

Habitats Regulation Assessment of the Local Transport Plan 2011 - 2026

1 Introduction

This document forms the strategic Habitat Regulations Assessment of the West Berkshire Local Transport Plan. It has been written to assess the LTP and its potential impacts on Natura 2000 sites. An HRA has also been carried out for the West Berkshire Core Strategy, which is linked very closely with the LTP and therefore many of the issues have already been considered.

Natura 2000 sites are European designated sites which are intended to form an ecological coherent network of designated sites across the whole of Europe. They comprise Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the conservation of Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC). For the purpose of this report they relate to Ramsar sites as advised in Planning Policy Statement 9 Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (PPS9).

The aim of this document is to assess whether there is likely to be an adverse affect on the integrity of any Natura 2000 site in light of its conservation objectives.

1.1 What is the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA)?

The term 'Habitat Regulations Assessment' (HRA) is used to describe the overall process, which includes an Appropriate Assessment (AA), and addresses the requirements set out in Articles 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive. By referring to the process as an HRA it helps to distinguish the various steps required, particularly where a plan is unlikely to have an effect on a European site and therefore does not require a full Appropriate Assessment.

Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, local authorities have a duty to ensure that all the activities they regulate have no adverse effect on the integrity of any of the Natura 2000 sites. Therefore, it must assess the possible effects of proposed plans on any Natura 2000 sites. This includes screening for potential impacts on European sites. If there is a probability or a risk that there will be significant effects on site integrity, alone, or in combination with other relevant plans or projects, (having regard to the site's conservation objectives) then the plan or project must be subject to an Appropriate Assessment of its implications on the site.

Depending on the outcome of the HRA, the local authority may need to amend the plan to eliminate or reduce potentially damaging effects on the European site. If adverse effects on the integrity of sites cannot be ruled out, the plan can only be adopted where there are no alternative solutions that would have a lesser effect and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest sufficient to justify adopting the plan despite its effects on the European sites.

1.2 What is the LTP?

Under the Transport Act 2000 all Local Transport Authorities are required to produce a Local Transport Plan. Until now the LTP has been a five year document outlining highways and transport related schemes and projects for the District. The new LTP, which needs to be in place by April 2011, has much greater flexibility in relation to timescales but still sets out the Authority's local Transport Strategies and Policies, including an Implementation Plan. West Berkshire Council has decided that the LTP will share the same timescale as the Local Development Framework (LDF). This will help to plan the transport infrastructure and services required to support the proposed development plans set out in the LDF. The LTP sets out a long term vision for transport in West Berkshire (up to 2026) with short term (3 year) implementations plans. The HRA, along with the SEA, assess the potential impact that the LTP could have on the environment, particularly in the case of the HRA on Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas both designated under EU law as protected sites.

2 HRA Process

The Habitat Regulations Assessment process is made up of four key stages as set out below:

- Stage 1 – Screening exercise
- Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment
- Stage 3 – Mitigation and Alternatives
- Stage 4 – Imperative reasons of overriding public interest

2.1 Screening Exercise (Stage 1)

A screening exercise for the LTP was undertaken in June 2010 to determine if a full Appropriate Assessment was required.

There are four stages to the screening of a plan or project for its potential effects on a Natura 2000 site:

1. Identifying whether the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site;
2. Describe the plan or project and the description and characteristics of other plan or projects that in combination have the potential to have significant effects on the Nature 2000 site;
3. Identifying the potential effects on the Natura 2000 site; and
4. Assessing the significance of any effects on the Natura 2000 site.

2.1.1 Screening Stage 1 - Identifying whether the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site

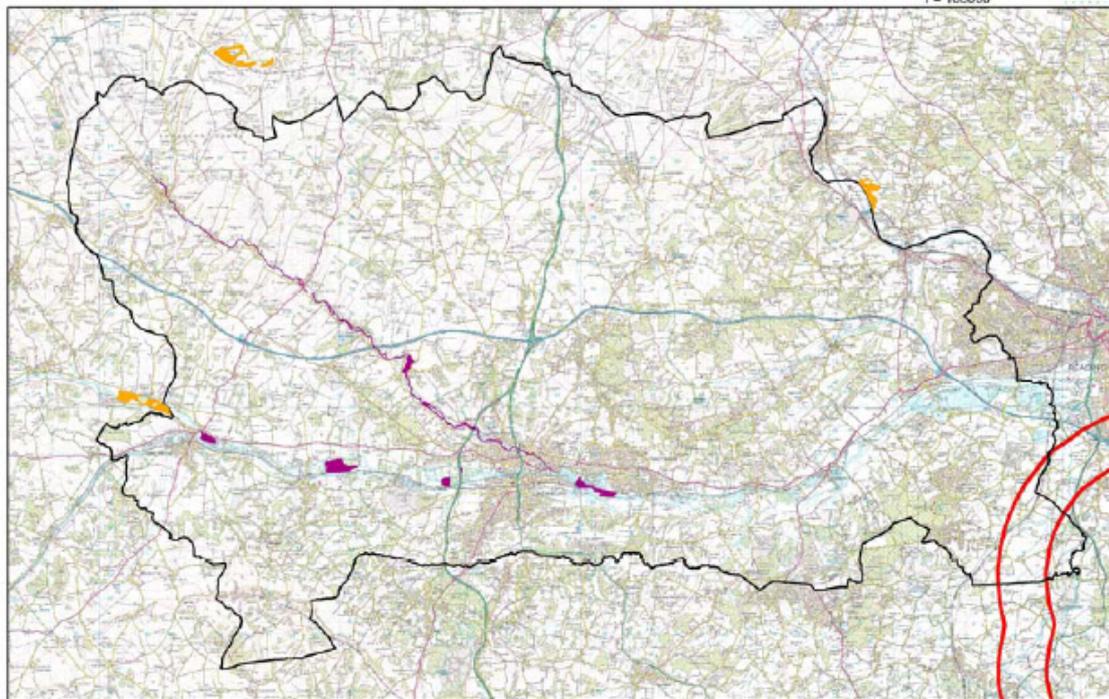
In order for the Council to undertake this part of the screening it was necessary to identify which Natura 2000 sites should be considered in the assessment. While there needs to be consideration of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) within the boundaries of West Berkshire, there is also the need to consider any effects on SAC or Special Protection Areas (SPA) outside of the local authority area. For the purposes of this assessment, any

SAC or SPA within 5km of the boundaries of West Berkshire has been considered.

Within the boundaries of West Berkshire there are three designated SACs and within 5km of the boundaries of West Berkshire there are two SACs. While there is no SPA within West Berkshire, the south-eastern area of the District falls within the 5km boundary of the Thames Valley Heaths SPA. The 5km boundary has been determined by Natural England as a buffer area to regulate development near the SPA.

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)	Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain	Thames Basin Heaths (non-WBC)
River Lambourn	
Kennet Valley Alderwoods	
Hartslock Wood (non-WBC)	
Hackpen Hill (non-WBC)	

Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Area consultation zone 08/07/2010 
1 = 160000



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The **Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain SAC** is a composite site of approximately 114 hectares located within West Berkshire and Wiltshire. The cluster of sites selected in the Kennet and Lambourn valleys support one of the most extensive known populations of Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) in the UK. The conservation objective related to the sites' designation is to maintain in favourable condition, the habitat for the population of Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*).

The **River Lambourn SAC** is a site of approximately 27 hectares located wholly within West Berkshire and consists of the River Lambourn water body. The Lambourn represents bullhead *Cottus gobio* populations inhabiting chalk streams in central southern England. Good water quality, coarse sediments and extensive beds of submerged plants provide an excellent habitat for the species. The presence of Brook lamprey is also a qualifying feature of the site.

The **Kennet Valley Alderwoods SAC** consists of two sites of approximately 56 hectares in total located within West Berkshire in the Kennet floodplain. Its general site characteristic is of broad leaved deciduous woodland. The woodlands are the largest remaining fragments of damp, ash-alder woodland in the Kennet floodplain area. The conservation of the site is dependent upon maintaining a constantly high groundwater level.

Hartslock Wood is a SAC located just outside the West Berkshire boundary in South Oxfordshire. **Hackpen Hill** is a 35.8 hectare SAC site located in the Vale of White Horse approximately 2km north of West Berkshire's border.

The **Thames Basin Heaths SPA** is a composite site covering an area of some 8274 hectares, consisting of 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) scattered from Hampshire in the west, to Berkshire in the north, through to Surrey. The site supports important breeding populations of a number of birds of lowland heath, especially Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), Woodlark (*Lullula arborea*) and Dartford Warbler (*Sylvia undata*). None of the SPA is located within the borders of West Berkshire; however the 5km buffer outlined by Natural England covers a small portion of West Berkshire's eastern area. The only settlement in West Berkshire that is within the 5km buffer is the village of Beech Hill. There are no additional settlements within the 5-7km buffer.

The next stage of the screening was to consider whether the LTP is directly related to the management of any of the above sites. The LTP sets the broad approach to transport in the District until 2026 and is not directly related to the management of any of the Natura 2000 sites identified. Further details of the potential impacts of the LTP are considered in the next stage of the screening process.

2.1.2 Screening Stage 2 - Description of the plan or project and description and characteristics of other plans or projects that in combination have the potential to have significant effects on the Natura 2000 site/s.

The LTP sets out the Council's plan for transport related activities and projects until 2026. It fits closely with the Council's LDF setting out how transport infrastructure will be delivered to support the development set out in the LDF.

There is no regional or national transport strategy that LTPs need to fit into, Local Authorities are able to develop their strategies and plans in the way that they feel is best for their area.

As transport is not contained within Local Authority Boundaries West Berkshire Council works closely with its neighbouring Berkshire authorities to the east (Reading Borough Council and Woking Borough Council) to produce joined up transport networks allowing people to travel easily between the different districts. There is also joint working with Hampshire County Council (to the South of West Berkshire) and Oxfordshire County Council (to the North), with more limited links with Wiltshire County Council (to the west).

It is not considered that these plans in combination will have a significant impact on the SACs or SPA that will not have already been identified in their (or District Authorities) Core Strategy HRAs.

2.1.3 Screening Stage 3 - Identification of the potential effects on the Natura 2000 site/s.

The following is a list of potential effects that the Core Strategy (in combination with other plans) may have on the Natura 2000 sites. They are based on the aspects of the Natura 2000 sites which could be affected or damaged as a result of the plan. As the LTP will help to deliver the Core Strategy it was considered appropriate to use the same potential effects to assess the LTP.

Effect	Comment
Fragmentation of habitat	Due to many years of urban and agricultural activities, the SACs and SPA are already fragments of habitat that have not been developed upon. Further development may have the effect of causing further fragmentation of the specific sites.
Predation	Domestic animals, such as dogs and cats potentially have the effect of increasing predation on species of animals that rely on the sites. Of particular concern is the disturbance of nesting birds.
Hydrology – alteration/pollution/enrichment	Development usually results in the alteration of the hydrology of an area due to earthworks, possible water abstraction for drinking purposes and the installation of roads and drainage. This has the potential to affect the hydrology of a site through alteration of the natural water inflows and outflows. Pollution levels may increase due to contaminants entering

	the water and enrichment may also occur.
Disturbance	People and animals visiting the site may cause physical disturbance to the landform, i.e. through trampling. Other disturbances, such as noise disturbance may occur due to increased traffic within or near the site.
Vandalism	Development within close proximity to a site may increase the potential for destruction of the area through vandalism.
Fire	Development in close proximity to a site increases the risk of fire due to a higher number of ignition sources.
Air pollution	Development tends to increase localised air pollution and could contribute to region-wide air pollution through increased vehicle use. This may interfere with natural processes and contribute to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions.
Management	Current management plans may be affected if development occurs in close proximity to the sites.

2.1.4 Screening Stage 4 - Assessing the significance of any effects on the Natura 2000 site/s.

In the LDF HRA the plan is considered in combination with other plans using the precautionary principle.

Precautionary Principle
<p>This is applied in circumstances where there are reasonable grounds for concern that an activity is, or could, cause harm but where there is uncertainty about the probability of the risk and the degree of harm.</p> <p>It is one of the key elements for policy decisions concerning environmental protection and management.</p>

A number of issues are highlighted, relating to development occurring close to the SACs and associated with water extraction and waste water treatment associated with these developments. Given that the transport policy in the LDF Core Strategy is not anticipated to cause any significant impacts to these sensitive areas, the LTP is not considered to have an impact either as the policies included are either linked to the transport needs to deliver the LDF or as part of the mixed strategy to encourage people to consider alternative and smarter ways of travel to the private car where appropriate.

2.2 Secondary Screening of Core Strategy Policies

The original screening exercise was undertaken in June 2010 as the LTP was being developed. Each of the LTP proposed policies have been considered in the HRA.

The LTP policies are outlined below:

Key Policy		Supporting Policies
LTP K1	Travel Choice	LTP SC1 Walking LTP SC2 Cycling LTP SC3 Travel Planning LTP SC4 Car Sharing / Car Clubs LTP SC5 New Technologies LTP SC6 Branding, Marketing and Promotion
LTP K2	Minimising Congestion	LTP NMP1 Highway Management LTP NMP2 Intelligent Transport Systems
LTP K3	Accessibility (to services)	
LTP K4	Accessibility (equality and inclusion)	
LTP K5	Climate Change	
LTP K6	Air Quality	
LTP K7	Highway Maintenance	
LTP K8	Road Safety	
LTP K9	Passenger Transport	LTP PT1 Bus Services LTP PT2 Community and Voluntary transport LTP PT3 Rail LTP PT4 Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles LTP PT5 Info, Promotion and ticketing LTP PT6 Infrastructure and Interchange LTP PT7 Park and Ride
LTP K10	School Travel	
LTP K11	Parking	LTP P1 Town Centre Parking LTP P2 Residential Parking LTP P3 Parking Standards (New Development) LTP P4 Enforcement
LTP K12	Freight	
LTP K13	New Development	
LTP K14	Health and Leisure	
LTP K15	Cross Boundary and Partnership Working	

The LTP policies have been screened according to the possible effects that could be experienced by the SACs and SPA listed in 2.1.3. This screening can be seen in Appendix 1.

The LTP policies are working to make travel smarter and greener and where it is appropriate reduce the need to travel at all. As a result of this and the isolated nature of the SACs and the SPA in relation to key transport routes it is not expected that any of the policies will have a significant impact on these sites and in many cases it is likely that there would be an improvement. The only policy where there might be slight impact is LTP K14 Health and Leisure. This policy talks about increasing use of and access to the countryside for health and leisure purposes. Therefore, there is the potential for increased numbers of people to be visiting these protected areas. Where projects are proposed under this policy serious consideration will be given to the environmental consequences of the project and if it is expected to cause damage to the SACs or SPA changes will be made to reduce or mitigate the impact.

The LTP fits very closely with the LDF, with the two documents supporting each other. The LDF Core Strategy Transport Policy (LDF CS14) is not anticipated to have any significant impacts on the SACs or SPA.

3 Conclusion

There are three Natura 2000 sites within West Berkshire, the Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain, the River Lambourn and the Kennet Valley Alderwoods and within 5km of the boundary of West Berkshire there are an additional two SACs, Hartslock Wood and Hackpen Hill. Whilst there is no SPA within West Berkshire, the south-eastern area of the District falls within the 5km boundary of the Thames Basin Heath SPA. The 5km boundary has been determined by Natural England as a buffer area to regulate development near the SPA (although large scale proposals between 5 - 7km from the boundary will also be individually assessed).

Under the LDF core strategy transport is not considered to have the potential to create a significant impact on the SACs or the SPA. Despite this the scoping report looks at whether the individual LTP policies might have a significant impact on the SACs or the SPA. The LTP policies aim to reduce the impact of transport on the environment where possible and so none of the proposed policies are seen to have the potential to cause significant harm to the SACs or the SPA. Therefore, it is considered that an Appropriate Assessment is not required for the LTP. At a project level all schemes and projects will be tested using the prioritisation method outlined in the LTP, which includes a section on the environment. If a scheme or project is considered to have a detrimental impact on the environment it will be changed, or appropriate mitigation measures will be put in place.

Appendix 1 – Secondary Screening of LTP Policies

(KEY: x = no impact, ? = possible slight impact but easily mitigated or managed)

Policy	Is there potential for a significant effect on an SAC or the SPA?								Comment
	Fragmentation	Predation	Hydrology	Disturbance	Vandalism	Fire	Air Pollution	Management	
K1: Travel Choice	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy aims to get people to consider using alternatives to the private car and therefore should help to protect SACs and the SPA
SC1: Walking	x	x	x	?	?	x	x	x	Access to the countryside is part of this policy, which could lead to more people accessing the countryside. This in turn could lead to disturbance and vandalism. However, use of existing footpaths and adherence to the countryside code should minimise the impact on the surrounding countryside.
SC2: Cycling	x	x	x	?	?	x	x	x	Access to the countryside is part of this policy, which could lead to more people accessing the countryside. This in turn could lead to disturbance and vandalism. However, use of existing footpaths and adherence to the countryside code should minimise the impact on the surrounding countryside.
SC3: Travel Planning	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Travel planning aims to reduce the impact of traffic and movement on the countryside by getting people to use alternatives to the car. Any impact due to increased walking/cycling would be preferable to continued car use.
SC4: Car Sharing and Car Clubs	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Car sharing reduces the number of single occupancy vehicles on the road, therefore reducing congestion and traffic. This should have a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA.

Policy	Is there potential for a significant effect on an SAC or the SPA?								Comment
	Fragmentation	Predation	Hydrology	Disturbance	Vandalism	Fire	Air Pollution	Management	
SC5: New Technology	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	New technology works to minimise the impact of travel on the environment and reduce congestion therefore new technology should have a positive impact of the SACs and the SPA.
SC6: Branding and Marketing	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy aims to make people more aware of the options available to them for everyday journeys without the car. This should have a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA.
K2: Minimising Congestion	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy aims to reduce congestion, which in turn should reduce the impact that motorised traffic can have on the environment. Therefore, it should have a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA.
NMP1: Highway Management	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy aims to manage the Highway in order to reduce congestion, make the best use of the available road space and improve safety. Through these activities the policy also aims to consider the impact on the environment of transport activities on the network. This should therefore not have a significant impact on the SACs or SPA.
NMP2: Intelligent Transport Systems	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Intelligent transport systems aim to reduce congestion and better manage traffic flows. Therefore this should have a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA.

Policy	Is there potential for a significant effect on an SAC or the SPA?								Comment
	Fragmentation	Predation	Hydrology	Disturbance	Vandalism	Fire	Air Pollution	Management	
K3 Accessibility (to services and facilities)	x	x	x	?	?	x	x	x	The aim of this policy is to improve access to facilities and services, including access to the countryside. This therefore could have a negative impact on the SACs and the SPA.
K4: Accessibility (equality, diversity and inclusion)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy aims to ensure that all people can have access to the services and facilities they wish to access. As with the policy above, projects aiming to deliver this which may have a detrimental impact on the environment would not be progressed or would include appropriate mitigation.
K5: Climate Change	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy aims to develop measures to reduce the impact of road transport on the environment, and the global climate. Therefore this should improve the environment near to and within the SACs and the SPA.
K6: Air quality	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy aims to improve air quality across the district where it is poor due to transport. This should improve the air quality in the areas near and within the SACs and the SPA.
K7: Highway Maintenance	x	x	?	?	x	x	x	x	Highway maintenance is vital to the links that already exist. The policy recognises the need to minimise and reduce the impact that maintenance could have on the environment. Therefore, although there is the potential for a negative impact the policy works to reduce this and were possible eliminate any negative impact.
Policy	Is there potential for a significant effect on an SAC or the SPA?								Comment

	Fragmentation	Predation	Hydrology	Disturbance	Vandalism	Fire	Air Pollution	Management	
K8: Road Safety	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy is working towards improving Road Safety and therefore should not have any negative impacts on the SACs or the SPA.
K9: Passenger Transport	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy itself will not have any negative impacts on the SACs or the SPA.
PT1: Bus services	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Changes and improvements to bus services should not have any detrimental impacts on the SACs or the SPA. As the policy aims to encourage people to use buses it should reduce the number of cars, therefore having a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA.
PT2: Community and Voluntary Transport	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Use of community and voluntary transport reduces the need for people to travel in their own car, and therefore reduces the impact of travel on the SACs and the SPA
PT3: Rail Travel	x	x	x	?	x	x	x	x	The Great Western mainline travels alongside the Kennet Valley Alderwoods and therefore any changes to train travel that increase services could have a slight impact on the SACs and the SPA. Improvements to rail services and infrastructure are reliant on the service provider and Network Rail, rather than the Council, so the council is limited in what it can do to minimise the impact to the environment. WBC will do all it can to ensure that the SACs and the SPA are not damaged should any significant rail improvements go ahead.
Policy	Is there potential for a significant effect on an SAC or the SPA?								Comment
	Fragmentation	Predation	Hydrology	Disturbance	Vandalism	Fire	Air Pollution	Management	
PT4: Taxis	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	The use of taxis helps to reduce the need

and Private Hire Cars									for private cars and therefore this policy should help to protect the SACs and the SPA.
PT5: Passenger Transport Information, Promotion and Ticketing	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy aims to raise awareness of passenger transport and encourage its use rather than private cars. This should therefore have a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA.
PT6: Infrastructure and Interchange	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Improvements to bus infrastructure and interchange are only likely to happen in urban areas away from the SACs. By improving these facilities it is hoped that people will change from using cars to public transport and therefore this policy will have a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA.
PT7: Park and Ride	?	x	?	?	?	x	?	?	This policy aims to investigate the feasibility of park and ride. Included in this will be consideration of any possible sites and the impact on the environment. It is unlikely that any sites would have a significant impact but as the project and possible sites are not known in detail, a slight impact cannot be ruled out. Should the environmental impacts be damaging to the SACs or the SPA, P&R would be very unlikely to go ahead at that location, if at all.

Policy	Is there potential for a significant effect on an SAC or the SPA?								Comment
	Fragmentation	Predation	Hydrology	Disturbance	Vandalism	Fire	Air Pollution	Management	
K10: School Travel	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy aims to encourage parents and pupils not to use the car to get to school. This helps to reduce congestion and traffic and therefore will have a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA. Even if more children walk to school through these areas (which are not located near to any schools, so is unlikely) the impact is likely to be less than that of driving to school.
K11: Parking	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy aims to use parking provision (for all modes) as a way of assisting to deliver the local transport goals. Therefore this policy will not have a detrimental impact on the SACs or the SPA.
P1: Town Centre Parking	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	The town centre parking locations are not near to any of the SACs or the SPA and therefore this policy should not have a negative impact on these areas. The policy is also aimed at providing cycle/motorcycle parking to encourage people to use these modes, and therefore this should further reduce the impact on the SACs and the SPA.

Policy	Is there potential for a significant effect on an SAC or the SPA?								Comment
	Fragmentation	Predation	Hydrology	Disturbance	Vandalism	Fire	Air Pollution	Management	
P2: Residential Parking	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy focuses on residential parking schemes for on-street parking. In these areas there is already parking occurring, this is a way of managing and trying to reduce the impact of inappropriate parking. This policy is therefore not likely to have any impact on the SACs and the SPA.
P3: Parking Standards	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Parking standards are associated with new development and include car, cycle and motorcycle parking. The aim is to reduce the impact of parking on surrounding roads in association with a new development and therefore this policy should not have a detrimental effect on the SACs or the SPA.
P4: Enforcement	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	This policy looks at the enforcement of parking regulations. Therefore, this policy should not have a negative impact on the SACs or the SPA as it aims to make sure people are parking safely and correctly.
K12: Freight	x	x	?	?	x	x	?	x	Freight movements have the potential to cause harm to SACs and the SPA. This policy aims to encourage the use of the preferred freight route network and reduce freight using inappropriate routes. Therefore this policy should have a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA.

Policy	Is there potential for a significant effect on an SAC or the SPA?								Comment
	Fragmentation	Predation	Hydrology	Disturbance	Vandalism	Fire	Air Pollution	Management	
K13: New Development	x	x	?	?	?	x	?	?	Without this policy there is the potential for new development to cause harm to the environment. This policy aims to ensure that the transport implications of a new development are considered (including parking arrangements). As a result of this policy there should be no negative impact on the SACs and the SPA as they will aim to be managed or mitigated through the consideration of the development proposal.
K14: Health and Leisure	x	?	?	?	?	?	x	?	This policy looks at using modes of transport to improve health and access to leisure facilities, including access to the countryside. This policy looks at improving existing facilities rather than creating new ones. If protected sites are considered inappropriate for improvements due to the negative environmental impact that the improvement may cause in the longer term it is very unlikely that this work would go ahead. The policy is aimed at improving access to the countryside in a way that is safe and easy both for the people accessing the countryside and the countryside itself. Improving health by encouraging walking/cycling could lead to fewer people using cars, and so in the longer term could have a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA.
K15: Cross Boundary and	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	By working together with other LAs and partnership organisations the environmental impact of a project can be

partnership Working									seen more clearly as authority boundaries are not relevant within the countryside. This policy therefore should have a positive impact on the SACs and the SPA as they will be being considered by all organisations involved in a project not just one.
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