



Sussex
Wildlife Trust

Charlotte Glancy,
Crawley Borough Local Plan Examination
Programme Officer
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Date: 2 November 23

Dear Ms Glancy,

The attached position statements are made on behalf of the Sussex Wildlife Trust (Rep 068) in relation to the Crawley Local Plan - Submission Version - Examination in Public.

The following comments are made in relation to the questions raised by the Inspector. Comments from our previous consultation responses still stand.

This statement contains responses to:

Matters 2 (Issue 1)
Matter 2 (Issue 2)
Matter 5 (Issue 1)
Matter 5 (Issue 2)

The Sussex Wildlife Trust wishes to participate in the November hearing sessions for all Matters listed.

Laura Brook, Conservation Officer, will be in attendance at the following sessions:

Tuesday 21st Nov - 2pm Session (Matter 2)
Wednesday 22nd Nov - 2pm Session (Matter 5)

Yours sincerely,
Laura Brook
Conservation Officer

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Matter 2 (Issue 1)

Question

2.4 Gatwick Airport and operational activities in support of the airport is clearly a key part of any spatial strategy for the Borough. In general terms, safeguarded land for the airport (under Policy GAT2) applies to the remaining tracts of undeveloped land within the Borough. If the extent of safeguarded land was not necessary or was not found to be sound as part of this examination, would that necessarily result in a different spatial strategy, especially in terms of options to meeting housing needs? Would it be premature to conclude on that now or are there known principles (such as noise levels) which mean safeguarding has limited bearing on a spatial strategy to meet housing needs in the Borough?

Sussex Wildlife Trust would like to highlight that if Policy GAT2 (safeguarded land) was no longer considered necessary for safeguarding for airport activities, the spatial opportunities may not relate solely to housing need but also to delivering nature's recovery, as is consistent with sections 175 & 179 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021. As highlighted in our May 2023 Regulation 19 consultation response, we support the Woodland Trust's comments that the safeguarded area contains areas of ancient semi-natural woodland. Further to this, the mapping of the safeguarded land on page 140 of the submission local plan indicates that areas designated for their biodiversity, including a Local Nature Reserve & Local Wildlife Site (Willoughby Fields) are included. These elements will be vital components of future Local Nature Recovery Strategies, as required under the Environment Act 2021.

Matter 2 (Issue 2)

Question

2.8 Does criterion xi) at paragraph 12.23 need to be amended to ensure consistency with national planning policy at NPPF paragraph 180c) which caveats the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats with "unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists"?

While we support an amendment to ensure consistency with national policy, we're unclear how this amendment would be incorporated with the current wording in bullet point (xi). The current wording of this bullet point appears to incorporate a number of policy priorities and we want to ensure that emphasis of the bullet point is not lost.

Proposed wording could be (addition in **bold**);

*Ancient woodland or veteran trees would not be damaged or lost and an appropriate buffer, in accordance with national guidance, is provided between any such trees and the edge of the development's construction **unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists**. Any TPO protected trees should be retained where possible and measures to avoid damage and root compaction should be implemented. Where the loss of existing trees is unavoidable, appropriate replacement trees are to be provided;*

Matter 5 (Issue 1)

Question

5.9 Would it be necessary for plan soundness to amend part iii) of Policy GAT1 to replace 'like for like' compensation with 'fair' compensation in relation to biodiversity?

Sussex Wildlife Trust suggests that by changing the wording to 'fair' the policy bullet point would no longer be sound. This is because the term 'fair' is open to interpretation when delivering habitat compensation and would not be consistent with national policy.

Sussex Wildlife Trust proposes that as a minimum the policy should state 'like for like' compensations, so that there is no net loss to biodiversity. We are concerned that the term 'fair' might result in a loss, given that what is considered 'fair' may be interpreted differently given a party's perception and drivers of fairness.

Sussex Wildlife Trust would state that if the wording is to be change from '*like to like*' then there can be no suggestion of 'less' for compensation, either through area or condition of habitat. This is because the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) sets a clear requirement through section 15 that biodiversity should be conserved, restored, enhanced, and measurable net gains delivered. Therefore, any change in wording from '*like for like*' (conserve) should only be an improvement or betterment to reflect the requirements to enhance (*restored, enhanced and measurable net gains*).

National Planning Policy Guidance states:

Where, despite mitigation, there would still be significant residual harm, as a last resort, can this be properly compensated for by measures to provide for an equivalent or greater value of biodiversity?

Paragraph: 019 Reference ID: 8-019-20190721

The requirement to leave the natural environment in a better state is further expressed in the Environment Act 2021, which looks to make the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain mandatory.

We would therefore suggest that any change in wording to this element of the policy must ensure that habitat compensation is **of equivalent or greater value to biodiversity**.

Matter 5 (Issue 2)

Question

5.18 *The Gatwick Airport Masterplan 2019 states that the airport is no longer actively pursuing a scenario for plans for an additional southern runway, but a future possibility remains to build and operate one. Is a precautionary approach to safeguarding justified given the current lack of certainty on a potential future second wide-spaced runway?*

As the Inspector will be aware, a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and associated Development Consent Order application for a second runway at Gatwick has been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate. Sussex Wildlife Trust is concerned that this proposal is already contrary to the Airports National Policy Statement and as such we do not support that proposal.

Given the current expansion proposals that are already submitted for consideration, we do not feel it is justified to further safeguard additional land for further expansion of the airport's operations. When considering the area identified as safeguarded land in Policy GAT2, page 140 of the Submission Version of the Crawley Local Plan appears to show that part of this area is already within the draft order limits of the current submitted Development Consent Order for the Northern Runway.

In addition, the precautionary approach to safeguarding the land for further aviation expansion seems to be contrary to The Climate Change Committee's Sixth Carbon Budget Report, which clearly states that '*there should be no net expansion of UK airport capacity unless the sector is on track to sufficiently outperform its net emissions trajectory*'. This has been echoed in their June 2023 progress report, which states there is a '*need for a framework to manage airport capacity. There has been continued airport expansion in recent years, counter to our assessment that there should be no net airport expansion across the UK.*'