Working towards a Core Strategy for Wiltshire

Draft topic paper 5: Natural environment/biodiversity

Wiltshire Core Strategy Consultation June 2011
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This paper is one of 18 topic papers, listed below, which form part of the evidence base in support of the emerging Wiltshire Core Strategy. These topic papers have been produced in order to present a coordinated view of some of the main evidence that has been considered in drafting the emerging Core Strategy. It is hoped that this will make it easier to understand how we had reached our conclusions. The papers are all available from the council website:

**Topic Paper**

TP1: Climate Change  
TP2: Housing  
TP3: Settlement Strategy  
TP4: Rural Issues (signposting paper)  
TP5: Natural Environment/Biodiversity  
TP6: Water Management/Flooding  
TP7: Retail  
TP8: Economy  
TP9: Planning Obligations  
TP10: Built and Historic Environment  
TP11: Transport  
TP12: Infrastructure  
TP13: Green Infrastructure  
TP14: Site Selection Process  
TP15: Military Issues  
TP16: Building Resilient Communities  
TP17: Housing Requirement Technical Paper  
TP18: Gypsy and Travellers
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Executive Summary

The aim of this topic paper is to gather evidence to inform the preparation of the Wiltshire Local Development Framework, particularly Core Strategy policies in respect of the natural environment. These policies are required in order to achieve the relevant strategic objective ‘To protect and enhance the natural environment’. A wide range of source material has been reviewed including research, best practice, and legislation. The current policy framework has been analysed, key stakeholders have been consulted and community concerns and aspirations have been identified as part of this process.

The information gathered as a result of this investigation has identified a wide range of potential threats to Wiltshire’s natural environment which could be exacerbated by planned development over the plan period. However it also identifies opportunities to guide development in a sustainable manner that not only protects our natural environment, but also provides opportunities to enhance it for future generations.

Key themes which run throughout the paper and will need to be addressed in the Local Development Framework include:

- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – nationally significant landscapes; Wiltshire holds a large proportion of the national resource; and national policies may not fully protect the setting of the AONBs.
- Strategic Nature Areas – regionally important areas as priorities for habitat restoration; development could potentially sterilise restoration potential; and masterplanning and landscaping provides opportunities to contribute towards targets for habitat creation / restoration.
- Local sites – important natural resources subject to negative trends; our communities desire to protect and enhance local sites; threats from development; and opportunities to enhance these sites through favourable management / restoration.
- Landscape Character Assessment – a comprehensive approach to landscape conservation; national pressure to use as a policy tool for planning; and potentially replace local landscape designations.
- Special Landscape Areas – an old local landscape designation; poorly defined and little supporting evidence; potentially replaced by landscape character assessment (LCA); however some landscapes may not be fully covered by LCA; further studies required.
- Green belt / rural buffers – strong national policy available on green belt; potential need for policy on local priorities or alterations to boundary; and national requirement to remove local rural buffers.
- Local Geological Sites – important natural resource; strong negative trends; threats from development; and opportunities to enhance / manage sites.
- Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species – national and local priorities for conservation; historical negative trends; local desire to encourage wildlife; loss to development; and opportunities for restoration and enhancement through planning.
- Natural processes – the importance of connectivity to counter the effects of habitat fragmentation and facilitate climate change adaptation; the importance of healthy functioning ecosystems; potential damage caused by development; and opportunities to restore and enhance connectivity / functionality.
- Tranquillity – very important aspect of landscape quality; traditionally overlooked in planning; and improved assessment techniques and evidence available.
- Sustainable design – the context of the natural environment is often overlooked in the design process; sensitive masterplanning and landscaping; and opportunities to enhance urban environments for our communities and our wildlife.
Disturbance – pressures of increasing recreational development on the natural environment; specific pressures on sensitive birds breeding on Salisbury Plain and in the New Forest; numerous cumulative effects on other wildlife across the county; and opportunities to reduce / offset impacts.

Policy options to address these issues and maximise opportunities for enhancement of our natural environment through the planning process have been explored. The most sustainable solution identified will involve an updated and enhanced policy framework with a broad scope, taking more proactive and holistic approach than the current policy framework. This takes a pragmatic approach to delivery of the strategic objective ‘To protect and enhance the natural environment’, ensuring that this is delivered in the most sustainable and effective manner.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Wiltshire’s natural environment is arguably its greatest asset. Although Wiltshire is dominated by the vast sweeps of the chalk downs, its landscape is highly varied with intimate river valleys contrasting with open uplands and broad vales. This range and distribution of landscapes and habitats is a result of the underlying geological characteristics of the land upon which natural processes and human activities have operated in turn influencing patterns of land use as well as ecological and cultural character.

The chalk which dominates the south and east of the county has produced the vast open downlands of Salisbury Plain, Marlborough Downs and Porton; much of these landscapes are of national importance, as recognised by the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation, and are also internationally important for populations of rare birds and calcareous grassland habitats. In the south west of the county the chalk has given rise to wooded downlands including Cranbourne Chase AONB due to different land uses and functions in this area, which supports a large proportion of Wiltshire’s remaining ancient woodland resource. The limestone in the north west of the county supports a network of ridges and valleys including part of the Cotswolds AONB, supporting important river corridors, ancient woodlands, limestone grasslands and internationally important populations of bats. The band of greensand and clay which runs through the county, dividing the limestone from the chalk includes the important ancient hunting forests of Braydon and the extensive wetlands of the Cotswolds Water Park.

Rivers are also an important feature of the county, helping to shape its landscape. The most extensive river system is the Salisbury Avon draining to the south; this chalk river is internationally important for its habitats and bird life. The Bristol Avon drains much of the north of the county, forming an important corridor for wildlife through the landscape. The upper reaches of the River Kennet also drain to the east; this is another internationally important chalk stream and floodplain. A small area in the north of the county also drains into the upper reaches of the Thames, an area which includes internationally important hay meadows within the floodplain.

All of these national and international designations help to demonstrate that Wiltshire has been bestowed with a remarkable proportion of the UK and Europe’s most important landscapes and wildlife. Wiltshire’s distinctive landscapes create its unique identity and character, while its natural processes provide us with clean water, fresh air, and food, and its sensitive ecosystems underpin our entire natural environment.

Wiltshire’s communities have played a vital role in shaping the natural environment we see today; without responsible land management and stewardship we would not still enjoy the relatively high quality environments we enjoy today which have been all but lost from so many other parts of the country. However at the same time Wiltshire’s natural environment has undergone slow and steady decline over the past century and this has the potential to accelerate in the future due to increasing pressures on land use and the effects of climate change. Wiltshire’s Local Development Framework (LDF) provides an opportunity to set policies to manage land use in order to protect, maintain and enhance our valuable natural environment for future generations.
1.2 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this topic paper is to gather evidence to inform and contribute towards the preparation of the Wiltshire LDF, particularly the development of Core Strategy policies related to the natural environment; these policies are required in order to achieve the relevant strategic objective ‘To protect and enhance the natural environment’.

In order to achieve this aim the following objectives have been addressed:

- Review all relevant legislations and policy which set the statutory framework for the LDF;
- Collate and review the latest relevant empirical research;
- Review the current local policy framework and its effectiveness through analysis of applications and consultation with Principle Ecologists and Landscape Officers / Architects;
- Review available best practice / guidance;
- Consult with key stakeholders involved in protecting and enhancing the natural environment;
- Identify community aspirations through a review of Community Area Plans and strategies and previous public consultations;
- Identify other relevant strategies in the county which LDF policies might contribute towards;
- Propose policy options to achieve the strategic objective; and
- Develop policy wording for the preferred option.
2 INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND REGIONAL REGULATIONS AND POLICY

2.1 European / International

International treaties and European Directives require Member States to adopt legal instruments to meet their objectives, while several also have direct effect upon the statutory functions of local government, including planning. Table 1 below provides a summary of relevant international law.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislative Framework</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Habitats Directive (92/43/EC)</strong></td>
<td>The Habitats Directive aims to promote the maintenance of biodiversity by requiring Member States to take measures to maintain or restore natural habitats and wild species listed on the Annexes to the Directive at a favourable conservation status, introducing robust protection for those habitats and species of European importance. These measures include designation and strict protection of the best resources of these habitats and species as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), part of a coherent European network known as Natura 2000. Development plans and projects likely to affect a Natura 2000 site must undergo a strict ‘appropriate assessment’ process before they can be adopted or permitted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)</strong></td>
<td>The EU meets its obligations for bird species under the Bern Convention and Bonn Convention through the Birds Directive (the codified version of Council Directive 79/409/EEC). The Directive provides a framework for the conservation and management of, and human interactions with, wild birds in Europe including a mandatory requirement for the identification and classification of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for rare or vulnerable species listed in Annex I of the Directive and all regularly occurring migratory species, paying particular attention to the protection of wetlands of international importance. SPAs form part of the Natura 2000 network and can trigger appropriate assessment of development plans and projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance</strong></td>
<td>The Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development. Important wetland sites can be designated as ‘Ramsar sites’ under the convention, and form another element of the Natura 2000 network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2001/42/EC)</strong></td>
<td>This requires Member States to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to determine whether the plans/programmes are likely to have significant environmental effects; SEA is mandatory for all land use plans. Assessment of biodiversity impacts is a mandatory component of the SEA process. This Directive has ‘direct effect’ on planning authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Convention on Biological Diversity</strong></td>
<td>The UK is a signatory of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which entered into force in 1993. It has three main objectives: 1) The conservation of biological diversity; 2) The sustainable use of the components of biological diversity; and 3) The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. Article 6a requires each Contracting Party to develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>European Biodiversity Action Plan</strong></td>
<td>The European response to tackling biodiversity loss establishes a detailed set of target driven objectives and actions at both national and European level. The Action Plan also calls for the full integration of biodiversity concerns into all other EU policy areas, requiring Member States to integrate biodiversity into land use planning and development, and calls for sound spatial planning policies that help prevent, minimise and offset the negative environmental impacts of regional and territorial development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>European Landscape Convention</strong></td>
<td>This convention seeks to further strengthen the protection, management and planning of England’s landscapes. It applies to all landscapes, towns and villages, as well as open countryside; the coast and inland areas; and ordinary or even degraded landscapes, as well as those that are afforded protection. Article 5(d) specifically requires landscape to be integrated into planning policy, and the Government has recognised the need to make the statutory framework fully effective when reviewing policy.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

2.2 National

Much of the UK’s domestic environmental legislation is transposed from EU directives or produced in response to international treaties (see Table 1) and sets the strict legal rules requiring compliance. Planning and environmental policy guidance is also derived nationally and sets a statutory framework for the development of local plans. Relevant national policy and legislation is set out in Tables 2 and 3 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Habitats Regulations (2010)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This transposes the Habitats Directive (92/43/EC) into UK law. Local planning authorities (LPAs) are defined as a ‘competent authority’, requiring all planning decisions to be screened for likely significant effects upon Natura 2000 sites and that an ‘appropriate assessment’ is carried out where such effects are likely. Also places a duty upon the LPA to have regard to potential impacts upon European protected species. Reg. 39 requires LPAs to include policies in their LDF to protect ecological networks.</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), as amended</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 28 requires that in the exercise of their functions, local authorities take reasonable steps to further the conservation and enhancement of the flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), and must consult Natural England before carrying out or granting consent for any action which might damage a SSSI. Part 1 also affords legal protection to breeding birds and certain animal and plant species.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Section 40 places a duty upon all local authorities to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity in the exercise of its functions. Conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This Act significantly amended the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (above). It increased the protection of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) for the purpose of conserving and enhancing their natural beauty (which includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries), and established the option to create dedicated conservation boards. It also clarified the role of local authorities and conservation boards to produce and review management plans for AONBs. Finally it introduced a duty upon all public bodies to have regard for the purposes of AONBs when undertaking their work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 – National Legislative Framework
**PPS1 Delivering Sustainable Development**
This national guidance identifies protecting important landscapes as part of achieving sustainable development, a high level of protection should be given to the most valued landscapes and wildlife habitats. It requires development plans to take account of the impact of development on landscape quality, the conservation and enhancement of wildlife species and habitats and the promotion of biodiversity.

**PPG2 Green Belts**
Green belts have been an important part of UK planning policy for over 50 years. This policy statement last amended in 2001, establishes the purpose of the green belt, including landscape and biodiversity objectives, and requires planning authorities to keep up to date approved boundaries for their green belt, to which the relevant policy will apply. It sets out the national policy framework for development within or close to green belt land.

**PPS7 Sustainable Development in Rural Areas**
The policies in this statement apply to the rural areas, including towns and villages and the wider, undeveloped countryside up to the fringes of larger urban areas. Requires local planning authorities to prepare policies and guidance that encourage good quality design throughout their rural areas, utilising tools such as Landscape Character Assessment, and conserve specific features and sites of landscape, wildlife and historic or architectural value. Includes national policy on strict protection of AONBs and the protection of valuable agricultural land.

**PPS9: Biodiversity and Geodiversity**
Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9) sets out the national planning guidance for biodiversity and geodiversity. It establishes a key principle of local planning policy that ‘should aim to maintain, and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological conservation interests’. It sets a framework for development of local policy, and includes development management policy.

**PPS12: Local Spatial Planning**
This policy statement sets out what the key ingredients of local spatial plans are and the key government policies on how they should be prepared. It identifies opportunities to protect and enhance designated sites, landscapes, habitats and protected species, and to create a positive framework for environmental enhancement more generally. It also sets out a key requirement that the core strategy should not repeat or reformulate national or regional policy.

**PPG17: Open Spaces, Sport and Recreation**
The policy statement sets out the objectives of planning for public open spaces and recreation. It sets out policies on such developments close to or in AONBs, SSSIs and green belts, and the importance of protecting visual amenity, heritage and nature conservation value of natural features and water resources.

**PPS22: Renewable Energy**
This sets out the national planning policy on renewable projects and includes guidance for the content of LDF policies on renewable energy. It recognises the potential sensitivities of landscape and nature conservation interests to these types of projects and provides policy and guidance on how these should be reduced and addressed.

**Government Circular 06/05: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation: Statutory Obligations and Their Impact Within the Planning System**
This circular sets out the procedures to be followed by planning authorities in order to discharge statutory responsibilities under the above pieces of domestic legislation. This includes procedures for carrying out appropriate assessment for Natura 2000 sites, authorising operations likely to damage SSSIs, protection of Biodiversity Action Plan species and habitats, and protected species.

**Table 3 – National Policy Framework**

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2.3 Local Policy Framework

The current Wiltshire policy framework comprises:

- Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan 2016\textsuperscript{10}
- Salisbury District Local Plan 2011\textsuperscript{11,12}
- North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011\textsuperscript{13}
- West Wiltshire District Plan 1\textsuperscript{st} Alteration\textsuperscript{14}
- Kennet District Local Plan 2011\textsuperscript{15}

Relevant policies from the Structure Plan and Local Plans are discussed in the following sections of this Topic Paper.


\textsuperscript{11} Salisbury District Council (2003) \textit{Salisbury District Local Plan 2011} \url{http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningpolicy/salisburystategiclocalplan.htm}

\textsuperscript{12} Please note that the emerging South Wiltshire Core Strategy will replace elements of this plan once adopted.

\textsuperscript{13} North Wiltshire District Council (2006) \textit{North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011} \url{http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/north_wiltshire_local_plan_2011_-_written_text.pdf}

\textsuperscript{14} West Wiltshire District Council (2004) \textit{West Wiltshire District Plan 1\textsuperscript{st} Alteration} \url{http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningpolicy/westwiltshirelocalplan.htm}

\textsuperscript{15} Kennet District Council (2004) \textit{Kennet District Local Plan 2011} \url{http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningpolicy/kennetlocalplan.htm}
3 COLLATION OF EVIDENCE

3.1 Natura 2000 Network

3.1.1 Evidence

There are 14 Natura 2000 sites present wholly or partially within Wiltshire, including three SPAs, 10 SACs and one Ramsar (see Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Feature of Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salisbury Plain SPA / SAC</td>
<td>Stone curlew, hen harrier, hobby, quail. Calcareous grassland and juniper heath supporting marsh fritillary butterflies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porton Down SPA</td>
<td>Stone curlew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bath &amp; Bradford on Avon Bats SAC</td>
<td>Horseshoe and Bechstein’s bats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chilmark Quarries SAC</td>
<td>Horseshoe, barbastelle and Bechstein’s bats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Yews SAC</td>
<td>Yew woodland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennet &amp; Lambourn Floodplain SAC</td>
<td>Desmoulin’s whorl snail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Forest SPA / SAC</td>
<td>Dartford warbler (breeding), honey buzzard (breeding), nightjar (breeding), woodlark (breeding) and hen harrier (wintering). Wet and dry heathland, woodland, grasslands, and wetland mosaics of mires, ponds, streams and fens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Meadow and Clattinger Farm SAC</td>
<td>Lowland hay meadows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pewsey Downs</td>
<td>Calcareous grassland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescombe Down SAC</td>
<td>Calcareous grassland supporting early genitian and marsh fritillary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Avon SAC</td>
<td>– Chalk river supporting Desmoulin’s whorl snail, Atlantic salmon, bullhead, brook lamprey and sea lamprey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 – Natural 2000 Sites in Wiltshire

These sites support some of Europe’s rarest habitats and species, and also provide some of the finest remaining examples of these wildlife resources. They are widely recognised as being of major importance to the UK’s biodiversity and are major components in our ecological network. John Lawton’s recent review of the UK’s wildlife sites network has highlighted their importance and the need to increase their size and quality through favourable management in order to ensure that they remain strong components of the ecological network in the future.

These sites are afforded the strictest protection under the Habitats Regulations (2010) and can be sensitive to the effects of certain developments due to their size, nature or location, even when situated at a significant distance from the designated areas. In particular, those sites which are potentially susceptible to impacts as a result of development include:

- Increased recreational disturbance upon breeding birds on Salisbury Plain and in the New Forest
- Loss of bat roosts, habitat loss / fragmentation and lighting in the areas around the Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats SAC sites
- Physical damage to habitats of the River Avon SAC
- Water pollution issues associated with additional discharge from sewage treatment works discharging in the River Avon SAC
- Water shortages to accommodate increased abstraction in the River Avon SAC catchment
3.1.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

Wiltshire Council screens all applications for potential impacts upon Natura 2000 sites, carrying out appropriate assessments in consultation with Natural England where necessary to ensure that there would be no likely significant effects upon these sites prior to issuing planning consent. This process is regulated under Regulation 61 of the Habitats Regulations, and is operated fully in accordance with principles of PPS9 and the procedures set out in Circular 06/2005.

Where an appropriate assessment indicates that adverse effects upon the integrity of a Natura 2000 site are likely or cannot be ruled out, the application is generally refused. Wiltshire Council has not consented any development projects which have failed an appropriate assessment.

Natura 2000 sites are also covered under saved local plan Policy NE5 of the North Wiltshire Local Plan, although they were not saved in other local plans as they duplicate national policy and legislation.

3.2 Sites of Special Scientific Interest

3.2.1 Evidence

There are 135 SSSIs in Wiltshire covering over 29,000ha of calcareous grassland, lowland meadows, broadleaved woodland, streams, rivers, standing waters and a wide variety of other habitat types which also support important populations of British wildlife. This network of sites is of national importance, providing a representative sample of our most important wildlife and geological sites. Wiltshire’s proportion of the SSSI network has suffered significant declines in the past, with 77% currently in unfavourable condition, however recent investment in the network and the efforts of Natural England have ensured that almost all of those sites are now recovering, with only 0.52% of the SSSI network in Wiltshire in unfavourable declining condition16.

3.2.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

SSSIs are afforded statutory protection in the planning system under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Country Act, 1981 (as amended). This requires local planning authorities to consult Natural England on all planning applications which might affect a SSSI and to take their advice into account in determining the application. Damage to SSSIs as a result of development is understood to be very rare in Wiltshire due to strict compliance with the statutory procedures required by Section 28, as set out in PPS9 and Circular 06/2005.

SSSIs are also still covered under local plan policy NE6 of the North Wiltshire local plan although they were not saved in other local plans as they duplicate national policy and legislation.

3.3 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

3.3.1 Evidence

Approximately 44% of the area administered by Wiltshire Council is designated as AONB; this comprises 38% of the North Wessex Downs AONB, 61% of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and 6% of the Cotswolds AONB. The primary purpose of AONB designation is to “conserve and enhance natural beauty”.

North Wessex Downs AONB
The North Wessex Downs AONB is the third largest in the country at 1730km², stretching from the east of Devizes to Reading, comprising a predominantly chalkland landscape of dramatic scarp slopes and moulded dip slopes that reflect the underlying chalk geology; this is made up of eight landscape types:

- Open Downland
- Downs Plain and Scarp
- Downland with Woodland
- Vales
- Wooded Plateau
- River Valleys
- High Chalk Plain
- Lowland Mosaic

The management plan for the AONB identifies a number of threats to the landscape including development pressure but also identifies opportunities to manage change and enhance its character. It recognises that there is a need to manage development pressures with sensitivity within the AONB and its setting in order to maintain a balance in promoting economic and social viability whilst retaining its landscape character. Key issues identified in relation to development include:

- Remoteness and tranquillity – at risk from intrusion, artificial lighting and noise
- Sensitivities to wind turbines – all of the landscapes within the AONB are constrained to a degree
- Green infrastructure – an opportunity for development to secure and enhance the green infrastructure of the AONB and deliver multiple benefits
- Urban fringe – expansion of urban areas (although this relates predominately to Swindon)
- Equine related activities – impacts of gallops and associated facilities;
- Noise – impacts of increased noise upon tranquillity
- Built environment - appropriate and sympathetic design and sitting of development, including brownfield sites especially MoD land, should be guided by local landscape character

In relation to biodiversity it also highlights potential threats including the fragmentation of habitats and loss of wildlife corridors, particularly in relation to the effects of climate change, and the effects of increased recreational pressure through erosion and disturbance, especially from dog walkers.

Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB
This designation covers 380 sq miles of countryside overlapping the boundaries of Wiltshire, Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset. It is a diverse landscape which includes areas of rolling chalk grassland, ancient woodlands, chalk escarpments, downland hillsides and chalk river valleys.

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each with distinct and recognisable characters. Eight landscape types have been identified in the AONB:

- Chalk Escarpments
- Open Chalk Downland
- Wooded Chalk Downland
- Downland Hills
- Chalk River Valleys
- Greensand Terrace
- Greensand Hills
- Rolling Clay Vales

The management plan identifies a number of threats to the landscape and biodiversity of the AONB related to planning:

- Sense of place – distinctive features are being replaced by standard designs and materials in developments, eroding local character and distinctiveness
- Roads and traffic - noise pollution, traffic and damage to rural lanes can seriously detract from the rural character of the AONB, local distinctiveness and tranquillity
- Landscape character sensitivity - a lack of awareness regarding AONB sensitivities leading to inappropriate development and land management schemes and policies
- Development pressures – residential development and tall structures e.g. wind turbines, threaten the special and perceptual sense of rurality, remoteness, tranquillity and dark skies
- Declines in chalk grassland and bird populations
- Habitat fragmentation
- Invasive species

**Cotswolds AONB**

The Cotswolds is the second largest protected landscape in England after the Lake District National Park, and the largest of the 40 AONBs in England and Wales, covering 2,038km². Nineteen different landscape types have been identified, however the area within Wiltshire is dominated by the dip-slope lowlands and enclosed limestone valleys.

The management plan recognises the importance of planning to maintain the character, appearance and biodiversity of the area and also identifies a number of key issues associated with development, including:

- The need to manage development pressures both within and in the setting of the AONB, maintaining economic and social viability whilst retaining traditional Cotswolds character
- The importance of providing affordable housing to ensure that balanced communities can survive and prosper

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http://www.ccwwdaonb.org.uk/docs/LandscapeCharacterAssessment_FULL.pdf


http://www.cotswoldsaonb.com/landscape_character_assessment/cotswoldslandscape.htm

• Concern regarding loss of local facilities and services
• Potential impacts of converting traditional agricultural buildings, and the need to retain distinctive features
• Noise, activity and lighting associated with development can impact on tranquillity
• Equine related activities can damage landscape characteristics and need to be controlled
• Potential impacts of wind turbines and support for alternative sources of renewable energy
• Potential impacts of re-using brownfield land, particularly MoD sites in the countryside
• Habitats and species are in decline
• Over abstraction for development
• Recreational disturbance upon wildlife
• The need to protect, enlarge and reconnect wildlife sites

3.3.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

North and west Wiltshire local plans contain specific detailed policies on AONBs (NE4 and C2 respectively), establishing the conservation and enhancement of the landscape as being of primary importance, and include criteria based policies on restricting development in these areas, although these largely reflect national policy (PPS7). Salisbury Local Plan includes a rather broad policy requiring that particular attention should be paid to conserve the character and scenic quality of the landscape within the AONB. Kennet local plan did contain a policy on AONBs, however this was not saved, presumably as it was considered to duplicate national policy. The Structure Plan contains a short policy requiring that planning authorities have regard to the designation and the need to protect, conserve and enhance by positive measures and that major development would be unacceptable unless in the national interest. PPS1 and PPS7 afford strong protection to AONBs in the planning process, although this refers to development within the designated areas and does not address their context or setting, which has been raised as a significant issue by the AONB stakeholders.

Wiltshire’s current policy framework for AONBs is clearly variable between the districts, however common weaknesses can be observed. Firstly, the policies clearly do not reflect the themes identified in the current AONB management plans, particularly issues surrounding tranquillity, urban fringe, landscape character, and the distinctiveness of local designs and materials. Each management plan has been through a significant degree of consultation and all relevant environmental appraisals, and therefore carries a substantial degree of legitimacy; however the current policies do not refer directly to these plans as is the case for some other local plans / LDFs, which would help to give them greater weight in planning decisions. The management plans could also potentially be adopted as supplementary planning guidance to provide a clear link and afford them more weight in planning decisions.

The national and local policies deal exclusively with the area within the designated boundary of the AONB and do not address impacts upon views into or out of these areas which can be quite extensive in very open landscapes. This is clearly raised in the management plans and emerged as a key theme through discussions with key stakeholders from the AONBs and Wiltshire Council’s landscape officers.
3.4 Nature Map

3.4.1 Evidence

Biodiversity South West has produced the south west Nature Map (see Figure 1)\(^{24}\); this goes beyond the protection of special sites and identifies opportunities for habitat restoration and creation to withstand the challenges of climate change and species loss. Crucially it provides a scientifically robust methodology for defining a set of ecologically functional tracts of land which are large enough, close enough together, and of the right quality to provide for the needs of our native species and the habitats they occupy, in the long term. This was completed by making use of available research, accepted ecological concepts and professional opinion to quantify Strategic Nature Areas (SNAs) for priority habitats in the South West; in Wiltshire this highlights opportunities to restore major areas of broadleaved woodland, neutral grassland, limestone grassland, chalk downland, river networks and wetland habitats. This information is being used as a basis for several landscape scale conservation projects across the region, particularly the emerging Biodiversity Delivery Areas. This approach of opportunity mapping is well established as an important tool for landscape scale conservation and spatial planning is also recognised as an important delivery mechanism\(^{25-26}\). Indeed when the south west Nature Map was produced, it was intended that it would be linked to emerging LDFs in order to aid delivery\(^{27}\), and several of the adopted Core Strategies across the south west do refer to the Nature Map.

Some strategic development which is planned during the plan period will fall within SNAs including the east of Trowbridge extension and the proposed area of growth at Warminster, while extension of other towns including Malmesbury, Tidworth, Ludgershall, Marlborough and Cricklade could potentially fall within SNAs.

3.4.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

The protection and delivery of SNAs through the planning process was recognised as an important objective for regional spatial planning through the inclusion of Policy ENV4 in the Draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). Although the RSS is due to be officially abolished once the Localism Bill receives royal assent, spatial planning still has a role to play at a local level in helping to protect and deliver targets within these areas. Development in SNAs has the potential to cause further fragmentation and sterilise areas of land from restoration back to the target habitat type, equally however, major development offers the potential to create, restore and enhance target habitat types through informed and sensitive masterplanning and developer contributions.

\(^{24}\) See website for interactive map [http://www.biodiversitysouthwest.org.uk/nm_map3dk.html](http://www.biodiversitysouthwest.org.uk/nm_map3dk.html)


\(^{27}\) Biodiversity South West (2007) South West nature map – A Planner’s Guide. Helping to Shape Spatial Planning for Biodiversity in Local Development Frameworks.
The south west Nature Map was developed after Wiltshire’s current suite of local plans was adopted, and the local plans therefore contain no policy mechanism to protect these areas from development that might prejudice delivery of SNA targets. Opportunities for masterplans and landscaping schemes to help contribute towards the objectives of the Nature Map are often missed due to poor awareness of this evidence base and a lack of recognition in the local plans.

3.5 County Wildlife Sites

3.5.1 Evidence

There are approximately 1,550 County Wildlife Sites (CWSs) in Wiltshire covering approximately 21,000ha of semi-natural habitats including most of our main rivers, ancient woodlands, our best wildflower meadows and the wetlands of the Cotswold Water Park. Although our CWSs are recognised for being of county significance for wildlife, many of them are as rich in wildlife and as
valuable as SSSIs; the CWS network is intended to be a comprehensive collection of our best wildlife sites, whereas the SSSI network is only a representative sample of the best examples of certain habitats and species. The CWS network therefore represents an incredibly important resource for Wiltshire’s wildlife; however it does not receive any statutory protection and is vulnerable as a result.

The Wiltshire and Swindon Wildlife Sites Project undertakes monitoring of the CWS network and offers advice to private landowners about the special value of their land and how to manage this favourably; despite this work there is estimated to be only 54% of the CWS network under favourable management. The network is also regularly updated as sites are de-notified as they become damaged, destroyed or degraded, but new sites are also added as they are discovered. Five sites were denotified in 2008-09, four in 2009-10 and 11 in 2010-2011 as a result of degradation and development.

Wiltshire’s Protected Road Verges (PRVs) scheme also identifies road verges which are of important nature conservation value due to the presence of rare or notable species, the presence of valuable habitats, functions as a wildlife corridor linking other wildlife sites, geological features or areas of community value. Given their proximity to the local road network, PRVs can be impacted by development where this requires new or upgraded road junctions or any widening of the carriageway.

Professor Sir John Lawton’s recent review of England’s wildlife sites *Making Space for Nature* has identified and stressed the importance of local wildlife sites, but also reports that they are often neglected, poorly managed, damaged or lost. Among his recommendations Professor Lawton advises that planning policy and practice should provide greater protection to local wildlife sites. DEFRA has also stressed the importance of local wildlife sites in providing refuges for wildlife, representing local character and distinctiveness, and playing a significant role in meeting national biodiversity targets, and also recommends that Development Plan Documents should include criteria based policies on the protection of local wildlife sites.

### 3.5.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

CWSs are currently afforded protection in the planning system under PPS9 and local plan policies:

- NE7 - Nature Conservation Sites of Local Importance (North Wiltshire Local Plan)
- NR3 – Local Sites (Kennet Local Plan)
- C6 – Protection of Local Sites (West Wiltshire District Plan)
- C13 & C14 – Wildlife and Natural Features (Salisbury District Local Plan)

These policies aim to protect the CWS network from the adverse effects of development unless the reasons for the proposal outweigh the value of the site, in which case they allow mitigation / compensation measures to be conditioned as part of any permission granted. While these policies tend to protect CWSs from direct damage or loss, Wiltshire Council officers have identified a number of weaknesses associated with their implementation which have led to the damage or degradation of CWSs:


30 DEFRA (2006) *Local Sites: Guidance on Their Identification, Selection and Management*
• Indirect and offsite effects such as trampling, fly-tipping, fires, isolation, pollution and disturbance are not recognised, making it difficult to control such impacts through conditions or obligations.
• Restoration potential is not recognised. Some CWSs have become degraded through lack of appropriate management but could be restored through favourable management. These areas are undervalued and as such are often lost to development and with it any restoration potential. Development can represent an opportunity to restore CWSs to favourable condition; however there is currently no driver to do so.
• Lack of commitment to manage a CWS appropriately can lead to long-term neglect, degradation and damage. The presence of a CWS in or next to a development should be seen as a community asset, and a commitment should be made maintain such areas responsibly.

A review of the current local policies also reveals that they do not reflect the requirements of PPS9, particularly the sequential mitigation hierarchy of avoidance (including consideration of alternative sites and layouts), mitigation measures, only then considering compensation measures, and finally ‘if significant harm cannot be prevented, adequately mitigated against, or compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.’ Any significant harm would need to be weighed against the reasons for the proposal by the planning officer / committee, however the current policies do not require that such reasons should be in the public rather than private interest i.e. Wiltshire’s communities must benefit in some way from the degradation of their natural environment in order to ensure that permissions are environmentally just.

Wiltshire Council has adopted NI197 as an indicator to measure its performance against the government’s national priorities. The indicator is intended to measure the active management of local sites as a measure of movement towards the target of improving biodiversity. Wiltshire Council has achieved its target of increasing the number of sites in favourable management for the past two years; development could provide opportunities to bring further sites into favourable management to deliver these targets.

### 3.6 Landscape Character Assessment

#### 3.6.1 Evidence

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is an objective method for describing landscape, based on the identification of generic landscape types (e.g. Open Downland) and more specific landscape character areas (e.g. Marlborough Downs). The approach identifies the unique character of different areas of the countryside without making judgments about their relative worth. Landscape character areas are classified based on sense of place, local distinctiveness, characteristic wildlife, natural features and nature of change. LCA can make a valuable contribution to the formation of planning policies, to the allocation of land for development, to development control activities, and to processes such as environmental assessment.

The entire county was subject to a LCA in 2005 (at 1:50,000 scale)\(^{31}\) following the Countryside Agency’s standard methodology\(^ {32}\), while there have also been several further LCAs of the Districts and specific areas of the county:

• North Wiltshire\(^ {33}\);  

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\(^{31}\) Land Use Consultants (2005) *Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment: Final Report*  
http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningpolicy/landscapeconservation/wiltshirelcafinalreport.htm  

- South Wiltshire\(^{34}\);
- Kennet\(^{35,36}\);
- West Wiltshire\(^{37}\);
- North Wessex Downs AONB;
- Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB;
- Cotswolds AONB;
- New Forest National Pak;
- Salisbury Plain Training Area; and
- Cotswold Water Park.

This is clearly a substantial evidence base on landscape character, management actions and landscape sensitivities which can aid decision making across the county. However, any development which is likely to have an impact upon visual amenity or the local landscape due to its scale, nature or location should also be accompanied by a site specific Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), using the above LCAs as baseline data.

In recent years the government has been strongly promoting the use of LCA as a tool for use in criteria-based policies on landscape within development plans, as can be seen in national policy statements:

- PPS1 - When preparing development plans, “planning authorities should seek to enhance as well as protect biodiversity, natural habitats, the historic environment and landscape and townscape character” (Para 27).
- PPS7 – LCA is recommended as a tool for implementing a carefully drafted, criteria-based policies in Local Development Documents (para 24); and
- PPS22 - applying LCA at the regional level is recommended to inform strategic planning for renewables (Para 3.33).

In 2004 the Countryside Agency provided funding for three demonstration projects in West Sussex, the High Peak and Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough that link LCA with criteria-based development policies\(^{38}\). More recently Natural England has called for all planning policies to be underpinned by LCAs, stressing that all landscapes matter and that we should aim to protect distinctiveness and diversity, manage change, and integrate landscape issues into strategies, policies, processes and actions\(^{39}\). This demonstrates a general trend towards the use of criteria based policies in LDFs as a preferred approach to protecting and enhancing all landscapes.

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\(^{33}\) White Consultants (2004) North Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment
http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningpolicy/planningpolicyevidencebase/evidencebasenorth.html#Landscape_Character_Assessment

\(^{34}\) Chris Blandford Associates (2008) South Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment
http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningpolicy/planningpolicyevidencebase/southwiltshirestrategyevidencebase.htm#SalisburyLandscapeCharacterAssessment

\(^{35}\) Atlantic Consultants (1999) Kennet Landscape Character Assessment
http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/planninganddevelopment/planningpolicy/planningpolicyevidencebase/planningpolicyevidencebaseeast.html#Landscape_character_assessment


This approach is also clearly consistent with the objectives of the European Landscape Convention, which emphasises the application of a holistic approach, applied to all landscapes, where Landscape Protection is defined as ‘actions to conserve and maintain the significant or characteristic features of a landscape, justified by its heritage value derived from its natural configuration and/or from human activity’.

3.6.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

North Wiltshire Local Plan contains criteria-based policies for landscape character, covering:

- The setting of, and relationship between, settlement and buildings and the landscape;
- The pattern of woodland, trees, field boundaries, other vegetation and features;
- The special qualities of watercourses and water bodies and their surroundings such as river valleys; and
- The topography of the area avoiding sensitive skylines, hills and not detracting from important views.

This policy represents Wiltshire best example of a criteria-based landscape policy, however a review of other LDFs and consultation with stakeholders and Wiltshire Council officers has identified an number of other criteria that could be included to strengthen such a policy; these include:

- tranquillity;
- historical and cultural character;
- geological features; and
- visual amenity.

Kennet Local Plan and Salisbury District Local Plan refer to landscape character, but do not use any criteria to help define this. West Wiltshire District Plan does not refer specifically to landscape character, although it does refer to the quality and variety of the countryside. The Structure Plan does not refer to LCAs.

None of the local plans refer directly to the relevant LCAs or the process as an approach to identify, maintain and enhance the characteristics and distinctiveness of the local landscape. Although several LCAs covering parts of the County have been carried out, the current suite of LCAs would need to be rationalised and consolidated into a SPD format if this evidence base were to be applied effectively as a planning tool on a Wiltshire wide basis. There is also currently no strong policy driver for site based LCA to be used to inform the design rationale for development schemes, representing a missed opportunity for development to make a positive contribution towards local landscape character.

3.7 Special Landscape Areas

3.7.1 Evidence

Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) are a local landscape designation applied to areas considered to be locally important areas of high landscape quality sufficiently attractive to justify adoption of particular development control policies or other safeguarding measures. They were initially identified and designated in the 1981 Structure Plan\(^{40}\), and are largely based upon the Areas of Great Landscape Value identified in the previous County Plan.

\(^{40}\) Wiltshire County Council (1981) *Wiltshire Landscape Local Plan (Adopted Written Statement)*
Seven SLAs are currently identified in Wiltshire:

1. The majority of Salisbury Plain excluding two areas around Netheravon, Larkhill, Bulford and Amesbury, and Ludgershall and Tidworth;
2. Areas of to the north and east of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, excluding an area around Salisbury and Wilton;
3. The Blackmore Vale from Zeals to Sedgehill, and a small area to the east of Shaftesbury;
4. The Chapsmanslade Greensand Ridge;
5. The higher land of the Spye and Bowood Parklands;
6. The River Frome valley at Vaggs Hill; and
7. The southern fringes of the Cotswolds outside the AONB.

No descriptions of the special landscape characteristics of these individual areas or the reason for each individual designation are known or available at the current time.

The criteria used in drawing the detailed boundaries of these areas were:

- Major breaks in slope and any important foreground setting to a change in slope; and
- Change in landscape character.

To facilitate the practical identification of the boundaries for administration purposes, fixed lines such as roads, tracks, streams and rivers were used, avoiding the use of more transient features where possible. In the case of settlements, no line was drawn around them to exclude built up areas with the exception of Salisbury and Wilton, and Amesbury and Durrington.

### 3.7.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

Since 1986, SLAs have been retained in subsequent revisions to the Structure Plan and the relevant District Council Local Plans. The current Structure Plan includes a policy requiring proposals to have regard for SLAs. West Wiltshire District Plan includes a policy requiring development to conserve or enhance the landscape character of these areas. Salisbury District Local Plan includes a policy requiring the careful control of development to conserve the character of the SLA. Kennet District did not save their policy on SLAs due to the requirements of PPS7 (discussed below).

There has been considerable debate over the use of Local Landscape Designations (LLDs) such as SLAs as a tool for planning policy in recent years, with a strong argument emerging for their replacement with criteria-based policies based on LCA. Support for this approach has been largely driven by the government’s PPS7, which advocates removal of LLDs in favour of an LCA approach:

> *carefully drafted, criteria-based policies in LDDs, utilising tools such as landscape character assessment, should provide sufficient protection for these areas, without the need for rigid local designations that may unduly restrict acceptable, sustainable development and the economic activity that underpins the vitality of rural areas*’ (para 24).

A recent review of LLDs identified a number of pros and cons of both approaches at that time (2006)\(^{41}\). Arguments in favour of retaining LLDs included:

• Valued and understood by members;
• Easy to use for planners, without the need for specialist advice;
• Generally perceived as useful in protecting landscapes; and
• Uncertainty surrounding the proven utility of criteria based policies.

However problems associated with LLDs include:

• Do not typically facilitate appropriate development or actively promote the enhancement of local character and distinctiveness;
• A lack of policy guidance on securing opportunities for conservation and enhancement benefits in the wider or ‘everyday’ landscapes outside of LLDs, and in focusing on the ‘best landscapes’ can exclude degraded landscapes;
• Not fully justified by a robust evidence base; and
• PPS7 has reduced the weighting that can be afforded to LLDs in planning decisions.

In relation to criteria based landscape policies based on LCA, the review did identify constraints to their use, as they are:

• more complex to apply than LLDs, especially where no in-house landscape expertise is available; and
• requires the availability of a comprehensive LCA to provide a robust evidence base to underpin plan policies and decisions

This issue will require significant consideration and further studies to identify the most appropriate option for landscape policies in the LDF, particularly as PPS7 requires that ‘local planning authorities should rigorously consider the justification for retaining existing local landscape designations’. LDDs should state what it is that requires extra protection, and why.’ A problem with retaining this local designation in the Core Strategy is therefore an apparent lack of evidence to support its elevated status as a ‘special’ landscape i.e. the characteristics which make these landscapes special. The current evidence base does not justify retention of the current suite of SLAs, however evidence is also emerging that the special characteristics of certain SLAs, or parts thereof, may not be fully captured by the LCA approach. Wellhead Valley near Westbury is an example of such an area.

Where SLAs, or parts thereof, have unique characteristics which are not accurately identified or differentiated by the LCA methodology, this may justify the retention of SLAs. However sufficient evidence will be required to demonstrate the special characteristics of these areas and provide a clear rationale for their boundaries. If the SLA designation is to be included within the emerging Local Development Framework for Wiltshire it will need to be applied in a much more focussed and targeted manner, it is therefore likely to cover a considerably restricted area relative to extent of the current seven SLAs.

A sound evidence base will be essential for any local policy on SLAs to meet the requirements of PPS7: ‘local landscape designations should only be maintained or, exceptionally, extended where it can be clearly shown that criteria-based planning policies cannot provide the necessary protection.’ The current lack of such evidence is a major constraint to adoption of policy on SLAs; this lack of evidence in support of SLAs has previously led to inspector’s recommendations for deletions of relevant policies for other local plans and LDFs. There are however also examples where the continued use of local designations has been found sound through scrutiny

by the Planning Inspectorate including the Borough of Sutton\textsuperscript{44} and Harrogate\textsuperscript{45}. These examples demonstrate that any continued use of LLDs must be supported by a sound evidence base to demonstrate their unique characteristics and must also be complemented by adequate policy to protect and enhance all non-designated landscapes.

3.8 Green Belt and Rural Buffers

3.8.1 Evidence

Green belt policy has been in place nationally (outside London) for over 50 years and applies to 14 green belts covering approximately 12\% of England. Their main purpose is to restrict urban sprawl, prevent neighbouring towns from coalescing, preserve the setting of towns, encourage urban regeneration and reuse of derelict land, and to maintain the openness of the surrounding countryside. However other benefits which have been reported include improved access for recreation and access to the countryside, improving health and wellbeing, and the protection of wildlife\textsuperscript{46}. Green belts have a higher concentration of public rights of way, broad-leaf and mixed woodland, Country Parks, Local Nature Reserves, and Registered (or historic) Parks and Gardens, than land that does not have Green Belt designation\textsuperscript{47}. Use of land in green belts should play a positive role to play in fulfilling the following objectives:

- provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;
- provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;
- retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;
- improve damaged and derelict land around towns;
- secure nature conservation interest; and
- retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

Wiltshire includes part of the Avon Green Belt which surrounds the wider Bath and Bristol areas. 58\% of the Avon Green Belt is classed as ‘neglected’ or ‘weakened’ in landscape terms and 33\% ‘maintained’ or sustained (data is not available for the remaining 9\%). The current condition of both agricultural land and field boundaries such as hedgerows are the main concerns, but the condition of woodland is good. 14,549 ha (22\%) of the Avon Green Belt coincides with land designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). 1,512 ha are registered as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or wildlife sites of at least national importance, representing 2.3\% of the Avon Green Belt, while there are a further 264ha of Local Nature Reserves.

Asked what Green Belt activities they would like to undertake in the next twelve months, the public in the south west most commonly chose\textsuperscript{48}:

- visiting the Green Belt on a day out with friends/family
- visiting Green Belt to get peace and quiet
- visiting Green Belt to see wildlife or bird watching.

When asked what they would like to see more of in the Green Belt, the public in the south west were keen to see:

\textsuperscript{44} Planning Inspectorate (2009) \textit{Report on the examination into the London Borough of Sutton Core Planning Strategy DPD} \url{http://www.sutton.gov.uk/CHandler.ashx?id=6905&p=0}
\textsuperscript{46} CPRE (2005) \textit{Green Belts: If They Didn’t Exist We’ve Have to Invent Them}
\textsuperscript{47} CPRE and Natural England (2010) \textit{Green Belts: a Greener Future}
\textsuperscript{48} CPRE and Natural England (2010) \textit{Green Belts: Key Facts – Avon Green Belt}
• woodland walks;
• nature reserves; and
• community food growing (e.g. allotments and pick-your-own farms).

85% of the public in the south west agreed that they would buy food known to have been grown or produced by farmers in the Green Belt local to them rather than buy food produced elsewhere.

The boundaries of Green Belts are determined by local authorities and kept up to date and publicly available in local plans; in Wiltshire this currently includes the North Wiltshire Local Plan and the West Wiltshire District Plan. Those parts of Wiltshire included in the Avon Green Belt include land surrounding Bradford on Avon, Trowbridge and west of Corsham. The particular objectives of the Western Wiltshire Green Belt are to maintain the open character of undeveloped land adjacent to Bath, Trowbridge and Bradford on Avon, to limit the spread of development along the A4 between Batheaston and Corsham and to protect the historic character and setting of Bradford upon Avon.

Rural buffers are a local designation included originally in the Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan and North Wiltshire Local Plan. These included a large buffer west of Swindon and some smaller areas between Chippenham and surrounding villages. The aim of these designations in the local plan was to protect towns and villages from coalescence by restricting development and land use in these areas, in a similar way to Green Belts.

3.8.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

The development control policy for Green Belts in the West Wiltshire District Plan (GB2) was not saved by Secretary of State and expired in 2007; this was not saved as it replicated national policy set out in PPG2. However, Secretary of State did save Policy GB1 which establishes the boundary of the Green Belt, as this is in accordance with PPG2, which requires local development plans to include Green Belt boundaries.

The Green Belt policy in the North Wiltshire Local Plan (NE1) has been saved as it sets the boundary of the Green Belt in north Wiltshire; however development control elements of this policy are not likely to be necessary as they appear to largely duplicate elements of PPG2.

The Swindon Rural Buffer (NE2) and Local Rural Buffer (NE3) policies of the North Wiltshire Local Plan were removed from these plans by the Secretary of State in 2007 as they conflict with national policy in PPS7 on local land designations:

Local landscape designations should only be maintained or, exceptionally, extended where it can be clearly shown that criteria-based planning policies cannot provide the necessary protection. LDDs should state what it is that requires extra protection, and why. When reviewing their local area-wide development plans and LDDs, planning authorities should rigorously consider the justification for retaining existing local landscape designations.

PPS7 calls into question ‘the need for rigid local designations that may unduly restrict acceptable, sustainable development and the economic activity that underpins the vitality of rural areas’, and includes policy restricting development in the open countryside, focussing development in or adjacent to existing settlements.
3.9  Local Geological Sites

3.9.1 Evidence

Local Geological Sites (LGSs) are currently the most important places for geology and geomorphology outside of geological SSSIs. LGSs (formerly Regional Sites of Geological Importance or RIGS) are selected in a different way to Earth science SSSIs, which are chosen by Natural England on a national basis, while LGSs are selected on a local or regional basis using four nationally agreed criteria:

- The value of the site for educational purposes in life long learning;
- The value of the site for study by both professional and amateur Earth scientists;
- The historical value of the site in terms of important advances in Earth science knowledge, events or human exploitation; and
- The aesthetic value of a site in the landscape, particularly in relation to promoting public awareness and appreciation of Earth sciences.

The concept of RIGS was first initiated by the Nature Conservancy Councils (NCC) in 1990\(^49\). RIGS sites started life as SSSIs which were denotified after the Geological Conservation Review (1997-1990), however the statutory agencies wished to secure their conservation in another form. RIGS sites are those which, whilst not benefiting from national statutory protection, are nevertheless regionally or locally representative sites where ".... consideration of their importance becomes integral to the planning process".

There are currently 54 LGSs in Wiltshire which include exposures of limestone, chalk, sand, gravel, sandstone and clay. Wiltshire Geology Group is currently undertaking a project to monitor the condition of all of these sites, which has revealed that almost all of them are in declining condition, and indeed five sites were lost and denotified during the period 2009-10. LGSs are likely to be significantly under recorded, and there are likely to be many more important sites within Wiltshire which have not yet been discovered.

LGSs can be affected by a wide range of development through covering or damaging exposures or contributing to the encroachment of vegetation through landscape management practices, however the greatest threats tend to be posed by mineral and waste developments. At the same time, development can provide opportunities to re-expose sites in poor condition, identifying previously unknown but significant features during environmental assessments, and making a contribution to accessibility and long-term management of such sites.

3.9.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

PPS9 states that an objective of planning is to conserve, enhance and restore the diversity of England’s geology by sustaining, and where possible improving, the quality and extent of geological and geomorphological sites, and that development plan policies should aim to maintain, and enhance, restore or add to geological conservation interests. It also includes a direct requirement to establish criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on, or affecting, LGSs should be judged.

Each of the local plans and the Structure Plan offers a degree of protection to RIGS / LGS through inclusion of policies on local sites such as County Wildlife Sites. There are no known instances where development proposals have resulted in the damage or loss of geological

\(^{49}\) Nature Conservancy Council (1990) *Earth Science Conservation in Great Britain – A Strategy*. NCC, Peterborough
features, and it is not therefore possible to comment on the effectiveness of these policies. However it is worth noting that while the policies afford protection from damage through development, they do not include any driver for positive management or access which might enhance and secure our known geodiversity for the future.

3.10 Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan

3.10.1 Evidence

The UK BAP was produced in 1994 as a response to the CBD, and identified a list of habitats and species which were known to be in decline nationally. It has since been regularly updated and provides a framework for many local BAPs, which identify local priorities for conservation, set out actions to halt or reverse declines, and set targets for those actions. Wiltshire’s current BAP was produced in 2008 by the Wiltshire BAP Steering Group, made up of representatives from Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Wiltshire Council, Natural England, Biodiversity South West, Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre, and the Cotswold Water Park Society. It includes action plans for ten habitats, and although there is only one action plan for a species group (bats), 260 local BAP species are listed; actions for these species are generally covered by their relevant habitat action plan and / or a UK BAP action plan. These habitats and species are included in the BAP due to significant declines within Wiltshire, as shown in Table 5.

Professor Lawton’s report has stressed the importance of BAP habitats in acting as core areas, ‘stepping stones’ and connections of ecological networks, and recommends that planning policy should provide greater protection to priority habitats.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006) places the ‘Biodiversity Duty’ on all planning authorities:

‘Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.’

And that ‘conserving biodiversity’ includes, ‘in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat.’

Section 41 of the Act clarifies that for the purposes of the Act, BAP habitats and species are those of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity.

Table 5 highlights that Wiltshire holds a huge proportion of the national resource for several of these habitat types e.g. calcareous grassland, parkland and neutral meadows; we therefore have a duty to act as responsible stewards of this resource on behalf of the UK. At the same time we have very little of some other habitat types remaining in Wiltshire e.g. traditional orchards, and we must protect these remaining fragments to ensure that we do not lose what we have left.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAP Habitat</th>
<th>Reason for BAP status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woodland</td>
<td>Ancient woodland is a finite resource in that it cannot be recreated, and supports a range of rare wildlife which rely entirely on it for survival. Since the 1930s approximately 50% of ancient woodland has been lost or damaged. Wiltshire only has approximately 7% woodland cover remaining, significantly less that the national average of 12%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood-pasture / Parkland</td>
<td>The characteristic ancient trees of this habitat are irreplaceable and support a wide range of rare fungi, lichens, liverworts invertebrates, mosses. Estimates of Wiltshire’s resource vary widely (3,200 – 8,400 ha) but it is understood to support a substantial proportion of the UK’s estimated remaining total (10-20,000ha), due to a large number of medieval parks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Species-rich Hedgerows</td>
<td>It is estimated that between 1984 and 1990, 23% of English hedges were lost. There is still an estimated net annual rate of loss of approximately 5%. Ancient hedgerows support the greatest biodiversity, and often date back to the Enclosures Acts 1720 – 1840. Hedgerow networks support a wide range of farmland species and provide connectivity for wildlife through an increasingly hostile landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Orchards</td>
<td>The area of orchard has declined by 57% in England since 1950. Of 134ha of orchard remaining in Wiltshire, it is not clear how much of this is traditional orchard; most traditional orchards are small fragments, often neglected. Traditional orchards support rare traditional cultivars of fruit trees, and wide range of flora and fauna including notable vascular plants, lichens, fungi, invertebrates, birds and mammals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmland Habitats</td>
<td>Arable flora is the most threatened group of plants in Britain today; 54 species are considered rare or threatened, while seven are extinct in an arable context; south Wiltshire is in Plantlife’s list of the 15 richest areas for arable plants. Farmland birds have shown continued decline, while abundance of butterflies on farmland sites has fallen by nearly a fifth over the last 16 years, with specialist species declining to a low point of 29% in 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcareous Grassland</td>
<td>This habitat type has seen sharp declines over the past 50 years, however due to its geology and military presence Wiltshire still supports 24,000ha of calcareous grassland, representing 50% of the UK resource. This habitat type supports a high botanical diversity including some very rare plants, which also support a wide range of butterflies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimproved Neutral Meadows</td>
<td>There has been an estimated 97% loss in UK in 50 years, with less than 8,500ha remaining in England. There has also been a significant decline in plant diversity of around 10% on neutral grassland between 1990 and 1998. There is estimated to be 500ha remaining in Wiltshire - approximately 9% of UK resource. Hay meadows support a great diversity of wildflowers and rare fauna such as the marsh fritillary butterfly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivers and Streams</td>
<td>Much of the Salisbury Avon and River Kennet are nationally and internationally important for wildlife, however all of our rivers form important wildlife corridors across our county. Many have suffered canalisation and degraded water quality over the years; however this is now beginning to be reversed, although climate change and increasing populations are likely to put new pressures on our rivers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing Open Water</td>
<td>It is estimated that over a million ponds were lost in the UK over the last century. Standing water is a relatively scarce resource in Wiltshire estimated at 600ha, predominately in north Wiltshire and the Cotswolds Water Park. A survey of the Salisbury area in 1994 estimated that over the last 100 years, 43% of ponds had been lost. Ponds are an important freshwater habitat, supporting least two thirds of Britain’s freshwater species.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built Environment</td>
<td>Canals, roadside verges and railway embankments provide habitat and wildlife corridors for wildlife when designed and managed properly. Allotments, gardens, parks and cemeteries can support a range of urban species. Derelict brownfield land often supports specialist species including rare weeds, invertebrates, bats and black redstarts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 – Wiltshire BAP Habitats

3.10.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

National government policy has directed development pressure onto brownfield land, which often conflicts with biodiversity interest at these sites. Such biodiversity is often overlooked when planning the redevelopment of brownfield sites, partially due to a lack of recognition in the local

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51 Data taken from the Wiltshire BAP
plan policies, despite specific reference to brownfield biodiversity in PPS9 (para 13). Such wildlife can often be incorporated into development schemes through well informed and sensitive design.

At the same time, Wiltshire’s paucity of brownfield land pushes a lot of development onto Greenfield sites where it comes into conflict with other BAP habitats particularly hedgerows, calcareous grassland, neutral grassland, and rivers and streams. BAP species are also frequently present on development sites, as these are still relatively common in the landscape despite significant declines.

Existing local plans refer to Areas of High Ecological Value (AHEVs) shown on proposals maps. AHEVs were identified to highlight areas which, on the basis of landscape characteristics, were likely to contain species and habitats of conservation importance. Local plan policies emphasised the need to ensure development avoided harm to ecological interests within these areas. AHEVs have been superseded by the Wiltshire BAP and there is no need therefore to have policy to protect them.

At present only the North Wiltshire Local Plan has a specific policy on BAP habitats / species (NE11 – Conserving Biodiversity). Other plans briefly mention BAPs within other policy areas (Kennet), or refer to specific habitat types (West Wiltshire) or 'the diversity of flora and fauna’ (south Wiltshire). These policies do not reflect the direct requirement set out in PPS9 for local plans to include policies to protect and conserve BAP habitats / species, and to identify opportunities to enhance to them. As a result, Wiltshire Council officers struggle to adequately protect BAP habitats / species from inappropriate development, or to secure measures to enhance them; cumulatively this is likely to have contributed to continued declines for these habitats / species.

3.11 Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

3.11.1 Evidence

Productive agricultural land which can consistently provide good crop yields is a valuable resource, which is likely to become increasing important in the future as demand for food increases and lower quality soils fail to yield crops as the effects of climate change are experienced. The importance of high quality agricultural land has long been recognised, hence the UK has been mapped using the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC), which grades land on a scale 1-5. Grades 1-3a are termed Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land as the land which is most flexible, productive and efficient in response to inputs and which can best deliver future crops for food and non-food uses such as biomass and fibres.

Development has the potential to remove BMV land from production, and such losses can be a material consideration in planning, as recognised in PPS7 which requires that BMV land be taken into consideration alongside other sustainability criteria, and where the loss of agricultural land is unavoidable, that this be directed towards lower ALC grades. Natural England requires consultation for applications involving the loss of 20ha or more BMV land. Soil protection is also mentioned in PPS1 and its associated supplement for climate change, and as an element of the environment requiring assessment in the both SEA and EIA Directives.

3.11.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

All of the local plans and the Structure Plan contain policies on the protection of BMV land, however these largely repeat the policy contained in PPS7; an approach which could be contrary to the requirements of PPS12 in relation to duplicating national policy. PPS7 requires that local plans identify any major areas of BVM land that are planned for development, and this has been carried out through the Sustainability Appraisal process in identifying and selecting sites for housing and employment allocations. Given the low availability of brownfield land for development in Wiltshire, many of the allocations are likely to fall to Greenfield sites; however BMV land has been given appropriate weighting in the site selection process. Windfall development is likely to be generally small in nature and unlikely to result in major losses of BMV land during the plan period, however the requirements of PPS7 will be applied to applications on BMV land.

The Planning (Grade 1 Agricultural Land Protection) Bill is currently before Parliament\(^53\); if this was to come into force it would prohibit local authorities from granting planning permission involving the development of Grade 1 agricultural land other than in exceptional circumstances, or for connected purposes. This would provide a legislative mechanism to protect Grade 1 agricultural land without the need to reflect this in local plan policies.

3.12 Natural Processes

3.12.1 Evidence

Research highlighting the importance of healthy functional ecosystems has gathered increasing attention in the literature recently, particularly within planning and policy arenas. PPS9 includes several references to conserving natural physical processes and healthy functional ecosystems, and stresses the importance of networks of habitats as a valuable resource to link sites of biodiversity importance and provide routes or stepping stones for the migration, dispersal of species. It also recommends that local authorities should aim to maintain networks by avoiding or repairing the fragmentation and isolation of natural habitats through policies in plans; this is in direct response to Regulation 39 of the Habitats Regulations, which requires that Local Development Documents include policies:

‘…encouraging the management of features of the landscape…which are of major importance for wild fauna and flora which, by virtue of their linear and continuous structure (such as rivers with their banks or the traditional systems of marking field boundaries) or their function as “stepping stones” (such as ponds or small woods), are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.’

A key theme to emerge from the Making Space for Nature review was the importance of ecological connectivity for creating and maintaining a coherent and resilient ecological network, through both stepping stones and wildlife corridors. The review goes on to stress the important role that local authorities can play in ensuring that ecological networks are maintained, restored and enhanced, particularly through the planning system. Several of the recommendations are also relevant to ecological corridors in the built environment:

- **Recommendation 7** – Responsible authorities should take greater steps to reconnect people to nature by enhancing ecological networks within urban environments, including wildlife-friendly management of green spaces, and by embedding biodiversity considerations in the need to adapt to climate change.

\(^53\) Please see UK Parliament website for details [http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/planninggrade1agriculturallandprotection.html](http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/planninggrade1agriculturallandprotection.html)
• **Recommendation 21 – Public bodies and other authorities responsible for canals, railways, roads, cycle ways and other linear features in the landscape, should ensure that they better achieve their potential to be wildlife corridors, thereby enhancing the connectivity of ecological networks, and improving opportunities for people to enjoy wildlife.**

This revival in the concept of ecological networks has gathered momentum as recent research continues to demonstrate the gravity of the emerging threats posed by climate change. Evidence demonstrates that our natural environment is already showing signs of the effects of climate change as animals emerge from hibernation too early to find food, and species ranges shift. More mobile species may be able to adapt to changing environmental conditions by moving, but only if the landscape is sufficiently permeable to allow them to do so; wildlife corridors and stepping stones will therefore become increasingly important for these mobile species. However, other less mobile species will be unable to migrate and will be more susceptible to localised extinctions during extreme weather events; sufficiently large habitat patches and populations will be important to these species in order to maintain sufficiently resilient populations which can withstand local extinction events. Establishing and maintaining a coherent and resilient ecological network will therefore help our wildlife to adapt to a changing climate.

DEFRA has also stressed the importance of establishing an ecological network, particularly in fragmented landscapes where species are vulnerable within small isolated patches54. Natural England has set out the role of the spatial planning system in facilitating the adaptation of biodiversity to climate change55; recommendations include incorporating biodiversity adaptation focussed policies into core strategies, which seek to protect and enhance ecological networks, and avoid creating barriers to connectivity or fragmenting habitats.

The multiple benefits of a healthy functioning ecosystem have also recently been highlighted through a numerous studies into ‘ecosystem services’. This approach focuses on the value of the natural environment, not just for nature conservation and wildlife, but for the benefits it provides to people. Our environment has always supported our needs and as a result we have taken this for granted and undervalued it in policy decisions; the ecosystems services approach aims to put a value on these environment services, including:

- **Provisioning** – provision of crops, fish production, supporting livestock, timber production, water supply;
- **Cultural** – a sense of place, local character and identity, distinctive landscapes, tranquillity;
- **Regulating** – pollution control, climate regulation, flood alleviation; and
- **Supporting** – decomposition, nutrient recycling.

This research demonstrates that it is more cost-effective to conserve and invest in our natural environment now than continue to damage it and pay the costs of repair or alternative means of delivering our essential services. Recent research has also shown that different biodiversity groups contribute to these services, as shown in Figure 2 below, and that the economic value can be substantial:

- If biodiversity and ecosystem losses continue at their current rates, the annual cost of the resulting loss in services could be up to $14 trillion per year globally and $1 trillion in Europe by 205056.
In Europe, wetlands are estimated to provide a value of 6 EUR billion per year\textsuperscript{57};

The worldwide economic value of the pollination service provided by insect pollinators, bees mainly, was €153 billion in 2005 for the main crops that feed the world\textsuperscript{58}; and

Forestry and primary wood processing was worth £2.05 billion in 2007, while the social (e.g. landscape and recreational visits) and environmental benefits of UK woodlands were valued at more than £1 billion in 2002.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Group</th>
<th>Final ecosystem services</th>
<th>Biodiversity Groups</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Terrestrial</td>
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<td>Marine</td>
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<td>Non-terrestrial</td>
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<td>Fungi</td>
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<td>Lower Plants</td>
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<td>Higher Plants</td>
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<td>Invertebrates</td>
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<td>Fish</td>
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<td>Amphibian</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Reptiles</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Birds</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mammals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Provisioning**
- Crops, plants, livestock, fish
- Water
- Wild species diversity
- Nourishing places
- Social valued land and wetlands

**Cultural**
- Climate regulation
- Nutrient regulation
- Waste breakdown & detoxification
- Purification
- Air & land regulation

**Regulating**
- Trees, standing vegetation & peat
- Water supply
- Wetlands
- Hardwood places
- Social valued land and wetlands

*Figure 2 - The Importance of Different Biodiversity Groups for the Delivery of Different Final Ecosystem Services (taken from Watson and Albon, 2010).*

Recent research carried out by the government think tank Foresight\textsuperscript{59}, has highlighted the new and existing pressures on land use predicted to increase throughout the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century, particularly demographic change, economic growth, climate change, new technologies, social preference and the policy / regulatory environment. In response to these challenges it highlighted the need for greater integration of policy areas and the requirement for multi-functionality of land, including nature conservation and landscape functions. It also highlights the importance of well connected landscapes for climate change adaptation and the importance of an ecosystems services approach in land use planning and policy making.


\textsuperscript{59} Foresight (2010) *Land Use Futures: Making the Most of Land in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century*
As a result of this recent research, DEFRA has made strong commitments to incorporate an ecosystem services approach into a broad range of government policy areas including those relating to planning through close working with the Department for Communities and Local Government.60

The ecosystems approach was also a key theme in the government’s recent discussion paper, produced in advance of a Government White Paper expected this spring / summer, indicating that this approach is likely to become integrated into a wide range of policy areas relevant to the natural environment, including planning:

‘Local Planning Authorities have a particular role, to identify the necessary environmental infrastructure needed to support growth, and ensure that the real value of nature’s services has been considered as part of the appraisal of local planning policy.’

3.12.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

Only North Wiltshire Local Plan includes Policy NE10 (Management of Nature Conservation Features) which aims to protect landscape features of major importance for flora and fauna (in accordance with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations), although ‘major importance’ can be difficult to define. Other plans mention specific features which are likely to be of value as wildlife corridors (rivers, hedgerows etc), however these are too prescriptive and do not protect the much wider requirement for connectivity, functionality (e.g. foraging, shelter, rest etc), or natural processes. As a result Wiltshire Council officers find it can be difficult to protect natural processes where these are not directly addressed by the current policy framework.

The River Biss Public Realm Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document has been adopted as part of the LDF and includes measures to protect and enhance this river corridor through regeneration of Trowbridge town centre, helping to reverse several decades of canalisation and inappropriate development along its banks.

3.13 Tranquillity

3.13.1 Evidence

Tranquillity is raised as an important element of the AONBs in their relevant management plans, and it is also cited in national policy documents as being an important characteristic of a landscape.62,63 In 2001 a poll for DEFRA of 3,700 adults in England found that the most mentioned enjoyable or positive aspect of the countryside was tranquillity, mentioned by 58 per cent.64 Indeed it can help to relieve stress, improve emotional well-being and even improve health.

Despite its perceived importance the concept of tranquillity is poorly defined and understood. The problem is that it is an extremely subjective and experiential quality of landscapes, but an

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60 Securing a Healthy Natural Environment: An Action Plan for Embedding an Ecosystems Approach
64 National Statistics and Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (2002) Survey of Public Attitudes to Quality of Life and to the Environment
important one nonetheless which is seen as an indicator of environmental quality. It is this perceived difficulty in defining tranquillity that often leads to it being overlooked in planning decisions and environmental assessments. However, it has recently been shown\textsuperscript{65,66,67,68} that major contributors to tranquil landscapes are: seeing a natural landscape; hearing birdsong; hearing peace and quiet; seeing natural looking woodland, seeing the stars at night; seeing water, and hearing natural sounds. Things that do not contribute to tranquillity are: hearing constant noise from cars, lorries or motorbikes; seeing lots of people; seeing urban development; seeing overhead light pollution at night time; hearing lots of people; seeing and hearing low flying aircraft; seeing power lines; and seeing towns and cities. These studies have improved understanding of tranquillity and helped to develop a methodology to assess tranquillity and potential impacts upon it, using the characteristics identified in the research.

Over the years various attempts have been made to assess and map tranquillity; however the most significant recent study was commissioned by the Campaign to Protect for Rural England (CPRE) in 2006, and involved mapping the relative tranquillity of the entire country\textsuperscript{69}. The study has been particularly significant as it has provided a more widely accepted, standard methodology for assessing and mapping tranquillity, and has given rise to a number of smaller scale, higher resolution studies, including Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB which undertook an investigation based on the CPRE data in 2008 using GIS\textsuperscript{70}; by ground-truthing this data.

Our understanding of tranquillity and ability to capture its quality and value are clearly improving, while the evidence base is also increasing.

### 3.13.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

Given the lack of understanding and evidence to support the concept tranquillity until recently, none of the local plans or the Structure Plan currently includes policy on tranquillity.

Following discussions with Landscape Officers it has been suggested that it may be possible to incorporate tranquillity as an aspect of LCA; while the existing LCAs for the county do not include detailed evidence on tranquillity as part of the assessment, this could form part of any site specific assessment for a development proposal. Tranquillity could therefore easily be incorporated into the Core Strategy as part of a criteria based policy for LCA using this approach.

\textsuperscript{65} Fuller, D (2005) Chilterns Tranquility Study—Report on the Participatory Appraisal Consultations in the Chilterns AONB, Countryside Agency (LAR), Cheltenham


\textsuperscript{68} Swanwick, C. (2009) Society’s Attitude to and Preference for Land and Landscape. Land Use Policy Vol. 26 (Supplement 1), pp62-75


3.14 Sustainable Design

3.14.1 Evidence

In recent years there has been a realisation that features of the natural environment should be incorporated into design schemes, not only to reduce the impacts of development upon biodiversity, but also to provide legibility, retain local character, create a sense of place, and allow people to connect with nature, while natural green spaces within developments can also provide ‘ecosystem services’ (see Section 3.6 above), encourage healthy lifestyles and increase the value of nearby properties (see Green Infrastructure topic paper for more details). It is often possible to incorporate elements of the existing ecological network such as hedgerows, ditches, ponds, meadows, trees etc into design schemes, and there are numerous examples of best practice available to demonstrate how this has been successfully achieved in sustainable developments such as Sherford in Devon.

The key step in achieving sustainable design is to identify important elements of the natural environment within and surrounding the site, and establish the local landscape character at an early stage in order to understand the context of the site and incorporate this into the design rationale. This includes all of the above elements from international designations down to individual features such as mature trees and hedgerows, particularly functional features such as wildlife corridors or foraging areas for protected or BAP species. This should help to inform the design scheme, with the objective of conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment, protecting local distinctiveness and minimising habitat fragmentation. Retaining such features can also provide opportunities to restore them to favourable condition, for example to open up a previously canalised watercourse, lay hedgerows or manage neglected areas of wildflower meadows, helping to enhance the natural environment and contribute to BAP and SNA targets. However, consideration must be given to how these features will be used and maintained in the long-term.

Sustainable development can also provide opportunities to create habitats and improve the local environment, particularly on sites of low ecological interest or in degraded landscapes. Landscape schemes can create areas of wildflower-rich grassland, native scrub, hedgerows and woodland and other landscape features, while the inclusion of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) can create a network of ponds, swales and wet grassland; such features can be particularly valuable for biodiversity where they form connections with elements of the surrounding ecological network, although long-term management and maintenance of such features must be addressed.

At a smaller scale the built environment itself can also provide opportunities for wildlife by incorporating bird and bat boxes into buildings, or including street trees, while use of local materials and designs can help to reinforce local character. There has also recently been significant interest in the use of green roofs and walls, which can provide a wealth of habitats for rare invertebrates and birds, while also reducing run-off rates and helping to cool buildings in summer and provide insulation in winter.

The recent Land Use Futures report has highlighted the importance of better integration of land uses and the importance of multi-functionality as a response to the increasing challenges and pressures on land use which we will face in the 21st Century.

\[71\] English Partnerships (2000) *Urban Design Compendium*
\[72\] Town and Country Planning Association (2004) *Biodiversity by Design*
3.14.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

A key principle of PPS9 is that ‘Plan policies should promote opportunities for the incorporation of beneficial biodiversity and geological features within the design of development.’ The associated best practice guide also recommends that core strategies should include policies ‘promoting sustainable design standards for the construction and management of development which includes features beneficial to biodiversity or geological conservation.’

This approach is similarly supported by PPS1, which recommends that development plan policies take account of environmental issues such as ‘the need to improve the built and natural environment in and around urban areas and rural settlements’ and that good design should ‘consider the direct and indirect impacts upon the natural environment’.

The North Wiltshire and Kennet Local Plans include policies which require that ecological features be incorporated within design schemes where possible, although they do not provide any incentive to restore existing features or otherwise improve the natural environment through design. West Wiltshire District Plan similarly supports the protection of certain features within development, but does not promote biodiversity gain through design, although the River Biss Public Realm Design Guide SPD does advocate specific habitat enhancements for the river as part of the redevelopment of the river corridor.

Design schemes are regularly submitted to the planning department with a ‘clean sheet’ approach to development, where natural features are not considered in the design rationale resulting in their removal, damage or degradation, often in situations where they could be retained. Wiltshire Council’s ecology, landscape and design officers often struggle for retention and maintenance of these features, requiring extensive consultations and changes to the design schemes which are both time consuming and expensive for developers, and could be avoided through a strong steer from policy. Opportunities for enhancement are often completely overlooked in design / landscape schemes and it is difficult to justify amendments in the absence of a strong policy driver; opportunities for good quality sustainable development are therefore often missed.

3.15 Disturbance

3.15.1 Evidence

Development has the potential to cause disturbance of the natural environment within the site itself, however such effects can also occur at significant distances from the development site. Such disturbances can range from short-term or one-off events to long-term, permanent effects. Examples include:

- Damage to habitats through trampling, mountain biking, fires, fly-tipping, litter, dog fouling etc;
- Disturbance of wildlife during construction through noise and vibration;

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• Predation of domestic cats upon wildlife such as nesting birds and water vole\textsuperscript{78};
• Recreational disturbance of sensitive fauna, particularly by dog walkers;
• Pollution and siltation of waterbodies / courses from run-off;
• Disturbance of nocturnal fauna through the use of artificial lighting\textsuperscript{79};
• Visual disturbance and mortality from wild farms\textsuperscript{80,81}; and
• Mortality caused by increased traffic or new roads.

Although such effects can be significant especially in combination, they are often overlooked in environmental assessments, and can often be reduced through the use of method statements, design / landscape schemes and planning obligations. Some disturbance impacts are an inherent part of the proposed change of use and cannot be fully overcome, however such impacts should be made clear in the proposals, in order that they can be weighed against the benefits of development during the decision-making process.

The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for the Wiltshire 2026 consultation document carried out in 2009 identified the potential impacts of anticipated development upon the Salisbury Plain and New Forest SPAs\textsuperscript{82}. Research has shown that stone curlew is very sensitive to recreational disturbance, particularly from dog walkers\textsuperscript{83}, and that the vast majority of regular visitors live within 15km of the plain\textsuperscript{84}. The HRA therefore concluded that proposed housing within this 15km radius of the plain could potentially impact upon stone curlew breeding success through increased recreational disturbance. Recreational disturbance has also been confirmed as having a significant effect upon the breeding success of the Dartford warbler\textsuperscript{85} and nightjar\textsuperscript{86}, and development in the south of the county could potentially increase recreational disturbance on these species in the New Forest. Potential mitigation measures have been identified to reduce and offset this recreational pressure through:

• Habitat mitigation / enhancement measures to increase the number of suitable nest sites;
• Provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Spaces (SANGS); and
• Securing management measures including access control.

\textsuperscript{80} Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (2003) \textit{Windfarms and Birds: An analysis of the effects of windfarms on birds, and guidance on environmental assessment criteria and site selection issues}
\textsuperscript{81} Jones, G., Hooper-Bohannon, R., Barlow, K. and Parsons, K. (2009) \textit{Determining the Potential Impact of wind Turbines on Bat Populations in Britian}
\textsuperscript{82} WSP Environmental (2009) \textit{Wiltshire Core Strategy – Assessment of the Core Strategy Options Under the Habitats Regulations}
\textsuperscript{84} Liley, D, Payne, K and Peat, J (2007) \textit{Access Patterns on Salisbury Plain}
Delivery of these measures would need to be secured through partnership working with organisations such as the New Forest National Park Authority, Defence Infrastructure Organisation and the Wessex Stone Curlew Project, and funded by developer contributions.

3.15.2 Current Wiltshire Policy Framework

The current suite of local plans includes policies on the protection of legally protected species, some of which address the disturbance of such species. This legislation and policy protects only a very limited range of species from relatively narrowly defined deliberate disturbance and does not cover the wider range of biodiversity or address the potential indirect effects listed above which can be sufficiently significant as to be considered a material consideration in planning decisions. Wiltshire Council officers often find that the impacts of disturbance on wildlife are overlooked in environmental assessments, and it is difficult to secure mitigation measures which would reduce such impacts, particularly where impacts are long-term or offsite.

There is currently no local policy on disturbance of breeding birds associated with the Salisbury Plain and New Forest SPAs. The Wiltshire LDF is unlikely to meet the requirements of a full HRA without a policy response to this issue, in which case it could not be legally adopted by the council. A local policy is also likely to be required in order to justify the collection of any developer contributions require to deliver mitigation measures for individual developments.

4 COLLABORATIVE WORKING

4.1 Internal Consultation

The following teams within Wiltshire Council have been consulted during in the preparation of this paper and policy development:

- Strategic Landscape (Landscape and Ecology)
- Urban Design
- Development Control (North, West, Kennet and Salisbury)

4.2 External Consultation

A targeted external consultation was also carried out, inviting the following organisations to comment and contribute during the preparation of this paper and policy development:

- Natural England
- Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
- Defence Estates
- Environment Agency
- North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding natural Beauty (AONB)
- Cotswolds AONB
- Cranourne Chase AONB
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Campaign for the Protection of Rural England

Consultation responses were received and recorded through a number of stakeholder events and e-mail correspondence during February / March 2011.
5  LINKS TO OTHER STRATEGIES

5.1  Wiltshire Green Infrastructure Strategy

Green Infrastructure (GI) is defined as ‘a strategic network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life in sustainable communities. It delivers a broad range of functions and provides vital socio-economic and cultural benefits which underpin individual and community health and wellbeing. These functions include: conserving and enhancing the natural environment; providing wildlife corridors; reducing noise and air pollution; and helping communities to adapt to a changing climate through water and carbon management. In urban areas, functions include providing routes (e.g. footpaths and cycleways) which link areas of open space within settlements; providing sustainable drainage, flood storage and urban cooling; and providing a wide range of opportunities for engagement and active citizenship, relaxation and quiet contemplation, sport, recreation and children’s play.87

Wiltshire is currently preparing a GI strategy for the county which will help to enhance and deliver strategic GI projects, several of which will be delivered through the planning process. The Wiltshire Core Strategy Consultation Document includes two proposed policies relating specifically to Green Infrastructure, and the proposed natural environment policies will also be complementary to the aims of GI strategy, particularly in relation to the creation and enhancement of ecological networks, and improving the quality of public open green spaces in developments.

5.2  Energy, Change and Opportunities Strategy (2011-2020)

This strategy sets out how Wiltshire as a council and a community can act on climate change. It is a framework document that will be linked to related council strategies (including the Core Strategy) to ensure objectives are embedded across the entire organisation. It will be supplemented by detailed action plans to set out more specifically how we are going to deliver our climate change ambitions. These will allow detailed targets to be developed, specific actions to allow the targets to be met and also outline a suitable monitoring framework. As this is the first time that a climate change strategy has been prepared, it is expected that the strategy will be reviewed and refined as further work is carried out on the action plans.

In relation to planning and the natural environment, it sets out some specific aims which the Core Strategy can help to deliver:

- assessing the impact of proposed development schemes on the natural environment, particularly in relation to climate change;
- seeking biodiversity and landscape enhancement through sustainable development, mitigation and compensation;
- formulating best practice natural environment and green infrastructure policies for the council’s Development Plan; and
- developing the understanding of making planning decisions.

5.3  Cotswold Water Park Master Plan

This strategic review and implementation plan aims to guide the future development of the Cotswold Water Park (CWP). Biodiversity is identified as core driver for the development of the CWP, with planning identified as an enabling driver which is fundamental to its development. It

includes a number of objectives in relation to sustainable recreation and tourism development within the park, which balances the potential economic and social benefits with the potential impacts upon the significant biodiversity interests, particularly in respect of disturbance.

The Master Plan is a landscape scale project in an area likely to see further significant changes during the plan period which will include new development to facilitate the recreation and tourism opportunities in the area. Given the rapid and large-scale changes which have occurred and will continue in the future it is therefore proposed to produce a Landscape Strategy which will help to facilitate appropriate landscape design changes to effectively create a new landscape character for the park; this Landscape Strategy will be vital to guide development in a coherent manner across the park area.

5.4 South West River Basin Management Plan

This plan focuses on the protection, improvement and sustainable use of the water environment. Many organisations and individuals help to protect and improve the water environment for the benefit of people and wildlife. River basin management is the approach the Environment Agency is using to ensure our combined efforts achieve the improvement needed in the South West River Basin District. River basin management is a continuous process of planning and delivery. The Water Framework Directive introduces a formal series of 6 year cycles. The first cycle will end in 2015 when, following further planning and consultation, this plan will be updated and re-issued.

Actions relevant to planning and the Core Strategy identified within the plan include:

- Ensure that planning policies and spatial planning documents take into account the objectives of the South West River Basin Management Plan, including Local Development Documents and Sustainable Community Strategies
- Action to reduce the physical impacts of urban development in artificial or heavily modified waters, to help waters reach good ecological potential
- Promote the use of sustainable drainage systems in new urban and rural developments where appropriate, and retrofit in priority areas including highways where possible

5.5 North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan

The Council of Partners of the North Wessex Downs AONB advises its Local Authority members how best to discharge their statutory responsibility for conserving and enhancing that landscape, for increasing everyone’s understanding and enjoyment of it, and for encouraging the social and economic well-being of those who live within it. The Management Plan describes how that responsibility will be discharged, and has been adopted by Wiltshire Council. Following the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the government confirmed that the landscape qualities of National Parks and AONBs are equivalent. The protection given by the land use planning system to natural beauty in both types of area should therefore be equivalent.

Relevant objectives for biodiversity and landscape in relation to development and planning include:

- To ensure that the characteristic habitats and species of the North Wessex Downs are conserved and enhanced
- To ensure that the formulation and implementation of planning policies across the North Wessex Downs takes full account of the purposes of designation and the character and quality of the AONB and its setting

With a more specific action to:
‘Ensure that ‘green infrastructure’ (new or enhanced biodiversity assets) is incorporated within the area of all medium or large-scale developments, both within and near the AONB.’

5.6 Cranbourne Chase AONB Management Plan

This document is the statutory Management Plan for the nationally designated and protected landscape of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, as required under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000; this has been adopted by Wiltshire Council. It is a plan for all those that have a responsibility for maintaining that landscape, including the local planning authorities. The plan sets out objectives and policies for AONB partners (including Wiltshire Council) that are believed to be realistic and achievable in the five year period 2009-15.

Key objectives relevant to the Core Strategy policies include:

- The landscape character, tranquillity and special qualities of the AONB and its settings are conserved and enhanced
- The landscape character and special qualities of the AONB are fully understood, informing and incorporated within effective landscape management and planning
- Characteristic habitats and species are conserved and enhanced at a landscape scale;
- Encourage the conservation and enhancement of habitats and species by extending and improving ecological connections between habitats at an appropriate landscape scale
- The AONB inputs effectively to national, regional and local strategies, policies and plans

5.7 Cotswolds AONB Management Plan

This sets a vision for the future management of the AONB, together with clear objectives and policies to guide the partnership in exercising its responsibilities and taking actions, to ensure the future of the Cotswolds AONB. The plan will operate alongside other statutory plans and programmes, especially community strategies, development plans and transport plans, and a considerable range of other initiatives. The plan provides the Board’s vision over the next 20 – 25 years, with an immediate five year time frame of 2008 – 2013.

The plan identifies many of the same issues set out in Section 4 above and a number of actions to counteract them including:

- Encourage and support action during the plan period to prevent any further loss and enhance where possible designated areas and other areas known to contain priority Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species when identified within, and adjoining the AONB
- Encourage the improvement of priority habitat and species conservation by extending and improving ecological connections between habitats at an appropriate landscape scale
- Rigorously assess development proposals that would have major implications for the Cotswold landscape, both individually and cumulatively, and/or would set an important precedent for future proposals that would adversely affect the special qualities, geology or tranquillity of the AONB
- Encourage the use of published landscape and land management guidance which interprets and applies landscape character assessments

It also includes specific policies relevant to the spatial planning process:
'That all Local Development Framework documents and planning decision-making processes will use the following criteria to determine the acceptability of a proposed development in the Cotswolds AONB. Development will:

- be compatible with the distinctive character of the location as described by the relevant landscape character assessment, strategy and guidelines
- incorporate designs and landscaping consistent with the above, respecting the local settlement pattern and building style
- be designed to respect local building styles and materials
- incorporate appropriate sustainability elements and designs
- maintain or improve the existing level of tranquillity
- not have an adverse impact on the local community amenities and services and access to these
- protect, or where possible enhance, biodiversity
- be in accordance with a more sustainable pattern of development, reducing dependence on car travel'

A position statement by the Cotswold Conservation Board\textsuperscript{88} also encourages local planning authorities to set out in Local Development Documents clear objectives and policies for landscape scale habitat restoration and creation. It also advises that local authorities should use the South West Nature Map to identify areas and sites for the restoration and creation of priority habitats and inform the use of appropriate policies in their LDFs.

### 5.8 UK / Wiltshire BAP

The UK BAP is the UK Government’s response to the CBD (see Table 1) which called for the development and enforcement of national strategies and associated action plans to identify, conserve and protect existing biological diversity, and to enhance it wherever possible. The UKBAP describes the biological resources of the UK and provides detailed plans for conservation of these resources, at national and devolved levels. Action plans for the most threatened species and habitats have been set out to aid recovery, and reporting rounds show how the UKBAP has contributed to the UK’s progress towards the significant reduction of biodiversity loss called for by the CBD.

Within the framework of the UK BAP, the Wiltshire BAP identifies local priorities for conservation most relevant to Wiltshire and sets out actions and targets for their conservation; it is produced and implemented by a partnership of organisations including Natural England, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre, Cotswold Water Park and many others including Wiltshire Council as a lead partner on many plans. Local BAPs are the UK’s mechanism to deliver it’s responsibilities under the CBD.

The Wiltshire BAP also includes a number of targets directly relevant to the planning system:

- **GAPT2** - No planning permission is granted where it is likely that there will be a net loss of biodiversity (includes all habitats/species in new BAP) NB: All CWS are covered by this.
- **GAPT3** - New major developments deliver biodiversity gain through the provision of new features (such as bat and bird boxes etc.) and where possible integrated green infrastructure (also including improvement of existing green infrastructure)
- **GAPT4** - New developments contribute to biodiversity gain via planning gain

\textsuperscript{88} Cotswold Conservation Board position Statement: Biodiversity Planning (undated)
• **GAPT5 - LAs to develop SPD/pre-application guidance to address how relevant aspects of the BAP will be implemented through the LDF**

Many actions for the protection and enhancement of woodland, rivers, brownfield habitats and bats are also directly relevant to planning system.

5.9 **Wessex Stone Curlew Project**

The historical change in agricultural practices has resulted in the decline of suitable habitat, such as grazed chalk grassland and fallow areas, favoured by the stone-curlew for breeding. Subsequently, their numbers have dwindled since the late 1800s, with an all-time low in the mid-1980s. The use of Salisbury Plain for military training has ensured that the stone-curlew breeding population has persisted and these areas provide the catalyst for the RSPB’s recovery project in Wessex.

The RSPB has worked closely with farmers and landowners, along with partner organisations such as the MoD, Defra and Natural England, to create more habitat that is suitable for breeding stone-curlews. Nesting plots for stone-curlews have been created by farmers under agri-environment schemes and have underpinned a significant increase in breeding stone-curlews across the region (around two thirds of stone-curlew nesting attempts in Wessex in 2009 were made on specially created plots). The project also works with farmers to find and protect stone-curlew nesting attempts in arable crops and provide advice.

The project objectives are:

- To produce a self-sustaining population of stone-curlews in Wessex
- To promote the creation of safe breeding habitat for stone-curlews on farmland through government agri-environment schemes
- To offer advice and support to landowners within and around the current breeding range of stone-curlews

The Wessex Stone Curlew Project is a partnership project which could potentially help to deliver and necessary mitigation measures for residential development projects in south and east Wiltshire through developer contributions.

5.10 **Interaction with Other Policy Areas within the LDF**

- Green Infrastructure – there are lots of potential synergies between the Green Infrastructure and Natural Environment policies. However proposed land use changes or increased recreational pressure could also cause impacts for sensitive wildlife while insensitive landscape scheme could affect local landscape character.
- Housing – increased housing will have a number of direct affects on local ecology and landscape character. For allocated housing sites these will be best addressed in individual development briefs, however this will not be effective for windfall sites. Offsite and indirect impacts such as recreation pressure upon SPAs will be particularly significant for housing development in the east and south of the County.
- Built environment (design quality) – There are clearly strong links with the ‘sustainable design’ and ‘landscape character’ elements of the natural environment policies which could be strengthened.
- Climate change (adaptation) – there are synergies between many of the potential adaptation measures and other policy areas such as the Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure which should be strengthened.
Renewable energy – renewable schemes are likely to have a visual impact upon local landscapes and visual amenity, and this link should be made clear with guidance as to what would be acceptable.

Water (SUDS) – SuDS are potentially highly multi-functional features which can provide a wide range of benefits for local environments and these many connections should be highlighted in the Core Strategy to encourage the delivery of multiple benefits.

Reuse of military land – several military sites are in the open countryside and as such redevelopment of these sites could have particularly strong impacts upon local landscapes, while also providing opportunities to enhance landscape character.

Each of these interactions should be recognised in the relevant supporting / policy text, and cross references made between these policy areas and the Natural Environment policies to provide a much stronger and more integrated Core Strategy document.

6 IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES AT A COMMUNITY LEVEL

6.1 Public Consultation

Previous public consultation responses for other local plan documents at a district level and in response to the Wiltshire 2026 consultation (October 2009) have been reviewed for comments in relation to the natural environment in order to gather an informed opinion of local concerns and priorities. This review has revealed a strong desire from Wiltshire’s communities to protect their local wildlife sites, with concerns raised for some specific sites in relation to development proposals, while opportunities to protect others were also recognised.

A wider concern to ensure that wildlife habitats and species are conserved and protected has also been raised, ensuring that development takes place in a manner that enhances rather than degrades a community’s natural environment, particularly through the careful location and layout of development sites. This is further supported by a desire for greater recognition of the positive role that development can play in protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

Another key theme was the importance of wildlife corridors and the potential to create and enhance such features, with particular reference made to river corridors such as the River Avon and River Biss, and canal projects such as the Kennet and Avon and the proposed Cricklade Country Way project. Concerns were also raised for the implications of habitat fragmentation, with particular reference to climate change adaptation.

Consultation responses also included a desire to maintain green buffers between towns particularly surrounding Swindon, Trowbridge (Hilpertton Gap) and Devizes. Encroachment of the Green Belt was specifically mentioned and in West Wiltshire a consultation paper posed the question “Are there any exceptional circumstances that would justify changes to the Green Belt boundaries”? 58% of respondents answered ‘no’ to this question; however, a significant minority (42%) did suggest situations where such changes could be considered.

In the same consultation 59% of respondents supported the existing landscape policy giving enhanced protection only to AONBs and to Special Landscape Areas, and wider concerns about AONBs were also raised elsewhere in the county.
### 6.2 Community Plans / Strategies

The Sustainable Community Strategy for Wiltshire (2007 – 2016)<sup>89</sup> includes a vision, for strong and sustainable communities in Wiltshire. It describes the strengths and advantages which the county enjoys, and summarises the key trends and challenges facing the county and how these may be addressed through instruments such as the LDF and the Local Area Agreement. The document was produced through two years of discussion and debate including analysis of public concerns in the 20 community areas. It highlights the impacts of habitat fragmentation and the potential risks associated as a result of climate change, stressing the importance of managing areas for wildlife and linking these with wildlife corridors.

The Local Agreement for Wiltshire (LAW)<sup>90</sup> is an agreement between organisations in Wiltshire to take action to improve the quality of life in Wiltshire. It sets out ambitions based on the community area plans, which include protection of the natural environment. A priority action of the agreement is to ‘increase opportunities for wildlife throughout Wiltshire by bringing more local wildlife sites into positive management and increasing the habitat available for wildlife’.

The Wiltshire Community Plan (2011-2026)<sup>91</sup> focuses on people, places and promises, setting out a vision, priorities and objectives for the next 15 years. It acts as an ‘umbrella’ for a hierarchy of plans which will both influence the community plan and be influenced by it. The plan includes an objective to:

> Create a series of living landscapes across the county to help local people, communities and businesses to have opportunities for environmental learning, whilst also protecting wildlife from the changes to the climate, agriculture and industry.

A total of 22 Community Plans across Wiltshire have been reviewed. These plans have generally been produced in close consultation with the communities they represent, highlighting the issues identified locally and proposing actions to address these concerns. Not all of these are directly related to planning, however they do provide an indication of the general concerns and priorities of communities across Wiltshire. Communities generally appear to value their local environments strongly, and are both keen to find out more about them, and concerned for wildlife and local sites in almost all of the community areas.

The following aspirations and views were common across many of the plans reviewed:

- Appreciation of the countryside and the natural beauty of the area
- Desire to protect local wildlife (species and habitats)
- Desire to maintain ‘green buffers’ between towns and outlying villages, to prevent Green Belt encroachment, and to avoid development on green field sites
- Desire to maintain the character of the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)
- Concern over loss of trees and woodland, and desire for more trees (particularly native trees) and/or flowers to be planted and to protect existing trees and hedges
- Appreciation of and desire to maintain ‘dark skies’
- Appreciation of and desire to preserve and enhance peace and tranquillity
- Desire to conserve the landscape and local landscape character

A number of other aspirations and views were only raised in one or a few community plans, but nonetheless concern issues which are not specific to certain places. These include:

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The need to enable wildlife to adapt to climate change, and the need to provide long term and viable habitats for a diversity of wildlife
Desire to maintain and enhance stream and river quality
Desire to enhance/create wildlife habitats in public open spaces
Desire to protect designated sites
Need to ensure that development takes place in a manner which enhances rather than spoils the environment / ensuring environmental gain with development
Desire to promote tourism (particularly related to wildlife, the locally distinctive environment and 'green' tourism)
Need to protect the environment within the New Forest National Park
Need to conserve the landscape setting in and around the towns and villages

7 WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT THE EVIDENCE HIGHLIGHTS

7.1 Wiltshire Wide Issues

7.1.1 Strategic Nature Areas

Recent research has shown the importance of landscape scale conservation projects in order to create a resilient landscape which can withstand the increasing pressures of climate change in combination with the long-term trends of habitat loss and fragmentation. The south west region benefits from an extensive study which provides a scientific evidence base to identify priorities for landscape scale restoration of habitats across the region known as SNAs; these areas will form the basis for conservation projects throughout the plan period, indeed many are already proposed across the county.

The Wiltshire Community Plan also sets out a main objective to create a series of 'living landscapes', which would be commensurate to the SNAs.

Major development within these SNAs could sterilise some areas with potential for habitat restoration, however at the same time landscape schemes and new public open spaces could create opportunities for such restoration. The current policy framework does not refer to SNAs and provides no driver to avoid conflicts or deliver benefits through development; the new policy framework provides an opportunity to influence major development in a manner that will contribute towards rather than conflict with the objectives of landscape scale conservation for the region.

7.1.2 Local Sites

Professor John Lawton and DEFRA have shown that CWSs are an invaluable resource for our natural environment and our local databases demonstrate that they are a vital component of Wiltshire’s ecological network. There is a general slow trend towards the loss and degradation of CWSs and although there is an existing policy framework which protects CWSs in the planning process, there have been continued losses as a result of development, indicating that these existing policies are deficient. Community consultations and documents have revealed that our communities are concerned about local wildlife and are keen to see it protected and enhanced where possible. In particular they are keen to see local wildlife sites brought into favourable management. Development in certain areas may provide opportunities to enhance some CWSs either by introducing favourable management or providing complementary habitats or improved connectivity.
Although our CWS network may face increased pressure from development in the future, a stronger policy framework will help to avoid inappropriate development affecting these sites. New policy could also maximise opportunities to manage and enhance CWSs favourably and improve Wiltshire’s ecological network.

Specific CWSs which may be at risk from known development pressures associated with allocations can also be addressed through development briefs (see Section 7.4 below).

7.1.3 Landscape Character Assessment / Special Landscape Areas

LCA is a valuable and widely accepted tool which allows the unique characteristics of all landscapes to be captured to inform development proposals. The use of criteria based policies using LCA has become dominant in local plans across the country as it replaces former local landscape designations; this change has been driven by national guidance and research. The Core Strategy should include a criteria based policy for all landscapes in Wiltshire; this should be informed by the extensive LCA evidence base available for the county, which should be consolidated and made available as SPD in order to provide clarity for planners, developers and designers, and greatly improve of the application of such a policy.

In Wiltshire, our current series of SLAs have been in place for over 25 years and appear to be poorly defined and understood, indicating that they should be replaced by a criteria based LCA policy approach. However, evidence is also emerging that the special characteristics of certain SLAs (e.g. Wellhead Valley) may not be fully captured by LCA, and would warrant protection by retention of the SLA designation. Retention of the SLA designation and policy could be permitted under PPS7, but only as an ‘exceptional circumstance’. Previous examinations in public have shown that without substantial evidence to support such local landscape designations, they are likely to be removed by an inspector as unnecessary and contrary to PPS7.

The SLA network will need to be reviewed to identify any areas with unique characteristics that would not be adequately protected by an LCA approach. An SLA policy should only be included in the Local Development Framework for Wiltshire if sufficient evidence can be presented to demonstrate the unique characteristics of these areas and define their boundaries; any such policy would only apply to those unique areas. There may be an opportunity to identify those truly unique areas of Wiltshire and protect them for the future, while also avoiding unnecessarily rigid local designations which restrict opportunities for sustainable development.

7.1.4 Wiltshire Biodiversity Plan

Local BAPs are the main delivery mechanism for biodiversity conservation in the UK, representing our most diverse habitat types and declining species as priorities for conservation. The NERC Act places a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure that BAPs are protected and where possible enhanced through the exercise of their functions and the LDF represents an important mechanism to do so. Wiltshire’s communities have shown a strong desire to see our flora and fauna protected and enhanced. Wiltshire Council is also a lead partner on many of the Wiltshire BAP’s action plans, some of which relate directly to the planning system, and is committed to delivering those targets.

The existing policy framework has been shown to be weak, only providing partial protection and failing to encompass some of the principles set out in PPS9 or harness opportunities for biodiversity gain. The LDF presents an opportunity to improve the existing policy framework for BAPs in order to offer them better protection through the planning system, in line with the
mitigation hierarchy, while also providing a stronger driver to maximise for biodiversity gain through development, particularly for major schemes.

7.1.5 Natural Processes

Much of the recent research and guidance on nature conservation stresses the need to allow the natural environment to adapt to climate change. For biodiversity, one of the key approaches to facilitate climate change adaptation is to maintain and create a highly permeable landscape for wildlife to move through, ensuring that species can migrate to areas of more suitable environmental conditions, colonise new areas as they become suitable, and re-colonise following localised extinctions as a result of stochastic events. Habitat fragmentation is already one of the greatest challenges to biodiversity, however this will be amplified in the future by climate change. Wiltshire’s local communities have also raised concerns about this issue in recent consultations on the Wiltshire 2026 document.

DEFRA / Natural England have published guidance on the role which spatial planning can play in climate change adaptation for biodiversity, and it is a requirement of the Habitats Regulations that LDFs include policies to protect wildlife corridors and stepping stone habitats to facilitate the movement of flora and fauna.

Functionality is closely linked to connectivity, which is generally a requirement of a healthy functional ecosystem. The importance of ecosystem functions has also recently received a lot of attention in research and policy for the natural environment, particularly their importance to human health and wellbeing; ‘ecosystem services’ have traditionally been taken for granted and undervalued in policy decision making and there is currently a strong promotion of an ecosystems approach in national policy development. Research into the growing pressures on land use in the UK has highlighted the need to integrate greater multi-functionality into land use planning.

The current policy framework does not reflect recent research and local policy and is not sufficient to secure a healthy and resilient natural environment in the face of increasing pressures on land use compounded with the effects of climate change; a policy response is required to ensure that the importance of connectivity and functionality is recognised in planning decisions. Spatial planning can contribute to adaptation of the natural environment through the protection of existing wildlife corridors and landscape features, and creation of new features through landscaping schemes and public open spaces, however a policy driver will be required to achieve these opportunities.

7.1.6 Tranquillity

Tranquillity is a vital component of our landscapes, particularly in Wiltshire. Although it is highly valued by people, it has often been neglected in environmental assessments and planning decisions due to its extremely subjective and experiential qualities. However, recent advances in research have improved the way we can assess tranquillity and potential impacts upon it. Community plans have also highlighted an appreciation of and desire to preserve and enhance peace and tranquillity. The Core Strategy represents an opportunity to capture and value this important landscape characteristic in planning decisions.

7.1.7 Sustainable Design

Numerous design guidelines stress the importance of incorporating natural landscape features into the built environment through good design in order to protect wildlife and retain local
landscape character and distinctiveness. Indeed this is increasingly important in light of the challenges of climate change and the need maintain and encourage natural processes (see above). Development can also provide opportunities to enhance the natural environment through good quality design, particularly where existing features are incorporated and restored or new habitats and landscape features are created through masterplanning and landscape design. However, experience has shown that the natural environment is generally underrepresented in design rationales, leading to conflicts with biodiversity and landscape character, delays to the planning process, and missed opportunities to enhance the environment of new and existing communities. Indeed, previous consultations have highlighted a public desire to see development which enhances rather that spoils the environment.

The current policy framework does not provide an adequate driver to ensure that features and characteristics of the natural environment are given sufficient consideration in design schemes or to incorporate opportunities to enhance biodiversity in line with PPS9 and reinforce local character; a stronger policy framework would help to provide better quality environments for Wiltshire’s wildlife and its communities. In the longer-term the new policy framework would ideally be supported by a Biodiversity / Urban Design Supplementary Planning Document to provide greater clarity for developers and masterplanners.

7.1.8 Disturbance

Research has shown that development can cause significant disturbance to wildlife throughout the construction and operational phases of development, particularly associated with residential development; indeed the effects of disturbance can be seen at some of our recent developments. Some of this disturbance must be accepted as an unavoidable symptom of the land use change required to support the growth and development of Wiltshire’s communities, however there are steps which should be taken to manage and reduce this disturbance as a part of the planning process. There is currently little recognition of the effects of disturbance in planning applications, and it is difficult to secure avoidance measures due to a lack of support from the current policy framework. Inclusion of policy wording on disturbance would provide a mechanism to manage disturbance resulting from development and reduce its cumulative effects on Wiltshire’s wildlife.

7.2 Issues Relating to a Discreet Place

7.2.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

AONBs include some of the nation’s finest landscapes and Wiltshire has been charged with responsibility for three of these areas, covering a substantial proportion of the county. AONBs are already afforded policy protection, however experience has shown that this does not adequately protect views into or out of these areas, potentially risking degradation of their landscape setting. The Core Strategy offers an opportunity to improve our protection of our AONBs by including consideration of ‘setting’ in planning decisions.

The current policy framework also does not refer directly to the relevant management plan for each of the AONBs. These management plans provide a well informed framework of the issues and priorities in each AONB, and a policy hook to these documents from the Core Strategy could significantly help define sustainable development principles for each unique area.

7.2.2 Salisbury Plain SPA and New Forest National Park SPA

Research has shown that rare bird species breeding within these areas are very sensitive to recreational disturbance, particularly dog walkers, and specific concerns have been raised by
Natural England and the RSPB in relation to proposed development close to these areas that could increase recreational pressures, particularly the housing allocations proposed in the LDF. Mitigation measures have been identified and could be adopted through developer contributions and partnership working with Wessex Stone Curlew Project, however a policy response to this issue will be required in order to make the Core Strategy compliant with the Habitats Regulations and provide a mechanism to gather planning contributions.

7.2.3 River Avon SAC

The Hampshire Avon catchment incorporates a large proportion of the county, and development along the river and its tributaries has the potential to impact upon its species interests. Given the large number of developments which could potentially affect the river, the River Avon Planning Forum has adopted a screening procedure to identify any development likely to have an adverse effect; any such development is generally subject to appropriate planning controls to ensure that any potential impacts are avoided, otherwise the application is subject to a full appropriate assessment in consultation with Natural England. Where there are likely significant effects, developers are generally required to submit a Construction Environmental Method Statement in support of their application, and while this system would continue to operate in the interim, it is intended that the River Avon SAC procedure and developer guidance would form part of a wider Biodiversity SPD. This procedure is considered to be an effective means to protect the ecological interest of the river from potentially damaging development and no further policy response is considered necessary at this time.

Natural England has also raised concerns about phosphate levels in the River Avon which have remained above national targets for a considerable period, and particularly the contribution from additional development in the catchment and associated flows from Sewage Treatment Works (STWs). This has prompted significant infrastructure improvements at STWs across the catchment which have significantly lowered phosphate discharges and improved water quality of the river, although phosphate levels are still likely to remain above target levels due to contributions from diffuse sources. It is understood that Natural England and the Environment Agency are currently undertaking a joint Nutrient Management Plan for the River Avon catchment which will aim to address these diffuse sources of phosphate in the catchment in addition to any further improvements to point sources where possible.

As the regulator responsible for all discharges into the river (including those to groundwater), Environment Agency and has recently carried out a review of all discharges in the catchment with the aim of modifying these where necessary to ensure that they will not affect the integrity of the SAC; the review concluded that licensed discharges would not affect site integrity and no further upgrades to the sewage infrastructure would be necessary subject to delivery of the Nutrient Management Plan. The main waste water utility provider for the catchment (Wessex Water) has confirmed that it can accommodate all of the planned development within the licensed headroom during the plan period. Therefore at present no likely significant effects upon the River Avon SAC are anticipated as a result of the planned growth and any potential impacts would be identified and controlled by the Environment Agency through the Environmental Permitting Regulations (2010), although the Nutrient Management Plan has not yet been fully costed, and in the event that this cannot deliver the necessary phosphate reductions in the catchment, causing the Environment Agency to change the conclusion of its Review of Consents, a policy response may be required address any necessary mitigation measures e.g. developer contribution to secure delivery of the Nutrient Management Plan. The working group for the Nutrient Management Plan is due to report during summer 2011, and the need for a policy response will be kept under review prior to preparation of the submission draft of the Core Strategy. In the long-term the Environment Agency will also continue to monitor water quality in the river during the plan period and where this indicates that water quality is declining due to additional development, it will
advice on any requirements of the planning system or specific contributions which the planning authority may take to help protect the river.

7.2.4 Bath and Bradford Bats SAC

This designation comprises a network of several component sites over a wide area used by the bats for roosting, foraging and commuting. Planning applications in this area with potential to affect the SAC are regularly identified, and generally amended to avoid any significant impacts; however there is currently no procedure for screening applications in this area. Development pressures are generally low in this area, however cumulative impacts could be significant, particularly when considered in combination with impacts from development in the Bath and North East Somerset (BNES) administrative area and from minerals development affecting underground sites in the area. The Core Strategy does not allocate any significant development within this area which would be likely to have significant effects upon the SAC, and no policy response is considered necessary within the Core Strategy; however ongoing cumulative effects could be significant.

Wiltshire Council is therefore working on guidelines for developers and planners in the area (including the BNES administrative area) to improve the detection of applications with potentially adverse effects and ensure that such impacts are identified and addressed at an early stage. It is also intended to keep a register of planning applications affecting the qualifying species and work more closely with the BNES local authority ecologists to improve our understanding of cumulative effects of development on this site.

7.2.5 Housing Allocations

Certain housing allocations have been identified as having potential effects upon important features of the natural environment, including:

- Trowbridge – River Biss corridor, Green Lane and Biss Woods CWSs, Bechstein’s bats associated with the Bath and Bradford Bats SAC
- Bradford on Avon – Bath and Bradford Bats SAC
- Chippenham – River Avon CWS and Bird’s Marsh Wood CWS

While these developments could potentially affect features of local, national and international importance, impacts can be largely avoided through the use of development briefs to ensure that development is delivered in a sustainable manner. Development briefs for major allocations will also be used in association with the Green Infrastructure Strategy to help deliver opportunities for biodiversity gain through development at these sites.

8 LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE AND BEST PRACTICE

8.1 Adopted Core Strategies

A review of recent Core Strategies which have been assessed as sound at Examination in Public and adopted by rural authorities reveals a range of approaches to biodiversity and landscape policy. Common themes within these policies are the need to protect local sites and BAPs, and the importance of connectivity in the face of climate change. The best examples also include a presumption in favour of retaining important features of the natural environment unless this is

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92 Land Use Consultants (2010) Local Landscape Policy: A Best Practice Summary
93 Wiltshire Council (2010) Biodiversity Policy Review
outweighed by requirements of the development which would deliver benefits in the public interest.

Most LDF’s adopted a broad approach in their Core Strategy, setting the principles for development in relation to biodiversity, which is supported by more detailed policies in other DPDs e.g. development management DPD, and the use of biodiversity SPDs. The best examples integrate protection and enhancement of the natural environment into a wide range of policy areas likely to interact such as sustainable urban design, noise, lighting, tourism, open spaces, climate change, renewable energy, use of agricultural buildings, flood protection, landscape, SUDS, transport and housing. Integrating biodiversity policy throughout the Core Strategy should have the effect of improving awareness of the challenges faced, helping to resolve potential conflicts and rationalise competing land uses, and ensure that these potentially adverse effects are addressed in applications.

A strong theme in these Core Strategies is the character and distinctiveness of local landscapes, with particular reference to LCA as a tool, and most refer to a specific LCA study of their administrative area or an SPD. Landscape is also generally well integrated into other policy areas including environmental quality, bio / geodiversity, cultural heritage, environmental heritage, and sustainability. The importance of landscape character is particularly incorporated in policies on design quality.

Tranquillity is also mentioned in several Core Strategies including emerging LDFs in neighbouring authorities including Cotswold District Council and West Berkshire. The importance of tranquillity is emphasised, often as an element of landscape character.

Policies on Green Belt are generally restricted to defining the boundaries and avoid repetition of national policy, only setting out exceptional circumstances where development shall be allowed to accommodate local needs. Policies on local buffers were not identified, and indeed it is worth noting that an inspector required the removal of a policy on ‘Local Gaps’ (equivalent to local rural buffers) from the New Forest District Core Strategy, as there was no evidence that its aims would not be achieved through the application of general countryside protection policies and the definition of robust settlement boundaries.

Local landscape designations are rarely included in Core Strategies, and where these are accepted by inspectors they are supported by an evidence base to demonstrate the distinctive qualities of these areas which cannot be protected through LCA. However, it is worth noting that the New Forest District Core Strategy includes a commitment to ‘review Areas of Special Character and landscape features through subsequent Local Development Framework Documents’; this approach has been accepted by an inspector at EiP (para 3.52).

AONBs are generally mentioned as part of a wider landscape policy with the aim of protecting these areas and their setting, although there is a tendency to avoid repeating PPS7. Where they are included in policy the relevant management plans are also referred to in the policy or supporting text. Specific allocations which are in or close to AONBs also often refer to the need to protect these areas where necessary.

8.2 Stakeholder Consultation

A wide range of topics were discussed during stakeholder consultations, and most of these viewpoints have been incorporated into the discussion above. However, a number of other issues were also discussed which were not considered to be main opportunities or threats; these are briefly touched on below.

During the stakeholder consultation, the possibility that the Core Strategy could adopt a more spatial approach to protection of the natural environment at a landscape scale was discussed;
this would involve identifying all important landscape features on plans and adopting specific policies for certain types of features. This approach has been given consideration in the policy options, however a number of weaknesses to this approach have been identified, namely:

- Many of the suggested areas (SACs, SSSIs etc) are already covered by national guidance and legislation, leading to potential conflicts with the requirements of PPS12.
- Our incomplete knowledge of the natural environment. Important natural features are still being discovered however the LDF plans could not be regularly and rapidly updated.
- The particular consideration of certain ‘special’ areas is likely to discount the importance of areas outside the line, leaving these areas more susceptible to degradation.
- Communities within particularly rich natural environments may experience planning blight from the landscape scale application of strict planning policies.

A more spatially specific approach such as this may be more appropriately adopted in a detailed biodiversity / landscape SPD document, rather than with a Core Strategy document.

The emerging concept of ‘conservation credits’ was also discussed with stakeholders. Conservation credits involve developers paying for damaged caused by development through planning contributions, which are then used to fund conservation projects to replace or restore biodiversity elsewhere. The Conservative manifesto includes a pledge to adopt conservation credits, indicating that this is likely to become part of national policy in the future. However this approach was generally unpopular with stakeholders and council officers due to concerns about:

- The long-term management of offset areas
- The loss of ecosystem functions which are not captured by the calculations
- The success of habitat creation
- Issues of environmental justice associated with degrading one communities natural environment to pay for enhancement of another communities environment
- Competition issues of charging developers in Wiltshire, which may encourage development to move into neighbouring (non-charging) administrative areas
- Conflicts with Wiltshire’s emerging Green Infrastructure Strategy

Professor Lawton has suggested that there may be potential benefits of a well regulated and managed scheme, however he also notes a number of potential risks. These benefits and risks reflect recent research undertaken into developing a conservation credits system in England\(^94\) and across Europe\(^95\). In light of the risks raised in stakeholder discussions and through the research, it is considered that it would be premature to adopt policy in relation to conservation credits at the current time. In the event that the national planning policy framework changes, this position will be reviewed in the future if necessary.

The option of introducing new Green Belt areas was discussed, particularly around Devizes and Swindon, however PPG2 requires that any amendment to the Green Belt should only be proposed in exceptional circumstances. Introducing entirely new Green Belt areas would be a major change and at present there is no evidence or justification for such measures.

The requirement not to duplicate national policy (PPS12) was also questioned, as national policy could potentially change before the Core Strategy is adopted, when PPSs are replaced by a

\(^94\) DEFRA (2009) Scoping Study for the Design and Use of Biodiversity Offsets in an English Context
\(^95\) EFTEC (2010) The Use of Market based Instruments for Biodiversity Protection – The Case of Habitat Banking
National Planning Framework (NPF). However, it is not possible to prejudge what the scope of content of the NPF will be, and the Core Strategy can only be constructed within the current extant national framework, as that is what an inspector will apply; if the NPF emerges prior to adoption, some of the policies may however need to be reviewed.

8.3 Best Practice Guidance

Guidance produced by David Tyldesley Associates\(^96\) recommends integrating biodiversity into a number of cross cutting topics which affect biodiversity including sustainable development, climate change, green infrastructure, and sustainable design and construction. It also recommends biodiversity specific policies within Core Strategies on environmental assets, and biodiversity and geological conservation; these relate to BAPs, designated sites and the wider countryside, acknowledging that statutory sites and protected species benefits from legal protection which does not require repetition in local policies.

The Association of Local Government Ecologists guidance on integrating biodiversity into LDFs recommends that Core Strategies should include policy for the conservation, restoration and enhancement of important BAP habitats and species. Policies should also propose an improvement in the quality and extent of natural habitats, the physical processes on which they depend, and the populations of naturally occurring species that they support. There should also be policy on the way that the distribution of nationally or regionally significant species and habitats may alter with climate change, and its effects on biodiversity and nationally or internationally designated sites.

Recent guidance by Natural England focuses on the role of spatial planning in biodiversity adaptation to climate change, recommending that Core Strategies should address biodiversity matters for the plan area, and in doing so should highlight climate change pressures and land-use measures for facilitating improved species adaptation, including for example, identification of broad areas for habitat re-connection. It also encourages policies to protect habitats and species which are locally important, particularly local BAPs, protect the wider environment, maintain and enhance natural processes, particularly flood plains and rivers, restore habitats and reverse degradation, secure net gain for biodiversity, protecting and enhancing structure and functionality, reduce fragmentation / isolation, support strategic habitat networks and based on a sound evidence base. It also recommends adopting the ‘no regrets’ policy framework, allowing for an approach which should be ecologically and landscape beneficial regardless of the actual extent of climate change impacts experienced within the plan area.

A summary of best practice produced by Land Use Consultants\(^97\) following a review of adopted DPDs highlights common types of policy that address or affect landscape protection and management:

- General Development Criteria - provide a tool to ensure new development is located appropriately and of a scale and design to benefit landscape character.
- Natural and Built Environment - should recognise the importance of protecting and enhancing the quality and character of all landscapes, particularly features that contribute to local urban or rural landscape character.
- Landscape-specific - establish generic protection for all landscapes, emphasise protection for designated landscapes, and/or focus on landscape character and quality.
- Designated Landscapes - should not reiterate general protection of nationally designated landscapes, but should provide policy relevant to local issues, reflective of the local context, to complement rather than reiterate national policy.

\(^96\) David Tyldesley Associates (2008) *Biodiversity Policies for Local Development Frameworks in Hampshire*

\(^97\) Land Use Consultants (2010) *Local Landscape Planning Policy: A Summary of Best Practice*
Setting - should refer to the relevant management plan, requiring development to respect the guidelines and objectives therein, and may draw on the LCA for protecting qualities/features outside of a designated landscape.

Development in the Countryside - control development in the countryside to protect the open and rural character. Also highlight linkages between landscape and the rural economy, including agriculture and tourism.

Design Quality - establish the need for new development to respect and enhance local townscape and landscape character, referring to character appraisals or detailed design guidance as appropriate.

Local Landscape Designations should be informed by a landscape character assessment to provide a robust evidence base, and should be complemented by policy on other, non-designated landscapes.

Historic Landscape Characterisation - should reflect the findings of national and local studies in the protection of heritage assets and the management of landscape change.

Several best practice principles also emerge from this review:

- Positive planning - the value of landscape policies being framed in positive terms, recognising that landscapes continually change, and the potential for development to contribute positively to landscape character and local distinctiveness.
- All landscapes - best practice policy avoids reiterating protection of nationally designated landscape, and establishes guidance for all landscapes, reflecting the European Landscape Convention.
- Character - the use of a character-based approach to guide landscape change, establishing policy that is informed by and references a suitable Landscape Character Assessment.
- Holistic approach - best practice policy recognises and incorporates the many components and features that contribute to landscape, and recognises the value of a landscape-scale approach to guide the management of these features.

8.4 Identifying and Testing Options for Addressing the Challenges

Policy options have been proposed to achieve the strategic objective to 'Protect and enhance the natural environment. The effectiveness of these policy options has been assessed against a number of criteria, as shown in Tables 6 and 7 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biodiversity Option</th>
<th>SA Outcome</th>
<th>Conformity with national and regional policy and/or regulations</th>
<th>Deliverability</th>
<th>Community aspirations met</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Do nothing</td>
<td>No significant effects identified. Minor adverse effects identified across several environmental objectives. No benefit for social / economic objectives.</td>
<td>No. HRA requires policy response on recreational disturbance.</td>
<td>Delivered through development control as currently. Previous experience has demonstrated that existing policies are weak and lead to damage / neglect / isolation of CWSs, loss of BAP habitats / species, poor design which does not respect the natural environment, and missed opportunities for enhancement of the natural environment through the development process.</td>
<td>No. Provides only partial protection for local sites and BAPs - fails to deliver community aspirations or protect community assets. Reduced quality of natural environment for new and existing communities. Does not address local concerns over linear features, CC adaptation and fragmentation / isolation. Does not address concerns about the impacts of increased public access on wildlife.</td>
<td>Lawton has shown that local sites are under protected – this fails to remedy the situation. Small cumulative effects likely to continue to be significant over plan period. Does not address new challenges of climate change. Missed opportunities to provide biodiversity gain through improved design quality and local environments in accordance with sustainable design guidance - DETR and CABE (2000), English Partnerships (2000 &amp; 2007), TCPA (2009).</td>
<td>Not preferred. Provides partial protection, but continues the generally negative trend and cumulative impacts upon biodiversity, particularly in relation to climate change. Fails to deliver the strategic objective.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Save existing policies:</td>
<td>North Wiltshire Local Plan – NE7 (Local Sites), NE10 (Nature Conservation Features), NE11 (BAPs), NE14 (Nature Conservation Features)</td>
<td>North Wiltshire Local Plan – NE7 (Local Sites), NE10 (Nature Conservation Features), NE11 (BAPs), NE14 (Nature Conservation Features)</td>
<td>North Wiltshire Local Plan – NE7 (Local Sites), NE10 (Nature Conservation Features), NE11 (BAPs), NE14 (Nature Conservation Features)</td>
<td>North Wiltshire Local Plan – NE7 (Local Sites), NE10 (Nature Conservation Features), NE11 (BAPs), NE14 (Nature Conservation Features)</td>
<td>North Wiltshire Local Plan – NE7 (Local Sites), NE10 (Nature Conservation Features), NE11 (BAPs), NE14 (Nature Conservation Features)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kennet District Local Plan – NR3 (Local Sites) &amp; NR4 (Nature Conservation Features)</td>
<td>No disturbance policy</td>
<td>No disturbance policy</td>
<td>No disturbance policy</td>
<td>No disturbance policy</td>
<td>No disturbance policy</td>
<td>No disturbance policy</td>
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<td>Biodiversity Option</td>
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<td>B. Spatial Approach</td>
<td>Some minor positive effects. Potential negative effects on socio-economic receptors.</td>
<td>Most features already covered under statutory regime – contrary to PPS12.</td>
<td>Dozens of maps required to cover the entire county at a meaningful scale. Regular updates required e.g. local sites – not practical. Implemented through development control under advice of Principal Ecologist.</td>
<td>Strong protection of the natural environment of some communities at the cost of planning blight. Discount the value of the natural environment of those communities ‘outside the line’.</td>
<td>Maps would be based on incomplete knowledge at the current time. It would not be possible to update the CS plans regularly as knowledge changes. Much of the county’s biodiversity would be ‘outside the line’ but would be discounted and more difficult to defend.</td>
<td>Difficult to implement, never comprehensive coverage. Better to protect features on the basis of their ecological value and function based on up to date knowledge rather than their geographical location and limited knowledge at a point in time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biodiversity Option</td>
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<td>C. Preferred</td>
<td>Generally positive effects, significant for biodiversity, air quality and landscape.</td>
<td>Yes – suitable mitigation measures for SPAs included to address requirements of HRA.</td>
<td>Delivered through development control following advice of Principle Ecologists. Delivery of mitigation measures for SPAs will require partnership working with RSPB, DE, NFNPA etc.</td>
<td>Yes. Improved protection of existing community assets and improved quality of natural environment for new communities. Addresses concerns over linear features, CC adaptation, fragmentation / isolation and the effects of public access on wildlife.</td>
<td>Complies with recommendations of DEFRA and Lawton in relation to local sites, connectivity / functionality and ecological networks. Contributes to local and national BAP targets. Maintains and creates resilient ecosystems which can adapt to climate change. Promotes better quality environments through sustainable design and development.</td>
<td>Preferred Option Meets statutory, policy and community needs without conflicting significantly with economic growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biodiversity Option</td>
<td>SA Outcome</td>
<td>Conformity with national and regional policy and/or regulations</td>
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<td>D. Aspirational</td>
<td>Positive environmental effects. Negative socio-economic effects, significant for the economy.</td>
<td>Unlikely to meet the requirements of 'sustainable development' – PPS1.</td>
<td>Likely to cause conflicts where development cannot be located elsewhere and / or there are strong socio-economic needs. Many sites could become economically unviable.</td>
<td>Yes for biodiversity. However, this would be likely to impinge heavily on property rights and people’s use of their own land. Could also restrict necessary sustainable development and growth of some communities.</td>
<td>Likely to conflict significantly with delivery of other strategic objectives. Could have other environmental impacts e.g. lowering densities – more sprawl, CO2 etc.</td>
<td>Not preferred. Unlikely to be deliverable. Potential conflicts with other policy areas and aspirations.</td>
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</table>

Table 6 – Biodiversity Policy Options
### Policy Options: Landscape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>SA outcome</th>
<th>Conformity with national and regional policy and/or regulations</th>
<th>Deliverability</th>
<th>Community aspirations met</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Criteria-based policy to be included in the core strategy seeking to protect, conserve and enhance landscape character. Include reference to the existing Landscape Character Assessments and to landscape setting of towns and villages. Include specific reference to AONB Management Plans, and also refer to the ‘setting’ of AONBs. Include specific reference to the need to protect tranquillity. Do not refer to Green Belt, rural buffers, or best and most versatile agricultural land in the policy. Further work needed to establish whether or not there is sufficient justification to maintain Special Landscape Areas (or parts thereof).</td>
<td>Significant positive effects for biodiversity, and also potentially for landscapes (score is +/-). Negative effects for housing and employment. Uncertain effects for health and economy (both score +/-).</td>
<td>Yes. Using a criteria-based approach is in line with PPS 7. The approach to AONBs would be consistent with PPS12, providing that the policy contains greater detail than that set out in PPS 7. This could be achieved through reference to the AONB Management Plans and the setting of the AONBs (neither of which are mentioned in PPS 7). The authority would need to have sound evidence that the approach would be justified by local circumstances. No specific need to address tranquillity according to national policy and regulations. PPS 12 indicates that there may be local reasons for having greater detail than national policy provides for.</td>
<td>Through the development management process and particularly through site specific landscape and visual impact assessments. The level of ‘tranquillity’ of an area is difficult to measure. However, it may be possible to use CPRE tranquillity mapping to establish a baseline.</td>
<td>Yes. Local level plans and responses to Wiltshire 2026 indicate a desire to protect local landscape character. Policy could also help to protect landscape setting in and around towns and villages. There are community aspirations to protect AONBs. This approach could assist in meeting this aspiration, particularly through reference to the AONB Management Plans and the ‘setting’ of the AONBs. Local level plans indicate a desire to maintain dark skies and tranquillity. Would meet community aspirations to protect the green belt since this is protected through PPG 2. Community aspirations to protect rural buffers / green spaces between</td>
<td>Responds to specific local circumstances as 44% of Wiltshire’s land falls within an AONB. Responds to concerns raised by AONB officers (in response to Wiltshire 2026 consultation) that AONB issues should be clearly identified with reference to AONB Management Plans. Addresses aspirations in the CC&amp;WWD and North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plans that local planning policy should fully recognise the purposes of the AONB designation. Addresses aspiration in the Cotswolds AONB Management Plan that the conservation and enhancement of the AONB and its</td>
<td>Suggested preferred option. This approach is highly consistent with PPS 7 and would assist in meeting community aspirations to conserve local landscape character. Community aspirations to protect the green belt would be met through national planning policy. Specific rural buffers would not be identified by the policy, but the policy would include reference to the ‘separate identity’ and ‘landscape settings’ of settlements. The approach to AONBs would be consistent with national policy since it would go beyond the guidance set out</td>
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</table>
Avoids repetition of national policy relating to Green Belts.

Not including a reference to rural buffers would be in accordance with PPS 7 which indicates that local planning policy should not include “rigid local [landscape] designations that may unduly restrict acceptable, sustainable development and the economic activity that underpins the vitality of rural areas”.

Not mentioning protection of the best and most versatile agricultural land would avoid repetition of national policy and therefore conforms to PPS 12.

settlements could be achieved through more general policies relating to development in the open countryside, and through reference to the ‘separate identity’ and ‘landscape settings’ of settlements in the landscape policy.

Responses to Wiltshire 2026 were varied in relation to retention of a rural buffer to the west of Swindon, with some supporting a buffer and others stating that this would be contrary to national policy and may hinder development.

No specific community aspirations identified relating to protection of agricultural land.

Environment Agency concern about specific site in Warminster will be addressed through the site selection process.

special qualities should be fully taken into account in plans to address development in the AONB. Also addresses aspirations relating to setting.

Wiltshire is ranked 10th out of 87 local authorities in terms of tranquillity (CPRE, 2006).

Campaign for Better Transport indicated that there should be a policy on tranquillity and noise in the countryside in response to Wiltshire 2026.

The three AONB Management Plans all highlight the importance of tranquillity and dark night skies in the AONBs.

in PPS7. Would address the aspiration amongst the AONBs for the Management Plans to be fully taken into account and for setting of the AONBs to be considered.

Local level plans and the CPRE tranquillity maps indicate that tranquility is one of Wiltshire’s strengths. Therefore local circumstances justify inclusion of policy text in the core strategy, in order to protect and enhance this aspect of Wiltshire’s natural environment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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<tr>
<td>B. Include a specific policy in the Core Strategy relating to the Green Belt and seeking to protect specific rural buffers. Also mention the need to protect best and most versatile agricultural land. (This would be in addition to a criteria-based landscape policy, as described in option A above).</td>
<td>Significant positive effects for biodiversity, land and soil, air quality, and landscapes. Significant negative effects for housing and employment, and possibly for economy (score is +/-). Negative effect for education. Uncertain effect for health (score is +/-).</td>
<td>No. Inconsistent with PPS 12. No need to provide additional local detail relating to the Green Belt, and any policy would therefore just repeat national guidance in PPG 2. Designation of specific rural buffers would be inconsistent with PPS 7. Inclusion of a specific policy to protect the best and most versatile agricultural land would be inconsistent with PPS 12. No evidence to suggest that there are local reasons for having greater detail than that provided in PPS 7.</td>
<td>Through development management process.</td>
<td>Yes. Would protect Green Belt and specific rural buffers.</td>
<td>Not recommended. Approach is not consistent with national policy.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
C. Do not include a policy on local landscape character in the Core Strategy. Instead rely on saved local plan policies relating to landscape protection in general. Do not include specific reference to AONBs or tranquility. There is no specific reference to tranquility in the current Local/District Plans, so this option would mean that there would be no reference to tranquility in local planning policy (although the West Wiltshire District Plan does include policy C35 on light pollution).

No significant positive or significant negative effects. Negative effects for biodiversity, land and soil, water, flood risk, air quality, climatic, heritage, and landscapes. Uncertain effects for health and economy (both score +/-).

Avoids repetition of national policy in relation to AONBs and therefore conforms to PPS 12. However, PPS 7 indicates that the conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside in AONBs should be given great weight in planning policies.

No specific mention of tranquility in national planning policy.

Does not follow the approach advocated by PPS7 to use “carefully drafted, criteria-based policies … utilising tools such as landscape character assessment”. North Wiltshire Local Plan currently includes criteria-based policies for landscape character, but does not refer directly to landscape character assessment. Kennet Local Plan and Salisbury District Local Plan refer to landscape character, but do not use any criteria to help define this. West Wiltshire District Plan does not refer specifically to landscape character, although it does refer to the quality and variety of the countryside.

Risk that lack of overarching policy would lead to erosion of peace, tranquillity and dark skies in Wiltshire.

No Inconsistent approach across Wiltshire with regards to protection of local landscape character.

Community aspirations to protect AONBs could still be met through national planning policy, which indicates that the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should be given great weight in development control decisions in AONBs. Saved local plan policies would also provide protection, although there would be an inconsistent approach across Wiltshire. The Kennet Local Plan policy on AONBs has not been saved.

Risk that peace and tranquility could be eroded in the absence of policy text covering this issue.

Table 7 – Core Strategy Landscape Policy Options
9 CONCLUSION

The preferred options to achieve the objective of ‘Protect and enhance the natural environment’ in the most sustainable and practical manner are:

- Biodiversity – replace the existing policy framework with a pragmatic approach (Option 3)
- Landscape – include a criteria based policy in the core strategy seeking to protect, conserve and enhance landscape character (Option A)

Existing biodiversity policies on CWSs and BAPs would be replaced by more proactive policy wording to protect and enhance these features, helping to reverse historically negative trends. New policy wording would be included to emphasise the importance of ecological connectivity, functionality and natural processes in response to the impacts of habitat fragmentation/isolation as amplified by the effects of climate change, and the importance of incorporating these processes into sustainable design. Policies on disturbance would be introduced, specifically ensuring that Natura 2000 sites are protected from recreational disturbance, but also that disturbance of wildlife and habitats associated with development more widely across the county is reduced where possible.

Generic policies on statutory protected sites and species would not be included as these are fully protected under national policy (PPS), procedures (Circular 06/05) and legislation (Habitats Regulations and Wildlife and Countryside Act); policy on these features would therefore duplicate national policy/legislation and inclusion in the LDF would be contrary to the advice of PPS12.

The landscape policy would adopt a criteria based LCA approach to protecting and enhancing all landscapes. However, it is not yet clear whether this approach would completely replace SLAs, or whether a policy may be retained to protect a rationalised and clearly justified suite of SLAs. No specific policy on AONBs would be proposed due to their protection under national policy, however the landscape policy would address their setting and make clear and direct links to the relevant Management Plans. The Core Strategy would not contain a specific policy on Green Belt as this is covered by PPG2, and the boundaries of the Green Belt would remain unaltered from the previous local plans. There would be no policy on rural buffers as these have been shown to be unnecessary by the removal of policies NE2 and NE3 from the North Wiltshire Local Plan, and any such policy is likely to be contrary to PPS7. There would be no policy on BMV agricultural land as this is sufficiently addressed by PPS7 without the need to duplicate this.

In order to improve policy implementation it is recommended that policy wording for the natural environment is incorporated throughout the LDF, particularly within non-environmental policy areas. This approach is consistent with current best practice guidelines (see Section 8.3).

9.1 Policy Text

Core Policy 33 – Biodiversity

Local Sites
Sustainable development will avoid direct and indirect impacts upon local sites through sensitive site location and layout, maintaining a sufficient buffer and ecological connectivity with the wider environment to avoid any significant impacts. Damage or disturbance to local sites will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where it has been demonstrated that such impacts:

- cannot reasonably be avoided.
- are reduced as far as possible.
- are outweighed by other planning considerations in the public interest.
where appropriate compensation measures can be secured through planning obligations or agreements.

Development proposals affecting local sites must contribute to their favourable management in the long-term.

**Ecologically Sustainable Development**

Development proposals will need to demonstrate how they protect features of nature conservation and geological value as part of the design rational. There is an expectation that such features shall be retained, buffered, and managed favourably in order to maintain their intrinsic value, connectivity and functionality in the long-term. Where it has been demonstrated that such features cannot be retained, removal or damage shall be permitted only in circumstances where the anticipated ecological impacts have been mitigated and sufficient compensatory measures can be provided to ensure no net loss of the local biodiversity resource and secure the integrity of local ecological networks.

All development should seek opportunities to enhance biodiversity. Major development in particular will include measures to deliver biodiversity gains through opportunities to restore, enhance and create valuable habitats and wildlife corridors. Such enhancement measures will contribute to the objectives and targets of the BAP and Nature Map, and be relevant to the local environment.

**Disturbance**

Development likely to increase recreational pressure on the Salisbury Plain Special Protection Area (SPA) and New Forest SPA will be required to deliver an appropriate level of mitigation to offset any potential impacts. Suitable mitigation measures will include:

- securing management measures for Stone Curlew on Salisbury Plain and surrounding areas.
- habitat enhancement for nightjar, woodlark or Dartford warbler within the New Forest National Park;
- provision of an appropriate area of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace to deter public use of Natura 2000 sites; and
- securing access management measures on Salisbury Plain and in the New Forest.

Such measures shall be secured through planning obligations and agreements.

All development proposals shall incorporate appropriate measures to avoid and reduce disturbance of sensitive wildlife species throughout the lifetime of the development.

**Core Policy 34 - Landscape**

Development will be supported where it protects, conserves, and where possible enhances landscape character. Proposals should be informed by and be sympathetic to the distinctive character areas identified in the relevant Landscape Character Assessment and any other relevant assessments and studies. In particular, proposals will need to demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been considered:

i. the distinctive pattern of natural features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and water bodies and their function as wildlife corridors.

ii. the locally distinctive character of settlements and their landscape settings.

iii. the separate identity of settlements and the transition between man-made and natural landscapes at the urban fringe.

iv. visually sensitive skylines, soils, geological and topographical features.

v. landscape features of cultural, historical and heritage value.

vi. important views and visual amenity.
vii. tranquility and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise, and motion.

II.
III.
V.
VII.

Proposals for development within or affecting the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) should have regard to the relevant Management Plans for these areas. This will include proposals for development which are within the setting of an AONB and could have an impact on views from or to the AONB.

9.2 Supporting Text

9.2.1 Biodiversity

Wiltshire’s natural environment is one of its greatest assets and includes a particularly large proportion of the UK’s biodiversity, including some of Europe’s most significant sites. The valuable natural environment includes not only our protected sites, but also our local sites such as County Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites, and features of nature conservation value including:

- species and habitats of conservation concern (including those listed on the national and Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plans).
- areas of habitat with restoration potential (particularly those identified on the South West Nature Map).
- features providing an ecological function for wildlife such as foraging, resting and breeding places, particularly wildlife corridors of all scales which provide ecological connectivity allowing species to move through the landscape.
- support ecosystem functions.

Collectively these sites and natural features make up the ecological network necessary to underpin and maintain a healthy natural environment, however the evidence demonstrates a trend of continual degradation of our ecological network; a trend which development has contributed towards. A positive policy response is therefore necessary to help halt and reverse this trend and meet new challenges particularly climate change adaptation and increasing populations.

Sustainable development in Wiltshire must be encouraged in a responsible manner which respects the importance and fragility of our natural environment. It is therefore vital that all stages of decision making are informed by relevant ecological information; this includes decisions involved in the production of development proposals by the applicant, and decisions about the sustainability of those proposals by the planning authority. All effects should be considered, including positive / negative, direct and indirect, cumulative and on / offsite impacts over the lifetime of the development (including construction and operational phases), also giving consideration to disturbance effects such as noise, lighting, recreational pressures, trampling, traffic, domestic pets, vandalism etc. Effects upon the natural environment should be addressed sequentially in accordance with the principle of the ‘mitigation hierarchy’:

- avoid e.g. site location, buffers.
- reduce, moderate, minimise.
- rescue e.g. translocation.
- repair, reinstate, restore.
- compensate / offset.
Good quality design should aim to incorporate features of wildlife value in a manner that delivers multiple benefits, enabling permeability in terms of physical and visual accessibility, providing legibility and identity, and facilitating future management and maintenance while also retaining ecological functionality. Compensation is a last resort, but will be necessary in some instances where the previous approaches cannot guarantee no net loss of biodiversity. Such measures should be delivered within the development site where possible; however where this is not feasible it may be more appropriate to deliver offsite measures through development agreements and partnership projects. Appropriate compensatory measures should demonstrate no net loss of the relevant local biodiversity resource in the short and long-term, and be delivered as close to the development site as possible.

Sustainable development also provides opportunities to enhance the natural environment for wildlife and Wiltshire’s communities, particularly through landscaping, public open space, Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems and features of the built environment e.g. bird and bat boxes. Such measures should be relevant to delivery of BAP targets, but tailored to the local ecosystems and landscape character. Development may also open up opportunities to bring degraded or neglected features back into favourable condition through sensitive management to encourage wildlife; such restoration will be particularly valuable in Strategic Nature Areas identified on the South West Nature Map or as part of other landscape scale projects including the Biodiversity Delivery Areas.

9.2.2 Landscape

The principle pressure to be addressed is ensuring that new development does not erode the separate identity, character and visual and functional amenity of settlements and their setting. This is particularly the case with the level of growth proposed at Salisbury, Chippenham and Trowbridge. Outside of the principal settlements, similar pressures apply and the challenge is to allow for appropriate development while having full regard to the conservation objectives of the valued landscapes including the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Core Policy 34 seeks to protect, conserve and enhance Wiltshire’s distinctive landscape character. The term ‘landscape’ here is used to refer to both the built and natural environment in urban, peri-urban and rural areas. There are currently ten Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs) which cover Wiltshire, and which will be used for the purposes of this policy:

5. West Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment (1:25,000) (2007).

Work will be undertaken to consolidate these LCAs into a single set of guidelines, to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document. Other assessments and studies which may be relevant include landscape sensitivity studies and historic landscape characterisation work.
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs)

The significance of the landscape of Wiltshire is acknowledged in the designation of 44 per cent of the area administered by Wiltshire Council as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This comprises 38 per cent of the North Wessex Downs AONB, 61 per cent of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB and 6 per cent of the Cotswolds AONB. The current Management Plans for the three AONBs are as follows:


Proposals for development within or affecting the AONBs will be expected to have regard to these, or any revised or replacement Management Plans. Other documents prepared by the AONBs may also be relevant, including position statements, woodland and biodiversity strategies, and the landscape character assessments listed above.

Core policy 34 also refers to development within the setting of an AONB. The setting of an AONB is not precisely defined and will vary depending on the nature and visibility of the proposed development.

Special Landscape Areas (SLAs)

There are currently seven Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) in Wiltshire, which have been identified as locally important areas of high landscape quality:

- the majority of Salisbury Plain excluding two areas around Netheravon, Larkhill, Bulford and Amesbury, and Ludgershall and Tidworth.
- areas of to the north and east of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, excluding an area around Salisbury and Wilton.
- the Blackmore Vale from Zeals to Sedgehill, and a small area to the east of Shaftesbury.
- the Chapsmanslade Greensand Ridge.
- the higher land of the Spye and Bowood Parklands.
- the River Frome valley at Vaggs Hill.
- the southern fringes of the Cotswolds outside the AONB.

There has been considerable debate in recent years over the use of local landscape designations such as SLAs as a planning tool, with a strong argument emerging for their replacement with criteria-based policies based on Landscape Character Assessments. Support for this approach has been largely driven by national planning policy, which advocates the removal of local landscape designations in favour of a criteria-based approach.98

In Wiltshire, our current series of SLAs have been in place for over 25 years and appears to be poorly defined and understood; indicating that they should be replaced by a criteria-based policy approach. Core Policy 34 does not therefore include any reference to SLAs. However, the SLA network will need to be reviewed to identify any areas with unique characteristics that would not be adequately protected by a criteria-based approach (an example of this may be the Wellhead Valley area near Westbury). Any such areas may require a specific policy response to ensure their protection, although this approach would need to be justified by evidence.

98 Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.
Green Belt

Wiltshire includes part of the Avon Green Belt which surrounds the wider Bath and Bristol areas. The boundaries of Green Belts are determined by local authorities and kept up to date and publicly available in local plans; in Wiltshire this currently includes the North Wiltshire Local Plan and the West Wiltshire District Plan. Those parts of Wiltshire included in the Avon Green Belt include land surrounding Bradford on Avon, Trowbridge and west of Corsham. The particular objectives of this ‘Western Wiltshire Green Belt’ are to maintain the open character of undeveloped land adjacent to Bath, Trowbridge and Bradford on Avon, to limit the spread of development along the A4 between Batheaston and Corsham and to protect the historic character and setting of Bradford upon Avon.

Applications for development within the Green Belt will be determined in accordance with national planning policy in Planning Policy Guidance 2: Green Belts, and any relevant saved local plan policies. The boundaries of the Green Belt will remain unaltered from those identified in the North Wiltshire Local Plan and the West Wiltshire District Plan.

Rural buffers

The North Wiltshire Local Plan previously identified ‘rural buffers’ to prevent coalescence of settlements with Swindon and protect their separate identity and distinctive character. The local plan policies relating to rural buffers were not saved because they were considered to conflict with national planning policy. The Wiltshire and Swindon Structure Plan still includes a policy relating to the Swindon Rural Buffer (policy DP13), but does not define the extent of any rural buffers.

This Core Strategy does not identify specific rural buffers. However, Core Policy 34 (above) seeks to protect, conserve and enhance the locally distinctive character of settlements and their landscape settings, the separate identity of settlements, and the transition between man-made and natural landscapes at the urban fringe, by requiring that these aspects of landscape character are considered as part of all development proposals.

10 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

11 GLOSSARY

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – A designation under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949) with the primary purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape, with two secondary aims: meeting the need for quiet enjoyment of the countryside and having regard for the interests of those who live and work there.

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) - an internationally recognized program addressing threatened species and habitat and is designed to protect and restore biological systems. The original impetus for these plans derives from the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (see below). In the UK plans apply to habitats and individual species, generally identifying threats, actions, targets and delivery partners.

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land (BMV Land) - The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) provides a method for assessing the quality of farmland to enable informed choices to be made about its future use. Land is graded 1-5 depending on its agricultural value, with grades 1-3a classified as BMV land.

99 Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas.
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – An international legally binding treaty signed by the UK at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Convention has three main goals, namely the conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

Core Strategy – the key compulsory element of a Local Development Framework required under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) and PPS12. The Core Strategy sets the principles upon which other Local Development Documents should build.

County Wildlife Sites (CWSs) - Non-statutory sites identified as having high nature conservation value of significance to the County. The Wildlife Sites Project is a partnership project which identifies, notifies, monitors and denotifies sites on an ongoing basis.

Department for Environment Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) - the government department responsible for environmental protection, food production and standards, agriculture, fisheries, and rural communities in the UK. It is responsible for the arms-length organisations Natural England and the Environment Agency (see below).

Environment Agency (EA) – the Agency's stated purpose is, "to protect or enhance the environment, taken as a whole" so as to promote "the objective of achieving sustainable development' (taken from the Environment Act 1995). Protection of the environment relates to threats such as flooding and pollution throughout England and Wales. The vision of the Agency is of "a rich, healthy and diverse environment for present and future generations".

Ecosystem Services - The benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These include provisioning services such as food and water; regulating services such as flood and disease control; cultural services such as spiritual, recreational, and cultural benefits; and supporting services such as nutrient cycling that maintain the conditions for life on Earth.

Green Belt – A land use designation surrounding urban areas for the purpose of preventing coalescence of neighbouring towns, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, preserving the setting and special character of historic towns, and assisting in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) – An assessment of the impacts of a plan or project upon the integrity of a Natura 2000 site (see below), either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, as required under Regulation 61 of the Habitats Regulations (2010).

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) - a technique used to develop a consistent and comprehensive understanding of what gives England’s landscape its character. It uses statistical analysis and application of structured landscape assessment techniques.

Local Development Document (LDD) - a set of documents required under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) which a Local Planning Authority creates to describe their strategy for development and use of land in their area of authority. Collectively LDDs form the Local Development Framework for an area (see below). LDDs are optional with the exception of the Core Strategy (see above).

Local Development Framework (LDF) - a new portfolio of documents (Local Development Documents, see above) that can be tailored to suit the different needs of a particular area, forming the spatial planning strategy required under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) and PPS12.

Local Geological Sites (LGSs) - sites that highlight important local geodiversity and heritage in order to protect and manage such interest and, where possible, provide educational opportunities. Sites are generally chosen on the basis of one, some, or all of geological or geomorphological features.

Local Planning Authority (LPA) – the local authority empowered by law to carry out planning functions for a set administrative area. For the county of Wiltshire (except Swindon) this is Wiltshire Council.

Natura 2000 – a European network of sites designed to protect Europe’s most seriously threatened habitats and species. The network comprises SACs and SPAs designated under the Habitats and Birds Directives respectively. All plans or projects which could affect a Natura 2000 site must be subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment under Regulation 61 of the Habitats Regulations (2010).
Natural England – the government’s advisor on the natural environment within DEFRA. It is responsible for agri-environment schemes, statutory designations including SSSIs / SACs / SPAs / Ramsar / AONBs and is a statutory consultee for planning in respect of such sites.

Nature Map – a strategic map identifying opportunities for habitat restoration and creation to withstand the challenges of climate change and species loss. Produced using a scientifically robust methodology for defining a set of ecologically functional tracts of land to provide for the needs of our native species and the habitats they occupy, in the long term.

Planning Policy Statement (PPS) - statements of the British government’s national policy and principles towards planning. They form a statutory component of the development framework under the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, and Local Planning Authorities are required to have regard to their policies in preparing development plans. Planning Policy Statements may be treated as material considerations in the determination of planning applications.

Special Area of Conservation (SACs) – areas designated under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) as being of European importance for habitats listed in Annex I and species listed in Annex II of the Directive. SACs form part of the Natura 2000 network (see above).

National Indicator – a list of national indicators (NIs) is used to monitor government performance on a range of priorities. These include the former NI197, which will become NI160 to monitor local sites and biodiversity.

Ramsar – an international network of important wetland sites designated in order to fulfil the legal obligations of the Ramsar Convention which requires national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) – areas designated under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) for their national importance for biodiversity and geodiversity. Some SSSIs are also designated as SACs and SPAs.

Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) - a local landscape designation applied to areas considered to be locally important areas of high landscape quality sufficiently attractive to justify adoption of particular development control policies or other safeguarding measures.

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) – areas identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds found within European Union countries. SPAs are designated under the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and form part of the Natura 2000 network (see above).

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) – the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2001/42/EC) requires all Member States to carry out a SEA to determine whether the plans/programmes are likely to have significant environmental effects; applies to all land use plans.

Strategic Nature Areas (SNAs) – areas of opportunity for restoring substantial parcels of semi-natural habitat as part of a strategic regional network of sites to allow species and habitats to adapt to climate change.
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For further information please visit the following website:

http://consult.wiltshire.gov.uk/portal