

LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE REVIEW

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Essex Ecology Services Ltd. (EECOS) have been commissioned by the Council to carry out a review of the district's Local Wildlife Sites. They have now provided the Council with a draft summary document for consultation and an amended register of proposed wildlife sites. This report seeks Members' approval for a preliminary consultation on this document feeding any comments received back to EECOS for them to produce a finalised report and Wildlife Site Register.
- 1.2 This report also seeks Members' approval for the production of a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Wildlife Sites once EECOS have completed the final Wildlife Site review. The draft SPD would then be reported to Members for approval before a more formal 4-6 week consultation period as required by Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004. Following this consultation a final SPD would be produced and reported back to Members again seeking approval to formally adopt the document.
- 1.3 A summary of the review is attached at appendix 1.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Late last year Rochford District Council commissioned Essex Ecology Services Ltd. (EECOS) to carry out a review of Wildlife sites in the district. EECOS have now provided the Council with a draft document for consultation and an amended register of proposed wildlife sites. It is now appropriate for these draft documents to be made available for public consultation. Once comments have been sought responses will be returned to EECOS for them to finalise the report and wildlife site register.

3 PRELIMINARY CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Whilst EECOS may be able to contact key stakeholders on the Council's behalf, making the documents available to the public more widely at this stage would constitute good practice and ensure stakeholders can have an input into the wildlife site review. This report seeks Members' approval for this preliminary consultation. It is expected this consultation would be carried out for a period of 4-6 weeks (there is no statutory period) during October and November.

4 SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

- 4.1 Once the finalised Wildlife Site Review is received from EECOS it is proposed that Rochford District Council seeks to adopt a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) dealing with the District's wildlife sites.

4.2 This SPD would include the revised Wildlife Site Register thereby providing policy protection for the district's wildlife sites.

4.3 It is suggested that the SPD will hang off Policy NR7 of the Replacement Local Plan (Local Nature Reserves and Wildlife Sites) and provide further details on the justification required for development affecting wildlife sites, information on mitigation which may be required, and details on when legal agreements will be sought. Guidance on the management of wildlife sites could also be included in the SPD.

4.4 The draft SPD would require a further formal consultation period of 4 to 6 weeks under Regulation 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004. Allowing for the receipt of the final report from EECOS, and the preparation of a Sustainability Appraisal (a statutory requirement), it is anticipated the draft SPD will be out for consultation in April/May 2008.

5 RISK IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Failure to adequately protect sites of importance to wildlife would increase the risk of degrading the District's environment and character.

5.2 Proposed Supplementary Planning Documents are required to be included in the district's adopted Local Development Scheme. An SPD dealing with Wildlife Sites could not be adopted until the Council has adopted a revised Local Development Scheme including proposals for a Wildlife Site SPD.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The completion of the Wildlife Site Review will provide an up-to-date evidence base to support the Local Development Framework. This will enable the Council to better manage, protect and enhance the District's environment.

6.2 The creation of a Supplementary Planning Document on wildlife sites would provide protection in policy for the revised wildlife sites register. It would also give the public, landowners and developers additional guidance on the Council's approach to sites that are of importance to wildlife.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Essex Ecology Services have already been commissioned by the Council to carry out a review of Wildlife Sites. The consultation proposed would need no additional financial resources.

7.2 The production of a Supplementary Planning Document could be carried out using existing in house resources. Supplementary Planning Documents require Sustainability Appraisals and Strategic Environmental Assessments that will need to be carried out externally.

8 RECOMMENDATION

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

- (1) That a preliminary consultation be carried out on the draft wildlife site review documents and that comments received be fed back to Essex Ecology Services for a final report to be produced.
- (2) That work be commenced on a Supplementary Planning Document concerning Local Wildlife Sites.

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Background Papers:-

Draft report on wildlife sites – July 2007

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