

Note for Inspector re SAC

On Day 1 of the Hearings, when discussing Habitats Regulations - Sandwich Bay Special Area of Conservation SAC, under Matter 1, Issue 5, Question 4, the Inspector asked for confirmation of Natural England's agreement with TDC's response to the question. This note documents an email from Rebecca Pearson, Lead Advisor at Natural England. Her response is as follows:

“Many thanks indeed for providing Natural England with the Council’s response to the Planning Inspector’s Question 4 Issue 5 of Matter 1 following the recent EIP.

I am pleased to confirm that Natural England concurs with this response. We note that none of the emissions-sensitive Qualifying Features of the SAC are present within 200m of any A- or B-roads and that the habitats that are present are not sensitive to the level of increase in emissions that could conceivably be borne out through the execution of the Local Plan. Therefore we agree with the Council’s conclusion that modelling is not considered necessary to allow the effects of the Local Plan on the SAC to be accurately and robustly assessed.”

The question and response appended to the email is as follows:

Q4. How are traffic flows predicted to change as a result of the development proposed in the Plan on A or B roads within 200m of any emission-sensitive features of the SAC, both within and outside of Thanet District?

Bespoke studies to determine traffic flows have not been undertaken as none of the emission-sensitive features of Sandwich Bay SAC are thought to be present within 200m of any A and B roads (see Section 5.3 of the HRA).

In summary, there are two points regionally where A- or B-roads are within 200m of Sandwich Bay SAC: on the A299 / Harbour Approach in Ramsgate (hereafter ‘Location 1’); and on the A256 between Great Stonar and Richborough Port (hereafter ‘Location 2’). The habitats within 200m of Location 1 are essentially intertidal mud and sand flats, with rocky shore exposures; the habitats within 200m of Location 2 comprise the estuary of the River Stour and associated intertidal muds and saltmarshes. None of these habitats are identified as Qualifying Features for Sandwich Bay SAC in the Conservation Objectives (the Qualifying Features are all sand dune habitats), and none are considered to be particularly sensitive to atmospheric N-deposition due to the dominance of nutrient loadings (including available-N) from river and tidal inputs.

The treatment of ‘non-qualifying’ habitats within European sites is variable; the Conservation Objectives do not make direct reference to associated habitats within an SAC (the ‘typical species’ of Qualifying Habitats are referred to), although they are generally taken into account in the appropriate assessment where they are relevant to the maintenance (etc.) of the

Favourable Conservation Status of the qualifying features (e.g. ‘buffer areas’ around sensitive features).

For the avoidance of doubt, therefore, the sensitivity of the habitats within 200m of Locations 1 and 2 to nitrogen deposition is set out in Table 2.1 below, based on data from APIS. None of the habitats are sensitive to acid deposition based on APIS.

Table 2.1 Sensitivity of Sandwich Bay SAC habitats within 200m of A- and B- roads N-deposition

Location / Road	Habitats within 200m of road	Equivalent Annex I habitat*	N-deposition (kg N/ha/yr)	
			Min. CL	Current Max
1 (A299)	Intertidal sediment /rock	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at lowtide	Not stated**	15.8
2 (A256)	Estuaries	Estuaries	20	15.8
2 (A256)	Saltmarsh	Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae)	20	15.8

CL = Critical Load

*The equivalent Annex I habitats are used to identify the appropriate critical loads for these habitats, although the habitats within 200m of Location 1 and 2 are not Qualifying Features of the SAC.

**No minimum critical load is identified for intertidal sediments, and this habitat is not considered sensitive to N-deposition.

It is evident that the minimum critical loads for N-deposition are not currently exceeded for the habitats present in the SAC within 200m of A- and B- roads. Notwithstanding this, the accepted threshold for ‘significant effects’ to be possible is an increase of >1% of the minimum critical load; in this instance, this would be approximately 0.2 kg/ha/yr (i.e. 1% of 20 kg/ha/yr).

Although it is not simple to apply ‘rule of thumb’ estimates to relationships between traffic volumes and N-deposition (as this is influenced by a number of factors), it is worth noting that the DMRB guidance regarding air quality thresholds is based on the assumption that 1,000 extra vehicles is equivalent to ~0.01 kg N/ha/yr (this is obviously a coarse figure and there are other factors that come into play such as the emissions factors used for opening year/ wind direction etc./ number of HGVs / speed etc.). Recent air quality modelling by Wood of a new link road elsewhere in the UK found that an increase of ~7,000 AADT increased N-deposition by 0.21 kg N/ha/yr at the worst receptor point (at the immediate kerbside), and that by 25m from the road the increase in N-deposition was zero.

Therefore, the HRA concludes that the Local Plan will have no adverse effect on the integrity of the Sandwich Bay SAC as (a) the emissions-sensitive Qualifying Features of the SAC are not present within 200m of any A- or B-roads; (b) the habitats that are present near the A-roads are not particularly sensitive to vehicular emissions; (c) the critical loads for the habitats that are present near the A-roads are far from being exceeded, and will not be exceeded under any reasonable scenario for traffic increases due to the Local Plan; and (d) the integrity of the Qualifying Features of the SAC will not be indirectly affected by any

changes in other site habitats that may be associated with vehicular emissions. Based on this, bespoke traffic modelling was not considered necessary to allow the effects of the Local Plan on the SAC to be accurately and robustly assessed.