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Dear Mr Shore


Thank you for your letter dated 29th July 2011 consulting Natural England on the above LDF documents. Our comments below deal with each document in turn.

**Shepway Core Strategy Proposed Submission Document**

**Summary comment**

The core strategy document is largely positive in the way it approaches biodiversity, landscape and green infrastructure (GI). Associated supportive text is often very thorough and Natural England welcomes its inclusion. However, our main concern is that some of the policy wording requires strengthening to reflect this text. Most notably the GI policy, which whilst welcome as an integrated approach to considering the importance of the natural environment in Shepway, falls short of giving sufficient specific consideration to either biodiversity or landscape. The Council needs to address this issue either within the GI policy or through the provision of additional landscape and biodiversity policies. Natural England advises the Council that if this issue is not addressed it may risk the overall soundness of the Core Strategy and we are keen to work with you to resolve this.

**Detailed comments**

**Section 1.2 About Shepway - District character areas**

There is no mention of the biodiversity wealth within the description of the District in this section.

**Environment and Natural Assets**

**Figure 2.8** The map of the designated sites does not cover the potential Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protection Area (pSPA) and proposed Ramsar, therefore the true extent of the international designation is not shown. Although note 9 highlights this, the precise maps are available for use by the Council or reference could be made in the text to the proposed extensions which covers the majority of the Special Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) at this location. It should be noted that both PPS9 and the draft NPPF extend the same level of protection to proposed as well as existing European designated sites.

**Section 2.26** The SSSIs and the Ancient Woodlands (AW) are indicated in the same colour and therefore cannot be distinguished. Also the colouring needs to be transparent or hatched so
overlaying designations can be identified. Dungeness National Nature Reserves should also be included.

This is section is the only place in the document the designated sites are given their protection status i.e. internationally protected, nationally protected, but here the SSSIs and AW are incorrectly designated as internationally protected rather than nationally. In the rest of the document these designated sites are referred to as GI assets which may lead to misinterpretation as to how they should be considered within the GI network as well as the level of protection they benefit from through national planning policy.

With regards to important landscapes, neither the North Kent Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or the Heritage Coast are mentioned beyond the initial description of the district. These are important parts of the environment and a natural asset so it would also be appropriate to map their extent here.

It would also be useful in this section to list the number of N2K sites (abbreviation for the Natura 2000 series of sites, which is another term for the internationally designated sites), SSSIs, local wildlife sites, ancient woodland and other priority habitats etc, and the area they cover.

Finally 2.10 shows a map of the strategic corridor for development activity in the district; it would be helpful to have either on this map or a separate map how this strategic corridor and other strategic sites for housing sits in relation to the designated sites.

Aims and Vision for Shepway

Strategic Need B: The challenge to enhance the management and maintenance of the rich natural and historic assets in Shepway

Apart from some minor word changes set out below, the aims in strategic need B are welcomed and cover all the aspects concerning the natural environment. National planning policies concerning landscape and biodiversity highlight the need to conserve and enhance these assets and these terms should be used to describe the overall challenge rather than the management and maintenance. To this end we would like to see rewording of aims 4 and 7 which should incorporate the wording ‘conserve and enhance the AONB and its setting’ within aim 4 and ‘working with natural coastal processes’ in aim 7.

Whilst Natural England welcomes the aims of strategic need B we are concerned that these are not sufficiently addressed within in the relevant core policy i.e. CSD4. This is particularly true of aims 3, 4 and 7. This has also led to some inconsistency with national policy including PPS9, PPS7, the draft NPPF and South East Plan policies NRM5, NRM 8 and C3 (The South East Plan remains part of the statutory development plan, although its revocation is a material consideration).

These concerns can be addressed, we suggest, in two ways, either by expanding the policy CSD4 ‘Green infrastructure of natural networks, open spaces and recreation’ or through additional separate policies. If the first approach is taken we would favour the policy being subdivided into sections covering biodiversity and landscape. The advantage of the second approach is that it may provide more clarity. Whatever approach is taken, the following issues need to be taken into consideration:

1.) N2K sites are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (the ‘Habitats Regulations’) and do not require a policy for protection. However, the Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) conducted to assess the impacts of the Core Strategy’s policy identified the main concern for the Dungeness site as being disturbance through increased recreation from new housing and the desire to increase tourism. The green box on page 88 describes the key findings for Dungeness; however this central issue needs to be interpreted into policy wording in order to be compliant with the Habitats Regulations. Recreational pressure can be relieved in part by the provision of nearby accessible green space but other mechanisms may also be required such as wardens, access management etc. The Policy should highlight that new development will need to take account of the additional pressure it may bring to N2K sites and demonstrate that it will not have an adverse impact on site integrity. With regard to managing greater tourism or watersports...
usage we suggest the development of an access management strategy at this strategic level needs to be embedded in policy. This strategy also needs to be developed in order to address recreational disturbance from wider sources. Please see further details in our response to the HRA.

2.) Provision of additional green space needs to consider the potential impacts on other N2K sites in the Shepway District. The findings of the HRA for the sites other than the Dungeness complex need to be reassessed once the results of the visitor survey for Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment SAC are available, in order to confirm some of the assumptions made. However, the issues and their means of resolution are likely to be similar. Provision of nearby accessible green space for all strategic developments sites and a monitoring program are required to ensure the assumptions made in the HRA remain valid and that the green space provision strategy is having the desired effect. Clear policy direction is likely to be fundamental in achieving this certainty.

3.) In addition to N2K sites the local authority should set out how it will protect and enhance its other biodiversity assets, again to ensure internal consistency within the plan, and comply with PPS9 and the South East Plan policy NRM5. One of our concerns with combining all these assets under GI is that there is no guidance for how development should treat each of these assets separately. The policy wording should set out how biodiversity will be considered with designated sites having a hierarchical level of protection including how international, national, local wildlife sites, ancient woodland and other priority habitat will be taken into account. This is not a replication of PPS 9 but is an implementation of what is required by national policy (and NRM5) to ensure the conservation and enhancement of valuable habitats and species is embedded at the local level. **PPS9 paragraph 5 (i)** sets the intention for policy to afford the appropriate levels of protection for these sites within the core strategy. Paragraph 11 of PPS9 states that “through policies in plans, local authorities should also conserve other important natural habitat types that have been identified in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 section 74 list, as being of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England and identify opportunities to ‘enhance and add to them’”. Thus PPS9 allows for a more widespread recognition of locally important habitats, and protection of these sites should be sought. Local Planning Authorities should be encouraged to consider appropriate levels of protection from development for habitat types which are locally significant, but which do not enjoy conservation designations currently and particularly those which are important locally. Local Biodiversity Action Plans are a useful reference. Such an approach will minimise the need for objections on biodiversity grounds at application stage and ensure the Local Authority fulfils its duties under section 28i of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Currently Natural England has specific concerns for SSSIs and priority habitats within the strategic development corridor purpose within the Spatial Strategy and how development may impact on them (this is highlighted below in the comments on each policy). A strategic policy in the core strategy where biodiversity protection is explicit, cross referenced with specific development policies, would address this.

4.) There is a requirement for policy wording within the core strategy relating to the enhancement of habitats and creation of new sites that can be linked to a delivery target such as the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan. This will enable the Local Authority to fulfil its role as a partner and assist in the delivering the England Biodiversity Strategy by identifying areas of biodiversity opportunity and ensuring that development and the activities of the Local Authority do not compromise biodiversity enhancement in the district.

5.) There is a requirement for policy wording within the Core Strategy to reflect the importance of Shepway’s landscapes. Aspects of landscape, the AONB and its setting are picked up in some of the spatial strategies and the Core Strategy delivery polices but not fully in the green infrastructure policy. The duty on Local Authorities is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and this terminology should be used consistently. Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, section 85, Councils must have regard to the purposes of the AONB designation and the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty. Natural England considers that the best way of
ensuring the above, as well as remaining internally consistent with the plans aims and PPS7 and C3 (SE Plan) is to include landscape policy wording which outlines:

- General considerations of landscape with regard to development and the use of a Landscape Character Assessment to further this consideration.
- How development will have regard to landscape designations and their settings in order to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.
- How the Council will take into account the management plan for the AONB and how spatial planning can help facilitate the aims of the management plan.
- How the Council will take into account the Kent Downs AONB Landscape Design Handbook for development.

**Policy CSD4: Green infrastructure of natural networks, open spaces and recreation**

If this policy is to remain the only natural environment policy within the Core Strategy the full suite of issues and opportunities for habitats, species and landscapes need to be covered more thoroughly as detailed in points 1 to 5 above. This will require a significant expansion of the policy, so the Council may prefer to provide additional policies on biodiversity and landscape. We would be keen to meet the Council in the near future to discuss the best way forward on these issues but in the meantime we would advise that in its current form the plan is unlikely to be considered sound in its policy approach to the natural environment.

**Policy CSD5: Water and coastal environmental management in Shepway.**

The policy wording within CSD5 is not specific regarding coastal change, this needs to be included with some text making reference to the Shoreline Management Plan and Coastal Strategy for the area (The Folkestone to Cliff End Flood and Erosion Risk Management Strategy) reflecting the need to deliver sustainable coastal management. The policy should recognise the dynamic nature of this coastal environment and support working with natural processes where possible. It should promote conserving the natural coastal landscape and making space for climate change adaptation by the natural environment.

Development should not proceed where it adversely impacts on these coastal processes.

Similar wording is critical to support the natural process of the coastal environment which underpins the geomorphology of Dungeness and generates its special features. This is highlighted in our suggestion to amend the HRA in relation to coastal processes (see below) however, with the SMP and Coastal Strategy and additional wording in the policy Natural England would be satisfied that this matter would be addressed by the Core Strategy.

**Additional comments on individual policies.**

In general it would be helpful to show on the strategic site maps the location of any designated nature site and the AONB.

**Policy SS1: District spatial strategy**

We would like to comment on the strategic priorities for the following three character areas of the district.

**Folkestone and Hythe area**

There are SSSIs within this character area that need to be taken into account particularly as high levels of development are to proceed in this area, therefore we recommend that in addition to securing accessible public green space, protection and enhancement of these sites is also highlighted. Alternatively a suitably worded biodiversity or GI policy could address these concerns more strategically.

**The North Downs area**
Again landscape issues and the AONB objectives do not appear to have been addressed adequately within the policy wording.

Policy SS2: Housing and economy growth strategy

In light of uncertainties around the impacts of increased recreational disturbance as a result of housing close to N2K sites we would recommend a policy caveat along the lines of ‘The council will revisit the rate, scale and/or distribution of development across the district to respond to the findings of new evidence, if it is necessary to protect the integrity of European sites.’ This would help address the fact the evidence base with respect to this issue is currently incomplete. Please refer to our comments on the HRA below.

Policy SS3: Place shaping and sustainable settlements strategy

An additional bullet point perhaps under item e. should be added about the natural environment and landscape with regard to place shaping and sustainability as both issues are fundamental to this agenda.

Policy SS4 Priority centres of activity strategy

Two of the employment sites at Lydd and New Romney are adjacent to the Dungeness N2K site, we would request that the position of the nearby N2K is raised in supportive text and is cross-reference to the relevant core policy.

Policy SS5 District Infrastructure

Natural England welcomes the inclusion of the third bullet point in Policy SS5. This links to the comments raised in response to the HRA and the issue of Air Quality. We would suggest that the word ‘allows’ is replaced with ‘promotes’ as a way to encourage reduction in carbon emissions

Policy SS6 Spatial Strategy for Folkestone waterfront

The policy proposes 1000 new houses and is located close to Folkestone Warren SSSI. Natural England is concerned about the impacts this level of development will have on the site and we restate the need for appropriate policy wording to ensure the protection of this and other SSSIs. Again one of the main impacts on this site will be from recreational pressure. The N2K sites of Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment and Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs should also be considered in the policy of this strategic site so that development delivers appropriate additional green space to ensure the recreational impacts do not affect these sites.

Policy SS7 Spatial strategy for Shorncliffe Garrison, Folkestone

Natural England is concerned about a number of designated sites that may be affected by this development. These include Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment and Dover to Kingsdown cliffs SACs; as well as the Seabrook Stream SSSI and Local Wildlife Sites. This policy also needs to consider the AONB and its setting.

Policy SS8: Spatial strategy for Folkestone Racecourse, Westenhanger

This strategic site needs to take into account the Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment and Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs SACs, as well as the impacts on the AONB and its setting and Otterpool Quarry SSSI.

Policy CSD1: Balanced neighbourhoods for Shepway

No specific comment.

Policy CSD2: District residential needs

No specific comment.

Policy CSD3: Rural and tourism development of Shepway

We are pleased to see the final sentence in this policy and the supporting text 5.35 - 5.39 is welcomed. Providing the biodiversity/GI policy wording is more robust in terms of its development control objectives, and the HRA recommendations are recognised in terms of recreation pressure on the N2K sites such as implementing a Sustainable Access Strategy within policy CSD3, we would be satisfied.
Policy CSD4 Green infrastructure of natural networks, open spaces and recreation
See comments above.

Policy CSD5 Water and coastal environment management
See comments above.

Policy CSD6 Central Folkestone
We have concerns about SSSIs sites at Folkestone Warren and Lympne Escarpment and Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment SAC.

Policy CSD7 Hythe Strategy
Development in the Hythe strategy has potential to impact on SSSIs such as Lympne Escarpment and Folkestone Warren as well as international sites of Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment SAC and Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs SAC.

Policy CSD8 New Romney Strategy
The proposed housing at New Romney is potentially 700 metres or so from the N2K site. Therefore we feel strongly that CSD8 should contain policy wording that not only cross references to a strengthened CSD4 policy and CSD3 policy but also highlights the designated site and references the findings of the HRA.

Policy CSD9 Sellindge Strategy
Need to consider impacts on the Gibbins Brook SSSI

Appendix 2: Infrastructure projects

Table 6.1 Strategically ‘Critical’ Infrastructure

Under green infrastructure the only project identified as strategically ‘critical’ infrastructure is related to the Seabrook / Shorncliffe project.

Mitigating any significant impacts on N2K sites in order to allow development to proceed should be seen as a critical infrastructure need, however, the phasing of development affects the importance of this infrastructure such that it can be viewed as non-critical in the short-term.

Table 6.2 Other ‘non-critical’ projects

These are outlined as important potentially ‘necessary’ infrastructure. Under the topic of biodiversity and natural resources is the detail regarding the management and implementation e.g. Habitats (AA measures for Dungeness), popular natural areas (e.g. Folkestone Warren)

The status of this project is suitable providing it meets the above criteria although the approach to working up an access strategy should begin soon with discussion between partners etc. The implementation of this project needs to be unlocked and becomes critical as the development in the district proceeds and as tourism strategies are taken forward.

As a point of information Flood defences and coastal engineering in the Table 6.2 Strategically ‘Necessary’ Infrastructure - Natural England needs to be included in the Lead partners group as both schemes are within N2K

Appendix 3 Monitoring and Risk

Table 6.5 Aims arising from Strategic Need B

In order to monitor the delivery and outcome of green space provision within the district and its role in alleviating recreational pressure from internationally designated nature sites, an additional measure to monitor this delivery and manage the potential risk of any adverse impacts on integrity on the N2K sites should be incorporated within Appendix 3. Possible measurements may include: GI delivery area to agreed standard, conservation status of SSSIs underlying N2K sites, monitoring survey of users at suitable intervals in relation to the plan's delivery. The target is to ensure that new development and policies that may increase recreational pressure are managed appropriately.
Rother and Shepway Core Strategies Habitat Regulation Assessment (Dungeness SAC; Dungeness to Pett Level SPA and SPA extension; and Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay proposed Ramsar site)

General comments

The HRA needs to be made against the conservation objectives for each of the international sites. There is reference to this step in Box 1 on Page 10 but there is no reference in the text of the HRA to the Conservation Objectives nor is there any interpretation given as to how these have been used to inform the HRA process.

2.5.2 Key development plans of relevance to Dungeness

The list needs to include:

- The Folkestone to Cliff End Flood and Erosion Risk Management Strategy

3.4 Key Environmental Conditions

3.4.1. An explanation of how the list of Key Environmental Conditions was collated would be useful. What sources were used to collate the list?

There is a need to add another two key environmental conditions in relation to the geomorphology feature of the SSSI. The geomorphology interest underpins the Dungeness SAC. This is because it is fundamental to the mix of flora and fauna found on the site. It is a dynamic coastline open to the natural coastal processes that gives rise to the unique habitats found at Dungeness.

It is suggested that to ensure that a complete assessment has been undertaken the following Environmental Conditions are added

- Maintain the natural patterns of erosion and accretion along the coast,
- No increase in the number of coastal defence operations disrupting the natural supply of sediment to the site.

4. Screening: Likely Significant Effects

Comments on the screening process in Appendix 1

Shepway DC Core Strategy – screening process

CSD5 Water and coastal

As commented above there is a very important addition required in this policy, that of natural coastal processes.

The HRA would need to screen this Policy and include as part of the HRA assessment. Further comments below.

5. Disturbance

HRA on Disturbance

Natural England welcomes the mitigation measures and recommendations that are suggested within the HRA with regard to disturbance arising from promoting tourism/recreational activity in the Dungeness area. We would wish to draw attention to the wider recreational pressure, not just that generated from tourism which could potentially increase with additional housing in the local area. The HRA recommends 5.5.2 that Owing to the potential for recreation/tourism to lead to
disturbance, Council Policy should adopt an integrated approach to this issue. Natural England would fully support this approach if this included taking account of new housing development. However, having set out the measures and recommendations in the HRA it is disappointing that these are not fully reflected in the relevant policies within the Core Strategies. Natural England would seek their inclusion, such as the suggestion of a sustainable access strategy. Indeed, without their inclusion, the Core Strategy is unlikely to be considered sound.

Furthermore there are additional measures that could be considered such as the provision of greenspace outside of the international designations as a way to relieve the recreation pressure on the International sites, As stated above in our comments under Policy CSD4: Green Infrastructure, there is a need to state that part of the reason why GI provision is required alongside new development is to relieve recreation pressure on the European sites. Measures to ensure that developers provide or contribute towards providing alternative greenspace to assist with visitor control and recreation management has not been incorporated into policy.

Until such changes are made to the policies to ensure that a more robust approach is adopted to protect the international sites from disturbance, Natural England advises that with regard to impacts from disturbance, the Core Strategy policies are not sufficient to demonstrate conformity with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Natural England does not concur with the conclusion at 5.7 ...that the Rother and Shepway Core Strategies do have sufficient safeguards in policy/supporting text that they would be unlikely to lead to significant effects on the Dungeness international sites through disturbance impacts.

Further comments on 5. Disturbance

5.1.12 and 5.1.13

Under the heading Activities other than recreation...... refers to noise, vibration and visual disturbance from sources such as ports, airports and wind farms. It is suggested that this paragraph is expanded to include other disturbance issues arising from development. For example there is potential disturbance from the Lydd Airport development to SPA, pSPA and pRamsar bird interest in addition to noise and visual disturbance from aviation to birds, such as habitat loss, disturbance from bird control and habitat management. All these measures that could potentially be introduced by a development at Lydd airport should be covered here.

5.2 Available survey data

The three sources of visitor data are useful but need to be approached with caution if using these as a means to assess the visitor pressure across the SAC, SPA, pSPA and pRamsar. The Rye Harbour LNR data is from 1996 and therefore rather dated. The Dungeness Point survey is very much at the specific location of the Point. Other areas within the international sites that are used by visitors would not feature in these surveys.

This is particularly relevant along the full extent of the eastern coast which includes Greatstone and Littlestone. The large intertidal area on this coastline is in the pSPA and pRamsar; the shingle foreshore all falls within the SAC.

Within the Rother area, Camber sands and Broomhill frontage are also heavily used areas of the coast for a variety of recreation and leisure pursuits. This location has not featured in the survey data.

5.2.1.

Natural England does not agree with the assumption taken in the HRA in 5.2.1 that the RSPB reserve can be removed from the assessment on the basis of a ‘cap’ on 40,000 visitors as suggested in the RSPB Management Plan.

5.2.2
Agree with the need for caution in 5.2.2 with regard to the conclusions reached in the Lydd Airport development planning application documents submitted to Shepway DC.

6. Water quality

If the recommendations set out in the HRA are addressed as suggested in the Core Strategies then Natural England would support the conclusion 6.6.1 of the HRA in relation to water quality.

7. Water resources

If the recommendations set out in the HRA are addressed as suggested in the Core Strategies then Natural England would support the conclusion 7.4.1 of the HRA in relation to water resources.

8. Air Quality

Natural England welcomes the policies in SRM1 Towards a Low Carbon Future, TR2 Integrated Transport and TR3 Access and New Development in the Rother Core Strategy.

Similar policy in the Shepway Core Strategy is found in Policy SS5 District Infrastructure Planning

If the recommendations set out in the HRA are addressed as suggested in the Core Strategies, together with the inclusion of sustainable transport policies, then Natural England would support the conclusion 8.6.1 of the HRA in relation to air quality.

9. Coastal issue

This section needs to cover natural coastal processes as well as coastal squeeze.

No AA of Dungeness would be complete without the consideration of the natural coastal processes that underpin the special conservation features of the site and how policies within the core strategy may impact negatively on these processes.

There needs to be an introduction within this section that covers the natural coastal processes of accretion and erosion that are occurring in this area. Natural England would be happy to work with you to develop suitable text that to address this and some of these issues that have already been outlined under the coastal squeeze section.

We would be satisfied with the text amendments to the HRA as suggested above and the adjustment to Policy CSD5: Water and coastal environmental management in Shepway, this would ensure that both the HRA for the core strategy is comprehensive with regard to the issues impacting on the site and subsequent project based HRA. It would also recognise this issue and providing that the suggested changes are made to CSD5 highlighting the need to work with the natural coastal processes by implementing the SMP and associated strategy for this coast line the conservation integrity of the site will be maintained with regard to this impact.

10 Land outside the European site boundaries

10.2 Existing situation.

In paragraph 10.2.2 reference is made to Analysis of potential impacts of a runway extension at Lydd......undergoing Public Inquiry. There is no reference to which analysis this is referring to. This misrepresents the case that has been presented to the Inspector through the process of Public Inquiry. Both Natural England and RSPB have serious concerns with the potential impacts to the SPA pSPA and pRamsar bird interests. This includes the shoveler as stated, but also numerous other species that are at risk from the proposed development at Lydd airport.

10.5.1 The HRA states that the text within the Policy CSD4 which states that Developments are expected to take into account the need for contoured protection and enhancement of the districts ecological....assets relates directly to the functional land of European sites, in particular SPA and Ramsar sites which support bird interest features.
In order to ensure that the adjoining land to designated sites is fully covered by this policy Natural England draws attention to its comments on Policy CSD4 which suggest that if the Green Infrastructure policy is to remain the only natural environment policy, then in terms of development control issues designated sites, habitats and species including the habitats and species using functional land to European sites, in particular SPA and Ramsar sites, need to be more clearly stated.

If this is addressed then Natural England would support the conclusion 10.6.1 of the HRA in relation to land outside the European site boundaries.

**Shepway Core Strategy Habitat Regulations Assessment (sites other than the Dungeness complex)**

Four other grassland N2K sites were assessed under the HRA process, these were Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment SAC, Parkgate Down SAC, Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs SAC and Lydden to Temple Ewell Downs SAC. The sites were assessed for the impacts of air pollution and/or recreational pressure, trampling or mechanical damage of the grass sward.

**Air Quality**

The assessment of air quality impacts from local sources against the background issue of air quality is difficult however we are satisfied with the approach that has been taken in the HRA and the conclusions that have been reached of unlikely significant effect on Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment. Issues regarding air pollution from traffic should be linked back to policy SS6 and the suggested word change.

**Recreational Pressure**

The assumptions made by the HRA regarding the four SACs outside of the Dungeness complex appear reasonable however, some of the survey data is still not available (visitor survey at Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment SAC, due for completion Summer 2011) and exactly how some of these assumptions will play out remains a concern for Natural England. The conclusion drawn for Folkestone to Etchinghill Escarpment and Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs SACs are of particular concern given their location to large housing proposals and also the attraction they pose to tourists in the area. Whilst the HRA concluded for the Dover to Kingsdown Cliffs that the increase in recreational pressure from new residents is a small proportion compared to the tourism numbers, the proposal to increase tourism may well see these numbers increased and therefore the cumulative impact on the site may become significant. We require a revisit of the predicted impacts when the final survey data is complete in order to gain a more robust understanding of the recreational pressure these sites are currently experiencing. Taking a precautionary approach to managing the risks regarding the assumptions made - Natural England require a monitoring program to be put in place to identify whether these assumptions come to fruition and help inform how development should proceed during the life time of the plan. Any policies which direct growth to areas where impacts as a result of recreational pressures are possible but unclear due to ongoing development of an evidence base should state that. "The council will revisit the rate, scale and/or distribution of development across the district to respond to the findings of new evidence, if it is necessary to protect the integrity of European sites." This is an approach that has been taken in the wider south-east to address similar issues of uncertainty.

**Shepway Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal Report**

Natural England is satisfied with the way in which the Sustainable Appraisal has been conducted and the iterated processes that it has undergone and how it informed the core strategy we would however, like to comment on some of the final recommendations that were made to the Council in June 2011 following this appraisal work.

**Appraisal Stage 5**

**Table 9.1 Accepted recommendations**

**CSD3: Rural and Tourism Development**
Recommendation: “The sensitive nature of the coastal and rural environments which attract tourism should be acknowledged in this policy, with connections made to the Appropriate Assessment findings and Policy CSD4 and CSD5.”

Natural England’s response:

Cross reference to policy CSD4 and CSD5 does occur within the policy however as already mentioned in our response to the core strategy there is no recognition in the policy of the need to provide green space to relieve pressure from the N2K sites. As it currently stands this cross reference is not sufficient until CSD4 and CSD5 are more appropriately worded.

Again much is said in the supporting text 5.32, 5.33, 5.37 and 5.38 and little is in policy.

Table 9.2 Rejected recommendations

CSD8 New Romney Strategy

Recommendation: “Strengthen the policy in relation to responding to ecological needs, so that there is a proactive and safeguarding element to the wording of bullet point five. Cross reference this to the Appropriate Assessment findings of Dungeness.”

6.) The Council’s response was ‘A reference to GI is made within 5.125 of the supporting text.

Natural England’s response:

The proposed housing at New Romney and Employment space is potentially approximately 700 metres at its closest point from the N2K site. Therefore we feel strongly that CSD8 should contain policy wording that not only cross references to a strengthened CSD4 policy but also highlights the designated site and references the findings of the AA as well as highlighting the need for a project based AA.

OVERALL CONCLUSION TO SHEPWAY CORE STRATEGY AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

Natural England considers that the issues raised with regard to the policy wording changes covering biodiversity and landscape within policy CSD4 as well as the changes needing regarding coastal issues covered in CSD5, and the additions required in the HRAs regarding coastal processes and visitor surveys, are currently sufficient to make the plan unsound. We have briefly discussed this matter with the Council prior to this submission and have stressed our willingness to work closely to help resolve these issues prior to examination in public and hope that this can be achieved in order to deliver all of the plan’s objectives successfully.

We look forward to working with Shepway in the future. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require clarification on our submission.

Yours sincerely

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