

## EQUALITY SCREENING

Equality Impact Assessment guidance should be considered when completing this form.

POLICY/FUNCTION/ACTIVITY	LEAD OFFICER
Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Supplementary Planning Document	Isabel Cordwell

**A. What is the aim of this policy, function or activity?** Why is it needed? What is it hoped to achieve and how will it be ensured that it works as intended? Does it affect service users, employees or the wider community?

As a Competent Authority, the Council has a requirement to provide a strategy to ensure the long-term protection of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), in compliance with the Habitats Regulations, whilst enabling otherwise acceptable development. In 2009, the Thames Basin Heaths Joint Strategic Partnership Board, comprising all affected local authorities adopted guidelines in the form of a Delivery Framework to protect the SPA from new residential development that is likely to have a significant effect on the ecological integrity of the Heaths.

The aim of the updated Thames Basin Heaths SPA Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is to avoid adverse effects on the SPA arising primarily from recreational use of the SPA by occupants of all net gain residential development up to 5km from the SPA boundary and for specific types of development within 5-7km of the Heaths.

The Council's current Thames Basin Heaths SPA Supplementary Planning Guidance (2009) requires updating and builds upon the principles set out in:

- Chapter 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019);
- Policy saved NRM6 of the South East Plan;
- the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework (2009); and
- the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan (notably, Policies EE10: Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area; EE9: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature; and EE11: Green Infrastructure).

and as such, it is a fundamental part of the planning policy 'toolkit' and is integral to the delivery of the Local Plan in relation to supporting the projected level of housing coming forward to meet the housing target set out in the Local Plan.

The avoidance and mitigation strategy is intended to protect three bird species which inhabit the Special Protection Area and in so doing, to improve the quality and quantity of alternative recreational open space available to the public. Those living, working or visiting the Borough will benefit from improved recreation areas (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace, "SANG"), and the wider community will benefit from the protection offered to the habitat and species of the SPA. Developers will benefit from guidance on how adverse impacts on the SPA can be avoided. However, it should be noted that other factors such as climate change; annual

fluctuations in weather; bird disease; predation by other wildlife; heath fires; vandalism; and development in adjoining local authorities could impact on the success of the strategy.

A further aim of the revised SPD, which has been prepared for public consultation, is to achieve a more equitable mechanism for collecting financial contributions, as it is considered that the current approach to SANG and SAMM (on a per unit basis) does not adequately address the potential increase in residents within the vicinity of the SPA.

When finalised, the document will be adopted as a supplementary planning document and will be an important material consideration during the determination of planning applications.

The SPD will not affect any employees or service users on the basis of any Protected Characteristics they have. Any effect it has on the wider community, including those groups with Protected Characteristics is likely to be beneficial through provision of high quality new open space for recreation and enhancement of any existing open space designated as SANG.

**B. Is this policy, function or activity relevant to equality?** Does the policy, function or activity relate to an area in which there are known inequalities, or where different groups have different needs or experience? Remember, it may be relevant because there are opportunities to promote equality and greater access, not just potential on the basis of adverse impacts or unlawful discrimination. The Protected Characteristics are: Sex, Age, Disability, Race, Religion and Beliefs, Sexual Orientation, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Gender Reassignment, Pregnancy and Maternity.

The avoidance and mitigation strategy set out within the SPD relates to new residential development within 7km of the SPA's boundary, irrespective of builder, financier, owner or occupant of the new dwellings.

To ensure that the strategy is more equitable in better reflecting the impacts from larger homes on the SPA, it proposed to alter the approach to calculating developer contributions from a dwelling to a bedroom-based tariff. This will align the Council's strategy with that of the other local authorities affected by the Thames Basin Heaths and would benefit smaller homes.

The strategy does specifically reference the Protected Characteristic of the **Race** in terms of Gypsy, Traveller and Show People in relation to residential accommodation for the purpose of calculating SANG and SAMM contributions but this is not known to cause any adverse impacts.

SANGs must be distributed across the borough and, when larger than 4 hectares, are encouraged to provide car parking facilities, unless the site is intended for local use and is within 400m of the developments linked to it. Where possible, sites with a gently undulating topography will be chosen for SANGS and boardwalks, visually sensitive way-markers and some benches can be provided. It is considered that this could have a positive impact on the Protected Characteristics of **Disability** and **Age** by providing easier access to semi-natural, managed green space for anyone with a visual impairment or restricted mobility, including older people and supervised young children, or anyone who is affected by mental health issues.

The SPD will enable and support the provision of new public open spaces (SANGs) which can be visited free of charge by the public and will not lead to a detrimental impact on socio-economic disadvantage.

Whilst there are no concerns with respect to the unmet needs of any of the Protected Characteristics, it is considered that the strategy offers opportunities to improve access to identified recreational semi-natural open spaces for young children and their carers, older people, and those with mental health, visual and mobility disabilities.

If the policy, function or activity is considered to be relevant to equality then a full Equality Impact Assessment may need to be carried out. If the policy function or activity does not engage any protected characteristics then you should complete Part C below. Where Protected Characteristics are engaged, but Full Impact Assessment is not required because measures are in place or are proposed to be implemented that would mitigate the impact on those affected or would provide an opportunity to promote equalities please complete Part C.

**C. If the policy, function or activity is not considered to be relevant to equality, what are the reasons for this conclusion?** Alternatively, if there it is considered that there is an impact on any Protected Characteristics but that measures are in place or are proposed to be implemented please state those measures and how it/they are expected to have the desired result. What evidence has been used to make this decision? A simple statement of 'no relevance' or 'no data' is not sufficient.

The SPD sets out the measures available to avoid or mitigate the impact of new development within the buffer zone adjacent to the Thames Basin Heaths, through s106 contributions and provision of, or in investment in, physical infrastructure. It is fully consistent and complementary to both the Thames Basin Heaths Delivery Framework (2009) and the adopted Runnymede 2030 Local Plan, of which the latter has had a detailed EqIA undertaken at each stage of Plan preparation and is used as a benchmark to assess this SPD. The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD provides detailed guidance to help implement the requirements of Policies EE9, EE10 and EE11 of the Runnymede Local Plan which has already been assessed under EqIA to have either positive or neutral impacts on protected characteristics of the population.

While it is anticipated that the implementation of the SPD will not have a negative impact on any of the nine Protected Characteristics, it is also anticipated that the 6-week public consultation may provide further information for officers to consider.

It is also acknowledged that more could be done to advance equalities of opportunity by ensuring that SANGS car parks have designated parking bays for people with a disability. Furthermore, there is a gap in data that could establish who is accessing the SANGS and also what issues are being experienced. Officers intend to obtain further information from the Thames Basin Heath Partnership which may be used to assess whether any future mitigation measures are required.

A review of the comments received following the public consultation will be undertaken and any implications in terms of equalities will be discussed with the Equality Group. Continued

monitoring of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD will take place after it is adopted, which may reveal any positive or negative impacts that exist and will assist officers in providing measures that seek to mitigate any negative impacts on any of the protected characteristics.

It is proposed that, if adopted, this SPD should be reviewed within 5 years or earlier, if deemed necessary, along with a further Equality Impact Assessment screening. Overall, based on the information we currently have, it is not considered that there are any unmet needs in relation to any of the protected characteristics considered as part of this EqIA, or to any combination thereof. If the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD is adopted, it is anticipated that there will be positive impacts for all members of the community as a result of increased provision of public space within the borough and implementation of a more equitable approach to calculating tariffs for new residential development within the affected area. Therefore, it is not considered therefore that a full EqIA is required.

Date completed: 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Sign-off by senior manager: Georgina Pacey

**Runnymede Borough Council**

**Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area  
Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)**

**Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)**

Screening Statement - Determination under Regulation 9 of the SEA Regulations 2004

**Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)**

Screening Statement – Determination under Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats  
and Species Regulations 2017

October 2020

## **Introduction**

- 1.1. This Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening determination has been undertaken by Runnymede Borough Council in their duty to determine whether the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) requires SEA or HRA. This final screening assessment is based on a draft version of the SPD dated October 2020. The three statutory bodies (Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) were consulted on a draft screening statement in August 2020 which was based on a draft version of the SPD dated August 2020. The comments received from the three statutory bodies are set out in Table 1-8 of this assessment and have been taken into account in this final screening assessment of the draft version of the SPD dated October 2020 which contains a minor amendment to the August 2020 version of the SPD in light of comments by Natural England.
- 1.2. Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 requires authorities to determine whether or not a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required for certain plans, policies or programmes. This statement also sets out the Borough Council's determination as to whether Appropriate Assessment is required under Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017.
- 1.3. Under the requirements of the European Union Directive 2001/42/EC (Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive)) and Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004), specific types of plans that set the framework for the future development consent of projects or which require Appropriate Assessment must be subject to an environmental assessment.
- 1.4. There are exceptions to this requirement for plans that determine the use of a small area at a local level and for minor modifications if it has been determined that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects.
- 1.5. In accordance with the provisions of the SEA Directive and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004) (Regulation 9(1)), the Borough Council must determine if a plan requires an environmental assessment. In accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017, the Borough Council is the competent authority for determining if a plan requires Appropriate Assessment.

## **Background to the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD**

- 1.6. The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) makes provision for local authorities to prepare and adopt Local Development Documents which can include SPDs. However, an SPD does not form part of the Development Plan for an area as set out in Section 38 of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) but it is a material consideration in taking planning decisions.
- 1.7. An SPD is required to be consulted on and adopted by the Borough Council and once implemented sets out additional planning guidance that supports and/or expands upon the Policies of a Local Plan. Chapter 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2019), saved Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan (2009) and Policy EE10 of the adopted Runnymede 2030 Local Plan require the SPA to be protected from new residential development which is likely to have a significant effect on the ecological integrity of the SPA.
- 1.8. The 2009 Thames Basin Heaths SPD took forward the agreed approach set out in the JSPB Delivery Framework in relation to the Borough's mitigation strategy.

Aspects of the existing Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance Strategy are now out of date and therefore the SPD requires updating to ensure it is in accordance with current policy and guidance, and to reflect changes to more equitable mechanisms for collecting developer contributions. It will also help to ensure that Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) is delivered appropriately within the Borough and is managed and maintained in perpetuity, in accordance with Natural England's guidance.

- 1.9. The proposed Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD is intended to provide general guidance on the Council's approach to avoidance of likely significant effect on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA arising primarily from a net increase in residential development located between 400m to 7km from the perimeter of the Special Protection Area. This area covers all but the northern most parts of the area within the jurisdiction of Runnymede Borough Council and contains the urban areas of Ottershaw, Woodham & New Haw and Virginia Water, along with parts of Addlestone, Englefield Green and Chertsey.
- 1.10. Interspersed between the urban areas is designated Green Belt holding numerous wooded copses, golf courses and businesses as well as small pockets of development, agriculture and equestrian uses. The M25 and M3 motorways bisect the Borough north-south and east-west respectively and effectively cut the Borough into four quarters. There are six rail stations in Runnymede Borough offering direct services to London Waterloo, Reading & Woking. A plan of the designated area is shown in Plan 1-1.

# Plan 1-1: Map of Runnymede Borough

## Runnymede Borough Key Diagram



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- 1.11. There are numerous areas of woodland/copses designated as ancient/semi-natural or ancient replanted woodland which are also identified as priority habitat as well as swathes of woodpasture and parkland which is a national Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) designation. Priority habitat designations also include areas of lowland meadows, lowland heathland, and lowland fens. There are five SSSIs located in the Borough area, Basingstoke Canal, Langham Pond, Thorpe Haymeadow, Thorpe no.1 Gravel Pit and Windsor Forest.
- 1.12. Unit 2 of the Basingstoke Canal SSSI lies to the south of the Borough and is in an unfavourable, no change status which does not meet the PSA target of 95% in favourable or unfavourable recovering status. Status reasons are extent of habitat, lack of plant diversity and poor water quality.
- 1.13. Langham Pond SSSI is formed of 3 units. 100% of the SSSI is in a favourable or unfavourable recovering status, meeting the PSA target. The Thorpe Haymeadow SSSI is formed of one unit in a favourable condition, which also meets the PSA Target.
- 1.14. The Thorpe no.1 Gravel Pit SSSI is formed of one unit and is in a favourable condition status meeting the PSA target. The SSSI also forms part of the wider South West London Water Bodies Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar, an internationally designated site for nature conservation importance.
- 1.15. The Windsor Forest SSSI is formed of 22 units with units 10, 11 and 16 within or partly within Runnymede. The SSSI is in 100% favourable condition status and meets the PSA target of 95%. The SSSI also forms part of the Windsor Forest & Great Park Special Area of Conservation (SAC) another internationally designated site for nature conservation importance.
- 1.16. Another internationally designated site, the Thursley, Ash, Pirbright & Chobham SAC, is located outside of the Borough but within 5km of its boundary. This also forms part of the wider Thames Basin Heaths SPA with the Borough also lying within 5km of other units of the TBH SPA. As such, small areas in the west of the Borough lie within the 0-400m zone of influence with large areas of the borough covered by the 400m-5km or 5km-7km zones of influence.
- 1.17. The Borough also lies within 12km of the Mole Gap to Reigate Escarpment SAC, 12.2km from Burnham Beeches SAC, 13km of the Richmond Park and Wimbledon Common SACs, 20km from the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC, 23km from the Wealden Heaths Phase I SPA and its component parts (including Thursley, Hankley & Frensham Commons SPA and Thursley & Ockley Bog Ramsar) and 30km from the Wealden Heaths Phase II SPA.
- 1.18. There are also over 30 Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) in the Borough as well as two Local Nature Reserves at Chertsey Meads and Riverside Walk in Virginia Water. The Borough lies within the River Wey and Tributaries catchment and there are large areas of the Borough, including within its urban areas which lie within flood risk zones 2 and 3 including functional floodplain.
- 1.19. The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD dated October 2020 does not form part of the Development Plan for the area and does not allocate any sites for development or propose policies for the use of land but is a material consideration in decision making. The adopted 2030 Local Plan which is the document which allocates sites and contains policies concerning land use has been the subject of Sustainability Appraisal (including the requirements for Strategic Environmental Assessment) as well as Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

- 1.20. The SPD instead sets out guidance on how Runnymede Borough Council will implement avoidance and mitigation measures for a net increase in residential development located between 400m to 7km of the SPA. It also sets out the issues which may need to be considered for non-residential development.
- 1.21. The SPD includes information on:
- the potential effects of development proposals on the integrity of the SPA;
  - the types of development proposals likely to require SPA avoidance and mitigation measures;
  - SPA buffer zones;
  - Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs);
  - Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM);
  - bespoke and third party mitigation solutions; and
  - developer contributions.
- 1.22. The Council intends to adopt the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD following a thorough public consultation process. Once adopted, it will form part of the Council's policy context and will be a material consideration when applications are being considered.

### **Sustainability Appraisal**

- 1.23 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and associated Regulations (as amended), requires a local authority to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for their Local Plan documents. This considers the social and economic impacts of a plan as well as the environmental impacts. SPDs are not Local Plan documents and therefore a Sustainability Appraisal is not required.

### **Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) – Screening**

- 1.24 The need to undertake an Appropriate Assessment as part of an HRA is set out within the EC Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and transposed into British Law by Regulation 105 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The Appropriate Assessment stage of HRA is only required should the preliminary screening assessment not be able to rule out likely significant effects.
- 1.25 The European Habitats Directive requires that any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on a European site must be subject to an Appropriate Assessment. The Habitats Directive states that any plan or project not connected to or necessary for a site's management, but likely to have significant effects thereon shall be subject to appropriate assessment. There are four distinct stages in HRA namely:

**Step 1:** Screening – Identification of likely impacts on a European site either alone or in combination with other plans/projects and consideration of whether these are significant. Following the decision of the ECJ in the *People Over Wind & Sweetman v. Coillite Teoranta (C-323/17)* case, avoidance and/or mitigation measures cannot be taken into account at the screening stage and it is purely an exercise to determine if possible pathways for effect exist and whether these can be ruled out taking account of the precautionary principle. It is the opinion of this HRA screening assessment and in light of the Planning Practice Guidance Note on Appropriate

Assessment that adopted policies of the current development plan cannot be taken into account at this stage of HRA where they are proposing mitigation for European Sites. Similarly any HRA undertaken for other development plan documents which have not been through Examination in Public (EiP) and found sound should only be given limited weight.

**Step 2:** Appropriate Assessment – consideration of the impact on the integrity of the European Site whether alone or in combination with other plans or projects with respect to the sites structure, function and conservation objectives. Where there are significant effects, step 2 should consider potential avoidance and/or mitigation measures.

**Step 3:** Assessment of Alternative Solutions – Assessing alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the plan/project which avoids impact, if after Step 2 significant effect cannot be ruled out even with avoidance or mitigation measures; and

**Step 4:** Assessment of Compensatory Measures – Identification of compensatory measures should impact not be avoided and no alternative solutions exist and an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) deems that a project should proceed.

- 1.26 Should step 1 reveal that significant effects are likely or effect cannot be discounted because of uncertainty, then it is necessary to move onto step 2: Appropriate Assessment. If step 2 cannot rule out significant effect even with avoidance and/or mitigation, then the process moves onto step 3 and finally step 4 if no alternative solutions arise.

### **Step 1 - Screening**

- 1.27 There are four stages to consider in a screening exercise:

Stage 1: Determining whether the plan/project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site;

Stage 2: Describing the plan/project and description of other plan/projects that have the potential for in-combination impacts;

Stage 3: Identifying potential effects on the European site(s); and

Stage 4: Assessing the significance of any effects.

#### **Stage 1**

- 1.28 It can be determined that the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site.

#### **Stage 2**

- 1.29 Information about the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD can be found in paragraphs 1.6 to 1.22 of this screening assessment. Table 1-1 lists those other plans and projects, which may have in-combination impacts.

**Table 1-1: Other Key Plans/Projects**

<p><b>Plan/ Project</b></p>	<p><b>National Planning Policy Framework (2019):</b> High level national planning policy covering topics such as housing, economy, employment, retail as well as biodiversity, flood risk and heritage.</p> <p><b>South East Plan (2009):</b> Saved Policy NRM6 sets out protection for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.</p> <p><b>London Plan (2016):</b> Contains planning policies for the development of land across the wider London area including housing and employment allocations with a target of 42,000 new homes per annum.</p> <p><b>Runnymede 2030 Local Plan (2020):</b> The current adopted Local Plan sets out policies for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA; consideration of development and the spatial strategy for the Borough including provision of 7,920 dwellings over the Plan period; and allocations for residential, employment and retail development.</p> <p><b>Other Local Authority Local Plans within 10km or adjoining sites identified in paragraphs 1.14-1.16:</b> Housing target for areas around European sites set out in Table 1-2.</p> <p><b>Large Scale Projects within 10km or adjoining European Sites:</b> Large scale projects within 10km are subsumed in the consideration of ‘Other Local Authority Local Plans’ above.</p> <p><b>Thames Basin Heaths Joint Delivery Framework (2009):</b> Sets out the agreed Framework regarding the approach and standards for avoiding significant effects on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.</p> <p><b>Environment Agency, Thames River Basin District Management Plan (2015):</b> Sets out actions to improve water quality. Future aims for the River Wey include implementing Lower Wey Oxbow Restoration Project to enhance and restore the main Wey river channel and Wey Diffuse Advice Project throughout the catchment.</p> <p><b>Environment Agency, Thames Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009):</b> Aim is to promote more sustainable approaches to managing flood risk. Will be delivered through a combination of different approaches.</p> <p><b>Environment Agency, River Wey Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy (2019):</b> identifies the Wey having restricted ‘Water available for licensing’.</p> <p><b>Environment Agency, Water Resources Strategy: Regional Action Plan for Thames Region (2009):</b> Key priorities for Thames region include ensuring sufficient water resources are available, making water available in over-abstracted catchments and reducing demand.</p>
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**Table 1-2: List of Local Authority Housing Targets within 10km of European Sites**

<b>Site</b>	<b>Local Plan Area</b>	<b>Housing Target</b>
<b>Thames Basin Heaths SPA*</b>	Windsor & Maidenhead	14,260
	Wokingham Borough	13,230
	Waverley Borough	11,210
	Bracknell Forest Borough	11,139
	Guildford Borough	10,678
	Rushmoor Borough	8,884
	<b>Runnymede Borough</b>	<b>7,920</b>
	Hart District	6,208
	Woking Borough	4,964
	Elmbridge Borough	3,375
	Surrey Heath Borough	3,240
<b>Total</b>	<b>95,108</b>	
<b>Windsor Forest &amp; Great Park SAC</b>	LB Hounslow	13,040
	Bracknell Forest Borough	11,139
	<b>Runnymede Borough</b>	<b>7,920</b>
	LB Hillingdon	6,375
	Slough Borough	6,250
	Woking Borough	4,964
	Elmbridge Borough	3,375
	Spelthorne Borough	3,320
	Surrey Heath Borough	3,240
	South Bucks District	2,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>76,683</b>	
<b>South West London Water Bodies SPA &amp; Ramsar</b>	Windsor & Maidenhead Borough	14,260
	LB Ealing	14,000
	LB Hounslow	13,040
	Bracknell Forest Borough	11,139
	<b>Runnymede Borough</b>	<b>7,920</b>
	LB Hillingdon	6,375
	Slough Borough	6,250
	LB Kingston	5,625
	Mole Valley District	3,760
	Epsom & Ewell Borough	3,620
	Elmbridge Borough	3,375
	Spelthorne Borough	3,320
	LB Richmond	3,150
	South Bucks District	2,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>98,634</b>	

\* Also includes the Thursley, Ash, Pirbright & Chobham SAC

### Stage 3

1.30 Information regarding the European site(s) screened and the likely effects that may arise due to implementation of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD can be found in Tables 1-3 to 1-6 and 1-7. All other European Sites were screened out of this assessment at an early stage as it was considered that their distance from the Borough area meant that there is no pathway or mechanism which would give rise to significant effect either alone or in combination. In this respect regard has been had to the 2030 Local Plan HRA specifically paragraphs 2.1 to 2.2.

**Table 1-3: Details of Thames Basin Heaths SPA and Potential Effects Thereon**

European site:	Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA).
Site description:	The Thames Basin Heaths SPA was proposed in October 2000, and full SPA status was approved on 9 March 2005. It covers an area of some 8,274 ha, consisting of 13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) scattered from Surrey, to Berkshire in the north, through to Hampshire in the west. The habitat consists of both dry and wet heathland, mire, oak, birch acid woodland, gorse scrub and acid grassland with areas of rotational conifer plantation.
Relevant international nature conservation features:	Thames Basin Heaths SPA qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting populations of European importance of the following species listed on Annex I of the Directive: During the breeding season: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>: 7.8% of the breeding population in Great Britain (count mean, 1998-1999):</li> <li>- Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>: 9.9% of the breeding population in Great Britain (count as at 1997);</li> <li>- Dartford warbler <i>Sylvia undata</i>: 27.8% of the breeding population in Great Britain (count as at 1999).</li> </ul>
Environmental conditions which support the site:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate management</li> <li>• Management of disturbance during breeding season (March to July)</li> <li>• Minimal air pollution</li> <li>• Absence or control of urbanisation effects, such as fires and introduction of invasive non-native species</li> <li>• Maintenance of appropriate water levels</li> <li>• Maintenance of water quality</li> </ul>
Potential Effects arising from the Thames Basin Heaths SPA Area SPD:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None (see Table 1-7)</li> </ul>

**Table 1-4: Details of Thursley, Ash, Pirbright & Chobham SAC and Potential Effects Thereon**

International site:	Thursley, Ash, Pirbright & Chobham Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
Site description:	The Thursley, Ash, Pirbright & Chobham SAC covers an area of some 5,154 ha with areas of wet and dry heathland, valley bogs, broad-leaved and coniferous woodland, permanent grassland and open water.
Relevant international nature conservation features:	The Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham Special Area of Conservation is designated for three Annex I habitats. The qualifying Annex 1 habitats are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath</li> <li>- Dry heaths</li> <li>- Depressions on peat substrates</li> </ul>
Environmental Conditions which Support the Site:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate management;</li> <li>• Managed recreational pressure;</li> <li>• Minimal air pollution;</li> <li>• Absence or control of urbanisation effects such as fires and introduction of invasive non-native species;</li> <li>• Maintenance of appropriate water levels;</li> <li>• Maintenance of water quality.</li> </ul>
Potential Effects arising from the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None (see Table 1-7)</li> </ul>

**Table 1-5: Details of Windsor Forest & Great Park SAC and Potential Effects Thereon**

International site:	Windsor Forest & Great Park SAC
Site description:	The Windsor Forest & Great Park SAC covers an area of some 1,680 ha with Atlantic acidophilus beech forests with Ilex and sometimes Taxus. It is one of four outstanding locations in the UK for oak woods on sandy plains and is one of only three areas in the UK for <i>Limoniscus violaceus</i> (violet click beetle).
Relevant international nature conservation features:	Annex I habitat of oak woods on sandy plain which is the primary reason for designation with Atlantic beech forests.

Environmental Conditions which Support the Site:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of trees through forestry management</li> <li>• Urbanisation</li> <li>• Managed recreational pressure</li> <li>• Air Quality</li> </ul>
Potential Effects arising from the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None (see Table 1-7)</li> </ul>

**Table 1-6: Details of South West London Water Bodies SPA & Ramsar and Potential Effects Thereon**

International site:	South West London Water Bodies SPA & Ramsar
Site description:	The South West London Water Bodies SPA & Ramsar covers an area of some 825 ha and is formed from 7 former gravel pits and reservoirs which support overwintering populations of protected bird species.
Relevant international nature conservation features:	Supports overwintering populations of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gadwall</li> <li>• Shoveler</li> </ul>
Environmental Conditions which Support the Site:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managed recreational pressure</li> <li>• Water quality</li> <li>• Water abstraction</li> </ul>
Potential Effects arising from the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None (see Table 1-7)</li> </ul>



Stage 4

1.31 The consideration of potential effects are set out in Table 1-7.

**Table 1-7: Assessment of Potential Effects**

<p>Indirect effect from recreational disturbance and urbanisation.</p>	<p>The likely effects of recreational disturbance have been summarised in the Underhill-Day study for Natural England and RSPB (2005); this provides a review of the urban effects on lowland heaths and their wildlife. The main issues relating to the conservation objectives and the integrity of the SPAs and SAC's effected by recreational disturbance and urbanisation as a whole are: fragmentation, disturbance, fires, cats, dogs (as a result of nest disturbance and enrichment), prevention of management, off-roading, vandalism and trampling.</p> <p>Natural England has advised that recreational pressure, as a result of increased residential development within 5km of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA &amp; Thursley, Ash, Pirbright &amp; Chobham SAC (or sites of 50 or more dwellings within 7km), is having a significant adverse impact on the Annex I bird species. Woodlark and Nightjar are ground nesting and Dartford Warblers nest close to the ground. They are therefore sensitive to disturbance, particularly from dogs, but also from walkers, and cyclists, etc. They are, in addition, vulnerable to other effects of urbanisation such as pollution arson and in particular, predation by cats.</p> <p>Joint work involving Natural England and the authorities affected by the SPA/SAC have agreed a mechanism to avoid impacts to the SPA/SAC from recreational activities in the form of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and Strategic Access Management &amp; Monitoring (SAMM) and from the impacts of urbanisation by not allowing any net additional dwellings within 400m of the SPA.</p> <p>In terms of the Windsor Forest &amp; Great Park SAC the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan HRA states that forestry management and recreational impacts has the potential for loss of trees and damage to trees from burning (arson).</p> <p>For the South West London Water Bodies SPA &amp; Ramsar threats arise through unmanaged recreational activities such as use of motorboats and fishing.</p> <p>The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD contains guidance on the zones within which</p>
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	<p>avoidance or mitigation is required, the types of development likely to be affected and the routes and basis for delivery and funding. However, it does not allocate or safeguard any land or sites for net additional dwellings or other types of development including infrastructure projects that could give rise to increased recreation or urbanisation impacts.</p> <p>As such, there are no pathways for effect for impacts either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects. Therefore it is considered, at the time of undertaking this assessment and even in the absence of avoidance and/or mitigation measures which cannot be taken into account at the screening stage of HRA (including any adopted policies in the adopted 2030 Local Plan) that the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD will not give rise to likely significant effects on any of the European Sites in terms of recreation or urbanisation and Appropriate Assessment is not required.</p>
Atmospheric Pollution	<p>The Runnymede 2030 Local Plan HRA concludes no likely significant effect as a result of atmospheric pollution in combination with other plans and projects on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, Thursley, Ash, Pirbright &amp; Chobham SAC or the Windsor Forest &amp; Great Park SAC, given the findings of the Council's air quality evidence.</p> <p>The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD contains guidance on the zones within which avoidance or mitigation is required, the types of development likely to be affected and the routes and basis for delivery and funding. However, it does not allocate or safeguard any land or sites for net additional dwellings or other types of development including infrastructure projects that could give rise to increased impacts from atmospheric pollution.</p> <p>Therefore it is considered, at the time of undertaking this assessment and even in the absence of avoidance and/or mitigation measures which cannot be taken into account at the screening stage of HRA (including any adopted policies in the adopted 2030 Local Plan) that the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD will not give rise to likely significant effects on any of the European Sites in terms of air quality.</p> <p>In this respect an Appropriate Assessment is not required.</p>

<p>Water Quality &amp; Resource</p>	<p>The Runnymede 2030 Local Plan HRA concludes no likely significant effects to European sites as a result of water quality or abstraction.</p> <p>The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD contains guidance on the zones within which avoidance or mitigation is required, the types of development likely to be affected and the routes and basis for delivery and funding. However, it does not allocate or safeguard any land or sites for net additional dwellings or other types of development, including water related infrastructure projects such as the River Thames Scheme or site-specific flood/drainage projects. This is the role of the adopted Local Plan and as such there are no pathways for effect for impacts either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects.</p> <p>Therefore it is considered, at the time of undertaking this assessment and even in the absence of avoidance and/or mitigation measures which cannot be taken into account at the screening stage of HRA (including any adopted policies in the adopted 2030 Local Plan) that the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD will not give rise to likely significant effects on any of the European Sites in terms of water quality or resource.</p> <p>In this respect an Appropriate Assessment is not required.</p>
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- 1.32 It is the conclusion of this HRA that following a screening assessment it can be ascertained, in light of the information available at the time of assessment and even in the absence of avoidance and mitigation measures that the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD **will not** give rise to significant effects on European Sites either alone or in-combination with other plans and/or projects. Given the findings of the screening assessment it is considered that a full appropriate assessment is not required.

### The SEA Screening Process

- 1.33 The process for determining whether or not an SEA is required is called 'screening'. For some types of plan or programme SEA is mandatory and includes the following:
- Plans which are prepared for town and country planning or land use and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive; or
  - Plans which have been determined to require an assessment under the Habitats Directive (this has already been screened out as set out in paragraphs 1.24 to 1.32 of this screening assessment).

- 1.34 However, the main determining factor when considering whether a plan or programme requires SEA is whether it will have significant environmental effects.
- 1.35 Within 28 days of making its determination, the determining authority must publish a statement, such as this one, setting out its decision. If it is determined that an SEA is not required, the statement must include the reasons for this.
- 1.36 This Screening Report sets out the Council's determination under Regulation 9(1) of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 on whether or not SEA is required for the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD. The Borough Council must consult with the three statutory bodies (Environment Agency, Historic England, Natural England) and take their views into account before issuing a final determination. The responses received from the three statutory bodies on a draft Screening Assessment dated August 2020 and how the Council has taken these into account in this final screening determination are set out in Table 1-8.

**Table 1-8**

<b>Statutory Body</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Comment &amp; Action</b>
Environment Agency	We have no comments to make with regard to your consultation on the following document:  Screening Statement for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Screening Statement for the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) dated August 2020.	Noted – no further action required.
Historic England	In light of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, our view is that a SEA is not required in this instance for the reason set out in paragraph 1.39 of the Screening Report.	Noted – no further action required.
Natural England	In our review of Runnymede's Thames Basin Heaths SPA SPD we advise that wording should be added in 4.2 SANG Catchments that says if a SANG does not have a car park then the catchment of it is 400m, regardless of its size.  Due to the fact that the Thames Basin Heaths SPA SPD does not allocate sites or development or safeguard infrastructure projects, Natural England supports the	Noted – additional wording added as requested.  Noted – no further action required.

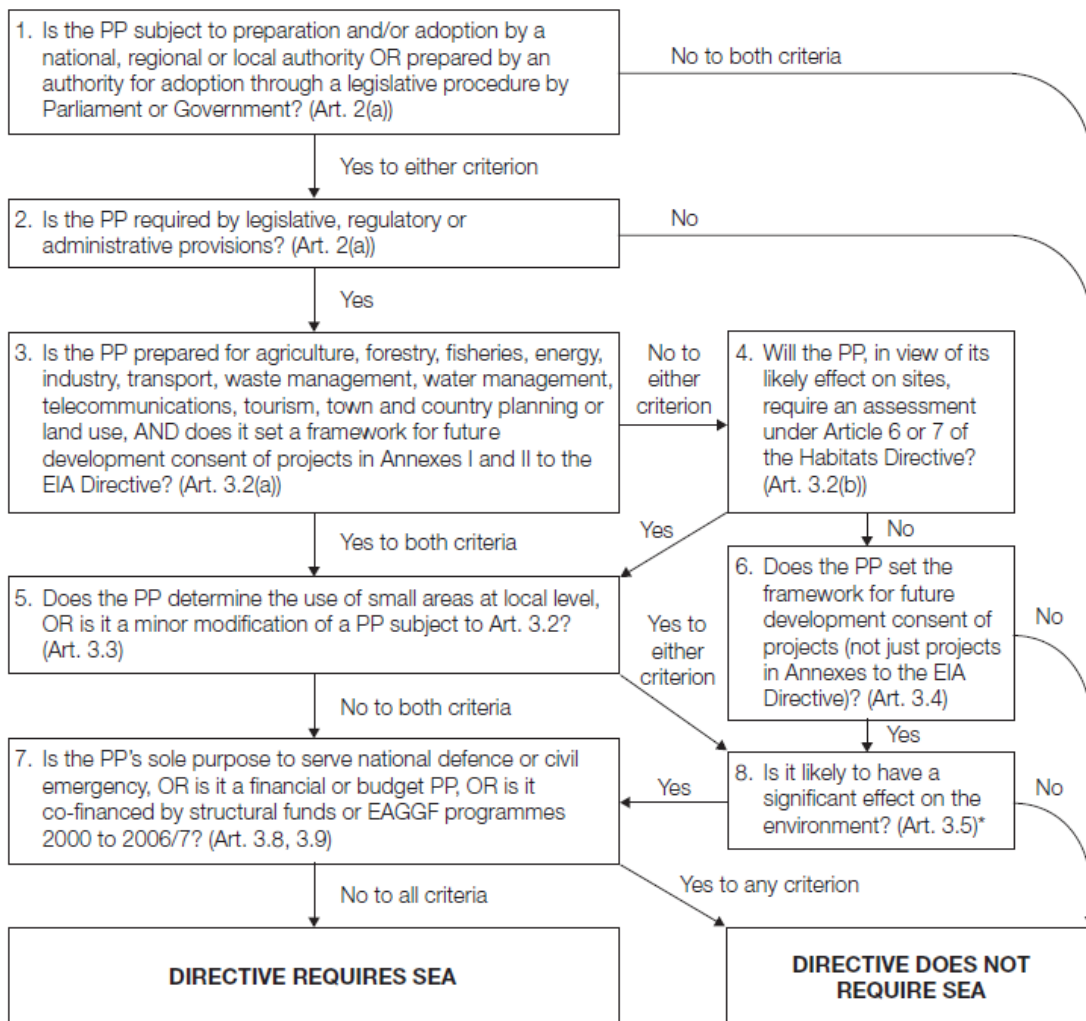
	<p>conclusion of the screening that a SEA will not be required.</p> <p>Natural England is in agreement with the conclusion of the HRA that, the Thames Basin Heaths SPA SPD will not give rise to significant effects on European Sites either alone or in-combination with other plans and/or projects and that given the findings of the screening assessment, it is considered that a full Appropriate Assessment is not required.</p>	<p>Noted – no further action required.</p>
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1.37 The determination is based on a two-step approach, the first of which is to assess the plan against the flowchart as set out in government guidance *A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive*<sup>1</sup>. The flowchart is shown in Figure 1.

<sup>1</sup> A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Process (2005) ODPM. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategic-environmental-assessment-directive-guidance>

**Figure 1: Application of the SEA Directive to plans and programmes**

This diagram is intended as a guide to the criteria for application of the Directive to plans and programmes (PPs). It has no legal status.



\*The Directive requires Member States to determine whether plans or programmes in this category are likely to have significant environmental effects. These determinations may be made on a case by case basis and/or by specifying types of plan or programme.

1.38 The second step is to consider whether the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area SPD will have significant environmental effects when considered against the criteria set out in Annex II of the Directive and Schedule I of the Regulations. The findings of step 1 and step 2 are shown in Tables 1-9 and 1-10.

**Table 1-9: SEA Screening Step 1**

Stage in Flowchart	Y/N	Reason
<p>1. Is the plan/programme subject to preparation and/or adoption by a national, regional or local authority or prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by parliament or Government? (Article 2(a))</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>The provision to prepare and adopt a Local Development Document is given by the Planning &amp; Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD has been prepared and will be adopted by Runnymede Borough Council. The preparation and adoption procedure is set out in the Town &amp; Country Planning (Local Development)(England) Regulations 2012. Whilst not forming part of the Development Plan the SPD will be a material consideration in planning decisions. <b>Move to Stage 2</b></p>
<p>2. Is the plan/programme required by legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions? (Article 2(a))</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>There is no mandatory requirement to prepare or adopt Supplementary Planning Documents and if adopted it will not form part of the Development Plan for Runnymede. <b>As answer is No, flowchart identifies end to screening process, but move to Stage 3 for completeness.</b></p>
<p>3. Is the plan/programme prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use, AND does it set a framework for future development consent of projects in Annexes I and II to the EIA Directive? (Article 3.2(a))</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>Whilst the plan is prepared for town &amp; country planning, the SPD does not set the framework for future development consents for projects in Annex I or II to the EIA Directive. <b>Move to Stage 4.</b></p>
<p>4. Will the plan/programme, in view of its likely effect on sites, require an assessment under</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>The HRA screening undertaken in paragraphs 1.24 to 1.32 of this assessment has determined that</p>

Stage in Flowchart	Y/N	Reason
Article 6 or 7 of the Habitats Directive? (Article 3.2(b))		Appropriate Assessment is not required. <b>Move to Stage 6.</b>
5. Does the plan/programme determine the use of small areas at local level, OR is it a minor modification of a PP subject to Art. 3.2? (Article 3.3)	N/A	The SPD will not form part of the Runnymede Development Plan and does not therefore determine the use of small areas at a local (or any) level.  The plan is not a minor modification of an existing plan.  <b>Move to Stage 6</b>
6. Does the plan/programme set the framework for future development consent of projects (not just projects in Annexes to the EIA Directive)? (Article 3.4)	N	The SPD does not allocate any land or sites for development or set a framework for future development consents.  <b>As answer is No, flowchart identifies end to screening process, but move to Stage 8 for completeness.</b>
7. Is the plan/programme's sole purpose to serve national defence or civil emergency, OR is it a financial or budget PP, OR is it co-financed by structural funds or EAGGF programmes 2000 to 2006/7? (Article 3.8, 3.9)	N	The sole purpose of the SPD is not to serve national defence or civil emergency. Whilst the SPD does set out financial matters concerned with developer contributions, this is not its sole purpose and it is not a budget plan or programme.
8. Is it likely to have a significant effect on the environment? (Article 3.5)	N	Effects on the environment and whether these are significant are considered in Table 1-10. <b>No Significant Effects identified in Table 1-10, so determine that SEA is not required.</b>



**Table 1-10: SEA Screening Step 2**

<b>Criteria (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule I of the Regulations)</b>		<b>Response</b>	
<b>Characteristics of the plan or programme</b>			<b>Significant Effect?</b>
(a) The degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources.	<p>The framework is set by regional and local policy guidance on avoiding impacts to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA in the form of policies NRM 6 of the South East Plan and Policy EE10 of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan. The SPD will supplement this regional and local policy, or successive policies, on measures to avoid impacts to the SPA and will help to ensure successful implementation of SANGs at a local level.</p> <p>The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD does not set out policies against which development proposals in the Runnymede area will be considered, although it will be a material consideration in decision making. The prioritisation of allocation or levels of development within the Borough and how these will be secured are not matters in the SPD which set the framework for projects.</p> <p>The section of the SPD dealing with developer contributions could be seen as setting a framework for projects in terms of allocating financial resources or physical infrastructure. However, the SPD is not the document which secures the contributions or allocates the land for physical provision but simply guides the Council in its negotiations with developers to make a project acceptable in planning terms. As such, it is considered that the SPD only sets a framework for projects to a limited degree.</p>		N
(b) The degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy.	The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD does not influence other plans or programmes but is itself influenced by other plans or programmes. It therefore does not influence any plans in a hierarchy.		N

Criteria (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule I of the Regulations)	Response	
(c) The relevance of the plan or programme for the integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.	<p>The SPD has some relevance to the integration of environmental considerations and the promotion of sustainable development in terms of securing measures to avoid harm to European Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (Natura 2000).</p> <p>The SPD does not however, allocate any land/development or safeguard any infrastructure projects and as a consequence its relevance to the integration of environmental considerations is likely to be limited.</p>	N
(d) Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme.	<p>Environmental problems include potential recreational or urbanising impacts, atmospheric pollution and water resources to European sites. Paragraphs 1.24 to 1.32 of this assessment sets out the effects of the SPD on European sites and has determined no significant effects.</p> <p>The Thames Basin Heaths SPA Avoidance and Mitigation SPD elaborates on the principles set out in both the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Policy EE10 (Thames Basin Heaths SPA) of the adopted Local Plan and sets out how development proposals can achieve them. It does not present any policies and serves only to provide greater clarity about the council expectations in relation to existing policies within the adopted Local Plan.</p> <p>The Runnymede 2030 Local Plan has already been subject to full Sustainability Appraisal (including SEA).</p>	N
(e) The relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of Community (EU) legislation on the environment (for example, plans and programmes linked to waste management or water protection).	The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD is relevant to the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC). However the implementation of these Directives in terms of avoiding impacts is primarily through national, regional and local policy, not through this SPD.	N

<b>Criteria (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule I of the Regulations)</b>		<b>Response</b>
<b>Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected</b>		
(a) The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects.	The proposed SPD will affect almost the entire Borough but will not in itself set out, guide or bring forward development plans or projects. It will purely set out the approach taken to avoid harm to the SPA based on existing and proposed policies. As such, no significant effects will arise as a result of the strategy.	N
(b) The cumulative nature of the effects	<p>The Thames Basin Heaths SPA Avoidance and Mitigation SPD elaborates on the principles set out in both the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Policy EE10 (Thames Basin Heaths SPA) of the adopted Local Plan and sets out how development proposals can achieve them. It does not present any policies and serves only to provide greater clarity about the council expectations in relation to existing policies within the adopted Local Plan.</p> <p>The Runnymede 2030 Local Plan has already been subject to full Sustainability Appraisal (including SEA). As such, no significant effects will arise as a result of this strategy.</p>	N
(c) The transboundary nature of the effects	Given the geographic scope of the SPD it is considered that no transboundary effects will arise.	N
(d) The risks to human health or the environment (for example, due to accidents)	None.	N
(e) The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	<p>The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD will cover all but the most northerly areas of the Borough of Runnymede.</p> <p>This SPD sets out the Council's approach to implementing SPA avoidance measures which are delivered through higher tier policies. Therefore, given the nature of the SPD it is considered that effects will not be significant.</p>	N

Criteria (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule I of the Regulations)	Response	
<p>(f) The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;</li> <li>ii) Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values;</li> <li>iii) Intensive land-use.</li> </ul>	<p>Given the nature of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD:</p> <p>The area covered by the SPD contains 4 SSSIs with the majority in a favourable condition status which meets the PSA target of 95% in favourable or unfavourable recovering condition status. The Basingstoke Canal SSSI is in an unfavourable no change status which does not meet the PSA target.</p> <p>The Runnymede area is a mixture of urban and Green Belt and contains features such as green spaces, wooded copses and golf courses. However, the SPD does not allocate any land for development or set development targets or safeguard any infrastructure projects and therefore significant effects on natural characteristics and cultural heritage are unlikely.</p> <p>ii) There are two Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in the Runnymede area, along the entire length of the M25 which runs through the Borough and the other in Addlestone at the High Street and Station Road junction. Air quality standards are exceeded at 5 air quality monitoring sites in the Runnymede area<sup>2</sup>. The Environment Agency has identified the Wey catchment as having restricted water available for licensing. However, the SPD does not allocate any land for development or set development targets or safeguard infrastructure projects and therefore significant effects on air quality and water availability/quality are unlikely.</p> <p>iii) Intensive land use occurs in the urban areas (built development), but the SPD does not allocate any land or sites for development or safeguard any infrastructure projects. As such significant effects are unlikely.</p>	<p>N</p>

<sup>2</sup> Runnymede 2017 Air Quality Annual Status Report (2017) RBC, Available at: <https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/airquality>

<b>Criteria (from Annex II of SEA Directive and Schedule I of the Regulations)</b>	<b>Response</b>	
(g) The effects on areas or landscapes which have recognised national, community or international protection status.	The effects on European Sites for Nature Conservation are dealt with in Table 1-10: SEA Screening Step 2 (e) above. There are no landscapes which have recognised national, community or international protection status in the Runnymede area.	N
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD is unlikely to give rise to significant environmental effects and as such an SEA is not required.</b>	

1.39 On the basis of the Screening process it is determined that the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area SPD does not require a SEA under the SEA Directive and Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004). This is because:

- The SPD is unlikely to give rise to significant environmental effects given that it does not allocate sites or development or safeguard infrastructure projects; and
- The content of the SPD when taken as a whole and in combination with policies in the emerging 2030 Local Plan will not give rise to significant effects.

1.40 This final assessment was made on the 28 October 2020.