

Extract from City of York Composite Modifications Schedule (April 2021):

PM70 Proposed new policy as follows:

GI2a: Strensall Common Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Development not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the SAC will only be permitted where it will not adversely affect the integrity of the Strensall Common SAC, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Proposals will be determined in accordance with the following principles:

- a) There is an 'exclusion zone' set at 400m linear distance from the SAC boundary. Permission will not be granted for development that results in a net increase in residential units within this zone. Proposals for non-residential development within this zone must undertake Habitats Regulation Assessment to demonstrate that they will not harm the integrity of the SAC.***
- b) There is a 'zone of influence' between 400m and 5.5km linear distance from the SAC boundary.***
- I. Where new residential development is proposed within the zone of influence on allocated housing sites SS9/ST7, SS10/ST8, SS11/ST9 and SS12/ST14, provision of open space must include secure access to areas of suitable natural greenspace secured by way of mitigation prior to any occupation of new dwellings and secured in perpetuity.***
 - II. Proposals for other housing development which are not within plan allocations will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that they will have no adverse effects on the integrity of the SAC, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Any necessary mitigation measures may be sought through planning contributions and must be secured prior to the occupation of any new dwellings and secured in perpetuity. Open space provision must also satisfy policy GI6.***

PM71 New Policy GI2a Justification:

Strensall Common is designated as a Special Area for Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It also has biodiversity value above its listed features in the SSSI/SAC designations that will need to be fully considered.

At over 570ha, it supports one of the largest areas of lowland heath in northern England. Extensive areas of both wet and dry heath occur and form a complex habitat mosaic with grassland, woodlands/scrub and ponds. Grazing, by sheep and cattle is the key management tool with stock typically present during summer and autumn. The heathland supports a diverse flora and fauna including such characteristic (and vulnerable) species such as nightjar, woodlark, marsh gentian, pillwort, pond mud snail and dark bordered beauty moth, with Strensall Common representing the only site for this species in England.

Strensall Common is managed by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Ministry of Defence (MOD) who operate an extensive training facility and firing range within and adjacent to the European site.

The heath is subject to considerable recreational pressure from visitors, especially those with dogs. Although an established network of paths and periodic closures of part of the heath by the MOD (to facilitate training activities) can influence visitor behaviour. However, both the dry and wet heath habitats are particularly vulnerable to trampling, erosion and vandalism such as fire, flytipping, pollution and other activities associated with visitor pressure. Although the common is already under intense recreational pressure, there are birds of conservation concern amongst other species and habitats which could be harmed by the intensification of disturbance.

In 2011, all of Strensall Common SSSI was considered by Natural England to be in favourable or unfavourable-recovering condition. However, the corresponding Site Improvement Plan identifies a number of threats including, inter alia, public pressure and air pollution. Natural England's Supplementary Advice (2019) highlights the threat posed to the maintenance of the grazing regime by the worrying and subsequent disturbance of livestock by dogs brought by visitors.

In addition, the heathland habitat is vulnerable to changes in the hydrological regime and air quality, which will need to be considered and assessed in detail for any proposed development.

The Habitat Regulation Assessment (2020) has established that adverse effects on the integrity of the common cannot be ruled out without mitigation. The HRA suggests that residential development allocations (in Policy H1) within 5.5km of the common are likely to lead to an increase in recreational pressure which will require mitigation in the form of suitable natural greenspace and such other measures as may be considered necessary to prevent an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC. Relevant policies/sites include strategic sites SS9(ST7), SS10 (ST8), SS11(ST9), SS12(ST14), SS15(ST17) and Policy H1 (allocation H46). The delivery of appropriate recreational open space on these sites will also need to be considered in line with policy G16. The HRA also anticipates that unallocated windfall development may come forward, although it is not possible at this stage to predict precisely where it will be proposed. To ensure that it does not cause any adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC, the HRA recommends the following policy controls: (1) no net additional dwellings will be permitted within 400m of the SAC, as it is not considered possible to prevent adverse effects from development in such close proximity to the SA; (2) where windfall development is proposed between 400m and 5.5km from the SAC, permission will not be granted unless it can be demonstrated that the proposals will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the SAC, both in respect of the proposals themselves and in combination with other development; (3) any necessary measures which avoid or reduce such effects must be provided before first occupation and established in perpetuity. The Council will have to consider whether planning obligations will be required, including financial contributions to secure such measures. Proposals must also comply with Policy G16 which requires that all residential proposals contribute to the provision of open space, in particular helping to address deficiencies in the area surrounding a proposed development.

Applicable 400m development exclusion zone

