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BY EMAIL ONLY

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Dear Rachel

Planning Consultation: Melton Local Plan 2011–2036 Emerging Options Draft Plan, January 2016

Thank you for your consultation on the above document which was received by Natural England on 12 January 2016.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Natural England welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the Melton Local Plan Emerging Options (Draft Plan). We welcome the broad approach to the plan and much of the content which is relevant to Natural England's remit. We have the following observations to make on specific aspects of the consultation document.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.14 What is the Melton Borough Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal?

We are pleased to note that the Local Plan is being prepared alongside an iterative Sustainability Appraisal Process incorporating the requirements of the European Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Our comments on the Sustainability Appraisal can be found below.

Chapter 2: Melton Borough Today – A Portrait

We welcome the reference to natural and semi-natural sites in paragraph 2.6.8.

There are a number of nationally designated nature conservation sites within Melton Borough, including the following Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (As Amended):

CROXTON PARK
GRANTHAM CANAL
MUSTON MEADOWS
KING LUD'S ENTRENCHMENTS AND THE DRIFT
RIVER EYE
SPROXTON QUARRY
STONESBY QUARRY
CRIBB'S LODGE MEADOWS
FRISBY MARSH
HARBY HILL WOOD
HOLWELL MOUTH
TERRACE HILLS PASTURE

BARNSTONE RAILWAY CUTTING
KINOULTON MARSH AND CANAL
BRIERY WOOD HERONRY, BELVOIR
WYMONDHAM ROUGH

Although located outside the Borough, the following nationally and internationally designated sites could potentially be affected by development within Melton Borough:

RUTLAND WATER SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA), SSSI & RAMSAR SITE
TWENTY ACRE PIECE SSSI
OWSTON WOODS SSSI
PRIOR'S COPPICE SSSI
MAIN QUARRY, MOUNTSORREL SSSI
TILTON CUTTING SSSI
BURLEY & RUSHPIT WOODS SSSI
BARROW GRAVEL PITS SSSI

We note from paragraph 2.6.9 that open spaces within the more urban area are generally well linked by green corridors. The provision of natural greenspace is an integral part of the creation of sustainable communities. One important function of Green Infrastructure (GI) is the provision of new opportunities for access to open space. Natural England's 'standards for accessible natural greenspace' (ANGSt) can be used to ensure new and existing housing has appropriate access to nature. More information can be found in Natural England's publication '[Nature Nearby, Accessible Greenspace Guidance](#)' (March 2010). The CABE Space Guidance '[Start with the Park](#)' (2005) outlines the importance of planning around green spaces, with consideration being given to the context of local landscape character and contribution to the wider GI network. The provision of new GI should be considered at an early stage to ensure it is deliverable at the planning stage.

2.7 Environment

We note from paragraph 2.7.1 that half the area consists of arable land and that 95% of the agricultural land is of Grade 3 quality.

The Local Plan should give appropriate weight to the roles performed by the area's soils. These should be valued as a finite multi-functional resource which underpin our wellbeing and prosperity. Decisions about development should take full account of the impact on soils, their intrinsic character and the sustainability of the many ecosystem services they deliver, for example:

1. Soil is a finite resource that fulfils many important functions and services (ecosystem services) for society; for instance as a growing medium for food, timber and other crops, as a store for carbon and water, as a reservoir of biodiversity and as a buffer against pollution. It is therefore important that the soil resources are protected and used sustainably. The [Natural Environment White Paper](#) (NEWP) '[The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature](#)' (Defra, June 2011), emphasises the importance of natural resource protection, including the conservation and sustainable management of soils, for example:
 - A Vision for Nature: 'We must protect the essentials of life: our air, biodiversity, soils and water, so that they can continue to provide us with the services on which we rely' (paragraph 2.5).
 - Safeguarding our Soils: 'Soil is essential for achieving a range of important ecosystem services and functions, including food production, carbon storage and climate regulation, water filtration, flood management and support for biodiversity and wildlife' (paragraph 2.60).
 - 'Protect 'best and most versatile' agricultural land' (paragraph 2.35).
2. The conservation and sustainable management of soils is reflected in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF), particularly in paragraphs 109 and 112. When planning authorities are considering land use change, the permanency of the impact on soils is an important consideration. Particular care over planned changes to the most potentially productive soil is

needed, for the ecosystem services it supports including its role in agriculture and food production. Plan policies should therefore take account of the impact on land and soil resources and the wide range of vital functions (ecosystem services) they provide in line with paragraph 17 of the NPPF, for example to:

- Safeguard the long term capability of best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a in the Agricultural Land Classification) as a resource for the future.
 - To avoid development that would disturb or damage other soils of high environmental value (e.g. wetland and other specific soils contributing to ecological connectivity, carbon stores such as peatlands etc) and, where development is proposed.
 - Ensure soil resources are conserved and managed in a sustainable way.
3. To assist in understanding agricultural land quality within the plan area and to safeguard 'best and most versatile' agricultural land in line with paragraph 112 of the National Planning Policy Framework, strategic scale Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Maps are available. Natural England also has an archive of more detailed ALC surveys for selected locations. Both these types of data can be supplied digitally free of charge by contacting Natural England. Some of this data is also available on the www.magic.gov.uk website. The planning authority should ensure that sufficient site specific ALC survey data is available to inform decision making. For example, where no reliable information was available, it would be reasonable to expect that developers should commission a new ALC survey, for any sites they wished to put forward for consideration in the Local Plan
 4. General mapped information on soil types is available as 'Soilscapes' on the www.magic.gov.uk and also from the LandIS website <http://www.landis.org.uk/index.cfm> which contains more information about obtaining soil data.
 5. Further guidance for protecting soils (irrespective of their ALC grading) both during and following development is available in Defra's [Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites](#), to assist the construction sector in the better protection of the soil resources with which they work, and in doing so minimise the risk of environmental harm such as excessive run-off and flooding. The aim is to achieve positive outcomes such as cost savings, successful landscaping and enhanced amenity whilst maintaining a healthy natural environment, and we would advise that the Code be referred to where relevant in the development plan.

We note the reference to the landscape and features of the Borough in paragraph 2.7.2. Natural England has published National Character Areas (NCAs) which divide England into 159 distinct natural areas. Each is defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision making framework for the natural environment. Melton Borough falls within NCA 74: Leicestershire & Nottinghamshire Wolds. Key facts and data on this area can be found at the attached website link –

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/2098895?map=true&category=587130>.

Chapter 3: Vision and Strategic Priorities

A Vision for Melton Borough

We welcome the vision for Melton Borough, especially the commitments to retain the character of the countryside, respect the character and distinctiveness of Melton's towns and villages, create strong, healthy & safe communities, address the causes and effects of climate change and to protect and enhance the natural environment.

3.2. Strategic Priorities for Melton Borough

We note the strategic priorities for Melton Borough. We welcome the commitment to improve the health and wellbeing of local people.

Environmental Objectives (EO)

We welcome the Environmental Objectives, namely the commitments to make the local environment more accessible (EP16), to reduce pollution (EP17), to protect and enhance the natural environment and biodiversity (EP18), to conserve the historic environment (EP19), to protect the rural character of the Borough (EP20), to protect and manage natural resources (EP21), to prepare for, limit, and adapt to climate change (EP22), to reduce the risk of flooding and avoid development in areas prone to flooding (EP23). The provision of high quality green infrastructure has a significant role to play in adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change including flooding. There is a useful section on this in paragraph 1.3 of the publication [Planning for a healthy environment - good practice guidance for green infrastructure and biodiversity](#).

4.4 Melton Mowbray South Sustainable Neighbourhood

We welcome the commitment in paragraph 4.4.6 to incorporate green infrastructure into the development and the commitment in paragraph 4.4.7 to respect the landscape, wildlife and heritage assets of this location.

Policy SS4 – South Melton Mowbray Sustainable Neighbourhood

Environment

We welcome the following commitments:

- Protection of the separate identities of Burton Lazars and Eye Kettleby in accordance with policy EN4 and respond to settlement fringe sensitivity in accordance with policy EN1 to create a locally distinctive development and an improved town edge;
- Protection and enhancement of important areas of bio-diversity (habitats and species);
- Protection and enhancement of historic and archaeological features; including the St. Mary and St Lazarus hospital scheduled monument and its setting and the line of the former Roman Road at Kirby Lane;
- Protection and enhancement to the existing wildlife corridors and, where appropriate, provide new corridors to create a coherent network of biodiversity and green infrastructure specifically the River Wreake tributaries and the Edendale Brooke;
- Establish a protection zone between the River Eye SSSI and any future development.
- Provide a network of new high quality of multi-functional green spaces in accordance with the Council's open space standards set out in policy EN7;
- A development that exceeds building regulations for energy efficiency and carbon emissions, where viable;
- Buildings and spaces which are adaptable to future climatic conditions including extremes of temperature, drought and flooding;
- Development that provides appropriate sustainable drainage systems and flood alleviation measures and where possible reduces flood risk in downstream areas fully integrated into the Green Infrastructure Strategy, all in accordance with the Melton South site assessment in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment;
- Protecting and enhancing water quality.

Master planning and delivery

We welcome the commitment to a master plan setting out:

- The distribution and location of proposed land uses;
- Important environmental features and heritage assets that are to be protected;
- Areas of green infrastructure and green space (including important strategic green gaps to be protected); and,
- Areas of new landscaping.

4.5 Melton Mowbray North Sustainable Neighbourhood

We welcome the commitment in paragraph 4.5.4 to significantly improve walking and cycling connectivity to the town centre. We welcome the proposal in paragraph 4.5.6 to incorporate new Green Infrastructure to create a neighbourhood that is attractive and walkable which enhances the setting of the Town and is respectful of its heritage and designed in a way that development is sensitive to the

Melton Mowbray landscape. We welcome the commitment to a development master plan for this area.

Policy SS5 – Melton Mowbray North Sustainable Neighbourhood

We welcome the environmental elements of this policy, namely:

- Protection and enhancement of historic assets and their settings;
- Protection and enhancement to the existing green infrastructure, local wildlife sites, wildlife corridors and, where appropriate, provide new corridors to create a coherent network of biodiversity and green infrastructure specifically Melton Country Park, Scalford Brook and Welby Brooke and the disused railway line;
- Establish a protection zone between Melton Country Park and any future development;
- Establish a protection zone between areas of high ecological importance identified around Scalford Brook in the biodiversity study and any future development;
- Seek to retain and mitigate any potential harm to notable areas identified in the biodiversity study;
- Provide a network of new high quality of multi-functional green spaces in accordance with the council's open space standards set out in policy EN7;
- A development that exceeds building regulations for energy efficiency and carbon emissions, where viable;
- Buildings and spaces which are adaptable to future climatic conditions including extremes of temperature, drought and flooding;
- Development that provides appropriate sustainable drainage systems and flood alleviation measures and where possible reduces flood risk in downstream areas fully integrated into the green infrastructure strategy; all in accordance with the Melton North Site Assessment in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.
- Protecting and enhancing water quality.

Policy C1 – Housing Allocations

We welcome the commitment to support housing proposals which provide the following:

1. Energy efficiency levels to meet the minimum sustainability and energy efficiency requirements set out in policy;
2. Measures to adequately mitigate any adverse transport impacts;
3. Measures to maximise walking, cycling and access to public transport;
4. Measures to adequately mitigate any adverse impacts on important site features (including trees) protected habitats and species;
5. Measures to mitigate the impact of flooding and regulate surface water run-off through the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS);
6. Measures to mitigate any adverse impacts on heritage assets.

5.14 Health

We welcome the statement in paragraph 5.14.2 concerning the health benefits of positive planning through the provision of open spaces and green space. See our comments on green infrastructure above. We support Policy C9: Healthy Communities.

Policy EC2 – Employment Growth in the Rural (Outside Melton Mowbray)

We welcome the commitment only to support development where the proposal:

- Is of an appropriate scale for its location;
- Is accessible by walking, cycling or public transport;
- Respects the environmental quality, form and character of the rural area and its landscape;
- Protects best and most versatile agricultural land;
- Doesn't adversely affect historic assets and their settings;
- Doesn't adversely affect designated habitats or species;
- Is of an appropriate scale in the context of the host settlement, where applicable;
- Doesn't have an unduly adverse impact on the amenities of existing residents.

Policy EC8 – Sustainable Tourism

We welcome Policy EC8 to support sustainable tourism only where the proposal:

- Is of appropriate use, form and character;
- Does not adversely affect the landscape;
- Does not adversely affect best and most versatile agricultural land;
- Does not adversely affect historic assets and their settings;
- Does not adversely affect designated habitats or species;
- Is of an appropriate scale in the context of the host settlement;
- Does not have an adverse impact on the amenities of existing residents.

Chapter 7: Melton Borough's Environment – Protected and Enhanced

We very much welcome the inclusion of this section and its content.

7.1 Landscape

We welcome Policy EN1 to protect and enhance the distinctive character of the Borough's landscape.

7.2 Biodiversity

We welcome the proposal to establish a protection zone between the River Eye SSSI and the nearest Sustainable Urban Extension to avoid any damage to this nationally designated nature conservation site which is protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (As Amended).

Policy EN2 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity

We welcome policy EN2 to protect and enhance biodiversity, ecological networks and geological conservation interests throughout the Borough and beyond its boundaries by supporting proposals which:

- A) protect, extend or strengthen the Borough's most ecologically sensitive areas, including the River Wreake Valley;
- B) contribute to the provision of coherent wildlife networks;
- D) de-culvert watercourses where appropriate; and
- E) promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats as listed in the UK and Leicestershire Local Biodiversity Action Plans;

Provided they do not harm:

- A) internationally important sites either individually or cumulatively in association with other plans or projects, namely Rutland Water Spa/Ramsar;
- B) nationally important sites;
- C) local wildlife sites (including candidate and potential) local sites, including ancient woodlands, veteran trees, hedgerows and existing corridors such as disused railways, that allow movement of wildlife between sites;
- D) river corridors; and
- E) priority habitats & species identified in UK and local biodiversity action plans and the Melton Biodiversity and Geodiversity Study unless it can be demonstrated that there is no alternative site available and there are clear and convincing benefits of the development that clearly outweigh the nature conservation or scientific interest of the site. In this case adequate mitigation measures or, exceptionally, compensatory measures will be required at a level equivalent to the biodiversity value of the habitat lost. Such proposals must be accompanied by ecological surveys and an assessment of the impacts on biodiversity and geodiversity.

7.3 Green Infrastructure

We strongly welcome this section and its content. We welcome Policy EN3 – The Melton Green Infrastructure Network.

7.4 Areas of Separation

We welcome Policy EN4 – Areas of Separation.

7.5 Local Green Spaces

We welcome Policy EN5 – Local Green Space.

7.6 Settlement Character

We welcome Policy EN6 – Settlement Character.

Policy EN7 – Open Space, Sport and Recreation

We welcome Policy EN7 especially the proposed enhancement of natural green spaces.

EN8 – Climate Change

We welcome Policy EN8 particularly the commitment to make use of green infrastructure to help with climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Policy EN9 – Ensuring Energy Efficient and Low Carbon Development

We support Policy EN9.

Policy EN10 – Energy Generation from Renewable Sources

We welcome Policy EN10.

Policy EN11 – Minimising the Risk of Flooding

We welcome Policy EN11 to minimise the risk of flooding.

Policy EN12 – Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems

We welcome Policy EN12 encouraging the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems to manage surface water runoff.

Policy EN13 – Heritage Assets

We support Policy EN13 to protect and enhance heritage assets.

Sustainability Appraisal Report

We note and welcome the completion of an iterative Sustainability Appraisal alongside the emerging options paper. We note that some minor potential significant effects have been identified and mitigation measures proposed. We welcome the proposal to take account of these issues in the next iteration of the local plan.

Habitats Regulations Assessment Report

We welcome the completion of a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Report. Although there are no European sites located within the Borough, we are pleased to note that the potential impact of development on European nature conservation sites outside the boundaries of Melton Borough, namely Rutland Water Special Protection Area (SPA) & Ramsar Site and Grimsthorpe Special Area of Conservation (SAC) have been taken into account in the Habitats Regulations Assessment. We welcome the precautionary approach to likely significant effects on these sites. We welcome the conclusion not to rule out potential significant effects at this stage and to continue to review the potential impacts of the Melton Borough Local Plan as it evolves and to use the Habitats Regulations Assessment to inform subsequent iterations of the Melton Borough Local Plan.

We would be happy to comment further should the need arise but if in the meantime you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us. For any queries relating to the specific advice in this letter only please contact me on 0300 060 0571. For any new consultations, or to provide further information on this consultation please send your correspondences to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk. We really value your feedback to help us improve the service we offer. We have attached a feedback form to this letter and welcome any comments you might have about our service.

Yours sincerely

Sean Mahoney, Lead Adviser, Sustainable Development, East Midlands Area Team