

Draft Design Guide Supplementary Planning  
Document (SPD)

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

**Screening Determination Statement**

December 2023

# Habitat Regulations Assessment

## 1. Introduction

1.1 This statement sets out Warrington Borough Council's initial determination of the need for a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) in accordance with *Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017* (as amended)<sup>1</sup> and *European Directive 92/43/EEC (the Habitats Directive)* for the Draft Design Guide SPD.

## 2. Habitat Regulations Assessment Context

2.1 The requirement for a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) is set out within Regulation 63 the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017(as amended)<sup>2</sup> and Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive. Legislation requires an Appropriate Assessment of any plan or project to be undertaken to assess if it is likely to have significant adverse effects upon the integrity of internationally designated sites of nature conservation importance, now known as the national site network (formerly known as Natura 2000 sites).

2.2 The Habitats Directive is transposed into English legislation through the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) published in November 2017.

2.3 European Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna – the 'Habitats Directive' provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. The national site network objectives are to:

- maintain or, where appropriate, restore habitats and species listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive to a favourable conservation status (FCS).
- contribute to ensuring, in their area of distribution, the survival and reproduction of wild birds and securing compliance with the overarching aims of the Wild Birds Directive<sup>3</sup>.

2.4 The Warrington Local Plan 2021/22-2038/39 has been subject to an HRA assessment process undertaken by AECOM. The HRA has been developed over a number of years in parallel to the drafting of the Local Plan and hence has fully assessed the impacts of the Plan. An assessment was undertaken for the first Regulation 19 Local Plan consultation in 2019<sup>4</sup>. An updated assessment<sup>5</sup> was undertaken to accompany the UPSVLP 2021 (The Draft Local Plan). This assessment included an assessment of

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<sup>1</sup> [Changes to the Habitats Regulations 2017 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-habitats-regulations-2017)

<sup>2</sup> [Changes to the Habitats Regulations 2017 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-habitats-regulations-2017)

<sup>3</sup> [Changes to the Habitats Regulations 2017 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-habitats-regulations-2017)

<sup>4</sup> [Habitat Regulations Assessment - March 2019](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Updated Habitat Regulations Assessment - August 2021 \(warrington.gov.uk\)](https://www.warrington.gov.uk/updates/updated-habitat-regulations-assessment-august-2021)

in combination effects taking into account other plans and projects as well as Local Plan site allocations, policies and the impact of the plan as a whole. A further updated version of the Warrington Local Plan HRA Report was produced in December 2021 in order to take account of comments made on the HRA during the Regulation 19 consultation on the Draft Local Plan (the UPSVLP 2021)<sup>6</sup>. The Warrington Local Plan 2021/22-38/39 was also subject to a final HRA assessment produced by AECOM (March 2023) at the Main Modifications Stage<sup>7</sup>.

- 2.5 The purpose of a HRA is to assess the impacts of a land-use plan against the conservation objectives of the national network of sites (formerly known as Natura 2000 Sites). The assessment must determine whether the plan would adversely affect the integrity of the site in terms of its nature conservation objectives. Where negative effects are identified other options should be examined to avoid any potential damaging effects.

### **3. Draft Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)**

- 3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines SPDs as documents, which add further detail to the policies in the Development Plan. As SPDs do not have the same status as policies contained within the Development Plan, they are not subject to independent examination.
- 3.2 The Council adopted its latest Design and Construction SPD in October 2010. The SPD sets out how the Council will seek to secure the many wider benefits of design in new developments across the Borough.
- 3.3 Since the initial adoption in 2010, several local key documents have come forward, including other new SPDs and the new Local Plan. National planning guidance and building regulations have also been updated, and Warrington has seen numerous developments, of differing scales and uses, come forward across the borough.
- 3.4 To address changes in statutory regulations, best practice guidance and Warrington's built environment, the Design and Construction SPD requires a thorough review and revision. It is proposed that the revised document will be prepared as "The Warrington Design Guide". This also reflects the changes to national policy highlighting the importance of good design, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2021); the Design: Process and Tools National Planning Practice Guidance; the National Design Guide 2021, and the National Model Design Code 2021.
- 3.5 The aims of the updated Design Guide SPD are to:
- Set the benchmark for the quality of the built environment and public realm in upcoming developments across the borough.

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<sup>6</sup> [Matter 1 - Habitat Regulation Assessment Issues Revised HRA \(Dec 2021\) \(warrington.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Warrington Local Plan HRA Main Mods HRA](#)

- Provide design principles for developments across the borough, based on quality design and sustainable growth principles.
- Reflect the aspirations and requirements of the Local Plan and other SPDs.
- Provide a strategy for the reviewing and updating of accompanying guidance documents, to ensure a consistent and clear suite of public information.

The proposed Warrington Design Guide SPD will:

- Serve as the primary point of reference for applicants, agents, design teams and planning professionals.
- Outline concise and robust guidance and design principles for developments across the borough.
- Direct design teams to relevant policy guidance and wider best practice documents.
- Ensure that developments demonstrate a holistic approach to the climate emergency.
- Include guidance for design teams to create thorough and robust design codes to accompany outline planning applications.
- Support the positive engagement of partners, developers, businesses, residents and other stakeholders.
- Consolidate existing and emerging design guidance currently contained in separate Council documents to ensure a holistic approach to Warrington's design requirements.

3.6 The Warrington Local Plan 2021/22-2038/39 is the “parent DPD”, which has already been subject to Habitats Regulation Assessment, prior to its adoption on 04<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

3.7 The Draft Design Guide SPD will supplement the following Local Plan (2021/22-2038/39) Policies:

- DEV2 (Meeting Warrington's Housing Needs);
- GB1 (Warrington's Green Belt);
- TC1 (Town Centre and Surrounding Area);
- INF1 (Sustainable Travel and Transport);
- INF3 (Utilities, Telecommunications and Broadband);
- INF4 (Community Facilities);
- DC1 (Warrington's Places)
- DC5 (Open Spaces, Sport and Recreation Provision)
- DC6 (Quality of Place)
- ENV2 (Flood Risk and Water Management)
- ENV7 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development)
- ENV8 (Environmental and Amenity Protection)

- 3.8 The SPD does not introduce new policy or affect the location or amount of new development proposed. It merely expands upon the policies referred to above.
- 3.9 It will be used, as a material consideration, to inform Development Management decisions, for development on sites allocated through the Warrington Local Plan 2021/22-38/39 and through the planning application process (for smaller sites not identified in the Local Plan).
- 3.10 The principle of development on sites will be determined through the Local Plan and through the planning application process (for smaller sites not identified in the Local Plan). All of the site allocation policies have been subject to HRA, as part of the HRA process of the Local Plan. In addition, Policy DC4 (Ecological Network), which has also been subject to HRA, sets out more detailed requirements in relation to national site network sites and supporting habitats and to planning application stage site-specific HRA where relevant.

#### **4. Initial Screening Determination**

- 4.1 The Draft Design Guide SPD will merely supplement policies of the adopted Warrington Local Plan 2021/22–2038/39 (adopted by Full Council on 04th December 2023), which have already been subject to SA/SEA and HRA, through the Local Plan process.
- 4.2 Therefore, it is the opinion of Warrington Borough Council that the Draft Design Guide SPD is not likely to have a significant effect on any sites in the national sites network, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.
- 4.3 Accordingly, no “appropriate assessment” is required to be made under Regulations 63, 64 and 65 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) before the Council decides to undertake, or give any consent, permission, or other authorisation for this SPD.
- 4.4 This initial screening determination will also be reviewed and updated, if required, once responses from the statutory consultation have been received and considered (including the three statutory consultees), as part of the iterative screening process.