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## **SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report outlines the details of a consultation received from the DETR which provides a new code of guidance aimed at developing positive partnerships for the management and protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- 1.2 SSSIs have statutory protection, with the aim of safeguarding, for present and future generations, the diversity and geographic range of habitats, species, geological and geomorphological features, including the full range of natural and semi-natural ecosystems and of important geological and physiographical phenomena throughout England.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The draft code of guidance is intended to emphasise the importance of positive management of SSSIs as follows:
- To improve the procedures for notifying sites of national nature conservation importance as SSSIs, and emphasise the importance attached to them;
  - To develop further constructive relationships between land owners and managers and the officers of the conservation agencies; and
  - To provide better protection for SSSIs from operations which damage, or are likely to damage, the special interest, and to secure management, by both public and private landowners, which contributes to the conservation of the special features of the individual SSSIs.
- 2.2 Comments on the consultation paper are required by 16 November 2000.
- 2.3 There are three areas within Rochford District designated as SSSIs as follows:
- Hockley Woods
  - Maplin Sands
  - River Crouch Marshes

The boundaries of the SSSIs are shown on the Local Plan Proposals Map.

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**3 MAIN POINTS**

- 3.1 Appendix One attached to this report details the main points of the new code of guidance.

**4 DISCUSSION**

- 4.1 The introduction of common standards for the identification of sites is to be welcomed. It is essential that all sites that have value should be included, but the criteria should apply across the board and be easily understood.
- 4.2 The management and protection of SSSI continues to be the subject of much concern. There is no doubt that over the years, many SSSIs have been damaged by inappropriate management and inadequate monitoring and protection. The introduction of a clear statement of management requirements should go some way to addressing this matter. Proceedings for offences in relation to SSSIs will continue to be the sole responsibility of English Nature.
- 4.3 The proposed procedures intended to control activities on designated sites are also to be welcomed. It is hoped that the proposed management notices will be actively used as a mechanism to control inappropriate activities in cases where active management agreements cannot be reached,. Public bodies will be expected to adopt the highest standards in relation to SSSIs which they own in order to secure positive management in accordance with an agreed management scheme. In Rochford's case, this would apply to the management of Hockley Woods.
- 4.4 The Rochford District Local Plan includes a policy (RC3) highlighting the importance of protecting SSSIs. The policy and the guidance included in the Local Plan will need to be amended in light of the new code of guidance.
- 4.5 The dissemination of information by English Nature is to be welcomed and the extent of SSSIs within Rochford District will be shown on the Local Plan Proposals Map.
- 4.6 Overall, it is considered that the proposed code of guidance will make a positive contribution to the management and protection of SSSIs.

**5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 SSSIs are, from time to time, subject to vandalism. It is hoped that more proactive management arrangements may help to counter this problem where it occurs.

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**6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 More positive arrangements and the introduction of a code of guidance will help to ensure that the SSSIs in the District continue to be managed and properly protected for the benefit of future generations.

**7 RECOMMENDATION**

It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS:**

That, subject to any additional comments by Members, the comments in this report be forwarded to the DETR as this Council's response to the consultation paper, Sites of Special Scientific Interest: Encouraging Positive Partnerships.

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**Background Papers:**

Consultation Paper – Sites of Special Scientific Interest, DETR August 2000.

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