



## 6.7 Spatial planning and development

This section assesses the use of the spatial planning system to address pressures on the natural environment and to develop green infrastructure. Evidence as to how well the natural environment is faring at the hands of the planning system is limited and mainly anecdotal.

### 6.7.1 The planning system

The development and other use of land (excluding agriculture and forestry) is managed through the spatial planning process. Planning decisions can have significant positive and negative impacts on the natural environment. Therefore, spatial planning has a major role to play in safeguarding and enhancing the state of the natural environment.

There is a hierarchy of planning policy with national, regional and local government tiers. The Government's Planning Policy Statements (PPS) provide a national steer to the spatial plans prepared at regional and local authority levels. Planning decisions are based principally on policies within the development plan, which comprises the policies set out in Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) combined with the Development Plan Document (DPD) policies set out in the Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) prepared at local authority level.

The following are examples of safeguards for the natural environment built into planning policies at the different levels in the hierarchy.

**Planning Policy Statement:** At the end of 2007, the Government published its most recent PPS, on Planning and Climate Change. This has adopted many of the recommendations made by Natural England during the consultation process, and should help to ensure that planning policies and decisions at regional and local level will better secure both the mitigation and adaptation required to address climate change.

**Regional Spatial Strategy:** The East of England Plan includes a range of policies dealing with the natural environment. These include a policy for green infrastructure to be identified, created, protected and managed to ensure that an improved and healthy environment is available for the benefit of present and future communities. Another policy requires future policies, programmes and proposals to afford the highest level of protection to the East of England's best landscapes. A further policy requires planning authorities and other agencies to ensure that the region's wider biodiversity, geodiversity and natural resources are protected and enriched through the conservation, restoration and re-establishment of key resources.

**Local Development Frameworks (LDF):** As part of its LDF, High Peak Borough Council has a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) that provides guidance for the design of new developments and alterations to existing developments, including associated landscape design. It supports Policy OC4 of the current Local Plan, which requires development in the countryside to be appropriate to landscape character. The aim of the SPD is to provide guidance on what that means for different Landscape Character Types in the Borough and how it can be achieved. The landscape types are based on those in the Landscape Character Assessment (Derbyshire County Council 2003). For each Landscape Character Type, this SPD identifies key characteristics and their implications for the siting, design and appearance of new development. This Supplementary Planning Document serves as a new approach to guiding development. It regards all landscapes as valuable and seeks to protect their essential character by making sure that the change that takes place supports rather than erodes landscape character.

### 6.7.2 Planning for Green Infrastructure

Natural England is involved, alongside the Department for Communities and Local Government, Defra and the Environment Agency, in assessing Growth Point and Ecotown bids (see Section 5.4.2), and setting and monitoring strict environmental conditions for them, such as provision of Green Infrastructure. Natural England believes that each Growth Point and Ecotown should be underpinned by a robust Green Infrastructure strategy.

Green Infrastructure can be defined as a strategically planned and delivered network comprising the broadest range of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multi-functional resource capable of delivering those ecological services and quality of life benefits required by the communities it serves as well

as those needed to underpin sustainability. Its design and management should also respect and enhance the character and distinctiveness of an area with regard to habitats and landscape types.

For example, the East London Green Grid concept aims to provide residents and workers with a network of green space that will improve their quality of life. The network of interlinked, multi-functional and high-quality open spaces would connect with town centres, public transport nodes, the countryside in the urban fringe, the Thames and major employment and residential areas. This would be achieved through the creation of new public spaces, the enhancement of existing open spaces and improvements to the links between them.

#### Thames Basins Heaths

In the Thames Basins Heaths on the borders of Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire, Natural England has spear-headed a strategic approach to ensure that new housing addresses legal requirements to safeguard the internationally protected heathland areas. Because of their importance as a breeding habitat for scarce ground-nesting birds, such as nightjar (pictured), these fragmented heaths were classified as a Special Protection Area under the Birds Directive. The delivery of housing targets set for this part of the south east, however, was threatening the protection of these important sites, due to the potential impact on ground-nesting birds as a result of increased recreational pressure. Natural England promoted a strategy for the provision of alternative recreational space, which has been recognised by the South East Plan, and is now being progressed by the Regional Assembly and the relevant local authorities in the Thames Basin Heaths area. If adopted, the strategy will allow housing to proceed in accordance with the legal protection afforded by the Habitats Directive.



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### **Access to Natural Greenspace Standard**

Natural England is testing a new national assessment framework for ANGSt (Access to Natural Greenspace Standard), which builds on the ANGSt standard developed by English Nature and used in PPG17 as part of green space audits. The standard provides a clear guide for the provision of green space within regional and local authority development plans.

The ANGSt criteria are:

- No person should live more than 300 m from their nearest area of natural green space of at least 2 ha in size.
- There should be provision of at least 1 ha of Local Nature Reserve per 1,000 population.
- There should be at least one accessible 20 ha site within 2 km from home.
- There should be one accessible 100 ha site within 5 km.
- There should be one accessible 500 ha site within 10 km.

The 300 m standard (a straight-line distance) is based upon a requirement to provide green space within 5 minutes walk. Alternatively, it is possible to calculate actual distances covered within a 5 minute walk taking into account real walking routes.