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Our ref: 445618
Your ref: 23/02098/OUT



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BY EMAIL ONLY

Customer Services
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Dear Andrew

Planning consultation: Outline application (all matters reserved), for multi-phased (severable), comprehensive residential-led mixed use development comprising: Up to 215,000 square metres gross external area of residential floorspace (or c.1,800 homes which depending on the housing mix could result in a higher or lower number of housing units) Supporting social infrastructure including secondary school/primary school(s); health, indoor sport and recreation, emergency and nursery facilities. Supporting retail, leisure and community uses. Including cafes and restaurants, commercial and professional services, a hotel, local community uses, public houses, bars and drinking establishments. Up to 155,000 net additional square metres of flexible employment uses including research and development, office and workspace and associated uses, industrial and storage in connection with the expansion of Begbroke Science Park; Highway works, including new vehicular, cyclist and pedestrian roads and paths, improvements to the existing Sandy Lane and Begbroke Hill road, a bridge over the Oxford Canal, safeguarded land for a rail halt, and car and cycle parking. Areas for sustainable urban drainage systems, allotments, biodiversity areas, outdoor play/sports facilities; Utility, energy, water, and wastewater facilities and infrastructure; associated works.

Location: Begbroke Science Park, Begbroke Hill, Begbroke, OX5 1PF

Thank you for your consultation on the above dated 07 August 2023 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 RUSHY MEADOWS SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST.

As submitted, the application could have potential significant effects on Rushy Meadows 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 information regarding the proposed buffer strip adjacent to the SSSI
- Further information regarding the proposed Local Nature Reserve Designation

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

Buffer Strip

The northern boundary of the proposed development is located within 10m of Rushy Meadows SSSI. Whilst we welcome the proposed 15m buffer strip between the SSSI and the perimeter of the proposed community farm, allotments and orchard we would welcome the provision of a larger buffer strip capable of absorbing potentially damaging recreational pressures from the proposed Rowel Brook Park which will be created as part of this large scale development.

In addition to recreational pressure, the proposed use of the land in the vicinity of the SSSI as a community farm and allotments has the potential to introduce non-native and invasive plant species to an area previously used for agricultural crops. Therefore a larger buffer than that proposed would be welcome.

The buffer strip is currently proposed to consist of native vegetation such as wildflower vegetation with scrub. The buffer strip should be designed and include features and planting that will support the species of special interest within the SSSI, as noted within the citation for the site. This will also assist in avoiding encroachment of other species on to the SSSI.

The land comprising the SSSI buffer area should be managed solely for a conservation purpose, with public access managed accordingly to ensure that potential recreational impacts are minimised.

Further information on the above points in support of the application would be welcome.

Local Nature Reserve Designation

LNRs are an essential part of the country's green infrastructure. They are an important way to enhance and conserve nature and ecosystem services – the services nature provides to benefit people – against threats like climate change, declining biodiversity and lack of access.

A key delivery requirement of policy PR8- Land East of the A44 (The Cherwell Local Plan 2011 - 2031 (Part1) Partial Review - Oxford's Unmet Housing Need) is the creation of a publicly accessible Local Nature Reserve on 29.2 hectares of land based on the Rowel Brook.

The responsibility for selecting, acquiring and making arrangements for the management of Local Nature Reserves lies with local authorities. A local authority can only declare an LNR after consultation with Natural England. The documentation supporting the application suggests that parts of the proposed Rowel Brook Park will form part of a Local Nature Reserve.

We will require confirmation as to whether the application includes consultation on the creation of a Local Nature Reserve and if so which parts of Rowel Brook Park are proposed for designation as such as this is currently unclear from the outline plans.

When being formally consulted on the creation of a LNR, Natural England requires:

- A statement outlining why the site was selected
- A map
- Tenure details

- An outline management plan setting out a brief description of the site aims and objectives including actual or potential biodiversity management, opportunities to be realised for environmental education and community participation, arrangements for access and visitor management and the management arrangements and initial management priorities
- Outline costs and funding arrangements

It should be noted that comments about site selection and management are simply our advice. Natural England has no mandatory powers over selection or declaration, but local authorities must consult us in exercising their powers under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP):

Natural England advises a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) should be submitted to and approved in writing by the district ecologist/biodiversity officer that identifies the steps and procedures that will be implemented to avoid or mitigate constructional impacts on Rushy Meadows SSSI, its species and habitats. The CEMP should address the following impacts:

- Storage of construction materials/chemicals and equipment;
- Dust suppression
- Chemical and/or fuel run-off from construction into the nearby Rowel Brook
- Waste disposal
- Noise/visual/vibrational impacts
- Measures to ensure no materials, machinery, vehicles or works will encroach on the designated site
- Mammal ramps for open excavations
- Lighting measures to ensure boundary habitats are not luminated.

The approved CEMP should be secured via an appropriately worded condition attached to any planning consent and shall be adhered to at all times, unless otherwise first agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

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.

Please note that if your authority is minded to grant planning permission contrary to the advice in

this letter, you are required under Section 28I (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 on Laura.Elphick@naturalengland.gov.uk.

Should the applicant wish to discuss the further information required and scope for mitigation with Natural England, we would be happy to provide advice through our [Discretionary Advice Service](#).

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

Yours sincerely

Laura Elphick
Sustainable Development Lead Adviser
Thames Solent 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.

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](#).

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

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

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 4.0](#) 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 4.0](#) and is designed for use where certain criteria are met.

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 4.0](#) 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.

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

Paragraphs 100 and 174 of the NPPF highlight the importance 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](#).

