

# **Habitats Regulations Assessment - Initial Screening Opinion on the Impact of Trafford Council's DPD1 Core Strategy (Preferred Options) on European Protected Sites**

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# **HABITATS REGULATION ASSESSMENT - INITIAL SCREENING OPINION ON DPD1 CORE STRATEGY (PREFERRED OPTIONS)**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 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 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.'*

- 1.2 The purpose of Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) of land use plans is to ensure that protection of the integrity of European sites is a part of the planning process at a regional and local level. 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

- 1.3 This document comprises Stage 1 of the Habitats Regulation Assessment process and contributes to the fulfilment of the Council's statutory duty as regards Article 6(3); that is, it is a Screening Opinion on whether or not Trafford Council's DPD1 Core Strategy (Preferred Options), hereafter referred to as 'the Plan', may have an impact on the special interest of any European designated protected sites and therefore whether the plan needs to undergo further Screening Opinions or more comprehensive Appropriate Assessments (Stage 2) as the Plan develops.

- 1.4 It should be noted that this document does not comprise a full Appropriate Assessment (Stage 2) under the terms of the Regulations. It is a screening opinion concerned with reaching an opinion as to whether the Plan needs to go forward for further, more detailed Assessment of impacts. In addition it is noted that the Plan being assessed is at the early stages of development and further screening opinions may be required as the Plan develops

- 1.5 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 interest, 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.

## **2 Brief description of the Plan**

- 2.1 The Plan is the Preferred Options for the Core Strategy of Trafford's Local Development Framework, DPD1, and (draft).

The Plan will:

- (i) Outline the Council's vision for Trafford up to the year 2023 and how managing the change necessary to achieve this vision is envisaged.
  - (ii) Provide a strategic framework against which decisions about the use of land can be planned.
- 2.2 The Preferred Options for Trafford are expressed as 3 Spatial Options, which outline three different scenarios for the future of the Borough. These are:
  - (i) Option 1 – Inner Area/Selected Regeneration Area Priority Strategy
  - (ii) Option 2 – Inner Area/Wider Regeneration Area Priority Strategy
  - (iii) Option 3 – Inner Area Priority Strategy
- 2.3 Part C of the Plan outlines the Council's preferred Core Policy Directions as well as preferred Development Management Policy Directions.
- 2.4 For the purposes of this Screening Opinion the Plan is not complete; an opinion is being sought at an early stage of Plan production to ensure that the requirements to meet terms of the Regulations regarding Habitats Regulation Assessment can be properly planned for.

### **3 Identification of European designated sites concerned**

- 3.1 This Screening Opinion considered the suite of European sites assessed within the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) Habitat Regulations Assessment (North West Regional Assembly January 2007 - Table 2.1 and Figures 2.1 & 2.2). Column 1 of Appendix 1 shows **all** sites that were considered within the RSS. This is a useful starting point for the screening opinion of this document's HRA in order that all sites are considered, but that a number of sites can be screened out of future consideration.
- 3.2 The HRA of the RSS specifically sets out to investigate the infrastructure requirements of the Region's 'developmental policies' as they relate to environmental resource demands (e.g. water supply, treatment of effluents and energy supply). It also seeks to investigate the impacts of likely products of development (e.g. increased traffic, atmospheric pollutants - principally car/plane emissions, water borne pollutants – waste products of production and residues of sewage treatment and visitor pressure) on the European sites. The RSS identifies sites that are susceptible to either strategic impacts or 'in combination' impacts. Column 3 of Appendix 1 shows the sites within Greater Manchester, which may be impacted by developmental and/or resource impacts. For example; the River Eden (SAC) does not provide a water resource for Greater Manchester districts, whereas the River Derwent & Bassenthwaite Lake (SAC) can potentially supply water to some districts. Alternatively, sewage and waste water disposal from Greater Manchester does not enter the Solway estuary, but may enter the Dee and/or Liverpool Bay and therefore impact the European sites within these areas.
- 3.3 Within any assessment there is a relationship between the source of any given impact and the potential magnitude of any impacts on distant European sites (i.e. those further from the administrative boundary of the Greater Manchester Districts). This document therefore has given consideration to potential impact pathways to these distant sites, the European sites' vulnerabilities and sensitivities and their proximity to Trafford Council. To assist in this the Policy Assessment and Tables within the RSS have been used along with GMEU's knowledge base.
- 3.4 For the purposes of this HRA therefore, sites in Column 3 with no 'N' are not considered further unless they are within Greater Manchester or in close proximity to the county. Sites identified with a 'P?' will be considered at a strategic level by the development of

the HRA for the North West within the RSS. These sites will not be considered further within this document unless they can be impacted directly by proposals under consideration within Greater Manchester and Trafford.

- 3.5 Finally, European sites, which occur in close proximity or within the administrative boundaries of the Greater Manchester Districts, have also been identified (Columns 4 & 5 respectively and Figure 1). Column 4 identifies proximal sites where any likely significant effects will occur from distal impacts, which are not specifically encompassed by impacts considered in the strategic context of the RSS. For the purposes of this document, these have been termed non-strategic distal impacts. Appendix 2 details the interest of proximal European sites and an initial view on likely impacts from projects or proposals within Greater Manchester.
- 3.6 Column 5 selects those sites which occur within a Greater Manchester district so can either be impacted by direct habitat loss and/or non-strategic distal impacts. Appendix 3 gives the details of the interest of these sites and potential threats to the site's ecological interest.
- 3.7 Given the comments above projects and Plans within Greater Manchester will be screened against a selection of sites taken from columns 4 & 5 of the Appendix.
- 3.8 Appendix 2 briefly describes the sites identified within Column 4 and their vulnerabilities and threats (as taken from JNCC web site). Following consideration of these threats, it is considered unlikely that the Plan currently under consideration will have an impact on the interest of these European sites, from non-strategic distal impacts.
- 3.9 **There are no European sites within the administrative boundary of Trafford Council and therefore, direct impacts such as habitat loss will not occur.**
- 3.10 This Screening Opinion considers the effects of the Plan primarily on European designated sites that lie within or in close proximity of Greater Manchester. These are:

Rochdale Canal SAC  
Peak District Moors SPA (South Pennine Moors Phase 1)  
South Pennine Moors Phase 2 (SPA)  
South Pennine Moors SAC  
Manchester Mosses SAC

## **Rochdale Canal**

The Rochdale Canal supports a significant population of floating water-plantain *Luronium natans* in a botanically diverse water plant community, which also holds a wide range of pondweeds *Potamogeton* spp.

The conservation objective for the European interest of the SAC is to maintain, in favourable condition, the habitats for the population of Floating water-plantain (*Luronium natans*).

Operations that may damage the special interest of the canal include operations and activities that affect the growth and survival of *Luronium natans*. These are

- Dredging of the canal
- Draining of the canal
- Pollution of the canal
- Shading of the canal
- Increased boat traffic using the canal
- Use of herbicides in or adjacent to the canal

Given the distance of the canal from Trafford (over 7km) and the lack of identified pathways linking it to Trafford, it is not envisaged that the Plan would have any impacts on the interest of the SAC and the site has therefore been screened out of further HRA assessments for Trafford.

### South Pennine Moors SAC/SPA

This very large site forms part of the Southern Pennines lying between Ilkley in the north and the Peak District National Park boundary in the south. The majority of the site is within West Yorkshire but it also covers areas of Lancashire, Greater Manchester and North Yorkshire.

The conservation objectives for the South Pennine Moors are as follows:

to maintain\*, in favourable condition, the habitats for the populations of Annex 1 species<sup>1</sup> of European importance, with particular reference to:

- blanket mire
- dwarf shrub heath
- acid grassland
- gritstone edges

<sup>1</sup>golden plover, merlin, short-eared owl

to maintain\*, in favourable condition, the:

- blanket bog (active only)
- dry heaths
- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*
- transition mires and quaking bogs
- old oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles

\* Maintenance implies restoration if the feature is not currently in favourable condition.

Operations that may damage the European special interest of the SAC include

- Cultivation
- Grazing
- Mowing or cutting
- Application of manure, fertilisers or lime
- Application of pesticides
- Burning
- Drainage
- 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
- Recreational activities
- Agricultural intensification leading to loss of bird feeding areas outside the designated site

Given the distance of the South Pennine Moors from Trafford (nearly 18km at its closest point), it is not envisaged that the majority of the proposals would have any impact on the interest of the SAC/SPA. It is possible that the development proposals outlined in the three options of the Plan could result in increased air pollution damaging the interest of the SAC. However, since the level of development has been set in the RSS, these impacts will have already been considered strategically. Any non-strategic impacts, such

as new infrastructure to support the proposed development, will need to be investigated further as the LDF develops.

## **Manchester Mosses**

The primary reason for the designation of the Manchester Mosses SAC is that the site supports degraded bog still capable of natural regeneration which has the potential to be restored to active raised bog. It incorporates three disparate sites Astley & Bedford Mosses (Wigan), Risley Moss (Warrington) and Holcroft Moss (Warrington) on the Mersey floodplain. The latter two are closest to Trafford being approximately 3km away but separated hydrologically by the Manchester Ship Canal.

Operations that may damage the European special interest of the SAC 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

Given the distance of the Manchester Mosses SAC from Trafford and the lack of identified pathways linking it to Trafford, it is not envisaged that the majority of the proposals would have any impact on the interest of the SAC/SPA. However it is possible that an increase in housing numbers outlined in the Plan could lead to an increase in recreational pressure on the SAC. The development proposals outlined in the three options of the Plan could also result in increased air pollution damaging the interest of the SAC. However, since the level of development has been set in the RSS, these impacts will have already been considered strategically. Any non-strategic impacts, such as new infrastructure to support the proposed development, will need to be investigated further as the LDF develops.

## **4 Consideration of 'In Combination' Effects with Other Plans and Proposals**

- 4.1 The Habitats Regulation Assessment must consider the likely significant impact of the Plan in relation to other proposals and Plans within other administrative authorities and statutory organisations (e.g. Environment Agency, United Utilities and other Local Authorities) and in combination with the identified impacts of those Plans.
- 4.2 It can be considered that this will fall into two categories; those associated with regional strategic proposals and those in relation to more localised 'in-combination' effects with either adjacent Authorities or geographically localised plans from other statutory agencies.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that the Regional Spatial Strategy will consider the 'in-combination' effects of the Region's projects and Plans at a strategic level (Entec January 2007).
- 4.4 It is considered that due to the types of European sites in adjacent Local Authority Metropolitan Districts to Trafford, as discussed earlier in this document, there is unlikely to be any non-strategic 'in-combination' effects. This view will be confirmed within later iterations of this document as considered necessary.

## **5 Overall Conclusions and Recommendations for further Screening/ Appropriate Assessment**

- 5.1 As regards the impact of the Plan on the special interests of the five European sites, there is a need to reconsider this HRA assessment once spatial allocations have been made.
- 5.2 In-combination effects may also need to be reconsidered as discussed at Section 4 above.
- 5.3 While Core Policy Direction R1 currently deals with biodiversity issues across Trafford and to a certain extent, Greater Manchester, it is recommended that the wording of the Policy refers to potential impacts on European Sites *outside* of Trafford.
- 5.4 Given the distance of the European Sites concerned from Trafford, it is considered likely that it is the scale and type of development as a whole that will be the determining factor for any impact of development on the special interest of the European Sites, rather than the spatial location of this development within the borough. No changes to the spatial options are therefore recommended at this stage.



**APPENDIX 1: - NORTH WEST REGIONAL EUROPEAN SITES CONSIDERED WITHIN GREATER MANCHESTER SCREENING OPINIONS (SEE EXPLANATION IN SECTION 3 OF THE TEXT)**

<b>Column 1</b>	<b>Column 2</b>	<b>Column 3</b>	<b>Column 4</b>	<b>Column 5</b>
<b>Site Name (list taken from NWRA January 2007)</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Sites within NW region where strategic impacts/ 'in combination' considered by RSS HRA</b>	<b>Sites in proximity to GM where distal non-strategic impacts could occur</b>	<b>Sites within GM administrative boundary</b>
Asby Complex	SAC	N	N	
Border Mires, Kielder – Butterburn	SAC	N	N	
Borrowdale Woodland Complex	SAC	N	N	
Bowland Fells	SPA	P?	N	
Calf Hill & Cragg Woods	SAC	N	N	
Clints Quarry	SAC	N	N	
Cumbrian Marsh Fritillary Site	SAC	N	N	
Dee Estuary	SPA/Ramsar	P?	N	
Drigg Coast	SAC	N	N	
Duddon Estuary	SPA/Ramsar	N	N	
Duddon Mosses	SAC	N	N	
Esthwaite Water	Ramsar	N	N	
Irthinghead Mires	Ramsar	N	N	
Lake District High Fells	SAC	N	N	
Leighton Moss	SPA/Ramsar	N	N	
Liverpool Bay	pSPA	P?	N	
Manchester Mosses	SAC	P?	N	P? Wigan
Martin Mere	SPA/Ramsar	P?	P?	
Mersey Estuary	SPA/Ramsar	P?	N	
Mersey Narrows & Wirral Foreshore	pSPA	P?	N	
Midland Meres & Mosses – Phase 1 & Phase 2	2 x Ramsar	P?	P?	
Moor House – Upper Teasdale	SAC	N	N	
Morcombe Bay	SAC/Ramsar /SAC	P?	N	
Morcombe Bay Pavements	SAC	N	N	
Naddle Forest	SAC	N	N	
North Pennine Dales Meadows	SAC	N	N	
North Pennine Moors	SAC/SPA	P?	N	
Oak Mere	SAC	N	N	
Peak District Moors (South Pennine Moors Phase 1)	SPA	P?	N	P? Tameside & Oldham
Ribble & Alt Estuaries	SPA/Ramsar	P?	N	

River Dee & Bala Lake	SAC	N	N	
River Derwent & Bassenthwaite Lake	SAC	P?	N	
River Eden	SAC	N	N	
River Ehen	SAC	N	N	
River Kent	SAC	N	N	
Rixton Clay Pits	SAC	N	P?	
Rochdale Canal	SAC	N	N	P? Rochdale & Oldham
Rostherne Mere	Ramsar	N	P?	
Roudsea Wood & Mosses	SAC	N	N	
Sefton Coast	SAC	N	N	
Solway Firth	SAC	N	N	
South Pennine Moors	SAC	P?	N	P? Rochdale Oldham & Tameside
South Pennine Moors Phase 2	SPA	P?	N	P? Rochdale
South Solway Mosses	SAC	N	N	
Subberthwaite, Blawith & Torver Low Commons	SAC	N	N	
Tarn Moss	SAC	N	N	
Tyne & Nent	SAC	N	N	
Ullswater Oakwoods	SAC	N	N	
Upper Solway Flats & Marshes	SPA/Ramsar	N	N	
Walton Moss	SAC	N	N	
Wast Water	SAC	N	N	
West Midlands Mosses	SAC	N	N	
Witherslack Mosses	SAC	N	N	
Yewbarrow Woods	SAC	N	N	

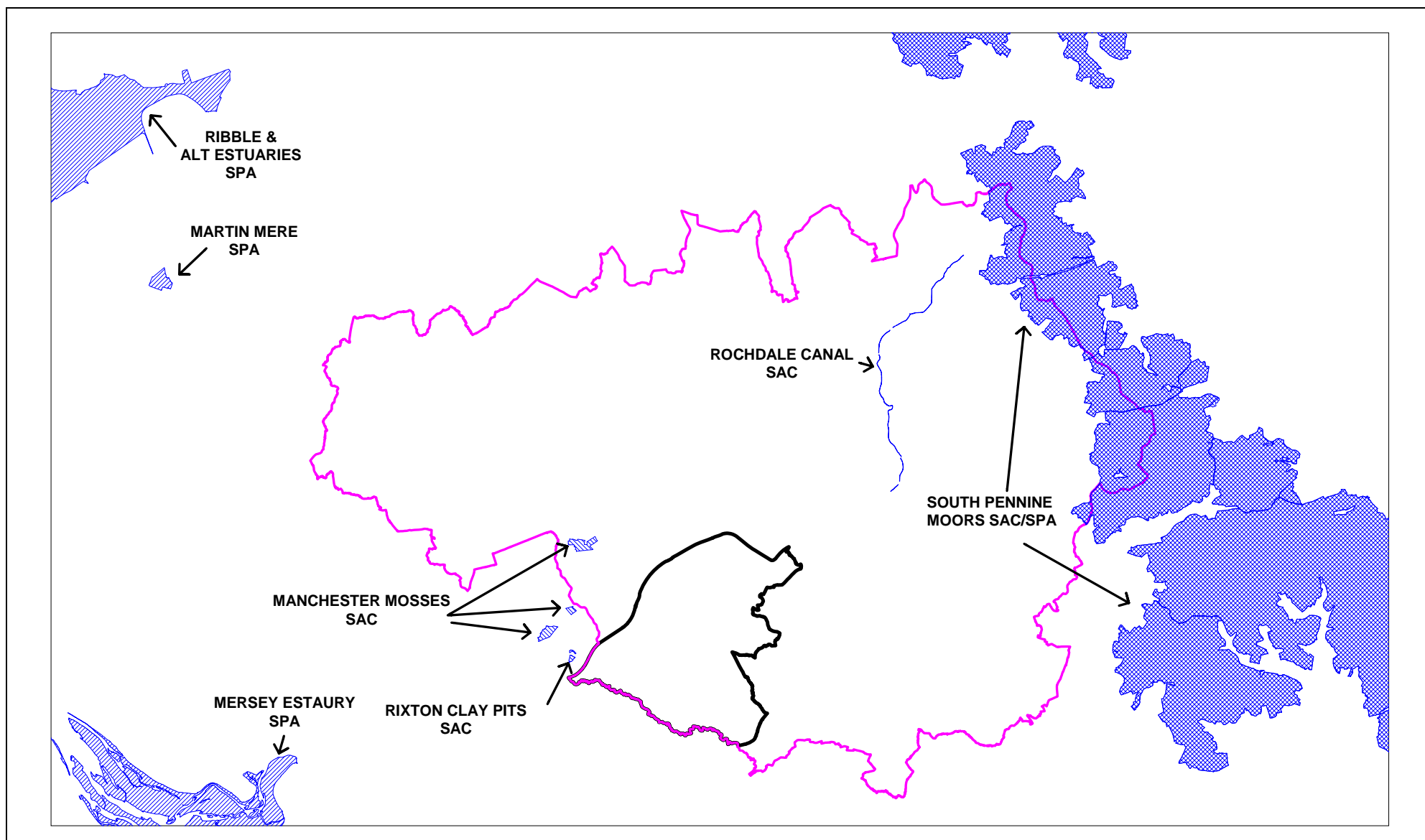
N = Significant effects unlikely

P? = Significant effects possible

P = Significant effects probable

*Assessment terms follow that presented in RSS Methodology (Entec 2007)*

**Figure 1 – Map Showing Location of European Sites within Greater Manchester and in Close Proximity to the County (Columns 4 & 5 in Appendix 1)**



## **APPENDIX 2 - GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF EUROPEAN SITES IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO GREATER MANCHESTER & SCREENING ASSESSMENT**

The Table in Appendix 1 above considers a number of sites that are in very close proximity to the boundary of Greater Manchester (Column 4) and those within the county (Column 5). The information below presents the site descriptions & primary reasons for selection for the proximal sites (Column 4). In addition, the site's vulnerability is considered and a brief assessment of the likely impacts from projects and Plans within Greater Manchester is given by considering the pathways for impacts. Sites which may be affected by the Plan under consideration are considered in more detail within the main body of the text.

### **MARTIN MERE RAMSAR DESCRIPTION & PRIMARY REASONS FOR SELECTION**

The site includes large area of open water with muddy margins associated with seasonally flooded grazing marsh and reed swamp overlaying deep peat. There are also large areas of surrounding damp species-rich grassland and semi-improved areas of damp grassland maintained by grazing.

Site selection is based on Ramsar criterion 6 with species/populations occurring at levels of international importance.

Qualifying species:

Peak counts in spring/autumn – Pink-footed goose

Peak counts winter – Bewick swan, Whooper swan, widgeon and pintail

Species occurring at levels of national importance:

Peak counts in spring/autumn – Teal

Peak counts in winter – Shelduck, pochard, ruff and spotted redshank

### **Vulnerabilities & Threats to Qualifying Features/Conservation Objectives**

All the vulnerabilities for the site are very localised such as direct loss of habitat by development, management of water levels including extraction for agricultural irrigation and eutrophication caused by agriculture, poor sewage processing and bird guano. None of these factors are likely to occur from any project or Plan within the 10 Greater Manchester districts. Therefore, this site has been screened out of further HRA assessments for the Greater Manchester districts

### **ROSTHERNE MERE RAMSAR DESCRIPTION & PRIMARY REASONS FOR SELECTION**

Site selection is based on Ramsar criterion 1, as it is one of the deepest and largest of the meres of the Shropshire-Cheshire Plain. Its shoreline is fringed with common reed. The catchment for the mere is localised from Little Mere, Mere Mere and a number of local streams and ditches

Species occurring at levels of nation importance;

Peak counts in winter – Cormorant, bittern and water rail

### **Vulnerabilities & Threats to Qualifying Features/Conservation Objectives**

All the vulnerabilities for the site are very localised such as direct loss of habitat by development, management of water levels including extraction for agricultural irrigation and eutrophication caused by agriculture, poor sewage processing. An additional threat is the introduction of non-native invasive species. None of these factors are likely to occur from any project or Plan within the 10 Greater Manchester districts. Therefore this site has been screened out of further HRA assessment.

## **MIDLAND MERES & MOSSES (PHASE 1 & 2) RAMSAR DESCRIPTION & PRIMARY REASONS FOR SELECTION**

The Meres and Mosses of the north-west Midlands comprise a series of open water and peatland sites, most of which developed in natural depressions left by the retreating ice sheets at the end of the last Ice Age. There are over 60 open water sites, or 'meres', as well as a smaller number of peatland sites, known as 'mosses'.

The site's primary interest is its wide range of lowland wetland types and successional stages within a distinct biogeographical area. Waters are generally circumneutral or acidic depending on the soil type, catchment size and usage. Substantial areas of open water remain in some sites, and in many cases this is fringed by extensive and varied swamp, fen and carr communities. Some basins have become peat-filled, leading in some circumstances to development of ombrotrophic conditions; of particular importance are the quaking bogs or schwingmoors.

The sites are selected under Ramsar criterion 1 and 2:

- The site comprises a diverse range of habitats from open water to raised bog.
- Supports a number of rare species of plants associated with wetlands including five nationally scarce species together with an assemblage of rare wetland invertebrates (3 endangered insects and 5 other British Red Data Book species of invertebrates).

### **Vulnerabilities & Threats to Qualifying Features/Conservation Objectives**

The majority of the vulnerabilities for the site are very localised such as direct loss of habitat by development, management of water levels including extraction for agricultural irrigation and eutrophication caused by agriculture, poor sewage processing. An additional threat is the introduction of non-native invasive species. None of these factors are likely to occur from any project or Plan within the 10 Greater Manchester districts. Therefore, this site has been screened out of further HRA assessments for the Greater Manchester districts

Some of these sites, such as the quaking bogs, where active peat processes are occurring are also susceptible to more regional processes such as changes in rainfall patterns and atmospheric pollutants such as acid rain and NO<sub>x</sub>s. These issues are influenced on a more strategic level and it is anticipated that the HRA of the RSA will deal with the Likely Significant Effects on this features.

## **RIXTON CLAYPITS SAC DESCRIPTION & PRIMARY REASONS FOR SELECTION**

The site comprises parts of an extensive disused brickworks quarry excavated in glacial boulder-clay deposits east of Warrington. Extraction of clay at different periods up to 1965 has left a mosaic of water-filled hollows and clay banks, which now support a diversity of habitats of varying maturity. It is of importance for its calcareous grassland communities and because the site supports a large breeding population of great crested newts.

The site's primary reason for selection is under Annex II species the great crested newt. Breeding by great crested newt is known to occur in 20 water bodies within the SAC.

### **Vulnerabilities & Threats to Qualifying Features/Conservation Objectives**

The threats to the conservation objective of the maintenance of the favourable conservation status of the great crested newt population include; loss/fragmentation of site and barriers to movement for amphibians between ponds, reduction in the number of waterbodies or decrease in size and/or depth of ponds, unacceptable pollution, shading, change in habitat structure and quality and population levels of fish.

The vulnerabilities for the site are very localised. None of these factors are likely to occur from any project or Plan within the 10 Greater Manchester districts. Therefore, this site has been screened out of further HRA assessments for the Greater Manchester districts.

## **REFERENCES**

Entec UK Ltd – 9 January 2007 'North West Regional Assembly Habitats Regulations Assessment of NWRA Regional Spatial Strategy – Stage 1; Screening and Avoidance Measures'