessment stage of HRA, and 63 preferred options which do not. These are preferred options: PO3, 8, 12, 13, 15, 22, 24, 27, 29, 31, 36, 40, 42, 43, 47, 51, 53, 62, 64, 68, 73 and 75.

3.3 Appendix 4B discusses the reasons for each preferred option being screened in to the appropriate assessment, and identifies the types of potential significant effect, and the N2K site/s of concern, in each case.

- 3.4 The preferred options screened in for the appropriate assessment include those which:
- Promote development in areas of the district which could result in physical loss (e.g. removal of offsite habitats used by priority species), physical damage (e.g. trampling) , non-physical disturbance (e.g. increased human presence, lighting, noise, visual presence e.g. traffic) or biological disturbance (e.g. predation of birds by domestic pets) effects to N2K sites that are considered vulnerable to such effects, given their proximity to development sites/areas being promoted in the Core Strategy and to current pressures. Examples include:
 - promotion of further development at Porton Down, both at a new settlement or expansion of Firsdown (PO8, 40) and further development at the MOD sites (PO42): Porton Down SPA and Salisbury Plain SAC are subject to development pressures associated with the MOD and related establishments, and where development outside the SPA could also affect Stone Curlew;
 - promotion of recreational access to the countryside: in relation to options likely to increase recreational pressures in areas of the New Forest and Salisbury Plain, e.g. PO22, 24, 43, 68.
 - Promote increased housing development in areas where current levels of water abstraction and treated waste water discharges from sewage treatment works are likely to be affecting the River Avon SAC in terms of water table/availability and non-toxic contamination, and which could further increase current effects (PO3 and many others).
 - Promote rural diversification in ways which could influence the essential management of some sites (e.g. Prescombe Down), e.g. PO15.
 - Promotes development close to River Avon SAC (and Avon Valley downstream) with potential for physical loss/ damage, non-physical disturbance, toxic/non-toxic contamination to the river corridor e.g. arising from construction activity and increased surface water runoff from nearby development (e.g. PO 29, 31, 36).
- 3.5 The preferred options screened out from any appropriate assessment are those which are likely to have no effect, a positive effect, and those with no adverse effects at this level of plan-making but will be assessed for adverse effects in lower tier plans/policies within the Salisbury LDF.
- 3.6 The N2K sites screened in for appropriate assessment include the following, due to identified effects highlighted above and detailed in Appendix 4:
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- River Avon SAC
- Salisbury Plain SAC, SPA
- Porton Down SPA
- New Forest SAC, SPA and Ramsar
- Prescombe Down SAC
- Avon Valley SPA, Ramsar

3.7 The following Sites are screened out from appropriate assessment as no significant effects are considered likely to arise from the Core Strategy alone or in combination with other plans and projects, including due to the distances from existing settlements and other proposed development areas within Salisbury District, and additional reasons below:

- Chilmark Quarries SAC: no existing pressures related to development;
- Great Yews SAC: no existing pressures related to development;
- Dorset Heaths SAC, Dorset Heathlands SPA and Ramsar site: Known to be under pressure from nearby developments and associated recreational disturbance, but these sites are distant from Salisbury district (just within 10km), and are much closer to (and more likely to be affected by) existing and proposed development outside the district.
- Fontmell and Melbury Downs SAC: outside district, closest to Shaftesbury where effects of future development are not considered significant in North Dorset LDF's HRA.
- Mells Valley SAC: distant from district, closest to Frome in Mendip district;
- Mendip Woodlands SAC: as for Mells Valley SAC
- Montisfont Bats SAC: distance from development areas promoted in Core Strategy;
- Solent Maritime SAC, Solent & Southampton Water SPA: distance from development areas promoted in Core Strategy.

4.0 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT (INTERIM ASSESSMENT)

4.1 The appropriate assessment of the Core Strategy has commenced and will focus on:

1. the preferred options identified in stage 1 as requiring appropriate assessment (see Section 3 above and Appendix 4);
2. the N2K sites identified as of concern (see 3.6 above);
3. the nature, probability and consequences of the identified likely significant effects of the preferred options (see below);
4. available guidance, research and other evidence of the likely direct, indirect and cumulative effects (see below);
5. the potential to avoid such effects through changes to the preferred options and the incorporation of relevant mitigation measures into the Core Strategy as it progresses to the Submission Stage and final adoption;
6. the potential to further improve the Core Strategy through refinements to policy wording, including to policies not identified as being of concern but which have been identified as having the potential to be strengthened in light of the HRA (see Appendix 4C);
7. the aim of ensuring that the final Core Strategy does not adversely affect the integrity of Natura 2000 sites.

4.2 Key issues identified at the Screening stage that will be the focus for the appropriate assessment include:

1. **River Avon and water abstraction:**

The likely effects of the level of proposed housing and employment developments proposed in the Core Strategy on the River Avon SAC, through increasing the effects of water abstraction on the water table, are considered to be uncertain. The Revised Draft SW RSS and accompanying HRA points to the need for districts such as Salisbury to consider the need for requiring development to achieve higher standards of water efficiency than in areas where water abstraction would affect the River Avon SAC. The implications of the Environment Agency's review of abstraction licences and associated HRA (which identified existing abstraction rates were affecting the integrity of the SAC), and Wessex Water's Low Flows Study will need to be assessed in liaison with the Environment Agency, Wessex Water and Natural England, in order to assess the likely impacts of development and derive suitable avoidance and mitigation measures.

2. River Avon and treated waste water discharges:

The likely effects of the level of proposed housing and other development proposed in the Core Strategy on the River Avon SAC, through increased nutrient loads discharged from specific sewage treatment works to the SAC, are considered to be uncertain. The Revised Draft SW RSS and accompanying HRA reported some disagreement between Natural England and the Environment Agency as to whether adverse effects on the integrity of the SAC from future planned development can be avoided through planning, investment and technological innovation. The likely impacts of development will be assessed further and suitable avoidance and mitigation measures identified through a review of available evidence in liaison with the Environment Agency, Wessex Water and Natural England.

3. Developments close to the River Avon SAC:

The River Avon SAC is also potentially affected by developments being promoted in close proximity to the river and adjacent habitats, from associated construction activity, increased surface water runoff, and diffuse or point source urban discharges, increased physical damage (e.g. loss of meadow habitats or riverside trees, trampling, smothering from silty water runoff or debris during construction) and non-physical disturbance (lighting, noise, recreational human presence), and biological disturbance (e.g. angling). The procedures in place within the Council to examine and avoid such impacts arising will be examined further in liaison with Council officers, the Environment Agency and Natural England, and where necessary suitable avoidance and mitigation measures will be identified for the Core Strategy.

4. Developments close to Salisbury Plain SAC and Porton Down SPA

The likely effects of developments being promoted within the Core Strategy, in combination with current MOD and other developments and activities in relation to these sensitive sites, and on areas outside the designated areas used by Stone Curlew, Marsh Fritillary butterfly and other birds listed as interest features, will be examined using available evidence of disturbance to bird breeding, in liaison with the RSPB, Natural England and other stakeholders.

5. **Recreational disturbance at Salisbury Plain SAC and New Forest:**

These sites (particularly the New Forest as a popular tourist destination) are identified as vulnerable to damage and disturbance from increased recreational pressure which is associated with new housing development surrounding the sites, due to potential increased disturbance to birds and damage to habitats. The SW RSS HRA identifies a need for districts such as Salisbury to protect these sites from unacceptable recreational pressure, including through the provision of alternative recreational greenspaces with new developments, suitable access arrangements, and potentially by restricting the scale and location of development. Available evidence and policy approaches being used in other districts with similar issues will be examined, in liaison with neighbouring local planning authorities, Wiltshire County Council, the RSPB and Natural England, and suitable avoidance and mitigation measures derived for the Core Strategy.

6. **Transport infrastructure:** the potential for damage or disturbance to arise through new transport infrastructure proposals, including that associated with the developments proposed in the Core Strategy will be identified in liaison with Wiltshire County Council and the Highways Agency/InterRoute.

7. **Air pollution:** available evidence will be reviewed on the potential for atmospheric pollution from traffic on major roads in the district to be causing biological disturbance through nutrient loading to sensitive habitats, in liaison with Natural England.

4.3 As stated in section I, further work will be undertaken for the full Draft HRA (due November 2008) for the next, Submission Stage, of the Core Strategy. This will ensure that the findings of the HRA are used to inform the final policies of the Core Strategy by fully considering options for mitigation and alternatives in the formulation of the Core Strategy Submission Stage. It will also take account of the responses arising from the consultation on the Preferred Options, and address any uncertainties remaining in this assessment (identified above) through further detailed assessments and liaison with relevant stakeholders.