

Date: 16/05/2011
Our ref: 22607
Your ref: 10/01780/HYBRID



Unit 11, Fenlock Court
Blenheim Office Park
Long Hanborough
Oxfordshire
OX29 8LN

By email only, no hard copy to follow

Dear Jenny,

Proposal: Development of exemplar phase of NW Bicester Eco Town to secure full planning permission for 394 residential units and an energy centre (up to 400 square metres), means of access, car parking, landscape, amenity space, and service infrastructure and outline permission for a nursery of up to 350 square metres (use class D2), a community centre of up to 350 square metres (sui generis), 3 retail units of up to 770 square metres (including but not exclusively a convenience store, a post office and a pharmacy (use class A1), an Eco-Business Centre of up to 1,800 square metres (use class B1), office accommodation of up to 1,100 square metres (use class B1), an Eco-Pub of up to 190 square metres (use class A4), and a primary school site measuring up to 1.34 hectares with access and layout to be determined.

Location: Bicester Eco Town Exemplar Site, Caversfield, Oxfordshire.

Thank you for your letter dated 14th April 2011 consulting Natural England on the above planning application.

Natural England has the following comments to make:

Designated Sites

Air Quality at Ardley Quarry and Cutting SSSI

As stated in our previous response (3rd February 2011) Natural England have requested that the increase in traffic along Middleton Road (between Bucknell and Middleton Stoney) and Ardley Road/Station Road (B430, between Middleton Stoney and Ardley), is modelled and any impacts on the above SSSI assessed.

Regardless of the distance of the SSSI from the development site, there is still the potential for an increase in traffic on this road which is less than 200 metres from the SSSI, to cause an impact on the designated site, due to the development.

Biodiversity

The River Bure and its tributary

Natural England are pleased to see that a 60m wide corridor of semi-natural habitat has been proposed to buffer the watercourse. However this seems to be encroached by several elements of development, including the NEAP, the nursery garden, bungalow access and gabions, which all erode the value and effectiveness of the buffer. In particular the gabions and NEAP will alter the natural profile of the watercourse, and is less acceptable than the previous plans consulted on in January 2011.

It is still unclear as to how much lighting will be provided within the 60m corridor, in order to assess the suitability of a dark corridor for the bats travelling up and down the watercourse. This includes lighting of the bridges (both road and pedestrian), and of the adjoining NEAP, terrace and pub seating.

Natural England still believes that a clear span bridge would be more beneficial for the continuity of habitat, bat flight paths and views along the watercourse.

Net Gain in Biodiversity

Natural England would like to see that the increase in species value calculated through the BREEAM guidance is backed up with qualitative explanations. This would help to see what the values of biodiversity are based on. For example, what habitats are to be created, what species these are expected to attract in the setting of the development, and how the habitats will be managed to ensure these gains. Where separate habitat types are combined e.g. hedgerows, new planting of trees within/alongside hedgerows and grassland buffer strips along hedgerows, the effect of combining these habitat types must be taken into account. For example how will shading from the trees impact the grassland buffer being established below (in terms of species numbers and composition), or the presence of the new trees in a hedgerow affect the management of the hedgerow?

Further information on the management of these hedgerow buffers is also needed, for example will they become used as walkways for people walking through the development, or have cars parked on them? If this is to be the case i.e. they will not be fenced off, then the biodiversity value of these buffers will be much decreased.

As explained in our previous response, the management of the habitats to be created is essential in being able to show a net gain in biodiversity. Without this information, a net gain cannot be ensured. Natural England would need to see as a minimum that management objectives and prescriptions are provided at this stage in the Landscape and Ecology Conservation Management Plan.

To support this the SuDS features need more detail provided, for example which features will be wet or dry and how this will be achieved/managed.

Green Infrastructure

Natural England are concerned with the lack of clarity on the calculations of the green infrastructure within the development. It is difficult to work out from the drawings provided exactly what area home zones and green lanes, for example, consist of. Also the school green spaces appear to be made of anything that is not covered by the school buildings. However some of this area must consist of car parking and hard play areas and so may not count towards green infrastructure.

Although Natural England is supportive of green roofs as an element of GI on the development, where these are provided on private garages information on the suitability of this should be included in the application. This includes the future necessary management that the owners would be expected to carry out including the costs.

Summary

This application does not have the feel of an exemplary Ecotown site, not least in terms of biodiversity. Natural England's remaining concerns relate to a lack of evidence on the net gain of biodiversity, and a lack of evidence on the impact of air quality on Ardley Cutting and Quarry SSSI.

Yours sincerely



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