HALTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

House Extensions

Supplementary Planning Document

Appropriate Assessment
November 2006

Halton Borough Council

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Appropriate Assessment – Screening Report

November 2006

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1 Summary

1.1 As part of the development of the House Extensions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) it has been necessary for the Council to carry out a Screening process to determine whether an 'Appropriate Assessment' is required. An appropriate assessment is used to assess the potential effect of plans and projects on sites of European importance, such as the Ramsar, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) that are within or close to Halton.

1.2 The Screening Report contains 4 steps, the first step provided the conclusion that the House Extensions SPD is not directly connected to or necessary for the management of any sites of European Importance.

1.3 The second step, Plan Analysis, gave further consideration to the purpose and policies contained within the House Extensions SPD and for other plans or projects that may have an impact in combination with the SPD on the sites of European importance.

1.4 The third step, Site Analysis, took a closer look at each of the sites of European importance that could be affected by the SPD including the Mersey Estuary SPA, Mersey Estuary Ramsar, Manchester Mosses SAC, Rixton Clay Pits SAC, Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 and Phase 2 and West Midlands Mosses SAC.

1.5 Step 4, Assessment, includes the screening assessment of the SPD on each of the identified sites of European Importance. This assessment indicates that the House Extensions SPD, alone or in combination, will not have impact on any of the sites of European Importance that were identified in Step 3.

1.6 The Screening Report concludes that in the opinion of Halton Borough Council the House Extensions SPD will not require an 'Appropriate Assessment'.

2 Introduction

2.1 Appropriate Assessment (AA) is an assessment of the potential effects of a proposed plan on one or more European sites.

2.2 Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna – the 'Habitats Directive' - provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. It provides the legislative means to protect habitats and species through the establishment and conservation of a network of sites of nature conservation importance known as **Natura 2000.**

2.3 The Natura 2000 network provides ecological infrastructure for the protection of sites which are of exceptional importance in respect of rare, endangered or vulnerable natural habitats and species within the European Community. These sites which are also referred to as European sites, and consist of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Offshore Marine Site (OMS) (there are no OMS designated at present). Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (PPS9) notes that Ramsar sites are to be afforded the same level of consideration as SPAs and SACs. Therefore throughout this document 'Natura 2000' will be used to refer to SPAs, SACs and Ramsar sites.

2.4 The requirement for AA of plans or projects is outlined in Article 6(3) and (4) of the European Communities (1992) Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora ("Habitats Directive").

Article 6(3)
'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.'

Article 6(4)
'If in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature, the member states shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.

Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or priority species, the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, of beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest.'

2.5 The Habitats Directive applies the precautionary principle to protected areas; plans and projects can only be permitted having ascertained that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the site(s) in question. In cases where information is not available or where there is doubt, and further research is needed, rather than attempting to create a case of 'no significant effects' the Council will proceed with the AA process.

2.6 This AA Report covers the first stage (Screening), and will be used for consultation purposes in order to assess whether the House Extensions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is likely to have a significant of effect on Natura 2000 sites. It is hoped that consultation at this stage will help to ensure that the decision on the requirement for AA will be robust and will support the progression of the House Extensions SPD. In England, Natural England is the nature conservation body under the Habitats Regulations and a key point of contact.

3 Methodology

3.1 It is possible to summarise the AA process prescribed in Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive into four stages:

- Stage One: Screening
- Stage Two: Appropriate assessment
- Stage Three: Assessment of alternative solutions
- Stage Four: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain

Stage One: Screening

3.2 The process which identifies the likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant.

Stage Two: Appropriate Assessment

3.3 The consideration of the impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site of the project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, with respect to the site's structure and function and its conservation objectives. Additionally, where there are adverse impacts, an assessment of the potential mitigation of those impacts.

Stage Three: Assessment of alternative solutions

3.4 The process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Stage Four: Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain

3.5 An assessment of compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed (it is important to note that this guidance does not deal with the assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest).

3.6 Each stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required. If, for example, the conclusions at the end of Stage One are that there will be no significant impacts on the Natura 2000 site, there is no requirement to proceed further. This is shown in diagram 1 below.

3.7 This report covers Stage 1 of the AA process and will determine whether the further stages of the AA will need to be completed.

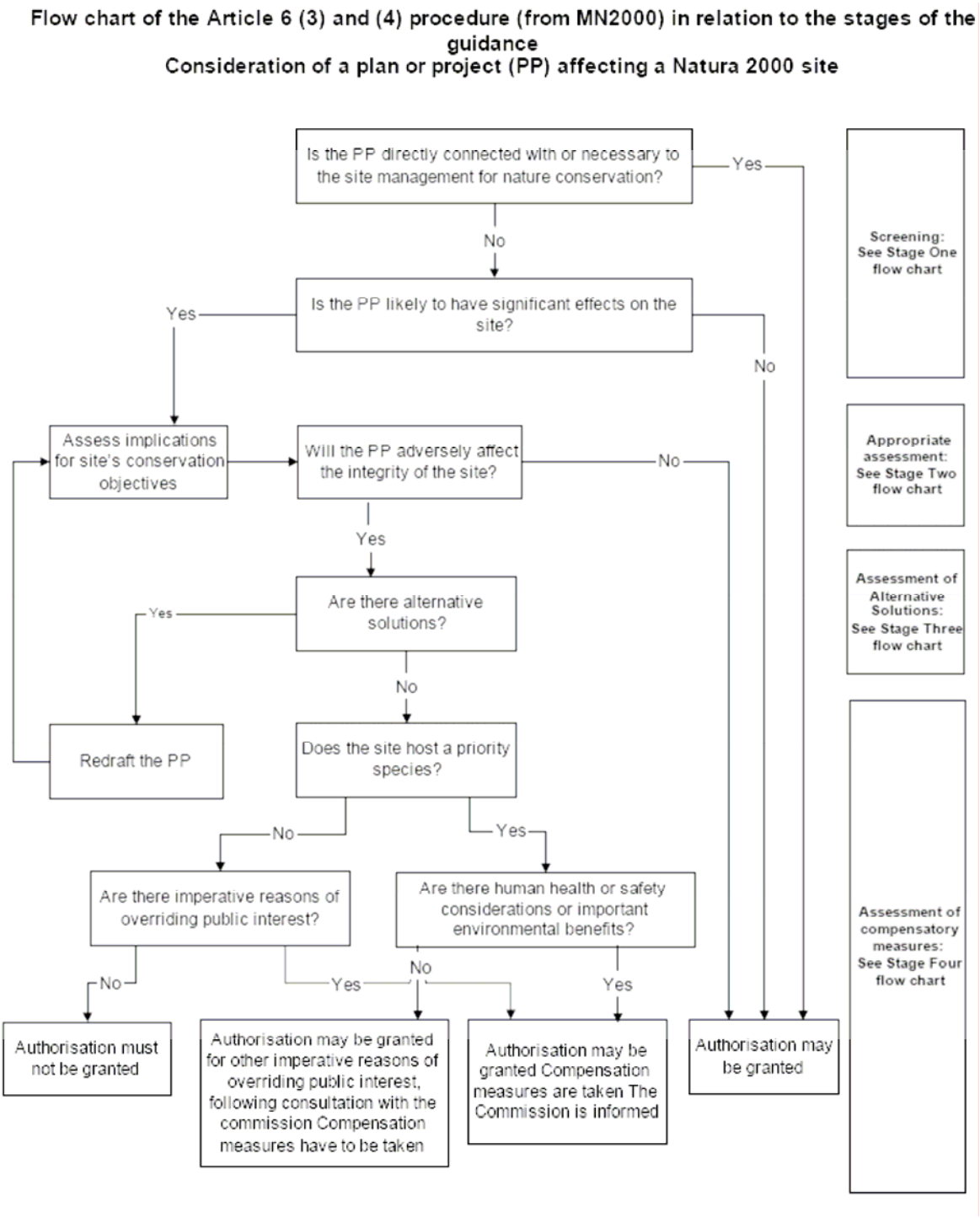


Diagram 1: Flow diagram, which sets out the stages of Appropriate Assessment that will be required.

Stage 1 – Screening

This stage examines the likely effects of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, upon a Natura 2000 site and considers whether it can be objectively concluded that these effects will not be significant. This assessment involves four steps they are described below and are documented over the next three sections of this report.

1 Determining whether the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary for the management of the site. This requires only that the Council identifies whether the plan contains management that are for conservation purposes or that it is solely conceived for the conservation management of the site.

2 Describing the project or plan and any others that in combination have the potential to significantly affect the Natura 2000 site. In order to describe the plan it will be necessary to identify all elements that either alone or in combination have the potential for a significant effect on the site.

3 Characteristics of the site and identification of possible effects. Characterisation of the site as a whole or where impacts are most likely to fall in order to identify possible effects.

4 Assessing the significance of any effects. Effects identified above are tested for significance.

4 Plan Analysis (Steps 1 & 2)

4.1 The House Extensions SPD is not directly connected to or necessary for the management of any of the identified Natura 2000 sites and has not been solely conceived for the conservation management of the site.

4.2 As set out above step 2 of this stage requires the examination of the likely effects of a Plan, either alone or in combination with other plans, upon a Natura 2000 site and considers whether it can be objectively concluded that these effects will not be significant.

4.3 It should be noted that even where a plan on its own may not have a significant impact on a European site, it may have a significant 'in combination' impact with other existing trends, plans and projects. The proposed plan may have only a small impact on a European site but, alongside other trends, plans and projects, this impact may be 'the straw that breaks the camel's back' as it were. It is therefore essential to consider all the various other pressures to which the site is exposed during the plan's lifetime.

House Extension SPD

4.4 The purpose of the House Extensions SPD is to complement the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP), by providing additional guidance for anyone intending to extend or alter their house or erect a garage or other outbuilding to ensure that all developments:

a are of exemplary design quality and that any extensions do not spoil the character of the original dwelling, but relate closely to it and harmonise with the existing house in its scale, proportions, materials and appearance;
b protect residential amenity of neighbouring properties;
c protect and enhance the built and natural environment;
d preserve the essential character of the street and surrounding area;
e avoid the creation of dangerous highway conditions; and
f safeguard the provision of a reasonable private garden space.

4.5 The intended geographical coverage of the SPD is therefore Borough wide.

Other Halton Borough Council Documents

4.6 **Halton UDP** (adopted April 2005) includes site allocations for housing and employment sites alongside policies (particularly GE17) to protect sites of International Importance such as the Mersey Estuary SPA and Ramsar. The Halton UDP covers the whole Borough and includes policies and guidance to control development up to and beyond 2016.

4.7 The **Halton Core Strategy** will set out the vision, objectives and strategy for the development of the area, it will not however allocate individual sites for development this will instead be done through the Allocation & Policy DPDs. The Core Strategy is intended to cover the period to 2021 and is expected to be adopted in 2009.

4.8 **Draft Halebank Regeneration Action Area SPD** covers the industrial estates in Ditton Ward, which borders Riverside Ward along a stretch of Ditton Brook and is in close proximity to the Mersey Estuary SPA and Ramsar sites. The Draft Halebank Regeneration Action Area Draft SPD sets out planning policy to:

- Bring new housing, residents and jobs into the area to sustain local community facilities.
- Ensure that heavy goods vehicles are diverted away from housing areas by new routes that are better connected to the main road network.
- Remove dereliction and introduce more landscaping and tree planting.
- Encourage existing industry to expand and prosper so long as any harmful environmental impacts are reduced.

4.9 **Draft Ditton Strategic Rail Freight Park (DSRFP) SPD** is approximately 200 metres from the Mersey Estuary. Both Ditton Brook and Stewards Brook run through the DSRFP area, and in to the River Mersey. The Draft DSRFP SPD sets out the planning policy to:

- Guide the development of the proposed rail freight park according to the Unitary Development Plan Policy
- Minimise the effects that new warehouses for rail freight will have on new and existing housing development.
- Ensure that heavy goods vehicles are diverted away from housing areas by new routes that are better connected to the main road network.
- Remove dereliction and introduce more landscaping and tree planting.
- Encourage existing industry to expand and prosper so long as any harmful environmental impacts are reduced.

4.10 The **Second Local Transport Plan** (LTP2) sets out Halton Borough Council's objectives, strategies and policies for transport for the period April 2006 to March 2011 and beyond. The overarching objective of the LTP2 is: *the delivery of a smart sustainable, inclusive and accessible transport system and infrastructure that seeks to improve the quality of life for people living in Halton by encouraging economic growth and regeneration, and the protection and enhancement of the historic, natural and human environment.* The LTP2 does not expect the Mersey Gateway to have been completed before 2014 and therefore outside of the period it covers.

Other Authorities Documents

4.11 The **Vale Royal Local Plan** (adopted June 2006) sets the policies for development and the use of land in this Borough between the period 2006 to 2016. It includes objectives to 'protect sites/areas of significant ecological, . . . value', 'to resist development that may cause . . . water, . . . pollution' and 'to enhance biodiversity'.

4.12 Production of the **Vale Royal Core Strategy DPD** is not expected to commence until November 2007.

4.13 The **Warrington UDP** (adopted January 2006), through its policies and proposals and the measures through which they will be implemented, seeks to play a key role in promoting and bringing about the development of 'sustainable communities through

regeneration'. Policy GN15 provides specific protection for Rixton Clay Pits SAC and Risley Moss and Holcroft Moss, which form part of the Manchester Mosses SAC.

4.14 Work has already started on the **Warrington LDF** and they expect their Core Strategy to reach Preferred Options Stage in November / December 2006.

4.15 **Ellesmere Port and Neston Local Plan** (adopted 2002) intends to nurture development and land use which will improve the quality of life in Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough without causing long term social, economic or environmental harm to existing or future generations. Policy ENV1 contains specific criteria to protect International Sites of Nature Conservation Importance particularly The Dee and Mersey Special Protection Areas/Ramsar sites.

4.16 The **St.Helens UDP** (adopted July 1998) provides a framework for directing and controlling development as well as conserving and protecting the environment. The principal underlying strategy of the UDP is urban regeneration. The UDP does not contain a policy to specifically protect European site, however, it does contain a policy which requires the developer to include measures to include measures to mitigate their effects upon features of nature conservation value.

4.17 **St Helens MBC** are preparing the **Core Strategy / Allocations Development Plan Document / Criteria Policies Development Plan Documents** together. They were consulted upon during August / September 2005, St Helens intend to prepare a the Preferred Options for consultation in January 2007.

4.18 The **Knowsley UDP** (adopted June 2006) sets out the Council's strategy for the physical development and regeneration of the Borough until 2016. A key purpose of the UDP is to promote the creation and maintenance of sustainable communities in Knowsley. Policy ENV9 may provide protection for the Natura 2000 sites as it states that development proposals will not be permitted if they would destroy or have a significant adverse effect on nature conservation interests within any sites which are designated nationally or internationally.

4.19 **Liverpool UDP** (adopted November 2002) the UDP's overriding objective of urban regeneration is refined into the following themes: Economic Regeneration, Environmental Improvement and Reduction of Inequality. Policy OE6 aims to protect the Natura 200 sites it states 'The City Council will seek to protect the nature conservation interest of open land and the water environment in the City by not permitting development which would destroy, fragment or adversely affect directly or indirectly a designated or proposed Special Protection Area (SPA), Ramsar site, or Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), unless the City Council is satisfied that there is no alternative solution and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest.'

4.20 **Liverpool City Council** is working on a **Core Strategy**: a vision of the future in terms of the city's spatial structure and development. It will set the ground rules for future planning policies and neighbourhood plans, and reflect the principles contained within the city's Community Strategy. Consultation on the Issues and Options Paper took place in February/March 2006, the Preferred Options Report will be consulted upon in 2007.

4.21 **Wirral UDP** (adopted February 2000) includes a policy to protect Natura 200 sites this states that development proposals, either individually or when combined with others, which seem likely to significantly affect a European Site, a proposed European site or a Ramsar site, and which are not directly connected with or necessary to site management for nature conservation, will be assessed in terms of the nature conservation objectives for the site.

4.22 **Wirral MBC** have started work on their **Core Strategy** DPD but they do not expect to publish their Preferred Options document until March 2007. Wirral have undertaken an AA as part of the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report for their Core Strategy DPD and have concluded that an AA is not required at this stage, however they will undertake a further screening exercise at the Preferred Options stage.

5 Site Analysis (Step 3)

5.1 The identification of impacts upon the Natura 2000 sites will require a characterisation of the sites which will be potentially affected. The following section describes the Natura 2000 sites that will potentially be affected by the House Extensions SPD, along with their qualifying interests and the conservation objectives.

5.2 Part of the Mersey Estuary Special Protection Area and the Mersey Estuary Ramsar site are within the Borough boundary. The extent of both these sites can be seen in diagram 2.

5.3 Diagram 2 also shows the European sites outside of the Borough which could potentially be affected by the House Extensions SPD these include Manchester Mosses SAC, Rixton Clay Pits SAC, Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 & parts of Phase 2 Ramsar Site and West Midlands Mosses SAC. These sites vary in distance from the Borough with Rixton Clay Pits SAC being approximately 7 miles from the edge of the Borough and parts of the Midland Meres Ramsar being approximately 4 miles from the Borough boundary.

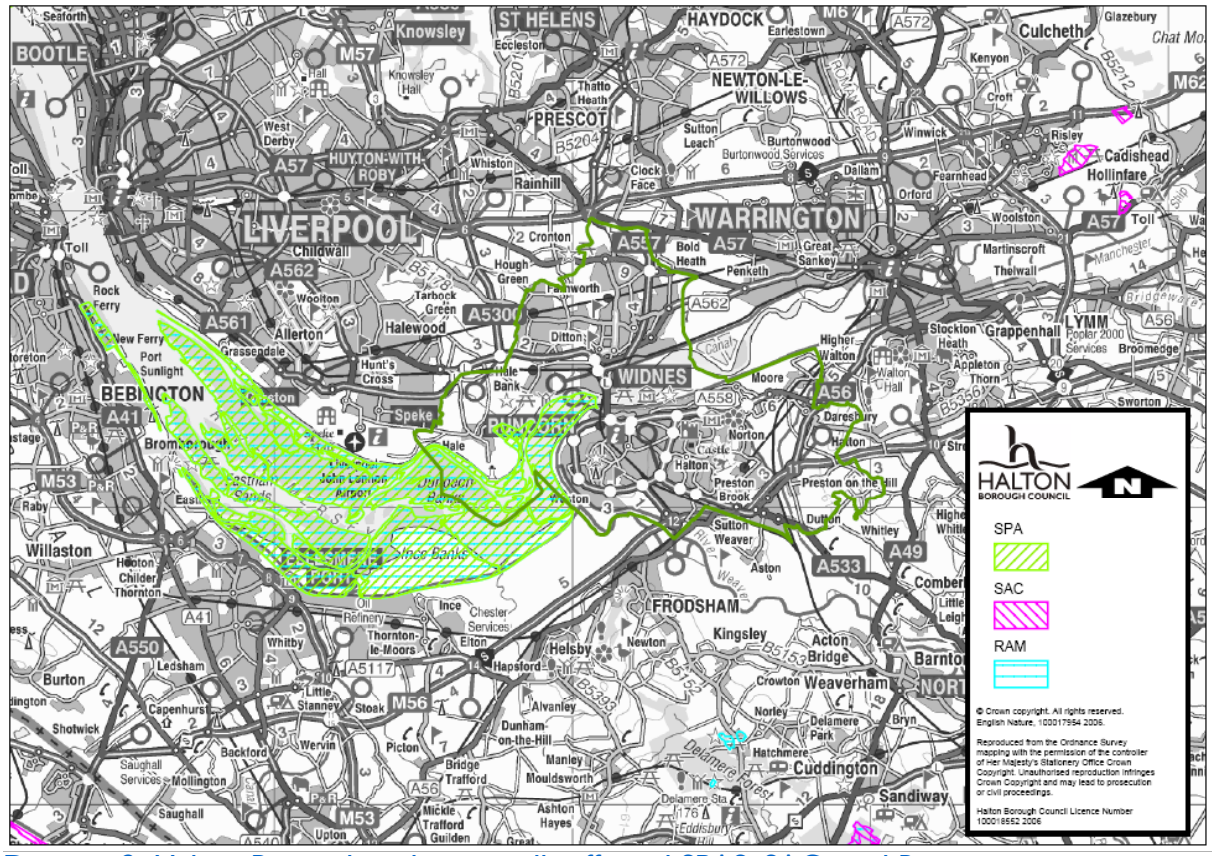


Diagram 2: Halton Borough and potentially affected SPAS, SACs and Ramsar sites

The characteristics and the conservation objectives of these European sites are set out below with more detail on each of the sites being provided within Appendix 1.

Mersey Estuary Special Protection Area

Brief description

The Mersey Estuary has been designated as a SPA for its internationally important numbers of migratory species and waterfowl. The Mersey Estuary includes both marine areas (subtidal and intertidal) and land which is not subject to tidal influence.

Qualifying Interests & Conservation Objectives

Internationally important populations of regularly occurring migratory species:
Calidris alpina alpina (Dunlin), *Tringa tetanus* (Common Redshank), *Anas acuta* (Pintail), *Charadrius hiaticula* (Ringed Plover) and *Tadorna tadorna* (Shelduck), *Anas crecca* (Teal).

Conservation objectives focus on maintaining habitats for these species in favourable condition subject to natural change. In particular:

- Intertidal sediments
- Rocky shores
- Saltmarsh

Internationally important assemblage of waterfowl:
The Mersey Estuary supports large populations of wintering waterfowl. 78,015 individual birds (47,714 waders and 30,301 wildfowl). The Mersey also supports nationally important populations of *Anas Penelope* (Wigeon), *Pluvialis squatarola* (Grey Plover), *Limosa limosa islandica* (Black-tailed Godwit), *Numenius arquata* (Curlew), *Tringa tetanus* (Common Redshank) and *Calidris alpina alpina* (Dunlin).

Conservation objectives focus on maintaining habitats for these species in favourable condition subject to natural change. In particular:

- Intertidal sediments
- Rocky shores
- Saltmarsh

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

(Taken from Site Characterisation of European Marine Sites – The Mersey Estuary SPA, Marine Biological Association, 2006)

Mersey Estuary Ramsar

Brief description

The Mersey is a large, sheltered estuary which comprises large areas of saltmarsh and extensive intertidal sand and mudflats, with limited areas of brackish marsh, rocky shoreline and boulder clay cliffs, within a rural and industrial environment. The intertidal flats and saltmarshes provide feeding and roosting sites for large and internationally important populations of waterfowl. During the winter, the site is of major importance for duck and waders. The site is also important during spring and autumn migration periods, particularly for wader populations moving along the west coast of Britain.

Qualifying Interests & Conservation Objectives

- Common shelduck , *Tadorna tadorna*

- Black-tailed godwit , *Limosa limosa islandica*
- Common redshank , *Tringa totanus totanus*
- Eurasian teal , *Anas crecca*
- Northern pintail , *Anas acuta*
- Dunlin , *Calidris alpina alpina*

Manchester Mosses SAC

Brief description

Manchester Mosses SAC consists of three sites (Risley Moss, Holcroft Moss and Astley and Bedford Mosses). This site has been identified because it is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK of degraded lowland raised bog, which is still capable of natural regeneration. Such a habitat requires specific conditions for its survival and restoration, two of the most important of which are the retention/provision, both of an acidic water supply, and of a high water table throughout the year.

Qualifying Interests & Conservation Objectives

- Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration

The conservation objective is to maintain, in favourable condition, the degraded raised bogs

Rixton Clay Pits SAC

Brief description

Rixton Clay Pits is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in recognition of its national importance for Great Crested Newts. In addition to the newts, its ponds also support large numbers of other amphibians, particularly toads, and 18 species of damselfly and dragonfly species, including the Ruddy Darter and the large Emperor Dragonfly.

Qualifying Interests & Conservation Objectives

- Triturus cristatus (Great crested newt)

The conservation objective is to maintain, in favourable condition, the habitats for the population of Triturus cristatus (Great crested newt)

Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 & parts of Phase 2 Ramsar

Brief description

The Meres & Mosses form a geographically discrete series of lowland open water and peatland sites in the north-west Midlands of England. These have developed in natural depressions in the glacial drift left by receding ice sheets which formerly covered the Cheshire/Shropshire Plain. The 16 component sites include open water bodies (meres), the majority of which are nutrient-rich with associated fringing habitats; reed swamps, fen, carr & damp pasture. Peat accumulation has resulted in nutrient poor peat bogs (mosses) forming in some sites in the fringes of meres or completely infilling basins. In a few cases the result is a floating quaking bog or schwingmoor. The wide range of resulting habitats support nationally important flora & fauna.

Qualifying Interests & Conservation Objectives

To be confirmed

West Midlands Mosses SAC

Brief description

West Midlands Mosses contains three pools, two at Abbots Moss (area of West Midlands SAC that could potentially be affected the Core Strategy), that are examples of dystrophic lakes and ponds in the lowlands of England and Wales, where this habitat type is rare. The dystrophic lakes and ponds at this site are associated with Schwingmoor development, a characteristic of this habitat type in the West Midlands. Schwingmoor is an advancing floating raft of bog-moss *Sphagnum*, often containing NVC type M3 *Eriophorum angustifolium* bog pool community, which grows from the edge of the pool and can completely cover over the pool.

Qualifying Interests & Conservation Objectives

Transition mires and quaking bogs (very wet mires often identified by an unstable `quaking` surface)
Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds (acid peat-stained lakes and ponds)
Bog woodland

The conservation objectives are:

- to maintain, in favourable condition, very wet basin mire identified by an unstable 'quaking' surface with particular reference to the M2 *Sphagnum cuspidatum/recurvum* bog pool community and M18 *Erica tetralix - Sphagnum papillosum* mire.
- to maintain*, in favourable condition, acid, peat-stained lakes (dystrophic pools)

6 Assessment (Step 4)

6.1 This step of the Screening Report involves the assessment of the significance of the House Extensions SPD on the characteristics and conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 sites, as set out in section 5 of this report.

6.2 Tables 1-5 of this section set out the assessment of the House Extensions SPD on each of the Natura 2000 sites which could potentially be affected by the SPD.

Glossary of terms used in the favourable condition table

Operational Feature & Criteria Feature	Features of the site which are key to its characteristic and its European designation.
Attribute	Selected characteristic of an operational feature / criteria feature, which provides an indication of the condition of the feature to which it applies.
Measure	What will be measured in terms of the units of measurement, arithmetic nature and frequency at which the measurement is taken. This measure will be attained using a range of methods from broad scale to more specific across the site.

Table 1: Assessment of Impacts of the House Extensions SPD on the Mersey Estuary SPA & Ramsar

Mersey Estuary SPA & Ramsar					
Operational Feature	**Criteria feature**	**Attribute**	**Measure**	**Possible impacts from the plan**	**Conclusions**
Intertidal sediments, rocky shores and saltmarsh	Populations of European and National importance	Disturbance in feeding and roosting areas	Reduction or displacement of birds measured using 5 year peak mean information on populations)	The House Extensions SPD does not include policies that will increase human activity, as it will only consider extensions to current dwellings as opposed to new development, within the Mersey Estuary SPA / Ramsar (human activities can result in reduced food intake and/or increased energy expenditure of the bird population). Therefore the House Extensions SPD is unlikely to lead to a significant reduction in numbers or displacement of birds.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Mersey Estuary SPA. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.

Mersey Estuary SPA & Ramsar					
Operational Feature	**Criteria feature**	**Attribute**	**Measure**	**Possible impacts from the plan**	**Conclusions**
		Extent and distribution of habitat	Area (ha) of habitat, measured once per reporting cycle	The House Extensions SPD will not lead to a decrease in extent and distribution of habitat. The SPD does not allocate land and as such will not lead to a decrease in the extent and distribution in habitats.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Mersey Estuary SPA. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
		Absence of obstruction to viewlines	Openness of terrain, unrestricted by obstructions (feeding, anti-predator, roosting). Measured periodically (frequency to be determined)	The House Extensions SPD will not lead to an increase in obstructions to existing bird viewlines.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Mersey Estuary SPA. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
Intertidal sediments	Migratory Species/ Waterfowl Assemblage	Food availability	Presence and abundance of intertidal invertebrates. Measured periodically (frequency to be determined)	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the presence and abundance of prey species, such as molluscs, marine worms and crustaceans including: *Nereis, Macoma, Hydrobia, Crangon* and *Carcinus* for dunlin, *Hydrobia*, *Macoma, Corophium* and *Nereis* for redshank, *Nereis, Hydrobia* and *Corophium* for shelduck, *Hydrobia* for teal and pintail, *Macoma*, *Cardium* and *Nereis* for black-tailed godwit, *Nereis*, *Hydrobia* and *Corophium* for curlew, *Nereis*, *Arenicola* and *Notomastsus* for grey plover, *Gammaurs* and *Pisidium* for ringed plover	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Mersey Estuary SPA. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
		Food availability	Presence and abundance of mud-surface plants and green algae. Measured periodically (frequency to be determined)	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the presence or abundance of Enteromorpha (which is important for Wigeon) or the presence and abundance of prey species.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Mersey Estuary SPA.

Mersey Estuary SPA & Ramsar					
Operational Feature	**Criteria feature**	**Attribute**	**Measure**	**Possible impacts from the plan**	**Conclusions**
					Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
Rocky shores	Migratory species/ Waterfowl Assemblage	Food Availability	Presence and abundance of intertidal invertebrates. Measured periodically (frequency to be determined)	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the presence and abundance of intertidal invertebrates (Waterfowl, including ringed plover, redshank and curlew) or the presence and abundance of prey species.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Mersey Estuary SPA. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
Saltmarsh	Migratory species/ Waterfowl Assemblage	Food availability	Presence and abundance of soft leaved and seed bearing plants. Measured periodically (frequency to be determined)	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the presence and abundance of food species (*Salicornia* and *Atriplex* are important for teal *Agrostis stolonifera*, *Pucinellia maritima* and *Salicornia spp*. are important for wigeon).	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Mersey Estuary SPA. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
Saltmarsh	Migratory species/ Waterfowl Assemblage	Vegetation characteristics	Open, short vegetation or bare ground predominating (roosting and feeding)	The House Extensions SPD is unlikely to have an impact on the height of vegetation within the areas used for feeding and roosting. There is policy contained within the UDP which this document is supplementary to, to protect the sites of European Importance including the Mersey Estuary Ramsar and SPA. The SPD also contains text which highlights that the Council will have regard to the biodiversity considerations given to any open space that is provided.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Mersey Estuary SPA. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.

Table 2: Assessment of Impacts of the House Extensions SPD on the Manchester Mosses SAC

Manchester Mosses SAC					
Operational feature	**Criteria feature**	**Attributes**	**Measures**	**Possible impacts from the plan**	**Conclusions**
Degraded Bog capable of natural regeneration as a precursor of active raised bog.	Active peat formation	Vegetation composed predominantly of species capable of peat formation. The net accumulation of peat.	Ombrotrophic Sphagna to cover not less than 30%, with cotton grasses (*Eriophorum angustifolium, E vaginatum*) accounting for the greater proportion of the remainder (excluding the rand). Every six years survey permanent belt transects through compartments covering observed surface variation to determine the cover of the above species (Dargie, Dargie & Tantram, 2000). Read a diametric transect of dipwells monthly or use continuous recorders. The mean free groundwater level should not fall more than 25 cm below surface level, taken as an average over the mire expanse (excluding the rand), in more than one year in five. Approximately 80% of the mire expanse should be active to achieve favourable condition.	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the re-establishment of vegetation with peat-forming capabilities or on the activity of the bog.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Manchester Mosses SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
Degraded Bog capable of natural regeneration as a precursor of active raised bog.	Mesotope	Rand and mire expanse NVC communities likely to be present: M25 *Molinia caerulea-Potentilla erecta* mire. M25a *Molinia caerulea-Potentilla erecta* mire.: *Erica*	Bog communities M1, M2, M3, M20 and predominantly M18 should extend close to the edge of the bog and occupy 80% of the mire expanse, excluding rand. The edge slope (rand) may support dwarf shrub such as heather or bilberry, not birch or bracken. A tree component may be expected on the rand of continental bogs, together with *Molinia*.	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the extent and health of the mire expanse and rand. The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the Manchester Mosses wider macrotope, through actions such as land drainage and aquifer abstraction.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Manchester Mosses SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.

Manchester Mosses SAC					
Operational feature	**Criteria feature**	**Attributes**	**Measures**	**Possible impacts from the plan**	**Conclusions**
		tetralix sub-community W4 *Betula pubescens-Molinia caerulea* woodland. Also degraded examples of communities listed for active bog.	A cover of more than 30% dominant *Molinia* or birch is unfavourable. Record extent by coarse estimates e.g. from aerial photographs. Use DAFOR for key species: *E.vaginatum. E.angustifolium, Calluna vulgaris, Erica tetralix, Vaccinium oxycoccos, Andromeda polifolia,*(score 4>F *for fav condt)* *Sphagnum cuspidatum, S. magellanicum, S. subnitens, S. capillifolium, S. papillosum,* and *S. tenellum (*at least 4 >/= F for favourable condition.*)*		

Table 3: Assessment of Impacts of the House Extensions SPD on the Rixton Clay Pits SAC

Rixton Clay Pits SAC					
Operational Feature	**Criteria Feature**	**Attribute**	**Measure**	**Possible impacts from the plan**	**Risk of a significant effect on site integrity?**
Great crested newts	Terrestrial habitat	Extent	Total area of site as notified (13.99 ha)	The House Extensions SPD will not result in a loss of area or fragmentation of the site. It will not create any barriers to newt movements between ponds.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Rixton Clay Pits SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
	Ponds	Presence of ponds	Ponds (permanent & temporary)	The House Extensions SPD will not result in a reduction in number of waterbodies at site	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Rixton Clay Pits SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
	Ponds	Pollution	Absence of pollution	The House Extensions SPD will not to lead to a level of pollution that will create a reduction in the viability of the ponds as a breeding site.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Rixton Clay Pits SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
	Ponds	Extent (depth and persistence)	Ponds should be of sufficient size and depth to avoid desiccation over the course of the breeding/tadpole development season (Feb to mid-Aug) for at least 1 in every 3 years. Ponds to be found throughout the site.	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the ability of waterbodies to hold water throughout the breeding and tadpole development season (February - mid August).	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Rixton Clay Pits SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
	Ponds	Shading	Extent of shading by trees	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the extent of shading by trees within the Rixton Clay Pits area.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Rixton Clay Pits SAC.

Rixton Clay Pits SAC					
Operational Feature	**Criteria Feature**	**Attribute**	**Measure**	**Possible impacts from the plan**	**Risk of a significant effect on site integrity?**
					Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
	Ponds	Fish	Absence of fish in majority of ponds	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the presence / absence of fish in ponds.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Rixton Clay Pits SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
	Terrestrial habitats		Habitat structure and quality.	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the habitat structure and quality.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the Rixton Clay Pits SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.

Table 4: Assessment of Impacts of the House Extensions SPD on the Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 & parts of Phase 2 Ramsar

Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 & parts of Phase 2 Ramsar					
Operational feature	**Criteria feature**	**Attribute**	**Measure**	**Possible impacts from the plan**	**Risk of a significant effect on site integrity?**
Conservation Objectives still to be confirmed.					

Table 5: Assessment of Impacts of the House Extensions SPD on the West Midland Mosses SAC

West Midland Mosses SAC					
Operational feature	**Criteria feature**	**Attribute**	**Measure**	**Possible impacts from the plan**	**Risk of a significant effect on site integrity?**
Basin mire with a quaking surface (Schwingmoor)	NVC types M2 *Sphagnum recurvum* bog pool community and M18 *Erica tetralix-Sphagnum papillosum* mire.	Water level and degree of fluctuation capable of sustaining the floating raft composed of NVC type appropriate to longstanding water chemistry and fertility. Scrub or woodland limited to margins, or no more than scattered over the open NVC communities.	Presence of raft which trembles when jumped on. Check for indication of trophic change. Install dipwells and measure at least bimonthly. Map extent and position of main NVC communities, monitor every 5 yr. Within the area occupied by these communities (and sub communities of M6 and M9) the eponymous species and others of constancy V and IV should be abundant (DAFOR). Scrub not to be more than occasional (DAFOR). (All site specific). Identify special species and seek specialist guidance in defining measures.	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the raft characteristics. The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the stability of groundwater. The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the type and extent of NVC communities. The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the populations of special or rare plant (and animal) species.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the West Midlands Mosses SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
Schwingmoor	Dystrophic Pools	Extent of community	Check extent of beds in July/August every 4 years.	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the present distribution of species representative of community.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the West Midlands Mosses SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
	Dystrophic Pools	Water quality	pH less than 4.5 rarely to 5.0. Measure quarterly to establish pH range over a 3 year period; thereafter annually (preferably October) when photosynthetic	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the present pH range.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the West Midlands Mosses SAC.

West Midland Mosses SAC					
Operational feature	**Criteria feature**	**Attribute**	**Measure**	**Possible impacts from the plan**	**Risk of a significant effect on site integrity?**
			activity is low.		Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
	Dystrophic Pools	Water quantity	Check levels annually during July/August.	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the water quantity levels, either through an affect at the drainage outfall or through the creation of a new outfall.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the West Midlands Mosses SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
	Dystrophic Pools	Sediment	Check for excessive growths of individual species or algal growth.	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact on the sediment quality and quantity.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the West Midlands Mosses SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.
	Dystrophic Pools	Algae	Check for algal growth July/August.	The House Extensions SPD will not have an impact t on the growth of algae.	The House Extensions SPD, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, will not have a significant effect on the West Midlands Mosses SAC. Therefore an Appropriate Assessment is not required.

6.3 Following the assessment of the impact of the House Extensions SPD on each of the Natura 2000 sites set out in Tables 1-5 above. It is possible to complete the Screening Matrix. The Screening Matrix is a summary of all the information contained within this report so far and is used to decide if there is likely to be significant effects on any Natura 200 sites.

Screening Matrix

Brief description of the project or plan	The purpose of the **House Extensions Supplementary Planning Document** (SPD) is to complement the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP), by providing additional guidance for anyone intending to extend or alter their house or erect a garage or other outbuilding to ensure that all developments: a are of exemplary design quality and that any extensions do not spoil the character of the original dwelling, but relate closely to it and harmonise with the existing house in its scale, proportions, materials and appearance; b protect residential amenity of neighbouring properties; c protect and enhance the built and natural environment; d preserve the essential character of the street and surrounding area; e avoid the creation of dangerous highway conditions; and f safeguard the provision of a reasonable private garden space. The intended geographical coverage of the SPD is therefore Borough wide.
Brief description of the Natura 2000 site	**Mersey Estuary SPA** The Mersey Estuary has been designated as a SPA for its internationally important numbers of migratory species and waterfowl. The Mersey Estuary includes both marine areas (subtidal and intertidal) and land which is not subject to tidal influence.
	Mersey Estuary Ramsar The Mersey is a large, sheltered estuary which comprises large areas of saltmarsh and extensive intertidal sand and mudflats, with limited areas of brackish marsh, rocky shoreline and boulder clay cliffs, within a rural and industrial environment. The intertidal flats and saltmarshes provide feeding and roosting sites for large and internationally important populations of waterfowl. During the winter, the site is of major importance for duck and waders. The site is also important during spring and autumn migration periods, particularly for wader populations moving along the west coast of Britain.
	Manchester Mosses SAC Manchester Mosses SAC consists of three sites (Risley

Screening Matrix

	Moss, Holcroft Moss and Astley and Bedford Mosses). This site has been identified because it is considered to be one of the best areas in the UK of degraded lowland raised bog, which is still capable of natural regeneration. Such a habitat requires specific conditions for its survival and restoration, two of the most important of which are the retention/provision, both of an acidic water supply, and of a high water table throughout the year.
	Rixton Clay Pits SAC Rixton Clay Pits is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in recognition of its national importance for Great Crested Newts. In addition to the newts, its ponds also support large numbers of other amphibians, particularly toads, and 18 species of damselfly and dragonfly species, including the Ruddy Darter and the large Emperor Dragonfly.
	Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 & parts of Phase 2 Ramsar The Meres & Mosses form a geographically discrete series of lowland open water and peatland sites in the north-west Midlands of England. These have developed in natural depressions in the glacial drift left by receding ice sheets which formerly covered the Cheshire/Shropshire Plain. The 16 component sites include open water bodies (meres), the majority of which are nutrient-rich with associated fringing habitats; reed swamps, fen, carr & damp pasture. Peat accumulation has resulted in nutrient poor peat bogs (mosses) forming in some sites in the fringes of meres or completely infilling basins. In a few cases the result is a floating quaking bog or schwingmoor. The wide range of resulting habitats support nationally important flora & fauna.
	West Midland Mosses SAC West Midlands Mosses contains three pools, two at Abbots Moss (area of West Midlands SAC that could potentially be affected the Core Strategy), that are examples of dystrophic lakes and ponds in the lowlands of England and Wales, where this habitat type is rare. The dystrophic lakes and ponds at this site are associated with Schwingmoor development, a characteristic of this habitat type in the West Midlands. Schwingmoor is an advancing floating raft of bog-moss *Sphagnum*, often containing NVC type M3 *Eriophorum angustifolium* bog pool community, which grows from the edge of the pool and can completely cover over the pool.
Describe the individual elements of the project (either alone or in combination with	None The SPD supplements policies **S25** Planning Obligations, **GE5** Outdoor Sport and Recreation Facilities in the Urban

Screening Matrix

other plans or projects) likely to give rise to impacts on the Natura 2000 site	Fringe and Open Countryside, **GE6** Protection of Designated Greenspace, **GE11** Protection of Incidental Greenspace, **GE12** Protection of Outdoor Playing Space for Formal Sport and Recreation, **H3** Provision of Recreational Greenspace and **TP9** The Greenway Network of the adopted Halton UDP. The SPD does not allocate sites or propose development that would result in either direct or indirect impacts to any of any of the sites listed above instead it provides guidance to ensure that the highest quality of development is provided.
Describe any likely direct , indirect or secondary impacts of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the Natura 2000 site by virtue of: • Size and scale; • Land-take; • Distance from the designated site and key features of the site; • Resource requirements (water abstraction etc); • Emissions (disposal to land, water or air); • Excavation requirements; • Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning, etc.; • Other	None As above.
Describe any likely changes to the site arising as a result of: • Reduction of habitat area; • Disturbance to key species; • Habitat or species fragmentation; • Reduction in species density; • Changes in key indicators of conservation value (water quality etc.); • Climate change.	No changes have been identified. See Tables 1-5 above
Describe any likely impact on the designated site as a whole in terms of: • Interference with the key relationships that define the structure of the site;	No impacts have been identified. See Tables 1-5 above

Screening Matrix

• Interference with key relationships that define the function of the site.	
Provide indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects set out above in terms of: • Loss; • Fragmentation; • Disruption; • Disturbance; • Change to key elements of the site (e.g. water quality etc.).	N/A
Describe from the above those elements of the project or plan, or combination of elements, where the above impacts are likely to be significant or where the scale or magnitude of impacts is not known.	There are no likely significant impacts identified.

6.4 Following the completion of the Screening Matrix it is possible to conclude that the House Extensions SPD is unlikely to have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site. Therefore the No Significant Effects Matrix has been completed to this concludes the Screening Report Process and identifies that no further stages of Appropriate Assessment are to required to be undertaken.

No Significant Effects Matrix

Name of Plan	House Extensions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)
Name and location of Natura 2000 site	Mersey Estuary SPA Mersey Estuary Ramsar Manchester Mosses SAC Rixton Clay Pits SAC Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 & parts of Phase 2 Ramsar West Midland Mosses SAC
Description of Plan	The purpose of the **House Extensions Supplementary Planning Document** (SPD) is to complement the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP), by providing additional guidance for anyone intending to extend or alter their house or erect a garage or other outbuilding to ensure that all developments: a are of exemplary design quality and that any extensions do not spoil the character of the original dwelling, but relate closely to it and harmonise with the existing house in its scale, proportions, materials and appearance; b protect residential amenity of neighbouring properties; c protect and enhance the built and natural environment; d preserve the essential character of the street and surrounding area; e avoid the creation of dangerous highway conditions; and f safeguard the provision of a reasonable private garden space. The intended geographical coverage of the SPD is therefore Borough wide.
Is the project directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site?	No
Are there other projects or plans that together with the Plan being assessed could affect the site?	No
Assessment of Significance of effects	
Describe how the Plan (alone or in combination) is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site	No likely effects
Explain why these effects are not considered significant	N/A

No Significant Effects Matrix

List of agencies consulted	**Natural England** Liam Fisher Natural England Pier House Wallgate Wigan Lancashire WN3 4AL & **Natural England** North West Region Regional Advocacy and Partnership Team Planning & Advocacy 3rd Floor, Bridgewater House Whitworth Street Manchester M1 6LT **Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service** Dr Alan Jemmett Environmental Advisory Service Bryant House, Liverpool Rd North Maghull, Merseyside L31 2PA **Environment Agency** Mark Chadwick Environment Agency Appleton House 430 Birchwood Boulevard Birchwood Warrington WA3 7WD **Government Office for the North West** Dianne Wheatley Government Office for the North West Cunard Building Pier Head Water Street Liverpool L3 1QB
Response to consultation	To be completed following consultation with the above bodies.
Data collected to carry out the assessment	
Who carried out the assessment	Halton Borough Council

No Significant Effects Matrix

Sources of data	Joint Nature Conservation Committee Natural England Halton Borough Council Site Characterisation of European Marine Sites – The Mersey Estuary SPA, Marine Biological Association, 2006 Magic UK SPA data form UK SAC data form Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands
Level of assessment completed	Desktop study is sufficient to support the conclusions of this screening opinion.
Where can the full results of the assessment be accessed and viewed?	The assessment will be available for inspection at Runcorn Halton Direct Link at Halton Lea and Widnes Halton Direct Link on Brook Street, normal opening times of these locations and a downloadable version of this document can be found at the Council's website: www.halton.gov.uk/forwardplanning

Conclusion

On the basis of the information contained in Sections 4 to 6 of this Report (covering steps 1-4) it is the Borough Council's opinion that the proposed plan to which this screening opinion relates:

a) is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site, and
b) is not likely to have a significant effect on

- Mersey Estuary SPA
- Mersey Estuary Ramsar
- Manchester Mosses SAC
- Rixton Clay Pits SAC
- Midland Meres and Mosses Phase 1 & parts of Phase 2 Ramsar
- West Midland Mosses SAC

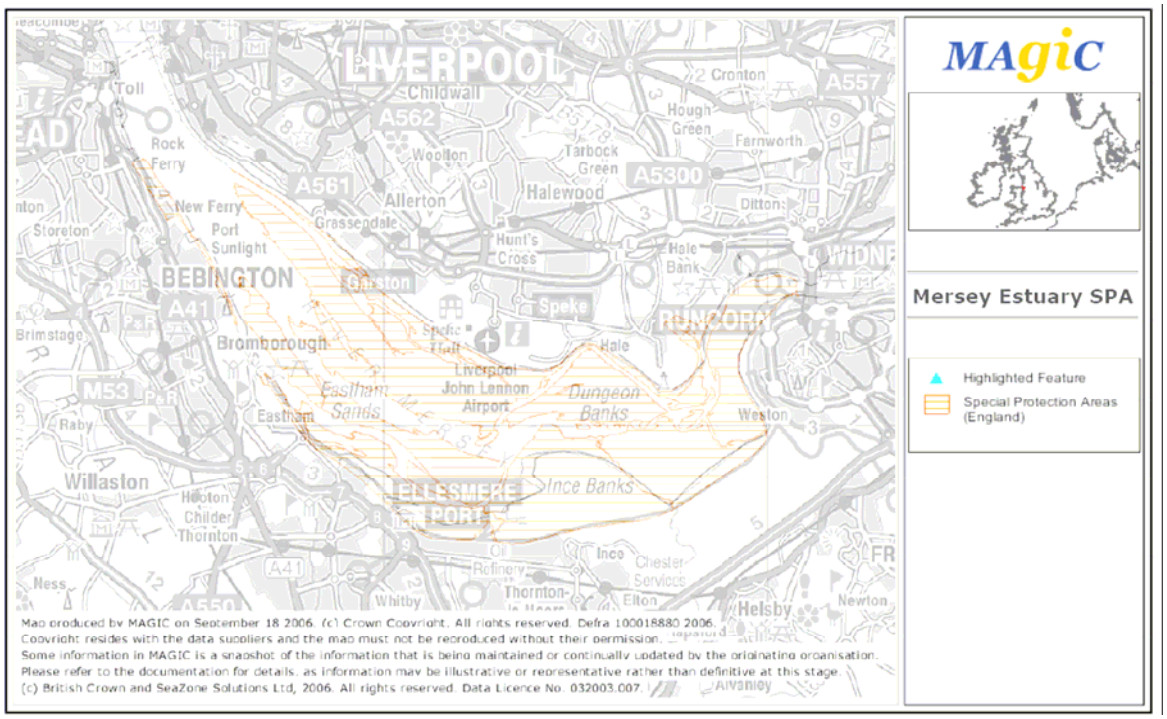
either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Accordingly, an "appropriate assessment" will not be required of those effects under Regulation 48, 49 and 54 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, before the Council decides to undertake, or give any consent, permission or other authorisation for this plan.

Appendix 1
Mersey Estuary SPA

Date site designated as a SPA: 12 / 1995

Location:



Site location:

Longitude: 02 49 25 W **Latitude:** 53 18 51 N

(This is the approximate central point of the SAC. In the case of large, linear or composite sites, this may not represent the location where a feature occurs within the SAC)

Site area (ha): 5023.35

General Site Character:

Tidal rivers. Estuaries. Mud flats. Sand flats. Lagoons (including saltwork basins)	89.0
Salt marshes. Salt pastures. Salt steppes	11.0

Other site characteristics

Soil & geology:
Mud, Sand, Sandstone/mudstone

Geomorphology & landscape:
Coastal, Estuary, Intertidal sediments (including sandflat/mudflat)

Annex I birds and regularly occurring migratory birds not listed in Annex 1:

		Population				Site assessment			
		Resident	Migratory						
Code	Species name		Breed	Winter	Stage	Population	Conservation	Isolation	Global
A054	*Anas acuta*			1169 I		B		C	
A052	*Anas crecca*			11723 I		B		C	
A050	*Anas penelope*			11886 I		B		C	
A149	*Calidris alpina alpina*			48789 I		B		C	
A137	*Charadrius hiaticula*				505 I	C		C	
A156	*Limosa limosa islandica*			976 I		B		C	
A160	*Numenius arquata*			1300 I		C		C	
A140	*Pluvialis apricaria*			3040 I		C		C	
A141	*Pluvialis squatarola*			1010 1		B		C	
A005	*Podiceps cristatus*			136 I		C		C	
A048	*Tadorna tadorna*			6746 I		B		C	
A162	*Tringa totanus*				4513 I	B		C	
A162	*Tringa totanus*			4993 I		B		C	
A142	*Vanellus vanellus*			10544 I		C		C	

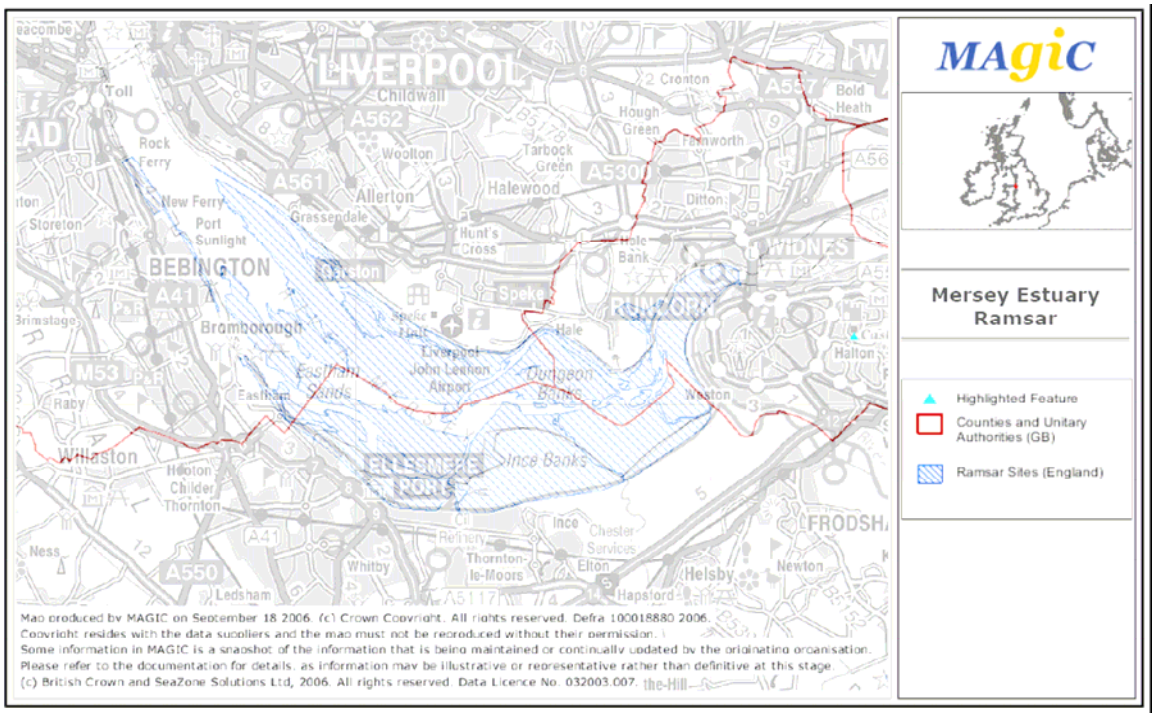
Vulnerability:

Wintering bird numbers and associated intertidal flats are robust to day-to-day change. Nevertheless, the estuary is subject to multiple uses; it is heavily industrialised, a substantial urban conurbation, has multiple transport requirements and increasing recreational activities. The site is vulnerable to physical loss through land-claim and development, physical damage caused by navigation capital and maintance dredging, agricultural requirements, non-physical loss, toxic and non-toxic contamination and biological disturbance by wildfowling. The Special Protection Area status, requirements for Environmental Impact Assessment and the estuary management plan should, however, safeguard the site.

Mersey Estuary Ramsar

Date site designated as a SPA: 20 / 12 / 1995

Location:



Site location:

Longitude: 02 49 25 W **Latitude:** 53 18 51 N

(This is the approximate central point of the SAC. In the case of large, linear or composite sites, this may not represent the location where a feature occurs within the SAC)

Site area (ha): 5023.35

Overview:

The Mersey is a large, sheltered estuary which comprises large areas of saltmarsh and extensive intertidal sand and mudflats, with limited areas of brackish marsh, rocky shoreline and boulder clay cliffs, within a rural and industrial environment. The intertidal flats and saltmarshes provide feeding and roosting sites for large and internationally important populations of waterfowl. During the winter, the site is of major importance for duck and waders. The site is also important during spring and autumn migration periods, particularly for wader populations moving along the west coast of Britain.

Justification

Ramsar criterion 5

Assemblages of international importance:

Species with peak counts in winter:

89576 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003)

Ramsar criterion 6 – species/populations occurring at levels of international importance.

Qualifying Species/populations (as identified at designation):

Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:	
Common shelduck , *Tadorna tadorna*, NW Europe	12676 individuals, representing an average of 4.2% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Black-tailed godwit , *Limosa limosa islandica*, Iceland/W Europe	2011 individuals, representing an average of 5.7% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Common redshank , *Tringa totanus totanus*,	6651 individuals, representing an average of 2.6% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Species with peak counts in winter:	
Eurasian teal , *Anas crecca*, NW Europe	10613 individuals, representing an average of 2.6% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Northern pintail , *Anas acuta*, NW Europe	565 individuals, representing an average of 2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Dunlin , *Calidris alpina alpina*, W Siberia/W Europe	48364 individuals, representing an average of 3.6% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

General Site Character:

Tidal rivers. Estuaries. Mud flats. Sand flats. Lagoons (including saltwork basins)	89.0
Salt marshes. Salt pastures. Salt steppes	11.0

Other site characteristics

Soil & geology:	clay, mud, sand, sandstone/mudstone
Geomorphology & landscape:	cliffs, coastal, estuary, intertidal sediments (including sandflat/mudflat), lowland, subtidal sediments (including sandbank/mudbank)
Nutrient status:	eutrophic, mesotrophic
pH:	no information
Salinity:	brackish / mixosaline, saline / euhaline
Soil:	no information
Water permanence:	usually permanent

Physical Features:

The Mersey catchment covers an area of approximately 535 km2 and includes the River Mersey and the River Bollin and their tributaries. Several canals and a large number of water bodies, including the Cheshire Meres, large reservoirs and ponds lie within the catchment. The area is heavily urbanised around Greater Manchester, contrasting with the more rural areas of Cheshire to the south and east. Water is abstracted throughout the catchments from both surface waters and groundwater for a number of uses including agricultural, industrial and public water supply. A number of public water supply reservoirs are present within the upper reaches of the catchments including Lamaload, Trentabank and Ridgegate reservoirs. The Mersey Estuary is located on the Irish Sea coast of north-west England. It is a

large, sheltered estuary which comprises large areas of saltmarsh and extensive intertidal sand- and mud-flats, with limited areas of brackish marsh, rocky shoreline and boulder clay cliffs, within a rural and industrial environment.

General ecological features:

Within this site the main habitat types are: Mudflats, Sandflats, Saltmarsh, Soft cliffs and Brackish marsh.

The main plant communities consists of: *Spartina anglica* saltmarsh (SM6), *Puccinellia maritima* saltmarsh (SM13), Transitional low-marsh vegetation with *Puccinellia maritima*, *Salicornia* species and *Suaeda maritima* (SM10), *Honkenya peploides–Cakile maritima* strandline community (SD2), *Typha latifolia* swamp (S12), *Phragmites australis–Urtica dioica* tall-herb fen (S26).

The estuary consists of large areas of intertidal sand and mudflats and saltmarsh. These provide feeding and roosting sites for large populations of waterfowl. Grazing of the saltmarsh by sheep and cattle adds diversity. Some parts of the northern shoreline are formed of boulder clay cliffs below which there are, in some parts, transitional areas with *Phragmites australis*.

Nationally important species occurring on the site.

Flora:

None reported

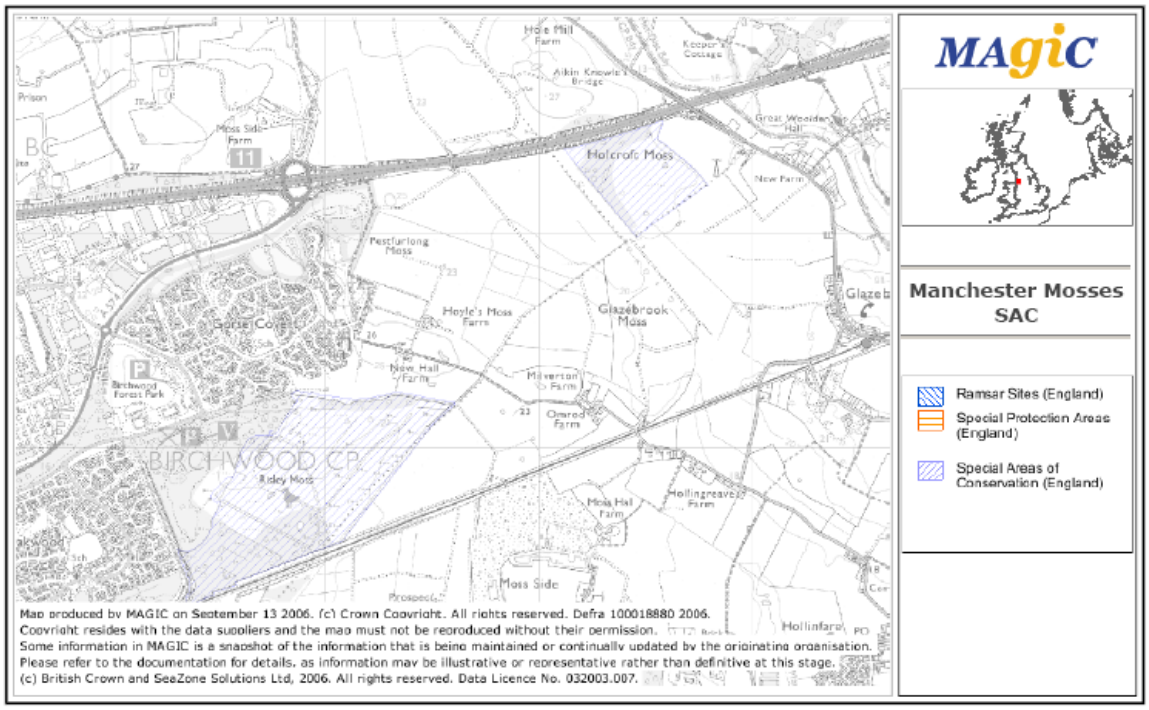
Fauna:

Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:	
Ringed plover , *Charadrius hiaticula*, Europe/Northwest Africa	429 individuals, representing an average of 1.3% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Eurasian curlew , *Numenius arquata arquata*, N.a. arquata Europe (breeding)	2010 individuals, representing an average of 1.3% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Spotted redshank , *Tringa erythropus*, Europe/W Africa	3 individuals, representing an average of 2.2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Common greenshank , *Tringa nebularia*, Europe/W Africa	6 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
Species with peak counts in winter:	
Eurasian wigeon , *Anas penelope*, NW Europe	8268 individuals, representing an average of 2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9- 2002/3)

Manchester Mosses SAC

Date site designated as a SAC: 04 2005

Location:



Site location:

Latitude: 53 28 16 N **Longitude:** 02 27 56 W

(This is the approximate central point of the SAC. In the case of large, linear or composite sites, this may not represent the location where a feature occurs within the SAC)

Site area (ha): 172.81

General Site Character:

Bogs. Marshes. Water fringed vegetation. Fens	(89%)
Broad-leaved deciduous woodland	(11%)

Other site characteristics

Soil & geology:
Acidic, Peat

Geomorphology & landscape:
Floodplain, Lowland

Annex I Habitats that are a primary reason for selection of this site:

Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration (7120)

- for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom.

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 Risley Moss, Astley & Bedford Mosses and Holcroft Moss 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.

Vulnerability:

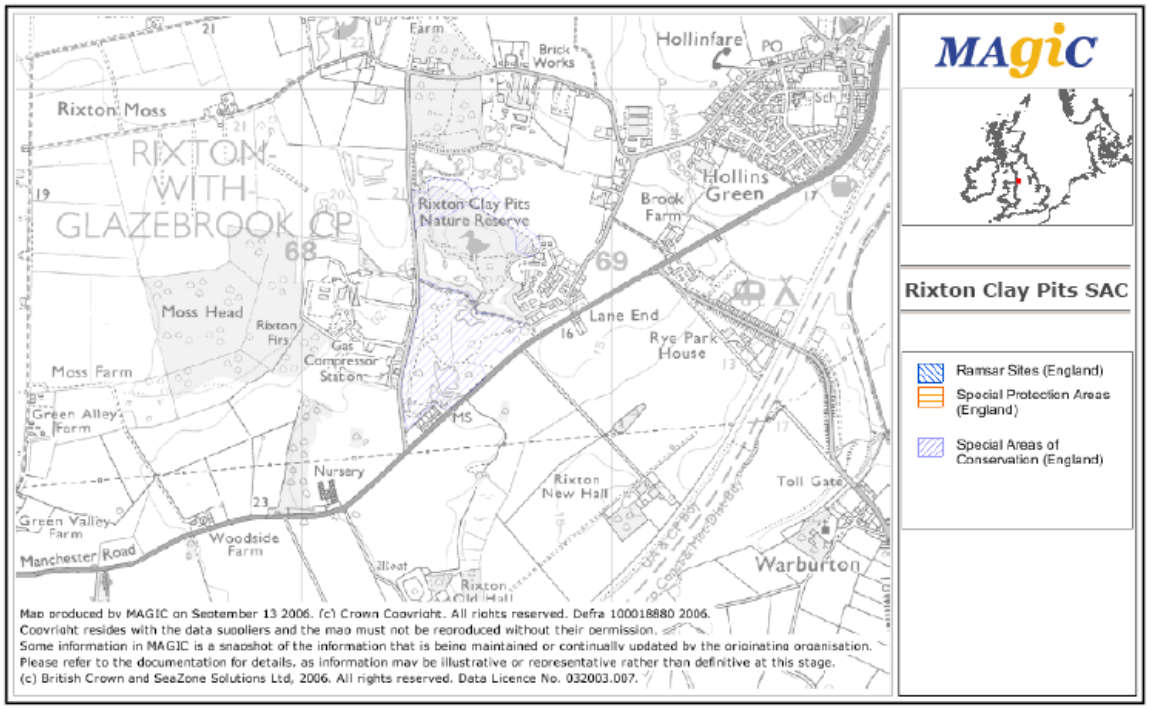
Manchester Mosses SAC consists of three sites (Risley Moss, Holcroft Moss and Astley and Bedford Mosses). Risley Moss is owned and managed by Warrington Borough Council, while Holcroft Moss is owned and managed by Cheshire Wildlife Trust. Both of these sites are undergoing restoration. Part of Astley and Bedford Mosses is owned and managed by Lancashire Wildlife Trust and is undergoing restoration, but the remainder (approximately 50%) is in private ownership. Management agreements or purchase of the land will be necessary for restoration on these areas.

All three sites have suffered from drainage in the past and are affected by continued, if reduced, drainage, particularly from boundary ditches. Agricultural land forms a significant part of the adjacent land on all three sites, which will have implications for restoration, particularly as re-wetting is one of the key requirements. Adjacent land will need to be taken into consideration and possibly placed under suitable management. All three sites are affected by scrub invasion, which is being controlled in some areas but will need further attention. Impacts on groundwater will need to be investigated, such as water abstraction, mineral extraction and waste management (landfill). The sites are located close to heavy industry (Greater Manchester, Merseyside). Air quality may therefore have an impact on *Sphagnum* regeneration and will need investigating.

Rixton Clay Pits SAC

Date site designated as a SAC: 04 2005

Location:



Site location:

Latitude: 53 24 23 N **Longitude:** 02 28 31 W

(This is the approximate central point of the SAC. In the case of large, linear or composite sites, this may not represent the location where a feature occurs within the SAC)

Site area (ha): 13.99

General Site Character:

Inland water bodies (standing water, running water)	(20%)
Heath. Scrub. Maquis and garrigue. Phygrana	(25%)
Humid grassland. Mesophile grassland	(55%)

Other site characteristics

Soil & geology:
Basic, Clay, Shingle

Geomorphology & landscape:
Lowland

Annex II species that are a primary reason for selection of this site:

Triturus cristatus Great crested newt **(1166)**

- for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom.

Situated east of Warrington, this site comprises parts of an extensive disused brickworks excavated in glacial boulder clay. The excavation has left a series of hollows, which have filled with water since workings ceased in the 1960s, leading to a variety of pond sizes. New ponds have also been created more recently for wildlife and amenity purposes. **Great**

crested newt *Triturus cristatus* are known to occur in at least 20 ponds across the site. The site also supports species-rich grassland, scrub and mature secondary woodland.

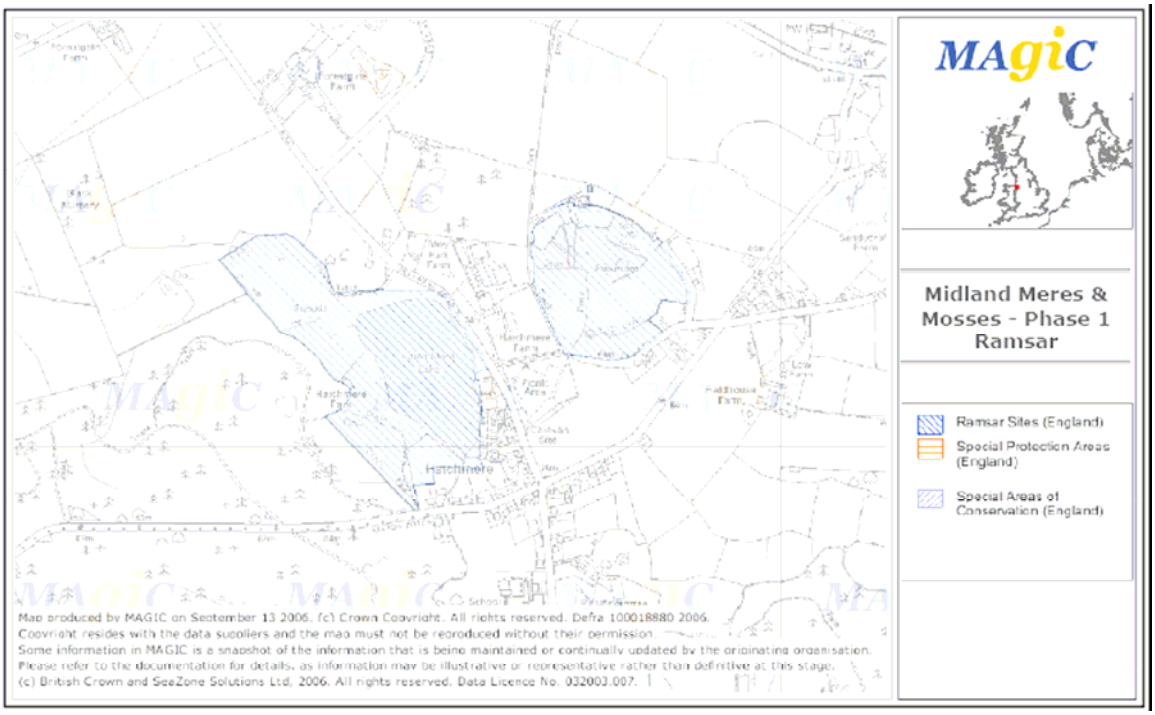
Vulnerability:

The site comprises parts of an extensive disused brickworks quarry excavated in glacial boulder-clay deposits east of Warrington. It is of importance for its calcareous grassland communities and because the site supports a large breeding population of great crested newts. 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. Warrington Borough Council owns and manages the site, and has a ranger based on-site. A possible conflict between grassland management and great crested newts has been identified; this is being addressed through contract research on the site. However, the great crested newt population is increasing at the site.

Midland Meres and Mosses – Phase 1 Ramsar

Date site designated as a Ramsar: 09 May 1994

Location:



Site location:

Latitude: 52 54 11 N **Longitude:** 02 50 25 W

(This is the approximate central point of the SAC. In the case of large, linear or composite sites, this may not represent the location where a feature occurs within the SAC)

Site area (ha): 510.88

Overview:

The Meres & Mosses form a geographically discrete series of lowland open water and peatland sites in the north-west Midlands of England. These have developed in natural depressions in the glacial drift left by receding ice sheets which formerly covered the Cheshire/Shropshire Plain. The 16 component sites include open water bodies (meres), the majority of which are nutrient-rich with associated fringing habitats; reed swamps, fen, carr & damp pasture. Peat accumulation has resulted in nutrient poor peat bogs (mosses) forming in some sites in the fringes of meres or completely infilling basins. In a few cases the result is a floating quaking bog or schwingmoor. The wide range of resulting habitats support nationally important flora & fauna.

Justification

Ramsar criterion 1

The site comprises a diverse range of habitats from open water to raised bog.

Ramsar criterion 2

Supports a number of rare species of plants associated with wetlands including five nationally scarce species together with an assemblage of rare wetland invertebrates (three endangered insects and five other British Red Data Book species of invertebrates).

General Site Character (Wetland Types):

Freshwater lakes: permanent	35%
Freshwater marshes / pools: permanent	7.7%
Freshwater marshes / pools: seasonal / intermittent	2%
Peatlands (including peat bogs swamps, fens)	36.2%
Shrub-dominated wetlands	6.1%
Other	13%

Other site characteristics

Soil & geology:	acidic, basic, sand, clay, alluvium, peat, nutrient-rich, nutrient-poor, sandstone, sandstone/mudstone, gravel
Geomorphology & landscape:	lowland, hilly, floodplain, escarpment
Nutrient status:	eutrophic, mesotrophic, oligotrophic
pH:	acidic, circumneutral, strongly acidic
Salinity:	fresh
Soil:	mainly mineral, mainly organic
Water permanence:	usually permanent

Physical Features:

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'.

Nationally important species occurring on the site.

Flora: Higher Plants.

Elatine hexandra, Eleocharis acicularis, Cicuta virosa, Thelypteris palustris, Carex elongata

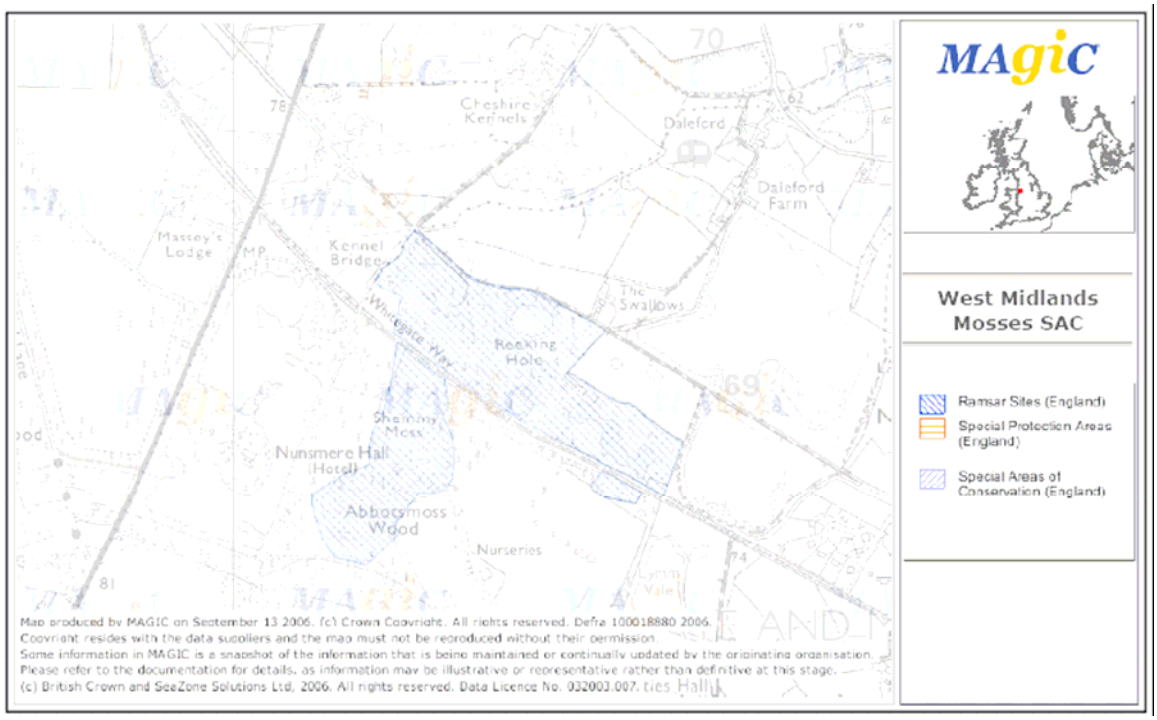
Fauna: Invertebrates.

Hagenella clathrata, Limnophila fasciata, Cararita limnaea, Lathrobium rufipenne, Donacia aquatica, Prionocera pubescens, Gonomyia abbreviata, Sitticus floricola

West Midlands Mosses SAC

Date site designated as a SAC: 04 2005

Location:



Site location:

Latitude: 52 51 04 N **Longitude:** 01 57 40 W

(This is the approximate central point of the SAC. In the case of large, linear or composite sites, this may not represent the location where a feature occurs within the SAC)

Site area (ha): 184.18

General Site Character:

Inland water bodies (standing water, running water)	2.3%
Bogs. Marshes. Water fringed vegetation. Fens	35.5%
Heath. Scrub. Maquis and garrigue. Phygrana	5.5%
Humid grassland. Mesophile grassland	3.3%
Improved grassland	20.5%
Broad-leaved deciduous woodland	22.5%
Coniferous woodland	4.9%
Mixed woodland	3.3%
Other land (including towns, villages, roads, waste places, mines, industrial sites)	2.2%

Other site characteristics

Soil & geology:
Acidic, Nutrient-poor, Peat, Sand

Geomorphology & landscape:
Lowland

Annex I Habitats that are a primary reason for selection of this site:

Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds (Annex 1 – 3160)

- for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom.

West Midlands Mosses contains three pools, one at Clarepool Moss and two at Abbots Moss, that are examples of **dystrophic lakes and ponds** in the lowlands of England and Wales, where this habitat type is rare. The lake at Clarepool Moss is unusual as a dystrophic type on account of its relatively base-rich character, which is reflected in the presence of a diverse fauna and flora. The two at Abbots Moss are more typical, base-poor examples. The dystrophic lakes and ponds at this site are associated with Schwingmoor development, a characteristic of this habitat type in the West Midlands. Schwingmoor is an advancing floating raft of bog-moss *Sphagnum*, often containing NVC type M3 *Eriophorum angustifolium* bog pool community, which grows from the edge of the pool and can completely cover over the pool; the site has also been selected for this

Transition mires and quaking bogs (Annex 1 – 7140)

- for which this is considered to be one of the best areas in the United Kingdom.

West Midlands Mosses represents Schwingmoor vegetation. Floating rafts of *Sphagnum*-dominated vegetation have developed over semi-liquid substrates within basins. In the UK this type of *Sphagnum*dominated vegetation with a scatter of sedges *Carex* species and cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccos* is confined to this part of England and mid-Wales.

Vulnerability:

Colonisation of open schwingmoors or *Sphagnum* lawns and rafts in the West Midland Mosses by birch and pine is controlled by works under Management Agreement or by National Nature Reserve management, and in liaison with the local wildlife trust at Abbots Moss. Several sources of nutrient enrichment, including atmospheric deposition of nutrients, pose a potential threat at these sites. A Management Agreement controls agricultural run-off at Chartley Moss. Trees at this site trap airborne nutrients and provide roost areas for birds, but the enrichment effect of both is only localised. At Abbots Moss the threat of enrichment from atmospheric sources has been reduced by lear-felling of basin slopes adjacent to the mires. All parts of that site are vulnerable to recreational disturbance, particularly the northern portion which is a scout camp.


HALTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL