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Eastleigh Local Plan Inspector  
c/o Mrs Louise St John Howe  
Programme Officer

## **Strategy – Strategic Planning**

Our Ref:  
Your Ref:  
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Dear Ms Masters

### **EBC response to Inspector's query (2nd April 2019) on how the New Forest recreation mitigation could be identified without the survey work being completed**

As set out in the Habitats Regulation Assessment, the Eastleigh Borough Local Plan will deliver approximately 14,580 dwellings within c.20km of the New Forest and in the absence of avoidance and/or mitigation measures, this level of residential development could increase disturbance from people and their dogs. The Council is part of a partnership addressing this issue and an updated evidence base will be in place by the end of the year. The partnership will develop a strategic approach to mitigation alongside and following this updated evidence. It will consider whether to identify a standard package of measures across the area or tailored packages for each local authority. Whichever approach is taken, the emerging Local Plan includes the commitment to deliver this mitigation strategy. Although much of the development proposed in the Local Plan either has planning permission or will not come forward before the full strategy is in place, the Council is working on an interim solution to fully address potential impacts before the full strategy is finalised.

The local authorities and environmental bodies within the Solent sub-region have a history of working together to address recreational disturbance. The Council is a member of the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership addressing the impact of new development on the coast. Following research on the extent of the issue, the partnership developed the Bird Aware programme that collects contributions to fund rangers, infrastructure improvements and communication tools.

Mitigation strategies are already in place in the local authorities with New Forest SPA/SAC/Ramsar sites within their boundary: New Forest National Park Authority; New Forest District Council; and Test Valley Borough Council. Although each strategy has a different methodology, they each consider the number of visits generated from development and measures needed to address the impact. Contributions are used to fund specific projects within the New Forest and to monitor their effectiveness.

In March 2018, the Government awarded a grant to fund research on recreational pressure. This was awarded to a partnership of local authorities within and adjacent to the New Forest including Eastleigh Borough Council and it also involves Natural

England and the Forestry Commission (who are responsible for nearly half of the land in the New Forest). The partnership is led by Test Valley Borough Council. The partnership appointed Footprint Ecology to undertake research into visitors to the New Forest from within 25km of the protected sites. This involves a telephone survey (now complete) and on-site visitor surveys and car parking counts (which are ongoing until the autumn). This research will be written up by the end of the year and will form the basis for a strategic approach to mitigation from local authorities close to the New Forest. It will update the evidence base to demonstrate the proportion of people visiting, how often people visit, where they have travelled from, the locations they visit and why, their activities and what proportion of these activities take place in the New Forest.

The telephone survey ran from November to December 2018 and interviewed 2,000 people (including 138 in Eastleigh borough), asking whether they had visited in the past 12 months, how this compared to other greenspaces, how often they visited and the activities undertaken. The draft telephone survey findings from Footprint Ecology (which will be available in an interim report later this month) and the original Tourism South East data from on-site surveys provide a framework for an interim strategy in Eastleigh borough until the partnership work is complete.

The draft findings from the telephone survey include:

- around two thirds of interviewees in Eastleigh borough had visited the New Forest in the past 12 months;
- the most common frequency of visits from Eastleigh borough residents was once a month or less than once a month;
- across the whole survey, the proportion of people who had visited the New Forest in the past year, and their frequency of visits, declined with distance and travel time;
- the proportion of visits to the New Forest as opposed to other greenspaces also declined with distance and travel time;
- for people travelling 10km or more, the most common activity undertaken was walking; and
- part of the reason why people visit the New Forest relates to the intrinsic characteristics of the landscape; however many people from nearby urban areas visit locations outside of the European designated sites, for example the larger villages of Lyndhurst, Burley, Brockenhurst and Lymington.

As would be expected, the emerging findings show that Eastleigh residents are less reliant on the New Forest and make fewer visits than residents living closer by. In advance of the completion of the research, the extent of the mitigation required will be calculated based on the average number of visits generated by new homes and reflecting the estimated proportion of households who visit the New Forest and designated SPA/SAC/Ramsar sites each year.

Within the borough, there is scope to provide SANGS (including within the west of Horton Heath and SGO developments and in the new country park in Bursledon) and implement changes to existing open spaces and routes. By improving facilities, increasing capacity and delivering a network of routes and spaces, these will be increasingly attractive as an alternative to visiting the New Forest.

The Council has identified a number of projects to improve open spaces and deliver footpath improvements as set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Capital Investment Programme. In addition, Hampshire County Council has identified strategic (and non-strategic) infrastructure projects within the borough and cross-boundary. These include improvements to HCC country parks and routes to these parks within the borough; and improving and connecting existing routes to help deliver a strategic network of walking, cycling and riding routes.

A proportion of the visits to the New Forest will be due to the intrinsic character of the New Forest, its landscape, nature and scale, and therefore cannot be diverted to other locations. Access management measures such as changes to car parks, way-marking and improvements to routes can be used to direct people to non-designated areas within the New Forest. In addition, face to face contact, communications, education and events help promote responsible recreation while visiting designated areas. Projects are already in place in the New Forest and contributions could be made to extend these further to address extra visits from Eastleigh residents.

Therefore, given the established programmes in place within the New Forest, the proposals to create new open spaces / SANGS (including as part of new development) and to improve access within the Borough, and the imminent release of the initial results of the telephone survey, the Council will be in a position to devise an interim strategy to inform the Local Plan examination. This interim strategy will be completed by 21<sup>st</sup> June 2019.

Yours sincerely

Graham Tuck

**PLANNING POLICY – SENIOR SPECIALIST**