

Examination of the Breckland District Local Plan (2011-2036)

Hearing Statement - RSPB

Matter 12 – Environment

Policy ENV 03 – The Brecks Protected Habitats & Species

12.6 Is Policy ENV 03 effective, to ensure that no adverse impacts would occur to the Brecks SPA/SAC through increased recreational pressure from new housing?

In our pre-submission consultation response, we highlighted that there was insufficient evidence in the plan to demonstrate that adverse effects on the nightjar and woodlark populations of the Breckland SPA from increased visitor pressure from housing allocations would be avoided. Recent research¹ predicts a significant increase in visitor pressure of approximately 30% over the plan period.

The RSPB has been in discussion with the Council following the submission consultation in order to find a solution to our outstanding concern, ideally through a proposed modification to the wording and supporting text for policy ENV03 to add sufficient certainty that visitor pressure will be monitored and that mitigation measures can be applied before pressure reaches an adverse level.

Whilst we have not been able to make sufficient progress to present a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) before the Hearing Statement deadline of 26th March, we are reassured by the direction of the discussions. We will continue to work with the Council and hope that our concerns can be resolved and the required modifications to policy ENV03 set out in a SoCG prior to the Examination Hearings commencing.

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¹ Panter, C., Liley, D. & Lowen, S. (2016). Visitor surveys at European protected sites across Norfolk during 2015 and 2016. Unpublished report for Norfolk County Council. Footprint Ecology.