



Doncaster
Council

Doncaster Local Plan Publication (January 2021)

Updated Addendum to Habitat Regulations Assessment (Appropriate Assessment Report) (May 2021)



Contents

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

2. Screening Assessment

2.1 Summary of Screening to Modifications to policies

2.2 Detailed Screening Results

3. Appropriate Assessment and Integrity Test

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Wind Energy Developments and impacts on Nightjar

3.3 Conclusion

Executive Summary

This report is an updated (May 2021) addendum to the completed Habitat Regulations Report for the Council's Local Plan and should be read in conjunction with the original report. Minor and major modifications to the policies and policy map resulting from the examination in public have been reviewed in order to determine if any of these changes have the potential to impact on European Sites. Two new policies have been screened and the results are provided here. Policy 59, Wind Energy Development, was screened as having the potential to negatively impact nightjar populations on Thorne and Hatfield Moors SPA. Suggested amendments to the policy following further discussion with Natural England are therefore made. None of the other changes were found to materially affect the conclusions of the original HRA report and no further appropriate assessment work is considered necessary.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 This report is an addendum to the completed Habitat Regulations Report for the Council's Local Plan and should be read in conjunction with the original report. Minor and major modifications to the policies and policy map resulting from the examination in public have been reviewed in order to determine if any of these changes have the potential to impact on European Sites.

2. Screening Assessment

2.1 Summary of Screening to Modifications to policies

2.1.1 The HRA was reviewed in light of the proposed modifications to the Plan. It is considered that the proposed changes to policy wording do not alter the screening results of the original HRA. These changes are therefore not considered further.

2.1.2 Changes to the policies map are also included in some of the proposed modifications. Again, these changes have been reviewed during a screening exercise. Changes to the policies map associated with Policy 59 (Wind Energy Developments), that shows areas of search for wind energy development, have changed the result of the previous screening exercise. A new screening assessment is therefore undertaken and shown in Table 1 below.

2.1.3 Two new polices have been added to the plan. These are Policy 71 iPort and Policy 73 Local Business Expansion Site Polypipe. A screening assessment of each of these polices is also shown below in Table 1.

2.2 Detailed Screening Results

2.2.1 Table 1 below contains the full results of the screening exercise for policies 59, 71 and 73.

Table 1: Policy and Site Screening Results

Section of document, policies or objectives being screened	Screening category with explanation
Policy 59 Wind Energy Development (Strategic Policy)	I. The policy directs medium to large scale wind energy developments towards the revised Area of Search shown in the policies map. The Area of Search abuts Thorne and Hatfield Moors SPA. Nightjar breeding on the Moors have the potential to be impacted by wind energy developments through land take associated with foraging habitats, disturbance to flight paths to and from foraging areas and migratory routes to and from wintering grounds.
Policy 71 iPort (Strategic Policy)	F. The policy sets out the principles for ongoing development at the site of an existing strategic rail freight interchange already permitted through an existing planning permission. It will not itself lead to development.
Policy 73 Local Business Expansion Site: Polypipe	G. The policy allocates a Local Business Expansion Site. This includes supporting office and ancillary uses, enhancing remaining open space and ensuring compensatory improvements to the greenbelt. The location of this site and the nature of the proposals will have no conceivable impact on any European Site.

2.2.2 Policy 59 is identified as needing a more detailed assessment of its impacts in order to determine whether or not it will adversely affect the site integrity of a European Site. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

3. Appropriate Assessment and Integrity Test

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This chapter examines in more detail issues arising from Policy 59, Wind Energy Development, identified in the screening exercise in Chapter 2. It considers whether in view of the conservation objectives of Thorne and Hatfield Moors SPA the policy will have an adverse effect on the integrity of this European Site.

3.2 Wind Energy Developments and impacts on Nightjar

3.2.1 The policy directs medium to large scale wind energy developments towards the revised Area of Search shown in the policies map. The Area of Search abuts Thorne and Hatfield Moors SPA. Windfarms have three main areas of potential risk to birds. These are:

- Collision with turbine blades resulting in injury or death
- Direct loss of habitat as a result of turbine construction
- Displacement of birds resulting in an indirect loss of habitat as disturbance causes birds to avoid the windfarm and nearby areas.

3.2.2 Nightjar breed on the SPA site but also travel off the site to forage, sometimes at distances of up to 3km from the designated area. Studies have also shown that birds travel between Thorne Moors and Hatfield Moors. In addition to this Nightjar are a migratory species that travel to their breeding grounds from South Africa. Impacts from displacement caused by turbines can act at all of these points in a bird's life history. So for example, disturbance from turbines could cause:

- Displacement of birds from breeding areas.
- Displacement of birds from foraging sites.
- A barrier to accessing foraging grounds if birds are unwilling to fly across areas with turbines.

- A barrier to birds being able to use their normal migratory routes to and from the breeding grounds.
- A barrier to travel between populations on Thorne Moor and Hatfield Moor.

At present birds are not thought to be using existing sites with wind turbines near to the SPA. It is unclear however if this is due to the birds actively avoiding these areas or having a preference for other areas. An appropriate assessment of the impacts of a proposed wind energy development would need to consider all of the potential factors listed above.

3.2.3 It is important to note that an Area of Search is not a designation that means all proposals within that area will be acceptable for wind energy developments. As illustrated above wind turbines have the potential to impact upon nightjar populations by causing changes in behavior related to breeding, foraging and migration. A project that had such impacts would not be considered acceptable by the Policy. It is not possible to undertake a meaningful assessment of the potential impacts listed above at this stage. Impacts could depend on the size and precise location of a proposal, as well as its geographical relationship with other existing or proposed turbine sites. Bearing this in mind, it is recommended that detailed assessments of these impacts are undertaken at the project stage, when more details are known about a particular proposal. To this end, it was proposed that Policy 59 sets out in part E that development must have no unacceptable adverse impacts on the natural environment and ecology, highlighting flightpaths for birds. Following discussion with Natural England it is further suggested that the supporting text to Policy 59 is updated to highlight the need for any wind turbine application within 3km of Thorne and Hatfield Moors to include an appropriate assessment under the Habitat Regulations to demonstrate that the proposals would have no adverse impact on the integrity of nightjar populations. This additional text will highlight that any such assessment should consider factors such as:

- Potential for direct impacts on nightjar within the designated sites boundary

- Impacts on feeding habitat outside the designated site
- Impacts on flight paths between the designated site and feeding habitats; and
- Impacts on migration routes

3.3 Conclusion

3.3.1 Subject to the proposed amendments to Policy 59 and given that being located within an Area of Search does not automatically give permission for wind energy development on any particular site, it is considered that impacts on the integrity of European Sites resulting from the proposed modifications to the Local Plan can be ruled out. The strengthening of Policy 59 and its supporting text highlights the need for these further assessments at the project stage when the scope of such proposals is fully understood.