

28th April 2017

Special Area of Conservation
Mole Gap to Reigate Escarpment
UK0012804

<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/protectedsites/sacselection/sac.asp?EUCode=UK0012804>

Sites, that are classified as Special Areas of Conservation include Richmond Park, Wimbledon Common and Ashdown Forest too, but as they are that much further away from the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) area they have not been considered.

The easternmost point of Mole Gap to Reigate is at the top of Reigate Hill. For residents from the NP area, their typical access to this SAC would be through walking, cycling or motoring to the car park at the top of Reigate Hill and from there continue westwards through the site.

This statement needs to limit itself as to whether there is likely to be a significant impact on this site from this NP. As it has been prepared, April 2017 Draft NP, there is no reason to expect a significant impact.

To explain this statement some background can be referred to. A key obligation in planning is Directive 92/43/EEC 'on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora', often referred to as the Habitats Directive. An assessment referred to as an Appropriate Assessment must be undertaken if the plan in question is likely to have a significant effect on a European protected wildlife site. If an NP requires Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive, then that plan will also require a Strategic Environmental Assessment. Neighbourhood plans cannot proceed if a risk of significant effects on an SAC cannot be excluded on the basis of objective information, and therefore the plan needs Appropriate Assessment.

The Draft CR3 Neighbourhood Plan does not allocate sites and it does not include policy that would result in significant effects/risks to SAC sites within the wider South East region. Nor to our nearest site which is the Mole Gap to Reigate Hill Escarpment. It is the case that the plan includes a number of provisions which seek to enhance green infrastructure and conserve biodiversity and habitats within the neighbourhood area.

Based upon the many and varied natural assets in the NP area, the steering group had resolved to instruct independent experts, Levett-Therivel, who have undertaken a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) to help assist in our plan making. The draft policies have been developed iteratively alongside the SA that assesses the plan against a series of the social, economic and environmental sustainability indicators. It is this control that addresses the issue of the requirement for an Appropriate Assessment which has been answered here.