

# **Initial Screening Opinion on the Impact of Manchester City Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance 'Providing for Housing Choice' on European Protected Sites**

**December 2007**



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## **Introduction**

Article 6(3) of the European Habitats Directive dealing with the conservation of European protected sites states that;

*'Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.'*

The purpose of Appropriate Assessment (AA) of land use plans is to ensure that protection of the integrity of European sites is a part of the planning process at a regional and local level. Appropriate Assessment can be seen as having a number of discrete stages -

- 1 Stage 1 - Screening
- 2 Stage 2 – Appropriate Assessment
- 3 Stage 3 – Assessment of Alternatives
- 4 Stage 4 – Assessment where no alternatives are available

This document comprises Stage 1 of the Appropriate Assessment process and contributes to the fulfillment of the Council's statutory duty as regards Article 6(3); that is, it is a Screening Opinion on whether or not Manchester City Council's Supplementary Planning Document 'Providing for Housing Choice' (hereafter referred to as 'the Plan') may have an impact on the special interest of any European designated protected sites and therefore whether the plan needs to undergo further Screening Opinions or more comprehensive Appropriate Assessments as the Plan develops.

It should be noted that this document does not comprise a full Appropriate Assessment under the terms of the Regulations. It is a screening opinion concerned with reaching an opinion as to whether the Plan needs to go forward for further, more detailed Assessment of impacts. In addition it is noted that the Plan being assessed is at the early stages of development and further screening opinions may be required as the Plan develops

The Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU), as the specialist ecological adviser to Manchester City Council, has prepared this Screening Opinion. Natural England and the JNCC were consulted for information on the conservation objectives and favourable condition tables for the European Sites concerned (the information is summarized below). GMEU ecologists, who are familiar with the European sites concerned and their special interest, reviewed the ecological information for the sites. The key vulnerabilities and sensitivities of the European sites concerned are well understood by GMEU allowing for an informed assessment of the possible effects of the Plan, and any specific aims, objectives and policies contained in the Plan.

## **Brief description of the Plan**

The Plan is a Supplementary Planning Document, which supplements policies in Manchester City Council's current Unitary Development Plan and the emerging Local Development Framework. The Plan will:

- (i) Give advice on how Manchester will meet the requirements of the City's planning policy and government guidance as set out in Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3), November 2006.

- (ii) Provide a diversity of housing to support continued economic growth and the delivery of Community Strategy objectives.
- (iii) Sets out to establish a strategy for affordable housing provision.
- (iv) Seeks to provide a diverse range of housing provision, which varies according to needs at a neighbourhood level.

The Guidance deals specifically with the provision of affordable housing and the main focus of the SPD is on new supply. The policies within the Plan are concerned with:

- (i) The proportion and types of affordable housing required
- (ii) The sites on which this will be required.
- (iii) The practical planning, design and procedural requirements to achieve the affordable housing provision

For the purposes of this Screening Opinion the Plan is not complete; an opinion is being sought at an early stage of Plan production to ensure that the requirements to meet the terms of the Regulations regarding Appropriate Assessment can be properly planned for.

### **European designated sites concerned**

This Screening Opinion considered the suite of European sites assessed within the Regional Spatial Strategy Habitat Regulations Assessment (North West Regional Assembly January 2007), as presented in that document's Table 2.1 (see Appendix 1 – column 1).

The HRA of the RSS will specifically investigate the infrastructure requirements of the Region's 'developmental policies' as they relate to environmental resource demands (eg water supply treatment of effluents and energy supply). It will also investigate the impacts of likely products of development (eg increased traffic, atmospheric pollutants - principally car/plane emissions, water borne pollutants – waste products of production and residues of sewage treatment and visitor pressure) on the European sites. These have been identified in the Appendix 1 – column 2.

There is a relationship between the source of any given impact and the potential magnitude of any impacts on distant European sites (Appendix 1 – column 3 and subsequent text). That is sites outside the administrative boundaries of Greater Manchester. This document therefore has given consideration to potential impact pathways to these distant sites, the European sites' vulnerabilities and sensitivities and their proximity of Manchester City Council.

Finally, European sites, which occur within the administrative boundaries of the Greater Manchester Districts, have also been identified (Appendix 1 – column 4 and subsequent text). There are no European sites within the administrative boundary of Manchester City and therefore, direct impacts such as habitat loss will not occur. It follows that, any likely significant effects will occur from distal impacts which are not encompassed by those considered in the strategic context of the RSS.

Given the comments above projects and Plans within Greater Manchester will be screened against a selection of sites taken from columns 3 & 4 of the Appendix 1. This Screening Opinion considers the effects of the Plan primarily on 1 European designated site. The site which needs to be considered in more detail for the screening opinion of this Plan is the Rochdale Canal SAC.

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE ROCHDALE CANAL SAC**

The Rochdale Canal extends approximately 20 km from Littleborough to Failsworth, passing through urban and industrialised parts of Rochdale and Oldham and the intervening areas of agricultural land (mostly pasture). The canal's SAC designation terminates at the Oldham – Manchester administrative boundary, although the features of interest for which the site is designated also occur within the canal in the Manchester City section of the waterbody. Water

supplied to the Rochdale Canal in part arises from the Pennines. This water is acidic and relatively low in nutrients, while water from other sources is mostly high in nutrients. The aquatic flora of the canal is thus indicative of a mesotrophic water quality (i.e. is moderately nutrient-rich) although there is evidence of some local enrichment.

## **PRIMARY REASON FOR DESIGNATION OF THE ROCHDALE CANAL AS A EUROPEAN PROTECTED SITE**

The Rochdale Canal supports a significant population of **floating water-plantain** *Luronium natans* in a botanically diverse water plant community, which also holds a wide range of pondweeds *Potamogeton* spp. The canal has predominantly mesotrophic water. This population of *Luronium* is representative of the formerly more widespread canal populations of this species within north-west England, although the Rochdale Canal supports unusually dense populations of the plant.

The conservation objective for the European interest of the SAC is to maintain, in favourable condition, the habitats for the population of floating water-plantain (*Luronium natans*). Maintenance implies restoration if the feature is not currently in favourable condition

### **Floating water-plantain; description and ecological characteristics**

Floating water-plantain *Luronium natans* occurs in a range of freshwater situations, including nutrient-poor lakes in the uplands (mainly referable to 3130 Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the *Littorelletea uniflorae* and/or of the *Isoëto-Nanojuncetea*) and slowly-flowing lowland rivers, pools, ditches and canals that are moderately nutrient-rich.

*Luronium natans* occurs as two forms: in shallow water with floating oval leaves, and in deep water with submerged rosettes of narrow leaves. The plant thrives best in open situations with a moderate degree of disturbance, where the growth of emergent vegetation is held in check. Populations fluctuate greatly in size, often increasing when water levels drop to expose the bottom of the water body. Populations fluctuate from year to year, and at many sites records of *L. natans* have been infrequent, suggesting that only small populations occur, in some cases possibly as transitory colonists of the habitat. Populations tend to be more stable at natural sites than artificial ones, but approximately half of recent (post-1980) records are from canals and similar artificial habitats. Its habitat in rivers has been greatly reduced by channel-straightening, dredging and pollution, especially in lowland situations.

## **POSSIBLE IMPACTS OF THE PLAN ON THE ROCHDALE CANAL SAC**

**Operations that may damage the special interest of the canal include operations and activities that affect the growth and survival of *Luronium natans***

- Dredging of the canal
- Draining of the canal
- Pollution of the canal
- Shading of the canal
- Increased boat traffic using the canal
- Use of herbicides in or adjacent to the canal

The above list is summarised from Table 1, which identifies more fully the mechanisms by which the favourable conservation status of the SAC can be achieved. When assessing the Plan for its possible impact on the Rochdale Canal SAC the potential of aims, objectives and policies in the Plan to cause the above listed damaging operations have been considered when reaching a decision as to whether the plan needs to undergo a full Appropriate Assessment. For example, if it is considered that a particular development described in the Plan (for example, new housing development) has the potential for causing any of the above damaging operations, and no mitigation is described, then it would be considered that either changes should be made to the plan to incorporate appropriate mitigation or the plan should be subject to full Appropriate Assessment.

## **Possible impacts of the 'Providing for Housing Choice' supplementary planning document on the special interest of the Rochdale Canal SAC**

<b>Harmful operation</b>	<b>Possible Impact of the Plan</b>
Dredging	No impact envisaged
Draining	Potential impact depending on allocation
Pollution	Potential impact depending on allocation
Shading	Potential impact depending on allocation
Increased boat traffic	No impact envisaged
Use of herbicides	No impact envisaged

### **Current mitigation for potential impact on the SAC described in the Plan**

The document currently proposes no mitigation for possible impacts of the Plan on the special interest of the Rochdale Canal SAC. The likely impacts will potentially occur within a limited area – on the boundary of Oldham – Manchester and the 'pound' which crosses that boundary. It is anticipated that the policies of the SPD will be implemented on general housing sites. However, at the current time the Plan has not identified specific allocated sites for the proposals.

### **Recommendations for further mitigation**

Once any decisions on housing allocations have been made in a DPD, it will be possible to highlight mechanisms to reduce the impact of any specific planning application by an appropriate design brief.

Future SPDs for Area Design Briefs for sites adjacent to the SAC should include policies to protect and enhance the features of the Rochdale Canal.

In addition, Manchester City should consider general measures to ensure that the favorable conservation status of floating water plantain within the non-SAC section of the canal. These measures could include layout designs to minimize shading and construction methodologies to reduce impacts on the canal.

### **Recommendations for further Screening/Appropriate Assessment**

As regards the impact of the plan on the special interest of the Rochdale Canal SAC it will be necessary to consider the Plan's impacts once further development of specific housing allocations have been decided.

## **CONSIDERATION OF 'IN COMBINATION' EFFECTS WITH OTHER PLANS AND PROPOSALS**

The Habitats Regulation must consider the likely significant impact of the Plan in relation to other proposals and Plans within other administrative and statutory organisations (eg Environment Agency and United Utilities etc) and in combination with the identified impacts of those Plans. At the current time there is no comprehensive list of Plans provided by other administrative districts. For the purposes of this Plan other documents within adjoining authorities have been/will be considered as they are developed. Appendix 2 shows a list of the Plans currently considered.

It is anticipated the Regional Spatial Strategy will consider the 'in-combination' effects of the Region's projects and Plans at a strategic level.

## **OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The strategic implications of increased amounts of housing are to be considered within the Regional Spatial Strategy.

European sites in close proximity to Greater Manchester have all been screened out and require no further HRA assessment.

The only site within the administrative boundary of Greater Manchester, but outside the district of Manchester City, which have been judged to be potentially affected by the Plan is the Rochdale Canal SAC. Further screening and assessment will be required once Manchester City has considered the allocation of housing sites.

As site allocations are developed there will be a need to review the 'in-combination' effects of other Plans in Rochdale MBC and Oldham MBC.

**Table 1: Favourable condition (integrity) of the Rochdale Canal is achieved when the following criteria have been met**

Operational Feature	Criteria Feature	Attribute	Measure	Target
Canal	<i>Luronium natans</i> {tc V3 "Luronium natans} (aquatic plant assemblage)	Extent of open water	Total area (ha), mapped in relation to baseline (i.e. first available map of interest feature when/after notified), in period May-July, measured annually if possible	No reduction in extent of water
		Water level	Level of water, taken from at least one sampling point in each unit	Maintenance of water level (baseline to be agreed), allowing for seasonal fluctuation within limits (to be established)
		Water quality	Absence of pollution and enrichment	Lack of pollution and enrichment (likely to be obvious by affects on vegetation e.g. algal blooms, or colour e.g. water surface discolouration)
		Trophic Status of water areas	Mesotrophic conditions	pH between 6 and 8
		Species composition: positive indicator species	Frequency of positive indicator species in period May – July, measured annually if possible  Frequency of freshwater sponge in period June – September, measured annually if possible	At least two species/taxa frequent and four occasional throughout the length of the SSSI: submerged macrophytes floating leaved species marginal species No decrease in distribution of freshwater sponge from baseline data
		Species composition: negative indicator species	Frequency and % cover of negative indicator species. Record in period May-July, measured annually if possible	No species/taxa more than occasional throughout the SSSI: filamentous algae algal blooms Azolla Distribution of invasive species (e.g. <i>Glyceria maxima</i> , <i>Elodea canadensis/nuttalli</i> , <i>Crassula helmsii</i> ) to be maintained within acceptable limits (limits to be set)
		Presence of nationally scarce and threatened species		Presence of: <i>Luronium natans</i> {tc V2 "Luronium natans}
		Lack of disturbance		Evidence of habitat being affected by human disturbance e.g. litter deposition, tipping of rubble and dredging (except by planned management) rare or absent

## Appendix 1: - North West Regional European Sites considered within Greater Manchester Screening Opinions

Site Name (list taken from NWRA January 2007)	Designation	Sites within NW region where strategic impacts/ 'in combination' considered by RSS HRA	Sites in proximity to GM	Sites within GM
Asby Complex	SAC			
Border Mires, Kielder – Butterburn	SAC			
Borrowdale Woodland Complex	SAC			
Bowland Fells	SPA	✓		
Calf Hill & Cragg Woods	SAC			
Clints Quarry	SAC			
Cumbrian Marsh Fritillary Site	SAC			
Dee Estuary	SPA/Ramsar	✓		
Drigg Coast	SAC			
Duddon Estuary	SPA/Ramsar			
Duddon Mosses	SAC			
Esthwaite Water	Ramsar			
Irthinghead Mires	Ramsar			
Lake District High Fells	SAC			
Leighton Moss	SPA/Ramsar			
Liverpool Bay	pSPA	✓		
Manchester Mosses	SAC	✓		✓ Wigan
Martin Mere	SPA/Ramsar		✓	
Mersey Estuary	SPA/Ramsar	✓		
Mersey Narrows & Wirral Foreshore	pSPA	✓		
Midland Meres & Mosses – Phase 1 & Phase 2	2 x Ramsar		✓	
Moor House – Upper Teasdale	SAC			
Morcombe Bay	SAC/Ramsar /SAC	✓		
Morcombe Bay Pavements	SAC			
Naddle Forest	SAC			
North Pennine Dales Meadows	SAC			
North Pennine Moors	SAC/SPA	✓		
Oak Mere	SAC			
Peak District Moors (South Pennine Moors Phase 1)	SPA	✓		✓ Tameside & Oldham
Ribble & Alt Estuaries	SPA/Ramsar	✓		
River Dee & Bala Lake	SAC			
River Derwent & Bassenthwaite Lake	SAC	✓		



River Eden	SAC			
River Ehen	SAC			
River Kent	SAC			
Rixton Clay Pits	SAC		✓	
Rochdale Canal	SAC			✓ Rochdale & Oldham
Rostherne Mere	Ramsar		✓	
Roudsea Wood & Mosses	SAC			
Sefton Coast	SAC			
Solway Firth	SAC			
South Pennine Moors	SAC	✓		✓ Rochdale Oldham & Tameside
South Pennine Moors Phase 2	SPA	✓		Rochdale
South Solway Mosses	SAC			
Subberthwaite, Blawith & Torver Low Commons	SAC			
Tarn Moss	SAC			
Tyne & Nent	SAC			
Ullswater Oakwoods	SAC			
Upper Solway Flats & Marshes	SPA/Ramsar			
Walton Moss	SAC			
Wast Water	SAC			
West Midlands Mosses	SAC			
Witherslack Mosses	SAC			
Yewbarrow Woods	SAC			

## GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF EUROPEAN SITES IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO GREATER MANCHESTER & SCREENING ASSESSMENT

The Table above considers a number of sites that are in very close proximity of the boundary of Greater Manchester and those within the county. The information below presents the site descriptions & primary reasons for selection for these sites. In addition, the site's vulnerability is considered and a brief assessment of the likely impacts from projects and Plans within Greater Manchester is given by considering the pathways for impacts. Sites which may be affected by the Plan under consideration are considered in more detail within the main body of the text.

### MARTIN MERE RAMSAR DESCRIPTION & PRIMARY REASONS FOR SELECTION

The site includes large area of open water with muddy margins associated with seasonally flooded grazing marsh and reed swamp overlaying deep peat. There are also large areas of surrounding damp species-rich grassland and semi-improved areas of damp grassland maintained by grazing.

Site selection is based on Ramsar criterion 6 with species/populations occurring at levels of international importance.

Qualifying species:

Peak counts in spring/autumn – Pink-footed goose

Peak counts winter – Bewick swan, Whooper swan, widgeon and pintail

Species occurring at levels of national importance:

Peak counts in spring/autumn – Teal

Peak counts in winter – Shelduck, pochard, ruff and spotted redshank

### **Vulnerabilities & Threats to Qualifying Features/Conservation Objectives**

All the vulnerabilities for the site are very localised such as direct loss of habitat by development, management of water levels including extraction for agricultural irrigation and eutrophication caused by agriculture, poor sewage processing and bird guano. None of these factors are likely to occur from any project or Plan within the 10 Greater Manchester districts. Therefore, this site has been screened out of further HRA assessments for the Greater Manchester districts

### **ROSTHERNE MERE RAMSAR DESCRIPTION & PRIMARY REASONS FOR SELECTION**

Site selection is based on Ramsar criterion 1, as it is one of the deepest and largest of the meres of the Shropshire-Cheshire Plain. Its shoreline is fringed with common reed. The catchment for the mere is localised from Little Mere, Mere Mere and a number of local streams and ditches

Species occurring at levels of nation importance;

Peak counts in winter – Cormorant, bittern and water rail

### **Vulnerabilities & Threats to Qualifying Features/Conservation Objectives**

All the vulnerabilities for the site are very localised such as direct loss of habitat by development, management of water levels including extraction for agricultural irrigation and eutrophication caused by agriculture, poor sewage processing. An additional threat is the introduction of non-native invasive species. None of these factors are likely to occur from any project or Plan within the 10 Greater Manchester districts. Therefore this site has been screened out of further HRA assessment.

### **MIDLAND MERES & MOSSES (PHASE 1 & 2) RAMSAR DESCRIPTION & PRIMARY REASONS FOR SELECTION**

The Meres and Mosses of the north-west Midlands comprise a series of open water and peatland sites, most of which developed in natural depressions left by the retreating ice sheets at the end of the last Ice Age. There are over 60 open water sites, or 'meres', as well as a smaller number of peatland sites, known as 'mosses'.

The site's primary interest is its wide range of lowland wetland types and successional stages within a distinct biogeographical area. Waters are generally circumneutral or acidic depending on the soil type, catchment size and usage. Substantial areas of open water remain in some sites, and in many cases this is fringed by extensive and varied swamp, fen and carr communities. Some basins have become peat-filled, leading in some circumstances to development of ombrotrophic conditions; of particular importance are the quaking bogs or schwingmoors.

The sites are selected under Ramsar criterion 1 and 2:

- The site comprises a diverse range of habitats from open water to raised bog.
- Supports a number of rare species of plants associated with wetlands including five nationally scarce species together with an assemblage of rare wetland invertebrates (3 endangered insects and 5 other British Red Data Book species of invertebrates).

### **Vulnerabilities & Threats to Qualifying Features/Conservation Objectives**

The majority of the identified vulnerabilities for the site are very localised such as direct loss of habitat by development, management of water levels including extraction for agricultural

irrigation and eutrophication caused by agriculture, poor sewage processing. An additional threat is the introduction of non-native invasive species. None of these factors are likely to occur from any project or Plan within the 10 Greater Manchester districts. Therefore, this site has been screened out of further HRA assessments for the Greater Manchester districts

Some of these sites, such as the quaking bogs, where active peat processes are occurring are also susceptible to more regional processes such as changes in rainfall patterns and atmospheric pollutants such as acid rain and NO<sub>x</sub>s. These issues are influenced on a more strategic level and it is anticipated that the HRA of the RSA will deal with the Likely Significant Effects on this features.

## **RIXTON CLAYPITS SAC DESCRIPTION & PRIMARY REASONS FOR SELECTION**

The site comprises parts of an extensive disused brickworks quarry excavated in glacial boulder-clay deposits east of Warrington. Extraction of clay at different periods up to 1965 has left a mosaic of water-filled hollows and clay banks, which now support a diversity of habitats of varying maturity. It is of importance for its calcareous grassland communities and because the site supports a large breeding population of great crested newts.

The site's primary reason for selection is under Annex II species the great crested newt. Breeding by great crested newt is known to occur in 20 water bodies within the SAC.

### **Vulnerabilities & Threats to Qualifying Features/Conservation Objectives**

The threats to the conservation objective of the maintenance of the favourable conservation status of the great crested newt population include; loss/fragmentation of site and barriers to movement for amphibians between ponds, reduction in the number of waterbodies or decrease in size and/or depth of ponds, unacceptable pollution, shading, change in habitat structure and quality and population levels of fish.

The identified vulnerabilities for the site are very localised. None of these factors are likely to occur from any project or Plan within the 10 Greater Manchester districts. Therefore, this site has been screened out of further HRA assessments for the Greater Manchester districts.

## **INFORMATION RELATING TO SITES WITHIN GREATER MANCHESTER**

### **SOUTH PENNINE MOORS SAC/SPA**

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE SOUTH PENNINE MOORS SAC/SPA**

This very large site forms part of the Southern Pennines lying between Ilkley in the north and the Peak District National Park boundary in the south. The majority of the site is within West Yorkshire but it also covers areas of Lancashire, Greater Manchester and North Yorkshire. The largest moorland blocks are Ilkley Moor, the Haworth Moors, Rishworth Moor and Moss Moor. The underlying rock is Millstone Grit which outcrops at Boulsworth Hill and on the northern boundary of Ilkley Moor. The moorlands are on a rolling dissected plateau between 300m and 450m AOD with a high point of 517m at Boulsworth Hill. The greater part of the gritstone is overlain by blanket peat with the coarse gravely mineral soils occurring only on the lower slopes. The site is the largest area of unenclosed moorland within West Yorkshire and contains the most diverse and extensive examples of upland plant communities in the county. Extensive areas of blanket bog occur on the upland plateau and are punctuated by species rich acidic flushes and mires. There are also wet and dry heaths and acid grasslands. Three habitat types that occur on the site are rare enough within Europe to be listed on Annex 1 of the EC habitats and Species Directive (92/43) EEC. These communities are typical of and represent the full range of upland vegetation classes found in the South Pennines. This mosaic of habitats

supports a moorland breeding bird assemblage which, because of the range of species and number of breeding birds it contains, is of regional and national importance. The large numbers of breeding merlin *Falco columbarius*, golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria* and twite *Carduelis flavirostris* are of international importance.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE SOUTH PENNINE MOORS SPA**

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are strictly protected sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Directive on the conservation of wild birds, also known as the Birds Directive, which came into force in April 1979. They are classified for rare and vulnerable birds, listed in Annex I to the Birds Directive, and for regularly occurring migratory species. The South Pennine Moors SPA includes the major moorland blocks of the South Pennines from Ilkley in the north to Leek and Matlock in the south. It covers extensive tracts of semi-natural moorland habitats including upland heath and blanket mire. The site is of European importance for several upland breeding bird species including birds of prey and waders.

## **PRIMARY REASON FOR DESIGNATION OF THE SOUTH PENNINE MOORS SAC**

**The site supports the following important habitats**

### **European Dry Heath**

The site is representative of upland dry heath at the southern end of the Pennine range, the habitat's most south-easterly upland location in the UK. Dry heath covers extensive areas, occupies the lower slopes of the moors on mineral soils or where peat is thin, and occurs in transitions to acid grassland, wet heath and blanket bogs. The upland heath of the South Pennines is strongly dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*. Its main NVC types are H9 *Calluna vulgaris* – *Deschampsia flexuosa* heath and H12 *Calluna vulgaris* – *Vaccinium myrtillus* heath. More rarely H8 *Calluna vulgaris* – *Ulex gallii* heath and H10 *Calluna vulgaris* – *Erica cinerea* heath are found. On the higher, more exposed ground H18 *Vaccinium myrtillus* – *Deschampsia flexuosa* heath becomes more prominent. In the cloughs, or valleys, which extend into the heather moorlands, a greater mix of dwarf shrubs can be found together with more lichens and mosses. The moors support a rich invertebrate fauna, especially moths, and important bird assemblages.

### **Blanket Bog**

This site represents blanket bog in the south Pennines, the most south-easterly occurrence of the habitat in Europe. The bog vegetation communities are generally botanically poor. Hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* is often overwhelmingly dominant, although bog-building *Sphagnum* mosses are present. Where the blanket peats are slightly drier, heather *Calluna vulgaris*, crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* become more prominent. The uncommon cloudberry *Rubus chamaemorus* is locally abundant in bog vegetation. Bog pools provide diversity and are often characterised by common cottongrass *E. angustifolium*. Substantial areas of the bog surface are eroding, and there are extensive areas of bare peat. In some areas erosion may be a natural process reflecting the great age (9000 years) of the south Pennine peats.

### **Old Sessile Oak woods**

Around the fringes of the upland heath and bog of the south Pennines are blocks of old sessile oak woods, usually on slopes. These tend to be dryer than those further north and west, such that the bryophyte communities are less developed (although this lowered diversity may in some instances have been exaggerated by the effects of 19<sup>th</sup> century air pollution). Other components of the ground flora such as grasses, dwarf shrubs and ferns are common. Small areas of alder woodland along stream-sides add to the overall richness of the woods.

## **PRIMARY REASON FOR THE DESIGNATION OF THE SOUTH PENNINE MOORS SPA**

The site qualifies for the designation by supporting populations of European importance of the following species listed on Annex I of the Directive:

#### **During the breeding season:**

Golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, at least 3.3% of the breeding population in Great Britain  
Merlin *Falco columbarius*, at least 5.9% of the breeding population in Great Britain  
Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, at least 1.4% of the breeding population in Great Britain  
Short-eared owl *Asio flammeus*, at least 2.5% of the breeding population in Great Britain

The SPA supports an internationally important assemblage of birds. During the breeding season the area regularly supports:

*Actitis hypoleucos*, *Calidris alpina schinzii*, *Carduelis flavirostris*, *Gallinago gallinago*, *Numenius arquata*, *Oenanthe oenanthe*, *Saxicola rubetra*, *Tringa tetanus*, *Turdus torquatus*, *Vanellus vanellus*

#### **Conservation Objectives**

Natural England lists the conservation objectives for the South Pennine Moors as follows:

to maintain\*, in favourable condition, the habitats for the populations of Annex 1 species + of European importance, with particular reference to:

- blanket mire
- dwarf shrub heath
- acid grassland
- gritstone edges

+ golden plover, merlin, short-eared owl

to maintain\*, in favourable condition, the:

- blanket bog (active only)
- dry heaths
- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*
- transition mires and quaking bogs
- old oak woods with *Ilex* and *Blechnum* in the British Isles

\* Maintenance implies restoration if the feature is not currently in favourable condition.

#### **Possible impacts of the Plan on the special interests of the South Pennine Moors SAC/SPA**

##### **Operations that may damage the European special interest of the SAC include**

- Cultivation
- Grazing
- Mowing or cutting
- Application of manure, fertilisers or lime
- Application of pesticides
- Burning
- Drainage
- Extraction of minerals including peat, topsoil and subsoil
- Construction or removal of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hardstands, banks, ditches or other earthworks or the laying or removal of pipelines and cables

- Erection of permanent structures
- Use of vehicles likely to damage the vegetation
- Pollution
- Recreational activities
- Agricultural intensification leading to loss of bird feeding areas outside the designated site

When assessing the Plan for its possible impact on the South Pennine Moors SAC/SPA the potential of aims, objectives and policies in the Plan to cause the above listed damaging operations have been considered when reaching a decision as to whether the plan needs to undergo a full Appropriate Assessment. For example, if it is considered that a particular development described in the Plan (for example, new housing development) has the potential for causing any of the above damaging operations, and no mitigation is described, then it would be considered that either changes should be made to the plan to incorporate appropriate mitigation or the plan should be subject to full Appropriate Assessment.

Although at this stage the Plan does not provide details of the actual operations that the plan will control and/or manage, general advice is provided

Harmful operation	Possible Impact of the Plan
Cultivation	
Grazing	
Mowing or cutting	
Application of manure, fertilizers or lime	
Application of pesticides	
Burning	
Drainage	
Extraction of minerals including peat, topsoil and subsoil	
Construction or removal of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hardstands, banks, ditches or other earthworks or the laying or removal of pipelines and cables	
Erection of permanent structures	
Use of vehicles likely to damage the vegetation	
Pollution	
Recreational activities	
Agricultural intensification	

### **Current mitigation for potential impact on the SAC/SPA described in the Plan**

The document currently proposes no mitigation for possible impacts of the Plan on the special interest of the South Pennine Moors SAC/SPA, but since no harmful impacts are envisaged from the implementation of the Plan no mitigation is required.

### **Recommendation for further mitigation**

### **Recommendations for further Screening/Appropriate Assessment**

# MANCHESTER MOSSES SAC

## DESCRIPTION OF MANCHESTER MOSSES SAC

Mossland formerly covered a very large part of low-lying Greater Manchester, Merseyside and southern Lancashire, and provided a severe obstacle to industrial and agricultural expansion. While most has been converted to agriculture or lost to development, several examples have survived as degraded raised bog, such as Astley & Bedford Mosses (Wigan), Risley Moss (Warrington) and Holcroft Moss (Warrington) on the Mersey floodplain. Their surfaces are now elevated above surrounding land due to shrinkage of the surrounding tilled land, and all except Holcroft Moss have been cut for peat at some time in the past. While past drainage has produced dominant purple moor grass *Molinia caerulea*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and birch *Betula* spp. scrub or woodland, wetter pockets have enabled the peat-forming species to survive. Recent rehabilitation management on all three sites has caused these to spread.

## PRIMARY REASON FOR DESIGNATION OF THE MANCHESTER MOSSES SAC

The site supports degraded bog still capable of natural regeneration (JNCC code 7120), which has the potential to be restored to active raised bog (JNCC code 7110).

SAC sites have been selected on a site-b- site basis and according to the [Interpretation manual of European habitats](#) (European Commission DG Environment 1999);- "where the hydrology can be repaired and where, with appropriate rehabilitation management, there is a reasonable expectation of re-establishing vegetation with peat-forming capability within 30 years".

## Operations that may damage the European special interest of the SAC include

- Cultivation
- Grazing
- Mowing or cutting
- Application of manure, fertilisers or lime
- Application of pesticides
- Burning
- Drainage, both within and outside the boundaries of the site
- Extraction of minerals including peat, topsoil and subsoil
- Construction or removal of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hardstands, banks, ditches or other earthworks or the laying or removal of pipelines and cables
- Erection of permanent structures
- Use of vehicles likely to damage the vegetation
- Pollution including atmospheric pollutants and NOx
- Recreational activities

When assessing the Plan for its possible impact on the South Pennine Moors SAC/SPA the potential of aims, objectives and policies in the Plan to cause the above listed damaging operations have been considered when reaching a decision as to whether the plan needs to undergo a full Appropriate Assessment. For example, if it is considered that a particular development described in the Plan (for example, new housing development) has the potential for causing any of the above damaging operations, and no mitigation is described, then it would be considered that either changes should be made to the plan to incorporate appropriate mitigation or the plan should be subject to full Appropriate Assessment.

Although at this stage the Plan does not provide details of the actual operations that the plan will control and/or manage, general advice is provided

Harmful operation	Possible Impact of the Plan
Cultivation	

Grazing	
Mowing or cutting	
Application of manure, fertilizers or lime	
Application of pesticides	
Burning	
Changes to hydrological regime within the site	
Changes to hydrological regime outside the site boundary	
Extraction of minerals including peat, topsoil and subsoil	
Construction or removal of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hardstands, banks, ditches or other earthworks or the laying or removal of pipelines and cables	
Erection of permanent structures	
Use of vehicles likely to damage the vegetation	
Pollution	
Recreational activities	

#### **Current mitigation for potential impact on the SAC described in the Plan**

The document currently proposes no mitigation for possible impacts of the Plan on the special interest of the South Pennine Moors SAC/SPA, but since no harmful impacts are envisaged from the implementation of the Plan no mitigation is required.

#### **Recommendation for further mitigation**

#### **Recommendations for further Screening/Appropriate Assessment**



## **Appendix 2 Other Projects and Plans within Adjoining Administrative Authorities Considered for 'In-Combination' Effects**

North West Regional Spatial Strategy

Rochdale MBC replacement Unitary Development Plan

Rochdale MBC supplementary planning document 'Energy and New Development'

Rochdale MBC supplementary planning document 'Provision of Recreational Open Space in New Housing Developments'

Rochdale MBC supplementary planning for the development of 'East Central Rochdale'

Rochdale MBC supplementary planning document 'Biodiversity and Development'

Manchester CC Supplementary Planning Document 'Providing for Housing Choice'