

Date: 02 June 2023
Our ref: 430903
Your ref: CA/23/00484



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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Mr Gambrell,

Planning consultation: Outline planning for up to 300 residential dwellings, new community hub, surface water flood mitigation and attenuation. All matters reserved except for access. Location: Land At The Hill, Bekesbourne Lane, East Of Bekesbourne Hill, Bekesbourne, Canterbury, CT4 5EA.

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 24 April 2023 which was received by Natural England on 24 April 2023.

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 Stodmarsh Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and Ramsar site. 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 evidence demonstrating how any impacts associated with an increase in nutrients entering the Stodmarsh designated sites will be appropriately mitigated. It is Natural England's opinion that all foul water should connect to the mains sewage network in the first instance.
- A Habitats Regulations Assessment undertaken by your authority that considers the proposed means of mitigation, as well as any measures required to maintain and monitor it for the lifetime of the development (where appropriate).

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.

Additional Information required

Despite the proximity of the application to European Sites, the consultation documents provided do not include information to demonstrate that the requirements of regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) have been considered by your authority, i.e. the consultation does not include a Habitats Regulations Assessment.

It is Natural England's advice that the proposal is not directly connected with or necessary for the management of the European site. It is also our view that a likely significant effect on the internationally designated Stodmarsh sites cannot be ruled out due to the increases in wastewater from new developments coming forward in the River Stour catchment. Your authority should therefore undertake an appropriate assessment of the proposal in order to ascertain whether an adverse effect on the integrity of the Stodmarsh sites can be ruled out or not. Based upon the information currently provided, it is our opinion that there is currently insufficient evidence to rule out an adverse effect on the integrity of the Stodmarsh designated sites. As such, we provide the following advice in order to inform any appropriate assessment you may wish to undertake.

Nutrient neutrality

Having reviewed the submitted "Nutrient Neutrality Assessment and Mitigation Strategy" it is our understanding that the applicant intends to treat any foul water arising from this development on-site, and then to discharge the effluent to a local watercourse. It is our view that, in the first instance all foul water should be connected to the existing mains sewage network in the first instance unless there is a clear justification as to why it is not possible to do so. It is also noted that the Environment Agency have Objected to this application on the basis that "*the applicant is proposing to install a package treatment plant with discharge to a local watercourse when the site is within an area served by the mains sewer network*" (12th May 2023, their ref: KT/2023/130653/01-L01).

Given that it is understood that a mains connection is feasible at this location, we would reiterate that the development should be connected to the mains sewer network instead. The applicant should also provide a robust and evidenced assessment demonstrating how any increased level of nutrients entering the Stodmarsh designated sites will be appropriately mitigated. We would advise that any mitigation strategy should be based upon the most recently [published guidance](#); and that a [nutrient budget calculator](#) is also available to applicants to use, that includes all of the different variables that we would expect to be considered during the undertaking of a nutrient budget.

Any mitigation required should also be supported by a maintenance and monitoring regime, with a commitment to ensure its efficacy for the lifetime of the development. Once a nutrient assessment and appropriate assessment – that has been completed or adopted your authority – concludes no adverse effect on integrity of the Stodmarsh sites, Natural England will review the proposal.

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 at luke.hasler@naturalengland.org.uk.

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

Yours sincerely

Luke Hasler
Sussex & Kent Area Team

Annex A – Additional advice

Natural England offers the following additional advice:

Landscape

Paragraph 174 of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (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 & 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.

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 174 and 175). This is the case regardless of whether the proposed development is sufficiently large to consult Natural England. Further information is contained in [GOV.UK guidance](#). Agricultural Land Classification information is available on the [Magic](#) website on the [Data.Gov.uk](#) website. If you consider the proposal has significant implications for further loss of 'best and most versatile' agricultural land, we would be pleased to discuss the matter further.

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.

Protected Species

Natural England has produced [standing advice](#)¹ to help planning authorities understand the impact of particular developments on protected species. We advise you to refer to this advice. 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.

Local sites and priority habitats and species

You should consider the impacts of the proposed development on any local wildlife or geodiversity sites, in line with paragraphs 175 and 179 of the NPPF and any relevant development plan policy. There may also be opportunities to enhance local sites and improve their connectivity. 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.

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. 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](#).

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/protected-species-and-sites-how-to-review-planning-proposals>

Annex A – Additional advice

Ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees

You should consider any impacts on ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees in line with paragraph 180 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 by planning authorities 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.

Environmental gains

Development should provide net gains for biodiversity in line with the NPPF paragraphs 174(d), 179 and 180. Development also provides opportunities to secure wider environmental gains, as outlined in the NPPF (paragraphs 8, 73, 104, 120, 174, 175 and 180). We advise you to follow the mitigation hierarchy as set out in paragraph 180 of the NPPF and firstly consider what existing environmental features on and around the site can be retained or enhanced or what new features could be incorporated into the development proposal. Where onsite measures are not possible, you should consider off site measures. Opportunities for enhancement might include:

- Restoring a neglected hedgerow.
- Creating a new pond as an attractive feature on the site.
- Planting trees characteristic to the local area to make a positive contribution to the local landscape.
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes for better nectar and seed sources for bees and birds.
- Incorporating swift boxes or bat boxes into the design of new buildings.
- Designing lighting to encourage wildlife.
- Adding a green roof to new buildings.

Natural England's [Biodiversity Metric 3.1](#) may 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 [Biodiversity Metric 3.1](#) and is designed for use where certain criteria are met. It is available as a beta test version.

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 [Biodiversity Metric 3.1](#) and is available as a beta test version.

Green Infrastructure

Natural England's [Green Infrastructure Framework](#) provides evidence-based advice and tools on how to design, deliver and manage green 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 Green Infrastructure Standards can be used to inform the quality, quantity and type of green infrastructure to be provided. Major development should have a GI plan including a long-term delivery and management plan. Relevant aspects of local authority green infrastructure 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.

Annex A – Additional advice

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

Paragraphs 100 and 174 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.

Biodiversity duty

Your authority has a [duty](#) to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of your decision making. Conserving biodiversity can also include restoration or enhancement to a population or habitat. Further information is available [here](#).