



Input to Consultation on Local Plan Focused Changes

Melton Country Park is currently surrounded on the north and east by open countryside which provides enhancements to biodiversity and geodiversity. The Park has QEII Fields in Trust status and has recently been designated a Local Wildlife Site, in recognition of its importance for the conservation of wildlife. The Friends support the need for new homes but are gravely concerned that proposed housing development adjacent to the Park will have a severe detrimental impact on the biodiversity and rural nature of the Park, effectively changing it from a country park to a town park. Indeed the Planning Inspector in his Core Strategy recommendations (April 2013) noted, *'the cutting off from the open countryside of the Country Park will also have an adverse effect upon biodiversity.'*

The Friends welcome the latest amendments to Policy SS5 of the Local Plan that describes how, *'development should respond to the local topography and utilise it to define the protection zone.'* However, the Friends feel strongly that the Council should go a step further and specify a minimum width for the protection zone, thereby removing any ambiguity and that this should be mandated by the Council for any planning applications abutting Melton Country Park. Such a buffer would provide protection for the wildlife that inhabits the Park, by reducing the negative impact of any noise and light pollution arising from residential development. One example of this is Surrey Heath Borough Council, who have established a 400m buffer around a Special Protection Area within which no new net residential development will be permitted.

In April 2017 the Friends launched a campaign to establish a buffer zone between Melton Country Park and any future development. 1281 local residents and other park users showed their support by signing a petition, which was subsequently submitted to Melton Borough Council at a Full Council meeting on 19 July.

In previous representations about the Local Plan, the Friends advocated the creation of a buffer zone of some 500m around the Park's northern and eastern boundaries, this being broadly consistent with the 2km wide strip described in the 2012 Bingham to Melton Wildlife Corridor project. However, by utilising local topography as described in Policy SS5, the Friends have concluded that a narrower buffer of between 100 to 200m would provide at least some mitigation for the increased noise and light pollution arising from any housing development. This would offer invaluable protection to threatened or declining species including birds, mammals and reptiles that inhabit the Park and its immediate surroundings.

The Friends are passionate that Melton Country Park should remain true to its original vision of a diverse park with open aspects to the countryside, to be enjoyed by people and wildlife, now and into the future. Although there is a requirement to build new homes in Melton, the total land available in the town is considerably greater than required and as such, the Friends are confident that there is sufficient capacity to incorporate a protection zone around the Park, of the scale described above.

Finally, while the Friends understand the need for a relief road around the town incorporating an Eastern distributor link, the Friends request that it is designed and constructed in a manner which minimises the impact on the Park and is sensitive to the needs of wildlife that inhabits the Park and its immediate surroundings.