

Executive 30 July 2019.

Agenda item 8 - South Hams Greater Horseshoe Bat SAC – HRA

Question from Councillor Mullone

*Regarding the new South Hams Special Area of Conservation – Habitat Regulations Assessment Guidance... Given the detailed reasons put forward by the WRA and APC, we trust that the Executive will elect NOT to adopt the guidance recommended by officers. The HRA guidance lately proposed fails to meet the required standard to meet the principle of no Lasting Significant Effect (LSE).*

*They represent a clear and deliberate watering-down of essential environmental safeguards, and after all we've heard lately about having to do questionable, ungreen things to satisfy Whitehall, this is something entirely in your court. And you have just declared a climate emergency. If you pass this guidance will you at least do the decent thing and admit that declaring this 'climate emergency' was done purely to appear fashionable*

### **Response from Portfolio for Planning**

There has been absolutely no watering down of the Bats' protections. As a European Wildlife Site, protected under international law, the South Hams Special Area of Conservation is afforded the highest level of protection possible. There is nothing we could have done via guidance to reduce the standard of protection, and of course we haven't. We have prepared the new HRA guidance to be more effective because it is based on more up to date knowledge gathered in the last 9 years, to ensure that these iconic South Devon residents will continue to live and thrive here for generations to come.

The new Guidance has been written by a group of ecological experts representing the 5 Local Planning Authorities and Natural England, and has also drawn expert guidance and advice from the University of Exeter, the Bat Conservation Trust, and other specialists in the field. The Guidance is the culmination of this expertise and knowledge plus extensive evidence derived from survey data and detailed studies undertaken. These professional ecologists are hardly going to water down any protection!

The guidance was objected to by various developers, including those promoting the Wolborough development. Clearly they don't think that this waters down protection either.

And the guidance itself is now much more fit for purpose and protective of the Bats' needs:

- It makes sure that full account will be taken of potential harm to the bats' habitat and food sources in a much wider area than previously, compared with the previous guidance which largely only considered a number of defined flyways.

- And of course, because they are in the wider “connectivity zone” or sustenance zones, the current defined flyways themselves are still fully protected.

This clearly demonstrates our commitment to environmental safeguards - in answer to your second question, we would confirm our commitment to the unanimous decision taken by this Council to declare a climate change emergency earlier this year.

But while our Executive will continue to steer what it considers the most effective course towards a zero carbon future - and our target date of 2025 - we do not have a monopoly on good ideas. We therefore ask for the continued support of all members - of all parties and of none - to help us in this ambitious aim.