

Shadow Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Matrix and Appropriate Assessment: Land off Brook Meadows, Tiptree

Details of the plan or project

Application Address	Land off Brook Meadows, Tiptree, Colchester, Essex, CO5 0QF
LPA	Colchester Borough Council
Application Description	Residential development with associated landscaping and access infrastructure
HRA Screening Date	14/01/2022
File reference	1005786 sHRA vf2

Stage 1a – Information Gathering, Initial Screening and Scoping

European Designations that could be affected by the proposals
<p>There are no European sites within the application site.</p> <p>The closest European site is Abberton Reservoir Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site, which is located approximately 4.8km east of the site. At these distances, direct effects (such as physical damage or pollution from contaminated surface water run-off) on the designations as a result of the proposals would not occur. Similarly, no adverse air quality or hydrological effects are anticipated. In addition, the application site does not provide supporting or functionally-linked habitat for any of the qualifying species of the SPA/Ramsar, such as arable or pasture (which may represent favoured overwintering foraging resources for qualifying species such as Lapwing and Golden Plover, as identified in Colchester Borough Council's Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Publication Draft Colchester Local Plan Section 2: Proposed Main Modifications (LUC, September 2021)). Furthermore, Abberton Reservoir is already subject to a robust visitor management regime and the Site Improvement Plan for Abberton Reservoir states that disturbance is well controlled by Essex and Suffolk Water. In addition, the site is managed by the Essex Wildlife Trust, which implements measures to reduce and manage disturbance, such as provision of an education visitor centre, paths, screens, hides and areas that are not accessible to the public; all of which is overseen by on-sight wardening. The proposed development is therefore unlikely to result in a likely significant effect on the designation, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects and as such Abberton Reservoir is scoped out of further assessment within this report.</p> <p>Also located within 22km of the application site are a number of European sites associated with the Essex Coast, of which the closest sites are Blackwater Estuary (Mid Essex Coast Phase 4) SPA and Ramsar site (6.5km), and Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (6.5km), followed by Colne Estuary (Mid Essex Coast Phase 2) SPA and Ramsar (11.6km), Dengie (Mid Essex Coast Phase 1 SPA and Ramsar (12.6km), and Crouch and Roach Estuaries (Mid Essex Coast Phase 3) SPA and Ramsar (18.1km). At these distances, direct physical effects on the designations as a result of the proposals would not occur and, similarly, no adverse air quality or hydrological effects are anticipated. In addition, the application site does not provide supporting or functionally-linked habitat for any of the qualifying species of these designations, such as arable or pasture (which may represent favoured overwintering foraging resources for qualifying species such as Lapwing and Golden Plover, as identified in Colchester Borough Council's Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Publication Draft Colchester Local Plan Section 2: Proposed Main Modifications (LUC, September 2021). As such, the proposed development is therefore unlikely to result in a likely significant effect on functionally linked land associated with these designations, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects and impacts on functionally linked land is screened out from further assessment within this report.</p>

There is however the potential for indirect effects to occur at these, and additional Essex Coast designations, such as from increases in recreational pressure. Colchester Borough Council is a signatory of the Essex Coast Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) which has been developed by Local Authorities in conjunction with Natural England and sets out mitigation measures that can ensure that new residential development and any associated recreational disturbance impacts on European sites are compliant with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, as amended.

As part of the work required to inform the Essex Coast RAMS evidence base, visitor surveys have been undertaken to determine the distance visitors will travel from their residences to visit the European sites for recreation. Following collation and analysis of the survey data, the Zones of Influence (Zoi) currently agreed by the Essex Coast RAMS Steering Group are set out in Table 1 below. A scoping exercise has been carried out to determine whether the application site lies within any of the identified Zois, as summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Agreed Zones of Influence for Essex Coast RAMS and Scoping Exercise for the Site

European designated site	Underpinning SSSIs	Zoi (km)	Is the Application Site within the Zoi?
Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar	Orwell Estuary SSSI Stour Estuary SSSI Cattawade Marshes SSSI	13	No – scope out
Hamford Water SPA and Ramsar	Hamford Water SSSI	8	No – scope out
Colne Estuary SPA and Ramsar	Colne Estuary SSSI	9.7	No – scope out
Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar	Blackwater Estuary SSSI	22	Yes – 6.5km from designation
Dengie SPA and Ramsar	Dengie SSSI	20.8	Yes – 12.6km
Crouch and Roach Estuaries Ramsar and SPA	Crouch and Roach Estuaries SSSI	4.5	No – scope out
Foulness Estuary SPA and Ramsar	Foulness SSSI	13	No – scope out
Essex Estuaries SAC	Blackwater Estuary SSSI Colne Estuary SSSI Crouch and Roach Estuaries SSSI Dengie SSSI Foulness SSSI	Follow respective Zois for the relevant SPA/Ramsar above	Yes – closest point is 6.5km (Blackwater Estuary SPA & Ramsar)
Benfleet and Southend Marshes SPA and Ramsar	Benfleet and Southend Marshes SSSI	4.3	No – scope out
Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar	Mucking Flats and Marshes SSSI	8.1	No – scope out

Based on the above, the Application Site lies outside of the agreed Zois for Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA and Ramsar, Hamford Water SPA and Ramsar, Colne Estuary SPA and Ramsar, Crouch and Roach Estuaries SPA and Ramsar, Foulness Estuary SPA and Ramsar, Benfleet and Southend Marshes SPA and Ramsar, and Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar, and these are therefore scoped out from further assessment.

The site lies within the agreed recreational Zoi for Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar, Dengie SPA and Ramsar, and Essex Estuaries SAC. Further information on these designations is set out below.

Blackwater Estuary SPA	This site qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting populations of European importance of the following species listed on Annex I of the Directive:
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	<p>During the breeding season</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little Tern <i>Sterna albifrons</i>, 36 pairs representing at least 1.5% of the breeding population in Great Britain (count as at 1997) <p>Over winter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>, 76 individuals representing at least 6.0% of the wintering population in Great Britain (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) • Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>, 7,247 individuals representing at least 2.9% of the wintering population in Great Britain (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) • Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i>, 4 individuals representing up to 0.5% of the wintering population in Great Britain (5 year mean, 1993/94-94/95, 1996/7-98/99) • Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>, 51 individuals representing up to 7.3% of the wintering population in Great Britain (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) <p>This site also qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting populations of European importance of the following migratory species:</p> <p>On passage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>, 955 individuals representing up to 1.9% of the Europe/Northern Africa - wintering population (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) <p>Over winter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa islandica</i>, 1,280 individuals representing up to 1.8% of the wintering Iceland - breeding population (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) • Dark-bellied Brent Goose <i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i>, 15,392 individuals representing up to 5.1% of the wintering Western Siberia/Western Europe population (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) • Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>, 33,267 individuals representing up to 2.4% of the wintering Northern Siberia/Europe/Western Africa population (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) • Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>, 5,090 individuals representing up to 3.4% of the wintering Eastern Atlantic - wintering population (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) • Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>, 4,015 individuals representing up to 2.7% of the wintering Eastern Atlantic - wintering population (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) • Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>, 600 individuals representing up to 1.2% of the wintering Europe/Northern Africa - wintering population (WeBS/Peter Clement) • Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>, 4,594 individuals representing up to 1.5% of the wintering Northwestern Europe population (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) <p>Assemblage qualification: A wetland of international importance</p> <p>The area qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by regularly supporting at least 20,000 waterfowl.</p> <p>Over winter, the area regularly supports 109,815 individual waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) including: Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>, Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>, Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>, Dark-bellied Brent Goose <i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i>, Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>, Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>, Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>, Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>, Avocet, Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>, Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>, Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>, Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>, Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>, Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>, Shoveler <i>Anas clypeata</i>, Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>,</p>
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	<p>Red-breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i>, Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> and Black-tailed Godwit.</p> <p>Conservation objectives</p> <p>The objectives are to ensure that, subject to natural change, the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features • The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features • The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely • The populations of qualifying features • The distribution of qualifying features within the site
Blackwater Estuary Ramsar	<p>Ramsar criterion 1 Qualifies by virtue of the extent and diversity of saltmarsh habitat present. This site, and the four others in the Mid-Essex Coast complex, includes a total of 3,237 ha that represent 70% of the saltmarsh habitat in Essex and 7% of the total area of saltmarsh in Britain.</p> <p>Ramsar criterion 2 The invertebrate fauna is well represented and includes at least 16 British Red Data Book species. In descending order of rarity these are: Endangered: a water beetle <i>Paracymus aeneus</i>; Vulnerable: a damselfly <i>Lestes dryas</i>, the flies <i>Aedes flavescens</i>, <i>Erioptera bivittata</i>, <i>Hybomitra expollicata</i> and the spiders <i>Heliophanus auratus</i> and <i>Trichopterna cito</i>; Rare: the beetles <i>Baris scolopacea</i>, <i>Philonthus punctus</i>, <i>Graptodytes bilineatus</i> and <i>Malachius vulneratus</i>, the flies <i>Campsicemus magius</i> and <i>Myopites eximia</i>, the moths <i>Idaea ochrata</i> and <i>Malacosoma castrensis</i> and the spider <i>Euophrys</i>.</p> <p>Ramsar criterion 3 This site supports full and representative sequences of saltmarsh plant communities covering the range of variation in Britain.</p> <p>Ramsar criterion 5</p> <p>Assemblages of international importance, Species with peak counts in winter: 105,061 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003)</p> <p>Ramsar criterion 6 – species/populations occurring at levels of international importance (species with peak counts in winter)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark-bellied brent goose • Grey plover • Dunlin • Black-tailed godwit
Dengie SPA	<p>This site qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting populations of European importance of the following species listed on Annex I of the Directive:</p> <p>Over winter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>, 1,156 individuals representing at least 2.2% of the wintering population in Great Britain (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) • Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i>, 5 individuals representing at least 0.7% of the wintering population in Great Britain (5 year mean 1994/95-1998/99)

	<p>This site also qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting populations of European importance of the following migratory species:</p> <p>Over winter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>, 2,411 individuals representing at least 1.6% of the wintering Eastern Atlantic - wintering population (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) • Knot <i>Calidris canutus</i>, 8,393 individuals representing at least 2.4% of the wintering Northeastern Canada/Greenland/Iceland/Northwestern Europe population (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) <p>Assemblage qualification: A wetland of international importance</p> <p>The area qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by regularly supporting at least 20,000 waterfowl</p> <p>Over winter, the area regularly supports 31,452 individual waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1991/2 - 1995/6) including: Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa islandica</i>, Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>, Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>, Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>, Dark-bellied Brent Goose <i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i>, Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>, Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>, Knot <i>Calidris canutus</i>, Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>, Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>.</p> <p>Conservation Objectives</p> <p>The objectives are to ensure that, subject to natural change, the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features • The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features • The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely • The populations of qualifying features • The distribution of qualifying features within the site
Dengie Ramsar	<p>Ramsar criterion 1</p> <p>Qualifies by virtue of the extent and diversity of saltmarsh habitat present. Dengie, and the four other sites in the Mid-Essex Coast Ramsar site complex, includes a total of 3,237 ha, that represent 70% of the saltmarsh habitat in Essex and 7% of the total area of saltmarsh in Britain.</p> <p>Ramsar criterion 2</p> <p>Dengie supports a number of rare plant and animal species. The Dengie has 11 species of nationally scarce plants: sea kale <i>Crambe maritima</i>, sea barley <i>Hordeum marinum</i>, golden samphire <i>Inula crithmoides</i>, lax flowered sea lavender <i>Limonium humile</i>, the glassworts <i>Sarcocornia perennis</i> and <i>Salicornia pusilla</i>, small cord-grass <i>Spartina maritima</i>, shrubby sea-blite <i>Suaeda vera</i>, and the eelgrasses <i>Zostera angustifolia</i>, <i>Z. marina</i> and <i>Z. noltei</i>. The invertebrate fauna includes the following Red Data Book species: a weevil <i>Baris scolopacea</i>, a horsefly <i>Atylotus latistriatus</i> and a jumping spider <i>Euophrys browni</i>.</p> <p>Ramsar criterion 3</p> <p>This site supports full and representative sequences of saltmarsh plant communities covering the range of variation in Britain.</p> <p>Ramsar criterion 5</p> <p>Assemblages of international importance: Species with peak counts in winter 43,828 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003)</p>

	<p>Ramsar criterion 6 – species/populations occurring at levels of international importance:</p> <p>Species with peak counts in winter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark-bellied Brent Goose • Grey Plover • Red Knot
Essex Estuaries SAC	<p>Annex I habitats that are a primary reason for selection of this site are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estuaries • Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide • Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand • Spartina swards (<i>Spartina maritima</i>) • Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i>) • Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (<i>Sarcocornetea fruticosi</i>) <p>Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of this site:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time <p>Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of this site:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None <p>Annex II species present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for site selection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None <p>Conservation objectives</p> <p>Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats • The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats, and • The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats rely.

Initial Screening of Impact Pathways

A number of threats and pressures on the European sites are included within the Site Improvement Plan for Essex Estuaries¹ which covers, Blackwater Estuary SPA, Dengie SPA and Essex Estuaries SAC, which are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Analysis of identified threats and pressures.

Threat/Pressure	Applicable/Not applicable to the proposed development	Reason
Coastal Squeeze	Not Applicable	Due to distance of the Application Site from the designations.
Public Access/Disturbance	Applicable	Residents of the proposed development could visit the designations.
Fisheries: Commercial marine and estuarine	Not Applicable	Due to the residential nature of the proposals.
Fisheries: Recreational marine and estuarine	Applicable	Residents of the proposed development could visit the designations for the purposes of recreational fishing.

¹ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5459956190937088>

Changes in species distributions	Applicable	Could occur as a result of public access/disturbance, such as trampling of vegetation.
Invasive Species	Not Applicable	Related to management of the designation.
Air pollution: risk of atmospheric nitrogen deposition	Not Applicable	Due to the distance of the Application Site from the designations, adverse effects of air quality on the European designations are unlikely.

In summary, a number of threats and pressures are not applicable to the proposals due to the distance of the application site from the designations, or the threats/pressures are not applicable to residential development. These elements are therefore scoped out from further assessment.

The pressures/threats applicable to the proposed development relate to effects resulting from increased recreational pressure, including recreational fishing. The site lies within the agreed Zol within which visitors could travel from their residences to visit the European sites scoped in above, therefore further assessment is required in this regard.

Summary

The above exercise concludes that further assessment is required in relation to increased recreational pressure at Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar, Dengie SPA and Ramsar and Essex Estuaries SAC. The proposals do not relate to the management of these designations and therefore a Stage 2 assessment is required to identify any likely significant effects, both alone and in-combination with other plans and projects.

Stage 1b – Likely Significant Effects

Potential Effect and Analysis

Public Access/Disturbance

Recreational use of the European sites has the potential to:

Damage soils and vegetation for example through trampling – this has the potential to damage qualifying features of Essex Estuaries SAC, Blackwater Estuary Ramsar and Dengie Ramsar and change species composition / distribution for example through path erosion. The habitats within the European sites are not considered to be particularly vulnerable to this potential effect, as the qualifying habitats comprise estuarine and tidal habitat types which would be underwater or very wet underfoot for the majority of the time, such that the majority of visitors would keep to the established paths. However, visitors could potentially access these habitats in some areas and damage vegetation in drier areas or at low tide (for example to access intertidal mud for the purposes of bait digging for recreational fishing). The Ramsar sites and SAC are also sensitive to saltmarsh erosion caused by water-based recreation such as jet skis.

Cause eutrophication and changes in habitat composition as a result of dog fouling – walkers with dogs can contribute to pressure on sites through nutrient enrichment via dog fouling. Most impacts occur close to paths and within a short distance of car parks.

Generate other anthropogenic effects as a result of littering, fires and vandalism – Such effects could give rise to eutrophication, animal mortality and localised pollution events.

Cause disturbance to qualifying features of the designation such as waterbirds – Disturbance events, for example through noise or visual disturbance, can cause birds to expend additional energy which may affect their survival, particularly in the winter. In addition, disturbance could displace birds from one area to another which could increase pressure on the available feeding resource in the remaining areas.

Disturbance of ground nesting birds could also cause birds to abandon the nest. Blackwater Estuary SPA is designated in part for its populations of breeding Little Tern. This species nests in open ground on beaches and is therefore extremely vulnerable to disturbance.

Visual disturbance is most likely to be caused by walkers with dogs (where dogs do not keep to the marked footpaths) and where the human form is exposed on open ground for example people bait digging in intertidal mud for the purposes of recreational fishing. Noise disturbance in relation to recreation would most likely be caused by activities such as motorised water sports (e.g. jet skiing).

The potential for the above effects to occur is assessed further below, in relation to the proposals alone, and in-combination with other plans and projects.

Likelihood of Effects

Visitor surveys have found that the most popular reasons for visiting the Essex Coast European sites are dog walking and recreational walking^{2,3}. The proposals are for 220 new dwellings, therefore on the basis of 2.4 people per dwelling⁴ there are expected to be approximately 528 residents. In addition, based on 24% of homes having at least one dog⁵, it is estimated that 53 of the new houses will own a dog.

None of the European sites are connected to the Application Site by public footpaths, and considering the separation distances it is expected that any visitors would travel by car rather than foot.

The closest of the European sites scoped in to this assessment are Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar and the overlapping Essex Estuaries SAC, located approximately 6.5km straight line distance from the Application Site. At over 1.5 hours each way approximate walking time, Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar and the overlapping Essex Estuaries SAC are not expected to be accessed from the Application Site by foot. The nearest recognised parking facilities to these designations from the site are approximately 20km away and 30 minutes driving time.

The Dengie SPA and Ramsar is located on the southern bank of the Blackwater estuary, therefore it is approximately 40 minutes' drive to reach the designation, with numerous other recreational opportunities in the area, it is highly unlikely that residents would regularly choose to visit Dengie SPA and Ramsar.

The site itself contains approximately 5.4ha of public open space, which represents nearly 50% of the total site area. The proposals include a circular walk and connections totalling in excess of 2.7km passing through areas of wildflower grassland, lakes, woodland, tree and shrub planting. It is expected that the on-site open space would absorb the majority of the everyday recreational needs of the residents. In addition, alternative larger areas of green space are available in close proximity to the site, including numerous Local Nature Reserves, and Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation. There are also numerous public footpaths in close proximity to the north and east and south of the site through open countryside.

Considering the above information it is likely that the majority of everyday recreational needs arising as a result of the new development would occur on-site and within the readily accessible alternative areas of green space outside of the European designations. However, due to the coastal nature of the European sites and the unique recreational opportunities they provide, there is the potential for a limited number of new residents to travel longer distances to visit the coastal designations. In addition, water-based

² Colchester Borough Council (2012) Habitats Regulations Assessment Survey and Monitoring – Year 3 Interim Report, November 2012.

³ Place Services (2018) Essex Coast Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) Habitats Regulations Assessment Strategy document 2018-2038. Final Draft, Appendices.

⁴ Office for National Statistics (2017)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2017>

⁵ PDSA (2018) PAW PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2018.

recreational activities such as jet skiing and fishing are restricted to the coast, albeit are only undertaken by a very small proportion of the population.

Considering the above, the number of additional visits to the European sites by residents of the new development is likely to be very low and therefore would not generate likely significant effects when considering the proposals alone. As a result of this it is less likely that the proposals would result in significant effects in combination with other plans or projects. Nevertheless, Natural England advises that new residential development within the Zols is anticipated to constitute a likely significant effect on the designated sites through increased recreational pressure when considered in combination with other plans or projects. As such, the Essex RAMS has been developed specifically to mitigate predicted in-combination effects of increased recreational activity at the coast as a result of development across Essex (see Stage 2 below).

Conclusion: In the absence of mitigation, the proposals alone are not considered to have a likely significant effect on European designations. However, when considered together with other proposed residential development at the Borough and County level, in-combination likely significant effects cannot be ruled out.

Stage 2 - Appropriate Assessment

Do the proposals, in-combination with other relevant plans and projects have the potential to affect the integrity of the European designation, given the sites' conservation objectives?

Yes.

The potential for increased recreational pressure as a result of the proposals in combination with other projects in the area may detrimentally affect the relevant interest features of the Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar, Dengie SPA and Ramsar and Essex Estuaries SAC, as the site is within the Zols for these European sites.

Proposed Mitigation Measures

Alternative Green Infrastructure

The proposals include on-site open space that is integral to the scheme, in accordance with Policy ENV1 of the Local Plan. As set out above, the European sites are unlikely to be a significant draw for residents for everyday recreation and no likely significant effects are predicted for the proposals alone. Nevertheless, the development includes well-designed on-site green infrastructure proportionate to its scale (in exceedance of Local Policy open space standards) and will be attractive to dog walkers through the creation and provision of access to a minimum 2.7km length circular walk including areas of semi-natural habitat, a dedicated 'dogs-off-leads' area and dog waste bins. Information leaflets will also be distributed to new householders highlighting local footpaths within the open countryside and alternative areas of green space including nearby amenities.

Adherence to the Essex Coast RAMS

Colchester Borough Council is a signatory to the RAMS, which includes education, access control, habitat creation, wardening, and monitoring and review. The current tariff for financial contributions, to deliver the RAMS is understood to be listed at £125.58 per new dwelling.

A financial contribution should be agreed and collected from the developer prior to commencement, on the basis that it can be used to fund strategic off-site measures. These measures should be targeted towards increasing the relevant European sites' resilience to recreational pressure (such as wardening schemes) and be in line with the aspirations of the emerging RAMS.

The applicant is prepared to agree to the required contribution (£27,627.06 based on 220 dwellings), therefore it is considered that appropriate mitigation can be secured to offset the potential in-combination recreational effects identified above.

Conclusion - with the implementation of mitigation, will the proposals in-combination with other plans and projects, taking account of the designations' conservation objectives, result in an adverse effect on integrity of a European designation?

No.

It is concluded that the proposed mitigation set out above, in view of the designations' conservation objectives, would fully mitigate the predicted in-combination effects. As such, there would be no residual effects which would have an adverse effect on the integrity of Blackwater Estuary SPA and Ramsar, Dengie SPA and Ramsar, or Essex Estuaries SAC. Therefore, no further assessment is required.