

## **FAQs relating to the Thames Basin Heaths SPA - December 2007**

### **What is the SPA?**

The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) is a network of heathland sites which are designated for their ability to provide a habitat for the internationally important bird species of woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler.

In Bracknell Forest this covers the area south of the Look Out, Wildmoor Heath and Crowthorne Woods.

### **Why might this mean my planning application for housing has been / will be refused?**

The site is protected by European and UK law which means the Council must make sure none of its activities cause harm to the protected bird species.

Natural England (conservation advisor to government) has advised the Council that any proposal for residential development (even one net additional dwelling) within 5km of the SPA may have an effect on the birds. This is because an increase in recreation and dog-walking may disturb the birds' nests. If there is likely to be harm then the new housing cannot be permitted. In order to allow development to take place without harming the SPA, avoidance and mitigation measures must be agreed with the Council and Natural England.

### **How can development provide avoidance and mitigation measure which will enable it to proceed?**

A Strategy has been approved which sets out how adverse effects of new housing can be removed by the Council putting in place certain measures. These include works to areas of open space towards which residential development pays a contribution, in order to avoid impacts on the SPA.

### **Has the SPA Strategy been approved?**

Yes, it was approved by Executive on the 5 June 2007 and, as part of the Core Strategy, has since been found sound by the Planning Inspectorate. However, in order to implement this strategy, the Council must produce **Open Space Management Plans** in consultation with Natural England. These will set out the precise works to areas of open space and the priority order for these enhancements. Some management plans have been finalised, whilst others are still in development, financial contributions can only be accepted where capacity exists and a management plan has been agreed.

The Council has been accepting contributions towards SPA measures since August.

### **How much is the financial contribution?**

£1,536 per dwelling.