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Your ref: 21/03522/OUT



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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Samantha,

Planning consultation: The erection of up to 540 dwellings (Class C3), up to 9,000sqm GEA of elderly/extra care residential floor-space (Class C2), a Community Home Work Hub (up to 200sqm)(Class E), alongside the creation of two locally equipped areas for play, one NEAP, up to 1.8 hectares of playing pitches and amenity space for the William Fletcher Primary School, two vehicular access points, green infrastructure, areas of public open space, two community woodland areas, a local nature reserve, footpaths, tree planting, restoration of historic hedgerow, and associated works.

Location: OS Parcel 3673 Ad-joining And West Of 161, Rutten Lane, Yarnton, OX5 1LT.

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 21 October 2021 which was received by Natural England on 27 October 2021

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

Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not have significant adverse impacts on designated sites and has no objection.

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

Rushy Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest

Based on the plans submitted, Natural England considers that the proposed development will not damage or destroy the interest features for which the site has been notified and has no objection.

The Oxford Meadows SAC is further south of the site however given the distance to the nearest constituent part of the site (~1.7km south) and the intervening land uses and infrastructure this is not a material consideration for this application.

The implementation of a well designed and realised system of Sustainable Urban Drainage for this

proposal will be key. This will help to ensure that the run off from the site is kept at the level seen currently for the land and if anything this could be improved with retaining ponds that could double up as biodiversity hotspots if designed correctly.

The site, being the size it is, has the opportunity to make use of the [Biodiversity Metric 3.0](#) which would aid the detailed design stages of the proposals and ensure they are as impactful in a positive way as possible.

In terms of the proximity to the Ancient Woodland at Begbroke Wood to the west there is a sufficient gap between the proposed development area and the woodland to ensure no direct impacts. The proposed area of new woodland to the north of the site is welcomed and should be composed of appropriate tree species for the area.

The proposed nature reserve to the south of the development site should also be developed with input from the local wildlife trust, for instance, in order to ensure that the proposals are appropriate for the area. This early engagement would help ensure the final design is fit for purpose and becomes a biodiversity hotspot protected for the future.

Soils and Agricultural Land Quality

Although we consider that this proposal falls outside the scope of the Development Management Procedure Order (as amended) consultation arrangements, Natural England draws your Authority's attention to the following agricultural land quality and soil considerations:

1. Based on the information provided with the planning application, it appears that the proposed development comprises approximately 59 ha of agricultural land, including 25.4 ha classified as 'best and most versatile' (Grades 1, 2 and 3a land in the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) system).

The British Society of Soil Science have published the Guidance Note [Assessing Agricultural Land Classification \(ALC\)](#) and we strongly recommend this is followed to validate an ALC survey.

2. National Planning policy relevant to agricultural land and soils is set out in paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework which states that:

'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: protecting and enhancing [...] soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan); recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.'

3. Soil is a finite resource which plays an essential role within sustainable ecosystems, performing an array of functions supporting a range of ecosystem services, including storage of carbon, the infiltration and transport of water, nutrient cycling, and provision of food.

In order to safeguard soil resources as part of the overall sustainability of the development, it is important that the soil resource is able to retain as many of its important functions as possible. This can be achieved through careful soil management and appropriate, beneficial soil re-use, with consideration on how any adverse impacts on soils can be avoided or minimised.

4. Consequently, Natural England would advise that any grant of planning permission should be made subject to conditions to safeguard soil resources, including the provision of an appropriately experienced soil specialist to advise on and supervise soil handling, including identifying when soils are dry enough to be handled. Sustainable soil management should aim to minimise risks to the ecosystem services which soils provide, through appropriate site design/masterplan/Green Infrastructure.

It is good to see that soils issues will be covered by a management plan for the appropriate reuse and improvement of soils, as per Part 18 of Policy PR9 in due course as stated in the table at point 4.16 in the Planning Statement.

Defra has published a [Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites](#) which may be helpful when setting planning conditions for development sites. It provides advice on the use and protection of soil in construction projects, including the movement and management of soil resources, which we strongly recommend is followed.

The British Society of Soil Science has published the Guidance Note [Benefitting from Soil Management in Development and Construction](#) which sets out measures for the protection of soils within the planning system and the development of individual sites, which we also recommend is followed.

Should the proposal change, please consult us again.

If you have any queries relating to the advice in this letter please contact me on 0208 026 3893.

Yours sincerely,

Piotr Behnke
Lead Adviser
Thames Solent Planning Team