

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCIL

20 OCTOBER 2020

Item 6. Questions from members of the public

- (i) Question received from Prof. Tom Oliver on behalf of Haslemere South Residents Association:

“How is the proposed development on AONB and AONB-candidate AGLV land in Planning Application WA/2020/1213 commensurate with a recent national pledge to safeguard biodiversity and the Waverley Council policy declaration on Climate Emergency?”

Context to question:

- The UK has failed to achieve commitments to reverse biodiversity decline¹ (failing to achieve 14 out of 20 targets for 2020, in particular the key biodiversity targets related to species and habitat protection). This biodiversity decline which fundamentally threatens the livelihoods and health of its citizens, for example Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated²: *“We must act now – right now. We cannot afford to dither and delay because biodiversity loss is happening today and it is happening at a frightening rate. Left unchecked, the consequences will be catastrophic for us all. Extinction is forever – so our action must be immediate.”*
- The UK is also suffering from increasing health problems in terms of mental health³ and obesity⁴, which Defra reports have been shown can be addressed through improved access to biodiverse greenspace⁵
- Our national policy response is a 25 Year Environment Plan⁶ with the pledge to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. In September 2020, Boris Johnson also committed the UK to the *Leaders Pledge for Nature*⁷ which recognises a ‘state of planetary emergency’, highlighting how “Nature fundamentally underpins human health, wellbeing and prosperity and how a transformative change is needed: we cannot simply carry on as before.”
- The Prime Minister announced that 30% of the UK’s land will be protected for nature by 2030, meaning an extra 400,000 hectares will be conserved.
- The local policy response for Waverley has been to declare a Climate Emergency which commits the council to regard climate change as a serious threat that requires urgent action to reduce carbon emissions and *conserve biodiversity* (italics added)⁸.
- The development on AONB and AONB-candidate AGLV land at Red Court conflicts with achieving these national and local policy targets.
- Specifically, crucial aspects of biodiversity that would be destroyed by the development include notable species (such as bats including BAP priority

species such as Soprano pipistrelle, Brown long-eared bat, Noctule; mammals such as dormice, priority bird species such as song thrushes and statutory protected reptiles such as slow worms and grass snakes).⁹ The site is also likely to provide a key part of the coherent ecological network for the area, sustaining populations of other priority bird species such as woodcock, nightjar, redwing, hen harrier, woodlark. Fragmentation of habitats is a primary driver of UK biodiversity loss. This site forms part of a woodland network including adjacent ancient woodland with very high biodiversity. At the larger scale, this site is within a 10km square which is particularly high in species richness for the large UK environmental zone defined as 'lowland calcareous hills/variable lowlands, S. England', scoring 0.82 for ecological status based on analysis of over 4000 species, e.g. see here ¹⁰. It is also directly adjacent (less than 1km away) to a one of the most highly biodiverse 10km squares for an adjacent zone 'flat/gently undulating plains, E. Anglia/S. England'. Therefore, at the regional scale this 10km square containing Haslemere is of high biodiversity and unique importance for regional ecological networks to sustain biodiversity. Habitat loss in this site really matters to UK biodiversity at the larger scale.

- Furthermore, access to biodiverse greenspace, which is well-used by the community (e.g. see numerous objections and evidence of use¹¹), will be lost through this development. This could have negative health implications for the local population⁵.
- In my professional opinion, the Landscape Strategy proposed by developers Redwood to "achieve biodiversity net gain" by planting fruit trees and native trees and "a variety of ground cover and shrubs incorporated into the development particularly those which are drought resistant and low maintenance"¹² are inadequate to protect and restore the priority species found on this site, and nor will they provide equivalent high-nature value greenspace for the local community. Just to give one example, the proposal that reptiles will need to be translocated to allow their persistence is not in line with recent scientific evidence, which suggests reptile translocations are ineffective¹³.
- The development conflicts with the WBC requirement that new development "should make a positive contribution to biodiversity in the Borough"¹⁴. The type of species on any restored land will likely be common suburban species and will not replace, in terms of type or diversity, the biodiversity lost. This also conflicts with Biodiversity Net Gain principles in the National Planning Policy Framework¹⁵.
- In summary, there will be a substantial net biodiversity loss from this development on AONB and AONB-candidate AGLV land, which conflicts with both local and national policy targets.

Question proposed by: Tom Oliver, Professor of Applied Ecology at University of Reading, Senior fellow on Defra Systems Research programme and member of European Environment Agency Scientific

Committee. <http://www.reading.ac.uk/biologicalsciences/about/staff/t-oliver.aspx>

References

¹ <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/united-kingdom-s-6th-national-report-to-the-convention-on-biologicaldiversity/>
http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/A%20LOST%20DECADE%20FOR%20NATU RE_tcm9-481563.pdf

² <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/28/world-leaders-pledge-to-halt-earth-destructionun-summit>

³ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/data-tools-and-services/data-services/mental-health-datahub/mental-health-bulletin>

⁴ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activityand-diet/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet-england-2019>

5

http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=14042_EvidenceStateme ntonnaturalenvironmentsandh_ealth.pdf

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

Excerpt from the UK Government 25 Year Environment Plan: *“We hold our natural environment in trust for the next generation. By implementing the measures in this ambitious plan, ours can become the first generation to leave that environment in a better state than we found it and pass on to the next generation a natural environment protected and enhanced for the future.”*

⁷ <https://www.leaderspledgefornature.org/> Excerpt from the Pledge that the UK has committed to: *“We are in a state of planetary emergency: the interdependent crises of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation and climate change - driven in large part by unsustainable production and consumption - require urgent and immediate global action. Science clearly shows that biodiversity loss, land and ocean degradation, pollution, resource depletion and climate change are accelerating at an unprecedented rate. This acceleration is causing irreversible harm to our life support systems and aggravating poverty and inequalities as well as hunger and malnutrition. Unless halted and reversed with immediate effect, it will cause significant damage to global economic, social and political resilience and stability and will render achieving the Sustainable Development Goals impossible....Nature fundamentally underpins human health, wellbeing and prosperity. We need to appropriately value nature and the services it provides as we make decisions and recognize that the business case for biodiversity is compelling. The benefits of restoring natural resources outweigh the costs ten-fold, and the cost of inaction is even higher....A transformative change is needed: we cannot simply carry on as before.... To put the world on the right track towards this long-term goal will require strong political will combined with real accountability and the appropriate legal, economic and financial tools and incentives. Everyone, governments, business and individuals, has a role to play. We must broaden and strengthen the movement for change.”*

8

https://www.waverley.gov.uk/news/article/515/waverley_borough_council_declares_climate_emergency#:~:text=Waverley%20Borough%20Council%20has%20officially%20declared%20a

[%20climate.action%20to%20reduce%20carbon%20emissions%20and%20conserve%20biodiversity and https://www.waverley.gov.uk/info/200287/council_policies_and_strategies/524/waverley_corporate_strategy_2019-2023](https://www.waverley.gov.uk/info/200287/council_policies_and_strategies/524/waverley_corporate_strategy_2019-2023)

9

http://planning360.waverley.gov.uk/civica/Resource/Civica/Handler.ashx/Doc/pa_gestream?cd=inline&pdf=true&docno=8011675

¹⁰ <https://eip.ceh.ac.uk/apps/ecostatus/>

¹¹ <http://planning360.waverley.gov.uk/planning/search-applications?civica.query.FullTextSearch=WA%2F2020%2F1213#VIEW?RefType=GFPlanning&KeyNo=461858&KeyText=Subject>

12

http://planning360.waverley.gov.uk/civica/Resource/Civica/Handler.ashx/Doc/pa_gestream?cd=inline&pdf=true&docno=7960378

¹³ <https://www.conservationevidence.com/individual-study/7228>

14

http://planning360.waverley.gov.uk/civica/Resource/Civica/Handler.ashx/Doc/pa_gestream?cd=inline&pdf=true&docno=7960378

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>