

# **Habitats Regulations Assessment (Screening) of the Trafford Council Civic Quarter Area Action Plan**

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 European protected sites are of exceptional importance for the conservation of important species and natural habitats. The purpose of Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) of land use plans is to ensure that protection of the integrity of European protected sites is an integral part of the planning process at a regional and local level.

Article 6(3) of the European Habitats Directive dealing with the conservation of European protected sites states that:

*‘Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, shall be subject to assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after it is ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.’*

The Trafford Council Civic Quarter Area action Plan is regarded as a Plan which is considered to have some potential to have significant effect on one or more European protected site and should therefore be subject to assessment.

- 1.2 Habitats Regulation Assessments can be seen as having a number of discrete stages

- Stage 1 - Screening
- Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment
- Stage 3 – Assessment of Alternatives
- Stage 4 – Assessment where no alternatives are available

This document summarises Stage 1 of the Habitats Regulation Assessment process and contributes (in part) to the fulfilment of the statutory duty of Trafford Council as regards Article 6(3). That is, it is an Opinion on whether the Civic Quarter Area Action Plan may have a significant effect on the special interest of any European designated protected sites.

### 1.3 Stage 1 – Screening

The purpose of the Screening stage of the HRA process is to initially identify the risk or the possibility of significant adverse effects on a European site which could undermine the achievement of a site's conservation objectives and which therefore require further detailed examination through an appropriate assessment. If risks which might undermine a site's conservation objectives can clearly be ruled out (based on the consideration of objective information), a proposal will have no likely significant effect (LSE) and no appropriate assessment will be needed.

In order for a Plan to be screened out of the HRA process a conclusion must be made 'beyond reasonable scientific doubt' that the plan will not have an LSE on the Natura 2000 site or its qualifying features.

Case law has established in relation to screening that -

- An effect is likely if it 'cannot be excluded on the basis of objective information' (Waddenzee C127-02 ∞ 45). This requires consideration and a conclusion made against known and presented data/survey or results/scientific evidence (e.g. literature review).
- An effect is significant if it 'is likely to undermine the conservation objectives' [of the European protected site (Waddenzee (C127-02 ∞ 48)]. This excludes from consideration other impacts not related to the qualifying features and their conservation objectives.
- In undertaking a screening assessment for likely significant effects 'it is not that significant effects are probable, a risk is sufficient, but there must

be credible evidence (see above) that there is ‘a real, rather than a hypothetical, risk’ Boggis v Natural England & Waveney District Council. This refines the understanding of the ‘precautionary principle’ as it applies to the Habitats Regulations.

- The Sweetman (case C258-11) also offers some simple guidance that the screening step ‘operates merely as a trigger’, in order to progress to further assessment stages through the process.

#### 1.4 **Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment**

In 2017 the decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union (People over Wind, case C323/17) concluded that it was not appropriate within the Screening Stage to consider measures that would mitigate for impacts on the qualifying or designated features of the Natura 2000 site. This ruling has resulted in an update to the Habitats Regulations 2017 as they have been translated into UK domestic legislation.

In a Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment, evidence and detail should be considered which can demonstrate that a Plan including any embedded measures or additional mitigation can result in a conclusion that there would be no ‘adverse effect on integrity’ (AEOI), when considering a Natura 2000 site’s conservation objectives.

In applying the Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment the relevant competent Authority – in this case the Local Authority concerned - must also consider whether there is a relevant planning mechanism (which may apply at a different level of the planning hierarchy) which can secure the necessary mitigation via either conditions or obligations.

In the case of a high level Plan the level of detail in land use plans concerning developments that will be permitted under the Plan at some time in the future is rarely sufficient to allow the fullest quantification of potential adverse effects. It is therefore necessary to be cognisant of the fact that HRAs for plans can be tiered, with assessments being undertaken with increasing

specificity at lower tiers. This is in line with DCLG guidance and court rulings that the level of detail of the assessment, whilst meeting the relevant requirements of the Habitats Regulations, should be 'appropriate' to the level of plan or project that it addresses.

Government guidance says:

*"The scope and content of an appropriate assessment will depend on the nature, location, duration and scale of the proposed plan or project and the interest features of the relevant site. 'Appropriate' is not a technical term. It indicates that an assessment needs to be proportionate and sufficient to support the task of the competent authority in determining whether the plan or project will adversely affect the integrity of the site."*

That is, the Plan must make every effort to ensure that no developments included in the Plan will not cause harm to the special nature conservation interest of European sites. But where some doubt remains as to whether harm will occur the plan must show that sufficient safeguards will be in place in other levels of the planning hierarchy to ensure that no harm will be caused to the special interest of European sites.

A precautionary approach should always be taken.

The advice of Advocate-General Kokott to the European Court of Justice (9th June 2005, Case C-6/04) is relevant. She commented that:

*"It would ...hardly be proper to require a greater level of detail in preceding plans [rather than planning applications] or the abolition of multi-stage planning and approval procedures so that the assessment of implications can be concentrated on one point in the procedure. Rather, adverse effects on areas of conservation must be assessed at every relevant stage of the procedure to the extent possible on the basis of the precision of the Plan. This*



*assessment is to be updated with increasing specificity in subsequent stages of the procedure”*

## 1.5 In Combination Assessment

The Habitats Regulations also include a requirement for an assessment not only for a Plan alone but also for consideration of any LSE in combination with other projects or plans. An ‘in combination’ assessment should be undertaken for any impact which is shown to have an effect even where it might be considered ‘*de minimis*’ for the plan in isolation. In the application of the in combination test projects or plans are also considered to include reasonably foreseeable proposals (RFP), which may include projects, plans or schemes which have not concluded their passage through the development planning process, whether they are in full or outline or include other strategic planning documents.

The implication of ‘in combination’ considerations for a plan with the scale of the Civic Quarter Area Action Plan may be profound, since a very wide range of other plans and proposals may be influenced by the operation of the Action Plan, and *vice versa*. It would be practically impossible for a detailed analysis to be undertaken of every possible plan or proposal which may be influenced by the Action Plan in isolation. Instead, this Screening Assessment has taken a high level precautionary approach and assumed that the impacts arising from the operation of the Plan are likely to result in in-combination effects.

This precautionary principle particularly relates to impacts which may arise from air pollution.

## 1.6 The Competent Authority – identification and roles

Under the terms of the Habitats Regulations the role of the competent authority is the body which undertakes the assessment of likely significant effects (LSE). This is usually the Local Planning Authority in relation to the preparation of Plans or the consideration of planning applications, but may also be another statutory body who has authority and powers to permit, consent or licence activities (e.g. the Environment Agency).

Trafford Council is 'the competent authority' in this case.

Natural England as the statutory government advisor in these matters also has a role in the process to ensure that the Plan will not have any likely significant harmful effects on European sites.

A recent Judicial Review (R (Preston) v Cumbria County Council [2019] EWHC 1362) concerning a project level HRA ruled that a Local Planning Authority cannot rely on the future decisions and assessment of another permitting competent authority within their own conclusions on the Screening (Stage 1) and must give consideration of sufficient securing measures (Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment) at the time of their own determination of an application for development.

Government guidance in this regard which seems relevant to plans, outline proposals or operations which might require an additional consent/permit from a third party indicates: -

*“a competent authority is permitted to grant a plan or project consent which leaves the applicant free to determine subsequently certain parameters relating to the construction phase, only if that authority is certain that the consent includes conditions that are strict enough to guarantee that those parameters will not adversely affect the integrity of the site.”*

While this Plan, and the HRA, are at a high tier of the planning process, this is important when considering any necessary mitigation for identified effects.

## 1.7 The Greater Manchester Ecology Unit

The Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU), as the specialist ecological adviser to Trafford Council, has prepared this Screening Opinion. Natural England and the JNCC were consulted for information on the conservation objectives and favourable condition tables for the European Sites concerned (the information is summarised below).

GMEU ecologists, who are familiar with the European sites concerned and their special interests, reviewed the ecological information for the site. The key vulnerabilities and sensitivities of the European sites concerned are well understood by GMEU allowing for an informed assessment of the possible effects of the Plan, and any specific aims, objectives and policies contained in the Plan.

GMEU has prepared a number of HRAs for District-level Local Plans and Strategies, prepares HRAs for individual planning applications across GM and Lancashire on a regular basis and is often consulted on HRAs prepared by others.

## 1.8 **Scope of the Assessment**

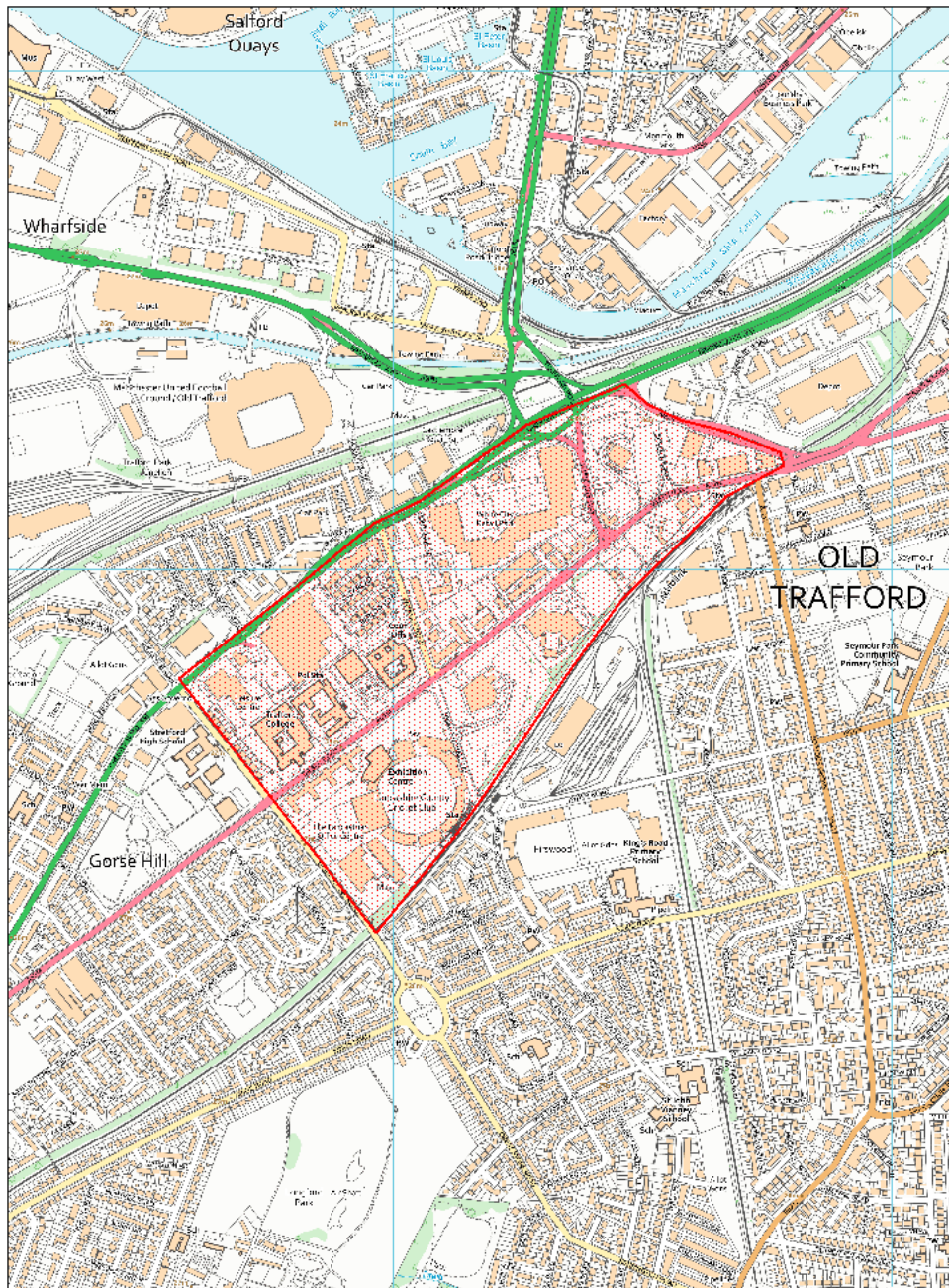
This report has Screened the Civic Quarter Area Action Plan (Regulation 19 version). Further assessments may be required for future iterations of the Plan.

## **2 Description of the Plan**

- 2.1 The Plan being Screened is the Trafford Council Civic Quarter Area Action Plan (2021).

The Plan refers to a key area of central Trafford, close to Manchester and Salford City Centre. The development of the Civic Quarter area has been a long-standing regeneration priority for Trafford Council. Its strategic location provides an opportunity that can act as a catalyst for the regeneration and renewal of not only the Civic Quarter but also the wider northern Trafford area, building on the area's existing unique opportunities, including the two world renowned sporting institutions of Manchester United Football Club (MUFC) and Lancashire Cricket Club (LCC) and the Town Hall.

Fig 1 Location and extent of the area included in the Plan (boundary in red)



**Fig 2 Location and Extent of the area included in the Plan**  
*(aerial view, 2020)*



The HRA Screening exercise examines the issues being considered at this stage of Plan production and identifies any of these issues which may need in future to be subject to further Screening and Assessment for their potential impacts on European designated sites.

- 2.2 The Plan area is already highly developed as an urban centre with a long history of development. It includes large sports venues, residential development, civic buildings, educational establishments, and retail and commercial concerns. It is crossed by very busy main trunk roads and railways. Semi-natural habitats are very limited in extent.

### 3 The European designated sites concerned

- 3.1 This Screening exercise has first screened European protected sites in the North West of England to decide which of these sites are most likely to be affected by development in the Civic Quarter. When assessing the impact of a Plan on European protected sites it is important to consider the impact on sites not only within the administrative area covered by The Plan but also those which fall outside The Plan boundary, as these could still potentially be affected by the implementation of the Plan.
- 3.2 In carrying out this initial screening process the Assessment has considered the main possible sources of effects on the European sites arising from the Plan, possible pathways to the European sites and the effects on possible sensitive receptors in the European sites. Only if there is an identifiable source, a pathway and a receptor is there likely to be a significant effect.
- 3.3 Possible sources and pathways for effects arising from development implemented as a result of Plan adoption, and used in the screening of European sites, were considered to include:
- Land take (direct habitat loss)
  - Cultivation (agriculture)
  - Diffuse and localised air pollution including dust and odour
  - Noise disturbance
  - Light spill or shading
  - Human presence/disturbance
  - Emissions to water (surface or ground water) containing pollutants or sediments
  - Ground water depression or flow interception
  - Decrease in surface water run-off e.g. through interception in a void
  - Increase in surface water run-off
  - Introduction and spread of invasive species
  - Effects on functionally linked land\*



- Changes to predator/prey relationships

More specific sources of harm to particular designated sites are listed in the summary descriptions of screened in European sites provided in Appendix 1.

*\* Areas of land or sea outside of the boundary of a European site may be important ecologically in supporting the populations for which the site has been designated or classified. Occasionally impacts to such habitats can have a significant effect upon the species interest of such sites, where these habitats are considered to be 'functionally linked' to the site.*

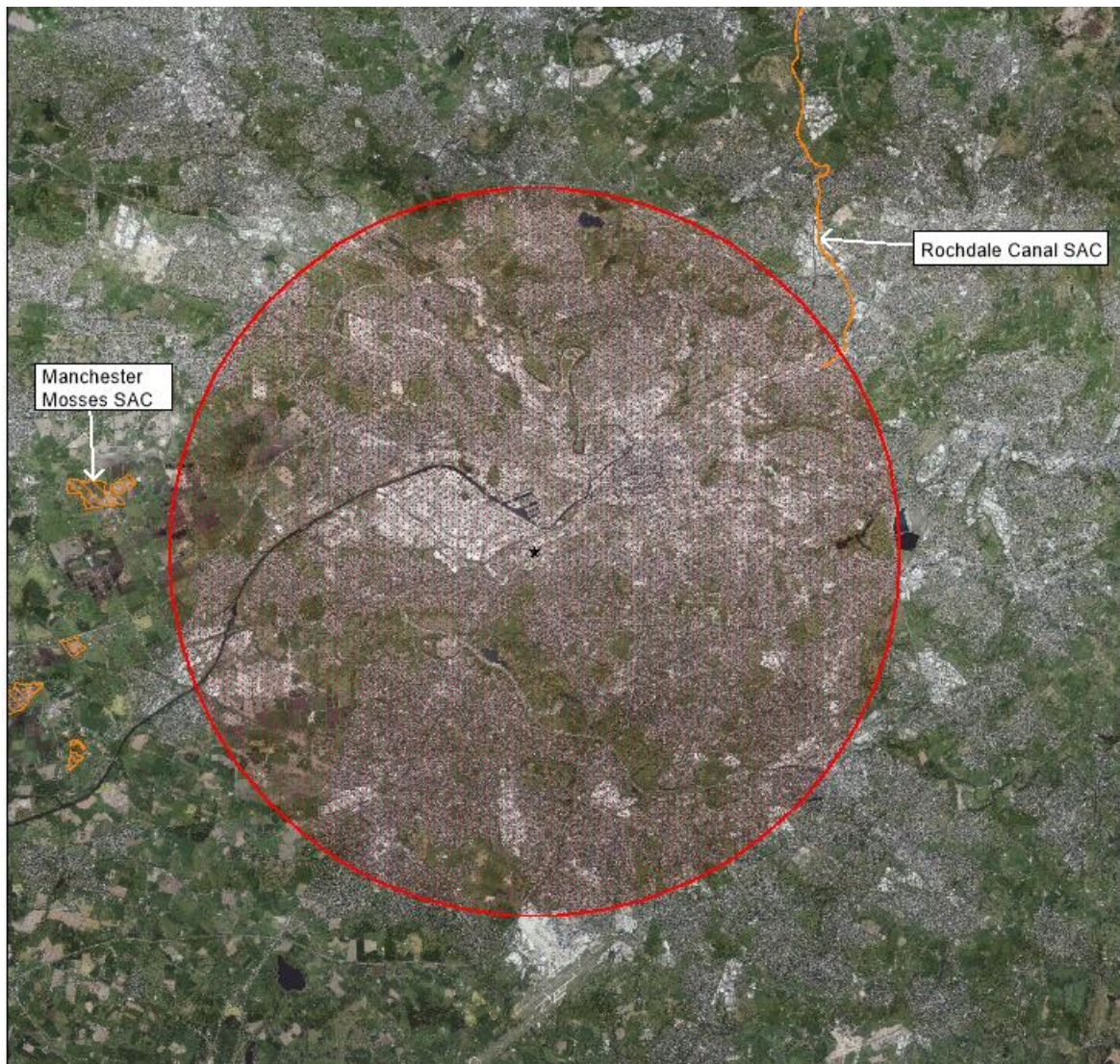
- 3.4 Natural England publishes SSSI 'Impact Risk Zones' (IRZs) providing guidance on the types of development which should be considered for their possible impacts on SSSIs, and which impacts should be considered. All European designated sites are also designated as SSSIs. IRZs have also been taken into account when screening European sites which could be affected by the Plan.

The only IRZ which the Plan boundary includes is for potential impacts arising from large-scale agricultural operations, and large scale general combustion processes such as energy from waste facilities, on the Manchester Mosses SAC. The Plan does not include proposals for either of these types of operations.

- 3.5 The closest designated site to the Plan area is the Rochdale Canal Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is some 8.8km from the Plan area. However, the Rochdale Canal is separated from the Plan area by extensive, established built development, including Manchester City Centre. There is no apparent hydrological connection between the Plan area and the Canal.
- 3.6 Parts of the Manchester Mosses Special Area of Conservation (SAC) are within 15km of the Plan area. The Mosses are separated from the Plan area by extensive, established built development, including the large Trafford Park

industrial and commercial area, and by the Manchester Ship Canal, a major east-west waterway.

**Fig 3 Location of designated sites in relation to the Plan area. The red hatch is a 10km buffer around the centre of the Plan area**



- 3.5 Given the distances involved, it is clear that the Plan will not cause any direct harm to European designated sites; the Plan will not result in direct land-take of any European sites. Since the Plan is a high-level, large-scale strategic plan intended to influence a large urban area, the main impacts on European sites are likely to be *diffuse* and *cumulative*.

That is, it is considered that certain potential diffuse or indirect sources of harm will be more likely to result from the Plan than more direct sources of harm.

These sources are considered to include –

- Diffuse air pollution,
- diffuse water pollution *and*
- recreational pressures.

3.6 Taking the above the above into account, the following European protected sites were initially Screened In -

1. Rochdale Canal Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
2. Manchester Mosses Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Other European protected sites were considered too distant to fall under the influence of the Plan, or with no apparent pathways for measurable effects to be discernible.

## 4 Initial Screening of potential Likely Significant Effects (LSE)

### 4.1 Given -

- the distances of the European sites concerned from the Plan area,
- the degree of separation of the sites from the Plan area,
- the current built up nature of the Plan area and
- the special nature conservation interests of the European sites concerned,

the following impacts can be effectively screened out of the assessment as being very unlikely to be caused through the operation of the Plan, or any effects will be so diffuse or diluted so as to be *nugatory* (that is, too small to be distinguished from background)

- Cultivation
- Direct Land take
- Noise disturbance
- Ground water depression or flow interception
- Decrease in surface water run-off e.g. through interception in a void
- Changes to predator/prey relationships
- Light spill or shading
- Introduction and spread of invasive species
- Loss of functionally linked land
- Localised air pollution

### 4.2 The following impacts have been initially screened in to the assessment as considered to have the potential to cause likely significant effects –

- Diffuse air pollution
- Human presence/disturbance
- Emissions to water (surface or ground water) containing pollutants

The following brief discussion of these impacts is included to give an understanding of the rationale for the conclusions reached in the subsequent Screening process.

### 4.3 Air Pollution

The main types of air pollutants likely to have an adverse effect on ecological sites are:

- Oxides of Nitrogen (NO<sub>x</sub>)
- Ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>)
- Dust (including particulates)
- Sulphur Dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>)
- Low level Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>)

*(Scott Wilson Ltd 2007)*

4.3.1 Of these NO<sub>x</sub> (nitrates) are considered to be the most likely to arise as a result of development controlled by the plan under consideration here. Dust and low level ozone only have effects very close to the source. Ammonia emissions are most closely associated with certain types of intensive agricultural production not identified as a significant land-use within the Plan area. The emissions of sulphur dioxide are most closely associated with certain industrial operations not in the scope of the Plan being assessed.

Nitrates can cause harm to habitats in two ways –

- Direct effects on species health, particularly to some plant species
- Favouring the growth of some plants (e.g. grasses) over others, leading to increased competition and simplified plant communities

The main sources of these pollutants are road traffic and industrial processes. The greatest damage caused by nitrate deposition occurs within 200 - 250 m of the source.

4.3.2 The Environment Agency has advised that levels of nitrate deposition arising from particular operations which are below 1% of the expected 'background' nitrate deposition levels can be regarded as insignificant when carrying out Appropriate Assessments, no matter what levels of nitrate are currently present on sites. But the European sites of concern to this Assessment are already exceeding nitrate levels which would be considered harmful to sensitive habitats on these sites (*source* Natural England and APIS), so any level of increased nitrate pollution, no matter how small, could be considered to be harmful. A precautionary approach has therefore been applied to the Screening process, bearing this fact in mind.

#### **4.4 Diffuse Water Pollution**

Pollutants of water courses can be highly mobile and can have discernible impacts on receptors (usually aquatic life) distant from the source. The most likely source of water pollution arising as a result of the Plan operation is the discharge of sewage to water courses.

#### **4.5 Recreational Pressures (Disturbance)**

The effects of significantly increased regional and sub-regional populations on recreational pressures on the north west's European protected sites has been considered in this Assessment because it is recognised that this could be an important harmful impact on the special interest of some European sites.

Recreational use of an internationally designated site has potential to:

- Cause damage through excessive erosion (trampling, wear and tear)
- Cause nutrient enrichment

- Cause disturbance to sensitive species, particularly nesting and overwintering birds
- Prevent appropriate management or exacerbate existing management difficulties

Different types of internationally designated sites are subject to different types of recreational pressures and have different vulnerabilities. The best studied effects of disturbance are concerned with birds, although even with birds studies across a wide range of species have shown that the effects from recreational disturbance can be complex. The outcomes of many of these studies therefore need to be treated with caution. For instance, the effect of disturbance is not necessarily correlated with the impact of disturbance, i.e. the most easily disturbed species are not necessarily those that will suffer the greatest impacts. It has been shown that, in some cases, the most easily disturbed birds simply move to other feeding sites if these are available, whilst others may remain (possibly due to an absence of alternative sites) and thus suffer greater impacts on their population. These facts have to be taken into account when attempting to predict the impacts of future recreational pressure on internationally designated sites, something that is particularly difficult when trying to assess the effects of a large-scale Plan.

As with diffuse water pollution effects, recreational pressures can also be (very) diffuse and it can therefore be difficult to accurately apportion any harmful impacts to a particular development. For example, increased recreational pressures on the Manchester Mosses may be caused by increases in the population of Trafford, but such pressures may also be caused by increases in national and even international visitors.

## 5 Screening

### 5.1 Air Pollution

The most likely source of air pollution arising from the operation of the Plan is pollution arising from road traffic emissions. The impact of road traffic emissions on natural habitats reduces quickly with increasing distance from the source. Generally, more than 250m from the source, emissions become too diluted and diffuse to have a significant impact on plant health.

The plant species for which the Rochdale Canal has been designated (*Luronium natans*) is not known to be particularly susceptible to air pollution effects, but habitats and species within the Manchester Mosses are known to be harmed by air pollutants emitted from road traffic. However, at its closest point, the Plan area is more than 10km from the Manchester Mosses SAC, and there are no direct road linkages between the site and the Mosses SAC.

The Plan area is already very built up, with long-standing development. The Plan does not aspire to a significant increase in population or traffic generation within and around the Plan area.

Rather, the Vision for the area is –

*“The creation of a new, diverse, resilient and vibrant mixed-use neighbourhood that builds on and maximises the existing opportunities in the area. It will have its own distinctive identity, allowing for the enhancement of heritage assets, providing a unique and attractive destination for the wider community, residents, businesses and visitors alike. High quality design, including sustainable design features, provision of green infrastructure and promotion of sustainable modes of transport will be at the heart of the area's development. New opportunities for work, leisure and play will be created in a high-quality setting, improving health and wellbeing and creating a sense of pride in the local area.”*

There are no direct road traffic links between the Plan area and the designated sites.

There are no plans for new roads within or around the Plan area.

The Plan promotes the use of sustainable transport and aims to reduce reliance on vehicular usage (Policy CQ4). Policy CQ4 will also require new developments to ‘demonstrate a positive contribution to air quality in the local area’.

The full text of Policy CQ4 states –

#### ***Sustainability and Climate Change***

*All development proposals within the AAP area should achieve the highest levels of energy and water efficiency that is practical and viable, and should maximise opportunities to incorporate sustainable design features where feasible.*



*All developers should demonstrate how their proposals meet all of the following criteria:*

- *Improve the pedestrian and cycle environment;*
- *Promote the use of sustainable transport modes;*
- *Reduce the reliance on vehicular usage;*
- *Incorporate sustainable drainage solutions;*
- *Make provision for the charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles;*
- *Increase site biodiversity and deliver biodiversity net gains;*
- *Demonstrate an actionable zero carbon plan, incorporating offsetting for both operational and embodied carbon over the first 60 years of the development; and*
- *Demonstrate a positive contribution to air quality in the local area*

5.1.1 It is therefore concluded that air pollution arising from the operation of the Plan will not cause any Likely Significant Effects on any European designated sites

## **5.2 Diffuse Water Pollution**

There are no apparent hydrological connections between the Plan area and any European designated sites.

The Plan area is already highly developed, and it is not envisaged that the regeneration of the area will cause any substantive increase in surface water runoff or foul water discharge. In fact, Policy CQ4 requires new development to incorporate sustainable drainage solutions.

5.2.1 It is concluded that water pollution arising from the operation of the Plan will not cause any Likely Significant Effects on any European designated sites.

## **5.3 Recreational Disturbance**

Harm could be caused to the Rochdale Canal SAC by an increase in canal boat traffic.

There is no water-borne connectivity between the Plan area and the Rochdale Canal, and the Canal is more than 8km from the Plan area.

The Plan area will include improved areas of greenspace and outdoor and indoor recreational opportunities. It is not envisaged that the regeneration of the Civic Quarter will cause any increase in the boat traffic on the Canal.

The Manchester Mosses SAC is more than 10km from the Plan area, with no direct connectivity. The Mosses are not developed as a recreational resource or a visitor destination, and the Mosses are not promoted as a local or regional recreational resource.

The Plan area will include improved areas of greenspace and recreational opportunities, and there are other significant recreational opportunities (both indoor and outdoor) within 5km of the Plan area.

- 5.3.1 It is concluded that recreational disturbance arising from the operation of the Plan will not cause any Likely Significant Effects on any European designated sites.

## 6 In-Combination Assessment

As previously stated, in the case of a high-level, large scale Plan covering a heavily developed, well-established urban area such as the Civic Quarter Area Action Plan, a very large number of other plans, strategies and projects could act in combination with the Plan and result in a likely significant effect on European sites where the plan operating in isolation would not. For in-combination effects to occur, it would need to have been established that the Plan being assessed would have at least a *de minimis* effect on European sites, too low for likely significant effects to occur but potentially working in combination to reach threshold levels above the *de minimis*.

In this case it has been established that the operation of the Civic Quarter Area Action Plan will not have any effects on any designated sites, even at a *de minimis* level.

Therefore, no cumulative effects will accrue.

## 7 Discussion and Conclusions

It has been concluded that the Trafford Council Civic Quarter Area Action Plan will not cause any Likely Significant Effects on any European designated sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.

The operation of Policy CQ4 will protect and enhance the natural environment.

## APPENDIX 1

### The Nature Conservation Interests of the “Screened In” European Sites

The following details are derived from information available from Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and from information held by GMEU

#### Rochdale Canal SAC

##### Description of the Rochdale Canal SAC

The Rochdale Canal SAC extends approximately 20 km from Littleborough at Ben Healey Bridge to Failsworth, passing through urban and industrialised parts of the Metropolitan Boroughs of Rochdale and Oldham and the intervening areas of agricultural land (mostly pasture). Water supplied to the Rochdale Canal in part arises from the Pennines. This water is acidic and relatively low in nutrients, while water from other sources is mostly high in nutrients. The aquatic flora of the canal is thus indicative of a mesotrophic waterbody (i.e. is moderately nutrient-rich) although there is evidence of some local enrichment. The canal continues through Failsworth and terminates at Castlefield in Manchester City, although this section of the canal is not included within the SAC.

##### Primary reason for designation of the Rochdale Canal as a European protected site

The Rochdale Canal supports a significant population of **floating water-plantain (*Luronium natans*)** in a botanically diverse waterplant community which also holds a wide range of pondweeds *Potamogeton* spp. The canal has predominantly mesotrophic water. This population of *Luronium* is representative of the formerly more widespread canal populations of north-west England, although the Rochdale Canal supports unusually dense populations of the plant.

The Site Conservation Objectives for the Rochdale Canal are to –

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of the qualifying species, and
- The distribution of the qualifying species within the site.

The main qualifying feature for the site is the presence of Floating water-plantain.

### **Floating water-plantain; description and ecological characteristics**

Floating water-plantain (*Luronium natans*) occurs in a range of freshwater situations, including nutrient-poor lakes in the uplands (mainly referable to 3130 Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the *Littorelletea uniflorae* and/or of the *Isoëto-Nanojuncetea*) and slowly-flowing lowland rivers, pools, ditches and canals that are moderately nutrient-rich.

*Luronium natans* occurs as two forms: in shallow water with floating oval leaves, and in deep water with submerged rosettes of narrow leaves. The plant thrives best in open situations with a moderate degree of disturbance, where the growth of emergent vegetation is held in check. Populations fluctuate greatly in size, often increasing when water levels drop to expose the bottom of the water body. Populations fluctuate from year to year, and at many sites records of *L. natans* have been infrequent, suggesting that only small populations occur, in some cases possibly as transitory colonists of the habitat. Populations tend to be more stable at natural sites than artificial ones, but approximately half of recent (post-1980) records are from canals and similar artificial habitats. Its habitat in rivers has been greatly reduced by channel-straightening, dredging and pollution, especially in lowland situations.

The operations that may damage the special interest of the SAC which have to be considered include:

- Application of pesticides
- Dredging
- Drainage, both within and outside the boundaries of the site
- Construction or removal of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hardstands, banks, ditches or other earthworks or the laying or removal of pipelines and cables
- Erection of permanent structures next to the Canal (shading)
- Diffuse air pollution
- Diffuse water pollution
- Increased boat movements (recreation)
- Climate change

## **Manchester Mosses SAC**

### **Description of the Manchester Mosses SAC**

Mossland formerly covered a very large part of low-lying Greater Manchester, Merseyside and southern Lancashire, and provided a severe obstacle to industrial and agricultural expansion. While most has been converted to agriculture or lost to development, several examples have survived as degraded raised bog, such as Astley & Bedford Mosses (Wigan), Risley Moss (Warrington) and Holcroft Moss (Warrington) on the Mersey floodplain. Their surfaces are now elevated above surrounding land due to shrinkage of the surrounding tilled land, and all except Holcroft Moss have been cut for peat at some time in the past. While past drainage has produced dominant purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*), bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and birch (*Betula*) spp. scrub or woodland, wetter pockets have enabled the peat-forming species to survive. Recent rehabilitation management on all three sites has caused these to spread.

### **Primary Reason For Designation of the Manchester Mosses SAC**

The site supports degraded bog still capable of natural regeneration (JNCC code 7120), which has the potential to be restored to active raised bog (JNCC code 7110).

SAC sites have been selected on a site-by-site basis and according to the Interpretation manual of European habitats (European Commission DG Environment 1999); "where the hydrology can be repaired and where, with appropriate rehabilitation management, there is a reasonable expectation of re-establishing vegetation with peat-forming capability within 30 years".

#### Conservation Objective of the Manchester Mosses

The Conservation Objective for the Manchester Mosses SAC is to maintain the bog habitat, subject to natural change, in favourable condition (Natural England 2018).

On this site favourable condition requires the maintenance of the extent of each designated habitat type. Maintenance implies restoration if evidence from a condition assessment suggests a reduction in extent. A series of site-specific standards defining favourable condition has been produced by Natural England. However these relate to management of the habitats on the site and are not particularly applicable to assessing the effects of thematic policies in the Plan on the SAC. Therefore in order to consider these potential impacts the operations that may damage the special interest of the SAC have to be considered. These include:

- Cultivation
- Grazing
- Mowing or cutting
- Application of manure, fertilisers or lime
- Application of pesticides
- Burning
- Drainage, both within and outside the boundaries of the site
- Extraction of minerals including peat, topsoil and subsoil
- Construction or removal of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hardstands, banks, ditches or other earthworks or the laying or removal of pipelines and cables
- Erection of permanent structures
- Use of vehicles likely to damage the vegetation
- Pollution including atmospheric pollutants and NOx

- Recreational activities
- Diffuse water pollution
- Climate change

(Adapted from information available from Natural England)



**END**