



Recreational Impact - Technical Note

JULY 2022

1. Overview

- 1.1 During the Regulation 18 stages of consultation on the draft Bassetlaw Local Plan, Natural England identified that the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre and surrounding forest (including the Clumber Park Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Birklands and Bilhaugh Special Area of Conservation (SAC)/Sherwood Forest National Nature Reserve (NNR) is a regional recreational resource, drawing visitors from a wide area. It was confirmed that residential development proposed within the District, has the potential to increase the recreational disturbance on existing sensitive habitats at these protected sites.
- 1.2 Recreational Impact Assessments (RIAs) were commissioned by Bassetlaw District Council in partnership with Newark and Sherwood District Council, covering the Clumber Park SSSI and the Birklands and Bilhaugh SAC to inform the production of the emerging Bassetlaw Local Plan, the associated Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) and the Local Plan work for Newark and Sherwood.
- 1.3 The RIAs were required to evaluate the potential impact of recreational pressure on Clumber Park SSSI, Birklands & Bilhaugh SAC and Sherwood Forest NNR from the housing allocations within Bassetlaw and Newark and Sherwood (alone and in-combination). The study makes recommendations for mitigation and monitoring which are proportionate to potential impacts to inform planning policy development in both the Bassetlaw Local Plan and Newark and Sherwood Local Plan and any other Local Plans whom are considered to potentially impact the sites with future development.
- 1.4 The RIA commissions produced by Footprint Ecology, were developed in partnership over the last 2 years as part of a Project Group (which included Bassetlaw District Council, Newark and Sherwood District Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Bolsover District Council, Gedling Borough Council, Ashfield District Council and Mansfield District Council as well as Natural England, National Trust, and the RSPB).

1.5 Visitor survey work, breeding bird surveys and habitat/recreation impact walkover were undertaken which identified potential recreational impacts, and a draft 'Zone of Influence' (ZOI). The final RIAs were authorised by Bassetlaw District Council.

1.6 The RIAs were completed in March 2022 and can be viewed on the council's website at <https://www.bassetlaw.gov.uk/planning-and-building/the-draft-bassetlaw-local-plan/bassetlaw-local-plan-2020-2037-publication-version-august-2021/bassetlaw-local-plan-2020-2037-publication-version-evidence-base/>

2. Findings

2.1 For Birklands and Bilhaugh there would be a very marked increase in visitor use of Birklands & Bilhaugh SAC/Sherwood Forest NNR of 250% compared to the current level, as a result of the increase in dwellings from the allocations in the Bassetlaw and Newark and Sherwood Local Plans.

2.2 For Clumber Park, there would be there would be an increase in visitor use of Clumber Park SSSI of 55% compared to the current level, as a result of the increase in dwellings from the allocations detailed in the Bassetlaw and Newark and Sherwood Local Plans. This increase was further broken down between Bassetlaw Local Plan allocations (35% increase, with 9% from the Garden Village alone) and Newark and Sherwood Plan allocations (20%).

2.3 A recreation zone of influence of 8.9km radius was calculated for the Birklands & Bilhaugh SAC/Sherwood Forest NNR study area, however this did not include the proposed Bassetlaw Garden Village Local Plan allocation. A recreation zone of influence of 24.7km radius was calculated for the Clumber Park SSSI.

2.4 Mitigation measures were proposed for both areas comprising of Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) / infrastructure projects away from the SSSI and the SAC. These approaches would need to dovetail and complement each other.

3. Withdrawal of the Garden Village

3.1 Since the completion of these RIAs, one of the two land owners of the Garden Village has withdrawn their land from the Bassetlaw Local Plan. Further information can be found here: <https://www.bassetlaw.gov.uk/media-centre/news/latest-news/local-plan-submission-moved-to-june-to-allow-further-consultation-after-landowner-pulls-out-of-garden-village/>

- 3.2 As such, the Garden Village no longer features as a Local Plan allocation within the draft Bassetlaw Local Plan. It is expected that the housing need as identified within the Second Addendum Document (May 2022), will be met through existing commitments and allocations, and as such, no additional sites are being considered for allocation going forward.
4. Impact on other authorities.
- 4.1 Several Local Authorities were identified by the RIA as being within the Clumber Park ZOI. These authorities were informed of this and the on-going development of the RIA work associated with Clumber Park.
- 4.2 The Addendum Local Plan (January 2022) set out requirements for a Recreational Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) to address the identified recreational impacts at Clumber Park. It was acknowledged by the affected Local Authorities that a strategic solution would be required in order to agree and implement the mitigation as set out within the draft RIA. It was proposed that the strategic solution would be led by Natural England. Natural England confirmed that they did not require a finalised RAMS to be produced in the short term (i.e. before the Examination in Public of the Bassetlaw Local Plan), however an 'interim plan' was required prior to the adoption of the Bassetlaw Local Plan. The interim plan was expected to set out the proposed mitigation solutions and the implementation timescales.
- 4.3 Bassetlaw District Council were committed to this 'interim plan' arrangement and as per this commitment, shared the draft RIA for Clumber Park with all 14 authorities falling within the draft 'zone of influence'. It was Bassetlaw's intention to set up a steering group (to be made up of those authorities already on the project group, plus the additional authorities falling within the zone of influence). The proposed steering group to be hosted by Bassetlaw District Council and led by Natural England to assist in the delivery of the RAMs. It was acknowledged that any costs associated with the RAMS should be proportionate, fair and reasonable for each of the affected Local Authorities.
- 4.4 In addition, Statements of Common Ground were drafted, to confirm that a strategic solution was proposed in the RIA for Clumber Park and noted the above approach regarding the associated costs.
- 4.5 Following with withdrawal of the Garden Village, Bassetlaw met with Natural England to agree a way forward in terms of recreational impact. Natural England subsequently advised that as Clumber Park is a SSSI (rather than a European site) a strategic solution would be hard to justify as recommended within the Clumber Park SSSI RIA (noting that the Garden Village was the main driver for both the commissioning of the RIAs and the proposed

RAMs). This was covered in-depth in the Statement of Common Ground between Bassetlaw District Council and Natural England (May 2022).

- 4.6 To establish and mitigate against any potential recreation impact from residential development proposed as part of the draft Bassetlaw Local Plan going forward, it was agreed that allocated sites of 50 units or more, that fall within an 'Impact Risk Zone' of a SSSI will be required to provide bespoke mitigation on a site by site basis which is to be agreed at the planning application stage. Natural England agreed that this was a suitable approach to address the recreational impacts associated with the Local Plan residential allocations.

5. Status of the Recreational Impact Assessments

- 5.1 The two RIAs commissioned are considered to be useful evidence, and so have been published as background evidence to support the Local Plan. They demonstrate the recreational impact on both the Clumber Park SSSI and Birklands & Bilhaugh SAC. They set out a technical understanding of how these areas are used and the potential impacts of recreational use.
- 5.2 Upon the adoption of the Local Plan, there may still be the potential to seek funding towards a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) for one or both sites as suggested in both assessments.

6. The Local Plan

- 6.1 Policy ST40 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) of the draft Local Plan has now been updated to clarify that a strategic solution is no longer required, and that mitigation will be sought on a site by site basis through the planning application process. As a consequence of Natural England advice (see above) elements of the former Policy ST40a (from the January 2022 Addendum) have now been incorporated into ST40 to ensure that recreational disturbance mitigation are adequately dealt with going forward.
- 6.2 The Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination in July 2022.