

Policy DM8

Development proposals must take account of their impact on local biodiversity and identify appropriate mitigation measures to safeguard or enhance attributes of ecological importance.

Where appropriate, proposals should seek to conserve the local natural environment by retaining, protecting, enhancing and linking existing wildlife habitats; by incorporating retained habitats sensitively into the development through appropriate design; and by ensuring that such retained and enhanced habitats are managed appropriately. Where necessary, longer term management will be achieved through suitable planning conditions.

Sites of International and National Importance

Development which would have an adverse impact on identified sites of international importance (which include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Ramsar sites) will not be permitted.

The North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC consultation area is defined on the Policies Map. The consultation will identify the potential impact of the proposed development in respect of, for example, bat navigation and foraging habitats and identify appropriate mitigation measures through site design and lighting strategies.

The Severn Estuary SAC, SPA and Ramsar site is defined on the Policies Map. Any proposals that could affect the sensitive bird species and other habitats and species of the Estuary will need to carry out adequate surveys and assessments of the cumulative, in-combination and offsite impacts (drainage, disturbance, runoff, impacts on managed realignment etc.) of the scheme.

Development within or in proximity to a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or National Nature Reserve that is likely to have a direct or indirect adverse affect on its biodiversity or geological interest would not normally be permitted.

Local Nature Reserves and Local Sites

Planning permission will not normally be granted for development that would result in loss in extent or otherwise have a significant adverse effect on Local Nature Reserves or Local Sites (locally designated Wildlife Sites and Geological Sites), unless the harm can be mitigated by appropriate measures.

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Legally Protected Species and Habitats and Species of Principal Importance in England – Priority Habitats and Species

Development which could harm, directly or indirectly, species, which are legally protected, or species and habitats that have been identified as Species or Habitats of Principal Importance in England (also known as Section 41 or 'Priority' species and habitats) will not be permitted unless the harm can be avoided or mitigated by appropriate measures.

Development proposals should ensure that, where appropriate, provision is made for:

- any lighting scheme to avoid adverse impacts on light averse wildlife;
- retention of native woodland, native trees (to include veteran trees), native hedgerows, watercourses, ponds, rhynes, other wetland habitats such as reedbeds, botanically diverse grasslands, traditional orchards, geological features, and other major natural features, habitats or wildlife corridors, and their protection during construction work;
- protection of ecosystem resources, to include water quality;
- compensatory provision, within the site itself, or immediate vicinity if practicable, of at least equivalent biodiversity value, where the loss of habitats or features of importance to wild flora and fauna is unavoidable;
- incorporation of habitat features of value to wildlife within the development (to include within building design) and including those which meet the needs of local species (e.g. provision of nesting features for swifts, swallows, house sparrows, bats);
- appropriate long term management of retained and newly created features of importance to wildlife;
- provision of monitoring of key species to evaluate impact of site management;
- planting of locally appropriate native species of local origin wherever possible; and
- measures to link habitats within the development and also that link into adjoining wildlife corridor networks.

Policy DM8**Ecological mitigation measures provided within the development**

Where development proposals may impact legally protected and notable species and habitats, they will need to be accompanied by an up to date ecological survey assessment as part of the submitted application. This will include:

- site context information provided by a local records data search of designated sites, legally protected and notable species in proximity;
- a description of the biodiversity interest of the site, to include current land use; and including, where applicable, regard for any Strategic Nature Areas;
- the nature and extent of the impact on legally protected species and habitats, Section 41 species and habitats/or other notable species of the proposed development or change of use of land; and the measures that may be needed to avoid, mitigate or compensate the identified impacts;
- the steps to be taken to retain, protect, enhance, link and, where appropriate, create and manage the biodiversity interest over the longer term; which may include monitoring;
- where necessary effective lighting design to avoid artificial light spill to wildlife habitats/corridors to avoid impacts on light averse wildlife.

Justification

North Somerset contains four sites of European importance, designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). These include: the North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC, Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC, Avon Gorge Woodlands SAC and the Severn Estuary SAC. The Severn Estuary is also designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA), due to the internationally important assemblages of overwintering/wading birds that it supports; and is also designated as a Ramsar site, as it is an internationally important wetland.

The purpose of the 5km consultation zone set around the North Somerset SSSI component maternity and hibernation horseshoe bat roosts of the North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC is to protect greater and lesser horseshoe bat navigation and foraging habitats (to include key habitats for insect prey such as cattle grazed pastures and wetlands). Protection of these habitats is required to ensure that these roosts continue to be viable and maintained in 'favourable condition' and that populations of horseshoe bats are maintained at favourable

conservation status. Horseshoe bats are known to be light sensitive requiring unlit, intrinsically dark navigation routes and foraging habitats. Following consultation with Natural England North Somerset Council are looking into producing detailed guidance on the North Somerset & Mendip Bat SAC for future proposed development in and around the 5km zone.

Any proposals with potential to directly or indirectly impact on a European site/SSSI will be subject to consultation with the government's statutory nature conservation body, Natural England.

North Somerset also supports other European protected species that are rare or declining across Europe, notably hazel dormouse, otter, a wide diversity of bat species and great crested newt.

The overall aim is to contribute to the international and national objective to halt loss of biodiversity, by the protection and creation of key habitats; and the maintenance of linked, coherent ecological networks, so that populations of species are not isolated and thereby made vulnerable to local extinction. Important ecological networks within North Somerset district include: the locally characteristic network of rhynes (wet ditches and their associated banks and marginal habitats) locally characteristic of the North Somerset Levels and Moors landscape; and which link to other key local wetland habitats such as reedbeds and wet woodlands (alder and willow), and to the watercourse networks/catchments of the district and adjoining counties. Such networks are important for species such as otter, water vole and kingfisher.

On higher ground, notably on the limestone ridges, there are extensive networks of tall native hedgerows and tree lines, which are significant in providing key habitat links between woodlands for woodland species such as dormouse, as well as providing navigation routes for bats from breeding and hibernation roosts to insect rich foraging habitats. It is essential that key habitats are linked to allow migration and interbreeding of populations of local key species. It should also be recognised that linear corridors of taller grassland and herbaceous vegetation (provided by road verge networks, cycle routes, public rights of way routes) are also important wildlife corridors for migration and dispersal. These locally characteristic habitats have contributed to the continued presence of rare species within the North Somerset District and need to be protected if this area is to continue to be a significant stronghold for many of these species.

Retained and enhanced habitats will ensure the continued functionality of essential ecosystem services, such as flood storage, flood attenuation and crop pollination (provided by local populations of insect pollinators).