

Date: 18 December 2024
Our ref: 495652
Your ref: DC/24/1538



Horsham District Council
Parkside
Chart Way
Horsham
West Sussex
RH12 1RL

Customer Services
Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ
T 0300 060 3900

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Sir/Madam,

Planning consultation: DC/24/1538 HRA & Appropriate Assessment & Water Neutrality Statement - Erection of 29 dwellings with associated landscaping, open space, parking & creation of new vehicular access.

Location: Land to the south of Furners Lane, Henfield, West Sussex

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 02 July 2024 which was received by Natural England on the same date.

Natural England is a non-departmental public body. Our statutory purpose is to ensure that the natural environment is conserved, enhanced, and managed for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

SUMMARY OF NATURAL ENGLAND'S ADVICE

FURTHER INFORMATION REQUIRED TO DETERMINE IMPACTS ON DESIGNATED SITES

As submitted, the application could have potential significant effects on Arun Valley Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar site as well as Amberley Wild Brooks site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Pulborough Brooks SSSI. Natural England requires further information in order to determine the significance of these impacts and the scope for mitigation.

The following information is required

- Further consideration of the proposed borehole offsetting scheme. .

Without this information, Natural England may need to object to the proposal.

Please re-consult Natural England once this information has been obtained.

Natural England's further advice on designated sites/landscapes and advice on other issues is set out below.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

Natural England notes that your authority, as competent authority, has undertaken an appropriate assessment of the proposal in accordance with regulation 63 of the Conservation of Species and Habitats Regulations 2017 (as amended). Natural England is a statutory consultee on the appropriate assessment stage of the Habitats Regulations Assessment process, and a competent authority should have regard to Natural England's advice.

Your appropriate assessment concludes that your authority is able to ascertain that the proposal will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of any of the sites in question. Having considered the assessment, and the measures proposed to mitigate for any adverse effects, it is the advice of Natural England that it is not possible to ascertain that the proposal will not result in adverse effects on the integrity of the sites in question.

Natural England advises that the assessment does not currently provide enough information and/or certainty to justify the assessment conclusion and that your authority should not grant planning permission at this stage.

Further assessment and consideration of mitigation options is required, and Natural England provides the following advice on the additional assessment work required;

Additional Information Required

The proposed development falls within the [Sussex North Water Supply Zone](#) (SNWSZ). As set out in Natural England's [Advice Note](#) regarding planning applications within the SNWSZ, the existing water supply in the zone cannot be ruled out as contributing to the declines in wildlife within internationally protected sites in the Arun Valley SPA, SAC and Ramsar site. Ensuring that there is no net increase in water consumption is recognised as a suitable method to rule out potential adverse effects on the integrity of these sites arising from development.

Natural England has considered the information provided in the submitted Water Neutrality Statement (26th September 2024), Appropriate Assessment (21st of November 2024), and the Water Neutrality Supporting Statement with appendices (P2027li, 31st October 2024), which also contains the Hydrogeological Conceptual Site Model Report (HCSMR). We advise that the following further information is required:

Proposed Mitigation

Water Credits

Having reviewed the submitted water neutrality statement, it is understood that 'water credits' are to be bought from a third party, following its lawful change of use (from a development that previously used a larger quantity of water, compared to the new development).

Whilst this is potentially an ecologically sound way of offsetting water usage at another site, Natural England would advise that you should be confident the following criteria can be met:

- That, as competent authority, you are satisfied that the savings in question can be secured via an appropriate mechanism, and that they will not be sold to another third party i.e., there is no double counting.

Subject to these criteria being met, Natural England is satisfied that the proposed 'savings / credits' can be used to help offset the impacts of this particular application. We would however advise that your authority should consider this approach and the mechanisms by which it would be secured as part of your appropriate assessment.

Borehole offsetting scheme

We note that the applicant is intending to offset the water use of the proposed development using a borehole scheme at Timberley Farm. While a borehole can be considered appropriate mitigation, there are several factors that need considered before it can be sufficiently certain.

Should the borehole demonstrate hydrogeological connectivity to the Wealden Greensand Semi-Confined Aquifer (also referred to as the Lower Greensand aquifer), water neutrality will still need to be achieved. Any boreholes with identified connectivity to wider features of the Arun Valley designated sites will need to consider potential impacts to these features, both alone and in-combination.

Natural England notes a Hydrogeological Conceptual Site Model Report (HCSMR), December 2023, has been submitted within the Water Neutrality Supporting Statement with appendices (P2027li, 31st October 2024). In this report, mention is made to the borehole's location being within the Folkestone Formation of the Lower Greensand Group.

We would therefore advise that your authority, as the competent authority should consider the findings of the HCSMR in your appropriate assessment. Appropriate assessments must contain complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions capable of removing all reasonable scientific doubt as to the effects of the works proposed on the protected site concerned.

Final Comments

Please note that if your authority is minded to grant planning permission contrary to the advice in this letter, you are required under Section 281 (6) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to notify Natural England of the permission, the terms on which it is proposed to grant it and how, if at all, your authority has taken account of Natural England's advice. You must also allow a further period of 21 days before the operation can commence.

Further general advice on the protected species and other natural environment issues is provided at Annex A.

If you have any queries relating to the advice in this letter please contact me ■■■■■

Please consult us again once the information requested above, has been provided.

Yours sincerely

Sam Ozaktanlar
Sussex and Kent Area Team

Annex A –Natural England general advice

Protected Landscapes

Paragraph 182 of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) requires great weight to be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (known as National Landscapes), National Parks, and the Broads and states that the scale and extent of development within all these areas should be limited. Paragraph 183 requires exceptional circumstances to be demonstrated to justify major development within a designated landscape and sets out criteria which should be applied in considering relevant development proposals. [Section 245](#) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 places a duty on relevant authorities (including local planning authorities) to seek to further the statutory purposes of a National Park, the Broads or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England in exercising their functions. This duty also applies to proposals outside the designated area but impacting on its natural beauty.

The local planning authority should carefully consider any impacts on the statutory purposes of protected landscapes and their settings in line with the NPPF, relevant development plan policies and the Section 245 duty. The relevant National Landscape Partnership or Conservation Board may be able to offer advice on the impacts of the proposal on the natural beauty of the area and the aims and objectives of the statutory management plan, as well as environmental enhancement opportunities. Where available, a local Landscape Character Assessment can also be a helpful guide to the landscape's sensitivity to development and its capacity to accommodate proposed development.

Wider landscapes

Paragraph 180 of the NPPF highlights the need to protect and enhance valued landscapes through the planning system. This application may present opportunities to protect and enhance locally valued landscapes, including any local landscape designations. You may want to consider whether any local landscape features or characteristics (such as ponds, woodland, or dry-stone walls) could be incorporated into the development to respond to and enhance local landscape character and distinctiveness, in line with any local landscape character assessments. Where the impacts of development are likely to be significant, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should be provided with the proposal to inform decision making. We refer you to the [Landscape Institute](#) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for further guidance.

Biodiversity duty

The local planning authority has a [duty](#) to conserve and enhance biodiversity as part of its decision making. Further information is available [here](#).

Designated nature conservation sites

Paragraphs 186-188 of the NPPF set out the principles for determining applications impacting on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and habitats sites. Both the direct and indirect impacts of the development should be considered. A Habitats Regulations Assessment is needed where there is a likely significant effect on a habitats site and Natural England must be consulted on '[appropriate assessments](#)'. Natural England must also be consulted where development is in or likely to affect a SSSI and provides advice on potential impacts on SSSIs either via [Impact Risk Zones](#) or as standard or bespoke consultation responses.

Protected Species

Natural England has produced [standing advice](#) to help planning authorities understand the impact of particular developments on protected species. Natural England will only provide bespoke advice on protected species where they form part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest or in exceptional circumstances. A protected species [licence](#) may be required in certain cases.

Local sites and priority habitats and species

The local planning authority should consider the impacts of the proposed development on any local wildlife or geodiversity site, in line with paragraphs 180, 181 and 185 of the NPPF and any relevant development plan policy. There may also be opportunities to enhance local sites and improve their connectivity to help nature's recovery. Natural England does not hold locally specific information on local sites and recommends further information is obtained from appropriate bodies such as the local records centre,

Annex A –Natural England general advice

wildlife trust, geoconservation groups or recording societies. Emerging [Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#) may also provide further useful information.

Priority habitats and species are of particular importance for nature conservation and are included in the England Biodiversity List published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Most priority habitats will be mapped either as Sites of Special Scientific Interest on the Magic website or as Local Wildlife Sites. A list of priority habitats and species can be found on [Gov.uk](#).

Natural England does not routinely hold species data. Such data should be collected when impacts on priority habitats or species are considered likely. Consideration should also be given to the potential environmental value of brownfield sites, often found in urban areas and former industrial land, further information including links to the open mosaic habitats inventory can be found [here](#).

Biodiversity and wider environmental gains

Development should provide net gains for biodiversity in line with the NPPF paragraphs 180(d), 185 and 186. Major development (defined in the [NPPF glossary](#)) is required by law to deliver a biodiversity gain of at least 10% from 12 February 2024 and this requirement is expected to be extended to smaller scale development in spring 2024. For nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs), it is anticipated that the requirement for biodiversity net gain will be implemented from 2025.

Further information on biodiversity net gain, including [draft Planning Practice Guidance](#), can be found [here](#).

The statutory [Biodiversity Metric](#) should be used to calculate biodiversity losses and gains for terrestrial and intertidal habitats and can be used to inform any development project. For small development sites, the [Small Sites Metric](#) may be used. This is a simplified version of the [Biodiversity Metric](#) and is designed for use where certain criteria are met.

The mitigation hierarchy as set out in paragraph 186 of the NPPF should be followed to firstly consider what existing habitats within the site can be retained or enhanced. Where on-site measures are not possible, provision off-site will need to be considered.

Development also provides opportunities to secure wider biodiversity enhancements and environmental gains, as outlined in the NPPF (paragraphs 8, 74, 108, 124, 180, 181 and 186). Opportunities for enhancement might include incorporating features to support specific species within the design of new buildings such as swift or bat boxes or designing lighting to encourage wildlife.

Natural England's [Environmental Benefits from Nature tool](#) may be used to identify opportunities to enhance wider benefits from nature and to avoid and minimise any negative impacts. It is designed to work alongside the [Biodiversity Metric](#) and is available as a beta test version.

Further information on biodiversity net gain, the mitigation hierarchy and wider environmental net gain can be found in government [Planning Practice Guidance for the natural environment](#).

Ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees

The local planning authority should consider any impacts on ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees in line with paragraph 186 of the NPPF. Natural England maintains the Ancient Woodland [Inventory](#) which can help identify ancient woodland. Natural England and the Forestry Commission have produced [standing advice](#) for planning authorities in relation to ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees. It should be taken into account when determining relevant planning applications. Natural England will only provide bespoke advice on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees where they form part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest or in exceptional circumstances.

Best and most versatile agricultural land and soils

Local planning authorities are responsible for ensuring that they have sufficient detailed agricultural land classification (ALC) information to apply NPPF policies (Paragraphs 180 and 181). This is the case regardless of whether the proposed development is sufficiently large to consult Natural England.

Annex A –Natural England general advice

Further information is contained in [GOV.UK guidance](#) Agricultural Land Classification information is available on the [Magic](#) website and the [Data.Gov.uk](#) website

Guidance on soil protection is available in the Defra [Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites](#), and we recommend its use in the design and construction of development, including any planning conditions. For mineral working and landfilling, separate guidance on soil protection for site restoration and aftercare is available on [Gov.uk](#) website. Detailed guidance on soil handling for mineral sites is contained in the Institute of Quarrying [Good Practice Guide for Handling Soils in Mineral Workings](#).

Should the development proceed, we advise that the developer uses an appropriately experienced soil specialist to advise on, and supervise soil handling, including identifying when soils are dry enough to be handled and how to make the best use of soils on site.

Green Infrastructure

Natural England's [Green Infrastructure Framework](#) provides evidence-based advice and tools on how to design, deliver and manage green and blue infrastructure (GI). GI should create and maintain green liveable places that enable people to experience and connect with nature, and that offer everyone, wherever they live, access to good quality parks, greenspaces, recreational, walking and cycling routes that are inclusive, safe, welcoming, well-managed and accessible for all. GI provision should enhance ecological networks, support ecosystems services and connect as a living network at local, regional and national scales.

Development should be designed to meet the [15 Green Infrastructure Principles](#). The GI Standards can be used to inform the quality, quantity and type of GI to be provided. Major development should have a GI plan including a long-term delivery and management plan. Relevant aspects of local authority GI strategies should be delivered where appropriate.

GI mapping resources are available [here](#) and [here](#). These can be used to help assess deficiencies in greenspace provision and identify priority locations for new GI provision.

Access and Recreation

Natural England encourages any proposal to incorporate measures to help improve people's access to the natural environment. Measures such as reinstating existing footpaths, together with the creation of new footpaths and bridleways should be considered. Links to urban fringe areas should also be explored to strengthen access networks, reduce fragmentation, and promote wider green infrastructure.

Rights of Way, Access land, Coastal access and National Trails

Paragraphs 104 and 180 of the NPPF highlight the important of public rights of way and access. Development should consider potential impacts on access land, common land, rights of way and coastal access routes in the vicinity of the development. Consideration should also be given to the potential impacts on the any nearby National Trails. The National Trails website [www.nationaltrail.co.uk](#) provides information including contact details for the National Trail Officer. Appropriate mitigation measures should be incorporated for any adverse impacts.

Further information is set out in Planning Practice Guidance on the [natural environment](#)