

# MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**Your Ref: PINS Ref: TR010060**

**Our Ref: MDC/A12/PINS/030123b**

Dear Sir,

## **RE: TR010060 - PROCEDURAL DEADLINE A - WRITTEN SUBMISSION ON SUGGESTED SITE INSPECTIONS – 3 JANUARY 2023**

I write on behalf of Maldon District Council with regards to your letter dated 12 December 2022 and its request to specify any locations that should be subject to a site inspection by the Examining Authority (ExA). The council has two recommendations as follows.

Firstly, it is recommended that the ExA undertake an Accompanied Site Inspection (ASI) at **Blue Mills Nature Reserve, Wickham Hill, Wickham Bishops, Maldon, Essex, CM8 3LH.**

**Justification:** This location is a well-established nature reserve along the east bank of the River Blackwater, wholly within private ownership. There is no clear, open public access and it is not accessible via any Public Right of Way. Nevertheless, with the DCO proposals, as an area it will still be materially impacted by the proposed Cadent Gas Main diversion (Annex C - Principal Issue 6 – Gas Pipeline Diversion).

Around a third of the Blue Mills Nature Reserve features within the *A12 to A120 Order Limit 2022*, with around half of the reserve also falling within its 200m buffer. As set out in the council's November 2022 Relevant Representation, the council surveyed the area in 2022 as part of its Local Development Plan Review and its ecology consultants, Essex Ecology Services (EECOS - the technical consultancy of Essex Wildlife Trust) have recommended that land including the reserve's limits and a stretch of the riparian corridor of the River Blackwater also be designated a new Maldon District Local Wildlife Site (LoWS). Its report notes it being of "important ecological habitat value and [a] significant wildlife corridor..." with diverse species including two veteran, rare female Black Poplars which it felt "...are possibly the best examples of the species in Essex." This site is known to support a variety of wildlife including bats, owls, otters and red kites. The Order Limit affects around 0.5ha of this recommended LoWS, which remains a significant concern for the District Council given its biodiversity and wider landscape value. Furthermore, the council confirmed an area Tree Preservation Order for a large part of the reserve in 2022 given the notable species present.

The uncertainty of the detailed path the rerouted gas main could take through the broader corridor identified in Maps 8 and 9 of the submitted DCO (particularly given the permanent tree/vegetation loss resulting in long-term landscape impacts and potentially significant ecological impacts to habitats and species that have not had the benefit of being informed by satisfactory surveys in advance of the DCO application being submitted) justifies the ExA familiarising itself with the environmental context of the Blue Mills Nature Reserve to ensure harm is reduced as much as possible and avoided or adequately mitigated in the DCO to determine the exact path and construction methods that should be used.

It is understood the landowners have also requested their reserve be subject to an ASI, but the council is happy to provide any necessary support to the ExA or landowner in making these arrangements if necessary.

Secondly, it is also recommended that the ExA undertake Unaccompanied Site Inspections (USI) that include the **Duke of Wellington mini-roundabout and Maldon Road junction in Hatfield Peverel village, Braintree District** at a peak time, during a weekday.

**Justification:** The council feels the ExA should appreciate fully the physical context of the existing entry and exit point of traffic from/to the Strategic Road Network for traffic going to, or originating from the Maldon District, in order to appreciate how it may, or may not change as a result of the project. The applicant's Transport Assessment confirms that the junction operates at "LoS E" at peak times and, even with the Project and its proposed mitigation the junction is forecast to perform worse in the future; which does not adequately support allocated growth in the Maldon District Local Development Plan, contrary to one of the project objectives set by National Highways.

Yours sincerely,

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Strategy, Policy & Communications Manager