MEDWAY COUNCIL
Summary report - Lodge Hill Technical Workshop – 25th September 2012

Location: Medway Council Offices, Chatham
Circulation: Attendees

1	Welcome & introductions	Action
	1. Brian McCutcheon (Medway Council) welcomed attendees and: a. confirmed that the Inspector has agreed to the process set out by Medway Council to consider the nightingale issue at Lodge Hill with examination of the core strategy suspended till 14th January 2013 b. noted that a Stakeholder Workshop is to be held following feedback from this Technical Workshop, Lodge Hill habitat condition and potential receptor site assessments – date to be confirmed c. noted that the Lodge Hill SSSI site notification is to be considered by Natural England on 1st October 2012.	
2	**Aims and programme for workshop**	
	1. Tom Tew (The Environment Bank) described the aims of the workshop, seeking consensus across all parties on the key technical issues on offsetting for nightingales and provide technical information to inform the Inspector on: a) Can offsetting work for nightingales? b) Can offsetting work for nightingales in Kent? c) Is there a reasonable prospect that offsetting would work at Lodge Hill? 2. Attendees were encouraged to speak openly and freely to explore the issues in scientific debate – the meeting would not be minuted and comments were not attributable; any views expressed were not prejudicial to any previous or subsequent positions. 3. The workshop was informed by three reports: a specially commissioned report by the BTO summarising the current scientific evidence on offsetting for nightingales; a list of potential nightingale receptor sites by GGKM; and a workshop programme and discussion document setting out some key issues by The Environment Bank. Additionally, several attendees had responded to a prior request to submit other potential receptor sites, and these had been circulated to all attendees.[D1]	• Produce report outlining consensus (EBL)

	4. The Environment Bank would produce a summary of the meeting (this report) setting out the key areas of agreement (or disagreement[D2]) and a list of actions – a draft summary would be circulated to all attendees for comment.	
3	**General summary of offsetting & Defra policy**	
	1. Tom Tew provided summary of biodiversity offsetting: introduced by Natural Environment White Paper on a voluntary basis. Defra pilots commenced in Spring 2012. Offsetting designed to deliver offsite compensation in a clear, quantifiable way to ensure sustainable development through no net loss of biodiversity at a minimum but with the aim of environmental gain. Outlined in National Planning Policy Framework guided via international standards. Offsetting designed for habitats although Defra guidelines allow for species offsetting to be designed on case-by-case basis. Offsetting is not intended to replace, undermine or reduce existing site and species legislation, and follows both on-site 'avoidance' and on-site 'mitigation' in the 'mitigation hierarchy'. • Point of information: Natural England noted that Lodge Hill needs to be treated as an SSSI until declared otherwise, and that the SSSI process is independent from the workshop process.	
4	**Overview of nightingale report – opportunity for questions to BTO**	
	1. Rob Fuller (BTO) outlined approach to nightingale report through review of literature and use of case studies and key findings – not exhaustive and limited time available. Key findings: a) Habitat dependencies – range limiting factors: climatically restricted; altitude: soil type; drainage; broad habitat type (scrub habitats more widely used); vegetation structure; food availability; social factors; landscape context and proximity to 'donor' sites. b) No known examples of large scale nightingale-specific habitat creation cases, but there are several examples of colonisation of derelict sites (notably post-quarrying). c) Many uncertainties relating to habitat creation for nightingales including speed of habitat creation, role of conspecific interactions, etc. with several examples of suitable nightingale habitat remaining unoccupied.	• Revise BTO report with workshop suggestions and submit to Medway Council for public record • Description of mulching to be included in nightingale report (BTO) • Examine case studies in more detail for additional technical

	d) Conclusion – habitat creation for nightingales in Kent is technically feasible, but is neither straightforward nor guaranteed. A suitable offset area would seem (based not on any habitat metric but on the number of pairs affected and comparisons with other sites) to be 300 – 400ha of the right habitat in the right place with the right management (such expert estimation does not seek to incorporate multipliers for 'risk'). 'Few large' areas are preferred to 'many small' areas. Proposed offset site selection could be based on a number of limiting factors e.g. habitat, size, altitude, wetness, presence of conspecifics, etc. 2. The workshop congratulated the BTO on their report and, with a number of suggestions that were accepted by the BTO for a final revision, agreed that it was an accurate and helpful summary of the factors affecting the success or otherwise of biodiversity offsetting for nightingales.	management information. Nightingale records through time held?
5	**Can offsetting work for nightingales?**	
	1. Consensus reached that offsetting could work *if* the offset site conditions required by nightingales (as stipulated in BTO report) are met. 2. Site-specific factors required for potential offsetting include: proximity to established nightingale populations, location in the core range, altitudinal and soil characteristics, association with water, habitat nuclei (shrub, hedgerows to seed further habitat), large habitat-diverse areas better than small. 3. Mulching of woodland coppice appears to offer a relatively quick rapid way to provide nightingale habitat but may provide lesser quality habitat that doesn't last (and may be contingent on certain woodland habitat types). An offsetting strategy to try and minimise ~~avoid~~[D3] temporary habitat loss would seem to require both woodland mulching to ensure some habitat available at earliest stage possible, along with longer term scrub creation or restoration.[D4] 4. Kent experts describe slight decline in nightingale numbers locally. Decline may be driven by factors outside UK and on migration, and by external factors such as deer grazing in breeding areas. 5. No evidence to determine whether 'habitat-metric' or 'pairs lost' approach more accurate to determining habitat area required – agreed to continue to use both methodologies.	• BTO to investigate further habitat management at Orleston.

6	**Discussion – can offsetting work for nightingales in Kent?**	
	1. Consensus that offsetting could work for nightingales in Kent, as above, but with the further caveat that optimal offset sites should be located as close to Lodge Hill as possible and within the county boundaries if possible. 2. Temporal lag in availability of created habitat at the outset appears to be unavoidable (even with a woodland mulching option to start to provide nightingale habitat in c.3 year time frame) and is an issue that needs further consideration. 3. It is desirable to have a solid ecological basis for site-selection and to seek the best sites rather than accept what is offered. Multi-criteria evaluations for site location, and suitability of landscape, are desired.	
7	**Discussion – is there a reasonable prospect that offsetting would work for the nightingales at Lodge Hill?**	
	1. There was not enough evidence (or time) for the workshop to properly debate this question and reach consensus. There might be a reasonable prospect that offsetting *could* work for nightingales at Lodge Hill but there remain very significant caveats and uncertainties in both the science and deliverability (including timescales) of an offsetting scheme. 2. Temporary loss can be mitigated with different habitat management techniques [D5]but cannot be avoided under the schedules currently proposed. There were a range of views on whether temporary loss of nightingale habitat was acceptable to deliver permanent net gain. 3. Better (more recent) information on the habitats at Lodge Hill site for nightingales is desirable – and wider scenarios of both direct and indirect (which is not well considered by the Defra metrics) habitat loss would be helpful e.g. consider all semi-natural habitats at Lodge Hill and in adjacent SSSI to be lost through development. 4. Develop and agree key criteria to determine site-selection process. Identifying habitat and site parameters crucial for suitable site selection. 5. Any additional potential offset sites would be welcomed.	• Desk study metric approach to offsetting to include all semi-natural habitats onsite and including indirect impacts on SSSI (EBL). • Develop key criteria for site selection invite input from workshop attendees (BTO/EBL). • Site visit to map all semi-natural habitat areas at Lodge Hill (EBL/BTO/TE). • Seek to identify best potential offset sites in Kent (GGKM/EBL/ BTO)

8	Programme	
	1. It was agreed that in order to complete the tasks required to inform the stakeholder workshop that it would be sensible to extend the planned programme by two weeks.	

[D1]Incorrect. I still haven't seen these.
[D2]See my concluding comments below
[D3]There was consensus that temporary habitat loss could not be avoided within the proposed development timescale and/or CS timescale, so this is misleading as written.
[D4]This is all contingent on what Tom referred to as the 'skeleton in the cupboard' which there still seems to be a determination to skirt round – i.e. the need to develop the site in a shorter timescale than would actually be appropriate for a successful offsetting strategy. Temporary loss would be much better avoided by creating high quality scrub habitat on a suitable site elsewhere and only removing habitat at LH once the new site was proven to be supporting nightingales. The problem is that this approach will take more time than the development/CS process is prepared to allow.
[D5]Forgive me, but this is a meaningless statement, and would need to be qualified by 'might' instead of 'can' in any event. Why not say "temporary loss could probably be avoided by giving compensatory habitat creation elsewhere time to work before removing habitat at LH". This would correctly identify time as a key piece of the offsetting jigsaw. I have a real problem with the evident reluctance to acknowledge this point in the note, and the implications it has for the credibility of the process. There is no argument amongst the parties on this 'inevitable temporary loss' point, so why can it not go on record?