



ROMSEY & DISTRICT SOCIETY

Reg.Charity 269308

Natural Environment Committee

Please reply to:

Mrs Elizabeth Pratt [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Planning Policy and Economic Development,
Test Valley Borough Council,
Beech Hurst,
Weyhill Road,
Andover,
Hampshire, SP10 3AJ

Dear Sir or Madam

Local Plan 2040 Regulation 18 Stage 1 Public Consultation

The Natural Environment Committee of the Romsey and District Society would like to make the following comments on the local plan document:

1.14 Supplementary planning documents

Are there any guidelines to inform developers about the policy on protecting the natural environment, creating green corridors, providing net biodiversity gain etc? If not, could there be such documents to help safeguard the quality and diversity of our natural environment when development is allowed in the countryside?

1.16 We welcome the inclusion of the local environment as a priority. However, increasing access to the natural environment and countryside must be within the constraints of protecting ecology and sensitive areas, and the needs of the agricultural community. A large rise in dog ownership needs to have areas where dogs can safely be exercised off-lead without ensuing damage to wildlife and livestock.

1.19 Climate emergency We also welcome the section regarding climate emergency, as all new houses currently add to emissions and a lot more could be done to make them more sustainable and wildlife friendly.

1.32 We welcome the inclusion of the natural environment

1.41 Evidence Base

We are concerned that whilst important documents have been produced regarding the natural environment in particular the Green Space Strategy 2020-30, Green-Infrastructure-Strategy-2014-2019 and the Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2008 these do not appear to have been actively pursued.

A lot more work needs to be done on these and they need to be active documents that inform the planning process. Green corridors in particular can only be safeguarded if there is a strategy for achieving them. Some of these documents have been overtaken by developments outside the current local plan.

2.21 Vision The vision of thriving town centres, offering high quality connected green and public spaces is good, but Romsey does not currently have connections between its town centre green spaces, eg Memorial Park and King John's garden.

2.38-2.41 Built, Historic and Natural Environment

Policy welcomed and much needed

2.42 – 2.45 Ecology and Biodiversity

It is important to enhance connectivity, quantity and quality of ecological and green infrastructure networks, to help to maintain and enhance the condition of protected nature conservation sites, protected species and the resilience of biodiverse environments to the changing climate. We need to be careful not to damage or destroy the very natural landscape qualities which contribute to our economy and personal well-being.

Spatial strategy

The local gaps in the existing local plan coincide with areas of importance for green corridors to maintain biodiversity. We believe it is important to continue to protect these areas from development, although some minor adjustments would be acceptable.

4.26 – 4.28 Green infrastructure

We welcome the recognition of the importance of green infrastructure and ecological networks. These can help to reduce car use by introducing pleasant walking routes into and around the town centres.

4.36 Environment:

It is important that the policy documents relating to the natural environment that have been previously referred to are up to date, detailed and robust to inform this process. Applications for individual sites need to be assessed against these policies and seen as part of the bigger picture

Environmental net gain

It is important to ensure that real biodiversity net gain is achieved. For example, if putting up bat boxes is proposed, this should not be at the expense of removing the foraging and commuting routes for bats

4.41 Key Environment topics

It is necessary to consider the interconnected functions of our green spaces; we need to conserve wildlife habitats, whilst providing places for natural play, public exercise and dog walking and off-lead play. It is preferable to provide SANGS and spaces for biodiversity net gain close to the areas lost to development, to provide alternative nearby locations for animals. Retention of existing flora should be seriously considered, rather than using a technique of removing the existing ground flora and treating with weedkiller before planting new wildflower areas.

4.43-56 Sustainable and high-quality development

More guidance is needed to require more provision for wildlife friendly features within new developments. There are many common species that are in decline but can tolerate being close to people eg sparrows, starlings, hedgehogs, swifts, bats etc. Not only does this help biodiversity but it enables residents to enjoy nature on their doorstep and seeing and hearing common songbirds is known to be good for human health and wellbeing. A revised LBAP would be helpful.

4.74 Romsey Town Centre

We welcome the emphasis on better transport links into the town centre, and for enhancements to the green spaces and waterways within the town centre. It is important to look for opportunities to improve the condition and access to the various waterways running through the town for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

Sustainable Transport and Movement

It is necessary to enable travel by public transport from new developments around Romsey. Frequent and punctual bus services are key to encouraging people out of their cars.

Please note that the above comments are entirely those of the RDS Natural Environment Committee and you may receive other comments from the Planning Committee of RDS. Please record and consider the points of each RDS committee separately.

Mrs Elizabeth Pratt

Chairman

Natural Environment Committee