

Response from Natural England

Planning consultation: Stratford upon Avon Neighbourhood Development Plan

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated and received by Natural England on 21 May 2015.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Natural England generally welcomes the draft neighbourhood plan which sets out development management policies which will guide the future sustainable development of Stratford Upon Avon.

We support Policy BE13 – Historic Parks and Gardens and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which protects the designated site. However Racecourse Meadow SSSI could have its own specific policy and be located within Section 9 Natural Environment.

We note Policy BE2 - Responding to Local Character, which is an important feature. Reference could also be made to National Character Areas, Stratford-upon-Avon falls within [NCA Profile:106 Severn and Avon Vales \(NE336\)](#).

We are pleased to note that the aspirations for the town described at section 9: Natural Environment, include the intention to maximise environmental assets and biodiversity. We particularly support Policy NE2 – River Avon Biodiversity Corridor, as this is a local wildlife site. The provisions of local nature reserves, protection of trees and hedgerows and a neighbourhood biodiversity action plan are also commendable. We welcome the delivery of priority habitats, as listed in [Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006](#), contributing to national and local targets. This could include habitats such as unimproved grassland, broadleaved woodland and ponds.

Natural England also support Policy CLW5 – Open Space and Play Areas within New Development, Policy CLW6 – Promoting New Strategic Green Open Spaces and Policy CLW7 – Encouraging Safe Walking and Cycling, with particular reference to provisions of green infrastructure. Green infrastructure can perform a range of functions including improved flood risk management, provision of accessible green space, climate change adaptation and biodiversity enhancement. GI can be designed to maximise the benefits needed for development, such as promoting opportunities for recreation, improving links between communities and promoting sustainable transport, such as the walking and cycling routes. For further information on GI, including its economic benefits, see

Natural England's [website](#).

Policy BE8 – Effective and Efficient Use of Land, section d) Making only exceptional use of the best and most versatile agricultural land, is also an important point. Soil is a finite resource that fulfils many important functions and services (ecosystem services) for society, for example as a growing medium for food, timber and other crops, as a store for carbon and water, as a reservoir of biodiversity and as a buffer against pollution. It is therefore important that the soil resources are protected and used sustainably. For guidance on how adverse impacts on soils can be minimised please refer to Defra's [Good practice guide for handling soils](#) and [Defra Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soil on Development Sites](#).

Strategic Environmental Assessment - Screening

Where Neighbourhood Plans could have significant environmental effects, they may require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) under the Environment Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. Further guidance on deciding whether the proposals are likely to have significant environmental effects and the requirements for consulting Natural England on SEA are set out in the National Planning Practice Guidance at:

<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal/does-a-neighbourhood-plan-require-a-sustainability-appraisal/>

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact Kayleigh Cheese on 0300 060 1411. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk.

We really value your feedback to help us improve the service we offer. We have attached a feedback form to this letter and welcome any comments you might have about our service.

Yours sincerely

Miss Kayleigh Cheese

Sustainable Development Team

South Mercia Area