Date: 06 November 2025
Our ref: 531132
Your ref: DC/24/1702

Hornbeam House
Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

Horsham District Council

BY EMAIL ONLY
planning@horsham.gov.uk

Dear Emma Parkes,

Planning consultation: Variation of Condition 20 of previously approved application DC/18/2506 (Erection of an employment building for use classes B1(c) and B8 with associated access, car parking and landscaping) relating to trading hours.
Location: Unit A Oakhurst Business Park Wilberforce Way Southwater

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 20 October 2025 which was received by Natural England on 20 October 2025.

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.

Further information on when to consult Natural England on planning proposals is here- Planning and transport authorities: get environmental advice on planning - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Natural England is not able to provide specific advice on this application and therefore has no comment to make on its details. Although we have not been able to assess the potential impacts of this proposal on statutory nature conservation sites or protected landscapes, we offer the further advice and references to Standing Advice.

Natural England advises Local Planning Authorities to use the following tools to assess the impacts of the proposal on the natural environment:

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)- Screening stages
If this consultation is regarding the Screening stages of an HRA, step by step guidance is provided on the GOV. UK website.

When assessing the Likely Significant Effect (LSE), you must check if the proposal could have a significant effect on a Habitats (European) Site, as defined in NPPF that could affect its conservation objectives. If you cannot rule out the risk of the proposal having a significant effect, you will need to do an appropriate assessment. If there's no likely significant effect on the site, either alone or in combination, then you do not need to carry out an appropriate assessment.

Following the *People Over Wind* ruling by the European Court of Justice, mitigation may not be taken into account at screening stage when considering 'likely significant effects', but can be considered at appropriate assessment. In the light of this, these measures should be formally checked and confirmed by your authority, as the competent authority, via an appropriate

assessment in view of the European Site's conservation objectives and in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Impact Risk Zones:
Natural England has provided Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) with Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) which can be used to determine whether the proposal impacts statutory nature conservation sites. Natural England recommends that the LPA uses these IRZs to assess potential impacts. If proposals do not trigger an Impact Risk Zone then Natural England will provide an auto-response email.

Standing Advice:
Natural England has published Standing Advice. Links to standing advice are in Annex A

If after using these tools, you consider there are significant risks to statutory nature conservation sites or protected landscapes, please set out the specific areas on which you require Natural England's advice.

Further information on LPA duties relating to protected sites and areas is here-
Protected sites and areas: how to review planning applications - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Further guidance is also set out in Planning Practice Guidance on the natural environment Natural environment - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) and on Habitats Regulations Assessment Appropriate assessment - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Non detailed advice from Natural England does not imply that there are no impacts on the natural environment. It is for the local planning authority to determine whether or not the proposal is consistent with national and local environmental policies. Other bodies and individuals may provide information and advice on the environmental value of this site and the impacts of the proposal on the natural environment to assist the decision making process.

Should the proposal change, please consult us again.

Please send any further correspondence, to consultations@naturalengland.org.uk quoting our reference 531132 .

Yours faithfully

Samuel Norton
Consultations Team

Horsham District Council
Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening Matrix and Appropriate Assessment

PLEASE NOTE: This screening relates only for potential impacts from water resources on the Arun Valley SAC/ SPA/Ramsar sites and does not consider impacts on any other designated habitat sites. A separate HRA screening will be required for development affecting other SPAs, SACs, or Ramsar sites.

It is the responsibility of the Competent Authority (in this case Horsham District Council) to prepare a HRA report and it is the responsibility of the applicant to provide information to support this process.

This HRA Appropriate Assessment template is for use where a planning application will result in additional demand for mains water being created in the Sussex North Water Supply Zone that is predicted to adversely impact the Arun Valley SAC/ SPA/Ramsar sites.

The purpose of this HRA screening record is to assess the need for appropriate assessment in relation to the project detailed below.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) requires that a Habitats Regulations Assessment screening is carried out in relation to any plan or project which is likely to have a significant effect on Habitats (European) sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Habitats sites are Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation. Ramsar sites should also be given the same level of protection, as stated within the National Planning Policy Framework.

In line with the Court judgement (CJEU *People Over Wind v Coillte Teoranta* C-323/17), mitigation measures cannot be taken into account when carrying out a screening assessment to decide whether a development is likely to result in significant effects on a Habitats site.

Where an Appropriate Assessment is carried out a project may only be authorised after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site(s) concerned.

Table 1: HRA Screening matrix for water neutrality

Stage 1 HRA screening	
Brief description of the development project	**Planning Application:** DC/24/1702 **Location:** Unit A Oakhurst Business Park Wilberforce Way Southwater Horsham West Sussex RH13 9RT **Development Description:** Variation of Condition 20 of previously approved application DC/18/2506 (Erection of an employment building for use classes B1(c) and B8 with associated access, car parking and landscaping) relating to trading hours. **Type of Application:** Removal / Variation of codition

Details of the development project	**Proximity to Arun Valley SAC / SPA / Ramsar**: Is the application site: A) Within the Sussex North Water Supply Zone (WSZ) **Yes** B) Arun Valley SAC / SPA / Ramsar potentially impacted by the planning application: **Yes there is credible evidence of a real risk that the proposal will, without measures to minimise water use and water offsetting, result in an increase in water demand.** C) Is the planning application directly connected with or necessary to the management of the Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar site? **No**
Brief description of the Habitats sites within scope of this assessment	Arun Valley SAC, SPA and Ramsar site supports rare and diverse plant, invertebrate and bird assemblages as qualifying features. It consists of low-lying grazing marsh, largely on alluvial soils, but with an area of peat derived from a relict raised bog. Variation in soils and water supply lead to a wide range of ecological conditions and hence a rich flora and fauna. Further details are provided in Appendix 1.
Key vulnerabilities / factors affecting site integrity	For applications where increased demand for water resources is the only pathway for impacts, Natural England's substantive advice (Position Statement Interim Approach, September 2021) is that such applications - without mitigation - will result in a likely significant effect on the Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar site either alone or in combination with other developments in the Sussex North WSZ. As it cannot be concluded that the existing abstraction within Sussex North Water Supply Zone is not having an impact on the Arun Valley sites, developments within this zone must not add to this impact. Therefore, such applications, even where mitigation is proposed, must progress to Appropriate Assessment (AA). Natural England's Position Statement (September 2021) is that the Sussex North Water Supply Zone includes supplies from a groundwater abstraction which cannot, with certainty, conclude no adverse effect on the integrity of; • Arun Valley Special Area Conservation (SAC) • Arun Valley Special Protection Area (SPA) • Arun Valley Ramsar Site
HRA Screening Assessment Criteria	
The individual elements of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) likely to give rise to impacts on the Arun Valley SAC, SPA and Ramsar site	Based on the threat from water demand identified by Natural England's Position Statement, the development proposals need assessment for hydrological changes to the Arun Valley SAC/ SPA/ Ramsar site. For applications, does the evidence show any likely significant effect on Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar site, without mitigation measures (either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects)? **YES** Test 1 the significance test below has been completed as the evidence shows a likely significant effect on Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar site, without mitigation measures (in-combination with other plans or projects).

Test 1 the significance test: – Can a judgement be made as to whether there could be any potential significant impacts of the development on the integrity of the Arun Valley SPA/ SAC/Ramsar.	Following the CJEU ruling People over Wind, it is no longer lawful to take into account any avoidance and mitigation measures as part of the application at this stage of HRA. For applications where increased demand for water resources is the only mechanism of impact, Natural England's advice is that such applications - **without mitigation** - will have a likely significant effect on the Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar site in combination with other developments in the Sussex North WSZ. **YES** Therefore, such applications, even where mitigation measures (minimise water use and water offsetting) are proposed, will progress directly to Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment to consider, with mitigation, the impacts of the development on mains water usage on the above designated sites, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. **Explanation: All development likely to increase the demand for mains water usage, is predicted to result an identifiable impact on the Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar sites.** After mitigation has been embedded into the project design, Test 2 – the integrity test then needs to be applied.
Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment	
The above Stage 1 HRA screening has determined that a Likely Significant Effect is predicted at Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar site as a result of impacts on water quantity. This pathway has been screened in, and the potential for adverse effects on site integrity, either alone or in-combination will be assessed. Therefore, this section of the report to inform HRA Stage 2 only discusses the potential for impacts on water quantity as a result of the proposed development.	
Potential for Adverse Effects On the Integrity (AEOI) of a Habitats site from the development alone or in combination.	Supplementary advice on conserving and restoring site features for Arun Valley SAC/SPA sets a number of targets for the site under the supporting the Conservation Objectives in order that the integrity of the sites is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the sites contribute to achieving the Favourable Conservation Status of the Qualifying Features. The targets cover hydrology and flow, water quantity, area depth and water quality. The hydrology of the river Arun is the major factor affecting these targets and this is turn is affected by the abstraction at Hardham for the supply of drinking water. Continued or increased levels of groundwater abstraction at Hardham reduces water quantity in the Arun Valley sites and adversely affects water levels and flow within the sites (in combination with other plans and projects in the Sussex North WRZ). Without an alternative sustainable water supply or mitigation measures, the hydrology of the sites will be unable to maintain the types and extents of habitats requited to maintain the Qualifying Features.

Details of Water usage for the development	Existing baseline water consumption The applicant has submitted a Water Bill as an example of existing water consumption based on the meter reading on the 18 March 2024 which states that the applicant uses 166 litres per day. Proposed water consumption (including onsite mitigation) The proposed development seeks to increase the sites operating hours from 61 hours per week to 81 hours per week. Where water usage is proportional to operating hours: Water per week currently = 166 litres/day × 6 days = 996 litres/week and therefore water use per hour would be equal to 996 litres ÷ 61 hours = 16.34 litres/hour. Therefore, the estimate new water usage based on new hours for new water usage per week = 16.34 litres/hour × 81 hours = 1322 litres/week. Therefore, the new daily average would equal 1322 litres ÷ 6 = 220 litres/day. The proposal would therefore result in **a net increase of 54 litres per day.**
Proposed mitigation for the project to secure the mitigation as a condition of any consent e.g. alternative sustainable water supply, minimising water use in new development. Water offsetting for residual demand in existing buildings in the Sussex North WRZ. See Position Statement issued by Natural England (September 2021)	**Summary of mitigation package** Onsite mitigation *The proposal seeks a variation of condition with no physical works proposed. No onsite mitigation is therefore proposed.* *Offsite mitigation* *The proposed development meeting all* eligibility criteria for access to purchasing SNWCS water credits. It is therefore considered that a Grampian condition give the applicant the option of addressing water neutrality through either SNWCS or through their own bespoke solution. Is the mitigation sufficient? These measures can be secured as part of any planning consent and are considered sufficient to avoid adverse effects on the integrity of the interest features of the Arun Valley SPA, SAC & Ramsar site from the development either alone or in combination with other plans and projects.
Test 2 – the integrity test	**Conclusion:** Having considered the proposed avoidance and mitigation measures above to be provided in-perpetuity through either the authorise SNWCS or through their own bespoke solution. Horsham District Council concludes that, with mitigation, the project will not have an Adverse Effect on the Integrity of the Arun Valley SAC/ SPA /Ramsar site, either alone or in combination with other plan and projects. This development would therefore be in conflict with the conservation objectives for the Arun Valley SPA, SAC and Ramsar site which include 'maintaining or restoring the population of Qualifying Features'. See Appendix 1.

	As the mitigation has been considered after HRA screening, this HRA Appropriate Assessment is in line with the People over Wind CJEU Court ruling and, being beyond reasonable scientific doubt concerning the effects of the work envisaged on the site concerned, is also in line with the Holohan and Others v An Bord Pleanála court ruling. Having prepared this Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the project for the Arun Valley sites in view of their conservation objectives, subject to consultation with Natural England and fully considered any representation received where necessary, the authority can now agree the project under regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

Approving Planner: Sam Whitehouse **Date: 20/10/2025**

DISCLAIMER: This information has been produced by Place Services's Ecology Team on behalf of Horsham District Council, at their request.

Appendix 1 – details of Arun Valley SAC/SPA/Ramsar site

Qualifying Features for SPA/SAC	**Arun Valley SPA** A037 Bewick's swan, *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* (non-breeding). During the time of site notification, the SPA supported 115 individuals representing at least 1.6% of the wintering population in Great Britain (5 year peak mean 1992/93 - 1996/97). During the non-breeding season, the SPA regularly supports an assemblage of waterfowl with the area regularly supporting 27,241 individual waterfowl (5 year peak mean for 1992/93 to 1996/97) including: Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Teal *Anas crecca*, Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii.* **Arun Valley SAC** 4056 Little Whirlpool Ramshorn snail *Anisus vorticulus* *Anisus vorticulus* occurs across a range of sites in southern and eastern England. The Arun valley is one of the three main population centres for this species in the UK. This proposed site includes two of its core sites in the wash lands of the Arun floodplain (Pulborough Brooks and Amberley Wild Brooks SSSIs).
Qualifying Features for Ramsar	**Arun Valley Ramsar** **Ramsar criterion 2** The site holds seven wetland invertebrate species listed in the British Red Data Book as threatened. One of these, *Pseudamnicola confusa*, is considered to be endangered. The site also supports four nationally rare and four nationally scarce plant species **Ramsar criterion 3** In addition to the Red Data Book invertebrate and plant species, the ditches intersecting the site have a particularly diverse and rich flora. All five British duckweed (*Lemna* species), all five water-cress (*Rorippa* species), and all three British water milfoils (*Myriophyllum* species), all but one of the seven British water dropworts (*Oenanthe* species), and two-thirds of the British pondweeds (*Potamogeton* species) can be found on site.

	Ramsar criterion 5 Assemblages of international importance: Species with peak counts in winter: 13774 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003)
Conservation Status of the relevant Qualifying Features	**Arun Valley SAC, SPA and Ramsar** In line with the national trend, the number of Bewick's swans wintering in the Arun Valley has declined since the time of designation and is now typically fewer than 50 birds. This may reflect an overall decline in the population of the species and/or be due to the effects of a milder climate in which more are able to winter in continental Europe (The Birds of Sussex, 2014). The waterfowl assemblage numbers fluctuate depending upon conditions in the valley but over the past five years have averaged 40,311, an increase from the five year mean of 27,241 at the time of designation. The Arun Valley is one of the remaining strongholds for the Little Whirlpool Ramshorn Snail.
Conservation Objectives (Only Relevant for SPA/SAC)	**Arun Valley SAC & SPA** Ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained or restored as appropriate, and ensure that the site contributes to achieving the aims of the Wild Birds Directive, by maintaining or restoring; • The extent and distribution of the habitats of the qualifying features • The structure and function of the habitats of the qualifying features • The supporting processes on which the habitats of the qualifying features rely • The population of each of the qualifying features, and, • The distribution of the qualifying features within the site.

Annex A – Natural England general advice

Protected Landscapes
Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) (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 190 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 (legislation.gov.uk) 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 187 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 Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3) - Landscape Institute for further guidance.

Biodiversity duty
Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (legislation.gov.uk) places a duty on the local planning authority to conserve and enhance biodiversity as part of its decision making. We refer you to the Complying with the biodiversity duty - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) for further information.

Designated nature conservation sites
Paragraphs 193-195 of the NPPF set out the principles for determining applications impacting on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and habitats sites (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs)). Both the direct and indirect impacts of the development should be considered.

A Habitats Regulations Assessment is needed where a proposal might affect a habitat site (see Habitats regulations assessments: protecting a European site - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) and Natural England must be consulted on 'appropriate assessments' (see Appropriate assessment - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) for more information for planning authorities).

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 the SSSI Impact Risk Zones (England) (arcgis.com) or as standard or bespoke consultation responses. Section 28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 places a duty on all public bodies to take reasonable steps, consistent with the proper exercise of their functions, to further the conservation and enhancement of the features for which an SSSI has been notified (Sites of special scientific interest: public body responsibilities - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Annex A – Natural England general advice

Air Quality

Natural England has produced *'Air pollution and development: advice for local authorities. How to assess sector-specific planning applications that could affect air quality on a protected site'.* This standing advice is to help planning authorities understand the impact on statutory protected sites from particular developments that emit specific air pollutants. The advice covers emissions of ammonia (NH_3), nitrogen oxides (NO, NO_2 or NO_x), nitrogen deposition, acid deposition and sulphur dioxide (SO_2).

The standing advice is Natural England's formal statutory advice and is a material consideration. It provides decision makers with the information needed to fulfil their statutory duties when making decisions on planning applications with potential air pollution impacts.

Note that this advice cannot be used to assess Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) or local plans.

Protected Species

Natural England has produced Protected species and development: advice for local planning authorities - GOV.UK (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. We refer you to Wildlife licences: when you need to apply (www.gov.uk) for more information.

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 187, 188 and 192 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 environmental records centre, wildlife trust, geoconservation groups or recording societies. Emerging Local nature recovery strategies - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) may also provide further useful information.

Those habitats and species which are of particular importance for nature conservation are included as 'priority habitats and species' 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. We refer you to Habitats and species of principal importance in England (gov.uk) for a list of priority habitats and species in England. You should consider priority habitats and species when applying your 'biodiversity duty' to your policy or decision making

Natural England does not routinely hold priority 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. We refer you to the Brownfield Hub - Buglife for more information and Natural England's Open Mosaic Habitat (Draft) - data.gov.uk (Open Mosaic Habitat inventory), which can be used as the starting point for detailed brownfield land assessments.

Biodiversity and wider environmental gains

Development should provide net gains for biodiversity in line with the NPPF paragraphs 187(d), 192 and 193. Unless exempt major development (defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (publishing.service.gov.uk) glossary) is required by law to deliver a biodiversity gain of at least 10% from 12 February 2024 and this requirement was extended to minor development from April 2024. For nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs), it is anticipated that the requirement for biodiversity net gain will be implemented from May 2026.

Annex A – Natural England general advice

Biodiversity Net Gain guidance (gov.uk) provides more information on biodiversity net gain and includes a link to the Biodiversity Net Gain Planning Practice Guidance (gov.uk).

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. We refer you to Calculate biodiversity value with the statutory biodiversity metric for more information. For minor development sites, The Small Sites Metric may be used where these sites meet the criteria to use this Small Sites Metric. This is a simplified version of the statutory biodiversity metric and is designed for use where certain criteria are met.

The mitigation hierarchy as set out in paragraph 193 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.

Where off-site delivery of biodiversity gain is proposed on a special site designated for nature (e.g. a SSSI or habitats site) prior consent or assent may be required from Natural England. More information is available on Sites of Special Scientific Interest: managing your land

Development also provides opportunities to secure wider biodiversity enhancements and environmental gains, as outlined in the NPPF (paragraphs 8, 77, 109, 125, 187, 188, 192 and 193). 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.

The Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool - Beta Test Version - JP038 (naturalengland.org.uk) 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 statutory biodiversity metric.

Natural environment - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) provides further information on biodiversity net gain, the mitigation hierarchy and wider environmental net gain.

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 193 of the NPPF. The Natural England Access to Evidence - Ancient woodlands Map can help to identify ancient woodland. Natural England and the Forestry Commission have produced Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) (standing advice) for planning authorities. It should be considered 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 187, 188). This is the case regardless of whether the proposed development is sufficiently large to consult Natural England. Further information is contained in the Guide to assessing development proposals on agricultural land - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). Find open data - data.gov.uk on Agricultural Land Classification or use the information available on MAGIC (defra.gov.uk).

The Defra Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites (publishing.service.gov.uk) provides guidance on soil protection, and we recommend its use in the design and construction of development, including any planning conditions. For mineral working and landfilling, we refer you to Reclaim minerals extraction and landfill sites to agriculture - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), which provides guidance on soil protection for site restoration and aftercare. The Soils Guidance (quarrying.org) provides detailed guidance on soil handling for mineral sites.

Annex A – Natural England general advice

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
For evidence-based advice and tools on how to design, deliver and manage green and blue infrastructure (GI) we refer you to Green Infrastructure Home (naturalengland.org.uk) (the Green Infrastructure Framework). 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 GI How Principles (naturalengland.org.uk). 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.

The Green Infrastructure Map (naturalengland.org.uk) and GI Mapping Analysis (naturalengland.org.uk) are GI mapping resources that 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 105, 185, 187 and 193 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 any nearby National Trails. We refer you to Find your perfect trail, and discover the land of myths and legend - National Trails for information including contact details for the National Trail Officer.

The King Charles III England Coast Path (KCIIIECP) is a National Trail around the whole of the English Coast. It has an associated coastal margin subject to public access rights. Parts of the KCIIIECP are not on Public Rights of Way but are subject to public access rights. Consideration should be given to the impact of any development on the KCIIIECP and the benefits of maintaining a continuous coastal route.

Appropriate mitigation measures should be incorporated for any adverse impacts on Rights of Way, Access land, Coastal access, and National Trails.

Further information is set out in the Planning Practice Guidance on the Natural environment - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).