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Date: 19 December 2023

Dear Inspectors,

Shropshire Council – River Clun Catchment Update

1. Introduction

- 1.1. As you are aware, the River Clun Catchment Special Area of Conservation (SAC) has been identified as being affected by nutrient pollution. As a result, Natural England and the Environment Agency have raised objections to the Council's proposed approach to development within this catchment within the draft Shropshire Local Plan.
- 1.2. Since submission of the draft Shropshire Local Plan, the Council has continued proactive engagement with Natural England, the Environment Agency, and Severn Trent Water regarding the River Clun SAC, including through the Clun Strategic Liaison Group. This engagement is consistent with the request in paragraph 28 of your Interim Findings (ID28).
- 1.3. This proactive engagement has been informed by further evidence prepared by Shropshire Council, including the River Clun SAC Phosphate Mitigation Solutions for Residential Development Report and associated material (GC4u-GC4w and GC4y) and the recently completed River Clun SAC Solutions Report (enclosed with this correspondence).
- 1.4. It has also been informed by updated national guidance provided on this matter (such as that referenced within previous Council correspondence GC16). The Council understands Natural England will establish Nutrient Mitigation Schemes to deliver mitigation measures in those catchments identified as being affected by nutrient pollution (such as the River Clun SAC) and there is an expectation that this will contribute to the evidence base for Local Plans.



2. Natural England Updated Position Statement

- 2.1. Natural England have now prepared an Updated Position Statement on the River Clun SAC, which is enclosed with this correspondence.
- 2.2. Shropshire Council acknowledges the continued concern expressed by Natural England regarding the need to establish the 'blueprint' for achieving restoration of the River Clun SAC, before determining which mechanisms are suitable for achieving nutrient neutrality to support development within the catchment.
- 2.3. However, the Council feels it is important to note that Natural England do not dispute there will, in due course, be measures available to achieve both site restoration and nutrient neutrality to support development.
- 2.4. A series of main modifications have previously been proposed to draft Policy DP13: Development in the River Clun Catchment, of the draft Shropshire Local Plan. The intention of these proposed main modifications was to address the concerns raised by Natural England and the Environment Agency.
- 2.5. It is the opinion of the Council that the impact of the Policy DP13 along with the proposed main modifications, would be to only allow development to occur within the Clun Catchment where it achieves at least nutrient neutrality; where measures to achieve this can be maintained for the lifetime of the development's effects; and, where measures to achieve this do not compromise the ability of the River Clun SAC to reach favourable conservation status.
- 2.6. As such, the Council considers that the draft Shropshire Local Plan, along with the proposed main modifications, is consistent with the updated position now set out by Natural England. We recognise Natural England do not confirm position in their letter.
- 2.7. Shropshire Council also acknowledges that Natural England are currently unable to provide specific timescales for preparation of the 'blueprint' for restoration of the River Clun SAC. However, it is apparent from the Updated Position Statement that good progress has been made on this 'Blueprint' and it is a priority for Natural England. This is a position fully supported by Shropshire Council.
- 2.8. The draft Shropshire Local Plan is proposed to cover the period from 2016-2038. The delivery assumptions for all existing and proposed allocations within the River Clun Catchment are purposely forecast to be



delivered in the latter part of the Plan period, and are therefore, in the view of the Council, consistent with the need to allow sufficient time for Natural England to prepare the 'Blueprint' for restoration of the River Clun SAC.

- 2.9. Specifically, Appendix 7 of the draft Shropshire Local Plan, which provides forecasts for delivery timescales for proposed allocations, does not envisage development occurring on any site within the River Clun Catchment until 2035 at the earliest.
- 2.10. Similarly, the latest Housing Land Supply Statement prepared by the Council in the context of the draft Shropshire Local Plan (GC33), does not envisage development occurring on any existing or proposed allocations within the River Clun Catchment until 2035 at the earliest.
- 2.11. Shropshire Council recognises the considerable opportunity associated with the proposed Bishop's Castle WwTW project. This proposed project would ensure that development proposed at Bishop's Castle would not effect the River Clun SAC as it would no longer form part of its catchment. The Council is continuing to proactively engage with Severn Trent Water regarding this and other projects related to the River Clun Catchment.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1. Shropshire Council is committed to continued proactive engagement within Natural England, the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water, including through the Clun Strategic Liaison Group.
- 3.2. The Council will provide further updates on this matter as and when appropriate during the ongoing examination of the draft Shropshire Local Plan.

Kind regards

Edward West

Planning Policy and Strategy Manager

Shropshire Council

