Date: 11 March 2024
[redacted] [redacted]
Your ref: DC/23/2230

Customer Services
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Crewe Business Park
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ

T 0300 060 3900

**BY EMAIL ONLY**

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Planning consultation:** Retrospective COU of building from office to AirBNB.
**Location:** Wallhurst Manor, Garden Cottage, Picts Lane, Cowfold, West Sussex RH13 8AW.

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 20 February 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**

**NO OBJECTION - SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATE MITIGATION BEING SECURED**

We consider that without appropriate mitigation the application would:

- have an adverse effect on the integrity of Arun Valley Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar site *https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/*.

In order to mitigate these adverse effects and make the development acceptable, the following mitigation measures are required / or the following mitigation options should be secured:

- Delivery, management and maintenance of measures identified in the Water Neutrality Statement to achieve water neutrality

We advise that an appropriate planning condition or obligation is attached to any planning permission to secure these measures.

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

**Water Neutrality**

The proposed development falls within the Sussex North water supply zone; As set out in Natural England's Advice Note regarding Water Neutrality within the Sussex North Water Supply Zone, the existing water supply in the Sussex North water supply 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. Achieving water neutrality is recognised as a suitable method to rule out potential adverse effects on the integrity of these sites arising from development.

*Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)*

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.

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 all identified adverse effects that could potentially occur as a result of the proposal, Natural England advises that we concur with the assessment conclusions, providing that all mitigation measures are appropriately secured in any planning permission given.

*Further Advice*

We note that offsetting at the existing main property on site is proposed as part of the mitigation package for this development and that, within the submitted calculations, the occupancy rate of this property has been listed as four.

As neither the number of bedrooms at the offsetting property nor evidence to support this figure has been provided, we advise that it is the responsibility of your authority as the competent authority to ensure all occupancy figures given are an accurate representation of the current circumstances.

**Other Advice**

In addition, Natural England would like to advise on the following:

*Protected Landscapes*

The proposed development is for a site within a nationally designated landscape namely High Weald AONB. Natural England advises that the planning authority uses national and local policies, together with local landscape expertise and information to determine the proposal. The policy and statutory framework to guide your decision and the role of local advice are explained below.

Your decision should be guided by paragraphs 176 and 177 of the National Planning Policy Framework which gives the highest status of protection for the 'landscape and scenic beauty' of AONBs and National Parks. For major development proposals paragraph 177 sets out criteria to determine whether the development should exceptionally be permitted within the designated landscape.

Alongside national policy you should also apply landscape policies set out in your development plan, or appropriate saved policies.

We also advise that you consult the relevant AONB Partnership or Conservation Board. Their knowledge of the site and its wider landscape setting, together with the aims and objectives of the

AONB's statutory management plan, will be a valuable contribution to the planning decision. Where available, a local Landscape Character Assessment can also be a helpful guide to the landscape's sensitivity to this type of development and its capacity to accommodate the proposed development.

The statutory purpose of the AONB is to conserve and enhance the area's natural beauty. You should assess the application carefully as to whether the proposed development would have a significant impact on or harm that statutory purpose. Relevant to this is the duty on public bodies to 'have regard' for that statutory purpose in carrying out their functions (S85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000). The Planning Practice Guidance confirms that this duty also applies to proposals outside the designated area but impacting on its natural beauty.

**Final Comments**

Further general advice on consideration of 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 on [redacted]

We would not expect to provide further advice on the discharge of planning conditions or obligations attached to any planning permission.

Should the proposal change, please consult us again.

Yours faithfully

Sophie Moore
Lead Advisor for Casework

# 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,

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 the timetable for mandatory biodiversity net gain can be found here. 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. Further

## Annex A –Natural England general advice

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