



Bishop's Castle
Neighbourhood Development Plan
2019-2038 Regulation 14 Draft dated
January 2022

Habitats Regulations Assessment

June 2022

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to Habitat Regulations Assessment

- 1.1.1 Under the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), known as the 'Habitat Regulations' it is a legal requirement for a competent authority¹ (in this case Shropshire Council) to prepare a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of plans and projects which have the potential to impact on sites of international importance.
- 1.1.2 Habitats of international importance comprise of sites designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA). In addition, as a matter of government policy, Ramsar sites (Wetlands of International Importance designated under the Ramsar Convention) are also treated as though covered by the Habitats Regulations. The term 'international sites' includes all the above designations and is used throughout this report.
- 1.1.3 The purpose of an HRA is to assess whether any plan or project, either alone or in combination with others plans or projects, will have a likely significant effect on any internationally designated sites, and if so whether this likely significant effect will adversely affect the integrity of any international site. If an adverse effect on site integrity will result from the implementation of the project or plan, either alone or in combination, the HRA process allows the assessment of whether mitigation measures can be implemented to avoid adverse effects.
- 1.1.4 If, after the implementation of mitigation measures, adverse effects on site integrity cannot be ruled out (based on the precautionary principle) then the plan or project can only proceed if it passes 3 legal tests:
- There are no feasible alternative solutions that would be less damaging or avoid damage to the site.
 - The proposal needs to be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest.
 - The necessary compensatory measures can be secured

¹ As defined in Regulation 7 (1) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)

1.2 Purpose of Report

- 1.2.1 HRA can be usefully split into three stages, screening, appropriate assessment and derogations.
- 1.2.2 Stage 1, screening is the process to identify the likely impacts of a policy or proposal upon an international site, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects and consider whether the impacts are likely to be significant or uncertainty exists. Straightforward counter-acting measures can be recommended for incorporation into policy wordings and then sites re-screened.
- 1.2.3 Stage 2 appropriate assessment considers the impacts on the integrity of international sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, with regard to the site's structure and function and its conservation objectives. Where there are adverse impacts, an assessment of mitigation options is carried out to determine adverse effect on the integrity of the site. If these mitigation options cannot avoid adverse effects, then to stage 3 is activated.
- 1.2.4 Stage 3, derogations and three tests are considered where the plan or project has failed the integrity test, as detailed at 1.4 above.
- 1.2.5 This document details both the screening (Stage 1) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) (Stage 2) of the Regulation 14 Draft version of the Bishop's Castle Neighbourhood Development Plan 2019-2038 (Reg 14 BCNDP which has been undertaken.
- 1.2.6 It documents the methodology employed during the screening and AA of the Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA), and records the evidence gathered and the process leading to any decisions made.
- 1.2.7 The Reg 14 BCNDP is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of an international site² and so is not exempt from HRA on this basis.

² Regulation 61 (1) (b) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)

2 BACKGROUND TO THE REGULATION 14 BCNDP 2019-2038

2.1 Neighbourhood Planning

- 2.1.1 Neighbourhood planning was introduced under the Localism Act to give members of the community a more ‘hands on’ role in the planning of their neighbourhoods. It enables communities to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development they need through planning policies relating to the development and use of land.
- 2.1.2 The BCNDP which this HRA report examines is the draft Regulation 14 version, dated January 2022. Therefore, this report will, where necessary, inform further consultation drafts and the final version for examination.
- 2.1.3 The BCNDP will, after passing through the relevant stages of consultation, submission, examination and the referendum, go on to become part of the statutory Development Plan for the area.

2.2 Shropshire Planning Policy Context

Core Strategy and SamDev

- 2.2.1 The relevant Shropshire development plan is the Shropshire Core Strategy alongside the Site Allocations and Development Policies Development Plan (SAMDev). Taken together these two documents make up the Shropshire Local Plan.
- 2.2.2 The Core Strategy sets out Shropshire Council’s vision, strategic objectives and the broad strategy to guide future development and growth in Shropshire during the period up to 2026. The Core Strategy was adopted in February 2011.
- 2.2.3 Shropshire's Site Allocations and Development Policies Development Plan (SAMDev) was adopted in December 2015 and sets out proposals for the use of land and policies to guide future development in order to help deliver the vision and objectives of the Shropshire Core Strategy for the period up to 2026.

Local Plan Review

- 2.2.4 A review of the Shropshire Local Plan (2016 – 2038) is currently being progressed. It was submitted for examination in September 2021, in conjunction with an accompany HRA. The purpose of the review is to update elements of the Plan and to make sure that Shropshire can respond flexibly to changing circumstances in line with the NPPF. The Review includes consideration of housing numbers (including objectively assessed need), employment land requirements, the distribution of development and a review of Green Belt boundaries as part of the consideration of strategic options to deliver new development.

2.2.5 The submission version of the Draft Shropshire Local Plan Local Plan Review proposes Bishop's Castle will continue to act as a 'Key Centre' and accommodate around 150 dwellings and 3 hectares of employment land between 2016 and 2036. Some of this development has already been delivered or allocated in SAmDev but there is additional housing land allocated in the Local plan review, over and above that allocated in SamDev.

2.3 Description of the BCNDP

2.3.1 The BCNDP covers the parish of Bishop's Castle which includes the town of Bishop's Castle itself and surrounding countryside (see Map 1).

2.3.2 When the BCNDP is 'made' it will become part of the Shropshire Local Development Framework. The Neighbourhood Plan will be used to help determine planning applications within the Bishop's Castle designated Neighbourhood Area.

2.3.3 The plan includes identification of sites to accommodate some of the additional housing land as identified in the submission version of the Local Plan review, which is over and above that in SamDev.

3 RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL SITES

3.1 Screening Thresholds

Distance

- 3.1.1 The first step in the screening process was to identify all internationally designated sites within 15km of the Bishop's Castle plan boundary. This distance is considered sufficiently large to ensure that internationally designated sites that could potentially be affected by the majority of impact pathways are considered. Map 2 shows Bishop's Castle with a 15km buffer and the spread of internationally designated sites across the area.

Possible Pathways of Effects

- 3.1.2 In addition to distance thresholds, possible pathways of effects between internationally designated sites and the BCNDP have been identified in order to ensure that all internationally designated sites, irrespective of distance, have been included in the report for screening for likely significant effects.
- 3.1.3 Broad mechanisms which could potentially give rise to likely significant effects include, but are not limited to:
- Alteration in water quality
 - Increased water abstraction
 - Increased run off from new roads and development
 - Air pollution from development work
 - Air pollution from increased traffic in the long term
 - Increased Nitrogen deposition
 - Increased recreational use
 - Increased fishing on open water sites
 - Increased introduced and invasive species issues
 - Alterations in site management
 - Increased hunting pressure from domestic animals e.g cats.
- 3.1.4 Of the above mechanisms for possible impacts to internationally designated sites only alterations in water quality and increased recreational use are considered to be relevant effects as a result of the Reg 14 BCNDP. This is in-line with the results of the HRA for the Draft Shropshire Local Plan submitted for examination in September 2021.

3.2 Sites to be Screened for Likely Significant Effects

- 3.2.1 No internationally designated sites are located within the boundary of the BCNDP area. Two internationally designated sites are located within 15km of the boundary of the BCNDP, and which are considered to be potentially subject to impacts from the BCNDP. These are the River Clun SAC and the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC. See Map 3 for the location of the River Clun SAC and the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC in relation to the BCNDP area

- 3.2.2 The BCNDP area is within the hydrological catchment of the River Clun SAC designated for supporting (freshwater pearl mussel) which is dependent on riverine habitat. Any new housing development proposed in Bishop's Castle would therefore be utilising a sewage treatment works which outfalls into a tributary of the River Kemp which ultimately feeds into the River Clun SAC. Therefore, there is a potential pathway of impact through changes in water quality.
- 3.2.3 The BCNDP area is approximately 5.2km south of the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC which is designated for supporting upland habitats and therefore within the distance widely considered to be of concern for recreational pressure of similar sized 'non-regional' sites. This distance is supported by various surveys, including surveys of Burnham Beeches SAC and Epping Forest SAC which indicate that approximately 75% of regular visitors to inland designated sites live within 5-6km of those sites. Therefore, there is a potential pathway of impact through increased visitors.
- 3.2.4 Sites where a larger zone of influence are more relevant are those such as the New Forest or Cannock Chase which because of the size and amenity offer, draw visitors from a larger area.
- 3.2.5 Details of the River Clun SAC and the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC are included in Appendix 1, which includes known issues impacting or threatening the condition of the features of each site.

4 SCREENING THE BCNDP FOR LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 The likelihood of significant effects has been assessed in relation to the specific features and environmental conditions of the internationally designated sites as could be affected by the Reg 14 BCNDP, alone, or in combination with other plans or projects, taking particular account of the sites' conservation objectives.
- 4.1.2 The results of the screening assessment based on the likelihood of significant effects of the Reg 14 BCNDP, on internationally designated sites are shown in Appendix 2.
- 4.1.3 This identifies that significant effects could arise upon the River Clun SAC and the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC as a result of the housing site allocation within the Reg 14 draft BCNDP, in combination with other plans and projects.
- 4.1.4 Much of the information used for this screening has been developed through the HRA for the Draft Shropshire Local Plan 2016-2038 which is currently at examination stage. It is considered that the background information in the Shropshire Local Plan HRA can be used for screening of the BCNDP and as such, this screening report should be read in conjunction with it.

4.2 Policy BC1

- 4.2.1 This policy allocates a site for delivery of 40 dwellings. As the housing allocation identified in the Reg 14 BCNDP will utilise a Waste Water Treatment Works (Bishop's Castle) that discharges into the River Clun, upstream of the river Clun SAC, but hydrologically connected, the policy has the potential to give rise to likely significant effects upon the River Clun SAC in combination with other plans (ie the submission version of the Draft Shropshire Local Plan 2016-2038).
- 4.2.2 In addition, impacts of the housing allocation through increased recreational pressure on the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC could have a likely significant effect upon the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC in combination with other plans and projects.
- 4.2.3 This policy identifies a level of housing in excess of that already allocated by SamDev, but which is in line with the housing targets in the submission version of the Draft Shropshire Local Plan 2016-2038. To date, the site allocation for 40 dwellings in the BCNDP is not included in an adopted plan, and therefore, there is no accompanying HRA that has been examined and approved, to provide certainty that appropriate mitigation can be secured to avoid likely significant effects on the River Clun SAC or the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC.

4.3 Screening Conclusion

- 4.3.1 It is considered likely that the Regulation 14 BCNDP is likely to have a significant effect on the River Clun SAC and the Stipertones and Hollies SAC, in combination with other plans and projects. Therefore, an Appropriate Assessment is required.

5 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT OF THE REG 14 BCNDP

5.1 Recreational Pressure

- 5.1.1 The Stiperstones and Hollies SAC has been identified during the screening process as having potential to be subject to likely significant effects as a result of the Reg 14 BCNDP through recreational pressure as a result of increased housing within its zone of influence, in combination with other plans.
- 5.1.2 The site allocation in the BCNDP is located approximately 6km south of the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC and new housing in Bishop's Castle is highlighted in the HRA accompanying the submission version Draft Shropshire Local Plan as potentially affecting the SAC.
- 5.1.3 Natural England do not mention recreational impacts in the condition assessment for the site (website accessed 9.7.2020). Most SSSI units being classed as Unfavourable-Recovering or Favourable, only 3 of the 68 units were classed as Unfavourable – declining.
- 5.1.4 Neither the 'European Site Conservation Objectives: Supplementary Advice on conserving and restoring site features – The Stiperstones and The Hollies Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Code: UK0012810, Natural England, 7 March 2019, nor the 'Site Improvement Plan: The Stiperstones and The Hollies (SIP243) January 2015 – 2025, mentions visitor pressure as an issue for protection of the site or its qualifying features.
- 5.1.5 Recreational events such as orienteering, mountain biking and rock climbing are by permit only. The current site management plan (Stiperstones Management Plan 2018- 2022) does not highlight particular problems from visitors. The majority of the reserve has been declared as Access Land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and further land was dedicated by Natural England in 2016, irrevocably as Open Access land. This extended access rights into most of the reserve including some but not all areas of grassland and woodland. The 'Vision' for the site includes the following in relation to public access: Though well-visited, The Stiperstones NNR is a wild, quiet, unspoilt place, and there are significant areas which, though open to the public, are little visited, and which are not penetrated by advertised trails. It remains inspiring and restorative to its visitors, and local people and visitors continue to take advantage of the wild harvest of whinberries and cowberries. The wider landscape has a network of well-maintained rights of way providing low-key access and easing visitor pressure on the reserve itself. Most people access the area by the shuttle bus or bicycle, the former continues to expand and benefit the local community. A general need to manage visitors is referred to in the plan, but the desired state of access is described as 'open' rather than 'managed', 'restricted' or 'excluded'.

- 5.1.6 Taking the above into consideration, it is concluded that existing plans and mechanisms are likely to be sufficient to mitigate for the increase in visitor numbers at the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC that could result from the BCNDP, in combination with other plans, however, as a precautionary measure, mitigation has been built into the policy wording contained in the submission version Draft Shropshire Local Plan, which covers the 40 dwellings proposed in the BCNDP..
- 5.1.7 Mitigation measures would include providing additional on-site open space for dog-walking for larger site allocations and linking open space on the development site to the existing public footpath or green infrastructure network to form publicised circular walks locally. In addition, developer contributions may be required towards visitor management measures if an evidence-based site management plan requires this to protect the qualifying features of the SAC. These measures are required through Development Management policies DP12. The Natural Environment paragraph 1, DP15. Open Space paragraph 3, DP14. Green Infrastructure and DP25. Infrastructure Provision.
- 5.1.8 In addition to the above Development Management policies, settlement policy S2.1. Development Strategy: Bishop's Castle Key Centre states that 'Mitigation measures will also be required to remove any adverse effect from increased recreational pressure arising from development in Bishop's Castle on the integrity of the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC in accordance with policies DP12, DP14 and DP15. Mitigation measures for recreational impacts are identified in the Plan Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) and supporting documents'.
- 5.1.9 Natural England have raised no objections or concerns regarding the housing allocations within the submission version Draft Shropshire Local Plan at Bishop's Castle in relation to impacts upon the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC and therefore it can be assumed that they are content that through Development Management Policies and Settlement Policy wording and the statutory requirement for a project level HRA for development, **there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC as a result of housing allocations in the submission version Draft Shropshire Local Plan which include the 40 dwellings at Bishops Castle as supported by policy BC1 of the BCNDP.**

5.2 Water Quality

- 5.2.1 The River Clun SAC has been identified during the screening process as having potential to be subject to likely significant effects as a result of the Reg 14 BCNDP through changes to water quality as a result of increased housing in the catchment of the river Clun, in combination with other plans. .

- 5.2.2 The River Clun is a tributary of the River Teme, which is the second largest tributary of the River Severn, draining a hilly, predominantly rural catchment of Silurian and Devonian rocks. The site includes only the lower reaches of the river and extends upstream from the confluence with the Teme to Broadward Bridge near Marlow. This section of the river holds a population of the freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera*, one of the few lowland populations left in the UK. The freshwater pearl mussel larvae attach to the gills of salmon and trout before eventually detaching and settling in the riverbed gravels where they grow to adulthood.
- 5.2.3 Freshwater Pearl Mussels are sensitive to changes in water quality, with nutrient enrichment impacting long term adult survival and juvenile recruitment. Recent water quality monitoring (2019-2021) shows nutrient concentrations within the River Clun SAC to be exceeding the targets for orthophosphate and Total Oxidised Nitrogen (TON). The latest 3-year mean orthophosphate (P) recorded within the SAC is 0.032mg/l, 320% of the site target of 0.01mg/l. The latest 3-year mean Total Oxidised Nitrogen (TON) recorded within the SAC is 4mg/l which is 266.6 % of the site target of 1.5mg/l.
- 5.2.4 Any nutrients entering the catchment upstream of the locations which are exceeding their nutrient targets, will make their way downstream and have the potential to further add to the current exceedance.
- 5.2.5 Wastewater from development in Bishop's Castle discharges into the River Clun catchment, upstream of the internationally designated site, so there is a pathway for effects upon the River Clun SAC as a result of site allocation BC1 within the Reg 14 BCNDP.
- 5.2.6 Policy DP13. Development in the River Clun Catchment is included in the draft Shropshire Local Plan to avoid impacts on the Freshwater Pearl Mussel and therefore SAC. The policy states:
1. *To protect the integrity of the river Clun Special Area of Conservation and to comply with the Habitats Regulations and policy DP12, development within the catchment of the river Clun will only be permitted if it can demonstrate either nutrient neutrality or a reduction in nutrient levels.*
 2. *All measures relied on to deliver either nutrient neutrality or a reduction in nutrient levels must demonstrate with sufficient certainty that they:*
 - a. *Will achieve either nutrient neutrality or a reduction in nutrient levels; and*
 - b. *Can be secured and funded for the lifetime of the development's effects; and*
 - c. *Do not compromise the ability of the River Clun SAC to reach favourable conservation status.*

5.2.7 In conjunction with specifically protective policy DP13, other policies included within the draft Shropshire Local Plan which will also contribute to the protection of the River Clun SAC are:

- DP12, paragraph 1 which requires a project-level Habitats Regulation Assessment for all proposals where the Local Planning Authority identifies a likely significant effect on an internationally designated site. Permission will be refused where such an HRA indicates an adverse effect on the integrity of a designated site which cannot be avoided or fully mitigated.
- DP19 Water Resources and Water Quality, which requires development not to adversely affect the quality, quantity and flow of both ground and surface water and must ensure that there is adequate water infrastructure in place to meet its own needs. Details of foul-water drainage must be provided to avoid any adverse impacts on the existing foul drainage network and proposals must help to conserve and enhance existing watercourses and riverside habitats.
- DP20. Water Efficiency expects new housing to meet the Building Regulations 110 litres per person per day standard which will help to prevent overloading WwTW and pollution events during times of high flow.
- DP21. Flood Risk covers measures to reduce flood risk and enhance as far as possible the natural capacity of soils, vegetation, river floodplains, wetland and upland habitats to help with this.
- DP22. Sustainable Drainage Systems requires development to incorporate SuDS to reduce flood risk, avoid adverse impacts on water quality and quantity and prevent contamination. Proposals will also be expected to have no adverse effect on the receiving water bodies, both during construction and when operational,
- DP25. Infrastructure Provision requires new development to only take place where there is sufficient existing infrastructure capacity available. Where a new development would lead to a shortfall in infrastructure provision, the development will be required to fund necessary improvements through a suitable developer contribution, unless the identified shortfall is being addressed by other means.
- S2.1 states that 'The Plan HRA identifies that development in Bishop's Castle is likely to have an adverse effect on the River Clun SAC so policy DP13 applies.'

- 5.2.8 Throughout the Local Plan Review process, Shropshire Council has sought to proactively engage and where appropriate undertake joint working with both Natural England (NE) and the Environment Agency (EA), however to date this process has not resulted in agreement with regard to the River Clun SAC. NE and EA have both objected to the Council's proposed approach to safeguarding this internationally designated site in the Draft Shropshire Local Plan and specifically object to the allocation of housing sites in the Clun catchment therefore including the 40 houses in Bishop's' Castle allocated as site BIS013.
- 5.2.9 Following more detailed meetings and communications between Shropshire Council, NE and the EA regarding this matter, the Council considered it was being advised by both organisations of the need to produce an evidence base of possible mitigation measures which would not form part of restoration plan in order to provide confidence that mitigation to enable housing development in the Clun catchment would not undermine the achievement of the site's conservation objectives.
- 5.2.10 Therefore in early 2022 the council commissioned consultants to produce a Mitigation Measures study which includes:
- a) a phosphate calculator
 - b) a phosphate budget for housing proposed in the Clun catchment through the Draft Shropshire Local Plan
 - c) recommendations for the most appropriate mitigation measures based on costings and effectiveness
 - d) an assessment of opportunities for broad locations for the recommended measures and
 - e) advise on implementation mechanisms.

5.2.11 However, in June 2022 Natural England wrote to the Council, noting the work undertaken to identify mitigation measures to enable development in the Clun catchment but maintaining their objection to the housing allocations in the catchment.

5.3 Conclusion

5.3.1 Following the appropriate assessment and the consideration of mitigation measures, Shropshire Council consider that at this stage of the plan making process, it cannot be ascertained that the Reg 14 draft BCNDP (dated January 2022) will not adversely affect the integrity of the River Clun SAC in combination with other plans or projects as the effects are uncertain as is consistent with the advice of Natural England.

6 NEXT STEPS

6.1 Stiperstones and Hollies SAC

6.1.1 It is noted that the BCNDP does specifically refer to the potential for recreational pressures on the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC or acknowledge the relevant overarching draft Shropshire Local Plan policies that require consideration when assessing a planning application on allocated site BIS013 in accordance with the Habitats Regulations.

6.1.2 To reinforce the conclusion of no adverse effect on integrity due to in combination effects from increased recreational pressure, **it is recommended that the next version of the BCNDP includes wording in the explanatory text to BC1 highlighting the policy requirements of draft Shropshire Local Plan policies DP12, DP14, DP15 and DP25 and Settlement Policy S2.1 with regards mitigation for any identified recreational effects.**

6.1.3 With the inclusion of this in the explanatory text it would be able to be concluded that there is adequate policy wording within the BCNDP to ensure that there are no impacts on the integrity of the Stiperstones and The Hollies SAC as a result of increased recreational pressure stemming from the new housing to be delivered under BCNDP Policy BC1 in combination with other housing to be delivered within the emerging Local Plan and neighbouring plans and projects.

6.2 River Clun SAC

6.2.1 Whilst the HRA into the Shropshire Local Plan (2016-2038) concludes that measures within policies (most notably DP13 of the Draft Local Plan) have been proposed which mitigate any likely significant effects, it is acknowledged that Natural England continue to raise an objection to the Draft Local Plan position. It is considered that at this stage in the process of the examination of the Shropshire Local Plan review, it would be beneficial for the BCNDP to wait for the outcome of Shropshire Local Plan examination into this issue, in order to proceed with sufficient certainty regarding the effect on site integrity from the BCNDP upon the River Clun SAC. This remains the case even with the inclusion of wording in policy BC1 to clarify to developers as to the work required to protect the River Clun SAC.

6.2.2 It is therefore recommended that the next iteration of the BCNDP awaits the outcome of the examination of the draft Shropshire Local Plan with regards the adoption of housing allocations in the Clun catchment, including site BIS013.

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Map 1: Bishop's Castle Neighbourhood Plan Area



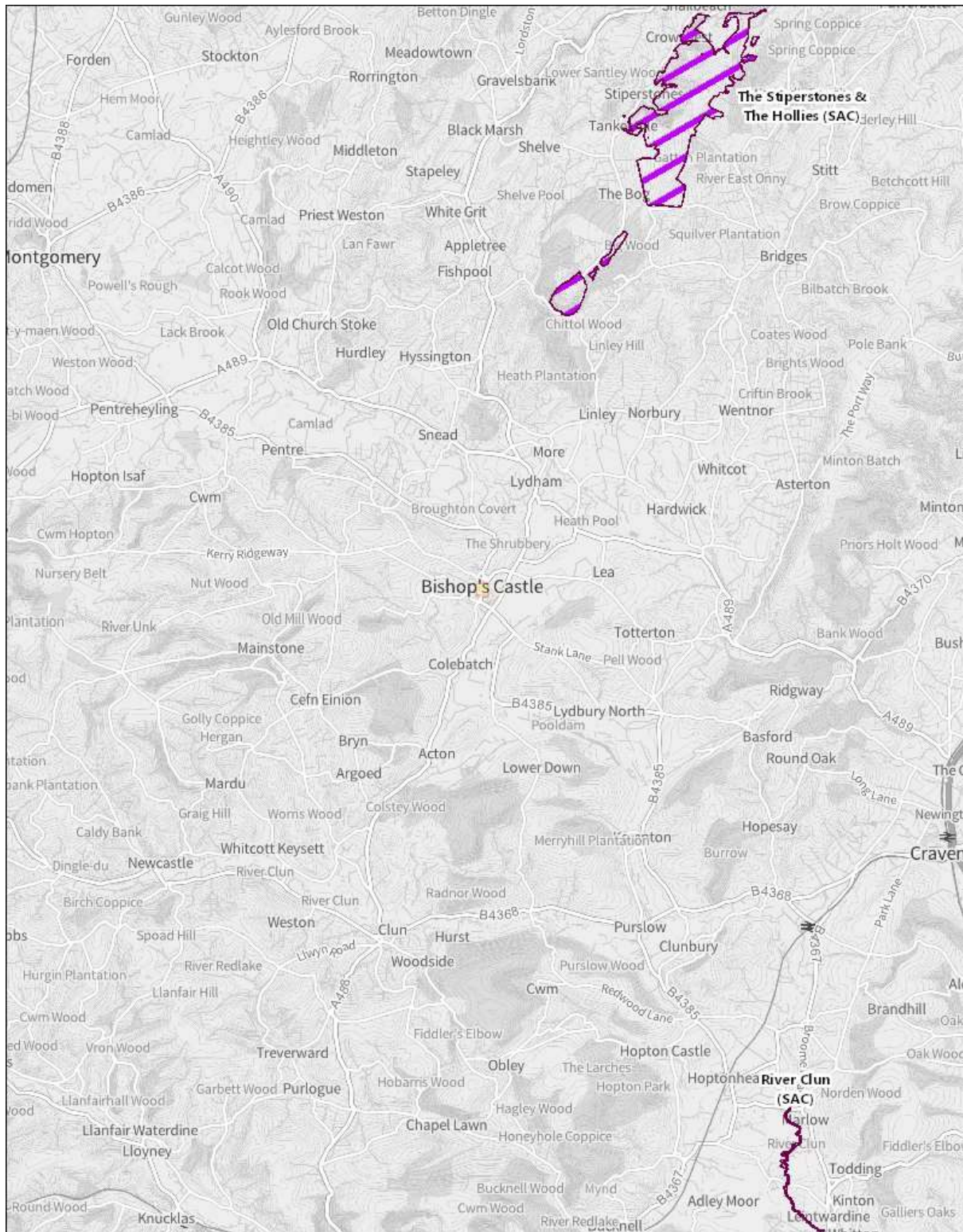
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Bishop's Castle Parish

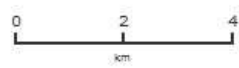
Parish Boundary

Scale: 1:21,512

Map 2: Location of the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC and the River Clun SAC in relation to Bishop's Castle



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Appendix 1: Details of internationally Designated Sites

Site Name: The Stiperstones and the Hollies SAC, SJ375006, Shropshire, England.
<p>Site Description: The Stiperstones are a series of tors which outcrop along a prominent quartzite ridge to the south-west of Shrewsbury. The ridge supports extensive and varied heathland vegetation showing transitions between southern lowland and northern upland heaths. The heathland vegetation varies with altitude and aspect. This is particularly evident in the steep sided valleys on the western side of the hill where bell heather <i>Erica cinerea</i> and western gorse <i>Ulex gallii</i> are characteristic of south facing slopes, whereas bilberry <i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i> is particularly abundant on north facing slopes. On higher ground, cowberry <i>Vaccinium vitisidaea</i> and crowberry <i>Empetrum nigrum</i> are significant components of the heathland. Typical heathland herbs include heath bedstraw <i>Galium saxatile</i>, tormentil <i>Potentilla erecta</i> and common cow-wheat <i>Melampyrum pratense</i>. Heather <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> is abundant or dominant in all these communities. The tors and boulders of the upper slopes provide important habitat for several species of moss and also support a diverse lichen flora.</p> <p>The northern end of the ridge, known as The Hollies, is an area of ‘holly parkland’ of great antiquity and considered to be unique for both its size and for the age of the holly <i>Ilex aquifolium</i> trees. These trees, which have unusually large girths, are at least 250 years old. However, many of the largest trees are likely to be over 300 years, and some possibly as old as 400 years. As well as being recognized as one of the oldest stands of holly in Europe, the hollies are considered to be amongst the oldest trees of any species in Britain. In the past the holly trees were pollarded to provide winter fodder, and as a result of this type of management they have well developed crutches in which rowans <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> have become established.</p>
<p>Conservation Objectives for SAC: Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats• The structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats, and• The supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats rely
<p>Issues that are currently impacting or threatening the condition of the features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changes in land management – The dwarf shrub, acid grassland and wet flush communities are heavily dependent upon sensitive grazing by sheep and cattle. Much of this site is registered common land featuring multiple grazing rights holders, mostly farmers whose activities have a direct influence on site condition. The viability of producing lamb and beef from a challenging upland grazing unit could impact upon the ideal grazing practice where habitat management is an objective

- Historically the heathland and related habitats in the Shropshire Hills were more extensive and inter-connected. Landscape initiatives such as the Back to Purple Project at Stipertones has resulted in the restoration of significant areas of dry heath on former conifer plantations. This approach should be continued and widened to improve the resilience of the site's features by improving habitat linkages including to other heathland/upland areas such as the Long Mynd. Much of the importance of this Stipertones relates to it being on the interface between typical upland communities and those more common with the lowland. The resilience of rare upland habitats and species found here could be especially vulnerable to climate change should warmer weather favour better adapted lowland species. Equally there is a possibility that other changes such as drought (increasing fire risk, reducing the viability of grazing livestock and weakening some species so that they are more vulnerable to pests and diseases) could have dire consequences
- Disease - Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* is an important component of the dwarf shrub habitat found on site, with a range of dependent species (such as the Bilberry Bumblebee *Bombus monticola*). This particular plant is highly susceptible to the disease *Phytophthora ramorum*. As its occurrence at the site is relatively new the consequences are not yet certain and requires monitoring. *Phytophthora pseudosyringae* is already present and also represents a significant threat, so close monitoring by Natural England and FERA is needed to indicate any change in status.
- Invasive species - Bracken has been controlled on the site to prevent the loss of heathland, however changes in climate seem to be favouring bracken and bramble growth. This is likely to affect the condition of the heathland directly and indirectly through the restriction of grazing. Japanese knotweed is present on site on some of the smaller watercourses and is controlled annually but persists.
- Air Pollution: impact of atmospheric nitrogen deposition - Nitrogen deposition exceeds site relevant critical loads. Surveys indicate that lichen species may be impacted.
- Wildfire/ arson - With predicted warmer summers the risk of wildfires is increased, and this could be exacerbated by predicted wetter winters which will limit the amount of controlled burning which acts as firebreaks in limiting the amount of combustible material on site.
- Deer - Woodland, comprising of Birch *Betula sp.*, Sessile Oak *Quercus petraea* and Holly *Ilex aquifolium* is a key habitat especially to the north of the site. Management such as coppicing is important to maintain the structure of these woodlands, but this would become increasingly difficult to continue successfully were deer numbers increase locally. The current deer population is not well recorded, but anecdotal evidence would suggest that it is increasing.

Reason for Designation	Environmental Conditions Needed to Support Site Integrity
<p>Annex I Habitats that are a primary reason for selection of site:</p> <p>European dry heaths.</p> <p>Annex I Habitats present as a qualifying feature but not a primary reason for selection of site:</p>	<p>Control of afforestation.</p> <p>Control of grazing pressure.</p> <p>Maintain appropriate woodland management.</p>

Old sessile oak woods with <i>Ilex</i> and <i>Blechnum</i> in the British Isles.	Monitor and control invasive species.
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Site Name: River Clun SAC, SO393754, Herefordshire, Shropshire, England.

Site Description: The River Clun is a tributary of the River Teme, which is the second largest tributary of the River Severn, draining a hilly, predominantly rural catchment of Silurian and Devonian rocks. The site includes only the lower reaches of the river and extends upstream from the confluence with the Teme to Broadward Bridge near Marlow. This section of the river holds a population of the freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera*, one of the few lowland populations left in the UK. The freshwater pearl mussel larvae attach to the gills of salmon and trout before eventually detaching and settling in the riverbed gravels where they grow to adulthood.

Conservation Objectives for SAC:

Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of its Qualifying Features, by maintaining or restoring;

- The extent and distribution of the habitats of qualifying species
- The structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- The supporting processes on which the habitats of qualifying species rely
- The populations of qualifying species, and,
- The distribution of qualifying species within the site.

Definition of Favourable Condition for River Teme SSSI which contains the River Clun SAC: To maintain, in favourable condition, the habitats for the population of Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*). (Maintenance implies restoration if the feature is not currently in favourable condition).

Issues that are currently impacting or threatening the condition of the features

- **Siltation** - Siltation is a major issue affecting the health of Freshwater Mussel, both by acting directly on the adult mussels but also by preventing juvenile recruitment. Excessive delivery of fine sediment, from the catchment or artificially enhanced bank erosion, may lead to a range of problems relating to surface siltation, the compaction or concretion of river beds and to the in-filling of substrate interstices. This affects oxygen supply and exchange between the river water and the substrate as well as the ability of juvenile and adult mussels to burrow. Infiltration by fine

sediments is one of the main causes of decline in juvenile recruitment for mussel populations. Fine sediments also subsequently provide a medium for macrophyte growth and further silt trapping, which makes the river bed habitat unsuitable for mussels. It should be noted that host salmonids also require clean gravels for spawning and are particularly sensitive to siltation of gravel beds. The River Clun Restoration Plan and Nutrient Management Plan highlight the issues around increased sediment loads and siltation affecting the remaining freshwater mussels. The scientific and local stakeholder consensus is that agriculture is responsible for the majority of sediment loads in the River Clun.

- **Water pollution** - Water quality is important for all life stages of Freshwater Mussel. Juvenile mussels, after they drop off the host fish and live within the river gravels, are most vulnerable to pollution events. Phosphorus, together with nitrogen, is important in enhancing productivity and elevated levels from point and diffuse sources are an important factor in eutrophication. As with siltation, nutrient enrichment can have serious and ongoing impacts on juvenile and adult mussels. Increased inputs of dissolved nutrients tend to lead to filamentous algal and macrophyte growth. The respiration of artificially large growths of benthic or floating algae may generate large diurnal sags in dissolved oxygen and poor substrate conditions (increased siltation) for fish and invertebrate species. Macrophytes can also smother the mussel habitat even further, and trap more sediment, exacerbating the problem in the long term. The River Clun Nutrient Management Plan identified agriculture as a significant contributor of P, N (also sediment). Agriculture (livestock and arable) are shown to contribute 61% of P and 92% of N. In addition Sewage treatment plants contribute 35% of P, at current levels. As there is pressure for more development this will only increase unless it is tackled.
- **Low breeding success/ poor recruitment** - The stressed and aging population of Freshwater Mussel is very vulnerable to one off events (floods, drought, pollution). Surveys since 1995 show there has been no juvenile recruitment and there has been an overall loss of 60% of mussels between 1995 and 2013. Most of the remaining mussels are in very poor condition and although they are long lived, the remaining population may only survive for another 20 years without major intervention. This is an aging population which is very stressed, the remaining mussels have been found covered in silt and algae and sitting on the surface of the gravel rather than buried amongst it. The numbers of mussels may reach a point where there is insufficient genetic diversity to maintain a healthy population. Studies have shown that translocation of mussels from river to river is relatively unsuccessful with mortalities of over 50% in the first three years. There may be physiological accommodation or genetic adaptation to particular rivers. Therefore it is crucial to maintain the existing population in situ.
- **Disease** - Tree death is compounding other problems such as siltation and nutrient enrichment. Alder phytophthora is killing numerous trees in the Clun catchment. Dead trees are leading to less stable banksides and contributing directly to bankside erosion/increased siltation. Occasional trees are falling into river and pulling out whole bank side. As well as adding silt to the river, over time this will effectively widen the river, causing slower and shallower water which will compound the other issues of siltation and pollution. Tree shade also helps to keep the river cool, cold water holds more oxygen and shade can help prevent the growth of plants and algae.
- **Physical modification** - The Freshwater mussel has a commensal relationship with migratory salmonids (salmon and trout), as the glochidia (larval stage) attach themselves to the gills of the fish before dropping off to bury themselves in clean gravels. Weirs and dams (not all of which are in

the SAC itself, some are downstream in River Teme SSSI) affect the movement of migratory salmonids on which the mussels depend. Although salmonids are arriving in the headwaters they are likely to be less healthy than if progress upstream was unimpeded.

- Invasive species - Himalayan balsam in the main problem species in the catchment at the moment. Work has begun to map and tackle the spread of this species. As Himalayan balsam dies back in winter, it often leaves bare banks during the winter season making them more vulnerable to erosion. This will add to the siltation problems faced by the Freshwater mussel although this has not actually been quantified. It is important to tackle this in conjunction with other issues in the catchment to prevent it undoing work that is happening elsewhere.
- Change in land management - Current and future changes in land management in the catchment, particularly intensification of farming practices are a concern. There is a general trend of arable farming replacing grazed grasslands. Changes in land use are a feature across the catchment. Arable, including potato growing has increased in the last decade, including on the steeper slopes higher up in the catchment. The soil types are vulnerable to erosion. Increased sediment loads are evident in the river and have impacted on the riverbed habitat affecting the Freshwater mussel population (siltation).

Reason for Designation	Environmental Conditions Needed to Support Site Integrity
<p>Annex II Species that are a primary reason for selection of site: Freshwater pearl mussel <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i></p>	<p>Maintained good water quality (targets on 0.01mg/litre of orthophosphate (SRP), 1.5mg/l of Total Nitrogen (TON) and 10mg/l suspended solids)</p> <p>Maintained salmonid populations.</p> <p>Maintained riparian vegetation.</p>

Appendix 2. Summary of screening elements of the Reg. 14 draft Bishop's Castle Neighbourhood Development Plan 2019-2038 (dated January 2022)

Element of Plan/Policy Ref.	Paragraph # or Policy Title	Screening Conclusion	Justification
Part 1. Introduction and Background	1 – 39	Screened out	General description of the Neighbourhood Plan Area and the plan making process.
Part 2. Planning Policies	40 - 61-	Screened out	Description of context for detailed policies
Part 2	62 - 69 Residential Land Allocation	Screened out	Description of housing objectives including delivery of 40 new dwellings which is more appropriately considered in more detailed policy BC1 of the NDP.
Policies			
BC1	Housing allocation and change to the development boundary	Screened in	Site allocation (BIS013) of 40 dwellings would discharge wastewater into the River Clun catchment approximately 19km upstream of the River Clun SAC. Local effects from this individual allocated site, would be negligible due to the distance from the designated site however, in combination with other allocations in plans out falling foul water into the Clun catchment, a significant adverse effect is likely through changes in water quality . This allocation is also approximately 6km south of the Stiperstones and Hollies SAC and so an adverse effect is possible through increased recreational pressure .
BC2	Development affecting the Bishop's Castle Conservation Area	Screened out	Criteria based policies relating to design. Cannot lead to development or other change
BC3	Development outside the Bishop's Castle Conservation Area	Screened out	Criteria based policies relating to design. Cannot lead to development or other change
BC4	Non-designated heritage assets and non-traditional design features	Screened out	Policy listing general criteria for testing acceptability of proposals
BC5	Local Green Spaces	Screened out	General plan-wide environmental protection / site safeguarding / threshold policies
BC6	Sustainable Transports	Screened out	Policies promoting links/paths/green routes. Could not have any conceivable effect on an site - No international sites within 6km and no impact pathways present.
BC7	Housing Mix	Screened out	Policies listing general criteria for testing acceptability of proposals.
BC8	Sustainable Construction	Screened out	Criteria based policies relating to design and construction. Cannot lead to development or other change