



Epping Forest District Council Local Plan Theydon Bois: Ecology Representation

On Behalf of:
Redrow Homes Ltd.
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1. Introduction and Objective

1.1 This representation demonstrates that the site controlled by Redrow Homes (the site) to the north of Abridge Road, Theydon Bois provides a valid case for inclusion in the Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Local Plan and will at the same time deliver net benefits to the Epping Forest SAC conservation objectives through the provision of significant areas of accessible greenspace.

1.2 The site under the control of Redrow Homes incorporates land previously identified as an emerging allocation in the Draft Local Plan as SR-0026C and a further parcel to the east. This area totals approximately 10.8ha and predominantly comprises of two large grassland fields (Figure 1). The area identified as housing allocation SR-0026C was for approximately 121 dwellings, (Aecom, 2016).



Figure 1: The site incorporating the housing allocation SR-0026C

2. Description of Housing Allocations within Theydon Bois

2.1 There was a range of sites within Theydon Bois considered for allocation under the EFDC Local Plan (2016) with a total allocation of 360 homes. Further details and locations are provided in Table 1 and Figure 2.

Table 1: Proposed Housing Allocations around Theydon Bois

Reference	Name	Area (ha)
SR-0026C	Land to the north of Abridge Road (Thrifths Hall Farm)	10.80
SR-0026B	Land east of Central Line, North of Abridge Road (including Old Foresters Site)	12.95
SR-0070	Land at Forest Drive	0.89
SR-0327B	Land east of Dukes Avenue	5.72
SR-0327A	Theydon Bois Golf Course and Land to East	35.58
SR-0328A	South Area	47.25
SR-0328B	South Area	28.00

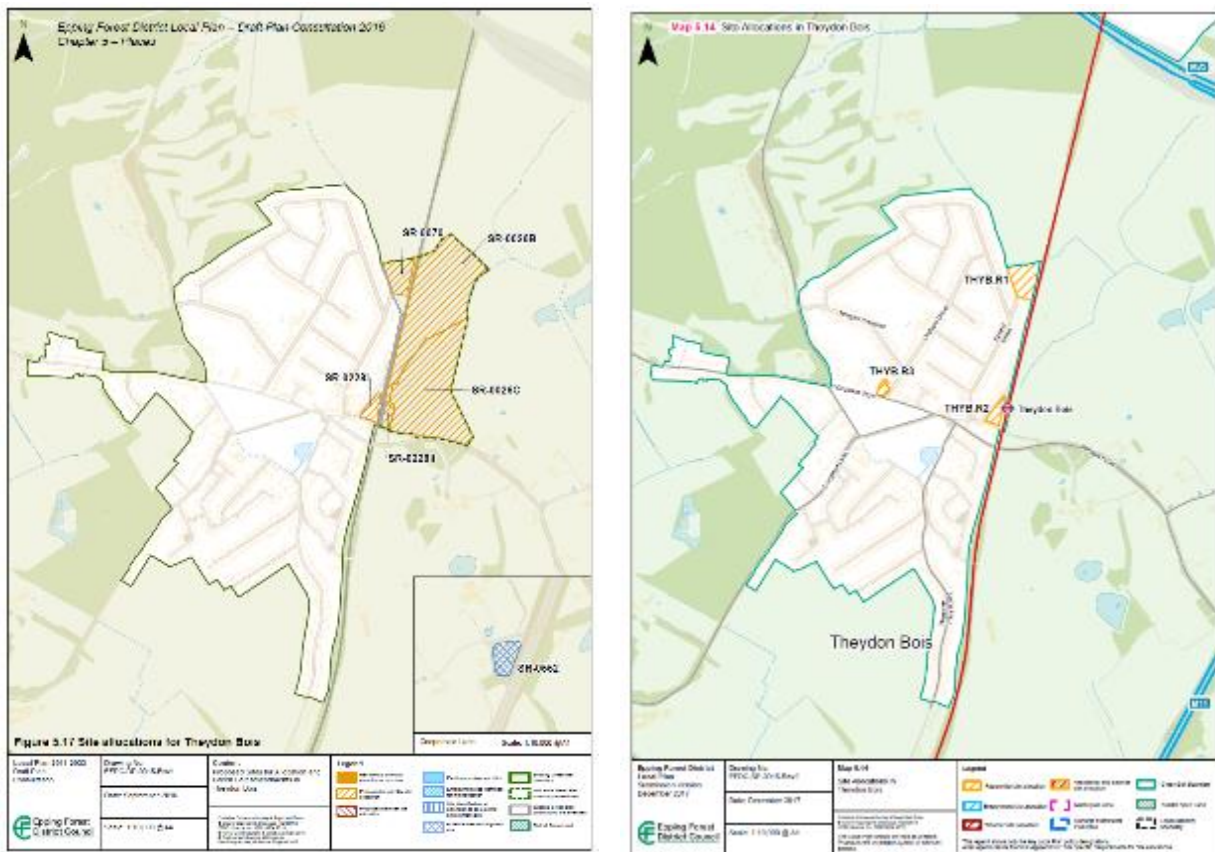


Figure 2: Housing Allocation in Theydon Bois in EFDC Local Plan 2016 and EFDC 2017 (draft for consultation)

2.2 The 2017 EFDC draft Local Plan has removed all but SR-0070 and SR-0228i within Theydon Bois and reduced the allocation to 57 homes. The 2017 Local Plan seeks to allocate the following three residential sites with Policy SP 2 and provided in Figure 2:

- i. THYB.R1 (formerly SR-0070) Land at Forest Drive – approximately 39 homes;
- ii. THYB.R2 (formerly SR-0228i) Theydon Bois London Underground Station car park – approximately 12 homes; and
- iii. THYB.R3 Land at Coppice Row – approximately 6 homes.

2.3 There is no clear justification within the Local Plan, or indeed its evidence base, for the removal of the allocations to the east of Theydon Bois railway, these are: SR-0026B, SR-0026C and SR- 0228ii.

3. Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) Screening of EFDC Local Plan Drafts

3.1 The Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) Screening of the 2016 EFDC Regulation 18 Local Plan (Aecom, 2016) provided guidance to the required mitigation for such allocations. Section 6.4.10 stated that:

“as an interim measure, it is recommended that Epping Forest District Council should, in line with Draft Policies DM 3 and DM 4, require:

- a) All outline or (if outline permission has already been obtained) detailed housing applications (that have not already received a Resolution to Grant permission) for more than 400 dwellings in Loughton, Epping, Waltham Abbey, Theydon Bois and Chigwell to deliver their own on-site accessible natural greenspace (typically at a rate of 8ha per 1000 population, although this can be judged against quality and accessibility on a case by case basis) and make a financial contribution towards access management of the SAC; and*
- b) All other outline or detailed residential applications (that have not already received a Resolution to Grant permission) in the same settlements to make a financial contribution to access management of the SAC.*

The size of the tariff remains to be determined but should be confirmed prior to submission of the Local Plan to the Secretary of State. This will be an interim tariff until the visitor survey and analysis is completed and the need for any additional mitigation is identified.”

3.2 Draft Policy SP 2: Spatial Development Strategy 2011-2033, including the residential allocation SR-0026C – approximately 121 dwellings, suggests that the site has the potential to result in in-combination impacts relating to recreational pressure upon Epping Forest SAC (Aecom, 2016). The cumulative development in Theydon Bois was 360 units over five sites, including 121 units in SR-0026C, (Aecom, 2016). Hence, these would all require mitigation in the form of Suitable Accessible Natural Green Space (SANGS) to offset likely increases in recreational activity on Epping Forest SAC.

4. Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation

4.1 Epping Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (1,630.74ha) is strictly protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (The Habitats Regulations, 2017). Natural England's currently published Site Improvement Plan (SIP) lists a range of pressures on the woodland habitats including air pollution and public access/disturbance. The measures to maintain site integrity (the favourable conservation status of the site features) include "a Nitrogen Action Plan" and in relation to public access/disturbance "the identification of key areas and plan to be implemented".

4.2 The City of London Corporation's (CLC) management plan (CLC, 2017) for Epping Forest states that it is trying to determine the carrying capacity of Epping Forest in relation to public disturbance and hence meet its obligations under the Habitats Regulations (2017) which requires it as the competent authority to maintain favourable conservation status of all European designated sites. Currently, the carrying capacity is not defined.

4.3 The CLC response to the Local Plan (December 2016):

The allocation at Theydon Bois is a very large block of housing which would represent over 20% increase in the population of this settlement. This would need a SANG in our view, despite the lower than 400 house threshold (see HRA para 6.4.10).

5. Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) Requirements and Features

5.1 The current SANGS guidelines were developed for the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) and specifically to avoid issues of disturbance especially by dogs that are let off the lead and consequent lowered breeding success of ground-nesting birds that are the designated features of the SPA; the principal species include nightjar and woodlark. This guidance has been more widely adopted for other European protected sites, including SAC where the features are vegetation types.

5.2 There is an increasing body of evidence that demonstrates that recreation and in particular dogs not only disturb wildlife especially when off the lead but also alter the vegetation through defaecation, although effects are most marked close to car parks and close to paths. A research project on the recreational impacts on Cannock Chase SAC (White *et al.*, 2012) is relevant to Epping Forest SAC because of the similarity in woodland and acid-grassland vegetation types. This demonstrated some likely significant effects from increased recreational disturbance. Hence it is prudent to adopt the guidance from Natural England (2008) that suggests that an area of SANGS is provided for new residential development at the rate of 8ha/1,000 new residents.

5.3 The average household size in EFDC was 2.4 in 2016 (Epping Forest District Local Plan – Draft Plan Consultation 2016, BPG1 - Housing Background Paper).

- 5.4** The SANGS requirement for 121 dwellings is (121 x 2.4 persons/dwelling) = 290 people and this equates to **2.32ha of SANGS** based on a rate of 8ha/1,000 increase in the local population as advised by Natural England.
- 5.5** A financial contribution of £50 - £150 per household has been employed in other authorities where some element of SANGS has been agreed. The contribution mitigates either any balance of SANGS required (i.e. to offset a deficiency in SANGS provision) and also the cumulative effects of development.
- 5.6** Notwithstanding that a financial contribution might be acceptable, the draft landscape strategy plan (Figure 3) would provide **c.3.56ha of SANGS** in relation to the site including a proportion of the proposed allocation SR-0026C. This is 50% greater than the SANGS requirement of 2.32ha and will therefore more than offset all recreational pressures arising from the residential development. Within the site there will be requirement for a buffer to the stream and maintain the existing footpath parallel to the stream, and there is scope for 1.2km circular path together with 0.3km central path on either side of the central shelterbelt. There is also the opportunity to connect to/improve the extensive footpath network to the north of the site. A review of the attributes of the site in relation to Natural England's SANGS guidelines is provided in Table 1.

Table 2: Natural England SANGS Checklist Applied to the Site

No.	Criterion	Remarks
1	Parking on all sites larger than 4ha (unless the site is intended for use within 400m only)	Not required but may be considered
2	Circular walk of 2.3-2.5km	✓ Circular walk of >1.2km within site and directly connected to circular walks >2.5km on PRoW to the north of site
3	Car parks easily and safely accessible by car and clearly sign posted	Not required but may be considered
4	Access points appropriate for particular visitor use the SANGS is intended to cater for	✓
5	Safe access route on foot from nearest car park and/or footpath	✓
6	Circular walk which starts and finishes at the car park	✓
7	Perceived as safe – no tree and scrub cover along part of walking routes	✓
8	Paths easily used and well maintained but mostly unsurfaced	✓
9	Perceived as semi-natural with little intrusion of artificial structures	✓
10	If larger than 12 ha then a range of habitats should be present	✓ new broadleaved woodland or scattered trees and meadows within greenspaces
11	Access unrestricted – plenty of space for dogs to exercise freely and safely off the lead	✓
12	No unpleasant intrusions (e.g. sewage treatment smells etc)	✓
13	Clearly sign posted or advertised in some way	✓
14	Leaflets or website advertising their location to potential users (distributed to homes and made available at entrance points and car parks)	✓
15	Can dog owners take dogs from the car park to the SANG safely off the lead	✓
16	Gently undulating topography	✓

No.	Criterion	Remarks
17	Access points with signage outlining the layout of the SANGS and routes available to visitors	✓
18	Naturalistic space with areas of open (non-wooded) countryside and areas of dense and scattered trees and shrubs. Provision of open water is desirable	✓
19	Focal point such as a view point or monument within the SANGS	To be considered

5.7 In addition, the area to the north of the site is well served by public rights of way (PRoW) and includes two local wildlife sites (LWS) (Figure 4). The site perimeter path will connect north over the stream (PRoW 208_04) and also east onto the adjoining land (PRoW 208_05), which with PRoW 209_14 and 209_27, forms a much longer circular route with access beyond the M25 via the underpass towards Coopersale Hall Farm and the southern edge of Epping.

5.8 The presence of the LWS demonstrates that no further development is feasible or likely under local planning policy. There is scope for biodiversity enhancement of the LWS and adjacent land and that this area also provides a valuable local SANGS for the use of Theydon Bois residents. This may even form the basis for the establishment of some form of local nature reserve or country park. The proposed development of SR-0026C could facilitate this wider SANGS development.



Figure 3: Landscape Strategy Plan for the Site

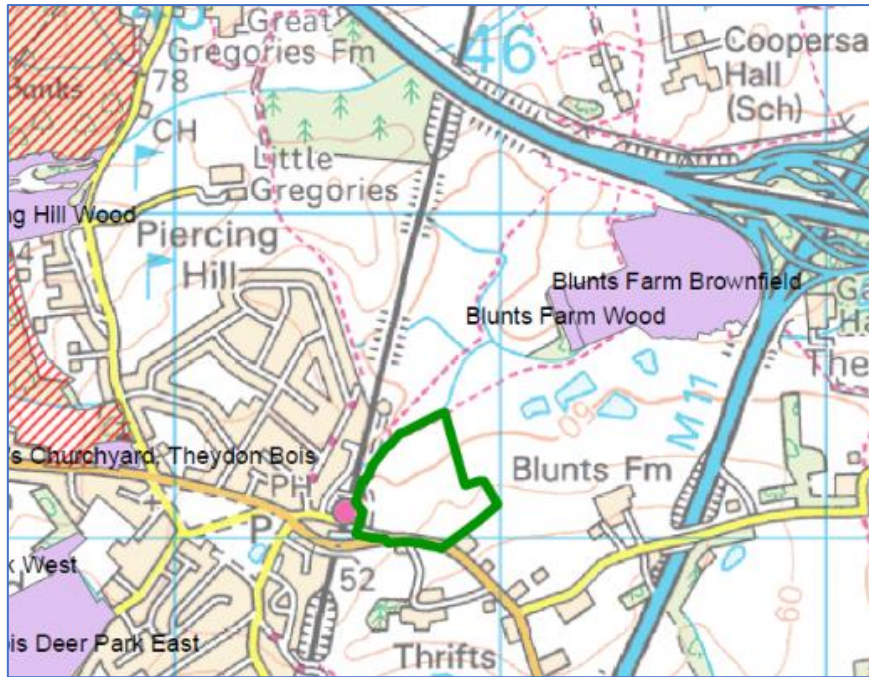


Figure 4: Wider Site SANGS Plan including Public Rights of Way and Local Wildlife Sites

5.9 If a new footpath or other access could be created across the railway line, this would link existing housing to the west of the railway with this new SANGS. This would reduce the requirement for existing residents to visit the SAC for recreation, especially routine dog walking. Such a scheme could provide a net benefit to the conservation of Epping Forest SAC and meets the requirement to deliver a local SANGS strategy.

6. Comparison of other allocations

6.1 AECOM (2017) noted that two site allocations, SR-0361 (LOU.R5) (Jessel Green) and SR-0478B (CHIG.R6) (Limes Farm), both within 3km of Epping Forest SAC could result in the loss of areas of existing green infrastructure that are used for recreational activities. In other words, they are current SANGS. As such the presence of these green spaces is likely to divert a level of recreational activity away from Epping Forest, therefore the loss of these sites, could result in an increase in recreational pressure upon the Forest, which is then compounded by the provision of an increase in net new dwellings.

6.2 AECOM (2017) identified 10 sites within 400m of the SAC boundary (Table 3) and stated that the City of London Corporation has identified that effects from urbanisation is a problem within the Forest. A 400m boundary was incorporated as a buffer distance and is based on Natural England's 'Delivery Plan' for the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, which concluded that adverse effects of any development located within 400m of the SPA boundary could not be mitigated. This has become more widely adopted in relation to all European designated sites and especially in relation to urbanisation effects. THYB.R3 Land at Coppice Row (identified

for approximately 6 homes) is one of the 10 sites within 400m of the SAC. The City of London Corporation identified that effects from urbanisation is a problem within the Forest. For example, fly-tipping and litter costs the Corporation approximately £250,000 per a year to address. This has a direct impact on their available budget and thus ability to sustainably manage and enhance the Forest’s environment, including the SACs special features. As such, urbanisation and recreational pressure are inter-linked. Given this and the presence of sites within 400m of the SAC this impact cannot be dismissed. Consequently, sites more than 400m but within 4km of the SAC are considered preferable locations.

Table 3: Allocations within 400m of Epping Forest SAC (Aecom, 2017)

Reference	Name	Approximate Allocation
EPP.R1 (West)	Land South of Epping (West)*	450
EPF/0055/17 (LOU.R17)	Land to the rear of High Road	12
EPF/0719/17 (LOU.R18)	Land at High Beech Road	8
SR-0527 (LOU.R6)	Royal Oak public house	10
SR-0565-N (LOU.R7)	Loughton Library	20
SR-0834 (LOU.R8)	Land west of High Road	29
SR-0176 (BUCK. R1)	Land at Powell Road	31
SR-0225 (BUCK.R2)	Queens Road car park	41
SR-0813 (BUCK.R3)	Stores at Lower Queens Road	15**
SR-1020 (THYB.R3)	Land at Coppice Row	6
Total Allocation		622

*Just outside the 400m allocation but included by Aecom (2017) as it is a large allocation

** also with retail floorspace

7. Delivering Net Biodiversity Gains to Epping Forest SAC by Releasing SR-0026C

7.1 The broad strategy for protection of Epping Forest SAC is set out in Policy DM2:

In pursuit of protecting the vulnerable habitat of Epping Forest the Council seeks to provide alternative spaces and corridors that can relieve the recreational pressure on the Forest. It recognises that additional development in the District is likely to give rise to further visitor pressure on the Forest that needs to be mitigated. This can be achieved by increasing public access to land that is not in the Forest, and altering the character of existing open spaces and the links between open spaces. These linkages are intended to improve access for walkers, dog walkers, cyclists and horse riders, as well as provide space, including additional space for wildlife and plant species.

7.2 Hence, we suggest that the following criteria would meet national and local planning policy and well as they key tests of the Habitats Regulations (2017):

- 1) No allocation of greenspace for housing within 400m of the Epping Forest SAC boundary because of significant urbanisation effects;

- 2) Allocate sites between 400m and 4km of Epping Forest SAC but ensure provision of SANGS that exceed the Natural England area requirements and site attributes;
- 3) Identify additional SANGS that complement the proposed housing allocations within the wider landscape;
- 4) Do not allocate existing urban green spaces within 4km of Epping Forest SAC as these have an important SANGS function;
- 5) Manage new SANGS as new local nature reserves or urban greenspaces.

7.3 The site that incorporates SR-0026C fits these criteria well with a SANGS provision within the site that exceeds the Natural England guidelines, and the opportunity to facilitate the creation of a larger SANGS to the north and east that incorporates existing local wildlife sites. As such, incorporating SR-0026C into the housing allocation at Theydon Bois promotes a win-win strategy for local people and wildlife and a net benefit to the conservation of Epping Forest SAC.

8. References

Aecom (2016) Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening of Epping Forest District Council Regulation 18 Local Plan. Aecom, Basingstoke.

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